Institute of Education

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Promoting the achievement of looked after children and young people in South Tyneside

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Case studies of education provision for children and young people in care in South Tyneside
Promoting the Achievement of Looked After Children
PALAC

South Tyneside Council

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Introduction

Education of children in care

As of March 2016, there were 70,440 children and young people in care in England. The number of looked after children has continued to increase steadily over the last eight years[1]. Sixty per cent of these children are in care because of abuse or neglect and three-quarters are placed in foster care arrangements. Children and young people who are in or have experienced care remain one of the lowest performing groups in terms of educational outcomes. Last year, 14% of looked after children achieved five or more A*–C GCSEs or equivalent, including English and mathematics. As a consequence, they also experience poorer employment and health outcomes after leaving school compared to their peers. They are over-represented amongst the offender population and those who experience homelessness.

However, research is emerging to show that children and young people in care can have very positive experiences of school and are supported effectively to reach their full potential academically and socially[2]. The purpose of this report is to share practice in selected South Tyneside schools that is contributing to improved outcomes and school experiences for children and young people in care.

In July 2015, the South Tyneside Virtual School (VS) collaborated with UCL Institute of Education to run their Promoting the Achievement of Looked After Children (PALAC) programme with seven schools in the local authority (LA). This report presents an account of the programme, including the activities undertaken by the participants and the outcomes of the programme to date for students in care and staff in the participating schools.

1   DfE (2016) Children looked after in England (including adoption) year ending 31 March 2016 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/556331/SFR41_2016_Text.pdf
2   Carroll, C. and Cameron, C. (2017) Taking Action for Looked After Children in School. London: UCL Institute of Education Press.

What is PALAC?

PALAC is a knowledge exchange programme that seeks to support practice in schools to improve outcomes for students in care. It originated as a result of the dearth of evidence available to support schools in developing practice for a group of children and young people who continue to underachieve both academically and subsequently in adult life. At its core, is the collaborative relationship that exists between practitioners in school and university researchers to seek to improve our collective understanding of how students in care can thrive in school. As a knowledge exchange programme, PALAC places considerable emphasis on the generation of evidence from practice. The programme promotes evidence-informed practice in schools and the structure of the programme itself is based on what is currently understood as to how to best support professional learning and development in schools.

PALAC began in 2014 and is now in its third year and it engages schools and VS in a collaborative six-month programme through access to research findings, a comprehensive school audit tool and regular support from facilitators with research and school practitioner backgrounds. Participants have the opportunity to share and evaluate their findings at the end of the six months. The PALAC team links with an LA to support the development of teacher practice in a more systemic way and to help ensure that learning from the programme can be sustained once the formal PALAC programme comes to an end.

The PALAC programme has identified seven evidence-informed domains around which schools can focus professional development and learning:

- **Supporting emotional development and wellbeing**
- **Raising and monitoring attainment**
- **Supporting learning**
- **School environment**
- **Effective deployment of staff**
- **Supporting equality and diversity**
- **Working with carers and other professionals.**

Schools focus their PALAC projects around one or two domains that are most relevant to their settings.

Case Studies

Fellgate Primary School
Assess, Plan, Do, Review for Students in Care

Background

Children in care are four times more likely to have special educational needs (SEN) or disability than their peers and ten times more likely to have a statement or education and health care plan (EHCP). In 2015, 61% of all children in care had SEN compared to 15% of their peers[3]. Social, emotional and mental health difficulties (SEMH) was the most common primary need for children and young people in care. The revised SEND code of practice: 0–25 years, states that class and subject teachers are accountable for the progress and development of all students they teach and that a graduated approach to teaching and learning should be adopted to ensure better outcomes[4]. The graduated approach is defined as an assess, plan, do, review (APDR) cycle of teaching and learning (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Graduated approach to teaching and learning

ASSESS

PLAN

DO

REVIEW

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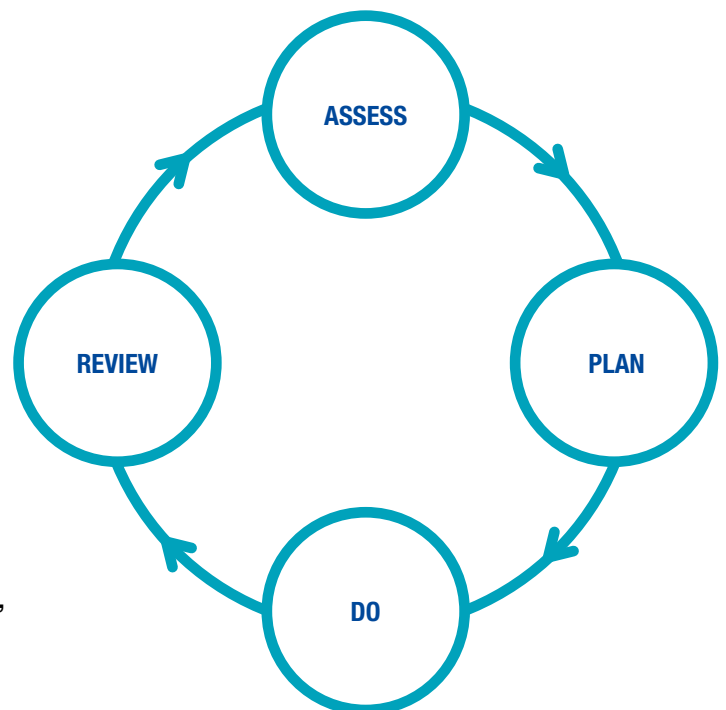
3 DfE (2016) Children looked after in England (including adoption) year ending 31 March 2016.
   https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/556331/SFR41_2016_Text.pdf
4 DfE (2015) SEND code of practice: 0–25 years.
   https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/398815/SEND_Code_of_Practice_January_2015.pdf

Fellgate Primary School in Jarrow, Tyne and Wear, has 136 students on roll. Overall, 30% of the students have SEN and the school has a resource base for students with autism. The head teacher and Senior Leadership Team (SLT) at Fellgate, as part of their PALAC project, wanted to look at the teaching and learning of children in care in their setting, as many of them had SEN. The team chose to pilot an APDR cycle with two students in care and six students with SEN. It was hoped that apart from seeing improved outcomes for the students, learning from the pilot would also inform a whole school approach to the APDR cycle for children in care and all children with SEN.

What did the school do?

Figure 2 summarises the different activities undertaken by the school in each stage of the APDR cycle. At the assessment stage summative and formative data were collected, including student and parent or carer perspectives. The school introduced the InCAS assessments from the Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring for assessing literacy, numeracy and attitudes to school and reading. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) was used to gather data on social and emotional development. Teachers and teaching assistants used this combined data to inform individual learning targets. The targets were written as part of the planning stage and incorporated with the introduction of personal passports that summarised on a page, the strengths, areas of need and targets for individual students.

The assessment and target information highlighted the additional professional learning that the whole staff and certain groups of staff would need to ensure that the teaching undertaken with the students would be more effective. In addition, a review of the evidence base for whole school, group and

individual teaching approaches that were relevant to the needs of the pilot group of students was carried out.

Figure 2: Graduated learning approach in practice
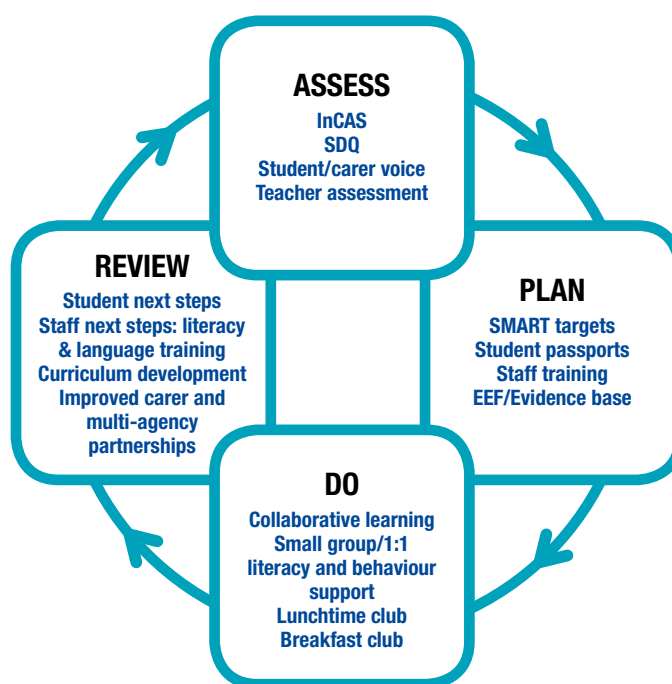
The result was that a combination of whole school approaches, for example, collaborative learning and small group/individual sessions on behaviour, literacy and numeracy were implemented. A lunchtime club and free breakfast club were also offered to the children. The impact of this multi-dimensional approach on student progress was very clear and is described in the next section. The student outcomes and the reflections of the staff were formally gathered and the next steps for the students, as well as for staff were formulated as part of the review stage of the cycle. This revealed the need for staff professional learning around literacy, language and the need to foster stronger connections with multi-agency colleagues and support for parents and carers.

5   Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring (2017) InCAS assessments. http://www.cem.org/incas

Outcomes for children and school staff

After six months of the multi-dimensional approach, the two students (Mark and Adam – not real names) in care made considerable progress academically and socially. Mark's reading age increased by one year and two months and his maths score by nine months. His SDQ score for conduct had improved by three points. Adam's reading had improved by two months and his maths by two years and four months. His SDQ scores saw improvements in two of the four areas (conduct and pro social). Mark had not been excluded and was in class permanently for the first time with one to one support.

The whole APDR cycle for staff, including the different professional learning opportunities, had afforded them greater confidence in responding and working more effectively with students on a day to day basis. They were, for example, able to identify when an attachment approach was needed as opposed to a behavioural or a more autism friendly approach. Moreover, they regularly drew on their increased knowledge and understanding to implement strategies of their own.

Implications for practice and research

The Fellgate PALAC project demonstrates the importance of a comprehensive and carefully considered APDR cycle in contributing to better outcomes for children with additional needs, including children and young people in care. In addition, it is integral to informing staff professional development and learning that is more likely to have an immediate and relevant impact. Professional development and learning that has a focus on specific outcomes for groups of students in a school has shown to be more effective.

The SLT was happy with how the InCAS and SDQ data had informed teaching and learning. The response of students to the assessments had been positive and did not appear to overburden them. The SDQ is completed annually for all children and young people in care and in recent years, it is increasingly being used by schools. From a research perspective, an analysis of this very large data set, including trends over time, would elicit important insights into the lives of students in care including research on the efficacy of the measure itself.

Whitburn Village Primary School
Supporting social and emotional development
Sunshine Circles

Background

Research from the past thirty years continues to explain the long-term impact of childhood experiences of abuse and neglect. Maltreatment can have negative consequences for academic achievement as well as implications for experiencing higher levels of anxiety, depression, substance abuse and stress disorder[6]. In addition, research is also emerging of the potential detrimental effects for physical and health development. Of the 70,440 children and young people in care in England as of March 2016, 60% were in care as a result of some form abuse or neglect. Given the well-established link between trauma and abuse, it is not surprising that elevated rates of SEMH difficulties are considerably higher for children and young people in care compared to their peers.

The fact that not all adolescents and adults are affected by their traumatic childhood experiences has led researchers to investigate potential 'protective' factors including personal attributes, relationships and environmental conditions. For some children in care, the failure to develop secure relationships with a care giver in the early years hinders their ability to establish positive and lasting relationships in adolescence and adulthood. This in turn can result in erratic behaviour patterns in school. Increasingly, schools are implementing whole school[8], group and individual attachment aware practices to help compensate for missed earlier experiences.

Whitburn Village Primary School, a mainstream junior school in Sunderland, had observed what they felt were attachment related behaviours in school for some of their children in care and those recently adopted. As part of their PALAC project they piloted the Sunshine Circles group activity

6   Widom, C. S. (2014) Long term consequences of child maltreatment. In Handbook of child maltreatment (pp. 225–247). Springer Netherlands.
7   DfE (2016) Children looked after in England (including adoption) year ending 31 March 2016. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/556331/SFR41_2016_Text.pdf
8   Attachment Aware Schools – http://www.bathspa.ac.uk/education/research/attachment-aware-schools/

based on the Theraplay[9] approach. Sunshine Circles draws on principles of attachment theory and the programme encourages a child's social and emotional development through a series of 'playful, cooperative and nurturing' activities. After attendance at a two-day training course, school staff are then qualified to lead Sunshine Circles groups in their setting supported by the programme handbook.

What did the school do?

Over eight weeks two Higher Learning Teaching Assistants at Whitburn delivered Sunshine Circles to ten students. The students in the group either had backgrounds in care or some were recently adopted. Each session lasted for 15 to 20 minutes and took place twice a week. Sessions included activities with a focus on turn taking, giving and receiving, 'showing the hurt' and developing trust based activities. All of the students were assessed using the SDQ at the beginning and end of the eight weeks. Parents and carers were invited to an information evening at the start of the programme to explain the aims of the Sunshine Circles group and to demonstrate activities that would happen in the group that could also be carried out at home. This would help foster a more consistent approach to supporting the children across home and school. Parents and carers were also invited to a review evening at the end of the programme.

Outcomes for children, school staff and parents and carers

There was an improvement in SDQ scores for half of the group of children, one student's score stayed the same and scores for three children were lower than baseline. Feedback from the children about their experiences in the group were positive:

> *The Sunshine group was fun. I liked the activities. Blowing feathers was the best, the different colours made me feel happy." (Child 1)*

> *I liked it but didn't like it. The activities were fun … it was a good experience. In the blanket game I felt strong. When I went back to class I felt like I had more energy. The bit I didn't like was I was embarrassed being paired with a younger guy." (Child 2)*

During the review session parents and carers were able to identify situations at home where their child had used strategies from the Sunshine Circles group such as resolving a conflict with a sibling using the 'cotton wool' approach and another had used the 'Hurts' activity to soothe a parent when she was unwell. More generally, the Sunshine Circles group had helped parents and carers to reflect on child behaviours from an attachment perspective which was a new outlook for many of them. They appreciated meeting other parents and carers experiencing similar situations. For the programme to have had more impact, they felt more training and support whilst the programme was taking place would have been beneficial.

9 Theraplay (2017) http://theraplay.org/index.php/sunshine-circles

Practitioner reflections at the end of the eight weeks described the strengths of the programme as:

- **Helping the children to begin to address feelings and behaviours that were emotionally challenging for them**
- **Opening up a dialogue between school and home about the best way to support each child as part of the Sunshine Circles group but also more widely in school**
- **The whole school training on attachment had helped to 'bridge' learning for the students from the group into the classroom.**

Implications for practice and research

At the end of the pilot and after review, the school leadership team was very keen to continue with the Sunshine Circles approach. The team understood that many of their children would require long-term support to overcome deep-rooted feelings and anxieties that affected behaviours in school, with peers and at home. There was concern that the SDQ was not sufficiently sensitive to measure very small steps of progress. Additional baseline and post intervention assessment would be needed, as well as offering sessions to children over a longer period of time for those that needed greater support. Data from the more detailed assessment would allow the team to identify with greater accuracy the children who might benefit from the approach, facilitate stronger target setting and long-term tracking of the impact of the programme.

More widely, the social and emotional development of all students in a school, is in and of itself important and valued by school practitioners. This subject is also addressed in light of the theory and evidence that there will be impact on academic attainment and progress. Current findings from the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) Toolkit[10] now reports four months additional academic progress as a result of social and emotional approaches. Research in this area is complex. Findings from research in schools and education more generally, can only ever show 'associations' and not causal links between a specific social and/or emotional intervention or programme and any subsequent increase in academic attainment. Furthermore, how long it might take to see any increase in academic attainment is yet not clear due, in large part, to the different variables in studies such as the child, school context and programme content and length. Nonetheless, further research would help to strengthen our understanding of how to take full advantage of social and emotional approaches and academic attainment.

10   Education Endowment Foundation Toolkit: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/resources/teaching-learning-toolkit/social-and-emotional-learning/

Walbottle Campus
Why schools need a key worker for students in care

Background
Time and again, children and young people in care describe the positive impact and significance of having a trusted and caring adult in school[11,12]. Students in care can often experience disruptive and chaotic periods in their lives. Proactive SLTs are aware of this context and place a priority on having an adult in school who is trained and available at all times (i.e. with no teaching duties) to support the work of the designated teacher (DT). A student, for example, who the night before, has had an unexpected change of foster placement cannot always wait until lunchtime to get the support they need from a DT who has teaching duties all morning. Consequently, schools are appointing a full-time mentor/key worker for children and young people in care who often, depending on the number of students in care in a given school, may also have responsibility for other students who are involved with Children's Services, such as those identified as children in need (CIN)[13]. The importance of this role from an attachment theory perspective is understood, allowing students, for example, to experience and develop stronger and potentially healing relationships with adults.

What is less documented is how the role can contribute more strategically to teaching and learning across a school to support better outcomes.

Implementing a more systematic approach to raising and monitoring progress and attainment was the PALAC project research focus for Ania Taras, the mentor for students in care at Walbottle Campus; a secondary school in Newcastle upon Tyne. At the time of the project, there were 22 students in care in school and the team wanted to explore what the actual role of a key worker looked like and how could the role be developed to contribute strategically to academic progress and attainment.

What did the school do?
There were two main elements to the PALAC project at Walbottle. The objective of the first task was to gain a deeper understanding of the key worker role. Ania, kept a research diary over the period of the project that included, across a week, the various activities she had participated in. Table 1 summarises the different responsibilities,

11 Sebba, J., Berridge, D., Luke, N., Fletcher, J., Bell, K., Strand, S. and O'Higgins, A. (2015) The educational progress of looked after children in England: Linking care and educational data. Rees Centre. University of Oxford. University of Bristol.
12 Cameron, C., Connelly, G. and Jackson, S. (2015) Educating children and young people in care: Learning placements and caring schools. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
13 Carroll, C. and Cameron, C. (2017) Taking Action for Looked After Children in School. London: UCL Institute of Education Press.

Table 1: Summary of roles and responsibilities of the school key worker for students in care

Key responsibilities	Specific tasks
Supporting students student	Daily support in school as required by each individual Attendance at urgent meetings for students in 'crisis' Weekly in class support Weekly lunchtime club Twice weekly academic support after school Writing and keeping up to date individual student profiles Completing funding applications for students Induction and return to school support for individual students Coordinating managed moves for students Visiting alternative and next provision with students
Collaborating with colleagues and governors	Weekly liaison with DT and safeguarding lead Coordination of PEPs and individual support plans Attendance at termly PEP meetings for all students Weekly meeting with school progress managers Termly meeting with school data manager Termly meeting and reporting to governors Attending staff training on resilience
Liaising with carers and outside agencies	Home visits as required Bi-weekly meetings with different VS colleagues Termly meeting with educational psychologists Termly meetings with school counsellor Termly meetings with carers Meetings with Connexions/CAMHS/Youth Offending Services /Education Welfare officer

tasks and activities which come under the three themes of supporting students, collaborating with colleagues and school governors and liaising with carers and outside agencies.

Table 1 clearly shows that the role of the key worker is wide ranging and necessitates a breadth of knowledge across education, care and multi-agency settings that far exceeds any 'traditional' support or teaching assistant role. The role requires of the practitioner that they have the ability to work empathetically and effectively with students on a day to day basis but also possess the expertise and credibility to work with school colleagues and professionals working in many different contexts in and outside of school. The practitioner in this role must have the capacity and support necessary to draw on substantial reserves of resilience to manage competing demands and emotionally challenging situations, often across one day and certainly across any week.

Secondly, as part of her responsibility of monitoring and raising the academic attainment of students, Ania investigated how she might encourage subject teachers to contribute more meaningfully and effectively to the personal education plan (PEP) process. To this end, she introduced a Google Docs app and regularly attended subject department meetings. All the

school quantitative data for students in care was entered into a Google Doc but in addition subject teachers were asked to include qualitative comments that were directed around key themes including: i) attitude to learning; ii) organisational skills; iii) levels of motivation and perseverance; iv) relationships with adults and peers; v) successful teaching and learning approaches; vi) additional support available for students in their subject; and vii) any specific difficulties or barriers a student might be facing in their subject.

The Google Docs combined data was used to:

- **inform planning and target setting for the PEP**
- **improve feedback and dialogue with staff at department meetings on a regular basis.**

Outcomes for the young people and school staff

There were two main outcomes of the Google Docs initiative and regular attendance by Ania at the subject department meetings. For students, the actions resulted in strategies to support learning being implemented more quickly and effectively. Secondly, staff had greater knowledge about the students and consequently relationships between staff and students improved.

Implications for practice and research

The results of the audit of responsibilities and activities of the key worker role present a compelling case for why such a position is need in schools, despite the very real constraints on school budgets. Even if the number of students in care is small, there will be other students where Children's Services are involved and these students will need very similar levels and types of support. In fact, academic outcomes for children 'in need' have been shown to be worse compared with children in care[14]. The numbers of children in need in a school usually far outnumber those in care and therefore strengthen the case for a full-time dedicated role. The role carries many challenging responsibilities and this needs to be reflected in the qualifications and experience required of the practitioner and in the training and support offered provided for their development.

In the past five years, through the *Maximising the Impact of Teaching Assistants* initiative, research has been published that has helped to define how best teaching assistants can support student learning including the pedagogy they should adopt in the classroom[15]. There is less research and guidance for support staff who hold an academic and wellbeing role for vulnerable students. In Europe and increasingly in the United Kingdom, an approach known as social pedagogy is being adopted across different settings including for example, foster care and residential settings in supporting children and young people in care[16]. Further research and application of these pedagogies in a school setting, and in relation to the key worker role for children in care, would help to clarify and embed this role in schools.

14   Sebba, J., Berridge, D., Luke, N., Fletcher, J., Bell, K., Strand, S. and O'Higgins, A. (2015) The educational progress of looked after children in England: Linking care and educational data. Rees Centre. University of Oxford. University of Bristol.
15   Maximising the Impact of Teaching Assistants: http://maximisingtas.co.uk/
16   Social Pedagogy Professional Association: http://www.sppa-uk.org/onlineresources/independent-evaluations-of-social-pedagogy-developments/

Marine Park Primary School
Supporting social and emotional development – Big Red Bus Story

Background

When a child experiences difficult situations and emotions they need a caregiver who can make them feel safe and help them to self-regulate their emotions. For many children and young people in care, their early experiences of caregiving have been frightening and they have lacked the necessary support, over time, to learn to self-regulate their emotions[17]. Exposure to acute stress over prolonged periods, can result in an excess of the cortisol hormone which can negatively affect cognitive functioning including planning skills, self-regulation, mood and impulse control for some children and young people in care[18].

Marine Park Primary School in South Shields has 210 students on roll. The number of students in receipt of Pupil Premium (PP) is above average, as is the number of children with SEN and with English as an additional language (EAL). In this context, the staff place great emphasis on ensuring that students have a strong sense of belonging in school and in their social and emotional development. As a result of participating on the PALAC programme the school leadership team was aware of the contribution of safe spaces in supporting and 'holding' the emotional lives of children and young people. However, as a small primary school it was a challenge to find a separate safe space, but they wanted to investigate how the adults in school might provide a 'safe space' for vulnerable students. The school team creatively piloted the Big Red Bus Story (BRBS) approach as a way of structuring a relationship focused safe space in school for a student in care. As part of the BRBS, a child identifies a group of significant adults within their school. These adults are then informed that they have been selected

17   Research in Practice (2014) Early Childhood Trauma. http://fosteringandadoption.rip.org.uk/topics/early-childhood-trauma/
18   Woolgar, M. (2013) The practical implications of the emerging findings in the neurobiology of maltreatment for looked after and adopted children: recognising the diversity of outcomes. Adoption & Fostering, 37(3), 237–252.

and asked if they are willing to offer five minutes a day of additional support to the child for an agreed period of time (usually six weeks).

What did the school do?

The school identified a student in year 2 (from here on called Ben, not his real name) to take part in the BRBS. The behaviour of this student was beginning to deteriorate in school and he was on the verge of becoming permanently excluded. He was finding it difficult to regulate his emotions and cope with social demands of the school day. Ben met with a familiar adult in school, with whom he had built a positive relationship, and an educational psychologist (EP) to complete the initial stage of the BRBS. During this stage he was asked to select a group of adults in the school who were important to him. This is central to the BRBS approach. In order to identify these adults Ben was presented with a series of questions relating to events that occur on a virtual journey to a theme park.

After Ben had identified who he wanted on the 'Bus', the team of adults met to reflect on the choices made by Ben, discuss what this might signal about his needs and consider ways in which they could work together across the school week to support Ben. The meeting was chaired by the EP to support staff in the process. The team included one of his current class teachers, the head teacher, his former nursery teacher and five teaching assistants, all but one of whom had worked with Ben in the past. The staff identified by Ben supported him at transition times, break and lunch times and for the last fifteen minutes of the school day when he chose an activity to do one to one with the member of staff who was working with him. The team implemented the approach with Ben over six weeks and met regularly to review progress.

Outcomes for children and school staff

After six weeks, the team had yet to see a consistent improvement in general behaviour. However, Ben was responding positively to most of the available support and would routinely inquire about whether or not he was having one to one 'down time' that day.

The feedback from the BRBS staff team was that the approach had facilitated stronger communication between the staff team. They reported that the involvement of an outside agency (EP) had been important to the process, as someone who was there to listen neutrally to the experiences and concerns of the group and suggest ideas they may not have considered. They had welcomed the opportunity to meet together to discuss and plan the work they would do together to support Ben. At the end of the project, the school team at Marine Park was considering investigating if the BRBS might have an impact with children whose needs were not quite as acute. The overall conclusion was that while for Ben the BRBS had not directly given him the emotional safe place that he needed, the specific support that might help in achieving this in the future had been identified as a result of the project. The BRBS team suggested that it would also be important to seek more regular feedback from students during the project as to how they felt it was going as there was for Ben a clear rejection of some support, for example, in the playground and acceptance and dependence on other, for example, 'down time'.

Implications for practice and research

This case study clearly highlights that choosing an 'effective' intervention for a child in care who is experiencing particular difficulties at a point in their lives is not always straightforward and sometimes different approaches need to be tried before improvements for a child might be observed.

For children who have experienced trauma over a sustained period, only a multi-dimensional perspective is required including whole school, group and individual approaches. There is no magic bullet.

Whether an intervention is 'effective' or not relies, in part on thoughtful SMART targets from the outset, with the flexibility to review the targets and intervention if there are concerns about progress. Fidelity to an intervention, with practitioners who are sufficiently trained and competent can also influence the outcome of an intervention. And yet, when all these factors are in place, we do not always see the outcome we may expect and/or hoped for. Here, reflective schools and practitioners will use these situations as learning opportunities and examine how practice might be informed for the child involved in the intervention and for future children who may or may not benefit from that intervention.

The study of emotional regulation (ER) is relatively new to psychology and education and only began to emerge in the mid-nineties. Despite the attention it has received during this time, there remains considerable uncertainty as to the meaning of ER, its conceptualisation and how to better support emotion generation and regulation[19]. This complexity is not easily translated to the classroom and school context. In addition, authors of and practitioners implementing interventions need to take into account and make explicit the specific processes involved in teaching children new cognitive and behaviour skills and how those skills might be generalised across different contexts.

19 Gross, J. (2015) Emotional Regulation: Current Status and Future Prospects. Psychological Inquiry, 26: 1–26.
    http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.670.3420&rep=rep1&type=pdf

South Shields Community School
Getting to know you

Background

Relationships in the classroom and school matter. They matter for many reasons, but crucially, learning is relational and it takes place through the interactions students have with their peers and adults in their school[20]. Within those interactions are the human stories that students and their teachers bring with them to school each day.

Therefore, school practitioners need to 'know' their students; their academic ability and potential, but also their interests and backgrounds. However, in the case of children and young people in care, there is sometimes a tension as to how much adults in school 'should' know about their background. There is no 'one size fits all' answer to this tension. However, a failure to address this tension in an individual school context, can prevent more effective interaction and the development of stronger relationships. This is particularly concerning as children and young people in care have often lacked reciprocal and nurturing relationships with adults in their lives and a failure to address this aspect of their lives potentially compromises the development of meaningful relationships. There are safeguarding matters to be respected, including the wishes of the child or young person as to what information is shared and with whom. However, proactive schools are finding creative ways to help adults in their settings to get to 'know' the students in care in their classrooms in order to more effectively support their learning and development. This case study describes one way in which the adults at South Shields Community School (SSCS), an 11–16 mixed community school, got to know, in a meaningful way, the young people in care in their setting.

20   Cameron, C., Connelly, G. and Jackson, S. (2015) Educating children and young people in care: Learning placements and caring schools. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

What did the school do?

With the permission of students and carers concerned, Charlotte Patton, a member of the school PALAC team, hosted a 'Tell the Story'. This was an after school continuing professional development (CPD) session for all school staff as part of a range of activities to raise the profile of young people in care in school and increase knowledge and understanding of the area more generally. The CPD session had two main objectives:

1. **To bring together, from the whole staff team, what was known about each young person in care to create a more holistic and up-to-date profile for each student**

2. **To use this increased knowledge and understanding to consider next steps in student learning and development in order for them to reach their full potential.**

The CPD session began with a three-minute overview of each student presented by the relevant head of year. The room was set up with a table allocated to each student and groups of staff spent ten minutes at each table using Post-it notes to add any new knowledge they had about the student (for example, interests and strengths) and what activities/strategies had proved successful in their learning.

Outcomes for the young people and school staff

The outcome of the session was that each student had a more personal, rounded and detailed up-to-date profile. For staff, the result was that for the first time they had a wider and more meaningful understanding of who the young people were. They felt that they now 'knew' each young person in a way that had more depth and which would have immediate implications for how to improve their teaching. Over 90% of the staff rated the session as very good or excellent in the session evaluation. The PALAC team running the session described it as very powerful and that for the next few days, were regularly responding to an increased number of comments and queries from colleagues about how to improve their practice in the education of young people.

Implications for practice and research

The SSCS case study shows how a short, thoughtful and well-structured CPD session, incorporating genuine involvement of school practitioners can have a very powerful and immediate effect on educators and their practice. The power of the session partly lay in the fact that both students and staff were able to bring their biographies 'to the table'. Such an activity, to have the most impact also requires the full support of the SLT as in the case of SSCS.

Research is emerging that conceptualises in detail, teacher–student classroom interactions[21] and that include frameworks for observing interactions and guidance for strengthening those interactions. Such evidence is helpful to practitioners in order to better articulate what can sometimes be a generalised or instinctive understanding. Finally, stronger relationships in the classroom are more likely to foster more inclusive classrooms and reduce the need for individual support that creates just another difference between a student in care and their peers.

21 Pianta, R. C., Hamre, B. K. and Allen, J. P. (2012) Teacher–student relationships and engagement: Conceptualizing, measuring, and improving the capacity of classroom interactions. In Handbook of research on student engagement (pp. 365-386). Springer US.

Park View School
Even Plato had a mentor

Background

Mentoring in schools is used extensively to support students in a variety of ways. These include programmes with a broad purpose, such as seeking to foster greater aspiration on the part of the young person, to programmes with a more specific focus such as improving attendance and behaviour. At present, according to the EEF toolkit, the effect of mentoring on academic outcomes is low, with on average, one month's additional progress[22]. Although there is some evidence, that children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds might benefit by up to two months' progress. The research findings to date point to community based mentoring approaches being on average more effective than school based programmes.

However, it is increasingly possible to identify characteristics of more effective programmes and these include programmes that have a clear structure and set of expectations, provide mentor training and use mentors with professional backgrounds. Programmes that continue over longer periods of time and facilitate more frequent contact between the mentor and mentee are also associated with greater success. There exists emerging evidence for the benefits of mentoring for children and young people in care including, for example, a programme in Scotland where university students mentored secondary aged students in care[23].

Park View is a special school in South Shields for students aged 11 to 16 and has a focus on supporting learners with SEMH.

At the time of the PALAC project, the school already had in place a successful mentoring programme but as a result of participating in PALAC, they wanted to review how their mentoring programme could be improved and adapted to better support the young people in care in their setting.

What did the school do?

The project entailed two elements. The main focus was to investigate how training for mentors of students in care might be developed. After a review of the relevant literature, key points were identified as central to mentor training and that were additional to the general mentor role. These factors included the need to:

- **Have an awareness of the social care system in relation to children and young people in care**
- **Understand and be able to promote with colleagues, an understanding of the difficulties and barriers faced by children and young people in care as a result of the loss and possible trauma they have faced in their lives**
- **Understand the importance of, participate in and actively contribute to the PEP and annual review process**
- **Possess the skills and attributes to maintain productive relationships with carers**
- **Possess a knowledge of the opportunities and organisations outside of school that can be utilised to maximise the support offered to students in care**

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22   EEF Toolkit (2017) https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/resources/teaching-learning-toolkit
23   Jackson, S., Cameron, C. and Connelly, G. (2015) Educating children and young people in care: Learning placements and caring schools. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

- **To maintain an awareness of the evidence base for supporting the education of students in care.**

The second element of the project focused on a pilot initiative with a local secondary school that offered mentoring to their students in care who were at risk of permanent exclusion. The pilot involved the identified students being placed at Park View School, the aim of which was twofold. Firstly, would they benefit from 1:1 mentoring and be successfully reintegrated back into the mainstream. Secondly, was their level of need sufficient to pursue an EHCP with a view to them joining Park View permanently?

Outcomes for the young people and school staff

- **Park View has worked closely with a local authority project (The PLACE, Project for Looked After Children's Education) to ensure smoother transitions for new students in the care system. As a result the project now consults directly with Park View to ensure the appropriate placement is identified for any looked after child undergoing assessment for SEN**
- **Staff from the PLACE have delivered training to mentors specialising in supporting students in care and other staff at Park View to develop their understanding of topics such as the care system, attachment disorders and the PEP system**
- **PEPs are now more targeted and timely as a result of devising them in direct collaboration with a designated member of staff from The PLACE**

- **Four students were involved in the pilot project. Following an assessment period at Park View, all four students were assessed and received EHCPs. Two were placed at Park View and are now flourishing (both now have attendance of 99% for their time at Park View compared to below 55% for their previous placements). Both of these students have very positive relationships with their mentors and the mentors liaise directly twice weekly with their carers.**

The other two students were deemed to have needs beyond those which Park View could cater for and were moved to alternative provision outside of the local authority.

Implications for practice and research

The Park View case study is a good example of how a school can take a current practice that is working well, but with small, yet significant changes ensure that the practice can be even more inclusive in nature, such as in this case, to the needs of young people in care. Whatever, the specific focus of a mentoring programme for a child or young person it will also provide an additional opportunity for relational learning, the importance of which has been previously described.

What is needed is further evidence both practice and research based, as to the relative difference in the impact of mentoring programmes that have a focus on academic, career or social and emotional outcomes and how best they might be implemented.

South Tyneside Virtual School
Are we doing all we can? Key Stage 4 Checklist

Background

'Are we doing all we can for our students in care?' is a question that reflective school practitioners regularly ask of their own practice and that of their setting as a whole. The question is at the heart of the work of any virtual school (VS) as part of their role to challenge and support head teachers and colleagues across the schools in their local authority. The extension to this question and one asked by Ofsted is 'How do you know that you are doing all you can?'

To respond with confidence to such straightforward questions is challenging but with the emerging evidence base it is more than possible. Firstly, it requires that SLTs know and understand what effective current practice in schools looks like at different levels in the school. The recent publication of evidence based, whole school audits ensure that SLTs now have the tools needed for leadership in this area[24]. Secondly, school practitioners require a sensitive understanding of the varied lives of children and young people in care beyond the school gates. Finally, this breadth and depth of knowledge held by practitioners across the school needs to be personalised for each student despite some of the commonalities experienced by children and young people in care. The SMART targets in the PEP are central to this process.

The VS in South Tyneside supports at any one time approximately 300 children and young people in care across the authority and in neighbouring authorities. As part of the PALAC programme, Vicky Borrell, one of the VS teachers, wanted to investigate how the VS might best support schools at Key Stage (KS) 4 to answer the question 'Are we doing all we can?' and their response was to devise the 'KS4 Checklist'.

What did the school do?

The VS wanted to write a one-sided, evidence-informed document that would serve as an aide-memoire to schools when reviewing termly progress and in preparation for an annual review. The result was the KS4 Checklist shown in Figure 3. The Checklist was based on the following principles:

24   Carroll, C. and Cameron, C. (2017) Taking Action for Looked After Children in School. London: UCL Institute of Education Press

Figure 3: Key Stage 4 Checklist

Strengths	Vulnerabilities
Has people that care around them	Trauma from pre-care experiences and/or coming into care
Has a full care order	Two or more placements changes in the past two years
In care for over a year	Two or more changes of school placement in the past two years
In a borough school	Two or more social workers in the past two years
Demonstrates agency in their lives	EHC plan for SEN
Supported with high expectations	Two or more school exclusions in the previous year
Receiving encouragement and support	Experience of mental health difficulties
Is able to make and maintain stable relationships	Placement in an out of borough school
Is able to participate and achieve outside school	Evidence of substance abuse
Current school placement is stable	Other:
Met national academic expectations at KS2	
Met national academic expectations at KS3	
Meeting current academic targets	
Is able to participate and achieve inside school	
Student feels a sense of belonging in school	

Support and intervention	Priorities for action

Whole school
SLT has completed PALAC audit
Student has a key worker in school
Emotional support/counselling is available

Designated teacher
Has personal overview and responsibility for PP
Involved in PEP meetings
High quality PEP and SMART targets in place
PP is linked to individual learning and targets
Impact of PP for each student is evaluated

Curriculum support
1:1 tuition (English and maths if needed)
Opportunities for involvement in mentoring programmes
Group or 1:1 strategies used have an evidence base

Effective communication
Within school
Between home and school

Involvement of other agencies
The PLACE (South Tyneside VS team)

- **It adopts strengths based, holistic and proactive approach to planning for each student whilst raising awareness of the potential vulnerabilities specific to the young person**
- **It includes whole school approaches as well as one to one methods for ensuring better academic and wellbeing outcomes**
- **It focuses the team around the young person to consider the quality of communication and collaboration between school, home and care.**

Outcomes for the young people and school staff

Members of the VS team have used the KS4 Checklist with DT, especially in preparation for PEP meetings. The feedback from schools to date has been very positive.

> *"The Checklist was a useful tool for summarising everything I needed to support the student.*

> *"It highlighted his vulnerabilities and pointed me to the most appropriate course of action.*

> *"I am not sure I would have been able to see the full picture otherwise.*
> *(Designated Teacher)*

It is proving a motivating tool to use with young people on an individual basis by revealing their strengths, identifying gaps in their learning experience and finding solutions to education barriers. In addition, it provides a structure for presenting the evidence base to schools in terms of sharing 'what works' for children and young people in care. Finally, it is a framework from which

to hang solution focused meetings to synthesise all the information – especially in complex cases.

Implications for practice and research

Since the introduction of the PEP in 2000, reports from Ofsted and the limited research available on PEPs, have described a lack of consistency across local authorities (LAs) in the quality of PEPs[25,26]. This national picture across England remains largely unchanged and as recently as 2016, Ofsted reported the quality of PEPs as inconsistent in nearly half of LAs inspected[27]. The two main causes for concern were the lack of ambition for the students and the lack of SMART targets that supported learners to make good progress. All too often PEP meetings lack planning, are piecemeal in their execution and therefore result in fragmented and often repetitive next steps for the young person.

The KS4 Checklist is an important 'tool' in supporting practitioners to take a moment to step back in the PEP planning process to look at the young person holistically, but also with ambition. The ambition required is as much for the adults around the young person as for the young person concerned.

Sixteen years after the introduction of the PEP, there has been scant evidence of any gradual improvement in their impact in supporting better outcomes for children and young people in care. Despite the evidence to show the challenge of writing effective education plans, whether they be a PEP or an EHCP, there is little research on the underlying processes, knowledge and skills required of writing effective plans. The KS4 Checklist is an important contribution to that evidence base but more is needed.

25   Ofsted (2012) The impact of virtual schools on the education of looked after children.
     https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-impact-of-virtual-schools-on-the-education-of-looked-after-children
26   Hayden, C. (2005) More than a piece of paper?: Personal education plans and 'looked after' children in England. Child & family social work, 10(4), 343–352.
27   Ofsted (2016) The third annual report on the state of children's social care in England.
     https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/574464/Ofsted_social_care_annual_report_2016.pdf

Conclusion

To conclude, the participants in the PALAC programme implemented a variety of changes in their schools at student and staff levels. At the student level, changes included, for example, new approaches to assessing and supporting emotional development and wellbeing. Some of the participants used the PALAC programme as a springboard in their school to raise the profile of the needs of children in care through whole school professional learning.

One of the aims of the PALAC programme is to continue to support developments in practice after the programme has ended through ongoing review of the audit and action plan. The schools in this PALAC programme have continued with their focus on the education of children and young people in care and in doing so are ensuring that they are helped to reach their potential and simultaneously contribute to an emerging evidence base of current practice.

Promoting the Achievement of Looked After Children (PALAC) is a knowledge exchange programme that aims to support the development of practice in schools and to expand the evidence base to ultimately improve outcomes for children in care.

For further information on the programme please contact:

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