Taking Action for Looked After Children in School

A knowledge exchange programme

Catherine Carroll and Claire Cameron

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As a foster child, I initially hated school life. Yet as I grew into my mid-teens, it swiftly transformed into a safe haven from the turbulence of my personal life. It became a place of productivity; a place of hope and optimism where I could redirect my life and define my future. With friends and teachers, I eventually found community, purpose and a sense of belonging (securing the contrasting blessings of a degree from Cambridge University and a spot on The X Factor!).

Ashley John-Baptiste, musician and activist for foster children
(*The Observer*, 10 August 2014)

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About the contributors

The book is a product of a knowledge exchange programme based at UCL Institute of Education, University College London. As such there are a large number of contributors.

Dr Catherine Carroll is the PALAC programme lead. She is an experienced researcher in education with an emphasis on the education of vulnerable groups of pupils including pupils with special educational needs and disabilities. She has extensive practitioner experience having taught in mainstream and specialist schools for sixteen years. More recently, she has been involved in the development and delivery of knowledge exchange partnerships between schools and universities including *Maximizing the Impact of Teaching Assistants*. Her work is published in peer reviewed journals and she is a member of the editorial board for the *Journal of Child Language Teaching and Therapy*.

Professor Claire Cameron is a leading researcher on the education of looked after children and young people. With a background in social work, she has been based in Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University College London since 1992. She has conducted many studies of the children's workforce, including cross-national studies. She was the coordinator for the first European study of the further and higher education pathways of young people from public care (known as YiPPEE) (Jackson and Cameron, 2014) that paved the way for a practical guide, with Sonia Jackson and Graham Connolly, called *Educating Children in Care: Learning placements and caring schools* (JKP 2015).

Gill Brackenbury, Director SENJIT (Special Educational Needs Joint Initiative on Training), at UCL Institute of Education, has extensive experience in mainstream schools as a class teacher, SENCO and peripatetic teacher of children with Specific Learning Difficulties. She also worked in a special school and managed a special care unit for children with severe learning difficulties. Her professional and research interests are in knowledge mobilization, literacy development and difficulties, impact of professional learning on teachers and teaching assistants in their workplace, and the education of vulnerable children.

Steve Grundy was, until 2015, Director of Widening Participation at UCL IOE with a remit to support professional development that underpinned increased access of school children to universities.

Vivian Hill is the Programme Director for Doctorate in Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology at University College London's Institute of Education. She is also Chair of the British Psychology Society's Division of Educational and Child Psychologists. Her research interests include: the medicalization of childhood behaviours, the educational and psychosocial development of children and young people with autism, and the rights of children, in particular the rights and education of children who live within the care system. Recent research activity has focused on the role of supervision in the training and professional learning of applied psychologists.

The schools involved were:

- Academy of Central Bedfordshire
- Ashcroft Technology Academy
- Hounslow Virtual School
- Lampton School, Hounslow, Middlesex
- Looked After Children Education Service (LACES), West Berkshire
- Percy Hedley School, Newcastle
- South Tyneside Virtual School
- Surrey Virtual School
- The Willink School, Reading, Berkshire
- Wandsworth Virtual School

Chapter 1

Introduction

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. It seeks to achieve this aim by providing a forum for the exchange of knowledge and expertise between practitioners and researchers.

On 31 March 2015, 69,540 children and young people were looked after by local authorities in England. This represents 0.6 per cent of all children under the age of 18 and the figure has been steadily rising in recent years. In 2011, 0.58 per cent of children were looked after. Three-quarters (77 per cent) of this group are looked after due to their experiences of abuse, neglect, or family dysfunction. Sixty per cent are on a full, compulsory, care order, and 29 per cent under a voluntary agreement with parents. Three-quarters (75 per cent) live in family based foster care; other placements are in children's homes, other residential settings, placed with parents under supervision, or are being prepared for adoption (DfE 2015). If we look across the whole year, 99,230 young people were looked after by local authorities, also known as 'in care', at any time (DfE 2015).

Although a small population, the needs of children in care are often very great. Their education has often, in the past, been chronically neglected. While local authorities have a duty (in s.52, Children Act 2004) to promote the education of children in its care, not enough is known or documented through research about what best supports the education of looked after children, particularly in relation to applying practice in schools. If we, as practitioners and researchers, wish to see greater improvements in outcomes for this group of pupils, it is vital that we come together, over a sustained period of time, to investigate how the evidence base that does exist might be applied to particular settings and to expand the evidence base – to inform the wider community of 'what works' in schools for looked after children. To achieve this, PALAC engages schools and virtual school heads in a collaborative six-month programme through access to research findings, a comprehensive school audit tool (Appendix 1), regular support from expert facilitators, and opportunities to share and evaluate findings. Since the pilot programme launched in December 2014, the PALAC team has collaborated with colleagues from schools, Virtual Schools, and further education colleges across England in locality based and UCL IOE based cohorts.

The PALAC programme draws its inspiration from three main sources. First, one of the authors, Claire Cameron, co-wrote *Educating Children and Young People in Care: Learning placements and caring schools*, which argued that 'for children to thrive

and flourish, and realize their potential, and particularly where they have had very difficult early childhoods, they need to be cared for in school and educated at home. The integration of care and education in daily life is key' (Cameron *et al.*, 2015: 7). Following this, in PALAC, social and emotional wellbeing in school is brought to the fore as a foundation for learning.

Second, in keeping with the spirit of evidence informed practice, the structure of the PALAC programme was influenced by the successful *Maximising the Impact of Teaching Assistants* programme at UCL IOE, which has run in over 100 schools since 2013. It also incorporates the factors that have been identified as leading to more positive outcomes in relation to professional learning in schools (CUREE, 2014).

The third source of inspiration is the practice itself, as brought to the programme by practitioners, who, through their projects, reflect, evaluate, and adapt their practice accordingly. Practitioner evaluations for the first year of the project exceeded expectations. One participant said that they 'loved the flexibility to build on what we already had and to take it to the next level'. Another said: 'PALAC provided the right amount of support and the framework for appropriate work'. Yet another participant declared that this was a 'brilliant project for our vulnerable students and colleagues who are tackling issues at the chalk face'.

The purpose of this book is to provide a summary of the evidence base that currently exists for promoting the achievement of looked after children and to act as a teaching resource for all professionals concerned with the education of children in care, such as designated teachers and Virtual School colleagues. In Chapter 2 we outline some features of a knowledge exchange partnership as an effective method of professional development. Then, Chapters 3–9 are organized around research and practice evidence in relation to one theme or domain of the audit tool. The domains are:

1. Supporting emotional development and wellbeing
2. Strategic approaches to raising and monitoring attainment
3. Supporting learning
4. School environment
5. Effectiveness and deployment of staff
6. Supporting equality and diversity
7. Working together with other professionals and carers

A case study from the PALAC project, where available, is used to illustrate practical learning in a domain, and to contribute to the emerging evidence base. A reference list is provided at the end of each section and where documents exist freely on the web, a link has been included.

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Chapter 2

PALAC: A knowledge exchange partnership between school practitioners and researchers

Background

The 'research to practice' gap has long been acknowledged in education and the social sciences more generally. One recent survey of 484 policymakers and practitioners, across different social sciences, reported that just 35 per cent of the respondents frequently used university research, despite it being one of the most trusted sources (McCormick, 2013). In response to such a context, within education at a national level, there have been a number of initiatives, such as the launch of the Education Endowment Foundation Toolkit, to support the development of a more evidence informed teaching profession. Recent studies have also highlighted the key factors that school leaders need to consider, such as enabling teacher capacity to engage in and with research, if they wish to establish more evidence-informed practice in schools (Brown and Zhang, 2016). However, understanding and then addressing the complexities of the 'research to practice' gap in all professions including education, social care and health demands that all relevant groups, including researchers, practitioners, and policymakers consider their role and contribution to the challenge.

What is knowledge exchange?

It was just this challenge and the fact that there is a dearth of studies relating to the education of pupils in care that influenced the team at UCL IOE to develop a programme with schools that was based on a Knowledge Exchange (KE) partnership. Knowledge Exchange is a process that brings together researchers in universities and users of research in schools and wider groups to exchange ideas, evidence, and expertise in order to address specific issues in education. In this case; the education of pupils in care. Central to the concept of KE is the bi-directional pathway between academic research and school practice. This bi-directional pathway is illustrated by the need for:

- consensus between practitioners and researchers about the sort of evidence needed for the classroom and not just by the researcher

- interaction between the tacit knowledge of the practitioner and the explicit knowledge of the researcher to create more meaningful evidence for the classroom
- more intense and long term relationships between practitioners and researchers to ensure that research is more likely to be used
- the accumulated knowledge of a field (including researchers and practitioners) rather than outputs of a single study (Schucksmith, 2016).

Many of the features of KE share principles in common with more effective continuing professional development and learning (CPDL) programmes in schools. Lessons from international reviews into effective professional development repeatedly described the importance of CPDL that had a focus on pupil outcomes, lasted for at least two terms, used outside expertise to support the programme, along with external facilitators acting as coaches and mentors (Cordingley *et al.*, 2015).

How is PALAC a knowledge exchange programme?

The philosophy and structure of the PALAC programme combines the ethos and practice of effective KE and CPDL.

The programme lasts for six months and begins with participants, who are drawn from small teams working in around eight schools or colleges, being introduced to:

- the (limited) evidence base available for the education of young people in care
- an evidence informed audit, written by the authors, to enable participants to identify their current strengths and areas for development in the education of pupils in care
- KE and its benefits for ensuring more lasting change in school and expanding and strengthening the evidence base.

Over the next six months, with the support of a facilitator, who is a member of the UCL IOE research team, participants identify changes they consider relevant for their settings based on the results of the audit and quite often studies they have read that have excited their interest and offer potential for improving outcomes for pupils in care in their schools. At the end of the six months, a review day is held for all participants with the UCL IOE PALAC team, during which observations and findings are shared.

What distinguishes the PALAC programme as a KE programme, and not just evidence informed CPDL, is the bi-directional nature of the collaboration throughout, including, for example the publication of this book. The emphasis on the importance of longevity of working relationships is continued with the opportunity for programme participants to continue their involvement through a series of networks. In this way, not only is the evidence base enriched and informed

by practitioners, there is a greater chance of the projects in schools not being one of the 65 per cent of changes in any organization that fail to deliver or maintain momentum (NCLSCS, 2009).

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Chapter 3

Supporting emotional development and wellbeing

What does the evidence tell us?

Around three-quarters of children admitted to local authority care in England have been abused or neglected prior to being looked after, or their family was dysfunctional (DfE, 2016a). Abuse and neglect, and family dysfunction, are closely associated with insecure emotional attachment to one or more primary adults with whom children come into regular contact (Bergin and Bergin, 2009). Insecure attachment may be of several types – avoidant, resistant, or disorganized – but all are associated with difficulties with learning in school. Infant attachment predicts willingness to accept challenges, social competence, and regulation of emotion and ADHD behaviour, and there is an association with psychopathology (Bergin and Bergin, 2009).

Emerging evidence from the terrain of brain research suggests that abuse and neglect as traumatic stress have an impact on the brain's ability to function. Separation from a primary caregiver in infancy may be enough to constitute trauma; violence through physical or sexual abuse certainly is (Cairns, 2013). If the child does not have access to sufficient conditions to repair the trauma, or the trauma is repeated, a cycle of automatic repair by the brain becomes disrupted and can result in post-traumatic stress disorder (Cairns, 2013). Children can become 'locked in a state of terror' and develop behaviours that are difficult to accommodate or manage (Cairns, 2013: 151). Age and gender tend to structure how these children are perceived: younger children and girls are seen as being in need of protection; older children and boys as entering the criminal justice system.

Looked after children are likely to have mental health difficulties (DfE, 2015; Meltzer *et al.*, 2003). Among primary school age children, half of looked after boys and one-third of girls had an identifiable mental disorder. These rates increase for older age groups of young people and compare to around 10 per cent of the general child population (aged 5–15). Most common were clinically significant conduct disorders (37 per cent) followed by emotional disorders (anxiety and depression) (12 per cent), and 7 per cent were hyperactive (DCSF, 2009). Mental health difficulties continue among those who are looked after on a long-term basis, although at a lesser rate.

Children who are looked after are also highly likely to have special educational needs: about 70 per cent of those in care for over 12 months are either on School

Action Plus or have a Statement of Special Educational Needs. Both statuses are markers of needs sufficient to warrant additional support in school. Sebba *et al.* (2015) found that certain kinds of special educational needs were more strongly associated with poorer academic outcomes. These were severe or profound learning difficulties, autism spectrum disorders, and moderate learning difficulties. Having a disability was also associated with poorer outcomes.

About one-third of children looked after in 2014–15 had more than one care placement (DfE, 2015). Several patterns are notable. Placements can be short and/or repeated, after return to the birth family, or longer term. If longer term, there may still be changes of placement as the child moves from emergency or short-term placement to more permanent placement, or more established placements may be disrupted at the request of carers, child, or for local authority-led reasons (Ward, 2009). Disrupted placements often lead to changes of school and mid-year admissions, exacerbating the child's experience of disruption. Evidence from analysis of administrative data shows that children in care for longer periods, and with greater stability in their placements and schools, perform better than those who are in care for shorter periods and who have many changes of placement and school (Sebba *et al.*, 2015).

There is a little doubt that the majority of looked after children have elevated needs for support for their emotional development and wellbeing.

What seems to work?

Specific school-based research in the United Kingdom (UK) on strategies to support children in care are sparse, but children in care are children first and strategies to support children in general are likely to be effective with children in care too. Strong teacher–child relationships based on trust and respect are key to learning (Driscoll and Pianta, 2010; Wetz, 2009). For children with insecure attachment, sustaining such relationships requires particular teacher and other school staff skills to address children's distrust of adults and challenging behaviour (Bergin and Bergin, 2009).

In the United States (US), Caring School Communities, based on whole-school policies promoting pupils' influence over their environment and their sense of belonging to the school, helped to increase academic achievement and to reduce anti-social behaviour (Schaps *et al.*, 2004). Developing strong empathic relationships between a 'key' adult and a child can be more effective than behavioural approaches. The UK-based 'emotion coaching' approach develops the child's internal regulation. An adult within the school with whom the child has some affinity fosters a relationship by showing the child understanding of their emotions, setting limits, and problem solving. The adult uses moments of challenging behaviour as opportunities for teaching. The relationship can last throughout the child's time at a school (Rose *et al.*, 2015).

Similarly, school-based mentoring can effectively promote looked after children's social and educational competences on a wider scale than in school. In one example in Scotland, a project partnership of a university and secondary schools recruited mentors from the university and paired them with looked after school students. Evaluations of the mentoring schemes show that the most successful were those where mentoring relationships were sustained over time, where they were structured to provide sufficiently regular and frequent contact to offer practical and meaningful help, and where there was an emotional closeness between the pair (Cameron *et al.*, 2015).

The 'In Care In School' programme developed at Bath Spa University in collaboration with the local In Care Council focuses on training teachers through discussion of possible action in response to observing specially devised film clips of children in care in classrooms. Based on professionally scripted real-life scenarios, the film clips have a deep authenticity about the looked after child's point of view and the dilemmas that teachers face (Parker and Gorman, 2013). The scenarios are particularly useful in drawing out issues of bullying and discrimination, being visible and being perceived as 'normal' in school.

Given that many children have special educational needs (SEN) or have behavioural difficulties, nurture groups can effectively integrate pupils into mainstream classes without additional support (O'Connor and Colwell, 2002; Pugh and Statham, 2006; Hughes and Schlosser, 2014). Nurture groups are based on principles of non-judgemental responses to children, with dedicated staff focused on building trusting relationships with children and a specific space within a school to provide a secure base.[1] When compared with children who did not attend nurture groups, children are most likely to improve in social and emotional functioning and academic achievement by attending provision for at least two terms, rather than remaining in their mainstream classroom.

In Norway, Daehlen (2015) found that promoting children's social and emotional lives in school helped them to do well academically. Child welfare clients (this included any child who had had contact with children's services) who enjoyed school were those who had friends and did well at school. Those children who were making good academic progress, who had support from teachers and who had friends at school enjoyed school almost as much as those who were not child welfare clients. Help from carers and caseworkers was particularly important for school engagement in a survey of 202 young people in care in Australia, whose experiences and progress were compared with a matched sample who were not in care (Tilbury *et al.*, 2014).

Furthermore, evidence from a Canadian review of literature about the relationship between child maltreatment and educational outcomes argued that, given overwhelming evidence of the impact of maltreatment on mental health across

[1] The Nurture Group Network: www.nurturegroups.org (accessed 30 June 2016).

emotional and behavioural domains that disrupt key developmental processes, there is a strong case for caregivers, school staff, and child welfare professionals to work together to address the multiple academic and mental health needs of maltreated children. Romano *et al.* (2015) argue that children need a positive culture of expectations, a trauma-sensitive school environment, and a fair and consistent routine that helps children to build on their strengths.

What is the impact?

To date, the interventions that are known to be effective with looked after children are also those that are effective for all children or all vulnerable children. For example, Attachment Aware Schools (2014) assess that a whole-school approach to building stronger relationships using a 'safe adult' model led to enhanced listening to children, reasoned responding to incidents in school, analysis of the triggers for incidents, and creating more attuned support for children. It also led to development of practical and creative curricula, and more informal small-group activities that strengthened children's constructive self-expression and feeling of belonging to the school spaces. The impact was better staff understanding of children, more resilient children, fewer incidents, better attendance, and better academic results.

Nationally recorded data shows only modest gains for looked after children in relation to educational achievements over the period 2011–15 (DfE, 2016b). The gap between looked after children and all children is still substantial. For example, 64 per cent of all young people without a special educational need gained five or more GCSE passes graded A*–C in 2015, compared to 32 per cent of those young people who did not have a special educational need and who had been in local authority care for 12 months or more. However, some looked after children do very well in education despite their difficult early start in life. The YiPPEE study of 32 young people from five areas of England who had 'educational promise' at age 16 through having passed at least some public examinations found that 25 were in education when interviewed aged 18–24, and 12 were on degree programmes, although very few had not had some delay along the way. Success factors were: continuity in schooling and care placements; availability of financial and practical help; and individual motivation to do well and to fulfil personal hopes and dreams. Often, a champion – either in school, in foster care or in the local authority – had made a critical difference to self-belief (Jackson and Cameron, 2014).

PALAC case study: Developing an 'attachment aware' school using the THINKSPACE approach

Research team and setting

The research team members were:

- Kate Smith, Head of Therapy, Percy Hedley School, Newcastle
- Michael Bettencourt, Virtual School Head Teacher, South Tyneside
- Catherine Carroll, Senior Research Associate, SENJIT, UCL IOE.

Percy Hedley School offers specialist provision for children and young people with a range of special needs and disabilities including autism, hearing impairment, and profound and multiple learning disabilities.

Focus for practice and research

This case study focused on:

- how to support the transition of a new pupil to the school into Year 9
- developing a professional learning programme to enable the school to become more 'attachment aware'
- how a Virtual School (VS) might develop a model of consultancy where the impact for pupils and staff was tangible and embedded.

Background

In September 2014, a new pupil called Paul (not real name) arrived at Percy Hedley whose experience of school had been very disrupted to date and had included five school placements. Michael Bettencourt had previously delivered a half-day's training on the importance and relevance of attachment theory for children in care and other potentially vulnerable pupils. The school leadership team and staff wanted to deepen and extend their understanding of attachment theory and how this knowledge and understanding might be applied more systematically across the school. The admission of the new pupil provided a particular focus for the training, as the school and the Virtual School (VS) were committed to ensuring that the pupil's placement was permanent.

What was done?

Michael Bettencourt and Kate Smith ran a total of 1.5 days of training on attachment theory over a term and a half. The one-day training was based on a carousel of three workshops, with staff participating in all three. The three workshops were focused on attachment theory delivered by a clinical psychologist, practical classroom strategies delivered by Michael and a reflective

team session delivered by an independent coach. The other half-day training session took place towards the end of the year, to allow time for repeated reflection on the application of learning to practice gained from the training.

Simultaneously, the class and the support team directly working with Paul took part in a 'reflective team' session that drew from the 'THINKSPACE' approach developed by Swann and York (2011), described in more detail in the next section. When pupils in care arrive in school they tend to have complicated histories, and it can be a challenge for a school to know the full story and background of the pupil. It was hoped that this approach would be a response to that challenge.

In preparation for the session, a 'genogram' of the pupil was drawn up. A genogram is a graphic representation of a family tree that displays detailed information on the relationships among individuals connected with the pupil. It goes beyond a traditional family tree, by presenting a picture of hereditary patterns and psychological factors that have played a part in relationships. It was considered that this genogram approach would be effective in allowing the team to quickly identify and understand various patterns in the pupil's family history that may have had an influence on how the pupil formed relationships. In addition, links were made with the theory on attachment and its potential relevance for the pupil.

The 'reflective team' session followed a structure that began with the group being given a brief to tell the pupil's story, and individuals being given specific tasks to report back on, such as identify themes, count the number of schools attended by the pupil, and note the names of people involved in their life. The remainder of the session took the following structure described in the THINKSPACE approach:

> **Step 1**: One person in the group who knows the pupil well (speaker one) describes the issues and all listen without speaking.
>
> **Step 2**: The team members reflect on what they have heard and make observations/pose questions – during this time speaker one remains silent.
>
> **Step 3**: Speaker One responds to issues raised, answers questions, reflects and reformulates.
>
> **Step 4**: The reflective team element ends, the facilitator summarizes and the team focus on actions to be taken.

At Percy Hedley the session was facilitated by Michael and included the team around the child at school, the social worker, and the carer. The meeting enabled everyone to have a better understanding of Paul and how they might all support him more effectively to ensure that he remained at Percy Hedley. For the rest of the year, the team working with the pupil met regularly to discuss how the pupil was settling into school life and any concerns they might have had as to how to respond to any challenging issues during the week.

How was the project evidence informed?

The project was specifically influenced by the research on attachment theory, what is currently known about 'what makes good' continuing professional learning and development, and the THINKSPACE model developed by Swann and York (2011).

The professional learning and development delivered throughout the year incorporated all the characteristics that have been associated with greater positive benefits for pupils and staff, namely: peer and specialist support, planned meetings, staff directing and owning their learning, and a focus on pupil outcomes (CUREE, 2014). Through participation on the PALAC programme the Virtual School staff were made aware of the potential limitations of 'one off' training sessions and were keen to adopt a regular and sustained collaboration over the length of the project.

The THINKSPACE consultative model begins with the creation of a genogram of the child, their birth, and foster family following the steps previously described. A brief history of the pupil's life experience and care history is examined along with a review of their emotional, physical, and social development and educational progress. There are also important discussions around where anxiety exists in the system, and the group offers a safe space to explore and contain that anxiety, as it is not always possible to eliminate it.

The impact of the project was measured using quantitative and qualitative data. The project team was keen to have in place different measures to show the impact of the training for both staff and the pupil. Data measuring the impact of the project for staff were gathered in the following ways:

- Pre- and post-test self-rated questionnaires of training, based on the Attachment Aware Schools audit undertaken at the start and end of the project (approximately six months). Staff were asked to rate themselves against five levels, from 'new area' to 'cutting edge', in knowledge of attachment theory, competence in managing their own responses and to those of individual pupils, their role within teams, and accessing 'safe spaces' in school.

- A focus group was held with the team that worked directly with the pupil and who had been part of the reflective team process.

Data measuring the progress of the pupil over the year included standardized and school-based measures. This included the Vineland Adaptive Behaviour Scales – a standardized measure that looks at adaptive functioning in the domains of communication, daily living (including academic skills), and socialization. The assessment can be carried out by school staff and parents/carers and is commonly used with children with limited language and with learning difficulties.

What were the findings of the project?

A year later, Paul had adapted to school life successfully, was happy and making progress. The project had contributed to this outcome, and had helped to facilitate a whole-school approach to Paul's education. Findings from the self-rated questionnaires and the focus group demonstrated very positive influences of the PALAC activities on staff development and professional learning. A comparison of the pre- and post-test questionnaires showed a statistically significant increase in the self-rating scores by staff. The scores of those members of staff working closely with Paul were also significantly higher than the rest of the staff, thus reflecting the added benefits of taking part in the 'reflective team' session.

These scores were corroborated by the findings from the focus group with the team who worked directly with Paul. Overall, the benefits reported of the reflective team session were a better understanding of the background of the pupil, the ability of the team to meet the needs of the pupil sooner, and the use of a common language and approach across the core team. The members of the team felt more confident as to what could be said to the pupil about personal circumstances, what strategies might work during the day rather than professional 'guesswork', and knowing that previous approaches used were 'along the right lines'. Since Paul had arrived at school, the team had observed how he was more able to self-regulate behaviour, was more accepting of praise and made less use of the 'safe base'.

Key learning

Perhaps the most important 'lessons' from the project for the research team were:

- understanding the importance of a VS and a school's ethical duty in 'pursuing permanence' for pupils in care in schools
- how whole-school development and learning, targeted CPD support and ongoing peer and specialist support can help to translate that commitment into action and, ultimately, into greater stability for pupils in care.

Next steps in the project

The school has since successfully used the 'reflective team' session approach with another pupil who was recently adopted, and it has proved equally valuable for this pupil. This reflective 'tell the story' session was facilitated by a professional with no knowledge of the pupil and the school. This proved very successful and will be adopted for further sessions. The results from the staff self-reported questionnaires were used to identify any further actions required for the school improvement plan such as the need for carers to have more bespoke training in relation to the education of children in their care, and an appropriate programme that can be delivered by school staff is being investigated. This recognizes the key role that foster carers play in supporting more successful placements in schools for looked after pupils.

The VS is planning to deliver a similar consultancy model in mainstream settings. The model will continue to use the approach of focusing on one pupil but utilizing that learning to influence practice across the whole school and for more pupils. The VS commissioned a further PALAC programme for 2015–16 to be run across eight schools in the local authority, to encourage greater evidence informed practice in schools for pupils in care. And one mainstream secondary school has used and developed the reflective 'tell the story' approach as part of a whole school CPD.

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Chapter 4

Strategic approaches to raising and monitoring attainment

What does the evidence tell us?

Children and young people in local authority care in England continue to perform well below their non-care peers in school attainment tests despite policy initiatives that began in earnest with the Labour Government (1997–2010). Furthermore, the numbers of young people in care are rising, especially among those aged 10–15 years and older (DfE, 2015).

Children who are, or have been, in care are one of the lowest performing groups in terms of educational outcomes internationally (Flynn, Tessier, and Coulombe, 2013). Data from the Department for Education (2016) showed that, in 2015, at the end of Key Stage 1 (age 7 years), 71 per cent of children in care achieved the expected level in reading; in writing the figure was 63 per cent and in maths, 73 per cent. This compares with 90 per cent, 86 per cent, and 92 per cent of all children in those subjects respectively. At the end of Key Stage 2 (age 11 years), the gap widens: 52 per cent of children in care reached the expected academic level in English and mathematics, compared with 80 per cent of all children. The attainment gap continues to increase as children get older, so that a young person from a care background is far less likely to go to university than one who had lived with their parents throughout childhood (DfE, 2015). Young people transitioning from care also have poorer employment prospects and health outcomes than the general population and are over-represented in the homeless and prison populations. Less is known about the factors that facilitate or limit educational progress for these young people. There are very few longitudinal studies of the educational attainment and life chances of care experienced young people once they reach adulthood and none that use a representative sample of the whole care experienced population. As a result we know little about the key factors associated with looked after children's lower attainment although such work is better established in the US and Canada (Hook and Courtney (2011).

The most recent statistical data from the Department for Education (DfE, 2016) explains that looked after children have poorer educational outcomes than socio-economically matched non-looked after children. A higher proportion (67.8 per cent) have a special educational need, and their emotional and behavioural needs are a cause for concern.

The percentage of looked after children achieving five or more A*–C GCSEs or equivalent including English and Maths increased from 11 per cent in 2009 to 15.3 per cent in 2013. This is compared to 58 per cent of non-looked after children who achieve this level. Although this gap has reduced, it is still higher than it was in 2009. GCSE rates for looked after young people in 2015 were 14 per cent, and 53 per cent for all young people, following changes in methods of measurement. Among those without a special educational need, 32 per cent of young people looked after who had been in care for 12 months or more gained five 'good' GCSEs, half as many as in the general population (DfE, 2016). Girls performed better than boys. Looked after children are twice as likely to be excluded from school as non-looked after children.

Local authorities have a duty to promote the educational achievement of all of their looked after children (s.52, Children Act 2004). But there is a sharp drop in educational engagement post-16: in 2013–14, a total of 41 per cent of 19-year-old care leavers were not in education, employment, or training (NEET) compared with 15 per cent for all 19-year-olds. Just 6 per cent of care leavers were officially recorded as being in higher education compared with one-third of all 19-year-olds (National Audit Office, 2015).

Although there is an emerging evidence base for specific interventions that result in increased attainment (described in the next section), there appears to be no research on the more strategic approaches needed for raising and monitoring attainment. However, the literature concerned with raising and monitoring attainment points to:

- the need for well-written personal education plans (PEPs) with rigorous SMART targets
- issues related to looked after children being included in the school improvement plan
- the designated teacher having received sufficient training to carry out the many and varied aspects of the role
- the 'Gifted and Talented' programme in a school addressing the needs of looked after children
- the use of the Pupil Premium being linked to attainment.

On the basis of a wide-ranging review of barriers to school progress, Ferguson and Wolkow (2012) found that the most universally expressed recommendation is to facilitate cooperation and coordination between schools and social care agencies and individuals in charge of the educational needs of children in care. They further recommended strategies such as:

- improved school records and information-sharing procedures
- more extensive training to improve awareness of the needs of children in care
- greater school and care placement stability
- increased educational supports for young people, including tutoring, training for foster carers, and educational enrichment activities
- more extensive educational planning and monitoring within children's social care services.

What seems to work?

In 2012, Ofsted reviewed the impact of Virtual Schools in nine local authorities. There was evidence of improving educational outcomes for looked after children in all of the local authorities visited. There was also good evidence of increased levels of attendance and reduced numbers of exclusions. More often, improvement was better for younger children at Key Stage 2. Virtual Schools, acting as advocates for looked after children's education, played a central role in raising the awareness of all those involved in supporting looked after children. Virtual Schools that had established effective data management systems (that went beyond straightforward school attainment data) were better placed to measure the progress of individual children and to assess the impact of support provided (Ofsted, 2012). Virtual School Heads were given statutory status in the Children and Families Act 2014. The National Association for Virtual School Heads (NAVSH), established in 2016, has a mission to improve measurement of attainment and looked after children's progress, uphold high quality educational provision for children in care, provide professional support for schools, and promote effective engagement with representative bodies for children in care such as Children in Care Councils, and professionals concerned with children in care.

What is the impact?

Even though robust evidence has yet to be collated on strategic approaches to raising and monitoring attainment, the data relating to the achievement and outcomes for looked after children continues to provide a strong rationale for the careful monitoring of their progress to enable better strategic planning to raise standards for these vulnerable children and young people (Berridge, 2012).

PALAC case study: Implementation of post-16 electronic personal education plans (ePEPs)

Research team and setting

The research team members were:

- Jennie de Bossart, Information Manager, Surrey Virtual School
- Peter Stanbridge, Post-16 Co-ordinator, Surrey Virtual School
- Catherine Carroll, Senior Research Associate, SENJIT, UCL IOE.

Focus for practice and research

This case study focused on:

- the implementation of a new post-16 ePEP
- establishing processes for monitoring the impact of ePEPs and their contribution to improved educational outcomes for children and young people in care.

Background

All children in care must have a care plan, of which the PEP (pre-school to 18) is an integral part. It is used to support the personalized learning of the child. The PEP is an evolving record of what needs to happen for pupils in care to enable them to make expected progress and to fulfil their potential. The quality of the PEP is the joint responsibility of the local authority that looks after the child and the education setting. Social workers, carers, Virtual School Headteachers (VSH), designated teachers, and, as appropriate, other relevant professionals need to work closely together and to involve the child and, where appropriate, the child's parent and/or other relevant adult (DfE, 2014).

Since the introduction of PEPs in 2000, reports from Ofsted and the limited research that has been undertaken on PEPs indicate a lack of consistency across local authorities in the quality and completion rates of PEPs (Ofsted, 2012; Hayden, 2005). Information about attainment history is often missing, targets are not sufficiently specific or challenging, and the views of children and young people are not always evident. The result is that PEPs are yet to be consistently used to plan and evaluate effectively in order to support a child's education and promote and raise their aspirations.

In response to this context, local authorities are increasingly implementing electronic PEPs (ePEPs) to try to overcome some of the communication and practical challenges of completing a continuously evolving document that must be completed by a range of professionals in many different settings. Surrey Virtual School (SVS) piloted the introduction of ePEPs in February 2015 with

its post-16 young people in care. The case study below describes the preparation for the implementation and the initial responses of professionals to the ePEP, to gain a better understanding of the facilitators and challenges of implementation, and to investigate how to evaluate the impact of the ePEP in the short and medium term. SVS planned to use lessons from the implementation to support the planned roll-out of ePEPs for all school aged pupils in care the following year.

What was done?

In February 2015, SVS introduced ePEPs for 229 post-16 students in care, almost 50 per cent of whom were in education provision outside Surrey. SVS wanted to conduct a small-scale evaluation of the post-16 ePEP while they were being rolled out, to elicit the views of professionals on the quality of the content of the ePEP and the experience of completing a PEP online.

To support the implementation of the new initiative, SVS delivered four half-day training events for social workers, education professionals, and independent reviewing officers (IROs) in January 2015. Participants were asked to complete an evaluation of the training and what elements of their learning they might implement on return to their settings. The feedback was also used to inform how the training might be improved for the eight half-days planned in June 2015 linked with roll-out of ePEPs to all pupils in care from September 2015 (Reception to Year 13). An e-survey was sent to social workers, education professionals, IROs, and social care managers to gather their views on the technical aspects of the ePEP, the content and quality of the ePEP, and how it might be improved. Funding was also allocated to further education providers, in recognition of the initial changes to working practices required of colleagues in further education colleges.

How was the project evidence informed?

Currently there is limited evidence as to whether – and how – ePEPs have addressed, or indeed are able to address, some of the concerns highlighted in the literature and in professional practice. These include completion rates and quality issues, particularly in relation to target setting. Nevertheless, some of the potential advantages of ePEPs over previous systems include:

- one access point to enable, quite often, a large professional team to contribute
- facility for a VS to be able to collate, monitor, and evaluate plans faster and more efficiently
- templates can be readily updated to keep abreast of, for example, statutory and local requirements
- they can be personalized, for example with pupil work being uploaded.

It would seem thus far from the evidence that the ePEP does offer some potential benefits, but much remains that is unknown about the extent and efficacy of its use. Ofsted (2012), in its review of virtual schools, did report that one VS had introduced ePEPs and observed that the percentage of pupils in care with a completed PEP had doubled. The ePEP was functioning as the evolving and living document that it should be. All relevant professionals had access, and pupils were themselves able to record their feelings and views. However, Ofsted also reported that one consequence of the 'remoteness' of the ePEP was that face-to-face meetings were less frequent, and to be mindful that increased completion rates did not always equate with an improvement in quality.

Although the evidence of ePEPs may only just be emerging, it is possible to look to related initiatives in education for lessons in how to maximize the potential of the ePEP. In 2004, as part of the Every Child Matters programme (DfES, 2004), the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) was introduced. The CAF is a shared assessment and planning framework used across all children's services and all local areas in England. Its purpose is to support the early identification of children and young people's additional needs and to promote coordinated service provision to meet those needs – not unlike the aim of a PEP. Some studies have shown that although not without its challenges, the CAF led to better outcomes for children, especially in engagement in education, and can be a very cost-effective approach (Easton *et al.*, 2011). Easton *et al.* (2011: 3) demonstrated that:

> Improved integrated working through the CAF process is not an optional extra but a fundamental building block that enables LAs and their partner agencies to work together effectively to support early intervention and prevention. But the 'process' alone cannot deliver the improved outcomes. Progress has been most apparent in those areas where the CAF process underpins specific evidence-based programmes that have been shown to be effective in working with vulnerable children and families.

Apart from an expanded evidence base and improved knowledge of the available evidence, the need for more relevant, meaningful, and measurable targets would also help to ensure that ePEPs had more of an effect on pupil outcomes. Finally, young people, including those in care, have demonstrated that they have insight into the factors that can help and hinder their education (Sebba *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, including them genuinely and fully in the PEP process helps to ensure that they are part of the decision-making process.

What were the findings of the project?

The initial response to the half-day ePEP preparation training event was very positive. The learning objectives of the session were:

- to understand the needs and benefits of the ePEP for young people in care
- to assist participants in the production of a quality ePEP for students in care, using the ePEP process.

Over 70 per cent of participants reported that the training fully met the learning objectives (Figure 2.1). The participants were asked to prioritize actions for their own development as a result of the training. The most common themes were: signing up early to the ePEP site, improving ePEP targets, taking more time to prepare for review meetings, and analysis of the best use of Pupil Premium funding.

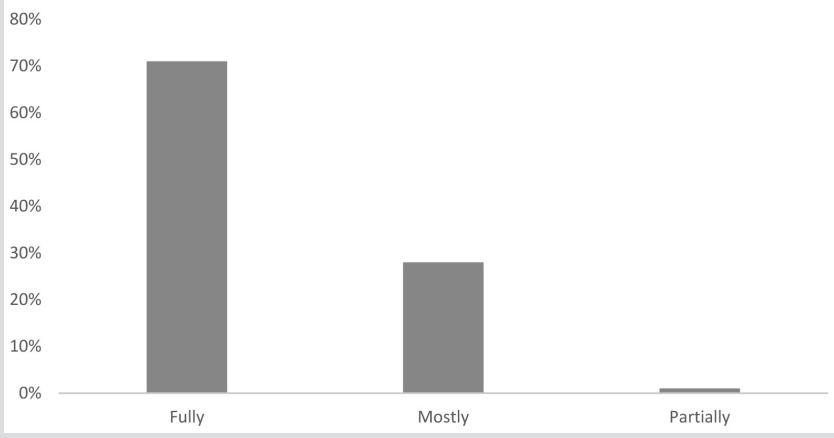

Figure 2.1: Participant response to ePEP training

The response rate to the e-survey, which was sent to the designated teacher, IROs, social workers, and senior social care managers, was very low (15 per cent). However, for those respondents who had completed the ePEP, over half reported that it had been easy to complete and that the average time to complete the first ePEP for a student (which will always take the longest time) was approximately 1.5 hours.

Respondents were asked to report their views on the strengths of the new ePEP for post-16 pupils. The most common themes were: the plan focused on forward planning for the young person; it would be a positive experience for young people; tracking and recording for each young person was quick and straightforward; and there was less paperwork and chasing of professionals. The areas for development highlighted by the respondents included: ensuring students' ability to get their information; communication and training for staff not in the county on how to complete the ePEP; and the length of the document.

Key learning

Four months after the launch of the ePEP, the Surrey team concerned with the implementation of ePEPS completed a 'Strengths, Challenges, Achievements, and Next Steps' (SCAN) analysis. The project clearly demonstrated that there was a recognition of need for post-16 ePEPs among professionals that allowed young people to engage more effectively around decisions about their education and training. The meetings and dialogues that had taken place had improved communications and links between the VS, the local authority and local colleges. The ePEP process and review meetings facilitated greater information sharing on a range of education and training provisions.

On a practical level, there was now a secure and accessible portal for staff to work on at any time. Already, the benefits of a reduction in entering repetitive information in a PEP from term to term were evident, and staff could now extract specific data items that had not previously been readily available. It also assisted in streamlining Pupil Premium funding. An initial half-day's training on the system, bringing all professional groups together, was sufficient for most professionals to go away and begin using the system.

There were, however, still challenges with the ePEP that would, in many respects, remain for the future. These included the following:

- The requirement for a named person for access from all professional groups meant that the VS would have to regularly update contacts, including social workers (where there could be high turnover in places).
- Many of the FE colleges had 200 or more students in care, and investigating common systems and approaches across the different colleges, inside and outside the local authority, was an ongoing challenge.
- There would be a requirement for a continued and ongoing training offer to accommodate a regular need for induction on how to use the system. However, this also provided the opportunity for the VS to update staff on other relevant issues.
- Finally, there was still a need to link with existing processes, in order to reduce the need for recoding information elsewhere.

Next steps in the project

In the short term, the next step was to collect the views of some of the young people about the ePEP process. It had also been planned to monitor completion rates of the ePEP over the first year and other quality assurance processes such as the quality of targets on the plans. As these were the first post-16 PEPs, there was no baseline to compare whether ePEPs were associated with better completion rates and quality indicators. However, this would be possible, with data from the

ePEP due to be launched for all schools pupils the following academic year. A final question for professionals and researchers remains for the future and that is how the effectiveness of ePEPs might be measured against student outcomes.

PALAC Case study: Strategic approaches to raising and monitoring attainment within a school setting

Research team and setting

- Sarah Emberger, SEN and MFL Teacher, Ashcroft Technology Academy, Wandsworth, London
- Adrian Cross, Wandsworth Virtual School
- Catherine Carroll, Senior Research Associate, SENJIT, UCL IOE.

Ashcroft Technology Academy is a mixed 11 to 18 academy situated in the London Borough of Wandsworth. The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals, and children who are looked after) is well above average.

Focus for practice and research

This case study focused on:

- Addressing how the education of pupils in care might be incorporated within whole school approaches to 'closing the gap' for all pupils who experience disadvantage

What was done

Students from disadvantaged backgrounds at Ashcroft were already making good progress during their time at the academy. In 2014, 55 per cent gained at least five A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, against a national average of 36 per cent. Nevertheless, completing the PALAC audit helped the academy team to identify specific changes that could be introduced at a strategic academy level and individual student level to support even better outcomes. These changes included:

- Adding a 'Top Tips' guide to the education of pupils in care to the staff shared drive that was introduced in staff briefings
- Adding pupils in care as an additional section to the SEN register for easy access for staff
- Specifically inviting pupils in care to join the academy mentoring programme to act as mentors for new pupils in care who joined the academy
- Professional development training for Teaching and Learning Assistants on metacognition and questioning delivered by Adrian Cross from the Virtual School.

Key Learning

'Closing the Gap' is a policy priority in England and schools are actively engaged in delivering whole school and pupil level initiatives to help improve outcomes for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Although many schools do indeed improve academic outcomes for disadvantaged groups, they do not actually 'close the gap' with their peers (Strand, 2016). Those schools that are actually managing to 'narrow the gap' do so due to factors such as high quality teaching and learning, an inclusive curriculum, and one-to-one support (Demie and Mclean, 2015). During the PALAC programme, the Ashcroft team had identified that specific approaches/interventions that had been identified in the evidence base as having some success with pupils in care, were more likely to be applied in the academy if they reflected and integrated into the academy's strategic approach to 'Closing the Gap'.

Next steps in the project

The senior leadership team at Ashcroft was investigating whether and how a key worker, specifically for pupils in care, might be introduced at the academy. The impact of the training on metacognition and questioning techniques was to be investigated through lesson observations. The importance of attachment training for pupils in care and other vulnerable students was to be integrated into general 'Closing the Gap' continuing professional development sessions. Finally, links were to be investigated with local universities that offered peer mentoring to sixth form students.

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Chapter 5

Supporting learning

What does the evidence tell us?

There is strong evidence that exposure to abuse, neglect, and broken attachments can have long-term psychosocial and educational consequences, but these should not lower expectations in relation to children's learning, since most children who eventually enter care do benefit educationally (Brodie, 2009). Spending longer in care is more educationally beneficial than shorter periods (Sebba *et al.*, 2015) and focused interventions can improve children's abilities, particularly in relation to literacy (Vinnerljung *et al.*, 2014)

Nevertheless, despite a recent period of considerable policy focusing on supporting the learning of looked after children, there is a dearth of high-quality evidence of what works and why (Liabo *et al.*, 2013). To date, there are just two papers that review intervention studies (Forsman and Vinnerljung, 2012; Liabo *et al.*, 2013), and in total these papers review no more than 20 studies. These reviews did demonstrate that most education interventions designed for pupils in care have benefits, but most were not sufficiently robust to make strong claims to effectiveness (Forsman and Vinnerljung, 2012; Liabo *et al.*, 2013).

Nevertheless, it is possible to identify some emerging trends, including the crucial contribution of caregivers, one-to-one tutoring in English or maths, paired reading and the Letterbox Club (Forsman and Vinnerljung, 2012; Liabo *et al.*, 2013; see also Chapter 7). Also available are the reviews of evidence and interventions for all pupils, including the Education Endowment Foundation toolkit and John Hattie's review of what approaches in the classroom support learning (Education Endowment Foundation, 2016; Hattie, 2009). Increasingly, 'what works' approaches are also being published and continually updated for different groups of children, including those with autistic spectrum disorder, dyslexia, and speech, language, and communication needs that will have relevance for some pupils in care (Brooks, 2013; Communication Trust, 2014; Research Autism, 2014).

What seems to be working?

Tutoring is the type of intervention that has been most widely evaluated to date – programmes such as Catch Up and the Three Tutoring Models study have resulted in significant gains in literacy (Liabo *et al.*, 2013). However, no statistical differences were found between different models of tutoring. Two Canadian studies focused on the Teach Your Children Well tutoring model, with some evidence in progress in

aspects of literacy and maths (Forsman and Vinnerljung, 2012). Interventions that encourage reading (including paired reading) show some very promising initial findings with respect to progress in attainment. These are the Letterbox Club project and the Paired Reading Intervention (Griffiths, 2012; Osbourne *et al.*, 2010). Vinnerljung *et al.* (2014) replicated the English study (Osbourne *et al.*, 2010) to show that paired reading is an effective literacy intervention for fostered children aged 8–12 in Sweden.

Connelly *et al.* (2008) evaluated a Scottish pilot of 18 authorities that were provided with funding to support the achievement of looked after children. The projects across the authorities came under five categories: direct support to pupils, personal education planning, transition support, staff development, and the provision of technological support. Where data were available, the findings did show that attainment improved (although it was not known whether this differed significantly from other children) and that there was some improvement in school attendance. The study concluded that individualized and flexible approaches were the most successful. The Helsingborg project from Sweden was one example of a personalized educational and psychological support programme for pupils with SEN, based on a very thorough initial assessment, which resulted in significant improvements in IQ and literacy (Tideman *et al.*, 2011).

Interventions that took a more strategic approach to attendance and attainment, including the Virtual School Heads Pilot, Taking Care of Education and Education Liaison, saw some improvements in scores, but few that had statistical significance (Liabo *et al.*, 2013). Promising findings have also been reported in relation to approaches such as the distribution of learning materials, deployment of an educational liaison person, and the provision of working memory training (Dill *et al.*, 2012).

What is the impact?

The conclusion of both review papers was that there is a dearth of quality evidence relating to outcomes from interventions developed to support the educational progress of looked after children, and that there is a lack of clarity about the variables and conditions that may be linked to a successful intervention (Forsman and Vinnerljung, 2012; Liabo *et al.*, 2013). This was in part due to the quality of the studies available, with small sample sizes, attrition of participants, and a lack of control groups preventing detailed comparative analysis. Liabo *et al.* (2013) highlighted that none of the studies included in their review would meet the stringent criteria for inclusion in a systematic review of the effectiveness of an intervention, in for example health or medicine, such as those conducted for Cochrane or Campbell reviews.

However, overall the findings from the studies described demonstrate the merit for further research, exploration, and application of these approaches within

a school setting. It is also clear that there remains an urgent need for more well-designed and effectively evaluated interventions to help to support the learning and to improve the outcomes for looked after children, including interventions with a focus on attendance (Dill *et al.*, 2012).

The following two case studies addressed different approaches to supporting learning; the first case study describes a whole school approach to embedding assessment for learning in the classroom and the second focuses on the impact of targeted literacy support for pupils in care.

PALAC case study: Embedding assessment for learning in the classroom

Research team and setting

The research team members were:

- Lisa Leonard, Head of School, Academy of Central Bedfordshire
- Claire Dawes, SENCo, Academy of Central Bedfordshire
- Catherine Carroll, Senior Research Associate, SENJIT, UCL IOE.

The Academy of Central Bedfordshire is an alternative provision free school, which provides education for students in Key Stages 3 and 4 who have been excluded, or who are at risk of exclusion, from their mainstream schools.

Focus for practice and research

This case study focused on:

- improving learning through accurate, detailed, and personalized assessment
- supporting practitioners to embed formative assessment in teaching and learning.

Background

The Academy of Central Bedfordshire (ACB) opened in September 2013. Typically, the students arrive with a weak record of attendance and behaviour from their previous schools, low levels of attainment, and poor perceptions of themselves as learners. A number of the students at the school are in the care of the local authority. Students can be referred at any point in the school year and in the year of the PALAC project, ninety pupils had joined the academy after the normal school entry point.

The school PALAC team was concerned that many of the students were being referred to the academy without staff having access to a partial or full academic record. The academy seeks to offer personalized learning but within

an inclusive approach to education, with each student spending most of their time in the classroom. But for this to operate effectively, a detailed and accurate assessment of a student's needs was essential before their learning commenced at the academy. For many of the students, joining the academy provided a 'fresh start', so it was important to ensure that their learning was a positive experience from the first day.

What was done?

The PALAC team combined current best practices in formative and summative assessment, and sought to embed practices in the classroom. The actions were:

- writing a pre-admission document to elicit a detailed education profile of a student
- using the pre-admission document to form the basis of a series of meetings held with the student, parent/carer (home visit), previous school, Virtual School, and other relevant professionals
- piloting the use of two standardized assessments on pre-admission with each student: the Pupil Attitudes to Self and School (PASS)[1] survey and the York Assessment of Reading for Comprehension (YARC)[2]
- training for all school staff in understanding and interpreting the information in the pre-admission document, including the standardized assessments, and in how to use the information in target setting, lesson planning, and assessment for learning for each student and for whole-class teaching
- senior leaders looking for evidence of the pre-admission information (in addition to student progress and attainment data) being embedded in learning through, for example, lesson observations and student work records.

How was the project evidence informed?

For all pupils, an initial accurate assessment of their learning and the use of a variety of strategies in assessment for learning by classroom teachers have been shown to lead to higher-quality learning (Wiliam *et al.*, 2004). Arguably, this is even more important for students who present with more complex learning profiles, including those in care, many of whom have additional needs and/or disabilities. Formative assessment approaches, through the graduated approach to learning (assess, plan, do, review) is integral to the revised Special

[1] Pupil Attitudes to Self and School Survey: www.gl-assessment.co.uk/products/pass-pupil-attitudes-self-and-school (accessed 30 June 2016).

[2] York Assessment of Reading for Comprehension: www.yarcsupport.co.uk (accessed 30 June 2016).

Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice in school (DfE, 2014b). The new ACB pre-admission document contained the information that established the baseline data (qualitative and quantitative), to enable a more robust start to formative assessment by teaching staff.

The use of standardized data in formative assessment by classroom practitioners is not yet common practice in schools. It is often viewed as the domain of specialist teachers, SENCos and/or external professionals such as educational psychologists. It is not typically part of initial teacher education programmes. However, there is research evidence to show that the judicious use of standardized pupil attainment data can lead to more accurate assessment of learning (Squires *et al.*, 2012; Snowling *et al.*, 2011). Snowling *et al.* (2011) showed that teacher assessments overestimated the 'risk of dyslexia' in a cohort of primary school pupils based on National Curriculum data. However, teacher judgements, supplemented by two short standardized assessments, allowed for a more accurate and specific identification of pupils who subsequently experienced reading difficulties. Similarly, a survey conducted by Squires *et al.* (2012) of 450 schools in England supported international research, which has shown that summer-born children are more likely to be identified as having SEN. They demonstrated that when a more thorough, multi-professional assessment (including standardized assessments) was undertaken, the month-of-birth effect was no longer present.

The ACB was sensitive to the benefits of using standardized assessments. However, it took time to make a decision about which ones to use, as the team needed to consider: the collective and individual needs of the students; which assessments offered data that could be readily used as part of formative assessment but also offered the opportunity to collect long-term data on the school population; resourcing in terms of purchasing the assessments and use of staff time; and implications for student time. The school decided to use two standardized assessments: the PASS survey and the YARC assessment with all students.

In the UK, the PASS survey has been used in mainstream and specialist settings, including pupil referral units.[3] Students' attitudes to learning can influence their whole experience of education and can have significant effects on their overall levels of attainment, engagement, and wellbeing. Most students at the ACB came with negative attitudes to learning, so it was key to measure and monitor how their experience of being at the academy influenced their

[3] Case study of how one junior school in England uses findings from the PASS survey: www.stlawrence-junior.surrey.sch.uk/Documents/Inspection%20Reports/2013-14/PASS%20Survey%20Results%20January%202014.pdf (accessed 30 June 2016).

attitudes in the short and the long term. Furthermore, the different elements of the PASS survey allowed the school to gather personalized data on individual students, to set specific targets and teaching strategies.

In addition to attitudes to learning, literacy ability is also a very important indicator of educational attainment (Hulme and Snowling, 2009). When a student presents with a reading difficulty in school, it is not always clear to the class teacher whether the student has difficulty with reading in terms of accuracy, fluency, and/or comprehension. For students in care, social, emotional, and mental health difficulties have been identified as the most common SEN, and yet studies confirm that a considerable proportion of school-age children and adolescents with emotional and behavioural difficulties also have language difficulties (Clegg *et al.*, 2009).

The ACB wanted to use a standardized assessment that measured reading for all students (those with and without reading difficulties), along with teacher assessment, and which helped to clarify the specific reading difficulties of a student, to better understand their literacy difficulties and plan their learning accordingly. The YARC, based on the Simple View of Reading (Hoover and Gough, 1990) was selected for use with students and is increasingly being used in schools by practitioners.

What were the findings of the project?

After just one term of implementing the project changes, data from lesson observations by senior leaders were already showing that those staff with a better understanding of the information in the pre-admission document, and who were applying that understanding in lesson planning, led to better student outcomes. The YARC data were helping staff from all subjects to better understand the literacy and academic needs of the pupils and to support their national curriculum assessment knowledge and understanding. This was especially the case for teachers of subjects other than English, whose subject background had not exposed them as much to the implications of language and literacy difficulties in the classroom.

These observations were backed up independently in an Ofsted inspection report later in the academic year, which stated that: 'The progress of looked-after children [in the academy] is supported effectively because good relationships are established with their main carers and their studies are well matched to their needs'. The school team had been able to use the PASS data collected to provide strong evidence to Ofsted that, despite behaviour that might have looked like 'a cause for concern' during the inspection for some individual students, they had actually made significant progress since their arrival at the academy. This evidence of progress was well received by Ofsted.

Key learning

Although the pre-admission document and standardized assessments had only been in place for a short time, the positive impact on staff practice and student outcomes was emerging. However, what should be noted was the planning and research time that was spent considering the content of the document, the most appropriate standardized assessments to use and then how best to support staff in their professional learning on the application of such information and data.

There are a number of standardized assessments available to schools and each school will need to make their own decisions, based on the following questions:

- What is the purpose of the assessment?
- What does it assess?
- Has the assessment been shown to be valid and reliable?
- How long does it take to administer?
- Is it designed to be administered with a group or an individual?
- Is it simple to score and analyse?
- Does it provide 'what next' strategies?
- What is the cost?
- How much training is required of staff?

On the issue of CPD, it was clear to the team that staff had benefited from a 'little and often' approach in order to absorb their new learning, and also to discuss how they were applying this learning to formative assessment approaches with colleagues in the classroom context.

Next steps in the project

It was going to take a full year to allow for a more thorough analysis of student outcomes, based on the standardized data and the contribution of the assessments themselves to formative assessment approaches in school. Planning was in place for the pre-admission document to eventually become the SEN Support Plan (as required by the Code of Practice (2015)) to be completed initially by the feeder school.

In terms of staff professional learning, the school leadership team wanted to conduct a more in-depth analysis of the level of staff knowledge and understanding of different additional learning needs through the use of some of the nationally available professional development audits, such as the Literacy and Specific Learning Difficulties Professional Development Framework (SpLD Trust 2011).

Case study: Raising the literacy attainment of primary aged pupils in care

Research team and setting

The research team members were:

- Suzanne Parrott, Assistant Head Teacher, Surrey Virtual School
- Vivian Hill, Director of Professional Educational Psychology Training, UCL IOE.

Focus for practice and research

This case study focused on:

- how to pilot a one-to-one literacy intervention led by school staff for primary aged pupils in care.

Background

The Ofsted Review of Virtual Schools observed the strong advocacy role played by Virtual Schools in raising the awareness of those involved in supporting pupils in care (Ofsted, 2012). Surrey Virtual School (SVS) wanted to develop this advocacy role, by being able to contribute knowledgeably to debates on specific pedagogy for pupils in care at a local and national level. The team also sought, where possible, to be involved in contributing to expanding the limited evidence base on specific strategies to support the education of pupils in care. This aim was linked to the fact that in 2014, Virtual Schools became responsible for the allocation of Pupil Premium funding. In most local authorities, schools make a specific request to the Virtual School for Pupil Premium funding for a pupil, based on the priorities in the PEP. As for other Virtual Schools, SVS had funded a number of requests for one-to-one tuition, often provided by external agencies, but the impact of the funding on pupil progress and attainment was not always apparent. The Surrey team was interested in investigating whether a tailored literacy intervention, delivered by school staff with the support of the Virtual School could improve literacy outcomes for pupils in care and whether such an 'in-house' approach would enable more effective monitoring of the impact of Pupil Premium funding.

What was done?

As part of the PALAC programme, participants were introduced to the research of Vivian Hill and Morag Stuart at UCL IOE on a literacy intervention specifically devised for pupils in care. SVS wanted to replicate the research, as far as possible,

as a pilot study with four primary aged pupils in two Surrey schools, with a view to rolling out the programme the following academic year, subject to findings and evaluation.

In February 2015, a trainee education psychologist from UCL IOE conducted individual literacy assessments with the four pupils, and used the findings to devise a personalized programme for each pupil. The programme was delivered by teachers and teaching assistants in the schools and who attended a one-day training workshop delivered by Vivian Hill. The workshop focused on assessing literacy, some of the barriers to literacy experienced by pupils in care and strategies to support their learning. As part of the literacy programme, each pupil received one hour of one-to-one tuition for ten weeks. The pupils were assessed again by the trainee education psychologist in September 2015, to measure their progress and attainment.

Finally, SVS agreed to fund £600 per member of staff who delivered the programme in schools in respect of the additional time commitment required from them for the programme, funded from the Pupil Premium grant.

How was the project evidence informed?

The literacy intervention delivered by the schools in this project drew on a range of evidence-informed approaches about what is currently known to support learning, including evidence available on one-to-one tuition, individualized support programmes, and attachment.

The benefits of one-to-one tuition has an emerging evidence base for pupils in care and for all pupils who fall behind in their learning compared to their peers. As described earlier in this chapter, one-to-one tuition has been shown to improve outcomes in mathematics and English for looked after children (Liabo *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, the Education Endowment Foundation toolkit, which summarizes the current research in the UK on strategies to raise the attainment of pupils, shows that one-to-one tuition can accelerate learning by approximately five additional months' progress (Education Endowment Foundation, 2016).

The programme of activities used with the pupils during the literacy intervention was tailored to the specific literacy needs. Staff drew on existing resources in the school and, where necessary, created new ones to support pupils' learning. The programme is not an 'off the shelf' intervention and, as such, reflects what we currently know about the importance and effectiveness of adopting flexible, individualized approaches to identify need and to support learning previously outlined by Connolly *et al.* (2008).

Another fundamental principle of the programme is that it is delivered by a member of staff in the school. (Although this member of staff does not have to be the pupil's class teacher or teaching assistant.) This is in recognition of the importance of attachment for many pupils in care to support their emotional well-being as well as their academic learning, as described earlier. Having the programme delivered by a known adult, increases the potential for establishing a rapport more quickly. It also allows for learning from the programme to be transferred and observed in the classroom more readily, which is not always achievable with the use of external tutors. Furthermore, it helps to develop a sense of belonging to the school community for the child and potential advocacy, through a staff member, for the young person.

What were the findings of the project?

The four children taking part in the pilot study made progress against their individual targets. The teachers and teaching assistants who delivered the project were positive about the intervention and described how they had noted improvements in learning, self-confidence, and relationships:

> His comprehension has come on leaps and bounds … When it was just us, he was happy to ask for help. In a classroom situation he just wouldn't do it.
>
> (Teacher on the programme)

> I think it has been a good thing and Evelyn [not real name] has loved it.
>
> Mel [not real name] is definitely more confident. She wouldn't read out loud before, but now she will read in small groups of 4/5 … she used to give up on her own ideas all of the time and she had to start again because she liked somebody else's better. But in here she was giving so many lovely ideas of her own, and she couldn't change it to anyone else's.
>
> Mary [not real name] has started to follow her ideas through in class.
>
> (Teaching assistant on the programme)

> Our relationship has benefitted … she knows I'll give her as much help and support as she needs.
>
> If she were with someone else and the basis of that relationship wasn't already there, it wouldn't work as well. Someone like Brian (not real name) would really struggle with that.
>
> (Teacher on the programme)

> We've got to build a good relationship, she often stays on to chat.
>
> (Teacher on the programme)

We also asked the children about their experiences and they told us how much they valued the relationships and felt more confident about their learning. They also noticed their progress against their targets:

> I liked working with Ms R, I wanted the sessions to be even longer, maybe 1hr and 30 mins.
>
> I really liked it [the intervention] … on Tuesday I wasn't supposed to go, but I went anyway.
>
> Once I came in and I just done it straight away, started straight away. But before when I first started I couldn't do it much.
>
> In class … when we were doing this reading comprehension about hippos and dolphins and we read it and I wrote quite a lot and I don't think I got any words wrong.
>
> Now I'm a bit like Rachel as Rachel didn't need any help, things just popped into her head and now that's what I'm like.

Key learning

The research team met with two members of the school team in June 2015 to review the literacy programme to date. At this point, even without the pupil impact data collected, there was strong support to extend the programme to the next academic year. The group was asked to reflect on a series of questions, and their responses are summarized below.

How was the programme received by pupils and staff?

The staff reported pupils as responding positively to the programme, and they appeared to value the 'nurture' aspect and the personal attention received as part of the one-to-one element. Pupils felt that they had an opportunity to ask questions about their learning that they wouldn't ask in class. Staff acknowledged that there were advantages and disadvantages to the intervention being delivered by a member of the pupil's class team, but welcomed the fact that the programme left this decision to the discretion of the school, which was best placed to assess the implications of choice of tutor. The literacy experience of the staff involved, their knowledge of the pupils and the UCL IOE workshop's emphasis on being sensitive to potential behaviours around attachment meant that there was a keen focus during each session on learning and teaching, as opposed to any session becoming 'hijacked' by external issues that might have been concerning the pupil at the time.

What were the views on the length of the programme?

Staff felt that ten weeks was the best length and that any longer would have been be hard to sustain within the pressures of school life and any less might not have had sufficient impact. It was found that one hour worked for some pupils, but for others thirty minutes was more achievable. Staff appreciated that the programme allowed a choice as to when to deliver the session, for example in lunchtime or after school, although running a one-hour session was not possible at lunchtime.

Should the virtual school develop standardized materials to support teachers next year?

The consensus was that this would not be a good idea, as each child is different and this dictated the planning. It was a view shared by SVS. It was suggested that looking at the education psychologist's report was a good way to start the planning process and then to use available resources in schools. However, it was agreed that exemplar materials of planning and pupil outcomes would be helpful, and teachers agreed to share these with SVS. Teachers reported that it would be good to keep a logbook of each session, recording content and progress made by the pupil.

What is the appropriate remuneration, if any?

It was felt that £600 with cover provided for attendance at the workshop was generous but it was acknowledged it had helped to provide an incentive to be first on the pilot and to participate in the evaluation activities needed to launch the programme for the following year. There was also a request for future consideration of using funds to purchase book tokens for the pupils involved in the project.

Next steps in the project

As a result of the feedback from the pilot programme, SVS decided to roll out the programme to a larger number of pupils (approximately 20) in September 2015. Specific recommendations from the pilot team included that the workshop should take place once the baseline testing had been completed, in order to help inform discussions during the day, and that the trainee education psychologist should be present during the workshop.

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Chapter 6

School environment

What does the evidence tell us?

Environment attachment matters, although it has been less theorized and empirically investigated than relationship attachment. Young children in Clark's (2010a) study identified personal, private, social, imaginary, and caring spaces within school settings. Caring spaces uses the example of the child who described the chair where you sit when you've hurt yourself. 'In-between' spaces, such as 'welfare rooms' in schools, may be particularly significant (Clark, 2010b), and Clark's earlier work pointed out the significance, to young children, of forgotten corners of playgrounds. Jack (2010) discusses place attachment for looked after children and points out that for many, especially those who have moved schools and placements, there is an absence of common reference points in space and place, which leads to a lack of shared memories and potentially to a sense of dislocation.

Psychodynamic theorists such as Bion (1961) point to the role of the physical environment in containing or holding children's emotional lives. Therapeutic communities use the physical location, the buildings and grounds to help children to feel that there are predictable routines and readily negotiable spaces, in order to promote feelings of safety. Bergin and Bergin (2009) argue that keeping the school to a small size promotes children's sense of belonging. A sense of belonging is frequently referred to as a major component of successful care placements (Boddy 2013). A structured school within a school approach is best, because having very small class sizes hinders the chances of finding good friends. Bomber (2011) points out the daily challenges that negotiating school spaces can represent for children with attachment difficulties.

What seems to work?

A head teacher in an 'attachment aware' school created a 'nest' from a cloakroom. The space was reconfigured to provide a cosy space, like a sitting room, where children and/or parents or carers could relax, share perspectives, feel listened to and enhance a sense of belonging to the school. (See the video clip at: http://vimeo.com/88340878 (accessed 30 June 2016).)

What is the impact?

The specific linkages between looked after children's educational achievement and the configuration of the school environment have not been systematically investigated. For vulnerable children or those with attachment difficulties, the role of the environment sits within more general evidence on fostering wellbeing and a sense of belonging.

PALAC case study: Designing and creating a safe base in a secondary school

Research team and setting
The research team members were:

- Nicolle Browning, SENCo and Designated Teacher, The Willink School, Reading, Berkshire
- Robin Douglas, Looked After Children Education Service (LACES) Team Manager, West Berkshire
- Catherine Carroll, Senior Research Associate, SENJIT, UCL IOE.

The Willink School is a co-educational comprehensive secondary school and a sixth form college in rural Berkshire.

Focus for practice and research
This case study focused on:

- investigating the contribution and design of a 'safe base' that would meet the needs of pupils and professionals in a secondary school setting.

Background
Various whole school and individualized approaches are used in schools to support the social and emotional learning of pupils. Research demonstrates that these approaches can bring positive gains in social and emotional development and academic progress (Durlak *et al.*, 2011). How teachers choose an approach for an individual pupil or group of pupils often combines the specific profile of a pupil, what resources (both knowledge and financial) are available to the school and, increasingly (if slowly), the evidence base for a particular approach.

For pupils in care, this evidence base is still emerging, but the creation of a 'safe base/place' in school is one that is becoming increasingly popular in schools. Colleagues from The Willink School and the LACES team in West Berkshire, as part of the PALAC programme, chose to investigate what a safe base in a secondary school might look like.

Before the PALAC project started, Robin Douglas, the head of the LACES team, had led a whole-school training session on attachment theory at The Willink School. The training had focused on how attachment issues might apply to specific pupils in the school, and how staff might develop their own strategies within the context of a wider, whole-school approach to achieve better outcomes for vulnerable pupils. One of the outcomes from the training session, combined with an analysis of the results of the PALAC audit and the insights into the needs of pupils at the school from Nicolle Browning, the SENCo and designated teacher, highlighted, as a priority, exploring the possibility of providing a more dedicated 'safe space' for vulnerable pupils. The question was: what would this safe space look like?

What was done?

From the outset, Nicolle and Robin decided that the final design of the safe space should be influenced by any information available on design in the research literature, but equally by the views of pupils, teaching staff, and multidisciplinary colleagues from the community, who would use the space and who had experience of such spaces in different settings. Quantitative data were collected through two different surveys:

- a survey to schools in the LA with a focus on safe bases for children and adults in the school community
- a questionnaire for pupils that asked about their views on what the safe base might look like.

How was the project evidence informed?

The project was informed by three strands of evidence.

The first strand was what we know about the importance of attachment for many pupils in care. Louise Bomber describes very clearly how school can be a daily challenge for pupils in care and the importance and contribution of a safe base for pupils by providing a familiar place, and as such, an anchor from which to face these daily challenges (Bomber, 2011). A safe base also requires a reliably present adult with whom young people can work and interact if such a resource is going to have a meaningful and long-lasting impact. It is through the ongoing experience and maintenance of these relationships with the secure adults that a pupil can start to make lasting changes to their lives.

The second strand was the value placed on inclusive principles of education in schools, and therefore the acknowledgment, that some pupils will need to be supported in different and personalized ways if they are to reach their full potential (CSIE, 2016). The final strand of evidence based practice

that informed the project was the emerging role that pupils have in developing more collaborative partnerships with teachers in research (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler, 2016). Hence the questionnaire completed by the pupils.

What were the findings of the project?

It was possible to identify key messages across all of the survey responses, including how much the spaces are valued by pupils and staff and that they can be relatively inexpensive to set up.

School survey

The key message from the school survey was that safe spaces were beginning to be established in schools. Seven schools did have safe spaces and most of these had been set up in the previous five years. They were used for a number of activities, including counselling, family work, behaviour mentoring, academic support, a prayer room, a chill-out space, and a sensory space.

The respondents reported many benefits of the space for pupils, including the provision of routine in an otherwise chaotic life, an emotional escape hatch, pupils feeling safe and the use of the room as an alternative to negative behaviour when feeling anxious. However, they also identified risks with the provision of a space, such as the demand on staffing and supervision, the challenges of when the space might be needed by two people at the same time, and the misuse of the space as a sanction. Finding a space or holding onto a space in a climate of resource pressures on schools was a very common theme in responses. Many schools struggled with finding a space, but had identified creative alternatives such as, in some primary schools, creating areas within a classroom using specific furniture such as tents or large chairs that offered some form of comfort and privacy away from the main class.

A range of professionals, including counsellors, a play therapist, educational psychologists, a school nurse, and health visitors were asked specifically for their views on what to consider when designing a safe space, to ensure that it would best meet the needs of all those who used the facility. Table 6.1 summarizes the findings from the survey and what to consider in the design of any safe space, including location, furniture and decoration. The findings clearly show that once a space has been found, the cost of setting up the room is fairly minimal.

Table 6.1: Safe Base Design Features

Location	Discrete entrance
	Quiet entrance (avoid thoroughfares)
	Additional adults nearby
	Easy access to toilets
	Window if possible
Furniture	Flexible arrangement
	Comfortable chairs with two tables – but not between the chairs and so acting as a barrier
Colours	Neutral and minimal – avoid bright colours
Decorative features	Basic and minimal – avoid images, ornaments and fragrances that can trigger memories for some
	Plants can work well
Technology	Wifi enabled – but no fixed technology
Refreshments	Water – but no glass
Other	Keep the layout the same for each session
	Reasonable size

Pupil survey

The Willink School had already established safe areas within the inclusion office suite of the school for identified pupils to use that included a kitchen area and some chairs in an office. Some of these pupils were asked for their views on how the current areas supported them and included:

> This is my neutral ground … it prepares me for the day. (Ben [not real name], 15)
>
> They nag you about breakfast and drinking water – there's no point in arguing.
>
> They won't give up. (Simon [not real name], 15)
>
> It's cosy … reminds me of being at my gran's house. (Lucy [not real name], 13)

The pupils were asked for their views on the design of a safe space. The most popular colours for the walls were blue and green, chairs were preferred over sofas and many did mention having paintings.

Next steps in the project

By the end of the project, the school had identified an area for the safe space that met all of the criteria reported by participants and even offered the opportunity to open up onto an outside area. Once the room was established, the next step was writing guidelines for staff and pupils for using the space. This would help to ensure that the room was used to its full potential to meet the needs of pupils. Another consideration was to investigate whether it was appropriate – and indeed possible – to measure more systematically the impact of the room in terms of short-term and long-term benefits for pupils and staff.

Key learning

As professionals and researchers, our understanding of the term 'inclusion' and how to implement effective inclusive practices in schools continues to evolve. One of the fundamental principles of inclusion is that pupils feel a sense of belonging to their school community (CSIE, 2016). For pupils with disruptive home lives, achieving a sense of belonging in school is perhaps more vital. The responses from the pupils and professionals in this project demonstrated that a safe space can make an important contribution towards this principle of belonging. It is recognized that finding any available space in schools today can be a challenge; however, once identified it is an inexpensive resource to set up. Finally, for many professionals, the availability of a safe space for vulnerable pupils makes sense, intuitively as well as theoretically.

The challenge for practitioners and researchers – in a context of crowded schools, evidence-based approaches to teaching, and limited resources – is to establish how we might demonstrate clearly and rigorously the contribution of such a resource in terms of pupil outcomes.

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Chapter 7

Effectiveness and deployment of staff

What does the evidence tell us?

Statutory guidance states the roles and responsibilities of the designated teacher under the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 (DCSF, 2009), but to date, no systematic empirical evidence exists as to the effectiveness of that role, including that of working models and outcomes for pupils. The Education Matters in Care inquiry found variability in the way the role was practised, with some marked differences in terms of seniority of role (APPG, 2012). Similarly, although there is now robust evidence concerned with the deployment of teaching assistants, this is not specifically linked to looked after children (Blatchford *et al.*, 2009).

Nevertheless, these findings still have important implications for looked after children, especially those with SEN and how the role of a teaching assistant concerned primarily with the education of pupils in care and other potentially vulnerable pupils might be envisaged. Finally, social pedagogy, a very long established theory and practice in parts of Europe, is emerging in the UK and is relevant for professionals working in this field, including for teaching assistants and designated teachers (Cameron and Moss, 2011; Kyriacou, 2009; Petrie, 2005). In the context of schools, training in social pedagogy enables the professional to: 'take up the role of a trusted and caring adult to help, support and empower a pupil to meet the demands they face in life so that they are better able to lead fulfilling and satisfying lives' (Kyriacou, 2015: 430).

What seems to work?

Findings from the Effective Deployment of Teaching Assistants project demonstrated that if schools addressed issues of deployment, preparedness, and practice of teaching assistants – and specifically teaching assistants talking with pupils – and strategies to support pupil independence with learning, teaching assistants were more effective in their roles (Blatchford *et al.*, 2012). Social pedagogy practices are being adopted, albeit on a small scale compared to some continental European countries, for different groups, including looked after children. A synthesis of evaluation studies shows highly positive results (Cameron, 2016). A number of networks, such as the Social Pedagogy Development Network and the Social Pedagogy Professional Association, have been established in the UK to support the development of a social pedagogy approach (Kyriacou, 2015; see also further details at www.sppa-uk.org).

What is the impact?

The impact of teaching assistants and mentors using specific interventions has been documented in Chapter 3 of this book. Evidence is yet to be gathered to support the effectiveness of a wider role of teaching assistants/mentors in supporting looked after children. The relative merits of the deployment and effectiveness of the designated teacher has yet to be systematically investigated.

PALAC case study: The role of a full-time social care mentor for vulnerable pupils including children in care

Research team and setting

The research team members were:

- Lawrence Carroll, Assistant Headteacher and designated teacher for pupils in care, Lampton School, Hounslow, Middlesex
- Susie Worthington, Social Care Mentor, Lampton School, Hounslow, Middlesex
- Catherine Carroll, Senior Research Associate, SENJIT, UCL IOE.

Lampton School is a mixed, 11–18 comprehensive school.

Focus for practice and research

This case study focused on:

- the role of a social care mentor
- the experience and professional qualities required of the social care mentor role
- the benefits of the role for pupils in care and other children in need
- how the impact of the role of social care mentor might be measured.

Background

One of the strengths of the PALAC programme is the opportunity to share and promote the innovative practice already established in schools to support the achievement of pupils in care. One such example was the role of the social care mentor in Lampton School, Hounslow, Middlesex.

In most schools, the designated teacher role is combined with teaching and often other leadership responsibilities. Some pupils in care and families requiring the support of Children's Services can often experience disruptive and chaotic times in their lives. It is not uncommon for a pupil in care to come into school in the morning having been moved to a new home, with new carers, the night before. Therefore, it would not be surprising if that pupil needed additional support and attention when they came into school that morning.

However, the reality of school life is that often a designated teacher might be teaching in class and unable to respond at the time when the pupil most needs support.

In 2006, Lampton's senior leadership team created the position of a full-time social care mentor in recognition of the need for a role that fully understood Children's Services and the implications for pupils, carers and families receiving Children's Services support. The senior leadership team envisaged a role that could respond flexibly and proactively to support the achievement of this potentially vulnerable group of pupils.

What was done?

A full-time role of this nature in schools, dedicated to a very small but vulnerable group of pupils, is not common, particularly with schools facing very real budget constraints. The research team wanted to investigate how the impact of that role might be evaluated, to demonstrate the very real benefits for pupils, carers, families, and school staff and to share that practice and knowledge with other professionals.

How was the project evidence informed?

Time and again, children and young people in care have reported positively about the impact and significance of having a trusted and caring adult in school (Jackson and Cameron, 2014; Sebba *et al.*, 2015). In many respects, this is the same for all pupils; but for pupils who may have experienced disruptive home lives and fragmented relationships, this relationship takes on even more importance. A social care mentor is an example of attachment theory being put into practice in a school setting, by providing the opportunity for pupils in care to experience and develop stronger and potentially healing relationships. The stability offered by a full-time member of staff, who has remained at the school for many years, exemplifies aspects of social pedagogy theory, with its emphasis on developing a holistic (heads, hand, and heart) relational approach to working with young people (Cameron and Moss, 2011).

Evidence from classroom studies has clearly demonstrated that formative feedback to pupils (Hattie, 2009) and supporting their development of metacognition and self-regulation strategies (Education Endowment Foundation, 2016) can have significant effects on learning. Throughout her day at Lampton School, Susie Worthington provides formative feedback 'in the moment' to pupils and, through mentoring, focuses on metacognition and self-regulation strategies individualized for each pupil and their circumstances.

Perhaps as a profession and research community, we have sometimes overlooked the influence of feedback provided outside the classroom and outside the formal curriculum context. This would be a greater challenge to

measure in terms of specific outcomes, but there is no reason to think that feedback in the form of regular 'check-ins' with a social care mentor, would have no less of an impact on the development of a pupil than feedback provided in the context of a lesson. For pupils experiencing a particularly stressful period, Susie would often see them sometimes up to four or five times a day to provide feedback and support.

How was the impact of the project measured?

The project adopted a realist evaluation approach (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). In this approach, evaluations need to identify 'What works in which circumstances and for whom?', rather than merely 'Does it work?' The difference between realist and other kinds of theory-based evaluation approaches is that a realist programme theory identifies what mechanisms will bring about the desired outcomes and what features of the context will affect whether or not those mechanisms operate. In the Lampton School project, the mechanisms were those associated with the role of the social care mentor and the context related to how the school supported the work undertaken by the social care mentor.

This evaluation approach supports any type of data collection method in order to answer specific research questions. Data was collected through interviews and analysis of school data. Catherine Carroll interviewed Susie about her position and the experience, qualities and skills required for the role. This interview also focused on how the role was supported by the school leadership team and the wider school context.

Susie herself interviewed a pupil who had recently left the sixth form but who entered care in Year 10 to explore her views on how the social care mentor role had supported her progress and wellbeing during Key Stages 4 and 5. School data were analysed, which included how students were performing with a view to reaching their target grades in English, maths, and science as well as how much progress they had made in the preceding year. This analysis was then used to tailor specific academic intervention support. Finally, Lampton is a teaching school, and colleagues from across the teaching school alliance were invited to a seminar to share good practice associated with better outcomes for pupils in care.

What were the findings of the project?

Roles and responsibilities of the social care mentor

The findings from the realistic evaluation showed that the social care mentor plays both a key strategic school role and equally at an individual pupil level in school. Most secondary schools have only a very small number of pupils in care at any one time and therefore it would be unrealistic to expect a dedicated full-time role for those pupils alone. However, schools often have a number of pupils

who have been identified by social services as being a 'child in need' at any one time. Furthermore, schools are often the first group of professionals to identify other pupils who might be particularly vulnerable in some way and where early intervention might help to prevent difficulties in families from escalating.

At the time of the project, Susie was responsible for 24 pupils, including seven pupils in care and 17 students who had signed a 'final warning' contract for behaviour issues. Figure 7.1 summarizes the roles and responsibilities of the social care mentor with three main elements to the role including: working directly with pupils; collaborating with and supporting school staff; and liaison with carers and multidisciplinary agencies. The strategic nature of the role was evident in, for example, monitoring and reporting to governors the progress and attainment of pupils in care.

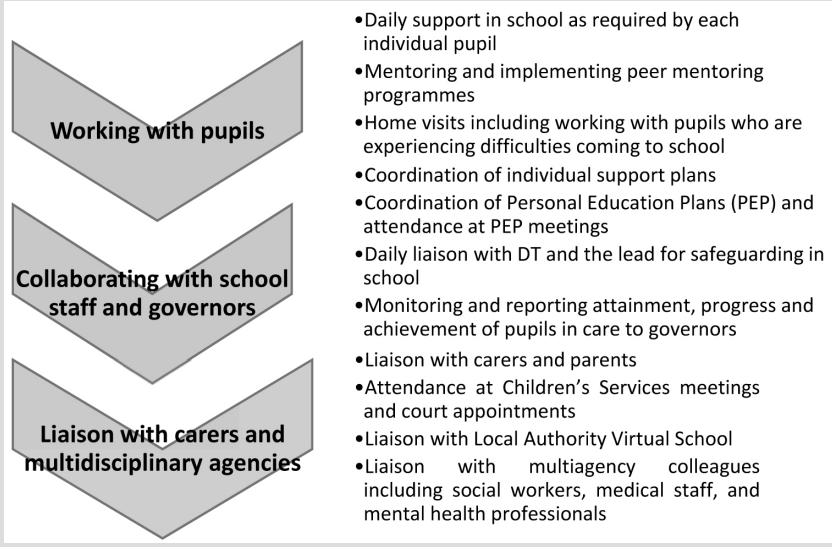

Figure 7.1: Roles and responsibilities of the Social Care Mentor, Lampton School

What is the experience and what are the professional qualities required of the social care mentor role?

Table 7.1 summarizes the fundamental knowledge, experience, and personal qualities of the social care mentor role. To ensure that pupils in care and other vulnerable pupils achieve and thrive in school requires highly trained and knowledgeable staff with a background that is not traditionally part of teacher training or that of teaching assistants and other associate roles such as family law and social care policy. Personal qualities of the role included resilience and an empathy for the experiences and perspectives of pupils in care.

Table 7.1: Knowledge, experience, and personal qualities of the social care mentor

Person specification	Examples
Knowledge and experience	• Implications of family law, social care policy and safeguarding legislation for pupils in care • Understanding of attachment theory • Behaviour specialism • Mentoring and peer mentoring • Education in schools for all pupils • Education policy for pupils in care
Personal qualities	• Importance of maintaining confidentiality • Resilience working under emotionally difficult circumstances • Flexibility • Empathy for pupils in care and the perspectives of all those working to improve outcomes for this group

What are the benefits of the role for pupils in care and other children in need?

The impact of the social care mentor role at a personal level for pupils in care was shown very clearly by the following account from a past pupil who went into care in Year 10. Julie (not her real name) described how all children in care should have a social care mentor like Susie for many reasons:

> Firstly, Susie Worthington has offered me a tremendous amount of support and has been the one consistent person I was able to speak to about my problems. With my constant changing social workers, moving placements, and not having a strong relationship with my family, I was able to speak to Susie if I was upset, had a problem or needed any advice. Susie would immediately try and resolve any problem I was unhappy about, whether it was internal or external from school. Doing this allowed me to be happier and carry on like a normal child with nothing to worry about. Susie also attended my reviews and PEP meetings with me. During these meetings, I was extremely shy, hated speaking in front of people, and was not able to express myself. Susie would act as support and also express my views that we had spoken about prior to the meetings. This was important as Susie specified how I was feeling, what I was finding difficult and also what I wanted, which then led other professionals to help me feel more comfortable.

> Secondly, having a social care mentor has also allowed me to achieve better academically. Throughout my time at Lampton Susie had emphasized how important it was to get an education, go to university and then become rich! But being in care whilst studying for exams was a very hard time. Just before my GCSE exams I was forced to move placement and also had a new social worker, which did increase my stress levels. Susie helped me throughout this time – we would have regular talks, [and] she organized tuition for English.
>
> During A Levels there was much to do to sort out university plans, where I was going to live for the summer, and how I had to financially support myself. I missed a great deal of school either staying at home or to be at work to earn money because I was scared about not being able to support myself in the four months [of] holidays. Speaking to Susie always cheered me up and assured me to come to school. Academically it seemed like I was going to fail and not many people thought I'd do well, but Susie always had hope! She spoke to the teachers making sure they would not give me a hard time after missing so many of their lessons. She then helped organize after school tuition with subjects I struggled with. She went out of her way to message various people from social services and an MP to ensure I was able to have somewhere decent to stay for summer that would be paid for. Her doing this made me feel so much more confident which encouraged me to attend lessons and allowed me to focus purely on exams.
>
> Overall, Susie Worthington has been a fantastic social care mentor, only because of her help, advice, and comfort I am where I am today. I believe that Susie Worthington's role is important and unique in numerous ways; I am privileged to have had her work with me. I strongly recommend whilst in school every child in care should have a social care mentor. Children in care are faced with a huge deal of problems normal students would never encounter. Having a social care mentor relieves so much stress making sure the child is treated and performs as 'normal' as possible.

Finally, the team was keen to hear whether similar mentor roles existed and to share current practice on supporting pupils in care in other schools across its teaching alliance. To this end, a half-day seminar was held, with speakers from Lampton, other schools and the local authority. Taking time out from school can be a challenge for all professionals and this is compounded by the fact

that many schools have just one or two pupils in care and can find it difficult to release staff from the school day. However, compared to other forms of professional learning events, opportunities are fewer for teachers and mentors to meet specifically to address the needs of pupils in care. Nevertheless, the seminar attracted 40 participants from within and outside the alliance and that the seminar could address issues specific to the local school context. Feedback from the participants during and after the conference was very positive about the social care mentor role. In most schools, it seemed that elements of the role were being delivered by different professionals in the same school, including family liaison officers, heads of year, learning mentors, and teaching assistants. All could see the value and the potential for better outcomes for pupils in care of bringing the activities together under one role, which also had responsibility for other vulnerable groups of pupils to make it more viable from a resource perspective.

Next steps in the project

As a result of the project, a school policy for pupils in care was written and was to be agreed at all levels. To support evidencing the impact of the social care mentor role and to support preparation for Ofsted inspections, individual case studies on pupils were being written, which described the achievement and progress of the pupils both academically and against wider outcomes such as attendance.

Key learning

Provision for pupils in care at Lampton School was already of a very high standard. However, sustained exposure to the research evidence during the PALAC programme allowed the participants to reflect on which aspects of practice in school were already evidence based and how these might be developed and improved. The programme provided further external validation of their work. The closer analysis and examination of National Curriculum school data for pupils in care revealed how the progress of looked after children compared to non-looked after children showed the 'value added' contribution of the school to the education of this group of pupils. Finally, all the data gathered clearly demonstrated the importance and impact of the social care mentor role in the school.

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Chapter 8

Supporting equality and diversity

What does the evidence tell us?

Children who are looked after by local authorities are highly likely to come from materially and socially deprived backgrounds (Viner and Taylor, 2005). Adults who have grown up in care are more likely to be (or to have been) homeless and to have had mental and physical health problems (Viner and Taylor, 2005; Meltzer *et al.*, 2003).

Young people in care today are disproportionately likely to be from mixed ethnicity or Black backgrounds (DfE, 2014). In 2015, 61 per cent of children looked after had a special educational need, compared to 50 per cent of children in need (defined as such under the Children Act 1989). Among the general population of children, around 12 per cent of children in schools have some special needs support and three per cent have a specialist support plan (EHC Plan) (DfE, 2016). Nearly half of the identified needs among looked after children were 'social, emotional and mental health', followed by 'moderate learning difficulty' (DfE, 2016). Attendance of children in care in school is often not full-time; it can be part-time, and on occasion young people have periods when no school place is allocated, such as when they are moving between placements. To a large extent, the local authority looked after population consists of children and young people from highly disadvantaged families.

The Equality Duty sets out 'protected characteristics' (Equality Act 2010) of race, disability, sex, age, religion or belief, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, and gender reassignment. Guidance for schools states that they must have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and harassment, advance equality of opportunity between those who hold protected characteristics and those who do not, and foster good relations between people who share and do not share a protected characteristic. The guidance argues that complying with the Equality Duty 'helps a school to identify priorities such as underperformance, poor progression, and bullying' (Equalities and Human Rights Commission, 2014, p. 8), as it invites school staff to think through which groups of pupils are underperforming or not accessing parts of the curriculum and to examine how they can address those gaps. While looked after children are not a protected group as such, they often hold characteristics of protected groups, notably race/ethnicity and disability. Addressing the Equality Duty will go some way towards addressing issues of possible invisibility for children in care.

What seems to work?

There do not appear to be any studies of initiatives aimed specifically at the operation of the Equality Duty for children in care in schools or, more generally, at addressing lower attainment for children in care from over-represented groups (mixed ethnic or Black backgrounds, those with SEN).

In relation to the representation of the views of young people in care, nearly all local authorities have forums run by young people in care, such as a Children in Care Council. Children in care are entitled to have their views taken into account; some local authorities have employed participation workers or children's rights workers to support this process. All children in care should have a voice in their own care plan and education planning, and there should also be mechanisms for engaging them in other consultative groups, such as schools councils (Gibb *et al.*, 2015). The effectiveness of Children in Care Councils is variable, despite these bodies being on a statutory footing (A National Voice, 2011).

Looking further afield in the UK, at initiatives that support children from minority groups, studies show the potential for using home–school support workers and preventative health services to, respectively, reduce fixed-term exclusions in secondary schools (Webb and Vulliamy, 2004) and help children in need of therapeutic support (Pugh and Statham, 2006).

Case study: Addressing educational underachievement of specific groups in Lambeth

While not a PALAC case study, the London Borough of Lambeth stands out as a local authority that has addressed educational underachievement of specific groups and is worth highlighting here as a possible source of inspiration.

Between 2000 and 2005, the attainment of African heritage Key Stage 2 and GCSE students significantly improved. At Key Stage 2, participating schools improved by 8 per cent (from 74 per cent to 82 per cent), and at GCSE, 79 per cent of African heritage students achieved five A*–C grades, compared with 56 per cent nationally (Demie, 2005). This was done through a whole-school participatory approach, employing small-group or one-to-one activities. These enabled positive relationships to develop, which explicitly addressed negative cultural influences that acted on vulnerable groups, and were coupled with strong leadership, and behaviour management policies stressing positive ways to teach children to behave well and to respect others. Participating schools used attainment data as a basis for action with pupils (for example, providing additional support, setting targets for children).

Subsequently, Lambeth addressed the issue of underachievement by White working class school students (Demie, 2014). Low parental aspirations were turned around in Lambeth through actions such as: successful leadership that recruits an effective diverse workforce; high expectations of all students; an inclusive and multicultural curriculum; rigorous monitoring systems that track individual pupil performance against expectations; personally tailored support and flexible intervention programmes; engaging parents and breaking down barriers; effective support during the primary–secondary transition; and a strong commitment to cultural diversity and equal opportunities (Demie, 2014). No single strategy was a blueprint, and success came through a range of strategies with extensive use of teachers, teaching assistants, and learning mentors. Three other factors were: strategic leadership at local authority level, extensive use of comprehensive data to identify areas and groups in greatest need, and working in partnership with and between schools (Demie, 2014).

What is the impact?

Over the decade to 2014, attainment at GCSE has risen much faster in Lambeth than nationally. The local authority has closed the gap and is now 6 percentage points above the national average for five or more A*–C GCSEs including English and Maths. White British pupils on free school meals do better in Lambeth when compared to their peers at national level (Demie, 2014).

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Chapter 9

Working together with other professionals and carers

What does the evidence tell us?

This chapter addresses three areas:

- working with parents and carers
- multi-agency working
- professional learning in schools.

Research shows that one of the factors needed in order for a child in care to succeed academically is a supportive home environment that encourages studying, and therefore all carers should be encouraged to take a direct role in supporting their child's education (Cameron *et al.*, 2015; Osbourne *et al.*, 2010).

Teachers and carers need to focus on looked after children within a framework of high expectations and what is good teaching and learning for all students (Ofsted, 2008). A robust home–school partnership is crucial to narrowing the attainment gap for looked after children, and this partnership must often include the state as parent too (Wigley *et al.*, 2011; Fernandez, 2008). Carers often seek outside help to address children's learning, social, emotional, and behavioural needs (Zetlin *et al.*, 2010). Schools are increasingly using a 'structured conversations with parents' approach, such as that developed by the Achievement for All programme with parents of vulnerable pupils to strengthen home–school relationships (Lendrum *et al.*, 2013).

The importance of carers, teachers, and different agencies working collaboratively is consistently emphasized in the literature (Berridge, 2012; Ferguson and Wolkow, 2012). A 2012 report from Ofsted, based on visits to nine local authorities, saw examples of how the virtual school worked closely with colleagues within the council and external agencies as part of an integrated, multidisciplinary approach to supporting looked after children in all aspects of their lives (Ofsted, 2012). Evidence of models of multi-agency consultation created for professionals working with looked after children, such as THINKSPACE, are being developed to support more effective collaboration (Swann and York, 2011).

Finally for this domain, it is important to consider how teachers in school learn and what we know about which elements of professional development and learning are most effective. This is fundamental to applying our knowledge and understanding

of what we know about what works for looked after children. A 2014 review of studies highlights two significant findings:

- that schools were still working towards knowing how to achieve effective professional development and learning (PDL) that had an impact, and that there was considerable variation in understanding as to what this constituted and how it was achieved
- that schools struggle with how to demonstrate and evidence the impact of PDL; they were able to assert that their project had made a difference, but were unable to substantiate that or explain how the PDL in which participants had engaged had brought about demonstrable improvements in classroom practice and pupil learning (Early and Porritt, 2014).

Increasingly, schools are adopting a joint practice development (JPD) approach. This was first proposed by Fielding *et al.* (2005) in one of the few studies to have investigated the transfer of practice between individuals, small teams, schools, local authorities, and other institutions. These authors defined JPD as the process of learning new ways of working through *interaction and mutual engagement* that opens up and shares practices with others (Sebba *et al.*, 2012).

What seems to work?

Ensuring that carers are recognized as an important source for improving educational outcomes for looked after children is an important start (Cheung *et al.*, 2012; Flynn *et al.*, 2012). The engagement of carers, particularly in the home setting, predicted greater probabilities of academic success for young people in care (Cheung *et al.*, 2012). Higher educational aspirations on the part of the carers were associated with better outcomes, and carer involvement in a greater number of school activities predicted significant improvement in the student's average marks (Flynn *et al.*, 2012).

Looked after children's carers value being involved in the pupil's personal education plan, receiving written communications regularly, and advice about how to support learning in the care facility or home (Ofsted, 2008). Communication needs to be regular and continuous, with multiple opportunities for self-evaluation and sharing of ideas (Ofsted, 2008). Projects that provide materials to support and develop learning demonstrate improvement in looked after children's attitudes towards learning as well as their actual attainment (Griffiths, 2012). For example, the Letterbox Club project in England sent parcels of literacy materials directly to where looked after children were staying, not only to encourage learning with their carers but also to focus their energy on engaging with, and owning, educational materials (Dymoke and Griffiths, 2010). The correct and sustained use of 'structured conversations with parents' can increase and lead to more positive engagement between home and school (Lendrum *et al.*, 2013). Many of the approaches used by

schools can also be found as part of a report from the National College on how to encourage parents to engage with schools (Campbell, 2011).

In respect of multi-agency working, Ofsted (2012) reported that the establishment of a social work post within one virtual school team had helped to break down barriers between education and social care. Also the co-location of the virtual school with social care teams was recognized as being beneficial in the development of professional relationships. Increasingly, virtual schools are playing a strong part in enhancing schools' understanding of how social care and emotional health issues can affect children's learning, which has helped schools to tailor pupil support.

However, the report described how the depth of understanding of the educational needs of pupils in care across different professional groups remained variable. Some progress was observed, with social workers gaining a greater understanding of education issues and what more rigorous targets would look like for an individual pupil. Several authorities had designed toolkits that explained expectations at each key stage and helped social workers to determine the extent of individual children's progress. Where the virtual school head was represented on fostering panels, the school gained a greater understanding of foster carers' training needs and was able to ensure that educational needs featured strongly when placements were being considered. Stronger practice tended to be based on a social worker, as lead professional, facilitating a multi-agency team approach in which the virtual school took an active part.

Finally, research has demonstrated that the characteristics of PDL that are linked to more positive benefits for pupils and staff include:

- peer support
- specialist support
- planned meetings
- developing teachers' ownership of their learning
- a focus on pupil learning and student outcomes (CUREE, 2014).

What is the impact?

The Letterbox Club, which sends literacy materials (for example, books, stationery, and maths games) to looked after children every six weeks with the aim of engaging carers, reported a significant improvement in reading and maths ability (Osbourne *et al.*, 2010; Griffiths *et al.*, 2010). However, it should be noted that there were no control groups in these studies. At the end of the programme, the maths test results were converted into National Curriculum levels for each child; for two years running, the percentage of Letterbox Club pupils increasing their National Curriculum level score by at least one level equalled or exceeded the average rate of their peers in class (Griffiths *et al.*, 2010). Although run independently of schools, the study described

the importance of the carers to the project and how much they welcomed being involved.

An English paired reading literacy programme for looked after children and their carers, which required weekly liaising between teachers and carers, demonstrated an average improvement of each child making a year's progress in just over four months (Osbourne *et al.*, 2010). Additionally, the average amount of progress made for each month the child participated in the intervention resulted in a reading age increase by just below three months (Osbourne *et al.*, 2010).

The impact of literacy interventions may extend beyond literacy skills alone – there were reported increases in children's confidence and interest in reading (Osbourne *et al.*, 2010; Griffiths, 2012). Not only do children get to spend one-on-one time with their carer, but reportedly the interventions also facilitated partnership working, building the trust and confidence in the relationship between carers, teachers, and social workers (Osbourne *et al.*, 2010; Dymoke and Griffiths, 2010).

Independent evidence exists for the impact of 'structured conversations with parents' as delivered by Achievement for All schools. Over a two-year period in more than 300 schools, parents taking part in all three structured conversations across the year rose from 27 per cent in Year 1 to 40.1 per cent in Year 2. The proportion of schools reporting excellent relationships with parents increased by 36 per cent (from 12 per cent to 48 per cent). Most schools (93 per cent) planned to continue with the structured conversation after the study had ended, although resources constraints meant that many thought it would be in a modified form (Lendrum *et al.*, 2013).

There is very little empirical evidence relating to the impact of multi-agency working for looked after children, particularly in relation to schools and how professional learning in schools can result in better outcomes for looked after children. The model of multi-agency working in Worcestershire, known as the Integrated Service for Looked After Children and Adopted Children, has some empirical support for impact (Golding, 2010).

Another study that has implications for professionals working with looked after children is the THINKSPACE model of multi-agency consultation. This study did show a positive impact on creating a shared understanding of a child's behaviour and needs across agencies, helping professionals to 'hold' the system's anxiety about a particular child or young person, and at times ensuring that the relevant agencies were informed and appropriately involved in the plan for a child (Swann and York, 2011).

Finally, as previously mentioned, there is very little empirical evidence linking the impact of PDL on pupil outcomes. One review of different types of PDL for teachers in 2007 did show that a year of PDL on a subject could improve pupil outcomes (Timperley *et al.*, 2007).

PALAC: Future Directions

The PALAC community continues to develop as a vibrant network of practitioners and researchers. The network seeks to improve outcomes for children in care in school and to extend our knowledge and understanding of this sometimes complex but much-needed area of research. The PALAC programme has expanded and diversified to include projects that address the interface between health and education, social care and education, and the collaboration of Virtual School Heads across different LAs.

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Appendix

Self-assessment audit of school practices in relation to Looked After Children

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Introduction

Educating children and young people who are looked after by local authorities has become a policy priority after many years of neglect. Policies include the duty imposed on local authorities to promote the attainment of looked after children, the requirement to have a designated teacher in each school with responsibility to promote the educational achievement of looked after children who are on the school roll, to provide every child in care with a Personal Education Plan (PEP) to be reviewed six-monthly, and secure a full time, mainstream education placement within 20 school days of a change of care placement. Most recently, the virtual school head was made a statutory requirement (Children and Families Act 2014) in every local authority.

However, the educational attainment of children in care is still very low compared to other children not in care. The gap in attainment starts early and widens through secondary school and beyond. While the home learning environment is clearly important, schools have a major role to play in enhancing the educational experience of looked after children. The PALAC project is a new way of supporting schools to do this. This audit tool is designed to alert school staff to the many domains of educational practice that are relevant and to enable you to identify where you might focus practice development attention to improve the school experience of children in care.

The indicators have been selected from a range of guidance documents and research. They have much in common with principles of high quality learning environments for all children. Most important appears to be building caring school communities where children have a sense of belonging, have influence and autonomy, and where their educational competence is both valued and stretched.

This has benefits for all children. There are particular aspects that are of particular relevance to looked after children.

Completing the audit tool

For ease of reference, the tool is divided into seven domains. Within each domain there are a number of indicators, or aspects of the domain, drawn from policy and practice, listed in the form of a statement and/or a question. In the next column to the right, there is some additional contextual information and additional questions, again drawn from research and practice guidance to help school staff assess progress with each indicator. Finally, there is a space to enter the evidence, drawn from dialogue between course participants from a particular school, to justify attaining each indicator.

It is important to point out that while the research and practice evidence points in the same general direction, there are few absolute right answers. The research evidence base is not sufficiently well developed to provide a clear blueprint for how every school must perform in every circumstance. The intention is that by completing this tool, you generate sufficient evidence about how a particular school operates to identify areas for improvement and material for an action plan.

Note

Looked after children are the main focus of this tool. However, children who are adopted are eligible for the Pupil Premium, and may have ongoing support needs in school. In addition, children who are vulnerable, may be likely to come into care. All the indicators here are relevant to children in care/looked after, also known as LAC, and some, particularly resource indicators, may be relevant to adopted children. Others may be worth considering from the point of view of vulnerable children who are not in care.

November 2015

Domain	Indicators	Contextual information from practice and research (n = reference on p. 90)	Not currently part of our work	A developing area of our work	A strong area of our work
1. Supporting emotional development and wellbeing	Is there is a whole school policy for looked after children which details the support available to students, the responsibilities of staff members and contact details of relevant support services outside school?	Having a policy raises staff awareness and should include procedures for how sensitive information is shared.			
	How do staff make a special effort to welcome looked after and adopted children?	Children in care are a priority for admissions, even when schools are technically full. This can create tensions in the transition process that must not be passed on to students, who should feel they have been admitted to the best school for them.			
	How are applications handled after the normal admission round?	Children in care often need to join a school during the academic year and/or at short notice. What procedures are in place to support them and who is in charge of this process?			

Domain	Indicators	Contextual information from practice and research (n = reference on p. 90)	Not currently part of our work	A developing area of our work	A strong area of our work
	How do teaching and associated staff recognize that looked after and adopted children may feel acutely anxious on joining a new school, particularly when it is not the start of term?	Children in care often want to blend in but they also often want to be appreciated as having something to offer. They may be very anxious but also want to be left alone. They may also have needs for additional learning support.			
	Do staff make it a priority to know looked after and adopted children well and to build strong relationships with them?	Strong relationships are the key to knowing how a child is coping with school. (6, 7)			
	Are there measures in place to help peers support children in care on joining a school?	Getting to know one's peers can be key to stable and successful school experience. Examples might be buddying or peer mentoring arrangements, structured informal activities or clubs at lunchtimes. (6)			

Domain	Indicators	Contextual information from practice and research (n = reference on p. 90)	Not currently part of our work	A developing area of our work	A strong area of our work
	Do school staff consult children who are looked after and adopted about how public they wish their status to be?	Talking to students in care before teaching starts about whether they want to share their experiences or prefer that nobody knows that they are in care can help them feel in charge of their personal information. Letting them take the lead on how they respond personally to the lessons and ensuring they are never put in a situation they are uncomfortable with will help reassure them that you respect however they want to proceed. (4)			
	How are children encouraged to participate in class discussions, school initiatives such as school council, specific roles, and tasks in the school, and how is it monitored?	Deflecting tension between pupils in the class or school can be achieved through giving a child in care a job or task that does not appear to reward difficult behaviour and enables them to feel they are contributing to the school community.			
	There is counselling available from a trained person.	Children in care often have mental health difficulties and need access to persons with specialized skills at times of trauma. Having this resource in school is ideal. (8)			
	Teachers and school staff monitor looked after and adopted children's wellbeing on a regular basis	The six monthly PEP is too infrequent to know that wellbeing is monitored. Other mechanisms should be in place. Is there a trusted link person for each LAC? (6, 7)			

Domain	Indicators	Contextual information from practice and research (n = reference on p. 90)	Not currently part of our work	A developing area of our work	A strong area of our work
	How does the school policy/ approach to bullying take into account the specific needs of LAC?	Staff involved in anti-bullying measures understand that children who are looked after or adopted may be particularly sensitive to bullying behaviour. (2)			
	Are there measures in place to address bullying by staff?	Policies need to acknowledge that in some instances children have complained that they were bullied or humiliated by staff and that this will not be tolerated. (9)			
	Have staff attended in-service/other training on looked after children and mental health?	Children in care are likely to have attachment difficulties, and difficulties making and sustaining friendships. In-service training can be very helpful in understanding the causes of mental ill-health. (10)			
	Are staff involved in any training or development activity to enhance understanding of children's wellbeing?	Children in care are children first: an understanding of overall wellbeing is highly relevant. Wellbeing is multi-dimensional and includes physical, social, and psychological aspects. (11)			
	What approaches are used to support the development of self-esteem?	For example, nurture groups have been shown to support children in care in school. (8)			

Domain	Indicators	Contextual information from practice and research (n = reference on p. 90)	Not currently part of our work	A developing area of our work	A strong area of our work
2. Raising and monitoring attainment	Do teachers set achievable and ambitious targets for looked after and adopted children?	Low expectations is an enduring problem for children in care while they also often have low expectations of themselves and low self-esteem. Make sure teachers know enough about each child's strengths to know what targets are ambitious and be prepared to revisit them. (6, 7)			
	Raising attainment of LAC is in the school improvement plan.	As the key planning tool, putting attainment of LAC in the SIP ensures they are at the heart of everything the school plans for including all policies. (1)			
	Is a new PEP prepared as soon as possible after arrival in the school and used to monitor and raise attainment?	The PEP is the joint responsibility of the local authority and the school. Schools can gain much useful information from previous schools, children's homes and foster carers, assemble key participants, focus discussion on strengths and interests, as well as areas for improvement, to feed into the PEP. (1)			
	Is the PEP reviewed every term and does the designated teacher check this is done?	As a key educational tool, it is helpful if the school takes ownership of the preparation and monitoring of the PEP. (1)			

Domain	Indicators	Contextual information from practice and research (n = reference on p. 90)	Not currently part of our work	A developing area of our work	A strong area of our work
	Does the gifted and talented programme include looked after children?	The specific skills, knowledge, and talents of looked after children may be forgotten for a range of reasons. What measures ensure their inclusion in the process of identification and support to engage in the gifted and talented programme? (6, 7)			
	Has the Designated Teacher had training in all aspects of the care system, including advocacy, the impact of care upon education, responsibilities under the Children Acts and associated Regulations, and the role of the school in relation to care planning and statutory reviews?	(3)			
	Does the Designated Teacher help young people in care to express their views about school and school progress?	Children in care need to have trust in a significantly senior teacher in order to feel that their views are taken seriously. (6, 7)			

Domain	Indicators	Contextual information from practice and research (n = reference on p. 90)	Not currently part of our work	A developing area of our work	A strong area of our work
	Does the Designated Teacher identify and provide resources to address the talents and strengths of Looked after Children?	Teachers should have sufficient access to the Designated Teacher to be able to discuss details of teaching, e.g. lesson plans, review how lessons went. (3)			
	Does the Designated Teacher coordinate or provide training for school staff on issues that affect LAC?	(3)			
	Does the Designated Teacher participate in LAC reviews?	This ensures 'join up' between the PEP and the LAC review. (1)			
	Does the Designated Teacher pass on information/visits when a looked after child transfers to another school?	(1)			
	How are young people encouraged to attend school and catch up on missed work?	Children in care often miss extended periods of schooling and have little home support to catch up. Who in school encourages attendance and spots when LAC have missed out on key learning? (6, 7)			

Domain	Indicators	Contextual information from practice and research (n = reference on p. 90)	Not currently part of our work	A developing area of our work	A strong area of our work
	How is the Pupil Premium used to raise attainment for looked after children?	£1900 per pupil is available after one day of being looked after. What PP resource has specifically targeted or supported looked after children? For example, has a learning mentor been appointed? (3)			
3. Supporting learning	Is school attendance of LAC closely monitored?	Since attendance is key to success in school, unexplained non-attendance needs to be followed up as soon as possible, using a procedure agreed in advance with the main carer. (2)			
	What and how effective are processes for identification for access to early intervention programmes to promote key skills such as reading and maths ?	Children in care often lack key skills in maths and English compared to their peers, a gap that can be addressed by intensive early intervention programmes. (9)			
	What has been put in place to ensure that school staff are sensitive to LAC wish not to be singled out in front of their peers?	Children in care often find it very difficult if, for example, they are called out of class to see a social worker or when their image is not allowed to be published in school documents or webpages. (4)			

Domain	Indicators	Contextual information from practice and research (n = reference on p. 90)	Not currently part of our work	A developing area of our work	A strong area of our work
	How does the school policy on homework reflect the needs of LAC and how do teachers put this into action?	Is homework feasible for children not living with birth families, or going between homes? Are children in care 'let off' homework and what impact does this have? (6, 7)			
	Which member of staff is responsible for communicating changes in routine to Looked after children?	Children in care have to cope with many changes and school is often one constant in their lives. If in school-routines change, such as timetables, events etc., the potentially disruptive impact of this can be minimized by allocating a trusted member of staff to the task of communication. (6, 7)			
	Teachers encourage in-class participation of looked after and adopted children without targeting them.	For example, teaching and learning in relation to the family should not be expected to write the 'truth' if it means revealing details they would prefer to keep private. (4, 6, 7)			
	Teachers and associated staff have had in-service or other training on learning issues for looked after children.	Examples might be attachment difficulties, challenging behaviour, special educational needs, impact of brain trauma on learning. (9, 12)			

Domain	Indicators	Contextual information from practice and research (n = reference on p. 90)	Not currently part of our work	A developing area of our work	A strong area of our work
	Is one-to-one tuition available in order to provide the maximum opportunity for looked after children to achieve challenging levels of progress across a Key Stage?	Statutory guidance to school governing bodies 2009 states that such tuition including private tuition should be part of the resources available to make good progress. (6, 7)			
	Extra help with pre-exam revision provided.	What additional support is there for LAC to revise before important exams? Is it access to the same classes as everyone else, individualized tutor help, or availability on request?			
	Looked after children routinely included in school trips including residential trips.	Is any additional information or assessment required to participate? What flexibility does the school provide to ensure inclusion on trips? Is paying for trips a barrier to uptake among LAC? (6, 7)			
	School staff suggest to carers/social workers extra-curricular activities for looked after children that might support their interests.	Extra-curricula activities are 'normal' for children living in birth families but often forgotten for children in care. Extra effort is required to make sure carers know what children in care might like to do or be good at outside of school. Including homework clubs, sports, music. (6, 7, 8)			

Domain	Indicators	Contextual information from practice and research (n = reference on p. 90)	Not currently part of our work	A developing area of our work	A strong area of our work
	How does the school ensure that looked after children who are out of school temporarily have instructions and materials to continue their studies?	Children out of school for any reason require learning resources but this is often not thought about for children in care. (2, 6, 7)			
	Teachers are alert to signs of special educational needs or specific learning disabilities among children who are looked after or adopted.	Children who are looked after/adopted are far more likely to have SEN than children who are not, usually for behavioural reasons. School staff need a sophisticated understanding of the distinctions between behaviour problems and specific learning disabilities and the impact of assigning SEN to LAC. (8)			
	Decisions to give young people an alternative or adjusted curriculum (e.g., at KS4) are subject to consultation with relevant professionals and carers and the young person.	Reducing options to take GCSEs seriously reduces options post GCSE and should be avoided. Maths and English GCSE must be retaken in Year 12 if a Grade C is not attained in Year 11.			

Domain	Indicators	Contextual information from practice and research (n = reference on p. 90)	Not currently part of our work	A developing area of our work	A strong area of our work
	Are looked after young people encouraged to aim for participation in further and higher education from an early age?	Discussion of further and higher education is embedded in PEPs, progress reviews, careers advice, attending open days, taster days and summer schools. Volunteer mentoring schemes can also be effective at encouraging ambition.			
4. School environment	How welcoming is the building and its grounds?	Looked after children often attach importance to school as a constant 'space' in their lives or 'haven'. Buildings and grounds that actively welcome children and young people through décor, furniture, lighting, and landscaping are likely to help children who are looked after feel that school is a meaningful place for them.			
	Are there any 'cosy' spaces?	Areas inside and outside that children can sit or be for time out that have soft furnishings, soft lighting, that are accessible and looked after (not neglected) are likely to help LAC feel that school is a safe place for them to be.			
	What is the environment like where children are placed if an incident has occurred in school?	Environment has a deep impact. When a cold or chaotic environment is combined with being in trouble it can feel far worse.			

Domain	Indicators	Contextual information from practice and research (n = reference on p. 90)	Not currently part of our work	A developing area of our work	A strong area of our work
	How are school staff who work outside/during break times prepared for or made alert to potential issues for looked after and adopted children?	Children in care can feel anxious, be easily provoked, aggressive, or need to escape by hiding. They may find difficulties being with other children, being alone, fighting, or running away. Break times and transitions between home and school and between areas of the school are particularly difficult. Staff who work outside classrooms need to be fully informed of potential difficulties and have discussed strategies in advance including promoting specific activities during break times.			
5. Effectiveness and deployment of staff	Is the Designated Teacher a qualified teacher who has completed the appropriate induction period?	(5)			
	Does the policy on professional development of staff include training vis-á-vis the needs of vulnerable children, LAC and adopted children?	For example, training for staff in the 'care system' and the roles of social workers, residential care staff, foster carers, and related professionals; attachment theory and the impact of attachment in the classroom; opportunities to shadow another professional in relation to expertise on looked after children. (2, 6, 7, 12)			

Domain	Indicators	Contextual information from practice and research (n = reference on p. 90)	Not currently part of our work	A developing area of our work	A strong area of our work
	How clear/how aware Teaching Assistants in their support role with looked after children?	Teaching assistants and allied staff are often key confidantes for children in care. They need to have a system of communication with teachers and/or the designated teacher in order to pass on important information. (6, 7)			
	How do TAs communicate progress of Looked after children to teachers and DT?				
	Are teaching assistants part of the team around the child/attend meetings/ discuss progress of LAC/ report information about LAC?	Teaching assistants often have important relationships with children in care and can represent their point of view. Schools should identify and address any barriers to their participation in meetings of professionals to review progress. (6, 7)			
	There is continuity of staff between classroom and break/lunchtimes.	Transitions between classrooms and break time can be a difficult point in the day. Continuity of staff between these spaces can help children in care to feel secure. (12)			
	What time has been allocated to the Designated Teacher to carry out their duties, know all looked after children individually and has sufficient time to take a particular interest in them?	The DT is a specific role but not necessarily a full time role. Enough time should be dedicated to fulfil all aspects of the role. (1)			

Domain	Indicators	Contextual information from practice and research (n = reference on p. 90)	Not currently part of our work	A developing area of our work	A strong area of our work
	How is evidence collected to show that the Designated Teacher role has been successful in promoting the achievement of looked after children?	Annual figures are produced to show the achievements of LAC, including not just test results but also wider curriculum achievements. (3, 6, 7)			
	Are teachers and associated staff encouraged to discuss concerns about children who are looked after or adopted with the Designated Teacher/a senior member of staff?	For example, forums the DT may have to invite reflective discussion about LAC in order to prepare lessons, forestall difficulties, or plan further children's ambitions.			
6. Supporting equality and diversity	There is a school policy on inclusion that encourages respect for diverse cultures and needs and that includes specific mention of LAC.	(2)			
	How does the school demonstrate being supportive of and sensitive towards the diverse cultures and needs of looked after children and young people?	Children in care come from very diverse cultural and social backgrounds often with very complex family backgrounds. How is this recognized? Without breaching confidentiality? (2, 4, 6, 7)			

Domain	Indicators	Contextual information from practice and research (n = reference on p. 90)	Not currently part of our work	A developing area of our work	A strong area of our work
	How does the school/ teachers ensure that teaching materials do not stigmatize children and young people who are looked after?	For example, are teachers encouraged to review teaching materials with a peer as a quality check? (4)			
	How do you know that looked after children and young people are treated with equality and fairness?	For example, what monitoring or feedback is gathered from young people? How are complaints fed back into practice?			
	What strategies are in place to avoid exclusion of looked after and other vulnerable children?	Children in care are likely to be excluded more often than other children with devastating consequences for self-esteem, educational attainment, and subsequent school re-entry. Schools should scrutinize patterns and trends to identify triggers for exclusion that might be avoided. (3)			
	What is the process for reintegration of excluded looked after pupils?	This can take time, depending on the degree of trauma and may need consideration of which adults are involved and how they are deployed (12). What if any special considerations are given for looked after children?			

Domain	Indicators	Contextual information from practice and research (n = reference on p. 90)	Not currently part of our work	A developing area of our work	A strong area of our work
7. Working together with carers and other professionals	Are policies in place that promote collaboration with other professionals that work with LAC?	Information might be required on attendance, attainment and exclusions, or more general aspects of wellbeing. Examples might be health professionals, CAMHs staff, school attendance officers, police, social workers. (1, 3)			
	Is the Designated Teacher clear about how they can support social workers, carers and the child's birth parents to ensure that looked after children in their school receive the support they need?	(1)			
	Is there a system of confidential record keeping about incidences and external contacts relating to children in care, and do staff know how to use it?	(2)			
	Is the school's admissions and appeals procedure made available to social workers and carers?	Examples could be via the school website, discussed at PEPs, or when a child is excluded. (1, 13)			

Domain	Indicators	Contextual information from practice and research (n = reference on p. 90)	Not currently part of our work	A developing area of our work	A strong area of our work
	Is a dedicated member of staff primarily responsible for communication with home (parents, carers) for looked after and adopted children?	This could be a class teacher, key worker or designated teacher. A single channel of communication is likely to help build strong relationships with home. (6, 7)			
	How does the school demonstrate taking proactive responsibility for establishing communication with home (parents/ carers)?	Foster carers say that schools often fail to make contact or recognize their important knowledge about children they look after.			
	How is attendance at progress evenings monitored and how does the school ensure follow up if no parent/carer attends parents' evenings	Who makes sure that foster carers are invited to school events, and who notices if they don't and takes responsibility? Is it discussed at PEP meetings? (1)			
	How are families and carers welcomed in the school?	Strong partnerships with carers and parents is often the key to children feeling settled in school.			

Domain	Indicators	Contextual information from practice and research (n = reference on p. 90)	Not currently part of our work	A developing area of our work	A strong area of our work
	Are home–school agreements signed and in place for looked after children?	Who makes sure this happens? Is the home–school agreement discussed at PEP meetings? Is it part of admissions process? Are special meetings arranged with parents and/or carers to foster the home–school agreement? (13)			
	Is there a procedure for communication with carers in the event of a crisis in school?	Be aware that foster carers cannot always drop everything and come to school. (8)			
	Where children are in care or adopted and have special educational needs, who advises parents/carers about the local SEND parent partnership service?	The SEND partnership service offers confidential and impartial information, advice and support to young people, and parents and carers of children with SEND, on issues relating to education, health, and social care.			
	How does the school work with Connexions/CAG to help advise carers and care workers on further educational opportunities for young people beyond school?	Children in care are particularly likely to need support with information and advice about open days, preparing applications for employment or further study, deciding which option to take and so on. (9)			

Domain	Indicators	Contextual information from practice and research (n = reference on p. 90)	Not currently part of our work	A developing area of our work	A strong area of our work
	What steps are taken to network with other schools and external agencies to share good practice and improve educational provision for the education of looked after children and young people?	Good practice spreads fastest by sharing. (4, 13)			

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