Looked After Children:

Observations of Teacher Education Students on Placement in Secondary Schools

Edited by Graham Connelly
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Introduction

In Scotland in 2008 there are more than 14,000 children who are 'looked after' by local authorities, about one percent of the school population. Some schools will never have had a looked after pupil on the roll, while others will usually have small numbers of looked after pupils – perhaps as many as 20 in some large, urban secondary schools.

A child or young person can become looked after on a voluntary basis, where the family is unable to provide care. More usually, becoming looked after is as a result of compulsory measures of supervision imposed by a children's panel or by a court order. A child under compulsory measures of supervision can be looked after by the local authority while continuing to live 'at home' with their family. This uniquely Scottish care category accounts for about 40% of looked after children. Children are also looked after 'away from home' in residential schools, secure units, children's houses in the community and in foster care settings.

Concerns about low achievement in education by children and young people in public care were first noted in the 1980s and despite a range of policy initiatives the problems have been fairly resistant to improvement. Looked after children in general fall behind on 5-14 National Assessment measures, leave school with few or no qualifications and have poorer than average attendance and considerably higher rates of exclusion. The outcomes appear to be much better for children in foster care and poorest for children looked after at home. Unfortunately schools are often blind to the 'at home' group, and may indeed be confused about the terminology.

Local authorities have special duties in respect of all looked after children, including those looked after at home; these duties are now referred to as 'corporate parent' responsibilities. The duties require schools to collaborate with other key agencies, in particular social work and health services. In practical terms, this means that a care plan should include very specific targets for education and detail any special arrangements required. Exclusion should be avoided if possible and only carried out in accordance with the local authority's agreed protocol. A key member of school staff should be responsible for liaising with social workers and carers.

The key member of staff is known as the designated senior manager for looked after children (DSM) and in a secondary school this will usually be a depute head teacher, who may delegate direct work with individual children to a member of the guidance/pastoral care team. An important task for the DSM is to decide, in discussion with a child and carer, what information to pass on to class teachers. Some looked after children have described ways in which schools have exacerbated their difficulties, as a result of insensitive lessons, bullying and failure to provide support for gaps in learning. Other looked after children describe their school experience as a relief from the other awful things going on in their lives. A teacher is most often remembered as being influential in the lives of looked after children and despite the complexities involved in improving a major social problem, teachers should not underestimate their capacity to make a difference.

A key government report is, *Looked after children & young people: We can and must do better* (2007)[1], structured around five familiar themes: working together, becoming effective lifelong learners, developing into successful and responsible adults, being emotionally and physically healthy, feeling safe and nurtured in a home setting. The report (p.8) says:

> Second best is not good enough for Scotland's looked after children and young people. As corporate parents, local authorities have a challenging role, and acting like good parents and being aware of the needs of their children and young people must be a key priority. In discharging their corporate parent responsibilities, they need to put and keep the needs of the child or young person at the centre of everything they do. It is essential that the individuals and agencies who form the corporate parent for Scotland's looked after children and young people are more aware and alert to their children's needs and work together to deliver for them.

This collection of accounts is the work of students of the Professional Graduate Diploma in Education Secondary (PGDE) – a one-year teacher education programme for graduates intending to become teachers in secondary schools. These students were taking an elective module on the education of looked after children. The module was presented on either side of a full-time period of placement in secondary schools during February and March 2008. The placement provided an ideal opportunity for the students to find out more about looked after children from the school perspective.

What follows is a series of 22 accounts which represent individual students' observations while on placement in different schools. The accounts have been edited only a little for consistency. In order to maintain confidentiality they are not credited to individual students, and schools, local authorities and staff are not mentioned by name.

We are grateful to our students for undertaking an unscheduled task during an already pressured year, and for helping us to understand the issues more clearly through their willingness to engage in discussion and to ask perceptive questions. We hope that this collection of accounts will provoke discussion and will add to the wider efforts to improve practice for the benefit of looked after children and young people in Scotland's schools.

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[1] http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/01/15084446/0

Account 1

I was placed in a school in an area that is regarded as very affluent where the general perception is that the young people who attend the school are 'middle class'. Although a significant proportion of the pupils attending the school could fit into this category, the school had around 25% of its pupils coming from outwith the catchment area through placing requests from areas that can be described as 'deprived'. As a consequence the school was rich in diversity.

The school had a wide range of provisions in place to meet the needs of its pupils, with extensive support networks in the form of guidance, pastoral care, additional support teachers, school counsellors and home/school link workers. Additional classes, extra-curricular activities/clubs and study support were also available. But these services were available for everyone attending the school and it was evident that there was no additional provision or specific provision in place for children looked after by local authorities.

During my experience, it was clear that the teachers, school managers and the pupils knew very little about the children looked after by local authorities in the school and about looked after children in general. When I met up with the person responsible for looked after children she said: 'I think we only have one.' When I spoke individually to teachers in the school, they were unaware of any pupils who were looked after children or what additional provision or support may need to be in place for them. Each department in the school was provided with information about the needs of pupils attending the school when they transferred from primary to secondary school, but from looking at the records there was no information about children looked after by local authorities. These documents were rarely updated, therefore if a student's circumstance changed during their time in the school teachers would probably not be notified of these changes and as a consequence there was no evidence of provision in place for looked after children. This is not to imply that just because a pupil is looked after they will require additional support, but at least if teachers were aware of the individual's circumstance provision could be available if the pupil needed it.

It was evident in discussion with staff in the school that there was a stigma attached to looked after children, and the perception that they must be 'bad' and that they were probably the 'trouble makers' in the school. This highlights the need for local authorities/schools to educate not only teachers, but also the pupils about what it means to be looked after to avoid stereotyping.

It has been highlighted that the local authority that I was placed in has only in the last couple of months realised that it not only has responsibility for young people accommodated away from home but also people looked after at home. This exemplifies that the provisions in place for looked after children in this authority are not sufficient to meet their needs and this was further exemplified by the lack of knowledge or provision in place for looked after children in the school. If schools and local authorities are to have a positive impact on the lives of looked after children then more information and education needs to be provided to teachers.

Account 2

During my second placement, I was not able to find out much information about looked after children. This was due to the fact that members of the teaching staff were largely unaware of which children in their classes were in a looked after situation. Many of the teachers did not even know who was responsible in the school for these children and once I found out, his large remit did not enable him to have very much time for any real discussion with me about the issue.

I was able to find out, however that in my school there was a large number of looked after children who were mostly living at home or in one of two permanent foster care families within the area. There are presently five youngsters being fostered in the area and eight children have been adopted by five different families in the last year. Due to the geographical area of the school, the social workers worked hard to keep these children in surrounding villages where they can retain close links with family members. There is only one residential home in the area which is located in a very isolated spot, far from the town. It currently houses only one pupil who attends the school. Three children from the area have recently been placed in residential schools outside the local authority area but this is largely due to them having specific needs which require specialist care. There have been other candidates for placements in residential schools outside of the area but an intensive support unit for non-attendees was recently provided through the local FE college. This has enabled eight young people who were struggling with mainstream school to be educated on a part-time basis and they have become looked after at home instead.

In the school, I observed that children who were looked after were generally not achieving well. They often had behaviour problems. Teachers of these pupils were not very well informed about how best to provide for them and did not really understand any of the issues these pupils faced as looked after children.

Account 3

The local authority of my second school placement had five residences for looked after children. In addition, children pupils were placed with carers throughout the area. School Experience Two was based within an area of significant deprivation and the school had a lot of disaffected pupils. The school was aiming to be a fully inclusive school. In terms of looked after children this was to give them the additional support they need.

The pupil's social worker would liaise with the Joint Assessment Team (JAT) on a bi-monthly basis to discuss their education and agree any additional support which was required. The people attending the meeting would include the pupil's carer, learning support teacher, the deputy head, family support officer and guidance officer.

Pupils also had the opportunity to visit the family support officer (FSO). The purpose may be just to listen to the pupil or organise additional support, if required. The support could include counselling or social support, such as setting up a senior pupil as a mentor or a buddy for junior school pupils.

In addition, the pupil's carer would liaise daily with the guidance teacher. The purpose of this would be to organise time off for the pupil to attend meetings or to meet their birth parents.

The school was a sport comprehensive and there were many extra–curricular activities available, including: French club, trampoline, netball, football, African drums, homework club, Easter school and breakfast clubs. Pupils were encouraged to join. Transport was provided for pupils who were attending social clubs in the evening to get back to their residence safely.

Account 4

My placement was in a rather small rural school which is currently decanted to a school in disrepair. The head teacher was off sick and as a result of this and the physical problems with the school, the senior management (SMT) was under considerable pressure. When ever I asked a member of the SMT about the designated member of staff associated with the Integrated Children's Services Plan I was told that they were to busy and I was to ask again later.

I also asked within the department about the Children's Services Plan and looked after children, but no-one knew anything about them. When I looked on the internet for the Children's Services Plan for my local authority I was only able to find a minute of a meeting in 2005. This meeting was about the Integrated Children's Services Plan for 2005 to 2008.

The Plan would be used by the Council and its partners to ensure that they fulfilled their obligations to:

- ∞ establish a Joint Children's Services Plan
- ∞ consider children's services as a single service system
- ∞ co-ordinate needs assessment
- ∞ co-ordinate intervention
- ∞ target services to areas of most need
- ∞ ensure inclusive access for all children into universal services

The minute said the plan had been subject to an extensive consultation process involving all the interested parties but did not say anything about the content of this discussion. It said that three separate versions of the Plan would be published and circulated to partners and the public as follows:-

- ∞ a detailed version for senior employees across partner agencies involved in the joint children's services planning process
- ∞ a summary version for front-line practitioners, employees and members of the public
- ∞ a children and young people's version

I was unable to obtain a copy of any of these but I was able to obtain a copy of a report from the Executive Director (Social Work) and the Executive Director (Education) to the Scottish Executive on the Children's Services Plan for 2005 to 2008. The purpose of the report was to present and seek approval for the Integrated Children's Services Plan. It gave a background to the plan and set out the aims and objectives.

Account 5

In Placement 2 I was placed in a comprehensive school that served a largely middle class catchment area but also two significant areas of deprivation. Teachers in the school were all aware of the designated senior manager yet I personally had difficulty in making contact. I was unable to arrange a meeting to discuss policy for looked after children, although I was assured this would be organised.

Policy on looked after children was, however, brought up at the school's in-service day. The DSM was allocated time to distribute information leaflets to members of staff and to emphasise her position as a point of contact between school and other child services. I felt that too little time was spent on the subject and that it did not actually inform staff of their duties and responsibilities. The information contained in the leaflets was not discussed and it was left up to each individual teacher to read them in their own time. I know that within my own department this did not happen. There were also limited copies of the information available and I was not able to obtain one for myself.

Despite the lack of information on official policies, there were initiatives in place to help with the education of looked after children. The DSM ran an after-school, homework club once a week and a paired reading scheme during registration period. Whilst they were not targeted solely at looked after children there was a number of children in attendance who had social work contact. I was able to assist in both schemes and found that the children responded positively to them. The after-school club provided refreshments and transport home and the children saw it as a chance to talk amongst themselves and with teachers. The environment was secure and relaxed and the children did not feel that their attendance created labels for them.

I hope to receive more information on the school policy when I go back on Placement 3.

Account 6

While I was unable to meet with the DSM for looked after children within the school (she was absent for the first weeks of my placement and was extremely busy and hard to track down when she returned, although I hope to have the opportunity to meet with her on Placement 3), I did speak to the principal teacher (support for learning) who was also the school's child protection officer. As the CPO she worked closely with the DSM, although she was unable to provide me will as much information as I had hoped. I did receive a copy of the report *Looked after children & young people: We can and must do better* and information on the number of looked after children within the school.

The school is a small and rural community school, with a roll of just 460 pupils. Three pupils are looked after by the local authority, all away from home. One of these pupils is in S3 and has medical and additional support needs, and is accompanied by support staff at all times within school. The other two are in S4. While individual class teachers are not automatically notified of a pupil's looked after status, the 'blue book' used to provide teachers with details of pupils' needs indicates that these pupils have 'social, emotional and behavioural problems'. It

is also indicated that further, confidential information on these pupils may be obtained by contacting the support for learning department. While I understand the need for class teachers to be aware of these pupils' circumstances, and also the need for confidentiality regarding a pupils looked after status, I feel that automatic labelling the pupils with the broad tag of having 'social, emotional and behavioural problems' (which is not just applied to looked after children) may not be fully appropriate to the individual pupils and may be unfairly stigmatising them. As it was a small school most staff, and indeed the other pupils, were aware of pupils' looked after status.

There did not seem to be much awareness amongst staff regarding the needs, circumstances or rights of looked after children. I wasn't sure if this was due to the school having so few looked after children - compared to many other schools at least, although that is no reason for ignorance of the subject. Very few teachers were able to tell me who the DSM was (or what a DSM was), and in conversation several members of staff admitted to knowing very little about the subject, although they felt it was an area they would like to know more about. When I return to the school next month I hope to arrange a meeting with the DSM to find out more information regarding the school and local authority and the strategies in place for looked after children.

Account 7

During my second placement I had regular meetings with the school regent and was able to inform her about my elective on looked after children. When I asked if it would be possible to have a meeting with the DSM, I received a strange look and was asked why I wanted to see the DSM. According to the regent, DSM was not an acronym for Designated Senior Manager but for some other role within the school. I explained what it meant and was then told that one of the senior management team (SMT) took to do with children in care (possibly the DSM?).

The following week, during our meeting slot, the member of SMT came to talk to us about his various remits. After failing to mention his remit for looked after children, I asked if there were any at the school. He very briefly mentioned that there was one girl in care however he was reluctant to disclose any information. That was the last I heard of the girl and I did not get the opportunity to meet her.

I asked a few of the teachers in my department if they know anything about the role of the DSM, but none of them had heard of it. Perhaps in my third placement I will be able to discuss the role of the DSM *with* the DSM and other members of staff to raise awareness of looked after children.

Account 8

In my placement school there were thought to be around 20 looked after children, approximately one per cent of the school population. Most were looked after at home or placed with relatives and one lived in a nearby children's home. There were three members of staff with additional responsibility for looked after children in the school; one was the depute head teacher and the others were

classroom teachers. One of these teachers had gone on secondment to work specifically in relation to looked after children and policies regarding their care.

When I spoke to the depute head, she acknowledged that in her experience most of the looked after children would not achieve similar academic qualifications to their peers but the school had a good reputation for the education of looked after children and most would leave with at least some qualifications. She also referred to looking after children as something of an 'industry' in the area and said that people would 'take in' children to give themselves an income. The depute head thought that the school was looked upon as an example of good practice and they did a lot of multi-agency working. For example, there was a web-site shared between social work, local police and schools that would alert the relevant people if a child was in trouble or danger when the school was closed. The staff in the school would not be told if pupils were looked after, so while no-one was treated differently in terms of discipline it also led to issues where teachers were less sympathetic to some pupils than they would have been if they had known the full facts.

Account 9

Whilst at my placement school, I was fortunate enough to have a brief meeting with a member of the senior management team, who was the school's child protection co-ordinator and was responsible for looked after children. He explained the different cases of looked after children attending the school, i.e. whether they were looked after at home or whether they were in alternative accommodation. He also explained how some children were looked after for issues other than child protection reasons, for example, children of asylum-seeking families who are housed in temporary accommodation. The school has 10 looked after children living with parents or other members of family, and one child who is provided with alternative accommodation. He explained the process of involving parents and how parents are encouraged to attend meetings which allow them to be involved with social work services. He was also able to give a brief explanation of the local authority's policy and procedures. The authority also provides the school with a specialist 'looked after and accommodated team' whose members work with school staff.

The local authority was given an HMI inspection in 1999-2000. The inspectors found evidence that looked after children were suffering from an educational disadvantage and were at risk of being excluded. HMI gave recommendations for action, which the council took very seriously and over the following four years they met these recommendations. The school, and other schools in this local authority, were given help to ensure that looked after children were included in school life and that their attainment levels were high.

Account 10

When introduced to one of the deputy head teachers (DHT) in my second placement school, I was given a brief overview about the school, its catchment area and about the pupils in general. At this meeting, it was mentioned that of approximately 970 pupils, there was, at present, only four pupils who were looked after (the number fluctuates). The staff handbook stated that the

guidance team should inform the depute head when they become aware of a child who is/or has become looked after or accommodated. The depute head then logs this information onto SEEMIS [an electronic management information system], which is meant to be accessed by all teachers. However, at this initial meeting on my first day of placement, I recall the DHT telling us that teachers were not informed that a child is looked after or accommodated, and they were told on a 'need to know' basis – after which I assumed that not all parts of the SEEMIS networks are available to all teachers (something I will query when I return for Placement 3). The staff handbook also states that the DHT will arrange joint meetings between different parties within the school and chair these meetings – for example, DHT, guidance staff, social worker, learning support etc. A plan for the child's education was made, to be reviewed every six months. I was not informed if any pupil I taught was looked after however I discovered by accident that a girl in one of my S1 classes lived in foster care. When I was giving out folders she was putting a coloured card away in her bag (maybe trying to hide it before I saw it); I saw it and commented that it would be nice to give to someone and she then told me it was for her foster carer who was in hospital. I wondered if I would have approached the situation differently had I known this, and I feel it would be beneficial to know if pupils are looked after, just the same as identifying a pupil in the class with dyslexia or behaviour problems. Just knowing these things could help when dealing with situations in class. I did ask the regent looking after the student teachers if I could speak to someone about looked after children in the school and explained as it was part of my coursework. She could not get anyone for me to talk to and so on my return to the school for Placement 3 she will put me in touch with a social worker.

Account 11

My second placement school seemed to be generally well informed about looked after children. In my first placement only the SMT could name the member of SMT responsible for looked after children. This was not the case in the second school. The whole chain of teachers - SMT, guidance, subject teaching staff - could identify the depute head responsible. I was also surprised when talking to class teachers how many were aware of what constituted a 'looked after' child (considering that there is often confusion about the term). On my initial visit day I was provided with a booklet of information that the SMT deemed to be 'essential' for student teachers joining the school. Within the booklet was the school's Child Protection Plan – detailing symptoms of child abuse to look out for, correct procedures to follow concerning looked after children and further support/advice that was available if staff needed/were interested in it.

The school regent informed us that there was a number of looked after children in the school and that it was important for student teachers to be aware of the implications for teaching. I met the Depute responsible for looked after children who was keen to give me information and share her experiences with me; although responsibility for looked after children was only a small part of her job she took the issue very seriously. She was impressed that student teachers were taking an interest in the area as she felt that it was an important one. She provided me with general information and has promised me more material when I return as well as any help that she can offer with my assignment. Overall my

impressions of my placement school were very positive: the staff were very aware of looked after children and the DSM took a very serious attitude towards the responsibilities of her post.

Account 12

School: I was introduced to the DSM for looked after pupils, the DHT in charge of Pupil Support. Due to illness I wasn't able to have a meeting with her. The school does have some looked after pupils on the roll. I would say that these pupils were seen by most staff as a guidance (and maybe social work?) problem and one that was best tackled 'off site'. All of those involved with pupil support in general did seem committed to their role, and I look forward to being able to discuss the specific issue of looked after pupils with the DSM when I return.

Local Authority: The amazing thing that I've found is the number of reports commissioned, pilots launched, and meetings held since the publication of *Learning with Care* regarding looked after children. I feel that for those involved their hearts have been in the right place but it does seem that after some success in the issue there was a lot of head scratching and folk asking, 'what next?' I don't want to disclose which local authority I was working in, however, I do believe that their current drive to align multiple services, in partnerships with other public agencies, will go a long way in improving the educational, vocational and social provision for looked after pupils.

General: I've had the chance to speak with some fellow students who 1) are not taking this elective and 2) were not at the same school on placement. I think this quote sums up the experience of a significant number of looked after pupils, with regard to the mindset of their teachers: '[looked after children] were never mentioned…but then I never asked, to be fair.'

Account 13

Guidance staff within my Placement 2 school were generally well informed about issues relating to looked after children. However, many ordinary staff believed that 'looked after' meant that a child was in residential care. The school had a very positive and inclusive ethos but they didn't specifically identify looked after children as a priority for social inclusion. I feel that this was partly because most of the staff, including senior management, believed that looked after meant being in residential care. The school is in an area of multiple deprivation and a lot is done to combat this deprivation and ensure that all children achieve their potential at school.

I feel that the biggest problem in the school is a lack of communication between teachers in respect of who looked after children are and what this means. Multi-agency working has been shown to be an effective way to improve the learning outcomes of disadvantaged children but how can we expect full multi-agency working when teachers within one school are not even communicating properly with each-other?

During one lunch I brought up in conversation the subject of looked after children with a principal teacher of guidance who had lunch in our base as she

had previously taught my subject before going into guidance. The discussion was dominated by whether or not 'these children' should even be in mainstream school. This highlighted for me how serious the lack of knowledge is in schools about looked after children. I can't understand how well-educated professional people can think that all children who are looked after are bad / criminal. I feel that the focus of this reflection may have been a little negative and this is not fair on the school as it is really good, particularly when working with really disadvantaged children, including looked after children. However, awareness about the issues surrounding looked after children do need to get directly to classroom teachers.

Account 14

My second school placement did little to enhance my knowledge of looked after children. My school was located in one of the most affluent areas of the city and its catchment area was almost exclusively confined to the leafy suburbs with the majority of pupils coming from middle class families. In my first week I asked the student regent, who was also a depute head, whether any of the pupils at the school were looked after by the local authority. She replied: 'we had one once, but that was years ago.' She then advised that she would check with another depute head whose remit included overseeing pupil welfare and looked after children. Rather worryingly, this depute said that she did not know of any pupils who were looked after by the local authority but would look into it and get back to me the next day. The following day she confirmed that none of the pupils were looked after by the local authority.

In further discussions, she questioned why I wanted this information and what indeed I meant by looked after children. I explained that I was undertaking an elective class in this field and was interested in what provisions the school had in place for the education of looked after pupils. She said that the school would need to contact the local authority for guidance in the first instance as it had been a long time since they had a pupil in this category.

It was very clear that the school staff, including the senior management team, had very little knowledge of looked after children. Indeed, when discussing the education of looked after children with subject teachers, one teacher asked: "are they not all in Kibble?' This comment highlighted the desperate need for teachers to be educated in this area. Furthermore, it appeared that they had very little interest in the education of looked after children and it was evident that there were no clear school policies or plans in place for looked after children.

Account 15

From my experience on Placement 2 I was able to make certain observations about the education of children looked after by local authorities. As with many things, I found there to be numerous misgivings about this situation, in particularly within my placement school. My placement was within an affluent local authority with a 0.1% of recordable deprivation. Many people may think that there would be little chance of there being such children within these schools. Within my own faculty, no teacher was aware of any pupil in the school falling into this category. While there is perhaps no need to flag up a 'looked

after child' for no good reason, it seems somewhat astonishing that in a school where there are several children who fall into this category, a very small number with behavioural and special educational needs, that so many teachers are not only unaware but uninterested in this situation.
Having approached the appropriate DHT I found that they were not keen to discuss any individual case with me but were quite prepared to offer numbers in most basic detail. However, when paying close attention to the attitudes, needs, behaviours and general conversation between teacher and pupil I did identify two children that I taught who were looked after by the local authority. With regards to policies on inclusion, there is often no need for direct classroom teacher input into the education of such children. Support plans in my placement school were put in place for so many children, including catch-up materials, differentiated materials etc., that some of the reasons were very clouded.

I did encounter a situation where I taught a young boy who spent time in and out of his home due to being in a single parent home situation where the primary carer suffered from alcohol addiction. This pupil spoke openly about his experiences with his classmates, and often with me, but in an open classroom setting. It was evident that sometimes allowances for tiredness, lack of uniform and or homework had to be made so as stay in line with inclusive policies. Often a policy of least intervention can make for the most comfortable situation. I also note from my placement experience that the different departments within certain schools are selective about what information is shared with other staff members. Perhaps it would be useful to share more information with classroom teachers so they know how to best prepare for and work with any children who might have any form of additional need.

Account 16

Attitudes to looked after children could be described as patchy at best. In meeting with the designated senior manager I felt that looked after children didn't really form a high priority focus – even though the school served areas of multiple deprivation. The DSM didn't seem to have a clear picture of the numbers of children in the school who were looked after, and also seemed to confuse looked after children with child protection policies (although significant overlap, they are not necessarily the same thing). He was also of the opinion that 'there are no expectations' on looked after children in terms of their education. This seemed to imply that as long as the children are attending school regularly they don't need to have anything further put in place to assist them in their education. When we consider that looked after children are more likely to experience poor outcomes, this seems strange.

It also seems that a common understanding of the term 'in care' is not universal, with a number of teachers believing the term only refers to children who are looked after and accommodated. Additionally, it seems that not every teacher is aware of how they can interface appropriately with the care system.

Confusion was apparent across a number of individuals: confusion regarding what looked after means; confusion regarding what needs to be done to ensure looked after children are given all the supports they need to succeed; confusion regarding how concerned adults or professionals can interact with the care system in the best interests of a child. *The Herald* newspaper provides a good

example of this general lack of understanding and prioritisation for looked after children.:
http://www.theherald.co.uk/news/news/display.var.2145955.0.Children_in_care_being_pushed_out_at_age_16_says_report.php.

It appears that we are discharging our statutory responsibilities for looked after children, but that once they reach 16 we are failing in our corporate parenting duties. It seems that a general lack of understanding – even within the teaching profession – results in looked after children being forgotten about at the earliest opportunity.

Account 17

In relation to looked after children I feel, from my school experience, that classroom teachers are very limited in what they can do to help these young people. In both my placement schools I was fortunate, or unfortunate depending on whose point of view you take, to be timetabled in a class where a looked after child was present. In Placement 1 I felt that I was very emotionally attached to the child as it was obvious by his behaviour that he felt uncomfortable around adults and had a severe lack of trust for people. I wasn't initially informed by the class teacher of this young person's circumstances and struggled firstly to understand why a child could be so uncontrollably 'bad'. I asked the teacher what we could do to help this pupil and found that they didn't have any answers for me. We were to try and test ways of teaching the pupil and hope that it didn't backfire on us. This was also true in Placement 2. On speaking to senior members of staff, it was clear that they had ran out of ideas for educating the pupil in question and were pretty much just housing him until circumstances changed.

Whilst at Placement 2 I took time to speak to the member of the senior management team responsible for looked after children and was given a brief outline of the procedures in place. He spoke to us about the meetings which are set up for parents or guardians to attend at the school and the involvement of Social Work Services within the school. He also described some of the reasons why children become looked after, and not just child protection issues, for example, children of asylum seeking families who are housed in temporary accommodation awaiting visa approval.

Account 18

The school where I carried out my second placement was in a relatively rural area in a comparatively small local authority. A striking fact I found out very early on in the placement was that there are no residential schools, homes or secure units within the local authority, the closest being 32 miles away.

After further investigation, I realised the educational provision for looked after children was made available through a support centre in a nearby town, approximately 15 miles away from the school. The centre provides support for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties which exceed the school's ability to meet their needs. The children are there on day placement for four and a half days per week but are still on the school roll and are therefore

still part of mainstream education. A link worker visits the designated child in school for half a day per week to work with the young person on issues such as anger management.

When having an informal discussion with the designated senior manager for looked after children in the school, I found this was an area she was extremely passionate about. She clearly knew each pupil who fell under the looked after umbrella, and could provide an in-depth description of their needs, difficulties and strategies for learning. She also communicated well with the staff in the Behaviour Support Department, stating her goals and objectives for staff development, and describing recent achievements and training her staff had accomplished. Additionally, she told me about activities which she had arranged outside school hours to improve the looked after children's life skills.

Although this was a very impressive aspect of how the school was catering for looked after children's needs, this did not permeate throughout the whole school. When doing some further research with class teachers, and indeed senior management, it was clear that meeting the needs of the looked after children was very much viewed as the responsibility of the Behaviour Support Department and that these children were very 'categorised'. This is evidently an area which must be investigated and developed by the school as a whole.

Account 19

During Placement 2, I had limited personal contact with my school regent. The large size of the school, accompanied by the large school roll was often used to the advantage of the senior management team to avoid answering queries put to them by the numerous student teachers on placement. Midway through the placement, after repeatedly attempting to make contact with the school DSM, the students were asked if there was any particular area the school could provide information on or alternatively arrange a meeting with the appropriate individuals. I asked to meet the school DSM or any other members of staff whose remits involve looked after children, in any capacity. I was assured these meetings would be arranged for the following week, however, despite repeated attempts to make contact with the appropriate individuals, I was not granted a meeting. When I confronted the regent regarding my issues, he assured me that: 'these issues shall be discussed in a meeting during Placement 3', therefore I hope to find out a lot more during my third placement.

Account 20

During my school experience I found out a little bit about child protection and who the child protection officer was. I found out also that there were co-ordinated support plans for any child which the school had identified as having needs, although nothing specific to looked after children. I also found out about various initiatives the school had running for children they had classed as disadvantaged or struggling in a variety of ways, though this was not specific to looked after children. I was informed by one teacher that 'there was a list of them somewhere' in relation to looked after and accommodated children and who that the designated senior manager was. I contacted this person and

emailed her with a few questions to get a general background on what the school was doing for these pupils however in three weeks she never returned my email and when I went to speak to her she was always hard to pin down because she seemed to be out of school a great deal of the time. Although the school did a lot for its pupils with learning difficulties or behaviour support needs they didn't seem to be at all aware or doing anything for looked after children.

Account 21

During my second placement, I spoke to the individual responsible for looked after and looked after and accommodated children in the school to gain better knowledge and understanding of the issue. It became apparent that there are currently four looked after and accommodated children and fifteen who are looked after in this particular school. Each child has an individual support plan and often an additional support plan. Regular monitoring of each child is essential to ensure their continued success at school but also to have the chance to discuss any issues with them.

The person responsible for looked after children in the school commented that it is during these meetings that new problems or issues with the child are discovered and therefore have to be dealt with quickly. She commented that the school had a well established pastoral care team that worked together by sharing good practice, and it was this that greatly helped her in her own tasks. She spoke to me about a particular student that is currently in S4 and is accommodated. This child is a refugee who came to Scotland with her mother and was well settled in school and happy at home. Her mother then passed away and the child was taken into accommodation. The school noticed a great change in this child; she became very withdrawn and has a lot of emotional issues. This child needs a lot of support from her school and the pastoral care teacher has regular meetings with her as has the person responsible for this area in the school. It was noted that these regular meetings and consultations have proved beneficial for this child who is becoming very settled in her new living arrangements.

Account 22

Both teaching placements have been undertaken within the same local authority. School A was a large, town-based grammar school with a roll of 1100 this results in a very broad and diverse catchment area. School B was a smaller, semi-rural high school with a roll of 700. This rural catchment suggests extreme contrasts in wealth, with significant pockets of rural deprivation and exclusion.

In both schools looked after children came under the remit of a designated deputy head teacher, who maintained overall responsibility for a wide range of pupil support functions. This incorporated a broad team of school-based professionals, as well as a quite overwhelming range of external, professional intervention from: attendance officer; careers; behaviour support; English as an additional language staff; educational psychologist; nursing and health services; family support worker; youth & community project worker; campus police officer; social work; vocational/sessional workers.

School A did not produce any formal statistics on how many children were currently looked after, as this information was considered to be 'highly confidential'. Staff, were, however, able to access this information via their 'shared area' or school portal. School guidance staff had further responsibility to ensure that this information was current, updated and subsequently distributed. In summary, School A demonstrated an exemplary 'guidance function' (incorporating looked after children roles/responsibilities) which, despite the size of the school, did not appear fragmented. Staff were clearly knowledgeable about key issues and were happy to assist student teachers in accessing confidential information, as required.

School B operated a similar system with some additional practices. The school had appointed three guidance staff, whose *sole* responsibility was the pastoral care of all pupils within the school - each teacher was assigned to two cohorts, e.g. S1/S2, S3/S4 and S5/S6. This system appeared to be valued within the school; again there was no fragmentation of function or responsibility. The school had recently undergone a HMIE inspection and had been required to produce statistics for all pupils with any additional support needs. From this list, it was noted that only five pupils fell into the looked after and accommodated category: (S1 = 1) (S3 = 3) (S4 = 1).

I was personally involved in teaching the S1 pupil who was accommodated. From the first meeting, I was given full details of the child's background and given access to both their learning needs record and confidential medical information. I found this to be most useful in managing this child's behaviour – which, at times, was unpredictable and often disruptive. On one particular occasion the pupil had clearly been experiencing a stressful and frustrating day at school and when they arrived at my class (last period) were very agitated and outwardly angry! The pupil was mature enough to want to direct the situation and accordingly asked if they could use one of the class computers to access their 'anger management' PowerPoint presentation. The pupil had helped to *create* this tool with the school's behaviour support staff and they were instructed to access it whenever they felt frustrated and/or unable to cope in a class. I was very happy to accommodate this request and actually watched it with the pupil to gain a better insight into how it made them feel better! Had I not known about the pupil's background and circumstances, I would have most probably not allowed this request and there could have been many implications.

Postscript

These are the highly individual accounts of students who had spent only a few weeks in the schools, and who also had only limited opportunity to engage with the complexities of the organisational culture. The accounts highlight variations in basic knowledge of looked after children and their circumstances, confusion about terminology, lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities, and differences between schools in approach. The accounts also document evidence of good practice but, sadly, also the persistence of questionable attitudes about looked after children. We would like to hear your reactions to these accounts and your ideas about what could be done to make things better.

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