

# Supporting looked after children

## Introduction

Ensuring that the right support is in place for all pupils is important in closing the attainment gap. Whilst our current catch-up arrangements are effective for many, we know that they are not working for all pupils. Some need a level of support which is beyond our control to deliver in the context of whole class or small groups. Without an individualised approach it will be very hard for this group to make the progress needed to achieve their full potential.

Schools and local authorities have already begun to make progress in raising attainment for looked after children. But this improvement remains slower than the national average for all pupils. Reversing the widening of this gap and transforming opportunities for young people is now an urgent necessity.

Research shows that success in education – more than anything else – determines whether a young person who has been looked after has a fulfilling adult life. Many children and young people in care do not receive a successful learning experience. They are more likely to have Special Educational Needs: 28% have a statement of SEN compared to 3% of all children. Their average attainment is far worse than that of their peers. At Key Stage 2, they are significantly less likely to reach level 4 or above in English or mathematics. In 2008 only 46% of looked after children achieved level 4 in English and 44% level 4 in mathematics. By contrast, 81% of all pupils obtained this level in English and 79% in mathematics. As pupils progress through the key stages so the attainment gap increases. In 2008 just 14% of looked after children achieved at least 5 A\* – C grade GCSEs, compared with 65% of all pupils.

It is for these reasons that looked after children have been specifically identified as a group who could benefit from one-to-one tuition.

There is no difference in the expectation of one-to-one tuition for looked after children than non-looked after children. All pupils deserve high quality tuition. This booklet supplements existing guidance on one-to-one tuition and offers some additional background information to consider when working with looked after children.

## Who are looked after children?

Every looked after child is an individual person with his or her own talents and interests, needs and concerns, fears and hopes. The term 'Looked after Children' (LAC) refers to children under the age of 18 who are provided with accommodation by a local authority or who are subject to a care order. Most live with foster carers but some live in residential children's homes or occasionally with parents or other relatives. (Children Act 1989)

There are around 60,000 looked after children at any time who enter care for many reasons and may have experienced problems not of their own making. 63% enter care because they have suffered abuse or neglect: many suffer mental health

problems resulting from this. Others may enter care because their parents are suffering from a severe disability or their family is experiencing acute stress. Looked after Children will also include those who are unaccompanied asylum seekers.

When a looked after child is accommodated by the local authority (Children Act 1989 Section 20) this is done with consent of parents on a voluntary basis. When a child is Compulsorily taken into care, a court order, which is known as a care order (Children's Act 1989 section 31), places a child in the care of a designated local authority. This enables the local authority to share parental responsibility with the parent(s). Taking a child into care is always for their own protection and well being.

All looked after children must have a care plan which is drawn up and reviewed, usually every six months, by the local authority which looks after them. The care plan will identify intended outcomes and objectives for the child and provide the framework to work with the child and carers in relation to his or her emotional and behavioural development, identity, relationships and self care skills. The care plan must also include a health plan and a personal education plan (PEP) that are developed and reviewed in partnership with relevant professionals. The health plan and PEP are important documents because they make it easier for the relevant professionals to gain a shared understanding of what they each must do to meet the child's needs. In the case of the Personal Education Plan, though it is 'owned' by the child's social worker it will be the designated teacher at the school the pupil is attending who will be responsible for making sure that it contains up-to-date information about the child's educational needs, goals and achievements. They will make sure that the school works with the child, the child's social worker, carer and sometimes an officer in the local authority who has responsibility for leading work to promote the educational achievement of all children looked after by the authority.

### **So what is a Personal Education Plan (PEP)?**

Every child in care has a PEP. When drawing up the PEP and planning for its regular review, the school's designated teacher will lead the school's work to:

- consider short and long-term goals agreed in partnership with the child and carers about helping him or her achieve his/her potential;
- Plan actions, e.g. on homework, one-to-one tuition, extra tuition, study support, including timescales that the school and others will take to promote the educational achievement of the pupil based on an assessment of his or her educational needs;
- identify how the progress of the pupil is to be monitored;
- identify in partnership with the child's carer/social worker any other discussions that are needed if planning reveals further support is required – e.g. possible action to support special educational needs involving the SENCO, educational psychologist or child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) or local authority education services;
- consider what action may be needed to support the child's long-term targets and aspirations, for example, in relation to goals for the next Key Stage, success in public

examinations consideration of further and higher education, work experience and career plans;

- record and celebrate the achievements of the child both academically and in taking part in the wider activities of the school and in other out of school learning activities (e.g. sporting, personal development, community);
- inform the statutory review of the care plan through keeping the child's PEP under review and attending the care plan review meeting to contribute to discussion about the child's educational progress and celebrate his/her achievements.

### **One-to-one tuition and looked after children**

One-to-one tuition, for pupils falling behind in English or mathematics, has been piloted in 10 local authorities as part of the Making Good Progress pilot in key stages 2 and 3. Early evidence from the tuition element of the Making Good Progress pilot suggests that looked after children make even better progress as a result of one-to-one tuition than their peers both during the tuition period and through sustained gains after the tuition has finished. This is unsurprising since looked after children regularly highlight the value they place on personalised learning and lessons finely tuned to their needs.

All looked after children are eligible for tuition. As one-to-one tuition appears to have a particularly significant impact on looked after children, all schools should review the progress of each looked after child on their roll and consider whether one-to-one tuition would be an appropriate additional intervention.

### **Tutoring looked after children**

First and foremost, one-to-one tuition addresses the need of the individual pupil who has been taught a skill in the classroom, and subsequent efforts have failed to secure it. The strength of one-to-one tuition is increased when the tuition builds on what the pupil already knows, and when it takes into account their strengths as well as their weaknesses. Pupils need to clearly understand what they need to improve, why they need to improve, how they have improved, what they can do as a result of tuition that they couldn't do before and how tuition will support them back in the classroom.

When planning for one-to-one tuition for a looked after child, it is essential that clear reference and links are made to the PEP. Following the identification of the focus of the tuition lessons, a meeting should take place between the class teacher, the carer(s), designated teacher, tutor and pupil to agree the outline and outcomes of the tuition.

### **Role of the tutor when working with looked after children**

The tutor will apply the same principles, high expectations and standards when working with looked after children as they would with non-looked after children. They will set, in discussion with the class teacher and designated teacher, realistic and achievable tasks to engage the pupil and support learning. Opportunities should be identified for regular feedback and communication with the class teacher and/or the designated teacher.

In developing the sessions the tutor will want to promote an environment where the pupil feels safe, confident, willing to participate fully and take risks. It is important that the tutor is sensitive to the needs of a looked after child particularly with reference to parents, families, carers and special events such as mother's day, for example.

Managing the first tutorial is particularly important as it sets the tone, pace, style and standard for the others. At this initial point the tutor will need to make sure that the child is comfortable and allow time to answer any questions he/she may have.

During the tutorial pupils need opportunities to talk, rehearse ideas and ask questions. Looked after Children may be initially reticent to participate in tuition sessions, finding it difficult to engage with yet another adult. Active encouragement and praise of success that is both genuine and earned will support the looked after child to demonstrate and develop the skills that will enable them to work independently.

If at any point during the tuition session the tutor has concerns, or feels that discussions are inappropriate, the best advice would be not to be drawn into the discussion but to handle the situation sensitively and refer immediately to the class teacher.

### **Points to consider when tutoring a looked after child**

A looked after child or young person may experience some or all of the following:

- Embarrassment at being 'looked after' or 'in care' and concern about the welfare of their parents or other family members. They may feel excluded from 'normal' family life and feel a strong sense of loss and sadness;
- Regular periods of instability, which may be the result of frequent moves of placement and can result in a fear of the unknown or an anxiety about their future;
- A disrupted education due to numerous changes of school, and/or periods of Non-attendance at school which may result in them falling behind;
- Isolation, low self-esteem and, in some cases, bullying as a result of their experiences. Difficult life events can affect concentration and the ability to make friends and build relationships;
- Difficulties in forming attachments to adults as a result of what has happened to them;
- The belief that teachers and 'officials' know all about them or that they don't know them at all. However, despite this, they may also have very positive feelings about being looked after.

For example:

- Feeling safe and having someone looking after them instead of them having to look after themselves;

- Being allowed to 'be a child' and receiving encouragement and support from adults who believe in them;
- feeling secure with a sense of routine and stability;
- having a better quality living environment.

## Who else is involved?

### **The class teacher**

As the main point of contact, the class teacher will be the initial link between the tutor and the parents/carer. It will be the responsibility of the class teacher to explain to the parents/ carer why a pupil has been selected for one-to-one tuition and provide an opportunity for all parties to meet and discuss fully the planning of the sessions. The class teacher will also support the organisation of the tuition ensuring that the tuition timing and location is acceptable for the pupil and the carer. This is particularly important if the pupil usually travels to school by provided transport. If for whatever reason attendance becomes a problem for the pupil, the class teacher will work with the tutor to seek practical solutions.

Regular liaison between the class teacher, tutor and designated teacher is needed to ensure all relevant information is shared, including the updating of educational performance, attainment and reflections on progress during tuition.

### **The designated teacher**

All maintained schools must have a designated teacher, who is responsible for promoting the educational achievement of all looked after children on the school roll. The designated teacher is responsible for developing the educational content of the PEP once it is received from the social worker, and will want to guarantee that the looked after child has access to tuition if they need it. The designated teacher will also work with carers to ensure that they understand the benefits of one-to-one tuition and are equipped to support whether tuition is delivered at home or in school. It is also the role of the designated teacher to liaise with social workers and share the progress of the pupil.

### **The carer**

The carer takes on all the responsibilities normally associated with parenting. It is expected that they will be positive about the tuition, have high expectations from it and encourage the pupil at all times by asking them about the sessions or helping them with homework. The carer will want to ensure that their child attends tuition: if it takes place in the home they will need to make a suitable space available, or make arrangements for the child to get to, and be collected from the tuition venue. As the lives of children in care are often complicated the carer will need to keep the school updated with any relevant information which may impact on the tuition and contact the tutor and school immediately if there is an attendance problem or change in arrangements.

## **The social worker**

The social worker, who is the main link between the local authority and the pupil's school, is responsible for monitoring and overseeing the PEP which includes ensuring that the views and wishes of the pupil about their education are sought and duly considered. In relation to one-to-one tuition they will liaise regularly with the designated tutor to ensure that tuition is given a high priority and that information regarding tuition and progress is obtained and provided to the statutory child care review.

## **The Virtual School Head (VSH)**

In every local authority, a senior official or 'virtual school head' works closely with the school to ensure continuity of schooling for every looked after child. Through rigorous tracking, the VSH makes sure that schools know when they have a looked after child on their roll and that the school is putting in place appropriate targeted support for that child. The Virtual School Head should liaise with the Local Authority Tuition Lead (the person within the local authority with overall responsibility for ensuring the delivery of tuition in schools) to ensure that schools know about and are accessing tuition, where appropriate, for looked after children on their roll.

Remember for most looked after children, being in care presents more than enough challenges. A tutor can provide valuable targeted support and stability enabling the looked after child to reach their potential.

# **Support for tutors**

Local authority tuition leads will provide localised support and guidance for tutors, however there are also a wide range of national materials which can also provide useful information and resources.

## **Developing one-to-one tuition: Guidance for tutors**

DCSF ref: 01066-2009, Feb 2009

Download from: <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications>

## **One-to-one tuition tool kit**

DCSF ref: 01068-2008, Feb 2009

Download from: <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications>

## **Useful Websites**

National Strategies: <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/>

Teachers TV: Need to know – Making Good Progress Pilot <http://www.teachers.tv/>

Teachernet one-to-one tuition:

<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/schoolstandards/mgppilot/on>

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