



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Education and Culture Committee

6th Report, 2012 (Session 4)

The Educational Attainment of Looked after Children

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The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Education and Culture Committee

Remit and membership

Remit:

The remit of the Committee is to consider and report on further and higher education, lifelong learning, schools, pre-school care, skills and other matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning and matters relating to culture and the arts falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs.

Membership:

Clare Adamson
Claire Baker (Deputy Convener) (until 22 December 2011)
Marco Biagi
Neil Bibby (from 22 December 2011)
Neil Findlay (from 22 December 2011) (Deputy Convener from 10 January 2012)
Jenny Marra (until 22 December 2011)
Stewart Maxwell (Convener)
Joan McAlpine
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Committee Clerking Team:

Senior Assistant Clerk

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Neil Stewart

Committee Assistant

Jonas Rae



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Education and Culture Committee

6th Report, 2012 (Session 4)

The Educational Attainment of Looked after Children

The Committee reports to the Parliament as follows—

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The recommendations and conclusions from the Committee's report are summarised below. The main report follows this summary—

The Committee heard often disturbing evidence about the consequences for children if they do not have sustainable, loving, secure and stable relationships with their parents or carers from a very early age. In devising its forthcoming national parenting strategy and in its work on the early years more generally, the Scottish Government must therefore consider the particular needs of looked after children. The Committee understands that engaging with some parents, including those of children who are looked after at home, can be extremely challenging but it is also the area where there is the greatest scope for improvement to be made. Given the scale of the problem identified in this report, the national parenting strategy and any other policy flowing from it must be properly resourced. (Paragraph 36)

During its joint event with the Centre for Excellence for Looked after Children in Scotland (CELCIS), several participants discussed existing early interventions such as employing more health visitors, expanding family nurse partnerships and teaching parenting skills to those who may become parents soon. Interventions of this kind may help to prevent children from becoming looked after in the first place. The Committee considers that, whatever interventions are made, they should be based on evidence of successful outcomes. (Paragraph 37)

The Committee endorses the principles behind the Early Years Taskforce in providing support and sharing good practice in relation to early intervention. Given the particularly strong benefits that looked after children may realise from effective early interventions, the Committee calls on the Scottish Government to consider how the Taskforce and CELCIS can work together where there is any overlap between the issues that they are addressing. In particular, the Scottish Government should consider whether CELCIS

should be represented on the Taskforce. (Paragraph 38)

There is no doubt that children looked after at home have poorer levels of attainment than other looked after children. As a first step, the Committee requests further information from the Scottish Government on the type and extent of social work support that is currently provided to children looked after at home and their families or carers, for example by children's service workers or similar individuals. The Committee believes that adequate resources and support should be available and therefore also calls for the Scottish Government's views on—

- whether the current support for children looked after at home produces satisfactory outcomes, bearing in mind the evidence presented throughout this report on the particular difficulties facing this group; and**
- whether resources are available to provide greater social work support to all looked after children, where required, given the Government's commitment to the preventative spending agenda. (Paragraph 45)**

Considerable evidence has been provided to suggest that the voluntary sector could play an even greater role in supporting looked after children. The Committee agrees and therefore calls on the Scottish Government – in conjunction with local authorities, NHS boards and the voluntary sector – to bring forward proposals on how volunteers could help deliver greater, more coordinated, nationwide support to looked after children, particular those looked after at home. The Committee stresses that such support would not be provided as a replacement for the services of trained professionals, but should complement their input, particularly where families prefer to receive more informal support. (Paragraph 46)

The Committee fully appreciates that striking the balance between supporting families and intervening to remove children from harmful situations raises extremely sensitive and difficult issues. As a result, the Committee considers that these issues are worthy of more detailed investigation and is therefore minded to carry out a further inquiry into this area prior to the introduction of the children and young people bill. (Paragraph 52)

Considering the concerns expressed by witnesses about placement moves, the Committee welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to reducing placements. The Committee is not clear at this stage on how this commitment will be achieved, given the complexities of the issues involved. The Committee therefore seeks more detail on the approach the Scottish Government plans to take and confirmation that it is supported by local authorities. (Paragraph 56)

The Committee believes that all professionals should work towards reducing the likelihood of such disruption (of emergency referrals to the study patterns of children accommodated in residential units) occurring and invites the Scottish Government to report back on the extent of the problem

and the steps it is taking, along with local authorities, to ensure that all residential units provide the best possible environment for children. (Paragraph 57)

The Committee appreciates that it may be too early to evaluate fully the effectiveness of initiatives such as Place2Be in tackling the underlying causes of exclusion. The Committee calls on the Scottish Government, in partnership with local authorities, to ensure that such an outcomes-based evaluation is carried out at the earliest opportunity and to publish a plan for the wider roll-out of such initiatives as appropriate. (Paragraph 67)

There is a clear consensus among witnesses that the use of part-time education, where no other provision is put in place, is unsatisfactory as every child has a right to a full-time education, however that may be provided. While this issue is not just relevant to looked after children, it may have a disproportionate impact on them. Therefore, the Scottish Government should investigate the extent to which part-time education without alternative provision exists. Further, the Scottish Government should set out, in conjunction with COSLA and the relevant professional organisations, how this practice can be ended, how more satisfactory arrangements can be put in place and the resources that this would require. (Paragraph 73)

The Committee calls on the Scottish Government to monitor more closely the implementation of its existing guidance on exclusions and considers that the practice of “informal exclusions” should be used with sensitivity. (Paragraph 74)

The Committee recognises that good relationships between key professionals and looked after children play a vital role in ensuring the wellbeing of looked after children in school and contribute to their learning. Excellent school leadership can facilitate this in shaping the ethos of the school. The Committee therefore considers that the Scottish Government should stress the importance of this area in its wider policies, in developing school leaders and in training teachers, recognising that building such relationships is an integral part of quality teaching rather than an additional part of teachers’ job descriptions. (Paragraph 80)

The Committee notes that in the current financial climate, resources are relatively scarce. The Committee is not able to evaluate fully the specific suggestions set out above (in paragraph 82) and invites the Scottish Government to consider the viability and merit of such proposals, in the context of its preventative spending agenda. (Paragraph 83)

It is not unreasonable to consider that differing views in this area (of measuring wider achievement as well as attainment) may influence expectations of looked after children and the Committee therefore considers that developing a common viewpoint across all relevant stakeholders is important. (Paragraph 89)

In this regard the Committee welcomes the emphasis in Curriculum for

Excellence (CfE) on recognising broader achievement, for example through the P7 and S3 profiles, and hopes that this will enable both attainment and achievement to be recognised for all pupils at an individual level. However, while attainment is reported nationally through SQA results, there is no national information which summarises the extent of broader achievement. Collating such information would be an important contribution to recognising its worth alongside the attainment of exam results. The Committee therefore considers that the Scottish Government should develop a method of monitoring and reporting this aspect of CfE at a national level. (Paragraph 90)

The Committee welcomes this work (that the Scottish Government has begun tracking the status of each cohort to give a fuller picture of a child's status throughout their journey through primary and secondary school), which will help to identify more clearly looked after children's paths through education, giving a more accurate picture of their attainment and where support is required. (Paragraph 91)

Children's plans should be accessible, practical, working documents, driven by the need to secure better outcomes for looked after children. The Committee believes that improvements can be made to deliver a more joined up approach and calls on the Scottish Government to bring forward proposals for addressing this. (Paragraph 98)

While the issues raised above (about the implementation of Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) and Additional Support for Learning (ASL) legislation) do not solely relate to looked after children, the Committee notes that some concerns have been expressed about the complexity of existing legislation, and that there are differences of opinion amongst senior professionals on how additional support for learning and GIRFEC sit together. While the Committee considers that there are strengths in the existing legislative and policy framework, it does have some concerns about how this is being implemented. The Committee considers that the Scottish Government, before introducing any further children's legislation, should carefully consider the concerns expressed above and how the new bill can build upon the best elements of the existing framework. (Paragraph 107)

The Committee considers that greater efforts are required to embed the corporate parenting approach amongst all staff in schools and that this should be emphasised in the revised guidance. The Committee notes that training is being provided for councillors on their role as corporate parents but believes that local authorities should consider ensuring that all councillors receive such training. (Paragraph 111)

Trying to establish better joint working between relevant agencies is a perennial concern across the public sector, is by no means an issue unique to this inquiry and is an area where significant efforts have been made. Nevertheless, the preceding paragraphs have made it clear that barriers still exist, often to the detriment of looked after children. The Committee therefore considers it necessary to restate the importance of strong working relationships between relevant agencies as a vital means of improving

looked after children's attainment, especially in the early years and at key points in the child's life such as the transition from primary to secondary school. The Committee appreciates that the Scottish Government, in the context of possible future legislation, is seeking views on joint working and calls on it to set out how it could help to resolve some of the outstanding barriers described above. (Paragraph 123)

The Committee agrees that better training on the particular needs of looked after children should be provided to all relevant children's services professionals. The Committee notes the on-going work by CELCIS and Who Cares? Scotland, and asks the Scottish Government to provide an update on how this work is progressing, how it is being co-ordinated and how the specific concerns discussed above are being addressed. (Paragraph 131)

In terms of teacher-specific training, the Committee asks the National Planning Group and other bodies taking forward the recommendations of the Donaldson Review of Teacher Education, to consider how training in issues around attachment theory, nurturing and the needs of looked after children could best be provided. (Paragraph 132)

This report has made clear that there are several complex issues preventing looked after children from achieving attainment levels comparable to other children. While the Committee appreciates the considerable efforts that have been made since devolution to narrow this attainment gap, it remains unacceptably wide. (Paragraph 133)

The Committee has made great efforts to ensure that all those with an interest in this area could contribute to its inquiry and it is of note that all expert witnesses considered that the present system for supporting looked after children could be significantly improved. Indeed, several suggestions for improvements were made throughout the inquiry and the Committee commends all those who share a commitment to improving the life chances of looked after children. (Paragraph 134)

While all looked after children face barriers, the Committee has noted the particular challenges facing those children who are formally classed as being looked after at home. Given these challenges, the Committee was very concerned to read the views of directors of education and social work that there had not been sufficient attention paid to the needs of this group. (Paragraph 135)

The Committee shares the view of many witnesses that a stronger emphasis on early intervention could prevent many children from becoming looked after in the first place, or reduce the barriers that they face. The Committee welcomes the increased policy focus on this area, which must be backed by sufficient resources, and also the considerable efforts underway to revise legislation and guidance of relevance to all looked after children, including those looked after at home. (Paragraph 136)

The Committee acknowledges that this process, combined with all the other suggestions it has made in this report, may still take considerable time to

deliver improvement and has highlighted how it intends to continue monitoring progress in this area. (Paragraph 137)

In short, the Committee recognises that there are a number of solutions to the problems set out in this report and trusts that its inquiry will make a contribution to delivering the improvements that everyone seeks. (Paragraph 138)

INTRODUCTION

1. At its meeting on 6 September 2011, the Education and Culture Committee agreed to carry out an inquiry into the educational attainment of looked after children. It did so as it was aware of Scottish Government statistics showing that, in addition to gaining fewer qualifications, looked after children tended to have poorer health outcomes, poorer school attendance records, higher rates of school exclusion and were less likely to go into employment, further or higher education, training or voluntary work after leaving school.

2. The remit of the Committee's inquiry was: to consider the reasons why more significant progress has not been made since devolution in improving the educational attainment of looked after children and to examine what could be done to address this.

3. The gap between the educational attainment of looked after children and other children can be observed from the average tariff scores of S4 pupils¹. These show that, between 2004-05 and 2009-10, the average tariff score for all children increased from 170 to 183. Over the same period, the average score for children looked after away from home increased from 68 to 86 and the score for children looked after at home increased from 42 to 54.

4. "Looked After Children" are those children who are "looked after" in terms of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 (the 1995 Act). They are either living at home under a supervision requirement issued by a Children's Hearing or placed by the local authority in kinship care, foster or residential care. The term also includes children on various warrants and orders such as child protection orders. There are over 16,000 looked after children in Scotland.

5. The Committee launched a call for written evidence on 8 September 2011, which resulted in 32 submissions being received. The Committee also took oral evidence from a variety of expert witnesses throughout November, culminating in oral evidence from the former Minister for Children and Young People, Angela Constance ("the former minister").

6. In addition to taking evidence in this traditional manner, the Committee also used a variety of other, more innovative methods to try to ensure that all those with a role to play could contribute to its inquiry.

¹ A "Tariff score" assigns points to different qualifications, enabling a comparison of educational attainment across different qualifications.

Other evidence taken

7. In order to gain a better understanding of the issues facing looked after children, Committee members visited schools and a residential unit in Glasgow to meet professionals working in the field and, importantly, looked after children themselves.

8. Rather than reporting to the Parliament immediately after completing its evidence taking, as is usually the case, the Committee agreed to seek other members' views on the outstanding issues to have arisen from this evidence. The Committee therefore held a chamber debate in January 2012, which allowed other members and Aileen Campbell, the current Minister for Children and Young People, ("the current minister") to contribute actively to the inquiry rather than simply respond to an already published report.

9. Following the debate, the Committee also decided to hold a joint event with the Centre for Excellence for Looked after Children in Scotland (CELCIS). The purpose of the event was to bring together experts in this area in order to discuss the main themes to have emerged from the inquiry and, crucially, to identify possible means of improving the educational attainment of looked after children. Almost 80 participants attended, enabling the Committee to hear the views of a far wider range of people than it could have done during formal oral evidence-taking.

10. Although not part of its formal inquiry, the Committee also took oral evidence on the early years from representatives of the Scottish Government's Early Years Taskforce and Inspiring Scotland. Many of the issues that arose are also relevant to the inquiry.

11. The views expressed at the event have fully informed the findings presented in this report, as have the Chamber debate, the visit to Glasgow and all the other evidence submitted. The Committee would like to thank all those who contributed to its inquiry, as their contributions have been invaluable. A note of the visit, the Official Report of the chamber debate and a note of the committee event are all available in Volume 2 of this report.

12. In order to give structure to both the Chamber debate and the event discussions, the Committee grouped the key evidence to have arisen from its initial evidence taking sessions under the following five themes. This report is also broadly structured around these themes, although the issue of resources has been subsumed into the other themes—

- readiness to learn;
- support at school;
- implementation of policy and legislation;
- joint working; and
- resources.

OVERVIEW

13. Having set out the background to the Committee's inquiry, the remainder of this report considers in more detail the key issues that arose in evidence. Before discussing the themes listed above in detail, the Committee wishes to address some of the broader, cross-cutting issues that are of relevance to all of these areas.

14. First, the Committee acknowledges that this inquiry has built on a considerable amount of existing work, in terms of previous legislation, guidance, inquiries and reports, that sought, at least in part, to improve the educational attainment of looked after children. By way of illustration, according to Audit Scotland there have been 30 Scottish legislative, policy and guidance documents relevant to looked after children and residential child care alone since 1995².

15. This report does not restate the findings of this existing body of work, or provide an in-depth description of all the challenges faced by looked after children and those who work with and support them. Such information is readily available elsewhere.³ Rather, the Committee's focus is on providing a broad overview of the main barriers to improving educational attainment and, far more usefully, exploring means by which these barriers could be removed.

16. In doing so, the Committee acknowledges that the activity highlighted above has resulted in improvement and pays tribute to all those individuals and organisations who have worked with and supported looked after children over many years. That said, the fact remains that attainment levels for many looked after children are very low in comparison with other children, despite the well-intentioned interventions of successive governments and other relevant bodies. In short, it is abundantly clear that there is still a considerable attainment gap to be closed.

17. There are various possible explanations for this situation, for example, that the problem has been misdiagnosed and the wrong symptoms are being treated; that planning and resources have been insufficient; that relevant policies and legislation takes a long time to deliver change; or even, in the worst case scenario, that the underlying problems are simply too great to be resolved. It should, of course, also be acknowledged that the educational gap may well have been even greater had interventions not been made. In addition to a lack of progress, it is important to note the significant rise in the number of looked after children over the last 10 years, from under 11,000 to over 16,000.

18. The evidence presented to the Committee repeatedly stressed that, in addition to the difficulties facing all looked after children, there were particular

² Audit Scotland (2010), *Getting it right for children in residential care*. Available at: http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/local/2010/nr_100902_children_residential.pdf.

³ At the outset of the inquiry, the Committee commissioned the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) to produce a research briefing in this area. The briefing was published on 26 October 2011 as: Scottish Parliament Information Centre (2011), *Educational Attainment of Looked After Children*, SPICe Briefing, 11/79. Available at: http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefingsAndFactsheets/SB_11-79.pdf. The briefing provides further detail on this lengthy and complex legislative and policy framework.

challenges for those children who are looked after at home. Attainment levels for this group are particularly low and it is no surprise to note that some children looked after at home come from poor and chaotic family backgrounds, where they may have been exposed to substance misuse, domestic violence, neglect and other issues from a very early age. In 2011 5,437 children were looked after at home⁴, a slight rise from 2001, although this number has fluctuated over the years.⁵

19. Clearly, such children are less likely to receive the same level of support for learning from their families as other children do, which suggests that policy should have been particularly focussed on their needs. However, the Committee was concerned to note the views of senior education and social work professionals that this has not been the case. For example, the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES) stated that—

“the group that is of the most concern in terms of outcomes but has probably had the least consideration over the last 10 years are those children who are looked after but live at home”.⁶

20. Similarly, the Association of Directors of Social Work (ADSW) said of the approach by successive governments to the educational attainment of children who are looked after at home—

“Essentially, we feel there has been a fragmented though well meaning approach, which has meant that there is no long term vision for improving the educational attainment of this group. Something that is essential if we are to make an impact”.⁷

21. While it is important to be honest and realistic about the scale of the challenge, the Committee was encouraged by the fact that several suggestions for improvement were made throughout the inquiry. Further, there is a substantial amount of activity already underway to improve policies aimed at looked after children. The Committee recognises that, while no one in evidence suggested that the current system was perfect, equally, no one suggested that closing the attainment gap was an insurmountable problem. It is also important to stress that, in acknowledging the particular problems facing looked after children at home, the Committee is not seeking to downplay the real and often very significant challenges faced by other looked after children.

22. In this section, the Committee notes that the Scottish Government intends to introduce a children and young people bill next year, and trusts that this report and associated evidence will inform the Scottish Government’s deliberations when drawing up that legislation. Specific references to issues that could be addressed in the proposed bill are made throughout this report.

⁴ Scottish Government (2012), *Statistical Bulletin, Health and Care Series, Children’s Social Work Statistics Scotland, No. 1: 2012 Edition, 29 February 2012*. Available at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0038/00388582.pdf>.

⁵ 4,842 children were classified as ‘looked after at home’ in 2001. This number has fluctuated over the last decade, from a low of 4,842 to a high of 6,360 in 2008.

⁶ ADES, written submission.

⁷ ADSW, written submission.

23. The Committee also welcomes the recent establishment of CELCIS, with its stated aim of “working [with partners] to improve the lives of all looked after children in Scotland” and commitment to “further improving the outcomes and opportunities for looked after children through a collaborative and facilitative approach that is focused on having the maximum positive impact on their lives”.⁸

24. CELCIS has been asked by the Scottish Government to refresh key policy documents relating to looked after children and, again, this report has suggested various issues that could be taken into account in carrying out that work.

25. Finally in this section, the Committee appreciates that an inquiry such as this will inevitably touch upon much wider policy and political issues, such as poverty, the early years and the appropriate level of state intervention in the family. It is beyond the scope of this report to consider all such matters in detail, but the Committee is nevertheless aware of their importance and that low educational attainment can be seen as a symptom of much wider social problems and not something that can be addressed in isolation. Further, the Committee also fully understands that many of the issues affecting looked after children also affect children who are not formally classed as looked after.

KEY THEMES

Theme 1: Readiness to learn

26. Having discussed some of the broad, over-arching issues to have emerged from its inquiry, the remainder of this report focuses on the specific themes identified by the Committee where improvements to attainment could be made. The first theme is readiness to learn, which can be seen as the support that needs to be in place to help a child or young person engage better with school and to help mitigate external barriers to learning. Fife Council summarised succinctly what it means for children to be ready to learn—

“Children are ready to learn when they are emotionally stable, with secure attachments to key care givers, are free of threat and risk and attend school on a regular and consistent basis, and are supported by key role models who value education and actively support learning”.⁹

27. Under this theme, the Committee considered a range of inter-linked issues such as early intervention, support for families and placement stability. The importance of early intervention, and preventative spending more generally, has been widely discussed in the Parliament and elsewhere and, while this is not an early years inquiry, this report considers this issue as it relates specifically to the educational attainment of looked after children.

Early intervention – supporting children and parents

28. There is considerable on-going policy work relating to the early years, such as through the Scottish Government’s Early Years Taskforce and Inspiring Scotland, while the Scottish Government will also publish its national parenting strategy in due course. The former minister also committed to using the

⁸ CELCIS mission statement. Available at http://www.celcis.org/about_us.

⁹ Fife Council Children’s Services, written submission.

forthcoming children and young people bill to place the early years framework on a statutory footing.

29. The Committee noted in its introductory comments that progress on educational attainment had been slow and questioned whether that may have been due, in part, to the wrong approach having been taken. A representative of the Early Years Taskforce suggested to the Committee that an earlier focus on early intervention could have delivered substantial change—

“as a nation we have made [little progress] in relation to the attainment of looked-after children ... If effective early intervention services had been available holistically to families at an earlier stage, two things could have happened: first, a number of children might not have become looked after in the first place; and secondly, if they had become looked after, the planning mechanisms would mean that they would have secured permanent foster placements much earlier and their outcomes would therefore have been on a much more positive track. To me, early intervention is critical in addressing the major challenges relating to the looked-after population”.¹⁰

30. Taking into account the backgrounds of many looked after children, it is not difficult to understand how effective early interventions could have such a profound impact. For example, Fife Council stated in written evidence—

“There is little doubt that some looked after children experience disadvantage from conception. Often this will be related to their parents’ own experience of disadvantage, for example as a result of drug or alcohol misuse, maternal health issues, poor nutrition, or inadequate housing, or indeed their own experience of poor parenting.”¹¹

31. The Committee received a large amount of evidence on what early intervention would mean in practice, particularly during its event with CELCIS, where participants proposed measures such as employing more health visitors; expanding family nurse partnerships; and teaching parenting skills, including child development and nurturing, to those in their mid-teens who might become parents soon.¹² While some of these suggestions may be particularly helpful for looked after children, they would also be able to help a far broader group of children and their families.

32. Many suggestions centred around the importance of interventions to support both children and their families and carers, and it is this area that the Committee would like to focus on. For example, CELCIS emphasised that support for family and carers is pivotal to improving educational outcomes for children who are looked after at home, particularly given the challenges faced by these families. The Scottish Division of Educational Psychology and Quarriers both highlighted the importance of child and family centres¹³, while participants at the Committee’s event discussed the need for better support for all-family learning.

¹⁰ Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 1 May 2012, Col 998.

¹¹ Fife Council Children’s Services, written submission.

¹² These suggestions are outlined in the note of the event, which is published in Volume 2.

¹³ Quarriers, written submission.

33. Children 1st argued that the parents of looked after children may require additional support to give them the confidence to engage with schools—

“the parents of many of the children about whom we are talking did not have a positive educational experience. Many of the parents might also be stigmatised for other reasons, for example, if they have drug or alcohol problems or mental health problems. If they have a lack of confidence and self-esteem, they will not approach the school to talk about their child’s requirements”.¹⁴

34. Other groups echoed these concerns and suggested means of overcoming them. For example, ADES argued that the most effective support for parents of looked after children comes from other parents, provided that that support is offered in a non-stigmatising way.¹⁵

35. In the chamber debate on the Committee’s inquiry, the current minister stated that “support for parents is key to improving outcomes for looked-after children and young people” and went on to say that “I want the [national parenting strategy] to help to ensure that parents and families get the help that they need, when they need it”.¹⁶

36. The Committee heard often disturbing evidence about the consequences for children if they do not have sustainable, loving, secure and stable relationships with their parents or carers from a very early age. In devising its forthcoming national parenting strategy and in its work on the early years more generally, the Scottish Government must therefore consider the particular needs of looked after children. The Committee understands that engaging with some parents, including those of children who are looked after at home, can be extremely challenging but it is also the area where there is the greatest scope for improvement to be made. Given the scale of the problem identified in this report, the national parenting strategy and any other policy flowing from it must be properly resourced.

37. During its joint event with CELCIS, several participants discussed existing early interventions such as employing more health visitors, expanding family nurse partnerships and teaching parenting skills to those who may become parents soon. Interventions of this kind may help to prevent children from becoming looked after in the first place. The Committee considers that, whatever interventions are made, they should be based on evidence of successful outcomes.

38. The Committee endorses the principles behind the Early Years Taskforce in providing support and sharing good practice in relation to early intervention. Given the particularly strong benefits that looked after children may realise from effective early interventions, the Committee calls on the Scottish Government to consider how the Taskforce and CELCIS can work

¹⁴ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 1 November 2011, Col 366.

¹⁵ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 8 November 2011, Col 413.

¹⁶ Scottish Parliament, *Official Report*, Col 5116.

together where there is any overlap between the issues that they are addressing. In particular, the Scottish Government should consider whether CELCIS should be represented on the Taskforce.

Utilising the voluntary sector

39. There are further, related issues around family support that the Committee wishes to address under this heading. As noted, children are looked after at home under a supervision requirement issued by a Children's Hearing. Despite this being the group with particular needs, the Committee heard some, albeit limited, evidence to suggest that social work interventions for children looked after at home may amount to only two or three visits a month. The Committee understands that the level of social work support to be provided is, to some extent, at the discretion of local authorities.

40. During its evidence session on the early years, the Committee discussed the type of basic support that some families needed, such as help with getting their children clean, washed and ready for school. A member of the Early Years Taskforce, who is also the Director of Health and Social Care at Highland Council, noted that at a time of additional funding being available his authority had employed "children's service workers"¹⁷, within social work, to carry out such tasks.¹⁸ He considered that "those children's service workers, transformed our service delivery model" and that "there was a period when we went without those workers in a very deprived part of Inverness and the number of looked-after children went up in six months".

41. Another Taskforce member added that while various authorities do provide such services, "there is not a uniform pattern out there in that regard, which is part of what the Taskforce needs to grapple with".¹⁹

42. In short, there is evidence to suggest that there are resource constraints to providing the type of basic support that may be particularly welcome to some parents of children looked after at home.

43. In addition, it was suggested in evidence that professionals may not always be best placed to deliver such support. For example, Barnardo's Scotland argued that the "often chaotic family backgrounds" of looked after children encouraged professionals to think that they cannot succeed, which "runs counter to the need to raise confidence, and recognise achievement" as well as attainment.²⁰ The former minister also suggested that supporting harder-to-reach parents is often best done through the voluntary sector.²¹

44. Other evidence provided to the Committee suggested that there was potential for the voluntary sector or volunteers to adopt a greater role in providing

¹⁷ During this discussion it was acknowledged that similar roles have been performed by "family support workers" and "social work assistants" in other local authorities.

¹⁸ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 1 May 2012, Cols 999-1000.

¹⁹ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 1 May 2012, Col 1000

²⁰ Barnardo's Scotland, written submission.

²¹ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 22 November 2011, Col 462.

support to parents of looked after children, or in providing advocacy or mentoring support more generally. For example, the Scottish Parent Teacher Council's written submission recommended that work be done "to develop a scheme which provides each looked-after child with an independent advocate who will represent the child's interests and co-ordinate this across all services". During the Committee's joint event with CELCIS, the Commissioner for Children and Young People in Scotland argued that looked after children should have a single point of contact in the system, to whom they can relate.

45. There is no doubt that children looked after at home have poorer levels of attainment than other looked after children. As a first step, the Committee requests further information from the Scottish Government on the type and extent of social work support that is currently provided to children looked after at home and their families or carers, for example by children's service workers or similar individuals. The Committee believes that adequate resources and support should be available and therefore also calls for the Scottish Government's views on—

- **whether the current support for children looked after at home produces satisfactory outcomes, bearing in mind the evidence presented throughout this report on the particular difficulties facing this group; and**
- **whether resources are available to provide greater social work support to all looked after children, where required, given the Government's commitment to the preventative spending agenda.**

46. Considerable evidence has been provided to suggest that the voluntary sector could play an even greater role in supporting looked after children. The Committee agrees and therefore calls on the Scottish Government – in conjunction with local authorities, NHS boards and the voluntary sector – to bring forward proposals on how volunteers could help deliver greater, more coordinated, nationwide support to looked after children, particular those looked after at home. The Committee stresses that such support would not be provided as a replacement for the services of trained professionals, but should complement their input, particularly where families prefer to receive more informal support.

Quicker decision making

47. While the Committee strongly welcomes the principle of early intervention and effective support for families, it is also acutely aware that there are still cases where difficult decisions will have to be made about removing children from harmful situations quickly, balancing a desire to keep families together with a commitment to acting in the long-term interests of the child. During the Committee's chamber debate, the former Minister for Children and the Early Years, Adam Ingram, touched on this issue, arguing that, to close the attainment gap between looked after children and their peers, early action must be taken to prevent developmental damage happening. He considered that this should include—

“the provision of significant support to vulnerable parents who are willing and able to put their child’s interests first through pregnancy and beyond. Failing that, children must be removed from harmful and abusive situations quickly before irretrievable damage is done and a permanent alternative home found for them as a matter of priority”.²²

48. In oral evidence, the Scottish Children’s Services Coalition drew attention to the impact on children of changes in their early years and highlighted some of the risks involved in removing a child from a family—

“There is a great deal of evidence that shows that, when young people go through lots of changes, it just adds to the trauma and the difficulties that they face and breaks any progress that they are making. Early decisions need to be needs led rather than resources led. Although it is perhaps reasonable to say that stronger decisions have to be made earlier, the decision to remove a young person from a family is a very difficult one, which should not be made lightly”.²³

49. Children 1st acknowledged that “There will be families where the outcome for the child would be improved by their being taken into foster or residential care, or being adopted”, but stressed that—

“There are many vulnerable families that would welcome the support that they require to enable them to keep their children at home, but they do not get that support. It would be very poor decision making to take children away from families that could manage with those children and parent them effectively if they had the support that they need”.²⁴

50. In discussing these issues in committee, the former minister stated—

“Removing a child from their family and putting them into care has a cost, which is why I am keen that we get sharper, better and more thorough parental capacity assessments done more quickly and that we have a sharper focus on risk assessment”.²⁵

51. She added that “drift or delay in decision making is no longer acceptable” in terms of permanence.²⁶

52. The Committee fully appreciates that striking the balance between supporting families and intervening to remove children from harmful situations raises extremely sensitive and difficult issues. As a result, the Committee considers that these issues are worthy of more detailed

²² Scottish Parliament, *Official Report*, Cols 5138-39.

²³ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 1 November 2011, Col 367.

²⁴ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 1 November 2011, Col 368.

²⁵ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 22 November 2011, Col 465.

²⁶ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 22 November 2011, Cols 458-9.

investigation and is therefore minded to carry out a further inquiry into this area prior to the introduction of the children and young people bill.

Placement stability

53. The Committee also considered the issue of placement stability under this theme. It is well recognised that placement moves (e.g. from foster care to residential care) impact on a child's development, and that there is a need to reduce their number, or to address the adverse effect that such moves can have. In evidence and during the event, several witnesses, such as the Scottish Children's Services Coalition, expressed concerns about the impact of placement breakdowns on educational attainment.²⁷

54. The Fostering Network considered that, due to a shortage of foster carers, children still experience disruptive placement moves—

“There is a significant shortage of foster carers so, for example, children from Aberdeen have been placed in Dumfries. The likelihood of those children successfully returning home or moving schools and going back will decrease with each month they are away. Friendships are built up, and so on. Part of the solution is therefore the structural change of increasing the number of foster carers who are available”.²⁸

55. During the Chamber debate, the current minister outlined steps that the Scottish Government was taking to deal with these issues—

“To be able to learn, children need safe, stable, nurturing and permanent homes. That is why this Government is focusing on ensuring that looked-after children experience as few placements as possible. Our ambition is that children experience only one placement so that a child's first placement is their only placement, from which they will return home or go on to permanence. Timescales for reaching decisions about permanence and adoption should be reduced”.²⁹

56. Considering the concerns expressed by witnesses about placement moves, the Committee welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to reducing placements. The Committee is not clear at this stage on how this commitment will be achieved, given the complexities of the issues involved. The Committee therefore seeks more detail on the approach the Scottish Government plans to take and confirmation that it is supported by local authorities.

Residential care

57. There is a specific issue around residential care that arose during the Committee's visit to a residential unit in Glasgow. Committee members were told that some children were having to study for exams alongside other children who had been the subject of emergency referrals. In other words, some children for

²⁷ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 1 November 2011, Cols 370 and 381.

²⁸ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 1 November 2011, Col 370.

²⁹ Scottish Parliament, *Official Report*, Col 5115.

whom the unit is effectively their home are having their education disrupted by other children arriving on a short term basis, which is by no means a criticism of those children. **The Committee believes that all professionals should work towards reducing the likelihood of such disruption occurring and invites the Scottish Government to report back on the extent of the problem and the steps it is taking, along with local authorities, to ensure that all residential units provide the best possible environment for children.**

Theme 2: Support at school

58. The previous theme considered the type of support that could be provided so that children are better prepared for school. This theme considers the issues that can make a difference to a looked after child's attainment in school. The Committee heard evidence about issues such as attendance, exclusion, part-time education, measuring attainment and the importance of having a key individual to support a looked after child in school.

Attendance and exclusions

59. The available data show that the lowest attendance and highest exclusion rates are for children looked after at home.³⁰ In 2009-10 the exclusion rate per 1,000 pupils was 427 for looked after pupils at home, 365 for all looked after children and 45 for all pupils. The overall school attendance rate for looked after children was 87.8 per cent in 2009-10 compared with 93.2 per cent for all school children. School attendance rates were lowest for children who are looked after at home (78.7 per cent).³¹ Attendance rates were generally lower for looked after children who had more placement moves during the school year.³² Within these broad figures, it is worth noting that attendance rates for children looked after by foster carers are very high, at 96%.³³ Further, the Scottish Children's Services Coalition claimed that children looked after by Coalition members had higher attendance and lower exclusion rates, and better examination results, than children looked after by local authorities.³⁴ In other words, there was evidence presented to suggest that attendance and exclusion rates could be improved.

60. In evidence, there was a difference of emphasis between some organisations as to whether the main problem was the level of attendance at school or the number of exclusions from school. For example, CELCIS argued that—

³⁰ Scottish Parliament Information Centre (2011), *Educational Attainment of Looked After Children*, SPICe Briefing, 11/79. Available at http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefingsAndFactsheets/SB_11-79.pdf.

³¹ Scottish Government (2011) *Statistics Publication Notice: Health and Care Series: Educational Outcomes for Scotland's Looked After Children, 2009/10*, Available at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/06/23123831/0>.

³² Scottish Government (2011) *Statistics Publication Notice: Health and Care Series: Educational Outcomes for Scotland's Looked After Children, 2009/10*, Available at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/06/23123831/0>.

³³ Scottish Government (2011) *Statistics Publication Notice: Health and Care Series: Educational Outcomes for Scotland's Looked After Children, 2009/10*, Available at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/06/23123831/0>.

³⁴ Scottish Children's Services Coalition, written submission.

“Attendance is the key to attainment. The research tells us that where there is good attendance, there is good attainment”.³⁵

61. ADES developed this point, stating—

“Looked after children often experience disrupted education making high levels of attendance more difficult and if they have been transferred through a number of care placements this again adds to the difficulty”.³⁶

62. However, in oral evidence ADSW urged the Committee not to dwell too much on attendance—

“I hear a lot that, if we could just get looked-after children to school, they would be fine. That is not the case and the figures do not bear that out. By and large, we are getting them to school. The problem is that they are being put out”.³⁷

63. ADSW then went on to spell out the negative consequences of exclusions—

“Kids who are excluded are out on licence. They hang around our shopping malls and get into significant problems. If we are to major on anything, we should major on reducing school exclusions”.³⁸

64. While the Committee recognises the strong consensus in favour of reducing exclusions, members questioned whether this could have a knock-on impact on the wellbeing of other children in a school. The former minister stressed the importance of a “whole-school approach to positive behaviour and relationships”, while a Scottish Government official added that she did not expect a reduction in exclusions to be achieved at a cost to the wider school community, adding “we would hope that the inclusive approach would benefit every child”.³⁹

65. The issue of exclusion and attendance also came up in the Chamber debate on the inquiry. Several members stressed that reducing exclusions and increasing attendance are both key to improving the educational attainment of looked after children.

66. Clearly, it would be in the interest of all pupils if exclusions could be reduced and attendance improved without detriment to other children. The Committee heard evidence about the importance of dealing with the underlying issues that lead to low attendance levels and high exclusion rates, such as poor behaviour and issues outside school. There are various initiatives already in place which seek to tackle such issues, including the Place2Be project, currently being piloted in schools across Scotland. Committee members visited one of its projects, in St Benedict’s Primary School in Easterhouse. The project aims to provide an

³⁵ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, Col 346.

³⁶ ADES, written submission.

³⁷ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 8 November 2011, Col 403.

³⁸ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 8 November 2011, Cols 403-404.

³⁹ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 22 November 2011, Col 473.

environment where all children can raise issues of concern, removing any stigma, from the child's perspective, of being looked after. It also allows any underlying issues that may lead to future non-attendance at school to be identified early and drawn to the attention of the relevant professionals. Committee members were impressed that Place2Be appeared to enable such underlying issues to be brought to the surface and dealt with at an early stage and in a delicate and discreet manner. Staff at the neighbouring school, Oakwood Primary School, advised members that Oakwood would also potentially benefit from an organisation such as Place 2 Be offering emotional support.

67. The Committee appreciates that it may be too early to evaluate fully the effectiveness of initiatives such as Place2Be in tackling the underlying causes of exclusion. The Committee calls on the Scottish Government, in partnership with local authorities, to ensure that such an outcomes-based evaluation is carried out at the earliest opportunity and to publish a plan for the wider roll-out of such initiatives as appropriate.

Part-time education

68. The Scottish Government's guidance on exclusions states that there is a need to ensure that "learners attend school or another learning environment for the widely accepted norm of 25 hours in primary schools and 27.5 hours for secondary schools" and that this could be achieved through "flexible packages of support" where learners "attend school for part of the week and other specialist provision for the remainder of the school week".⁴⁰

69. However, the Committee has heard anecdotal evidence that this is not always happening and that some local authorities are operating "informal exclusions"⁴¹, which may result in children only receiving a part-time education. In evidence, the Care Inspectorate and others told the Committee that such part-time education can mean as little as one session per week in school.⁴²

70. While the extent of such arrangements is not apparent from the evidence received by the Committee, many witnesses agreed that this situation is inappropriate. For example, ADES stated—

"There should not be part-time education. If a young person is excluded from school it is still the local authority's responsibility to provide them with an education. The education might not necessarily be in school but it should be much more than part-time—the authority should be aiming for the 25 hours a week that other children get".⁴³

⁴⁰ Scottish Government (2011), *Included, engaged and involved: part 2 - a positive approach to managing school exclusions*. Available at:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/03/17095258/0>.

⁴¹ "Informal exclusions" is a term used to describe the situation where children are sent home from school but where the school has not gone through formal exclusion procedures.

⁴² Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report, 8 November 2011*, Col 404.

⁴³ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report, 8 November 2011*, Col 405.

71. Barnardo's Scotland argued that part-time education and exclusions led to a loss of learning which ultimately impacted upon attainment, and argued that "Schools should be required to put in place a programme to address learning loss where school time is missed".⁴⁴

72. CELCIS also expressed concerns about the monitoring of part-time education—

"stakeholders...are really concerned that there is no way of monitoring the significant number of looked-after young people who appear to be in part-time education. It might look as though their attendance has been full, but that might relate to a timetable of one or two days. A more rigorous attempt to quantify attendance is needed. If some young people cannot cope with a full curriculum, we must consider alternative ways of building in a full curriculum for them around other activities that can build their self-esteem and resilience".⁴⁵

73. There is a clear consensus among witnesses that the use of part-time education, where no other provision is put in place, is unsatisfactory as every child has a right to a full-time education, however that may be provided. While this issue is not just relevant to looked after children, it may have a disproportionate impact on them. Therefore, the Scottish Government should investigate the extent to which part-time education without alternative provision exists. Further, the Scottish Government should set out, in conjunction with COSLA and the relevant professional organisations, how this practice can be ended, how more satisfactory arrangements can be put in place and the resources that this would require.

74. The Committee calls on the Scottish Government to monitor more closely the implementation of its existing guidance on exclusions and considers that the practice of "informal exclusions" should be used with sensitivity.

Key individuals

75. The Committee heard very strong evidence that looked after children's school experiences are enhanced considerably by their developing a close relationship with a particular member of school staff, whether formally or informally.⁴⁶

76. The 2001 HMIE report, *Learning with Care*⁴⁷, recommended that a senior member of staff in each school should maintain an overview of looked after children's progress and take responsibility for ensuring that appropriate measures are in place for supporting the children's education. Scottish Government guidance

⁴⁴ Barnardo's Scotland, written submission.

⁴⁵ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report, 1 November 2011*, Col 346.

⁴⁶ Scottish Parent Teacher Council, written submission.

⁴⁷ Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (2001), *Learning with Care - The Education of Children Looked After Away from Home by Local Authorities*. Available at: <http://www.hmie.gov.uk/documents/publication/lwc.pdf>.

since then has restated the importance of such a post in each school, which is known as the designated senior manager (DSM).⁴⁸

77. In oral evidence, CELCIS stressed the importance of the DSM role, describing it as “pivotal”.⁴⁹ The EIS added that “their role is to ensure that everyone else is getting it right for the young person” but warned that DSMs often had many other responsibilities as part of their remit.⁵⁰ The Committee also heard evidence that the role of DSM appears to have been implemented differently in different schools. In larger schools with a high number of looked after children, it can be more challenging for the DSM, for whom this role is only part of their job description, to build the relationships envisaged in the guidance.

78. ADES highlighted, more generally, the importance of looked after children having a member of staff to whom they can go with any issues they may have. ADES also stressed the importance of developing and maintaining good relationships in this regard, noting that “The key to making school work for looked-after children is to talk to the individual child”⁵¹, and “The key is having a trusted individual to whom they can go and who can sometimes mediate for them with other staff”.⁵² This may or may not be the DSM and it is therefore important to have a culture of inclusivity throughout the whole school.

79. The Committee considers that strong leadership at school level is a key part of creating a school culture that is more inclusive of looked after children. In this regard, the Committee is aware that the report of the Donaldson Review of Teacher Education⁵³ includes recommendations for developing leadership capacities for headteachers.⁵⁴

80. The Committee recognises that good relationships between key professionals and looked after children play a vital role in ensuring the wellbeing of looked after children in school and contribute to their learning. Excellent school leadership can facilitate this in shaping the ethos of the school. The Committee therefore considers that the Scottish Government should stress the importance of this area in its wider policies, in developing school leaders and in training teachers, recognising that building such

⁴⁸ Scottish Government (2008), *Core Tasks for Designated Managers in educational and residential establishments in Scotland*. Available at:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/237892/0065324.pdf>.

⁴⁹ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 1 November 2011, Col 360.

⁵⁰ Educational Institute for Scotland, written submission.

⁵¹ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 8 November 2011, Col 394.

⁵² Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 8 November 2011, Col 394.

⁵³ “The Donaldson Review” (Report Title: *Teaching Scotland’s Future – Report of a review of teacher education in Scotland*) is Professor Graham Donaldson’s review for the Scottish Government of teacher education in Scotland, which contains 50 recommendations, covering the entirety of teacher education, which are designed to help to build the professional capacity of teachers and ultimately to improve the learning of the young people of Scotland. It reported in December 2010.

⁵⁴ Scottish Government (2010), *Teaching Scotland’s Future – Report of a review of teacher education in Scotland*, recommendations 49 and 50. Available at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/337626/0110852.pdf>.

relationships is an integral part of quality teaching rather than an additional part of teachers' job descriptions.

Resources

81. There was considerable discussion throughout the inquiry and during the event about the adequacy of existing resources to support the education of looked after children. In the current financial climate the Committee, understandably, heard that a lack of resources, in terms of time, staff capacity and money, could act as a barrier to providing learning support or to joint working. For example, CELCIS drew attention to the capacity issues that teachers face, particularly in relation to joined up working and the implementation of national guidance and legislation.⁵⁵ The EIS stated that—

“there are not sufficient resources in any mainstream establishment to do the things that we are being asked to do. However, directly in relation to looked-after children, part of the issue is to do with whether the number of looked-after children is a factor when allocating staff to a school”.⁵⁶

82. The Committee heard various suggestions as to how resources could be more effectively utilised for looked after children, for example—

- the EIS argued that school staffing formulae ought to be weighted according to the number of looked after children in each school;⁵⁷
- ADSW suggested that each local authority should have a dedicated looked after children teaching and health resource, and that all residential units should have a link education officer or teacher;⁵⁸
- Children 1st advocated pooling of local authority budgets, citing the example of the early years fund in South Ayrshire generating positive education and health outcomes.⁵⁹

83. The Committee notes that in the current financial climate, resources are relatively scarce. The Committee is not able to evaluate fully the specific suggestions set out above and invites the Scottish Government to consider the viability and merit of such proposals, in the context of its preventative spending agenda.

Measuring attainment

84. The available data for measuring the educational attainment of looked after children relate to examinations undertaken at age sixteen. In evidence, several organisations questioned whether this was the most appropriate method and point in time for assessing the achievements of looked after children and, by extension, of assessing the success of policy in this area. Rather, it was proposed that

⁵⁵ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 1 November 2011, Col 356.

⁵⁶ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 15 November 2011, Col 442.

⁵⁷ Educational Institute of Scotland, written submission.

⁵⁸ ADSW, written submission.

⁵⁹ Children 1st, written submission.

schools should place far more emphasis on recording looked after children's broader achievements, although it was not always explained in detail how such an approach would work in practice.

85. There was a related debate around whether it is reasonable to expect looked after children to have the same academic aspirations at 16 as other children. For example, ADSW argued—

“Because of their life experiences, it is not reasonable to expect 16-year-old looked-after children—especially those who have been looked after for long periods—to be in the same place at 16 as other children are ... we know from experience that many looked-after children will go on to achieve things after they leave school. It is worth focusing on that a little bit more, and not using the arbitrary age of 16 as the time to measure the success or otherwise of how looked-after children are doing in the education system. What is an indicator of a good outcome? The answer is not simply educational achievement”.⁶⁰

86. Similarly, ADES expressed concern that there is currently too much focus on examination results being the most effective way of measuring what is a good school.⁶¹

87. In oral evidence the former minister acknowledged these points, but pointed out that this was not just an issue of relevance to looked after children—

“As for whether we measure attainment too narrowly, I point out that we only take a snapshot at S4 when a lot of the children in question are leaving care. There are all sorts of difficulties with that and, as a measurement, it is quite limited. There are arguments for measuring achievement more widely, but I think that that is true for all children”.⁶²

88. The former minister was also clear that—

“We must have absolutely the same ambitions for our looked-after children as we have for all our children ... we should focus clearly on bringing the attainment levels of looked-after children up to levels that are on a par with those of non-looked-after children”.⁶³

89. The Committee notes the strong body of opinion in favour of schools reflecting looked after children's wider achievements, rather than solely their educational attainment at 16⁶⁴. The Committee also understands the Scottish

⁶⁰ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 8 November 2011, Col 402.

⁶¹ ADES, written submission.

⁶² Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 22 November 2011, Col 477.

⁶³ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 22 November 2011, Col 476.

⁶⁴ According to Scottish Government statistics, 59% of looked after children school leavers who left school during 2009-10 were assessed as being in a positive initial destination, whilst 44% were deemed to be in a positive follow up destination. This compares with 87% and 85% for all school leavers (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/06/23123831/11>). 1% of looked after

Government's view that ambitions for looked after children should be as high as for all other children, but recognises the opinions of some professionals that it may be unrealistic to expect the same outcomes given their life experiences. **It is not unreasonable to consider that differing views in this area may influence expectations of looked after children and the Committee therefore considers that developing a common viewpoint across all relevant stakeholders is important.**

90. **In this regard the Committee welcomes the emphasis in Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) on recognising broader achievement, for example through the P7 and S3 profiles, and hopes that this will enable both attainment and achievement to be recognised for all pupils at an individual level. However, while attainment is reported nationally through SQA results, there is no national information which summarises the extent of broader achievement. Collating such information would be an important contribution to recognising its worth alongside the attainment of exam results. The Committee therefore considers that the Scottish Government should develop a method of monitoring and reporting this aspect of CfE at a national level.**

91. The Committee is aware that the methodology used for collecting statistics on the attainment of looked after children relates to a child's looked after status at a point in S4. However, it is clear that the looked after population is fluid and dynamic. For example, a child looked after throughout primary school may no longer be looked after by S4. Equally, a child may only become looked after during secondary school. The Committee notes that the Scottish Government has begun tracking the status of each cohort to give a fuller picture of a child's status throughout their journey through primary and secondary school. **The Committee welcomes this work, which will help to identify more clearly looked after children's paths through education, giving a more accurate picture of their attainment and where support is required.**

Theme 3: Implementation of existing policies and legislation

92. The third theme explored by the Committee is how successfully existing policy and legislation that aims to support looked after children is being implemented. Evidence was presented to the Committee to suggest that elements of current legislation were adequate, but the inter-relationships between the legislation could be very complex. There were also some concerns that legislation was not always implemented fully or consistently at a local level.⁶⁵

Looked after children's plans

93. An area of recurring concern was the number and complexity of plans that require to be completed for looked after children. All looked after children are required, under the Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009, to be assessed and have a plan which describes how their needs will be met. This plan should include education outcomes. Further, under the additional support for

children initially went into higher education, while 33% initially went into further education. Of all looked after children 1% stayed in higher education and 25% stayed in further education.

⁶⁵ For example - Scotland's Children's Services Coalition, written submission.

learning legislation, all looked after children are presumed to have additional support needs. Additional Support for Learning is a statutory framework which requires local authorities to provide support to all those who need extra help in order to benefit from school education. Those with particularly complex needs will have a statutory co-ordinated support plan (CSP) and all looked after children should be assessed for whether they require a CSP.

94. Local authorities will also produce non-statutory plans for use by professionals working with children. Examples include child protection plans and individual education programmes. Under Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) local authorities are encouraged to create a single plan which can incorporate these legislative requirements alongside any non-statutory plans.⁶⁶

95. Regarding the statutory care plans that must be prepared for all looked after children, CELCIS stressed the importance of having a care plan in which all relevant parties are involved, of which they have knowledge and which is monitored and reviewed.⁶⁷ However, the Scottish Children's Services Coalition expressed serious concerns about the extent to which education was being built into care plans—

“Recent legislation seeks to make education integral to care planning, but the picture is patchy. Some local authorities work hard at doing that but, in others, education is very much an afterthought. Some education departments barely manage even to contribute to discussion and they certainly do not make any strong decisions. The fact that there is a mixed picture is a critical issue and those cases must be addressed so that there is consistency”.⁶⁸

96. In response to this point, the representative from ADES expressed surprise, stating that this had not been her experience⁶⁹. The Committee did not receive evidence from all local authorities on this particular point but notes that Fife Council, for example, provided examples of data and information sharing protocols being developed to ensure that key information is shared timeously about children.⁷⁰

97. On a broader note, EIS suggested that there was a need for simplifying existing plans as—

“the plans themselves are not what help the young people. What is written in the plan is only as good as its implementation: if people are spending time writing plans, they are not spending that time working with the young people...There are so many different plans...and every minute that is spent

⁶⁶ Broadly, GIRFEC is a policy approach with the purpose of reducing duplication and bureaucracy and creating a common language and approach to assessing and planning the support that a child needs. It is particularly relevant where different services and professions need to collaborate to provide services for a child.

⁶⁷ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 1 November 2011, Col 352.

⁶⁸ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 1 November 2011, Col 373.

⁶⁹ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 8 November 2011, Col 410.

⁷⁰ Fife Council, written submission.

duplicating paperwork in the form of a plan or a report could be better spent working with the young people”.⁷¹

98. Children’s plans should be accessible, practical, working documents, driven by the need to secure better outcomes for looked after children. The Committee believes that improvements can be made to deliver a more joined up approach and calls on the Scottish Government to bring forward proposals for addressing this.

ASL and GIRFEC

99. The Committee also heard evidence to suggest that some local authorities are finding it difficult to integrate the GIRFEC approach with the requirements of the ASL legislation. For example, COSLA stated in oral evidence—

“There are some very complex pieces of legislation. For example, the ASL acts are extraordinarily complex. The approach that councils put in place for GIRFEC and the principle of a single plan does not sit easily with the principles set out in the ASL acts”.⁷²

100. ADES concurred with the view that the legislative and policy requirements do not sit easily together, arguing that—

“GIRFEC has got it right in having a fully integrated plan around the best interests of the child, but parts of the ASL legislation do not sit terribly comfortably with that. That is partly because, in the ASL legislation, the responsibility sits with only one agency, which has a responsibility to call in other agencies to help, whereas GIRFEC takes a joint approach. That is a much more helpful approach to take to looking at the needs of all vulnerable children and, in particular, looked-after children”.⁷³

101. ADES added “arguably, if you get GIRFEC right and you are getting it right for every child, you do not need the ASL acts”.⁷⁴

102. A specific issue that arose in evidence in relation to ASL, GIRFEC and the Children’s Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 was that of the relative rights of the parents and the rights of the child. For example, ADES and ADSW expressed concerns that, in the ASL Act, the child’s views and rights had become secondary to the views and rights of the parent whereas other legislation such as the Children’s Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011, and the GIRFEC approach, place the child at the centre.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 15 November 2011, Col 430.

⁷² Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 8 November 2011, Col 400.

⁷³ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 8 November 2011, Col 401.

⁷⁴ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 8 November 2011, Col 401.

⁷⁵ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 8 November 2011, Col 406.

103. This view was not shared by Education Scotland, who argued that GIRFEC and ASL legislation were not at odds with each other⁷⁶—

“... I believe that the situation on the ground is quite the opposite. GIRFEC is as it was intended to be: it is the root pin, if you like, on which everything else can be built. It is not at odds with the legislation and they should support each other if they are implemented properly. We looked specifically at how that operated and found that the two working hand in hand had the biggest impact for young people who are looked after and accommodated”.⁷⁷

104. Education Scotland did, however, express concern about the way in which understanding of GIRFEC is being communicated by head teachers and middle managers to those working at an operational level.⁷⁸

105. When the issues of possible conflicts between ASL and GIRFEC and ASL being overly parent-focussed were put to her the former minister stated—

“Sometimes when parents are striving for the rights of their child, they are unnecessarily labelled as difficult because they are an inconvenience to services. In any group of people there are always difficult folk, but I am not sure that that should be the premise of our approach to parents”.⁷⁹

106. The former minister acknowledged the need to build on the ways in which ASL legislation and GIRFEC sit together and also committed to using the forthcoming bill to place GIRFEC and the early years framework on a statutory footing.⁸⁰

107. While the issues raised above do not solely relate to looked after children, the Committee notes that some concerns have been expressed about the complexity of existing legislation, and that there are differences of opinion amongst senior professionals on how additional support for learning and GIRFEC sit together. While the Committee considers that there are strengths in the existing legislative and policy framework, it does have some concerns about how this is being implemented. The Committee considers that the Scottish Government, before introducing any further children’s legislation, should carefully consider the concerns expressed above and how the new bill can build upon the best elements of the existing framework.

⁷⁶ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 15 November 2011, Col 426.

⁷⁷ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 15 November 2011, Col 427.

⁷⁸ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 15 November 2011, Col 427.

⁷⁹ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 22 November 2011, Col 475.

⁸⁰ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 22 November 2011, Col 478.

Corporate parenting

108. The Care Inspectorate argued that “There has to be shared ownership of these kids [looked after children], and a desire to do better by them”...We have to get all services to share ownership and to believe that the kids are worth investing in and spending time on”.⁸¹ This is at the heart of the idea of ‘corporate parenting’, guidance on which was issued in 2008. During the Committee’s joint event with CELCIS, several participants stressed the importance of ensuring that all persons who form part of the corporate parent, including councillors, are fully aware of their corporate parenting responsibilities. While there is a programme of training on corporate parenting for councillors, the Committee heard that—

“overall, staff in schools do not yet have a clear understanding of their corporate parenting responsibilities. Those in leadership positions, at authority and establishment level, need to implement more effectively corporate parenting strategies and continue to promote positive attitudes and high expectations for this group”.⁸²

109. In oral evidence, the former minister said that CELCIS would be updating two key pieces of guidance relating to looked after children, namely *These Are Our Bairns: a guide for community planning partnerships on being a good corporate parent*, and *Looked After Children and Young People: We Can and Must Do Better*. *These are our Bairns* makes clear the unique opportunity which education staff have to influence looked after children.

110. All staff in education have an important role as corporate parents and opportunities to support and guide looked after children and young people and care leavers through their everyday interactions. According to *These are our Bairns*, “Teachers are cited by young people as the most influential or constant person in their lives”.⁸³

111. The Committee considers that greater efforts are required to embed the corporate parenting approach amongst all staff in schools and that this should be emphasised in the revised guidance. The Committee notes that training is being provided for councillors on their role as corporate parents but believes that local authorities should consider ensuring that all councillors receive such training.

Theme 4: Joint Working

112. A recurring theme in evidence was the need for better joint working between the agencies that have a responsibility for looked after children. As one witness

⁸¹ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 8 November 2011, Col 399.

⁸² Education Scotland, written submission.

⁸³ Scottish Government (2008), *These are our Bairns: A Guide for Community Planning partnerships on being a good corporate parent*. Available at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/236882/0064989.pdf>.

said, it is clear that when social work, health and education professionals work well together, a difference is made to the lives of looked after children.⁸⁴

113. In general terms, several witnesses described current practice in respect of joint working as “patchy”⁸⁵ and drew attention to existing barriers to working together. However, many witnesses also suggested ideas for better joint working and, therefore, potentially improved outcomes for looked after children. The Committee welcomes the comments of the former minister that, as part of the consultation on what is now the forthcoming children and young people bill, the Scottish Government is seeking views on what helps and what hinders joint working, and how good practice can be shared.

114. In terms of specific concerns, CELCIS and others noted that the main divergence in attainment between looked after and non-looked after children occurs on the move from primary school to secondary school⁸⁶, and suggested that there was a lack of co-ordination between primary and secondary schools and the relevant services during this crucial point of transition. The importance of all professionals working together and involving the child during this transition was also raised with committee members during their visit to Glasgow.

115. Children in Scotland expressed the concern that services to address the attainment gap are often delivered too late, fail to deal with the problems in a holistic way and are triggered by behaviour or performance becoming difficult for teachers to manage rather than at the point that children start to struggle.⁸⁷

Achieving better joint working

116. As to how improvement can actually be delivered, the Care Inspectorate said that the local authorities that do particularly well are those in which everyone, from the elected members to chief officers and right through to the front-line services, shares the same belief in getting the best for children. The Care Inspectorate described one director of education who visits secondary schools and asks for a report back on the looked after children or the children in part-time education, before reporting back in turn to elected members.

117. The Care Inspectorate also suggested that multi-agency inspections of child protection services were a good example of how to achieve better joined up working, adding—

“We need to measure jointly the chief officers’ joint commitment. We need to consider quality assurance together so that we do not simply have the education service looking at its quality assurance system and the social

⁸⁴ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 15 November 2011, Col 428.

⁸⁵ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 1 November 2011, Cols 358, 373 and 383.

⁸⁶ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 1 November 2011, Col 346.

⁸⁷ Children in Scotland, written submission.

work service looking at its system. We require a commitment from all the services to consider what would be an improvement”.⁸⁸

118. Barnardo’s Scotland stated that “we need better co-ordination between the education system and other services supporting looked after children”⁸⁹, arguing that “effective school leadership at a school level and efforts to bring together all the services working with the children as envisaged in GIRFEC are the key to success in this area”.⁹⁰

119. ADSW pointed to the importance of good relationships between relevant professionals to ensure that they achieve their potential—

“What makes the difference is the quality of relationships between the professionals in the various services for children—their getting to know one another, getting to know one another’s roles and responsibilities, getting to value one another’s particular professional contribution, getting to understand what that contribution is, and getting to work together regularly with particular children in localities within local authorities”.⁹¹

Integration

120. There was some disagreement on the specific issue of greater integration between agencies. For example, the Care Inspectorate argued that—

“integration between education, social work and health—as well as other local authority departments—matters for all children, not only looked-after children. It is about having an attitude of mind that it is everyone’s job to look after children and to ensure that they achieve their maximum potential”.⁹²

121. However, ADSW questioned the use of terms like “integration” in the context of management structures, arguing that there is “no body of evidence to validate the proposal that fully integrated management structures make any difference to the outcomes for children, including looked-after children”.⁹³

122. There is, however, one area where integration between agencies is not working and which may be causing difficulties as a result. The EIS argued that a lack of integration in IT systems was a barrier to effective joint working, with education services, social work services and health services all using different systems for keeping data on looked after children.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 8 November 2011, Col 397.

⁸⁹ Barnardo’s Scotland, written submission.

⁹⁰ Barnardo’s Scotland, written submission.

⁹¹ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 8 November 2011, Col 402.

⁹² Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 8 November 2011, Col 392.

⁹³ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 8 November 2011, Col 396.

⁹⁴ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 15 November 2011, Col 441.

123. Trying to establish better joint working between relevant agencies is a perennial concern across the public sector, is by no means an issue unique to this inquiry and is an area where significant efforts have been made. Nevertheless, the preceding paragraphs have made it clear that barriers still exist, often to the detriment of looked after children. The Committee therefore considers it necessary to restate the importance of strong working relationships between relevant agencies as a vital means of improving looked after children's attainment, especially in the early years and at key points in the child's life such as the transition from primary to secondary school. The Committee appreciates that the Scottish Government, in the context of possible future legislation, is seeking views on joint working and calls on it to set out how it could help to resolve some of the outstanding barriers described above.

Training

124. The Committee also considered the importance of better training in the particular issues relevant to looked after children, which overlaps with some of the other issues raised above.

125. At the Committee's event, participants discussed the need for all children's services professionals to have more effective and consistent training in child development and in developing quality relationships with children. In written evidence, Aberlour Child Care Trust stated that—

“Training around the specific needs of looked after children, including a particular understanding around the issues of attachment, trauma and loss should form a core module in pre-qualification training for all professionals who may form part of the corporate parent”.⁹⁵

126. The Fostering Network expressed particular concerns about the needs of foster carers—

“there are currently no requirements about the training that foster carers should undergo in the first year or two as a foster carer. A greater emphasis on learning and development for foster carers would be, in our view, an essential component in a strategy to train, support and empower foster carers to improve the educational outcomes and overall wellbeing of children growing up in foster care”.⁹⁶

127. Various witnesses specifically highlighted the need to train teachers on issues faced by looked after children, through both initial teacher education and continuing professional development. Education Scotland summarised the importance of training in building relationships with, and responding to the needs of, looked after children—

“Every teacher who goes into the world of education should know that the vital thing is to concentrate on young people, have a feel for their situation

⁹⁵ Aberlour Child Care Trust, written submission.

⁹⁶ Fostering Network, written submission.

and know that if the young person does not feel safe, secure and cared for they will not be able to learn”.⁹⁷

128. Both Education Scotland and the EIS considered that there was scope in initial teacher education for training teachers on issues such as attachment theory and nurturing.⁹⁸

129. During the Chamber debate, the current minister stated that the Scottish Government was working in partnership with Who Cares? Scotland to develop a national training programme to ensure that those who care for looked after children and young people are the best possible substitute parents.⁹⁹ ADSW advised the Committee that some work is being done at the national level on core skill sets for all children’s services professionals.¹⁰⁰

130. CELCIS also set out how it intended to improve joint training—

“We hope to bring the sector together to consider how it can better co-ordinate pre-qualifying training. It came out in the Donaldson review that, if people train together, they are much more aware of one another’s roles as practitioners and they will work in a co-ordinated way. There are also clear implications for us in relation to post-qualifying training, because we already have a set of staff who are out there”.¹⁰¹

131. The Committee agrees that better training on the particular needs of looked after children should be provided to all relevant children’s services professionals. The Committee notes the on-going work by CELCIS and Who Cares? Scotland, and asks the Scottish Government to provide an update on how this work is progressing, how it is being co-ordinated and how the specific concerns discussed above are being addressed.

132. In terms of teacher-specific training, the Committee asks the National Planning Group and other bodies taking forward the recommendations of the Donaldson Review of Teacher Education, to consider how training in issues around attachment theory, nurturing and the needs of looked after children could best be provided.

CONCLUSIONS

133. This report has made clear that there are several complex issues preventing looked after children from achieving attainment levels comparable to other children. While the Committee appreciates the considerable efforts that have been made since devolution to narrow this attainment gap, it remains unacceptably wide.

⁹⁷ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 15 November 2011, Col 431.

⁹⁸ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 15 November 2011, Col 444.

⁹⁹ Scottish Parliament, *Official Report*, 11 January 2012, Col 5115.

¹⁰⁰ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report*, 8 November 2011, Col 397.

¹⁰¹ Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee, *Official Report* 1 November 2011, Col 349.

134. The Committee has made great efforts to ensure that all those with an interest in this area could contribute to its inquiry and it is of note that all expert witnesses considered that the present system for supporting looked after children could be significantly improved. Indeed, several suggestions for improvements were made throughout the inquiry and the Committee commends all those who share a commitment to improving the life chances of looked after children.

135. While all looked after children face barriers, the Committee has noted the particular challenges facing those children who are formally classed as being looked after at home. Given these challenges, the Committee was very concerned to read the views of directors of education and social work that there had not been sufficient attention paid to the needs of this group.

136. The Committee shares the view of many witnesses that a stronger emphasis on early intervention could prevent many children from becoming looked after in the first place, or reduce the barriers that they face. The Committee welcomes the increased policy focus on this area, which must be backed by sufficient resources, and also the considerable efforts underway to revise legislation and guidance of relevance to all looked after children, including those looked after at home.

137. The Committee acknowledges that this process, combined with all the other suggestions it has made in this report, may still take considerable time to deliver improvement and has highlighted how it intends to continue monitoring progress in this area.

138. In short, the Committee recognises that there are a number of solutions to the problems set out in this report and trusts that its inquiry will make a contribution to delivering the improvements that everyone seeks.

ANNEXES

Please note that all annexes to this report are published electronically only, and can be accessed via the Education and Culture Committee's webpages at:

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/46956.aspx>

Educational Attainment of Looked After Children Volume 2

ANNEXE A: EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF THE EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

3rd Meeting, 2011 (Session 4), Tuesday 6 September 2011

Work programme: The Committee considered its work programme. The Committee agreed to focus its budget scrutiny on further and higher education funding issues and to hold an inquiry on the educational attainment of looked after children.

8th Meeting, 2011 (Session 4), Tuesday 25 October 2011

Inquiry into the educational attainment of looked after children (in private): The Committee agreed a timetable for taking oral evidence, to delegate to the Convener responsibility for any changes to that timetable, and to undertake a site visit outwith its normal weekly meeting schedule.

9th Meeting, 2011 (Session 4), Tuesday 1 November 2011

Inquiry into the educational attainment of looked after children: The Committee took evidence from—

Claire Burns, Strategic Policy Implementation Manager, Centre for Excellence for Looked after Children in Scotland;
Phil Barton, Director of Starley Hall, Scottish Children's Services Coalition;
Bryan Evans, Assistant Director, Children and Family Services, Children 1st;
Sara Lurie, Director, The Fostering Network Scotland.

10th Meeting, 2011 (Session 4), Tuesday 8 November 2011

Inquiry into the educational attainment of looked after children: The Committee took evidence from—

Carol Kirk, Corporate Director of Educational Services, North Ayrshire Council, Association of Directors of Education in Scotland;
Fred McBride, Convenor of Children and Families Standing Committee, Association of Directors of Social Work in Scotland;
Robert Nicol, Team Leader, Education, Children and Young People, COSLA;
Jacquie Roberts, Interim Chief Executive, Care Inspectorate.

11th Meeting, 2011 (Session 4), Tuesday 15 November 2011

Inquiry into the educational attainment of looked after children: The Committee took evidence from—

Susan Quinn, Vice President, the Educational Institute of Scotland;
Malcolm Schaffer, Head of Practice and Policy, Scottish Children's Reporter Administration;
Norma Wright, HM Assistant Chief Inspector, Education Scotland.

12th Meeting, 2011 (Session 4), Tuesday 22 November 2011

Inquiry into the educational attainment of looked after children: The Committee took evidence from—

Angela Constance MSP, Minister for Children and Young People,
Jackie Brock, Director Curriculum, Health & Wellbeing, and David Blair, Head of Looked After Children Policy, Scottish Government.

2nd Meeting, 2012 (Session 4), Tuesday 17 January 2012

Inquiry into the educational attainment of looked after children (in private): The Committee considered issues arising from the chamber debate on the inquiry.

16th Meeting, 2012 (Session 4), Tuesday 22 May 2012

Educational attainment of looked after children (in private): The Committee considered a draft report. Various changes were agreed to, and the Committee agreed to consider a revised draft, in private, at its next meeting.

17th Meeting, 2012 (Session 4), Tuesday 29 May 2012

Educational attainment of looked after children (in private): The Committee considered a revised draft report. Various changes were agreed to, and the report was agreed for publication.

ANNEXE B: ORAL EVIDENCE AND ASSOCIATED WRITTEN EVIDENCE

9th Meeting, 2011 (Session 4), Tuesday 1 November 2011

Written Evidence

[Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland](#)
[Scottish Children's Services Coalition](#)
[The Fostering Network Scotland](#)

[Oral Evidence](#)

Centre for Excellence for Looked after Children in Scotland;
Scottish Children's Services Coalition;
Children 1st;
The Fostering Network Scotland.

Supplementary Evidence

[The Fostering Network - Fostering Achievement Annual Report](#)
[Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland](#)

10th Meeting, 2011 (Session 4), Tuesday 8 November 2011

Written Evidence

[Association of Directors of Education in Scotland](#)
[Association of Directors of Social Work](#)
[Convention of Scottish Local Authorities](#)
[Care Inspectorate](#)

[Oral Evidence](#)

Association of Directors of Education in Scotland;
Association of Directors of Social Work in Scotland;
COSLA;
Care Inspectorate.

Supplementary Evidence

[Care Inspectorate](#)

11th Meeting, 2011 (Session 4), Tuesday 15 November 2011

Written Evidence

[Educational Institute of Scotland](#)
[Scottish Children's Reporter Administration](#)
[Education Scotland](#)

[Oral Evidence](#)

Educational Institute of Scotland;
Scottish Children's Reporter Administration;
Education Scotland.

12th Meeting, 2011 (Session 4), Tuesday 22 November 2011

[Oral Evidence](#)

Angela Constance MSP, Minister for Children and Young People,
Jackie Brock, Director Curriculum, Health & Wellbeing, and David Blair, Head
of Looked After Children Policy, Scottish Government.

Supplementary Evidence

[Minister for Children and Young People](#)

ANNEXE C: OTHER WRITTEN EVIDENCE

[Aberdeenshire Council Children's Rights Service](#)
[Aberlour Child Care Trust](#)
[Anne Lee - MA Consultants](#)
[Barnardo's Scotland](#)
[Barnardo's Scotland – supplementary evidence](#)
[Barnardo's Scotland – case study – “STRIVE”](#)
[Barnardo's Scotland – Scoping Study](#)
[Children in Scotland](#)
[Entrepreneurial Exchange in Scotland](#)
[Equality and Human Rights Commission](#)
[Falkirk Council](#)
[Fife Council Children's Services](#)
[Fife Council Education Service](#)
[Foster Care Associates Scotland](#)
[Glasgow City Council](#)
[Marina Shaw – Circle \(Family Service Unit Scotland\)](#)
[National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Scotland](#)
[North Lanarkshire Council Learning & Leisure Services](#)
[Quarriers](#)
[School Leaders Scotland](#)
[Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People](#)
[Scottish Parent Teacher Council](#)
[Scottish Throughcare & Aftercare Forum](#)
[South Lanarkshire Council](#)
[SWIIS Foster Care Scotland](#)
[UNISON Scotland](#)

Supplementary Evidence received prior to the Committee event on 20 April 2012

[CELCIS Research briefing](#)
[Place2Be](#)
[East Ayrshire Council](#)
[Enquire](#)

Supplementary Evidence received after the Committee event on 20 April 2012

[Barnardo's Scotland - *STRIVE* : Interim report for advisory group](#)
[Circle](#)
[Ken McAra - Lead Inspector, Equality and Inclusion, Education Scotland](#)

ANNEXE D: CHAMBER DEBATE

The Official Report of the Chamber debate on the inquiry on 11 January 2012 is available on the following link:

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28862.aspx?r=6656>

ANNEXE E: NOTE OF COMMITTEE VISIT TO GLASGOW

Introduction

1. As part of its inquiry into the educational attainment of looked after children, the Education and Culture Committee visited Glasgow on Monday 21 November 2011.
2. Three members of the Committee¹ visited St Thomas Aquinas Secondary School and Norse Road Children's Unit, whilst three other members² visited St Benedict's Primary School and Oakwood Primary School, both in Easterhouse.
3. Prior to the visits, the Committee met Maureen McKenna, Executive Director of Education, Glasgow City Council, and were given a briefing, outlining some of the issues faced by the three schools and the unit, what the challenges facing Glasgow City Council are in respect of the educational attainment of looked after children and how local provision in Glasgow relates to national policy direction.

Group 1 Visit 1: St Thomas Aquinas Secondary School

4. Committee Members met the Pastoral Care Team. The Joint Assessment Team meet monthly to discuss any issues arising with regard to looked after children in the school. They receive updates from social workers and have no difficulty in identifying the looked after children in the school. Staff told the Committee that they could often identify children in S1 who are likely to have problems later on. While some of these young people were 'looked after', many of them were not. Staff considered that it would be beneficial if more of them became 'looked after' as this might enable them to get more support.
5. Staff stressed the importance of dealing with non-attendance. However, it is a struggle to get pupils 'looked after' only on grounds of attendance. They considered that some of the problem was that social workers were so busy and so had to prioritise the most complex and serious cases.
6. Alternative provision, such as the Enhanced Vocational Inclusion Programme (EVIP), and that offered by organisations such as Right Track, Fairbridge and the Princes Trust, is very useful in getting some children re-engaged with learning. However, they take different approaches and so a range of alternative provision is needed. For example, Princes Trust focuses on outward bound which does not suit all pupils.
7. Staff considered that a major problem was a lack of resilience and self-motivation rather than low ability. Although all these pupils tended to have chaotic home lives, individual pupils' circumstances are very varied.
8. It could be difficult to work with parents who often do not like intervention from social work at school. Staff considered that a fundamental problem was that teaching and social work staff have both supportive and enforcement roles with

¹ Stewart Maxwell, Clare Adamson and Joan McAlpine

² Claire Baker, Marco Biagi and Liam McArthur

regard to school attendance. The role of school counsellor was useful because it allowed pupils to talk to someone who had no official role in enforcing attendance. Staff noted that there were fewer of these posts than previously. Asked whether tutor (registration) teachers could take on this role, they thought that teachers probably did not have the training for it and some would not have the aptitude for it.

9. Staff considered that earlier intervention is desirable and can produce very positive results, however 'light touch' resources are sometime overburdened. The Pastoral Care Team's understanding of 'light touch resources' was the use of a resource such as school counsellors and restorative practices which they have found to be very helpful.
10. Staff suggested that ideally there should be a dedicated department at local authority level who could work with children and parents.

Group 1 Visit 2: Norse Road Children's Unit

11. The unit had two long term residents, but also took in young people in crisis. When young people joined the unit in crisis, this could be disruptive for the other residents. This is particularly true of the long-term residents studying for exams, for whom the unit was their home.
12. Committee members spoke to the manager who spoke about schools' different reactions to pupils' 'challenging behaviour' – some schools excluded, but others did not. In her view the key was getting head teachers and teachers to understand that the young people are coping with trauma. She also noted that school staff do not have the same training as residential staff in how to deal with difficult behaviour. She felt that Social Work could work much closely with education to assist and help them to manage young peoples' behaviour in school.
13. The Manager spoke of children's unit staff challenging some of the schools' decisions and not just accepting exclusions. Unit staff can go and explain to the school about the pressures these young people are living with – about the realities of 'group living.' The Manager felt they had a very positive relationship with St Thomas Aquinas.
14. Nearly all young people are known to social work prior to becoming 'looked after'. The Manager spoke about the huge workload of social work in Glasgow and the fact that many of these families have two or three generations unemployed. This affected young people's aspirations and values.

Group 2 Visit 1: St Benedict's Primary School, Easterhouse

15. Committee members met the Headteacher and a member of staff from "Place 2 Be", a voluntary organisation supporting schools across the United Kingdom, providing targeted and specialist training programmes to support the local children's workforce, offering new skills and strategies to support children's emotional wellbeing, helping them to manage their feelings and improve their

social skills. “Place 2 Be” is currently undertaking a two-year pilot in Glasgow, working in two primary schools in Easterhouse (St Benedict’s and Aultmore Park).

16. Members were also given a tour of the school, which included being shown the “Place 2 Be” facility, by two students.

17. In the meeting with the Headteacher and the member of staff from “Place 2 Be” the following points were raised—

- Looked after children have specific emotional needs and they should be recognised;
- Providing access to services to meet those needs can be a challenge;
- The presence of “Place 2 Be” provides an environment where all children can raise issues of concern, removing any stigma from the children’s perspective surrounding being looked after (“Place 2 Be” match counsellors with children where appropriate and provide input to the additional support plan);
- “Place 2 Be” can only work effectively when there is buy-in from staff. In certain circumstances involving teachers can be good;
- The “Place 2 Be” staff member looks at what support is available for children in communities;
- There has been a big reduction in the number of looked after children attending St Benedict’s over recent years. The view of the Headteacher is that this has more to do with changing catchment areas than any overall reduction in the number of looked after children;
- There is a joint support team in place to manage the move from primary school to secondary school, involving the Headteacher, educational psychologists and teachers from the secondary schools. Assistance is also provided by Barnardo’s and designated transition managers;
- In general, the importance of early intervention was stressed, spotting signs of the need for additional input and flagging this up quickly;
- Although it was noted that non-attendance can be a sign of wider issues, non-attendance cannot lead to referral in itself;
- The Headteacher stressed that child protection is taken very seriously in St Benedict’s, but that the school does not make an arbitrary distinction between the needs of looked after children and others with additional support needs.

Group 2 Visit 2: Oakwood Primary School, Easterhouse

18. Committee members met members of the school senior management team along with the senior social worker. The following points were raised in discussion—

- The view was expressed by school staff that, at times, due to the impact that children’s emotional needs have on their learning there is a need for greater support in class. Oakwood would potentially benefit from an organisation such as “Place 2 Be” coming in and providing that emotional support;
- Staff also expressed the view that ideally they would like more specialised services in supporting children’s emotional development but that in practice a greater onus would be placed on developing the skills of school staff;

Education and Culture Committee, 6th Report, 2012 (Session 4)

- The Joint Support Team (JST) is a multi-agency Learning Community resource. Children or young people who have Additional Support Needs, and despite having an Additional Support Plan (ASP) continue to experience difficulties and therefore require additional multi-agency supports are referred to the JST. All Looked After Children, in each establishment throughout the Learning Community, are discussed annually on a rotational basis.
- Ultimately JSTs will feed into the Integrated Support Group (ISG), which provides a sector-wide overview of children with additional needs.
- As part of their on-going monitoring staff in Oakwood complete fortnightly care and concern records, this allows scope for staff to flag up specific concerns about Looked After Children.
- Raising attainment and providing opportunities for achievement have been key priorities for the school. For a small minority of children academic achievement remains a challenge. It is important therefore for their holistic development that we also celebrate their wider achievements.
- Staff also noted that looked after children have a care plan, which provides a structure for them and joined up working around them. Children who are not looked after, but have considerable additional support needs, do not receive the same level of support as children who are looked after. Staff therefore queried whether issues of poor attainment are actually about looked after children rather than being wider and more complex issues around deprivation, poverty, parenting and school support.
- The transition from primary school to secondary school is tricky for pupils at Oakwood. Currently there are early meetings between teachers and an extensive transition programme where children are taught by both primary and secondary teachers. The addition of something along the lines of “Place 2 Be” would add an extra layer of support for the child into this process.
- It was also noted that good relationships and regular communication with parents, and including them in the child’s support within school, was vital. Many parents may be reluctant to engage with school for a number of reasons. It was noted that ensuring that the best environment is created for them is key, for example through chatting to parents at the school gates. It was also noted that the format of school publications should be as accessible as possible.

ANNEXE F: NOTE OF COMMITTEE EVENT

As part of its inquiry into the educational attainment of looked after children, the Education and Culture Committee held an event at the Parliament on 20 April. The event was held in association with the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland (CELCIS) and was attended by over 70 individuals, most of whom had frontline experience of working with looked after children. Participants were split into five groups and tasked with identifying solutions under each of the five themes identified by the Committee in advance.

Those themes were—

- Readiness to learn;
- Support at school;
- Implementation of policy and legislation;
- Joint working; and
- Resources.

The following solutions were identified by each group—

Readiness to learn

We would ask the Scottish Government to consider better early intervention that promotes wellbeing and does not just prevent harm and involve universal services that enable better support for parents and promote parental attachment.

For example:

- Increase the number of health visitors;
- Have better support for all-family learning;
- Recognise the impact of issues such as domestic abuse
- Provide more effective and consistent training for all children's services professionals in child development and developing quality relationships with children.

We would ask the Scottish Government to consider:

- That early intervention should not neglect 14-16 year olds who will need help when they become parents themselves. Support should be provided before they become parents.

We would ask the Scottish Government to note that:

- Some placement moves cannot be avoided
- All placements should be high quality

For example, better training and support in attachment could be provided to short term foster carers.

Support at School

We would ask the Scottish Government—

- To consider improving learning and development for education staff to enable them to be prepared to meet the needs of vulnerable children and young

people (including looked after children). This should include influencing the curriculum of pre-qualifying courses and CPD to include multiagency approaches, attachment theory, inclusive approaches and listening to the voices and experiences of children and young people.

- To consider that the support provided to improve the attendance and reduce exclusion rates of vulnerable children and young people needs to be flexible, based on individual need and well resourced.
- To consistently implement and monitor and inspect a genuine GIRFEC approach which values the contribution of children, young people and their families – including one plan.

Implementation of Policy and Legislation

- Not a need for primary legislation specific to looked after children and care leavers. However, regulation / national guidance to clarify, streamline and simplify existing legislation would be of benefit.
- The health and development of children has a major impact on their future educational outcomes. Health should be the universal provider of children 0 - 3 and education should come in for children 3 – 5.
- Cognisance should be given the potential impact on looked after children and their families of other legislation and policy developments (e.g. housing, prison service, welfare reform, etc.)
- There should be work done to clarify the policy / protocols at a national level in relation to looked after children being placed in other local authorities and other countries.

Joint Working

We would ask the Scottish Government to consider:

- The Code of conduct for councillors – with a view to making corporate parenting training attendance mandatory;
- Adopting a more co-ordinated and strategic approach to inter disciplinary professional training, to include the refresh of “We can and must do better”;
- Ensuring that through GIRFEC the best outcomes become the cultural norm across professions and to use the Children’s Services Bill to help drive up quality standards.

Resources

We would ask the Scottish Government to consider:

- That there is a shortage of resources to address the needs of looked after and other vulnerable children.
- Some within the group felt that a weighting for looked after would help schools to prioritise this population. However this would also carry perverse incentives (rise in referrals to the Reporter) and practical problems. If there are to be additional resources, should these sit within schools? This links to the **Role of voluntary and independent sector** – resources could be used to support the development of community capacity.
- The issue of self-directed support.

Education and Culture Committee, 6th Report, 2012 (Session 4)

- the issue of the pooling of budgets, as strategic commissioning cannot be done without it. This needs to involve all agencies (health, justice, etc.).
- that dedicated resources should not be seen as the 'solution' but could be useful in embedding GIRFEC throughout structures and systems.
- making greater use of existing, underutilised resources (foster carers, voluntary / independent orgs) to support learning. Should not necessarily be 'extra' teachers. There is a home issue that needs to be addressed. There is a need to arrest the decline in funding for behavioural support staff / educational psychologists and others.

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