Evaluation of the Vulnerable Children Grant

Volume 2
Appendices

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National Foundation for Educational Research

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Volume Two Appendices

Appendix 1

The case studies

Introduction

This section of the report presents detailed case studies from each of the eight LEAs visited during the course of the study. Each case study begins with an LEA overview, followed by a number of vignettes focusing on particular groups of vulnerable children supported by the VCG.

The LEA overview provides details on the:
location of responsibility for the VCG
LEA's strategic approach to supporting vulnerable children
implementation of the VCG
impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development
areas for future development.

The vignettes provide details on:
strategies funded by the VCG
the impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development
targets, tracking and monitoring
the impact of the VCG on support for this group
effective practice in supporting this group
areas for future development.

The vulnerable groups/interventions covered in the vignettes are detailed below:

Looked after children (case study 1, vignette 1; case study 3, vignette 1; case study 5, vignette 1 [distance learning strategy supporting a range of pupils]; case study 5, vignette 3; case study 6, vignette 1)
Teenage parents (case study 1, vignette 2; case study 6, vignette 2)
Asylum seekers (case study 2, vignette 1; case study 8, vignette 2; case study 8, vignette 3)
Gypsy/Travellers (case study 2, vignette 2; case study 4, vignette 3; case study 8, vignette 1)
Young people with medical needs (case study 3, vignette 2; case study 4, vignette 1; case study 5, vignette 1 [distance learning strategy supporting a range of pupils]; case study 7, vignette 1)
School refusers (case study 3, vignette 3; case study 4, vignette 2; case study 5, vignette 1 [distance learning strategy supporting a range of pupils])
Young carers (case study 7, vignette 2)
Primary pupils with poor social and emotional competence (case study 4, vignette 4)
Child protection (case study 5, vignette 2)

Excluded pupils/pupils at risk of exclusion (case study 6, vignette 3; case study 7, vignette 3)

Parents of vulnerable children (case study 7, vignette 4)

Pre-school children with behavioural difficulties (case study 7, vignette 5).

Case study 1

OVERVIEW
Type of LEA: Metropolitan **Interviewees**: Team Leader SEN and Inclusion Support Services and Vulnerable Children Project Manager

Location of responsibility for the VCG

The Team Leader SEN and Inclusion Support Services has overall management responsibility for the VCG. The LEA had also appointed a Vulnerable Children Project Manager as a result of the implementation of the grant to act as a coordinator. The Project Manager's role was to: identify gaps in provision, coordinate the activity of the teams/interventions funded by the grant and evaluate some of the new projects and initiatives funded by the grant.

The LEA's strategic approach to supporting vulnerable children

The framework for supporting vulnerable children comes from the LEA's 'Inclusion Strategy' and within this there is a commitment to all of the vulnerable groups and, in addition, the LEA had identified: 'children in vulnerable accommodation', 'children of drug using parents' and 'those at risk of sexual exploitation' as vulnerable groups. The Project Manager acknowledged that amongst the most vulnerable groups were those young people who were not in mainstream provision and that there was '*a real commitment*' to address issues for that group.

Implementation of the VCG

The LEA held a **'Vulnerable Children's Seminar Day'** attended by all agencies from the LEA and, in addition, partners from health, social services, voluntary agencies, and the Youth Offending Service (YOS), to examine the LEA's position in relation to services for vulnerable children. There were a number of outcomes from the day, '*some of which were going to happen anyway because of the Children Bill*' (Project Manager), for example, protocols and procedures regarding information sharing, working across services, and joint and multi-agency working with other services. The Vulnerable Children's Strategic Group will look at these areas for development. This group (which consists of representatives from LEA services, the YOS and, it is hoped in the future, other agencies, such as social services and health) planned the seminar day. The LEA also developed a **Vulnerable Children's Strategy** and a linked action plan based on the DfES guidance for the VCG. The strategic group, which meets monthly, decides on the allocation of VCG funding and also has a monitoring remit for the projects and interventions funded. The LEA's focus on **cross-cutting themes** means that group members are expected to put forward project proposals for joint working.

The Project Manager felt that the VCG had given the LEA an opportunity to '*focus on those vulnerable groups and to identify some of the vulnerabilities*'. She felt that her post provided the LEA with an opportunity to look at things differently and that the VCG '*in funding my post is looking at different ways of working with those groups that are more cross cutting – so identifying that many of the young people with the*

greatest vulnerability are across a number of those groups'. Consequently, the VCG was felt to have made '*quite a big difference*' in what they were looking at because they had identified that new work should be '*cross cutting*'. This had resulted in the LEA using the VCG to fund two education posts which were part of a '*a virtual multi-agency team*' for children in vulnerable accommodation: '*What we know is that children in vulnerable accommodation are likely to be children out of provision, very likely to be refugee and asylum seekers, very likely to be in situations where there's domestic violence, where there's crime*'. Hence, attempts are being made to establish projects to address 'issues' rather than compartmentalise groups: '*That's been a very deliberate strategy following on from the grant and the grant guidance about trying to work in a more holistic way*'.

In terms of allocating the funding, existing services were requested to audit their work against the Vulnerable Children Strategy and action plan. Existing services that had been supported for some time by the Standards Fund continued to receive funding in 2003/4 if they met the criteria. These were:

>   The Traveller Education Service
>   The Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood Initiative
>   The Education Protects Team
>   Refugee and Asylum seekers
>   Children with medical needs.

In addition, other bids were taken against agreed criteria for additional grant. Young offenders, school refusers and young carers did not receive funding in the first year. However, the audit of provision conducted by the LEA to identify gaps in provision resulted in VCG funding a full-time project worker for young carers in 2004/5. The worker was employed by Barnardo's but was working with the EWS, and the LEA was hoping to mainstream the post in the future. This post also linked in with other provision for homeless children and those in vulnerable accommodation because: '*We're becoming more aware that, as we identify some of those children, many of them are carers*' (Project Manager).

The LEA was exploring ways that existing teams could work more holistically and across some of the vulnerable groups. For example: '*The Teenage Pregnancy Initiative do a lot of preventative work which means they're coming into contact with young women in care, those at risk of sexual exploitation and parents with problematic drug use*' (Project Manager). Similarly, the TES were becoming more involved with refugee and asylum seekers: '*We are trying to identify pieces of work that will engage some of the existing staff working across groups*' (Project Manager).

The VCG had been used to maintain funding for **looked after children** (although they were allocated an additional £10,000 for dowry funding. Funding for **teenage parents** and **Gypsy/Travellers** had essentially stayed the same with the VCG replacing existing grants. For **pupils with medical needs** the VCG was contributing to a much a larger LEA budget for hospital schools and home tuition. The VCG had facilitated an increase in funding for **Refugee and Asylum seeker** pupils which was necessary because of the increase in the numbers arriving in the LEA: '*The numbers have tripled because we are a dispersal city*' (Team Leader). However, the increase in funding was not felt to reflect the increase in the numbers of pupils. It was noted that

the EMAG team were not providing any EAL support (for non-asylum seekers) because they had to focus their work on supporting asylum seekers. The LEA had also invested VCG funding in new work around anti-bullying work and to support children in vulnerable accommodation, and those at risk of sexual exploitation and drug abuse.

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development

The **Vulnerable Children's Strategy Group** (see above) was the main partnership that had evolved out of the VCG to have impacted on working practice within the LEA because: '*We have never been sat round the table before in this way and linking up. Quite a lot of this is changing the way people work*' (Team Leader). It was also felt to be supporting existing partnerships by working with the Children's Fund, study support and learning mentors within the LEA. In 2003/4 funding was exclusively through the LEA and the Project Manager was unaware of any new multi-agency partnerships being funded by the VCG. In relation to existing multi-agency partnerships, the Education Protects Team (Education and Social Services) was seen as extremely effective (the VCG funded the education posts in that partnership – see Vignette 1 for further details). The VCG had also been used to fund a multi-agency conference focusing on supporting vulnerable children, attended by learning mentors and other stakeholders from across the LEA. The Project Manager was also drawing up a communications policy with the local authority, health and the referral centres for refugee and asylum seekers, to ensure that the LEA had as much information about families before they arrived and that, when they did arrive, links were made and information was shared between the LEA, the centres and schools. She acknowledged that there was also a need to develop a communication policy for children in vulnerable accommodation.

Future developments

The Project Manager felt that there was a need to continue developing the cross-cutting themes and learning from the projects '*so that we are more effective in terms of targeting and seeing what it is that works in improving access*'. She also felt that there was a need to continue working with specific groups but that the LEA would '*learn a lot from trying to be more cross cutting*' and that this would have implications for the way existing services, for example, the TES '*respond and work with young people. We do really recognise that the cross-cutting approach makes a real difference*'.

VIGNETTE 1

Vulnerable group:	Looked after children
Numbers:	1500
Amount of grant allocated:	11 per cent of total grant
Interviewee(s):	Education Protects Coordinator

Strategies funded by the VCG

The VCG part-funds the Education Protects Team for looked after children. It is a multi-agency (education and social services) team that has been in existence since 1999. The team is made up of two coordinators: an education coordinator (funded by the LEA via VCG) and a social services coordinator (funded by social services). The third member of the team is a support officer (also funded by the VCG) who mentors children in the children's homes who have difficulty with school access or attendance. The VCG also funds most of the project work carried out by the team, although social services occasionally contribute. The team's remit is to raise the educational attainment of children in care and to narrow the gap in attainment between looked after children and their peers. There are three main aspects to the team's work:

1. Training and awareness raising

They work with teachers, social workers, residential care workers, mentors, governors, carers, managers in education and social services, and health professionals to raise awareness of the educational issues faced by children in public care. They examine the research and literature about children's comparatively poor attainment and the requirements of the National Guidance on the Education of Young People in Care and provide advice and support in implementing some of the practical measures that are suggested in relation to supporting young people, e.g. education planning.

2. Data collection and analysis

Data are collected on: test outcomes, GCSEs, attendance and exclusions for the DfES but the team also carry out: '*Value added analysis and use the data to try and plan effective interventions – so we try and use data in a positive, creative way*'.

3. Project work

This involves developing new ideas and initiatives to try and raise the educational attainment of looked after children. This ranges from: designing a new PEP and introducing an early years PEP for looked after children, to introducing a leisure card for looked after children (and their foster families) entitling them to free access to museums and sites of interest across the region.

In addition, the VCG had been used to continue to fund pre-existing interventions including: supporting a project focusing on raising the aspirations of looked after children for FE and HE; dowry funding for children at risk of exclusion (VCG funding had allowed the LEA to extend this provision); the development of a handbook for schools; guidance documents and training for early year's managers; resources for children's homes, e.g. key stage study support material and workbooks for those children out of school; and the development of a help line. New work carried out by the team and funded by the VCG included: bursaries to schools to provide study support for Year 11s who may have difficulties with their GCSEs (the LEA had

a drop in GCSE attainment for looked after children in the previous year); the introduction of a new PEP and an early years PEP and a leisure card.

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development

No new partnerships or policies had been developed as a result of the VCG. However the team was part of a regional network that had looked at how different LEAs had used the VCG funding. The Education Protects Team was seen as an example of a multi-agency partnership where the whole issue of partnership working was '*endemic in the team ... working as a team is built into what we do*'. The need for any new partnerships was not identified, although meetings with the other vulnerable children's teams might be useful '*to see where people are at*'. The team's manager (Team Leader SEN and Inclusion Support Services) sat on the Vulnerable Children's Strategy Group and represented the team's interests.

Although no new policies have been implemented as a result of the VCG, it has been used to fund a new handbook for schools on the education of children in care (although it was acknowledged that this would have been funded without the VCG). Thus, every school receives a '*practical and local interpretation of the National Guidance which sets out staff responsibilities and the practical issues around planning etc*'.

Targets, tracking and monitoring

Attainment

The team is working towards a target of 15 per cent of looked after children achieving 5 GCSEs A*–C in 2005/06. In 2003, five per cent of looked after children achieved this and it was felt that the LEA would be '*struggling*' to achieve the 15 per cent target by 2006. Similarly, for the numbers achieving one GCSE: the target for 2003/04 was that 75 per cent achieved this, but in 2002/03, only 58 per cent had achieved that level. The target of 90 per cent of looked after children to be entered in GCSEs or equivalent in 2005/06 was seen as a challenge because of the numbers of pupils with SEN. Last year, 43 per cent of the cohort were not entered (reflecting the national average) and about a third were not entered because of '*significant*' SEN. However, once those pupils with SEN and on alternative programmes were removed from the data '*there were about six children who weren't receiving appropriate education, so the figures mask the complexity of the issue*'. The LEA's key stage outcomes were '*better than the national average*'. In relation to key stage 2 targets that outcomes for looked after children should be at least 60 per cent as good as their peers by 2006, it was noted that, last year, 55 per cent of pupils achieved this so it was felt that they were '*on track with that one*'.

Attendance

Last year 82 per cent of looked after children in the LEA had attendance of 85 per cent or more (below the national average).

Permanent exclusions

Target: less than one per cent. It was 0.6 per cent last year.

The team's budget was monitored within the team but also within the broader SEN Inclusion Support Service (SENISS) Team, so it had a '*double layer of monitoring*'. The team had a **multi-agency steering group**, which monitored and set the agenda

for their work. The broad base of the steering group was seen to assist the team in its joined up working. The top five priorities of the team's work were:

1. To ensure that children out of education received 25 hours education a week (this was the top priority). It was noted that this was not happening universally at the moment
2. Reviewing the workload of designated teachers. It was felt that designated teachers were given a crucial role but not the time to do it
3. Linking with youth services to ensure that looked after children had full access to leisure opportunities
4. To ensure that social workers knew how to appeal and work their way through the process if looked after children were not admitted to, or were excluded from, school
5. Developing the early years PEP.

Impact of the VCG on support for this group
The VCG was not seen to have impacted on support for this group of vulnerable children because it was seen as a continuation of existing funding. However, it was felt that the VCG had raised the team's awareness of the different sub-groups of children in care, for example unaccompanied asylum seekers. Furthermore, the introduction of the VCG and the Vulnerable Children's Strategy Group was perceived to have '*sharpened senior manager's understanding of the particular vulnerability of children in care – the need to prioritise* [them] *in decision making and allocating resources*'. The role played by the team in raising the profile of looked after children was also noted.

Nevertheless, the VCG had enabled the team to continue providing **dowry funding** to primary schools to support pupils at risk of exclusion. Previously the LEA had paid for dowries out of its existing budget, but the money was spent by Christmas 2003. Extra funding (£10,000) secured from the VCG meant that 15 pupils in danger of exclusion were successfully retained in school.

The team's work funded by the VCG included transition support to address an identified dip in achievement for looked after children after transferring to secondary school. This year all Year 6 pupils were sent a study support pack for Year 7. The team also ensured that designated teachers and/or learning mentors at feeder primaries and secondaries met to plan effective support.

Effective practice in supporting this group
The work has to be '*joined up and multi-agency*', with '*partnership all the way through it*'. Thus, the multi-agency nature of the team was seen as particularly effective because:

The nature of the team overcame many of the barriers to successful multi-agency working. The social services coordinator '*knows everyone in social services* [so] *those contacts are much easier, just getting hold of people, because they know you and we know them, so at that very practical level there's not that barrier there*'.

Whenever the team attended meetings or briefings or carried out training they were modelling good practice in terms of partnership working because '*we're*

there together, education and social services are there, representing what we're talking about – joined-up working and there we are with a joint team doing it'. Issues around data sharing were overcome.

The **dowry funding** was seen as an effective use of relatively small amounts of money: '*It's highly successful at keeping exclusions down and keeping children in school because we can give it immediately*' (Team Leader). Effectiveness was also seen to stem from the schools being able to specify the work and targets they wanted to focus on, the team did not prescribe them: '*It is very effective because it's using their* [schools'] *expertise. Sometimes that's all it needs, someone to support the child at lunchtime for an hour a day for six weeks*'. Schools felt that effectiveness lay in the speed with which they could access funding and thus meet the needs of individual youngsters.

The team had also introduced an **educational assessment tool kit for new foster carers** to assess their educational competency, which focused on attitudes to education. Fostering officers used this in their recruitment of new carers and it had been highlighted as an example of good practice nationally on the Education Protects website.

The **training** carried out by the team was also seen as a '*huge benefit*'. The telephone help line was seen as very useful because schools, social workers, anyone could ring up with a query and talk it through and get some practical support. The team also carried out a lot of 'signposting' and their face-to-face, hands-on approach was seen as effective in building relationships because '*If people have met you they are more likely to ring you*'.

Future developments
The team would like to extend looked after children's opportunities for inclusion in **leisure facilities** and further develop links with the Youth Service, libraries etc: '*It's a sad reflection that* [name of LEA] *children in care can't access* [LEA's] *leisure centres for free*'. They also wanted to **develop more sophisticated data analysis** including 'value added' data analysis, which takes into account the context of the school and socio-economic factors. It was felt that the **targets set should reflect the complexity of the work** more appropriately and that there was a need to refocus some of the targets for looked after children. For example, the date used for a child to be in care for a year or more is the 1st of October to the 30th of September. It was noted that the LEA had children who had been in care for a number of years but were leaving care in the summer after taking their GCSEs. Consequently, the LEA had to discount these youngsters' results because they left care before the 30th September: '*We lost a number of children last year who got 5 A–Cs because they went out of care after their exams. It should be the 1st July to 30 June to capture that*'. It was noted that the team would continue to look for new, innovative project work to attack educational attainment from a number of angles. One of the strengths of the team was that '*If something catches our eye, we pounce on it and do something about it*'. The team also wanted to conduct more multi-agency training that brought teachers and social workers together to look at joint issues.

VIGNETTE 2

Vulnerable group:	Teenage parents
Numbers:	94 (at the end of the academic year)
Amount of grant allocated:	15 per cent of total grant
Interviewee(s):	Teenage Pregnancy Coordinator, Childcare Coordinator and Specialist Learning Mentor

Strategies funded by the VCG

The Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood Team was in existence pre-VCG and was previously funded by the Teenage Pregnancy Grant. The VCG funds a number of existing posts: the **Teenage Pregnancy Coordinator** who line manages the team and has a strategic role. The post also has a prevention focus, has links with Healthy Schools, is involved in partnership working and providing guidance to schools. The **Inclusion Support Worker** who works with school-age parents and carries out prevention work in PRUs, special schools and with those pupils not on roll (in 2003/04 this post was vacant so the money was used to contribute towards funding the specialist learning mentors' posts who also took on some of the duties of this post). The **Childcare Coordinator** (funded by the VCG) identifies childcare places and funding for pupils, and coordinates on-site childcare. The VCG also pays for additional childcare staffing (part-time and agency), crèche costs (the educational provision for young mothers has baby rooms on-site) and transport for pupils with babies under three months and in other specified circumstances. In addition, in 2003/04 the VCG also part-funded five **Specialist Learning Mentors** who work with schools, pregnant pupils and school age parents to remove barriers to education, re-engage non-attenders and improve practice in schools. The learning mentors also carry out preventative work with schools and work with FE and Connexions on transition at 16. The VCG also contributed towards **development work with young fathers** and reducing unintended teenage fatherhood for boys at increased risk. £10,000 from the VCG supplemented much larger funding from Sure Start Plus and Connexions (in July 2004 young fathers' and young men's workers were appointed). In 2003/4 VCG also contributed £5000 towards the cost of producing a **good practice guide for schools**.

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development

It was felt that the VCG had not been used to enhance or develop existing partnerships '*directly*' but that the everyday work of the team involved partnership working, e.g. the childcare coordinator carrying out development work with childcare providers, or training for the team from health professionals regarding issues facing teenage parents. VCG had been used to pay for: '*ongoing bits we're doing but not specific initiatives because we've got all that done*' (Coordinator), for example, it had contributed to the work with Sure Start and Connexions focusing on young fathers. No policies had been drawn up or developed in response to the VCG as it was felt that the work was already fairly well developed in that area. Policies with schools were already in place via the teenage pregnancy grant, e.g. in relation to referral procedures. Agreements with organisations like Sure Start Plus about sharing work were already in existence to try and avoid duplication of work. It was hoped that schools would take on more of the support work so that the team could concentrate on more preventative work: '*We've raised awareness of what good practice is in schools,*

so ideally, our support load should lessen and we can put more into the prevention and safeguarding – but we're not quite there yet' (Coordinator).

Targets, tracking and monitoring
The team was working to national targets to reduce the number of conceptions and increase the engagement of teenage parents in education, employment or training to 60 per cent.

Supporting the reduction of conceptions was a local authority target, so the coordinator felt that it was difficult to tease out the team's specific contribution towards meeting that target. However, it was noted that some of the preventative work normally carried out by the team could not be completed because of funding issues: '*It's not that we haven't got the money, it's just that we haven't got it for long enough to make it worth advertising a job*' (Coordinator). Nevertheless, some preventative group work was being carried out by a mentor in one of the key stage 3 PRUs and, until recently, in one of the high schools (however this had to be scaled down in the summer term as this is when the referrals increased). The team was also targeting schools in areas of high rates of conception and many schools they had worked with over the last four years were now carrying out their own independent sexual health work with vulnerable pupils via the learning mentor strand of Excellence in Cities. Preventative work in some of these target schools had not taken root subsequently, or in some cases got off the ground at all, so the team had developed a '*sideways*' approach to working with them, via a project focusing on health notice boards and information about sexual health and other health issues. Not only was this less time-consuming for schools under pressure than running group work, it was hoped that this less '*heavy-duty approach*' would help establish a relationship with the schools who were wary of doing more sexual health work. This approach had proved successful as the team had begun work in three schools who previously, over the past four years, had not taken up offers of support.

Maintaining/increasing engagement was seen as one of the team's successes: engagement rose as a result of referral to the team, there was an increase in attendance, specifically of those who were attending three or less days a week beforehand. It was noted that only 40 per cent of referrals had attendance of 80 per cent or more and that 60 per cent were attending three or less days a week and '*a lot of them were attending no days and were completely disengaged from the system*' (Coordinator). Thus, the increase in engagement was seen as significant:

> *Although they didn't always go back to school, if they hadn't been going for two years, they did come to something and, even if they're only attending two or three days a week compared to nothing, that's a significant change in terms of their engagement with education and their chances of moving* onto *FE* (Coordinator).

The reason for this increase in engagement was linked to the fact that young people were having their (often multiple) needs supported for the first time. The team also monitored changes in attendance pre- and post-referral and analysed the numbers of young women who moved onto FE and training providers.

There was an **attainment** target to increase the average GCSE point score of teenage parents, which was seen as a realistic target by the team coordinator because it took

account of young women's (i.e. as a cohort, rather than individuals) prior levels of attainment and looked at the relative progress that they had made. The coordinator observed that the average GCSE points score for teenage parents was increasing. Furthermore, at the time of the interview, the team were reconfiguring the education support plans completed with young people so that they had a more detailed focus on GCSEs, including, for example, whether or not targeted support was required in particular areas. It was hoped that this would help '*hit the GCSE targets*' (Coordinator). There was also a target to increase the numbers of young women obtaining one GCSE of any grade. It was felt that the more young women the team retained in school the more were going to achieve this target and '*given that we're getting more young people into school and keeping them in school when perhaps previously they would have dropped out, we're hoping that's going in the right direction*' (Coordinator). In terms of overall monitoring, the team's database was used to track and monitor referrals, as well as analyse data to examine trends and significant issues. Members of the team had their own targets, as did the team itself. The team's work was reviewed quarterly at a LEA and multi-agency partnership level.

Impact of the VCG on support for this group

The team coordinator felt that the VCG had reduced the isolation of her team within the LEA because as a result of the VCG, they were now part of a multi-agency group who came together to '*discuss the use of the grant*' and share practice with other teams working with '*different vulnerabilities*'. This was perceived to have resulted in '*a better overview of how our work is similar, where it links, where it overlaps*', there had been an impact on the 'bigger picture'. The team were now part of a bigger group that had more influence within the LEA, whereas previously teenage parents were viewed as something of a '*minority issue*'. In addition, an under spend on VCG in 2003/04 meant that the grant was used to continue to fund the specialist learning mentor posts. Without these posts it was noted that '*there would be a lot of young people who would be struggling*', so the VCG was seen to have kept the '*work on the road this year*'. Another impact of the grant was that the VCG guidance was seen to strengthen the position of the team because it brought reducing conceptions and supporting teenage parents under the same umbrella, '*whereas before, although we did both, we were a bit unusual*'.

Other areas of impact related to the work carried out by the existing team. For example, the childcare coordinator's role was seen as removing barriers to access to education. This post was also viewed as an important resource in supporting the development of young women's parenting skills: '*I'm always around so they can ask me anything they want to know or anything they feel unhappy with and I can keep an eye on the babies and the girls*' (Childcare Coordinator). This was seen as particularly crucial by the team coordinator because sometimes the young women did not have particularly good relationships with health visitors and social workers because '*they feel they're being judged*' (especially where there was the possibility of children being taken into care). The childcare coordinator was also responsible for helping the young women access funding, e.g. via the 'Care to Learn' initiative for childcare places. The team used VCG funding to pay for transport, which was seen to have a '*big impact*' on the young women's ability to access education. Transport was provided for the young women shortly before the birth and when their babies were very young, but sometimes there was a need to accept a childcare place that was some distance from

where they lived or their school which meant that the team would fund the transport.

The specialist learning mentors were seen as crucial in providing support for the young women on a daily basis: '*They know that there's somebody there, that I'm constant, that I'll be with them all the way through and it's the reliability of somebody being there and helping them out*'. The mentors provided young women with support in all areas, not just education, and were seen as successful in reintegrating them back into education. The team had increased the numbers of young women moving on to FE to approximately 50 per cent from a much lower figure. However, there are problems around retention in FE and, as a result, Connexions have funded a teenage pregnancy advisor to support this work. Consequently, for the first time this year, the team have been able to '*hand over those going on to FE to someone else*' but it was noted that there was still a gap for those young women who were not going on to FE. For impact on attendance and engagement see targets, tracking and monitoring above.

Effective practice in supporting this group

The **flexibility** in approach was seen as crucial: '*Not one size fits all, you've got to look at each individual and what they need and what they want, that's the key*'. The quality of the **multi-agency partnerships** working with these young people, particularly the Teenage Pregnancy Partnership, was also seen as important. The need to have individuals who can **challenge** schools' attitudes and practice towards teenage parents was seen as necessary. Effectiveness was also seen to lie in having a **team of specialists** (both at practitioner and strategic level) who '*live and breathe*' supporting the needs associated with teenage pregnancy: '*There's a team rather than just one or two people. The combination of the face-to-face work that the mentors do and someone like me who's doing all the semi-strategic meetings with other organisations and the partnership work etc. you get the best of both worlds*' (team coordinator). Having a team also meant that they were able to identify and work with some of the most vulnerable young women, including those who were out of school, who it was felt, might not be identified in other LEAs with fewer personnel. Furthermore, it was felt that the role of the **specialist learning mentors** could not be overstated '*because not only do they do all that face-to-face work with the schools and pupils, but they are also the eyes and ears that inform strategies*' (Coordinator). The mentors were seen as having changed attitudes in schools. Effective practice was also seen to lie in having interventions that brought the **young women together** due to the isolation many of them experienced in school. Educational projects run by the team were seen as providing the young women with somewhere they felt valued, where they could develop their self-esteem and their own social support networks. Providing **transport** for young women was also seen as contributing to effective practice because without it some of the most vulnerable young women would not access education.

Future developments

The team coordinator identified a number of areas for future development, including extending the capacity developed within schools to support teenage parents enabling the team to focus on more preventative work '*to get to a situation where the good practice is embedded across all schools*'. Also, to focus on the legal issues with schools surrounding pastoral work with pupils and to develop a practical framework for school's interpretation of legislation relating to this area. It was also felt that, if the team could strengthen the pastoral work in schools, they would have fewer young women only being identified late on in their pregnancy. Earlier identification would

ensure that young women had options to make decisions and better antenatal care. A broader issue for future development was to look at how the team worked with other teams in the vulnerable children's group, for example, in relation to asylum seekers and refugees who are pregnant, and preventative work with specific groups.

Case study 2

Location of responsibility for the VCG

The LEA's Head of the Minority Communities Achievement Service has overall responsibility for managing the planning of the grant.

The LEA's strategic approach to supporting vulnerable children

This was seen as being within the overarching multi-agency preventative strategy, which had been developed in partnership with other agencies through existing multi-agency partnerships. It was felt to be particularly important that the LEA had used existing multi-agency strategies and forums in order to inform the priorities for the VCG: '*How the VCG can support the strategic priorities that are already in place and then identify a way of planning for the VCG which is rooted within existing multi-agency groups*'. Whilst the VCG was not seen as the '*main driver*' in developing a strategic approach to supporting vulnerable children, it had provided '*some of the resource*'. The grant was seen as contributing to the achievement of the LEA's strategic targets set out in its EDP (National Priority 4: focus on underachieving groups), local preventative strategy, Behaviour Support Plan and Teenage Pregnancy Strategy.

Implementation of the VCG

Prior to the introduction of the grant, representatives from the strategic groups had met to '*share information and agree priorities*'. As highlighted above, the approach taken by the LEA was to plan and implement the VCG through existing multi-agency structures at a strategic and operational level. Strong links were made between the local preventative strategy and planning the implementation of the VCG. It was felt that the grant provided '*a substantial and virtually the only retained resource to focus on EDP National Priority 4*'. The LEA was committed to using the grant '*creatively*', which might mean initially that they provided a relatively large amount of funding to one area but that this might then be reduced because of '*the impact of that input, which would mean you wouldn't need to sustain such high levels of support in the long term*'. The LEA's approach to using the VCG focused on '*trying to build capacity within schools and early years settings so they are able to meet the majority of needs of these students*'. The VCG was seen as having enabled the LEA to be more strategic and flexible in its approach to working with vulnerable children, providing opportunities for joint planning and management of projects between services.

The interviewee stated that the level of funding received from the VCG was greater than the amount received previously through the various smaller grants. However, it was felt that this increase was necessary to support the numbers of asylum seekers and looked after children arriving and residing in the LEA. The VCG had been used to increase the funding available to asylum seekers, pupils with medical needs and looked after children. For **asylum seekers** the VCG had been used to continue funding refugee outreach teachers and family liaison officers to reduce the numbers of

secondary-aged asylum seeker and refugee children out of school and to reduce teachers' time spent on family liaison. It had also been used to fund alternative curriculum provision, which the LEA had been unable to fund prior to the VCG because of the cost (see Vignette 1 for further details). For **pupils with medical needs**, the VCG had funded new work focusing on service development. This involved moving away from one-to-one tuition towards delivering the curriculum through ICT and teachers acting as coordinators of education so that, if able, pupils could access up to ten hours provision. The VCG was seen to have funded '*innovation*' in this service. For **looked after children** additional VCG funding had been used to appoint a further advisor to work with schools in supporting pupils (increasing the number of advisors across the LEA from three to four). It had also been used to provide targeted support to schools where there were high numbers of looked after children. This support included project and advisory work, e.g. specialist teacher and psychology interventions, support for designated teachers, study skills workshops, learning mentors, emotional literacy training and revision guides. VCG funding had also been used to provide additional course work mentoring for looked after children at key stage 4 and to provide targeted EWO support to focus on raising attendance. There had been no change in funding for **young offenders**, **teenage parents** and **Gypsy/Traveller** pupils as the VCG essentially replaced existing funding streams. However, for teenage parents, it was noted that a review of provision had led to the appointment of a reintegration officer (due to start July 2004). The work with Gypsy/Travellers is explored in more detail in Vignette 2.

The flexibility of the grant was reflected in changes in funding in 2004/05, resulting in a reduction in the amount allocated to asylum seeker and refugee pupils because the LEA was '*able to manage the project effectively with a lower level of resource*'. The amount given to pupils with medical needs was also reduced because many of the '*improvements brought about by remodelling the service have had a sustainable impact*' and therefore no longer required further funding. This then meant that the LEA had been able to invest VCG funding in new work focusing on **early years** provision. An early years access post had been funded because '*we know that very young children who fall within this group* [vulnerable children] *are not getting access to early years settings and their entitlement to early years education*'.

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development
No new partnerships or policies were created as a result of the implementation of the grant because it was felt that existing multi-agency partnerships and strategies could do this effectively. It was felt that forming a new partnership would just place another layer on the planning process and that there was a danger that this would take away management resource and duplicate work. However, the LEA was looking at how they defined the service they offered to unaccompanied minors and examining what works in terms of induction and assessment and how social services and education can work together to assess the needs of this group. They are currently developing assessment strategies.

Future developments
It was felt that the LEA could improve the management of the grant at a multi-agency level by looking at how it complemented other grants that might be coming to other agencies, such as social services. The interviewee felt that it was clear that the VCG was tied into the EDP, but that more guidance in relation to that relationship would be

useful. The LEA also wanted to carry out more work focusing on early years provision and to explore how they could work with schools so that they were better able to meet the needs of young people in a cross-cutting way, rather than focusing on separate vulnerable groups.

VIGNETTE 1

Vulnerable group:	Asylum seekers
Numbers:	600 (five to 16 years, including approximately 200 unaccompanied minors)
Amount of grant allocated:	12 per cent of total grant
Interviewee(s):	Head of Service, Refugee Outreach Teacher, Family Liaison Officer and Designated Teacher

Strategies funded by the VCG

For asylum seeker pupils (with their families):

Refugee outreach teachers focus on preparing and inducting asylum seeker pupils on entry to secondary school

Refugee outreach teachers focus on building capacity in schools to meet the needs of asylum seekers (designated teacher project)

Family liaison officers focus on facilitating home–school liaison between children, families and schools.

For asylum seeker pupils (unaccompanied minors):

Refugee outreach teachers focus on preparing and inducting unaccompanied minors on entry to secondary schools

Refugee outreach teachers focus on building capacity in schools to meet the needs of unaccompanied minors (designated teacher project)

Refugee outreach teachers support foster carers

The provision of alternative curriculum provision (based in FE colleges).

For both areas, a **specialist senior psychologist** was employed to focus on developing an holistic approach to assessment and the provision of training to professionals working with unaccompanied minors and other asylum seeker pupils.

The Head of Service noted that prior to the introduction of the VCG the LEA had significant numbers of asylum seeker/refugee pupils of secondary school age who were not in school. They had experimented with a role that would help them address this issue which comprised a mixture of outreach, and school-based work. Having used LEA funding to develop this approach and establish the **refugee outreach teachers** it was evaluated and decided that it was appropriate for VCG funding (currently five in post). The LEA is still contributing towards funding these posts as not all of them are funded by the VCG. The refugee outreach teachers are qualified teachers, with half their time time-tabled in secondary schools where there are significant numbers of asylum seeker pupils, including unaccompanied minors. Their remit is to work in schools to raise the achievement of children and to support their induction. The other 50 per cent of their time is spent working with new arrivals to facilitate their access to secondary school, including carrying out assessments, preparation for induction and then supporting pupils during the first few weeks in school.

The **family liaison officers'** (FLOs) role is '*to facilitate and improve home-school liaison, particularly working on issues of attendance and admissions and supporting*

the family' (Head of Service). These posts came about because the LEA identified that teachers were spending a substantial amount of their time on family liaison. Prior to the introduction of the VCG, the LEA had funded three FLOs for ten months through the European Refugee Fund (ERF). That was successful but the LEA chose not to continue with the ERF funding because of the administrative burden associated with the grant. Instead, it was decided to fund the posts through the VCG (there are three refugee FLOs working in areas of the LEA with the largest numbers of refugees). This model of working had also been used successfully with Gypsy/Travellers.

The **designated teacher project** was established because the LEA had identified a lack of knowledge and expertise at a middle management or leadership level in schools on issues relating to refugees and asylum seekers. The project ran in six secondary schools during the summer term of 2004. Schools received £500 worth of resources, up to ten days INSET for the designated teachers who also received an incentive allowance. The teachers have '*responsibility in school for refugee children*' (Refugee Outreach Teacher), which was seen as a sustainable aspect of the project. At the time of the interview the project was being externally evaluated as a component part of a report linked to the overall preventative strategy. This model of working had also been used successfully with Gypsy/Travellers.

For **unaccompanied asylum seekers** who arrive during Year 11 an evaluation and assessment is carried out to '*determine whether or not school or college is the most appropriate environment*' (Head of Service) depending on their emotional state and history of education. A specialist senior educational psychologist supports the assessment process, which was seen as '*particularly important*' (Head of Service) because of the emotional trauma many of the young people may have suffered '*we really felt that we needed that additional level of knowledge and expertise to add to that evaluation process*' (Head of Service).

The VCG was also funding **alternative curriculum provision** at college for Year 11 unaccompanied asylum seekers. This was new provision introduced as a result of VCG, as prior to this the LEA was unable to fund the provision. The LEA was funding intensive 'roll-on, roll-off' college programmes focusing on English, maths, ICT, PSE and volunteering opportunities leading to entry to mainstream school or college courses and taster sessions and then LSC-funded FE courses.

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development
The head of service noted that the VCG had enabled the LEA teams working with minority ethnic groups and looked after children to carry out joint planning and management of projects for unaccompanied minors. Furthermore, the refugee outreach teacher felt that the designated teacher project (funded by VCG) was a good example of the LEA working in partnership with schools.

Targets, tracking and monitoring
Interviewees noted that they were working towards statutory targets for the achievement of minority ethnic groups. The head of service observed, however, that it was difficult to monitor the achievement of this group because there were so many ethnic groups within it. There were also local targets to reduce the number of asylum seeker pupils out of school and the LEA monitored the number of young people out of school on a monthly basis. The LEA had a database which contained details of all the

schools, the pupils attending schools (including which schools they were at before if the had transferred), details of ethnicity etc. This year the LEA had also monitored the primary/secondary transfer of asylum seekers and refugee pupils as a whole and the '*success rate at doing that is very high*'. It was also noted that most unaccompanied asylum seekers are placed within the six-week timeframe and that this was closely monitored. If they are not placed within six weeks it is because they have medical needs or special needs (usually mental health), which means that it would be detrimental to place them in school.

Impact of the VCG on support for this group
The Head of Service noted that the Refugee Outreach Teachers had been able to reduce the numbers of asylum seekers out of school. The number of new arrivals had dropped allowing teachers to work through the backlog, although a lack of school places was an issue in some areas. The Refugee Outreach Teacher felt that, as a result of his role, young people were accessing school places more swiftly. Refugee Outreach Teachers were seen as having a positive impact on the numbers out of school because they were able to: find children, carry out preparation work before they were admitted to school, work with the school so there are systems in place to support the pupils, address whole school issues such as racism, and provide support for individual pupils when they are first admitted into school. The Head of Service noted that they had been able to make provision for asylum seekers that was not there before, for example, funding the alternative curriculum in college. The input of the specialist educational psychologist who had lead responsibility for work with vulnerable children was also seen to have enhanced the quality of the assessments made for unaccompanied minors, as well as focused on issues of work with looked after children generally. In addition, this work '*meant the whole of the psychology service has moved forward in terms of their capacity to meet the needs of those individuals and to support schools to meet their needs*' (Head of Service). The Refugee Outreach Teacher felt that the VCG had provided the service with opportunities to fund additional projects and work, e.g. the designated teacher project.

However, it was noted by the Head of Service that the mobility of asylum seeker pupils, '*sometimes we will only have them for about six to eight weeks*', meant that it was difficult for the LEA to evaluate the long-term impact of the grant.

Effective practice in supporting this group
The outreach teachers were seen as successful in building capacity and working directly with young people in schools. Furthermore, schools saw them as '*good value for money ... and having impact (on individual children and reducing what is a perceived burden on the school)*' (Head of Service). In addition, the refugee outreach teacher noted that the ethos and atmosphere of the school and its willingness to support pupils and their parents was the key to effective practice. Furthermore, raising whole school awareness of the cultures within school was seen as raising the esteem of asylum seeker pupils and making other pupils aware that other countries have values and the need to respect those values: '*The evidence is, if you do more initiatives with the whole school about refugees and awareness, the self-esteem of those pupils will be raised because their culture's given some status*' (Refugee Outreach Teacher).

The availability of alternative educational provision for the Year 11 unaccompanied

asylum seekers was also seen as effective because '*for some young people school isn't the appropriate placement so if you send them to school you are setting them up to fail*' (Head of Service). The initial work and assessments with unaccompanied minors when they first arrived in the LEA was seen as effective. The LEA collected and monitored a variety of data in this area, including the time taken for an assessment to be carried out, what their needs are and what happens when they go into school.

The role of the specialist senior educational psychologist was viewed as effective because not only was she addressing issues faced by unaccompanied minors she was taking a much wider remit and impacting on practice for looked after children generally.

Future developments
The Refugee Outreach Teacher noted that schools frequently asked the team to provide specialist input into assemblies, INSET, and in the development of resources. An area for development was to try and get some of the agencies working with refugees and asylum seekers such as United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Refugee Council to provide some input into this work in schools. Refugee outreach teachers were also hoping to become involved in more partnership teaching and to provide input into the citizenship curriculum in schools (as refugees were part of the syllabus): '*I think we could have major input there*' (Refugee Outreach Teacher).

VIGNETTE 2

Vulnerable group:	Gypsy/Travellers
Numbers:	600 (age five to 16)
Amount of grant allocated:	36 per cent of total grant
Interviewee(s):	Head of Service, Secondary Support Teacher, Family Liaison Officer, Secondary Headteacher

Strategies funded by the VCG

Primary and secondary school support teachers who work with schools to advise on providing an inclusive curriculum and to build capacity in schools to help them raise the achievement of Gypsy/Traveller children. This includes a **designated teacher project** focused on the leadership team of schools (nine designated teachers are being trained and supported to raise specialist skills and knowledge of Traveller education in mainstream schools). Support teachers also work within the LEA to develop more inclusive structures to raise the achievement of Gypsy/Traveller children.

Specialist EWOs who focus on promoting and enforcing the attendance of Gypsy/Traveller children

Family liaison officers (FLOs), these posts have been in existence since September 2003, and focus on improving access to education for Gypsy/Traveller children, reducing the numbers of children out of school and improving primary/secondary transition. FLOs also focus on supporting induction to school and sustaining attendance of children. In particular they are targeting primary/secondary transfer and working with children and families in Years 5 and 6 to aid transition, support them through the transition process and into Years 7 and 8. The posts came about as the LEA had increased attendance '*quite dramatically*' (Head of Service) in primary but primary/secondary transfer and attendance at secondary remained an issue. The FLOs' '*prime focus is to liaise with families and schools and facilitate the liaison rather than do it for schools*' (Head of Service) and to target pupils and families who are at risk of dropping out.

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development
None stated.

Targets, tracking and monitoring
There were local targets and objectives linked to attendance and reduction of children out of school. Non-identification of pupils, particularly at the secondary level, was noted as an issue, which inevitably impacted on monitoring the achievement and targeting support for pupils.

The LEA had commissioned some research to evaluate how VCG-funded interventions had impacted on access to education for children who lived on unauthorised encampments, to look at how effective the grant had been in targeting specific groups. At the time of interview the LEA was also conducting research on primary/secondary transfer of Gypsy/Traveller and refugee children, including an investigation of the issues surrounding those pupils who did not secure a place at secondary school.

Impact of the VCG on support for this group

In relation to the creation of the post of FLO, this was seen as an area where the VCG had had an impact because '*when we were looking at VCG objectives we saw this as an area for development*' (Head of Service). This resulted in changing the focus of existing support workers (whose work was primarily focused in schools) to that of *family liaison* officer. As a result of this change in focus and the creation of the post of FLO, schools said that relationships with pupils and parents had improved and that issues were being addressed at an earlier stage. The FLO also noted that since she had been working with families more, '*things have moved on a lot better, in terms of confidence with the children and the families and the schools*'. The Head of Service felt that the LEA now needed to look at rates of attendance to see if there had been an improvement and also to look at impact on educational outcomes in the longer-term.

Although the primary and secondary support teachers were in existence prior to the VCG, the Head of Service felt that there were now '*stronger links between their work and the strategy for minority ethnic achievement*' as result, not of VCG, but of the 'Aiming Higher Strategy' which impacted on their work in schools (in relation to the race equality action plan and the strategy for celebrating the achievement of minority ethnic pupils), as a result '*those teachers, but also the schools are rethinking the needs of Gypsy/Traveller pupils*'. Nevertheless, the grant was seen as having established overarching links between groups particularly in relation to Gypsy/Travellers and refugees and these links were seen to have had a positive contribution towards the implementation of the race equality strategy within the LEA. The LEA had also used VCG funding to provide 'holistic' early years provision across a number of the groups, namely Gypsy/Travellers, refugee and asylum seekers, and looked after children, as all were identified as having difficulty accessing early years provision.

Effective practice in supporting this group

The Head of Service felt that the work the Family Liaison Officers were doing supporting primary/secondary transition and improving attendance was particularly effective. The work of the Primary and Secondary School Support Teachers on building capacity within schools to meet the needs of pupils was also seen as effective, as there was a concern that LEA provision '*did not take responsibility away from the school*' (Head of Service).

The need for pupils to have a good support network in school and the importance of having a link person in school: '*not just rely on us*' (Family Liaison Officer). The school also felt that it was important that pupils had someone they could talk to who was from outside the school. The TES was seen as providing a powerful 'communicative bridge' between pupils, families and schools. Their role in helping schools develop trusting relationships with parents was highlighted: '*You've really got to get the confidence of parents. The fact that we know the parents is a real advantage because if the parents respect what we're saying that can have a big impact*' (Family Liaison Officer).

Interviewees highlighted the need for schools to have a flexible approach to managing behaviour and to develop different ways of dealing with behavioural incidents, for Gypsy/Traveller pupils, if attendance was an issue, i.e. exploring alternatives to exclusion.

The role of FLOs and Support Teachers in identifying pupils was also seen as key to providing effective support. Interviewees had been involved in an ethnic monitoring exercise within one of the secondary schools in the LEA. The Secondary Support Teacher felt that projects like this were the '*one thing that would result in the most positive change*'. This project had not only resulted in better identification of pupils, but had also raised other issues, for example, in relation to pupils' and teachers' use of language which the school had not previously been aware of. Awareness-raising, throughout the school, from management down, was seen as the '*biggest single thing*' to result in positive change: '*If we can go in and get it right from the top, you are affecting positive change for all students not just on an individual basis*' (Secondary Support Teacher).

Future developments
The Head of Service felt that there was a need to disseminate good practice surrounding schools' admission of pupils living on unauthorised sites and to look at how the LEA prepared families and children so they know '*what to expect when they go into school and also know the expectations that will be placed on them*' (Head of Service).

VIGNETTE 3

Vulnerable group:	Young offenders
Numbers:	6,500 young people referred to the Youth Offending Service per year
Amount of grant allocated:	10 per cent of total grant
Interviewee(s):	Education Liaison Officer, Youth Offending Team

Strategies funded by the VCG

The VCG funds teachers who work as part of a multi-agency team within the County Council's Youth Offending Service. They focus on:

Facilitating access to full-time education
The reintegration of young offenders into mainstream environments
Promoting a more holistic approach to meeting the needs of this group
Supporting schools in implementing strategies to engage young people during reintegration.

Teachers work with schools at an individual pupil case level but also at a strategic level focusing on preventative work. Their role focuses on:

Assessment: As a team they are required to produce reports to local courts based on national standards. These national standards suggest that a pre-sentence report incorporates education information about attendance, behaviour and performance

Access: '*Accessing appropriate, high quality provision for the young people*' They are frequently working with unplaced children, so cases can be '*highly complex and involve working with different officers at different levels*'

Support: Working to maintain the young person in their educational placements and also supporting the institutions/organisations: '*They need as much support as the young person, it's a constant public relations effort to ensure that the education provider feels secure*'. They also support the families and advise parents and provide feedback to the YOT regarding the service's responsibility for meeting young people's needs.

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development

No new partnerships or policies had been developed specifically as a result of the introduction of the VCG. However, the education liaison officer's post was clearly routed in partnership working being part of a multi-agency team: '*It has to be that way so that I can effectively deliver the service that education want me to do to the YOT*'. His role meant that he needed to have a clear understanding of both education and youth justice issues and the multi-agency component of the role was '*one of the most crucial parts of my job*'.

The officer sits on a number of forums, including an inclusion forum, where practitioners come together to try and resolve issues for vulnerable young people: '*Certainly in those forums there is a greater understanding that children who are marginalised need to be addressed quickly and appropriately*'. This approach was seen to be in contrast to previous work, which had primarily focused on making schools and LEA staff more aware of their obligations regarding young offenders and

the importance of addressing their needs. He felt that now there was a clearer understanding within the local authority that those young people who are looked after, young offenders, or permanently excluded have to be '*dealt with immediately*'.

In relation to new partnerships that were being developed, the officer noted that the most recent partnership was the YOT link with Connexions and that a Connexions PA would shortly be joining the team. The work with Connexions was viewed as '*another multi-agency interface*'. The interviewee also noted that when working with young offenders there was a need to focus on 'exit strategies' particularly as the involvement of the YOT was finite. There is a need for '*meaningful exit strategies so that they're supported in the community in case there's a chance they become NEET* [not in employment, education or training] *or are pulled back into offending*'.

Targets, tracking and monitoring
It was noted that the Youth Justice Board sets and monitors targets for this group. The main educational target is that by 2006, 90 per cent of young people known to the youth justice system are in full-time education, training or employment. The education officer noted that he was working to policies and educational imperatives of both education and the Youth Justice Service. It was noted that the Youth Justice Board (YJB), also have national standards which include educational elements, for example, relating to the number of young people in full-time educational provision within a certain period of time, which was seen to 'marry' with DfES targets. Thus, the education officer working within the YOT was seen to be contributing to meeting a range of targets.

The interviewee observed that '*any young person who comes into our system, I strive to achieve education provision as quickly and appropriately as possible*' and that over 95 per cent of young people were appropriately placed. It was felt that the YJB target had been met and exceeded because of a growth in alternative educational provision within the LEA for key stage 4 pupils. However, the interviewee acknowledged that, within other areas of the LEA, due to large numbers of looked after children and '*complex cases*', achieving this target was '*more challenging*'.

Impact of the VCG on support for this group
It was felt that the VCG, along with other initiatives, was seen to have had an impact on support for young offenders and that in the last one to two years there had been:

> *Increasing pressures and realisations that children who are out of school need to have provision, and quickly and appropriately. That* [young] *people who are not attending school have high priority and looked after children and young offenders have priority.*

In terms of the impact that the VCG-funded role had on supporting young offenders, it was felt that because education was a protective factor, in terms of reducing offending, then '*if a young person has appropriate, timely, quality education then that component's been satisfied*' so by improving engagement in education it was felt that, indirectly, offending was also being reduced.

Effective practice in supporting this group
This was seen to focus on the education liaison officers' work with schools and

ensuring that reintegration was successful '*particularly when young people are leaving custodial sentences and returning to school – working with the school and the young person to ensure that that is successful*' (Head of Service). In addition, and where appropriate, it was also seen to lie in accessing appropriate alternative education for young people, e.g. in college.

The education officer felt that effective practice in supporting young offenders lay in reducing the time that young people were out of education: '*If one can reduce the time period from referral to placement to as short a possible period then that's the most effective thing*'. There was also a need to be able to build relationships quickly with the young person and engage and retain them in suitable educational provision: '*You can find the best education provision in the world but if they don't engage it means nothing – you've got to be able to maintain them in that placement because if you don't do that all the work that's been done to get them there is wasted*'. Frequently, there was also a need to address non-educational issues and to obtain the right balance between welfare and justice when working with this client group:

> *We have a statutory responsibility to challenge the offending behaviour but a lot of the children we work with are children in need in the widest sense and it's important to address a number of issues in their lives to help them to develop to meet our own specific targets about offending.*

The multi-agency nature of the team the education liaison officer worked in was felt to enhance the effectiveness of the work. In addition, the liaison officer was seen as an educational resource within the YOT and also as a conduit between the education service and the other agencies represented in the YOT. Furthermore, the liaison officer was also able to prioritise the needs of young offenders within educational contexts.

Future developments
It was felt that there was a need to focus on the professional development of teachers and to work with schools to address the needs of children out of school to help them meet the needs of young offenders. One possible area for development highlighted by the education liaison officer was exploring the introduction of 'restorative justice' in schools, as this was seen as integral to confronting and challenging offending behaviour. However, it was acknowledged that this was a relatively new concept in the LEA and that it would require a change in many schools' attitudes towards working with young offenders, as well as a need to equip staff with the skills to implement such an approach.

Case study 3

OVERVIEW
Type of LEA: Unitary **Interviewee**: Head of Learning Support/Principal Educational Psychologist

Location of responsibility for the VCG

Responsibility for the VCG sits with the Head of Learning Support. There has been close collaboration on the coordination and implementation of the VCG between this officer, the Head of Services for Children and Young People and the Assistant Director. *'It made sense for it to sit within our branch, as a grant, and it made sense for it to sit with me because I am responsible for a significant number of areas'*.

The LEA's strategic approach to supporting vulnerable children

When the LEA became a unitary authority six years ago, they created an SEN strategy and a behaviour support plan, both of those documents highlighted the LEA's broader strategy in relation to vulnerable children. More recently, when they were updating these documents the LEA carried out an audit and generated a new strategy to take them forward. Connected with this, they have a behaviour support forum bringing the key players together to discuss their agendas and to drive plans forward.

The Head of Learning Support felt that when the VCG was introduced to the LEA they became more focused in particular areas, over and above those articulated in the behaviour support plan. The lead officer and his two colleagues (Assistant Director and Head of Services for Children and Young People) undertook an audit exercise and approached people in different services, asking them to identify levels and types of need and also to propose projects or outlets through which the VCG funding could be channelled to address them. They then made strategic decisions and allocations of the VCG on the basis of the information gathered.

Implementation of the VCG

VCG funding was allocated to six of the eight identified vulnerable groups including: looked after children, children with medical needs, teenage parents, school refusers, Gypsy/Traveller pupils and asylum seekers. The lead officer notes that: *'What we've done with this particular grant is regard it as additional. It is facilitating ideas that were there already and through the audit new things have come to light'*.

The LEA has a core funded service for **looked after children**, which is well established and can provide for the young peoples basic needs; so the VCG has been used to fund additional support. The audit identified a need to support looked after children who are placed in schools outside of the authority, thus the grant was used to fund Learning Support Assistants to aid the transition of these children into school. The VCG was also used to fund a Study Support Worker to support looked after children within the authority and a part-time Educational Psychologist. The VCG was used to provide additional funding to support **pupils with medical needs**. The hospital school allocated a proportion of funding to purchase laptops and associated

equipment to support the education of children in isolation and further VCG funding increased the level of reintegration support as additional monies were used to pay for supply cover when hospital school teachers were supporting a child back into mainstream school. The LEA allocated VCG funding to enhance the range and amount of provision available to **teenage parents**. Funding paid for access to provision from the Alternative Education Service, which offered support for teenage parents on a range of alternative programmes that lead to accreditation. The Alternative Education Service was able to offer teenage parents places in a virtual school which offered flexible learning opportunities in core subject areas through on-line website access. The Alternative Education Service also provided a coordinating tutor for the virtual school, to assist and encourage pregnant schoolgirls/teenage parents, as well as other vulnerable groups to access education. Similar provision was allocated to **school refusers** through the VCG, where funding was used to enhance the range and amount of alternative provision the LEA purchased. With regards to **asylum seekers**, the LEA allocated a proportion of the VCG to the Equalities Team who provided guidance and support to schools. A Refugee Support Worker and Community Assistants worked with parents to facilitate access to appropriate schooling for their children. Staff also provided initial bilingual assessments and induction support. The VCG was also used to provide alternative education in local FE colleges to pupils arriving in key stage 4. In respect of support for **Gypsy/Traveller pupils**, the VCG was used to contribute to the TES (in full), which is jointly-funded by six unitary authorities. The TES aims to secure improved access to education for Gypsy/Traveller pupils, to support attendance, integration or reintegration into school and to provide additional educational support to enable this group of pupils to reach their potential. Funding contributed to the salary costs of a Headteacher a Senior Advisory Teacher, five Advisory Teachers and one Traveller EWO. VCG funding was also allocated to a number of existing LEA projects, focusing on support for **children in nurseries**, **attendance and participation**, and **mental health**.

Of those groups not receiving VCG funding, it was reported that **young offenders** were currently receiving support from the Alternative Education Service who offer a range of alternative programmes however the LEA were working on a '*plan of action*' relating to future VCG funded provision for these young people. In addition, the VCG was not used to provide support for **young carers,** although information on their needs was gathered in the audit, which will determine the LEAs future response to this group.

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development
The LEA's last inspection highlighted that they tended to '*work in silos*', and a needed to focus on joined-up work to increase impact. The lead officer noted: '*We're now seeing that through* [more joined up working], *responding to the feedback we got from the inspection and the grant is facilitating and encouraging it*'.

The interviewee felt that the VCG had been helpful in driving forward multi-agency work at a strategic level, which then fed through to partnership work at operational level: '*It's brought our branches together within our directorate, and it's also brought the directorates together to some extent, particularly social care and education and health*'.

The lead officer also felt that the VCG had been instrumental in bringing together the school improvement team and children and young people's services, particularly over unaccompanied asylum seekers, although he indicated that multi-agency work, focusing on particular groups, seems to be easier within a small unitary authority than a big shire county.

Future developments
The lead officer recognised that, in the case of young carers, the VCG guidance made the LEA focus on future development for a group that they might have otherwise seen '*as something that sat more within the social care domain and with the voluntary services*'. The LEA felt that young carers were a group that they '*didn't have a handle on*' and they are currently amalgamating the information gathered in the audit of need to determine future VCG funding allocations.

The officer noted that they wanted to increase the strategic involvement of the TES within the LEA and the head of the TES had been invited to attend LEA strategic meetings to look at how their work '*complements and reinforces the support that's being put in by other services*'.

VIGNETTE 1

Vulnerable group:	Looked after children
Numbers:	184
Amount of grant allocated:	16 per cent of total grant
Interviewee(s):	Advisory Headteacher (Looked After Children's Education Service), Study Support Worker and Head of Learning Support

Strategies funded by the VCG

As the LEA had a core-funded looked after children's service, the VCG was being used to '*refine and develop the things that are currently being delivered through the core*' (Head of Learning Support). To this end, the LEA had identified a need to support children who are the responsibility of the LEA but who were being placed in schools out of authority: '*We're keen to make sure that they get equality of opportunity compared with their peers who are here within the authority ... specifically in connection with raising their educational achievement*' (Head of Learning Support).

In order to address the specific challenge of looked after children being placed out of the LEA, a proportion of the VCG had been used to provide dowry funding to schools in order to help them settle in to their new educational placement. The VCG had also been used to fund a Study Support Worker to provide '*after school study*' and in-school support for key stage 3 and key stage 4 pupils, placed within the authority, in preparation for examinations.

The VCG was also used to fund provision of a part-time educational psychologist to '*promote the mental health of looked after children*'. The educational psychologist worked with individual teachers, provided staff training, solution-focused work with carers and children, group supervision sessions with social workers, and workshops on a range of issues such as anger, withdrawal, anxiety and self-esteem.

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development

The Advisory Headteacher felt the VCG had affected policy development as it had resulted in the creation of a new service level agreement (SLA) with schools in relation to the dowry funding allocated to schools to support looked after children in out-of-borough placements. The SLA required schools to complete an audit and provide information on how the grant was used and the outcomes. The interviewee also felt that the VCG had helped create new partnerships, particularly with the Education Psychology Service (due to the new post). The Head of Learning Support felt that the VCG was driving forward multi-agency work regarding looked after children, in particular he noted that '*strategically, it's pulling things together*'.

Targets, tracking and monitoring

The overall aim of the looked after children's service is to raise the attainment of children in public care. The specific targets include:

Increasing the number of looked after children achieving level 4 in key stage 2 SATs to at least 60 per cent

All looked after children who are eligible for GCSEs to be entered for at least one exam

Increase the numbers of looked after children taking GCSEs by ten per cent

Increase by a minimum of five per cent those looked after children gaining five or more A*–C grades at GCSE.

In order to monitor the progress towards meeting these targets, the service receives feedback from schools on pupils' performance. Following this, the service has then been able to target resources, using the VCG, to raise attainment, (i.e. through the LSA). All the support staff carry out detailed planning of their work on a termly basis.

The looked after children service also has a target to reduce the number of children in public care placed more than twenty miles from the LEA. In addition, the service works to ensure appropriate educational placement for unaccompanied asylum seekers within 20 days.

Impact of the VCG on support for this group

The VCG enabled new posts to be created within the team increasing the support available for looked after children, for example, through the appointment of a Study Support Worker. The Advisory Headteacher felt they had '*been able to do more*'. She also felt that the VCG had resulted in the team being able to provide more coherent support for the group, she noted that:

It's tied it all together because it's enabled us to have a Support Worker that focuses on SATs, GCSEs and additional homework. It's funded an educational psychologist whose work is specifically on the emotional, mental health of our looked after children.

The availability of funding for the educational psychologist was felt not only to have facilitated multi-agency working and new partnerships, but also provided additional psychological assistance for young people and their carers that had not been previously provided by the team. The dowry funding given to schools outside of the LEA was also felt to have had as positive impact:

I think schools have been very appreciative of that and they have taken the children on board although they might have thought 'oh this is a difficult child' but they've got a sum of money to go along with it to support (Advisory Headteacher).

The one-to-one support for looked after children was also felt to have had a significant impact on individual pupils, especially those in residential homes as it provided focused time to study.

I go and support with homework, it can be a bit chaotic in their placement or the children's home so I can go in and it's a nice quiet time for us to sit and do homework so it's focusing them on that (Study Support Worker).

The Study Support Worker felt that VCG funding had most impact in supporting looked after children during assessments and it meant that she was able to provide them with study support prior to the assessment but was also able to provide specific

to them during the assessments.

> *I can actually go in and offer them specific support for their SATs. They can have copies of past papers that I can sit and do with them. I can sit and read their papers to them. I can arrange for them to have more time if they need it, just generally support them through it. It's generally a stressful time for them when they sit their SATs* (Study Support Worker).

Effective practice in supporting this group

The key strategy for effective practice when working with looked after children was felt to be the '*whole-team approach to support*' and that '*all the different parts of the team work together*'. Furthermore, that support was needed to be tailored to the individual: '*We meet the individual needs we don't look at 'it's a looked after child', each one is individual and the specific support is targeted to their individual need*' (Advisory Headteacher).

Future developments

The Advisory Headteacher felt future developments for the service would be related to post-16 support. She felt that that the work of the looked after children's team largely focused '*on getting young people through their GCSEs*' but there was no one person focusing on further educational and vocational training posts and that a post-16 Study Support Worker would be particularly useful.

VIGNETTE 2

Vulnerable group:	Medical needs
Numbers:	Maximum of 12 at any one time
Amount of grant allocated:	5 per cent of total grant
Interviewee(s):	Hospital School Teachers and Head of Learning Support

Strategies funded by the VCG

Teachers working within the LEA's hospital school identified that, for some children in hospital, access to education was limited due to their particular medical needs. They specifically identified children who were in isolation wards and allocated a proportion of VCG funding to purchase laptops and associated equipment to support their education. The Head of Learning Support noted:

> *It's being used for those that are being isolated within the hospital. They are in isolation wards because of the nature of their medical difficulties, and it's been a way in which the staff can engage with them and support them in that isolated environment.*

The remainder of VCG funding allocated to support children with medical needs was used to 'buy in' sessional Learning Support Assistants to relieve teaching staff whilst they were supporting the reintegration of pupils who were returning to mainstream school.

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development

There had been no new partnerships or policies developed as a result of the VCG. However, interviewees noted that the grant had enabled continued partnership working with schools, which was said to be essential to the reintegration process.

Targets, tracking and monitoring

The overall aim of the Service is to supply and support the education of those unable to attend school because of their medical needs. Those working in the hospital school aim to ensure that:

Pupils are accessing a full, broad and balanced curriculum (where able)
Pupils who are discharged from hospital are reintegrated into school as soon as possible.

In addition to this, hospital teachers set individual targets in relation to attainment. Pupils' progress is gauged against targets set out in individual education plans and is monitored by regular written reports. The hospital teachers noted that they have to be guided by the medical staff on suitable expectations for each individual pupil.

Impact of the VCG on support for this group

The Head of Learning Support noted that VCG funding allocated to pupils with medical needs was relatively '*small scale*' in relation to the total grant but that it had had considerable impacts for those involved.

Laptops purchased with VCG funding were felt to have had a significant impact on the '*continuity of provision*' for pupils in isolation, such that programmes of work could be saved and then accessed at a later time as pupils' health improved. In addition, computer-aided learning had increased the hours of educational engagement than would be available through one to one tuition. The additional funding also meant that extra computer software could be purchased for those pupils in isolation where resources must be kept sterile to prevent infection. The interviewee also highlighted how relatively small levels of funding had significant impacts on the lives of individual young people. For example, in the case of one terminally ill pupil, the provision of a laptop was felt to provide a '*lifeline*' in the final stages of her life. The Hospital School Teacher noted that:

> *Even though her body systems were shutting down her mind was still active and although in isolation having the laptop enabled her to access the outside world and stay stimulated mentally, the family said felt it was her lifeline.*

The '*buying in*' of sessional support from Learning Support Assistants who worked in the hospital school freeing up core staff to provide reintegration support was felt to have had a major impact on the percentage of pupils reintegrated into mainstream schools and the success of those placements.

Effective practice in supporting this group
The hospital teachers felt that having a '*flexible approach*' was key to effective practice for pupils with medical needs '*because each child is different*'. Another aspect of effective practice highlighted was the use of specialist modified equipment to accommodate physical restrictions such as lightweight monitors with long leads for young people in traction. Another area noted in the discussion of effective practice was partnerships with schools. The hospital teachers felt that close liaison with the school was essential for successful reintegration and that working with the school from the beginning to ensure a programme of work related to the curriculum was seen to allow young people to '*slot straight back in*' to school.

Future developments
The hospital school teachers felt that a useful development would be to have internet access on the hospital wards. This would enable teachers to link up with pupils via email, which would help with communication and continuity of studies. They also felt that provision could be enhanced by the inclusion of more educational trips.

VIGNETTE 3

Vulnerable group:	School refusers
Numbers:	Unknown
Amount of grant allocated:	21 per cent of total grant
Interviewee(s):	Principal Education Welfare Officer and Head of Learning Support

Strategies funded by the VCG

The VCG was used to support the work of the EWS by part-funding additional EWO posts and Education Welfare Assistants (EWAs) posts. The aim of their work was to enable school refusers to gain appropriate support and guidance to return to full-time schooling/alternative provision on a regular basis. The work of the service includes:

Individual support: The EWS has a system whereby every school refuser and his or her carer has access to support from an individual EWS team member. This worker will actively seek to engage with the pupil with a view to supporting reintegration back to their educational establishment or aid the transition to alternative provision.

School refusers' group work: engaging small groups of pupils who are sharing similar experiences, using mutual support and group challenges to build confidence and share positive progress made.

Support programmes for parents/carers: The EWS in conjunction with the Behaviour Support Service and Youth Offending team, have parenting support programmes available. The programmes endeavour to assist carers in meeting their responsibility to ensure their children's regular attendance at school.

The EWS also work to ensure access to appropriate alternative curriculum provision and the VCG has been used to pay for online alternative provision for two pupils. One pupil who has been out of school for three years is accessing the provision at the PRU, and another pupil, who is refusing school due to bullying, is accessing the package in the school's learning support unit.

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development

New policies had been developed for school phobics attending provision within the hospital school. The PEWO felt this led to a more '*streamlined approach*' to referrals and admissions:

It's a lot clearer so we've got a much better route to referral. So we know who the people are in the LEA who are going to respond to a referral, what advice is given out how we access the [name of provision]. *Rather than just people ringing up and throwing children at the* [name of provision].

The VCG was also credited with having improved the quality of established partnerships, primarily because it allowed the team more time to work together.

Targets, tracking and monitoring

Whilst no specific targets for attainment had been set across the whole authority, targets were set at an individual level. School refusers are discussed by the local 'Pupils Educationally at Risk Panel'. At this panel, decisions are made as to the suitability of particular pupils for alternative programmes. The pupil will also be allocated a link worker/advocate, who will be responsible for the coordination and setting up of their support programme and liaison with parents/carers and relevant agencies. Attendance targets are also set at an individual level:

> *In terms of school refusers, what we've started to do in* [name of LEA] *is look at whole-school attendance targets. We're breaking it down to look at all those children below a certain percentage level, building on that, looking at an expected attendance target. A school refuser would be on the list of having a lower percentage mark than the agreed amount so therefore, because of that, we would then give them an internal target to reach over a six-week period where they would be closely monitored, and people like the education welfare service would be going out and working with that child. For the school refusers that we have on our books we would have an attendance target* (PEWO).

The EWS had also introduced electronic monitoring, increased the frequency of truancy sweeps and appointed EWAs who carry out first day response to non-attendance. In these cases, the school alerts the EWA and they carry out a home visit on the first day.

Impact of the VCG on support for this group

The main impact of the VCG is that it was felt to have enabled the EWS to fund additional members of staff, increasing service capacity and improving the speed of reintegration: '*Having that additional person funded through the VCG is such a major significant help for this team which obviously enables those young people who are school refusers to get back into school quick*' (PEWO).

This was perceived to have had a knock-on effect on the amount of time that the existing education welfare staff could devote to spending directly with the young people. It was felt that this then led to staff being better able to meet the educational needs of school refusers: '*It's freed them up significantly for when that child needs the intensive input, they've been able to do that*' (PEWO).

The Head of Learning Support felt that the VCG has enabled the EWS to '*work in a more differentiated way*' as officers were ascribed to particular areas: one was linked to the looked after children education service and another was linked to alternative education and as a result, they were seen to be '*developing more specialist roles within the service*'. He also felt that the service is seeing a positive impact, particularly at secondary level, in terms of improved attendance. With regards to the alternative online educational provision for school refusers, the Head of Learning Support noted that it was '*getting good results*' and that its flexibility meant they could meet individual needs.

Effective practice in supporting this group

The Head of Learning Support noted that the most effective method for working with school refusers and ensuring they continued to access education was ensuring that

agencies and services working with the young people responded quickly to their anxiety. It was also emphasised that support for school refusers has to be an ongoing process and has to be maintained, particularly for those young people who are reintegrated back to school. The schools' response is quite crucial in maintaining their reintegration:

I think the most challenging are those that return to school. If they've been out for a long time we still get the quips from the teacher saying 'Oh nice of you to join us' or 'Oh good afternoon', which doesn't help, because that one sentence can affect a hard week's work. So, in terms of the next stage, it's really trying to talk to schools about approaches to school refusers because it matters (PEWO).

Future developments
Future developments centred on further development work with schools and sharing good practice across the region.

Some schools we're currently working with have really successful reintegration policies. It's about taking that good practice and the partnership working between us and the schools and showing that to schools that are not so on board (PEWO).

Case study 4

OVERVIEW

Type of LEA:	County
Interviewee:	Head of Access and Inclusion

Location of responsibility for the VCG

The Head of Access and Inclusion is the lead officer for social inclusion and SEN and has the main responsibility for the grant.

The LEA's strategic approach to supporting vulnerable children

Five years ago, the LEA took a 'fresh approach' to improving behaviour and attendance and reducing exclusion and truancy. As part of this, the LEA established a Social Inclusion Strategic Partnership. This partnership is used as a vehicle for establishing, implementing and reviewing strategies for social inclusion in education. The partnership is chaired by the LEA's Head of Access and Inclusion who has responsibility for the VCG and includes representation from primary, secondary and special schools, LEA services and other agencies including health, social services, the Youth Offending Service, Connexions and the police. Together, those involved in the partnership identified 17 new areas of development relating to vulnerable children. The partnership ensures that there is constant monitoring of initiatives, it works to identify gaps in provision and possible solutions:

> *What we do fits together like a jigsaw and because everybody was involved in the solutions everybody is committed to make them work. Now if anybody turns up at any point in time and says to me: 'If we gave you some money, what would you spend it on?' I would know exactly what I would spend it on and furthermore that everybody was signed up to it* (Head of Access and Inclusion).

As the LEA's social inclusion strategy is driven through the social inclusion partnership, the Head of Access and Inclusion felt that '*the strategy drives the funding*' (rather than vice versa). She went on to note that: '*It's about making the funding fit the agreed high level strategy, it's not about allocating a fund at operational level and saying 'what can you make of that?'*.

Implementation of the VCG

Following the introduction of the VCG, the Head of Access and Inclusion felt that the LEA's overall funding had stayed the same and that funding was replacing other funding streams:

> *The VCG replaced other grants which disappeared and the amount of extra money was only* [related to] *inflation in staff salaries. We aren't spending VCG on anything different than we were before VCG through the Social Inclusion Standards Fund and the Traveller grant.*

However, the interviewee did go on to suggest that a key benefit of the grant was that it had enabled the LEA to pilot work within the context of their strategy. Furthermore, where pilot projects had been successful in the past, the LEA had received permanent

funding from the local authority to continue projects in the long term.

VCG funding was allocated to five of the eight identified vulnerable groups including: looked after children, children with medical needs, teenage parents, school refusers and Gypsy/Traveller pupils.

The VCG was used to facilitate the LEA's educational support for **looked after children**. Staff funded through VCG worked with looked after children to raise attainment through in-class and out-of-school study support. They also provided transition support, counselling support, foster carer support and training and professional development for schools, services, agencies and carers. VCG funding had been used to enhance the levels of provision for **pupils with medical needs** by increasing the number of hours of home teaching from five to seven hours per week for particular pupils, e.g. those at key stage 4. The grant was also used to maintain funding for two advisory and support teachers who managed and monitored provision for pupils with medical needs. To address the attendance, attainment and reintegration of **teenage parents** the VCG was used to maintain funding for an Advisory/Reintegration Officer who provided a single point of contact for information and advice for young people, schools, parents and other agencies. The grant was also used to continue funding childcare for teenage parents. The VCG contributed towards funding a key stage 4 group for **school refusers**. The group, targeted at anxious school refusers, provided access to the curriculum and a range of multi-agency support. The VCG enabled the LEA to maintain support for **Gypsy/Traveller pupils** by funding the existing TES.

Of those groups not receiving VCG funding, it was reported that **young offenders** were in receipt of funding from the Youth Engagement Service and, although VCG funding would not be used for this group specifically, the interviewee noted that they would benefit indirectly from the grant if they were experiencing other difficulties, such as attendance problems or behavioural difficulties. Similarly, although the LEA had not identified an amount of VCG funding for **young carers**, the lead officer noted that they '*support the difficulty not the group*' and those young carers facing problems would benefit from the VCG indirectly. The LEA have recently identified their first five **asylum seekers** and, as a result, are currently investigating strategies for support and identifying possible additions to the TES in relation to this.

VCG funding was also allocated to provide support for a number of other vulnerable groups including:

Pupils with poor social and emotional competence: the VCG was part-funding a social skills programme in primary schools

Pupils disengaged or at risk of disengagement from learning at key stage 4: the VCG was contributing to the cost of alternative education programmes

VCG funding was also allocated to the LEA's **anti-bullying initiative** that provided support to schools on the development of anti-bullying policies and guidelines and the introduction of buddy schemes and mediation programmes

A **behaviour on school transport initiative**, where funding was used to install CCTV on school buses and to support policy development in relation to improving behaviour on school transport

In addition, a proportion of the VCG funding was allocated to the LEA to pay for

events to review progress and share practice.

It was noted that all of these initiatives were originally funded from Standards Fund and continue to be funded through the VCG.

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development

As the VCG was used to maintain initiatives that were already in place under the LEA's social inclusion strategic partnership, the Head of Access and Inclusion felt that all of the initiatives that were operating within social inclusion had 'sound' policies, procedures, and protocols in place prior to the implementation of the VCG. However, she noted that policies and procedures were continually reviewed and updated, and that the VCG would effectively contribute to their development: '*This grant has helped us sustain and develop existing effective partnerships at both strategic and operational management level*'.

Future developments

As services were working within the LEA's social inclusion strategy, the Head of Access and Inclusion noted that: '*We know exactly where we are now and what we want to do next, and we know what we're proposing to do about it as well*'.

The LEA had identified a rise in exclusions in specific year groups, e.g. in Year 10. Thus, future developments will focus on addressing this. Future developments also related to the extension of current primary initiatives, such as the work supporting pupils with poor social and emotional competence. The coordinator from the Home and Hospital Support Service felt a key worker would be beneficial in supporting future work in this area: '*Vulnerable children are likely to have the involvement of a number of agencies, all sorts of people contact schools, and they do not know who to go to, so a key worker would help that*'.

VIGNETTE 1

Vulnerable group:	Medical needs
Numbers:	109
Amount of grant allocated:	17 per cent of the total grant
Interviewee(s):	Home and Hospital Support Service Coordinator and Advisory/Support Teacher.

Strategies funded by the VCG

The VCG was being deployed to expand the work of the LEA's Home and Hospital Support Service, which provides teaching for pupils who are medically unfit to attend school. The grant was used to fund two advisory/support teachers whose role it was to assist the LEA in fulfilling the statutory duty to provide 'Education Otherwise'. The advisory/support teachers provided information, advice and consultancy services to children/young people, schools, parents/carers and other agencies regarding pupils who are on the roll of a school but who are temporarily unable to attend because of physical or mental health needs. They ensure appropriate educational provision, either at home, or in hospital, monitor the provision and support pupils' reintegration into school. They also support home teachers and generally ensure there is quality provision. VCG funding had also been used to enhance levels of teaching for some home-educated pupils with medical needs and, as a result, the minimum number of hours teaching had been increased from five to seven per week.

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development

It was felt that the VCG had not impacted on policy development, instead the coordinator felt that the main impact of the VCG was with regard to partnership working: '*securing effective partnerships already in place*'. She felt that: '*The pupil is always at the centre of it but our main aim is not to work in isolation but to include everybody, including parents*'.

The advisory/support teacher noted that she worked to develop firmer links with the EWS. For example, they carry out joint visits to try and identify what the child's needs are and what appropriate support might be, or to provide general advice. She also has positive working relationships with colleagues from CAMHS, which was felt to be vital for working with children and young people with mental health problems.

Targets, tracking and monitoring

Through extending the provision of the Home and Hospital Support Service, it was felt that the VCG was enabling the LEA to meet its targets in relation to pupils with medical needs. Targets included that:

> Pupils with medical needs have access to education within 15 working days, (pupils with recurrent illnesses should have access, as far as possible, from day one)
> Procedures are in place to ensure early identification of pupils' needs
> Pupils receive a minimum entitlement of five hours teaching per week.

The main focus of the service was the reintegration of pupils with medical needs. In terms of attendance and attainment, the Advisory/Support Teacher noted that: '*Most

of the pupils we deal with, their attendance is usually 100 per cent and in terms of attainment, all of the pupils that I work with in Year 11 have sat GCSEs'. The Home and Hospital Support Service Coordinator confirmed this: '*Our children do tend to achieve well. Last year we had a boy who'd been out of school for years with ME and he still got seven GCSEs. We do push that'*.

In relation to tracking and monitoring, the Coordinator felt that the LEA had '*a very clear strategic overview*' and that there was '*clear monitoring and reporting back*'. However, she also believed that, because of the advisory/support teacher posts, they were now able to '*keep much more of a grip on what's going on*' within the service. The advisory/support teachers guide and monitor hourly paid staff, attend reviews, provide strategies for school based staff in supporting the return to school of pupils with medical needs.

Impact of the VCG on support for this group

The Home and Hospital Support Service Coordinator noted that one of the main impacts of the VCG was that it had raised the profile of this group of children, she stated:

> *There's a big inequality between what you would give to an excluded child, i.e. full-time provision and what lots of authorities were giving to sick children, which was very, very little. I think this grant, the access document and the OFSTED document have all raised the profile nationally but also within local authorities who've then had to say we have to fund it.*

One of the main impacts of the VCG was that it had enabled the LEA to increase provision to pupils with medical needs. They were working to a minimum of five hours home teaching per week but the service has a criterion that entitles some pupils to seven hours. For example, pupils with SEN, pupils in Years 10 and 11 studying five of more GCSEs, and pupils who are being reintegrated. All of the pupils with medical needs in those groups will receive additional provision (see Vignette 2).

The Home and Hospital Support Service Coordinator felt that the advisory/support teachers whose posts were funded by the VCG, have '*put a structure into what could have been a very flat service*'. Prior to the creation of the posts, she felt that there was limited management and support for home teachers who were often quite isolated and required a considerable amount of advice and monitoring. She noted how the posts have helped increase the efficiency of the service as they are now much more aware of the needs of the children and work towards reintegration rather than continuous home teaching. They ensure all of the home teachers keep records of the curriculum work and feed back the child's progress to schools.

The Advisory Support Teacher felt that, since she joined the service, there was evidence that schools prioritised the needs of pupils more: '*They're more aware of the inclusion issue and we're finding they're not as prepared to let things slide as they might have done in the past*'.

Effective practice in supporting this group

The Coordinator of the Home and Hospital Support Service felt that effective practice in relation to pupils with medical needs was about '*trying to keep high expectations*'

regarding attendance, achievement and reintegration. Staff negotiate programmes of study with schools and usually follow the curriculum so the child reintegrating into school is not at a disadvantage. The advisory/support teacher felt that a key characteristic of their effectiveness was matching staff members with the pupil, for example, some home teachers might have experience in particular areas, such as working with young people who have ME.

In addition, both interviewees agreed that a key feature of effective practice for working with pupils with medical needs was not to work in isolation. They felt that parents were key to the reintegration process and '*unless the parents are supportive in what we do then it won't work*' (Advisory/Support Teacher). The coordinator ensured that parents were invited to pupil reviews, which she felt was good practice for addressing any issues and a useful mechanism for clarifying everyone's roles and responsibilities. The service also worked with parents to encourage them to establish work patterns and routines at home, such as not watching TV during the day, to assist reintegration.

The Advisory/Support Teacher noted that awareness of the service was key to their effectiveness and that it was essential to '*sell the service*' to school and EWOs and to have regular meetings with schools to see how the service could be improved.

Future developments
The Advisory/Support Teacher felt that there was a small group of pupils who may not access the service because they do not meet the criteria or who do access the service but find it difficult coping with mainstream education because of their medical needs. She felt that work is needed to be carried out manage their education more appropriately and improve access to the curriculum.

The Coordinator from the Home and Hospital Support Service felt that future development at a strategic level should involve working towards more integrated services. She felt that it would be useful for those working with vulnerable children to have common targets, as sometimes agencies may not share priorities. She felt that joint training between agencies would also be useful.

VIGNETTE 2

Vulnerable group:	Anxious school refusers
Numbers:	10 young people currently access the service
Amount of grant allocated:	4 per cent of the total grant
Interviewee(s):	Home and Hospital Support Service Coordinator, Anxious School Refusers' Advisory Teacher, Consultant Child Psychiatrist, Connexions Personal Advisor

Strategies funded by the VCG

Although the Home and Hospital Support Service within the LEA is committed to promoting reintegration wherever possible, it became apparent to them that for a small number of anxious school refusers, reintegration was neither appropriate, nor realistic. The LEA, after identifying this gap in provision, commissioned a pilot project for a group of key stage 4 pupils whose reluctance to attend school was driven by anxiety, i.e. pupils who '*can't go*' rather than those who '*won't go*' to school:

> *The core is kids who have a great deal of anxiety wherever it's come from, they're not getting a life, they're not getting an education, they are not in school, despite the best efforts of the EWO and Connexions or input from Home and Hospital Support teachers and in some of those cases input from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service. So these are the kids who have been known to these services for a number of years who are getting no more than five hours teaching a week* (Child Psychiatrist).

The group for anxious school refusers, introduced in September 2001, was funded originally from Social Inclusion Standards Fund and is now partially funded through the VCG. The grant is used to part-fund the salary of an advisory teacher, to pay for pupil transport, to pay for the rent of a building, to buy resources and to provide specialist input from a consultant clinical psychologist. The project provides access to the curriculum, social interaction, therapeutic support e.g. anxiety management and post-16 planning. The provision also broadens the range of multi-agency support available to anxious pupils:

> *We have a range of students that have anxiety but the reasons as to why they developed the anxiety are different for each young person. So, we give them a good education in the core subjects but spend at least as much time overcoming their anxiety and becoming confident with the outside world* (Connexions Personal Advisor).

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development

There have been no specific policies or procedures developed following the introduction of funding from the VCG, however, the Child Psychiatrist did feel that through the VCG the team had been able to build on existing partnerships with other services and organisations. The project works with a range of services and agencies, these include: the Home and Hospital Support Service, CAMHS, Connexions, social services, schools, voluntary organisations, youth projects and careers. The Connexions advisor noted that partnership working was essential to the success of the

project: '*None of us could meet the needs of this group of children unless we worked together*'. Although the project has strong communication links with parents, this was the first year that it had carried out specific work with them. The clinical psychologist ran a parenting group outlining what the issues around anxiety are and gave them strategies on how to respond positively and avoid behaviour which might reinforce the anxiety.

Targets, tracking and monitoring
This project is monitored and evaluated by a multi-agency steering group made up of project staff, school staff and CAMHS personnel. Areas for evaluation include attendance, educational attainment, wider achievement, e.g. in relation to social skills and progress to FE, training or work. The views of pupils and parents/carers are considered throughout. '*We do actually listen to the young people, we have a lot of feedback. We do act on feedback, if they're not happy with something they will say so*' (Connexions Personal Advisor).

The steering group takes an overview of its work twice a year. The Advisory Teacher noted that she '*discusses development all the time and continually monitors how things are going*'. She also felt that there was flexibility built within the project: '*We don't have to go through any long-winded process to introduce a change*'.

Impact of the VCG on support for this group
Interviewees felt the main impact of the VCG was that it had facilitated continued provision for this group. Most of the young people who attend the project have received home teaching for some time and despite the work of the Home and Hospital Support Service have not been reintegrated into school. The Coordinator noted that, because the LEA has a strong commitment to reintegration, ultimately in the case of anxious school refusers '*if they had not had this provision and had not been reintegrated to school then* [parents] *could have faced prosecution on attendance issues*'.

Through the project, the coordinator felt better equipped to provide anxious school refusers with higher levels of educational provision. She suggested that grouping young people together in this way meant that the LEA could increase levels of provision and '*redress the balance between the educational provision which excluded children get and what sick children get*'. The project works to 'normalise' an anxious school refuser's educational experience and allows a range of social interactions not possible through home teaching. Through the intervention, they are also able to access other services, such as input from CAMHS to help resolve young people's anxiety issues.

> *If they had remained in home teaching, if they were highly motivated students they could have ended up taking five GCSE's, possibly more, but at the end of that time they would have still been stuck at home with no friends and it would have been difficult to move on to the next step, for example FE or training* (Advisory Teacher).

Attendance at the project was seen as a positive alternative by the young people:

> *When I'm doing my initial home visit, when I'm telling them about* [name of

project] *I say, 'If you would like to come to* [name of project], *I can say to you that you don't ever have to step foot in that school ever again'. They usually feel about six inches taller because the school has come to represent everything that causes them unhappiness in the world* (Advisory Teacher).

Interviewees also highlighted the success of the project in addressing students' poor self-esteem and confidence. After attending the project they noted how students were able to engage in tasks that previously they were too nervous to attempt, for example, leaving the home, sitting examinations and using public transport.

Effective practice in supporting this group

Overall, the approach aimed to address the social emotional and behavioural issues that were preventing the young person accessing education in school. To this end, the Home and Hospital Support Service Coordinator felt that the partnership aspect was key to the provision, since those anxious pupils that access the service will have anxieties related to a number of different issues. Thus, having input from a wide range of services all working 'under one roof' was seen as advantageous. The other key feature of effective practice identified for supporting anxious school refusers was working with both the parents and the child, the Coordinator noted:

This is the first year that we have run a parenting group and that now seems like a really silly thing to have missed because we were dealing with children who were going home to families who were reinforcing the behaviour that was causing their anxieties.

In addition to this, locating the project within the grounds of a school was also seen as a factor in its success, as it made the young people address their anxieties:

We decided that [name of project] *had to be set up within a comprehensive school because if we take anxious students and then protect them or let them avoid what is causing them anxiety then they would just remain anxious. So, by siting it in a comprehensive school they faced up to some of their anxieties and realised that they are relatively easy to overcome* (Advisory Teacher).

The school had also supported the project by providing teaching in subjects that the project tutors were unable. They had also provided resources and classrooms so the pupils were able access science laboratories and ICT suites. School staff also played a key role in the young people accessing accreditation. The project was not a registered exam centre therefore the school's Exams Officer ensured the young people's access to examinations.

Future developments

The project did not have specific plans for future development as it was felt that things '*evolved',* however interviewees stressed that they would continue to develop work with parents and in the longer term: '*work on some kind of prevention to stop them dropping out of school in the first place'* (Coordinator).

VIGNETTE 3

Vulnerable group:	Gypsy/Traveller pupils
Numbers:	450 (estimate)
Amount of grant allocated:	20 per cent of the total grant
Interviewee(s):	Traveller Education Service Manager

Strategies funded by the VCG

The VCG is used to fund the LEA's contribution to the TES, which is part of a consortium that works across two LEAs. The service works to ensure that Gypsy/Traveller families have access to education and aims to raise educational achievement and to improve attendance. The service also supports schools and nurseries to '*celebrate diversity, eliminate discrimination and promote equality of opportunity*'.

The VCG provides funding for the team, which includes a full time LSA for early years and an early years advisory teacher (with a management role). It also funds 1.75 (full-time equivalent) primary advisory and support teachers focusing on primary support and transition and a 0.9 (full-time equivalent) teacher to provide support at the secondary level. The early years team works to encourage parental involvement in the learning of their children, which involves home visits and liaison with Gypsy/Traveller families. In addition, there is work with pre-foundation stage children, which involves initial visits to Gypsy/Traveller families, and the use of 'play sacks' containing play equipment linked to early learning goals. The LSA models this equipment and explains to parents ways in which it will facilitate their child's learning. The service is also actively involved in encouraging and facilitating access to nurseries. The primary and secondary support teachers support the induction of Gypsy/Traveller pupils into school and may also supply targeted support in numeracy, literacy and ICT, for limited amounts of time.

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development

The TES Manager felt that the VCG had not influenced policy development specifically, given it was funding the TES, which had existing aims and objectives (e.g. those relating to improving access, attainment and attendance). She also noted that, due to the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act (2000), many services within the LEA have had to examine their polices and functions to see whether they have any adverse or positive impacts on minority ethnic groups, including Gypsy/Travellers. This means that departments are looking more closely at their policies and will bring them to the TES to 'look over'. The TES Manager felt that this was potentially a way that the VCG could impact on policy. No new partnerships had been set up as a result of the VCG.

Targets, tracking and monitoring

The TES Manager noted the difficulties in setting targets for Gypsy/Traveller children in that '*you don't have the same children in the authority from one year to the next.*' Despite this, the service had met its target in relation to nursery places, and access to primary education for Gypsy/Traveller children (see impact for more details). Although she did note that progress towards meeting these targets was based only on

the number of identified pupils and that 'highly mobile' pupils were considerably more difficult to monitor and track. In an effort to support the education of children from Gypsy/Traveller families, the TES had established a 'mobile classroom', which aims to ensure that these families receive two visits before they are moved on by the local authority. In relation to targets regarding achievement of Gypsy/Travellers, the TES Manager felt that they were still underachieving and considered this to be a key issue for future VCG funding.

Impact of the VCG on support for this group

The provision of VCG funding as a block grant presented a major change for the TES, which had previously received a discrete grant. However, given that Gypsy/Traveller pupils represented the largest ethnic minority and potentially vulnerable group within the authority, the LEA maintained its funding contribution to the TES. As such, the service was able to continue to develop work initiated under previous funding.

The LSA was felt to have had an impact on the involvement of Gypsy/Traveller families in their children's education and on the LEA's ability to build up '*vital relations*' with parents. In addition, the increased percentage of Gypsy/Traveller pupils securing nursery placements was also felt to have had a major impact: '*Up to two or three years ago we actually had very few children attending nurseries, now we've got a 90 per cent success rate for those on the official site*' (TES Manager).

The close working relationship between the Specialist Education Officer, Advisory Teacher (VCG-funded) and Support Teacher (VCG-funded) was felt to have been particularly influential in Gypsy/Traveller pupils' access to, and participation in, education, such that 100 per cent of the authority's primary-aged and 88 per cent of the authority's secondary-aged Gypsy/Traveller pupils were accessing education.

For the interviewee, the management structure and the appointment of staff with a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities was felt to have had resulted in coherent, efficient and effective service for Gypsy/Traveller pupils. One of the main impacts of this had been the service's ability to respond to a concern from a Gypsy/Traveller family within 24 hours and to be able to follow-up these concerns (i.e. provide mobile provision) within 48 hours.

Effective practice in supporting this group

The TES Manager felt that having a clear vision was crucial for effective practice in supporting Gypsy/Traveller pupils. She particularly noted the benefit of having: '*A clear understanding of the drivers, both from DfES and from OfSTED, and the planning to be able to transfer that into practice*'.

The importance of building positive relationships with schools and families was also considered to be a key feature of effective practice for supporting Gypsy/Traveller pupils: '*Transfer the drivers into practice by the building of good relationships otherwise it's just paper, it's just words. Reach out to the families, build up trust, the same in the schools*' (TES Manager). A '*dual focus*' approach, involving pupil directed work (e.g. targeted support at transition or for numeracy, literacy or ICT), as well as school and strategic monitoring and evaluation (e.g. school self reviews and school improvement), was identified as another important feature of effective practice for working with Gypsy/Traveller pupils.

Future developments

The TES Manager noted that a possible future development with regard to the service would be in bringing together the work of the VCG with EMAG. In addition, she noted that the TES are looking to improve their practice through working and planning with the LEA's language for learning service to see how they can share expertise.

VIGNETTE 4	
Vulnerable group:	Children in key stage1 and 2 with poor social and emotional competence reflected in peer relationship difficulties
Numbers: schools)	In 2003/4 the team worked with 94 children (from 44 identified as being vulnerable in relation to their social competence and relationship skills
Amount of grant allocated:	3 per cent of the total grant
Interviewee(s):	Project Manager/Educational Psychologist, Primary School Headteacher in receipt of intervention, Head of Access and Inclusion

Strategies funded by the VCG

The initiative, first established in 2000, is a preventative intervention which promotes more positive relationships within the classroom and the inclusion of pupils who experience difficulty in their peer relationships. The Head of Access and Inclusion noted that it was: '*A proactive initiative to identify children with social skills difficulties and try to redress those, so that they don't fall into one of the* [vulnerable] *groups* [because] *that is then much more difficult to change*'.

The initiative is run in partnership between the Educational Psychology Service and the Behaviour Support Service. Initially funded through the Standards Fund, since 2003 approximately half of the total funding has come from the VCG. The VCG contributes to the cost of salaries for a Project Manager/Educational Psychologist (0.4 full-time equivalent), a Senior Project Worker, and a part-time Project Worker.

The project aims to improve the social and emotional competence and relationship skills of children in the primary phase targeting, in particular, children who are vulnerable because of difficulties in relation to their social competence and/or peer-relationship skills. Working alongside school staff, the team works with small groups of children to deliver a programme designed to enhance the social skills of key stage 1 and 2 pupils. The project also involves the development of materials and resources to assist with the group work. The project is sustainable in that schools receive materials and training in the approach and delivery of the programme and then school staff deliver the programme to other groups of children and train other staff in its delivery. Once schools are familiar with the programme and its aims, it can be integrated into the curriculum and delivered to whole class groups.

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development

There have been no specific policies or partnerships developed as a result of the VCG, although the Project Manager felt that through the VCG they had been able to maintain existing partnerships with the behaviour support service and schools, and that future partnerships with social care and health and social services would be beneficial.

Targets, tracking and monitoring

The initiative is '*rigorously monitored and evaluated*' by the Project Manager using questionnaires completed by headteachers, class teachers and the children involved.

The only '*hard*' target the project has relates to the number of schools the team work with; which is 15 schools per term, and they are regularly meeting this target. The '*softer*' targets at team-level are to aim to improve the social and emotional competence of the young people within the ten-week intervention period. This is evaluated by looking at pre- and post-questionnaire evaluations.

Impact of the VCG on support for this group

The main impact of the VCG was to maintain funding for staff so that the intervention could continue to work with schools. The Project Manager noted that, of the 100 schools they have worked with, only a handful felt that the initiative had not had much impact at all. The headteacher, of a primary school in receipt of the initiative said that the main impact was that it modelled pro-social behaviours.

They hadn't been shown how to behave and they hadn't been shown different responses so it's copying good responses and to give them time to think in a small group setting and showing them what a good response would be. It's had a very positive impact (Primary School Headteacher).

Impacts were seen to extend beyond the pupils involved in the group intervention as a headteacher of a primary school in receipt of the initiative noted: '*They* [the pupils] *intermingle in the yard and the behaviours rub off, socially they're better off*'.

One of the main impacts noted was the project raised the awareness of school staff of behavioural difficulties related to poor social and emotional competence. The Project Manager noted that 95 per cent of the headteachers they surveyed as part of the project evaluation felt that it had done this:

I think before this, people knew there were children with these difficulties [but] *they would often mistake their problems and just say that the children were naughty. Schools flounder with behaviour in general, in terms of understanding it and what to do about it and I think we've been able to help schools understand where this behaviour might come from and actually what to do about it* (Project Manager).

Effective practice in supporting this group

The Project Manager felt that key to effective practice in supporting children with poor social and emotional competence is understanding, helping staff to understand where the behaviours are coming from and '*not just seeing these children as purely naughty children*'. She also felt that involving their peers, both to support pupils and to create a situation of empowerment was also key to effective practice and '*making it fun*' so it is not a pressurised environment, '*the situation is set up in such a relaxed, fun and empowering way that they just learn*'.

Future developments

Given the positive response of schools and parents to the work of the initiative, the Project Manager hoped to extend the work to a wider range of pupils, for example, at key stage 3. She felt that they would also like to develop their work with parents, although this would require a greater level of funding. She also reported a need for '*more time to follow up*' on the progress schools have made.

Case study 5

OVERVIEW
Type of LEA: Metropolitan **Interviewee**:   Service Development Manager

Location of responsibility for the VCG

The LEA's Strategic Leader for Attendance, Behaviour and Inclusion Services has overall responsibility for managing the grant.

The LEA's strategic approach to supporting vulnerable children

The LEA's overall strategic approach falls under their 'vision for inclusion': '*To develop a culture and practice of education and learning that will include all of our children, young people and adults from the start and focus resources and support to achieve this vision*' (LEA Policy Document).

In addition, the LEA also has a 'policy framework' and 'delivery plan (2004–2006)' for 'educationally vulnerable children'. The policy framework outlines the LEA's strategic objectives in relation to the education of vulnerable children and within the delivery plan, activities and performance indicators for achieving these objectives are identified. Under the policy framework for educationally vulnerable children the LEA aims to: '*Establish a culture, practices, management and deployment of resources that ensure that all of our educationally vulnerable children's needs are identified and met through high standards of educational support*' (LEA Policy Document).

Whilst the service development manager noted that the vision for inclusion had preceded the introduction of the VCG, he felt that the grant had been useful in identifying those groups of children that needed support and had enabled the LEA to target support for those groups and deliver the objectives set out in the strategy.

Implementation of the VCG

Following the introduction of the VCG, the amount of funding available for vulnerable children was felt to have increased. As such, the LEA was able to maintain the amount of funding being allocated to certain groups, (namely, teenage parents and asylum seekers), increase the funding for other groups (looked after children, school refusers and children with medical needs) and allocate funding to support some new initiatives within the LEA (child protection, the Children and Young Peoples Strategic Partnership). No VCG funding was allocated for young offenders in light of the support they received from the YOT. In addition, no funding was allocated for young carers as it was felt that, where support was required, they would benefit from generic services within the LEA (e.g. EWS for Attendance Issues).

The service development manager reported that the allocation of funding was based on the issues facing the different vulnerable groups and their access to existing support. Where additional support was required, the cost of this provision was calculated and VCG funding allocated to cover this cost. The LEA also identified additional areas which they felt required development and allocated VCG funding to

address this need:

Child protection for example, we needed a manager for child protection and we needed to provided training for designated teachers for child protection, so it was how much is the training going to cost and how much for the salary and that is basically what we did with each group.

Each of the strategies funded through the VCG are being monitored through a new layer of management. New appointments have included management positions and part of their role is to monitor strategies funded through the VCG.

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development

Although no new polices and procedures were felt to have been developed specifically as a result of the introduction of the VCG the LEA was focusing on the development of a multi-agency approach to working with vulnerable pupils which the service development manager felt had been reinforced by the VCG, particularly through staff appointments funded through the grant:

I think we are developing a whole raft of multi-agency approaches. I think the VCG particularly reinforces that ...The VCG has enabled us to employ more staff in specific areas to do with vulnerable children and it has enabled people to access multi-agency working.

Following an appointment to the team of a member of staff from social services and increased liaison with schools, looked after children were the group identified as having benefited particularly in this respect. In addition, the VCG had contributed to a one-off 'vulnerable children's training day' within the LEA aimed at raising awareness and understanding across the LEA of the work of individual services and agencies supporting vulnerable pupils:

We've got a big day on the vulnerable children's side with teachers and parents and pupils coming in for presentations and workshops and that sort of thing. It's a bit of a launch because we've just had the schools identify their designated teacher for vulnerable children so that's our springboard.

Future developments

The service development manager considered the VCG to be very much a '*resource*' and, in this way, noted that the LEA was very aware that in the future the authority would need to '*look further than the VCG*' in order to maintain its support for vulnerable children. In doing so, he noted that future development would most likely involve the VCG-funded support being incorporated into mainstream funding and provision.

VIGNETTE 1

Vulnerable group:	Children with medical needs, school refusers, looked after children
Numbers:	47, six and 349 respectively
Amount of grant allocated:	15 per cent of total grant (for Distance Learning Strategy)
Interviewee(s):	Distance Learning Development Officer, Complementary Education and Special Circumstances Manager, Offsite Manager (PRU)

Strategies funded by the VCG

The VCG has contributed to the development of a 'Distance Learning Strategy' (DLS) within the LEA. The purpose of the strategy is to enhance the experience of, and access to educational provision for vulnerable children and those not engaging in mainstream education through the development of a distance learning curriculum. The service works with children who are unable to attend school for medical and/or other reasons (including school refusers, school phobics) and also operates a support strand for looked after children.

The service includes an 'IT bank' which currently holds 73 laptops (part-VCG funded), a distance learning development officer (VCG-funded) and a technician (VCG-funded). The service:

Provides access to ICT-based learning resources
Encourages use of the Internet for exchanging work with schools
Provides hardware and software (on loan) to support pupils' study
Provides ICT support to vulnerable children.

The service also offers:

Technical support (via the technician)
A system of monitoring the level, and nature of, computer use (via the technician)
Liaison with schools and sharing information regarding academic progress
Assistance in raising pupils' self-confidence, computer literacy and academic achievement.

In addition, the service also provides some initial ICT training for carers of looked after children covering '*what to look out for*' in terms of internet access.

The service works with looked after children, pupils attending the pupils referral unit and those working with the Home Tuition Service (including pupils with medical needs and school refusers). Under the DLS the LEA has purchased a licence for up to 20 users for the *Success Maker* educational programme. Of these licences, four have been allocated to the PRU and a further ten installed on laptops for use by home tutors. The additional licenses are used by LEA staff and have been installed onto laptops which can be issued on loan.

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development

The services involved in the DLS were already working together prior to the VCG, however, the distance learning development officer post (VCG-funded) was felt to have facilitated closer working and encouraged services to share ideas under the DLS, further developing relationships. One interviewee felt that where the VCG was contributing to joint funding initiatives (such as the DLS) closer partnership working had been promoted: '*It has given us more strength in working with other partner agencies because we have been able to provide resources and people and then they have given an equal part or whatever*' (Complementary Education and Special Circumstances Manager).

In addition to the support provided through the DLS, the VCG had also funded the development of a handbook and guidelines outlining the policies of the complementary education services (including the PRU, the Home and Hospital Tuition Service and the Education Support Team for Looked After Children). One example of the guidelines produced was the PRU admissions policy for the pupils with medical needs.

Targets, tracking and monitoring

Targets for school refusers and pupils with medical needs are set on an individual basis. For school refusers, targets are dependent on the stage at which the pupil is identified, for example, if identified early, the target would be to reintegrate the pupil into mainstream school as soon as possible. However, if a pupil has been out of education for some time, they may be referred to the PRU to be reviewed on a six-weekly basis, following which they will be gradually reintegrated into school.

> *There is an overall policy that we review them every six weeks and that we move them back into school. It is like a revolving door, but it is very much dependent on how long they have been out of education when we pick them up* (Offsite Manager, PRU).

Targets for children with medical needs are dependent upon their medical condition. The service ensures that pupils admitted to hospital receive education from the first day that they are admitted. The service employs a tutor who is based in the hospital school at all times in order to meet this target: '*Sometimes they go into hospital and they say it is for a day and then find they are still there a week later so if you don't teach them straight away then they have missed out*' (Complementary Education and Special Circumstances Manager).

Within the Hospital or Home Tuition Service pupils receive between six and ten hours of education per week. With effect from September the service will be using VCG funding to provide extra tuition to increase the hours to ten per week in line with government targets. Within the Complementary Education Service the individual strands are responsible for monitoring and tracking the children they support. Each strand produces monthly figures for the young people it supports which are then compiled to produce termly reports.

Impact of the VCG on support for this group

Since the introduction of the VCG those working within the Complementary Education Service felt that there had been a '*significant impact*' on multi-agency working to support vulnerable children within the authority:

I think we have now got more of an across the board approach to the different groups of vulnerable children. We see it as a whole across the authority whereas under the previous grant system it was grants for specific things, now we are all working together to look at ways that we can get the grant to benefit the most children (Offsite Manager, PRU).

This interviewee also noted that VCG funding had impacted on the provision available for pupils attending the PRU or accessing education through the Home and Hospital Tuition Service (i.e. as a result of increased resources available through the DLS). In addition, VCG funding had also enabled the service to target resources to support individual pupils by funding individual programmes and initiatives, for example, buying in college places for pupils not accessing mainstream schools: '*The initiatives have really moved on the support, and what we have been able to do for the children is tremendous*' (Complementary Education and Special Circumstances Manager).

Under the DLS a number of impacts were reported. For the distance learning development officer, the main impact of the VCG funding was felt to be an increase in the resources (hardware and software) available through the DLS for vulnerable pupils. The particular impact of this for looked after children was noted (see Vignette 3 for more details).

Since the introduction of the VCG the service also felt that it had been able to offer support to an increased number of schools within the authority. The appointment of additional staff through the VCG had enabled the service to offer more in-school support and the '*people power*' to provide a more effective service and develop a closer working relationship: '*We have been able to work with schools to provide support, to provide resources and to provide training and expertise*' (Offsite Manager, PRU).

Effective practice in supporting this group
The complementary education and special services manager felt that, **setting realistic targets**, **tracking and monitoring**, maintaining **full access to the curriculum** and **multi-agency working** were all key features of effective practice in supporting pupils within the Complementary Education Service.

Future developments
A number of future developments are planned under the DLS. The Complementary Education Service hopes to expand the DLS by increasing its resources and providing more in-school support for pupils. The service also hopes to develop an e-mail communication system to enable schools and the PRU to send and submit pupils' work on a regular basis.

VIGNETTE 2

Vulnerable group:	Child protection
Numbers:	199 (on the Child Protection Register)
Amount of grant allocated:	10 per cent of total grant
Interviewee(s):	Child Protection Manager

Strategies funded by the VCG

VCG funding has been used to establish a child protection manager post within the LEA to offer advice and support to education and school staff on child protection matters. The role and responsibilities of the post include:

Offering advice to schools
Providing training (through the LEA's professional development programme and through the Area Child Protection Committee programme, which is centrally based).

Through the work of the child protection manager, two training programmes have been developed which include a specific training programme designed for designated teachers for child protection and a more basic course covering general child protection issues. At the basic level, training covers the main types of abuse and ways staff might recognise signs and symptoms of abuse in a school. For designated teachers, training covers their roles and responsibilities in relation to child protection, (e.g. record keeping, attendance at child protection meetings). The training also covers situations in which staff themselves might feel vulnerable with respect to child protection issues (e.g. working alone with a pupil, providing lifts for a pupil): '*It is a burning issue with staff, situations where they feel vulnerable ... so that is also part of the training*'. The training programme offered to schools is available to the whole school community and thus has involved teachers, LSAs, secretarial staff and lunchtime supervisors.

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development

The procedures for child protection were already set out by the Area Child Protection Committee. However, in consultation with health and social services, education has developed a model 'education child protection policy' which outlines the policy and procedures for schools where a child protection concern may arise. In developing this policy, the child protection manager has consulted closely with school staff (through training programmes) and has made use of existing guidance available through national networks (e.g. Child Protection in Education). This has also involved contact with the local DfES coordinator for child protection (Investigation Referral and Support Coordinator) whose responsibilities include disseminating good practice.

The LEA has also identified a need to review and update the written guidance on child protection for education staff and, as such, the service is in the process of developing a '***good practice guide to child protection***'. The guide will be issued to education staff and all schools and school governors. The guide will also be available to social services. To inform the development of the guidance, the child protection manager has visited a number of similar and contrasting LEAs to gather information

on their child protection policy and procedures. Additionally, a model training pack has been developed to be used by designated teachers to support the training of newly qualified staff:

> *The expertise of newly qualified teachers is very variable on child protection so there was a requirement for training and we are asking them* (designated teachers) *to look at the model training that they have provided and cover this.*

The role of the child protection manager also involved liaising with the senior officer within social services (also the custodian of the child protection register) and colleagues in the Health Service. In addition, the child protection manager represents education at the Area Child Protection Committee meeting and also within two sub-groups of that committee (the practice and procedures sub-group and the training sub-group).

Targets, tracking and monitoring

The main target for child protection was for every school to have a trained designated teacher for child protection (as required by national targets). The LEA ensured it was proactive in meeting this target by reviewing which schools had not attended training and then contacting those schools to ensure that they had appointed a designated teacher and that a programme of training had been provided by the LEA. There was also a target within the LEA to develop an ongoing programme of training, the child protection policy and the good practice guide by the end of the summer term, 2004.

Impact of the VCG on support for this group

Through the appointment of the child protection manager from the VCG, it was felt that the LEA was in a better position to meet the needs of the group. By creating a dedicated post for child protection it was noted that the LEA was able to provide more effective and efficient service with respect to child protection issues: '*This is my sole responsibility, I don't fulfil any other function other than this one … it is a dedicated service to child protection and nothing else*'.

The manager noted that child protection is a complex area of work which required an immediate response and felt that through her role the LEA was now in a position to respond in this way. In addition, it was noted that significant progress had also been made towards meeting the LEA's child protection targets. There was a designated teacher in every school and the child protection manager was identifying any schools which had not received training to ensure that it was provided promptly.

Effective practice in supporting this group

The ability to offer quality **advice** and **support** to schools was recognised effective practice with respect to child protection issues: '*They need some support and re-assurance, so advice, support and re-assurance is one of the key functions*'. **Training** and **developing expertise** at both an LEA and school level was identified as key features of this practice. The child protection manager felt a **multi-agency approach** was fundamental for addressing child protection issues and noted the increasing requirement of legislation for services to work on a multi-agency basis. To this end, the development of stronger interagency links through the Area Child Protection Committee was highlighted.

Future developments

Refining and developing training packages further was identified as an area for future development within the service, including for example, the introduction of separate training packages for non-teaching staff working in schools. The child protection manager also hoped to increase colleagues' skills in order to establish a core group of individuals to deliver the training programmes. The service had also planned to develop joint training initiatives with a colleague from social services.

As a next step, the child protection manager was hoping to set up meetings for designated teachers with the aim of establishing a network for those teachers through which they could share experiences and access support from the child protection manager and other designated teachers.

VIGNETTE 3

Vulnerable group:	Looked after children
Numbers:	349
Amount of grant allocated:	30 per cent of total grant
Interviewee(s):	Learning Mentor, Looked After Children

Strategies funded by the VCG

In addition to the provision for looked after children available through the Distance Learning Strategy, the VCG has also enabled the LEA to appoint a full-time learning mentor (LM) for looked after children and an attendance support worker (ASW) for looked after children and teenage parents.

The Distance Learning Strategy offers specific ICT support for looked after children which includes:

An audit of ICT skills of looked after children and their carers focused on:
- a questionnaire survey to gauge the levels of ICT skills
- identification of training requirements
- delivery of training to looked after children and carers

Loan of equipment including:
- laptops and printers on a fixed-term basis
- availability of digital cameras and scanners when required to support academic work

Learning resources including:
- computer aided learning (CAL) software
- **'**Success Maker Enterprise' – a self-assessing, 'all-inclusive' package for English and Maths that identifies learning 'gaps' and teaches pupils according to these gaps. The programme incorporates practice and re-assessment options and provides reports of learning gains over the course of the programme

Subscription to web sites including:
- 'SAM learning' (a revision tool which allows pupils to test themselves)
- an online library
- public domain websites.

In addition, the service was in the process of installing internet access into residential homes and foster carers' homes to enable children and young people to access the educational programmes through their home computer. The distance learning strategy development officer had also been assigned some time to work alongside pupils in school to develop their ICT skills.

The role of the LM involves working within schools and supporting the looked after children with literacy and numeracy. She also offers out of classroom support for pupils, including anger management sessions, social skills sessions and circle of friends sessions. The ASW liaises closely with the Education Support Team for looked after children to ensure that pupils do not miss more than 25 days of school.

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development

In recent months there have been revisions of the policies and procedures for looked after children which have included the development of a 'Corporate Parenting Strategy' outlining the LEA's policy and procedures for looked after children. In addition, the Education Support Team has identified designated teachers in every school, has organised training for those teachers and has published a handbook for schools to be used as a training aid in this respect. In consultation with schools, the service has also drawn up new PEPs for looked after children.

Through the LM post the service was felt to have developed its working relationship with both social services and schools, particularly in respect of younger looked after pupils within the authority. She also works closely with representatives from the New Deal initiative which is currently funding a LSA within the authority.

Targets, tracking and monitoring

The overall aim of the education team is to raise the attainment of looked after children by ten per cent. In order to establish a baseline from which to set realistic targets the Education Support Team carried out an audit of the attainment and attendance of looked after children within the authority. From the data obtained the service identified that:

> The current cohort of pupils who will be eligible to take end of key stage 2 SATs was 22
> The current cohort of pupils who will be eligible to take GCSEs was 17.

Realistic targets for these groups were then set such that:

> The target for level 4 and above English and Maths is 29 per cent
> The target for five A*–C is 15 per cent.

The service receives termly feedback from schools on pupils' performance in order to monitor the progress towards meeting these targets. Following this, the service then targeted resources, using the VCG, to raise attainment, increase attendance and reduce pupil exclusions (i.e. through DLS and LM support).

Impact of the VCG on support for this group

The VCG was felt to have had a significant impact on the support for looked after children. For example, the availability of funding for contribution to joint initiatives with other agencies had facilitated multi-agency working, particularly with social services. The VCG had also enabled new posts to be created within the team increasing the support available for looked after children, for example, through the appointment of the learning mentor for looked after children:

> *She has been able to go into schools particularly where a child needs some help and may well have been excluded to work individually with that chid on behaviour management, anger management, academic support* (Complementary Education and Special Circumstances Manager).

Since the introduction of the VCG the amount of resources available for looked after children through the DLS increased '*dramatically*'. Initially social services had

purchased a number of laptops for looked after children. However, as a consequence of the availability of additional funding (through the VCG), the service was able to significantly increase the number of laptops for looked after children both in and out of the borough. Under the DLS, the service had also increased the facilities available in the residential units in the LEA placing computers and revision software in each.

The one-to-one support for looked after children provided by the distance learning strategy development officer was felt to have had a significant impact on individual pupils. For the Development Officer, the impact of this work on raising pupils' self-esteem was noted: '*What I'm finding at the moment is the kids that I am working with personally, the impact on their self esteem is such that it is having a knock-on effect on their behaviour and their attendance in class*'.

Effective practice in supporting this group
Sufficient **staffing** to be able to offer effective support for looked after children was felt to be the most significant feature of effective practice. Furthermore, recognising that pupils often have multiple other needs in addition to their 'looked after' status, including behavioural problems, attendance issues and exclusion and providing appropriate support to address these needs was noted.

Future developments
The team is currently looking to recruit two mobile homework support workers to work after-school with looked after children in their foster homes or residential units. In addition, the LM hopes to introduce closer monitoring of PEPs. Currently this involves initial meetings at which PEPs are devised following which progress is reported back to the LEA. The LM uses this information to monitor pupils' achievement and attendance and as such feels that the service would benefit from a more systematic approach to monitoring PEPs.

Case study 6

OVERVIEW

Type of LEA:	Inner London
Interviewee:	Head of Support for Learning Service, Access and Inclusion Team

Location of responsibility for the VCG

Responsibility for the implementation of the VCG is located within the access and inclusion team within the LEA. The lead officer for social inclusion (also Head of Support for Learning Service) has the main responsibility for the grant.

The LEA's strategic approach to supporting vulnerable children

Prior to the introduction of the VCG there had been a move within the LEA towards looking at children '*at risk*' and '*vulnerable*' in general, rather than '*pigeon-holing*' pupils into categories. The LEA felt that pupils from within the vulnerable categories often overlapped (for example, a number of teenage mothers are children in public care) and, as such, felt that it was more helpful to look at provision required at the level of '*the child*' rather than a specific group, i.e. based on individual needs. Bringing together the disparate grants for different groups (e.g. teenage parents, looked after children, Gypsy/Travellers) under the one funding stream (VCG) has supported the LEA's overall strategic development.

At the same time, under the LEA's social inclusion agenda, there had been a push for schools to be more systematic in their approach to identifying children showing indicators of being at risk. In this way, panels were formed in schools to identify children at risk and instigate action plans for those pupils. Alongside this, a multi-agency panel was set up at LEA level (including representatives from health, social services, voluntary bodies, the EPS, and headteachers). Schools may refer pupils whose needs cannot be met through the schools' panels to this panel to implement a multi-agency action plan.

Implementation of the VCG

Following the introduction of the VCG, the head of support for learning felt that the LEA was able to assess the overall range of provision required within the LEA. In this approach, the LEA did not necessarily aim to target specific groups but to allow for '*the flexibility to move between different groups and respond to local priorities*'. At the same time, the LEA was aware that certain groups would require specialist knowledge and expertise and that this needed to be secured within the LEA:

> *I think it is important to try and get a balance between resources against individual children and retaining some funding to train and improve the quality of what schools offer and challenge them around these certain groups of children* (Head of Support for Learning Service).

Following the introduction of the VCG the LEA's overall funding for vulnerable pupils (i.e. those from the separate groups) was felt to have decreased, to the effect that it was necessary for the LEA to '*prune some of the activities that we would have liked to have maintained*' and seek additional funding to maintain service in some

areas. Support from the LEA's base budget to alleviate this problem was noted.

Funding was allocated to five of the eight identified vulnerable groups: looked after children, teenage parents, school refusers, Gypsy/Traveller pupils and children with medical needs.

VCG funding was described as '*critical*' for **children in public care**, given that 72 per cent of the authority's looked after children are educated outside of the borough, thus presenting the LEA with a particular range of challenges (e.g. monitoring and tracking, building relationships with 23 LEAs). This required the LEA to use funding in specific ways namely: to provide bursaries to schools accepting looked after pupils (subject to the return of audit information and the completion of PEPs); to fund a full-time education social worker post to monitor the attendance of looked after children in other boroughs; and to maintain a core team within the LEA to retain central support and challenge. **Teenage parents** were another group that the interviewee felt required '*a lot of advocacy*' and thus, the retention of specialist knowledge and expertise within the LEA was a key feature of support. To this effect, VCG funding maintained the post of teenage pregnancy reintegration officer with responsibility for '*keeping their right to education alive*'; linking them to other services and agencies; and, providing advice, guidance and external challenge to schools. Additional funding was also set aside for transport and childcare costs. A decrease in the amount of funding for **school refusers** resulted in funding to cover the salary costs of only two of the four education social workers previously employed. To overcome this issue, the LEA provided additional funding to cover the cost of the two additional posts. The responsibilities of the ESW posts funded through VCG included (i) supporting pupils reintegrating into mainstream school from the PRU and (ii) preventative work with 'at risk' pupils in mainstream schools to reduce exclusion. Funding was maintained for **Gypsy/Traveller pupils** and enabled the LEA to continue to fund a teacher post for this group. The head of support for learning service deemed this as '*critical*' in supporting Gypsy/Traveller pupils such that, '*there is a very specific level of expertise about working with Travellers and Traveller families … it is a skilled area of work*'. The advocacy role of this post was also seen as important due to the attitude of some schools towards Gypsy/Traveller pupils. In light of the significant commitment to **children with medical needs** from other sources within the borough, for this group VCG funding was used as an '*extra resource to tap into*'.

Of those groups not receiving VCG funding, it was reported that **young offenders** were in receipt of funding from the YOT and **asylum seekers** would be supported through the provision for either Gypsy/Traveller pupils (if Roma refugees) or looked after children (if unaccompanied asylum seeker pupils). **Young carers** would have access to support through either, schools panels or the LEA's multi-agency panel on an individual case basis.

VCG funding was also allocated to provide support for a number other vulnerable groups including: **pupils from dysfunctional families** and **pupils at risk of exclusion** including African Caribbean pupils, primary and secondary-age pupils. In addition, a proportion of the VCG funding was allocated to the **LEA's multi-agency panel** to provide a contingency fund to support individual cases requiring support in '*exceptional circumstances*'.

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development
Under the LEA's social inclusion agenda considerable work had begun on the development of LEA policy and procedure for identifying children at risk. This had resulted in the establishment of schools' panels and the LEA's multi-agency panel. It was felt that the VCG had '*reinforced*' this system. The LEA had also introduced a 'zero tolerance' policy on pupils taking holiday during term-time. New guidance and policy on exclusions and bullying was to be introduced in the near future.

The head of support for learning service felt that the use of VCG funding was '*very much about multi-agency working*' such that, funding had been used to both retain existing, and fund new posts, within the LEA with an emphasis on maintaining and increasing contact with other agencies. This was reflected in the role of the teenage parents' reintegration officer (TPRO) who was seen as '*very much a hub of services*' and worked closely with a wide range of services including: health, social services, housing, Sure Start, and Connexions, to develop support packages for teenage parents. Links with several other local voluntary agencies were also identified (see Vignette 2).

The head of support for learning service described how policies and procedures for looked after children were being continually reviewed and updated within the LEA. Furthermore, the VCG was being used to fund a specified amount of support (0.1 FTE) for the looked after children's team from other central teams within the LEA, thereby prioritising and increasing its access to other services. Through the work of the team, links with national organisations e.g. the Who Cares? Trust and local organisations e.g. library services had been established: '*We are continually reaching out to find out who would be useful to have as contacts*' (Advisory Teacher, Looked After Children).

VCG funded appointments within the multi-agency behaviour support team were also recognised as enabling that team to maintain existing partnerships with other services, local organisations and schools. VCG funding was also seen as crucial in enabling the service to approach other organisations and offer their support: '*They have the client group, we have the knowledge base and funds*' (Community Development Officer), which had facilitated the development of a new partnership with a local organisation (see Vignette 3).

Through VCG funding the LEA was also addressing the needs of pupils at risk of social exclusion because of family dysfunction or serious family circumstances. In this way a new link was established and a SLA was drawn up with the **Family Welfare Association (FWA)** to offer support to pupils experiencing difficulty and other individual cases referred to the LEA's multi-agency panel (for example, young carers).

Future developments
The LEA is aware that some of the interventions and strategies funded through the VCG are long-term and as such will, in the future, require central funding. As a consequence, it was felt that the strategies funded through VCG would be likely to change over time:

I think what the Vulnerable Children Grant does is enable you to make short term

expedient decisions while you have got time to think of the long-term solution. I happen to think that you will go on needing short-term expedients but they will probably change so the Vulnerable Children Grant might fund sick children this year but next year we might say actually that is a mainstream funding need we are not going to do that but we have identified a new area of need which is a gap in provision that we need to fund in the interim while we discuss what we are going to do with it (Head of Support for Learning Service).

This interviewee also felt that an audit of the needs of, and provision for, young carers was an area which required future work. In addition, future plans for a review of the use of funding for children with medical need was reported with the aim of ensuring that it is being used to best effect (i.e. is having a focused impact).

VIGNETTE 1

Vulnerable group:	Looked after children
Numbers:	360 (241 of school age)
Amount of grant allocated:	34 per cent of total grant
Interviewee(s):	Advisory Teacher, Looked After Children

Strategies funded by the VCG

As well as contributing toward the salaries of the looked after children team (namely, a full-time education social worker and full-time administrator), in order to address the specific challenge of 72 per cent of the authority's looked after children being placed out of borough, a proportion of VCG funding had been used to provide **bursaries to schools** receiving a looked after pupil. In the first year of funding (2003/04) a grant of £400 per looked after pupil was issued to schools to establish the initiative. This is to be reduced in the second year to around £200 per pupil. The grant could be used at the discretion of the receiving school, however, in order to receive the money schools were required to cooperate in two ways: (i) by returning audit information to the LEA (including key stage results/GCSE results and exclusion and attendance data) and (ii) by ensuring each looked after children has a PEP: '*We did not issue the grant until we had the audit information back, and a school was engaging in the PEP planning process…*' (Head of Support for Learning Service).

Additionally, VCG funding had also enabled the LEA to develop and introduce 'education support packs' to be issued on a yearly basis to those involved with looked after children including, carers, teachers and social workers:

> *We have put together a support pack for social workers and teachers that has lots of useful information in, like the dates of school years, which school year the child fits into according to their date of birth, the names of all the designated teachers in the borough with a contact number, some of the jargon that both departments use, a sample PEP form. That is given to carers, social workers and teachers and is updated on a yearly basis* (Advisory Teacher, Looked After Children).

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development

The looked after children's team is dedicated to establishing new links and developing partnerships with other agencies: '*That is what our team is absolutely about*' (Advisory Teacher, looked after children). Since the introduction of the VCG, a new team called **'Help for you'** (title chosen by looked after children in the borough) has been developed within the authority. The team is part of **CAMHS** and is dedicated to working with children in care and, through this team, the looked after children's team have established close links with CAMHS.

In addition, the looked after children's team has met with the **Who Cares? Trust** to discuss the work of the trust and consider if any of their initiatives might complement the work of the education team. They have also talked to the **Libraries Service** regarding the possibility of the service visiting the children's homes.

> *It is about constantly looking at what services other children have got and seeing*

if that is accessible for our group and if not what can we do about it (Advisory Teacher, Looked After Children).

Policies and procedures for looked after children are regularly reviewed and updated. Most recently, this has involved a major revision of the format of, and procedures for, the completion of PEPs.

Targets, tracking and monitoring

The looked after children team is working towards the revised Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets to improve the life chances of looked after children (DoH, 2003; DfES, 2003). In addition, their local objective is that 80 per cent of care leavers should have one or more GCSEs grade A–G.

The team has introduced monitoring and tracking of pupils' attainment from Year 9. From this, the progress of each year group is monitored on a yearly basis. As such, when a looked after pupil reaches Year 11 the team has a clear idea of the likely achievement at GCSE. Through this, the team are then able to offer funding (through social service's budget) to provide additional support for those pupils.

Impact of the VCG on support for this group

The expansion of the looked after children's team through the VCG was considered to have had a significant impact on **raising the profile** of the client group. Through the development of a **dedicated team** for looked after children the support provided was considered to be more efficient, effective and coherent: '*Social workers now know who we are… they also know that we are a resource that they can call on*' (Advisory Teacher, looked after children). For the Head of Support for Learning Service, expansion of the team enabled central challenge and expertise to be maintained: '*I think that it is really critical that you have got that central challenge and I don't think that you would have achieved anything like that without that grant*'. The team was also felt to have had a significant impact on **multi-agency working** by '*bridging the gap*' between education, other services and schools: '*It has very much enabled us to develop ourselves as a resource for both departments*' (Advisory Teacher, Looked After Children).

The provision of bursaries was also felt to have had a major impact on the authority's **relationship with other LEAs** which was recognised as particularly important in terms of **monitoring and tracking** looked after children placed outside of the borough

> *I think that it goes down very well with other boroughs, they are impressed with the fact that the while the child is their educational responsibility* [name of LEA] *are still monitoring what they are doing* (Advisory Teacher, Looked After Children).

The strategies funded through the VCG were also felt to have had an impact on the **completion of PEPs** for looked after children. Through the appointment of an administrator (VCG-funded), other members of the team have felt able to be '*more proactive*' allowing them to attend initial PEP meetings, and, '*develop the direct work with children, with schools and social workers*' (Advisory Teacher, Looked After Children). One reported impact of this was the attendance of a member of the team at

all initial PEP meetings. The role of the administrator in issuing PEP reminders to schools was also considered to have had a significant impact on the LEA's ability to *enforce* the development of PEPs within 20 days of a looked after pupil being placed in care as well as on '*compliance rates*'. A '*massive increase*' in the number of PEPs completed was reported (currently 70–80 per cent compliance rate, within 20 days).

> *I don't have to stop and think, 'do I stay in the office and read the PEPs that are coming in or do I go and visit a school?' I have actually got time to do both because the admin job is being taken away from me. I am not having to enter the PEPs on a database, file them, send PEP reminders, because that is all being done by the admin role. I can concentrate absolutely on the needs of the children and the people working with them rather than on the systems* (Advisory Teacher, Looked After Children).

For the Advisory Teacher, the introduction of the VCG had resulted in more '*flexibility*' for the service in terms of introducing new initiatives and allocating support for pupils: '*I have felt it has been much more possible to access funding for projects that are going to benefit the children, There doesn't seem to be the struggle to think of where we are going to find the money*'.

Effective practice in supporting this group

A key issue for looked after children in some authorities is out of borough placements. The ability to **respond to children out of borough** was identified as a key feature of effective practice in supporting the group. In order to tackle this issue of working '*at a distance*' with looked after children the LEA considered **bursaries** to be a particularly effective strategy.

More generally, the **completion of PEPs** was considered to be effective in providing support for looked after children. PEPs enabled all involved parties to plan, monitor and review support effectively and efficiently. Furthermore, staff reported that, by reviewing PEPs regularly, they were able to identify, at an early stage any issues arising and allocate some support to address these issues. To this end, the LEA was '*committed to promoting the PEP as a contract between the pupil, the school, carers, social services and the LEA*' (Head of Support for Learning Service) in order improve the educational provision for pupils. The ability to be **flexible with training** and to meet almost any training, particularly at a multi-agency level, was identified as another feature of effective practice.

Future developments

Currently, a number of informal strategies and procedures exist between services and agencies, many of which are based on the positive working relationship between those organisations and the looked after children's team. For the team, service development would benefit from formalising these procedures in the near future: '*I would like a much more formal agreement about what should happen in certain situations*' (Advisory Teacher, Looked After Children).

VIGNETTE 2

Vulnerable group:	Teenage parents
Numbers:	20 (2002/03)
Amount of grant allocated:	7 per cent of total grant
Interviewee(s):	Teenage Pregnancy Reintegration Officer

Strategies funded by the VCG

The VCG funds the salary cost of the teenage pregnancy reintegration officer (TPRO) who is responsible for identifying all pupils of statutory school age who become pregnant and putting in place a support package for those pupils to ensure that their education is maintained during pregnancy and after the birth of the child. The TPRO provides advice and guidance to schools on their responsibilities to pregnant pupils and school-age parents. The TPRO supports pupils in their education during the pregnancy to minimise the disruption to their education and assists their reintegration after the birth, securing them a school place, or transfer to another school, as appropriate. The TPRO also accesses funding for childcare and transport, supports pupils in choosing suitable childcare and links pupils to professionals from other agencies including: social services, Sure Start Plus, Connexions, and other non-statutory agencies.

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development

It was not felt that the VCG had led to the development of any new partnerships, however, it had enabled the service to develop and enhance existing partnerships with a number of agencies. It was felt that the VCG had enabled the service (through the TPRO) to develop and enhance its partnership with social services. Many of the teenage parents in the authority required social services' involvement given that they were under the age of 16 years. As such, the TPRO developed close links with this service which involved regular attendance at review meetings with social services and the Education Social Work Service. She is also part of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy group through which she is able to maintain links with other services and agencies.

Through the work of the TPRO much closer links with the Connexions service have developed. The post has also facilitated the development of links with a number of other statutory and non-statutory agencies including: **Creative Insights** (to develop work with black and ethnic minority young people at risk of mental illness or social exclusion); **Sure Start** (to offer support on childcare); the **Careers Service** (who provide support packages for teenage parents); **Street Matters** and the **NSPCC.**

In addition, a protocol for the reintegration of school age parents has recently been developed and accepted by the borough.

Targets, tracking and monitoring

The LEA has been set a local target that, by 2010, under–18 conceptions are reduced by 55 per cent (with a 15 per cent reduction reported in 2004) and 60 per cent of teenage parents are engaged in education or training or employment. Beyond this, however, targets for teenage parents are set on an individual pupil level. The TPRO is

responsible for identifying, monitoring and tracking the teenage parents in the borough. Referral from other services (e.g. health) is a key feature of the initial identification of teenage parents within the borough.

Impact of the VCG on support for this group

The work of the TPRO is felt to have had a major impact on **raising awareness** of the client group and, importantly, on challenging the stigma surrounding teenage pregnancy (particularly within schools and with Roman Catholic and Muslim faith groups which represent a high percentage of the LEA's population). The outcome of this has been a much more '**positive approach**' to the teenage parents in the authority: '*I think it has been a really key post in moving things forward*' (Head of Support for Learning Service). The TPRO has been able to provide training and information to parents, pupils and schools and, her teaching background, has meant that she has an understanding of the practical issues faced by schools in maintaining the education of pregnant pupils, but has also been able to identify where schools have not been providing effective support: '*She can go into schools and challenge them on how inclusive they are being in supporting these particular groups*' (Head of Support for Learning Service).

It is felt that the major impact of the TPRO post has been on **multi-agency working**. The close working relationship between the TPRO and other agencies (for example, Sure Start Plus and the Health Service) has led to a greater number of referral routes for teenage parents with a positive impact for the **identification and tracking** of the teenagers becoming pregnant within the borough: '*It has brought them out of the woodwork*'.

A key issue for the group was felt to be **practical support** to enable them to continue with their education during and after pregnancy. By maintaining and developing links with other partners, the service has been able to support pupils in education (for example, through learning mentors provided by Creative Insights who provide intensive support) and **maintain pupils' participation** in education. Through the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy and closer working with the Early Years Service the LEA is now able to offer more **childcare provision**. Furthermore, VCG funding had provided the service with **funding for transport**: '*To be able to get to school by taxi is quite crucial in many cases ... It has given us that ability to get girls into school*'.

It was felt that through the work of the TPRO in particular, the VCG had contributed to the LEA's significant progress in meeting its targets which included the number of teenage parents achieving at least one GCSE increasing from five in 2002, to 11 in 2003, with an average of six passes: '*Over the last three years there is a much higher proportion of girls staying in mainstream education*'.

Effective practice in supporting this group

The appointment of a **key worker** (e.g. TPRO) at a central level with overarching responsibility for: liaising with other services and agencies; acting as an advocate for the group; offering training, advice and guidance and providing a '*swift response*' was noted as effective practice for supporting teenage parents.

In addition, the TPRO felt that a **multi-agency approach** was key to working with teenage parents given that many have other educational issues which may have

preceded, or be in addition to, their pregnancy (e.g. behavioural problems, non-attendance). Working alongside other agencies (e.g. Creative Insights) has enabled the LEA to address some of these issues and offer more intensive support for those pupils. In addition, it was felt that a multi-agency approach was particularly important in light of the range of support teenage parents required to maintain their participation in education: '*I think it is this multi-agency approach, and being able to tap into other services that I cannot necessarily provide*'.

The TPRO felt that another key feature of effective practice for supporting teenage parents was the ability to devote **time** to each pupil. The time to engage with the young person on an individual basis and to **build a relationship** with that person was considered to be fundamental:

> *I think if you don't make a very good relationship with that young person it is quite difficult because often they feel quite isolated ... I think you need somebody who can see them through not only their education in school but continue to link them through to post-16 options.*

Early identification and assessment of needs was also identified as a key feature of effective practice which enabled a reintegration plan to be developed promptly and thus the support required from relevant agencies and services to be in place with immediate effect:

> *So that they feel that they are supported and a bit more secure ... that they know there are services that will continue during the pregnancy and afterwards.*

Future developments
Establishing **closer links with other agencies** was seen as the main area for future development. The TPRO hoped to develop future partnerships with specific organisations within the borough which offered one-to-one support for parents. Those organisations identified included: 'Newpin', a registered charity, dealing with parents who experience isolation and depression and need to build confidence in their parenting skills and 'Coram Family', a family strengthening project. It was noted that this would be a particularly useful for some of the younger teenage parents who often required more intensive support.

A high number of the teenage parents in the borough have also been identified as children in public care and, as a consequence were at greater risk of losing the care of their babies after the birth (where intensive support cannot be provided). Given this, the TPRO was beginning to develop closer links with the leaving care service. To date this had involved the development of a proposal for the leaving care service to buy into other services within the borough to enable them to provide greater support for those children. In addition, the TPRO had also recently been involved in a training programme with the Family Planning Association which focused on sex and relationship education with looked after children. Expanding this preventative work to the young people, social workers, foster carers and residential staff was felt to be an area for future development:

> *We can almost foresee from the PEPs which girls in particular are vulnerable to becoming pregnant and know that work needs to be done around their self-esteem*

and their knowledge of sex and relationship education.

The TPRO also felt that the service should consider providing more parenting support for the group and hoped to develop future links with other agencies (including those listed previously) to work with the young people in this respect:

There is a great need which I don't think is being met around parenting skills and I think that although the academic side is obviously important, if they don't feel valued and supported around parenting it will have an impact on their education, their self-esteem and their ability to engage.

VIGNETTE 3	
Vulnerable group:	Pupils at risk of exclusion (African Caribbean, primary and secondary)
Numbers:	African Caribbean (3717); primary (50); secondary (unknown)
Amount of grant allocated:	26 per cent of total grant
Interviewee(s):	Community Development Officer, Multi-agency Behaviour Support Team

Strategies funded by the VCG

The VCG funds four posts within the multi-agency behaviour support team, namely, three specialist behaviour support teachers (African Caribbean, primary and secondary) and the community development officer. The multi-agency behaviour support team runs parenting skills courses for families within the borough, whose children have behavioural problems, are at risk of exclusion, or have received a fixed-term exclusion. Courses are organised on a referral basis (for example, from the school, social services, the EWS, following a court order, or a request for support from a parent).

The courses focus on discussing issues and considering ways in which parents can involve themselves in their children's education. This might involve a discussion of the government expectations and educational targets for pupils nationally, setting realistic goals for their children: '*You don't want to spend too much time on homework for a five year-old kid but some parents think that you should*' or advice on becoming involved with their children's education (e.g. homework, reading materials). Parents are also encouraged to become more actively involved in the local community, with local issues and school life, (e.g. becoming a school governor): '*We encourage them to be part of the community and to be part of the school community*'. The sessions are delivered on an informal basis and promote discussion, sharing experiences and offering advice and guidance:

> *We don't say we teach, you can't teach a parent who is a parent of six or seven children parenting, you work with them and you present some ideas to support them, you debate some issues on how they deal with things, whether it is the right way for example, among other parents.*

The work of the team also involves visiting schools to offer advice and general support and to support teachers in pupil assessments (for example, ensuring that the school is able to communicate effectively with parents by overcoming any language difficulties).

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development

No specific polices or procedures had been developed with the schools following the introduction of the VCG. However, the community development officers felt that, through the VCG, the team had been able to maintain existing partnerships with other services and local organisations.

The multi-agency behaviour support team plans to maintain its existing partnership

with a number of services and organisations including: the EWS, the local parent advice centre (with whom they run a parenting advice course) and the Race Equality Council. The team has also received some funding from the Children's Fund so plans to investigate joint funding opportunities with the fund. In addition, increased interest in the work of the service had enabled the team to develop links with numerous schools in the authority:

> *Last year we ran about eleven different courses, some of them in schools, some of them in here* [behaviour support centre], *some of them in the community centres. This year, we have about nineteen proposed enquiries from schools, so it is developing.*

VCG-funded posts within the multi-agency behaviour support team were felt to have facilitated partnership working, for example, as noted by the community development officer (VCG funded) the very nature of his post enabled partnerships to be maintained and new links to be established:

> *My post is community development officer so I look for involvement with other people. If I hear something is going on I make sure that they learn more about what we do and we look to know what they are doing and we see if we can work together.*

In addition, in order to develop their work further, the behaviour support worker (African Caribbean pupils) had developed a link with a local voluntary organisation: Organisation for Sickle Cell Anaemia (OSCAR), providing support for people with sickle cell anaemia.

Targets, tracking and monitoring

The multi-agency behaviour support team aims to reduce the number of fixed-term and permanent exclusions within the borough to meet the LEA's target of 1.2 permanent exclusions per thousand pupils. Other targets for the team are:

> To ensure that individual pupils PSP or PEP targets are met
> To involve more parents in the parenting education programme
> To ensure that schools have a race equality policy.

Impact of the VCG on support for this group

The ability for the team to maintain and further develop its level of service was considered to be the main impact of the VCG: '*I feel that this grant is very important for us so that we can carry on with the work that we are doing, and developing work into preventative work*'.

The community development officer felt that the behaviour support team represented a particularly effective central support service that could offer advice and guidance to parents, schools and other agencies, or provide access to other services where necessary: '*We are giving them access to other agencies or supporting them ourselves, or both*'. In addition, through the expansion of the team as a result of new VCG-funded posts, its capacity to engage in additional work with parents and the community was noted.

Effective practice in supporting this group

Support for pupils on an **individual basis** was considered to be effective in addressing the needs of pupils with behavioural problems. The community development officer noted that this could involve either one-to-one counselling with the young person, or a joint meeting between the pupil, parent and behaviour support worker. The importance of allowing sufficient time to **listen to** and **discuss issues** with parents and pupils was also identified as effective practice in establishing and then identifying solutions to address those issues. The involvement of **extended family** and **engagement in the community** was also considered to be effective practice when working with pupils and families of pupils with behavioural problems.

Future developments

Given the positive response of schools and parents to the work of the team the community development officer hoped to extend its work by increasing the number of schools and families that they were able to offer their service too. In addition, the team hoped to become more proactive, that is, work preventatively with schools rather working on a referral only basis:

> *There is big potential there because there are a lot of needs in most schools ... they are interested in working with parents because they can see that this will help the schools to achieve their attainment, and behaviour and attendance targets.*

The community development officer also hopes to develop links with other parent support centres noting that the behaviour support team could offer support in terms of training needs accessing information from other services. The team is in the early stages of establishing links with a parent support centre in other areas of the borough working specifically with Bangladeshi parents.

Case study 7

Type of LEA: County
Interviewee: Assessment and Intervention Manager, Inclusion Branch

Location of responsibility for the VCG

The officer with lead responsibility for the grant holds the positions of Assessment and Intervention Manager and Principal Educational Psychologist and is based in the Inclusion branch of the LEA.

The LEA's strategic approach to supporting vulnerable children

The LEA's overall approach to supporting vulnerable children is to provide a balance of both preventative work and intervention. The Assessment and Intervention Manager feels that this was the approach taken prior to the introduction of the VCG and that the overall approach has not changed, although the grant has been influential in enabling the LEA to implement their strategic plans. Another interviewee highlighted that a key feature of the LEA approach was inclusion: '[The] *Local Education Authority has a very clear steer towards inclusion, so with supporting vulnerable children, we're all looking at how they can be included in mainstream settings, their communities, etc.*' (County Portage Coordinator). Additionally, the head of the LEA's EOTAS service noted that the authority's strategic approach was now being very much influenced by the Green Paper 'Every Child Matters' (DfES, 2003) and the forthcoming Children's Bill: '*Broadly speaking, it's a multi-agency, proactive approach, supporting schools and families*'.

Implementation of the VCG

The LEA had primarily allocated funding to those groups identified in the guidance and, as noted above, in doing do, '*sought to strike a balance between prevention and intervention*'. However, a key benefit of the grant, as viewed by the interviewee, was the flexibility it gave for innovation and development work. As such, a number of new projects had been developed, in some cases targeting groups which had not previously received any dedicated support:

> *We see it primarily as an opportunity to build some capacity in our normal systems, whereas otherwise we wouldn't have a chance to do. On the other hand, it's a chance to do some experimental project work around developing particular programmes for youngsters who we know are vulnerable and don't necessarily benefit from ordinary provision.*

In terms of allocating the funding, there is an annual 'bidding process'. In the first year of VCG, the net was '*thrown fairly wide*' for potential bidders. All departments on the Inclusion Management Team were made aware that there was money available and heads of service were able to submit bids. The Assessment and Intervention Manager met with the SEN Manager to make an initial selection, which was then taken to the Inclusion Management Team for further discussion.

All but one of the eight of the 'original' groups received VCG-funded support, the exception being young offenders, for the basic reason that no party had submitted a bid for funding. For **looked after children**, VCG was felt to have facilitated a '*massive increase*' in investment, including: a new 'corporate team'; new policies and procedures; dowry funding; and training for schools. There had been an increase in funding for **teenage parents**, which meant that, in addition to maintaining the contribution made to the local teenage pregnancy strategic group, the LEA had also set aside its own 'reintegration fund' to support teenage parents to remain in education. There had been significant developments around **school refusers**, both of the anxious type and those non-attending through disaffection. For school phobic pupils, VCG had paid for additional time from EWS and EPS, to increase reintegration support for school phobic pupils and reduce the time spent out of school or on waiting lists for assessment. To address the more disaffection-based school refusal, three additional EWOs had been appointed to do targeted work in schools/areas where attendance is particularly poor.

Additional funding had been allocated to supporting **asylum seeker** pupils through an increased contribution to the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service budget. There had been no change in funding for **Gypsy/Traveller** pupils, however, with VCG essentially replacing the previous Standards Fund. Significant new developments were underway for pupils with **medical needs**, where an increase in funding had been instrumental in the development of a 'virtual learning environment' (see Vignette 1). Finally, in terms of the 'original' groups, a minority of VCG funding had been allocated to **young carers**, through a small number of one-off grants (see Vignette 2).

The LEA had also invested in new or increased support for a number of other vulnerable groups, including: **excluded pupils**, **parents of vulnerable children, pre-school children with behavioural difficulties** and **'hard to place' pupils**. The first three of these are detailed in the following sections (see Vignettes 3, 4 and 5), whilst support for the latter comprised the sourcing and purchase of college places or alternative packages for pupils in key stage 4.

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development
New policies and procedures had been developed in respect of looked after children, for example, a manual of good practice for schools and training for designated teachers. The VCG was also seen to have increased partnership working with social services, in that the newly established corporate team for looked after children brought together teachers, social workers, a psychologist and educational support workers. Policies had also been developed around the new approaches to pupils with anxiety-related school refusal, and there was new interagency work with Primary Care Trusts, who were contributing to this strategy.

Innovative projects, such as the virtual learning environment, parenting education and work with pre-school children with behavioural needs, had led to new or increased interagency working, for example, through consultation on development, joint training or delivery of programmes. Specific policies were less common, however, and as noted by the assessment and intervention manager, the VCG was seen to be more '*about building capacity rather than developing policy*'.

Future developments

Services which have received VCG funding in the first year will be required to submit an evaluation report during August, stating whether or not they require continued funding, and giving reasons for this. If existing projects are seen to be effective, the Inclusion department may attempt to secure base funding by submitting to the county council's bidding process. If this is not possible, the more effective existing projects will be prioritised for further VCG funding, although new bids will also be taken.

VIGNETTE 1

Vulnerable group:	Pupils with medical needs
Numbers:	Not stated
Amount of grant allocated:	6 per cent of total grant
Interviewee(s):	Head of EOTAS, Virtual Learning Environment Coordinator

Strategies funded by the VCG

VCG has funded the establishment of a virtual learning environment (VLE), which will provide teaching and educational support for pupils out of school due to medical needs (both physical and emotional/psychological). In the first year of VCG funding, the grant largely paid for hardware and software packages, including the necessary licenses. A consultant was also bought in to do some initial '*groundwork*' and planning. In the second year, VCG will be covering the salary of the recently appointed VLE coordinator and the costs of implementing the 'VLE Action Plan' as it becomes operational.

There are two elements to the VLE, which will be launched operationally in September 2004:

> A website, which will contain '*ready made*' lessons produced by teachers and will also be a 'gateway' to other quality educational websites and online curriculum packages. This site will be accessible to all pupils at any time (although certain areas will be password protected for security).

> A 'virtual classroom' where teachers and pupils log in at a set time and a lesson is conducted via the internet, using laptops with interactive technology and audio equipment.

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development

When in the initial planning stages for the VLE, the Head of Inclusion and Head of EOTAS visited a number of beacon technology colleges in the LEA to consult with staff and ensure they were drawing on good practice and expertise. This was also an opportunity to discuss how schools and the LEA could work together to make the VLE a more widespread tool in the future, beyond provision only for pupils with medical needs (see 'future development' below). Since development has got underway, two mainstream schools have expressed an interest in linking into the VLE, developing materials for the website which might assist continuity and reintegration for pupils spending periods of time out of school. It is hoped that, as the VLE becomes established, the LEA will be able to involve local businesses, e.g. for mentoring, sponsorship, and to support apprenticeships. The VLE coordinator would also like to develop links with the Connexions Service and FE colleges, in order to provide support around '*progression routes*' for those leaving the VLE.

There have been no new policies specifically in light of the introduction of the VCG. Children with medical needs fall under the remit of the EOTAS service, and as such, planning and provision for this group is included within existing strategic documents, such as the EOTAS Development Plan and the Behaviour Support Plan: '*Subsumed*

within those there is reference to how we want to use funding and how we want to develop services towards vulnerable children'.

Targets, tracking and monitoring
The EOTAS service is working to the national target of a minimum of ten hours educational provision per week for pupils with medical needs. There are well established systems for tracking and monitoring all pupils registered with the EOTAS service and where pupils access the virtual classroom, it will also be possible to log the number of hours provision they have received through online tuition. Beyond this, local objectives focus on effective provision and reintegration to mainstream school when appropriate. The EOTAS Best Value Review includes targets for a percentage improvement in reintegration, although at present this is not differentiated for excluded pupils and those with medical needs.

Impact of the VCG on support for this group
It is felt that the VLE will have a '*significant impact*' on meeting the target of ten hours of educational provision per week. Pupils out of school because they are physically unwell currently receive five hours per week individual tuition, whilst those with emotional or psychological needs will access PRU provision. Interviewees were keen to stress that the VLE will be additional to this, rather than replacing existing provision. With the launch of the open-access website, in addition to the virtual classroom, the total number of hours of educational input a child receives is effectively unlimited. There is also felt to be potential for positive impact on reintegration, given that the VLE will support continuity in pupils' education, keeping them up-to-date with the curriculum and maintaining links with their mainstream school.

Overall, it was felt that the VLE would enable the LEA to better support the education of pupils with medical needs and that the VCG had been instrumental in enabling this resource: '*Given that the development of a virtual learning environment is being funded entirely from the grant, I don't think I'm going too far to say that if it wasn't for that, I suspect we wouldn't have been able to go down this road*'.

Effective practice in supporting this group
A key issue for this group was seen to be the need for accessibility. Through the website and 'virtual' lessons (which can be recorded and played back at a later date), young people who are unwell will be able to access education at times when it is convenient for them to do so. The virtual classroom offers increased time and cost efficiency, in that one tutor can reach several pupils in different locations, teaching them as a group, rather than travelling to see individuals on a one-to-one basis: '*We're talking round about £50 an hour on a one-to-one basis, whereas with the virtual classroom, if we have a tutor delivering to a group of ten pupils, let's say, clearly the cost benefits are demonstrably greater*'. A further benefit of the VLE is that the website element is accessible to parents, who can go in, look at the curriculum and the work their children are doing, and in this way offer additional support.

Regarding variation in effectiveness for different sectors of the client group, it was felt that the virtual classroom would be used more at key stages 3 and 4 as the level of 'unsupported' participation would make it less suitable for very young pupils. However, it was expected that the website element would contain '*something for*

everyone'. There were also some reservations from another interviewee around suitability for school phobic pupils. Concerns were raised that providing these pupils with an alternative to reintegration may lead to entrenchment at home, when '*what we need to do is get to the heart of the problem and get them back in there*'. It was felt that sustained attendance at mainstream school, with appropriate support, might be more effective in overcoming anxieties in these cases.

Future developments

The major area for future development is the potential to make the VLE available to a wider client group. Whilst the initial beneficiaries of the VLE will be pupils with medical needs, there is seen to be significant potential in expanding the target group to include: excluded pupils; pupils at risk of disengaging from education; young offenders leaving secure accommodation; looked after children (through access to the VLE in children's homes); and hard to place pupils: '*We see one of the benefits and potentialities of this is its potential breadth. We're developing it in the EOTAS service, but it's almost limitless in terms of its application*'.

It was also noted that, whilst referral to the EOTAS service is only made where it is known that a pupil will be out of school for more than three weeks, there is potential for VLE to be accessed by pupils who will be absent for a shorter period of time (e.g. fixed-term exclusions, short-term medical treatments), thereby supporting continuity and assisting swift reintegration.

In the shorter term, there are plans to develop partnerships with businesses, FE colleges and other agencies, in order to expand the range of provision available to pupils with medical needs (e.g. apprenticeships, mentoring, vocational courses via the VLE). The VLE coordinator also plans to produce a regular newsletter to keep schools and services informed of what is available via the online service.

VIGNETTE 2

Vulnerable group:	Young carers
Numbers:	Unknown
Amount of grant allocated:	0.1 per cent of total grant
Interviewee(s):	Deputy PEWO (Lead Officer for Young Carers, Education Department), Leader of Young Carers' Project

Strategies funded by the VCG

A relatively small amount of VCG had been used to make three one-off grants to teams or individuals.

In the first example, the grant had been used to purchase awareness-raising packs, which would be provided to schools via a local Young Carers Initiative (not VCG-funded). Young Carers Development Workers (YCDWs), working within this initiative, had been establishing links with local secondary schools, to: help them identify and raise awareness of young carers; increase understanding of what schools can do to support them; and highlight what the authority can provide in terms of individual and group support. To this end, the YCDWs planned to go into schools, liaise with (chiefly) pastoral and Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) staff and to '*put caring firmly on the map*'. The YCDWs intended to take a pack into schools with them, which would include: a copy of the authority's interagency policy; a copy of the book '*Making it Work*'[1]; a video made by a local young carers' project; a CD; and leaflets produced by the Young Carers Initiative. The cost of one of these packs was approximately £23. It was decided that the YCDWs would write to schools offering to visit and run an information session, and that schools who invited the workers in would receive this pack free of charge. An application was made to the LEA for funding in order to facilitate this, and the LEA was able to make a contribution of approximately £500 from the VCG.

A one-off grant of approximately £1000 was made to one young carers' project in the voluntary sector. The Deputy PEWO explained that one-off 'spot funding' is not the way they generally like to provide support. However, in this instance, the applicant explained that the project had established good links with local secondary schools and was working to raise awareness of young carers, in a similar way to the work done by the YCDWs. As such, it was felt that, since the funding was available, it would be appropriate to support this type of work. The work of the project team includes: support and advocacy for young carers; training and awareness raising for school staff; contributions to school PSHE lessons to raise awareness among pupils of young carers and their needs, and to establish a climate in which young carers feel able to identify themselves; and the running of the '*Student Assistance Programme*', a package of support for young carers involving small group mutual support sessions based in schools. Pupils self-refer to this programme, and can have additional one-to-one support from a key worker if they wish. This may include, for example, assistance in negotiating an appropriate arrangement with the school, to support education whilst

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[1] FRANK, J. (2002). *Making it Work: Good Practice with Young Carers and their Families*. London: The Children's Society.

fulfilling caring duties.

Finally, a one-off grant of approximately £65 was made in respect of an individual young carer, as a contribution towards a short break. The school had identified this pupil as a young carer and made a request to the LEA for some funding. However, as is explained below, the LEA officer noted that this is not generally the way in which they like to provide support for young carers.

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development

No new partnerships, policies or multi-agency groups have been formed specifically due to the introduction of the VCG. However, an existing multi-agency group is operating within the authority, with a focus on young carers. The group includes representatives from education, health, social services, youth services, The Children's Society, Connexions and voluntary organisations. Chaired by a social services representative, its remit is two-fold: (1) to promote awareness of young carers among the partner agencies and address any business around issues regarding young carers (e.g. policy revision), and (2) to act as an advisory steering group for young carers' groups and organisations across the authority: '*They can sound ideas off to us*'.

Targets, tracking and monitoring

Interviewees did not mention any 'hard' targets in terms of educational outcomes for young carers. Within its guidance document, however, the multi-agency steering group had set out a number of objectives relating to raised awareness and improved support for young carers, primarily relating to the work of social services.

Impact of the VCG on support for this group

A relatively small amount of the total VCG was allocated to young carers and from the perspective of the Deputy PEWO, the impact of VCG had been minimal. The rationale for this limited use of the grant was that the Deputy PEWO did not view one-off grants to individuals or particular projects as particularly appropriate or feasible in the long term. He saw the role of the LEA as raising awareness and offering advisory support 'across the board', rather than 'spot-funding' particular cases:

> *Rightly or wrongly, we see the education department's role is to actually raise awareness within its own staff. A lot of the support young carers need and want doesn't cost anything. You're talking about understanding, appreciation, in schools maybe being allowed some extra time to do homework or to take into account their circumstances, the stress if something's happened at home. So that doesn't cost any money as such.*

The interviewee felt that for young carers who required more one-to-one support on personal and social issues, this would be more appropriately addressed by one of the young carers' projects operated via the voluntary or youth sector.

Given the minimal influence of the VCG on work with young carers, the LEA officer did not feel that it had contributed a great deal to meeting the authority's targets for this group. However, it was hoped that the promotional packs, which were part-funded by VCG, would be contributing to raised awareness among school staff of the impact of the caring role on young people. In the case of the contribution to the young

carers' project, the project leader explained that the small financial contribution had been valuable in contributing to ongoing staffing costs. The project has no long-term financial support and is reliant of blocks of short-term funding from various sources: '*In terms of keeping the project afloat and giving us breathing space, yeah, it was very important*'. Thus, VCG had played some part in sustaining the positive work of the project.

Effective practice in supporting this group

Regarding the role of the LEA, the Deputy PEWO stated: '*I think we need to establish a climate where young carers feel safe enough and confident enough to actually identify themselves*'. They have tried to facilitate this through the 'sensitive' adaptation of schools' admissions forms. Whereas a tick box labelled 'My child is a young carer' would be unlikely to put parents at ease, due, for example, to concerns around social services intervention, the LEA have tried to be more subtle, including questions such as 'Are there any circumstances at home we should know about?' or 'Is there any reason why you might not be able to attend parents' evenings?', which might identify, for example, if the parent is a wheelchair user. Education welfare staff also try to work sensitively and cooperatively in cases where they are aware that a young person is carrying out caring duties: '*We're not saying 'You're a young carer, therefore necessarily you must be treated differently'. We're saying, 'You're a young carer'. That in itself may be sufficient support, that they know they can actually go to somebody*'.

Future developments

No comments were made in this respect.

VIGNETTE 3

Vulnerable group:	Excluded pupils
Numbers:	Total not stated, but approximately 23 pupil supported by the interviewee to date through this approach
Amount of grant allocated:	8 per cent of total grant
Interviewee(s):	Assistant Psychologist

Strategies funded by the VCG

Three full-time assistant psychologists (APs) have been appointed through VCG funding, to increase the LEA's capacity to reintegrate permanently excluded pupils. With the requirement for full-time provision and an increase in permanent exclusions, it was felt that renewed emphasis on reintegration was needed, with some focused and intensive input, '*trying to find what worked and what didn't work and taking it forward*'. Each AP is based in one area of the authority, working flexibly and covering a number of the LEA's Education Centres (PRUs). The grant covers their salaries, mileage, administrative costs and professional supervision from a senior educational psychologist.

The initial remit of the posts was to work with pupils where reintegration was seen to be achievable, addressing issues of emotional vulnerability, anger management and aggressive behaviour, with a view to a return to mainstream school. However, the interviewee felt, that, over the course of the first year, the post had expanded and now had five key areas of focus (among which some degree of overlap was recognised):

Counselling and therapeutic work with permanently excluded pupils in key stage 3 who are suitable for reintegration

Counselling and therapeutic work with emotionally vulnerable pupils (possibly 'self-excluded') who are suitable for reintegration

Support for pupils in key stages 3 and 4, who have been given fixed-term exclusions from the Education Centre (i.e. some counselling and discussion around the reasons for the exclusion and strategies for settling back into the centre)

Preparation for college or careers/work-related training, for pupils in years 10 and 11, who will not be returning to mainstream school

Group work with pupils in key stages 3 and 4 presenting severe emotional and behavioural difficulties, who are not yet ready for return to mainstream school (e.g. around anger management, drugs and alcohol, offending behaviour or negative attitudes to education).

Largely, the work is based around the Cognitive Behavioural Therapy method. For those pupils who are returning to mainstream school, the focus may be on their anxieties about school, or on the triggers for their angry, disruptive or anti-social behaviour. For young people entering post-16 destinations, sessions will focus on goal setting, exploring the young person's options for the future, and preparing for what they may experience in college or the workplace. For those who return to school, the AP will continue to offer reintegration support for as long as is necessary, accompanying the pupil on initial visits, continuing their counselling sessions in school, and acting as an advocate or mediator with school staff if problems arise.

Impact of the VCG of partnerships and policy development

A job specification has been produced for the assistant psychologist posts and formal referral forms have been developed. However, regarding excluded pupils generally, no other formal policies or procedures had been drawn up specifically due to the VCG. Partnership working between the APs and Education Centres was seen to be strong. The AP interviewed felt that he was now very much an integrated part of the education centre team, attending staff meetings when on site, sharing information with staff on the progress made with pupils, and making suggestions as to ways in which teaching staff could support these pupils.

Regarding liaison with mainstream schools, there is in some cases an outreach member of staff from the education centre who works in the schools, so this individual will manage the reintegration and will arrange for the AP to come in and work with an individual as necessary. APs also work with staff in LSUs (into which reintegrated pupils generally go in the first instance), who will pass on information about events that have occurred during the week, issues they should be aware of, and things they might want to discuss with the young person during their session. The AP interviewed has made some links with Connexions, talking in general terms, to find out about each other's work and areas where this could have impact across the services. To date, however, he had not been involved with other agencies coming into school, for example, child protection, social workers or care teams.

Targets, tracking and monitoring

Targets for this group will depend on individual circumstances. In the widest sense, reintegration to mainstream school is the overall objective for a number of pupils. Within this, however, the AP will set targets for the young person, relating to changes in behaviour or attitude: '*I think a positive result is the young person doing what fits with them rather than me achieving a result of getting a bum on a seat in the school. It's more a case of them moving forward, because ultimately, that's what we're all here for*'. The APs keep records of the reasons for intervention and aims for the pupil, keep notes of work done with individuals, and track long- and short-term outcomes.

Informal evaluation comes through discussion with staff about whether pupils' emotional and behavioural issues have improved. The APs also give formal evaluation sheets to the education centres at the end of each week, to record how they feel the work has gone. There will be a full evaluation by the EPS at the end of this year, to which these evaluation sheets will contribute. With the young people themselves, the AP interviewed has found that an effective evaluation method is to use sentences or phrases based on their experiences and concerns (e.g. 'how my life is at home', 'how successful I feel my reintegration will be'), and ask them to rate how they feel about each issue on a scale, at various points in their programme, for example, every three or four weeks.

Beyond access to full-time provision, there are no specific attainment targets for these pupils. Attendance is on a 'value added' basis, rather than specific targets. The education centres nearly always find that attendance improves on levels in school, although it is unlikely that overall figures will ever reach the averages of mainstream schools.

Impact of the VCG on support for this group

To date, the AP interviewed has worked with around 23 young people, 12 of whom have been reintegrated to school on a full or reduced timetable, or have moved on to college: '*I've been able to work with a lot of young people that a lot of other members of staff haven't been able to make much progress with, which is very rewarding*'. He felt the role had proved very effective in its first year, key features being the sustained reintegration support APs could offer and the advocacy role they could play with mainstream schools. Acknowledging the pressures that school staff are facing, the AP felt it was useful that he could take a wider view of the young person's situation and, with this '*bigger picture*' could negotiate with schools to arrange a more appropriate curriculum for the young person:

> *With the young people I work with, there are certain elements of the curriculum which just turn them off straight away, which are flashpoints really, during the day. And so just for schools to be able to be a little bit more flexible ... If French is a problem, okay, he doesn't have to do French for the short term, and we'll try and solve that problem. So it's having that flexibility, looking at the bigger picture, rather than getting a bum on a seat.*

In terms of impact on education centres, the AP makes efforts to compliment staff and remind them that they are successful in building positive relationships with pupils. He encourages them to recognise their successes, and the fact that pupils are attending, which is a key positive achievement which they can build on. Within the education centres, the AP feels he is also able to play a wider role in supporting pupils and staff, in that he can offer an outlet for young people at times of crisis or 'high emotion': '*I've got good relationships with the majority of the young people, and I can sit and talk to them ... If I'm actually in the education centre and they sort of blow a fuse, I can help to calm them down to an extent*'.

Regarding the impact on mainstream schools, the AP interviewed felt that some had been very receptive towards their involvement, and had reported positive changes in pupils. He felt that he had been able to fit in well to the systems of the schools he is working with, and become part of the integrated timetable for that young person, providing some added value. From other schools, there had been less feedback, although the AP was of the view that '*no news is good news*'. When asked whether mainstream schools themselves were becoming better able to support these children because of the work done by the APs, there was a 'tempered' positive response. It was felt that APs were helping schools to reintegrate these pupils, through a more collaborative approach: '*Instead of going in and saying 'This has to change', I think it's more a case of 'How can we help you support to maintain these people in the school?''*. However, there were concerns that, to some extent, APs were still '*hidden professionals*'. The AP interviewed felt it was important to continue to build relationships with school staff and work closely with Learning Support Centres, to raise awareness of the work being done with this client group.

Effective practice in supporting this group

Overall, the approach aims to address the social, emotional and behavioural issues which are preventing the young person from settling into education and 'functioning' in school. To this end, the AP felt that 'small steps' were necessary, allowing the young person to address one issue at a time, where there were complex difficulties. At

the same time, it was felt to be important to raise the young person's self-esteem, and help them to recognise the skills and attributes that they already have, for example, that they are mature for their age, independent and able to make positive choices.

At the outset, the APs were working with something of a '*blank slate*' in that they were free to experiment with approaches, to find out '*what worked*' for these young people and develop strategies accordingly. The AP interviewed gave several examples of what he had found to be effective practice over the first year, noting that it was important to first build up a positive relationship with the young person on an equal and non-judgemental level, and give them time to open up to more personal conversation:

> *I've found that trying to do full-on counselling therapeutic work, they just reject it. The first thing you have to do is develop a positive working relationship, so they start to trust you and you can have a laugh with them and a bit of banter, and they think 'Oh, he's alright actually'.*

During sessions, the AP had found that a neutral, hands-on activity was useful in 'breaking the ice' (e.g. a card game or construction set). Also, the young people responded better to activities based around visual materials, such as flashcards and posters, rather than worksheet-based exercises. Observing young people in their lessons at the education centre was also beneficial for the APs, in giving them a complete picture of their behaviour and reactions to situations.

The AP interviewed felt that the posts have been very cost-effective, in that each of them covers a number of education centres and is able to put in very intensive support for the pupils referred to them, both in the centres and in mainstream school. Importantly, the dedicated focus of the APs means they can provide a very quick response, for example, if an education centre puts in a request to see a pupil, the AP can be there the next day, whereas there may be a waiting list of some weeks to see an educational psychologist. It was also acknowledged by the AP and the strategic interviewee in the LEA that appointing assistant psychologists rather than fully qualified educational psychologists was a cost-efficient strategy, although work was not seen to be any less effective.

Finally, the fact that APs are not teachers was felt to be of benefit to them in their support role, in that young people were more willing to open up and share their concerns: '*You're separate from the school, you're independent, you can go in and you can just sit and chat to them about how things are going really, whether it's at home or in school*'.

Future developments

The AP interviewed had become aware that many of the client group are, or have been, in public care, are on the child protection register, and/or have been in contact with youth offending services. Over the summer, he planned to contact and meet with various agencies (Family Support Teams, Care Teams, Child Protection Teams, YOTs) to build up contacts, find out more about their work, and discuss areas where their work could compliment each other. It was hoped that this would raise awareness of the issues each agency was dealing with, and help their work to become more 'joined up': '*I think that's essential really, because essentially, we're doing the same*

sort of work with the same sort of people to an extent, so it would just be good to have that open channel really'.

Finally, the AP described how he would like, in future, to offer more training to schools and education centre staff, around the counselling and behavioural therapy techniques used in his work, which they themselves could then begin to implement.

VIGNETTE 4

Vulnerable group:	Parents of vulnerable children
Numbers:	Not stated
Amount of grant allocated:	9 per cent of total grant
Interviewee(s):	Manager of Parent Development Team

Strategies funded by the VCG

Building on various parenting education activities, begun under the remit of Behaviour Support Teams and the EPS, the LEA has established a dedicated Parent Development Team (PDT). The remit of the team, which is based within the Inclusion branch of the LEA, is: to audit and coordinate provision of parent education and support across the authority; to run parent development courses; and to provide facilitator training for those wishing to run classes themselves (e.g. LSAs, home–school workers, health visitors, family support workers, social workers and mental health workers).

The VCG covers the salaries of the PDT staff, which comprises: a permanent full-time manager, permanent full-time administrative support, and four 0.5 FTE coordinators (currently on fixed-term contracts). There is also financial support from a consortium of local Primary Care Trusts and the County Council's base budget (totalling around £87,000). Each coordinator has responsibility for one of four parenting programmes:

> A programme aimed at increasing the confidence and parenting skills of parents of two- to eight-year-olds (established prior to the VCG)
> A programme aimed at increasing the confidence and parenting skills of parents of teenagers (established prior to the VCG)
> A new programme targeting parents of children who are having problems with school attendance, including those on Parenting Orders
> A new programme targeting parents of pupils with disabilities.

Although the first two programmes are open to all parents, much of the work of the team has been with the parents of '*children whose family life is vulnerable, which therefore makes them vulnerable*'. For example, the programme aimed at younger children has helped many families who come into contact with early years centres, who would not have access to other forms of pre-school provision, because their families are either unable or unwilling to access services that are available generally. Additionally, in some areas, these programmes are used in a 'targeted' way, for example focusing on the parenting skills and involvement of fathers.

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development

The establishment of the PDT has led to increased working with other LEA departments and other agencies: '*I think we have started to make links across agencies and within agencies that didn't exist before, and for me, that's really, really positive*'. A key element of the team's action plan is to develop a cross-agency county parenting strategy. To this end, a group has been established with representatives including: health, social services, several branches of the LEA, the YOT, Children's

Fund, secondary and primary schools.

Specifically regarding social services, there are no more formal links at present. However, the PDT Manager feels that part of the reason she was offered the post was due to her social work background and the hope that she would be able to develop these links more effectively. There are obstacles, in that social services are constantly under pressure and their work is '*very much crisis response*' whereas the PDT are working preventatively, attempting to reaching families before this point. The manager notes that it is difficult for social services to promote prevention when there is so much pressure for crisis intervention. However, it is hoped that, by having social services represented on the multi-agency group, links will be improved.

The PDT works closely with schools, offering 'two-fold' support. If a school expresses an interest in parenting education, the team can either go in and run parenting courses or they can offer training to school staff to facilitate the courses themselves. Links have also been developed with other private, voluntary and statutory sector agencies offering parenting support, for example, Parentline Plus, Positive Parenting, and Family Learning, a local authority provider, based within Adult and Community Learning. Prior to the establishment of the PDT, there was little official linkage between the parenting work of the LEA and that of Family Learning (whose focus includes promoting education among families where parents themselves been poorly engaged in learning). Since the establishment of the PDT, however, there are joint programmes running, where Family Learning input financial support and the PDT contributes the 'human resources' through their facilitators. This increased linkage is felt to be '*a really big success story*'.

The two new programmes have also involved increased partnership working. The attendance programme has been developed in collaboration with the education welfare service. The coordinator is also looking at working with the YOT to develop materials for families where children are non-attending and have become involved in offending. Regarding the disability programme, a multi-agency working party was set up, to look at writing materials specifically for parents of children with disabilities. The coordinator has '*gained a huge range of views*', through consultation with all statutory and voluntary agencies working with these families, members of the deaf and blind community, physically disabled people, people with learning disabilities, and several agencies that work with specific client groups.

Targets, tracking and monitoring
The PDT is working to an action plan which includes: the production of an authority-wide, multi-agency parenting strategy; an audit of availability of parent education and support; the review and adaptation of existing LEA parenting programmes; recruitment and retention of high quality facilitators; and raising the profile of the PDT within the authority. As noted above, a multi-agency team has been convened, and work on the parenting strategy is felt to be progressing well. A mapping exercise of existing provision has been completed and the PDT is now actively looking at '*plugging the gaps*' in areas of the authority where there is no provision, through work with local agencies. The LEA's programmes have also been reviewed and remodelled to make them as appropriate as possible '*for the world we live in now*'.

Impact of the VCG on support for this group

VCG has been instrumental in establishing the PDT, in that it has funded the salaries of all the staff members. Although two of the programmes had been established for some time, the grant enabled them to establish '*a central hub*', and this central point of contact is seen to have improved coherence and efficiency. Additionally, the mapping exercise carried out by the team has given, for the first time, a county-wide view on the range and availability of parenting education, as well as who is actually accessing provision: '*I feel that's enabled us to make much clearer plans about where we need to be renewing our efforts*'.

The VCG has also enabled the team to develop the two new programmes, which, it is hoped, will improve support for specific groups of parents. Regarding the impact of the attendance programme, the PDT Manager explained, '*We end up in this very, kind of, punitive world, where parents are getting punished for their children not going to school, children are getting punished for not going to school, and I would say that some of that money is therefore being used to try and break into that cycle and offer a more supportive service to those children and families*'. It is hoped that the EWS will be able to identify families and refer them before a crisis intervention stage, and also that the programme coordinator will develop ways to encourage schools to identify these families earlier.

Effective practice in supporting this group

The manager feels that effective parenting education work should promote confidence in the parent and help them to feel empowered to be parents to their children. It should impart knowledge and information and be an opportunity to meet with parents who are in similar situations. A key feature of the LEA's courses is that they are free to families. Whilst the manager stresses that they have good links with other providers and are not in competition with them: '*A lot of those are programmes that parents have to pay to go on and that's not the service we're offering. Our programmes are free at the point of delivery*'.

For the manager, '*what makes a good class is the quality of the facilitator*', but she acknowledges that many colleagues also think that the choice of venue is important, in that parents who have had negative experiences of education might find it difficult to come into a school setting. Other venues which are used include community halls, church halls and libraries. In terms of publicising programmes, the most effective medium is felt to be word of mouth. However, the PDT also has poster campaigns and leaflets in information centres, libraries and schools. This year, they are going into Year 6 information evenings in schools, to promote the programme aimed at parents of teenagers. When parents go to look round secondary schools, the PDT will have a physical presence and parents will be able meet and talk to members of the team, '*because we do find that actually talking to people is a far better way of doing anything than posters*'.

The manager feels that the programmes are cost-effective in that the facilitators work with groups of parents and 'tap into' the skills that they can share with each other. This is seen to be more cost-effective than professionals meeting parents on an individual referral basis. The manager also feels that parenting programmes enable a wider cohort of vulnerable children to be supported, in that they reach parents that would not necessarily '*trigger*' intervention from other services, but would

nonetheless benefit from some support:

The school has felt able to directly go to a parent and say 'We just wondered whether this is something that you would find supportive?' [They are] *absolutely not parents that they would be looking to refer to any other kind of service, but people know that there is a struggle going on, but they wouldn't hit anybody's criteria*.

Future developments

No comments were made in this respect.

VIGNETTE 5

Vulnerable group:	Pre-school children with behavioural difficulties
Numbers:	Not stated
Amount of grant allocated:	16 per cent of total grant
Interviewee(s):	County Portage Coordinator

Strategies funded by the VCG

The VCG has been used to expand the work of the LEA's existing Portage service, which is core-funded. The main function of Portage is to support pre-school children with SEN and there are '*fairly strict criteria*' for eligibility for this intervention. Using VCG, the LEA has expanded the scope of the service to address behavioural problems where there is not necessarily any other identified SEN. This new branch of the service has been titled 'Portage Plus'.

The rationale for this development was a concern from primary headteachers regarding pupils arriving in reception classes without the necessary social and behavioural skills, manifesting in anti-social behaviour in school. It emerged that these children had often had limited or no access to pre-school education, for a variety of reasons, not least that preschool providers were having problems coping with the child. Thus, children had often been withdrawn by parents or were asked to leave, either explicitly or by more covert '*exclusion by the back door*'.

The VCG is funding eight area coordinators or 'home visitors' who work with families where children are presenting with behavioural difficulties. There is an open referral system; parents, health visitors or other professionals can refer a family to the service. Following a referral, there is an initial home visit, at which a decision is made as to whether intervention is appropriate. At the initial visit, the home visitor will talk to the parents, discuss their concerns, observe the child, and complete an assessment of the child's level of need. Home visitors may also talk to the referring party and the pre-school setting, if there is one involved (although this is unusual). There are then regular weekly home visits, building a relationship with the family and helping parents to address and manage their child's behaviour.

For those children who are not accessing provision, part of the team's work is to identify a preschool provider, in partnership with the family. They then have a 'consultancy' role in working closely with the provider and offering advice and guidance to establish: what sort of support they might need in place, prior to the child coming in; and what strategies the preschool can use to work with that child.

Prior to a child going into school, Portage Plus will make the LEA's Behaviour Support Service (BSS) aware of the child. A meeting is organised with the school and any other involved parties (e.g. speech therapists or educational psychologists), to look at the transition into school. Portage Plus coordinators may also support schools with Individual Education Plans for the children. They will continue to work with the child, within the school setting, up to the end of first half term. At this point there is a transition meeting, where all of the information will be passed over to the BSS, who then take over the casework.

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development

As described above, Portage Plus involves partnership working with pre-school providers, schools and other LEA departments. The establishment of Portage Plus has also led to increased links being developed between the LEA and independent pre-school providers. As noted by the strategic interviewee in this LEA, prior to this new development, '*we would have had fairly limited contact with them, unless they happened to have admitted a child with a serious disability*'.

Due to the close working with the BSS, the team have drawn up protocols and procedures for transition into school: '*It's something that we've tightened up, I think, for these children ... Obviously when we're looking at the transition into school, that's when we have to be very clear about whose role it is and at what point we're going to draw out and what each of us is going to be doing*'. There has been discussion around the possibility of joint training with the BSS. Although the opportunity has not arisen so far, this is something they would like to do in future. There has, however, been joint training with the EPS and with area SENCOs.

As Portage Plus was being developed, the team gave presentations to groups of health visitors, social services staff, speech and language therapists, paediatricians and educational psychologists. These sessions were an opportunity to publicise the work of the new service and also to explore avenues for future joint working. In one area of the authority, Portage Plus has developed a new partnership with CAMHS. Together, the two teams have run a group for children with ADHD. Work takes place with groups of families (both parents and children) over a course of eight weekly sessions. The Portage Plus home visitor then continues to monitor those children who were part of the group, and will also monitor them as they move into school.

A future goal of the team is to work more closely with social services. Some of the families they work with have social service involvement, and there is seen to be potential to share good practice and help social services develop the preventative side to their work.

Targets, tracking and monitoring

The overall aim of the programme is around inclusion and '*to enable all children to access pre-school education*'. The four key objectives of the programme are:

Improving behaviour at home by enabling parents and carers to manage their children's behaviour more effectively
Ensuring that the induction to the early years setting is successful
Providing support to the early years setting in managing the child's behaviour
Ensuring that the transition into school is planned and appropriately supported.

There will be ongoing tracking and monitoring of children, both whilst they are receiving Portage Plus support and also as they move into schools, so that the team can monitor whether there is sustained impact. Systems are being developed whereby the EPS will be able to continue to monitor these children, to see whether or not behaviour concerns re-emerge later on.

Impact of the VCG on support for this group

Fundamentally, the VCG has enabled the LEA's Portage service to broaden its criteria and reach a group of children and families for whom there was no existing support. As the coordinator noted: '*I think we always knew that this was an area that was much needed, and certainly we have found from the referrals that we've received, that it very much is*'. The Coordinator feels that there is now increased capacity for support and a more coherent service for this group of children. Previously there was no specific provision targeting this group, and parents were unsure who to approach. Whilst there may have been support available from early years centres, special schools or the outreach branch of Portage, this was seen to be '*very hit and miss, so this has pulled it together*'. One of the area coordinators has, in fact, produced a leaflet for parents, detailing the various agencies offering support for behaviour and explaining the differences between the services provided. Families who find they no longer need support are asked to complete an 'exit questionnaire'. So far, feedback has been very positive, with improvements in both behaviour and parent-child relationships highlighted.

When asked specifically whether she felt better able to meet the educational needs of this group, the coordinator was positive, highlighting the fact that successful intervention from Portage Plus meant that children would be better equipped to settle into pre-school. As the project is in its first year, there was no 'hard' data available as yet, regarding children's successful integration to primary school. However, there will be a full evaluation of the project in September 2004. Regarding the impact on schools, the coordinator again acknowledged that it was '*early days*'. However, she felt that there were positive indications, in that meetings were being held to discuss the needs of children who would be moving into school in the coming term: '*Supporting the schools in supporting the children and putting things into place for the children. I think that it will have an impact, in that the schools are listening and learning from the things that we have to say*'. Additionally, the strategic interviewee in this LEA noted that there was now improved support for pre-school providers, in managing behaviour and supporting children: '*We're more able to challenge* [unofficial exclusions] *and I guess make it safe, make it comfortable for the pre-school provider to take on a child who they thought was going to be challenging, because of the input we provide*'.

Effective practice in supporting this group

The Portage model on which Portage Plus is based is '*very much about an equal partnership with parents*' and the coordinator highlighted this as a key feature of effective work with this group. Whilst the home visitors were able to offer advice and training to parents, they also helped parents to recognise their own skills and expertise. This can create a feeling of partnership and thus help the home visitor to build a positive relationship with families: '*Within Portage, we are an empowering service, and although we do have the skills and we will assess the children and teach the children new skills, etc., what we're largely about is empowering the parents to be able to do that for themselves*'. Additionally, seeing the child in both the home and pre-school/school setting was felt to be beneficial, in order to fully assess the child's behaviour patterns: '*That allows us to have different perceptions of the child and recognise what's working somewhere and then take that and use it elsewhere*'.

The new branch of the Portage service was seen to be efficient and cost-effective because, aside from the new VCG-funded appointments, all overheads and systems were already in place and the Portage Plus team were able to '*link in*' to existing structures. The coordinator also highlighted the fact that that the team were able to respond quickly to referrals, generally within a week.

The coordinator noted that the team had to remain flexible and adaptable to the needs and nature of families, rather than solely pushing their own agenda and that of the pre-school/school: '*I think we need to look at where the parents are at, how the family functions, and work with that, so that does require a great deal of flexibility actually*'. Finally, it was also felt that Portage Plus staff could usefully fulfil a 'key worker' role, negotiating with or making referrals to other services (e.g. speech therapists).

Future developments
No comments were made in this respect.

Case study 8

Type of LEA: Outer London borough
Interviewee: Pupil Support Service Manager

Location of responsibility for the VCG

Responsibility for the implementation of the VCG is located within the Pupil Support Service, under the remit of the Pupil Support Service Manager. This is a third tier post, which includes strategic responsibility for looked after children, school refusers, pupils with medical needs, unaccompanied asylum seekers and excluded pupils, and involves liaison with other departments on young offenders, teenage parents, young carers and Gypsy/Traveller pupils. The manager notes: '*On all the children who are vulnerable, we either are responsible for them, or we belong to joint steering groups with all these people*'. It was felt that, by placing responsibility for the grant with a third tier officer, this would enable a more creative approach to implementation at operational level:

> *I had it as an operational manager, with strategic knowledge, but looking at all the issues ... I can at least see what the issues are and what the problems are and then agree, if we can move forward on them. People that aren't working closely with front line teams have more difficulty with this.*

The LEA's strategic approach to supporting vulnerable children

The LEA has a strategic approach on vulnerable children, documented in the EDP. This plan was in place prior to the introduction of the VCG, and as such, the grant was not felt to have affected the LEA's strategic approach to any great extent. However, it had fed into the strategic plan and facilitated support strategies, for example, providing the opportunity to target support at individual level in the form of one-off grants. The manager noted that initially, there were uncertainties about the length of time over which the VCG would be available, and as such, there was a hesitancy to implement any major strategic changes or make staff appointments based on this funding stream. However, now that the grant was confirmed for three years, it was felt that it could be used more strategically in the coming year.

Implementation of the VCG

Within the current EDP, the LEA considers the term 'vulnerable children' to include all the key groups identified by the DfES guidance on the VCG, plus pupils at risk of exclusion and gifted and talented children (although the latter are not under the remit of the Pupil Support Service and have not been targeted with VCG funding). As the total amount granted to the LEA was felt to be a substantial increase on previous funding, it was decided that all of the key groups would be allocated a '*nominally ring-fenced*' amount of VCG funding, although in some cases (e.g. young carers, teenage parents) there had been little call on the resource.

A meeting was held between all services that had previously had Standards Fund grants, to assess the funding as it stood and decide what services and strategies needed to be maintained, ensuring there was not shortfall. The group then considered other

possibilities and areas of need, which could be targeted by the new grant. Local branches of the Children's Fund and Connexions had recently carried out 'mapping exercises' around vulnerable groups and through links with the steering groups of these agencies, the Pupil Support Service Manager was able to utilise the findings of these analyses. The director took final decisions on the allocations for strategies and services that needed to be maintained, and then the Pupil Support Service Manager was able to decide, in consultation with other colleagues, which 'gaps' and new areas to address.

All services previously in receipt of Standards Fund money, including support for emotional and behavioural difficulties and pupils at risk of exclusion, were maintained, with additional funding for the majority (e.g. for expansion in staffing). Groups which were receiving education-based funding for the first time included young carers and young offenders and completely new strategies included a school-based mentoring project for unaccompanied asylum seekers (see Vignette 3).

Additionally, all services were able to bid for 'one-off' grants in respect of individual needs among their client group. Within the LEA, there is an 'education, youth and leisure' newsletter which is sent to schools. The Pupil Support Service Manager placed a bulletin in this publication to let them know that the funding was available for one-off bids and detailing the types of groups and strategies they would consider. Schools were required to approach the relevant team or key worker (e.g. Traveller Education Service, Education Officer for looked after children) and, if the suggestion was felt to be appropriate, it was then referred to the Pupil Support Service Manager for final approval and funding. It was finally endorsed by a joint Education Department/school strategic group.

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development

No new policies had been developed specifically around the VCG, although, as noted above, the grant was felt to link into existing local strategy effectively. Similarly, the LEA did not establish a new strategic panel in response to the introduction of the VCG. Firstly, the Pupil Support Service Manager felt that there was not time to do so, given the perceived short 'lead-in' time for the first year of VCG funding. More significantly, however, there were several other existing interagency groups in the LEA who had the function of planning around these groups and, as such, it was felt that these groups could effectively manage the implementation of the VCG.

Regarding the impact of the VCG on multi-agency working at strategic level, the Pupil Support Service Manager explained that for 2004–05 an amount of VCG had been given to a multi-agency support team involving health, social services and education (funding had also been contributed by the partner agencies). This team will particularly focus on the mental health needs of looked after children, offering clinical psychology and family therapy. The ability to contribute financially to a joint project was felt to have impacted positively on interagency partnerships:

> *I suppose you could call it additional goodwill because obviously there's always this tension between social services and education priorities, and the director was quite clear that he wanted this pooled. He wanted to start looking at pooled budgets, and so that has been really good.*

Health services within the authority are also funding a counsellor who is available to schools for individual-level work. The Pupil Support Service Manager noted the effectiveness of this post and stated that she was considering funding an additional worker through the VCG, to work alongside this counsellor and expand capacity for supporting pupils at risk of exclusion.

Future developments
At the end of the first year, there was an amount of VCG funding remaining in the budget. Schools have been able to bid for this money, for projects where they have a significant number of children in a vulnerable group. Projects were short listed by the Pupil Support Service Manager and the Deputy Director, and were then taken forward to the LEA's Inclusion Strategy Group. Twelve projects were proposed and six will go ahead in September 2004.

For example, one project, based in a special school, will involve providing outreach and family support from the school for sick children who cannot attend. Another is based in a primary school, and will look at support for bereaved children (death or family breakdown). This was felt to be causing '*huge issues*' around behaviour and possible exclusions. The school has bought in a twelve-week programme from Relate around loss and bereavement, to deliver with these children.

From non-VCG funding, a vulnerable children's data officer has recently been appointed, with the remit of gathering data for all children within the vulnerable categories, who are 'flagged' by schools on the LEA's system. This officer will look at statistical data and will match data to postcodes, exclusions, attendance, etc. It is hoped that this will give a much better overview of need and will allow for a more strategic approach to supporting groups of pupils, rather than one-off children.

VIGNETTE 1

Vulnerable group:	Gypsy/Travellers
Numbers:	213 pupils supported in schools,11 supported in other settings and 33 early years children (2003–2004)
Amount of grant allocated:	13 per cent of total grant
Interviewee(s):	TES Coordinator, Traveller Teacher, Traveller Liaison Worker, Primary School Deputy Headteacher

Strategies funded by the VCG

The LEA's existing Traveller Education Service (TES) is now wholly funded by the VCG. The service comprises six members of staff: a coordinator; a liaison officer; an early years worker; two teachers; and a classroom assistant. The TES is largely school based. Staff work with children in school to address gaps in learning and support families to access school provision and to integrate pupils into school routines. The liaison officer's role focuses on helping families to access education, e.g. getting uniforms, filling in forms, going to admissions interviews and exclusion meetings, and generally supporting families with any issues relating to school. The liaison officer is mobile and sees families as and when (and where) needed. Additionally support is offered where parents need assistance in understanding the SEN statementing process, or to understand the procedures if a child is going through an exclusion.

Since the introduction of the VCG, there has been a slight increase in funding, which has been used to increase the hours of the liaison officer from 0.5 FTE to 0.9 FTE. This additional funding was secured through a bid to the LEA's strategic officer, for this specific purpose. The TES has also been able to apply for one-off grants from the VCG, for support for individuals (e.g. classroom assistants or reintegration support).

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development

The TES has strong existing links with social services, domestic violence support agencies, housing and health. Links with social services are mainly around cases where a child is 'in need', or if parents need extra support for a child with SEN. Whilst the TES are not on any formal strategic groups with social services, meetings are convened as necessary around particular cases or local issues. The increased hours of the liaison officer have meant she has been able to build up further links with statutory services and agencies within the community. She has made home visits on behalf of, or with social services, to families where there are concerns and may also refer families to social services if she has a concern around welfare. The officer is also able to act as a 'conduit' to other services (e.g. housing or health services) where families are not confident or knowledgeable about how to access support. Liaison with health has been greatly facilitated by the NOF funded project Health Opportunities Promotion and Education, (HOPE) which has appointed a health worker with a responsibility for Gypsy/Travellers. The TES and HOPE are working closely to promote awareness of Gypsy/Traveller culture at all levels of service provision and to ensure all Gypsy/Travellers access the health care they need.

Regarding links with the wider community, there has been collaboration with a local community centre who have received funding from the Children's Fund to work with

the 5–13 age group. Assisted by the liaison worker's links with the community, a parenting group was set up for Irish Traveller women. A positive knock-on effect is that the mothers have then come forward and said that they are very keen to develop presentation skills and literacy skills, so that they can support their children's education. In another example of community links, the local council had recently carried out a customer survey on housing, as part of a cultural strategy, and were keen to consult with marginalised groups. The liaison officer was able to facilitate this, providing the link with the Irish Traveller community to gain their views: '*So now we have a Traveller voice, we have consultation with an Irish Traveller group, which is a really positive step forward*'.

No new policies have been developed specifically as a result of the VCG. However, within the remit of their 'umbrella' organisation, the Ethnic Minority Achievement Support Service, policy is constantly being reviewed and updated.

Targets, tracking and monitoring

The TES produces a termly monitoring plan, listing service priorities (linked to the EDP), expenditure and evidence of impact. Objectives relate to: access and participation; educational support and attainment; support for schools; and partnership with families. Each pupil receiving in-school assistance will have a 'Programme of Support', which is drawn up by the Traveller teacher, the school SENCO and the class teacher. This includes aims and activities for the pupil and is reviewed on a termly basis. All pupils are also tracked through PLASC data. Attendance and achievement are monitored on an annual basis and there are targets for improvement year on year, although the coordinator noted the difficulties in target setting for this group, in that it is a highly mobile cohort. There is also a target for 100 per cent primary–secondary transfer, which was achieved in 2003–04.

Impact of the VCG on support for this group

The increased capacity of the liaison officer was felt to have had several positive impacts on support for Gypsy/Traveller pupils. Fundamentally, additional hours meant that the liaison officer was more 'available' and could work more flexibly. She was now able to spend more time with families, thus developing stronger relationships and building up a greater sense of trust and cooperation. This also gave the opportunity to offer more 'thorough' support, taking time to discuss and explain issues which, in turn, might increase the likelihood of impacting on families' attitudes to education:

Before, I just used to explain to parents the importance of arriving on time at school as 'The children really have to get there early because they're missing important information in the morning'. Now I can give more detail: 'They're missing out where they're told how the lesson is going to go, what they're going to do, how they start off, and the lesson organisation'. So it's so much better now because the parents then get a fuller understanding of what's going on in the classroom.

Additionally, as noted above, the increased time with families meant that the liaison officer was able to offer more holistic support, for example, enabling families to access health services or social security benefits themselves. For example, one parent '*contacted our service, because all the Travellers in the area know that we can offer*

help. Obviously my remit is not health or social services, but again, I had the time to go round and explain to mum how she could access the service and become more confident'. Furthermore, the increased time meant that the officer could become involved in the more 'positive' aspects of support, for example, passing on messages to parents of their children's achievements in school. This again was felt to have potential benefits in improving parents' attitudes to education.

The TES coordinator believed that there was now faster access to school for Gypsy/Traveller pupils, due to the increased capacity of the liaison officer and the consequent improved relationships with families. On a personal level, the Liaison Officer felt that she could now plan work more carefully, and thus could be more effective overall:

> *It's just given me the time to pre-plan my work. Before, I had no time for planning, I just used to have to go in there feet first, and that can become quite stressful. But now I have more time to think things through, to liaise with other LEA staff first, and do it more effectively.*

Given that the service is entirely funded by the VCG, progress towards targets and the continued effective practice of the service overall could be attributed to the grant to some extent. General positive impacts of the service's work were noted to include: that children remain settled in school and make progress in their attainment; that they gain confidence and self-esteem; and that school staff benefited from the training and guidance offered by the TES team.

Finally, the one-off grants, available in respect of individual pupils, were felt to have increased the effectiveness of support for newly arrived Gypsy/Traveller pupils with additional learning needs, by providing additional support where the TES itself did not have capacity within its permanent staff. In particular, the targeted in-class support was seen to have assisted (re)integration of pupils:

> *That's something that the grant has really enabled us to support, because when we've had new children into the borough, often with quite extensive needs, quite unusual needs in some cases ... the grant has enabled [us] to allocate specific, targeted amounts of money to support the children in their new places, to get them into school and integrated into school life, because we just didn't have the capacity to work with individual pupils with complex needs requiring consistent support. This has been very helpful in the short term, although we have had to request to schools that monies be returned when pupils leave mid-term* (TES Coordinator).

Effective practice in supporting this group
A key feature of effective practice was felt to be the building of trust with Gypsy/Traveller families. As a marginalised group, often cautious of 'mainstream' services, it was felt that strong, positive relationships with parents were essential in developing positive attitudes to education: '*It's crucial for Travellers that they trust you and they understand you're on their side*'. To this end, continuity of staffing was felt to be effective. Positive relationships with the pupils themselves were also seen to be crucial. The TES teachers respected the pupils' common wish not to be identified in class, in terms of their ethnicity, and agreed that this was better for the children in

terms of social inclusion. Interviewees felt this attitude varied from school to school – some pupils were open and positive about their ethnicity and were proud to say '*I am a Traveller*'. However, it was also noted that the pupils valued the '*special relationship*' they had with the TES teachers, and enjoyed the individual attention during their 'step out' sessions. The TES teachers highlighted that the learning styles, interests and aptitudes of Gypsy/Traveller pupils often differed from mainstream school approaches. In the specialist sessions with individuals or small groups, the teachers endeavoured to match activities to these learning styles, using practical, hands-on activities as a medium for literacy work, particularly in key stage 3.

The team approach was felt to be cost-effective in that they were able to work across several schools in the LEA and offer staff training, as well as support for pupils. Finally, the role of a dedicated liaison officer was felt to be effective, in that teaching staff were able to retain their focus on support in schools, and access to education was facilitated more quickly, again by the officer having a focused remit. As noted by the TES coordinator: '*She's absolutely crucial to the way we work. Without a liaison officer we would have less time to work proactively with staff and children in schools, and would need to devote time to enable new families to get access to education*'. Furthermore, as Gypsy/Traveller families can arrive at any time of the year, it was felt that a dedicated post holder could respond more flexibly to changing needs.

Future developments
There was an under spend on the VCG in its first year and schools were invited to bid for funding for specific projects to support vulnerable groups. The TES coordinator was now working with one of the successful schools in developing an after-school club with a focus on developing the self-esteem of Gypsy/Travellers and vulnerable pupils.

The TES was working on the development of relevant curriculum resources for the Gypsy/Traveller group, which will also be used to raise awareness among all pupils. There are currently two 'Quality Texts', that have been developed using the QCA National Literacy Strategy Guidelines, being used in the LEA's schools, and more materials are being developed. In integrating these resources into schools' practices, one Traveller teacher noted that more concentrated '*blocks of time*' in schools might be necessary. To this end, discussions around a possible '*regrouping*' or redistribution of staff were planned.

If there was additional money available, the TES Coordinator would like to see more investment in vocational training for children from Year 9 onwards, to better match the interests and aptitudes of this group:

> *Leaving it until they are 16 is too late. Traveller pupils start dropping out in Years 8 and 9; I'd like to see a complete turnaround in attitudes and expectations in preparation for the new 14-19 curriculum so that we can plan for pupils to do work experience, and real vocational training, from a much younger age.*

Finally, following the success of the parenting group for Irish Travellers, described above, there were plans to establish a similar group for English Gypsy/Traveller women. The Liaison Officer felt that she would like to develop the holistic advocacy role, offering advice on the range of social and educational issues, which in 'an ideal

world' would be addressed by service providers :

I'd like to be an advocate for all Travellers. I'd like to have a big mobile unit where I could go round, and just help and open doors for them if I could.

VIGNETTE 2

Vulnerable group:	Unaccompanied asylum seeker pupils
Numbers:	Approximately 60 pupils over the academic year
Amount of grant allocated:	6 per cent of total grant
Interviewee(s):	Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers Project Teacher

Strategies funded by the VCG

The VCG has maintained funding for an existing 'Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Project'. This project comprises one member of staff who works with unaccompanied asylum seeker children (UASC) as they arrive in the country. She is mobile among all the schools in the LEA which have asylum seekers. There is also a cohort of pupils who are only in the borough for a few weeks and will not go into a school. In these cases, the teacher will give them some *ad hoc* provision in the Children's Home.

Most of the client group are pupils in key stage 4, as it is unusual for younger pupils to arrive unaccompanied. The UASC teacher's role involves assessing each pupil's needs and supporting them in classes as required. She may also provide support in the process of finding a school place. The teacher helps with English language development, understanding of coursework requirements, and also produces resources, for example, to help pupils understand GCSE texts. In addition, most schools have an appointed member of staff for ethnic minority achievement, and the UASC teacher will work in collaboration with them to address English language development needs, for example, through an EAL course at college or additional EAL support in school.

The amount of time spent with each child will vary; support is 'needs led', rather than an allocation of time per pupil. In schools with a high number of UASC, there may be several pupils in one class, for example, in one GCSE English class there may be ten asylum seeker pupils, so the teacher will work across the whole group, spending more or less time with individuals as necessary. She also supports children with homework, working with them at the Children's Home. As well as working with pupils on school subjects, the UASC teacher will spend time getting to know them '*as a whole person*' so that she can also help them to look at their post-16 options, and what their expectations are beyond GCSE.

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development

The UASC teacher's remit has this year been extended beyond pupils placed in the Children's Home, so she now has more links with foster families, hostels, etc. and a greater range of contact within social services. It was felt that this broader remit provides a more 'joined up' response.

The UASC teacher has existing links with schools and social workers, through her involvement in INSET, PEPs and review meetings. She is part of the looked after children 'link group', which involves educational psychology, social services, and the Education Officer for looked after children. This group meets every six weeks to share good practice or concerns. Although not a member of the LEA's Corporate Parenting Group, she is kept informed of issues being discussed.

The UASC teacher is also a member of the local voluntary refugee support group and networks with the local partnership group for refugees. This latter group is currently developing a pool of mentors from the asylum seeker community, who are following courses on mentoring and are becoming interpreters and advisors. The UASC teacher feels these mentors will have a positive impact, in terms of helping asylum seeker children talk through their experiences and aspirations.

Targets, tracking and monitoring
The UASC project teacher produces termly and annual monitoring, listing service priorities (linked to the EDP), expenditure and evidence of impact.

The project has five main objectives:

> Support for carers, including review/information meetings
> Support and advice for schools on raising achievement for asylum seekers
> Individual needs assessment, PEP planning and target setting
> School based in-class support and promoting best practice
> Maintenance of curriculum resources which support and promote the needs of asylum seekers.

Pupils are all tracked and their progress monitored by the UASC teacher, and individual named pupils will also be monitored through the LEA's data capture and monitoring of attainment. Other measures of progress include EAL assessment, and general competency in English. PEPs will reflect individual pupil targets.

Impact of the VCG on support for this group
The VCG has maintained funding for this service, enabling continued effective practice and progress towards targets. It has also increased the profile of work with UASC which is having a positive impact on partnership working and recognition of the diverse needs of asylum seeker pupils.

Effective practice in supporting this group
The UASC teacher was able to outline some of the key features of effectiveness of the ongoing strategy. Firstly, continuity was felt to be important in building a relationship with the young people enabling them to access a source of stable and sustained support.

For the unaccompanied asylum seeker group, the interviewee felt that emotional support and belief in the pupils was as important as the support for their education:

> *It is important to show the child that you believe in them and that you think that they are going to succeed in what they're going to do ... Because they're very worried, they're very upset about lots of things. Not just the past, but the future.*

The teacher also noted that unaccompanied asylum seeker children are often very mature, having had to undertake adult roles in their home country. Thus it was important to acknowledge this in working with the young person, treating them with equality and respect: '*Their experiences have often matured them a lot more, and you need to work with them on that level and not talk down to them*'.

Finally, the UASC teacher highlighted her role in raising awareness of the needs and experiences of asylum seeker pupils among mainstream school staff.

Future developments

The UASC teacher felt that better links could be developed with the Connexions Service.

I sometimes give informal advice rather than immediately saying: 'Go and speak to a Connexions PA' [because] *at first they want to talk to someone they know and trust. I am looking forward to building more links with the* [Connexions] *service.*

VIGNETTE 3

Vulnerable group:	Unaccompanied asylum seeker pupils
Numbers:	75 looked after children in the school
Amount of grant allocated:	Not specified (VCG covers salary of one full-time mentor)
Interviewee(s):	Mentor for Looked After Children, Deputy Headteacher Secondary School

Strategies funded by the VCG

Due to the high number of unaccompanied asylum seeker pupils being placed in one school in the LEA, a school-based mentoring project was established with VCG funding. The school also has a relatively high number of 'indigenous' looked after children and 'children in need'. The mentor is available to support all of these groups if required.

The mentor's role involves: liaising with social workers, foster families and children's homes; ensuring language support classes are arranged for newly arrived pupils; ensuring pupils have access any resources they need; and she is also responsible for ensuring PEPs are drawn up. Additionally, a key feature of the role is personal and emotional support for young people who may be experiencing trauma or social difficulties: '*My basic role, I see as being in school to support young people with their social welfare problems, any communication problems they may be having, and trying to alleviate worries that may be distracting them from their studies*'.

The mentor is available at all times, and young people are able to make appointments to discuss specific concerns. However, she is also available at short notice in '*crisis moments*'. The mentor has been provided with a private office in the school, in the recognition that many young people do not want to be identified as looked after or asylum seekers. This was also seen to be essential due to the confidentiality of issues discussed. Pupils are able to 'self-refer' for support, by may also be brought to the attention of the mentor by a teacher or friend. The mentor is also constantly observing pupils around the school, and will attempt to engage a young person where problems are evident.

Beyond this, the mentor has also facilitated various activities with unaccompanied asylum seekers, which aim to increase their vocational skills and their cultural understanding of this country. For example, asylum seeker pupils have: made a visit to British Airways' educational centre; taken part in an entry to employment project and other vocational skills courses; produced a play in conjunction with a local drama group and the refugee forum; visited the London Eye and the London Aquarium; and participated in a shopping and cooking session with the mentor.

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development

The mentor's role involves networking with other statutory services and local support groups on behalf of pupils and their families. Since taking up post, she has been called upon to make a number of referrals to social services regarding child protection or issues around family breakdown. She has developed links with various social services departments, the YOT, the local educational health worker, the EWS, the refugee

forum, ethnic minority support groups and churches.

Part of the mentor's role is to organise PEPs. She will arrange for a 'round robin' to go out to all the teachers of a particular child, which includes requests for comments on: attitude in class; presentation and appearance; content of work; homework; and 'other' comments. When these are returned, the mentor will arrange to meet the child's social worker in school, along with the child and possibly the carer and other relevant parties (e.g. link workers). The mentor also attends every child's social services review wherever possible, although this is sometimes difficult when the pupils are placed cross borough.

Beyond the arrangement of PEPs, there is no specific policy or protocol for the mentor's intervention with pupils; every case is treated individually. Although she is not a trained counsellor, she has a range of expertise and links with other agencies, many of which have been built up through previous career experience (social housing, homeless project, youth guidance and voluntary youth work). If a particularly sensitive or unusual case emerges, the mentor will liaise with school staff to see how they would like it to be dealt with.

The mentor highlighted the issue that looked after children often have so many key workers or agencies involved with them that it can sometimes be '*too much*' attention. If she feels that a child already has a lot of people dealing with them, she will restrict her work to the education and PEP side. Within the school, if there is a looked after child that has been settled for some years and already has a strong relationship with a class teacher who performs a mentoring role, the mentor notes that she will not '*interfere*' with this, and that this other teacher will continue with the PEP and other supporting functions.

Targets, tracking and monitoring
Because the mentor post was not appointed until the spring term of 2003–04, the school is not being asked to evaluate for the LEA until spring 2005 (rather than at the end of this academic year). However, the GCSE outcomes of pupils this year will be one indicator of impact.

There are no fixed targets for the mentor's work with individual pupils. However, she states that aims of the intervention will be that the young person is settled, confident, happy and wanting to come to school. Regarding PEPs, in which the mentor has a key role, these will include individual attainment targets for the pupil, which will vary depending on the child's abilities and educational history. As the mentor notes, these should be '*positive but reachable*' and it is important that children are not '*set up for failure*'.

Impact of the VCG on support for this group
The appointment of a mentor for looked after children is seen to have improved support for unaccompanied asylum seekers and had several positive impacts for the pupils and for the school. Both the deputy head and the mentor agree that, through the individual support, they have been able to uncover many more social issues than they might otherwise have been aware of (e.g. self-harming and domestic problems):

I've been able to highlight things that, without the input of my post, a lot of this

stuff would never have come to bear. This is a big premises, and the biggest fear was that no one really knew what was going on and I think that now, we're aware of all of the issues.

The ability to come to the mentor and begin to address their personal difficulties was felt to enable young people to settle better into school and access education. As noted by the deputy headteacher: '*By addressing that, we are actually meaning that those children can actually begin to address the things that are going on in their mind, and can work*'. The mentor had been able to assist pupils and their families with a range of issues, including accessing support from health, social services and young carers' support groups. Furthermore, the fact that these pupils were more settled in class meant that lessons were running more effectively for all pupils.

In terms of efficiency, the mentor's designated responsibility for ensuring the production of PEPs was proving effective in that PEP meetings were happening more consistently and almost all looked after children now had a plan in place. The mentor was seen to be instrumental in moving this work forward, although there remained difficulties in encouraging social workers to attend meetings.

Regarding impact on attendance, it was again felt that the mentor role had been beneficial, in that the young people felt they were supported in school and had someone they could turn to with problems: '*Basically we haven't got a situation where kids don't come to school because they've got problems, they come to school because they've got problems*'.

Effective practice in supporting this group
As noted above, the provision of confidential support for social and/or emotional difficulties was seen to be a key feature in supporting these young people's access to education. Building personal relationships with the pupils and ensuring that their needs were recognised and met (either by the mentor or through referral to the appropriate service) were essential in helping them to settle into learning. The deputy headteacher also noted that activities aimed at developing young people's cultural awareness were very beneficial:

> *If they're trying to do a piece of work, say in English, to do with Shakespeare, which is based in the English culture, but don't have a clue about what the Church of England is, then actually they can't access that particular piece of work. So we've felt very much that understanding of the culture was very important* (Deputy Headteacher).

Finally, in terms of cost-effectiveness, the mentor was seen to have been '*a bargain*' for the amount of work she had put in, both in and out of school hours. However, it was recognised that the post had been very demanding and stressful, particularly in terms of the levels of social and emotional need uncovered. In the longer term, it was felt that one person could not continue to take on this amount of work effectively, and that the school needed a number of people fulfilling this role.

Future developments
The mentor noted that she would like to undertake further training in order to develop professional counselling skills: '*I'm very, very aware of not opening cans of worms*

that I can't close, but some of these kids need cans of worms opening'. Alternatively, she felt it would be beneficial for the school to appoint a trained counsellor or mental health worker, ideally with a teaching background. As noted above, whilst the mentor was seen to be doing '*a fantastic job*', she was extremely overworked and the school are investigating the possibility of having one mentor per year group. Ideally, the mentor would like the school to have a 'welfare department', including a social worker, a mentor, counsellors and health workers: '*I think what you would need is people that were specialist in their field, but were flexible enough that they could cover for each other, and all work and bounce off each other*'.

VIGNETTE 4

Vulnerable group:	Looked after children
Numbers:	103
Amount of grant allocated:	7 per cent of total grant
Interviewee(s):	Education Officer for Looked After Children

Strategies funded by the VCG

From the VCG, a 'pot' of money has been set aside for one-off grants in respect of individual looked after children. Schools and social workers are able to approach the education officer for looked after children with requests for funding to address particular needs. The Education Officer (who is funded by social services) will discuss the issues and perceived needs with the school and/or social worker and then funding is granted as appropriate. The VCG has been used in various ways:

To provide behaviour support for looked after children at risk of exclusion, through the use of LSAs in the classroom. (This strategy has mainly been used with primary school pupils)

To provide additional in-school support for looked after children who have problems 'settling' when they first come into care

To purchase study guides and extra revision tuition for GCSE students

To provide additional support for unaccompanied asylum seekers, through EAL classes and in-school classroom support

To purchase alternative key stage 4 packages and college courses (both EAL courses for unaccompanied asylum seekers and vocational courses for any looked after child, as appropriate)

To purchase a computer and educational books to go in one of the authority's children's homes.

In respect of looked after children, the VCG has also funded a new mentoring project in one school (see Vignette 3) and has continued to fund the existing Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers Project (see Vignette 2).

Impact of the VCG on partnerships and policy development

No new policies had been developed specifically around the VCG, although there are existing guidelines for schools and services regarding this group. Similarly, there had been no new strategic partnerships developed due to the VCG, although there are a number of existing panels on which the Education Officer sits (e.g. the multi-agency Corporate Parenting Group, the adoption panel, and the LEA admissions forum). At operational level, however, the Education Officer felt that the introduction of the VCG – and specifically the availability of one-off grants for support – had led to improved partnership working between schools, social services and the LEA.

Overall, the Education Officer felt that there was room for improvement with regard to partnership working, but this was limited by time constraints. A key area for development was the clarification of roles and responsibilities regarding cross-borough placements, and the officer felt there was also a need to raise awareness of corporate parenting: '*People just think it's not to do with them, but it's the social worker, the foster carer, and other LEA officers ... we all have a part to play*'.

Targets, tracking and monitoring

Grants are delivered to schools in the form of finances, and they are then responsible for implementing the agreed strategy. Thus, the Education Officer has a role in monitoring that schools have, in fact, spent grants as agreed. Learning from initial experiences, the officer now requires schools, for example, to name the LSA who will be supporting the child, before funding is transferred. The education officer will monitor grant-funded support in conjunction with schools, reviewing progress at regular intervals (e.g. on a monthly basis). Support will be continued if it is seen to be effective, or some alternative strategy may be tried.

The LEA are working towards the national targets for the attainment of looked after children and also have local objectives including targeted additional resources to ensure that looked after children have full-time education and additional resources to support looked after children in secondary schools. Pupil outcomes are monitored through PLASC data and a new appointment within the Pupil Support Service was due to be made at the time of interview (not VCG-funded), the remit of which was to improve data collection and monitoring of looked after children's outcomes at LEA level.

Impact of the VCG on support for this group

The availability of VCG funding, in the form of grants to individuals, was felt to have improved the LEA's ability to meet the educational needs of this group and increased the support available to schools. The VCG is being used in a focused way to address local objectives of access to education for looked after children and it was felt that time out of school had been reduced due to additional (re)integration support: '*Getting them back and settled into a new school is getting better, because we can offer some short-term additional support for the school*'.

Regarding impact on meeting national targets, the officer was optimistic about progress in GCSE attainment. She felt that this was partly attributable to the VCG, through the additional study support and revision materials the grant had provided. A financial contribution from social services was also funding similar strategies, however, so the 'credit' for any improvements was felt to be shared. The additional support at GCSE level was also felt to have had a positive impact with schools, in terms of reinforcing the importance of supporting the educational achievement of this group.

Furthermore, the ability to offer targeted additional support for the education of looked after children was felt to have improved relationships between schools, social services and the LEA. In the knowledge that additional support was available, schools were more amenable to admitting looked after children and unaccompanied asylum seeker pupils, and it was felt that working relationships had become more positive and cooperative overall:

> *Previously we had schools saying 'We can't possibly address this child's needs. Until they can speak English, we can't take them in,' and whereas before there was no real funding or no budget to be able to get that, and we just had to try and keep forcing the schools to admit the child, now we can say to schools, 'We know this child, you know you're going to have difficulties, therefore we're prepared to*

> *fund some extra English tuition if you admit them'. So they'd have to admit them, which they do now much quicker.*

Finally, the Education Officer felt that her profile had been raised through the availability of grant funding, meaning that educational support for looked after children might become more effective overall: '*It's funny, when there's money involved, people tend to be more interested in you!*'

Effective practice in supporting this group

The use of specific grants in respect of individual looked after children was felt to be an effective strategy for a number of reasons. Through the allocation of a 'pot' for individual grants, there was now a specific source of funding to address the needs of these pupils. This was also felt to have improved coherence, in that schools and social workers knew who to approach for support. The targeted nature of support was also seen to have increased effectiveness, in that strategies were tailored to the needs of an individual and grant funding was not '*lost*' within the school: '*It's not like, 'Oh here, give the schools an extra budget and they can spend it if they get a looked after child'. It's actually targeted specifically for the pupil*'.

It was felt that time efficiency had also improved, in that by having a dedicated fund on which to draw for this group, decisions on financial support for education could be made much more quickly than perhaps going through a '*rigmarole*' of trying to secure money from social services for a particular child. Individual grants were also seen to be more cost-effective than previous strategies. For example, in one case, a full-time LSA had been appointed to be permanently available 'on call', but when funding became scarce, the post had to be withdrawn. Through the use of grants, support could be bought in as and when needed, and there was no risk of paid staff sitting 'unused' in times of lesser demand.

Future developments

In the second year of VCG funding, the grant will be used to appoint an additional member of staff to work alongside the Education Officer for looked after children. The specific remit of this post was yet to be confirmed, but it was hoped that it would increase the service's capacity to support primary-aged children and to be more actively involved in PEPs. In increasing capacity, it was also hoped that the service could have some more 'positive' involvement with these children, rather than be limited to 'crisis response': '*At the moment, I don't get to go to prize givings or to be part of the corporate parenting of the child. I had a child last year got 11 GCSEs* [but] *I've never met him because he's had no problems in school'*.

Lastly, the financial support from social services, mentioned above, is closely targeted at GCSE attainment. As such, the Education Officer would like, in future, to redirect more of the VCG funding towards key stage 3, with a view to earlier intervention: '*One of my plans would be that social services would continue with the revision and extra help for GCSE and bring the Vulnerable Children Grant down to Year 8s and Year 9s, so that by the time they get to Year 10 and 11, they'll already be up to speed, sort of thing'*.

Appendix 2

Views on the concept of 'vulnerable children'

Interviewees were asked to give their views on the generic concept of 'vulnerable children', and to comment on its usefulness at both strategic and operational level.

Views on the 'generic' concept

Overall, the majority of interviewees expressed broadly positive views on the generic term 'vulnerable children'. Where further comment was made, the term was seen to be useful for one or more of the following reasons:

> In a number of cases, the LEA was already using this terminology. It was felt that schools and services were becoming familiar with the concept and that the term was fairly well understood by the key parties involved in supporting these children.

> It was felt to be useful to keep a broad definition of need, which allowed LEAs to address the needs of a wide range of vulnerable groups. As has been noted in Chapter 2, the breadth of the concept was seen to be useful in that not all vulnerable children fall into a 'discrete' category.

> It was seen to be useful to keep a broad term because vulnerability can be complex and fluid state: '*Many children fit into many categories and dip in and out of categories during their life*'.

> A broad term was seen to be preferable to '*labelling*' children, and can help to avoid/overcome prejudices around certain identified groups.

> The term was felt to keep the concept distinct from 'Children in Need'.

Just two of the 42 interviewees who commented expressed an explicitly negative viewpoint, one feeling that the term was '*too broad and emotive*' and another feeling that the generic term '*deflects from focusing on the particular and very diverse needs that are reflected in the group*'. Additionally, minority of interviewees commented that no one title could ever '*say it all*' and that the term itself was not critical so long as it was consistent and understood.

Whilst the majority of interviewees were in favour of a generic concept, several also made comments relating to a need for clarity in definition, on a number of levels. Firstly there were calls for a more explicit definition of vulnerability, for example, where vulnerability began in terms of a '*continuum of need*'. Six interviewees highlighted the issue that not all children who fall into an identified 'vulnerable group' are necessarily vulnerable:

> *It's just a matter of labelling which sort of children are vulnerable, because there are vulnerabilities within vulnerabilities. Asylum seekers aren't always*

that vulnerable. They are clever, bright, and desperate for education. But some of them are incredibly vulnerable. If you label all of them vulnerable, it can be a bit difficult (Pupil Support Service Manager, Outer London Borough).

Interviewees also called for clarification of whether vulnerability in this context related only to education, and of the distinction between vulnerability and educational underachievement. Furthermore, some felt there was a need for a clearer definition of which groups were 'eligible' to be supported by the grant. Finally, three interviewees also raised the issue of how young people themselves might feel about the concept. Two of these interviewees felt that young people might have objections to the term '*vulnerable*', whilst one felt that they would probably prefer it to alternatives such as '*child in need*'.

Usefulness of the concept at strategic and operational level

As with overall views on the term, the majority of interviewees found that the concept 'vulnerable children' was useful at strategic and operational level (although somewhat less so in the latter case). At strategic level, the term was seen to be useful for the reasons noted above, and also in that it fitted into the multi-agency 'Children's Services' approach which statutory services are working towards '*in terms of preventative planning, and looking at more proactive interventions at an earlier stage*'.

By bringing the range of groups together within the grant, it was felt, in some cases, that strategic thinking had been aided, e.g. in assessing provision 'across the board', highlighting any inequalities in support, and bringing agencies together for strategic planning. As has been highlighted in Chapters 2 and 3, the broad focus of the grant's nomenclature was also felt to offer opportunities for more 'cross-cutting' strategies, which addressed the needs of several vulnerable groups, as well as those children for whom vulnerability was not 'distinct':

> *It is helpful, because services have clearly in the past been compartmentalised around specific groups, and now we are much clearer that many of these children fall in to a number of groups and that there are some vulnerabilities that aren't even identified. So, in one sense, I would see the overall term as being helpful because it helps to break down some of the stereotypes around particular groups of children that might actually impact on crossover joint working* (Vulnerable Children's Project Manager, Metropolitan LEA).

As above, however, usefulness of the concept was closely related to issues of definition and some interviewees commented that the degree of specification within the broad framework was helpful. Where there was a shared understanding of terminology, interviewees felt that the concept was useful, in working across LEA departments and with other agencies. However, the need for services (social services, health and education) to align their concept of vulnerability was highlighted by some:

> *It's useful as a catch all, but it's not as useful as 'children in need' will be, because 'children in need' will enable us to talk across agencies. We need to*

have a common language which we can talk to health and social services with
(Social Inclusion Manager, Outer London Borough).

Around half of the interviewees who commented felt that the concept 'vulnerable children' was useful at operational level. Positive views were largely based on the reasons outlined above, although again there were a number of comments on the need for clarity within the definition. Additionally, it was noted that the term was useful in dialogue with schools, and across all services, in that the concept helped people to refocus away from 'standards' and drew attention back to the shared responsibility for vulnerable children.

However, a small number of interviewees felt that the term was less useful at operational level, because service providers would be focusing more specifically on one particular group, so the term would simply not be relevant: '*People are concerned at that level with very specific and particular needs related to that group of children or individual children. At the end of the day you are looking at very specific issues*' (Head of Service, County LEA). A further interviewee commented to the effect that, ultimately, action to support these groups is more important than the terminology used.

Finally, there were a small number of comments implying that the concept hadn't been *as* useful operationally yet, but that once the strategic thinking was in place, or local issues had been overcome, they would aim to develop the concept at operational level.

Appendix 3

VCG guidance 2004–05: Targets

The Government places considerable importance on ensuring that the targets are met. These are to:

Meet the PSA target for looked after children so that by 2006 the gap between educational attainment and participation of children in care and their peers is substantially narrowed, so that by 2006:

i. Outcomes for 11 year olds in English and maths are at least 60 per cent as good as those of their peers

ii. The proportion who become disengaged from education is reduced, so that no more than ten per cent reach school leaving age without having sat a GCSE or equivalent exam

iii. The proportion of those aged 16 who get qualifications equivalent to five GCSEs graded A*-C has risen on average by four percentage points each year since 2002; and in all authorities at least 15 per cent of young people in care achieve this level of qualifications.

Meet agreed targets for children who are identified as missing school or at risk of doing so, and to contribute to the PSA target to reduce unauthorised absence.

Provide high quality education for children who are unable to attend school because of medical needs, and increase the minimum hour's home teaching to ten hours per week.

Secure access to education, integration into school, regular school attendance, in school support and higher attainment for looked after children; sick children, Gypsy/Traveller children; asylum seekers, young carers, school refusers, teenage parents and the reintegration of young offenders.