Evaluation of the Vulnerable Children Grant

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The research findings

Executive Summary

Introduction

- This report relays the findings from a study which examined the implementation of the Vulnerable Children Grant (VCG). The VCG, introduced in April 2003, amalgamated and built on existing Standards Fund grants for individual groups of vulnerable children. Key groups identified by the DfES included: looked after children, children unable to attend school because of their medical needs, Gypsy/Traveller children, asylum seekers, young carers, school refusers, teenage parents and young offenders.

- The research was conducted between January 2004 and September 2004 and was divided into two phases. Phase One comprised a literature review and a survey of 50 LEAs to examine how the grant had been implemented. During Phase Two of the study, eight case-study LEAs were visited.

- The report covers how the grant was implemented; the strategies and interventions funded by the grant including those for each type of 'vulnerability'; effective practice associated with VCG-funded interventions; methods for identifying and tracking vulnerable children; and LEAs' methods for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the grant.

Implementation of the grant

- Most LEA representatives who commented, felt there had been an increase in funding through the introduction of the VCG. This additional funding facilitated three main opportunities: the maintenance of existing services and support strategies; expansion or enhancement of existing work; or the development of new work. New or expanded provision included: increases in staffing; growth in service capacity; new or increased contributions to multi-agency teams or projects; the ability to retain a contingency fund for one-off or unforeseen needs; and 'development funds' for pilot projects and innovation.

- A key feature of the VCG was that it was allocated to LEAs as 'block funding' rather than 'ring-fenced' amounts for pre-defined groups of pupils. Overall, interviewees highlighted the benefits of the block funding style of the grant because of the flexibility it allowed. LEAs were able to respond to locally identified need and changing circumstances and could also take a broader view of vulnerability, targeting support at a wider range of needs. The broader remit of the grant meant that some LEAs had provided support for 'new' vulnerable groups, for example young carers. In addition, a further benefit of the grant was that pupils who did not fall neatly into one category could be supported through its broader remit. The grant had also been used to pilot innovative work that otherwise might not have received funding, as well as providing opportunities to focus on more preventative work and earlier

intervention. In addition, the flexibility of the grant provided LEAs with opportunities to implement interventions on varying scales, from funding whole services, to awarding grants to support individual pupils.

- Challenges were noted around the initial implementation of the grant and there were some concerns regarding a loss of focus on groups that had previously had discrete funding streams, for example Gypsy/Travellers. There were also more general concerns about the long-term availability of Standards Funds and LEAs' ability to 'mainstream' VCG-funded strategies should the grant be withdrawn.

- LEAs' rationale for allocation of the VCG was primarily on 'historical' allocations and maintenance of existing strategies. This was particularly so with regard to Gypsy/Traveller pupils and teenage parents. Other rationales included: addressing unmet local needs; a focus on the stated objectives of the VCG; and the implementation of strategies to meet local or national strategic targets. In terms of addressing local need, the flexibility of the VCG was again highlighted in that it could be used to address the needs of groups or individuals for whom there was no specific funding stream available. The increased flexibility and breadth of the grant was also felt to have increased LEAs' ability to identify and target support more clearly at vulnerable children. Mapping exercises or audits of need had been carried out in four LEAs in conjunction with the introduction of the VCG, in order to ascertain current levels of support and identify gaps in provision.

- Practitioners interviewed in the case-study phase identified new interagency links at operational level arising from VCG-funded activities. The availability of VCG funding was felt to have facilitated interagency partnerships and opened up possibilities for joint working. At strategic level, the VCG was not felt to have led to the establishment of *new* strategic groups or multi-agency links, as most LEAs already had such networks in place. However, there was a general sense that the aims of the VCG had '*reinforced*', '*enhanced*' or '*embedded*' existing partnerships.

- In line with the VCG guidance, a small number of LEAs had used the grant to fund overarching strategic posts, with a coordination-type remit for the oversight of several or all vulnerable groups. These posts were felt to have benefits, including improved coordination and efficiency of services.

- Whilst there was a sense that, overall, the VCG was 'facilitating' the LEAs' existing strategic approach, rather than 'driving' it, some interviewees noted that the VCG guidance had given a renewed focus on the vulnerable groups identified and was beginning to lead to more 'cross-cutting' and holistic support for vulnerable children. Given time, there was seen to be potential for further strategic change and development of this type, as promoted by the VCG guidance.

Strategies and groups funded by the grant

- The groups most frequently supported by VCG funding were, in rank order, looked after children, pupils with medical needs and Gypsy/Traveller children. Young carers and young offenders were the groups least likely to be supported by the grant. Nevertheless, it was felt in some LEAs that the introduction of the VCG had raised awareness of young carers as a vulnerable group. In many LEAs it was felt that sufficient funding to support the education of young offenders was provided from other sources.

- Whilst funding was largely retained centrally by LEAs, a number had also conferred funding to schools in the form of grants or bursaries, for example, to support individual pupils. Grants to support individual pupils were most commonly used to support looked after children, often at key points in time, for example, at transition or during examination periods. Grants had also been used to successfully support looked after children at risk of exclusion and to assist schools in the delivery and development of Personal Education Plans (PEPs). In a small number of LEAs, funding was contingent on schools providing data to the LEA, this was seen as an effective way of monitoring and tracking looked after children placed out of the LEA.

- For some vulnerable groups, notably Gypsy/Traveller pupils and teenage parents, the VCG was mostly continuing to fund strategies and interventions initiated under previous grants, for example Traveller Education Services and Teenage Pregnancy Reintegration Officers.

- The grant had also been used to fund the development of new interventions and approaches, for example, funding the establishment of virtual learning opportunities for pupils out of school and work with unaccompanied asylum seekers (including work on mental health issues). The VCG had also been used to fund college places for asylum seekers arriving late in key stage 4, resulting in quicker and earlier access to education for these young people.

- Half of the LEAs were using the VCG to support excluded pupils and pupils at risk of exclusion. This level of support was notable, as the group were not specifically named in initial DfES guidance. Some LEAs had used the VCG to continue to fund initiatives for these pupils previously funded by the Social Inclusion Pupil Support Standards Fund. The increased flexibility of the VCG was also noted as having increased capacity for support, both at service level and in terms of individually targeted intervention.

- Two-thirds of LEAs cited 'other' groups which were being supported with VCG funding. Groups mentioned most frequently included pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties; children who were 'socially' vulnerable, children 'at risk'; and children with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Work with minority ethnic groups was also funded.

Cross-cutting themes

- A number of common themes and issues were identified as key to supporting vulnerable groups, for example the importance of a key worker or advocate. The study highlighted opportunities for cross-vulnerable group learning and that conceptual approaches for working with particular groups of vulnerable children may have resonance for work with other groups.

Effective practice

- VCG funding was felt to have contributed to effective practice through the implementation of the grant itself, through funding key worker posts, through the funding of teams to support vulnerable children, and through the funding of grants/bursaries for supporting individual pupils.

- Effectiveness stemmed from the implementation of the grant in terms of LEAs' ability to provide holistic support across vulnerable groups and efficiencies linked to the way funding was allocated (via a single grant rather than a number of smaller separate grants).

- The ability of VCG-funded key workers/teams to engage and develop relationships with young people, schools and other relevant support providers was noted as effective. Having the time and capacity to work on a one-to-one basis and establish trust-based relationships with the young people was fundamental, as was the ability to work to meet specific needs at specific times. Efficiencies were seen to lie in the speed with which staff could respond to need and the cost-effectiveness of using para-professionals where appropriate.

- Grants and bursaries were seen as an efficient and cost-effective way of responding to the needs of vulnerable children, providing targeted support when it was required.

Monitoring and tracking

- Monitoring and evaluation of the VCG and VCG-funded strategies most commonly occurred at the level of individual services through their review of service or business plans.

- A number of approaches for identifying and tracking vulnerable children were reported, for example, separate and/or central databases and monitoring panels and procedures. Two-fifths of interviewees highlighted that the VCG had impacted on the identification and tracking of vulnerable children. Four areas of impact were identified: better monitoring due to increased rates of staffing; raised awareness of vulnerabilities; greater accountability; and database development.

Concluding comments

- Without doubt, the VCG block-funding style was seen by the vast majority of interviewees to be a positive step, allowing greater flexibility to take into account local circumstances, needs and priorities. Hence, in view of this consensus, **it is suggested continuing such an approach**. The longer-term funding cycle was also welcomed.

- Nevertheless, it may be worth reiterating the concern that a loss of focus on groups which had previously had discrete funding streams might result. Equally, this audit of activity funded by the VCG may have revealed some unanticipated uses at both strategic and operational level. **It is suggested that some clarification of what is not appropriate expenditure may be helpful in any future guidelines**.

- The study's audit of the individual vulnerable group types has revealed a vast array of activity at both operational and strategic service level, as well as in the arena of interagency partnership. VCG funding provided resources to maintain, extend, or actually instigate this work. In a number of LEAs it was seen to have raised the profile of some vulnerable groups, notably pupils with medical needs, young carers and teenage parents, whilst in others it had resulted in an audit of provision for vulnerable youngsters. Variety in funding destination – retained, conferred to schools and the use of individual bursaries – was also evident. **It is recommended that there is further dissemination of such an array of activity and innovation**. There are clearly opportunities for those responsible for different vulnerable groups to learn from strategies employed by colleagues working with other types of vulnerability. In addition, it may be worth particularly promoting the work of those LEAs which incorporated the suggestion that the VCG should be used to develop a strategic approach within the LEA to deal with vulnerable children in the round rather than replicating the previous series of grants for specific groups.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1   Background to the Vulnerable Children Grant

The Vulnerable Children Grant (VCG), introduced in April 2003, amalgamated and built on existing Standards Fund grants for individual key groups of vulnerable children. As part of the Standards Fund, the grant aims to secure improved access to education for vulnerable children, in particular to:

- Provide high quality education for those unable to attend school, or whose circumstances make it difficult for them to do so
- Support attendance, integration or reintegration into school
- Provide additional educational support to enable vulnerable children to achieve their full potential (DfES, 2004).

Key groups of vulnerable children identified by the DfES include: looked after children, children unable to attend school because of their medical needs, Gypsy/Traveller children, asylum seekers, young carers, school refusers, teenage parents and young offenders.

Strategies and interventions funded by the grant should aim to improve the educational attainment and participation of vulnerable children. The main focus of the grant is on school-aged children but LEAs can take a wider view and support children aged 0–19. Guidance for the grant states that it '*should be used to develop a strategic approach within the LEA to deal with vulnerable children in the round rather than replicating the previous series of grants for specific groups*' (DfES, ibid).

The grant is allocated to LEAs on a formula basis:

- 55 per cent of the grant is allocated on pupil numbers (including the numbers out of school)
- 25 per cent is allocated on the basis of free school meals
- 20 per cent on the number of Gypsy/Traveller children residing in the LEA between September 1999 and July 2002.

The grant should not be devolved to schools but can be used to provide bursaries for individual children. The guidance highlights a number of targets for vulnerable children (see Appendix 3 for details), which it is expected the grant will be used to meet. The guidance also provides a number of aims and objectives for effective use of the grant, including that '*decision-making should include representatives from all relevant services and should seek to incorporate the views of children and families*' and that '*clear responsibility should be established for monitoring and evaluation of the grant*' (DfES, ibid).

1.2   Methodology

The research documented in this report set out to examine the implementation of the VCG and to assess the initial impact and effects of the grant on the young people, schools and LEAs involved. The research was conducted between January 2004 and September 2004.

The aims of the research were to:

- Map how the grant has been used
- Evaluate the extent to which the grant is perceived to have enabled LEAs and schools to provide effective and coherent support for vulnerable children
- Provide in-depth examples of how good practice in the grant has been implemented
- Explore perceptions of the efficiency and effectiveness, including cost-effectiveness.

The study was divided into two complementary phases:

1. Phase one: an orientation phase which provided an overview of related research and literature in this area, as well as a survey of LEAs to examine how the grant had been implemented. The survey was conducted with a representative sample of 50 LEAs (in terms of LEA type and size of grant allocation) and included telephone interviews with LEA personnel responsible for implementing the grant within their authority, along with a proforma to gather additional data on how the grant had been allocated.

2. Phase two: in order to allow for an in-depth exploration of how the grant was implemented, eight LEAs were selected for case-study research. The LEAs chosen had strategies and interventions reflecting a range of vulnerable groups and practice.

Phase two involved:

- Follow-up interviews with eight LEA officers responsible for managing the grant within their authority
- 22 interviews with heads of service/strategic-level staff responsible for interventions/services in receipt of the grant: teenage pregnancy coordinators, looked after children coordinators, Traveller Education Service (TES) coordinators, heads of home and hospital tuition services
- 26 interviews with practitioners whose posts were funded by the grant including: refugee advisory teachers, learning mentors, Gypsy/Traveller advisory teachers, family liaison officers, Youth Offending Team (YOT) education liaison officer and learning mentors
- Seven interviews with staff from schools in receipt of the grant.

Interviewees in this phase of the research were asked to provide their insights into strategies for supporting vulnerable children, to provide examples of partnership

working and to highlight strategic developments, targets and objectives, as well as examples of effective practice.

This report presents research findings within the following structure:

- Volume One: The research findings
- Volume Two: Appendices, including detailed case studies.

Volume One consists of:

Chapter 2: Implementation of the grant

This chapter focuses on the location of responsibility for the grant within the LEA, changes in overall funding for groups of vulnerable children as a result of the introduction of the grant, views on the funding style, and the LEA's rationale behind the allocation of the grant. It also considers the strategic developments and partnerships enhanced or developed as a result of the implementation of the grant.

Chapter 3: Strategies and groups funded by the grant

Chapter 3 looks at the groups of vulnerable children supported by the grant and the numbers of vulnerable children and funding allocations within individual LEAs. It also provides a detailed analysis of funding provided for each of the vulnerable groups, along with an exploration of the strategies funded, targets set and any identified impacts and outcomes for vulnerable children.

Chapter 4: VCG cross-cutting themes

This chapter provides an overview of the common themes and issues explored during the course of the study, which were viewed as key to supporting vulnerable children.

Chapter 5: Effective practice: an overview

This chapter explores the impacts and outcomes more generically, in terms of whether VCG-funded strategies were perceived as providing effective, coherent, efficient and/or cost-effective support for vulnerable children. Within the overall context of effectiveness, it goes on to explore the common themes and issues identified by interviewees as key to supporting vulnerable groups, as well as those considered to be specific to particular groups.

Chapter 6: Vulnerable children: monitoring and tracking

Chapter 6 outlines methods for identifying and tracking vulnerable children within LEAs and strategies for monitoring their access to education. Where appropriate, it highlights the impact the VCG has had on these strategies. It also includes methods for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the grant and the interventions funded, as well as how LEAs have incorporated the views of young people and families.

Volume Two: The Appendices consists of:

Appendix 1: The case studies
Appendix 1 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.

Appendix 2: Views on the concept of 'vulnerable children'
Appendix 2 presents interviewees' views on the generic concept of 'vulnerable children' and their views on the terms usefulness at both strategic and operational level.

Appendix 3: VCG guidance for 2004–05
Appendix 3 provides details of targets contained in the VCG guidance (DfES, 2004).

Chapter 2

Implementation of the grant

Introduction
This chapter explores issues involved in the implementation of the VCG. It considers:

- Location of responsibility for the VCG within the LEA
- Changes in overall funding as a result of the introduction of the grant
- Views on the move from ring-fenced grants to block funding
- Rationale for allocation of the grant
- Impact of the VCG on strategic development and partnership working.

Information is drawn primarily from the perspectives of participants in the survey of 50 LEAs, although case-study data are incorporated where relevant.

2.1   Location of responsibility for the grant within the LEA
In the initial stages of data collection, a proforma was sent to the member of staff who had been identified within the LEA as '*the officer who has responsibility for the VCG*'. The overall profile of these personnel is outlined below, in terms of the 'tier' of their post and the LEA department in which they were located.

Of the cases where it was specified, two-fifths of officers with this responsibility were 'second tier' post holders (e.g. Assistant Director, Head of Service). More commonly, however, in the remaining LEAs, those with overall responsibility for the VCG were identified as 'third tier' personnel, managing a branch within an LEA service. There is variation in the way different LEAs structure and 'title' branches of their education directorate. However, in almost two-thirds of the LEAs giving details, management of the grant was located within the branch concerned with Access and/or Inclusion. Branches with the nomenclature Pupil or Student Support Services were the second most common location of management, whilst in a minority of cases, the lead responsibility sat with an officer in the School Improvement or Learning Support branch.

Although it was anticipated, when developing the proforma, that the officer with 'lead' responsibility might find it necessary to liaise with colleagues in specific services to gather more precise details of provision for the various groups, it is perhaps notable that, in a small minority of LEAs, there was some difficulty in identifying a specific member of staff who could provide a strategic overview of the grant as a whole. One interviewee commented on this issue:

> *Doing this exercise has been quite interesting. I actually asked the question at our Standards Fund group, about who had strategic overview of the Vulnerable Children Grant and I didn't get an answer. I asked my predecessor*

and he said there's never been anybody. It's been a bit of an historical mish mash of changes from other grant regimes, then putting it under 'Vulnerable Children'. It's very diverse, in that the people who lead on it are not, even just in my division, within the education department (Inclusion Support Manager, Metropolitan LEA).

2.2   Perceptions of changes in overall funding

Interviewees were asked whether they felt the introduction of the VCG had impacted on the overall amount of funding available to support vulnerable children. In half of the 50 LEAs it was felt that there had been an increase in funding available. In terms of the extent of change, comments ranged from a '*massive*' increase (Pupil Support Service Manager, Outer London Borough) to what was perceived as a '*pittance*' (Assistant Director for Education, Metropolitan LEA). No notable change in funding was perceived in 12 LEAs, whilst in ten authorities interviewees either did not state explicitly the extent to which the amount had changed, or felt they could not comment. Three interviewees felt that there had been a decrease in funding, although data supplied by the DfES showed that none of the LEAs in the sample received a decrease in funding when VCG allocation was compared against the sum of previous Standards Fund grants which it 'replaced'. It should be stressed that these responses were interviewees' *perceptions* of change, often related to impact on service capacity and changes in other funding streams.

2.2.1   Perceived increase in funding: implications

The VCG was felt to have resulted in an increase in funding in half of the LEAs surveyed. Fundamentally, an increase in funding allowed for three main opportunities: the maintenance of existing services and support strategies; expansion or enhancement of existing work; or the development of new work. New or expanded provision cited by interviewees included:

- Increases in staff ('overarching' posts or at specific group level)
- Growth in service capacity (e.g. more alternative provision through Education Otherwise Than At School [EOTAS] services, more staff time on individual casework)
- New or increased contributions to multi-agency teams or projects (financial or human resources)
- The ability to retain a 'contingency' fund for one-off or unforeseen needs
- A 'development fund' for pilot projects and innovation.

Each of these developments would then have potential impacts for pupils, families and services (for example, a quicker response, increased hours of educational provision and greater interagency awareness). These 'resultant' impacts are considered in subsequent sections of this report; see Chapter 3 for impact on specific groups and Chapter 5 for a discussion of overall impact of the grant.

2.2.2   No perceived change in funding: implications

Where changes in funding were felt to be negligible or non-existent, some interviewees commented on the fact that the VCG had '*re-profiled*' a number of previous Standards Fund grants, namely: Sick Children and Children in Public Care; Teenage Pregnancy; Traveller Children Achievement; Asylum Seekers; and the transfer of Social Inclusion Pupil Support (SIPS), including the Pupil Retention Grant, into education formula spending: '*I think it has* [increased] *overall but not significantly because when they gave us that we were reduced in other areas* (Head of Inclusion, County LEA).

Here, comments on impact mainly reflected the fact that existing services, for groups previously supported by specific grants, could be maintained. Clearly, had previous grants been withdrawn and not replaced, there would '*undoubtedly have been a shortfall in our funding*' (Deputy Head of Pupil and Student Services, County LEA). A minority of interviewees commented further on the impact of the loss of particular Standards Fund grants; these views are discussed in section 2.3.3.

2.2.3 Perceived decrease in funding: implications

In three LEAs, there was felt to have been a decrease in funding for vulnerable children, although, as noted above, this was perception, rather than actual fact. In two cases, this was seen to be particularly problematic, in terms of maintaining levels of service. Commenting on experience in a previous LEA, however, one interviewee noted that a reduction in funding through the introduction of the VCG had not had entirely negative consequences. Although it had been a challenge to maintain existing levels of service, this officer felt that the reduced budget had forced people to think more creatively and innovatively about provision:

> *I think the challenge is actually saying: 'Does it work more efficiently?' ... We got a lower amount but actually that did force us to think in a different way which was constructive, perversely* (Assistant Director Inclusion and Pupil Services, Unitary LEA).

A further five interviewees reported either specifically that funding was insufficient, or that they '*could always use more*' (Officer for Social Inclusion, Outer London Borough).

2.3 Views on the funding style: block funding vs. ring-fenced grants

As highlighted above, the VCG was seen as an amalgamation of several previous Standards Fund grants, targeted at specific groups. A key feature of this new grant was that it came to LEAs as 'block funding' rather than 'ring-fenced' amounts for pre-defined groups of pupils. Interviewees were asked to give their views on this alternative funding style, in terms of the benefits and challenges it presented.

Interviewees in 42 of the 50 LEAs made positive comments on the block funding style, although over half of these (26) noted both pros and cons. In three LEAs, interviewees gave negative comments only, and in five cases, there were no specific comments made in this regard.

2.3.1 The benefits of block funding

The majority of positive views on the block format of VCG funding were associated with the flexibility of the grant. While the DfES had issued guidance (DfES, 2002) on the range of groups to be supported by the grant, interviewees felt that there was a welcome latitude in terms of what funding could be spent on and how it could be allocated among the various groups. Two main benefits were identified:

- The ability to meet locally identified needs
- The ability to broaden the scope of support for vulnerable children.

Interviewees in almost two-thirds (31) of the LEAs commented on the fact that block funding enabled authorities to allocate funding according to local needs, in terms of which groups required funding, and to what level. Benefits included not only the ability to target identified areas of need, but also to be able to respond to changing local circumstances which emerged over time, for example, local political issues, the introduction or withdrawal of other funding streams, or demographic changes. Whilst DfES guidance (DfES, 2004) highlighted that the VCG should not be used to '*replicate the previous series of grants for specific groups*', it was notable that some LEAs had 'nominally' ring-fenced an amount of the grant for each group, which could then be redirected as necessary: '*It's ring-fenced and yet I can transfer it between groups if I need to … it's not, 'I must keep it there and then I mustn't spend it'*'(Pupil Support Service Manager, Outer London Borough). This flexibility was also felt to aid strategic planning, for example, in that LEAs could '*map*' the funding strategically around core budgets and other funding streams, target VCG at areas not in receipt of other grants, and use it to address locally determined strategic priorities. Additionally, it was noted in two LEAs that the introduction of the VCG – the guidance on which explicitly refers to asylum seekers – had resulted in the 'freeing up' of financial resources in other funding streams, namely the Ethnic Minorities Achievement Grant (EMAG) and SEN, which had previously been supporting this group: '*We were supporting asylum seekers from our SEN budget, so it offset some of our expenditure on that*' (Head of Service for Learners and Young People, Metropolitan LEA).

As well as enabling flexibility among the groups already in receipt of Standards Fund, VCG guidance expanded the boundaries, in terms of the range of groups eligible for support via the grant. This broader definition of vulnerability was welcomed by a number of interviewees, who reported that they had been able to introduce support for 'new' vulnerable groups, for example young carers, children educated at home by their parents, and children below statutory school age. Alongside these 'discrete' new groups, a further benefit of the VCG was that pupils who did not fall '*neatly*' into one category, but were vulnerable for complex reasons which were not so clearly defined, could now be supported through the broader scope of the grant. Similarly, during the case-study phase, a small number of interviewees highlighted the fact that the VCG had led to a more 'holistic' approach, with the recognition that vulnerable children often fall into more than one 'category' (for example, an unaccompanied asylum seeker who is also pregnant).

The lack of prescription around the VCG meant that it could be used as a development fund for the piloting of innovative work, 'pump priming' initiatives that would otherwise not have had any source of financial backing. In some cases, it was noted that, if such pilots proved effective, LEAs might then be able to 'mainstream' them. Interviewees also commented that the flexibility of the VCG had enabled them to divert more resources into preventative work and early intervention, as opposed to '*referral services*' and '*crisis response*'.

An additional benefit of the flexibility of the grant was the opportunity for LEAs to implement strategies on varying 'scales', from funding whole services to giving individual bursaries. As is discussed in section 2.5.2, interviewees highlighted that a block grant for vulnerable children meant there was scope to develop overarching support strategies addressing the needs of the range of vulnerable children (as recommended by DfES, 2004). In this respect, there were also seen to be 'conceptual' benefits in grouping together vulnerable children under one block funding stream, in terms of focusing minds, seeing 'the bigger picture', and raising awareness of the issues among LEA and school staff: '*It's more of the shift in actual thinking, and thinking about who are these children and what do we need to be doing for them and how do we support them and working with schools along those routes*' (Education Support Service Manager, Unitary LEA). Interviewees' perspectives on the concept and nomenclature of 'vulnerable children' are considered further in Appendix 2.

2.3.2 The challenges of block funding

Interviewees in 29 LEAs noted challenges related to the block funding style of the VCG. As already noted, however, only three interviewees made exclusively negative comments; for many (26 of the 45 interviewees who commented), there was recognition of both pros and cons of the funding style. The two most common areas of challenge centred on implementation of the grant and the concern that certain groups may be overlooked.

Regarding implementation difficulties, interviewees commented on such things as:

- Maintenance of existing strategies previously supported via separate Standards Fund grants
- 'Transitional' difficulties around planning and administration in the move from ring-fenced to block funding
- Competition between service managers for grant funding
- Strategic decision making around allocation and having to justify these decisions to services.

A small number of interviewees raised issues regarding the withdrawal or replacement of other Standards Funds, and the need to maintain strategies funded through previous grants. There were felt to be challenges in terms of sustaining levels of funding and posts or initiatives linked to previous grants, and '*not losing the impetus*' around groups which had previously had specific funding streams. One interviewee felt that the new grant format '*didn't take account of current commitments to vulnerable groups of pupils funded from Standards Funds which then disappeared. It became a source of funding which needed to be stretched very far*' (Deputy Head of Pupil and Student Services, County LEA). Interestingly, however,

one interviewee reported feeling somewhat constrained by existing strategies, which there was an 'obligation' to maintain, even though these groups were not necessarily the highest priority for the LEA at this time. In an authority where Gypsy/Traveller pupils were supported via a consortium service involving six LEAs, a particular challenge had been faced when certain consortium members had decided to reduce their allocation to Gypsy/Traveller pupils. In light of the flexibility afforded by the VCG, there was a desire to redistribute funding in accordance with current local priorities and this was seen to have led to some tensions across the partner LEAs.

Five interviewees commented specifically on the 'loss' of the Social Inclusion Pupil Support (SIPS) grant, and the potential impact on provision for pupils presenting challenging behaviour. There was a view that, although schools would now be allocated this money directly, they would nonetheless feel that there had been a reduction in support from the LEA. Whilst it was acknowledged that the VCG would be able to 'pick up' some of the work previously funded by SIPS, there was also recognition that the objectives of this grant were somewhat different: '*The VCG actually moved quite a way away from kids with behaviour problems*' (Education Support Service Manager, Unitary LEA). With the perceived 'withdrawal' of the Pupil Retention Grant, there were concerns that exclusions would rise and that there may be pressures on the VCG to focus on the needs of these pupils as schools felt unable to go on supporting this area because there was not a specific grant.

Interviewees also highlighted implementation difficulties in terms of the 'transition' from discrete funding streams to a block grant: '*We are asking everybody from strategic to operational levels to work differently, and so managing that change is always going to be the priority* (Vulnerable Children Project Manager, Metropolitan LEA). In some cases, initial decision making around allocations had been challenging, with strategic managers feeling they had to 'justify' their decisions to services. It was also noted that a block grant could lead to '*a competitive market*' among the various LEA departments, with funding often going to '*the best political players rather than the neediest groups'* (Assistant Director, County LEA).

The challenge that block funding could lead to groups being overlooked was seen as two-fold. Firstly, there were concerns from some interviewees that a loss of specific focus on the needs of key groups would reduce levels or effectiveness of support: '*I think there is a danger that by calling it a generic title then you do miss that sharp focus on those individual groups ... When the funds came directly aimed at a specific group it made sure that all LEAs did actually work with that particular group* (Head of Attendance and Behaviour Support, Inner London Borough). Secondly, some interviewees raised concerns that, with the broadening of the remit of the grant, the VCG would be '*spread too thinly*' and that there would be insufficient funding to address the needs of all vulnerable groups. Unsurprisingly, this problem was particularly acute for LEAs which had perceived a decrease in funding, and there were again comments from a minority of interviewees that VCG funding was insufficient to meet levels of need.

It was also noted, however, that a clear strategic plan could counter the majority of these difficulties and, whilst noted as a challenge, some interviewees felt they had embraced the task of managing a block fund and viewed the strategic planning around the new grant as a positive exercise. This view was also supported by strategic

interviewees in the case-study phase. While there were some comments that the prospect of managing a large grant had seemed a '*daunting*' prospect initially, there was consensus that, in the event, the management of the VCG was fairly '*straightforward*' and in some cases was felt to be more so than previous grants, due to the additional flexibility.

2.3.3 Other issues relating to the funding style

A number of interviewees commented spontaneously on issues relating to the nature of the Standards Fund more generally, which had a bearing on the extent to which the VCG could be used strategically. Sixteen interviewees noted challenges of short-term funding, expressing concerns regarding the '*uncertainty year-on-year*' around fixed-term funding streams (Head of Service for Learners and Young People, Metropolitan LEA). However, there were also positive comments from 13 interviewees regarding the benefits of retained funding, in that the VCG was to be held centrally by LEAs, rather than delegated to schools.

Regarding concerns around the longevity of the VCG, two related issues were raised. Firstly, strategic planning was felt to be difficult when funding was only confirmed for a limited period. This issue was particularly problematic in the first year of VCG funding, when interviewees were reportedly very uncertain about the continuation of the grant beyond the initial 12 months. Consistent with confirmation of three-year funding, it was felt by some that the grant could now be used more strategically. However, other interviewees still felt this was too short a time to effect any genuine strategic change, making comments such as: '*The expectation that you're going to be able to make a huge difference when all you've got is a three-year planning cycle, it is ridiculous*' and: '*It is difficult to plan given the uncertainty about the grant post-2006*' (Head of Pupil and Parent Support, Unitary LEA).

Furthermore, there were felt to be challenges around LEAs' ability to core fund or 'mainstream' strategies, should the VCG be withdrawn. Given the relatively short-term lifespan of the grant, there was, in some instances, a reported reluctance to make staff appointments, establish large-scale projects or make major strategic changes which may not be sustainable in the longer term[1]: '*Whilst it is not mainstream funding, it will always be volatile and it is likely to mean that authorities fall back into relatively short-term planned services*' (Assistant Director Inclusion and Pupil Services, Unitary LEA). Three interviewees also commented that strategic planning was difficult because the 2003–04 VCG funding had been confirmed '*late*'.

The retention of the grant by LEAs was, however, viewed positively by the 13 interviewees who commented. Interviewees referred to experience of other delegated grants where funding was seen to have '*just disappeared*' into school budgets. It was felt that by holding the VCG as a central fund, the focus and intended purpose of the grant would be maintained:

> *I'm always concerned that vulnerable children … are not necessarily high in the spending priorities of schools and consequently this funding, by keeping it*

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[1] Note that in some cases, these comments were also made in relation to SEN and other Standards Fund grants, as well as the VCG.

central, with a central oversight, means it can be more readily targeted, rather than lost within the morass of school spending (Manager of Specialist Learning Support, Unitary LEA).

While not questioned directly on this issue, the formula on which VCG funding is based (55 per cent pupil numbers; 25 per cent free school meals; 20 per cent Gypsy/Traveller pupils) did raise comment in a small minority of LEAs. Interviewees commented spontaneously that they felt the funding formula was not entirely effective. For example, one interviewee raised the concern:

Formula, in terms of where do the numbers, e.g. the historic numbers for Gypsy/Traveller children come from? Refugee and asylum pupils don't feature as a factor in the formula at all, and yet they're one of the target groups – those sorts of issues (Head of Service, County LEA).

This interviewee felt that the '*formula needed to be re-examined in the light of what the purposes of the grant are*', that there was a need to recognise the limitations of the data used and that the allocations were not '*transparent enough*'. Another interviewee noted that, given the fluctuations within the Gypsy/Traveller population, annual grant allocations could vary significantly, affecting the '*stability*' of grant-funded strategies.

Finally, the eight strategic-level interviewees consulted during the case-study phase were asked to comment on any issues around the requirement for 'matched funding'. In all but one case, there were not felt to have been any difficulties in LEAs meeting this requirement. In one authority (which had received a relatively high VCG allocation overall), the LEA had not felt able to match the Standards Fund allocation in direct finances. However, an agreement had been reached that various LEA services (e.g. education welfare, educational psychology) would provide an equivalent level of support to vulnerable groups '*in kind*', and this was felt to be an effective resolution.

2.3.4 Overall views on the funding style

In spite of the challenges noted above, there was an overall sense that block funding was preferable to separate grants for particular vulnerable groups. Just one interviewee stated that they would have preferred the grants to have remained entirely separate. However, it was occasionally noted that, for particular groups, namely looked after children, asylum seekers and Gypsy/Travellers, a discrete funding stream might be more appropriate. These views were based either on the fact that these pupils represented an especially large area of need in the authority, or that, with fluctuating and unpredictable numbers, grants should be allocated on an individual, case-by-case basis.

Finally, however, it should be noted that, whilst the format of the grant was welcomed overall, a minority of interviewees commented that, in the longer term, they did not feel it was desirable to have funding for vulnerable children delivered as a separate grant. Notwithstanding issues noted above, regarding challenges around the mainstreaming of strategies, it was felt that, over time, there should be a permanent commitment to support for vulnerable children from councils' core budgets:

If the block can be mainstreamed and committed to, then actually it keeps it on the consciousness of all schools and all other education providers that vulnerable children do need specific support … Unless it is mainstreamed then actually we are still playing with services, which by default means that we're messing around with young people's lives (Assistant Director Inclusion and Pupil Services, Unitary LEA).

2.4 Rationale for allocation of the grant

Interviewees were asked to describe the rationale behind the allocation of VCG funding. This question was interpreted in a number of ways, with interviewees commenting variously on: their rationale for allocating VCG funding to particular vulnerable groups; rationale in terms of the focus of support strategies; and rationale as linked to the strategic approach.

In terms of which vulnerable groups were receiving support via the VCG, and proportional distribution of the fund, the most frequently noted rationale was 'historical' allocation, i.e. LEAs were initially basing decisions around the maintenance of existing support strategies for vulnerable groups previously funded via separate Standards Funds. As was stated frankly by one interviewee: '*Some of it was already given, because if you didn't use it for certain purposes, you make people redundant*' (Social Inclusion Manager, outer London borough). Secondly, it was reported that allocations were made according to other locally identified priorities, where there was a shortfall in provision or as yet unmet areas of need. In this respect, the flexibility of the VCG was again highlighted, in that the grant had been used to address the needs of groups or individuals for whom there was no other specific funding stream available (e.g. children where vulnerability is acute but complex and not easy to 'label'). As well as maintaining existing support strategies, a number of interviewees commented that the VCG had been channelled into enhancing provision and/or piloting new developments: '*We have allocated different amounts, based on starting from the historic point of view and then looking at our local priorities and what we actually want to improve and what our key aims for improvement are*' (Head of Education Finance, Metropolitan LEA).

Interviewees in four LEAs described mapping exercises or '*audits of need*' which had been carried out in connection with the introduction of the VCG, in order to ascertain current levels of support and identify gaps in provision. In some cases, these involved a survey of local services, or a meeting convened specifically to discuss the implementation of the VCG, whilst in others, the process was an exercise of analysing existing data to identify areas requiring additional input.

When describing the rationale for allocation, only four interviewees specifically stated that they had endeavoured to provide support for all of the groups listed in the VCG guidance. Comments implying a greater investment in more predominant areas of need were more frequent. Correspondingly, where interviewees gave rationales for *not* allocating to particular groups, these generally referred to well-funded and effective provision being made by outside agencies, or via base-funded LEA services.

In around one-third of LEAs, interviewees described rationale for allocation in terms of the focus of VCG-funded support strategies. In this sense, 'rationale' equated

closely to the objectives of the VCG as specified in the DfES guidance. Most frequently, comments centred on improved educational outcomes for vulnerable children, in terms of raised attainment, better access to education (including increased hours of provision), improved integration/reintegration, and raised attendance:

> *The VCG is allocated to enable services to work with different groups of vulnerable pupils, to ensure they remain in or become re-engaged with education. The focus of the work with sick children and school-aged mothers, for example, is to provide a continuum of teaching to avoid or identify and address gaps in learning resulting from missed schooling* (Head of Attendance and Behaviour Support, Inner London Borough).

Less frequently mentioned as a 'rationale' for allocation (in just four LEAs overall) was the prevention of exclusion, disaffection and offending.

Finally, a number of interviewees explained that, in terms of the rationale for allocation, VCG funding had been distributed in ways which linked into the LEA's overall strategic approach. In these authorities, interviewees stated that the VCG had been allocated in accordance with local strategic priorities or statutory responsibilities (e.g. minimum hours of provision for pupils out of school): '*The LEA has put inclusive education as one of its priorities and identified certain groups of children, such as Children in Public Care and asylum seekers ... So they are actually identified groups through the LEA Education Development Plan* (Senior Advisor Inclusion, County LEA).

2.5 Impact of the VCG on strategic development and partnership working

DfES guidance (2004) states that the VCG '*should be used to develop a strategic approach within the LEA to deal with vulnerable children in the round*'. To this end, the guidance recommends the development of multi-agency 'vulnerable children's panels' with increased attention to interagency planning and support. In order to determine the extent to which the VCG had impacted on LEAs' strategic approach to supporting vulnerable children, interviewees were asked whether any new strategic groups or multi-agency partnerships had been established as a result of the grant. They were also asked to comment on the extent to which they thought the VCG had influenced the strategic approach locally.

2.5.1 Strategic groups and multi-agency partnerships

Among the 50 LEAs surveyed, very few had established new strategic groups or panels as a specific outcome of the introduction of the VCG: new groups were cited in just four authorities. In light of the national agenda around social inclusion in recent years, however, the vast majority of LEAs already had in place one or more strategic groups – '*a plethora of multi-agency initiatives which are already required by other national strategies*' – the remit of which included a focus on vulnerable children. In some LEAs, interviewees explicitly stated that a decision had been taken not to establish a further group specifically around the VCG, instead choosing to have it managed '*through the existing multi-agency fora that were already up and running, which agencies were already signed up to*' (Head of Minority Communities

Achievement Service, County LEA). Most interviewees thus referred to existing strategic groups, such as: Inclusion Support Panels, Out of School Panels or Children and Young People's Strategic Partnerships. In many cases, these established groups had provided a forum for initial discussions around the implementation of the grant and continued to be the arena for ongoing decisions around VCG allocation and support strategies.

In the four LEAs where interviewees attributed the establishment of strategic groups directly (or in a large part) to the VCG, the remit of these groups typically included planning the implementation of the grant, decisions on allocations to services and individuals, and monitoring of strategies. Membership of the groups was generally limited to services within education (e.g. education welfare, educational psychology, SEN, school improvement), although, in one case, the YOT had become involved, and it was hoped that more 'outside' agencies would join in the future. The Cameo presented below gives an example of one of these new strategic groups.

It should be noted that, whilst new groups at *strategic* level were cited rarely, the VCG had been used more widely to facilitate the establishment of teams addressing the needs of specific groups, whose remit tended to be more operational, for example, Corporate Parenting Groups for looked after children or asylum seeker support teams. Additionally, the VCG had been instrumental in some LEAs in implementing new services, such as EOTAS or Pupil Referral Services. These developments at the specific group level are discussed in section 3.2.

CAMEO: Vulnerable Children's Strategy Group (Metropolitan LEA)

In this LEA, in conjunction with the introduction of the VCG, a Vulnerable Children's Strategy Group was established. The group meets approximately once a month and has representation from the range of LEA services and the Youth Offending Service, although it is hoped that the number of 'outside' agencies represented will increase over time (to include schools, social services and health). The group takes responsibility for the oversight of the VCG and has the remit to:

- Develop a vulnerable children's strategy for the LEA
- Audit existing provision and identify gaps
- Monitor and evaluate current effectiveness
- Disseminate good practice
- Make recommendations to further develop services that are child centred, holistic, solution focused and innovative.

Within its action plan, the group has a number of other activities and aims including training and development for schools and services and to explore the potential of various support strategies (e.g. peer mentoring, school-based counselling, alternative educational programmes and celebration events). As part of the LEA's strategy on vulnerable children, a vulnerable children's coordinator has also been appointed, to undertake a number of the activities around auditing provision and evaluating effective practice. A key positive impact of the group to date has been the drawing together of services across the LEA and allowing a broader perspective on issues of vulnerability:

> *We have never been round the table before in this way and linking up. Quite a lot of this is changing the way people work, because it's a new service, it's a*

> *new team in the scheme of things … Just getting people together right across, looking at the needs of the children, because they are often in lots more* [groups]. *An asylum seeker can be pregnant and homeless all at the same time, so it's building those* [links] (Team Leader for SEN and Inclusion Support Services).

In terms of partnership working, again VCG was not widely reported to have led to the establishment of new interagency links at a strategic level. However, there was consensus among those who commented that the VCG had '*reinforced*', '*embedded*' or '*enhanced*' existing partnerships:

> *The grant has facilitated the bringing of professionals and services together, over and above that which was happening already. It's been a catalyst, in a way, to take forward cross-service working in a way that was happening, but it's probably galvanised things more efficiently than was happening previously* (Head of Learning Support, Unitary LEA).

Operational-level practitioners consulted during the case-study phase were more able to identify new partnerships stemming from VCG-funded activities at 'ground level'. Newly appointed teams or key workers were reported to be building links with schools, families, and other agencies. These included, for example, teenage parents' Reintegration Officers linking with Sure Start, health and housing, or ethnic minority key workers linking with behaviour support teams and local voluntary groups. In establishing new roles and strategies (e.g. Child Protection Officers, Virtual Learning Environments), there were also reports of networking activities with schools and other agencies, to gather expertise and good practice (See Appendix 1: Case studies, for further examples of impact on partnership working). It is also noteworthy that a small number of interviewees highlighted that the VCG had drawn together services *within* education, where previously, there had been some sense of '*working in silos*'.

Where new interagency activity was cited, these variously included instances where:

- The LEA was able to make new or increased financial contributions to multi-agency projects (e.g. mental health projects with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service [CAMHS] and social services)
- The LEA was able to financially support projects within the voluntary sector (e.g. alternative key stage 4 providers)
- VCG was funding an operational staff post within a multi-agency team (e.g. looked after children support teams, working alongside social services)
- VCG was funding a strategic staff officer who was able to represent the LEA on multi-agency panels (e.g. representation on children and young people's strategic partnerships).

Another example given was an LEA where the VCG had been used to establish two 'extended schools' projects, which had initially involved social services, school nurses, mental health services, and YOT mentors and had continued to attract more agencies as time went on.

It was noted that having a financial resource available to support interventions was an aid in terms of prompting thinking around multi-agency approaches, and in '*oiling*' partnership working, at both strategic and operational level:

> *I think it's very important that agencies have funding to take to a multi-agency table. If you're going to try and get outcomes you've got to have resources that you can take and for other agencies to bring resource as well and plan how you are going to do that together* (Head of Service, County LEA).

Where LEAs were able to make contributions to multi-agency teams or projects (either financially or in 'human resources'), this was also seen to have had a positive impact in terms of strengthening interagency links and increasing a sense of cooperative and collaborative working. For example, one interviewee gave an example where the VCG had been used to secure 'matched funding' from social services, for a joint project, which had consequent positive outcomes in terms of an improved interagency partnership. Following the Green Paper '*Every Child Matters*' (DfES, 2003), a small number of interviewees also highlighted the value of the VCG in the bringing together of Children's Trusts, Integrated Children's Services and local preventative strategies. In this respect, interviewees in five LEAs made comments regarding other funding streams and how they might fit alongside, or work in conjunction with, the VCG. Given the shared aims stemming from the Green Paper (ibid), interviewees recognised the potential for VCG to link up with funding streams such as Children's Fund or Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) funding, in jointly financing projects supporting vulnerable children. However, it was also noted that there were ongoing challenges in this type of joined-up working and a need for clarity in terms of shared aims and who is supporting what or whom. As stated by one interviewee: '*The difficulty we have is there are different funding streams for the same vulnerable children … one of our problems is balancing and juggling all these different funding streams*' (Assistant Director of Operations, County LEA).

2.5.2 Impact on LEAs' strategic approach

In terms of the development of new policies or strategic documents, the VCG had not, for the most part, prompted the development of any *new* strategic plans. However, there was a sense that the aims and purpose of the grant were an affirmation or confirmation of the strategic approach LEAs were taking, through existing plans, such as: behaviour support plans, education development plans or single education plans. One interviewee pointed out that:

> *There weren't any objectives specified within the VCG by the DfES which were new. It brought together a whole raft of targets and priorities which were already in existence, so LEAs should already have been addressing those areas* (Head of Service, County LEA).

However, in some cases, it was felt that the guidance gave LEAs a '*renewed focus*' on these key areas. Furthermore, whilst new strategic plans were uncommon, it was notable that VCG-funded strategies had led to policy development at an operational level in some LEAs. For example, practitioners interviewed in the case-study phase described the production of guidance, handbooks or good practice guides for schools, referral or reintegration protocols, and training packages.

Regarding impact on the overall strategic approach, interviewees generally forwarded the view that, whilst not determining or '*driving*' strategy, the VCG was a valuable contributor in terms of facilitating and implementing work identified through plans such as those noted above:

> *I think it's a tool, really, rather than a thing being used to develop it. We have a strategic approach and a direction that we want to go in and priorities within that ... and we have a variety of funding streams that help to make that a reality and the Vulnerable Children Grant is one of those* (School Improvement Advisor, outer London borough).

However, a small number of interviewees (particularly those interviewed in greater depth during the case-study phase) were able to identify impact of the VCG on the LEA's strategic approach, namely that a more 'cross-cutting' or holistic view of vulnerability was being taken. In light of the recognition that many vulnerable pupils were affected by multiple issues, there was a sense in some LEAs of moving away from '*compartmentalised*' provision and developing support strategies that addressed 'the child' rather than 'the category':

> *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 previously, under the grant system, it was grants for specific things, now it's a whole thing and we are all working together to look at ways that we can use the grant to benefit the most children* (Manager of Pupil Referral Unit [PRU], Metropolitan LEA).

These overarching strategies included, for example: strategic coordinators working across all vulnerable groups; investment in EOTAS provision catering for the range of pupils out of school; and one-off events, such as development days and conferences to review and share good practice around vulnerable children. In three LEAs, new appointments covering all vulnerable children had been made, for example 'Vulnerable Children's Coordinator' or 'Manager'. The remit of these posts included taking an overall view of provision, monitoring and tracking vulnerable groups, driving forward new developments and coordinating work across existing services. In one LEA, a major element of the role (a two-year fixed term appointment) was to conduct research with schools into existing effective practice around vulnerable children and then disseminate this good practice more widely. Reported impacts of these posts included: improved tracking and monitoring of vulnerable children at an individual level; more consistent completion of PEPs; better identification of need; and thus improved targeting of support. Elsewhere, the potential to join up support for Gypsy/Traveller pupils and looked after children was being explored, again in the recognition that a focus on needs rather than 'labels' could be more effective:

> *I'm beginning to see synergies, really, between teams. When you look at the children,* [they] *look very different ... but if you look at what the team needs to be like to meet their needs – or that helps schools to meet their needs – it ends up looking very similar* (Assessment and Intervention Manager, County LEA).

A number of interviewees also emphasised the benefits of being able to target funding at individual- and small-group level, both within and outside of a pre-defined category of vulnerability: '*The one-to-one support has been fantastic. The schools can't believe that they can suddenly have a small grant to support this child in a very extreme moment in their life*' (Pupil Support Service Manager, Outer London Borough). As cameos in Chapter 3 will illustrate, it was felt that the ability to allocate relatively small amounts of funding to the specific needs and circumstances of an individual pupil could have a significant impact on their access to education: '*The most satisfying thing is to be able to introduce small initiatives that make a big difference to a relatively small number of children*' (Principal Advisor, County LEA). That LEAs could use part of their VCG as a 'contingency' fund, to be drawn on to implement support for a particular need at short notice, was also seen as valuable: '*The ability to respond to perhaps a crisis of a short-term situation, to prevent it becoming more chronic*' (Head of Service for Children and Young People, County LEA).

Some interviewees raised broader strategic issues around effective support for vulnerable children, i.e. '*what works*' strategically. Three main areas emerged. Firstly, some interviewees commented on the need to strike a balance between '*crisis response*' and prevention. In these cases, efforts had been made to channel VCG funding into the latter, in order to increase capacity for early intervention. A second issue raised was the need to implement an appropriate combination of overarching strategic posts or teams and targeted support for specific vulnerable groups: '*Do you put the money into specialist services, or do you put it more into generic stuff that supports all children?*' (Social Inclusion Manager, outer London borough). Thirdly, the need to achieve an appropriate balance between investing in 'external' support, i.e. specialist services at LEA level, and enabling schools to develop their own capacity to support vulnerable pupils from within, was highlighted. For some groups (e.g. asylum seekers) it was felt that 'external' support at LEA level would always be necessary, for example, in managing initial pupil placement and additional needs. One interviewee also noted that it was useful to retain a degree of LEA-level support, as schools could not be expected to maintain a full and current awareness of all issues for all groups:

> *The challenge will always be getting the right balance between money that follows children and money that provides training advice and challenge for schools ... To expect every school to have that range of expertise and that knowledge of ongoing contacts and links is unreasonable, so we needed to secure some expertise, for example, for Travellers and certainly for children in public care* (Head of Support for Learning Service, Inner London Borough).

It was also noted that this approach allowed LEAs to retain a '*central support and challenge*' function with schools. An example of the VCG being used to develop schools' own capacity, however, was in an LEA where the grant was being used to fund training on inclusion for school staff. In this authority, an 'Inclusive Schools Quality Mark' had been developed, for which schools were able to bid. One requirement of this was that schools undertake a particular training course on inclusion and the LEA was able to fund teachers' attendance on this course through the VCG.

Implementation of the grant: summary of key points

- Most LEA representatives who commented, felt there had been an increase in funding through the introduction of the VCG. This additional funding facilitated three main opportunities: the maintenance of existing services and support strategies; expansion or enhancement of existing work; or the development of new work.

- A key feature of the VCG was that it was allocated to LEAs as 'block funding' rather than 'ring-fenced' amounts for pre-defined groups of pupils. Overall, block funding was seen as preferable to the previous ring-fenced grants because the flexibility of this approach allowed LEAs to respond to locally identified need and changing circumstances. The broader remit of the grant meant that it had enabled some LEAs to provide support for 'new' vulnerable groups, to pilot innovative work and to focus on earlier intervention. In addition, the grant's flexibility had allowed LEAs to implement interventions on varying scales, from funding whole services, to awarding grants to support individual pupils.

- Challenges were noted around initial implementation and there were some concerns regarding a loss of focus on groups that had previously had discrete funding streams, for example Gypsy/Travellers. There were also more general concerns about the long-term availability of Standards Funds and LEAs' ability to 'mainstream' VCG-funded strategies should the grant be withdrawn.

- LEAs' rationale for allocation of the VCG was primarily on 'historical' allocations and maintenance of existing strategies. This was particularly so with regard to Gypsy/Traveller pupils and teenage parents. Other rationales provided by interviewees included: to address unmet local needs; to focus on the stated objectives of the VCG; and to implement strategies to meet local or national strategic targets.

- Whilst the introduction of the VCG had not generally instigated the development of new policies or procedures at strategic level, guidance and protocols linked to new VCG-funded teams or strategies were noted more frequently, at operational and specific-group level.

- Practitioners interviewed in the case-study phase identified new interagency links at operational level arising from VCG-funded activities. The availability of VCG funding was felt to have facilitated interagency partnerships and opened up possibilities for joint working, in this respect it was a catalyst for change. At strategic level, the VCG was not felt to have led to the establishment of *new* strategic groups or multi-agency links. However, there was a general sense that the aims of the VCG had '*reinforced*', '*enhanced*' or '*embedded*' existing partnerships.

- In line with the VCG guidance, a small number of LEAs had used the grant to fund overarching strategic posts, with a coordination-type remit for the oversight

of several or all vulnerable groups. These posts were felt to have benefits including improved coordination and efficiency of services.

- Whilst there was a sense that, overall, the VCG was 'facilitating' the LEAs' existing strategic approach, rather than 'driving' it, some interviewees noted that the VCG guidance had given a renewed focus on the vulnerable groups identified and was beginning to lead to more 'cross-cutting' and holistic support for vulnerable children. Given time, there was seen to be potential for further strategic change and development of this type, as promoted by the VCG guidance.

Chapter 3

Strategies and groups funded by the grant

Introduction

This chapter considers the way in which the VCG had been used to support vulnerable children across the 50 LEAs surveyed. Beginning with an overview of the vulnerable groups receiving grant-funded support, section 3.2 then turns to discussion of support for specific groups of vulnerable children.

Key groups identified by the DfES for VCG-funded support include: looked after children; young offenders; teenage parents; school refusers; asylum seekers; Gypsy/Travellers; pupils with medical needs; and young carers. The proforma, which comprised the initial data collection phase, asked participants to provide information on each of these groups, with the addition of an 'other' category.

Data were requested regarding: numbers of pupils in the LEA; amount of funding allocated (if any); strategies being funded by the VCG; any other sources of support and/or funding for education; and local and national targets being addressed. Further clarification and elaboration on these data were gleaned through the telephone interviews with LEA personnel. In each of the sections, there is discussion of:

- Size of VCG allocation to the group, including relative changes to previous funding
- Funding destination (i.e. whether funding was retained centrally by the LEA or 'conferred' to school level)
- Strategies for support funded by the VCG
- Targets set in relation to the group, including progress against meeting these targets
- Other agency involvement in educational support
- Impact of the VCG on this group.

Each section also includes cameos drawn from the LEA-survey interviews which provide exemplars of strategies and interventions funded by the grant. More detailed vignettes of VCG-funded support strategies can be found in the case studies in Appendix 1.

3.1 Allocation of the VCG

This section gives an overview of: the groups to which the 50 LEAs were allocating VCG funding; the frequency with which groups were supported; and variation in the amount of support in terms of size of allocation. There is also consideration of the relative numbers of pupils within each vulnerable group, across the 50 LEAs surveyed.

3.1.1 Groups supported by VCG funding

Figure 3.1, below, provides an overview of the number of LEAs allocating VCG funding to each of the vulnerable groups, in order of frequency. The top-ranking groups are those which had previous Standards Fund grants. The category 'excluded pupils and pupils at risk of exclusion' was added following initial analysis of data collected, due to the high number of LEAs referencing this as an 'other' group on their proforma. Groups referenced within the 'other' category included, for example, pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, those with mental health problems and children 'at risk'. Some of the VCG spending in the 'other' category, for example, in relation to pupils with SEN, did not necessarily appear to meet the grant's criteria.

Figure 3.1   Overview of the number of LEAs allocating VCG funding to each vulnerable group
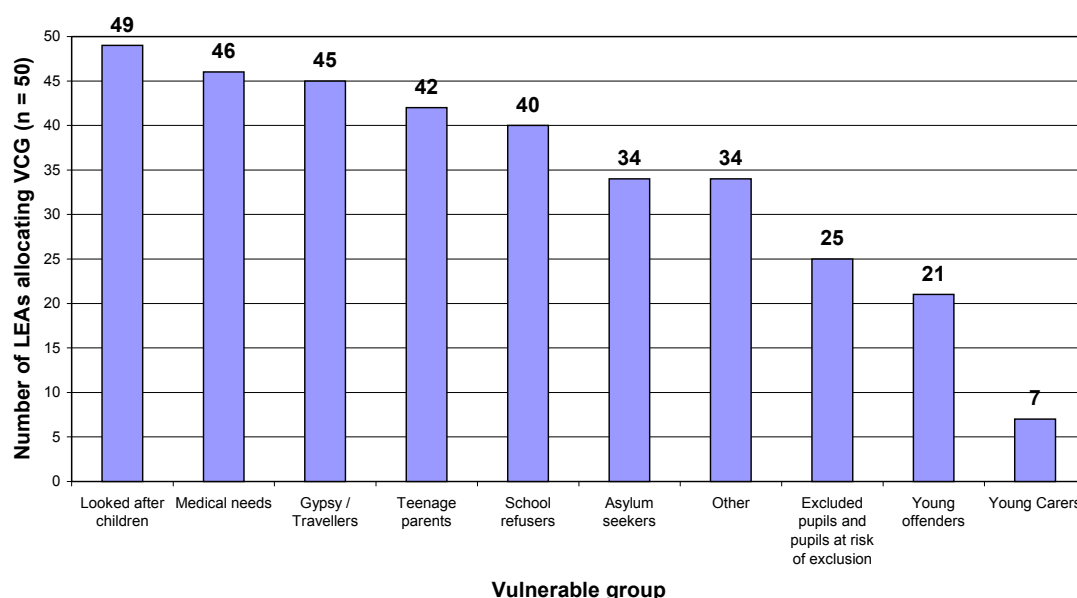
Source: *proforma data in the LEA survey phase of the NFER study, 2004*

It should be noted that, for some groups (e.g. young offenders and school refusers) in certain LEAs, the principal support strategy funded by the VCG was an EOTAS service or PRU, which provided educational support for a range of vulnerable groups. In these cases, it was sometimes felt by interviewees that there had been no 'direct' VCG allocation to a particular group, but that they would nonetheless benefit from more 'generic' strategies funded by the grant.

Regarding 'breadth' of allocation, no LEAs cited all ten of the above categories, and just four LEAs were reportedly using VCG to support young people in nine groups. Two of these LEAs were in receipt of relatively large VCG allocations (over one million pounds) although two were around only half a million. Twelve LEAs were addressing eight groups, 15 had allocated VCG to seven groups and 13 were supporting six of the nine groups. Two respondents stated that VCG had been

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allocated to five groups, three were addressing the needs of just four and one had reportedly used VCG to support just two groups.

3.1.2 Numbers of vulnerable children and size of funding allocations

This section gives an overview of the numbers of vulnerable children in each of the 50 LEAs and amounts of VCG funding allocated, based on data provided in the proforma. LEAs were asked to provide actual or estimated figures for each of the eight 'main' groups identified. In considering these data, however, a number of caveats should be observed which may in turn have implications for funding formulae. Many respondents provided explanatory notes alongside their numerical data, specifying exactly what a figure referred to. In many cases, the respondent highlighted that figures were a 'snapshot' on a given day, and not necessarily indicative of total numbers over an academic or calendar year (e.g. numbers of asylum seekers or looked after children). In other cases, an annual estimate was given, sometimes in addition to a 'snapshot' figure.

Further specifications were given regarding particular groups. For example, in the case of looked after children, figures supplied variously referred to: numbers placed within the LEA; numbers on school rolls (within the LEA and/or cross-borough); numbers of children aged 5–16; or breakdowns of numbers at pre-school, statutory school age and 16–18. Likewise, for Gypsy/Traveller pupils, numbers may have referred to pupils on a school roll, families known to the Traveller Education Service, or numbers of children of statutory school age. Thus, in light of these different definitions used, it should be noted that the figures in Table 3.1 do not necessarily refer to the same 'sample' across LEAs and can only be taken as a guide to the range of variability in pupil numbers.

A number of respondents also noted the difficulties in providing precise figures for some vulnerable groups, given that numbers were constantly fluctuating (e.g. asylum seekers, Gypsy/Travellers, looked after children) or that different data collection 'tools' gave widely differing results. For example, one interviewee noted that, for asylum seeker pupils, PLASC data gave much lower figures than a language survey (a method recommended by the Refugee Council). The fact that, in some cases, young people might not wish to identify themselves (e.g. young carers and Gypsy/Travellers) was also noted to present difficulties in accurate data collection.

The figures presented in Table 3.1 are drawn only from those LEAs who were able to give actual or estimated pupil numbers and the above qualifications regarding variations in the 'format' of data should be borne in mind. Note that 'excluded pupils' and 'other' groups are not included in this section of the analysis, as insufficient data were provided. Categories are ranked according to the average number of pupils.

Table 3.1   Range and average numbers of pupils in each vulnerable group

Vulnerable group	Range of pupil numbers	Average pupil numbers
Young offenders	31–5500	1031
Looked after children	69–3000	462
Medical needs	3–976	338
Asylum seekers	0–1957	278
Gypsy/Travellers	0–979	203
Young carers	8–500	153
School refusers	1–2000	116
Teenage parents	1–500	54

Source: *proforma and interview data in the LEA survey phase of the NFER study, 2004*

The variation in numbers across the LEAs is large in all cases, and markedly so for some vulnerable groups. This is due, in part, to the range of pupil numbers overall in differently sized LEAs, but may also reflect the different measures used to define pupil numbers. For example, a count of all young people known to the YOT would be significantly higher than the number of young people who had actually been convicted of an offence. Similarly, the variation in school refusers may reflect the difference between those LEAs counting only pupils with a medical diagnosis of school phobia and those referring to all pupils known to the Education Welfare Service (EWS) as low attenders.

Table 3.2 shows the range and average proportion of total VCG allocated to each vulnerable group, across the 50 LEAs[2], ranked according to average proportional VCG allocation. It was possible to include 'excluded pupils' in this analysis, although 'other' groups are again omitted due to the more 'general' nature of information given for this category.

Table 3.2   Range and average proportional allocation of VCG for each vulnerable group

Vulnerable group	Range of VCG allocation	Average proportional VCG allocation (%)
Excluded pupils	£3,000–£674,000	23
Gypsy/Travellers	£16,500–£723,000	22
Looked after children	£10,000–£475,000	15
Asylum seekers	£1,000–£430,000	10
School refusers	£4,500–£138,000	10
Medical needs	£2,000–£150,000	9
Teenage parents	£3,000–£166,728	8
Young offenders	£3,000–£210,000	6
Young carers	£1,565–£20,000	2

Source: *proforma and interview data in the LEA survey phase of the NFER study, 2004*

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[2] Calculations were based on those LEAs where a specific figure was given

Again, those groups previously in receipt of specific Standards Fund grants feature among the most 'generously' supported groups. The high proportional allocation to Gypsy/Traveller pupils may be due to the fact that the VCG was, in many cases, the sole funding source for LEAs' Traveller Education Services. Notably, however, allocations to support excluded pupils and pupils at risk of exclusion ranks highest in this table. This may be due to the fact that the PRU and EOTAS services often funded in this capacity (see section 3.2.9) were in fact addressing the needs of a range of pupils, who may be represented within one or more of the other categories (e.g. Gypsy/Travellers, school refusers).

3.2   Analysis via type of vulnerable child

The following sections now turn to specific discussion of VCG-funded support for the various groups of vulnerable child. The groups are considered in order of frequency of VCG allocation, although excluded pupils and 'other' groups are presented at the end of the chapter.

3.2.1 Looked after children

Funding

Of the 50 LEAs surveyed, all but one were using VCG to support the education of looked after children. The amount of VCG funding allocated to this group ranged from £475,000 in a large county LEA, to £10,000 in a smaller county authority. The amount of funding allocated for looked after children often represented a relatively high proportion of the overall grant. Allocations varied between 1.4 and 44.4 per cent with an average of 15.2 per cent. In the majority of LEAs (31), interviewees reported that the introduction of the VCG had led to an increase in the amount of money available to support looked after children. In addition, interviewees from eight LEAs felt there had been no change in funding, and two reported that they felt funding had decreased. Information on changes in funding was not available from seven LEAs.

Funding destination

VCG funding for looked after children had been retained by the LEAs in all cases. In addition, and reflecting DfES guidance (DfES, 2004) on the use of the VCG, 18 of these LEAs had also conferred a proportion of the funding to schools in the form of bursaries/grants. Moreover, in three of these authorities, the funding was allocated immediately to schools on placement of a looked after pupil and was used at the school's discretion.

Most commonly, interviewees reported that VCG funding had been used to expand existing provision. This included: increased educational support for pupils (for example, study skills, revision sessions and homework clubs); increased staffing (e.g. learning mentor, advisory teacher); and the introduction of training programmes for schools and education staff. In 14 LEAs, it was reported that VCG funding had been used to maintain existing levels of provision through, for example, continuing to fund staff salaries and maintaining existing contributions to multi-agency teams. Furthermore, in 13 LEAs, interviewees reported that new work had been funded through the VCG, including: new staff appointments; additional resources (for

example, laptops); and the introduction of 'innovative' projects and activities (such as contributing to an arts project involving visual, media, and drama artists working within a number of children's homes).

Strategies and focus of support

Across the 49 LEAs allocating VCG funding for looked after children, the most common use of funding was for **staffing**. Interviewees from 42 LEAs reported that VCG funding had been used to either maintain the current level of staffing (often through contributions to existing teams) or appoint new staff. Positions being funded through the VCG included:

- Coordinators/team leaders
- Designated teachers/teaching staff
- Advisory teachers
- Learning support assistants/mentors
- Home tutors
- Social workers
- Education welfare officers
- Educational psychologists
- Youth workers/art therapists.

Through increased staffing, LEAs reported a focus on supporting looked after children in three main areas, namely: **raising attainment/achievement**; **attendance, participation, reintegration and access to education** and **holistic support**. Moreover, where VCG funding was contributing to, or expanding existing teams, the impact on **multi-agency working** was noted.

Most commonly, interviewees described a focus on **raising the attainment** of looked after children, and increased staffing was identified as a key strategy in this respect. In one LEA, for example, VCG funding had been used to appoint a study support worker to provide in-school and after-school support for key stage 3 and 4 pupils preparing for their GCSEs and SATs. In another case, staffing had been increased through the development of a number of partnerships with local HE and FE providers. Through these partnerships, trainee teachers and learning mentors assisted looked after children with homework, study support and revision skills. Furthermore, in one unitary LEA, a number of staff (including specialist teachers and support assistants) had been appointed through the VCG as part of the LEA's ongoing development (pre-VCG) of a team dedicated to raising the achievement of looked after children.

Other strategies through which LEAs had used the VCG to focus on raising achievement included: funding individual tutors (privately); buying in alternative provision (e.g. providing college courses and/or ESOL courses for looked after asylum seeker pupils); providing a study support pack to looked after pupils transferring to secondary school; designing new PEPs and introducing early years PEPs; providing reading initiatives for primary-age pupils; ICT courses; and distance learning packages (including laptops and computer-based learning programmes).

Interviewees from 27 LEAs described a focus on **attendance, participation, reintegration** and **access to education**. Where a specific focus on attendance was

described, in the majority of cases, support from the EWS was noted. In one LEA, for example, attendance was being targeted specifically through the appointment of a number of education welfare officers for looked after children:

> *There is the provision of targeted education welfare officers ... we have put an additional £120,000 for that. It is about those education welfare officers targeting looked after children on attendance issues because they are not going to achieve unless they're in school* (Head of Service, County LEA).

In addition, in one LEA the VCG was funding a support officer as part of an existing multi-agency team to mentor looked after children in children's homes who had been identified as experiencing difficulty with school access and attendance.

Staff appointments also contributed to a focus on the provision of **holistic support** for looked after children (e.g. increasing access to leisure facilities). Cameo 1 provides an example of holistic support funded specifically for unaccompanied asylum seeker pupils in public care.

CAMEO 1: Looked after children

- **LEA:** Outer London
- **Percentage of grant:** 6.9 per cent
- **Number of looked after children:** 103
- **Funding destination:** Funding retained by the LEA, and also conferred to schools as bursaries/grants for specific projects or individual pupil support
- **Strategy:** A staff appointment for a project to develop 'life' skills and 'introduce' looked after unaccompanied asylum seeker pupils to the community
- **Focus:** To provide holistic support for unaccompanied asylum seeker pupils in public care
- **Account of impact:** Although the impact of the project on educational outcomes for the pupils could not be determined at the present time, it was felt to have had a major impact on pupils' overall development and their integration into society and the school:

  > *They are teaching them how to use the tube, how to use buses … teaching them how to cook, how to shop, all these kinds of things. This is way outside the National Curriculum … but it's an absolutely vital thing to bring them into the English way of life* (Pupil Support Manager, Outer London Borough).

As a result of the success of the project, funding was continuing until August 2005.

Often, the provision of holistic support for looked after children involved the employment of staff from other agencies and services, for example, health, CAMHS and the Educational Psychology Service (EPS). In this way, the VCG was also contributing to the development of **multi-agency partnerships** in some LEAs, where links were being made with other statutory services and providers.

> *It starts to draw in health personnel. We've got somebody who's appointed as a nurse for our looked after children. It links with social care, it links with education* (Head of Learning Support, Unitary LEA).

One LEA, for example, had used the VCG to employ a part-time **educational psychologist** to raise awareness of the mental health issues of looked after children and work with individual pupils '*in crisis*' (see Cameo 2).

CAMEO 2: Looked after children

- **LEA:** Unitary
- **Percentage of grant:** 16.3 per cent
- **Number of looked after children:** 160
- **Funding destination:** Funding retained by the LEA. The VCG was used to expand existing provision within the LEA, including the introduction of some new initiatives
- **Strategy:** The development of a mental health project targeting looked after children (including unaccompanied asylum seeker pupils). The project aimed to promote the mental health issues of looked after children and identify areas for development in supporting these pupils. Through the appointment of a part-time educational psychologist the project undertakes: intervention with individual teachers; staff training; solution-focused work with carers and children; group supervision sessions with social workers; workshops on loss and bereavement, anger, withdrawal, anxiety and self-esteem
- **Focus:** To promote the mental health issues of looked after children (including unaccompanied asylum seeker pupils) and work with looked after children '*in crisis*' both in and out of the LEA
- **Account of impact:** Although still in the early stages of development, the project has had a major impact on '*driving forward*' multi-agency working within the LEA, linking education, in '*a creative way*' with colleagues in health and social services.

In other cases, one-off events (including prize giving, celebration days and conferences) had been funded which were regarded as effective in **raising schools' and LEAs' awareness** of looked after children.

In addition to the main areas of focus described above, the work of staff funded through the VCG included: referral (referring pupils to other services); multi-agency work; liaison with schools and families; behaviour management; training; awareness raising; and an advocacy and support role for looked after children.

Eighteen LEAs also reported the use of VCG funding to provide **bursaries** to schools. Generally, the focus of this strategy was on helping schools support looked after children, and, in doing so, aimed to facilitate pupils' **attendance, participation, reintegration and access** to education. The most common application of this strategy was through the provision of dowry funding to individual schools with a specific focus (for example, to enable the school to provide additional Learning Support Assistant (LSA) support to pupils during reintegration or transition):

> *We wanted to provide increased support to aid them settling into their new educational provision. We didn't have that through the core, we've added that in through the Vulnerable Children Grant* (Head of Learning Support, Unitary LEA).

Other reported uses of dowry funding included: study support (e.g. increased LSA time/posts) for pupils sitting GCSE or SATs examinations, or those at risk of not

being entered for their exams; supporting pupils at risk of exclusion (e.g. providing a learning mentor or behaviour support assistant); and supporting schools to fulfil their responsibilities towards looked after pupils (e.g. to support the development and delivery of PEPs and to assist the designated teacher to fulfil their role).

Bursaries were allocated to schools in three main ways. Most commonly, they were distributed to schools at the discretion of the LEA, that is, where a requirement was identified by the authority (e.g. funding for additional LSA support):

> *In one of our junior schools there were nine looked after children with a variety of different needs. Some of them had quite challenging behaviour and were putting extra strain on the schools' capacity to support them, so we funded a teaching assistant for a term to work alongside one of the support workers to develop social skills' groups and things like that to support those children* (Education Support Service Manager, Unitary LEA).

In addition, in three authorities, financial support was allocated to schools automatically on admission of a looked after pupil. In these cases, although funding was allocated on the basis of pupil numbers rather than specified by the LEA, it was often subject to specific conditions. For example, schools were required to submit regular data to the LEA regarding each looked after child in order to be issued with the bursary. This was considered to be a particularly effective way of monitoring and tracking looked after children, especially within LEAs with a high percentage of children placed out of borough. In two LEAs, arrangements were in place so that schools could apply for a grant to address a specific need or project, e.g. to prevent the exclusion of looked after children from primary schools (see Cameo 3). The advantage of this was the speed with which support could be put in place.

CAMEO 3: Looked after children

- **LEA:** Metropolitan
- **Percentage of grant:** 10.9 per cent
- **Number of looked after children:** 1500
- **Funding destination:** Conferred to schools to provide grants to support looked after children
- **Strategy:** Schools can apply to the LEA for a grant to support primary-aged looked after children in danger of exclusion. Once funding has been accessed schools have the flexibility to use the funding as they wish, for example, to employ a new member of staff or increase the hours of existing staff or to provide one-to-one support for pupils at crucial points in the day, e.g. lunchtimes or particular lessons. In addition, this year (2003/04), the LEA had used VCG funding to provide grants to schools to support Year 11 pupils at risk of not being entered for GCSE examinations (e.g. to provide revision and coursework sessions to bring pupils work up to date for entry to exams), following a 'dip' in GCSE achievement in the previous year
- **Focus:** To provide support to schools to maintain looked after children's participation in education, reduce exclusions, and improve the number of pupils being entered for examinations
- **Account of impact:** Dowry funding was considered to be a '*highly successful*' strategy for maintaining pupils in school and reducing exclusions. The LEA's

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> ability to provide immediate and flexible support to schools through this strategy was recognised as a key feature of its success:
>
> > *It's very successful because it's not us saying you have to spend it on x, y and z. It's us saying you tell us what you think you need and we'll give you the money for it. Because schools know the children it is very effective because it's using their expertise* (Education Protects Coordinator).
>
> The 15 primary-aged pupils in danger of exclusion supported through dowry funding in 2003/04 were retained in school. The impact of bursaries on pupils being entered for GCSEs is currently being evaluated.

In 14 LEAs, the VCG had been used to provide **training programmes**, for example: for school governors and staff (in particular for designated teachers); for LEA staff (e.g. early years and the EWS); for professionals from other agencies (including social services and health); training for foster carers (e.g. study skills sessions for foster carers with children in Years 6 and 9); and residential staff in children's homes. In one LEA, a family learning project had been introduced which provided foster carers with opportunities to gain accredited qualifications. **Awareness raising** and the provision of **family support** were a common focus of these strategies.

In nine LEAs, VCG funding had been used to increase **resources** for looked after children. Examples included: individual pupil resources (e.g. the provision of computer equipment for pupils in Years 10, 11 and 12); increasing in-school resources for looked after pupils and staff (e.g. pupil access to a regular magazine and service leaflets, the production of a handbook for schools on the education of looked after children); resources for LEA staff (including an education assessment tool kit for fostering officers to assess potential foster carers understanding of, and attitude towards, educational issues); and resources for children's homes (e.g. in one LEA, thesauruses, dictionaries and revision materials were supplied to the children's homes).

Other less common outlets of the VCG included the use of funding to support **alternative education provision** (e.g. college courses for unaccompanied asylum seeker pupils and priority access to the PRU for looked after children) and **strategic development** (for example, the development of a corporate parenting manual, appointment of strategic staff and the development and maintenance of the database for looked after children).

Targets
Interviewees were asked to detail targets or local objectives which had been set in relation to looked after children. Of the 49 LEAs who reported allocating VCG funding for looked after children, information on targets for the group was supplied by 37 LEAs. Most commonly, interviewees referred to targets set within the LEA's overall objectives, for example, in its Education Development Plan, Behaviour Support Plan, or Inclusion Strategy, which related to either, looked after children specifically, or to the education of vulnerable children in general.

In addition, interviewees from 16 LEAs referred to targets in line with the revised Public Service Agreement (PSA) to improve the life chances of looked after children

by '*substantially narrowing the gap between the educational attainment and participation of children in care and that of their peers by 2006*' (DfES, 2003; DoH, 2003). Targets to this effect were, that:

- Outcomes for 11-year-old looked after children in English and maths are at least 60 per cent of those of their peers
- 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
- 15 per cent or more of looked after children aged 16 to achieve five GCSEs grades A*–C (and that the proportion of those achieving this grade has risen by four percentage points each year since 2002).

Given this, targets relating to the education of looked after children predominantly related to attainment and were focused at a national level. Indeed, as noted by one interviewee, '*there are a lot of national targets now, so what has happened is, we have moved away from locally set targets towards national targets*' (Social Inclusion Manager, Outer London Borough).

In addition, a number of LEAs also provided details of specific local quantitative targets relating to the education of looked after children. In some cases, these mirrored national targets, in others, although reflective of national targets they had been adapted to meet local objectives. Variation was evident across LEAs in relation to target setting. In one LEA, for example, the target for the percentage of looked after children achieving five or more GCSE grades A*-C had been set above the national minimum, at 35 per cent. In another LEA, however, this target had been set below the national minimum, at ten per cent.

 A number of problems associated with the application of national targets for looked after children at a local level were also identified by several interviewees; namely, the small number of pupils involved when looking at GCSE results and the number of looked after children identified as having special educational needs.

> *We have problems with the targets for children in public care… nationally it's a big cohort, but at a local level, it's a small cohort, and within that small cohort, you could well have children with quite complex special needs as well as children within the normal ability range* (Manager of Specialist Learning Support, Unitary LEA).

In one LEA, for example, the impact of the changing nature of the cohort of Year 11 looked after pupils and specifically the numbers identified as having special educational needs was highlighted: between 2001 and 2004 the percentage of looked after pupils with statements of SEN ranged from, 57 per cent in 2001/02, to 34 per cent in 2002/03, to 24 per cent in 2003/04. In this respect, it was felt that progress towards meeting targets on attainment, attendance, and exclusion for looked after children should be seen in context, and that these trends needed to be taken into account.

Despite such issues, the benefit of national targets for raising the awareness and expectations of the group was noted in many cases:

I believe strongly that for that particular group of disadvantaged children, we should certainly set aspirational targets, but I think that if you don't hit the target, then there are reasons why, which may well be outside of the control of the schools or outside of the control of the LEA … Be aspirational, but be realistic is the bottom line (Manager of Specialist Learning Support, Unitary LEA).

Additionally, interviewees from several LEAs reported more general targets and local objectives for looked after children. Often, these related to service-level improvements. Examples included: establishing and maintaining links with other services (e.g. CAMHS, EWS) and agencies (e.g. libraries, voluntary organisations); increasing resources (e.g. extend laptop schemes, books); improving the educational support available for looked after children (e.g. increased tuition, interventions for under-achieving pupils, increased hours for pupils out of education, increased completion of PEPs); increasing participation in extra curricular activities (e.g. summer schools, outdoor activities); improving liaison with, and support for, families and carers; improved monitoring of provision and outcomes; and the development and provision of training for designated teachers, social workers and carers. Progress in meeting the targets for looked after children identified by case-study interviewees are summarised below.

Progress in meeting targets for looked after children
In the case-study LEAs, VCG-funded interventions were seen to have had a positive impact on looked after children's attainment and the numbers out of school.

Attainment
The grant had enabled LEAs to continue to invest in providing targeted support for looked after children at key times, e.g. GCSEs and SATs. In one case-study LEA, GCSE results for 2003/4 were not available at the time of interview, although in previous years, it was suggested that there had been '*significant improvement*' in those achieving at least one GCSE.

In another case-study LEA the progress made in GCSE achievement was partly attributed to the VCG as the grant had been used to buy resources, e.g. revision guides, extra tuition etc.

VCG-funded staff were felt to have contributed to an improvement in GCSE attainment and the fact that no looked after child had been excluded from one case-study LEA in the last three years: '*If those staff weren't working day and night and harassing people in schools, I don't think that anything like that progress would have been made*' (Head of Support for Learning, Inner London Borough).

The VCG was continuing to fund an existing team's work in primary schools: providing training, briefings, dowry funding, support visits to schools, and attending planning meetings etc. This year, outcomes at Year 6 had increased from 38 per cent achieving a level 4 in key stage 2 SATs, to 50 per cent achieving this level, which was partly attributed to the work of the team.

VCG funding had been used to provide transition support (as the move to secondary school was seen to have a negative impact on the attainment of looked after

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children). All Year 6 pupils received a study support pack (with dictionaries, grammar books etc.) for Year 7. The looked after children's team also ensured that designated teachers and/or learning mentors at feeder primary schools and secondary schools met to plan effective support.

Exclusion
VCG grants had prevented the exclusion of looked after children in two case-study LEAs. In one, dowry funding had been given to primary schools to prevent the exclusion of 15 pupils. As a result of this additional support, none of the young people were excluded, so this was seen as having had a positive impact on exclusion figures.

The grant had enabled one LEA to provide targeted support for looked after children, which previously, had not been possible: '*That's gone up 100 per cent, because we weren't able to target support before at all*' (Education Officer, looked after children, Outer London Borough). The provision of targeted support for looked after children was perceived to have helped reduce the numbers out of school.

Other agency support
LEAs were asked to identify any other agencies or services offering educational and/or financial support for looked after children. Most commonly, social services were identified (in 32 LEAs), in terms of providing both educational and/or financial support for looked after children. Most frequently, they were providing part-funding of multi-agency (education and social services) teams. Moreover, where financial support from social services was highlighted, numerous references to Quality Protects funding were made. In addition, LEAs frequently cited LEA base budgets as offering financial support for looked after children and thus identified core-funded services as providing educational support. Those services referenced included: the EWS; the Behaviour Support Service; the EPS; PRUs; EOTAS provision (including, the Hospital and Home Tuition Service); and early years services. Furthermore, in four LEAs, mainstream schools were also cited as providing educational support or funding for looked after children. The financial support for looked after children obtained through specific government initiatives was also noted in several LEAs and included: LPSA funding (seven LEAs); the Children's Fund (two LEAs); and the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (one LEA).

Educational (and in a small number of cases financial) support from the Health Service (including CAMHS) was identified by nine LEAs and educational support from Connexions was also reported by six authorities. Independent and voluntary providers (e.g. the National Teaching and Support Service (NTAS), National Children's Homes (NCH) and the Leaving Care Service) were also cited as providing educational support for looked after children. In addition, a small number of LEAs (five) referred to educational support from the Youth Service and YOT.

Impact
In describing the impact of the VCG, in many cases, interviewees referred to pre-existing teams for looked after children within the LEA that were well established and considered to be particularly effective. As a consequence of this, several interviewees

felt that they were unable to attach any impact on processes or outcomes for looked after children specifically related to the VCG.

> *The problem with this, is that as it's part of the overall funding for the looked after children's service, I'm not sure whether you could actually delineate specific strategies where this money's being used because it's become part of the looked after children team* (Principal Officer Pupil and Student Services, Metropolitan LEA).

Notwithstanding this, the majority of interviewees felt that the VCG had not only enabled LEAs to maintain existing provision but had also, in many cases, resulted in improvements in, and additions to, the LEA's provision for the client group.

> *We've been fortunate compared with some authorities, in that, for example, we've got a Looked After Children Education Service. We've also got the Vulnerable Children Grant ... and looked after children is one of the headings. So our response is, we don't need the money to set up a service, because we've got one in operation so, what we can do, is use the money for additionality* (Head of Learning Support Service, Unitary LEA).

Overall, interviewees were positive about the general impact of the VCG, although it was apparent that the grant had impacted on LEAs to different degrees, often determined by the pre-existing level of service. For example, in one LEA, where provision for looked after children was well established, the VCG was considered to be, '*like the cherry on the cake*' (Chief Education Officer, County LEA). However, in another authority, with a less developed service, the VCG had enabled a large investment for looked after children with significant impact:

> *There has been a massive increase in investment in this group… it's the biggest single investment we're making from the VC Grant. We wouldn't be doing it to anything like that level without it* (Assessment and Intervention Manager, County LEA).

In addition, the impact of specific VCG-funded strategies was noted in several cases. The flexibility of VCG funding to enable LEAs to provide bursaries to schools was considered to have had a particular impact in terms of looked after pupils' **access to**, and maintained **participation in**, education.

Furthermore, the flexibility of the VCG was seen to have had an impact on LEAs' ability to target specific problems experienced by looked after pupils (e.g. low achievement, accessing a school place) and was commended by a number of interviewees. Examples of support in this respect included: increased LSA support during admission or reintegration and study support during GCSE or SATs examinations. In several cases, the impact of the VCG on the completion of PEPs was also noted and recognised as particularly influential in raising the achievement of looked after children.

In several cases, the VCG was seen to have impacted on **multi-agency working**. Various interviewees reported working more closely with social services and schools and being more proactive in **monitoring and tracking** looked after children.

I just feel much more confident that we know who is where, we know who's in education and who isn't and, we know who we're working with to get them back in (Assessment and Intervention Manager, County LEA).

A number of interviewees felt that, although the VCG had had a positive impact, it was still relatively early for them to be in a position to provide quantifiable evidence of outcomes for pupils (e.g. attainment or attendance). However, other interviewees cited explicitly their progress towards meeting targets. For example, in one county authority, the percentage of looked after pupils achieving five GCSEs grade A*–C had increased from 8.7 per cent in 1999/00 to 20.1 per cent in 2002/03. The contribution of VCG funded strategies towards achieving these targets was noted (for example, the targeted support for pupils preparing for their GCSEs provided by looked after children education advisors which was part-VCG funded).

More generally, several interviewees spoke positively of the impact of the VCG on raising awareness of the client group, for example, through the work of dedicated teams, the development of policy and procedures and increased multi-agency work.

I think that there is a much greater awareness of the needs of looked after children and the idea of being a corporate parent and everyone being responsible (Education Support Service Manager, Unitary LEA).

Concluding comment

Given the national focus on improving the education of looked after children, it is perhaps unsurprising that this group was receiving significant support through the VCG. Furthermore, it would seem that, following the introduction of the VCG, LEAs had been able to maintain and enhance their existing service for looked after children. Moreover, in a majority of cases, the impact of the VCG on LEAs' ability to implement government recommendations on the education of looked after children such as, closer multi-agency working, use of PEPs (DfES, 2000) and thus, in their role as 'corporate parent', was noted. In addition, the research also indicated that, through the support in place, specific outcomes for pupils were emerging and, progress towards meeting national targets was being made.

3.2.2 Medical Needs

Funding

Interviewees from 46 of the 50 LEAs surveyed reported using VCG funding to support the education of young people with medical needs. It is important to note that of these, seven interviewees reported funding had been allocated jointly with school refusers. This would suggest some overlap in the types of educational provision for these two groups and reflect a medical definition of school refusal. In the four LEAs where the VCG was not used to support this group, three interviewees reported this to be because their needs were being met through existing core-funded home and hospital tuition services.

Of the 46 LEAs using the VCG to support young people with medical needs, 25 interviewees reported that the introduction of the grant had led to an increase in funding for this group compared with previous years. Thirteen interviewees felt that there had been no change and two reported a decrease in funding. The reason for this decrease in one LEA was that the LEA had fewer children with medical needs than previous years. For six LEAs, information on changes in funding was not available.

Allocations to this group ranged from £2,000 in an inner London borough where the VCG had been used to buy laptops, to £150,000 in a county LEA where it had been used to establish a virtual classroom. Across the sample, the proportion of VCG funding allocated to support young people with medical needs ranged from two per cent in an inner London borough, to 27 per cent in a unitary LEA, which had used the grant to pay for tutors. An average of nine per cent of the VCG was allocated specifically to young people with medical needs.

Funding destination

In the majority of cases, LEAs retained VCG funding for young people with medical needs. However, in two London boroughs, interviewees reported that, in addition to retaining funding for LEA-wide support, they had also given funding directly to schools by means of a grant (see Cameo 1). Such grants were used to provide temporary support, for example, funding a Learning Support Assistant to aid the mobility of a wheelchair-bound pupil. In addition, a metropolitan LEA, whilst continuing to use its core budget to support the majority of pupils with medical needs had used £10,000 of the VCG to support the education of a pupil in a London hospital some distance from the LEA.

Of the 46 LEAs using the VCG to support young people with medical needs, 14 had used the grant to provide new forms of provision for this group, with half using it to fund virtual learning provision. Other new forms of provision included funding new posts, such as LSAs and home tutors; providing resources for example, laptop computers; and providing grants to support individual pupils. In 25 LEAs, interviewees reported that the VCG had enabled them to enhance their existing provision. The focus of this enhanced provision was usually increasing part-time posts and increasing the number of hours of sessional tuition time. In a number of cases, LEAs reported that the enhancement of provision was in response to DfES guidance (DfES, 2004) which stated that LEAs should: '*provide high quality education for children who are unable to attend school because of medical needs, and increase the minimum hours home teaching to ten hours per week*'. In 14 LEAs, the VCG was used to maintain existing provision for pupils with medical needs, however, it should be noted that the VCG was not the main source of funding for a number of these initiatives.

CAMEO 1: Young people with medical needs

- **LEA:** Outer London Borough
- **Percentage of grant:** 8 per cent
- **Number of young people with medical needs:** 54
- **Funding destination:** New posts, funding retained by the LEA. Individual packages of support where funding was conferred to schools

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- **Strategy:** Additional staffing for tuition and individual grants to schools for pupils with medical needs who required additional support
- **Focus:** To increase educational provision and support the reintegration of pupils with medical needs
- **Account of impact:** The additional funding had enabled the LEA to increase educational provision for children with medical needs through additional staffing. This meant that the LEA had been able to meet its targets for ten hours minimum education for this group. By introducing a coordinator role, they had also been able to ensure a more coordinated approach to the service. Individual grants to schools to provide temporary additional in-school support had enabled pupils with medical needs to return to school earlier than had previously been possible. The example was provided of a grant given to a primary school to support a pupil with a steel cage screwed into his skull:

  > *Usually we would have taught him at home, but* [the team leader] *persuaded the school that, if they employed an LSA to guard him and help him, then he could go back to school. And we did it for eight weeks and it was great. He spent all his time in school rather than at home, which was far better for this little boy* (Pupil Support Manager).

Strategies for support

Of the 46 LEAs using the VCG to support young people with medical needs, the most common outlet of funding was **staffing** (reported in 35 authorities). The types of staffing post being wholly or part-funded by the VCG included:

- Hospital school teachers
- Home tutors
- Learning support assistants
- Learning mentors
- Support officers.

Typically, the main role of staff funded through the VCG was to **engage** young people with medical needs in education whilst they were out of school, thus **ensuring access** to, and **maintaining participation** in, education. Staff provided tutoring both for pupils with physical medical needs and mental health needs (including school phobics). For those in hospital, tuition commonly took place within hospital schools and/or on the wards. The VCG was also used to support the home tuition of young people who had been discharged from hospital but were not in school. For those pupils accessing out-of-school provision for longer periods of time, staff funded through the VCG would liaise with schools to obtain information regarding their current curriculum, coursework and examinations.

Another key focus of staff was to support pupils' reintegration back into mainstream school (see Cameo 1). The VCG had been used to employ staff, such as LSAs, to liaise with schools and provide time limited in-school support for young people to help them settle back in. Occasionally LEAs had used the VCG to fund staff with a non-teaching role to physically support a pupil within school, in order either to keep them in school, or to support their return.

LEAs also used the VCG to provide **alternative educational provision** for young people with medical needs whilst they were out of school. Other than the tutoring carried out by staff in hospitals, PRUs and in pupils' homes, the most common form of alternative education was through the use of virtual learning environments, which were highlighted in 16 LEAs (see Cameo 2).

CAMEO 2: Young people with medical needs

- **LEA:** County
- **Percentage of grant:** 10 per cent
- **Number of young people with medical needs:** 106
- **Funding destination:** New virtual learning provision, funding retained by the LEA
- **Strategy:** VCG funding had enabled the LEA to buy-in an online educational package. The VCG had also been used to develop a virtual classroom
- **Focus:** To provide increased tuition time through online opportunities in order to help meet the requirement for ten hours provision per week
- **Account of impact:** The LEA reported positive impacts. The virtual classroom enabled teachers to work online and teach a number of children in different locations at the same time, whilst still addressing their individual needs. This not only meant that the LEA was able to reduce its staffing costs, but it also enabled those pupils with medical needs to access an increased number of hours provision and also feel less isolated because they were part of a virtual community. The Chief Education Officer noted:

    It is great. Although these kids are working on a computer, actually, there is a feeling of community because there are up to six at any one time. So they can talk to each other and also we are providing opportunities for them to get together as a group.

In addition to establishing online learning, the VGC was used to support other forms of **strategic development** (in 15 LEAs). This included establishing dedicated teams for young people with medical needs (see Cameo 3), new partnership working (e.g. with health services), developing policy, strategy and guidance documents, developing procedures concerning early identification and establishing health and safety protocols for home tutors. In addition to this, 12 LEAs had used the VCG to pay for **resources**, the most common being the acquisition of laptop computers for use by young people whilst in hospital or in the home.

Less common outlets of VCG funding were practical support initiatives, such as transport and training. In six LEAs, the VCG was used to provide **training** for staff. In four, the focus of staff training was on virtual learning, whilst in another, the VCG had funded training for new staff when the Hospital Education Service was expanded. LEAs had also funded temporary **transport** to school for pupils with impaired mobility during the period of their recovery, in order to support an earlier return to school and/or a gradual reintegration into school after illness.

CAMEO 3: Young people with medical needs

- **LEA:** County
- **Percentage of grant:** 17 per cent

- **Number of young people with medical needs:** Approximately 150–200 pupils at any one time, with a range of temporary and long-term needs
- **Funding destination:** A new team for pupils with medical needs was established, expanding the existing provision
- **Strategy:** VCG funding had been used to increase three part-time posts to full-time in order to provide additional hours of home tuition (to meet the recommendation for a minimum of ten hours tuition per week). The VCG also funded the expansion of the team for medical needs and school refusers
- **Focus:** To provide increased tuition and a coordinated team approach
- **Account of impact:** The team introduced a range of new structures and had produced procedures and guidance in relation to identification and referral of pupils. The Principal Advisor noted:

    When we took over we started to try to set up the new procedures in terms of how identification and referral would take place. Education welfare officers used to trigger any referral but obviously not all the children were picked up.

They developed new forms and letters to *'tighten up the whole admin procedure so that children didn't slip through the net'.* They made contact with all the home tutors and initiated meetings with them to ensure that they were not isolated. Part of the work also involved drawing up a protocol for home tutors alongside the county's health and safety worker because there were health and safety issues that they were concerned about. The team had also been working on a draft policy on medical needs for the county, in line with the statutory guidance from DfES: *'We felt that we had to get the tuition going but at the same time we had to do this policy' (*Principal Advisor)*.*

Targets

Interviewees were asked to detail any targets or local objectives which had been set in relation to pupils with medical needs. Several interviewees identified difficulties in setting targets for this group:

> *The challenge around pupils with medical needs is that some pupils may be admitted to hospital with a broken ankle and might be in hospital for two or three days, other pupils could have serious medical conditions who could be in for a number of months. I think the process around trying to set formal targets for individual pupils is far more challenging in the Home and Hospital Tuition Service because of the very nature of the indeterminate timescales* (Inclusion Leader, Metropolitan LEA).

Despite this, 21 LEAs provided information on targets relating to young people with medical needs. Fourteen had targets associated with the minimum number of hours of educational provision. Two LEAs had targets to provide a minimum of five hours of tuition per week, whilst eight had targets to provide ten hours and one had a target to ensure that, wherever possible, pupils received 25 hours tuition per week, if approved by medical staff. Two LEAs also noted targets for providing educational provision for young people unable to attend school due to medical needs (where they were able) within 15 days, (as per DfES guidance, 2001). Six LEAs also referred to setting individual targets in personal education plans and monitoring young people's progress in that way. Only one authority reported a target related to achievement, however, this

was a target for all children, and not specifically for those with medical needs. Progress in meeting the targets for pupils with medical needs identified by case-study interviewees are summarised below.

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Progress in meeting targets for young people with medical needs
LEAs were working to targets to provide high quality education for children who are unable to attend school because of medical needs, and increase the minimum hours of home teaching to ten hours per week.

Increasing the hours of provision
A number of LEAs in the study had used VCG funding to increase the numbers of hours of provision to meet the minimum target of ten hours per week.

Improving the quality of provision
LEAs had also used the VCG to enhance the nature of the provision, e.g. via the use of ICT, and thus provide better quality education and increase the number of hours available: *'We would not have been able to provide distance learning without the Vulnerable Children Grant'* (Head of Distance Learning, Metropolitan LEA).

Reducing time out of school and improving reintegration
The VCG was seen as assisting one LEA in meeting its targets for this group: *'We wouldn't have been able to do some of the things that we've done here if we hadn't had the grant. We are able to offer a more consistent and regular service'.* With the introduction of the grant there was perceived to be *'less of a postcode lottery, with an increasing emphasis on reintegration'* (Head of EOTAS, County LEA).

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Other agency support
Thirty-four LEAs provided information relating to other agencies or services offering educational and/or financial support for children with medical needs. Thirty-one of these LEAs reported that base budgets were most often used for the financial support for children with medical needs and thus, identified core-funded services as providing educational support. Those services referenced most frequently included: the Hospital and Home Tuition Service; PRUs; and EOTAS. References were also made to the EWS; the EPS; the Learning Support Service (LSS) and the SEN Service. Furthermore, in five LEAs, mainstream schools were also cited as providing educational support for children with medical needs. Health service support (including CAMHS, child and family consultation, and a therapeutic centre) was identified in 13 LEAs, and Connexions, social services and the Youth Service were also highlighted as providing support.

Impact
Twenty-five of the 46 LEAs allocating VCG funding to pupils with medical needs reported an increase in funding suggesting that, in many cases, work to support pupils with medical needs had been enhanced or expanded through its introduction. Twenty-eight interviewees reported that progress related primarily to increased provision through additional staffing. Eight authorities said that it had helped to extend provision but provided no further details. Eleven LEAs reported that the VCG was used to ensure a minimum of ten hours tuition per week for young people with medical needs.

Several authorities also reported that the VCG had enabled them to increase the educational provision available to pupils with medical needs via the introduction of e-learning opportunities. Virtual classrooms/environments were seen as enabling tutors to work more flexibly with several children in various locations at one time and also helped LEAs address some of the issues surrounding the differing needs of this group. One interviewee noted that:

> *A child who's going to be taking GCSEs and has got a broken leg, we can actually provide quite a bit of input to them. Whereas the child with ME might only get three hours because that's all they can cope with or they can do the work at 2 am rather than 9 am when they're not really up to it* (Assessment and Intervention Manager, County LEA).

Another significant impact of using e-learning related to opportunities to broaden the curriculum provided:

> *It has enabled young people to receive a broader curriculum because we could introduce specialists to the teaching and learning rather than home tutors* (Assessment and Intervention Manager, County LEA).

Virtual classrooms were also found to contribute to assisting sick children, often working at home or in isolation, to feel part of a community. With a combination of increased staff time and new learning provision, one interviewee felt this would have significant impact on the attainment of young people in this group. He noted:

> *We've certainly increased the amount of individual tuition available and we've also increased the level of access to ICT for pupils and access into distance learning packages, which are very good. So I would expect that there's evidence of improved GCSE results* (Assistant Director, Children Schools and Families, County LEA).

Such increases meant that several LEAs were now able to meet the requirements regarding the minimum number of hours of provision to be provided for this group.

Concluding comment

Pupils with medical needs were one of the groups most commonly supported through VCG funding. LEAs acknowledged that targets relating to the number of hours of provision for pupils with medical needs were set in response to the VCG guidelines and the grant itself was enabling them to meet this target. The main focus of support for this group was to engage young people in education and, where possible, reintegrate them back into mainstream school.

3.2.3 Gypsy/Traveller pupils

Funding

Of the 50 LEAs surveyed, over four-fifths (45) were using VCG to support the education of Gypsy/Traveller pupils and were funding existing Traveller Education Services (TES). Some of these had been established for nearly 20 years and VCG was

the sole source of funding for these services: '*If we didn't have the grant we couldn't do what we do*' (Pupil Support Manager, Outer London Borough). Over a third (16) were funding TES provided in consortia with other LEAs. The amount of funding allocated ranged from £16,500 in a small London borough, to £723,000 in a large county LEA. In a number of LEAs, funding for TES accounted for a substantial proportion of the total VCG budget: three were spending nearly half of their total VCG budget on Gypsy/Traveller support (45 to 48 per cent respectively). On average, LEAs were allocating over a fifth (22 per cent) of their VCG budget to supporting Gypsy/Traveller pupils. In the majority of LEAs, funding had remained the same, although in 11 LEAs there had been some small increases with the introduction of the VCG: in four of these, funding had risen due to increased contributions to the consortia. The VCG was not used to support Gypsy/Traveller pupils in five LEAs, largely because the small population of Gypsy/Traveller pupils meant that, where appropriate, their needs were met by other services, for example, the EWS, Access to Learning Service, or SEN systems.

Funding destination

In most LEAs in the sample, the LEA **retained** funding to support Gypsy/Traveller pupils, although two LEAs had **conferred** funding to schools via grants to support individual pupils, for example to provide LSA support to help retain pupils in school (see Cameo 1). In four LEAs, VCG funding had been used to enhance existing provision to increase time for existing members of staff to focus on transition support, curriculum development, re-engagement at key stage 4, and in one LEA it had been used to fund a new outreach post.

CAMEO 1: Gypsy/Travellers

- **LEA:** London borough
- **Percentage of grant:** 17 per cent
- **Number of Gypsy/Traveller pupils:** 209
- **Funding destination:** New provision, funding conferred to schools
- **Strategy:** The VCG was used to provide grants to schools to support individual pupils. In this instance, a secondary school was provided with funding to employ a LSA to support a Year 7 Gypsy/Traveller pupil with severe learning and behavioural difficulties
- **Focus:** Pupil retention
- **Account of impact:** The pupil was able to increase his attendance at school from one morning a week to full-time attendance. The extra time, support and mentoring provided by the LSA had enabled the school to identify the pupil's learning difficulties which had previously been masked by his behavioural difficulties. As a result of this intervention the school employed the LSA as a member of staff and she was supporting other pupils (including Gypsy/Traveller pupils) in the school, thus increasing the school's capacity to support vulnerable pupils: '[The TES coordinator] *kicked it off with the VCG. It proved to be a massive success and so the head's said we'll take it on now*' (Assistant Headteacher).

Strategies for support

The vast majority of VCG funding was paying for TES staff, and in a minority of cases, was enhancing existing staff time. The posts funded by the VCG included:

- TES coordinators
- Advisory teachers
- Family liaison officers/Traveller liaison officers (see Cameo 2)
- Traveller EWOs
- Learning support assistants
- Connexions personal advisors
- Administrative assistants.

CAMEO 2: Gypsy/Travellers

- **LEA:** London borough
- **Percentage of grant:** 46 per cent
- **Number of Gypsy/Traveller pupils:** 60
- **Funding destination:** New staff post, funding retained by the LEA
- **Strategy:** VCG funding was used to employ an outreach worker to focus on home school liaison. The TES wanted to focus more of their work on the Gypsy/Traveller sites, not just in school. The outreach post linked in with existing multi-agency work carried out on the sites, including voluntary agencies, social workers, youth and health workers
- **Focus:** To improve home–school liaison
- **Account of impact:** The view from the LEA was that it was too early to say.

TES also used their budgets to pay for transport, alternative education packages and curriculum materials and resources. In three LEAs, VCG money had been used to support **one-off events and celebrations**: in one it had been used to expand the provision of 'Traveller cultural month' where storytellers and performers went into schools to '*raise the self-esteem and status of Traveller children in the school community*' (Deputy Director of Education, Inner London Borough). The other LEAs had funded story time activities and displays in libraries and a Gypsy/Travellers' conference. A number of interviewees also commented that they were focusing on areas of **strategic development**, not directly linked to the introduction of the VCG, but reflecting ongoing changes regarding the role and focus of the TES in the LEA generally. In the two LEAs where **grants** had been conferred to schools, one school was developing an after-school club for Gypsy/Traveller and other vulnerable pupils providing arts and sports activities. In the other LEA, grants had been given to schools in 2004/05 to employ support teachers to work with Gypsy/Traveller pupils and asylum seekers and their families and to provide funding for residential trips.

The VCG was generally being used to fund existing TES, and as such this discussion provides an overview of the role of TES staff, in terms of providing support for Gypsy/Traveller pupils. (The term 'service' is used loosely as, in some LEAs, it might have been just one member of staff). The work of TES staff focused on a wide range of activities including:

- Access, participation and attendance
- Transition and retention
- Home–school liaison
- Multi-agency work
- Raising awareness, training, advice and guidance
- Raising attainment/achievement
- Monitoring and evaluation
- The development of resources.

A key focus for TES was the **access, participation and attendance** of Gypsy/Traveller pupils at school (given that Gypsy/Traveller pupils have the worst attendance of any ethnic minority group and participation at secondary school is a particular area of concern). Thus, TES were ensuring that Gypsy/Traveller pupils were able to access school swiftly; this included setting targets for the time taken for pupils to access school. In addition, they were trying to ensure continuity of access and participation via the efficient transfer of pupil information and records and transition support. The focus on supporting Gypsy/Traveller pupils' attendance was reflected in some TES having specialist EWO posts.

TES were also focusing on **transition and retention**, including the development of early years work, for example, playgroups on sites/access to local nurseries to ensure pre-school provision was in place, aiding transition to school. Work on the retention of Gypsy/Traveller pupils, particularly in secondary school and at key stage 4, for example providing LSA support to retain pupils in secondary education, was increasingly an area of development. There was also a concentration on primary/secondary transition as this is a common time for dropout for Gypsy/Traveller pupils. One LEA was exploring the appointment of 'transition mentors' (in conjunction with a Gypsy/Traveller organisation) to aid transition and other LEAs were providing targeted transition support to Year 6 pupils.

Home–school liaison was another important area of TES support and reflected in the employment (VCG funded) of family liaison officers to focus on access, attendance, transition and developing relationships between home and school. These officers were described in one LEA as '*experienced teaching assistants*' whose role was to facilitate and improve home–school liaison, particularly through working on issues of attendance, admissions and supporting the family. They also worked with parents, for example, in developing their parenting and literacy skills, so that parents were in a better position to support their children. In terms of **multi-agency work**, many TES were working with other partners and agencies e.g. Sure Start (Early Years), Connexions (14-19) and Children's Fund to provide support for Gypsy/Traveller pupils and their families. In one LEA, a multi-agency group to coordinate work with Gypsy/Traveller pupils facilitated collaboration with other agencies.

TES staff were also fulfilling a key advisory role in **raising awareness** and providing **training, advice** and **guidance** to schools. TES support for schools included:

> *Specialist knowledge of Traveller culture and the impact on teaching and learning. Advice and training on all aspects of Traveller education, on inclusion and the reflection of diversity* (Traveller Education Service Consortia literature).

Most TES provided INSET, which was offered to schools and other agencies focusing on, for example: '*combating racism and reflecting diversity*'. Given the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, TES were increasingly being asked to provide training in this area:

> *A rapidly growing role for the TES is in providing training for schools as they have become increasingly aware of this group when striving to meet their legal obligations under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act* (proforma County LEA).

TES were increasingly becoming involved in providing training and awareness raising for other agencies and services, for example, Connexions. It is evident that there has been a shift in focus in a number of TES away from providing direct support for individual pupils, to providing schools themselves with the skills to support Gypsy/Traveller pupils. There was an increasing strategic approach to service delivery and the advisory nature of TES teachers' role was becoming more predominant. However, one interviewee felt that a strategic approach had yet to be started, highlighting that LEAs were clearly at very different stages of development:

> *A lot of the work that's gone on … has been at an individual, small group level and what we need to do develop the service to do is whole school improvement* (Head of Pupil Support Services, Metropolitan LEA).

Increasingly, schools were being encouraged to develop their own expertise in supporting Gypsy/Traveller pupils and TES staff were working with schools to build capacity. One LEA was training and supporting 'designated teachers' (using the looked after children's concept of designated teacher) to raise the specialist skills and knowledge of Traveller education in its schools (see Cameo 3). In some LEAs, the remit of the TES was widening, they were not just focusing on Gypsy/Traveller issues but were being used to promote awareness on equal opportunities generally:

> [The TES] *is a key player in our county council equal opportunities – ensuring that we have effective systems for the reporting of racist incidents and what we do about them* (Head of Access and Inclusion, County LEA).

CAMEO 3: Gypsy/Travellers

- **LEA:** County
- **Percentage of grant:** 36 per cent
- **Number of Gypsy/Traveller pupils:** 600
- **Funding destination:** Existing provision, funding retained by the LEA
- **Strategy:** The VCG funded advisory teachers to work with schools to advise on providing an inclusive curriculum and strategies for support. The aim of the advisory teachers was to increase awareness and build capacity within schools to ensure that they were better able to raise the achievement of Gypsy/Traveller pupils. This included a 'designated teacher project' to raise the specialist skills and knowledge of Traveller education in mainstream schools
- **Focus:** To build capacity within schools to effectively support Gypsy/Traveller pupils

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- **Account of impact:** An upward trend in achievement and attendance of Gypsy/Traveller pupils was identified. The advisory teachers were building capacity in schools to meet the needs of pupils.

TES staff were also becoming involved at a strategic level, for example, TES coordinators attending LEA strategic meetings so that they are aware of what other services in the LEA were providing: '*to look at how their support complements and reinforces the support that's being put in by other services*' (Head of Learning Support, Unitary LEA). Linked to this more strategic approach to service delivery, was a greater focus on data collection and **monitoring and evaluation**. One interviewee felt that improved data monitoring and evaluation by the TES consortium had led to a better strategic overview and reporting of Gypsy/Traveller pupils within the LEA:

> *What's improved and increased has been the monitoring, the evaluation, the reporting of the work that's being done so that now there's a greater strategic overview and reporting of these youngsters* (Deputy Head Pupil and Student Services, County LEA).

Although not directly attributable to the introduction of the VCG, this interviewee did indicate that the VCG guidance had allowed some '*negotiation and refocusing*' of the TES work in the authority, requiring the TES to demonstrate the effectiveness of their service to the LEA. Other LEAs had also used the introduction of the VCG as an opportunity to review the support they received from the TES. **Research** had been commissioned to evaluate the impact of interventions funded by the VCG on access to education for Gypsy/Traveller children living on unauthorised encampments in one LEA. Others felt that there was a need to review the service provided in terms of making data monitoring '*integral to their provision*' (Head of Pupil Support Services, Metropolitan LEA).

The other main area of TES work focused on **raising attainment/achievement** of Gypsy/Traveller pupils within schools [see Cameo 3]. This was achieved through the development of culturally relevant resources and curriculum materials, providing advice and guidance to schools, providing in-school support where appropriate, monitoring progress and ensuring the swift identification of pupils' and schools' needs. In terms of **monitoring** progress, one interviewee highlighted that they were ensuring that every Gypsy/Traveller pupil's Unique Pupil Number (UPN) was identified to establish a profile of achievement and progress and where appropriate, targeted support would be agreed, often detailed in a service school partnership agreement. TES were also ensuring the continuity of Gypsy/Traveller pupils' learning by coordinating distance learning for Fairground Travellers who travel seasonally. They were also involved in the **development of resources** to reflect diversity and the production and publication of culturally appropriate guidance and curriculum materials for schools. One LEA had developed a website with information for Gypsy/Traveller pupils and for use as an awareness-raising resource.

Targets

Interviewees were asked to detail any targets or local objectives which had been set in relation to Gypsy/Traveller pupils. Across the 50 LEAs surveyed, 38 interviewees

provided information on targets and objectives, 27 of whom indicated that they had specific targets relating to the education of Gypsy/Traveller pupils. One respondent noted that there were more targets for Gypsy/Travellers than for some other vulnerable groups because the TES had been '*established for longer and we know what we are doing with them*' (Assessment and Intervention Manager, County LEA). However, a number of respondents (11) indicated that no specific targets were set for Gypsy/Traveller pupils, although they would be included in more general targets around attendance, exclusion, ethnic minority achievement and retention. Targets relating to the education of Gypsy/Traveller pupils focused on:

- **Access**, including targets for reduction in the number of children out of school, time taken to access school, admissions, levels of enrolment and pupil access to pre-school provision
- **Attendance**, including targets for numbers of roadside children in school, non-registered pupils back on roll, pre-school, primary and secondary attendance and targets for transition
- **Attainment**: targets set for key stage 2 and 4, average point score per pupil, points progression between key stages and GCSEs
- A reduction in the number of **exclusions** (fixed-term and permanent), although no figures were provided.

A small number (five) of LEAs provided numeric targets relating to the attendance and attainment of Gypsy/Traveller pupils, for example, '*90 per cent enrolment at key stage 1 and 2, 25 per cent enrolment at key stage 4, 80 per cent primary attendance, 70 per cent secondary attendance, 30 per cent reaching expected levels at key stage 1 and 20 per cent reaching expected levels at key stage 2*'. However, others noted that attainment targets were set at an individual, rather than LEA level. This was linked to the mobility of resident Gypsy/Traveller populations which meant that it was difficult for the LEA to establish group baselines from which to set group targets. For example, in one of these LEAs only two children who were resident in the LEA at key stage 1 were still resident in the authority to take their key stage 2 assessments. In addition, gaps in learning and poor parental literacy skills meant that some LEAs felt it was more advantageous to examine pupil progress rather than targets which were not '*contextualised*'.

Other targets focused on TES targets to raise awareness, provide training, increase parental and pupil involvement and improve monitoring systems. Specific areas included: the number of schools and other agencies in receipt of training; parental attendance at school consultations; the number of parents on school governing bodies; pupil involvement in school activities; data monitoring and monitoring the effectiveness of the service; monitoring of EOTAS; and service level agreements with schools. Progress in meeting the targets for Gypsy/Traveller pupils identified by case-study interviewees are summarised below.

> **Progress in meeting targets for Gypsy/Traveller pupils**
> There are no national targets set for the attainment of Gypsy/Traveller pupils, although they will be included in minority ethnic group attainment figures. However, case-study LEAs had set local targets for Gypsy/Traveller pupils' access and attainment. In these LEAs the following progress towards meeting targets was highlighted (although not directly attributable to the VCG*):*

Ensuring access to education and attendance

- Access was felt to be improving, but attainment was still a problem, which inevitably impacted on the retention of Gypsy/Traveller pupils in secondary school
- There was an *'upward trend'* in attendance and achievement of Gypsy/Traveller pupils, with primary schools increasing attendance *'quite dramatically'* but not as much in secondary
- The TES coordinator from one case-study LEA noted that they had met and exceeded their targets for access to nursery, primary and secondary school, although they currently had six young people not accessing any form of secondary education
- In one case-study LEA it was felt that there was a need to evaluate the impact of new posts (family liaison officers) on the attendance of Gypsy/Traveller pupils.

Educational attainment

A TES coordinator from one of the case-study LEAs noted that the underachievement of Gypsy/Traveller pupils *'is a key issue for the VCG for the future'*.

A number of issues were raised by interviewees in relation to meeting targets for Gypsy/Traveller pupils:

- The movement of pupils meant that it was difficult for the LEA to set targets when *'you don't have the same children in the authority from one year to the next'* (TES coordinator, County LEA)
- The LEA was only monitoring the attainment of a small number of pupils who were identified as Gypsy/Travellers. Research in the LEA suggested that, if data monitoring included the attainment of non-identified Gypsy/Traveller pupils, there would probably be a large increase in the group's attainment. In addition, in the relatively small group of pupils who were identified as Gypsy/Traveller pupils, there was a huge range of attainment, including a number who were achieving *'well above'* national targets, so the *'message that all Gypsy/Travellers under achieve, they don't'* (Head of Service, County LEA)
- The difficulties of evaluating work on a short-term basis and the contention that there was a need to look at longer-term impact and outcomes. For example, to look at the key stage 3 outcomes for those pupils who successfully transfer to secondary school and the impact that their experiences have on younger siblings' transfer and retention.

Other agencies

Respondents were asked to indicate any 'other' sources of funding or support for the education of Gypsy/Traveller pupils. Two-fifths (19) of respondents highlighted that there were no other sources of funding for the education of Gypsy/Traveller pupils, reflecting the importance of VCG to the maintenance of the TES in supporting Gypsy/Traveller pupils. Additional support in the education of Gypsy/Traveller pupils was most likely to come from base-funded services in the LEA (19), whilst a further five respondents listed core LEA funding as an additional source of financial support. The most commonly mentioned type of LEA support was from the EWS (seven LEAs), reflecting the service's role in monitoring Gypsy/Traveller pupils' attendance. Other LEA support services identified included, Education Otherwise, Behaviour and Learning Support Services, Early Years, admissions, SEN, EPS and the Ethnic

Minority Achievement Service. Mainstream schools were also highlighted as an 'other' agency supporting Gypsy/Traveller pupils in four LEAs. 'Other LEA budgets' (in consortium) were identified as an additional source of funding in three LEAs: for example, in one instance, another LEA in the consortium paid the TES accommodation costs and provided professional support.

The Children's Fund had provided additional sources of funding to support Gypsy/Traveller pupils and their families in seven LEAs. In one case, it had funded a three-year project to improve social inclusion and introduce ICT to the Gypsy/Traveller community, whilst in another it had provided one-off funding to purchase laptops. Additional support/funding identified by respondents also focused on pre- and post-school provision (aiding transition). Thus, in six LEAs, Connexions were identified as providing support and/or funding for Gypsy/Traveller pupils and, in two of these, Connexions were funding dedicated personal advisors for Gypsy/Travellers. Additional support was also identified for adult education/family learning provided by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in four LEAs. In a further three LEAs, Sure Start had provided funding to establish more regular play groups on sites and fund a full-time teacher. In two LEAs, the European Social Fund had provided funding for Gypsy/Traveller educational initiatives, including a Year 11 project where Gypsy/Traveller students worked in primary or special schools supporting other pupils. They received payment and accreditation for this work. Other sources of support and funding included the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, the Catholic Children's Society and local Gypsy/Traveller organisations.

Impact

A small number of interviewees (four) highlighted impact directly related to the introduction of the VCG, in that the implementation of the grant had resulted in the LEA reviewing its existing provision for Gypsy/Traveller pupils. One interviewee felt that the introduction of the VCG meant that LEAs had more flexibility in where they allocated funding so the TES were having to '*sharpen up*' and justify their impact: '*It may have kicked into action changes in working practice out of which we may see educational advances not identifiable now*' (Head of Learning Support, Unitary LEA). Other LEA interviewees felt that, as a result of the introduction of the VCG, they were working in a more holistic way and for the first time staff working with vulnerable groups, for example Gypsy/Traveller pupils, asylum seekers and teenage parents, were coming together to share expertise and resources. Similarly, an event organised in one LEA to share practice amongst services working with vulnerable children, had resulted in the TES offering the team working with teenage parents access to their minibus. In addition to increasing opportunities for collaboration, the introduction of the VCG was also perceived to have raised the profile of individual services, such as the TES, which were previously seen as on the 'periphery' within the LEA.

All LEAs were funding pre-existing services and therefore found it difficult to relate impact/outcomes to the introduction of the VCG specifically, but focused more on the work of the TES generally. An interviewee in one LEA felt that the work undertaken by the TES had led to an increase in attendance and attainment but, as he pointed out, to link this to the VCG '*would be pretty spurious really*' (Head of Learning Support, Unitary LEA). As already highlighted, one LEA had commissioned research to

evaluate the impact of interventions funded by the grant on access to education for children who lived on unauthorised encampments. Two specific examples of impact were given in relation to LEAs that had been able to expand their provision:

1. The VCG had been used to pay for additional support to fund a LSA for two terms for a 13-year-old pupil who had multiple learning difficulties '*which nobody had really figured out before*' because of his behavioural difficulties and who was unable to read or write. Without this additional support '*the school said they couldn't cope*' and would have excluded him. Prior to this, the pupil was only able to attend one morning a week and had become involved in offending behaviour. As a result of the additional support he was able to attend five mornings a week and then this was increased to full-time attendance. The grants were seen as having enabled children to be integrated into education with the support they needed. Due to the success of this intervention the school employed the LSA to work with all pupils in the school (see Cameo 1).

2. VCG funding had been used to extend the hours of the Traveller Liaison Officer (TLO) from two and a half to four and a half days a week. This was seen as a '*very good use of money*' because of the TLO's focus on home–school liaison and the '*cultural aspects of Travellers' lives*' (TES coordinator, Outer London Borough). The TLO's ability to establish links with other services and agencies had led to positive community consultation and to the establishment of a parenting group with '*positive social and educational outcomes for the families*'. The LEA's achievement of 100 per cent transfer of Gypsy/Traveller pupils to secondary school was attributed to the TLO's increased hours. It was also felt that the full-time post had increased the trust and cooperation with families so that children were '*getting a faster access rate to school*' (TES Coordinator). The TES Coordinator felt that the main positive impact of her team was from having continuity of staffing, which was possible because of the stability of the funding and being able to increase the hours of the liaison officer.

Concluding comment

Gypsy/Traveller pupils (like teenage parents) were one of the vulnerable groups for which an existing funding stream, the 'Traveller Achievement Grant' was 'replaced' by the VCG. Gypsy/Traveller pupils emerged as the third most frequently supported vulnerable group through the grant. The VCG had been used by LEAs to maintain support to existing TES and, in some instances, begin to refocus or develop how that support was provided. Most interesting in terms of the latter point, was the increased involvement of the TES in strategic development within a number of LEAs.

3.2.4 Teenage Parents

Funding

Just over four-fifths of LEAs (42) were using VCG to support the education of teenage parents and teenage parents to be, although in a minority of cases, this was not a '*direct*' or '*specific*' contribution to this group. For example, in a small number

of these LEAs, interviewees explained that support for teenage parents and pregnant pupils fell chiefly within the remit of the LEA's base-funded EOTAS service, but that, via this service, the VCG was contributing to the purchase of alternative curriculum packages (e.g. e-learning, college places). Also, in some cases, education of teenage parents was grouped with provision for anxious school refusers or children with medical needs.

The VCG was not being used to support teenage parents in eight LEAs. In some cases, LEAs were providing education for teenage parents through base-funded EOTAS services, where no additional funding had been required. Alongside this, it was noted in two LEAs that specialist support was available via local teenage pregnancy strategy groups or coordinators, who were funded via other streams (e.g. Teenage Pregnancy Strategy Local Implementation Funds, social services). Finally, in two LEAs, it was noted that rates of teenage pregnancy were low, and that there was an ethos of keeping teenage parents in mainstream education wherever possible.

The amount of VCG funding allocated to teenage parents ranged from £3,000 in a small, unitary LEA, to £166,728 in a medium, metropolitan authority. The highest proportional allocation was 20 per cent of the total VCG (in a small, Metropolitan LEA), although the average allocation was 8.2 per cent of the total grant. In 13 of the 42 LEAs, the VCG was said to have led to an increase in funding to support teenage parents. More commonly, in 20 of the LEAs allocating VCG to this group, the grant was thought not to have affected the overall amount of money available. In just one LEA, there was felt to have been a decrease in funding, although this was not construed as a negative outcome; whilst funding had decreased, it was felt that provision had '*become more effective as it has decreased*', as tracking systems had improved and strategies refined.

Funding destination

A number of LEAs were continuing to fund existing provision through the VCG, underpinning the aims of local teenage pregnancy strategies, which had previously been funded through the Standards Fund Teenage Pregnancy Grant. Existing strategies maintained via the VCG primarily included coordinator or reintegration officer posts and, to a lesser extent, individual tuition and specialist groups or units for teenage parents.

New work facilitated by the VCG was specifically reported in nine LEAs and mainly included new appointments of reintegration officers or key worker roles. Less commonly, new specialist teaching units or groups with a more holistic focus (e.g. '*young mums groups*' or '*one-stop shops*' with input from health visitors) had been established, and in some cases the VCG had enabled 'new work' in that, for the first time, there was a dedicated budget *within* education, which could be allocated to teenage parents for educational support. A minority of interviewees explained that the VCG had led to an expansion in provision, for example, through increasing the number of hours' tuition or additional financial input into alternative curriculum packages.

In the majority of cases, the VCG was retained by the LEA and contributed to the funding of authority-wide staff posts, specialist units or alternative provision. Other

examples of retained funding included the provision of childcare (either in kind or covering expenses) and transport costs for individuals. In these cases, schools might apply for funding in respect of an individual pupil, but the LEA retained control over the allocation and spending of the grant. Just one LEA gave a clear example of conferred funding. Here, three-quarters of the allocation to teenage parents had been delegated to mainstream secondary schools to provide in-school support for pregnant pupils and school-aged mothers as they deemed appropriate (see Cameo 1). The LEA had retained the remaining quarter to fund childcare places.

Strategies for support

Strategies to support teenage parents most commonly focused on their **continued engagement in education**, and to this end, the VCG was most frequently reported to be funding key worker posts, practical support (childcare and transport) and alternative educational provision.

Staffing was the most commonly cited outlet for VCG funding (27 LEAs). Largely these were reintegration officer roles - key members of staff working to support and encourage the continued educational engagement of teenage mothers. The remit of these officers typically included: securing appropriate educational provision for teenage mothers; multi-agency liaison with schools, alternative providers, and statutory services (e.g. Connexions, health, Sure Start, social services); training and awareness raising for schools and education staff; and an advocacy and support role for teenage parents and their families[3]. Other staff posts funded through the VCG included: dedicated education welfare officers; teaching staff (e.g. home tutors, tutors at specialist units); learning mentors; and, less frequently, administrative or childcare staff.

In 24 authorities, VCG was reported to be funding **practical resources** to support teenage parents' access to education. Most commonly, in 20 LEAs, this included support for childcare. Predominantly, VCG was financing nursery or childminding provision for individual cases, although in a minority of LEAs, VCG was contributing to the overall budget of on-site childcare at a PRU or specialist unit. Other, less frequently cited, forms of practical support funded by VCG included transport costs, course materials, uniforms and equipment. It should be noted that the extension of the DfES' 'Care 2 Learn' initiative was imminent at the time of interview. The scheme, which provides financial support for childcare and associated travel costs for young parents in education, was extended to under-16s in August 2004. However, data collection regarding use of the VCG was carried out from March 2004 to June 2004, and as such, the majority of LEAs had not yet begun to access this resource.

VCG was funding **alternative educational provision** in 16 LEAs, including: specialist teaching bases (see Cameo 2); online educational packages; alternative curriculum programmes (often via the LEA's EOTAS service); and home tuition for a fixed period of 'maternity leave'. In around half of the LEAs where VCG was supporting teenage parents, interviewees stated that there was a focus on a return to mainstream school wherever possible. While the priority remained on *appropriate*

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[3] See Selman *et al.* (2001) and Hosie and Speak (2003) for a detailed description and evaluation of the reintegration officer role.

provision, with individual tuition, colleges and alternative programmes also being facilitated through the grant, notably few LEAs had used the VCG to establish specialist units for teenage parents. Although literature considered in the NFER review identified evidence that these units were valued by young mothers, the current study indicates that LEAs are accepting the Government's standpoint that mainstream school is the most appropriate place for teenage parents to continue their education, wherever possible.

In 11 LEAs, the VCG was used to facilitate **training and awareness raising**. This included the production of good practice guides for schools, training sessions for school staff, projects in schools with a preventative focus, or training and awareness raising for the young parents themselves (e.g. on childcare, PSHE or publicity on support services available to them). Other less common outlets for VCG funding included:

- The improvement of monitoring systems through ICT developments
- An incentive scheme awarding school-aged parents with vouchers for high attendance
- An annual consultation event for teenage parents
- The refurbishment of a specialist unit for teenage parents
- The running of a 'drop-in' group for teenage parents.

Referring to another issue raised through the literature review it was notable that work to support teenage fathers was only referenced in one LEA. In this authority, a small amount of VCG funding had supplemented Sure Start/Connexions funding to appoint young fathers' and young men's workers (see Case Study 1, Vignette 2).

CAMEO 1: Teenage parents

- **LEA:** Unitary
- **Percentage of grant:** 12 per cent
- **Number of teenage parents:** Nine teenage parents supported in 2003–04
- **Funding destination:** New work, part retained, part conferred
- **Strategy:** The LEA retained £5,000 to provide childcare costs. £15,000 was delegated to mainstream secondary schools to provide 'in-house' educational support for school-aged mothers. Schools had been able to use the money flexibly, and had developed a variety of strategies including: a rest room in school; a full-time learning mentor; additional educational materials; and time off timetable for school staff to support teenage parents
- **Focus:** To enable school-aged parents to remain in mainstream education
- **Account of impact:** This strategy was adopted due to dissatisfaction with the education provided via the local school-aged mothers unit and the outcomes teenage parents were achieving. Through supporting teenage parents in mainstream education, GCSE point scores had increased year-on-year, attendance was higher than it was at the specialist unit, and schools were responding positively and creatively to the needs of teenage parents.

CAMEO 2: Teenage parents

- **LEA:** Metropolitan

- **Percentage of grant**: 12 per cent
- **Number of teenage parents:** 15
- **Funding destination:** existing work, retained by the LEA to contribute to provision jointly funded by VCG and Sure Start Plus
- **Strategy:** VCG funded the staffing of a Young Parents' Centre based at a local college (a senior teacher, a learning mentor and subject teachers). Teenage parents attending the centre receive core subject tuition, accessed courses within the college and had childcare provided on site. It was hoped that this early familiarisation with the college will mean that, on completing their compulsory education, teenage parents feel able to continue with college courses post 16. Childcare, advice and support continue to be available to them from the Young Parents' Centre.
- **Focus:** To enable school-aged parents to complete their compulsory studies and remain engaged in education post 16, with childcare support
- **Account of impact:** Teenage parents are able to complete their GCSEs in maths and English, and (where a substantial amount of the work has been completed in mainstream school) work in other subjects can also be supported. Young people attend well at the centre, and it is felt that the links with the college mean that transition into post-16 education is eased.

Targets

Interviewees were asked to detail any targets or local objectives which had been set in relation to teenage parents. Across the 50 LEAs surveyed, information was provided by 32 interviewees. A minority of authorities supplied detailed information drawn from existing documentation, e.g. local plans and strategies, whilst, more commonly, interviewees gave a general outline of objectives. Just four of these interviewees stated that there had been no targets set in relation to the education of teenage parents.

Most commonly, interviewees in 18 LEAs referred to targets and objectives set within the framework of the national Teenage Pregnancy Strategy. The main targets of this strategy, which are implemented by groups at a local level, are:

- To halve the under 18 conception rate by 2010 (and establish a firm downward trend in the under 16 rate)
- To increase the participation of teenage parents in education, training or work, to reduce their risk of long-term social exclusion (including a specific target to increase the participation of teenage mothers aged 16 to 19 in employment, education or training to 60 per cent by 2010).

Whilst most interviewees simply referenced local Teenage Pregnancy Action Plans (which all local authorities are required to produce), a minority supplied copies or extracts of plans, illustrating in more detail the range of areas of focus (e.g. local coordination; sex and relationships education; advice and information on contraception; and housing support). The Teenage Pregnancy Strategy extends beyond educational goals to more holistic social support for teenage parents. Within the sphere of education, a smaller number of interviewees referred to local plans, for example, Education Development Plans or Behaviour Support Plans, which contained targets and objectives relating to teenage parents or the education of vulnerable groups more generally.

Quantitative or 'hard' targets were notably rare with regard to the educational outcomes of teenage parents. Just two interviewees provided details of numeric targets relating to the attendance and attainment of this group. In two LEAs, it was noted that attainment targets were set at an individual, rather then LEA, level. As highlighted by a further interviewee, generic targets for services providing out-of-school education would be difficult to set and monitor:

> *How would we know who's going to be there? We may very well have somebody in October who will be back in their mainstream school by the time exams come. What we just try and do, if a youngster is doing GCSEs, is to ensure that we try and identify with the youngster which GCSEs they can do and they can deliver on, and make the arrangements accordingly* (Manager of Specialist Learning Support, Unitary LEA).

More commonly interviewees described 'soft' targets and local objectives, or 'aspirational' goals, primarily related to the reintegration and continued engagement of teenage parents in education. Other aims and objectives related to the provision of a minimum number of hours of education for pupils out of school and improved educational support for teenage parents. Also noted were aims relating to service improvement, for example, improved monitoring of provision and outcomes, improved childcare arrangements, improved liaison with other agencies, or the development of courses for teenage parents. Progress in meeting the targets for teenage parents identified by case-study interviewees are summarised below.

Progress in meeting targets for teenage parents
Case-study LEAs were working to national targets to halve the conception rate by 2010 for under 18s and that by 2010, 60 per cent of teenage parents are in education, training or employment.

Reduction in conceptions
In one case-study LEA the VCG funded teenage pregnancy team was engaged in preventative work, e.g. group work, targeting schools with high rates of conception, helping schools set up health information points, notice boards etc. to address this target (it should be noted that this was a LEA-wide target which included health and other agencies). It was acknowledged that, due to funding issues and the need to prioritise support work with teenage parents, progress in meeting this target was not as developed as they would have liked.

Educational attainment
An interviewee from one case-study LEA felt they were making progress with the target to increase the numbers of young women obtaining one GCSE of any grade:

> *The more young women we keep in school the more who are going to get at least one GCSE. 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* (Teenage Pregnancy Coordinator, Metropolitan LEA).

Engagement
It was noted that, as a result of referral to, and intervention from, the teenage pregnancy team, that young women's engagement with education rose and that there was an increase in their attendance:

> *Specifically, of those who were attending three or less days a week before (including some who were not attending at all). Last year that was one of the successes, 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* (Teenage Pregnancy Coordinator, Metropolitan LEA).

The team were successfully supporting young women's transition to FE, although there was an issue about their retention in FE.

Other agencies

Most frequently, almost three-fifths of respondents (29), listed core LEA funding, or base-funded services in this capacity. Most commonly mentioned were base-funded PRUs or EOTAS provision (e.g. individual tuition, home and hospital teaching services), which were available to teenage parents as appropriate. Also noted, less frequently, was the EWS or teams supporting looked after children, where there was overlap in the client group. In 12 LEAs, interviewees also referenced mainstream schools as an 'other' agency providing educational support for this group, and occasionally funding, in terms of buying into alternative packages.

Next most commonly cited (in 15 LEAs) was support or funding from local elements of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy, for example, Teenage Pregnancy Local Implementation Grants and the Teenage Pregnancy Partnerships these grants support. In some LEAs, these initiatives were funding key worker or reintegration officer posts. Involvement of various health services was noted by 12 interviewees, whilst in 11 LEAs, the Sure Start Plus pilot scheme was cited[4] and similarly, 11 interviewees listed social services as providing support for teenage parents. Support from Connexions Personal Advisors was noted in eight LEAs, whilst FE colleges were reported to be providing support in six authorities. Also listed, less frequently, were local projects supporting young families from within the voluntary, independent or statutory sectors (e.g. Young Women's Christian Association [YWCA], Early Excellence Centres, family learning groups). Other sources of financial support listed included the Care to Learn initiative, Children's Fund, Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and the Behaviour Improvement Programme.

Impact

The most common outlet for the VCG in respect of teenage parents was the **maintenance of work** initiated under the previous Standards Fund Teenage Pregnancy and/or local teenage pregnancy strategy grants, namely reintegration officer roles and their associated activities. Therefore, in many cases, the VCG itself had not had any 'new' or independent impact beyond the fact that LEAs had been able to continue with existing effective practice:

> *We had already got a teenage pregnancy strategy starting to develop prior to VCG coming in as a specific grant line. What clearly VCG has enabled us to*

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[4] Fourteen of the 50 LEAs surveyed were, in fact, part of the Sure Start Plus pilot.

do is to continue and further develop those strategies and policies (Strategic Leader for Inclusion, Metropolitan LEA).

However, as was noted in the literature review carried out for this study, research reported in Selman *et al.* (2001) and Hosie and Speak (2003) indicated that the reintegration officer role was a highly effective strategy, found to be particularly effective in several areas including: breaking down barriers to education; raising awareness within schools and the LEA; establishing procedures for referral; and data collection (i.e. tracking and monitoring). Many of these types of impact were reflected in comments from interviewees consulted in the present study, in relation to both reintegration officer and other support roles targeting teenage parents (e.g. learning mentors, dedicated education welfare officers [EWOs]). The Independent Advisory Group on Teenage Pregnancy (2003) also recognised the positive impact of these posts and recommended that they continue to be supported via the VCG as funding became un-ringfenced. That interviewees in over half of the LEAs in this sample referred to new or maintained appointments of this type, supported through the VCG, seems a positive sign that the strategy continues to be valued.

Notably, a Teenage Pregnancy Coordinator interviewed during the case-study phase of the study reported that, since the introduction of the VCG, the **service felt less isolated** within the authority. By becoming part of a broader funding strategy, with representation on the local strategic management group, the Teenage Pregnancy Team had been brought closer to the 'centre' of the LEA, with positive impact on cross-service awareness:

> *Rather than teenage pregnancy being over there in a corner with our separate grant, what it has done is put us in a group ... with lots of different people working with different vulnerabilities and so it's enabled everybody to have a better overview of how our work is similar, where it links, where it overlaps etc. So I think it's an improvement in that it's reduced the isolation* (Teenage Pregnancy Coordinator, Metropolitan LEA).

As noted by some interviewees, at the time of the survey, it was still rather '*early days*' to be able to give evidence of impact in terms of 'hard' data on pupil outcomes (e.g. GCSE attainment or retention post 16). However, interviewees were able to describe impact based on perceptions and anecdotal evidence. Regarding reintegration and continued engagement in education, it was felt that the reintegration officer roles described above, along with enhancements to alternative educational provision, meant that teenage parents were **staying in education** and consequently, their **prospects for attainment at GCSE were increased**. Interviewees also noted a **change in ethos**, with schools becoming more supportive and positive in their attitudes to supporting teenage parents in mainstream education.

In connection with the above discussion on other sources of support and funding, it was evident that there was substantial variation in terms of how fundamental the VCG was to support strategies for teenage parents. In some LEAs, the VCG was funding virtually the whole range of provision for this group, including staffing, educational provision and childcare, whilst in others, the VCG provided one-off grants for additional support as and when required (e.g. see Cameo 3). However, even where the contribution of the VCG was small in financial terms, interviewees were positive

regarding the large impact a relatively small amount of targeted funding could make to an individual.

CAMEO 3: Teenage parents

- **LEA:** Outer London Borough
- **Percentage of grant:** 2 per cent
- **Number of teenage parents:** Estimated 75 teenage parents, two supported with VCG during the 2003–04 academic year
- **Funding destination:** One-off grants for individual support
- **Strategy:** The LEA set aside a '*nominally ring-fenced*' amount of money to be drawn on as and when requested, to support teenage parents in accessing education. Two allocations were made during the 2003–04 academic year, one for childcare during GCSE examinations (approximately £1000) and one for transport costs to and from school (cost not specified)
- **Focus:** To enable school-aged parents to continue in and complete their statutory education
- **Account of impact:** Both of the allocations were seen to be relatively small, yet highly effective for the two individuals concerned, in maintaining their access to education. The pupil for whom childcare costs were provided was able to take her GCSE exams. It was felt that this would not have been possible had the financial support not been available:

  > *Without that childcare, she would not have taken her GCSEs. I don't know what the results are, but she had this baby and she needed it looked after whilst she took her exams. So that was terrific … It wasn't a huge amount, it ended up to be just over £1000, but there was no way otherwise I would have £1000, so that was really good* (Pupil Support Services Manager).

The second case was of a young woman who had had a particularly traumatic childbirth and was having difficulty in walking any distance. The VCG was able to pay for public transport costs for a time, whilst the young woman recovered physically: '*We gave her half a term's money for the bus. I mean how pathetic is that, really, but it got her to school, and she attended after the baby was born, and now she's fine*'.

It was noted in a minority of LEAs that the initial amount of VCG allocated to teenage parents had been found to be excessive. In one LEA, the concurrent establishment of a (base-funded) hospital school meant that much of the provision for teenage parents was now being provided via this service and the amount of VCG allocated was to be '*drastically cut*' for the second year of the grant. In three LEAs, an amount had been '*nominally ringfenced*' to support the reintegration of individuals as necessary (e.g. through financing childcare or transport), but interviewees explained that there had been little call on this budget. Whilst one of these LEAs was looking to find more effective ways to refocus the grant in subsequent years, in another, it was felt that having the fund there as a 'contingency' had been beneficial nonetheless:

> *What we set aside the £15,000 for was for the reintegration of schoolgirls who'd just had babies, but in fact we didn't really draw on it hardly at all during 03/04. But it was there as a contingency, and a contingency that otherwise we wouldn't have had* (Assessment and Intervention Manager, County LEA).

Concluding comment

Teenage parents are one of the vulnerable groups for which an existing Standards Fund was 'replaced' by the VCG and thus emerged as one of the groups receiving most widespread support through the grant. Beginning with the report of the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU, 1999), there has now been a national focus on support for this group for some five years. As such, the current research indicates that the VCG has primarily enabled authorities to maintain and build on effective practice, rather than bring about large-scale changes in provision. However, that is not to understate the value of the grant in continuing to support school-aged parents, enabling access to education through the provision of childcare, improved and expanding options for alternative curricula, and in the continued focus on inclusion and changing attitudes of mainstream schools:

> *Previously, the kind of response to the pregnancy was always to move them out of school and I think that's changed. We've changed a culture there ... The schools have got more courage. They ring someone and they will actually support the whole process through* (Children's Services Manager, Metropolitan LEA).

3.2.5 School refusers

Introductory comment

Prior to a discussion of the interventions and support provided for school refusers it might be useful to consider the definition and classification of 'school refusers' as a group of vulnerable children. A number of respondents raised issues concerning the definition of school refuser and/or phobic and, in turn, the implications that this had for meeting young people's needs.

Some LEAs were using a very specific, medical needs-type definition to identify what they usually described as 'school phobics'. School phobia is viewed as a recognised anxiety disorder and DfES (2001) guidance has highlighted it as a medical need. One respondent said that in their LEA they would not use the term 'school phobic' unless there was a medical diagnosis and they were reluctant to use the term 'school refuser'. Some LEAs in the survey were specifically using the VCG to support those pupils with medical-needs type phobia: '*What we are trying to do is concentrate this grant on children who are at the extreme end of school refusal due to anxiety* (Assessment and Intervention Manager, County LEA). In contrast, other LEAs were using a more wide-ranging definition of school refuser, which also included more general disaffection type non-attendance. A number of interviewees highlighted the difficulties of defining this group of pupils (something which was also raised in the literature review) and also how the definition used determined the support provided, e.g. in one LEA support for 'phobic pupils' was provided by the Home and Hospital Service, whereas school 'refusers' were supported by the EWS.

Other LEAs did not define school refusers as a discrete group but merely included them within provision focusing on non-attendance generally, whilst others felt that it was unhelpful to make distinctions between 'phobia' and 'refusal'. One interviewee

felt that 'phobic' and 'disaffected' non-attendance were two extremes of a continuum and that many children fell into a grey area in the middle and that making a distinction between the two was not always helpful. The following discussion has been written within this context.

Funding

Of the 50 LEAs surveyed, fourth-fifths (40) indicated that they were using the VCG to support school refusers. However, it should be noted that only a relatively small number (12) of LEAs were using the VCG to fund interventions specifically for school refusers. In addition, a further seven LEAs had allocated funding jointly with medical needs (reflecting a medical definition of school refusal) and one had allocated it jointly with teenage parents. LEAs were also using the VCG to contribute towards general attendance initiatives (rather than those specifically for school refusers) and/or were funding provision for all young people out of school (which again might include school refusers). With these caveats in mind, the amount of VCG funding allocated to 'school refusers' ranged from £4,500 in a county LEA, to £138,000 in a metropolitan LEA. The highest proportional allocation was 25 per cent of the total VCG (in a small, unitary LEA), although the average allocation was 10 per cent of the total grant.

Over a third (17) of respondents thought that the introduction of the VCG had resulted in no change in funding for this group, whilst a similar number (13) felt that it had resulted in an increase. Two interviewees highlighted a reduction in funding for school refusers as a result of the introduction of the VCG. This decrease had resulted in one LEA halving its £80,000 contribution to an existing mentoring project for non-attenders and school refusers, whilst the other LEA had only been able to maintain existing staffing levels in its Education Social Work Service by using core funding, but the LEA was concerned that they would be unable to sustain this provision in the future. In eight LEAs, interviewees were unable to comment, either because they were new to post, or did not have this level of budgetary information.

Funding destination

All the funding was **retained** by LEAs, apart from one authority that had **conferred** money to schools and individual pupils. VCG funding was continuing to provide financial contributions to existing services and interventions supporting school refusers, for example, virtual schools/colleges, the Home and Hospital Tuition Service, and multi-agency projects for school refusers. In ten LEAs, VCG funding had been used to enhance existing provision for school refusers by: increasing the hours of tuition provided; increasing the support available for reintegration; increasing staff time for existing members of staff, such as EWOs; and enhancing the curriculum available to pupils by providing distance learning/virtual provision.

In eight LEAs, VCG funding had been used to establish, or contribute towards, new provision for interventions supporting school refusers. The VCG had:

- Funded additional staff to develop a 'new approach' to anxiety-related school refusal in one LEA

- Contributed to the establishment of a new service for all pupils out of school (EOTAS) and to a new post monitoring EOTAS
- Funded new project provision (art and science workshops) for school phobic pupils
- Contributed towards the purchase of ICT to improve tracking and monitoring of pupils out of school
- Funded the provision of alternative education in the form of new 'intensive individualised packages' for hard to engage young people, including school refusers. For 'extremely' phobic pupils, intensive packages might include the provision of a laptop and contact with a tutor
- Funded the establishment of an e-learning project for school refusers and pupils with medical needs.

In addition, one LEA was hoping to fund some preventative work with Year 6 pupils who may be in danger of dropping out of education and who might be particularly vulnerable at the secondary transition stage. In this project, students and sixth formers were trained to deliver a programme focusing on developing self-esteem, teamwork and team building, and work on the importance of education. This LEA was also planning to appoint a home school liaison officer (in 2004/05) to support an attendance programme in the LEA, which would include work with school refusers and their families, focusing on developing relationships and supporting reintegration.

Strategies for support

The vast majority of funding was paying for **staffing** to support school refusers, either in alternative provision, home tuition or in reintegration. The range of staff employed to support school refusers included:

- Coordinators and teachers
- EWOs
- Educational psychologists for specialist counselling support
- Connexions personal advisors
- Technical staff (for virtual provision)
- Learning support assistants.

The main focus of staff's work was ensuring appropriate alternative provision was provided for school refusers and that, those who were able, were reintegrated back into education (school or otherwise) as swiftly as possible. (The development of appropriate alternative provision was most likely for those young people who had a medical definition of school and were classed as 'school phobics'). Alternative provision took a number of forms including:

- Virtual schools/colleges
- Alternative education projects for school refusers at a physical base
- Home tuition.

OFSTED (2003) identified isolation and lack of contact with schools and peers as factors which may acerbate school refusal. Furthermore, they identified a lack of ICT provision for pupils to communicate with peers and schools. LEAs were clearly using

the VCG to address some of these issues. Eight LEAs were using VCG funding to develop virtual schools/colleges to support all young people out of school, including school refusers. One interviewee observed that the VCG had allowed the LEA the '*flexibility*' to establish a virtual school and appropriate e-learning packages for all pupils out of school, as well as providing a strategic management system (with monitoring and evaluation, baseline assessment and curriculum development) for those pupils. The method of delivery varied between LEAs, but most were trying to ensure that even if the delivery was 'virtual', some contact time with pupils was maintained so that they did not become further isolated. For example, in one LEA, half of the provision was delivered 'virtually', whilst the remainder was a one-to-one session with a tutor wherever the young person felt most comfortable to learn. The VCG had enabled the LEA to extend this key stage 4 project into key stage 3. Another interviewee highlighted the benefits of being able to tailor on-line packages to re-engage and meet the needs of pupils (including school refusers) out of school:

> *They can pick up learning online related to where they are at the moment and move forward. Rather than having to try and fit back into school or a PRU, something bespoke is set up for them* (Head of Learning Support, Unitary LEA).

This mixture of provision, where pupils may be working in a base or at home and in contact with an on-line tutor was seen as an '*ideal way of maintaining their* [school phobics] *education*' (Deputy Head of Access and Inclusion, Metropolitan LEA).

In five LEAs, the VCG was used to fund existing alternative education projects for school refusers, although those whose anxiety was particularly acute might be unable to attend such projects. Nevertheless, VCG funding was contributing to a number of initiatives that existed for those young people who were unlikely to return to mainstream school. For example, one LEA had an established key stage 4 project for anxious school refusers (see Cameo 1), whilst another had a group for '*anxious, depressed, M.E.* [Myalgic Encephalomyelitis]*, or phobic pupils*' (Head of Learning Support, Unitary LEA) that was based in a hospital PRU. Due to the nature of school refusers' difficulties, one of the key areas for development involved focusing on improving young people's self-esteem and confidence and this LEA had used group work as a way of allowing pupils to engage with small groups of young people who were sharing similar experiences. Mutual support and group challenges were used to build confidence and share the positive progress that the young people made.

CAMEO 1: School refusers

- **LEA:** County
- **Percentage of grant:** 4 per cent
- **Number of school refusers:** 72 in the LEA (10 young people attend the project)
- **Funding destination:** Existing provision, funding retained by the LEA
- **Strategy:** The VCG was contributing towards funding a multi-agency, key stage 4 project, for school refusers. The project has an advisory teacher, specialist input from a consultant clinical psychologist, Youth Service input and a Connexions personal advisor. This project is for pupils who are unable to return to school; however they remain on the roll of their school, which has to provide appropriate programmes of study and materials for GCSE/GNVQ or other courses. The

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project is based in the grounds of a school to enable pupils to begin addressing their anxieties. It also means that the project can access the school's facilities and 'buy in' a limited number of lessons from school staff, which are taught in the school. The project also runs a parenting group, so staff are addressing behaviour at home that might be reinforcing a pupil's anxiety

- **Focus:** To provide suitable alternative education for school refusers
- **Account of impact:** Pupils are able to access GCSE courses whilst attending the project. Positive outcomes demonstrated included: improved attendance, attainment at GCSE (2002/3 100 per cent pass rate A–G) and equivalent levels, improved independence, development of appropriate social relationships, improved confidence and self-esteem (previously housebound young people were using public transport, going into shops and entering the main school building) and progression to FE, training, or employment.

LEAs providing interventions for school refusers were clearly at different stages of development in meeting the needs of these pupils. One interviewee acknowledged that their provision, based in a room in a PRU, was not the most 'appropriate' environment for school refusers and the method of delivering education was an area for development:

> *I am aware that we are dealing with students on an individual basis and we need to have a facility to go from individual, to small group, to larger group, before we get them back into school, and we haven't got that* (Head of Pupil Support Services, Unitary LEA).

One LEA had used VCG funding to provide a new intervention for school phobics that moved away from individual tuition, to the provision of weekly art and kitchen science workshops. The aim of these sessions was to encourage school refusers to leave the home: '*They wouldn't come for tuition but because it is an art workshop they will* [attend]' (County Coordinator). This was seen as a significant development because many of the young people '*haven't been out of the home for ages*'. In three LEAs, VCG funding had been used to increase the hours of tuition available for school refusers, for example, in order to provide extra support for GCSEs. Funding had also been used to enhance existing provision, both in terms of the facilities provided, and the staffing available (see Cameo 2).

CAMEO 2: School refusers

- **LEA:** Unitary
- **Percentage of grant:** 8 per cent
- **Number of school refusers**: 25
- **Funding destination:** Enhancing existing provision, retained by the LEA to contribute to provision jointly funded by VCG and Sure Start
- **Strategy and focus:** The VCG contributed to furnishing and equipping a new base for school refusers and teenage parents. The existing provision was dilapidated and '*squashed*'. By combining VCG and Sure Start funding, the LEA was able to provide new facilities attached to a Sure Start neighbourhood nursery. The 2004/05 VCG will cover running costs, additional staffing to provide outreach support, buy in specialist advice and possibly increase the involvement of other services

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> - **Account of impact:** The new provision will enable the LEA to increase the numbers of hours of tuition, provide better facilities and a wider range of support for school refusers.

As already highlighted, the other main area of focus was **attendance** and **reintegration**. Sixteen interviewees reported using the VCG to fund general **attendance** interventions; this included respondents from five LEAs who indicated that they were not supporting school refusers, but included attendance interventions in the 'other' category on the proforma. Examples of VCG funding to support and promote attendance in these LEAs included one authority that had spent nearly £180,000 of VCG funding on LEA-wide strategies, including weekly truancy patrols and strategies to promote attendance amongst schools, families and the community. These strategies included input to school assemblies and events, targeted initiatives in '*vulnerable schools*', advising families of their responsibilities, working with local businesses to combat truancy and the production of promotional materials. In eight LEAs the VCG was funding or contributing towards the funding of education welfare staff posts, either generic or focused specifically on vulnerable children. For example, in two LEAs the VCG had funded additional staff to work in schools with high rates of unauthorised absence and in another, increased funding as a result of the VCG, had enabled the appointment of two additional members of staff, which meant that every school now had its own dedicated EWO, with the impact that schools were receiving an improved service. Other attendance strategies supported by the VCG included, the funding of 'attendance assistants' in a county authority to target those pupils who may be at risk of non-attendance at primary and secondary and funding a parenting officer to work with parents to encourage attendance. Finally, one LEA had used the VCG to fund the provision of multi-agency support plans for vulnerable children, where other social or domestic issues were felt to be affecting their attendance.

The focus on **reintegration** work for school refusers included using the VCG to fund staff with a reintegration remit and to provide additional supply cover to allow staff to focus on reintegration work with pupils returning to mainstream school. The VCG had also allowed one LEA to provide schools with additional money to use existing LSAs to carry out additional support work with school refusers. This approach was seen as effective '*because they* [the LSAs] *know the school and probably know the child*' (Head of Learning Support, Unitary LEA), although it was highlighted that schools were not always enthusiastic about this strategy as it was felt they preferred somebody else to do it. In a number of LEAs, the VCG was seen to allow some 'additionality', to provide something they did not have prior to the grant, to support the reintegration of phobic, depressed, anxious pupils. Examples of this additionality included the funding of additional packages or additional staff to support reintegration, rather than school refusers '*sitting at home on a course*'. The grant also provided additional funding to facilitate access to parenting courses for the parents of school refusers or in one authority what was described as any other '*exceptional provision*' to support school refusers.

Four LEAs indicated that they were using VCG funding to develop monitoring and tracking systems for all pupils out of school (including school refusers). In one LEA this included a database identifying alternative education providers which also had an assessment and evaluation of the provision. LEAs had also used VCG funding to focus on strategic development and changing their approach to the way they worked

with school refusers. One LEA (see Cameo 3) had identified a need to accelerate the referral process so that school refusers were '*not left on a waiting list*'. Interviewees highlighted the particular importance of early identification and referral for this group of vulnerable pupils to ensure that their anxieties were addressed and were not entrenched by remaining in the home: '*we try to get them out of the home initially*' and '*the most effective method is to respond quickly*'.

CAMEO 3: School refusers

- **LEA:** County
- **Percentage of grant:** 4 per cent
- **Number of school refusers:** 350
- **Funding destination:** New work, funding retained by the LEA
- **Strategy:** VCG was funding additional staff (EWS, EOTAS, EPS) time. The LEA had developed a protocol for pupils who were not attending school due to emotional difficulties focusing on the EWO as the key worker and was also developing a training programme for schools on identifying and addressing anxiety-related difficulties. The VCG provided funding for additional educational psychologist time to allow for an accelerated assessment of school refusers to try and prevent the entrenchment of their non-attendance at school. The existing problem was that, by the time young people were seen by the relevant agencies, their school refusal had become acute. VCG funding had been used to enable the EPS to 'fast track' cases of school refusal
- **Focus:** Swifter identification and referral of school refusers to support agencies
- **Account of impact:** The interviewee noted that it was too early to assess the impact of the intervention but they were hoping that it would build capacity within the EWS and EPS to provide an '*alternative to the medical pathology model*' of school refusal. It was also hoped that funding additional staff time would allow practitioners to work more intensively with school refusers and their families in order to identify and address their needs more swiftly, before their refusal became acute.

Other LEAs had used VCG funding for quite distinct interventions in this area. For example, one LEA had used the grant to create a new post in the LEA, which was a member of staff to assess and monitor home education. This reflected the growing numbers of EOTAS in the LEA, many of whom were school phobic/refusers. In another, the VCG had contributed to a strategic reorganisation within the LEA via the establishment of an EOTAS service, which replaced home tuition. This provided a head of service and two full-time teachers to monitor the provision of tuition and provide advice on reintegration for all pupils out of school. Provision for school refusers was increasingly coming under the remit of provision for **all** pupils out of school, which it was felt, had led to a more coordinated and cohesive strategy within LEAs. Provision providing for a number of young people who have a range of difficulties, so:

> *It seemed sensible for school refusers to come under that umbrella so that we've got a more coordinated strategy for addressing different needs* (Deputy Head of Access and Inclusion, Metropolitan LEA).

The benefits of a **multi-agency approach** for working with this group of pupils, who had both complex and diverse needs, was reflected in the work (existing and new)

funded by the VCG and highlighted in the cameos provided. Two LEAs were aware that their policy on school refusers was inadequate and therefore had established a multi-agency group, including CAMHS and the EPS, to explore ways of improving provision for these pupils. Research evidence has highlighted the complex issues that may impact on school refusal and the need for training to ensure school staff are aware of the issues and how to address them (Archer *et al.*, 2003; Tansey, 1995). Two LEAs in the sample had used the VCG to develop **training** for tutors and school staff (see Cameo 3) to make them aware of the needs of these pupils and how to address them. Similarly, two LEAs had used the VCG to focus on attendance work linked to anti-bullying strategies. One of these LEAs had used the VCG to fund a revision of its policy and publicity on bullying and information for schools, parents and children, i.e. they were focusing on the possible causes of non-attendance and school refusal.

One LEA had provided **grants** as a mechanism for supporting **all** vulnerable pupils within the authority, and, in relation to school refusers, it had used VCG funding to support two young people's access to 'Notschool.net'. Notschool.net is an on-line education package aimed at supporting young people for whom '*traditional alternatives, such as home tutoring, have not worked*'. It is a virtual community where young people are given the opportunity to '*develop their self-esteem and be reintroduced to learning*' (Ultralab, 2001). This LEA had also used VCG funding to trial an alternative online educational package with a Year 9 pupil who was unable to return to school. Two LEAs had also used the VCG to pay for **resources** for the development of hardware and software for distance learning/virtual schools and the provision of laptops for pupils out of school.

Targets

No national targets have been set for school refusers but they are likely to be included in general LEA attendance targets, including targets to reduce the numbers of pupils out of school, and to reduce the numbers of young people out of school with no provision. They may also be included in medical needs targets to increase tuition for pupils to ten hours a week. School refusers are also likely to impact on GCSE targets if they are unable to access courses because they are not in school/education. Where LEAs had set targets/local objectives for school refusers these focused on:

- The number of pupils out of school: '*to reduce the numbers of pupils out of school due to anxiety-related difficulties by a third in the lifetime of the VCG*'
- Access to education for young people unable to attend school for medical reasons (including school refusers)
- Attainment: to facilitate access to the curriculum; progression: individual targets set against pupils' previous achievement; and GCSE attainment
- Attendance targets, for example, attendance at the school refusers' project
- Rates of reintegration back to education (school or alternative provision)
- Prevention: targets focusing on earlier identification and quicker referrals
- To increase the number of hours tuition per week for school refusers.

Also noted were aims relating to service improvement, primarily monitoring targets. These included targets to ensure the LEA knew the location of all pupils out of school and the type of educational provision they were receiving, and, in another instance, individual learning plans to ensure that students had access to GCSE courses and

examinations. In terms of local objectives, three LEAs had established multi-agency groups to focus on developing policies for, and meeting the needs of, school refusers. One LEA also provided details of 'softer' targets for school refusers focusing on '*inclusion and anxiety management*' and increasing self-esteem and confidence.

Other agencies

Respondents cited a wide range of other agencies, services and organisations that provided funding and/or support for school refusers, reflecting the diverse range of needs of many of these young people. However, again it should be noted the agencies/services identified might be supporting general attendance interventions and provision for all pupils out of school, which could include school refusers. Most frequently, respondents (in 30 LEAs) referenced LEA core funding, or base-funded services, for example the EWS and the EPS. The most commonly mentioned sources of support and/or funding in this category were EOTAS provision, the Home and Hospital Tuition Service and PRUs. In seven LEAs, schools were also identified as an 'other' agency providing educational support and/or funding, for example buying in alternative packages, for school refusers.

Other statutory services identified as providing support and/or funding for school refusers reflected the health and other social needs of many of these young people and included, CAMHS (seven LEAs), the Health Service (five LEAs), social services (seven LEAs) and the Youth Service (three LEAs). The Connexions Service (in five LEAs) and alternative education providers, for example, local FE colleges and voluntary organisations, such as the Princes Trust and Fairbridge, were also identified as providing support. Other sources of financial support included the Behaviour Improvement Programme and the Local Public Service Agreement. Four respondents indicated that there were no other agencies supporting school refusers within the authority.

Impact

The main areas where the VCG was seen to have impacted on work focusing on school refusers included the view that it had been a catalyst for change: '*It has facilitated a lot of development work that might never have happened*' (Head of School Refusers' Project, County LEA). In addition, it was also seen to have increased the 'visibility' of school refusers as a group who might require support and funding. In one LEA, previous provision for school refusers had been funded through the medical needs budget, but now the group had their own budget: '*Before we dealt with refusers if we had any spare capacity, what we've done now is build in capacity for school refusers*' (Head of Inclusion, County LEA). Increased funding, as a result of the introduction of the VCG, was seen to have assisted some LEAs in enhancing and expanding their provision for school refusers, for example, via the extension of existing key stage 4 programmes into key stage 3, or the provision of better facilities and increased hours of tuition (see Cameo 3), or increasing the capacity of the EWS to support school refusers. In another LEA, the VCG had provided the authority with 'leeway' to fund alternative programmes for Year 10 and 11 pupils which previously they would not have had funding to do.

Additional VCG funding meant that in one LEA, it was felt that staff had been able to work in a more diverse and differentiated way with young people and EWOs had developed more specialist roles within the service, resulting in a positive impact, in terms of improved attendance at secondary level. The ability to provide extra hours tuition was also seen as 'significant' in terms of providing GCSE students with additional study support: *whereas before we were scrimping around and saying can we do this*?' (County Coordinator). Perhaps most interestingly, in one LEA, the VCG had been used to develop new ways of working with school refusers (see Cameo 1). This new approach to working with school refusers would, it was hoped, increase the capacity of EWS and the EPS to meet the needs of school refusers more effectively via swifter identification of their needs. Finally, the method of funding allocation used by the VCG was seen to have allowed LEAs the flexibility to provide support for all pupils out of school, for example, via the development of new forms of educational provision, such as virtual learning initiatives. Areas of impact identified by respondents also focused on young people's re-engagement with learning, attendance and attainment.

Concluding comment

Only 12 of the 50 LEAs (about a quarter) were specifically funding interventions for school refusers, perhaps reflecting a lack of recognition of this vulnerability within LEAs or the competing priorities of other groups. Certainly, interviewees were using a wide range of definitions for this group, from the disaffected truancy-type non-attender, to the medical needs type definition of anxious school phobic with complex mental health issues. Increased awareness and identification of this group may lead to more consistent provision. Nevertheless, interesting practice was highlighted in relation to changes in practice allowing swifter identification and referral of pupils to support agencies and in the provision of alternative educational opportunities for those for whom a return to school was unrealistic. Furthermore, greater publicity for good practice and inter-LEA networks may be of value.

3.2.6 Asylum Seekers

Funding

Of the 50 LEAs surveyed, 34 interviewees reported using VCG funding to support the education of asylum seekers. Allocations to this group ranged from £1,000 in an outer London borough to assist setting up a 'shop front' to provide information services for asylum seekers, to £430,000 in a metropolitan authority with a large number of asylum seekers, which allocated a large proportion of the funding to schools as bursaries. Across the LEAs, the proportion of VCG funding allocated to asylum seekers ranged from 0.3 per cent in an outer London borough, to 28 per cent in a metropolitan LEA. Across LEAs, an average of 10 per cent of the VCG was allocated to this group.

In 16 LEAs, interviewees stated that there had been no '*specific*' VCG-funding allocated to asylum seekers. For eight of these, this was either because there were no identified asylum seekers within the area, or there were only a small number and it was felt that their needs were being addressed through existing support structures. Several interviewees also reported that asylum seekers would benefit '*indirectly*' from

the VCG in that they fell within the client groups of other VCG-funded strategies. For example, a number of asylum seeker pupils were unaccompanied and came under funding for looked after children, whilst some Roma asylum seekers received support from Traveller Education Services.

Funding destination

In the majority of cases, LEAs retained VCG funding for asylum seekers. However, five interviewees reported that, in addition to retaining funding for LEA-wide support, they had also conferred monies to schools in the form of a bursary or grant to support asylum seeker pupils (see Cameo1). Bursaries were most often used by schools to support the integration of pupils into schools, for example, by providing extra support staff time to work on language development and curriculum support. Two LEAs conferred the total amount of VCG funding allocated to asylum seekers directly to schools. The amount of funding per pupil for individual bursaries ranged from £450 to £600, and in one LEA, the amounts varied according to the age of the pupil. A number of interviewees reported that they allocated funding to schools in this way because this was the way previous grants had been allocated.

CAMEO 1: Asylum seekers

- **LEA:** Metropolitan
- **Percentage of grant:** 8 per cent
- **Number of asylum seekers:** 187
- **Funding destination:** Bursaries: funding conferred to schools
- **Strategy:** Bursaries to support the integration of asylum seeker pupils into school
- **Focus:** On the admission of an asylum seeker pupil, the school makes a claim to the LEA for funding support. This is allocated on a termly basis for one year, the amount varying according to the pupil's key stage. Funding must be used by the school to support the asylum seeker pupil in the school
- **Account of impact:** Schools had used the bursaries to pay for practical resources, such as uniforms to help the asylum seekers 'fit in', and provide schools with equipment, such as bilingual books and dictionaries that would assist with the pupils' learning. Schools also used the bursaries to provide teaching support and bilingual support staff. The Head of Service noted that there had been some *'significant success stories'* with asylum seekers and that many *'did very well'*. She said: *'The grant is used to support the children.* [It] *supports them in terms of uniform, resources, etc., so it contributes towards the targets'*.

Interviewees from 18 LEAs reported that the VCG had led to an increase in funding for this group. In seven LEAs, the amount of funding was felt to have stayed the same and three reported a decrease. In six LEAs, information on changes in funding was not available.

Interviewees from 11 LEAs reported that the VCG had enabled them to provide new forms of provision for asylum seekers. Most often, (in nine LEAs) the VCG had been used to fund **new teams and posts**, which included:

- The establishment of a dedicated team for asylum seekers

- A refugee and asylum seeker project providing introductory courses in English for asylum seekers awaiting school placements
- A black and ethnic minorities manager post
- A home–school liaison officer specifically for asylum seekers
- Refugee outreach teachers
- Advisory teachers.

LEAs had also used the VCG to fund strategic developments and to provide alternative education provision. Three interviewees stated that the VCG provided entirely new LEA-wide funding for asylum seekers as previous DfES grants had been devolved to schools.

In six LEAs, the VCG had been used to enhance existing provision for asylum seekers. Types of expanded provision included the employment of additional teaching staff, increasing posts to full-time, increasing the number of hours of language support available and providing a greater number of college places. Where interviewees reported that the funding had stayed the same, LEAs were continuing to use the VCG to support existing provision.

Strategies for support

Of the 34 LEAs that used the VCG to support asylum seekers, the most common use of funding was to employ staff (22). Examples of the type of role funded included:

- Advisory teachers
- Designated teachers
- Learning mentors
- Home–school liaison officers
- Support officers
- Translators/language support staff
- Outreach workers
- EWOs.

Staff funded by the VCG were primarily supporting asylum seekers' **access** to, and **participation** within, education. Typically, members of staff would provide assessments of need of new arrivals and then work with the admissions service and liaise with schools and colleges to ensure that the young people accessed an appropriate educational placement as swiftly as possible. VCG-funded staff often supported the induction of asylum seeker pupils into school and would also provide support for them before they went into school, for example via intensive language support (see Cameo 2). The attendance of asylum seekers was also supported through specialist EWO posts or family liaison officers, funded by the VCG.

CAMEO 2: Asylum seekers

- **LEA:** Metropolitan
- **Percentage of grant:** 10 per cent
- **Number of asylum seekers:** 200
- **Funding destination:** New and extended posts, funding retained by the LEA

- **Strategy:** The VCG had enabled the LEA to establish a new advisory teacher post and enhance an existing EWO post to full-time. The aim of this was to provide support for asylum seeking pupils and pupils new to English in schools for a limited time period (four hours a week for two weeks initially), in order to build capacity in schools, maintain the placement, and raise the attainment of pupils
- **Focus:** To provide access to appropriate full-time school places for asylum-seeking children in the LEA
- **Account of impact:** The VCG had enabled the LEA to enhance its provision and fund a full-time education welfare officer dedicated to asylum seekers. The Service Development Manager noted that the impact of this was they were now able to access places for primary-aged asylum seekers more quickly - usually within five days: *'There is less time spent finding a school place, we are getting them into school a lot quicker'.*

The other main area of focus for staff was on raising the **attainment and achievement** of asylum seekers. The most common outlet for funding was for study support provided by specialist teachers, support staff, translators and learning mentors. Staff often provided additional support both in, and out of, school. This included: homework sessions, 'Saturday classes' and summer schools. Some LEAs also used the Saturday classes as a 'catch up' session for both parents and children, not only to support attainment but also to strengthen the family support aspect. Staff were often also responsible for carrying out initial assessments of asylum seekers and for setting targets relating to the attainment of pupils through personal education plans.

Staff funded by the VCG provided **training** and gave **advice and guidance** to schools, LEA staff, parents and carers and other agencies, to raise the profile of asylum seekers, help raise awareness and highlight their needs. For example, Refugee Family Liaison Officers from a county LEA had been involved in delivering, with their colleagues from the TES, a 'Junior Citizenship' project for Year 6 pupils in the LEA.

The nature of the work of staff supporting asylum seekers often had a **multi-agency focus**, for example, working with voluntary organisations and bodies, colleges and social services. Ten LEAs had used the VCG to fund new **strategic developments**, such as establishing dedicated teams for asylum seekers, research to ascertain accurate numbers of asylum seekers within the LEA and project evaluations. In addition to this, one LEA had used the VCG to establish a steering group to help devise an LEA wide policy for asylum seekers, whilst another had used the grant to develop policy, strategy and guidance documents for a range of individuals and services, e.g. parents/carers and schools.

Nine LEAs also used the VCG to fund **alternative education provision**, most commonly college places for key stage 4 youngsters and for those who arrived part-way through the year (see Cameo 3). A number of LEAs also provided language courses for those young people awaiting a school place.

Eight of the LEAs surveyed had used the VCG to pay for **resources**, such as books, curriculum materials, and bilingual dictionaries. Several LEAs had also used VCG

funding to produce training packs for schools, pupils and their families and to provide transport and school uniforms.

Targets

Information on targets and/or local objectives was provided by 17 LEAs. Targets were included in a range of documents including Education Development Plans, divisional plans and VCG strategy documents. 'Hard' targets around attainment and attendance were noted infrequently. Interviewees in just two LEAs provided details of numeric targets relating to asylum seekers, for example, that '*25 per cent of refugee pupils get at least one GCSE A*–C*' and that '*25 per cent of refugee children to continue in education in local colleges*'. Another LEA also outlined targets for attainment at key stages 2 to 4 for *'other ethnic minority groups'* but noted that very few would be asylum seekers. In other LEAs, targets applying to all vulnerable children were cited, which focused on raising levels of attainment more generally.

A number of LEAs had objectives relating to the swift placement and integration of pupils. However, one interviewee noted that there was often difficulty in obtaining school places for asylum seekers, particularly when schools were technically full. There was a range of other 'softer' targets and objectives based around engaging asylum seekers in education and raising achievement. Other objectives included raising awareness of the needs of asylum seekers, providing guidance and support for schools and language support and support for parents.

Difficulties in meeting targets focusing on admissions and the attainment of asylum seekers were noted by a project worker working with unaccompanied asylum seekers.

She noted that because asylum seekers were a highly mobile group, it meant that, '*not all who begin the year will be there at the end, and vice versa. There is also a cohort of pupils who are only in the borough for a few weeks and will not go into a school*'. Progress in meeting the targets for asylum seekers identified by case-study interviewees are summarised below.

Progress in meeting targets for asylum seekers
In relation to targets to reduce the number of asylum seekers out of school and/or their time out of school prior to accessing a place

Ensuring access to education
In one case-study LEA, VCG-funded key workers (advisory teachers and family liaison officers) were addressing this issue and had '*made some good progress*', however, there were difficulties in some areas due to a lack of school places. In this respect, cross-LEA cooperation had enabled workers to access additional school places, although it was acknowledged that, if a school was genuinely at capacity, little could be done. Opportunities to provide alternative provision at college (not available pre-VCG as the LEA was unable to fund the provision) had also reduced the numbers out of education.

LEAs were also using VCG grants to provide additional English tuition which had resulted in schools admitting pupils more quickly. In another LEA, the VCG had enabled the LEA to target support through individual bursaries. Previously they could not do this, and children were sometimes out of education for up to four months at a time. With support from the VCG, it was reported that '*now* [we are] *getting them into school*' (Education Officer, Looked After Children, Outer London Borough).

Other agency support

LEAs were asked to identify any other agencies or services offering educational and/or financial support for asylum seekers. Information in this respect was provided by 29 LEAs. Respondents highlighted a wide range of other agencies, services and organisations, reflecting the diverse range of needs of young people in this category. Most commonly, (as noted by 18 LEAs), Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) was identified, in terms of providing both financial and educational support for asylum seekers. In addition, LEAs cited LEA base budgets as offering financial support for asylum seekers and thus, identified core-funded services as providing educational support. Those services referenced included: the EWS; the Behaviour Support Service; the EPS, children and young people's services and SEN services. Furthermore, mainstream schools (noted by five LEAs) and colleges (noted by three LEAs) were also cited as providing educational support and/or funding for asylum seekers. Educational (and in several cases financial) support from social services was reported in seven authorities and Connexions were also identified as providing support for asylum seekers in four LEAs.

The financial support for asylum seekers obtained through specific government initiatives was also noted in a number of LEAs and included: the Children's Fund (five LEAs), The Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (one LEA), Sure Start (one LEA) and the European Social Fund (one LEA).

Impact

Interviewees were asked to report on the impact the VCG had had in terms of their ability to meet the educational needs of this group. Of those LEAs who responded, 23 described the funding as having a positive impact. The main impact being that the VCG had enabled LEAs to provide new or continuing support to asylum seekers. As noted earlier staffing was the main focus of support funded by the VGG and several LEAs reported that such increases in staffing had resulted in more effective working. For example, one LEA had increased a part-time EWO post to full-time and the interviewee felt this had resulted in them being able to access places for primary-aged asylum seekers more quickly.

Interviewees from other LEAs felt the grant had had a specific impact on supporting pupils within schools. One county LEA had been able to use the funding to buy-in sessional translators or teachers with additional languages to run English language classes in school and to support asylum seeker pupils in class. Due to the range of first languages, buying in sessional translators meant that they were able to support a wider range of pupils. One interviewee highlighted how support funded through the VCG had helped pupils adjust to school life sooner, stating: '*The impact is that we're giving children an induction into school and into English as an additional language so that they're more settled when they actually access school places*' (School Improvement Advisor, Outer London Borough).

For a number of LEAs, the most significant feature of the VCG was that, unlike previous funding, it had not been devolved or conferred to schools, which meant that they were able to support this group of pupils at an LEA-level for the first time. In addition, LEAs were able to use the VCG to buy-in alternative provision, such as college places for asylum seekers, which they had not been able to do through previous funding streams such as EMAG. This meant that LEAs had been able to reduce the numbers of pupils out of school. One interviewee noted:

> *For those kids, they would have been out of school longer, they wouldn't be in college now, if we hadn't had the money to do that. So it stopped them hanging around, being given home tuition. If we could arrange it quickly, they've gone straight into college. So in that sense, it's better* (Head of Access and Inclusion, Outer London Borough).

Other impacts of the VCG were evident at a strategic level. The Head of Education Finance from a metropolitan LEA reported that the VCG had '*taken the pressure off the Ethnic Minority Achievement Services*' as previously this service was only able to support asylum seeker children as they were the 'most needy'. The VCG had allowed the LEA to support the asylum seeker children and then use EMAG to support other minority ethnic children. Another interviewee felt the VCG had helped the LEA focus work at the school level, assisting them in embedding support strategies in their own practices:

> *I think, in all cases, what we're hoping to do is to support schools to support their pupils. Rather than rush in to support an individual child, we're trying to teach schools the strategies. It has been one-to-one support because that seems to be the way our Minority Ethnic Service works, but we are working to make them more strategic. We want schools to be more aware of the strategies*

that are out there, so they can support the pupils (Senior Advisor for Inclusion, County LEA).

Six LEAs did not report any impact of funding for asylum seekers. One of these had allocated funding which had not been taken up and another one felt it was too early to say. Two LEAs did however feel that there had been a negative impact due to a decrease in the amount of funding available for this group.

Concluding comment

VCG funding was most commonly used to fund new teams and posts, such as liaison officers, or to expand existing provision by increasing the levels of employment of staff already working with asylum seekers. A key focus of these support strategies was to increase access to, and participation within, education. A secondary aim was to improve the attainment and achievement levels of those who had successfully been brought into the education system. This was usually achieved through a multi-faceted approach, involving staff from several agencies and organisations working together.

For a number of authorities, the VCG represented an increase in funding for this group, and in some cases this was felt to be the first time LEAs had a specific fund within education which could be used flexibly to meet the educational needs of asylum seekers. Key benefits of this new flexibility included the facility to buy-in college provision for pupils arriving in key stage 4, and the ability to target bursaries for 'tailored' integration support at individual level. Both of these were felt to impact positively on the speed with which asylum seeker pupils could access educational provision. Nevertheless, it should be noted that there were concerns from two LEAs that the VCG had resulted in a decrease in funding for asylum seekers within their authority.

3.2.7 Young offenders

Funding

Of the 50 LEAs surveyed, just over two-fifths (21) were using the VCG to support the education of young offenders. Illustrative of the complexity of vulnerability, it should be noted that within this, four interviewees stated that there had been no '*specific*' allocation to this group, but that young offenders would benefit '*indirectly*' from the VCG. This was because young offenders fell within the client group of other VCG-funded strategies, namely provision for excluded and disaffected pupils, through PRUs and alternative educational programmes. LEAs making this type of allocation are considered in section 3.2.9. Eleven LEAs were not allocating VCG to young offenders because it was felt that the LEA was able to support the education of young offenders through its core budget (e.g. through mainstream schools, base-funded PRU/EOTAS provision, or base-funded staff seconded to YOTs) and/or the local YOT was well funded and did not require any additional financial contributions from the LEA.

Where a 'direct' allocation had been made to young offenders, the amount of VCG funding ranged from £3,000 in a small unitary LEA, to £210,000 in a large county authority. Across these 17 LEAs, allocations to young offenders represented a

relatively small proportion of the grant, between 0.3 and 10.5 per cent, with an average of 5.7 per cent. In 12 LEAs, interviewees reported that the introduction of the VCG had led to an increase in the amount of money available to support this group. Four interviewees felt there had been no change, and just one perceived a decrease in funding.

Funding destination

In all cases, funding had been retained by LEAs, although funding destinations varied in terms of whether strategies were authority-wide or directed towards individuals. For example, in three LEAs, the VCG was used to buy in additional tuition for individual young people, as required, whereas in eight LEAs, the grant was funding full-time posts with a remit for authority-wide support. As noted above, four LEAs were making a contribution from the VCG towards the LEA's PRU or EOTAS service.

In eight of the LEAs making a 'direct' allocation to young offenders, VCG funding had been used to maintain existing levels of provision (for example staff salaries, college placements), whilst in five, it was reported that the grant had facilitated an increase in provision. Examples included: increased educational support for pupils and enhanced contributions to jointly funded strategies or posts. Finally, in six LEAs, interviewees described new work funded through the VCG, namely new staff appointments with a focus on reintegration or outreach tuition.

Strategies for support

The most common outlets for funding were **staffing** and **alternative education provision**, each reported in 11 authorities. The types of staff posts and alternative provision being wholly or part-funded by the VCG are shown in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3   Key strategies for support funded by the VCG: staffing and alternative provision

Staffing roles supported by VCG	Alternative education provision supported by VCG
• Home or outreach tutors • Learning support assistants • Education welfare officers or education support workers seconded to YOTs • Brokerage officers with a remit to arrange educational provision • Key workers with a remit around reintegration and family support • Mentors	• College placements • Vocational programmes (e.g. motor vehicle maintenance) • Online learning packages • Personal/social development courses • Individual tuition • A contribution to the overall budget of the LEA's PRU or EOTAS service

Source: *proforma and interview data in the LEA survey phase of the NFER study, 2004*

Strategies to support young offenders most commonly focused on **reintegration** and/or continued **engagement** in some form of educational provision, be that academic or vocational. For those pupils where a return to school was the aim, the

VCG was being used to employ LSAs to assist with reintegration. Where pupils would not return to mainstream education, the VCG was variously being used to pay for individual tutors (see Cameo 1), to buy into alternative provision directly (see Cameos 2 and 3), or to employ staff with a brokerage role: '*Working with people, for instance, the SEN manager and Home and Hospital Education Service, to make sure, if a young person, say, comes out of secure accommodation, they get an educational package set up, rather than it drifting* (Director of Operations, County LEA). In this way, the VCG was also contributing to the development of multi-agency partnerships in some LEAs, where links were being made with other statutory services and providers of alternative curriculum activities.

Other less common outlets for VCG funding, noted in two or fewer LEAs, included: a focus on **training and awareness raising** (e.g. training for schools on restorative justice, training for YOT staff on behaviour management); a contribution to local crime prevention strategies; family support and advocacy; and more holistic support for young offenders (e.g. personal development courses).

CAMEO 1: Young offenders

- **LEA:** County
- **Percentage of grant:** 3 per cent
- **Number of young offenders:** Approximately 12 targeted with this strategy
- **Funding destination:** A new post, funding retained by the LEA
- **Strategy:** An outreach tutor to work with young people out of school
- **Focus:** To provide educational support for pupils who are in custody or on bail
- **Account of impact:** An example of a positive outcome, given by the interviewee, was that, with support from the outreach tutor, Connexions and the YOT, two Year 11 pupils who were remanded in custody were able to take GCSEs whilst in secure accommodation. They were able to '*fulfil their exam aspirations*', although both were later sentenced.

CAMEO 2: Young offenders

- **LEA:** County
- **Percentage of grant:** 7 per cent
- **Number of young offenders:** Not stated
- **Funding destination:** New staff posts and individual packages of support, funding retained by the LEA
- **Strategy:** Additional staffing and alternative curriculum packages for young offenders
- **Focus:** To provide appropriate educational provision for young offenders out of school
- **Account of impact:** The additional funding has enabled LEA services, which were stretched, to increase educational provision through additional staffing and a greater range of alternative curriculum packages. Links have been developed with providers in the voluntary sector and the YOT has been able to meet its targets for percentages of young offenders engaged in education or training.

Targets

Interviewees were asked to detail any targets or local objectives which had been set in relation to young offenders. Information was forthcoming from 20 interviewees. Targets around the education of young offenders predominantly related to participation. The most frequently referenced 'hard' target was that set by the Youth Justice Board: That by 2004, 90 per cent of young offenders aged 13–18 who are supervised by Youth Offending Teams will be in education, training and employment. Within this, a small number of respondents gave details of progress against locally set annual interim targets. Given the significant overlap with excluded pupils, a minority of respondents also referenced the requirement for full-time provision for pupils out of school and in one LEA, it was explained that the education worker seconded to the YOT had a '*personal target*' to see 100 per cent of statutory school-aged offenders, make an assessment of their educational need and refer them to the appropriate agency.

Hard targets around attainment and attendance were noted infrequently. In three LEAs, targets applying to all vulnerable children were cited, which focused on raising levels of attainment more generally. One interviewee highlighted the issue that the setting of standardised hard targets for groups such as young offenders was not necessarily of value: '*We firmly believe in targeting on an individual basis, because it's about self-achievement and attainment*'. Progress in meeting targets for young offenders in one of the case-study LEAs is summarised below.

Progress in meeting targets for young offenders

Ensuring access to education
The education liaison officer (funded by the VCG) noted that he was working towards the Youth Justice Board target for 90 per cent of young offenders to be in education, training or employment and that he had achieved this in '*over 95 per cent of cases*'. The reason he could achieve this target was related to the increase in alternative educational provision within the LEA at key stage 4: '*Having alternative arrangements for them, rather than trying to put them back into a situation which they've already rejected, that's more likely to be successful*'. However, the officer was aware that in other, more deprived areas of the LEA that had large numbers of looked after children and complex cases, that target had not been achieved because '*getting them placed in appropriate education is more challenging*'.

The education liaison officer also had a target to achieve educational provision for young offenders as '*quickly*' and as '*appropriately*' as possible. Since coming into his post (eight years ago) he observed that he had reduced the time from referral to placement from '*three months or more*', to '*several weeks*' by '*cutting through the process*' and '*by raising the profile of the young person in the eyes of the people who are responsible for delivering the service*'.

Other agency support

Education or equivalent local authority departments (e.g. Children, Schools and Families) featured highly both in terms of provision of educational support and financial contributions (cited in 23 LEAs). Often, educational provision for young offenders was financed through core LEA budgets, via the authority's statutory out-of-school provision (e.g. PRUs). Additionally, in five LEAs, schools were also listed

as providing educational support for young offenders through mainstream provision and school budgets. In a small number of authorities (six), alternative providers from the voluntary, private and FE sectors were cited as providing educational support for this group.

Local youth offending services and the Youth Justice Board were also commonly referenced (in 17 LEAs) as providers of educational support, as were statutory services such as social services (nine), Connexions, (nine), health/CAMHS (six) and youth services (five). Finally, in three LEAs, financial contributions from government funding streams or initiatives (BIP, European Social Fund, Children's Fund, LSC) were cited.

CAMEO 3: Young offenders

- **LEA:** Outer London borough
- **Percentage of grant:** 0.4 per cent
- **Number of young offenders:** 541 young offenders in the borough, although VCG had been used to support just one pupil to date
- **Funding destination:** One-off grant for individual support
- **Strategy:** One-to-one intervention from an outside agency offering support in education and social skills development. Two sessions (each of two weeks' duration) were bought in. A tutor from the agency came into school and worked with the pupil on an individually tailored scheme of work
- **Focus:** To attempt to prevent the permanent exclusion of a very challenging pupil, by developing his social skills and preparing him for reintegration to the mainstream classroom, following a number of fixed-term exclusions and time spent in the Learning Support Unit (LSU). The pupil had a record of theft, drug use and difficult family circumstances
- **Account of impact:** During the first period of intervention, there were initial difficulties in terms of the pupil's reluctance to engage with the tutor. By the end of the fortnight, changes were noted, in terms of a more positive relationship with the tutor. However, the assessment was that the pupil was not yet ready to return to the mainstream classroom from the LSU. Shortly after the intervention, the pupil's behaviour deteriorated again, and he was given another fixed-term exclusion. A second two-week session of support was bought in from the same agency. However, this time there was '*complete failure*' to engage. While the support offered by the agency was seen to be of a very high quality, the pupil was ultimately unable or unwilling to engage with the tutor, due to the extreme nature of his disaffection and challenging behaviour. However, there were unexpected benefits in that, following the target pupil's disengagement from the programme, the school was able to 'transfer' the tutor's support to a number of other vulnerable pupils for the remainder of the fortnight, which was seen to be extremely valuable.

Impact

Given that the VCG was not being widely used to support young offenders, and was often being channelled via existing or joint-funded EOTAS services, it should be noted that explicit comments on impact of the grant itself were limited. However, the fact that over two-thirds of the LEAs allocating VCG 'directly' to young offenders reported an increase in funding suggests that, in many cases, work to support young offenders had been enhanced or expanded through its introduction. Where

interviewees did comment specifically on the impact of VCG-funded strategies, progress related primarily to **increased capacity** to source and provide curriculum alternatives, through additional staffing. This then enabled services to **meet targets**, and led to **greater numbers of young people accessing and participating** in educational provision:

> *It's helped us to reach targets that we would otherwise have been struggling with, so in so far as the workers have been appointed over the last two years, that's been helpful ... We actually exceeded the government target there* (Director of Operations, County LEA).

Concluding comment

In terms of the number of LEAs allocating VCG funding, young offenders were one of the groups least supported through the grant. This may be explained largely by the fact that there were already well established YOTs, with dedicated education workers, in the majority of LEAs, who were carrying out their statutory duties in this area. It is also possible that conceptualisation of 'the young offender' in the context of education may have a bearing on the relatively sparse data collected in this area. Within the sphere of education, young offenders who remain in the community are likely to present to schools and LEAs as those at the extreme end of the disaffection/disengagement scale, rather than as a discrete group. As noted under discussion of strategies and targets, the main focus of support for this group was to re-engage in some form of education or training and there was notably little reference to crime prevention or reduction. This suggests that education as a statutory sector sees its role (not unreasonably) as providing education rather than addressing offending behaviour and, as such, LEAs and respondents to our survey may be more likely to have identified these young people as a 'sub-set' of their excluded pupil cohort, as pupils 'at risk of exclusion' (see section 3.2.9).

It is also noteworthy that there was limited commentary from interviewees regarding impact on pupil outcomes. Under discussion of impact, the majority of comments related to increased service capacity to source and facilitate or fund alternative educational provision, rather than perceived impact on pupil behaviour or attainment. As the cameos suggest, it is possible that, whilst the VCG can improve LEAs' capacity to *offer* educational support to young offenders, the ability to change the extreme and entrenched behaviour which leads to educational disengagement and criminal offending may be beyond the scope of this grant and its aims (and again may well be being addressed by Youth Offending Services). Perhaps other initiatives, stemming more directly from the criminal justice system, may be better equipped to address these challenges, and these, in conjunction with strategies supported by the VCG, may then be effective in preparing young offenders to re-engage with education.

3.2.8 Young carers

Funding

Only seven of the 50 LEAs surveyed were using VCG funding to support young carers. However, their inclusion in the VCG guidelines was seen as raising the profile of this group within LEAs:

> *The inclusion of young carers in the grant, although we haven't used it specifically for that this year, is a very good thing because it's actually flagged them up as an equally needy group* (Social Inclusion Manager, Outer London Borough).

In this way, the introduction of the VCG appeared to have highlighted young carers as a 'vulnerable group', where perhaps they had not been identified previously. Furthermore, in another LEA, the reason given for not allocating VCG funding to young carers was reported as being partly due to *'a lack of data'* suggesting that, following identification of those within the group, future funding may be allocated. Interestingly, four LEAs reported ongoing research to identify young carers and their needs and, indeed, commented on the likelihood of future funding where a need was identified. In one LEA, this had resulted in 2004/05 VCG funding being allocated to employ a project worker as part of the local young carers' organisation. In addition, just under half (18) of those LEAs not allocating funding for young carers highlighted that they felt the group were receiving support from elsewhere, notably, funding and/or support from social services, the Children's Fund, alternative agencies and Connexions. As one interviewee commented, although the LEA recognised young carers as an important group, '*at the moment, we think we're delivering on the young carers from somewhere else*' (Assistant Director of Operations, County LEA). Similarly, interviewees from two LEAs noted that, although VCG funding had not been earmarked specifically for young carers, pupils would fall under the remit of other VCG-funded strategies including: access to VCG-funded support services through the LEAs multi-agency panel and a VCG-funded EWS post focusing on the attendance of vulnerable children.

Of the seven LEAs using VCG funding to support young carers, information on the amount of funding allocated was provided from four LEAs. With the exception of one outer London borough, where £20,000 was allocated (although not taken up), all three LEAs reported allocations of under £5,000 (£5,000, £2,000 and £1,565 respectively). As a proportion of the total VCG budget, the allocations for young carers were particularly small, representing less than two per cent of the overall VCG budget in all cases. In four of the seven LEAs, interviewees confirmed that the funding represented an increase on previous years. In addition, one LEA reported that funding for young carers had stayed the same and in two, information on changes in funding was not available.

Funding destination
In the seven LEAs allocating VCG funding for young carers all had retained funding within the LEA. However, in one, a proportion of the funding had also been conferred to provide support to an individual pupil. In this case, the school had approached the LEA to request funding for a pupil, which resulted in a 'one-off' grant being given to provide a '*short break*' for that pupil. In two LEAs, VCG funding had been used to maintain existing provision within the authority by continuing to provide funding contributions to existing posts within the LEA namely, a generic part-time support

assistant post and the head of inclusion. Two LEAs reported that funding had been used to enhance existing provision (for example, through the appointment of staff and/or the introduction of some new provision, i.e. resources). Two other LEAs reported that funding had been used to introduce new provision for young carers. In one, this involved the introduction of a LEA project which focused on developing a strategy and set of procedures for supporting young carers. In the other, a joint initiative with 'Crossroads' (a national association providing support for, and raising awareness of, carers' needs) was introduced, with the aim of identifying young carers within the local area. In another LEA, funding had been set aside for allocation on an individual grant basis for pupils requiring some additional support (in or out of school). However, as cited previously, no take up of this funding was reported.

Strategies and focus

The most common use of VCG funding was for **staffing** (four LEAs), which mainly involved contributions to existing teams/posts within the LEA. In two LEAs, the VCG continued to fund existing posts and in another, funding was used to provide an increased contribution to a Young Carers' Support Team, a joint project managed by social services and National Children's Homes (NCH). In the fourth LEA, funding had been set aside to provide extra support for individual pupils, however, was not taken up in this case. Funding strategies which focused on **strategic development** were reported in two LEAs. In one, this was achieved through the work of a part-time support assistant post with overarching responsibility for liaising with other agencies thereby facilitating multi-agency work. In the other, VCG funding had been used to develop an LEA strategy and set of procedures relating to young carers. The use of VCG funding to both produce and increase **resources** (see Cameo 1) was noted in another LEA: '*We are doing things that otherwise we would probably not have done, things like producing a video, leaflets and flyers*' (Assessment and Intervention Manager, County LEA). Furthermore, in one LEA, funding had been allocated to a local young carers' project working directly with schools to support pupils.

The strategies to support young carers most commonly focused on the development of **multi-agency work and partnerships**. Increased involvement with other agencies offering support to young carers (e.g. social services, the EWS and voluntary organisations) was noted in this respect. In addition, two LEAs had used VCG funding to focus on **raising the attainment and achievement** of young carers through the provision of additional support (e.g. individual grants to support pupils requiring '*catch up*' or other agreed support). The importance of **training and awareness raising** was also identified by interviewees who described strategies to address this at an LEA- and school- level, including the development of policy and procedures (LEA) and a resource pack for schools (see Cameo 1). Where VCG funding had been used to support a local young carers' group, the LEA recognised the **holistic** nature of the support that could be provided by this organisation to young carers in the authority.

CAMEO 1: Young carers

- **LEA:** County
- **Percentage of grant:** 0.1 per cent
- **Number of young carers:** Unknown

- **Funding destination:** Retained by the LEA to expand the existing provision and introduction of some new provision for young carers
- **Strategy:** A proportion of the funding was used to develop school resource packs which included a book '*Making it Work*', a CD, a video, policy, leaflets and flyers. In addition, funding was allocated to local projects working directly with schools to provide support for young carers. Where required, funding was also allocated to support an individual young carer directly
- **Focus:** Resource packs were provided to schools with a focus on raising awareness of young carers' issues. In allocating funding to the local young carers' project, holistic and educational support was available to young carers in the LEA
- **Account of impact:** The introduction of the VCG had enabled the LEA to increase its existing support for young carers and, in addition, introduce some new initiatives to increase awareness and support in schools: '*We'd already got a system up and running, and it's just enabled us to do a bit more than otherwise we might have done*' (Assessment and Intervention Manager).

Targets

Of the 50 LEAs included in the survey, 11 provided information regarding targets for young carers. Of these responses, the vast majority (ten) did not report explicit targets for young carers but referred to targets incorporated into overarching objectives and responsibilities within the LEA:

> *The main targets we have which fall within this would be the targets that are within our corporate plan which are set down by the Government. Those are around attendance, exclusions and staying on rates, and educational achievements of looked after children. So they will be somewhere in the EDP* (Principal Officer Pupil and Student Services, Metropolitan LEA).

In this respect, five LEAs referred to the incorporation of targets for young carers within their EDPs and another to targets incorporated into the authority's Inclusion Strategy. Thus, targets for young carers tended to focus more generally around attendance, exclusions, achievement, retention and raising awareness.

In addition, two LEAs referred to multi-agency young carers' strategies which outlined their responsibilities and objectives. In one county LEA, this strategy had been developed across education, social services, the Youth Service, the NHS, Connexions and The Children's Society. Within this, a number of responsibilities and objectives towards young carers were outlined, which included:

- To enable a young carer to be a child first and foremost, as reflected in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- To work in a holistic way to meet the complex needs of a young carer and to help maintain family stability
- To be aware and respond to individual needs
- To ensure that staff and practitioners are given interagency support and training
- To minimise any negative impact of caring on a child's physical, emotional and educational development
- To ensure effective working between agencies.

Only one LEA reported specific targets for young carers, namely:

To improve attendance in the school attended by young carers by reducing authorised/unauthorised absence to five per cent and to improve the overall educational performance among children and young people who are in receipt of services for young carers (Head of Service for Learners and Young People, Metropolitan LEA).

Other agency support

LEAs were also asked to identify any other agencies offering support to and/or funding for young carers. Information in this respect was obtained from just over half (28) of the sample. Of those responses, the following agencies were identified as providing support for young carers:

- Alternative providers (voluntary and independent)
- Education (including the EWS)
- Connexions
- Health service
- Schools
- Social services
- Youth Offending Team (YOT)
- Youth service.

Alternative providers (e.g. NCH, Crossroads) were the most frequently reported agencies offering support for young carers (17 LEAs). Social services were also involved in providing support, as identified by 11 LEAs, three of which referred to specific posts funded by social services that offered support to young carers including; social workers, a project worker and a team of development workers. Six LEAs highlighted support provided by the EWS, of which three identified this support in relation to attendance issues for young carers that arose from their caring responsibilities: '*Youngsters who perhaps are young carers and have attendance problems as a result of that, would benefit from support from our education welfare service*' (Deputy Head of Access and Inclusion, Metropolitan LEA).

In addition, three LEAs identified schools as providing support for young carers. Support from the Youth Service was also reported by three LEAs which, in one, case involved an after-school session for young carers.

In a number of cases, those agencies providing educational support for young carers were also those which offered an additional source of funding (e.g. alternative agencies, schools and social services). Financial support from the Health Service (grants received from the Department of Health) was also identified by two LEAs and, in another the Health Service was reported to be providing educational support for young carers. Connexions were also identified as an agency providing both financial and educational support. In other cases, however, separate and additional sources of funding for young carers were identified. The Children's Fund was reported most commonly as an independent source of funding for young carers. Three LEAs referred specifically to the Fund's contribution to Young Carers' projects, one of which involved the establishment of a service for young carers. Development of this service included the appointment of support workers, (health and education) and the introduction of a programme of training for school nurses and EWOs. Moreover, the scheme extended to provide support to many individuals involved with young carers including: families, young carers themselves, and learning mentors. However, some concern over the longevity of this project was expressed, where, following the impact of the Government's announcement for Children's Fund managers to cut their budgets, the Children's Fund contribution to the project had ceased.

Impact

Interviewees were asked to comment on the impact of VCG funding on the LEA's ability to meet the needs of young carers. Perhaps reflecting the level of funding for young carers, in the majority of cases, the impact of this funding was felt to be minimal. Generally, the amount of VCG funding allocated to young carers did not allow for '*significant spends*' but rather to achieve a broader (e.g. raising awareness, offer general support), if less quantifiable, impact. However, the importance of recognising the appropriateness of this type of impact for young carers was highlighted:

> *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* (Principal Education Welfare Officer, County LEA).

Of the seven LEAs allocating funding to young carers, two interviewees referred to the impact of the funding on multi-agency work, noting that the VCG had enabled them to increase contributions to multi-agency teams and liaison more closely with voluntary agencies, social care and health colleagues. In another LEA, VCG funding had enabled the existing service for young carers to be maintained and some new work to be introduced. Another LEA described the impact of funding on strategic development which, as discussed, involved the development of strategy and procedures for young carers. Three LEAs did not report any impact of funding for young carers, two of which had allocated funding that had not been taken up. In the third LEA, the need to address the lack of impact for the group was noted: '*Young*

carers I don't think we've made any impact on at all and that is an area we've got to address' (Head of Inclusion, County LEA).

Concluding comment

It would seem that the level and impact of VCG funding for young carers may have been low in comparison to other vulnerable groups. The importance of identifying the client group and their needs prior to the allocation of funding would appear to be one factor contributing to the paucity of funding for young carers at the present time. Alternatively, given the competition for VCG funding from other vulnerable groups, this under representation might suggest that, as a group, young carers are regarded by LEAs as a lower 'priority' in contrast to other vulnerable groups. As noted by one interviewee, for example, *'To be blunt, there isn't enough money in the pot to cover everything, we had to draw a line somewhere'* (Manager of Specialist Learning Support, Unitary LEA). However, it might be argued, that the type of support required for young carers and thus the nature of the impact of funding is not comparable to other vulnerable groups. What is evident from the findings is that the introduction of the VCG would appear to have gone some way to highlighting young carers as an equally vulnerable group and prompted, in some cases, a greater need for identification and consideration of future funding.

3.2.9 Excluded pupils and pupils at risk of exclusion

Introductory comment

While not identified specifically in the proforma which formed the initial data collection phase of the study, it was felt appropriate to discuss support for excluded pupils and those at risk of exclusion in the same degree of depth as other 'main' groups. Although not listed as a '*key group*' in Standards Fund Circular LEA/0473/2002 (DfES, 2002), there may be an indication later in the guidance that excluded pupils fall within the target groups of the VCG:

> *Provision of full-time access to education through PRUs or alternative provision for those vulnerable children whose circumstances prevent them from attending a mainstream or special school, including meeting the needs of children in Years 10 and 11 in further education.*

Furthermore, the number of LEAs listing this group as 'other' in their proforma and giving details of support strategies meant that there was scope for more detailed analysis than for the 'other' groups outlined in section 3.2.10. It was noteworthy that this group of young people were receiving VCG allocations more frequently than some of the vulnerable groups that were specifically identified in the DfES guidance. It should, however, be noted that information was generally less full than for the eight groups for which data was primarily requested.

Funding

Twenty-five LEAs were reportedly using VCG to support a range of strategies for students who were permanently excluded, at risk of exclusion or identified as disengaged or disaffected. Reasons given centred on the levels of need, namely high

rates of permanent exclusion and a lack of alternative mainstream school places, or schools facing increasing challenges around managing pupil behaviour. It should also be noted that, in this category, there was often crossover in 'clientele' with other vulnerable groups. This arose both where interviewees highlighted complex vulnerabilities of some pupils (e.g. a looked after young offender who had also been excluded from school) and in cases where provision for excluded pupils was 'shared' with other groups (e.g. PRUs or EOTAS services catering for excluded pupils, school refusers, and those with medical needs).

Allocations to this group ranged from £3,000 to £674,000, with proportions varying from two to 62 per cent of the total VCG allocation (23 per cent on average). There was little information provided as to whether the VCG had led to a change in funding for this group. Some LEAs used the VCG to continue to fund initiatives for excluded pupils and those at risk of exclusion previously funded by SIPS.

Funding destination

In the majority of cases, VCG funding had been retained by the LEA, although interviewees in four authorities described instances where funding had been conferred to schools who were managing 'in-house' provision for pupils at risk of exclusion (e.g. LSUs). Where funding was retained, VCG was covering the costs of staff posts, alternative curriculum packages or contributing to the service budgets of PRU or EOTAS provision. Additionally, in a number of cases, LEAs had retained a 'contingency' fund whereby schools were able to submit bids for project work or one-off grants in respect of individuals (see Cameo 1). In nine authorities, interviewees highlighted new work, which had been facilitated by the VCG (e.g. the employment of a rapid response officer, the appointment of applied psychologists to work with pupils, and the establishment of a Pupil Referral Service). However, it was more likely that existing strategies were being maintained or enhanced through the grant.

CAMEO 1: Excluded pupils and pupils at risk of exclusion

- **LEA:** Outer London borough
- **Percentage of grant:** 18 per cent
- **Number of excluded pupils:** Not stated
- **Funding destination:** Grants to schools who bid for funding in respect of specific projects or identified individual/small group needs
- **Strategy:** Several schools have received funding over the 2003–04 funding period, for a variety of in-school support strategies, including:
  - the purchase of two laptops for use by 13 pupils at risk of exclusion. Staff bring pupils out of lessons for mentoring and counselling and pupils use the laptops to catch up on missed work and homework
  - the employment of artists/art teachers to run projects in the community with disaffected pupils and those at risk of exclusion
  - a residential weekend trip for five disaffected young people
  - the purchase of intervention programmes from outside agencies, targeting pupils at risk of exclusion, underachievement and offending
  - funding for college courses for pupils in key stage 4, where schools could not cover the costs
  - the appointment of a key worker in a high-excluding school, to help pupils at risk of exclusion (and also looked after children) with homework, lessons,

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reviews and '*organisational matters*'

- **Focus:** Support for pupils with challenging behaviour to prevent permanent exclusion from school and to provide alternative programmes for those disengaged from mainstream education
- **Account of impact:** The facility to give one-off grants to schools meant that a wide range of targeted and tailored support had been implemented. In many cases, VCG has enabled the provision of additional support (both educational and pastoral) which would otherwise not have been possible through schools' own budgets, and in some cases, there is 'hard' evidence of impact, in that there have been no permanent exclusions from schools which had received funding.

Strategies for support

Strategies to support excluded pupils and those at risk of exclusion were largely targeted in the secondary sector. Whilst some respondents cited primary-level behaviour support interventions, these tended to have more of a social and emotional development focus and are discussed under section 3.2.10. Broadly, the nature and focus of VCG-funded strategies could be grouped into five main areas, each of which is described below:

- Contribution to base-funded EOTAS or **PRU provision**
- Contribution to **alternative educational provision**
- Individual grants for **early intervention** or rapid response
- **Reintegration** Support
- Funding conferred to schools for LSUs or other **in-school support**.

In 11 LEAs, VCG funding was **contributing to PRU or EOTAS provision**, which was also partly base-funded. In two authorities, VCG had contributed to the start-up costs of new Pupil Referral Services, whilst in four LEAs, VCG had funded additional staff posts within existing PRUs. One interviewee explained that, in the knowledge that permanent exclusions were on the rise, she had been able to act pre-emptively, asking PRUs to make new appointments which would be funded by the grant. This expanded capacity meant they were able to continue to meet the requirement for full-time provision and also to offer some dual-roll places for pupils at risk of exclusion.

In four LEAs, VCG was making an overall contribution to the budget of the authority's out-of-school provision and, in one of these cases, it was felt that the financial support from the grant had been instrumental in the continued operation of a PRU which had '*major funding problems*'. Two interviewees stated that the VCG had in effect replaced SIPS funding in this capacity. Finally, in one LEA, the VCG had funded a one-off arts project for children attending the PRU.

In 11 LEAs, VCG was **funding alternative curriculum provision** for pupils in key stage 4, who were excluded, disaffected, or identified as 'hard to place' (e.g. pupils excluded from out-of-borough special schools). These alternative packages included college courses, vocational and work-based training, and programmes with a personal and social development focus. In some cases, the grant was used to '*spot purchase*' provision for individual pupils, whilst in others VCG was contributing to the budgets of ongoing programmes. In one LEA, VCG was funding staff posts and contributing to running costs within two existing local projects. One of these, a motor mechanics project, had been facing financial problems and it was felt that VCG had been vital in '*keeping it afloat*'.

In two LEAs, VCG had also been used to commission evaluations of alternative provision. In one case, the LEA was able to buy in consultancy to look at '*aspects of the curriculum that we weren't happy about*' in a project which was struggling financially. Weaknesses were identified and addressed, resulting in a more effective provision:

> *From our point of view, that £71,000 has been really, really helpful, keeping things that were good ideas, but were running into difficult times, going. And*

> *we're now confident that they're delivering a good safe service to the young people* (Assistant Director of Operations, County LEA).

Elsewhere, VCG was funding the secondment of a headteacher to research alternative provision for key stage 4 pupils. It was recognised that the LEA was paying for some very poor quality provision, and that pupils on alternative programmes were not achieving at GCSE, despite having attained average results in key stage 3 SATs. Finally, there were plans in one LEA to appoint a Social Inclusion Coordinator, whose remit would involve the sourcing and purchase of alternative provision for excluded and disaffected pupils, through the development of links with other providers.

In ten LEAs, the VCG was targeted in the form of **grants for individual support**, in cases where pupils were identified as being at risk of exclusion. This support generally came in the form of in-school LSA or learning mentor support, or outreach from behaviour support services, purchased as and when required for a set period of time. However, in two LEAs, new 'permanent' support teams, (variously focused on primary, secondary and black and ethnic minority pupils at risk of exclusion) were in development, with staff posts being funded through VCG. These strategies were seen to be effective in terms of a faster turnaround in addressing the needs of pupils verging on exclusion (given that waiting times for admission/exclusion panels often led to delays in decisions and outcomes) and in providing an alternative to fixed-term or permanent exclusion.

In six authorities, VCG was funding work with a **focus on reintegration**. In some cases, staff posts were being financed, for example, reintegration officers or dowries for additional LSA support where pupils were returning to mainstream school. In one LEA, VCG had been used to maintain the posts of two reintegration officers who had been appointed the previous year through SIPS, bringing the total team up to four. Through doubling the number of officers, it was felt that service was now more consistent across the authority:

> *We've got four, two of which are funded from base and two of which are funded from the grant, so what the grant has enabled us to do is to move forward to a more uniform service across the authority as a whole, quicker than we would otherwise have done* (Assistant Director of Operations, County LEA).

In one authority, over one-fifth of the LEA's total VCG allocation had been used to develop a large-scale project focusing on inclusion and the provision of education for all pupils. An element of this included working in partnership with schools, colleges, training providers, Connexions, and the private and voluntary sectors, to ensure that all young people were receiving an appropriate educational package. Elsewhere, three assistant psychologists had been appointed to work in a counselling/therapeutic way with excluded pupils in PRUs, using cognitive-behavioural techniques to modify behaviour and prepare pupils for their return to mainstream school (see Case study 7 in Appendix 1 for full details of this strategy).

Finally, one LEA had allocated a proportion of the grant to a headteacher panel in order to resource and '*kick start*' a 'managed move' protocol among a group of 11

secondary schools. Where schools agreed to a managed move rather than permanent exclusion, VCG funding could be used to support pupils in their new school place.

In four LEAs, VCG had been **conferred to mainstream schools**, in order to fund LSUs or other in-school support. In one case, a school in special measures had put together a proposal to establish a '*mini PRU*' within the school. Being in special measures, the school could exclude but had no obligation to take in pupils who had been excluded from other schools, therefore, enabling the school to develop capacity to retain its own pupils at risk of exclusion was felt to be money well spent. A unit had been established in a youth centre adjacent to the school. The centre was providing a youth worker and a member of staff had been appointed through the grant to teach pupils who were removed to the unit on a temporary basis before being reintegrated to the school. Pupils were able to follow a basic core curriculum whilst also focusing on behaviour modification and reintegration plans:

> *Now rather than excluding, if a young person commits a misdemeanour that maybe would warrant a fixed-term exclusion, ten days or a week, then instead of excluding them they will go to this unit … it's immediately taken off and it's very successful* (Principal Education Welfare Officer [PEWO], Outer London Borough).

Finally, one LEA had conferred a proportion of the grant to nine of its secondary schools to develop various in-school support strategies for pupils at risk of exclusion. These included: staff appointments (e.g. a pastoral administrator who organised '*solution focused meetings*' and retention packages, additional mentor support); the establishment of a breakfast club; a 'health for life' course focused on healthy lifestyles and self-esteem; and resourcing a '*chill-out base*' in school. While it was somewhat early to assess hard evidence of impact, a meeting had been held to share and disseminate emerging good practice, and it was felt by the interviewee that engaging headteachers in debate around support strategies for these pupils was a positive step.

Targets
Just under half of the 25 LEAs allocating VCG to this group provided information regarding targets. These tended to be in the form of objectives or actions, rather than 'hard' numeric targets (although three interviewees supplied sections of local plans with details of performance measures). Areas of focus noted by three or more interviewees included:

- To meet the commitment to provide **full-time provision**, both in terms of keeping pupils in full-time education and having a broad and appropriate range of alternative curriculum options
- To **reduce permanent and fixed-term exclusions** (or to increase the numbers of pupils educated in mainstream school)
- **Prevention and early intervention**, including supporting schools to address challenging behaviour and improve pupil behaviour overall
- To increase rates of **reintegration** to mainstream school
- To raise the **attainment** of excluded pupils, or those at risk of exclusion and underachievement.

Other targets related to: the production and monitoring of Pastoral Support Plans; increased attendance of pupils at risk of exclusion; and, in an LEA where Black pupils were being targeted in particular, the development of race equality policies in schools and the attendance of families on parenting education programmes. Progress in meeting the targets for excluded pupils identified by case-study interviewees are summarised below.

Progress in meeting targets for excluded pupils
Targets for excluded pupils in the case-study LEAs focused on the provision of full-time education and improving rates of reintegration

Improving reintegration
One LEA had successfully used dowries to reintegrate excluded pupils back into school. Of the 12 who were reintegrated, only two were unsuccessful. When asked how much of this progress was attributable to the VCG the interviewee replied: '*Most of it, most of it. I am dreading it going. I don't know what we're going to do*'

Prevention
In one case-study LEA VCG resources had also been targeted to schools for those pupils at risk of exclusion. This was seen to have been working particularly well in primary schools, where levels of permanent exclusions had been maintained

Full-time provision
Another LEA had used the VCG to buy in additional pupil support teachers and college places for permanently excluded pupils, which it was felt the LEA would have been unable to do without the grant. This meant that all permanently excluded children were receiving between 20 and 25 hours, according to their key stage, although it was acknowledged that there were still delays in accessing provision within 15 days.

Other agency support
This was an area where less detailed information was provided by proforma respondents. However, in many cases, other agency support might be assumed, in that the VCG was reportedly being used to buy in alternative educational packages from outside agency providers. Where 'other' agencies were listed specifically (by 13 interviewees), the most commonly cited were: LEA services (e.g. EPS, behaviour support services, EOTAS services); voluntary sector providers; and schools. Also noted by two or fewer respondents were: youth services; Connexions; drugs advisory services; CAMHS; Police; '*healthy communities*' initiatives; private sector providers of work placements; parental advice centres; and other government funding streams (e.g. European Social Fund, Behaviour Improvement Programme).

Impact
The grant had enabled both the maintenance of existing strategies (previously supported through SIPS funding), and the expansion of capacity to provide support for excluded pupils and those at risk of exclusion. Impact on pupils was cited in terms of:

- Maintaining pupils in their mainstream school (i.e. preventing exclusions)

- Quickening responses to cases where exclusion from school was imminent
- Assisting reintegration to mainstream school for those who had been permanently excluded
- Providing suitable alternatives for pupils who were at risk of disengaging from education.

In some cases, it was felt that work had become more effective or had been able to advance more quickly than if the grant had not been available. It was also noted that the increased capacity afforded by VCG-funded strategies had helped LEAs to fulfil their duty of full-time provision for pupils out of school:

> *I don't think we could have really met our legal obligations without funding from VCG, which is a pretty crucial issue, because obviously when OFSTED come, they want to crawl all over that particular area of work to make sure that we are meeting our legal requirements* (PEWO, County LEA).

Finally, both in terms of early intervention and reintegration, it was noted by some interviewees that the ability to target amounts of money at an individual level was particularly beneficial, in terms of the capacity to provide flexible and individualised support.

Concluding comment
School exclusion and disaffection are associated with several types of vulnerability and the number of LEAs allocating VCG to this group (exactly half) was notable. As was highlighted in section 2.2, the introduction of the VCG coincided with the transfer of SIPS (Standards Funding) to education formula spending. Whilst new interventions were mentioned in some LEAs, it is probable that in many cases, the VCG had been used to maintain LEA-level strategies for excluded pupils and those at risk of exclusion which had been implemented under SIPS. With the ceasing of the Pupil Retention Grant, some interviewees noted that permanent exclusions were beginning to rise, and as such, VCG would be a key source of support for these pupils out of school.

3.2.10 'Other' groups
In addition to the nine 'main' categories of vulnerability discussed above, respondents were asked to give details of any 'other' groups to which VCG funding had been allocated. A wide range of responses were given, with a total of 34 of the 50 LEAs indicating that VCG was being used more broadly[5]. Overall, the range of other groups could be classified into 13 areas. These are listed in Table 3.4 in order of frequency. Each of these groups will be discussed below. In many cases, less detail was supplied around these 'other' groups than was given for the 'main' groups, so discussion is more general than in earlier sections.

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[5] With the inclusion of 'excluded pupils and pupils at risk of exclusion' (originally recorded as 'other' but reclassified as a 'main' group) this figure would increase to 43 of the 50 LEAs allocating to groups beyond the eight which were originally identified.

Table 3.4   VCG allocation to 'other' groups

VCG allocation to 'other' groups	Number of LEAs
Pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties	10
Children who are 'socially' vulnerable	9
Children 'at risk'	7
Children with SEN (including physical, sensory, developmental and language difficulties)	7
Children with mental health needs	5
Ethnic minorities, including children with English as an Additional Language	5
Mobile pupils	5
Children in early years	4
Parents of vulnerable children	3
Victims of bullying	3
Children who are home educated by parents	2
Girls	2
Missing Children	2

Source: *proforma and interview data in the LEA survey phase of the NFER study, 2004*

The above typology aims to provide a clear overview of the 'other' types of vulnerability being addressed by LEAs through the VCG. However, illustrative of the often complex nature of vulnerability, it should be noted that among these categories, there was often a degree of overlap. Categories cannot always be viewed as mutually exclusive, either within the 'other' groups included here or indeed across 'other' and 'main' groups discussed in earlier sections. For example: strategies aimed at children in early years typically had a focus on those with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) or SEN; children home educated by their parents may be from the Gypsy/Traveller community; and ethnic minority pupils and those who are 'socially vulnerable' may also be targeted as pupils at risk of exclusion. These areas of crossover have been highlighted as relevant within the discussion.

Pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties
Ten LEAs had allocated VCG to support for pupils presenting social, emotional, or behavioural difficulties. While there was a degree of similarity to those strategies grouped under 'Excluded pupils and pupils at risk of exclusion' (see section 3.2.9), these strategies tended to focus on early intervention for pupils requiring support in the development of positive behaviour, social skills or emotional literacy. In contrast to the strategies described in section 3.2.9, these interventions were concentrated largely in the primary sector.

In six of the ten LEAs, VCG was providing whole or part-funding for behaviour support teams, often with a multi-agency constitution (e.g. educational psychology, health/CAMHS, social services). In one case, it was emphasised that this work would have been impossible without the input from the VCG, whilst in another LEA, almost 35 per cent of the total VCG was funding a support team of teachers and advisory workers, whose remit included individual level work (e.g. mentoring), group

interventions (e.g. anger management), support for families and support and guidance to schools in developing their own practices and procedures.

In four LEAs, the VCG was funding project work, for example, nurture groups, emotional literacy projects, or interventions aimed at pupils finding it difficult to build relationships or interact appropriately in school (see Cameo 1). One of these LEAs had also invested VCG in an existing behaviour and school transport strategy, designed to improve behaviour on school buses and protect all children from the difficult or challenging behaviour of other pupils.

CAMEO 1: Pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties

- **LEA:** County
- **Percentage of grant:** 3 per cent of total grant allocated to this project (plus 21 per cent of total grant allocated to LEA's Behaviour Support Team).
- **Number of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties:** During 2003/04, 94 pupils in 44 schools were supported through the peer relationships initiative
- **Funding destination:** Existing strategy previously funded via Social Inclusion Pupil Support (Standards Fund). VCG is funding 50 per cent of the project and the SEN budget is funding 50 per cent. The VCG funding is retained by the LEA
- **Strategy:** A project which 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. A team of three staff (two project workers managed by an educational psychologist) provide a ten-week block of support to schools. There are two parallel strands to the intervention. The educational psychologist and support assistants work with small groups of pupils, some of whom are very popular among the peer group and others who have been identified as experiencing difficulties in interacting with their peers. Group sessions are structured to:

  Help improve the social skills of the group who aren't [popular] *and to get them to understand each other and how people interact with each other and how just by saying something not quite the right way might upset somebody and understand why.*

Packs of support materials have been developed and alongside the group work, the team provide training to school staff in the principles of the approach and the use of the materials to enable them to independently use the resources. Schools are also given guidance in the development of the approach across the curriculum
- **Focus:** Support for the development of positive behaviour, social and emotional competence and the development of positive peer relationships
- **Account of impact:** The peer relationships project has been very well received by schools, and demand has increased continually since its launch in 2000.

In one LEA, through joint funding with CAMHS and the Children's Fund, a 'mobile' nurture group had been developed, which moves from school to school, demonstrating the principles which could then be embedded in schools' practice. One LEA was using VCG to fund a member of staff linked to an EBD special school, whose remit was to coordinate educational visits in order to cover areas of the curriculum which the school could not facilitate itself. Finally, it was noted in two

authorities that new work that had been pump-primed by the VCG – a multi-agency behaviour support team and the installation of CCTV on school buses – would be mainstreamed in the forthcoming year, through core LEA funding.

Children who are 'socially' vulnerable

In nine LEAs, VCG was supporting work to address what might be termed as broader 'social vulnerability'. This included a range of issues which might potentially have knock-on effects on children's ability to access education effectively. Examples of the areas of need included here were:

- Children living in vulnerable accommodation, e.g. refuge centres or women's refuges
- Children at risk of sexual exploitation
- Children at risk of drug use
- Children from low income families
- Families where there is domestic abuse or substance abuse
- Family breakdown or changes in home circumstances.

In several cases, support for these types of vulnerability tended to be in the form of one-off grant for intervention at specific times of need, for example, crisis response from counselling or family support agencies: '*We keep a cache of the VCG to cope with the 'odds and sods', the peculiar cases, which I think it's very useful for*' (Head of Integrated Support Service, Inner London Borough). Through the VCG, one LEA was offering fee remission for school trips and residential activities where parents could not afford to pay (e.g. families in receipt of benefits, unaccompanied asylum seekers and looked after children): '*I thought, well these are vulnerable children by any definition, it's crucial that they shouldn't be left back in school while the whole of their class goes off on a visit to one of our outdoor centres*' (Principal Advisor, County LEA). In another authority, a base-funded Social Inclusion Panel was in operation. Through this panel, appeals for support were heard (from schools or key workers), and one-off payments could be made from the VCG, in respect of individual pupils (e.g. for transport, one-off purchases of equipment, or provision of interim resources pending access to statutory support).

Longer-term strategies included the appointment of key workers, for example, an EWO with a focus on drugs and prostitution, and family liaison workers (see Cameo 2). In another LEA, the VCG had been used to develop two extended schools projects, which were now described as '*thriving*'. As was explained by the interviewee, these projects were able to cover a wide range of vulnerabilities, including those which were less explicit: '*That group of young people where there are a variety of social, health and educational concerns about, but they don't necessarily slot into a category*' (CEO, SEN and Inclusion, County LEA).

CAMEO 2: Children who are 'socially' vulnerable

- **LEA:** County
- **Percentage of grant:** 7 per cent
- **Number of children who are 'socially' vulnerable:** 40 children (four refuges in the authority)

- **Funding destination:** Retained by the LEA to appoint new members of staff
- **Strategy:** Four 0.5 FTE family liaison workers were working in a mentoring and advocacy capacity with families living in women's refuges, supporting children in their education and helping families to access services (e.g. health, social services). These liaison workers also link with schools to train and advise staff on the issues
- **Focus:** To support the education and wider social needs of children in difficult family circumstances and living in vulnerable accommodation
- **Account of impact:** The early impact of these posts was seen to be positive, with schools responding well. The interviewee highlighted this as an example of where a relatively small amount of money could have an important impact: '*What would have happened to these children had there been no intervention, probably they would have been out of school for a very long time*' (Principal Advisor, County LEA).

Children 'at risk'

Seven LEAs were using VCG to support work around child protection, care and control. In four authorities, new appointments, e.g. Child Protection Officer, Advisory Teacher or Care and Control Coordinator, had been made through VCG, whilst in one LEA, a part-time post had been enhanced to full-time. Duties of these posts typically included: training and awareness-raising for schools, governors and LEA staff on child protection issues (including restraint/positive handling), case monitoring, and ensuring the LEA was fulfilling its responsibilities around children at risk. In an LEA where the '*stretched*' EWS had previously covered this work, it was felt that the dedicated appointment had increased capacity to deal with child protection cases, whilst elsewhere, making appointments at operational or 'hands-on' level was seen to be an effective strategy and it was felt that schools would now be better equipped to recognise and respond to these issues. In other authorities, the VCG was contributing to existing Area Child Protection Committees, supporting their work of training and awareness-raising. Finally, in one LEA, VCG had funded the development of a positive handling and restraint policy, on which training was being given by the appointed Care and Control Coordinator.

Children with SEN (including physical, sensory, developmental or language difficulties)

In seven LEAs, strategies were described which supported pupils with various SEN or disabilities impacting on their access to education. These included physical disabilities, sensory impairments, developmental conditions (e.g. autistic spectrum disorder, Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and speech and language difficulties.

In one LEA, a mobility worker had been appointed to assist visually impaired pupils in mainstream school. This was felt to be effective in that it was more cost-efficient than placement in an out-of-county special school, and pupils were able to remain in their mainstream school. Recognising the positive effect of this strategy, the LEA had decided to core-fund the post the following year:

> *It's one of those things for a small amount of money, in total £7,000, but it did bring about a change in culture whereby one particular youngster, who is a totally blind boy, is staying in the borough and is now supported as a pupil in a mainstream school* (Assistant Director, Unitary LEA).

Another LEA was funding speech therapists to support pupils within their mainstream classroom. This was felt to have had a very positive impact on pupils: '*All of the kids have made much more progress than they would do, just in terms of their chronological age, and when we have cross-referenced it against kids who go out for clinic support again it's much higher*' (Inclusion Support Services Manager, Unitary LEA). Elsewhere, strategies included one-off grants to individuals in need of additional in-school support, and in one LEA, the VCG had funded a number of developments including the provision of two sensory rooms, voice recognition for dyslexic pupils, a programme for children with mobility difficulties and advanced training (doctoral courses) for educational psychologists.

It should be noted that it may be questionable whether some of the interventions funded in this area met the grant's criteria.

Children with mental health needs

In five LEAs, VCG had contributed to work around pupils with mental health needs. In one case the grant had funded a temporary teaching assistant post to 'backfill' for a fixed-term specialist secondment to a CAMHS project, whilst elsewhere, the VCG had taken over the part-funding of an existing mental health project which had previously been provided by health:

> *That health funding is coming to an end, yet it's at a point when this project is having greatest impact. It's set up, it's rolling, we've got a lot of work being done on packs for schools, and some really exciting stuff is going to happen there. And what we've said is, right, we will draw on the Vulnerable Children Grant to continue that, alongside funding coming in from other streams* (Head of Learning Support, Unitary LEA).

One authority was funding new, small-group work in primary schools, through the use of music therapy and play therapy. This was felt to be a particularly innovative use of the grant, and effective in terms of early intervention and inclusive support for mental health problems. Finally, in one LEA, the VCG was boosting the core funding of a schools' counselling service, which was available to children with a range of vulnerabilities in mainstream schools.

Ethnic minorities, including children with English as an Additional Language (EAL)

In five LEAs, VCG funding had been allocated to supporting pupils from ethnic minorities. One interviewee highlighted the fact that not all ethnic minority pupils are necessarily vulnerable, but that a decision had been made to allocate VCG to this group to ensure that they succeeded and had effective support where necessary. There was a degree of overlap in groups in some of these authorities: in one case, strategies were targeted specifically at black children at risk of exclusion, whilst in another,

work around ethnic minority pupils was encompassed within the same grant allocation and strategies described in respect of Gypsy/Traveller pupils.

In three LEAs, new or enhanced staff appointments were being funded by the grant. These posts included: area EAL coordinators; learning mentors; a specialist EWO; and a Black and Minority Ethnic Manager. This latter post was being funded wholly by the VCG. Having had a number of full- and part-time teaching and language support staff working across the authority, this appointment was made in order to draw together what had been '*dislocated*' provision, to audit and monitor the service and to take it forward it in a more cohesive and effective way, including building links with families and community groups. The potential impact of this newly created post was viewed very positively by the interviewee: '*I think he's going to be effective, because I think he's going to coordinate and streamline this provision, and make what is an excellent but disjointed service into a more effective resourceful one*' (Head of Access and Inclusion, Metropolitan LEA). Elsewhere, VCG was contributing to the overall budget of existing ethnic minority support services, which provided learning support, resources and training for school staff.

Mobile pupils
Interviewees in five LEAs mentioned VCG-funded work around mobile pupils, i.e. those who moved home, and thus schools, very frequently. In two LEAs, exploratory work had been done around mobile pupils. In one case, this had been carried out by the newly appointed Vulnerable Pupils' Coordinator, whilst another LEA had commissioned research into mobile families. In this authority, it was noted that mobile pupils tended to come from families where parents had come to teach at local universities; these children were not necessarily vulnerable, but were nonetheless at risk of '*slipping through the net*'. One authority had appointed an education access worker through the EWS, whose remit focused on assisting the placement and integration of pupils moving schools, whilst another was targeting individual grants at pupils where this mobility was seen to be impacting on their education. Finally, in one LEA, a school with a number of mobile pupils had submitted a successful bid for a temporary classroom support teacher to work with pupils whose mobility had impacted on their literacy skills (alongside asylum seeker children).

Children in Early Years
In four LEAs, VCG was being used to support children in Early Years. In one case, through a contribution to the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, VCG was helping to meet the cost of placements in private day nurseries for pupils with identified SEN, whilst in another LEA contributions had been made directly to nurseries. One LEA had used the VCG to fund a major development to the existing Portage Service (see Case study 7, Vignette 5). A new branch of the service had been established, focusing on children who did not necessarily meet the standard criteria for Portage intervention, but nonetheless were exhibiting challenging or simply '*off the wall*' behaviour. This was prohibiting their access to pre-school provision and the lack of early social group experience was then found to be impacting on their ability to settle into mainstream school. The strategic interviewee in this LEA highlighted the opportunity the VCG had provided to address this 'new' vulnerable group:

It was a lovely example of a whole population of children who were falling through the net, being kept at home in the hope that, somehow or other, magically, they would get ready for [school], *and of course they didn't. So having some new money has enabled us to invest in some behaviour support work attached to our Portage Service. They can work with children at home, and then ease their transition into pre-school groups, which hopefully will then also ease their transition into mainstream school* (Assessment and Intervention Manager, County LEA).

In another LEA, similar work to that described above was planned. VCG funding would be invested in the coming year into researching and developing support for vulnerable children in the early years, including: training and awareness-raising for pre-school providers; strategies to support access to pre-school provision; and work to support transition into mainstream school.

Parents of vulnerable children

Three LEAs had allocated VCG funding to parenting education and support, particularly targeting vulnerable families, or parents of children presenting difficulties (e.g. non-attendance). One had contributed funding to the overall budget of an existing Parent Partnership; another was using the VCG to buy in support for individual families from the Family Welfare Association, whilst the third LEA had used the grant to significantly develop its own parenting support strategies. In this latter case (see Case study 7, Vignette 4), VCG had been used to establish a dedicated Parent Development Team. This team's duties included gaining an overview of parenting education and support in the LEA, identifying and filling gaps in provision, acting as a central point of contact and coordination for parenting services across the authority, and developing new programmes of support for particular groups (e.g. the parents of children with disabilities).

Victims of bullying

Two LEAs were using the VCG to support strategies to combat bullying. One had launched a media publicity campaign and, alongside joint funding from the European Social Fund and core budgets, another had developed a comprehensive anti-bullying strategy. Here, a countywide anti-bullying policy had been developed, in consultation with young people, and training had been provided to schools and other agencies on implementing this policy. An anti-bullying service (with website and email support) was available to all schools, including: guidance on the development of school policies; assistance with the introduction of peer support or 'buddying' schemes; an in-school mediation and support service whereby an anti-bullying officer visited secondary schools on a weekly basis; and an annual event to raise awareness, share and celebrate the achievements of young people. Finally, in one LEA, it was reported that the 2004–05 VCG grant would be used to fund training for schools on racist incident bullying.

Children who are home educated by parents

Two LEAs had used the VCG to support children who were educated at home through parental choice. In both cases, VCG was funding new work. One authority had

appointed a '*teacher mediator*' whose remit included working with families and other agencies to monitor the quality of educational provision and ensure that children did not become 'missing'. This LEA was also in the process of drawing up guidance for parents, schools and education staff, and had held a number information evenings for parents, although it was noted that these were poorly attended and tended to attract only the '*well motivated*' parents. Similarly, the other LEA had appointed a member of staff who would make home visits to assess and monitor the quality of provision on an annual basis.

Interviewees felt that these posts were particularly important in light of the circumstances or issues which might sometimes accompany a decision to home educate. It was noted in one authority that this cohort had some overlap with school refusers, where parents had chosen to withdraw an anxious pupil from mainstream school. In the other LEA, pupils in this category showed significant overlap with the Gypsy/Traveller community.

> *I think we were well justified in using the grant that way although I think it wasn't one of the ideas listed ... within the context of the new white paper, Every Child Matters, children educated at home shouldn't be overlooked* (Principal Advisor, County LEA).

Girls

Interviewees in two LEAs highlighted girls as a group being targeted through VCG-funded strategies. One authority had made a contribution of £7,000 to a counselling project for girls based in a secondary school. Elsewhere, in an authority which had conferred funding to schools for various projects to reduce exclusion, it was reported that one school had established a '*girls' group*' run by an education social worker.

Missing children

In two LEAs, VCG was contributing to support for children 'missing' from education. One authority was using the grant to fund a newly establish small team comprising two posts (a Manager/Principal Officer and an EWO) to focus on the identification and reintegration of missing children. Elsewhere, a 'Pupils at Risk' panel had been formed, which focused on finding places for pupils out of school, with dowry assistance from the VCG.

Concluding comment

It is evident from the range of interventions described above that the VCG was being used much more broadly than for the nine 'main' groups discussed in the previous sections. The breadth of needs being addressed is illustrative of the flexibility of the grant in its block-funding format (as has been highlighted in section 2.3.1). This potential to support a wider range of vulnerable, or potentially vulnerable young people, has been seen as one of the key benefits of the VCG. Nevertheless, this audit of activity may have also revealed some unanticipated uses of the grant.

Strategies and groups funded by the grant: summary of key points

- The groups most frequently supported by VCG funding were, in rank order, looked after children, pupils with medical needs and Gypsy/Traveller children. Young carers and young offenders were the groups least likely to be supported by the grant. Nevertheless, it was felt in some LEAs that the introduction of the VCG had raised awareness of young carers as a vulnerable group. In many LEAs it was felt that sufficient funding to support the education of young offenders was provided from other sources.

- Whilst funding was largely retained centrally by LEAs, a number had also conferred funding to schools in the form of grants or bursaries, for example, to support individual pupils. Grants to support individual pupils were most commonly used to support looked after children, often at key points in time, for example, at transition or during examination periods. Grants had also been used to successfully support looked after children at risk of exclusion and to assist schools in the delivery and development of Personal Education Plans (PEPs). In a small number of LEAs, funding was contingent on schools providing data to the LEA, this was seen as an effective way of monitoring and tracking looked after children placed out of the LEA.

- For some vulnerable groups, notably Gypsy/Traveller pupils and teenage parents, the VCG was mostly continuing to fund strategies and interventions initiated under previous grants, for example Traveller Education Services and Teenage Pregnancy Reintegration Officers.

- The grant had also been used to fund the development of new interventions and approaches, for example, funding the establishment of virtual learning opportunities for pupils out of school and work with unaccompanied asylum seekers (including work on mental health issues). The VCG had also been used to fund college places for asylum seekers arriving late in key stage 4, resulting in quicker and earlier access to education for these young people.

- Half of the LEAs were using the VCG to support excluded pupils and pupils at risk of exclusion. This level of support was notable, as the group were not specifically named in initial DfES guidance. Some LEAs had used the VCG to continue to fund initiatives for these pupils previously funded by the Social Inclusion Pupil Support Standards Fund. The increased flexibility of the VCG was also noted as having increased capacity for support, both at service level and in terms of individually targeted intervention.

- Two-thirds of LEAs cited 'other' groups which were being supported with VCG funding. Groups mentioned most frequently included pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties; children who were 'socially' vulnerable, children 'at risk'; and children with SEN.

Chapter 4

VCG: cross-cutting themes

Introduction

A wide range of different strategies for supporting vulnerable children was highlighted throughout the course of the study, both within and across the different groups of vulnerable young people. Within the overall context of effectiveness, this chapter provides an overview of the common themes and issues identified by interviewees as key to supporting vulnerable groups.

4.1 Cross-cutting themes

The themes identified during the course of the study were:

- The role of the key worker/designated teacher or advocate
- Other agency support and multi-agency partnerships
- Communication between agencies and clarification of roles and responsibilities
- Flexibility of schools and the curriculum
- Active involvement of pupils and parents
- A need to identify the client group
- Strategies to address pupils' mobility
- Data sharing
- Training and development.

These themes were explored in further detail during the case-study phase of the research, specifically how they related to overall effective practice in working with vulnerable children. Each of the above themes are now considered in turn.

Key worker/designated teacher

The role of the key worker/designated teacher was seen as the most crucial aspect in providing effective support for vulnerable children. However, the effectiveness of this role was seen to be at risk if staff had so many other responsibilities they did not have time to carry out the role effectively. It was also acknowledged that a key worker model would be helpful for school refusers and pupils with medical needs, due to the number of agencies working with some of these young people.

Other agency support and multi-agency partnerships

This theme was often linked with communication between agencies and clarification of roles and responsibilities and as such the two are considered together. Multi-agency partnerships and communication between agencies, along with clarification of roles and responsibilities, were seen as critical to providing effective support for looked

after children. Hence, the effectiveness of an intervention was associated with the 'joined-up' and multi-agency character of the work in practice, as well as in name. Effective provision was seen as being permeated by a partnership approach. Interviewees noted that there was still work to be done in this area, for example, around multi-agency training and the number of agencies working with some vulnerable children. It was also suggested that difficulties arose from the differing expectations about the roles and responsibilities, which could mitigate against effective multi-agency working. Notwithstanding these issues, the multi-agency partnership nature of the teams working with looked after children and young offenders were seen as a particular strength of the interventions. For other groups of vulnerable pupils, notably those with medical needs and Gypsy/Travellers, effectiveness lay in ensuring schools maintained responsibility for pupils.

Flexibility of schools and the curriculum

The flexibility of schools and the curriculum was identified as a key issue for all children, although it was noted that it was necessary for the young person and their parents/carers to 'sign up', if a particular intervention was to have any chance of success. Opportunities to provide alternative curriculum provision for those pupils where a school placement may not be most appropriate, for example for asylum seekers arriving late in key stage 4, had been possible via the VCG. The need for more relevant educational opportunities or curriculum enhancement prior to Year 10 was highlighted. Interviewees also felt that the flexibility of schools had to be reflected in their attitudes towards vulnerable pupils and their parents.

Active involvement of pupils and parents

This was viewed as particularly important for those groups, such as asylum seekers and Gypsy/Travellers, whose educational engagement was relatively 'new'. The need for schools to build trusting relationships with Gypsy/Traveller families was seen as being facilitated by the liaison work and continuity of staffing funded by the VCG. The need to work with parents of vulnerable children, for example, to address behavioural issues within the home, was also highlighted. The active involvement of pupils (for example, in the reintegration process for excluded pupils and young offenders, and in the development of PEPs for looked after children) and parents/carers in education planning, was identified as an important issue.

A need to identify the client group

A need to identify the client group was seen as a significant issue for Gypsy/Travellers, teenage parents and young carers. In relation to Gypsy/Travellers, it was acknowledged that issues of racism within school meant that some pupils and parents were reluctant to acknowledge their ethnicity. Thus, work was needed to focus on pupils feeling secure about identifying themselves within the school context. In relation to teenage parents, it was felt that some LEAs were not identifying some of the most needy and vulnerable young women. VCG-funded teams were thus seen as playing an important role in identifying these sometimes 'hidden' client groups.

Strategies to address pupils' mobility

This was an issue for asylum seekers nationally and was seen as the hardest issue to address by staff working with pupils who could be moved at any time. Interviewees felt that issues relating to pupil mobility for looked after children, specifically moving care placements, whilst a significant problem in the past, had largely been resolved by strategies implemented by LEAs. It was noted that a significant number of girls who became pregnant were pupils who had moved schools frequently due to housing moves, thus 'mobile pupils' were a possible focus for teenage pregnancy teams to conduct preventative work.

Data sharing

Perhaps unsurprisingly, data sharing was identified as a major issue when working with young offenders because of the sensitive information concerned. However, the development of protocols for data sharing and the use of secure email systems and procedures to ensure that this was carried out correctly, were seen as ways of minimising possible problems. The issue of data sharing was not raised in relation to looked after children where there were multi-agency teams, as the multi-agency nature of these interventions was seen to assist in data sharing.

Training and development

Interviewees highlighted the benefits of raising awareness of specific groups, for example, Gypsy/Travellers, asylum seekers and looked after children, via the training of designated teachers to develop schools' expertise and knowledge and thus raising the capacity of schools to support vulnerable children. Training and development was seen as important for all groups of vulnerable children, although comments were made that, for example, training for looked after children was not given the weight of importance that it needed. One interviewee suggested that, although it was given weight in public documents, in practice there was little appreciation of how much time is needed to deliver training effectively and to monitor the quality of the training delivered, to ensure that it is effective. Specific training issues were raised regarding schools' understanding of some of the issues affecting particular vulnerable groups, such as teenage parents.

Further themes for consideration

In addition to the cross-cutting themes already identified, interviewees highlighted a number of further themes for consideration, which they felt, had pertinence for the effective support of vulnerable children. These additional themes included:

- **The importance of a significant adult who values education:** This was raised as a theme in relation to looked after children, however, it could be relevant for vulnerable children generally. In one of the case-study LEAs it was apparent that those looked after children who had performed well in their GCSEs had in common someone who provided them with educational support and guidance. This was not a key worker but was someone who had a personal relationship and 'investment' in the young person, i.e. a carer or relative: *'What came through strongly was the quality of the care planning'*. In addition, the young person's own 'internal resilience' was also seen as a key

factor in their success, thus highlighting a need to focus on developing such resilience within young people.

- **Addressing vulnerable children's non-educational needs:**

  Clearly, the children can't learn if they're worried about basic things that are going on in their lives and I believe that is a real barrier to many of our children succeeding … They need to have school as their stability and school is their stability for many of these students and I think that can't be underestimated (Deputy Headteacher, Secondary School, Inner London Borough).

Accommodation issues for asylum seekers and other children in vulnerable accommodation, and childcare and transport for teenage parents, were noted specifically. Furthermore, the need to address the **emotional well-being** of pupils, which was linked to practitioners being able to identify pupils' needs, was another theme for consideration raised by interviewees.

- **Racism, harassment and anti-bullying:** These were seen to cut across issues for all vulnerable groups and the need to have strategies in place to address these issues was identified:

  Unless schools have those in place and the LEA is able to work with schools to address these issues and enable this client group to access those policies those children don't achieve (Head of Service, County LEA).

  Linked to this was the need for whole-school awareness-raising and supporting schools in developing inclusive practice.

Cross-cutting themes: summary of key points

- This analysis has shown that there are opportunities for cross-vulnerable group learning which may be developed further by LEAs. It has highlighted that conceptual approaches for working with particular groups of vulnerable children may have resonance for work with other groups.

- The value in identifying and addressing common underlying issues, in addition to the specific circumstances of individuals, has also been acknowledged, along with the tangible benefits of multi-agency and inter-agency working.

Chapter 5

Effective practice: an overview

Introduction

This chapter explores impacts and outcomes in terms of whether VCG-funded strategies were perceived as providing **effective**, **coherent**, **efficient** and/or **cost-effective** support for vulnerable children. However, it should again be noted that, because in many instances, the VCG was funding existing interventions and provision, some interviewees felt unable to attribute impact and outcomes directly to the VCG. Where this was the case, interviewees were asked to consider how the VCG-funded work they were involved in helped provide effective, coherent, efficient and/or cost-effective support for vulnerable children. The majority of these insights are drawn from the case-study data, although relevant comments from the telephone interviews conducted in the first phase of research have also been included.

Specifically, the following aspects of the VCG are considered in terms of providing effective, coherent, efficient and cost-effective support:

- **The grant itself**, i.e. the impact of its implementation
- **Staffing**, i.e. the VCG-funded staff, at both strategic and operational level
- **'Other' spend**, i.e. the retained VCG-funded resources for areas like transport and e-learning
- **Grants/bursaries for individual pupils** and **conferring of funding to schools** for in-school support.

5.1 Implementation of the grant

In terms of impact relating to the introduction of the grant itself, interviewees from the case-study LEAs felt that, at a strategic level, the VCG had both raised the profile, and prioritised the needs of, the vulnerable groups identified within the grant, as well as having enabled LEAs to provide more holistic support across vulnerable groups. These were felt to have resulted in the provision of more **effective** support for vulnerable children, but also to have increased **efficiencies** through an audit of existing provision: '*Efficiency comes from identifying some of the gaps and overlaps and working in a more holistic way*' (Vulnerable Children Manager, Metropolitan LEA). Efficiencies were also seen to have originated from the way the funding was allocated, i.e. via a single grant rather than a number of smaller, separate grants and that it was retained by the LEA (see Chapter 2 for more details). Similarly, the grant had '*allowed the development of projects that address issues for young people and don't compartmentalise them as was done previously*' (Vulnerable Children's Manager, Metropolitan LEA). It was also seen to have reduced the isolation of teams working with vulnerable children: '*It's enabled everybody to have a better overview of how our work is similar, where it links, where it overlaps*' (Teenage Pregnancy Coordinator, Metropolitan LEA). It was perceived to have made individual teams

more aware of sub-groups of vulnerable children, for example, unaccompanied asylum seekers. Furthermore, it had allowed some LEAs to fund *additional* provision for vulnerable children. However, interviewees noted that there was a need to consider impact over a longer period of time in order to assess the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the interventions supported by the VCG. Additionally, among the eight strategic interviewees consulted in the case-study phase, there was consensus from seven that, since the introduction of the VCG, they felt better able to meet the educational needs of vulnerable children. In the remaining LEA, the interviewee felt that work had continued to be '*equally effective*'.

Most managers of the grant within the case-study LEAs felt that the implementation of the VCG had resulted in more **coherent support** for vulnerable children. The implementation of the grant in one case-study LEA was felt to have improved the LEA's coherence in supporting vulnerable children generally: '*It has enabled the LEA to look at resources for vulnerable groups of children in a much broader and strategic way and it's given more flexibility*' (Head of Service, County LEA). In another case-study LEA the implementation of the grant had also resulted in strategic developments and the creation of a 'Vulnerable Children's Strategy Group'. This was felt to have raised managers' understanding of the needs of the various client groups, as well as giving them better coherence to their work (i.e. in the way it fitted together). Nevertheless, one manager did feel that the lack of development time and uncertainty about the availability and amount of funding had made coherence around implementation of the grant '*very difficult*' (Strategic Manager, Outer London Borough).

In relation to **cost-effectiveness**, one interviewee felt that the way the grant was allocated was cost-effective because the LEA knew it was a three-year funding stream, therefore they could plan more effectively. Conversely, another interviewee felt that the short-term nature of the funding meant that the LEA might lose good quality staff because of the lack of security of posts.

5.2   Staffing

The introduction of VCG funding was seen to have contributed to the **effectiveness** of support for vulnerable children within LEAs through the establishment of new, overarching strategic posts in terms of: improved monitoring and tracking, better identification of needs and more effective targeting of support (see Chapter 2 for a fuller discussion). The funding of these posts was felt to have led to more **coherent support** for vulnerable children because their strategic overview meant that they were able to identify gaps and overlaps in provision and focus on working in a more holistic and coherent way.

The funding of key worker posts (including new posts, existing posts or the expansion of existing posts) at both strategic and operational levels for specific groups of vulnerable children was also seen to have increased the effectiveness of the support provided. Areas where key workers were perceived to have made a positive impact included:

- Raising awareness
- Providing training

- Challenging schools/advocacy
- Providing specialist advice and support.

Operational key workers were the posts most commonly funded by the VCG. Raising schools' awareness of the needs of vulnerable children and increasing capacity within the school to respond effectively to those needs was seen as the key area of focus and one where they could have most significant impact. This capacity-building approach included the training of designated teachers to support vulnerable pupils, for example, looked after children, asylum seekers and Gypsy/Traveller pupils within schools. Raising schools' (including other pupils') awareness of the culture of vulnerable pupils, notably asylum seekers and Gypsy/Traveller pupils, was also noted, which in turn was seen to have a positive impact on pupils' self-esteem. Other areas where posts funded by the grant were seen to improve effectiveness of the support for vulnerable pupils included:

- Ensuring vulnerable children's access to education
- Sourcing alternative educational provision
- Support for integration/reintegration/transition
- Building relationships with parents/pupils and schools
- Identifying and addressing personal/social issues and offering social/holistic support
- Providing targeted support.

VCG funding of key worker posts/teams was also seen to have maintained or improved the **coherence** of support available because the grant allowed services to maintain or expand existing posts, thus ensuring continuity, as well as coherence of support. For some groups, particularly Gypsy/Traveller pupils and their families, the ability to provide this continuity was seen as crucial because of the importance of developing trusting relationships with families. The key worker role was also seen as providing coherent support because staff were supporting the wider needs of vulnerable children, not just their educational needs, and often acted as a conduit to other agencies. Key workers' detailed knowledge about the pupils they were working with and the assessments they could provide, were seen as increasing the coherence of support for vulnerable pupils within LEAs, for example updating information held by admissions, or providing schools with pupil assessments. However, in one case-study LEA, the strategic manager interviewed felt that there was still an issue around the numbers of different people and agencies working with looked after children and the provision was, to date, not '*very coherent*'.

The main **efficiencies** identified in relation to the staff and teams funded by the VCG focused on the speed with which they could respond to need: '*We're available when they need us*' (Assistant Psychologist working with excluded young people, County LEA), which was felt to result in faster integration or access to education for vulnerable pupils.

Interviewees felt that the strategies funded by the VCG were **cost-effective** because LEAs were, where appropriate, using paraprofessionals rather than qualified teachers to provide support. A number of teams and interventions were focusing on group work, in addition to, or instead of, individual work, which was also seen as a more cost-effective strategy. The VCG was also being used to fund preventative work

which identified need and/or addressed issues before they reached crisis point, which it was hoped, would lead to cost savings in the future. Key workers were helping retain pupils in school, which was seen as more cost-effective than educating them out of school. Key workers were also used as a resource by schools to access information and/or funding, for example, they knew where to apply for a grant or the team had access to staff who could speak a variety of languages, which all led to cost savings. Teams/services which had the capacity to cover several schools were seen as more cost-effective than each school having a dedicated person to work with pupils. In addition, their focus on building capacity within schools to support pupils was seen as more cost-effective than them supporting individual pupils.

In relation to VCG funding (or contributing towards the funding of) staff deployment in teams or projects, a number of impacts identified related to the specificity of actually having a team to support these young people. This was seen to raise the profile and awareness of the needs of the group within the LEA, for example, prioritising the needs of looked after children out of school. The development of a team for looked after children meant that '*social workers now know who we are. They know that if they don't do their PEPs that they are going to get pestered until we get a copy, but they also know that we are a resource that they can call on*' (Advisory Teacher looked after children, Inner London Borough). The VCG had enabled the team to develop themselves as a resource both for education and social services. In some instances, the size of the team was seen to have a significant impact on providing **effective** support:

> [The strength of the approach is because] *there's a team, rather than just one or two people, that the combination of the face-to-face work and* [strategic work] *you get the best of both worlds.* [Name of city] *is a big city with high numbers of pregnancies, lots of inner city areas with high levels of disaffection and by having people on the ground out there every day in the localities, that's made a big difference to the young people* (Teenage Pregnancy Coordinator, Metropolitan LEA).

The **cost-effectiveness** of teams could be dependent on the criteria used to assess them. As an interviewee from a teenage parent intervention (focusing on preventative work as well as support) observed, they had a relatively large team which made them more expensive, but they were working with and identifying a large number of young people, including the most vulnerable and needy young women who were not in school: '*We have a higher percentage awareness of pregnant teenagers than a lot of LEAs who feel they don't have much of a problem because they haven't found them*'(Teenage Pregnancy Coordinator, Metropolitan LEA). This interviewee felt that the size of the team meant they were able to undertake:

> *Significant work with youngsters who really need it – that's why we make a difference at the sharp end of referrals because we have a capacity to put extra in where it's unreasonable to expect a school to do it. For most of our young women, if we weren't there working with them on some of these difficult issues, nobody would be and how do you put a price on that?* (Teenage Pregnancy Coordinator, Metropolitan LEA).

Similarly, the provision of childcare for new mothers was relatively costly, however it meant that they had young women who had not attended school for three years returning to education 14 days after the birth of their baby: '*How do you put a price on that? If you didn't do that, what would happen?*' (Teenage Pregnancy Coordinator, Metropolitan LEA).

In other areas, relatively small teams were seen as providing effective support because they focused on building capacity within schools. Thus, the expectation was that the schools carried out the majority of the work and the team supported the schools in doing this work, so the onus was on the schools to '*come up with the solutions*' (Education Protects Coordinator, Metropolitan LEA).

5.3 'Other' spend

The VCG had also been used to provide resources, such as e-learning programmes, transport, childcare, school uniform, extra-curricula activities and training to support vulnerable children. Those LEAs that had used VCG funding to develop e-learning interventions felt that this was an **effective** use of resources because it increased the amount and quality of provision available for vulnerable children (without the VCG some interviewees observed that they would have been unable to fund the establishment of e-learning projects). E-learning was also perceived as a way of meeting individual needs more effectively and enabling greater flexibility in provision. Interviewees also felt that e-learning provided **efficiencies** because interventions could be replicated across the LEA to target a wide range of individual pupils. E-learning packages were also seen as more efficient and **cost-effective** because, unlike home tuition, they allowed staff to work with a number of young people at the same time and there were no travelling costs. Young people were also able to access a broader range of input and specialist support via these interventions. Greater **coherence** was hoped for in relation to the provision of e-learning packages for vulnerable children by bringing in a range of agencies to provide input to the interventions.

Using the VCG to fund other resources, notably transport and childcare, was also seen as effective because, without this additional support, some vulnerable young people, such as teenage parents and Gypsy/Travellers living on roadside sites, might be unable to access education.

5.4 Grants/bursaries for individual pupils

Although grants/bursaries conferred to schools to support individual pupils were generally for relatively small amounts of money and time-limited in nature, interviewees were able to identify a range of tangible impacts and outcomes. Grants used to provide additional staffing, for example, LSAs and learning mentors, were seen as providing targeted support, tailored to meet the needs of the individual, as well as identifying the issues the child was facing. This approach was seen as particularly **effective** in comparison to a generic service. It was also seen as more **cost-effective** to put in support when it was needed. The grants were also helping to maintain pupils in school, either by preventing exclusion, or supporting reintegration (previously LEAs may not have had the resources to fund this work). Thus, they were seen as providing greater **coherence** for vulnerable pupils by maintaining continuity

of their educational provision. In addition, the fact that services and agencies knew that there was somewhere that they could go to access funding was seen to have improved the coherence of support available. Furthermore, the fact that one person 'held the pot' centrally and that the criteria for eligibility was relatively simple, with little 'red tape', meant that schools could access support quickly and when they needed it.

The additional support provided by such grants was felt to be effective in reducing the pressures and/or burdens on members of staff, which also resulted in improving the attitudes of school staff, i.e. schools were more willing to accept/retain pupils when there was support available. The additional support provided was also seen to increase the capacity of schools to support pupils and provided a swift response to both pupils' and schools' needs. Relationships between the LEA, schools and other services improved when grants were available, it was felt that work could be more positive when there was genuine, effective support available. Grants were also seen as helping raise the profile of services when schools knew the services had funding available. The raised profile in turn potentially meant that services were reaching more children/families and a reduction in time out of school, for example, for unaccompanied asylum seekers.

Grants had also been given to support individual pupils via one-off expenditure to provide glasses, text books, revision guides, laptops, and to fund school trips, study support and childcare during GCSEs. The key areas of impact of this additional funding focused on increasing access to education and the attainment of vulnerable pupils. VCG funding had also been used to purchase alternative curriculum packages, such as college courses and alternative programmes for vulnerable pupils, which had resulted in the provision of appropriate education for those young people who were unable to access mainstream school. This had resulted in increasing the educational provision available for those out of school, providing education for those arriving part-way through the year, targeting and tailoring support to meet individual needs and a chance for disengaged pupils to succeed. Thus, these packages were seen as having the potential to improve attendance, attainment and positive post-16 transition.

VCG funding had also been conferred to schools to provide in-school support in the shape of learning support units, extended schools and various other support projects, for example, breakfast clubs, girls' groups, asylum seeker projects and summer schools for vulnerable children. The perceived **effectiveness** of these VCG interventions was related to their ability to prevent exclusion and aid the retention of pupils in school, as well as assist integration and engagement, and raise aspirations. Preventative work always carries an assumption of **cost-efficiency** given the resources needed for specialist provision.

Effective practice: summary of key points

From the comments of interviewees representing agencies, initiatives and projects working with all groups of vulnerable children, it is evident that VCG funding contributed to effective practice through the implementation of the grant itself, through funding key worker posts, through the funding of teams to support specific looked after children, and through the funding of grants/bursaries for supporting individual pupils.

- Effectiveness also stemmed from the implementation of the grant in terms of LEAs' ability to provide more holistic support across vulnerable groups and efficiencies linked to the way funding was allocated, i.e. via a single grant rather than a number of smaller separate grants.

- Effectiveness also stemmed from the ability of key workers to engage and develop relationships with the young people themselves, the schools and other relevant support providers. Having the time and capacity to work one-to-one and establish trust-based relationships with the young people was fundamental, as was the ability to work to meet specific needs at specific times.

- Teams funded by the VCG had the ability to add extra dimensions in supporting vulnerable children and this multi agency-aspect was highlighted as beneficial for effective delivery. Within this, the ability to consider and address needs in a holistic way was seen as particularly significant, and the VCG had facilitated this through allowing personnel from different agencies or organisations to 'come together'. The quality of multi-agency partnerships were regarded as being key to the effective and coherent support of vulnerable children.

- The effectiveness of the strategies funded by the VCG focused on raising awareness of needs, highlighting ways of addressing those needs and increasing the capacity within schools to support those needs.

- The strategies funded by the VCG also reflected the need to address non-educational issues before focusing on educational issues.

- The importance of building relationships with families and the provision of continuous and coherent support from the client's perspective was emphasised.

- The perceived cost-effectiveness of the strategies and interventions highlighted again reflected the benefits of providing coherent support across the LEA which is used to address issues rather than focus on individual groups of vulnerable young people.

Chapter 6

Vulnerable children: monitoring and tracking

DfES guidance on the VCG for 2004/05 (DfES, 2004) outlines the importance of establishing clear procedures for identifying and assessing pupil need and monitoring their progress. To this end, this chapter considers LEAs' methods for monitoring and tracking vulnerable pupils and the impact of the VCG in this respect. LEAs' approaches to monitoring and evaluating VCG-funded strategies are also reported. Data are drawn from the 50 LEA survey interviews and supplemented by information obtained from the eight case-study visits. The chapter covers:

- Methods for identifying and tracking vulnerable children within LEAs, including their access to, and progress in, education and the impact of the VCG
- Methods for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the grant and grant-funded interventions
- LEAs' incorporation of the views of young people and families.

6.1 Identifying and tracking vulnerable children

6.1.1 Methods used within LEAs

A number of different approaches to identifying and tracking vulnerable children were reported and, in several LEAs, a combination of methods was employed. Interviewees referred to pupil identification and tracking through either one, or a combination of: **separate systems or databases** within service areas; a **central database;** and/or **specific panels and procedures**. In addition, in several cases, the **Information Sharing and Assessment Programme** was being used to move the current systems forward.

Most commonly, LEAs reported that vulnerable children were being identified and tracked through **separate systems/databases** within the LEA. Twenty-nine LEAs referred to a range of individual databases for the different groups of vulnerable children.

> *We are doing it by individual group, so the young carers track progress of young carers and teenage pregnancy tracks the progress of their client group, etc., etc. It's all very fragmented still* (Assessment and Intervention Manager, County LEA).

In these cases, specific services were often identified as responsible for the identification and tracking of particular groups of vulnerable children which included: the LEA and social services (looked after children); the EOTAS (teenage parents, pupils with medical needs, school refusers, excluded pupils); the EMAS (asylum

seekers, Gypsy/Traveller pupils); the YOT (young offenders); and the EWS (excluded pupils, school refusers).

Interviewees also highlighted the implication of this arrangement for some groups, noting that where information was held on separate databases, the identification and tracking of some groups of vulnerable children, notably looked after children, Gypsy/Traveller pupils and teenage parents, was often more developed than for other groups (such as young carers and asylum seekers):

> *It depends on the type of vulnerable children really, I think that we are better in some areas than others ... In terms of particular cohorts, like children in public care and teenage parents, we've got very tight tracking systems* (Head of Support for Learning Service, Inner London LEA).

In ten LEAs, however, interviewees reported a commitment to moving away from separate systems to a centralised database and, in some cases, were in the process of importing data from the separate systems onto a central database.

Fourteen LEAs reported that vulnerable children were already being tracked by a **central-LEA database**. In most cases, central systems included a record of all pupils in the LEA. Furthermore, in some instances, separate fields within that database 'flagged up' specific pupils for the attention of the LEA (for example, in one county LEA where pupils 'out of school' were highlighted within the system). Two LEAs referred specifically to the introduction of new database systems within the authority that would increase central identification and tracking and in one LEA the VCG had been used to contribute towards purchasing a database system.

When describing the systems in place for identifying and tracking vulnerable children interviewees from 13 LEAs referred to **panels and/or procedures** within the authority which enabled them to monitor pupils. Multi-agency panels which met on a regular basis were reported as a means through which LEAs could identify specific cohorts of pupils within the authority (e.g. children missing from education and pupils without an educational placement) and, in addition, track pupils identified within a specific vulnerable group (e.g. looked after children, asylum seekers). In one county LEA, for example, a looked after children panel was established which comprised of representatives from EOTAS, EWS, social services, the Primary Care Trust (PCT), the EPS, and a number of young adult care leavers. This panel met on a three-weekly basis to review a list of children and '*troubleshoot*' those pupils who were out of school.

Two LEAs also referred to the role of a coordinator with respect to the identification and tracking of vulnerable children. In one LEA, the appointment of a Vulnerable Pupils' Coordinator (specifically through the VCG) was noted to have had a positive impact in this respect, particularly for looked after children.

Eighteen LEAs referred to Identification, Referral and Tracking (IRT) projects under the **Information, Sharing and Assessment Programme** as contributing to the development of effective systems for monitoring vulnerable children, '*I think all LEAs now have to have things in hand for Information, Referral and Tracking*' (Principal Education Welfare Officer, County LEA). In addition, three LEAs were

identified as 'trailblazers' for the project and, as such, had been involved in the development of new ways of information sharing and tracking. This had led to the development of '*a whole basket of indicators ... that will be monitored on a pupil, vulnerable group, school, area and borough level*' (Children's Services Manager, Metropolitan LEA).

Interviewees were also asked to identify any systems in place for monitoring vulnerable pupils' access to education, as well as their progress and attainment. Perhaps not surprisingly, the systems identified reflected the systems in place for identifying and tracking vulnerable pupils, that is, in the majority of LEAs monitoring pupils' access, attainment and progress in education was through separate databases within the individual services (22 LEAs). In 11 LEAs, interviewees reported that pupils were monitored in these areas through a central pupil database. With regards to monitoring pupils' access to education, interviewees from several LEAs referred to the role of specific panels within the authority with responsibility in this respect (e.g. 'children not receiving education panel'). In addition, monitoring pupils' progress and attainment in education was identified as the responsibility of the school in a small number of LEAs (four).

6.1.2 Impact of the VCG on identification and tracking of vulnerable children

Interviewees were asked specifically if they felt that the VCG had impacted on identification and tracking of vulnerable children within their LEA. Of those LEAs who commented (45), just over half (25) felt that the VCG had not had a direct impact on the identification and tracking of vulnerable pupils. However, in these LEAs, several interviewees noted that tracking vulnerable pupils was something they were '*doing already*' and that the VCG had enabled them to continue with existing work. In 20 LEAs, the VCG was reported to have had an impact on identification and tracking. Four main ways in which the grant had impacted were identified including: **increased staffing**; **raising awareness**; **accountability**; and **database development**.

In 13 LEAs, the use of the VCG to **appoint new staff** was considered to have had a positive impact on the identification and tracking of vulnerable children. For one LEA, the ability to extend tracking '*beyond a computer exercise*' had enabled it to become more relevant and focused to issues '*on the ground*'.

LEAs also felt that the appointment of additional staff through the VCG had enabled more effective monitoring and tracking of vulnerable pupils within and across services (for example, giving staff more administrative time and increasing the time available to attend meetings and reviews). Additionally, a small number of interviewees referred specifically to strategic staff appointments through the VCG (e.g. Vulnerable Pupils' Coordinator) and noted the positive impact of this for multi-agency working and, concomitantly, the identification and tracking of vulnerable pupils.

In three LEAs, interviewees suggested that the VCG had '*pulled together a range of issues about vulnerable children*' (Assistant Director of Operations, County LEA), **raising awareness** of the needs of the groups. Through this, interviewees suggested that, not only were practitioners more aware of pupils' needs and how to respond to

those needs, but also, better recognised the importance of identification and tracking through, for example, maintaining and updating pupil databases.

Two LEAs referred to the '*obligations*' or **accountability** attached to VCG funding and noted the implication of this for identifying and tracking vulnerable children. In these cases, allocation of funding was coupled with specific responsibilities for the receiver (for example, the return of audit information, such as attendance or attainment data, or the completion of PEPs).

For one inner London authority, in which 72 per cent of its looked after children were placed out of the borough, the VCG was considered to have had a major impact on the LEA's ability to monitor and track these pupils. In this case, a bursary was made available to the receiving school on the understanding that specific data would be returned to the LEA. Through this, the LEA felt that it could monitor and track pupils placed out of the authority more efficiently (see Case study 6 for further details).

> *We allocated a small grant per head on the grounds that 'you don't get the grant until you produce the statistics and the data'. That was extremely useful, to be able to say to schools, 'if you collaborate with our audits and if you fill in all the forms and do the PEPs, we will be providing you with a sum of money to offset the costs you incur in doing that'* (Head of Support for Learning Service, Inner London Borough).

In two LEAs, interviewees noted that the VCG had enabled services to **develop or enhance existing databases** for vulnerable children. In addition, several LEAs noted that the VCG had enabled services to maintain the systems that were already in place, through, for example, the increased administrative time available as a consequence of a greater number of staff.

There were no specific reports of any impact of the VCG on monitoring pupils' access to education, progress and attainment.

6.2 Methods for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the grant and interventions funded

In the majority of cases, monitoring and evaluation of the VCG-funded strategies was at the level of the individual services. Interviewees were less likely to report a process for monitoring and evaluating the VCG as a whole. Most commonly, interviewees reported that this was achieved as part of the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of service and business plans for each of the services, '*each of the particular teams have their own service plan so any monitoring goes on within that mechanism*' (Principal Officer Pupil and Student Services, Metropolitan LEA). However, in several cases, interviewees reported a '*double layer of monitoring*' (Education Protects Coordinator, Metropolitan LEA), where monitoring and evaluation occurred at different levels. Most often, this involved regular evaluations within individual service areas which would then feed into progress reviews and reports at a higher level (for example, quarterly performance reviews, annual service plan reviews).

In some cases, allocation of the grant would then be reviewed following a higher-level audit of overall allocation and spending. In one LEA, for example, each individual

service held responsibility for monitoring and evaluating spending in line with its agreed service plan. In addition, however, an evaluation of VCG allocations overall was carried out twice yearly which involved a review of spending against each individual service budget and resulted in re-assessment and allocation of funding where appropriate (i.e. in light of significant under-spends or to address a specific need). In other LEAs, specific procedures for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the VCG had been developed (e.g. the completion of a proforma at particular points throughout the year). Cameo 1 provides an example of a monitoring form developed for the purpose of monitoring and evaluating the VCG.

CAMEO 1: Monitoring and evaluation

In one metropolitan LEA, a VCG monitoring sheet had been produced for the purpose of monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the grant. Service managers held responsibility for completion of the sheet on an annual basis. The sheet requests the following details: an overview of the initiative; costs (including those for: additional consultancy, administration, venue, management time, and payments to schools); milestones (key activities and dates), including details of those expected, those achieved and identification of any difference between the two; outputs (number of pupils supported, number of sessions etc.), including details of the expected and actual outputs and any difference between the two; outcomes/impact (e.g. attendance, attainment), again, including details of the expected outcomes, the actual outcomes and highlighting any difference between the two, as well as supporting evidence and identification of the next steps.

Completed sheets are then fed back to higher level management for an overarching evaluation of the implementation of the VCG which may then inform future allocations: *'By using this, when we get to the end of the financial year and are looking at the next year's funding we can focus specifically on the impact of the initiative and use this in future planning'* (Service Development Manager).

In one LEA, a 'Vulnerable Children's Strategic Group' had been established following the introduction of the VCG. This involved monthly meetings to focus on the allocation of VCG funding and also a monitoring remit on the impact and outcomes of VCG-funded strategies. The role of the Vulnerable Children's Project Manager was highlighted as key to this work. Monitoring of other provision occurred through quarterly monitoring strategies set against targets within service plans. Both monitoring procedures informed the other, as part of the LEA's on-going review of provision.

In several cases, interviewees noted that processes for monitoring and evaluating strategies had developed from existing strategies used for other grants. Some interviewees also referred to performance indicators attached to the provision of grants to services as a means through which the VCG was being monitored and evaluated (for example, progress towards meeting attainment, attendance, and exclusion targets).

6.3 Incorporating the views of young people (and families)

Interviewees were asked specifically if the views of young people and families had been incorporated into the implementation, monitoring or evaluation of the VCG as

recommended by DfES guidance (DfES, 2004). In several cases, interviewees noted that incorporating the views of young people and their families formed part of their overall strategic policy (e.g. inclusion strategy, education strategy).

> *It is a pretty routine part of any policy development now that we say to ourselves, 'how can we articulate the children's voice and how can we respond to it?'* (Principal Advisor, County LEA).

Cameo 2, provides an illustration of one LEA's commitment to incorporating the views of young people and their families:

CAMEO 2: Incorporating the views of young people

In one county LEA, a priority, under the Community Strategy is to ensure that all learners are involved in decision making about their own learning and that children and young people play an active part in their local communities. To this end, the County Council has actively promoted the development of school councils in over 200 schools.

The County Council has also established a County Youth Forum and District Youth Forums and supports the work of the UK Youth Parliament. It has recently established an 'Engaging Young People Unit' and seeks the views of young people on issues of concern to them, including priorities for County Council budget setting. This commitment is reflected in the LEA's education strategy priority: '*To ensure the active involvement of children and young people in decision making'*, through the following strategic objectives:

- To increase the number of school councils
- To ensure children and young people are consulted on issues that affect them
- To ensure the views of learners are taken into account when developing learning programmes
- To seek, on a regular basis, the views of learners about the provision they receive in order to improve the quality of service provided.

6.3.1 Young people's views and the implementation of the VCG

Interviewees were unlikely to report that the views of young people and their families had been incorporated into the allocation of VCG funding, noting most commonly, that this occurred at a strategic level and from a statistical and historical base, with some flexibility according to locally identified need: '*We did the same kinds of things as last year. We knew where our priorities are. It's just a case of refining them slightly*' (Manager of Specialist Learning Support, Unitary LEA). Several interviewees also noted that, where the VCG had replaced previous grants, it had mostly been used to maintain existing levels of service rather than prompting a mapping exercise for new work which might involve enquiry into the views of families and young people.

> *If you thought of it as new money, yes, you could do that. In fact, it wasn't new money, it was old money parcelled differently. So, in a sense, some of it was already given* (Social Inclusion Manager, Outer London Borough).

Where interviewees did report that the views of young people and families were incorporated into the implementation of the VCG, this often occurred as a consequence of the overall monitoring and evaluation of service provision: '*They* [the young people] *could influence what we decide to spend money on in the future*' (Social Inclusion Manager, Outer London Borough). One interviewee, for example, referred to '*feedback loops*' which allowed the LEA to obtain the experiences and views of young people and incorporate this into developing future provision:

> *We do work with social services on what the views are on the tutors that the children in public care get. What do they think of it? Is the quality of service any good to them? So we get feedback from the young people about the service they get from the tutors ... If they said, 'No it's rubbish', we wouldn't fund it. Generally they're very positive about it, so we've continued to fund it* (Social Inclusion Manager, Outer London Borough).

In another LEA, however, looked after children were identified as a group with particular involvement in the implementation of some of the strategies funded through the VCG. In this case, the young people had been directly involved in producing a film to be used as a training aid, training teachers on transition issues and designing their PEPs.

6.3.2 Young people's views and monitoring and evaluation

For many of the vulnerable groups, specific channels and opportunities to '*hear the voice*' of young people and their families were identified (e.g. young people's forums). Most commonly, however, interviewees reported that such evaluation was related to all aspects of their provision as opposed to monitoring and evaluating the VCG specifically. In addition, interviewees from several LEAs reported having more established systems for some groups, namely looked after children and Gypsy/Traveller pupils, compared to other groups, such as children with medical needs, school refusers and young carers.

Looked after children were identified as the main group for which the views of young people and their families/carers were incorporated into monitoring and evaluating their provision: '*In terms of looked after children, it's part and parcel of the system, their views are always sought at every stage*' (Manager of Pupil, School and Parent Support, County LEA). Interviewees from 15 LEAs referred to a variety of strategies in which the group were provided with opportunities to evaluate their provision, revealing some innovative ways of accessing the views of young people. One LEA, for example, had established a feedback mechanism through the development of a 'looked after children's forum'. Through this, looked after children were consulted on numerous aspects of their provision (education and otherwise), as well as on future developments:

> *The looked after children have got their own forum, so they're involved in all the service planning arrangements. So, for instance, every year, all of the residential homes will construct service plans which are based on local discussion with the children in the homes, and an annual conference [is held] where the children present their views of what's happened in the last 12*

months, and what they think about the targets for the future (Assistant Director of Operations, County LEA).

In addition, through partnership with a national charity offering support for children and young people in public care, children were encouraged to speak out with the aim of informing future LEA provision. In other authorities, alternative opportunities were reported. There were accounts of: an annual festival or celebration day for looked after children, during which questionnaires regarding educational access and provision were completed and used to inform future provision and consultation with pupils on their PEPs.

Gypsy/Traveller pupils were identified by seven LEAs as a vulnerable group for which the views of young people and families were incorporated into monitoring and evaluation of their educational provision. The difficulty associated with involving the young people and families from this group was noted by several LEAs (for example, communities being '*suspicious*' of intentions or reluctant for children to discuss issues with practitioners).

Interviewees from several LEAs noted that for certain groups (namely school refusers, children with medical needs, and teenage parents) the work of the home visitor/family support worker was key to obtaining the views of young people and their families (for example, through regular contact with the pupil/family, building a rapport) which could then be fed back to LEA services. Case work with individual pupils (particularly those receiving support from specific LEA services, such as the EPS) was also identified by a small number of interviewees as a means through which the views of pupils and families were obtained and strategies were monitored and evaluated.

Large scale surveys to gather pupils', as well as professionals' views on practice had been implemented in some LEAs to monitor, evaluate and plan provision for vulnerable children. These included: a comprehensive audit of the Traveller Education Service (Metropolitan LEA); an audit of the provision for asylum seeker pupils (county LEA) and a 'Best Value Review' of the provision for children with medical needs (county LEA).

Monitoring and tracking: summary of key points

- Whilst monitoring and tracking of vulnerable pupils within LEAs was most commonly retained within individual service areas, some development towards incorporating this into a central system was evident. The impact of the VCG would appear to have facilitated the current system within some LEAs by expanding teams and thus aiding services' ability to maintain and update their databases.

- The extent to which young people's and families' views were incorporated into the implementation of the VCG was minimal. However, it should be noted that, in a number of cases, interviewees referred to the late notification of the grant and the impact of this on its allocation, such that LEAs had to be reactive (and based on previous funding allocations) rather than pro-active (and based on a strategic overview).

- There were accounts of existing monitoring and evaluations of strategies now funded through VCG, several of which incorporated the views of young people and their families. Given this, the extent to which those views might inform the allocation of the VCG in the future was noted. It may be that well developed procedures used with some groups (e.g. looked after children) could be usefully adopted by professionals working with other vulnerable pupil types.

Concluding comments and recommendations

This study has provided detailed accounts of practice underway in 50 LEAs following the introduction of the VCG, as well as relaying the views of relevant LEA personnel on the grant's efficacy overall.

Without doubt, the VCG block-funding style was seen by the vast majority of interviewees to be a positive step, allowing greater flexibility to take into account local circumstances, needs and priorities. Hence, in view of this consensus, **it is suggested continuing such an approach**. The longer-term funding cycle was also welcomed.

Nevertheless, it may be worth reiterating the concern that a loss of focus on groups which had previously had discrete funding streams might result. Equally, this audit of activity funded by the VCG may have revealed some unanticipated uses at both strategic and operational level. **It is suggested that some clarification of what is not appropriate expenditure may be helpful in any future guidelines**.

The study's audit of the individual vulnerable group types has revealed a vast array of activity at both operational and strategic service level, as well as in the arena of interagency partnership. VCG funding provided resources to maintain, extend, or actually instigate this work. In a number of LEAs it was seen to have raised the profile of some vulnerable groups, notably pupils with medical needs, young carers and teenage parents, whilst in others it had resulted in an audit of provision for vulnerable youngsters. Variety in funding destination – retained, conferred to schools and the use of individual bursaries – was also evident. **It is recommended that there is further dissemination of such an array of activity and innovation**. There are clearly opportunities for those responsible for different vulnerable groups to learn from strategies employed by colleagues working with other types of vulnerability. In addition, it may be worth particularly promoting the work of those LEAs which incorporated the suggestion that the VCG should be used to develop a strategic approach within the LEA to deal with vulnerable children in the round rather than replicating the previous series of grants for specific groups.

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