

Children's messages on care 2010

A report by the Children's Rights Director for England



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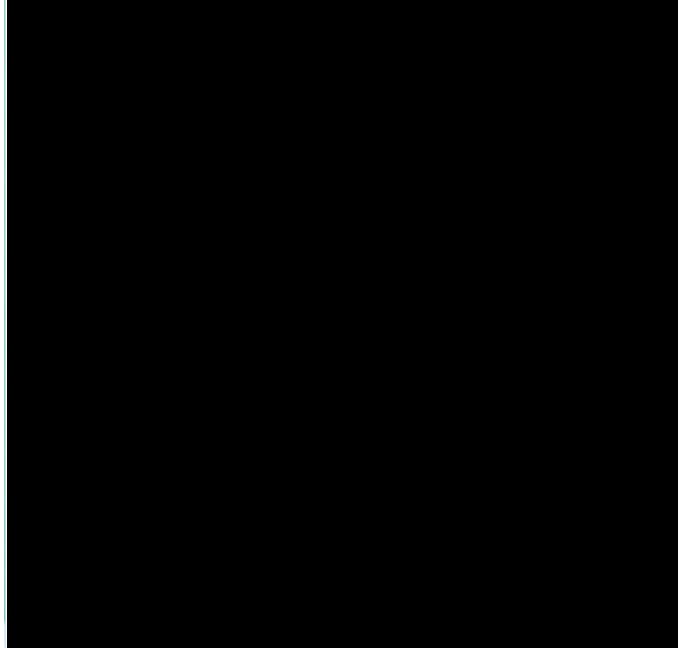


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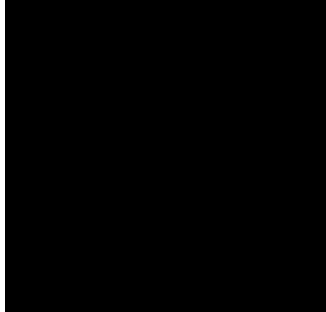
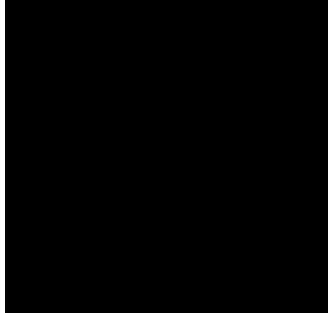


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Introduction

Roger Morgan, Children's Rights Director for England



This digest is to help people find children's views about being in care, about social care services, or about living in residential schools or colleges. It brings together in one place the key messages from children and young people from the 20 reports of children's views that we published between April 2007 and April 2010. In an earlier digest (*Children's messages on care*, Ofsted, 2007), we published key messages from 14 of our earlier children's views reports. You can download our reports from www.rights4me.org.

If you are looking for children's views on a particular rights or welfare issue, I hope this digest will help you find them. I also hope that having children's key messages in one place will mean they are more likely to be found and used by people making decisions affecting children.

As Children's Rights Director for England, the law gives me the duty to ask children and young people for their views about their rights, their welfare, and how they are looked after in England. I must consult children and young people in care or getting any sort of help from council social care services, children and young people living away from home in any type of boarding school, residential special school or further education college, children and young people living in children's homes, in family centres, in foster care or who have been placed for adoption, and care leavers.

With my team I also give advice on children's and young people's views and on children's rights and welfare to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector at Ofsted, and to the government. I have a duty to raise any issues I think are important about the rights and welfare of any child or young person living away from home or getting children's social care support.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Roger Morgan'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'R'.

Making ContactPoint work

(October 2007)

This report gave the views of 62 children on the draft guidelines for running the ContactPoint database of all children.

Children's main concerns were that ContactPoint should be run in a way that makes sure that information about children stays confidential from people who shouldn't see it, and that the information put on it is actually right and up to date. There would always be a lot of work for councils to deal with constant changes and checking of information. Some children wanted an assurance that neither photographs of children, nor their telephone numbers, would ever be added to ContactPoint.

The children thought that even with the most complicated security systems, one day the system would break down or its security would be breached. A list of all the children in the country, with details like where they live and how old they are, would always attract paedophiles. Social workers and other people with access to the database would always spoil even the best security by passing their security tags and passwords on to other people to use for them.

Children thought the best way to check that information on the database is right would be to let children check their own information, or to check it with their parents or carers. Children thought they should have a right to see what was held on them on ContactPoint. Anyone looking for a child on the database should have to put in what they already knew about that child, to show that they were already involved with the child and were looking for extra information, rather than (as one child said) just 'scrolling through children'.

There should be serious punishments for deliberately misusing information from ContactPoint, including putting wrong information on it. Children thought people were also likely to be found innocently looking at details of their friends' children, and this needed to be punished, but more lightly.

There was a concern that ContactPoint would probably never have information on it about some children who might need it most – such as asylum seeking children, or children who were missing and living on the street. It would also probably not have information about children who came to the UK from abroad to go to boarding schools or further education colleges.

Children's main worries were that people they didn't know could look up information about them, and that people might find out where they lived. For some children, both in care and in boarding schools, there may be someone who might put them in danger if they ever found out where the child was living.

**'I will worry my Dad
could find me'**

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Children on care standards

(December 2007)

This report sets out what 433 children said about the future standards there should be for looking after children in children's homes, foster care, boarding schools, residential special schools and residential family centres, and for children supported by social care services.

According to the children consulted, children should know what the standards are for the place they are living in. Children should be treated fairly and with respect, be kept safe and helped to grow healthily.

Care placements should not separate brothers and sisters.

Staff working with children should be the right sort of people, properly recruited and checked. They should not shout or swear at children, or belittle them. Children should be involved in recruiting staff. Changes of staff should be kept to a minimum, to give children stability.

Personal information about a child should only be passed on to people with a real need to know it. Children should be asked if information about them can be passed on, or told about it if it has to be passed on. Staff should not discuss children in front of other people.

Complaints should be sorted out where children live, and if not possible, by the service that placed the child there. If a child has to be moved because they are not being looked after properly, their views about what should happen should still be asked and taken into account.

Children should have privacy and their own bedroom. They should be able to get away from other people to be on their own when they want to. Staff should knock before entering a child's room.

Places where children live should be spacious, have facilities for their activities, be in good repair and decoration and be in good locations. They should be able to meet any special needs children have.

Children should have a choice of ways to tell people their views and concerns. Those in care should be able to give their views about where they live to their social worker. Each child should have a key worker who asks them what they need rather than leaving it to the child to ask for help. There should be someone available to give advice 24 hours a day.

All children should know what the rules are where they live, and how to undo things they have done wrong. Staff should discuss behaviour with children. Sanctions should not be too lengthy, and children should know when they are over. Nobody should be stopped from seeing their family as a punishment, and there should be rewards for good behaviour.

'Keep safe, be listened to, be treated fairly'

Children on bullying

(February 2008)

This report sets out the experiences and views of bullying given by 319 children.

According to those consulted, bullying is something that hurts people who can't defend themselves and don't deserve what happens to them. Bullying depends on how it affects someone, not on what is being done, and it is worse if it is done by a group. The most common sort of bullying is verbal, the next is being hit, and it most often comes from those of around the same age. Joking and teasing may be bullying, depending on how it affects someone. Bullying by mobile phone or messaging is increasing. Most said bullying is getting worse.

Like people in any group, children will pull themselves up in the group by pushing others down. Children told us that this is not bullying unless there is just one victim.

Bullying is most likely to happen at school (especially when there are no staff around), in children's homes or residential schools, in the street, or in quiet places. Sixty per cent of bullying is by someone who has bullied the victim before, 40% by a new bully.

'It can never be actually stopped, but you should try before it goes too far'

Being seen as different from others makes someone likely to be bullied. So does being seen as unable to stand up for yourself, or not having friends. Children are better than adults at spotting who is likely to be bullied. Children's advice on staying safe from bullying is to build up friendships, avoid trouble, blend in, and try to avoid being seen as different. Adults can help children build friendships and not stand out as 'different' individuals. But someone can start bullying as a way of getting accepted as part of a group of friends.

Almost anything the victim says or does to try to stop a bullying incident can make it worse. It is best to avoid crying or losing control in a way bullies find amusing.

When they see bullying, children are most likely to stay and watch, for fun, excitement, or because they are scared. They are more likely to help the victim if they are family or a friend.

Victims can feel upset, angry and even suicidal. Just under one in five children worry a lot or most of the time about getting bullied – especially when they move somewhere new. They are most likely to talk to a friend about bullying, and next most likely a member of staff.

Children cannot predict what adults will do when they find out about bullying, but although adults usually help (especially for younger children), they can make things worse without meaning to.

Children's views on advocacy

(May 2008)

This report gave the views and experiences of advocacy given by 138 children in care and care leavers.

Just over half had heard of advocacy, though seven out of 10 said they had at some time had a person speaking out on their behalf. A third of these people were advocates, the rest were most likely to be social workers, key workers, parents or relatives, teachers or other carers. They had spoken out for children most often about personal issues, court or legal matters, care planning or reviews, family contact and education issues such as getting back into school. One in five children said they wouldn't know how to get someone to act as an advocate for them. Some children had been given wrong information about what an advocate is (for example, confusing them with Independent Visitors, or being told that they were people who helped with school work).

Some advocates had helped on a particular occasion, others were regular visitors to children. Some children and young people wanted advocates to listen to the child's view and then help to put it forward for them.

Others wanted advocates to give them advice and help sort their problems out. Still others wanted advocates to be powerful people who could fight a child's cause strongly for them.

Children said the ideal advocate is a good listener and speaker, who understands children's issues, is reliable and respects privacy. Over half thought advocates should be independent of the people looking after the children, but others thought that being part of

the same organisation could help advocates to sort out some issues. Children wanted a choice of advocate, and to be able to change their advocate if they wanted.

Those who had been supported by an advocate were very positive about how well their advocate had listened to their views, put them across, made others listen and kept good privacy. The great majority said having an advocate had made a difference for them.

The main criticism of advocates was that they sometimes put over their own opinions as well as the views the child wanted them to put across.

For the future, children did not want advocates and Independent Visitors to be the same people, and wanted to be able to have an advocate for any issue they needed one for, and not only when they made a complaint. Many however wanted to have their own independent personal adviser rather than necessarily an advocate to help them get their views across.

'An advocate should always listen to you and your opinions, and put your point of view across – whether he thinks you are right or not'

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Children's experience of private fostering

(September 2008)

This report gave the views of 59 privately fostered children, following up our previous report on private fostering in 2005 and checking children's experience since the implementation of private fostering Regulations and National Minimum Standards.

Almost all the children thought private fostering was right for them. Private fostering arrangements were usually made by the child's birth parents, and over three quarters said they had a say in the choice of their private foster carers. Over three quarters knew their private carers before they moved in; one in five did not. Most would want a trial stay with possible private carers before the arrangement was agreed. Over three quarters had been given enough information about their future carers before they moved in.

Some children told us that local council children's services had arranged their private fostering placements. Councils cannot legally make private fostering arrangements.

Most of the children said they had a say in everyday decisions in their private foster families.

Children were concerned that they might need a different placement if they needed to move away from their private placement. One in five said they were getting fewer social worker visits than the law says they should. Social workers usually saw children in their private carer's home, and most children were able to speak to their visiting social worker alone. How often social workers spoke to the child alone still varied from every visit to not at all.

Children thought there should be more information telling parents and carers that they must tell social care services about children being fostered privately. They thought privately fostered children should get more support, especially with school issues. They wanted their social workers to keep checking that they were all right, by regularly phoning them, always talking directly to them, checking with their schools and making 'surprise' visits to their private foster homes.

'Professionals thought I was happy, but a few months later when things went sour they weren't there any more'

'I knew my carer and family before being fostered. I have grown closer to them. Now they are my family'

Future care

(October 2008)

This report gave the findings of a consultation with 686 children to provide children's input to new National Minimum Standards for care and residential education.

Children thought National Minimum Standards should tell children and young people how they should be cared for, tell parents how their children should be cared for and tell staff what they should be doing. Next, children saw the standards as important for inspectors to know what to check, to show what staff need to be trained in, to tell managers what they need to check on and to tell people starting a new service what to do.

Children did not want any of the existing National Minimum Standards to be left out of the future standards.

Children saw the most important standards as those about privacy, respecting children's culture and background, keeping children safe, keeping children healthy, keeping bullying down, and treating children fairly. Good buildings to live in were safe, homely and clean, and had space, privacy and gardens. Children had their own bedrooms. Bad buildings were unsafe, messy and too small. As well as the building itself, whether a building was good or bad to live in depended on what happened in it. Activities, staff, how children were looked after and whether there was bullying were all important.

Standards could say that security cameras were acceptable, as long as they were for safety and were only outside the building. Before moving in, children wanted a children's guide to any home or school, covering who will care for them, who else lives there, what the place is like, the rules there are to keep, what their bedroom will be like and whether or not it is shared, where they will go for schooling, and local facilities and activities.

Children wanted future standards to have rules to keep children safe on the internet by blocking unsuitable sites and chatrooms, adult supervision of internet use, internet safety to be taught to all children, and computers to be where adults could supervise children using them.

Future rules should make sure that staffing levels should be set to deal with times when children themselves thought there were not enough staff around, with extra staff if children had disabilities, special needs or behaviour problems. Children thought that staff should not be allowed to start any work with children until their police checks were completed.

**'Safe, with caring people,
warm and friendly inside'**

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Future rules

(February 2009)

This report set out the views of 136 children who were consulted on what should be in the Regulations to be issued under the Children and Young Persons Act 2008.

The children thought the Regulations should say that every child in care must be visited by someone from the council at least once a month, with extra visits if the child has problems, needs to talk or is unhappy.

Before returning a child home, the council should make sure this will be safe, and that the parents really are able to look after the child again, and should listen to the child's views. The child should be removed from home again if they are no longer safe, are not being looked after properly again, or are unhappy back home.

Disabled children, those out of contact with their family and lonely children need an Independent Visitor to visit, befriend and advise them. People who have been in care themselves would make ideal Independent Visitors.

The main reasons a child could be placed out of the council's area were to keep the child safe, if they needed to be away from where their family were or if they wanted to move a long way away (for example, for a fresh start away from where they had been getting into trouble).

If social workers work for an organisation other than the council, the Regulations should make sure they do not make important decisions – especially about children's placements – without taking the child's views into account, that they are safe to be with children and that they keep children's confidentiality.

The member of staff appointed in a school to help children in care should help with school work, be available for support and advice, give help the child wants, and make sure the child is OK in and out of school. Councils should try not to make children aged 15 or 16 change schools, but this could be right if it would make them safer or happier, give them better services or move them from problems where they are.

Independent Reviewing Officers should listen to children and make sure they are happy with their plans, their views are heard and their plans are kept to – and be powerful enough to do something about it if they are not. Children and young people wanted them to keep in touch between review meetings, see the child one-to-one, keep checking things are OK for the child and explain important decisions.

Finally, the Regulations should make sure that each care leaver is asked what help they think they need, and whether they have enough money and somewhere to live that is OK.

'Make sure everyone does what meant to'

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Life in children's homes

(April 2009)

This report gave the experience of 117 children from 55 children's homes.

Best about children's homes were staff, activities, making friends, outings, support from staff and other children, good care, facilities and your own bedroom. Worst were missing your family, rules, living with people you don't get on with and when the staff aren't good.

The best staff were kind, caring, good listeners and helpers, fun, happy, easy to get on with, supportive, understanding and encouraging, and kept children safe. Poor staff were moody, too strict, shouted or had favourites. Staff make the difference between good and bad homes, and overall children were positive about staff.

Compared with living in a family, children's homes had more rules, were bigger and less homely and had less love. You lived with more people you didn't know well.

Good children's homes were spacious, with plenty to do, homely, had individual bedrooms, were safe, secure, had good gardens, enough toilets and showers to avoid queues, and were clean and well decorated. The worst were old, dirty, in poor repair, not homely and had lots of locked doors. The best locations for children's homes were near activities and shops, in a pleasant, quiet area close to town, near good transport and with good neighbours. The worst were on a 'bad estate', in an unsafe area, far from family and friends,

and in a remote or rural area (especially near a farm). It might be important for a child to be in a home far enough away from areas where they had got into trouble.

The main preparation for the future was being taught independence and practical skills, staff support, and help with education and training.

The biggest dangers in homes were other children, being bullied or beaten up, fires and running away. The main safety measures were staff supervision, building safety, talking with keyworkers, and rules. The main counters to bullying were staff supervision, rules and sanctions, and children themselves standing up to bullies.

Restraint was usually only used for permitted reasons: to stop someone hurting themselves or others, or seriously damaging property. But a few children reported use of restraint to make children do as they were told, or as a punishment, neither of which is a permitted use of restraint. A quarter of the children said restraint hadn't been used at their home during the time they had lived there.

'Social services leaflets say a lot about the good things in children's homes, but none of the negatives'

Life in residential special schools

(April 2009)

This report gave the experience of 338 children in 40 different residential special schools.

Best things about living in residential special schools were the activities and trips out, being with friends, and the staff. According to the children, the worst thing was being homesick, followed by rules and sanctions and living with other children with problems. Forty-one per cent said they were homesick. Many had lived in both children's homes and residential special schools. Neither was generally better – it depended on the school and the home.

Children were very positive about residential special school staff. Good staff were kind, understanding, nice people, friendly and fun, and did their caring job well. Poor staff were too strict about rules and punishments, and shouted at children. The most usual sort of help with children's problems was staff talking problems through and giving personal advice. Seventy per cent thought their school gave them all the support they needed.

Residential school buildings were good if there was plenty to do, you had your own bedroom and plenty of space, and they felt homely and safe. Old buildings were liked if they were

interesting and had an interesting history, but not if they were 'spooky', smelt or had poor heating and plumbing.

Children told us the two main dangers to them were fire, followed by bullying. Disabled children were particularly worried about getting out of the building in a fire, and some older buildings seemed more at risk of fire.

The four things children thought kept them safe in residential special school were staff supervision and advice, fire alarms and drills, the security of the buildings, and children's own knowledge of how to keep themselves out of danger. The main things helping to counter bullying were staff being around, punishments for bullying, ways of reporting bullying, and school anti-bullying campaigns.

Restraint was usually used for the permitted reasons: to stop someone hurting themselves or others, or seriously damaging property. But 6% said restraint was used as a punishment, and 4% that it was used to make children do as they were told, neither of which is a permitted use of restraint. Thirteen per cent said restraint hadn't been used at their school during the time they had lived there.

The main spare time activity was sport, followed by computing, spending time with friends, and arts and crafts. Most were happy with the activities on offer. Most saw a healthy diet and plenty of exercise as keeping them healthy at school, but a quarter thought that junk food that they themselves added to the school diet was unhealthy for them.

'You can talk to staff and they help you to sort it out'

Life in residential further education

(April 2009)

This was a report of the experience of 149 residential students under 18 in 14 different further education (FE) colleges.

According to these students, the best aspects of residential life in an FE college were social life, activities, learning independence, enjoying new freedoms away from home and not having to travel long distances between home and college. The three most common differences from living at home were being with friends, having independence and responsibility, and being without parental supervision. Sixty-one per cent of residential students were homesick.

Students rated their accommodation as good if students got on with each other, had good internet access, kitchens and bathrooms, it was homely, safe and secure, near town, shops and transport, and close to residential and study buildings. Whether rural locations were liked was a matter of personal taste.

Living at college meant more encouragement and time to study, less travelling, but also more distractions from studying. The two main activities outside work time were sporting or fitness activities and socialising. Some students were concerned that their diet, often supplemented by junk food and takeaways, had become unhealthy.

The best college staff were friendly, helpful, fair, approachable and easy to contact. Students disliked staff who treated them 'like children', supervised too closely, were too strict or were moody.

Over three quarters of the students we consulted thought that they were supervised 'very' or 'fairly' closely outside teaching time. Half thought this was 'about right', a third that it was 'a bit too much' and 13% that it was 'much too much'. The two main differences in supervision between those under and over 18 were curfews for under 18s and not being allowed alcohol.

The main welfare support was having special staff available to give support when they needed it. Almost half thought their college gave them enough welfare support. The three main dangers students identified were the risks of not having parental supervision, strangers coming on to campus, and not looking after themselves properly. The main things keeping students safe were secure entrances to buildings, CCTV, wardens and security staff. Bullying was countered by staff supervision and support, together with students generally getting on well together.

'Living away from home has really helped me grow up quicker than most people at home, it's great'

Life in secure care

(April 2009)

We visited nine of the 18 secure units then open in England to ask the young people there about their experiences of security.

We heard that the best of living in a secure unit was that it is safe, it keeps you out of trouble and safe from people who might harm you, and helps you to sort yourself out. For many, the best thing was having your own private bedroom.

Staff make a huge difference. Children told us the best are friendly, good listeners, with a good sense of humour, and calm when things go badly. They help by talking things through. They also protect you against bullying, violence and other people 'kicking off'. Poor staff are unfair and moody, and seem to wind young people up or only to be concerned with control.

Education was good if you had not had it before, but bad if you had to attend when other young people had school holidays or would have left school.

Worst things about security were loss of freedom, other people 'kicking off', being unable to do many things teenagers usually

do and being away from friends and family. So were being restrained, property being removed for safety, rules and routines, a limited choice of what to wear, not being allowed to smoke and being watched so you didn't have much privacy. Being in security could make you depressed or make you self-harm.

Giving advice on security from their own experience, young people said rooms in units are always small and should be larger, heating and ventilation should be controlled better, and it should be easier to go into secure outside areas. Secure units should be more local to young people's homes. Young people accepted cameras watching them within units, to prevent bullying and to prove innocence if wrongly accused of something. Better risk assessments would allow some rules and routines to be relaxed and young people to mix more, when it was safe to do so. There should be better separation of younger people more likely to 'kick off'. Many wanted separate units for 'welfare' and 'criminal' placements.

Preparation for leaving included much-valued staff-supervised 'mobilities' (trips outside the unit), staff help, progressing through points systems to sort out behaviour and gain skills, and being clear about your next placement. What young people most looked forward to after leaving security was smoking again, and being back with family and friends. Many said they were afraid of leaving security. What they feared most was being less safe, going back to their old ways and getting into trouble again.

'It's trying to change me so I can stop doing what got me here in the first place'

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Care and prejudice

(August 2009)

This report gave the views of 362 children and young people about their experience of care and about any prejudice they had experienced because they were from care.

According to the children we asked, the best things about being in care were meeting new people, having good foster carers or staff and being able to do activities and have your own possessions. The worst thing was missing your family, though this got less the longer you were away from them in care. Being in care could mean being away from dangers at home, feeling more supervised, and sometimes having to get more permissions to do things than other children did.

Being in care did not make you more likely to be treated generally better, or generally worse, than other children. Girls and foster children were more likely to report being treated better for being in care. The longer someone was in care, the more likely they were to experience being treated worse at some time while in care. Better treatment usually meant getting more help and support. Worse treatment was usually about being bullied for being in care.

Half the children said being in care made them feel different from others. Girls felt more different than boys. Children felt more different the longer they spent in care, mainly because they lived away from their families and had some very different experiences from other children. Other children, and professionals such as teachers, reacted differently to children in care – sometimes this was good, sometimes bad, but people

often showed fixed and not good views about people in care.

Coming into care made a difference to many things – a quarter said it stopped them seeing their family regularly, over a quarter that it had meant seeing friends less, for some it had stopped risky behaviour. For 44% of children, being in care meant they could not stay overnight with friends because their friends' parents hadn't been police checked, which is not a statutory requirement.

Overall, children in care believe the public has a negative view about children and young people in care. Nearly half thought the public saw children in care as bad and uncontrollable, only one in 10 that the public saw children in care as the same as any other children. One in eight thought the public felt sorry for them and under one in 12 that the public saw children in care positively. Forty-five per cent of the children and young people worried about other people knowing they came from care – in case they were judged, treated differently or bullied. Some thought that if people knew they had been in care, they might have difficulty getting either work or accommodation in the future.

'You get labelled for being in care'

Children's messages to the Minister

(November 2009)

This was a report to the Children's Minister of the views of 437 children for the 2009 Ministerial Stocktake of care. One hundred and fifty-two of the children attended consultation events with the Minister present.

According to the children we asked, local councils are doing best at keeping children in care safe and making sure they achieve well, and worst at keeping them healthy, making sure they enjoy activities and leisure, helping them make a contribution to the community and helping them prepare to get good jobs.

Over a third of members of Children in Care Councils reported being often discriminated against for being in care. Two thirds thought the opinions of their Children in Care Councils made 'some' or 'a lot of' difference to what happened for children in care. Forty-two per cent of members reported that in their authorities children are only allowed to stay overnight in friends' houses if their friends' parents have been police checked (this has never been a government requirement), and 45% said that the last time someone they knew moved to a new placement, their possessions had been carried in plastic rubbish bags.

'Listen to us, check if we need anything, help us stay in contact with our family, remember we are people'

Sixty-five per cent of Children in Care Council members voted that children in care should get visited no less often than once a month by someone from the council. Children should have a choice of social worker and talk to them one-to-one in private. Some told the Minister their carers were usually there when they were talking to their social worker.

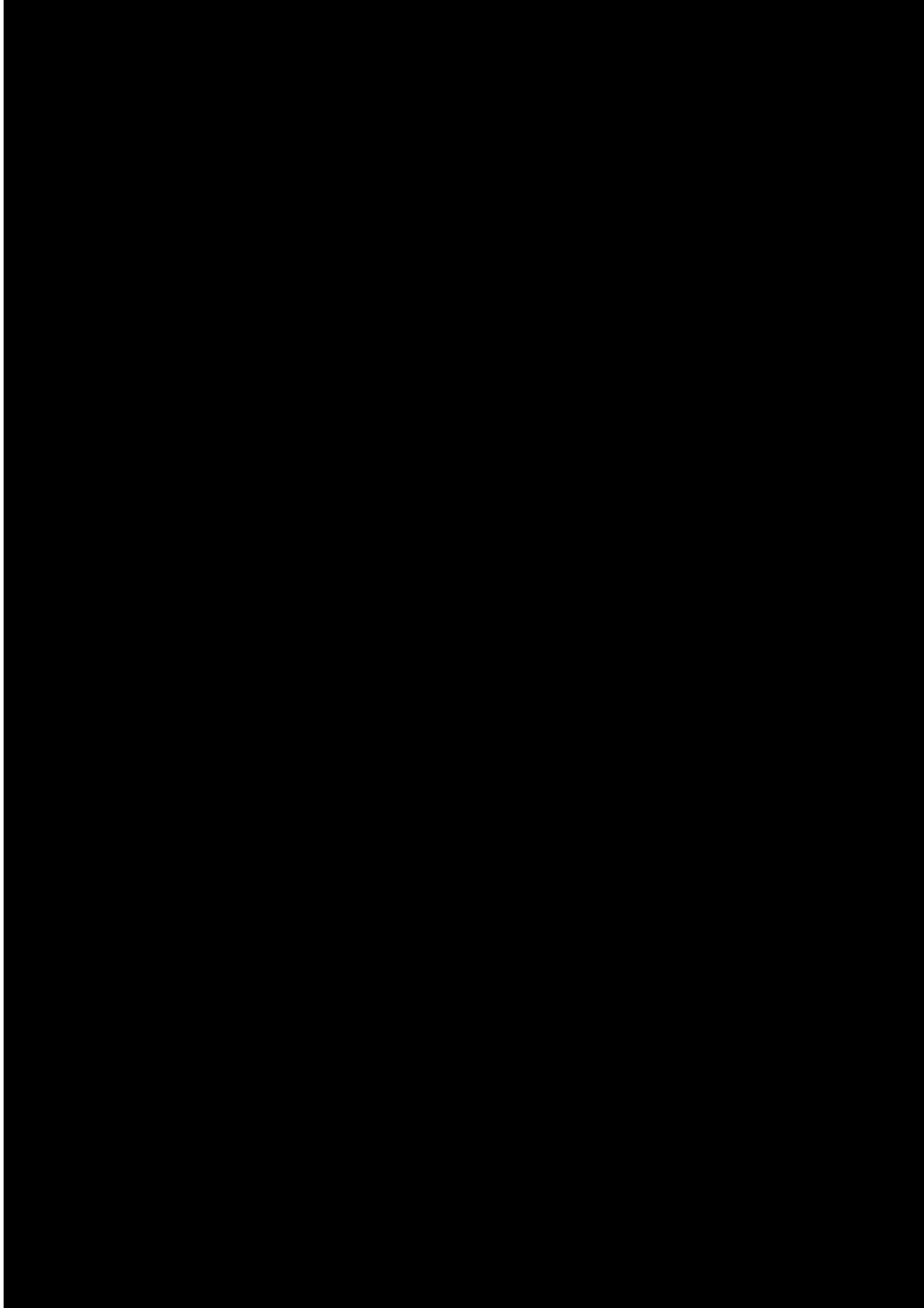
Children in Care Council members reported that the main reasons for children running away from care were being unhappy with their placements, being unhappy with how they were being treated by carers, not being listened to, or feeling generally bad.

The subjects most discussed so far by Children in Care Councils were their local council's Pledge to children in care, setting up the Children in Care Council and support for children in care. Children in Care Councils should organise more activities for their members and give more information and support to children in care.

The three government proposals that children thought would make the biggest difference for children in care were providing more money for those going to university, not moving children aged 15 or 16 to a new school, and helping young people to stay in placements until they were 21. Changing placements could be either a bad experience or a fresh start.

Seventy-seven per cent of Children in Care Council members thought things were generally getting slightly better or much better for children in care, and one in 10 that things were getting slightly or much worse for children in care.

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Children's Care Monitor 2008 (August 2008)

Children's Care Monitor 2009 (December 2009)

The Children's Rights Director reports children's views on the state of social care in England each year, covering keeping safe, bullying, having a say in what happens, making complaints, education, care planning and leaving care. The first Monitor was published in 2008 and the latest in 2009, involving 1,195 children and young people. These are selected findings for 2009.

- Children felt safest in the building where they live, next safest at school or college, next in the countryside, and least safe in towns or cities.
- Disabled children felt less safe in towns and cities than other children did.
- Top five dangers to children and young people were seen as drugs, alcohol, knives, strangers and kidnappers, and bullying.
- Girls were more likely than boys to see alcohol as a source of danger.
- Under-14s were more likely to see strangers, kidnappers and road accidents as dangers, over-14s were more likely to list drugs and alcohol.

'I think it is great that people get a say in the things that are happening with our lives'

- 43% worry a little or a lot about their safety – those in residential special schools worrying most, and those in other types of boarding school worrying least.
- Children feeling unsafe were most likely to go for help to a friend, next to the police, followed by a foster carer, teacher, social worker and parent.
- Top three likely causes of accident were seen as road traffic, then the results of alcohol, then injury while being beaten up or fighting.
- Nine per cent said they were being bullied often or always, 69% that they were hardly ever or never bullied and 15% that they often or always worried about getting bullied – there is slightly more worrying about bullying than actual bullying.
- Most common form of bullying was teasing or name-calling, followed by spreading rumours, then getting left out of things, then being hit or physically hurt.
- Sixty-nine per cent of bullying was by someone of around the same age.
- Twenty per cent of those in care said they were bullied for being in care.
- Half were usually or always asked their opinions on things that matter, and 48% said their opinions usually or always make a difference.

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- Sixty-nine per cent said they were usually or always told about major changes coming in their lives, but 11% that they were never or not usually told.
- Seventy-three per cent knew how to make a complaint, and 65% thought complaints they had made were sorted out fairly.
- Fifty-three per cent of children in care knew how to get an advocate, but 29% didn't know what an advocate is.
- Eighty-four per cent rated their education as good or very good, with 79% saying they were doing well or very well in their education.
- Ninety per cent of children in care rated their care as good or very good, and 81% thought they were in the right placement for them.
- Sixty-eight per cent said their last change of placement was in their best interests, and 54% said their last change of school because of a change of placement had also been in their best interests.
- Seventy-six per cent of children in care knew what was in their care plan, while 65% had a say in it, 68% agreed with it, and 82% said it was being kept to.
- Seventy-six per cent of children in care who also had a brother or sister in care said they had been separated from one or more brothers or sisters.
- Forty-eight per cent of children in care knew how to get in touch with their Independent Reviewing Officer, but 23% didn't know what an IRO was.
- Seventy per cent of care leavers rated their social care support as good or very good, and 58% said they were in the right accommodation for them.

'Adults just do what they think is right for you and sometimes they're not right!'

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Keeping in touch

(December 2009)

This report gave the experience of 370 children in care on keeping in touch, and losing contact, with family and friends.

Children wished to be able to choose to keep in touch with family and friends who in turn wanted to keep in touch with them, unless this was unsafe, and wanted social workers to help them keep contact. Contact was often lost as time passed, when children moved to new placements, or when someone such as a brother or sister was adopted. Keeping in touch could be by visits, phone, email, networking sites and photographs. Having news of your birth family could be very important. Meeting people again after losing contact could be strange and should be gradual.

The longer a child had been in care, the more likely they were to have lost contact with parents, brothers and sisters. Half had at least monthly contact with their birth mother, but 18% had lost all contact with her. Twenty-three per cent had at least monthly contact with their birth father, while 46% had lost all contact with him. Fifty-six per cent had contact with a brother or sister at least once a month, and 36% had at least monthly contact with a relative other than a parent, brother or sister.

Thirty-five per cent had lost all contact with friends they had before coming into care, while 14% had at least monthly contact with a friend they had made in an earlier placement.

Few kept in regular contact with previous carers: 16% (mainly foster children) had at least monthly contact with a previous carer.

Eighty-one per cent of children in care who had at least one brother or sister who was also in care had been separated from them in care. Boys, and children in children's homes, were more likely to live separately from brothers or sisters. Most thought siblings should be kept together in care, but many thought it sometimes right to place siblings in different placements if there was a good reason. Possible reasons would be if siblings didn't get on together, if there was danger to any of them or if they wanted to be separated. Losing contact with siblings was most likely to happen once a child had spent between two and six years in care.

The three best ways for siblings to keep in touch were by visits, by phone or email, and by having photos of each other.

'Don't split us up. It is hard enough coming into care without not seeing my brother/sister'

Getting advice

(January 2010)

This report gave the experience of 351 children in care and care leavers about getting information and advice.

Social workers were seen as the most usual source of advice and personal information overall, though for foster children their foster carers were the most usual source. Friends, then parents, came next, then teachers, siblings (especially for those in their first two years in care) and doctors. The internet came just below doctors, but above leaflets and books.

Eighty-seven per cent said they were getting all, or nearly all, the advice they needed. Children wanted to know why they were in care. Sixty-eight per cent said they had been told everything they needed to know about why they came into care. Those who had been in care more than six years were less likely to know why they were in care.

Children needed more advice and information in times of change: when first coming into care, when they were without a social worker or during a change of social worker, when

changing placements, and when leaving care. They could miss out on information they wanted if adults thought it might be upsetting. Children most wanted more advice about emotional and physical well-being, how to look after themselves, and plans for their future. Twenty per cent said they didn't know enough about the plans for their future, and 8% that they weren't told enough about their care reviews. Some wanted to know who could attend their reviews, and to have their own copies of review minutes.

Some wanted to know what to expect when first coming into care, about any problems happening back at home, and about education, money, legal ages for various things, cooking and shopping. It was, however, possible to be given too much information.

The best ways of getting advice and information were through booklets or websites, as long as they were young-person-friendly, and through face-to-face discussions. Some preferred written information, some face-to-face discussions, and some preferred not to use the internet. It was important to know where to go for advice. Adults giving advice to children need to be prepared to explain as well as tell, and to look up what they don't know.

'Aggression comes out of not knowing'

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Planning, placement and review

(February 2010)

This report to the DCSF gives the views of 58 children on issues in the consultation drafts of new Regulations and Guidance.

Overall, children recommended that Independent Reviewing Officers should work for an independent organisation rather than the local council, that children in care should be able to have an advocate whenever decisions were being made about their lives, and that they should be able to stay as long as possible in the same placement – though it could also be right to move. Most advised that annual health assessments were not frequent enough.

Overall, they advised that the proposed six-weekly social worker visits to children during the first year of a placement, and three-monthly visits after the first year, are not often enough.

The majority agreed that children should never have to change schools in years 10 or 11 (at examination or qualification time), but many advised that they should still change schools if their placement had gone wrong.

‘If they’re used to being around the same area, getting into trouble, the child may want to move away to a different area and different school, for a clean start’

Most supported new rules that there should be a choice of more than one new placement at each move, and a backup placement available if the child didn’t settle, that if possible children should be able to carry on at the same school or college when they moved placements, and that brothers and sisters should if possible be placed together. Children should usually be placed close to home, but should be placed a distance away if there was a good reason.

Placement with a ‘connected person’ (a family member or friend) could be a good option, but children advised that these placements could also be unsafe and should be checked out before they were made, like any other placement.

Reviews should be less formal, and the child should agree where they were held and who should attend. Teachers should not usually attend and meetings should not usually be held at school, where they might make a child in care stand out. Reviews should check whether decisions from previous reviews have been carried out, and whether the child is getting what they are entitled to – if not, the Independent Reviewing Officer should take action. Care plans should include immigration issues and the young persons’ finances. Placements or care plans should only be changed without a review meeting in an emergency.

Accommodation for care leavers should be safe from risks from other people, either locally or in the same accommodation.

Children on rights and responsibilities

(March 2010)

This report gives the views of 1,888 children who were consulted on children's rights and responsibilities, for a future Bill, charter or Act of Parliament setting out UK citizens' rights and responsibilities. **A right was defined as something you should always be able to do, to have, to know, to say or to be protected from, and a responsibility as something everyone is expected to do, for themselves, for other people or for the world we live in.**

Children were in favour of rights and responsibilities being set down in a single document, to tell people their rights and what was expected of them, and to set out rights such as being listened to and treated fairly.

The top 10 children's rights voted by children as most important.

1. To be protected from abuse
2. To have an education
3. To be kept alive and well
4. Not to be discriminated against because of my race, colour, sex, language, disability or beliefs
5. Not to be treated or punished in a way that is cruel or meant to make me feel bad about myself
6. Special help for any child with a disability
7. To have privacy
8. Not to be bullied
9. To keep in touch with my parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters if I want to and they want to, wherever we all live
10. To have my private letters, phone calls, emails and messages kept confidential

'We should have the right to take responsibility'

The rights not to be bullied, and to keep in touch with family, are new rights sought by children through this consultation. The others came from the Human Rights Act or the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Analysing children's reasons for supporting particular rights led to nine absolute human rights according to children.

- The right to be safe from harm
- The right to well-being
- The right to be alive and well
- The right to learning and education
- The right to enjoy life
- The right to be oneself
- The right of all people to be treated equally and fairly
- The right to socialise with other people
- The right to have a say in one's own life

The top 10 children's responsibilities voted by children as most important.

1. Responsibility for your own behaviour and actions
2. Making use of your education
3. Showing respect to others
4. Responsibility for your own safety
5. Looking after others
6. Looking after yourself
7. Your own health and hygiene
8. Carrying out your responsibilities around the house
9. Looking after the environment
10. Giving your opinion

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Fairness and unfairness

(June 2010)

This report gave the views and experience of 268 children in boarding schools, children's homes and other care and residential settings on fairness and unfairness.

Children defined fairness as being treated equally unless there was a good reason for different treatment, having your rights, being listened to, having what you ought to have, only being punished proportionately and for things you had actually done, and getting on together without anyone being left out. Unfairness was most commonly being wrongly blamed for something. It could also be when someone else is treated better than you, when children who misbehave get more attention and help than others, and when you are labelled and treated according to your past, or just one past incident.

Children were treated most fairly by adults running activities. Next most fair were doctors and health workers, though it was unfair when they kept you waiting to see them, or did not take your health worries seriously. Next most fair were then school and college staff, then adults looking after children, then friends, then people you were paying for a service or buying something from, and then other children generally. Children were not treated very much more fairly by friends than by other children. Children were treated least fairly by the general public.

Most usual reactions to being treated unfairly were telling a parent or teacher, or doing nothing. Being treated unfairly made

children feel sad, upset, angry and bad about themselves. They feel angry when they see others being treated unfairly and feel they should be doing more to help. Children feel more strongly about being treated unfairly than about almost anything else.

To be treated fairly, it was important to treat others the way you expected them to treat you, to be polite, and to tell someone if you were being unfairly treated. To be fair, adults should support children equally, be kindly and listen to their views and feelings.

Being treated fairly makes children feel happy and good about themselves. Seeing others treated fairly was good, though there could be jealousy if they were treated better than you.

Children most likely to be treated unfairly by other children were those who are 'different' in any way, who misbehave, are disabled, or are from a different race or culture. Those most likely to be treated unfairly by adults are children who misbehave, have a bad attitude, are rude or unkind to others, and sometimes younger children.

Overall, the way children are being treated is becoming fairer.

**'Listen to two sides
of a story'**

Reports published in 2007–10

These and all other reports of children’s views from the Children’s Rights Director can be downloaded from the children’s rights website: www.rights4me.org.

Care and prejudice, Roger Morgan, Children’s Rights Director, Ofsted, August 2009

Children on bullying, Roger Morgan, Children’s Rights Director, Ofsted, February 2008

Children on care standards, Roger Morgan, Children’s Rights Director, Ofsted, December 2007

Children on rights and responsibilities, Roger Morgan, Children’s Rights Director, Ofsted, March 2010

Children’s Care Monitor 2008, Roger Morgan, Children’s Rights Director, Ofsted, August 2008

Children’s Care Monitor 2009, Roger Morgan, Children’s Rights Director, Ofsted, December 2009

Children’s experience of private fostering, Roger Morgan, Children’s Rights Director, Ofsted, September 2008

Children’s messages to the Minister, Roger Morgan, Children’s Rights Director, Ofsted, November 2009

Children’s views on advocacy, Roger Morgan, Children’s Rights Director, Ofsted, May 2008

Fairness and unfairness, Roger Morgan, Children’s Rights Director, Ofsted, June 2010

Future care, Roger Morgan, Children’s Rights Director, Ofsted, October 2008

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Getting advice, Roger Morgan, Children’s Rights Director, Ofsted, January 2010

Keeping in touch, Roger Morgan, Children’s Rights Director, Ofsted, December 2009

Life in children’s homes, Roger Morgan, Children’s Rights Director, Ofsted, April 2009

Life in residential further education, Roger Morgan, Children’s Rights Director, Ofsted, April 2009

Life in residential special schools, Roger Morgan, Children’s Rights Director, Ofsted, April 2009

Life in secure care, Roger Morgan, Children’s Rights Director, Ofsted, April 2009

Making ContactPoint work, Roger Morgan, Children’s Rights Director, Ofsted, November 2007

Planning, placement and review, Roger Morgan, Children’s Rights Director, Office of the Children’s Rights Director, February 2010

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