



how are schools supporting children in care?

annual survey of trends in education 2007

This is one of a series of papers reporting the findings from the Annual Survey of Trends in Education 2007, carried out by the NFER on behalf of the LGA. During the summer term of 2007, 347 primary schools and 854 secondary schools in England took part in the survey, covering a range of topics: support for children in care was one of the key topics covered.

1 What is known about the education of children in care?

In general, the educational achievements of children in care remain significantly lower than those of their non-looked-after peers. The national statistics of formal achievements show the differences in GCSE attainment and key stage 2 (KS2) attainment. For example in 2006, only 12 per cent of children who had been looked after for 12 months or more achieved five or more GCSEs (or equivalent) at grades A* to C, compared with 59 per cent of children nationally (DfES, 2007a). Similarly, at KS2 in 2006, only 43 per cent of children who had been looked after for 12 months or more achieved level 4 in English and only 41 per cent achieved level 4 in mathematics, compared with the national percentages of 79 and 76 per cent respectively (DfES, 2007a).

Recent research and government documentation have focused on identifying ways to improve the educational achievement of children in care, in order to narrow the gap between the achievements of those in care and their peers.

This includes the joint DfES and DoH guidance providing support on the corporate parenting role for local authorities (LAs) and schools (DfEE and DoH, 2000), Ofsted's (2001) report on raising achievement, and research on the role of the school in supporting children in care (Fletcher-Campbell *et al.*, 2003). But the difference in performance between those in care and their peers has remained unacceptably high. Building on the guidance, and on the findings from the Social Exclusion Unit's (2003) report, Section 52 of the *Children Act 2004* placed a duty on LAs to promote the educational achievement of looked-after children (LAC), as well as safeguarding and promoting their welfare (DfES, 2005). Although the statutory duty was placed on LAs, schools need to cooperate with LAs in order for this to be achieved. The statutory guidance stated:

The Government expects schools to take a proactive approach to co-operating with and supporting local authorities in discharging this duty. (p. 4)

Since last year's survey of trends, the Government has published the White Paper *Care Matters: Time for Change* (GB. Parliament. HoC, 2007) – a further effort to increase

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the educational achievement and attainment, improve the health and emotional well-being of children in care, as well as to provide more secure care placements and a securer transition from care. This White Paper builds on responses to the Green Paper *Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care* (DfES, 2006). Some of the measures to support the education of children in care detailed in the White Paper include:

- putting the role of the designated teacher on a statutory footing
- providing £500 annually for each child in care at risk of falling behind in their education, to spend on books and after-school activities
- giving children in care the highest priority in school admissions, with LAs having the authority to direct schools to admit children in care regardless of whether the school is fully subscribed
- an increased emphasis on the importance of schools and LAs developing strategies to increase the attendance and reduce the exclusions of those in care.

In this context, primary and secondary schools that took part in the Annual Survey of Trends were asked about their school policies in relation to support for children in care.



2 What are schools doing?

2.1 Do schools have policies to support children in care?

Schools were asked whether they had an agreed policy for educational provision and support for children in care (see Table 1), and for cooperating with and supporting the LA in promoting the achievement of these children (see Table 2).

Table 1 Percentage of schools that have an agreed policy for provision and support

Do schools have an agreed policy for educational provision and support for children in care?	% of primary schools	% of secondary schools
Yes, existing policy covers this	59	67
Currently being developed	22	17
No	16	9
Don't know	0	1
No response	3	6
	N=347	N=854

A single response item

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

- A high percentage of the primary schools (81 per cent) and secondary schools (84 per cent) indicated that their existing policy covered educational provision and support for children in care or that they were currently developing a policy with regard to this.
- A small proportion of primary (16 per cent) and secondary schools (nine per cent) indicated that they neither had a policy to support children in care nor were they developing one.
- Compared to the results of the 2006 survey (Chamberlain *et al.*, 2006), the percentage of schools with an agreed policy for educational provision and support had increased by four percentage points. In primary schools, the proportion had increased from 55 per cent to 59 per cent, and in secondary schools, the percentage had increased from 63 per cent to 67 per cent.



Table 2 Percentage of schools that have an agreed policy for cooperating with and supporting the LA

Do schools have an agreed policy for cooperating with and supporting the LA in promoting the educational achievements of children in care?	% of primary schools	% of secondary schools
Yes, existing policy covers this	52	59
Currently being developed	23	19
No	21	14
Don't know	1	2
No response	4	6
	N=347	N=854

A single response item

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

- With regard to cooperating with and supporting the LA in promoting the educational achievements of children in care (see Table 2), the situation was similar to that described in Table 1. A high percentage of primary (75 per cent) and secondary schools (78 per cent) indicated that their existing policy covered cooperating with and supporting the LA in promoting the educational achieve-

ments of children in care, or that they were currently developing a policy with regard to this.

- Approximately a fifth (21 per cent) of primary schools and 14 per cent of secondary schools indicated that their policies did not cover this, nor were they developing policies.

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- Compared to 2006, the percentage of schools with an agreed policy for cooperating with and supporting the LA had increased slightly. In primary schools, the proportion had increased from 50 per cent to 52 per cent, and in secondary schools, the percentage had increased from 55 per cent to 59 per cent.

Differences between groups

The survey findings also revealed some significant differences between secondary schools with different characteristics, although no differences were found at the primary school level.

- At secondary school level, schools with the lowest proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) or with the highest levels of attainment were less likely to already have policies in place to support children in care’s educational provision. Schools with the lowest

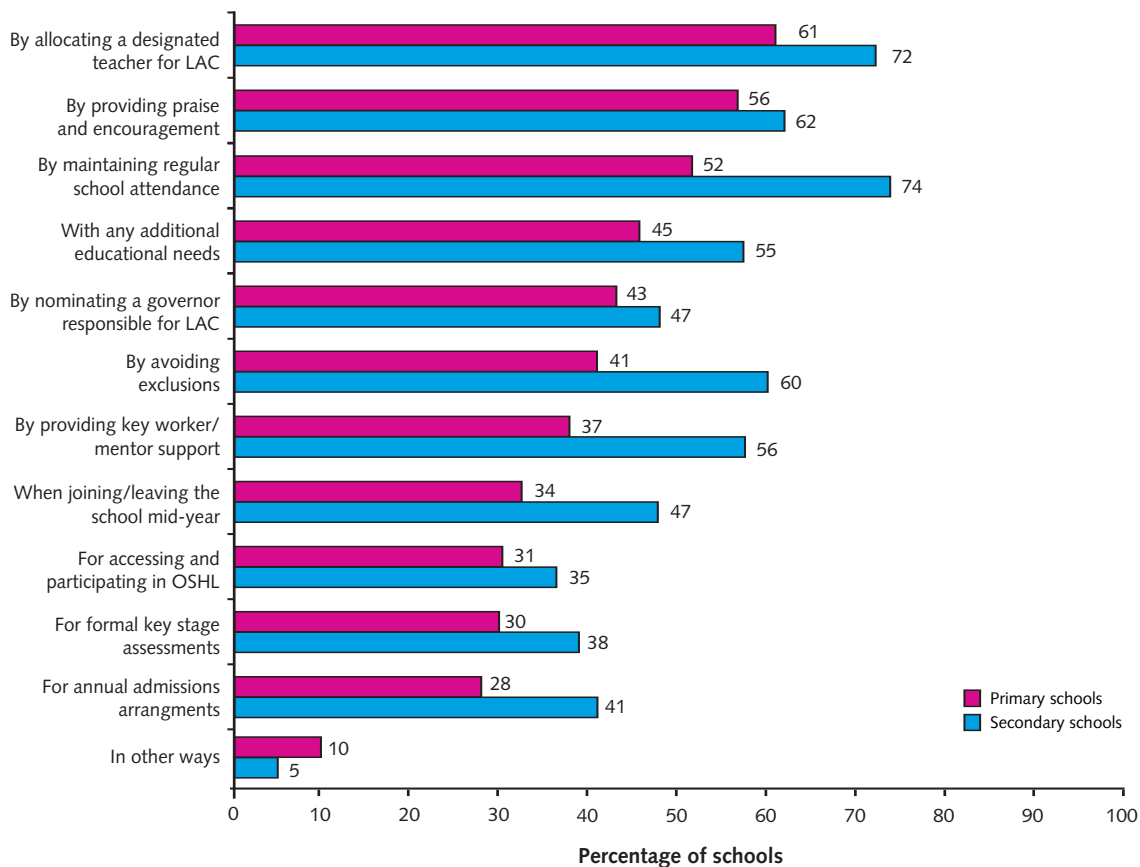
proportion of pupils eligible for FSM were also less likely to already have policies in place for cooperating with and supporting the LA in promoting the achievements of those in care. These findings are very similar to the findings last year.

2.2 Do schools prioritise children in care in their support arrangements?

The schools were also asked whether they prioritised children in care in any of their support arrangements (see Figure 1).

Overall, schools were most likely to prioritise children in care by allocating a designated teacher, by providing praise and encouragement and by maintaining regular school attendance.

Figure 1 Means by which schools prioritise children in care in support arrangements





A greater proportion of secondary schools than primary schools indicated that children in care were prioritised in their support arrangements, particularly with regard to maintaining regular attendance, by avoiding exclusions and by providing a key worker/mentor support.

A comparison of the proportion of schools prioritising children in care in these ways in 2006 and 2007 showed that, generally, slightly more schools were prioritising children in care in their support arrangements. The methods used by secondary schools showed a particularly marked increase.

The most marked increases were in the use of praise and encouragement (an increase of nine percentage points); in accessing and participating in out-of-school-hours learning (OSHL) (an increase of eight percentage points); and by avoiding exclusions (an increase of seven percentage points).

Differences between groups

Within the primary schools, there were some significant differences. A greater proportion of primary schools with the following characteristics indicated that they prioritised children in care in their support arrangements compared to other types of primary schools:

- schools with high proportions of pupils eligible for FSM (with regard to most of the support arrangements shown in Figure1)
- large primary schools (with regard to about half of the support arrangements)
- schools with the lowest levels of attainment (with regard to some of the support arrangements)
- schools situated in Metropolitan boroughs (with regard to a few of the support arrangements).

In summary, large primary schools and primary schools in more challenging circumstances were more likely to prioritise children in care in some of their support arrangements – a finding that was also noted in last year’s survey.

Within the secondary schools, there were also some significant differences. Secondary schools with the following characteristics were less likely to prioritise children in care in their support arrangements, compared to other types of secondary schools:

- grammar schools (with regard to all of the support arrangements)
- schools with low proportions of pupils eligible for FSM (with regard to most of the support arrangements)

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- schools with high levels of attainment (with regard to most of the support arrangements).

Furthermore, secondary schools situated in Metropolitan boroughs were more likely to prioritise children in care by providing a key worker or mentor support, compared to schools situated in other types of LA.

A small number of schools made the point that their support arrangements were the same for all children, regardless of whether they were in care, and others noted that they had few or no children in care currently on roll at their school.

3 What are the implications for local authorities?

School policies

This year's data corroborates the findings from last year's Annual Survey of Trends. The findings showed that there remains a proportion of primary and secondary schools that still do not have sufficient policies in place for supporting children in care. Recent statutory guidance (DfES, 2005) stated that LAs should emphasise to governing bodies:

the value of schools having an agreed policy on educational provision and support within the school for looked after children on their roll...[and on] the school's role in taking a proactive approach in cooperating with and supporting local authorities with regard to the education of looked after children attending the school (p.20).

The findings suggest that LAs may still need to promote this further in both primary and secondary schools.

Similarly to 2006, at secondary school level, schools in more affluent areas with high-ability pupils were less likely to have such policies already in place to support children in care – perhaps the types of schools that, historically, children in care have been least likely to attend. Disruption to care placements has often meant that these children have had to change schools mid-year, at times when the schools with high levels of attainment are already full, therefore reducing the likelihood of those in care being admitted to



such schools. Since February 2007, however, schools have been required to admit children in care even if they are theoretically full:

Children who are in public care (looked after children) must now be given top priority in the oversubscription criteria for all schools. And because these children often have to move school during the school year, the law gives their corporate parent the crucial right to direct any school to give them a place, even where the school is full (DfES, 2007b, p. 10)

The recent White Paper *Care Matters: Time for Change* (GB. Parliament. HoC, 2007) also strengthened this point by giving LAs the right, under the *Education and Inspections Act 2006* (England and Wales. Statutes, 2006), to direct schools to admit children in care, particularly in cases where the school is fully subscribed. This emphasises the importance of *all* schools having effective policies in place, regardless of whether they currently have any children in care on roll.

- LAs should support schools and their governing bodies in developing and agreeing policies for the educational provision and support for LAC, regardless of whether schools currently have any LAC on roll, given that all schools must admit children in care, even when they are full.



School strategies

The survey findings also revealed that schools were most likely to prioritise children in care by allocating a designated teacher, by providing praise and encouragement and by maintaining regular school attendance. The concept of the designated teacher for children in care was first introduced in 1994 through the promotion of certain teachers holding a ‘watching brief’ for these children (DFE and DoH, 1994). The role was then outlined further in guidance issued in 2000 (DFEE and DoH, 2000), but it was only through the recent White Paper *Care Matters: Time for Change* (GB. Parliament. HoC, 2007) that the designated teacher role was put on a statutory footing. As aspects of the White Paper are implemented within schools and LAs, one would expect the proportion of schools allocating designated teachers for children in care to increase further. Similarly, the importance of maintaining regular school attendance for children in care was another area highlighted in the White Paper, so it is encouraging to note that many schools are prioritising children in care in this regard.

A greater proportion of secondary schools than primary schools indicated that children in care were prioritised in their support arrangements, particularly with regard to maintaining regular attendance, by avoiding exclusions and by providing a key worker/mentor support – all aspects highlighted in the recent White Paper. There was also a small increase from 2006 to 2007 in the proportion of sec-

ondary schools prioritising children in care through the use of praise and encouragement, in accessing and participating in OSHL and by avoiding exclusions. This may be related to the promotion of such strategies nationally or locally, for example, the increase in providing access to OSHL is likely to reflect the marked increase in schools providing OSHL for all pupils, as part of the drive for all schools to become extended schools by 2010.

Similarly to the findings last year, there were significant differences between schools with different characteristics. Large primary schools and primary schools in more challenging circumstances were more likely to prioritise children in care in their support arrangements. At secondary school level, the schools that were less likely to prioritise children in care in their support arrangements were grammar schools, schools with low proportions of pupils eligible for FSM, and schools with high levels of attainment. Finally, primary and secondary schools situated in Metropolitan boroughs were more likely than schools in other types of LA to prioritise children in care in some of their support arrangements, particularly by providing key worker or mentor support. These differences are similar to those found in 2006, suggesting that:

- LAs might wish to target the high-attaining schools in the more affluent areas, to ensure that their support strategies are meeting the needs of children in care

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- LAs should continue to recognise and promote the importance of effective implementation of the strategies outlined in the White Paper to improve the outcomes for children in care. This will require successful partnerships between LAs and regional and national Government, voluntary and private sectors and the wider children's workforce.

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