

**REPORT TO:** Education Committee

**MEETING DATE:** 24 September 2013

**BY:** Depute Chief Executive (Resources and People Services)

**SUBJECT:** Promoting Good Practice for Looked-After Pupils at Risk of Exclusion from schools in East Lothian

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## **1 PURPOSE**

- 1.1 To ask the Committee to approve the recommendations within the report entitled “Promoting Good Practice for Look-After Pupils at Risk of Exclusion from schools in East Lothian” (Appendix 1).

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:-
- i. Note the recommendations of the report entitled “Promoting Good Practice for Look-After Pupils at Risk of Exclusion from schools in East Lothian” (Appendix 1).
  - ii. Approve the recommendations contained within the report (Appendix 1).

## **3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The research was carried out in 2011/12 by a multidisciplinary group, exploring the experiences of secondary aged looked-after pupils and exclusion.
- 3.2 It focused on the authority’s 6 secondary schools and an independent special school situated within the authority. It used semi-structured interviews and focus groups to gather the views of young people, parents, carers, school staff and other professionals involved in supporting the young people.
- 3.3 The aims of the project were to reduce exclusion measures for looked-after pupils, identify and build on current good practice, and raise

awareness and understanding within our schools of the issues looked after pupils can face.

3.4 The research involved an extensive literature review exploring issues particular to looked-after pupils in relation to their educational experience. The recommendations emerging from the research are endorsed by the literature e.g. “Engaged and Involved: a positive approach to managing school exclusions” Scottish Government (2011).

3.5 The main areas of recommendations within the report are:-

**3.5.1 Authority Level:**

- 1) Develop guidance for schools on alternatives to exclusion, related processes (options analysis, External Panel etc.) and resources (both within and out with the authority).
- 2) Develop guidance for schools around re-admission processes.
- 3) Education and Children’s Wellbeing should review and develop the systems for maintaining accurate information on looked-after pupils e.g. looked-after Pupils Digest, SEEMIS.
- 4) The Exclusion Scrutiny Group, or an alternative body, should monitor exclusion data for looked-after pupils.
- 5) Looked after pupil attainment should be monitored and tracked at both a school and authority level.

**3.5.2 Secondary School should ensure:**

- 1) Review the role of the Designated Manager for looked-after pupils in their school to ensure the remit reflects related policy, guidance and local practice.
- 2) Ensure that the lead professional for each looked-after pupil is a trusted adult who experiences a positive relationship with the pupil.
- 3) Ensure all looked-after pupils are within Staged Assessment & Intervention at Stage 3.
- 4) Carry out a needs analysis with staff on issues around looked-after pupils, and arrange development opportunities as required e.g. training for all staff on attachment.

**3.5.3 Professionals should ensure:**

- 1) A focus on looked-after pupils as individuals, as well as being part of an identifiable group.
- 2) That when a looked-after pupil is at risk of exclusion the team around the child meet to create a plan that identifies supports and avoids exclusion where possible.

- 3) The team around the child are consulted prior to a looked-after pupil being excluded from school to ensure all the current factors and alternatives to exclusion are considered before a final decision.
- 4) That where exclusion is unavoidable the period of exclusion should be kept to a minimum with a priority on arrangements to return the pupil to school.

### **3.6 The Department will:**

- Create a short life working group to develop guidance for schools as outlined in the recommendations.
- Ensure schools, Education and Children's Wellbeing monitoring, track and the dissemination of exclusion and attainment data for looked-after pupils is regularly reviewed.
- Ensure secondary School Head Teachers implement the recommendations of practice at a school level.
- Support all professionals involved in supporting looked-after pupils to implement the recommendations for practice.

## **4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 All appropriate policies will be updated in accordance with the recommendations.

## **5 EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 5.1 This report is not applicable to the well being of equalities groups and an Equalities Impact Assessment is not required.

## **6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Financial - none
- 6.2 Personnel - none
- 6.3 Other - none

## **7 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 7.1 The research report entitled "Promoting Good Practice for Looked-After Pupils at Risk of Exclusion from schools in East Lothian" (Appendix 1)

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<b>DATE</b>	23 August 2013



# Promoting good practice for looked-after pupils at risk of exclusion from school in East Lothian 2011/12

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## Education and Children's Wellbeing

**This report looks at how we can reduce the number of looked-after pupils being excluded from school. It identifies good practice around the processes involved in exclusion, and looks to raise awareness and understanding on the issues faced by looked-after pupils.**

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# ***Promoting good practice for looked-after pupils at risk of exclusion from school in East Lothian 2011/2012***

## **Introduction**

Looked-after pupils<sup>a</sup> are 8.5 times more likely to be excluded from school (Scottish Government, 2011). 20% of looked-after pupils are reported to be behind age-appropriate levels of education as a result of school exclusions (Fernandez, cited in McClung & Gayle, 2010). Exclusion of looked-after pupils is often the result of lack of understanding by teachers and other pupils of the experience of being looked after (McClung & Gayle, 2010)<sup>b</sup>. Research indicates looked-after pupils have little

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<sup>a</sup> ***This report uses the following definition of looked-after pupils:*** Pupils who are looked after at home, away from home and in formal kinship care will be included in the study.

<sup>b</sup> ***McClung and Gayle (2010)*** 'Exploring the care effects of multiple factors on the educational achievement of children looked after at home and away from home: an investigation of two Scottish local authorities'. Child and Family Social Work Vol. 15, No 4. Pg 23

support to question their exclusion and many local authorities fail to pre-empt their exclusion (McClung & Gayle, 2010).

The guidance document *Included, Engaged and Involved* (Scottish Government, 2011) provides local authorities with the opportunity to reassess the use of exclusion in schools and ensure a focus on prevention, early intervention and response to individual needs. Looked-after pupils are not a homogenous group and there are a number of reasons why a child or young person may be looked after. For many looked-after pupils exclusion can exacerbate already challenging circumstances and lead to additional loss of learning (Scottish Government, 2011). Exclusion of looked-after pupils may have significant impact on care placements; acting as a catalyst for a change of care placement due to the need to find an alternative school or increasing pressure for a parent or carer to support the young person during school time (Scottish Government, 2011).

Local authority statistics indicate the average length of exclusion for a looked-after pupil is greater than that for pupils who are not looked after.

This research looks at the experience of exclusion for looked-after pupils in all 6 East Lothian High Schools and an outwith specialist school located within East Lothian (which a number of East Lothian pupils attend), as well as the impact on wider circumstances such as care placement stability.

## **Aims**

This research aims to:

- Reduce the number of looked-after pupils being excluded
- Identify and build on good practice around exclusion processes involving a looked-after pupil
- Raise awareness and understanding on the issues faced by looked-after pupils

## **Methodology**

This is an illuminative study, designed to give a rich picture of the experience of exclusion and its effects. The methodology is therefore qualitative in nature.

Following exclusion, schools were asked to inform the pupil and parents or carers about the project and ask if they would be prepared to take part in it. The names of those who were willing to take part were passed to a designated project team member. Written consent was obtained from pupils, parents and carers at the point of contact with the project team.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted following a looked-after pupil's readmission to school with:

- Looked-after pupils who are excluded from school between November 2011 and March 2012. These interviews took place in different settings, with the pupils' views being taken into account.
- Parents of looked-after pupils who had been excluded during the period of the research. These interviews took place in different venues agreed by the carer and the researcher with the parents' views being taken into account.



- Carers of looked-after pupils who have experienced exclusion during the period of the research. These interviews took place in venues agreed by the researcher and carer and researcher, with the carers' views being taken into account.
- The deputy Head Teacher with designated responsibility for looked-after pupils. These interviews took place in school at a mutually agreeable time.

Two focus groups took place at Randall House, Macmerry involving a mix of professionals from the 2 groups detailed below:

- Children's Services staff who provide support to the looked-after pupils who have experienced exclusion during the period of the research.
- Other professionals supporting the looked-after pupils who were excluded during the period of the research.

The core questions used for the interviews and focus groups were:

- What is the purpose of the exclusion?
- How did you feel about the exclusion at the time, following readmission and now?
- If you could make three positive changes to the exclusion process what would they be?
- What was the wider impact of the exclusion e.g. on care placements? What was the impact of the exclusion for you?

These questions were adapted to suit participants' needs and the format of the information gathering process, for example, interview or focus group. The questions aimed to tap into the feelings generated by exclusion, and how exclusion affected the care placement. It provided rich data to feed back into the system to inform and improve policy and practice.

### ***Resources***

The following resources were requirements of the project:

- The costs of the time of the core group members in planning, implementing, evaluating and disseminating the project.
- A transcription kit to record individual interviews in an electronic format, which ensured accurate recording of participant's views and an efficient method of transcription. The costs of admin support to transcribe the interviews.
- An incentive for pupils who gave their time to participate.

### ***Ethical considerations***

- Consideration was given to relationships between core members of the project and the participants of the study to ensure participant responses were not influenced by the relationships.
- As schools were asked to notify a designated member of the group when a looked-after pupil is excluded, the group might influence the research process. Schools may be more reluctant to exclude looked-after pupils during this time and become more aware of the

processes when they do so. This gave the project the potential to have an impact in the initial stages of its implementation.

- How to sensitively engage with the parents/carers, staff and pupils. The exclusion might evoke strong emotions and therefore the group ensured that time had passed following readmission to school, before undertaking interviews. Individuals were informed that participation was voluntary and, if they agreed to participate, they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point.
- Offering pupils involved in exclusion an incentive to participate in the research produced obvious concerns around reinforcing undesirable behaviours. The group were clear that the offer of the incentive would come after the exclusion and be specifically linked to taking part in a piece of action research. It was recognised that incentives were regularly offered to pupils providing their views in other pieces of research.

## **Evaluation Framework**

The project aimed to impact on the following measures:

### ***A reduction in exclusion figures***

- Exclusion figures in the period before, during and after the project to be looked at comparatively using the same time period for the previous 2 years.

### ***Identifying and building on good practice around exclusions***

- Collate and analyse examples of practice around exclusion, as highlighted by participants (pupils, school staff, parents and carers) through interviews and focus groups, identifying aspects of good practice and areas for development.
- Provide Education and Children's Wellbeing with the outcomes from the project to inform and develop the council's policy and practice around exclusion.

### ***Raising awareness and understanding on the issues faced by looked-after pupils***

- Identify training needs for school staff and professionals involved with looked-after pupils based on the outcomes of this research (collected through interview and focus group) and related research to highlight the complexity and related implications of being a looked-after pupil.

## **RESULTS**

### **Exclusion Figures**

This project aims to reduce exclusion figures for looked-after pupils. The tables below and related statements demonstrate the changes in exclusion data over a 3 year period.

<b>Year</b>	<b>No. Pupils Excluded</b>	<b>No. of 1/2 Days Lost</b>	<b>Total Number of Looked-After Pupil Exclusions</b>	<b>Average Length of Exclusion</b>
<b>2009-10</b>	23	359	63	5.7
<b>2010-11</b>	15	192	33	5.8
<b>2011-12</b>	18	177	35	5.1

***Table 1: Total Exclusion figures for Looked-After Pupil Exclusions from 2009 - 2012 November-March Period***

There has been a fluctuating trend in exclusions of looked-after pupils within the period November to March over the previous 3 sessions. A direct comparison of the period Nov to Mar 2009-2010 with Nov – Mar 2011-2012 shows the following:

- The total number of looked-after pupils excluded decreased by 22% (5 pupils) over the 3 year period.

- The total number of half days of education lost as a result of exclusion decreased by 51% (182 half days) over the 3 year period.
- The total number of looked-after pupil exclusion incidents decreased by 44% (28 exclusions) over the 3 years period.
- The average length of exclusion decreased by 11% (0.6 of a half day) over the previous 3 years.

Year	No. Pupils Excluded	No. of 1/2 Days Lost	Total Number of Exclusions	Average Length of Exclusion
2009-10	341	1716	245	7.0
2010-11	292	1354	292	4.6
2011-12	228	961	235	4.0

**Table 2: Total figures for all pupil Exclusions from 2009 - 2012 November-March Period**

Data on exclusions for all pupils for the same period shows the following:

- The total number of pupils excluded decreased by 33% (113 pupils) over the 3 year period. This compares with 22% (5 pupils) over the same period for looked-after pupils.
- The total number of half days of education lost as a result of exclusion decreased by 44% (755 half days) over the 3 year period. This compares with 51% (182 half days) over the same period for looked-after pupils.
- The total number of exclusion incidents decreased by 4% (10 exclusions) over the 3 year period. This compares with 44% (28 exclusions) over the same period for looked-after pupils.
- The average length of exclusion decreased by 43% (3.0 half days) over the previous 3 years. This compares with 11% (0.6 of a half days) over the same period for looked-after pupils.

## **Identifying and Building Good Practice**

*Young people, parents/carers, school staff and other professionals highlighted the following areas as examples of good practice that can be shared and built upon.*

### ***Knowing your looked-after pupil <sup>c</sup>***

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<sup>c</sup> **Scottish Government (2012)** 'Online Survey of Stakeholders regarding looked-after pupils.' Pg 22

Teachers, practitioners, parents and carers agreed that understanding the individual needs and personalities of looked-after pupils was of key importance. It is essential that looked-after pupils are known in schools. Teachers favoured having a member of staff assigned to every looked-after pupil and that person should have a positive relationship with the looked-after pupil. They would be a trusted adult for that pupil. Guidance staff may be appropriate in this role. Practitioners also felt that good relationships between looked-after pupils and teaching staff were very important and that young people need to know they are wanted in school and liked. Each looked-after pupil should be seen as an individual. Demonstrations of caring, such as teachers visiting an excluded young person at home were highly valued by practitioners. They value the principles of Getting it Right with Every Child (GIRFEC) with the young person at the centre with an individual plan and related support. Schools felt that it was vital that information and records about each looked-after pupil were kept up to date. They also stated that it was important to recognise the difference between the needs of looked-after pupils and other pupils, and that looked-after pupils themselves have different needs, some do well and others less so.

*'Knowing every looked-after pupil well offers huge benefits because there is a positive relationship established.'*

Depute Head teacher

### ***Looking at the message behind the behaviour***

Practitioners emphasized looking at the young person's behaviour, and observed that many pupils who were excluded had a history of neglect and/or abuse. They emphasized that adult responses to the behaviour can make a significant difference.

### ***Communication***

Good communication - before, during and after challenging incidents – was very important for pupils, parents, carers, teachers and practitioners. It was very important that the looked-after pupil understood what had led to their exclusion, how long it would last, what would happen at their re-admission and what they could do to modify their behaviour to prevent further exclusions or other disciplinary action.

### ***Early identification and multidisciplinary working***

Parents, carers, teachers and practitioners felt that good, prompt information-sharing about looked-after pupils was key. This enables early identification and intervention. Staged assessment and intervention was viewed as the process to underpin this work, involving the team around the young-person planning and implementing assessment and intervention. The role of the lead professional is crucial in providing key information to all involved.

Schools felt that tracking of attainment is crucial in identifying patterns and reacting accordingly. They also feel it is very useful to get related advice from education officers.

*'I was sad I got excluded.'*

Pupil

Collaboration between all those involved in decision-making over exclusions is essential. Having agreed strategies and communication arrangements at the outset was seen to be helpful.

### ***Consistency in administering exclusion***

All agreed that exclusions should be consistently applied to all pupils with clear information regarding behaviours that result in exclusion. Exclusion should be the last resort. Consequences

should have meaning for pupils and be proportionate. Everyone should work together to give pupils consistent messages about what is acceptable behaviour.

### ***Shorter exclusions***

It is very important to minimise the period of exclusion to ensure that looked-after pupils continue to engage in education and that exclusion does not lead to feelings of alienation. Re-admission meetings should be carried out the next day.

*'The young person can feel a failure and that they have let people down.'*

*Educational Psychologist*

### ***Re-admission meetings***

There was some evidence of these meetings being managed well. Most respondents felt that effective readmission meetings should involve:

- The parents and/or carers, the young person and a teacher
- Clear information regarding expectations of the young person at the meeting
- A careful explanation of the reason for exclusion and how to avoid it happening again
- An opportunity for the young person to express their views
- Two-way communication
- A calm, helpful, flexible, solution focussed approach
- Jargon free conversations
- A sense of belonging for the young person

### ***Alternatives to exclusion***

Carers acknowledged that exclusion is a response to situations where a pupil is completely out of control and that it is done to support the education of others and as a way of supporting the pupil to see what is and is not acceptable.

When exclusion is used it should be presented to pupils as a support.

There was agreement from practitioners and teachers regarding avoiding exclusions altogether. All groups felt strenuous efforts should be made to identify alternatives to excluding looked-after pupils. This included the use of Support Bases as they enable internal exclusion, allow a cooling off period, can be self selected by the young person and provide both adult support and support back into mainstream classes.

*'The way forward is to use resources to avoid exclusion and to have a corrective input. I think exclusion in school is an option, but it's very staff intensive.'*

*Depute Head teacher*

Other strategies identified included:

- Flexible use of staffing
- Using other professionals to support the child e.g. mediators, team around the young-person
- Whole school approaches e.g. Restorative Justice, Conflict Resolution etc.
- Use of other school sanctions e.g. detention
- Considering alternative placements to ensure the pupil's needs are met

- Changes to schools e.g. smaller schools, community schools

### ***Professional development***

Teachers and practitioners felt professional development supported the reduction of looked-after pupils being excluded. It supported equality across the authority and enables the sharing of good practice and information. Schools felt that attachment training should be developed for all staff, with a special focus on classroom strategies for pupils with attachment issues. Information about alternatives to mainstream should be included in professional training.

*'The school did try really hard with him..... they ran out of options. They didn't know what to do with him.'*

*Foster Carer*

### **Raising Awareness and Understanding on the Issues Faced by Looked-**

### **after Pupils**

Analysis of the data gathered from all groups produced information relating to issues faced by looked after pupils. This has been condensed into themes. The information in brackets indicates the groups that highlighted the issue.

### **Key themes linked to exclusion<sup>d</sup>**

The research revealed the following common themes:

1. Feelings of isolation and powerlessness (*pupils, parents and carers*)
2. Not being treated fairly and inequities in the application of exclusion (*pupils, parents and carers, teachers*)
3. Failure in communication (*all groups*)
4. Not being heard (*pupils*)
5. An unhelpful attitude from some school staff (*pupils, parents and carers*)
6. Unhelpful readmission meetings (*pupils, practitioners*)
7. Negative impact on school work (*parents, carers*)
8. Negative impact on pupil's family life (*parents, carers*)
9. Negative impact on parent/carer's life and obligations (*parents, carers*)
10. Negative impact on the care placement (*parents, carers*)
11. Negative impact on the pupil's friendships and standing at school (*parents, carers, teachers, practitioners*)
12. Lengthy exclusions (*parents, carers*)

'Life stops until they go back to school.'

Foster Carer

'We don't want to exclude pupils..... It's the last thing.....it's like a personal failure.'

Depute Head teacher

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<sup>d</sup> Stone, M. (2005) 'The education of pupils excluded from school for between 16-45 days' pg 24



## **Conclusion**

This research aims to promote good practice and related supports for looked-after pupils in secondary schools focusing specifically on the area of exclusion.

When the exclusion figures for looked-after pupils for the past 3 years, in the period November to March, were examined decreases were found in:

- The number of looked-after pupils being excluded
- The number of exclusion incidents involving looked-after pupils
- The amount of education lost by looked-after pupils as a result of exclusion
- The length of time looked-after pupils are excluded for

When comparative data for all secondary aged pupils in East Lothian schools was also examined for the same time period we can see areas requiring further focus:

- The number of looked-after pupils being excluded has not dropped to the same extent it has for all pupils (22% decrease for looked-after pupils, 33% decrease for all pupils).
- The average length of an exclusion for a looked-after pupil is currently longer than the average for all pupils (5.1 days for looked-after pupils, 4.0 days for all pupils)

We can also see areas of clear progress:

- The amount of education lost through exclusion for looked after pupils has dropped to a greater extent than it has for all pupils (51% decrease for looked-after pupils, 44% decrease for all pupils)
- The number of exclusions incidents for looked-after pupils has decreased to a greater extent than it has for all pupils (44% decrease for looked-after pupils, 4% decrease for all pupils)

The general trend is positive, with a need for targeted work in further reducing the number of looked-after pupils being excluded and the length of exclusions for looked-after pupils.

In terms of good practice the bedrock of supporting looked-after pupils was placed on good communication, positive and trusting relationships, knowing and valuing pupils and demonstrating care towards them. The role of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in promoting specialist knowledge in areas such as attachment, grief, loss and trauma was highly valued for staff working with looked-after pupils. Having strong teams around looked-after pupils, who work efficiently sharing information and engaging in collaborative work, is crucial. Using these teams to work in creative and preventative ways to avoid exclusion from school was a key theme. Having consistency across East Lothian schools with a focus on alternatives to exclusion was a clear goal. When exclusion is unavoidable minimising time out of school, and making the return a useful experience in preventing further exclusion is also an area for continuous improvement.

The voice of the pupil lies at the heart of this research. The responses from the pupils and the important adults in their lives highlight strong feelings around isolation, powerlessness and a lack of equality. They told us they want to be heard and have a voice in decisions concerning them. Parents and carers brought sharp focus to the impact that exclusion has on their work and

responsibilities and the pupil's school progress and social status in school. Those working with looked-after pupils need a well developed sense of these key issues to help them respond sensitively in ways that promote growth and development for looked-after pupils.

This research had identified strength and progress in relation to all 3 intended outcomes. It has also sharpened focus on areas for further development and growth which are outlined in the final section of the document. The findings resonate strongly with related policy and research. They also demonstrate the commitment of all those involved to contribute to the process of reflection and improvement, a commitment which can be capitalised on in implementing the next stage of growth in relation to supporting looked-after pupils in our schools.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations have emerged from this research. They reflect the good practice evidenced in the authority and the developments that young people, parents, carers, professionals and school staff have identified. They are endorsed by related policy and research in this area.

*'If you don't have a relationship you have nothing.'*

*Residential Childcare  
Worker*

1. The authority should produce guidance for schools on alternatives to exclusion, related processes (options analysis, External Panel etc.) and resources (both within and outwith the authority).
2. The authority should produce guidance for schools around re-admission processes.
3. Education and Children's Wellbeing should review and develop the systems for maintaining accurate information on looked-after pupils e.g. Looked-after Pupils Digest, SEEMIS.
4. The Exclusion Scrutiny Group, or alternative body, should monitor exclusion data for looked-after pupils.
5. Looked-after pupil attainment should be monitored and tracked at both a school and authority level.
6. Each secondary school should:-
  - Review the role of the nominated Teacher for looked-after pupils in their school to ensure the remit reflects related policy, guidance and local practice.
  - Ensure that the lead professional for each looked-after pupil is a trusted adult who experiences a positive relationship with the pupil.
  - Ensure all looked-after pupils are within Staged Assessment & Intervention at stage 3.
  - Carry out a needs analysis with staff on the issues around looked-after pupils and arrange development opportunities as required e.g. training for all staff on attachment.
7. Professionals should ensure a focus on looked-after pupils as individuals, as well as being part of an identifiable group.
8. When it is clear that a looked-after pupil is at risk of exclusion the team around the child should meet to create a plan that identifies support and avoids exclusion where possible.

9. The team around the child should be consulted prior to a looked-after pupil being excluded from school to ensure all current factors and alternatives to exclusion are considered before a final decision. <sup>e</sup>
10. Where exclusion is unavoidable the period of exclusion should be kept to a minimum with a priority on arrangements to return the pupil to school.

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<sup>e</sup> **Scottish Government (2012)** 'Online Survey of Stakeholders regarding looked-after pupils.' Pg 22

## Appendix 1

### Interview structure (Pupils, Parents & Carers)

1. Why do you think you/the child you care for was excluded?
  
2. How did you feel about the exclusion
  - a. at the time,
  - b. following readmission,
  - c. now?
  
3. If you could make positive changes to the exclusion process what would they be?
  
4. Did any other things happen to you as a result of this exclusion, for example with school, at home, with friends or family?
  
5. Any other comments?

Information gathered by

Name:

Date:

## Appendix 2

### Interview structure for School Staff (A)

1. Why was the pupil excluded?
  
2. How did you feel about the exclusion
  - a. at the time,
  - b. following readmission,
  - c. now?
  
3. What aspects of the exclusion process do you feel were managed well?
  
4. If you could make positive changes to the exclusion process what would they be?
  
5. What things happened within school as a result of the exclusion e.g. impact on you, other staff, pupils, the excluded pupil?
  
6. Any other comments?

Information gathered by

Name:

Date:

## **Appendix 3**

### **Interview structure for School Staff (B)**

1. What aspects of your school's process and practice around exclusions for looked-after pupils do you feel works well?
2. If you could make positive changes at a school level to the exclusion process for looked-after pupils what would they be?
3. If you could make positive changes at an authority level to the exclusion process for looked-after pupils what would they be?
4. Any other comments?

Information gathered by

Name:

Date:

## **Appendix 4**

### **Focus Groups – LAC & Exclusions Research**

#### **East Lothian Council**

**May 2012**

**Purpose:** To gather the views of professionals, involved with the pupils who were excluded over the period of the research, in relation to exclusion and LAC pupils

**Moderators:**

- Jenny Scott (CAMHS)
- Jane Ogden Smith (Children's Services)

One moderator will be responsible for keeping the process moving and encouraging participation. The other will record participants' responses.

Skills: respect, listening, clear communication, friendly manner.

**Assistants:**

- Anita Harrison (Education)
- Jillian Peart (Children's Services)

One assistant will be on hand at each focus group. Anita on the 12<sup>th</sup> June and Jillian on the 19<sup>th</sup> June. Their role is to manage the environment and minimise any disruptions.

**Administration:**

Lisa Thomson, (Business Unit)

Lisa will manage the administration tasks related to the focus groups.

**Focus Group Composition:** Professionals working with the pupils at the point they were excluded from school will be invited to take part in the focus groups. This includes staff the local authority, health professionals, and charitable organisations.

**Environment:** Two meeting rooms within Randall House, Macmerry. Meeting room x on 12<sup>th</sup> June and Meeting room x on 19<sup>th</sup> June. Doors will be kept closed to ensure confidentiality. Chairs for participants will be arranged in a semi circular shape with the moderators positioned at a central point where they can see everyone.

### **Dates of Focus Groups:**

- 12<sup>th</sup> June 10-12pm
- 19<sup>th</sup> June 2-4pm

### **Equipment:**

- Large sticky post-its and marker pens (poster size) for the moderators
- Smaller post-its and marker pens for participants

### **Preparatory Tasks:**

- Letters of invitation to be emailed to all participants by 21<sup>st</sup> May 2012 (Anita Harrison & Lisa Thomson)
- List of Participants to be compiled and distributed to moderators and assistants prior to the first focus group (Lisa Thomson)
- Rooms booked (Jillian Peart)
- Equipment (Anita Harrison)
- Tea and coffee facilities (Jillian Peart)
- Seating, equipment and refreshments to be set up beforehand (Anita Harrison & Jillian Peart)

## **STRUCTURE**

### **Welcome: Moderator 1 (5mins)**

Refreshments should be ready for participants at the start of the session.

Welcome participants and facilitate introductions.

Explain that all the questions and discussion relate to exclusion and pupils who are LAC pupils.

(Definition of LAC: Children who are LAC at home, away from home and in formal Kinship)



### **Ground Rules: Moderator 1 & 2 (10mins)**

Ask participants to provide rules that will facilitate the smooth running of the focus group. The rules will help make the group feel safer. If rules are not proposed spontaneously the following can be suggested:

- Speak from your own experience and own your statements
- Maintain confidentiality regarding all personal information e.g. individual situations should not be discussed out with the room unless it is clearly in the interests of those concerned

If you have a large number of rules you might want to agree which ones are essential.

Remind the group that the moderators now have permission to ensure the rules are adhered to. You can ask how they would like this to be done. This can be done in a light hearted way but serves to remind the group that people will be challenged if the rules are breached.

The rules should be recorded on the large post-its and numbered for ease of reference.

### **Questions: Moderator 1 & 2**

#### ***Opening (5mins)***

The aim of this section is to get everyone to talking.

Go round the semi circle and ask each person to name a food they would never eat and why.

#### ***Introductory (10mins)***

Give each person a smaller post it and pen. Ask them to draw the first thing that comes into their head when they think of the word "exclusion". Go round the semi circle and get each person to share their drawing and stick it on central piece of paper to form a collage.

#### ***Key Questions (45mins)***

Invite the group to respond to the following question by providing responses which are recorded by the moderator on a large post it.

- What impact did exclusion have on the young person/people you are involved with?

Provide each participant with small post its and a pen and ask them to note up to 3 strengths they have observed or experienced around a potential or actual exclusion of a LAC pupil. Gather all the responses and note any patterns.

- What strengths have you noted in the current exclusion process?

Repeat the previous task but ask participants to note up to 3 changes they would like to see in relation to exclusions.

- What changes would you make to the exclusion process?

### ***Any other comments? (5mins)***

Invite participants to make any other comments they would like to make in relation to this topic. The moderator should record any contributions on large post its.

### ***Ending (5mins)***

Go round the semi circle and ask each participant what they would choose if they had one wish in terms of making changes to the exclusion process. Record the responses on large post its including a number or tally marks where more than one person names a particular response.

### **Conclusion: Moderators 1 & 2 (5mins)**

Thank the participants for taking part. Explain that the research group will report back to the Departmental Management Team in August / September. The process of wider dissemination will be clarified at this time.

Ask participants on their way out of the room to record one word or short phrase that captures how they felt about the focus group. Have pens and large post-its positioned by the exit for recording purposes.

## **Appendix 5**

### ***Looked After Children Exclusions Literature Review (April 2012)***

#### ***Introduction***

Since the turn of the millennium there has been a growing concern about the attainment and general educational experience of looked after children and young people (Maxwell et al 2006). Poor educational experience may lead to:

- Economic marginalisation in adulthood (Hilton 2006)
- An increased likelihood of psychosocial difficulties such as alcoholism and substance misuse

The main findings that emerge from the few Scottish studies into the attainment of looked-after pupils are that they perform less well academically than their counterparts in the general school population (McClung and Gayle 2010). The research also pointed to factors that were significant in determining educational achievement, for example:

- Placement type
- Reason for becoming looked after
- Age on becoming looked after

More significantly, in relation to this research, the indication is that looked after pupils suffered from discrimination and social exclusion in many areas of their lives, including school.

#### ***Rationale for exclusion***

In Scotland, the power exists to exclude children and young people if their continued attendance at school would be extremely detrimental to order and discipline. The *Better behaviour, better learning* report led to a substantial programme of development to address disruption and exclusion in Scottish schools. This was then built upon with the Scottish Government publication *Included, engaged and involved – a positive approach to managing school exclusions* (2011). This report recommended encouraging teachers to assess the needs of their vulnerable pupils and provide learning and support.

#### ***Exclusion rates for looked-after children and young people***

Despite this, the last national Scottish data publication (September 2011) showed the overall exclusion rate for looked after children was 365 per 1,000 looked after children, compared with 45 exclusions per 1,000 pupils for all school children. Exclusion rates were highest for

Looked-after children are eight times more likely to be excluded from school than other children.

children who were looked after in a local authority home (866 per 1,000 children).

### ***Education and Culture Committee Inquiry 2012***

The most recent inquiry by the Education and Culture Committee of the Scottish Parliament (6th Report, 2012 (Session 4) into the educational attainment of looked-after pupils heard conflicting evidence from some organisations as to whether the main problem was the level of attendance at school or the number of exclusions from school.

CELCIS (Centre for excellence for looked after children in Scotland) argued that 'Attendance is the key to attainment. The research tells us that where there is good attendance, there is good attainment'. The Association of Directors of Education Scotland (ADES) developed this point when they stated:

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

However, the Association of Directors of Social Work (ADSW) urged caution about dwelling on attendance too much. Comments included:

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

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

### ***Information from research***

This report summarises the key findings of seven key reports looking at the effects of exclusion on looked-after children.

### ***Online Survey of Stakeholders regarding Looked-After Pupils (June 2012)***

The school experiences of looked-after pupils can be enhanced considerably by their developing a close relationship with a particular member of school staff. In the *Online survey of stakeholders regarding looked-after pupils* (June 2012), respondents were asked to identify gaps in priority areas which would lead to better outcomes for looked-after children, if addressed. The areas highlighted were:

- Permanence
- Stability
- Transitions
- Corporate parenting
- Community or family support

The themes cannot work in isolation but need to be delivered in partnership. One of the most interesting features of this report was the fact that less importance was set on exclusion and school.

### ***Exploring the care effects of multiple factors on the educational achievement of children looked after at home and away from home: an investigation of two Scottish local authorities (2010)***

The overall finding here was that looked-after pupils perform less well academically than their counterparts in the general school population. Factors significant in determining educational achievement included:

- Placement type
- Reason for becoming looked after
- Age on becoming looked after were

Peer support is reduced and impacted on through school exclusion.

### ***Included, engaged and involved (2011)***

This report found that:

- School should discuss exclusion prior to it happening with lead professional or social worker.
- Child protection issues must also be considered.
- Exclusion of looked-after pupils means that already potentially challenging circumstances are likely to be exacerbated and an additional loss of learning is likely.
- Exclusion can be a catalyst to a change of placement, pressure on carers and respite may be required.
- Consultation with social work may take place where the learner may be exposed to stressful home situation.
- Social work should be informed of exclusion.

Teachers are often cited by young people as the most influential or constant person in their lives.

It recommended that, as with any other vulnerable learner, alternatives to exclusion which enable the ongoing wellbeing and stability of the learner should be explored and exhausted with exclusion from school being the last resort.

### ***Tough love (Barnardos, 2011)***

This publication looked at how early intervention and family support could be used to tackle issues that impact on schools. It raised concern about the UK government's Education Bill 2011, which adopts a more authoritarian approach to pupils, for example, searching, confiscating etc. The evidence shows this approach may not be effective in supporting children and subsequently improving educational outcomes for children because it tackles symptoms not causes. It argued that the authoritative 'tough love' approach, combining high expectations and good support responses to pupil results, has better outcomes than authoritarian approaches alone. It did not touch on exclusion in school specifically, focusing instead on how to address the underlying problems

Good schools recognise that it is worthwhile tackling causes of poor behaviour through early intervention.

It argued that the authoritative 'tough love' approach, combining high expectations and good support responses to pupil results, has better outcomes than authoritarian approaches alone. It did not touch on exclusion in school specifically, focusing instead on how to address the underlying problems

children were experiencing, thus preventing them from reaching the point where their behaviour might lead to exclusion.

### ***The education of pupils excluded from school for between 16-45 days (Barnardos, 2005)***

This was a small scale study into exclusion, highlighting isolation, lack of communications and disadvantage created by exclusion. Amongst the themes that emerged were:

- Schools achieve 'relief' from a situation
- It sends a clear message to other pupils (effect unclear, however)

The conclusion was it was unclear how effective exclusion may be.

### ***Not present and not correct (Barnardos, 2010)***

This publication, released five years later, found that frequently repeated exclusion does little to improve behaviour. It stated, 'Challenging young people need more, not less guidance from supportive adults' and the early intervention supports around behaviour and family input are key to preventing exclusions. It also claimed that exclusion reduces stability, recommending alternatives and preventative interventions.

'He needs help with his temper – not excluding because of it.'

Research shows best practice in discipline is a clear hierarchy of sanctions but the consequences of exclusion included:

- Less guidance and support
- Young people left to their own devices
- Routines not upheld
- Token educational provision
- Pupils falling behind

'For some children school is the only stability they get; exclusion can give the message that it's ok to give up and walk away.'

The social isolation reduces motivation and leads to rejection from school. Support can prevent exclusion or at least reduce rates.

### ***The education of Looked-After Pupils in Scotland: comparisons with Scandinavian countries and Finland (2012)***

This report highlights educational attainment is lower for looked-after pupils than the general school populations. Scandinavian countries have:

- Widespread pre-school education
- School commencing at 6-7 years old
- Mixed ability classes
- Limited use of exclusion
- Free higher education.

Primary 6 results are poorer for looked-after children in Scotland and unemployment higher. Exclusion is used on limited basis and alternative provision established prior to this commencing. The attendance of looked –after children is also poorer in Primary 7 in Scotland.

### ***References:***

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McClung and Gayle (2010) ‘Exploring the care effects of multiple factors on the educational achievement of children looked after at home and away from home: an investigation of two Scottish local authorities’. Child and Family Social Work Vol. 15, No 4.

Scottish Government (2011) ‘Included, Engaged and Involved: a positive approach to managing school exclusions.’

Scottish Government (2012) ‘Online Survey of Stakeholders regarding looked-after pupils.’

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**Promoting Good Practice for Looked-After Pupils at Risk of Exclusion in East Lothian**  
**2011/12**

**Executive Summary**

This research was carried out by a multidisciplinary group, exploring the experiences of secondary aged looked-after pupils and exclusion. It focused on the authority's 6 secondary schools and an independent specialist school situated within East Lothian. It used a combination of semi-structured interviews and focus groups to gather the views of young people, parents, carers, school staff and professionals involved in supporting the young people.

The aims of the project were to reduce exclusion measures for looked-after pupils, identify and build on good practice, and raise awareness and understanding of the issues looked after pupils can face.

Results show evidence of good practice, unified thinking and commitment to further development. The exclusion figures demonstrate positive change, with specific areas highlighted for further focus. The identified good practice was clearly placed upon a foundation of positive communication, trusting relationships and collaborative working. Higher levels of consistency, within multidisciplinary teams, within schools and across the authority are required. Maintaining a clear focus on alternatives to exclusion was also highlighted as a priority. The issues and related feelings that can be experienced by looked-after pupils are very clearly outlined alongside a need to ensure that all staff working with looked-after pupils have a well developed understanding of these issues and a related capacity to respond in a sensitive and supportive manner.

The research group identified a range of recommendations for consideration at an authority, department, school and individual professional level to support the future for looked after pupils within East Lothian.

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