



## Promoting the achievement of looked after children and young people in the London Borough of Hounslow

May 2017

**Case studies of education provision for children and young people in care in the London Borough of Hounslow**

*Promoting the Achievement of Looked After Children  
PALAC*



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## Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank all the children and young people, their carers, parents, schools and local authority colleagues who have contributed their time and support to the case studies described in this report.



# Introduction

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## Education of children in care

As of March 2016, there were 70,440 children and young people in care in England. The number of looked after children has continued to increase steadily over the last eight years<sup>1</sup>. Sixty per cent of these children are in care because of abuse or neglect and three-quarters are placed in foster care arrangements. Children and young people who are in or have experienced care remain one of the lowest performing groups in terms of educational outcomes. Last year, 14% of looked after children achieved five or more A\*–C GCSEs or equivalent, including English and mathematics. As a consequence, they also experience poorer employment and health outcomes after leaving school compared to their peers. They are over-represented amongst the offender population and those who experience homelessness.

However, research is emerging to show that children and young people in care can have very positive experiences of school and are supported effectively to reach their full potential academically and socially<sup>2</sup>. The purpose of this report is to share practice in selected Hounslow schools and colleges that is contributing to improved outcomes and school experiences for children and young people in care.

In July 2015, the Hounslow Virtual School (VS) collaborated with UCL Institute of Education to run their Promoting the Achievement of Looked After Children (PALAC) programme with seven schools in the local authority (LA). This report presents an account of the programme, including the activities undertaken by the participants and the outcomes of the programme to date for students in care and staff in the participating schools.

<sup>1</sup> DfE (2016) Children looked after in England (including adoption) year ending 31 March 2016. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/556331/SFR41\\_2016\\_Text.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/556331/SFR41_2016_Text.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Carroll, C. and Cameron, C. (2017) Taking Action for Looked After Children in School. London: UCL Institute of Education Press.

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## What is PALAC?

PALAC is a knowledge exchange programme that seeks to support practice in schools to improve outcomes for students in care. It originated as a result of the dearth of evidence available to support schools in developing practice for a group of children and young people who continue to underachieve both academically and subsequently in adult life. At its core, is the collaborative relationship that exists between practitioners in school and university researchers to seek to improve our collective understanding of how students in care can thrive in school. As a knowledge exchange programme, PALAC places considerable emphasis on the generation of evidence from practice. The programme promotes evidence-informed practice in schools and the structure of the programme itself is based on what is currently understood as to how to best support professional learning and development in schools.

PALAC began in 2014 and is now in its third year and it engages schools and VS in a collaborative six-month programme through access to research findings, a comprehensive school audit tool and regular support from facilitators with research and school practitioner backgrounds. Participants have the opportunity to share and evaluate their findings at the end of the six months. The PALAC team links with a LA to support the development of teacher practice in a more systemic way and to help ensure that learning from the programme can be sustained once the formal PALAC programme comes to an end.

The PALAC programme has identified seven evidence-informed domains around which schools can focus professional development and learning:

- **Supporting emotional development and wellbeing**
- **Raising and monitoring attainment**
- **Supporting learning**
- **School environment**
- **Effective deployment of staff**
- **Supporting equality and diversity**
- **Working with carers and other professionals.**

Schools and colleges focus their PALAC projects around one or two domains that are most relevant to their settings.





# Case Studies



## Cranford Community College

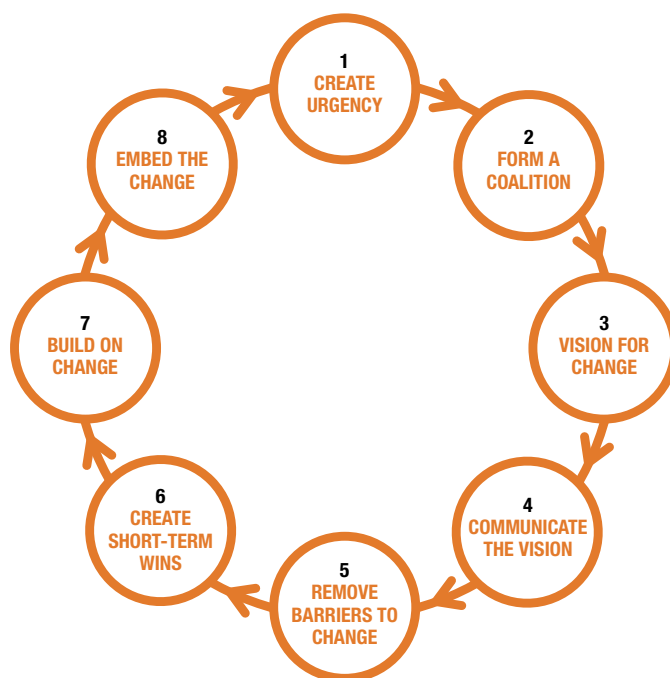
### Making lasting changes in school step by step

#### Background

An estimated 65% of change programmes in organisations fail to deliver or sustain momentum<sup>3</sup>. Initiating, managing and sustaining change in school can be difficult to accomplish. This lack of success has been attributed to external pressures such as government policy initiatives, insufficient resourcing and internally through poor communication between the change makers and colleagues within a setting. Even the best written school action plan to improve outcomes for children and young people in care is unlikely to succeed unless the project team considers in depth, how and what mechanisms they will use to effect change. To assist in this process, it is important that any project team in school adopt one of the many change models available in the education leadership literature.

The change model used by participants on the PALAC programme is John Kotter's 8-Step Change Model<sup>4</sup>. Figure 1 summarises the key actions for each step in the model.

Figure 1: Kotter's 8-Step Change Model



<sup>3</sup> National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services (2009) Change Facilitators' Handbook. Nottingham: NCLSCS

<sup>4</sup> John Kotter 8-Step Change Model. <https://www.kotterinternational.com/8-steps-process-for-leading-change/>

Cranford Community College is an 11–19 Academy in Hounslow, Middlesex. The PALAC team at Cranford used Kotter’s model to underpin the actions they took to shape whole school changes in order to improve the practice of teachers and support staff in educating students in care. This case study maps the actions taken by the team against each step of the model to achieve changes in practice.

### What did the school do?

After completing the PALAC audit, the school PALAC team identified a number of changes they wanted to see for students in care in college and these included: firstly, the need for all staff to meaningfully know their students in care and how each student might be better supported; secondly, for curriculum and not just pastoral staff to take responsibility for the education of students

*Table 1: Using Kotter’s Change Model to raise the whole school profile of students in care*

8 Steps	Actions taken by the school	
1	Create urgency	Gain staff attention, empathy and buy in through imaginative staff training session that included, for example, well-known people who had experienced foster care and powerful evidence that shows the benefits of care despite the initial trauma of going into care
2	Form a coalition	The PALAC lead in school was a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) who was joined by a year mentor. The support of the head teacher and the rest of SLT secured
3	Create a vision for change	PALAC Action Plan created, which included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• interviews with students</li> <li>• individual Learning Plans</li> <li>• new school policy for students in care</li> </ul>
4	Communicate the vision	Findings from the pupil interviews and draft Learning Plans shared with staff through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular attendance by PALAC at heads of department (HoD) and heads of year (HoY) meetings</li> <li>• Staff meetings</li> </ul>
5	Remove any barriers	Data and information for each student provided in a quick and accessible format for staff
6	Create short-term wins	Immediate staff training led to positive staff comments about the process Creation of looked after children (LAC) Learning Plans including student comments and ideas in order to support staff building relationships with the students was seen as a very positive move
7	Build on change	The PALAC action plan formed part of School Improvement Plan and Self-Evaluation Plan Standing item on HoD meeting agendas
8	Embed the change	Consistency of approach by the member of SLT who was leading the change enabled the school to embed the change Close monitoring and supportive challenge when staff wavered.



in care; and finally to increase opportunities for students in care to have their voices heard about their education and to feel that staff had responded to these views. Table 1 summarises the actions and journey taken by the school team to bring about these changes, which followed Kotter's Change Model.

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### **Outcomes for the young people and staff**

At the end of the six-month programme the young people were interviewed again about their experiences of school. Six of the seven students currently in care, from years 7 to 11, felt that things had improved since the start of the project. One student suggested that her teachers knew her better and took more time to speak to her in lessons. Another student felt that she had been listened to and that it was nice that staff seemed to have stopped pressuring her if she did not put her hand up.

Five of the students reported that they felt happier and were doing better in school. A year 10 female student reported that she felt much better because staff seemed to understand her better and looking at her year 10 grades there was clear evidence that she had made good progress since the project had begun earlier in the year. A year 10 male student was pleased to see that he was reaching and in most cases passing his target levels and his year manager had spent more time with him, actually praising him. A year 7 student felt that teachers were being more positive towards her and her behaviour logs had dramatically reduced throughout recent weeks.

Feedback from curriculum staff was equally positive:

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“ *The training helped to raise awareness of these students as individuals with varied needs and was a good reminder about the responsibilities we have towards these students.* ”

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“ *Great to see the communication from these students about themselves and their preferences. (English)* ”

It was also clear that there had been some changes to practice:

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“ *We have agreed that marking their books first would be a great strategy.* ”

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“ *We make more effort now to speak with these students outside lessons. (Humanities)* ”

By the end of the project, all of the heads of department and teachers reported that they knew who the students in care were, their preferences and aspirations for learning. The personalised Learning Plans, regular communication from SLT and making students in care a standing item on department agendas had all been very influential in bringing about this change.

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### **Implications for practice and research**

How do you convince colleagues to get on board and effect whole school change when usually a school will only have a handful of children or young people in care? And this is in a context of very real and competing demands on staff time. There are many responses to this dilemma but one fundamental issue to remember is that the majority of teachers and support staff come into the education profession to improve the life chances of children and young people in their community. Sadly, many teachers have reported this lack of influence as one of their main reasons for leaving the profession.



However, as the Cranford and other PALAC case studies have demonstrated, relatively small changes to practice can have very real and meaningful outcomes for how students in care experience school. Secondly, many of the changes we make in school for this group of students can benefit many more if not all students in some way.

The positive rewards of working in schools with children in care is only just emerging in the research literature<sup>5</sup>. A recent study of the experiences of 14 KS2 teachers reported that interactions with students in care often resulted in very positive outcomes for the students but also a sense of personal accomplishment on behalf of the staff. The findings of the study also showed that the same staff could correspondingly experience many ambivalent and sometimes negative emotions when educating students in care.

This indicates that further research is needed into how best to support the ‘emotional labour’ (both positive and negative) element of the work of teachers and support staff. Practitioners from other professions that work closely with vulnerable children and young people, such as social workers, education psychologists and speech therapists to name just three, receive regular supervision. What this might look like for teachers and support staff has yet to be investigated in any depth.

<sup>5</sup> Edwards, L. N. (2016) Looking after the teachers: exploring the emotional labour experienced by teachers of looked after children. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 32(1), 54–72.

# Chiswick School

## Chiswick Book Club

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### Background

‘Are we doing all we can for our students in care?’, is a question that reflective school practitioners regularly ask of their own practice and that of their setting as a whole. To respond with confidence to such a straightforward question is challenging but from the emerging evidence base it is possible to identify key priorities. Firstly, it requires that SLTs know and understand what effective current practice in schools looks like at whole school, practitioner and student level. The recent publication of evidence based, whole school audits ensure that SLTs now have the tools needed for leadership in this area. Secondly, school practitioners require a sensitive understanding of the varied lives of children and young people in care in and beyond the school gates. Finally, this breadth and depth of knowledge held by practitioners across the school needs to be personalised for each student despite some of the commonalities experienced by children and young people in care. Addressing these priorities requires whole school, practitioner and student level initiatives both large and small scale.

This case study describes how Chiswick School, a 11–19 secondary school in Hounslow, Middlesex, sought to improve their education provision for students in care at both staff and individual pupil levels. Andrea Kitteringham, the Designated Teacher, led on two initiatives. The first initiative addressed practitioners’ knowledge and understanding of the needs of students in care and specifically, their responsibilities as class teachers and tutors and inclusive practice in the classroom for students

in care. The second activity, focused on adapting the Letterbox Club<sup>6</sup> national initiative for students in care from years 9 to 12 in the form of the Chiswick School Book Club.

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### What did the school do?

As shown by many of the case studies from the PALAC programme, schools are investigating and implementing different and creative ways to genuinely engage practitioners in the urgent need to improve outcomes for children and young people in care. Chiswick School’s response was to create a two-sided Question and Answer (Q & A) guide for staff, which included contributions from their students in care. Capturing the student perspective was particularly important as school staff are not always aware of the positive impact they can have on the lives of young people in care. Indeed, the Chiswick Q & A guide was entitled ‘Chiswick School is My Family’ from a comment made in a personal education plan (PEP) review meeting by one of their students. Figure 2 summarises the main points in the guide. It starts with information on the wider context of children and young people in care in England, tutor and class teacher responsibilities and examples of small actions in the classroom that can go a long way in improving the teaching and learning experience for students in care. Finally, comments were gathered from students in care on their perspectives about what works for them in school.

<sup>6</sup> Letterbox Club (2017): <http://www.letterboxclub.org.uk/>

## **‘Chiswick School is My Family’: How to support better outcomes for students in care at Chiswick School**

### **Introduction**

The comment below was recently made at a review in school for one of our students in care. The staff and the school have made a real difference in the life of this young person.

*‘Chiswick School is my family’*

This booklet has been written by students in care and staff at Chiswick School. The purpose of the booklet is to summarise what you should know and what you can do to support better short- and long-term outcomes for students in care in our community.

Testimonies of young people in care including national studies in the United Kingdom, consistently report how one or more adults in a school had a significant impact on the life of a young person. Often school is the only stable element in their lives over many years. We hope that this booklet will help you to think of different ways you might change the life of a young person in care.

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### **Did you know?**

- The number of children in care in England at any one time is not enough to fill Old Trafford football stadium
- Those of school age (5–16 years) number approximately 37,000
- At Chiswick we currently have three students in care (March 2016) and more could join at any point in the year
- 16% of KS4 students in care achieve five A\*–C (including English and mathematics)
- Some children who go into care for the first time can experience severe distress with levels of post-traumatic stress disorder similar to returning American Afghanistan veterans
- Evidence shows that going into care can have positive outcomes – children who have been in care longer achieve higher GCSE results
- Over £17 million was spent on student premium for children in care in 2015
- Usually, very small changes in practice by teachers and support staff can have a lasting and sometimes life changing impact on the lives of young people

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## As a class teacher and tutor what should I know?

- Know if any students in care are in your lessons
- Speak with the Designated Teacher (DT) to find out how comfortable the student is with staff openly acknowledging their care status – this will help you to clarify what you can say to the young person and not worry about saying the ‘wrong’ thing
- Every student in care has a personal education plan (PEP), which is reviewed termly. Read this in order to know how to address their targets (where relevant) in your lesson
- Check to see if the student has any special educational needs or disabilities
- Students in care can experience genuine difficulties completing homework at times (contact meeting with birth parents after school, taxi collection means being unable to attend after school support, SEN, lack of resources)
- Lemm Sissay (author, broadcaster and Chancellor of Manchester University who spent most of his childhood in care) realised that at the age of 18 there was no one in his life at that time who had known him for more than a year. Many students in care experience severe difficulties in establishing healthy relations with adults and their peers. Find out more about attachment theory – it will affect many more students than just those in care. See behaviour as a form of communication – positive or negative

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## As a class teacher what can I do in the classroom?

- Just being sensitive to the issues described so far and completing the checking in with the DT and the PEP will make a difference to your practice
- Have high expectations of students in care in your subject
- Consider any subject content and/or activities that might be a challenge for students in care and talk to the DT about how best to approach it
- Without being too obvious, take time and steps to get to know the young person; relationships are very important to them
- Discuss with the student what works the best for their learning in your subject
- Be proactive to prevent behaviours – e.g. check, connect, expect
- Students in care rarely receive materials in the post – could your subject send a book/resource and a note per term?
- The two ‘interventions’ that have the greatest evidence base to date for better academic outcomes for students in care include, one-to-one tutoring and academic mentoring. Is this happening/or is this relevant for your subject?
- Can class/homework materials be consistently provided online to support their education in times of absence or foster care placement change?

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## What can I do as a tutor?

- You are the school adult that the student sees every day – (if only for ten minutes) – be proactive with these students
- You play a key role in helping to provide stability each day and perhaps over their whole secondary school career
- Work towards building the self-confidence and self-esteem of the young person, for example, through participation in extra-curricular activities in and outside school
- Engage with foster carers – many of them would like more support from school but are not always sure how to go about it
- Be particularly vigilant at times of transition – e.g. between key stages, care placements, change in social worker

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## What helps me the most in Chiswick School – voices of students in care

### Do...

- Be discreet – find out what I want you to know and do
- Write Post-it notes to communicate in class
- Sometimes asking how I am can be helpful
- Give specific constructive comments
- Have someone available to turn to at any time
- Persevere and do not give up
- Carry on supporting school trips and extra-curricular activities.

### Do not....

- Say it going to be all right, that is glib; say do not give up or keep trying
- After an absence, ask where I have been in front of other students
- Refer to carers in front of other people or mention that you will be phoning home
- Be confrontational, be mindful.



The second element of the PALAC project at Chiswick School investigated how the Letterbox Club programme might be adapted for older students. The Letterbox Club is a charity that annually, through VS, posts literacy materials (e.g. books, stationery, mathematics games) to the homes of LAC from ages 3 to 13, from May to October. The aim of the programme is to inspire a love of reading and an engagement with numeracy. The benefits of the programme include that children feel 'remembered' and are excited about receiving their parcels and carers and their children spend more time together reading and playing games. Aware of the benefits of Letterbox Club and keen to build on the increased awareness and understanding of classroom practitioners, each subject department at Chiswick was asked to nominate a book that would support and inspire a student in care related to their curriculum. Each of the three students in care received one book per month paid from Pupil Premium.

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### **Outcomes for the young people and staff**

Comments from some of the students below show the positive impact of receiving a book (without any warning) in the post:

*I have never been to the Post Office to collect a parcel for me before.*

*I was really surprised. (Year 12)*

*Any post I get is usually from the Council. (Year 9)*

One of the students, who did not regularly engage with reading, began reading her books with the residential care staff in her home. In line with findings from Letterbox Club, the effect of the book for this student was that she felt more valued by school. The staff enjoyed researching books and it gave them further material to discuss with the students. The year 10 history student was given a novel about Berlin and a guide book before he embarked on a school trip. This not only enhanced his trip but gave him knowledge and information to discuss with his teacher. The A level student found it most useful to have books that she could have at home and refer to rather than going to the library. All students were touched by the fact that the school had made the effort to surprise them.



## The Green School Corporate Parenting in Practice

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### Background

Research and practice demonstrates that there is no ‘silver bullet’ for improving outcomes for children and young people in care in school. Providing an effective education for all students is a complex process and may be more so for those children and young people in foster care. Positive outcomes in school are a fine balance of, for example, an appropriate curriculum, available and consistent pastoral support, relevant teacher knowledge, skills and attitudes, and effective, targeted individual support to name just some of the factors. Central to these activities and which is a crucial element of the corporate parenting role is a commitment to facilitating change in the lives of this group of potentially vulnerable children and young people. The term ‘corporate parenting’ in itself is not one that is immediately transparent to school practitioners. Senior Leadership Teams (SLT) and Designated Teachers (DTs) can have a challenge on their hands translating the term into meaningful action in schools. Therefore, it is important that individual schools work through how they articulate and personalise the corporate parenting commitment in their setting.

This case study describes how The Green School, an 11–18 school for girls in Hounslow, Middlesex articulated and put into practice their corporate parenting commitment for students in care, in the form of The Green School Pledge. Along with the Pledge, the school PALAC team introduced a series of initiatives that embodied the spirit of the Pledge that entailed, amongst many actions, a significant review of the school behaviour policy with a shift away from a punitive to restorative school culture.

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### What did the school do?

The school PALAC project team, led by Francis Markall, the Assistant Head Teacher, began the project with an awareness raising exercise session with all the school staff. This session included topics on the background of the students in care, why it is important to know who they are, an introduction to attachment theory and the importance of relentless positivity when working with students in care. The learning from this session, combined with that gained from the PALAC literature and audit resulted in three specific initiatives.



The first initiative was the creation of a Learning Passport for each of the six students in care. Individual Passports or Plans summarise on a page what practitioners need to know about their children and young people in care and are increasingly being used in schools. Figure 3 shows The Green School Learning Passport and is similar in structure and content to those created by other schools in the PALAC programme.

The students were all interviewed to ensure that the information on the Passport was personalised and to provide another

opportunity for the young people to have their voices heard. The Passports were shared with relevant pastoral and teaching staff and were included in a student's planner. As part of this interview the young people were introduced to the second initiative – The Pledge. The Pledge (Figure 4) is a series of additional commitments the school promises to undertake for each student in care as they move through each year in school. A Pledge Tracker document enables the DT to monitor the process and ensure that all promises are undertaken.

Figure 3 Learning Passport – to send by email

NAME			
<p><b>Aspirations:</b> I want to be a pilot when I am older.</p>	<p>PHOTO</p>	<p><b>Reading Age:</b> 14 years 9 months  <b>Standardised Reading Score:</b> 121  <b>Spelling Ability:</b> A+  <b>CATS Verbal:</b> 105  <b>CATS Non-verbal:</b> 98  <b>KS2:</b> English 5c and Maths 5c</p>	<p><b>Learning Passport</b>   <b>Date issued –</b>  <b>/12/15</b></p>
<p><b>What I am good at:</b> I love sport and taking part in PE. I enjoy playing basketball, football and badminton. I also enjoy reading fiction.</p> <p><b>What teachers say I am good at:</b> Oral contributions to class discussions, leading teams, group activities and performance.</p>		<p><b>I would like you to know that:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am really keen to do well and exceed my target levels in all of my subjects.</li> <li>I respond well to praise and will listen carefully if you tell me how to improve.</li> </ul> <p><b>Things that I find challenging:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I can sometimes become quite anxious about tests. I worry about the outcomes of my tests, and achieving a low level that I will not be able to improve until the next assessment.</li> <li>I find it hard to prepare for tests/assessments.</li> </ul> <p><b>I will help myself by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Writing homework due dates into my diary and completing all of my homework to the best of my ability.</li> <li>Attending Homework Club.</li> <li>Always being organised and having my locker key..</li> </ul>	
<p><b>It would help me if you could:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Challenge, support and encourage me. I am happy to meet with you after school or at lunchtime to discuss how I can improve.</li> <li>Give me extra reading around the topic to help improve my subject knowledge</li> <li>Please try and tell me in advance if there is a test.</li> </ul>		<p><b>PEP Targets:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Numeracy</li> <li>Literacy</li> <li>Other</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Overseas trips</b> I really enjoy taking part in trips and would like to visit as many different places as possible.  <b>NOTE:</b> Trip leaders will need to gain written permission from Social Services in order for ... to attend an overseas trip. This can easily be obtained by contacting ..<b>Social Worker</b> ... on</p>			

Figure 4: The Pledge

## OUR PLEDGE TO OUR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC)

When?	As part of our commitment to ensure your success we will:
At least once in your TGS journey	<p>Ensure you meet someone inspirational.</p> <p>Arrange for you to attend cultural visits for enjoyment: theatre, museum, gallery or fine dining.</p> <p>Encourage you to take on a leadership role.</p> <p>Make sure you excel in at least one aspect of life at TGS and then celebrate it.</p>
Key Stage 3	<p>Organise for you to attend an educational visit outside London that is linked to the curriculum.</p> <p>Provide regular opportunities for you to attend extra-curricular clubs.</p> <p>Arrange for you to attend one-to-one careers advice from Year 8.</p>
Key Stages 4 and 5	<p>Organise for you to attend events aimed at raising aspirations: visits to organisations, companies and further and higher educational institutions.</p> <p>Organise one-to-one tuition for you that guarantees your full potential is realised.</p>

The Green School's third initiative was to review the behaviour policy. Inclusive school behaviour policies are not about making exceptions for certain students but they do need to be sufficiently differentiated to allow all students to take part in school and build on success whatever difficulties they may be experiencing at any given time. The Green School trialed a Code of Conduct Policy that had an emphasis on restorative rather than punitive approaches in one curriculum area. The new Code clearly described how staff were to respond to behaviours that broke the Code of Conduct. However, the Code also entailed a very detailed rewards system that ensured all students, including those experiencing difficulties with self-regulating their behaviours, still had opportunities to regularly experience success across the week, a month and the school year. The Code included, for example, recognition of 'small acts of botheredness' and

'champagne moments'. This was in addition to a recognition of the more traditional areas of attainment, punctuality, attendance, attitudes and organisation.

### Outcomes for the young people and staff

As a result of the new Code of Conduct, the achievements of students, including those in care, is constantly being celebrated. Since its introduction for example, 370 students had received letters for positive conduct, 381 certificates have been awarded for punctuality and attendance, 350 postcards sent from subject teachers and 65 students had won a Magic Monday voucher. As a result of the Learning Passport, the strengths, areas for development and aspirations of all the students in care were known to the staff who could now plan more personalised learning opportunities for each student. The Pledge meant that as every student in care moved through the school,



key elements of their development such as cultural experiences, opportunities for leadership and targeted careers advice had been made a systemic part of their school curriculum.

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### **Implications for practice and research**

‘When adults in a school change everything changes.’ This is how Francis summed up the actions and impact of the PALAC project at The Green School. This phrase also speaks to inclusive school settings, where the staff understand, at a fundamental level, that the school rather than students, often need to change in order to see the desired changes in student behaviours. In tandem with whole school policy changes, it is often in the very small, day to day actions that whole school cultures can begin to change. These actions can be even more crucial in

the case of students in care as they are a demonstrable way of making the corporate parenting role real and authentic for staff and students.

In a recent study<sup>7</sup> of the views and experiences of 579 young people in care, the young people described ‘good parenting’ as demonstrated through: being loved; listened to; supported; respected and kept safe. These are characteristics that schools aspire to for all their children and young people. ‘Being loved’ is not an aspiration typically found on school websites or related school documents. However, it is a concept that might benefit from examination in what this means and might look like in the school context for students in care. It seems as if The Green School might have something to contribute.

7 Dixon et al. (2015) Corporate Parenting for young people in care – Making the difference? <http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/86665/1/CparentSum.pdf>

## Kingsley Academy

### There is no ‘magic bullet’ approach to improving outcomes for children and young people in care

#### Background

As described in the introduction, the academic attainment of students in care, as a group, remains consistently behind their peers. The reasons for this are complex and improvements in outcomes will require a coordinated and sustained effort from all agencies, including schools, who have a corporate parenting responsibility with other agencies. This system complexity is mirrored in the school context in that there is no one ‘magic bullet’ approach to ensure better outcomes for this potentially vulnerable group. Success will be based on a whole school approach, coupled with daily small acts on the behalf of practitioners that indicate a nuanced understanding of how to ensure that students in care thrive in school.

To help schools develop a whole school approach to supporting improved outcomes for students in care, the PALAC programme focuses on seven domains around which schools can audit and develop their practice (Figure 5). This case study describes how Kingsley Academy, an 11–18 school in Hounslow, Middlesex, used the PALAC domains to create a three-year action plan and programme to improve outcomes for students in care. The first year of this programme is reported here. The PALAC project team in school included Sharon Gladstone, the Assistant Principal and Catherine McCutcheon, SEMH Lead. At the time of the project there were four students in care.

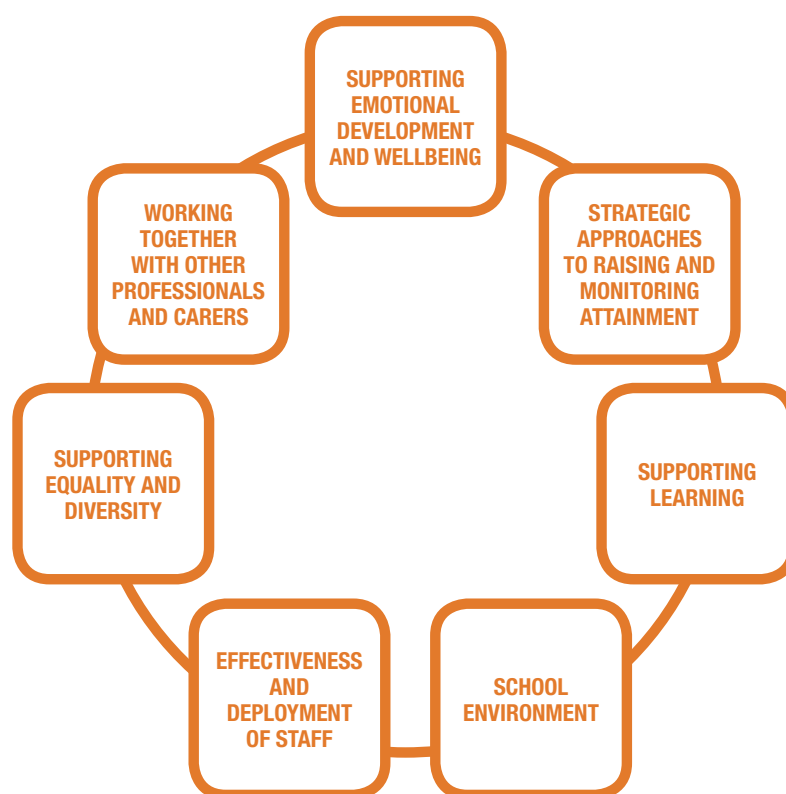


Figure 5: PALAC Domains: A whole school approach for children and young people in care



### What did the school do?

At the time of the PALAC project, Kingsley Academy had recently become part of an academy network and thus all school procedures were under review. Senior leadership changes were in process and a new head teacher and governing body due to be appointed. The findings from the PALAC audit and subsequent actions became integral to the whole School Improvement Plan. Auditing and action planning is very much an individual process for any school and the PALAC programme facilitates schools in identifying key priorities for their setting and ultimately the individual children and young people in care in their settings. The seven domains describe practice at whole school, teacher and student levels and schools can focus their initiatives in one domain, some or all at the same time, depending on the results of the audit and capacity to implement change.

Table 2 summarises the different actions taken by the Kingsley Academy PALAC team across five domains in one year, with planning and implementation of each action taking place simultaneously. Table 2 shows how it is possible for one action to have implications and positive outcomes in more than one domain.

*Table 2: Example of Kingsley Academy’s whole school approach to improving outcomes for students in care*

Domain	Actions in school
Supporting emotional development and wellbeing	Setting up a safe space for students to use as required
Strategic approaches to raising and monitoring attainment	Developing a whole school policy for students in care SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timebound) target training for key staff for 1:1 tuition sessions Improved student voice for PEPs Detailed and regular reporting to the Management Board
Supporting learning	Individual Pupil Passports
Effectiveness and deployment of staff	Regular staff awareness sessions and professional learning opportunities for all staff
School environment	Setting up a safe space for students to use as required

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### **Outcomes for the young people and staff**

At the student level it was possible to identify positive outcomes, academically and socially as evidenced by termly progress reports in all subjects and with behaviour, exclusion, attendance and rewards data. Crucially, the SMART targets set for three-quarters of PEPs had been achieved (one child was taken into care during this time and had to move from the school so progress data could not be collected). The safe space based on an open door policy was regularly used by the students. For individual students, there was evidence of more secure attachments with staff, with, for example, one student staying on site more often rather than leaving without permission. Another student had started to speak for the first time and begun to make friends after being very isolated in school.

These positive outcomes were also extended to staff and at a whole school level. All staff, for example, were more aware of the students in care after the whole school staff meeting where the Kingsley PALAC project aims were shared and due to the Passport information, which included 'pupil voice'. All staff felt more able to offer targeted and individualised learning where appropriate. This was demonstrated by external inspection data and through SLT and team leader observations in lessons.

Staff also had a clear vision for future development and were ready to plan the next year's action plan and the School 'Standard Operating Procedure' (school policy) for the area of 'looked after children' was written and ready to be put in place for the start of the new academic year.

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### **Implications for practice and research**

As outlined at the start of this case study, improvements in outcomes for students requires schools to change and improve their practice across many elements of school life. As demonstrated by the project at Kingsley, it is never possible to identify one action that 'will make all the difference'. If a school has not addressed, in any depth or breadth, the education of students in care, we are learning as part of the PALAC programme, that it may take two to three years to embed major changes and continuous monitoring thereafter as part of the School Improvement Plan. There is always a balance of having in place achievable goals but within the context of a challenging long-term plan. Finally, this case study, once again shows, that at least one member of SLT needs to be part of the project team to ensure impact and sustainability.

It is incumbent upon schools to undertake evidence-informed practice in schools. For children and young people in care this evidence, at the student level, is only beginning to emerge and it will be some time before there is a secure evidence base. Evidence about the importance of whole school approaches for all students has been established. In the meantime, and even when more evidence is available, schools will always need to make decisions about what they do for individual students in care. This should essentially be guided by what is on the PEP and therefore indicates why a challenging and relevant PEP is fundamental to better outcomes for students even when whole school issues have been addressed.



## West Thames and South Thames Colleges Improving provision for students in care in Further Education

### Background

Findings from a study of the pathways to further and higher education in five European countries in 2011 showed that young people in care were less likely to progress into further education (FE) and complete their courses<sup>8</sup>. The courses they took were often short-term occupational training rather than the higher level academic and vocational programmes. In England in 2013, approximately 6% of students in care took up a university course<sup>9</sup>. FE colleges have a vital role to play in the successful transition to adulthood for students in care. One large-scale study of 1058 young people in care from the United States clearly demonstrated that the longer students were enrolled in college the more education and employment outcomes achieved<sup>10</sup>. Not only

have FE colleges an important role to play in education and employment outcomes, they have a role in providing a 'safe haven' for students in care who during this time are experiencing many changes in their lives<sup>11</sup>.

However, the education of young people in care in FE in England has not received the policy, practice and research attention afforded to those children in care, aged 5 to 16. Their education presents some fundamentally different challenges compared to school aged children. Although we lack robust data, young people in care often drop out of college early. The reasons for this are complex and will be different for individuals. However, young people often find themselves on a course that does not match their academic ability. They will

8 Jackson, S. and Cameron, C. (2011) Final report of the YIPPEE project WP12. Young People from a Public Care Background: Pathways to further and higher education in five European countries. London: University of London.

9 UCAS (2014) Looked after Children and Care Leavers. <https://www.ucas.com/file/4996/download?token=YI9B1Wwh>

10 Barnow, B. S., Buck, A., O'Brien, K., Pecora, P., Ellis, M. L. and Steiner, E. (2015) Effective services for improving education and employment outcomes for children and alumni of foster care service: Correlates and educational and employment outcomes. *Child & Family Social Work*, 20: 159–70. doi:10.1111/cfs.12063

11 Connelly, G., Duncalf, Z., Furnivall, J., Seagraves, L. and Soden, R. (2011) Supporting care leavers in Scottish further education colleges: A research account of a pilot programme aimed at supporting looked after young people and care leavers in further education colleges in Scotland. Edinburgh: The Scottish Funding Council. [https://pure.strath.ac.uk/portal/files/27840236/SFC\\_Care\\_Leavers\\_in\\_Further\\_Education\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](https://pure.strath.ac.uk/portal/files/27840236/SFC_Care_Leavers_in_Further_Education_Final_Report.pdf)

likely not have received targeted advice on college courses and pathways that best suit their interests and aspirations. Progression between courses can also be problematic. Young people can experience uncertainty at key transition points including year 11 and when leaving care. Unlike the majority of their peers, young people in care often have to learn independent life skills earlier, which can be challenging alongside demanding college courses.

There are many strategic challenges to ensuring effective provision for students in care in FE. Many colleges have high numbers (n=150–250) of students who are in care and often they attend from a range of local authorities. These high student numbers entail managing large volumes of information with little consistency in how the information is presented and collated. There is a lack of uniformity in structures and policy that exist at school level, such as the DT role.

This case study describes how two FE colleges addressed some of the key priorities for the education of students in care in their settings. The first account describes how West Thames College in Hounslow, Middlesex, sought to improve the support for the transition phase between year 11 and FE and ensure greater retention of students through improved collection of pre-entry student information, an agreed protocol for PEP completion for students aged 16 to 18 and the creation of a Virtual Group support page on the College intranet. The second account describes how South Thames College, in Wandsworth, London, captured the perspectives of students in care in order to inform how support at the college might be improved.

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### What did the colleges do?

The PALAC project team at West Thames College, led by Julie Bennet, Head of Inclusion, was acutely aware of the national context of the higher risk of students in care, compared to their peers, of dropping out of their new FE courses in the first few weeks of term. The first step West Thames initiated was to introduce a strengths based 'pre-entry' information form to be completed by a student and their tutor at the end of year 11. The form elicited information in the following:

- **Areas of interest – academically, vocationally and socially**
- **Academic skills (strengths and if and how they might want support)**
- **Wellbeing**
- **Support received to date**
- **The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire.**

In this way, the information received, meant that the college was ready at the beginning of a student's year in September to offer targeted and informed support in order to ensure a stronger transition onto an appropriate course with the right support. A second initiative to support transition was the creation of a Virtual Group page on the college intranet specifically for students in care, which included relevant sources of information, a translation service and the opportunity to provide anonymous feedback and suggestions for improvement in provision. Finally, in collaboration with Hounslow VS, a protocol was agreed on the completion of PEPs for 16–18 students in care in college.

The PALAC team at South Thames College lead by Gail Walmsley, Head of Learner Support, drew guidance for their project from a previous research study that had taken place at the college that investigated the views of students in care including their experiences of using support services.



The participants reported drawing on the support of a wide range of professionals including Learning Support, Youth Workers, Counsellors and Education and Welfare Advisers. The student responses and an audit of practice in the college resulted in a focus on:

- **Investigating appointing specific learning support roles for students in care**
- **Implementing a professional learning day across the whole college staff team on the needs of students in care and how staff might improve their practice to support better outcomes**
- **Establishing a secure area on the staff intranet about students in care to act as a source of accessible information and support for staff**
- **Creation of a college policy for students in care.**

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### **Outcomes for the young people and staff**

As a result of the changes at West Thames College there had been an increase in the number PEPs completed for students in care in Hounslow and these had been completed on a termly basis and according to the timetable. This resulted in an increase in the number of students identified as needing additional support. As a consequence an Associate Engagement Mentor, sponsored by Hounslow VS, was appointed for two days a week to offer specialist input for students in care. In addition, a week-long bespoke Easter course, led by Pet-xi, was delivered for 18 students that offered intensive English and maths, as well as teambuilding events.

Findings from the ten students in care at South Thames College who took part in the interviews, showed that a half had accessed Learning Support Services and two had accessed Welfare and Education

Advice. All of them reported that the various services had 'helped a lot' or 'helped a great deal'. The students were asked for recommendations to improve support at college and suggestions included meeting young people who had experienced success at college and who could act as role models.

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### **Implications for practice and research**

Currently there is limited research evidence published that specifically addresses what approaches in FE will help to increase retention and ultimately improve education and employment outcomes for students in care post-16. However, the FE sector is aware of the risk factors including the transition from year 11, transition between courses when at college, the need for more ambitious and rigorous choices of curricula and the increased risk of experiencing mental health difficulties to name just a few. What these two case studies show and represent more broadly, is that FE colleges are increasingly engaged with implementing changes that are aimed at alleviating and reducing some of the risk factors. It is imperative that this tacit knowledge and understanding, gained as part of daily practice in colleges, is captured and researched more formally to contribute to a stronger evidence base.



# Conclusion

To conclude, the participants in the PALAC programme implemented a variety of changes in their schools and colleges at student and staff levels. At the student level, changes included, for example, new approaches to assessing and supporting emotional development and wellbeing. Some of the participants used the PALAC programme as a springboard in their settings to raise the profile of the needs of children and young people in care through whole school professional learning. One

of the aims of the PALAC programme is to continue to support developments in practice after the programme has ended through ongoing review of the audit and action plan. The schools and colleges in this PALAC programme have continued with their focus on the education of children and young people in care and in doing so are ensuring that they are helped to reach their potential and simultaneously contribute to an emerging evidence base of current practice.



Promoting the Achievement of Looked After Children (PALAC) is a knowledge exchange programme that aims to support the development of practice in schools and to expand the evidence base to ultimately improve outcomes for children in care.

For further information on the programme please contact:

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