



Promoting the achievement of looked after children and young people in the City of Nottingham

May 2017

Case studies of education provision for children and young people in care in the City of Nottingham

*Promoting the Achievement of Looked After Children
PALAC*

Contents

Introduction	4
Case studies	6
The Nottingham Emmanuel School <i>“We need a bean bag” – creating a safe base in a secondary school</i>	7
Nottingham Children’s Hospital School <i>Enhancing the lives of children and their families</i>	10
Scotholme Primary School <i>Finding a connection – supporting students to feel more connected to school</i>	13
Nottingham City Virtual School <i>Strengthening links between education and social care</i>	16
Conclusion	18

Authors

UCL Institute of Education

Dr Catherine Carroll, Senior Research Associate, Centre for Inclusive Education

Professor Claire Cameron, Deputy Director, Thomas Coram Research Unit

City of Nottingham

Kelley Connolley, Achievement Consultant,

City of Nottingham

Ann Dargavel, SENCo, Scotholme Primary School

Kate Hall, Head Teacher, Scotholme Primary School

Barbara MacCarthy, Achievement Consultant,

City of Nottingham

Donna Snowden, Academic Mentor, The Nottingham Emmanuel School

Eleanor Tweedie, Head of Nottingham Children’s Hospital

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

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 years¹. 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 socially². The purpose of this report is to share practice in selected City of Nottingham schools that is contributing to improved outcomes and school experiences for children and young people in care.

In July 2015, the City of Nottingham Virtual School (VS) commissioned 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 pupils in care and staff in the participating schools.

¹ 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

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

What is PALAC?

PALAC is a knowledge exchange programme that seeks to support practice in schools to improve outcomes for pupils 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 pupils 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 VS in an 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 focus their PALAC projects around one or two domains that are most relevant to their settings.





Case Studies



The Nottingham Emmanuel School “We need a bean bag” – creating a safe base in a secondary school

Background

Increasingly, schools are developing attachment aware practices to support children and young people’s emotional needs and development³. Alongside staff professional learning and adaptations to school procedures such as whole school behaviour policies, the physical environment of a school should also be considered as part of a review of attachment aware practices. The physical environment can make an important contribution in helping to ‘hold’ the emotional lives of children and young people. Louise Bomber describes very clearly how school life can be a daily challenge for some students in care and that the provision of a safe base, by providing a familiar place for students, can provide an anchor from which to face these daily challenges⁴. A safe base also requires a reliably present adult with whom young people can work and interact if such a

resource is going to have a meaningful and long-lasting impact. It is through the ongoing experience and maintenance of these relationships with the secure adults, that a pupil can start to make lasting changes to their lives.

The Nottingham Emmanuel School is a Church of England Secondary school in West Bridgford. This case study presents an account of how the school set up a safe base for vulnerable students, including children in care, and the impact of the safe base for students and school staff. Here, Donna Snowden who was the Academic Mentor at the time of the project and Andy Wolfe, Vice Principal describe the safe base, how it was used and the benefits for those who accessed the space. The account also includes feedback from a student in care who regularly used the base.

³ Attachment Aware Schools: <https://www.bathspa.ac.uk/education/research/attachment-aware-schools/>

⁴ Bomber, L. (2011) *What About Me? Inclusive strategies to support pupils with attachment difficulties make it through the school day*. Belper, Derbyshire: Worth Publishing.

What did the school do?

Space in most schools is at a premium and a lack of space is often cited as a stumbling block to creating a safe base. However, research shows that if a space can be found, the base can be relatively inexpensive to set up⁵. A separate space was not available to the team at Emmanuel, but due to the commitment of the senior leadership team (SLT) to the potential benefits of such an initiative, a classroom was converted to allow for multi-functional use, including an office function for Donna and Andy and a safe space for pupils. The specific changes for the safe space area included a sofa, round table, projector, sound, positive poster quotes on the walls and refreshments as shown in photographs A and B.

The Nottingham Emmanuel School Safe Space

Creating the safe space was just the first step in the process. As a 'shared space' consideration was given to how this would work for the benefit of all those who used the space including agreeing with students what would happen to support them if the space was not immediately available on an occasion they might wish to use it. This was due to the fact that throughout the year the space was used for a range of activities including small group subject revision, group coaching and 1:1 mentoring/coaching. For young people in care it was also the place for meetings related to their personal education plans (PEPs). It was important to communicate to all staff the purpose of the room and this provided a platform for a whole staff inset on the education of children and young people in care. Finally, for any safe space to function effectively, a 'safe person' needs to be available. As the office space was allocated to the designated

teacher (DT) and academic mentor for pupils in care, a known and knowledgeable adult was always present.

Outcomes for young people and school staff

Staff involved in the project, as well as one of the students in care who regularly used the base, were asked to give their perspectives on the initiative. Donna, felt that the 'proactive' nature of having a safe space had actually decreased the need for students in care to 'opt out' of lessons and had contributed to each young person being more settled in lessons, which was reflected in 100% attendance, no exclusions and positive behaviour for learning data. The young person reported that:



Above: Safe Base

“ I like the room because it has a sofa for people to sit on and talk and I enjoy having a hot chocolate. It makes you feel good about yourself, because of the posters and what they say. When we do Circle Time we can have hot chocolate, eat lunch, listen to music and talk. I feel proud of myself, in my primary school I only had one room to go in, which if other people were in there, I couldn't go in. Here with B15 if Miss is talking to other people or staff, I usually only have to wait a while and then go in. I think I can talk about my feelings in the room – compared to other spaces. It's a place I can go to if I need to, which is better than me walking around school. We need a bean bag.

An unexpected outcome of the project was the impact of the room for the member of SLT who shared the space:

“ The constant communication and respect for each other has enabled the safe base to be such a success, especially for those students who have been using the room for their coaching and mentoring. In addition to the space providing a very visual reminder and prompt for my leadership work, it has enabled me to get to know key students, and partner closely with Donna in her mentoring and coaching work. As we have chosen to design the room deliberately to reflect the values of the school, it has provided a very conducive atmosphere for meetings I have undertaken in the space particularly sensitive staff meetings, where staff have benefited from a more informal room layout, hospitality and a more relaxed approach. Overall, I have valued immensely the sense that my office is also a space for working with students, it has communicated to them that they are important and the space is a place of growth and development for them.

Implications for practice and research

Successfully setting up a safe base at The Nottingham Emmanuel School and similar safe base projects in other PALAC schools have shown that:

- **Secondary as well as primary aged students benefit from safe base provision**
- **As well as a place for 'holding' the emotional lives of children and young people, it communicates to them that they are important and cared for**
- **If a separate space cannot be found, it is possible to thoughtfully adapt areas that have more than one use**
- **A safe space needs an available adult**
- **How the space is used will in part, reflect each individual school's context, but there needs to be agreement in how it is to be used and that this is clearly communicated**
- **Adults in schools can also benefit from safe spaces.**

There is much theoretical research and practitioner support for the potential benefits of safe bases in schools. However, the short- and long-term impact of safe bases in schools has yet to be empirically investigated in depth and is an area for future research.



⁵ Carroll, C. and Cameron, C. (2017) Taking Action for Looked After Children in School. London: UCL Institute of Education Press.



Nottingham Children's Hospital School

Enhancing the lives of children and their families

Background

Very little is reported about the experiences of children and young people in care when they are in hospital. In 2014 the Care Quality Commission (CQC) conducted the first survey of the hospital experiences of nearly 19,000 children and young people who received inpatient or day case care in 137 acute NHS trusts in 2014⁶. Overall, children and their parents or carers reported good experiences of hospital care. The majority of children and young people said they were happy with the care they received, felt safe while on the wards, thought staff did everything possible to control their pain and they understood the information given to them by staff. However, children, parent and carer reports of patient experiences were significantly poorer for children with a disability, a learning disability or a mental health concern. The experiences of children and young people in care were not separately reported. Therefore, we do not

know their experiences. Furthermore, as children and young people in care can have high levels of special educational needs (SEN) (68%)⁷, therefore, it is possible that they are at risk of more negative experiences of care in hospital.

The Nottingham Children's Hospital School (CHS) is one of the first hospital schools to address the education of children in care in a hospital setting as part of a research project. Even before the publication of the CQC report, the hospital school staff were concerned about the experiences of care and education of these children and young people as part of their school. However, there were also concerns at a wider hospital strategic level including admissions policies and the knowledge and expertise of ward staff when caring for children in care.

What did the school do?

The project followed two streams of work. The first element involved all school staff, including administrative support staff and governors reviewing their practice in the education of children and young people in care. This was undertaken by using the PALAC audit and a professional learning needs analysis. This information informed a training day led by a member of the UCL Institute of Education PALAC team, the outcome of which was the creation of a hospital school action plan on the education of children in care. The key action plan priorities were:

- **Improved literacy progress and attainment for identified students**
- **Improved provision for supporting the emotional wellbeing of students.**

The second stream of work was concerned with how the hospital school, at a strategic level might influence improving practice across the hospital for children and young people in care. This included meetings with wider hospital staff, for example, the Safe Guarding team to try and ascertain how information was shared and ultimately how practice might be developed to better support children and young people in care when in hospital.

Outcomes for children and staff

The Nottingham CHS has set up a charity, Ducklings, and is using some funding to run an adaptation of the Letterbox Club. Students are assessed whilst attending the hospital school, for risk of underachievement in literacy. Agreement is sought from parents/carers for the young person to take part in the scheme. A carefully chosen book, a small gift and a newsletter are then sent four times a year to the home address. The package is sent in a large golden envelope to mark this as a special event. A dedicated mobile phone is kept at the school and the

young people are asked to call the number and leave a review of each book.

The Nottingham CHS has links with other hospital schools and medical needs settings through The National Association of Hospital and Home Teachers (NAHHT) and the National Association of Hospital School Leaders (NAHSL). Through these two organisations, Nottingham CHS is able to keep in contact with all the similar institutions in England. Currently Nottingham CHS is working closely with the school at Leeds General Infirmary. They are in the early stages of developing an approach to social and emotional issues for young people unable to attend school due to medical needs and finding ways to track the emotional wellbeing of these young people.

All staff at the CHS have contributed to the development of a plan for professional development and learning in the coming year. They have identified issues of attachment theory, resilience and Growth Mindset as areas in which to develop skills.

The meetings with the wider hospital staff revealed the need for the education of children in care whilst in hospital to be addressed at a national level and subsequently hospital schools nationally, through the NAHHT and NAHSL organisations, are coming together to address issues of children in care in hospital.

Implications for practice and research

The PALAC project at Nottingham CHS shows that as with mainstream schools, a hospital school must also strive to meet the academic and emotional wellbeing needs of all pupils. Although empirically tested strategies to support the education of children and young people in care are only emerging, and many have not been designed specifically for a hospital context, it is possible to adapt and develop approaches

⁶ Care Quality Commission (2015) Children and young people's inpatient and day case survey 2014. https://www.cqc.org.uk/sites/default/files/20150630_cypsurvey_keyfindings.pdf

⁷ CQC (2015) Children and young people's inpatient and day case survey. http://www.cqc.org.uk/sites/default/files/20150630_cypsurvey_keyfindings.pdf

for a particular school context as in the case of the Letterbox Club resource in this case study. In addition, that the small number of hospital schools and the range and variety of organisational arrangements for medical needs education nationally make it necessary for medical needs settings to undertake their own research and develop initiatives bespoke for children and young people in care in their settings. Finally, in their role as corporate parents, hospital schools have a potentially important role to play in bringing to national attention the care and education provision for children in care in hospital.

Apart from the CQC survey, individual studies have also addressed the experiences of hospital care for specific groups of children such as patients with autism. Studies that address the experiences of children and young people in care in hospital are crucial, not only as part of a duty of care in our corporate parenting role, but to help inform practice at ward level and with their education whilst away from their home school.



Scotholme Primary School

Finding a connection – supporting students to feel more connected to school

Background

Research has identified associations between school connectedness and a number of adolescent outcomes, including positive links with academic motivation and achievement, emotional and physical health and a reduction in risk-taking behaviour⁸. Terminology can vary to describe the concept of school connectedness but the three main dimensions are affective (how pupils feel about school, teachers and their peers); behavioural (pupil actions, for example, participating in school activities) and the cognitive dimension (pupils' beliefs, including their motivations and hopes linked to school). School connectedness theory argues that pupils feel more connected to school when they believe that the adults care about them as individuals as well as their learning and achievement. In this sense it also draws on attachment theory and that positive adult relationships can help to foster resilience.

Scotholme Primary and Nursery school in Hyson Green, close to the city centre of Nottingham has 420 pupils on roll in the main school and 60 pupils in the nursery. The school deprivation index is high, between 75% and 80% of pupils have English as an additional language, pupil mobility is higher than the national average and at the time of the project approximately 10% of the school population were (or in the past) involved with social services. In this context, ensuring that the school developed practice for increased opportunities for school connectedness was an important priority. The school team wanted to increase pupils' feelings of being 'cared about' and that they really 'mattered' to at least one person in school. In the longer term the team hoped to see these positive feelings harnessed to promote greater academic achievement in the classroom and better socialisation with peers and other adults in school.

⁸ DiE (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

What did the school do?

The PALAC project in Scotholme was led by the Kate Hall (head teacher) and Ann Dargavel (SENCo) and addressed two interrelated themes: firstly, how to increase a pupil's sense of connectedness with school and secondly, developing ways of measuring pupil wellbeing. Drawing inspiration from such approaches as the Big Red Bus Story and In My Shoes⁹, the Scotholme team devised an approach specific to the school called the Scotholme Happy Attached Children Everywhere (SHARE) programme. As part of the project, individual volunteer members of staff (teaching, support, administrative and maintenance) were paired with a pupil over a period of six months to foster a relationship with the pupil that would, ultimately, help the pupil to feel more connected to school and that they mattered. The staff group met to identify specific ways and times across the week that would enable them to develop stronger relationships with each pupil. This was based on data gathered during the pupil interviews about their interests and what was important to them. The 'connection moments' across the week might often be very brief, for example, catching up on Thursday lunchtime to talk about the mid-week football scores but the challenge for staff was to regularly keep to these 'connection moments' across the week. The staff team met regularly to review progress and discuss issues arising from the project.

Identifying the pupils who might benefit from participating in the programme crossed over with the second strand of the PALAC project that sought to develop ways of assessing pupils' attitudes to school and feelings of school connectedness. Following an investigation of the various assessments and tools available to schools, the Pupil Attitudes to Self and School (PASS) survey¹⁰

was adopted. All pupils from years 1 to 6 were surveyed and the results highlighted other pupils, apart from those in care, who might benefit from taking part in the SHARE programme. In addition, interviews (questionnaire specifically written by the school team) were held with these pupils which included the questions around their relationships with friends, family and school staff. At the end of the SHARE programme, the pupils were tested again on the PASS survey and completed a follow-up questionnaire. Participating staff took part in a focus group meeting using the Strengths, Weaknesses, Achievements and Next Steps (SWAN) format to review their experiences of the SHARE programme.

Outcomes for children and staff

Forty pairs of pupil and adult took part in the programme and despite the pilot nature of the project it was possible to identify positive gains for pupils and staff.

Staff described some of the benefits of the programme as the opportunity to:

- **Think carefully about the kind of relationships they made with pupils**
- **Get to know a pupil from another part of the school that they did not usually work with**
- **Understand how the smallest of actions, including non-verbal actions, can help a pupil to feel better about themselves**
- **Observe some pupils beginning to initiate contact after the programme had started**
- **Use the PASS survey results to identify pupils who often 'go under the radar' and were 'internalising' their emotions and difficulties.**

The SWAN focus group with staff also highlighted some of the challenges of implementing the SHARE programme as:

- **The challenge of keeping to weekly commitments with just one pupil within the context of a busy school week**
- **Establishing a relationship with a pupil who might find it difficult to respond to an unfamiliar adult**
- **Pupil movements in and out of school that are more common for vulnerable pupils**
- **Gaining an understanding of how long it might take to see changes in the standardised measures such as the PASS survey.**

At the pupil level, after just two terms, there was evidence to show the emerging positive impact of the programme. Of the 36 children surveyed in both January and July, scores for 23 children had improved, scores for five remained the same and scores for eight children had decreased. Findings from the pupil questionnaires were also promising with an improvement in average scores across the group for the two main statements:

- **I have a grown-up in school who I can trust if I need to talk to someone**
- **I know that there are teachers in school who care about me.**

Implications for practice and research

The SHARE programme shows that:

- **Building nurturing relationships between pupils and staff can have a positive impact for both groups and the programme was contributing to an improvement in the whole school ethos**

- **Unlike some other commercial programmes, there are no initial expensive costs with the SHARE approach but there are resource implications in respect to staff time**
- **New initiatives are always a 'work in progress', not all pairings were successful but the analysis of why and what can be learnt from the less successful outcomes is fundamental to strengthening any approach.**

More widely, the wellbeing of any and all pupils in a school is in and of itself important and valued by school practitioners. Nevertheless, wellbeing is also addressed in light of the theory and evidence that for vulnerable pupils not reaching age-related expectations that there will be an impact on academic attainment and progress. Current findings from the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) Toolkit¹¹ now reports four months' additional academic progress as a result of social and emotional approaches. Research in this area is complex. Findings from research in schools and education more generally, can only ever show 'associations' and not causal links between a specific social and/or emotional intervention or programme and any subsequent increase in academic attainment. Furthermore, how long it might take to see any increase in academic attainment is yet not clear due, in large part, to the different variables in studies such as the child, school context, content and programme length. Nonetheless further research would help to strengthen our understanding of how to take the full advantage of wellbeing approaches and academic attainment.

⁹ In My Shoes: http://www.inmyshoes.org.uk/In_My_Shoes/About.html

¹⁰ 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

¹¹ Education Endowment Foundation Toolkit: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/resources/teaching-learning-toolkit/social-and-emotional-learning/>



Nottingham City Virtual School Strengthening links between education and social care

Background

When a child or young person enters the care system for the first time, his/her social worker must ensure that the needs of the child and how they will be met by the LA are documented in a care plan. One element of the care plan is the PEP. This is a record of what needs to happen to enable that the child or young person to reach their full potential. Social workers have a statutory duty to initiate and subsequently support the completion of a termly PEP.

Therefore, having an informed understanding of the school system, including the role of VS, DTs, how to write SMART targets and contribute meaningfully to review meetings, is essential for all social workers responsible for children and young people in care. However, the social work profession, including child and family social workers is subject to a high turnover of staff and a heavy reliance on temporary agency staff¹². This national context for social work was reflected in the City of Nottingham and in response the VS wanted to try and mitigate any potential negative impact on the lives

of children and young people in care by offering a programme of workshops. The aim of the workshops was for newly qualified and experienced social workers to have an enhanced understanding of how to support better education outcomes for children and young people in care.

What did the school do?

The following activities were undertaken by the VS:

- **A rolling, differentiated and personalised training programme consisting of one-hour slots and drop-in sessions was devised**
- **Four training slots were held from December 2015 to June 2016 with individual one-hour individual follow-up sessions and included subjects such as an introduction to the role of the VS and how it can support the education of looked after children, how to complete a PEP and how to apply for a school place.**

Outcomes for staff

A total of 18 social workers attended the training with six of these social workers coming to at least two different workshops. Their years in service ranged from four months to 27 years and they represented different social care teams including, for example, Children in Need. Their roles were varied, including social workers and family support workers.

The workshops were very well received by those social workers who attended:

- **84% of the attendees felt that the workshops were very good or excellent**
- **All of the attendees agreed that the training had increased their knowledge and understanding of how to support the education of looked after children (57% strongly agreed)**
- **All of the attendees would recommend the training workshop to others (63% strongly agree).**

The attendees particularly liked the sessions on the statutory responsibilities of social workers, VS head teachers and schools, funding sources, how to complete a PEP and time for question and answer sessions.

The attendees reported that the workshops could have been even better if they had included a timeline of social worker responsibilities and more exemplar forms. Comments from the evaluations also mentioned that training with teachers and SENCos would have been welcomed. As a result of the feedback received the VS team were planning to run the training again the following year supported with a training handbook for social workers.

Implications for practice and research

The City of Nottingham VS workshop programme did successfully meet the expectations and training needs of those social workers who attended. It provides a template for other VS in terms of content and structure for similar social worker training and collaboration. The participants appreciated the flexibility offered and the balance of whole group sessions with opportunities for individual follow-up sessions. Nevertheless, despite the flexibility and relevance of the content of the programme, the attendance rates were low despite this being an area of interest and need on the part of the social work profession. The project answered the question about the type of training that can be offered and was positively received by social workers but highlighted the strategic need, on the part of leaders of social care teams, to enable social workers to attend such training.

¹² Bowyer, S. and Roe, A. (2015). Social work recruitment and retention. Research in Practice. file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/RIP_Strategic_Briefing_social_work_retention_web.pdf



Conclusion

To conclude, the participants in the PALAC programme implemented a variety of changes in their school at pupil and staff levels. At the pupil 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 school to raise the profile of the needs of children in care through whole school professional learning. A particular feature of the City of Nottingham PALAC programme was the multi-agency nature of the projects

with activities that included hospital school education professionals and social workers. 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 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 the students 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:

**Centre for Inclusive Education
UCL Institute of Education
Bedford Way
London
WC1H 0AL**