Promoting the achievement of looked after children and young people in Barnet

May 2019

Case studies of education provision for children and young people in care in Barnet
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## Acknowledgements

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 2018, there were 72,670 children and young people in care in England. The number of looked after children has continued to increase steadily over the last eight years.¹ 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. The average Attainment 8 score for children in care was 18.8 compared to 44.4 for non-looked after children and 19 for children in need. In 2018, the percentage of children in care achieving a pass in English and Mathematics (grade 4 or above at GCSE) remained similar to 2017 at 17.5%. Care leavers can 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 if they are supported effectively to reach their potential academically and socially.² The purpose of this report is to share practice in Barnet schools that is contributing to improved outcomes and school experiences for children and young people in care.

In 2017, Barnet Virtual School (VS) collaborated with UCL Centre for Inclusive Education to deliver the Promoting the Achievement of Looked After Children (PALAC) programme with eight schools. 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.

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 current understandings of how to best support professional learning and development in schools.

PALAC, which began in 2014, is now in its fifth year; it engages schools and VS in a collaborative year long programme through access to research findings, a 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 academic year. The PALAC team links with 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
Queenswell Infant and Junior School
Creating a network for carers, relatives and adopters

Background
In 2018 3820 children were adopted from care and 3430 children left care through a special guardianship order. Special guardianship is increasingly used as an alternative to adoption. Special guardians may be foster carers, but are usually people within the child’s birth family or family network, such as grandparents, aunts and uncles or family friends. Special guardians face specific challenges as they were not usually planning to become carers but have responded to a need within the wider family.

For those children who move from care to adoption we know that this does not mean that their needs disappear overnight. They continue to remain vulnerable to poor academic and social outcomes even though they have been found a loving home. Indeed, many years into a stable and settled adoption placement, their early life experiences can have implications for the teenage years and early adult life.

In February 2018 the Department for Education placed a statutory duty on schools to offer ‘support and advice’ to previously looked after children, their parents and carers, in recognition of the fact that many remain vulnerable and need additional support. Research indicates that parental actions that provide a strong home learning environment can make a difference to children and young people’s academic and other educational outcomes. The limited research that has been undertaken has shown that this the same for pupils in care.

Studies from the UK and US have demonstrated that higher educational aspirations on the part of carers were associated with better outcomes and carer involvement in a greater number of school activities predicted significant improvement in the pupils’ average marks.

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4 N. Biehal, S. Ellison, C. Baker & I. Sinclair (2010). Belonging and Permanence: Outcomes in Long-Term Foster Care and Adoption. BAAF.
A research team from Norway investigated what foster carers could do to support successful academic outcomes based on the perspective of sixteen young adults who had studied in HE and their foster carers (thirteen). The findings highlighted the importance of the promotion of a feeling of belonging in the foster home, valuing education and providing order and structure in the lives of the young people.

Finally, findings from the London Fostering Achievement Programme, a project across London local authorities that aimed to improve the confidence and skills of carers to engage with schools and make a positive contribution to the education of children in care, found positive results from the introduction of Education Champions who were employed for four hours per week by five of the LAs. They were experienced foster carers, often with education experience, who worked with less experienced foster carers to boost their confidence in supporting educational needs: for example, attending meetings with them, working with them and their foster child at home on reading or maths or helping them to navigate the educational system.

What did the schools do?
Queenswell Infant School is larger than most infant schools. The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and those known to be eligible for free school meals are well above average. Over half the pupils speak English as an additional language and approximately 6% are at an early stage of language acquisition. The vast majority of these students move into Queenswell Junior School which is a larger than average junior school which has similar characteristics to its main feeder school. Half the pupils in the school receive the pupil premium, which is twice the national average, and a high proportion have additional needs. This case study describes how the Designated Teachers, Kelly Crack, from the Infant, and Sarah Lloyd, from the Junior, collaborated to offer support to the carers of children who attended both of their schools.

Kelly and Sarah had a good working relationship and felt that they liaised well in supporting their looked after children, including siblings at both schools. This was confirmed by a joint needs analysis that they carried out on their care-experienced cohort. Both instinctively felt that they had good relationships with carers and wanted to capture their good practice but also investigate if there was anything else they could do to support carers of care experienced children further.

The team started their project off by holding a focus group during a coffee morning for all of the carers of children in care. Mindful of the statutory duty, they extended the invitation to carers of children on special guardianship orders, adopters and anyone who had legal care of a child who was not their own birth child. Sarah and Kelly devised questions, conducted the focus group and consulted with carers to understand their levels of understanding of school systems, their views on why care-experienced children underachieve, different interventions and support they might want from school. Using the information from the focus group during the coffee morning Sarah and Kelly decided to write a series of Newsletters (Figure 1) to the carers addressing the issues they had raised, then inviting them back for a follow up session.

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Mrs Sarah Lloyd and Miss Kelly Crack would like to thank you for attending our first carer group as part of the ‘Promoting the Achievement of Looked After Children (PALAC)’ project, alongside the University College London (UCL). Below is our first newsletter which details information defining categories of Care. We hope you find this useful and we welcome and value your feedback.

**Children in Foster Care**
- Sometimes called ‘children in care’ or ‘looked after children’.
- These are children who cannot live with their birth families usually due to abuse and neglect.
- The local authority has full or shares parental responsibility for them.
- Most looked after children live with trained foster carers either for a short period of time until they move on or in a long term placement (until they are 18 or sometimes older).
- All these children will get support from a social worker and regular care team meetings to review how they are doing.
- There are specific laws which mean that local authorities and schools must support them.
- This includes a duty to promote their education.
- Schools receive additional funding to support our children in care.

**Special Guardianship Orders (SGO)**
- An SGO is a legal order which gives parental responsibility usually to a relative (e.g. a grandparent).
- That family member makes day to day and important decisions about the child until they are 18.
- Children under the care of a SGO are seen as an alternative to a child being in care as they can still have contact with family members.
- Unlike looked after children these children do not typically have a social worker.
- Family members often have to manage contact with the birth family.
- Schools receive additional funding to support our children who have a SGO.

**Adopted Children**
- Adopted children have been removed from a birth family who is unable to care for them usually due to abuse or neglect.
- Adopters are trained, selected and assessed before they are approved to be matched.
- Children are looked after by the local authority until an Adoption Order is made.
- At this point the Adopters have full parental responsibility.
- Adopted children will usually stop having a social worker at this point and are likely to have no or very little direct contact with their birth family.
- Schools receive additional funding to support our adopted children if the families inform them.

**Next Steps:** We will send you further newsletters covering:
- School Support and interventions
- What you can do at home
- Advice & Contact
- Barnet Virtual School information

*Figure 1: Newsletter for carers*
They then posted out newsletters to everyone who attended their focus group covering the following areas:

- Vulnerable Groups
- Different kinds of carers (‘All about you’)
- School support and interventions
- What you can do at home
- Contact, signpost including the Virtual School.

A second session was organised for carers in the Spring Term. Interest in the event was generated at a Designated Teachers Conference so the event was opened to carers from neighbouring schools and a local adopter also volunteered to speak. The follow up session included presentations from the Virtual School on their role, the role of the Designated Teacher and the pupil premium. There was also space provided for carers and adopters to be able to share their personal experiences.

**Outcomes for students and staff**

The needs analysis of the cohort of students across two sites revealed that looked after children at both schools were in stable placements and receiving all of the appropriate interventions and support. Whilst the schools felt that they had good relationships with parents and carers the information pointed towards the need to work more with carers in order to add value. There was also a gap in that children who were previously in care did not form part of the analysis.

The focus groups revealed that despite apparent warm relationships between school and parents there was often a fundamental lack of knowledge of key support systems. Carers did not know what a Designated Teacher was and the support and advice they can offer. Whilst they attended PEP (Personal Education Plan) meetings and their children benefitted from Pupil Premium they did not appreciate that these were specific policy initiatives aimed at supporting them. Similarly carers had limited understanding of the role and purpose of the Virtual School including new legal duties to support children who are adopted and those on special guardianship orders.

An unintended consequence of the programme has been the creation of a network of support for parents and carers. Carers have a new, shared non-judgemental space, which for many has been particularly informative. Carers used the forum in particular to share their experiences including frustrations and anxieties. This included recounting their personal journeys and accounts of feeling disempowered and for some feeling let down or depersonalised by social care systems. Significantly this has included Special Guardians who care for a group of children who have many of the characteristics and vulnerabilities of looked after children but none of the support systems. The school plan to run these sessions for carers on a termly basis.
Implications for practice and research
A major outcome of this case study has been improving carers’ and parents’ knowledge and therefore access to support systems both now and in the future. Foster carers want to increase their knowledge and understanding of how to promote the education of children in their care and the majority report getting the support from schools. Findings from this case study show that schools and Virtual Schools can be an important source of information and support for carers and that it is important for settings to take a proactive approach with carers, especially special guardians and adopters who may be particularly vulnerable and isolated. Some schools, for example, aware of the bureaucratic demands on carers, have introduced a slimmed down school prospectus, which can be quickly referenced to support the transition of a care-experienced child into a new school setting. It is in the interest of schools to work proactively with carers and adopters, particularly during settled periods, to in order to be aware of any early warning indicators that a pupil may be experiencing difficulties in their school and or at home.

We know from research that increased difficulties, particularly in adolescence, are strongly associated with foster carer placement breakdown. Therefore, research that focuses on how to strengthen links between foster placements, kinship care, adopters and schools in the first instance might help to prevent breakdown or, at the very least, enable a more responsive and collaborative approach between carers and schools when difficulties arise.

Friern Barnet School
Prompting emotional connection

Background
One of the reasons for the increased interest in attachment theory in schools is an understanding that nurturing relationships between pupils and practitioners is beneficial for all pupils as well as children and young people in care. Adults can provide pupils with the protective and secure foundation from which to explore and engage with their peers and the wider school environment.\(^{15}\)

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 behaviour.\(^ {16}\) 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 cognitive (pupils’ beliefs, including their motivations and hopes linked to school).\(^ {17}\)

Although there is no universally accepted definition, school connectedness theory argues\(^ {18}\) 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.\(^ {19}\)

Friern Barnet is a smaller-than-average-sized secondary school. A significant proportion of students are from vulnerable groups. This includes: almost half who speak English as a second language; those eligible for pupil premium; those eligible for free school meals and a high proportion with additional needs. Furthermore, around 15% of students join the school outside of the usual admission round throughout the year from different education systems: consequently the cohort is often in a state of flux.


This case study describes how Angela Moore, the Deputy Head, Andy Bolton, a Teacher of Design and Technology and Kemi Omijeh, the School Counsellor implemented a professional learning programme with an emphasis on promoting stability, attachment and emotional connection practices.

**What did the school do?**
The starting point of the project was an ‘Attachment Aware Schools Audit’ led by Angela and carried out with the Senior Leadership Team. This was a self-assessment activity conducted to investigate the whole system. The audit considered the skills and competence of individuals, teams and therefore the whole school to support the emotional needs of its students as well as highlighting strengths and areas for improvement.

Angela and Andy devised an action plan based upon the findings of the audit, which recognised the need to build upon and reinvigorate previous training delivered to colleagues on attachment. Angela led two further whole staff training sessions which focused on emotional connectedness, attachment and the vulnerable cohort in school in January and May. The sessions explicitly addressed how in-service training in schools can bring about change by paying attention to how professional development activities in schools can affect practice in the classroom.

Whole school in-service training was interspersed with the development and formalisation of regular ‘staff sharing’ sessions. These meetings were carefully structured by the project team using a ‘reflective team’ model in order to promote a shared understanding of the context of children’s behaviour. This provided a purposeful forum for staff to discuss specific cases, reflect and consider how to translate learning from training sessions into practical classroom strategies.

The final part of the project involved updating school policies and providing staff with guides based upon discussions held in these meetings and capturing learning to create a cycle that reinforced ‘attachment’ and ‘emotional connecting’ practices.

**Outcomes for students and staff**
The school audit confirmed the views of the project that there was an aspect of emotional ‘disconnect’ between staff and some students. Secondly, the audit revealed that whilst there had been some benefit and expertise developed from previous professional development activities, this had not been fully embedded.

All staff were given an opportunity to attend ‘staff share’ sessions where they could hear and share strategies that work and were given time and space for reflection. The space provided opportunities for staff to discuss how they had implemented practical strategies in the classroom and reporting of both successes and failures. It proved a good way for new staff to get to know students but also for those who may struggle with a particular student to hear and understand that they succeed in other areas of the curriculum or specific times of the day. Staff feedback on the initiative was both positive and constructive. Colleagues described how the sessions had deepened their awareness and they appreciated hearing practical strategies that gave them tangible ways of working with students. Staff asked that multiple sessions were run.

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concurrently, they wanted written information prior to each meeting and suggested the creation of a lead coach. Staff appreciated the way these professional development activities had been run and were enthused to engage with them in the future.

In order to capture learning from the programme and in response to a request from some staff for written guidance Andy developed an ‘Underground Map’ as a point of reference (Figure 2). This is a guide for staff on how to apply a relational attachment approach to a variety of different scenarios. It demonstrates the flexible routes and different options that staff can take rather than a fixed, hierarchal ascent up a ladder of punitive sanctions.

Implications for practice and research

The danger of delivering one off whole school training sessions, without due regard for how the learning will be captured or embedded into the classroom is well documented. Implementing effective change in the school setting works when it is: clearly linked to student outcomes, carefully planned and has time given over to its implementation. This Case Study points towards an accessible model that practitioners can use to ensure that any school initiative is effectively translated into the classroom. It also points towards a key factor that is taken for granted, particularly in clinical professions, but is often missing in teaching: namely, how to provide ‘supervision’ and the space that

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23 Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) 2010. Good professional development in schools. How does leadership contribute?
teaching staff need to reflect in the context the modern school and all of the demands of the curriculum.

The wellbeing of all pupils in a school is important and valued by school practitioners but we know that vulnerable groups have specific issues which impact upon how they experience life. A recent study revealed as many as one in six children in care had low wellbeing compared to the general population. Current findings from the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) Toolkit 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 not yet 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.

London Academy
A key adult for children in care; creating a distinctive role

Background
Time and again, children and young people in care describe the positive impact and significance of having a trusted and caring adult in school. Students in care can often experience disruptive and chaotic periods in their lives. Proactive Senior Leadership Teams (SLTs) are aware of this context and place a priority on having an adult in school who is trained and available at all times (i.e. with no teaching duties) to support the work of the designated teacher (DT). A student, who the night before, for example, has had an unexpected change of foster placement cannot always wait until lunchtime to get the support they need from a DT who has teaching duties all morning. Aware of this need, schools are increasingly appointing a full-time mentor/key worker for children and young people in care who often has responsibility for other students who are involved with Children’s Services, such as those identified as children in need (CIN). The importance of this role from an attachment theory perspective is understood, allowing students, for example, to experience and develop stronger and potentially healing relationships with adults. What is less documented is how the role can be implemented and contribute more strategically to teaching and learning across a school to support better student outcomes.

Implementing a more systematic approach to the Key Adult role was the PALAC project research focus for Sue Plater, Assistant Principal and Designated Teacher at London Academy. London Academy is a large all through school with some 1400 students on roll including 350 in the six form. In the past, the setting has had experience of changes of staff and a fluid student population. Even

though children in care were a fairly settled cohort, Sue wanted them to experience more stability and continuity during their journey through the academy. Whilst some change is inevitable, Sue recognised its potentially damaging effect on vulnerable students and felt that they would benefit from a more consistent approach.

**What did the school do?**
Staff, including teachers, teaching assistants and support staff who already had a connection or relationship with a student in care were invited to be part of the Key Adult (KA) initiative. The KA's were asked to meet with young people for ten sessions and were given a schedule to follow for each one. The timings of the sessions were agreed with the students in session one and these varied according to their needs and wishes and the availability of staff. The schedule provided a framework which included (Figure 3) an explanation of the programme, a getting to know you session and completion of a pupil profile which would be shared with teaching staff. The KAs were advised to keep a simple reflective journal throughout the duration of the programme by recording factual events and their thoughts in them.

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**Figure 3: Content of meetings between the key adult and child in care**

During the course of meeting with students Sue facilitated three workshops to support key adults to develop their role:

- **The Role of the Key Adult**
  *Introduction to the concept of the key adult, rationale and purpose of the programme*
- **Supporting Students with Attachment Difficulties**
  *Impact of developmental trauma, abuse and neglect on students’ presentation*
- **Personal Education Plans**
  *Purpose of this statutory process, how to become involved and support students to participate in a meaningful way and work towards targets*

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Outcomes for students and staff
The journals kept by the KAs provided a rich source of data highlighting how staff ‘kept a watching brief’ of day to day schooling as recommended by statutory legislation. Every child in care at the school met with their KA and the majority of students met regularly with their key worker. The content and nature of the sessions varied dependent upon the needs of the student and the expertise of the teacher. Each member of staff provided a bespoke programme for students and therefore activities included checking in, study support, goal setting, coaching to more intensive support and interventions outside of the one to one sessions. Two vignettes are described opposite:

Keeping Jay (pseudonym) on track
Jay met with their KA for the full ten sessions. Jay presented as confident and used the KA as a coach to ensure they remained on track. The KA checked in with Jay and monitored how they were doing. The KA ensured that Jay was supported to revise for exams, accessed a work experience placement and went on a visit to university. Jay was pro-actively applying for jobs: the KA reviewed applications, helped to update Jay’s CV and recommended specific employers. Jay was a determined student who used agency and resilience to remain on track and the KA supported Jay to stay on this trajectory.

Additional Support for Bobbie (pseudonym)
Bobbie had some learning difficulties and spoke English as an additional language. Bobbie lived a substantial distance from school and struggled to be on time and presented as anxious about studies. Bobbie met with the KA on eight occasions but was absent for two. The KA pro-actively intervened to offer direct and indirect support. The KA helped Bobbie to research post-sixteen options, organised study support, offered social and emotional advice and adapted the timetable so that Bobbie could access additional literacy lessons. Bobbie was a vulnerable student at risk of disengagement and poor attendance. Every barrier to learning that Bobbie experienced was quickly identified by the KA and a discreet solution was implemented.

Implications for practice and research

Day to day interactions in school have the potential to considerably improve outcomes for children in care. The results of this case study present a compelling case for why a KA position is needed in schools, despite the very real constraints on school budgets. The role of the ‘key worker’ is wide ranging and necessitates a breadth of knowledge across education, care and multi-agency settings that far exceeds any ‘traditional’ support or teaching assistant role. Even if the number of students in care is small, there will be other students where Children’s Services are involved and these students would benefit from similar levels and types of support. In fact, academic outcomes for children ‘in need’ have been shown to be worse compared with children in care. The numbers of children in need in a school usually far outnumber those in care and therefore strengthen the case for a fulltime dedicated role. The role carries many challenging responsibilities and this needs to be reflected in the qualifications and experience required of the practitioner and in the training and support provided for their development.

In the past five years, through the Maximising the Impact of Teaching Assistants initiative, research has been published that has helped to define how best teaching assistants can support student learning, including the pedagogy they should adopt in the classroom. Whilst there is some guidance for support and teaching staff who hold an academic and wellbeing role for vulnerable students, the concept of a key worker in schools is under-theorised. In Europe and increasingly in the United Kingdom, an approach known as social pedagogy is being adopted across different settings including for example, foster care and residential settings in supporting children and young people in care.

Further research and application of these pedagogies in a school setting, and in relation to the key worker role for children in care, would help to clarify and embed this role in schools.

38 Maximising the Impact of Teaching Assistants: http://maximisingtas.co.uk/.
Whitefield School
Prioritising children in care

Background
Research and practice demonstrates that there is no ‘silver bullet’ for improving outcomes for children and young people in care in school. We know that educational chances are highly influenced by parents, but this picture is complicated when the local authority has a role to play in the parenting task. Positive outcomes in school are a fine balance of, amongst others, being in loco parentis, an appropriate curriculum, consistent pastoral support, relevant teacher knowledge, skills and attitudes, and effective, targeted individual support. Central to these activities and a crucial element of the corporate parenting role is a commitment to having the same aspirations and providing the same kind of care that any parent would provide – as if they were their own. 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 find it difficult to translate the term into meaningful action in schools. Therefore, it is important that individual schools work through how they articulate and personalise this policy and statutory requirement in their setting.

Whitefield School is a smaller than average academy school in Barnet. Over half of the pupils are eligible for the Pupil Premium and the majority of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. More than two-thirds of pupils speak English as an additional language. The school offers immediate support and provision for unaccompanied asylum seeking children whilst they wait for the allocation of a school place.

This case study describes how Whitefield School captured and articulated their corporate parenting commitment for students in care. The school PALAC team consisted of Anthony Croucher who was new to the Designated Teacher role and Mumin Humayun, Deputy Head, who had carried it out previously. The team was confident that it offered good support to vulnerable children but saw in PALAC an opportunity to review, improve and embed new processes.

**What did the school do?**
The starting point for this project was an e-survey designed by Anthony and circulated to all teaching members of staff. This provided the team with a baseline of staff understanding of the reasons that children come into care, the complexity and challenges facing new arrivals to the country and the processes around the care system. Anthony and Mumin met with the Vice Chair of Governors with responsibility for children in care and the SLT with their findings and a proposal of how to raise awareness of the children in care and the introduction of specific initiatives to prioritise the cohort amongst practitioners in school.

A briefing was delivered to all staff which included sharing the findings of the survey, a reminder of the vulnerability of the cohort and the rationale behind ‘Corporate Parenting’. There was an explicit explanation of the importance of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) and how staff could contribute to support the process. Meetings were then held with each child and a bespoke ‘Success Passport’ was designed (Figure 4). These short forms included brief biographical details on the students, information about their learning needs and academic targets from their PEPs. For unaccompanied asylum seeking children and those with English as an additional language the passport included information on previous schooling, their country of origin, culture, religion and examples of script and key words in their home language. These passports, with the permission of students, were circulated amongst the staff who taught them and were used to inform PEP meetings for the children.

Success Passports, along with improved communication with staff, were used to ensure that PEP meetings were well attended, fully briefed on the young person’s holistic needs, purposeful and included up to date SMART academic targets. The school ensured that each child in care was given an opportunity by guaranteeing priority for every school initiative. This meant they were the first to be considered for school trips, were signposted automatically to out of school activities and received additional academic support.

**Outcomes for students and staff**
As a result of Success Passports students had a personalised, attractive one-page profile which they helped to design. Profiles were updated after each PEP meeting so students had a voice and say in what became a living document. Staff were prompted to view these at regular intervals and got an at-a- glance, up-to-date guide to the student’s background, learning needs and their academic targets.

As a result of the programme Anthony described receiving on the job training and induction including a particularly nuanced understanding of the role. Mumin described how much of the work he had carried out in the past had been consolidated and formalised creating more effective systems, a clear vision and offer for children in care. Feedback from staff indicated that they had a better understanding of support mechanisms, they were more willing to contribute to PEP meetings and that they got timely feedback after their contributions.
The school has used the PALAC programme to update its behaviour policy and developed a relationships policy. Children in care and unaccompanied asylum seeker children are named along with other vulnerable groups. The policy (see Figure 4) underscores the rationale behind corporate parenting and explains why a different approach is used to prioritise vulnerable groups.

**Looked After Children**

At Whitefield School there are a high percentage of students who are in the care of the local authority including unaccompanied asylum seekers. This should be taken into account when staff are dealing with our young people. Although we must consistently apply school policies and procedures, there are occasions when flexibility is needed to take into account individual circumstances. Looked after children are at higher risk of being bullied and excluded from school. We have a moral and legal duty to give consideration to their needs and experiences. Staff should take into account the impact of changes in placement and instability which some children in care regularly experience. Advice should be sought from their form teacher, nominated key person or the Designated Teacher for Looked After Children.

**Figure 4: Excerpt on Children in Care from the School Behaviour Policy**

**Implications for practice and research**

‘We treat them all fairly, we don’t treat them all the same.’ This is how Mumin summed up the philosophy that underpins work that prioritises vulnerable learners at Whitefield School. This phrase also speaks to inclusive school settings, where the staff understand, at a fundamental level that the school, rather than students, needs to change in order to see the desired changes in student presentation. 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 authentic for staff and students.

In a recent study\(^{44}\) 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. ‘Corporate Parenting’ invites schools and organisations to treat children in care as ‘if this were my child’. The high aspirations behind this concept can be difficult to translate into practice\(^ {45}\) and can be lost behind an intention of wanting to care for all students in the same way. The Whitefield case study demonstrates clearly how schools can prioritise and demonstrate good parenting and a duty of care for its most vulnerable students and not assume that it is the responsibility of some other local authority department.\(^ {46}\)

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East Barnet School
Listening to students and practitioners in designing a safe space for all students

Background
Increasingly, schools are developing attachment aware practices to support children and young people's emotional needs and development. Alongside 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 a children and young people. Louise Bomber describes very clearly how school life can be a daily challenge for some pupils in care and that the provision of a safe base offers a familiar place for students and can provide an anchor from which to face these daily challenges. If such a resource is going to have a meaningful and long-lasting impact a safe base also requires the presence of a known, knowledgeable and skilled adult with whom young people can work and interact. It is through the ongoing experience and maintenance of relationships with the secure adults that a pupil can learn to make lasting changes to their lives. A recent national survey of 219 practitioners in English settings across the age range, reported the use of a ‘safe space’ as one of the most common approaches to supporting pupils with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) difficulties. However, despite the popularity of the approach, there is little empirical evidence that specifically addresses the efficacy and contribution of such an approach to the education and wellbeing of pupils, including those in care.

47 Attachment Aware Schools: https://www.bathspa.ac.uk/education/research/attachment-aware-schools/.
East Barnet School is a larger than average secondary academy with over 1400 students including 300 in the Sixth Form. This case study explores how the school planned and designed a safe base with a distinct purpose and identity. The school had a pupil development centre which served two functions, a place for internal exclusions as well a place where students accessed additional support. On one day a student was there as part of a sanction and on another they were there taking part in mentoring – this was confusing for both students and staff. Leanne Swaine, Associate Head and Designated Teacher and Laura Coffill, the Safeguarding lead, the school PALAC team, wanted to re-design the space so that its role and function was clear.

**What did the school do?**
The team started their programme by conducting two focus groups. The first with a group of students who had never used the centre and the second with a group of staff in order to get views and attitudes on the concept of a ‘safe space’ and opinions on how the centre should be used. Both groups were asked similar questions with the wording adjusted for students:

- What do you think about the idea of a safe space for students?
- Which students in school do you think would benefit from a safe space?
- Where do students go now when they need a safe space?
- How do you think the space should be managed?
- What do you think pupils should be doing when they are in the safe space?

The next step was to audit how the pupil development centre had been used to date. The team consulted with students who had used the centre historically through interviews and creative activities including envisioning their ideal space. The two members of staff who worked in the centre were interviewed about: what they did in the centre; how their time was allocated and their views on future improvements including consideration of their own professional development. The team sought external advice from a special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) specialist within the Virtual School who visited the site. They also contacted a PALAC school from another local authority in order to contextualise their findings and get evidence on the factors that contributed towards effective bases in other settings.

The team put together a proposal for the building and re-design of two spaces, with separate entrances and distinct purposes. They submitted their plan to SLT which included: the rationale for the space, a floorplan, proposed policies, financial implications; exemplar pro-forma’s for referrals and monitoring; as well as how to ‘launch’ the space with staff and students.

**Outcomes for students and staff**
The team analysed their findings and they affirmed their hypothesis. The focus groups confirmed that staff and students wanted a space for containment, calm and where students could reflect and catch up. There was broad support from staff and students about the need for a safe space which could be required at any time for any student regardless of vulnerability. The reasons identified were wide ranging from highly specific...
short term ad hoc support, for example, to catch up with work to longer term intensive support, for example a student needing a prolonged period of a time due to suffering a bereavement. Most agreed that the current use of the space was confusing and there was a consensus that students should be 'working' whilst in there and not 'messing about'.

The proposal for the creation of the new safe space was approved by SLT and supported financially by the Virtual School who felt strongly that it would benefit both current and future cohorts of care experienced students. Building work for the two new spaces began in July and was completed in September 2018. Students who used the centre were involved in planning the room and influenced its design and use which includes an outdoor space. A referral form was circulated along with a rationale for the use of both spaces to staff and pupils. The team developed data forms in order to track how the safe space would be used to monitor the effectiveness of different approaches.

**Implications for practice and research**
Apart from the resource implications, senior leadership teams can be reluctant to establish a safe space due to fears that it might end up becoming a place of punishment rather than a proactive, evidence-informed response to supporting a range of pupils at different times in their school life. Moreover, such a space is not always seen as compatible with a whole school positive behaviour approach and high quality teaching and learning in the classroom. However, the East Barnet School case study shows that when a centre is predicated on a clear rationale and educational philosophy, is fully resourced, has clear protocols and is designed with the views and involvement of both staff and students, it has the potential to make a positive contribution to achievement and wellbeing.

Although there are studies that have considered the correlation between building design and learning, the concept of environment attachment is less theorised and even less so than relational attachment. 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. It would be a challenge to subject the use of a safe space to any form of experimental research study. However, it would be possible to use a variety of data collection methods, as demonstrated in this case study, across settings, where the findings could inform the wider research literature.

Hendon School
Embedding Emotion Coaching into the life of the school

Background
In 2017, one in eight (12.8%) children aged 5–19 in England were identified as having some form of mental health difficulty. More than half (55%) of students in care have SEND with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs the largest category (38% of those with a EHCP or statement). Moreover, schools report that this is a difficult area professionally and that they want to be more informed of the evidence. A recent scoping review of whole school and targeted approaches to support pupils with SEMH found an emerging evidence base to support more effective provision for pupils with SEMH, but there remains, particularly at the group and individual level, a dearth of literature. There is even less evidence available specifically evaluated in relation to pupils in care with SEMH.

In this context, the importance of having a strong theoretical foundation is imperative. Emotion Coaching is a humanistic approach to improving personal and collective well-being. It was developed originally by John Gottman, a psychologist who sought to identify what constituted good parenting. He identified four ‘types’ of parents: dismissing, disapproving, laissez-faire and the ‘emotion coach’. The emotion coach gets alongside the child particularly during moments of distress, validates their feelings, helps them to work through their problems and models how to regulate their emotions. The approach has been adapted and developed and is offered as a simple, universal and low cost whole school strategy for nurturing well-being. Emotion coaching is a relational approach which focuses on interactions between teacher and student rather than locating the difficulty or ‘behaviour’ within the individual child. The

emerging evidence base of implementing emotion coaching in schools proposes enhancing the communication skills of teachers to support children to regulate their emotions through attuned relationships.\textsuperscript{60}

Hendon School is a large Academy School with over 1250 students including a Sixth Form in Barnet. Sixty three per cent of students have English as a second language. Almost half of students receive free school meals and there is a high percentage of students with SEND. The PALAC team at Hendon comprised Lee Davey, Designated Teacher, Nicky Routledge, Student Support Manager and Freda Datson, Key Worker for Vulnerable Students. This case study describes how the team implemented and created the conditions to embed an Emotion Coaching approach into the life of the school.

What did the school do?
The starting point for the PALAC team was presenting their proposal to the Senior Leadership Group. They were clear that for the programme to succeed that Senior Managers needed to spend time understanding the ethos of the approach and the steps towards maintaining effective change. The aims of the team were:

- To promote an understanding of the complex context of children in care;
- To develop a professional development programme that prepared staff to implement Emotion Coaching theory into practice and
- To promote a consistent approach by staff across the school.

The team introduced Kotter’s eight step change model\textsuperscript{61} as the preferred framework to help staff understand why initiating, managing and sustaining change could be difficult and would require support from every part of the school system. Finally the team delivered a bespoke session on emotion coaching, including their understanding of the issues on implementing it in their context based on the emerging evidence base.

The team then distributed and asked all staff to complete a questionnaire which they adapted from the attachment aware schools programme in Bath and North Somerset.\textsuperscript{62} The survey comprised fifteen questions on the social and emotional life of the school including individuals understanding of emotional regulation, the impact of trauma, relationships between staff, between teams and between staff and pupils. The purpose of the questionnaire was to begin a whole school process of self-reflection and to provide a baseline to measure how the school rated itself.

The programme was formally launched in school with an awareness raising session delivered during in-service training to all staff. The session introduced Emotion Coaching, Kotter’s change model and explained the purpose and rationale behind the questionnaire as well as plans for subsequent training and implementation. This was followed by formal training in the Spring term delivered by an external consultant from Kate Cairns Associates\textsuperscript{63} the delivery agent of the original attachment aware school initiative in Bath and North Somerset. A number of planned and ad hoc sessions were delivered throughout the year.

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\textsuperscript{60} L. Gus, J. Rose, L. Gilbert & R. Kilby (2017). The introduction of emotion coaching as a whole school approach in a primary specialist social emotional and mental health setting: positive outcomes for all. The Open Family Studies Journal, 9(1), 95-110.


\textsuperscript{63} https://kca.training/?info=main.
in a variety of contexts to re-visit, reinforce and discuss the application of the approach with students both individually and in the classroom.

**Outcomes for students and staff**

The staff audit was completed by the vast majority of staff (n=123) including non-teaching colleagues. This provided a rich source of data on the ‘emotional life’ of the school which helped the team to focus their activities. To summarise, around half of staff reported feeling ‘competent’ in aspects of emotional learning and trauma informed practice. A third of staff reported that this area was completely new to them and a minority that this was an area of expertise.

The most tangible outcome that came from this case study was the bespoke professional development framework that emerged from the project. Five key strands became apparent to the team (Figure 5) when they reflected back on the work they carried out over the six month time period. This included the importance of senior management commitment from the start. The Leadership Team to quote Lee, ‘owned’ the initiative and cascaded and modelled the principles at every opportunity. Another strand was the systematic way in which professional development was prepared, planned, delivered, reviewed and embedded. The team was acutely aware of the barriers that can get in the way of successful professional development in schools and understood that many training activities can start and end with an interesting ‘training day’ day but do not necessarily lead to a change in practice. They put much of their energies into ensuring that the momentum that followed the training sessions were sustained by listening to staff through supervision and offering timely feedback.

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**Figure 5: A Model for Implementing Emotion Coaching in School**

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The school has reviewed its behaviour policy and produced a practical guide for staff which supplements it as part of on-going efforts to sustain the approach.

**Implications for practice and research**

Teachers report feeling insufficiently prepared to support children in care and an absence of training on the experiences of children in care both before and after qualifying. The Hendon case study shows how a thoughtful and well-structured framework, incorporating genuine involvement of school practitioners, can create the right conditions for professional development and change to embed and have a meaningful impact. The power of the approach partly lay in the fact that the Senior Leadership Group fully supported and modelled the approach and to quote Lee, ‘they walked the walk and talked the talk’. The other factor was the time given over to staff to reflect on the practicalities of implementing approaches in their classroom. There is a persuasive argument for the need for reflective spaces and professional supervision in schools, a practice accepted in social care and clinical practice and which could also support teacher resilience and well-being.

The application of attachment theory in schools lacks empirical evidence, small scale studies and evaluation reports from the Attachment Aware Schools programme are pointing towards themes with parallels in the Hendon case study. These include the quality of training, senior leader commitment, a better understanding of the impact of early childhood experiences and the subsequent impact in the classroom. Larger scale, empirical studies are needed to support and build the evidence base with a focus on outcomes and impact, particularly on the difference that these initiatives make directly on student attainment and well-being.

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Mill Hill County High School
Supporting transition from Key Stages 4 to 5 – a pathway rather than a transition between settings

Background
As young people from care move into post-16–21 education, employment and training, they are increasingly at risk of not being in education, training or employment (NEET) (Table 1). By the age of eighteen, for example, almost a third will be NEET.

Table 1: Activities of young people in care aged 16-21 (%) (DfE 2018)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Employment/training</th>
<th>NEET</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19–21</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although we lack robust data, young people in care often drop out of further education early. The reasons for this are complex and will be different for individuals but young people often:

- find themselves on a course that does not match their academic ability and/or
- have not received targeted and advice on college courses and pathways that would best suit their interests and aspirations
- enter care in adolescence and have often experienced disruption in their education.

Moreover, there are elements of the national context which compound many of these challenges. The first was the removal of...
the statutory duty for schools to deliver work-related learning in Key Stage 4.\textsuperscript{70} Secondly, despite the potential promise of apprenticeships, the number of available apprenticeships in the future is uncertain – a result of the implementation of the new apprenticeship levy for employers.\textsuperscript{71} In additional to national challenges, young people are also facing the very personal challenge of adolescence – a time of considerable change for a young person in relation to many aspects of their life including physiological, cognitive and social developmental changes. Therefore, within this context, it is beneficial for professionals and educators, including school practitioners in key stage 4 to consider the ‘school to work’ transition as a pathway rather than a transfer between activities.\textsuperscript{72} As many care leavers come into care in their teenage years, the majority will require extended time and structured support in developing their career identities and interests before linking these ideas to employment.

Mill Hill County High School is a mixed, all ability academy of over 1600 students aged 11 to 18 in Mill Hill, North London. The PALAC project was led by Orla Ridge, Assistant Head teacher, her focus was a desire to support and enhance the progression of year 11 students in care into further education. After a review of the relevant literature and aware of some of the specific risks such as a lack of knowledge of post – 16 options, poor choices of post-16 courses and the negative consequences for educational achievement having entered the care system in adolescence, the project focused on coaching, one to one tuition and work related learning (WRL).

**What did the school do?**
There were three interlinking strands to the project at Mill Hill County High School which targeted six students in Key Stage Four. The central strand was the development of an academic coaching initiative to develop a tailored plan for each student in the run up to GCSE exams. The second strand was access to internal tuition delivered by subject teachers and informed by the coaching plan. Finally, the third strand was raising student’s aspirations through work experience placements and a visit to a local university.

Each student was assigned a ‘Coach’ who worked with the student to develop an action plan which started with setting SMART goals based on their career aspirations. The coach and student met on a weekly basis to review and adjust the plan according to the activities and tasks assigned. The plan differed according to each student but typically included: encouraged students to create a revision timetable; supporting them to access tuition being offered by subject teachers and helping them to apply for college places and apprenticeships. Coaches observed students in lessons, monitored their attendance and reflected with students on the barriers they faced. Coaches used the principles of Carol Dweck’s ‘Growth Mindset’ to underpin their work,\textsuperscript{73} encourage self-reflection and promote ways of thinking that supported students to think differently, and learn and grow from perceived frustrations and obstacles (Figure 6).

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Set high expectations: this shows that you have belief in their abilities and potential.

Promote resilience: encourage children to persevere even when they find things difficult – this is a sign of learning.

Celebrate mistakes: fear of making mistakes can stop children from having a go. If we are not making mistakes then we are not stretching ourselves.

Explore inspirational role models: demonstrate that professionals all work hard and practice to achieve.

Figure 6: Guide to School Coaching Sessions

Students were encouraged to access a range of activities both in and out of schools through their coaching plan. All six students were offered a work experience opportunity and the group visited a local university. The trip, coordinated by Orla, included a tour of the site, visits to departments of interest and a presentation from university support services which highlighted issues that new undergraduates faced and the range of support available.

Outcomes for students and staff
An analysis of outcomes for the students based on feedback from the coaches identified important changes in the cohort. Students were described as: being actively involved in the support available to them, independently seeking out opportunities to study and asking for resources and study support. There was a marked difference for one student in particular, who staff described as being able to ‘take control over her learning’ as a result of the programme. Her attainment was raised particularly in subjects that she previously found difficult and did not enjoy, so that she was working above target in five out of eight subjects, where previously she was below.

All students met regularly with their academic coach, followed a coaching plan and accessed tuition from subject teachers. They all secured their post sixteen destinations and all in the cohort were described as ‘settled’ including three who had previously been described as ‘disaffected’. These three had improved school attendance (above 96%) and reported an aspiration to pursue Higher Education. There was a significant decrease in detentions for two students compared to previous years.
Implications for practice and research

The PALAC project at Mill Hill County High School addressed one element of the transition pathway of the students in care by adopting, in large part, evidence-informed (student data and the research base) strategies, which is an important implication for practice. Evidence indicates, for example, that one to one tuition can be effective for many groups of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, including children and young people in care. The Teaching and Learning Toolkit from the Educational Endowment Foundation (EEF) currently records one to one tuition, on average, as accelerating learning by approximately five additional months’ progress. More effective one to one tuition is likely to be delivered over short, regular sessions, over a fixed period of time and have immediate relevance to the classroom curriculum at the time. Secondly, by emphasising the importance of WRL, the PALAC team were building on many of the recommendations in the 2014 Gatsby Good Career Guidance Report. Finally, by adopting a coaching/mentoring approach, the case study highlights the importance of coaching over longer periods of time to allow for more frequent contact between the mentor and mentee, which has been associated with greater success. Further research on all the elements that would contribute to a wider understanding of transition from KS4 to 5 as a pathway, rather than a transfer between activities, would be beneficial for students in care as well as practitioners.

The Grasvenor Project
A specialist mentoring programme for children in care

Background
Mentoring in schools pairs a young person with a peer or adult and is primarily used to address non-academic outcomes such as, for example, self-confidence, self-esteem and attendance. At present, according to the EEF toolkit, the effect of mentoring on academic outcomes appears to have little, if any positive impact on academic outcomes. However, results vary for individual programmes and positive findings are particularly associated with programmes that support students from disadvantaged backgrounds and who may benefit by up to two month’s progress.78

Mentoring is used extensively to support students in a variety of ways, such as aiming to improve academic outcomes, attendance and behaviour. At present, according to the EEF toolkit, the effect of mentoring on academic outcomes is minor, with on average one month’s additional progress.79 However, mentoring can also address aspects of development such as self-esteem, confidence and a sense of agency. Agency as a concept can be challenging to define but it has been described as the ‘capacity to self-direct/regulate one’s effort, attention and behaviour over time to achieve goals’.80

Characteristics of effective mentoring programmes include ones that draw on either directive (devising and maintaining relevant structures and activities for young people to experience opportunities and

undertake tasks over time that develop different capacities) and/or facilitative (an adult thinking strategically about how to accomplish work, including anticipatory reasoning, as well as contingency planning and task prioritisation) approaches. In addition, more effective mentoring programmes include a clear structure and set of expectations, provide mentor training and use mentors with professional backgrounds. Programmes that continue over longer periods of time and facilitate more frequent contact between the mentor and mentee are also associated with greater success.81 There exists emerging evidence for the benefits of mentoring for children and young people in care including, for example, a programme in Scotland where university students mentored secondary aged pupils in care.82

This PALAC case study describes how Karen Walsh-Saunders, Deputy Head of Barnet Virtual School, and Sarah Jane Morton, Grasvenor Project Lead at Grasvenor Avenue Infant School, sought to evaluate The Grasvenor Project. The initiative is a mentoring project that provides a physical placement one day per week to children or young people in care referred, either at Grasvenor Avenue Infant school, or a partner school in the London Borough of Barnet. Specifically, the PALAC team wanted to measure the impact of the project by streamlining the plethora of data that they produced.

**What did the school do?**
The project team started by reviewing all of the data they collected historically in order to formalise their approach and make best use of the information they generated. They grouped the evidence that was routinely collected into three areas: student generated, staff reports and assessment tools. The team agreed three streamlined approaches that they would use in order to track the trajectory of students through the project. The first, designed to capture student voice and daily experiences in the infant school environment, involved supporting pupils to keep a journal. Students were actively encouraged to reflect upon and record responses to daily experiences. The second approach amalgamated various observational forms into one simplified report completed by the Mentor, briefly recording the student’s presentation each week.

The last, and perhaps the most complex, area was the refinement of the project’s method of measuring impact on each student. The aim was to measure and track progress (and contain anxieties about risk) across a range of indicators that reflect the complexity that some children in care face. The team designed a bespoke Matrix tool which scored students across a range of descriptors in twenty different areas including academic ability, risk of exclusion (formal and informal), placement stability, self-esteem, self-harm and peer relationships. The team completed the tool four times throughout the year. The lower the score then the lower the risk of poor outcomes and an indication of the success of the placement. The next part of the project was to support students to offer help and support in the school by taking on the role of assistants, for example, supporting in the classroom, running lunch time clubs and hearing infant students read – this was an already tried and tested part of the programme. At the end of the year students completed a portfolio of their work and an amalgamation of photos and quotes from their journals. All staff and the host school completed an end of year evaluation.

Outcomes for young people and school
All of the young people who completed the programme remained on roll at their host school, who all reported increased motivation, social inclusion and achievement. This included a student who was at risk of permanent exclusion who went on to become an anti-bullying ambassador. The school said that the experience gave the student something positive to talk about and a sense of kudos with his peers; he formed a positive self-identity, where previously he regarded himself as ‘trouble’.

Students’ journals highlighted a sense of personal achievement, pride and overwhelming enthusiasm for involvement in the project.

Students used their journals to reflect on their day and plan ahead. One student worked with their mentor to reflect on why he became angry after an incident. He drew a picture (Figure 7) and was able to articulate why he became angry, what the emotion felt like and how he could calm down and do things differently. He went on to further reflect on this incident, write about making friends and a gaining pride in his work. His journal tracked his growing sense of confidence which was echoed in his Matrix score.

The Matrix Tool was applied to three target students which showed that all had a lower ‘risk score’ from entry into the programme. The data taken together indicated that students gained work readiness skills and a sense of professional pride which boosted their confidence and self-esteem. Crucially, this confidence transferred back into their mainstream school setting. Practitioners hypothesised that children in care benefitted in particular from being in an infant school environment, where relationships are important and play is paramount to learning. Mentors observed students on placement,
playing with infant pupils and reflected that this dimension may have provided an appropriate context for children who may have missed developmental milestones.

There were two secondary outcomes which emerged as a result of the programme. The first relates to the professional growth of staff at the Infant School. The placements have increased awareness of the needs of children in care. Staff reported high levels of motivation in their support roles as lead adults and a sophisticated understanding of the needs of the cohort. Secondly the Grasvenor Physical Project has developed an outreach service which is working with other schools in the local authority to offer further physical placements as well as a mentoring service.

**Implications for practice and research**

At some point in our lives, whether as children or adults, many of us have benefitted from the advice and support of a mentor. Often, this can happen spontaneously and generously on the part of a friend, colleague or extended family member. However, students in care do not always possess the same levels of social and cultural capital as many of their teenage peers to draw on such resources of support. Therefore, offering students in care a timely, purposeful and relevant mentoring programme has the potential to make a significant difference to their lives both in the short term and in preparation for the future.

The Grasvenor Project case study is a good example of a programme that is grounded in theory, evidence informed and includes characteristics of mentoring programmes associated with success such as longevity, flexibility, trained mentors and student voice/consultation. Schools considering coaching/mentoring programmes for students in care need to account for all these considerations as well as fully commit to the long-term nature of such support. This is because poorly implemented programmes, and/or those that end early, can have a detrimental effect on students who have already experienced being let down by adults. The Grasvenor Project due to its structure, content and the commitment of those in the infant school, Virtual School and in key roles across the local authority have helped ensure that the programme is embedded in practice.

Despite its popularity as an approach, the research findings on the impact of mentoring remains mixed at best. What is increasingly evident is the complexity that underpins what seems, on one level, a relatively straightforward way to support young adults. Further evidence, both practice and research based is required, not just into the expected impact but also how long it might take, or the different stages participants (adult and young person) might experience as part of the process.
Conclusion

The participants in the PALAC programme implemented a variety of changes in their schools at pupil, practitioner and school levels. At the pupil level, changes included, for example, emotional well-being, exam results and career prospects. At practitioner and school levels, 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, for example, 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 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 for 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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