

Over recent years there has been concerted actions to promote the educational outcomes of Looked after Children and care leavers, yet they remained a larger group of children still needing support from social care whose education has historically lacked the same attention and focus despite their outcomes being on a par. The Children in Need review was initiated by the government to review the support for children in need of help and protection (CiN/CP) to help us understand why their educational outcomes are so poor and establish what further support might be needed. The review focuses on those children who need or have needed a social worker – that beyond the assessment process required support for safeguarding or welfare reasons – including disabled children.

The Children in Need review found that needing help and protection had a profound impact on the children's educational outcomes. This disadvantage is in addition to other needs, although compounded for many children by having additional special educational needs or coming from a low income family. In addition, it was recognised how intrinsically linked safety, stability and education outcomes are, as the longer a child is in 'need' of social care support or the more significant the risk of harm the greater impact on education – and therefore impact of future life and opportunities.

The review is the beginning of the work needed to raise the profile of this cohort and take steps to address the disadvantage of children with a social worker at a national and local level. It highlights the importance of not lowering expectations for children that are or have experienced adversity – 'because they are dealing with enough already' – as this impacts on their life outcomes. Education, therefore cannot be put on hold until family circumstances are resolved – safety and stability for these children must be pursued by all agencies alongside a strong aspiration for educational achievement and life outcomes – as this is what children have expressed they want – the key message from children is that they do not want to be defined by their family circumstances.

The review concludes by calling all services into action by putting some of the review findings into practice across 4 key areas -

Visibility – better recognition of the scale of how many children have ever needed a social worker; national focus in policy and practice; improving the availability of data; and improved information sharing between social care and schools.

Keeping children in education - recognising increased risks when children are missing education; tackling persistent absence; improving in-year admissions; avoiding children being out of school where safety is a concern; and action around exclusions, off-rolling and alternative provision.

Aspiration - high expectations for children to achieve, pursuing safety in parallel but not as a precursor; aspirational leadership; partnerships with aspiration as a shared goal; key roles that bring schools and social care together.

Support in and around school - developing and sharing evidence of what works; recognising and responding to social, emotional and mental health needs; establishing specialist support in and around schools to facilitate and coordinate effective interventions.

As a result of the Children in Need review the Department for Education has sought to extend the role of the Virtual School Head to include promoting better outcomes for children with a social worker – Child in Need & Child Protection. Cheshire West and Chester Council have developed the role of Education Adviser for Children with a Social Worker to ensure that we are doing all we can as an authority to raise the visibility of this cohort and develop practice that promotes improved educational outcomes for children with a social worker.

The Education Adviser for Children with a Social Worker will be –

- Available to offer advice and signposting to social care, schools and partner agencies regarding education matters for children with a social worker
- Offering training to Social Workers as part of their induction to provide education guidance and advice in order to promote education for these young people
- Supporting schools to develop and embed whole school approaches with regards to meeting the social and emotional needs of children and young people including Our Way Of Working, Emotional Based School Non-attendance and the graduated approach
- Provide advice and signposting on evidence-based interventions that can address barriers to learning, such as those highlighted by What Works for Children’s Social Care in their analysis of the Education Endowment Foundation’s schools toolkit
- Use data and analysis to understand and monitor the cohort’s needs including making links to local strategic priorities e.g. attendance, fixed term exclusion and permanent exclusion rates, overlaps with other kinds of disadvantage such as Free School Meal (FSM) eligibility and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) rates
- Enhance the partnerships between education settings and the local authority, including working with partner agencies to further understand and address the disadvantage that children with a social worker can experience
- Attendance at multi agency forums to raise the visibility of children with a social worker and ensure that their needs are reflected in any revisions to policy, process and procedures

The Education Adviser for Children with a Social Worker will be unable to –

- Become involved with individual cases
- Offer advice and support regarding Children Looked After, this will be through the relevant Education Adviser for the Virtual School
- Give advice and support to parents

Links to relevant DfE documents are below –

Help, protection, education: concluding the Children in Need review (June 2019)

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/809236/190614_CHILDREN_IN_NEED_PUBLICATION_FINAL.pdf

Promoting the education of children with a social worker (June 2021)

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/994028/Promoting_the_education_of_children_with_a_social_worker.pdf