



Raising the Ambitions and Educational Attainment of Children who are Looked After in Wales

- a review of the second year of the Welsh Government's looked after children's education strategy 2017-2018

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March 2018

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background and purpose of the review

The purpose of the review is to establish and report on foster carers' views on the implementation of the Welsh Government's Strategy, '[Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales' \(January 2016\)](#). This is the second consultation on the implementation of the strategy, following the first that was published in 2016 -'[Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales': a review of the first year of the Welsh Government's looked after children's education strategy' – The Fostering Network](#).

The national objectives within the strategy are simple and are to bring about improved educational outcomes for children and young people who are looked after in respect of:

- 25% achieving five A*-C grades at GCSE, including English or Welsh and Mathematics in 2016
- 75% of care leavers who, on their 19th birthday, are in education, employment or training by 2018.

The seven strategic aims, and six operational aims, of the strategy are well focussed.

Strategic:

- promote a consistent national approach to raise aspirations at every level
- provide stronger corporate leadership committed to improving the education of children who are looked after
- clarify roles and responsibilities of all involved in the lives of children who are looked after
- strengthen and reinforce arrangements and partnerships of all agencies - improve communication between all those involved in the lives of these children and care leavers
- ensure corporate commitment to find ways of doing things better to influence educational outcomes positively
- make more effective use of data to understand how attainment can be balanced with the individual's personal, social and emotional development (wellbeing)
- strengthen the level of collaboration between the Welsh Government, regional education consortia, local authorities, schools, educational settings, foster carers and looked after children, to ensure that decisions impact positively on learners.

Operational:

- identify and implement practical action needed to overcome barriers to delivery

- provide robust challenge to under-performance
- give clarity and alignment of expectations of the key roles in supporting children who are looked after
- share good practice and ensure interpretation of existing guidance is consistent
- monitor outcomes for funding available to support children;
- exchange information within local authorities between social services and education departments, particularly Looked After Children in Education (LACE) Co-ordinators.

The Fostering Network welcomes the Welsh Government's commitment to review the implementation and outcomes after the second year of the strategy's implementation. The strategy had been operational for fewer than two years at the start of this consultation, which is a relatively short time to achieve significant change. This report will, therefore, be useful as a marker from which to measure future progress, as well as capturing any early changes.

This report reflects the views of foster carers in Wales between November 2017 and March 2018. As the everyday carers for looked after children, it is critical that foster carers are both engaged with and enabled to shape the evolution of this ambitious strategy; this is welcomed by The Fostering Network. Foster carers have been identified as key stakeholders, whose views and ideas need to be gathered as part of the work to raise the ambitions and educational outcomes of looked after children, which in turn is a shared priority of The Fostering Network and Welsh Government.

The Fostering Network's 2015 consultation with foster carers helped shape the strategy and identified what foster carers in Wales said they needed to enable the young people in their care to progress with their education. The 2016 consultation set out the response of foster carers to the Action Plan, developed by the Welsh Government to implement the strategy. It aimed to determine whether any changes were needed to the strategy and to see if there were any early signs of change.

This consultation not only tests whether foster carers have seen any signs of positive change in relation to the education of the children in their care, but also identifies what more is now needed to drive the actions through. It recognises that to bring about change, the wellbeing and educational progress of children and young people who are looked after in Wales must be addressed hand in hand.

1.2. Methodology

The findings of this review are based upon evidence from two focus groups with foster carers during November 2017 (one in North Wales and one in South Wales), and a survey of foster carers in January 2018. A total of 16 foster carers were involved in the focus group discussions and there were 45 respondents to the online survey. Evidence has also been drawn from the

extensive dialogue and documented feedback that has taken place with foster carers in the first two series of masterclasses as part of [The Fostering Network's Fostering Wellbeing programme](#).

The focus group consultation method led by The Fostering Network has been used with foster carers and local authorities across Wales for over a decade. Our evaluations of previous work indicate that the approach is robust and demonstrates the following strengths:

- reflects what foster carers want
- ensures engagement in a non-stigmatising environment
- generates a richness of data, using both quantitative and qualitative methods
- obtains detailed information about personal and group feelings, perceptions and opinions
- saves time and money compared to individual interviews
- provides a broad range of information and feedback
- offers the opportunity to seek clarification
- provides useful material, such as quotes for public relations and presentations.

The focus groups considered what changes, if any, foster carers had seen in relation to the education, and related wellbeing, of children they had looked after since when they were last consulted. The questions explored how far foster carers felt involved by various agencies, what kinds of support they most needed and provided an opportunity for foster carers to say anything else they felt was important.

The findings of the focus groups were used to structure a questionnaire, which was circulated to foster carers in early January 2018. The questions which were included in the questionnaire were based upon issues which had emerged from the focus groups. 45 completed questionnaires were returned. The findings from the survey reinforced the emerging findings from the focus groups and allowed opinion to be measured quantitatively.

While the consultation involved a relatively small number of foster carers, the findings to date from the Fostering Wellbeing programme (involving some 50 foster carers) support much of what the focus groups and survey have reported.

However, the research process was structured in a way that allowed participant validation. This means that the process began with a series of generally open questions in the focus groups, and the findings which emerged from the focus groups were then tested by a structured questionnaire through a survey. This process strengthens confidence in the findings.

In a number of cases the findings are not conclusive; some foster carers had seen signs of change, others had not, some had gone through positive experiences, while others had encountered difficulties. However, the consistency of this response is itself a form of convergence and makes it

more likely that the pattern described is being experienced across the population of foster carers.

In some cases, the findings were very clear with an overwhelming majority of foster carers saying the same thing. In these cases, it is possible to have much more certainty about the findings.

This report presents the views and the perceptions of foster carers, which are very often based upon their own direct experience. It is useful because it presents a foster carer's perspective on the impact of the Welsh Government's strategy at grass roots level, indicating what may have changed and where more time may be needed for changes to become manifest or, indeed, where further interventions may need to be made by the Welsh Government.

The report is structured to align with the six themes and 37 action points, as set out in the Action Plan which seeks to plot how the strategy is to be implemented. By taking this approach, the views and experiences of foster carers, and The Fostering Network, will be reported and evaluated in the context of what the strategy is endeavouring to achieve. Most of the 37 actions are phrased in broad, quite strategic, terms but by setting what foster carers have to say in the context of the seven strategic and six operational aims of the Welsh Government and then the themes and actions of the Action Plan, the success or otherwise of the strategy can be better evaluated and gaps more easily identified.

Not all themes and action points are directly relevant to foster carers, though all are indirectly. Of the 37 actions, only four refer specifically to the role of foster carers. It is the case that in a further 27 actions, foster carers have an important role to play and could, and should, contribute positively to the success of that action; the report is able to offer comment on progress with these actions.

1.3 About The Fostering Network

The Fostering Network is the UK's leading fostering charity. We are the essential network for fostering, bringing together everyone who is involved in the lives of fostered children. We support foster carers to transform children's lives and we work with fostering services and the wider sector to develop and share best practice.

We work to ensure all fostered children and young people experience stable family life and we are passionate about the difference foster care makes. We champion fostering and seek to create vital change so that foster care is the very best it can be.

1.4 Acknowledgements

This report has involved many foster carers from across Wales who have been both generous with their time and expertise. We would like to extend our thanks and gratitude to them, as this report is grounded in and informed by their everyday experiences.

We would also like to thank The Fostering Network associates- Alain Thomas for his facilitation of the focus groups and the online survey, and Trevor Guy for his contribution to the findings and compilation of the report.

2.0 Executive summary

2.1 Background

The Fostering Network welcomes the Welsh Government's commitment to review the implementation and outcomes after the second year of the Welsh Government's Strategy, ['Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales' \(January 2016\)](#).

The purpose of the review is to test if foster carers have seen any signs of positive change in relation to the education of the children in their care, but also seeks to identify what more is needed to drive through the strategy's actions. This is the second annual review of the strategy. As the everyday carers for looked after children, it is critical that foster carers are both engaged with, and enabled to shape, the evolution of this ambitious strategy.

The findings of this review are based upon evidence from two focus groups of foster carers during November 2017 (one in North Wales and one in South Wales), and a survey of foster carers in January 2018. A total of 16 foster carers were involved in the focus group discussions and there were 45 respondents to the online survey. Evidence has also been drawn from the extensive dialogue and documented feedback that has taken place with foster carers in the first two series of masterclasses, as part of the Fostering Wellbeing programme.

2.2 Main findings

In relation to the two national objectives for the strategy, we know that 23% of young people who are looked after achieved five A*-C grades at GCSE including English or Welsh and Mathematics, in 2016, compared to the national average of 60%. This outcome for young people who are looked after was 2% short of the target, although the increase was higher than the average increase for all pupils nationally. The 75% target for young people who have been in care to be in education, employment or training when reaching 19 years of age is set for 2018 and has yet to report.

The review covers the detail of the six themes, but foster carers were also asked to offer a general view of progress.

Overall, how much has changed since January 2016 in relation to the education of the children you have looked after.

	Number	%
I have seen significant positive changes since January 2016 in relation to the education of children I have looked after.	1	2
I have seen a few positive changes since January 2016 in		

relation to the education of children I have looked after.	17	38
I do not think anything has really changed since January 2016 in relation to the education of children I have looked after.	23	51
I have seen changes for the worse since January 2016 in relation to the education of children I have looked after.	4	9
Totals	45	100

About half of respondents believe nothing has changed. However, of the remaining half, there is a clear view that there have been a few positive changes. Just 2% believe there have been significantly positive changes but 9% believe things have changed for the worse in the past two years. Everyone felt they had enough information to answer this question, which strengthens the findings.

Theme 1: Effective leadership – roles and responsibilities

In terms of national leadership, while there is a sense of what the strategy is aiming to achieve, foster carers generally feel there is no clear point of contact or involvement with the Welsh Government at the political level for issues relating to children and young people who are looked after. One foster carer, who had previously lived in England, appreciated the fact that there was a dedicated minister for foster care. Very few local authorities have an elected member named as someone taking oversight of children who are looked after, the role largely being subsumed in one with responsibility for safeguarding.

The four lead co-ordinators in each consortium in Wales have, primarily, a strategic role across the local authorities within the consortium. The LACE co-ordinators in each authority have a role closer to that of the Virtual School Head (VSH) in England, but arguably without the status that a headteacher carries. Just over half of foster carers were aware of the LACE co-ordinator role and the named person. While all schools have a designated member of staff for children who are looked after, the way in which the role is fulfilled varies, as does its effectiveness. In the best instances, foster carers are very appreciative of the work undertaken in championing children who are looked after. There is no clear evidence on the degree of take up of the lead governor role, nor of any difference it may be making where one has been appointed; a more concerted effort to make this role more widespread and meaningful would offer a line of accountability which is not currently in evidence.

The issue of meeting the additional learning needs of children and young people who are looked after continues to be a source of concern for many foster carers. There is a clear relationship between learning needs and the child's other basic needs, particularly social and emotional needs. Practical

action is needed to follow through on the recognition by Welsh Government, local authorities and schools that addressing additional and complex needs, in particular communication difficulties, can have a significant and positive effect on behaviour and, therefore, the capacity to learn.

The strand in the strategy which outlines an educational and social care pilot is seen to be taken forward in the Fostering Wellbeing programme, in which a number of foster carers in South Wales have been participating. A range of issues which have been raised in the masterclasses have also come up in this consultation. Potentially, many of these could be addressed if the pilot programme proves successful and is implemented on a larger scale.

An holistic appreciation of need, and an integrated and consistent approach to meeting need, come through strongly in the review as being critical to improving the wellbeing and educational attainment of the child. The place of the foster carer in this relationship overly depends on the individuals involved. Many feel that their knowledge of the child and expertise as carers is not given due weight by education and social services staff. Individual stories of children being let down, recounted by foster carers, raise the issue of how far the roles of social workers, Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and Looked After Children in Education (LACE) co-ordinators are, or can be, or should be, champions as well as safeguarders of children and young people. While most would say they are, there is a need to recognise the role of foster carers as equal partners in the relationship. The concept of shared or dispersed leadership is a relevant one in this context.

On balance, foster carers believe that there has been a slight improvement in training, although the amount and quality of training is not seen as being adequate to meet the wide range of needs of both foster carers and children and young people who are looked after. While there is some excellent training available, too often the provision is piecemeal and not co-ordinated across agencies.

Theme 2: Building effective partnerships and collaboration

Foster carers do not believe that the relationships which they have with various professionals are sufficiently well developed to constitute true partnership working. Neither is there a sense that the different professional services collaborate effectively enough to support both children who are looked after and their carers. On a more personal level, there are examples of good, and sometimes excellent, working relationships.

In respect of health, foster carers feel involved only to a limited extent by health professionals. There are examples of very good practice, but there are also barriers to involvement, notably the CAMHS threshold for accessing mental health support and confidentiality. While referral to CAMHS services is not always appropriate, many feel that this is their only course of action given either the paucity of early intervention services, or difficulty in accessing them.

Unsurprisingly, partnership working at a more local level is seen in a more positive light, but there are still many obstacles to really effective collaboration. One foster carer talked about there not being 'a Team around the Child' but instead, 'Teams around the Child'. Undoubtedly, foster carers are able to identify examples of good, or even excellent, practice and these serve as pointers to what can be achieved. The multi-agency role of LACE co-ordinators was mostly seen as a positive. When foster carers report no change, or a deterioration in partnership working, the main contributory factors are the failure to identify all the needs of the child, unsatisfactory sharing of information between services and families, and insufficient access to the right resources to meet the child's needs at the right time. On the whole, foster carers have not seen a lot of change in levels of engagement and partnership working over the last two years.

There is a strong sense among foster carers that for services to work together more effectively, there has to be a greater degree of trust between them and their co-professionals. This would mean that social workers and school staff in particular could learn more about the needs of the child, and that foster carers would be better supported in caring for and advocating for the child.

Theme 3: Effective teaching and learning

A number of issues arise concerning transition from primary to secondary school, partly due to the passing on of information, partly arising from matching a child's needs to an appropriate school place, and partly due to lack of continuity when children move school other than at the usual transition points. Any school move adversely affects a child's pace of learning and frequent changes are more common for children who are looked after than for others. Of the 20 foster carers who cared for children who had moved schools in the past year, only a quarter rated the sharing of information as good or very good.

Absence from school is not a significant issue for the great majority of children in the care system, but exclusions are. In addition to higher rates of permanent and fixed term exclusions for children who are looked after, there is the added concern some schools are unofficially excluding pupils; the foster carer is contacted and asked to keep the child at home for a period of time without a proper exclusion process being followed. This finding was true for half of the foster carers in one focus group. Some schools are very successful in reducing all forms of exclusion to be near or at zero; for many foster carers this is a matter of the school's priorities being right and having a positive attitude to those who need significant additional support. The work of the LACE co-ordinator is mostly well received, though still not known to quite a sizable minority.

There are some indications of improved communication between schools and foster carers which may be due to the strategy. Foster carers feel that communications with schools are better, in some aspects, but improvements are modest and patchy. Some foster carers feel that their schools are quite accessible and communicate well with them, but voice caution about expecting schools to pick up social care and health issues. For others, gaining

and maintaining good channels of communication have proved difficult and required perseverance on the foster carer's part.

Some improvement has been seen in the knowledge and skills of school staff in respect of understanding and meeting the needs of children who are looked after. Foster carers would welcome training being made available to all staff, including support staff, and not just the designated teacher.

Foster carers report a mixed picture when commenting upon the assessment by schools of a child's needs. There is a common understanding amongst educational professionals and amongst foster carers that unmet social and emotional needs act as obstacles to a child's capacity to learn. Being involved in the assessment process and planning of provision is important for foster carers, and there is a very mixed picture with regard to how far the carer's perspective on their child's abilities and needs are listened to and taken into account and how far they contribute to the Personal Education Plan (PEP). Approximately one third of respondents believe that the school or college their child or young person attends is now more responsive in meeting their needs. There are a number of simple things which a school can do to improve the way in which needs are recognised and met e.g. timing and location of reviews, regular mentoring sessions, providing a safe space in school. Two-fifths believed that support for meeting emotional needs had improved, in contrast to approximately one quarter who indicated that it was not as good.

Theme 4: Making better use of data

Individual schools, local authorities and education consortia may have analysed the performance of children and young people who are looked after at the ends of key stages but, currently there is little data readily available nationally to place this in context. If data on children and young people who are looked after is captured and given a high profile, such as with those who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), it is possible that a greater focus would rest on the achievement of children who are looked after.

Theme 5: Strengthening funding arrangements

Concerns were expressed that financial constraints are affecting services. The closest foster carers come to being involved in funding issues is with the Pupil Development Grant (PDG). There is a very low level of awareness of the PDG among foster carers. Two thirds of respondents had not heard of the PDG and most did not understand what it was for. They felt that at least an element of the PDG should be used to address the needs of individual children in the case of those who are looked after.

Theme 6: Participation of children who are looked after

A message which does come through strongly from foster carers in the focus groups, and dialogue about system change in the Fostering Wellbeing

programme, is the need for decision-makers and professionals working with those in care to listen to both the children, young people and the foster carers. These two groups are at the heart of the care system and hold the greatest knowledge of what the needs are.

3.0 Strategy review by theme

3.1 Effective leadership – roles and responsibilities

Leadership and co-ordination

Actions 1, 2, 3 and 4

The four lead co-ordinators in each education consortium in Wales have, primarily, a strategic role across the local authorities within the consortium. The LACE co-ordinators in each authority have a role closer to that of the Virtual School Head (VSH), but arguably without the status that a head teacher carries. Just over half of foster carers were aware of the LACE co-ordinator role and the named person.

The guidance on LACE co-ordinators as outlined in action 2 is not yet published but should contain ways in which lead co-ordinators can access the views and experiences of foster carers in a more systematic way. Liaison between lead co-ordinators in the educational consortia and LACE co-ordinators will also help to bridge the gap between the strategic and operational responsibilities.

The role and effectiveness of the lead co-ordinator in each consortium was not a question posed to foster carers taking part in the review. One related issue did arise when a foster carer who had come from England referred to the role of the VSH. In the Welsh Government strategy, replicating the VSH model was not taken forward, preferring instead to have in place a regional lead co-ordinator for children and young people who are looked after (Para: 4.12). This role does not embrace all that is found in the role of the VSH, as one foster carer who has experience of both models explained. She found that a VSH was able to address any problems that arose with children and young people who are looked after and was very proactive, managing the Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings, monitoring the targets set and addressing the financial support a child requires to meet their needs. Children sit in the meetings and their views are heard. This meant that PEP meetings were scheduled so that lessons were not missed and only those who really needed to know were aware of the child's care status; this is not always the case in Welsh schools.

The recent publication, *'Making a difference – a guide for the designated person for looked after children in school'*, makes clear the various obligations placed upon a school, its staff and governing body, in respect of the wellbeing and education of children and young people who are looked after. There are a number of instances of good practice which, if implemented by all schools, would significantly enhance their relationships with foster carers to the benefit of the child. The Merthyr Tydfil/Rhondda Cynon Taf resource, *'CLA friendly schools'* also contains much valuable guidance on involving foster carers in the education of children and young people who are looked after.

A foster carer's guide as to what they can expect from schools, how they can support the school, and how the school can support them, could usefully be developed to complement the Welsh Government publication '[Making a difference – a guide for the designated person for looked after children in school](#)'.

Additional learning needs

Action 5

The issue of meeting the additional learning needs of children and young people who are looked after continues to be a source of concern for many foster carers. While, at the time of writing, the *Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Bill* has yet to be finalised, this review has again highlighted certain issues, including:

- accuracy of the assessment of educational needs
- placing needs in the wider context of social and emotional needs
- addressing a learner's communication difficulties, which are often a major contributory factor to poor behaviour and underachievement, not just for children and young people who are looked after, but this does apply to them in significant numbers
- involvement of the child and foster carer in decisions about the most suitable form of provision
- stability and continuity of provision.

One foster carer described how a child had been moved to a Specialist Resource Base. Although the child needed to be in such a setting, the foster carer was unhappy not to have been involved in any of the decision making about the move, nor were they involved in the move itself. The move provoked anxiety for the child and the foster carer felt the child had no special person to support him. As a result, the foster carer said: "*We are seeing different issues now*".

There is a clear relationship between learning needs and the child's other basic needs, particularly social and emotional needs. Recognition by Welsh Government, local authorities and schools that addressing communication difficulties can have a significant and positive effect on behaviour and, therefore, the capacity to learn, needs to be followed through with practical action.

Educational and social care pilot strategy

Action 6

The [Fostering Wellbeing programme](#) is now being piloted in one region in Wales, Cwm Taf, and the progression of this Welsh Government strategy is most welcome. It is based on ten principles of social pedagogy and aims to bring foster carers, education, social services, health and other relevant services together, to effect better care and educational outcomes for those who are looked after. Although the formal evaluation of the programme has yet to report, the first of the three strands of the programme, the series of five masterclasses, has shown that foster carers and their co-professionals benefit greatly from the shared learning. Most importantly, they are contributing to ideas on what sort of cultural and system change is required and how it might be brought about.

A range of issues which have been raised in the master classes have also appeared in this review. Potentially, many of these could be addressed if the pilot programme proves successful and is implemented on a larger scale. Such issues include the need for:

- better communication between foster carers and services
- more holistic assessment of needs
- the application of person centred planning and practice
- involvement of foster carers, and children and young people who are looked after, in decision making
- better understanding of emotional and related health issues
- earlier and more accessible intervention strategies to meet social and emotional needs
- consistently high aspirations by schools and the strategies to realise them
- best use of time by social workers
- equality in professional relationships and more authentic partnership working.

Roles and responsibilities

Actions 7, 8, 10 and 11

Foster carers have minimal or no knowledge of those holding elected posts, either at local or national government levels. Of the seven local authority websites visited, there was only one where it was possible to find an elected member with any specific responsibility for children and young people who are looked after. Some referred to 'safeguarding', not specifically 'children looked after', as being part of a wider brief. One local authority has a 'Carers' Champion', which is a positive move in raising the profile of children and young people who are looked after, and that of their carers. [The Fostering Network's Foster Carers' Charter in Wales](#) for foster carers and corporate

parenting, advocates that all local authorities designate an elected member as a Foster Carer Charter Champion.

Despite there being a Welsh Assembly committee with responsibility for children and young people who are looked after, foster carers feel somewhat detached from national decision making. One described her unsuccessful research to find an elected member of government with responsibility for looked after children and she eventually turned to her local Welsh Assembly Member.

The separate points of Action 8 relate to the roles of social workers, IROs and LACE co-ordinators. As is clear in the action points, all three roles need to work to the same end i.e. identify the child's needs, provide appropriate support and monitor progress. An holistic appreciation of need, and an integrated and a consistent approach to meeting need, come through strongly in the review as being critical to improving the wellbeing and educational attainment of the child. The place of the foster carer in this relationship overly depends on the qualities of the individual co-professionals involved and their readiness to engage with the foster carers. Many feel that their knowledge of the child and expertise as carers is not given due weight by education and social services staff. While the fourth bullet point in Action 8, about carers being properly equipped, through training if necessary, is a valid one, it does not recognise that their co-professionals also have much to learn from the foster carers about the individual child.

If the social workers and IROs are to make the right decisions about a child's education, there has to be sufficient knowledge of their educational needs and progress. A frequent issue raised by foster carers is the high case load and high turnover of social workers, particularly the child's social worker. Consequently, they do not know the child well enough and relationships between the foster carer, child's social worker and the supervising social worker do not always work in the best interests of the child.

There was general agreement that supervising social workers were helpful and supportive, but responses to the children's social workers were more mixed.

'I have to meet the child's social worker every four weeks and can contact him when I want. My supervising social worker is an ally....'

'My boys are on social worker number five in 12 weeks. When staff left, agency workers were taken on – they know nothing about the child and it's further disruption for the child.'

'The child that moved from Anglesey has had three social workers in eight months.'

'In terms of the relevance to education – they don't know the child.'

'They haven't got time to look after you because of high caseloads, court work, and because the good ones are promoted.'

'I've found them to be reactive in that they are box ticking – 'I've got four weeks to get this sorted for the child' – their tasks are linked to targets.'

'I've had good links with the social workers I've worked with. However, they tend to be more reactive than proactive in relation to the needs of the children.'

Foster carers feel that, too often, it depends upon how active and vociferous they are as advocates for the child. One foster carer said that the school had no understanding of the child's basic needs until she intervened. After a few months, the child was allocated a place in an appropriate school with a nurture room:

'If this child had gone to mainstream education, she would have been a victim. It's about us as foster carers representing the known needs of the child. As foster carers we must be very active and very involved. I have fought more for my foster children than I have for my birth children. It took a heck of a lot of listening to the child and putting the education around the child, not the child into the education.'

A foster carer reported that a school isolated a child for two weeks, making her sit at a table away from the other children in the class. The child was self-harming, head-banging, threatening suicide. When visiting the school, the foster carer discovered the isolation of the child and was shocked and appalled. She returned to the head's office the next morning and sat outside it at 8 a.m., armed with research, and challenged the method of handling the child's behaviour. She felt that the head responded to an educated, middle class, assertive woman and so made changes. The child was provided with one-to-one support and she was able to offer the child different options according to the child's mood and emotional state.

Examples such as this raise the issue of how far the roles of social workers, IROs and LACE co-ordinators are, or can be, or should be, champions as well as safeguarders of children and young people. If a child is not in school, or is isolated or receiving inappropriate provision, not matched to their needs, it is inevitable that they will not make the necessary progress to fulfil their potential. Although vital, it is not enough in itself to keep the child 'safe'.

Another foster carer reported how, when a child moved to Anglesey, Social Services did not organise the transfer of paperwork in time for an assessment, so the child was put into a lower class. She said, *'We've knocked a few doors down to take things forward'*. It is easy for a foster carer, however much they wish to be advocates or champions, to feel powerless when support systems do not work holistically, and collective responsibilities are not recognised.

One foster carer described how troubled their foster child was as she had experienced six transitions from the age of ten. The child had experienced a

lot of trauma in her life, much emotional turmoil. Nevertheless, they settled her into school, arranging taxi transportation and her homework was going well. Following contact with her birth parents, all went downhill. In a Core Group meeting the school said they could no longer keep her safe on account of her risky behaviours and she received CAMHS and counselling support. She was out of school for eight weeks and no educational provision was put in place for her. The school did not want to attend her LAC review as they said she had left school. Eventually the foster placement broke down and she was moved into a residential unit. The foster carer regretted that services had not come together in a timely way. When she was in hospital for six days, only the hospital and clinical team attended a meeting; education did not attend. The foster carer said, 'everyone should matter'.

Many foster carers were aware of the LACE co-ordinator in their local authority; a significant minority were not. In terms of tracking progress, the immediate responsibility for this lies with the school and, in the best practice, the designated lead receives regular and frequent updates from relevant staff, and progress is discussed with the child. Importantly, these updates are shared with the foster carers. The work of LACE co-ordinators is generally much appreciated by foster carers when they know of the role and receive support from them.

'Support from the LACE team in my local authority is very good with additional training offered to foster carers on a regular basis.'

One foster carer describes how a child's behaviour is rated in each class using set criteria. She finds this helpful as blips or patterns can be detected at an early stage and there is an instant flag in the system indicating where, when and with whom (i.e. subject/time of day/teacher) problems occur, so that immediate action can be taken. She receives an email from the school's designated lead at the end of the day, or end of the week, and information about the child is shared on this regular basis. This allows for a good relationship to be built up.

In the absence of a Virtual School Head, the role of the LACE co-ordinator in the local authority needs to include taking an overview of the progress of each child who is looked after. Not only this, but the LACE co-ordinator needs to have the authority to effect change if the provision for the child is inadequate and progress is unnecessarily slow.

With regard to Action 10 and the role of the link governor for children and young people who are looked after, no foster carer made reference to such a role being evident in their school. As it stands, this advice has yet to be taken up by most schools.

The Buttle UK Quality Mark, to which Action 11 relates, has been discontinued. In 2014-15 a report was published which showed that, overall, 15 in every 10,000 students at Quality Mark (QM) universities across the UK were identified as having been looked after at age 16 or over. When this was analysed, the figure for Wales was 9 in every 10,000 students. Within further

education colleges across the UK, 55 out of every 10,000 learners were a looked after child or care leaver. There is no separate figure available for Wales. This reflects greater participation of looked after children and care leavers in further than higher education. Nearly two-thirds achieved their 'personal learning aim', which for the great majority meant achieving a qualification. Some 18% withdrew from their courses, for a variety of reasons. For many learners, withdrawals were the result of personal circumstances that made it difficult to continue learning, including:

- accommodation breakdown/tenancy problems
- not ready to engage in education
- pregnancy
- attendance or behavioural issues.

However, withdrawal is not always a sign of personal difficulties. There were also many reports of students withdrawing for other reasons such as:

- gaining employment
- moving to another area and transferring colleges
- changing courses.

Training

Action 9 is designed to support foster carers and other carers with appropriate training, which has a specific educational focus on children in their care.

On balance, foster carers believe that there has been a slight improvement in training, although the amount and quality of training is not seen as being adequate to meet the wide range of needs of both foster carers and children and young people who are looked after. While there is some excellent training available, too often the provision is piecemeal and not co-ordinated across agencies.

I think training for foster carers has improved over the last two years

	Number	%
Strongly agree	1	2
Agree	15	33
Neither agree nor disagree	14	31
Disagree	9	20
Strongly disagree	3	7
I do not know enough about this to answer the question.	3	7
Total	45	100

'There is no training on offer from education to foster carers – this is needed.' Foster carers, particularly post-approval, need training on the educational offer in Wales, especially given the rapid and radical changes taking place in the statutory curriculum and assessment regime. Such core provision would

be welcome in the foster carers post approval training as part of the National Fostering Framework.

In terms of continuing professional development, one foster carer spoke of how an independent fostering provider (IFP) requires that foster carers attend three training courses a year. It was felt that there was a big difference in the training offer between local authorities and independent fostering providers (IFPs); and, in turn, larger fostering services generally deliver more training as they have a bigger resource base.

There was concern that there was a lack of communication across organisations to maximise accessibility of training to foster carers:

- *‘Training should be made available according to where you live, not according to which agency you belong.’*
- *‘We need standardised training for Wales: a core programme of post approval training, evidenced based training, options available to address specific needs.’*
- *‘We’d like to see training as a pooled resource – not just available through your agency or local authority.’*

There is the potential in the National Fostering Framework to ensure that opportunities for good quality and comprehensive training are open to all. A common entitlement would prevent some foster carers having to search out and fund their own training; in one case the foster carer said it was unaffordable at about £155.

A number of different but key points about training were expressed by foster carers:

- *‘We need recognition as professionals with a clear set of standards.’*
- *‘There should be consequences for those who do not meet training requirements.’*
- *‘Training which focuses on the Foster Carers’ Guide to Education.’*
- *‘More PACE training.’*
- *‘A continuation or expansion of Confidence in Care.’*
- *‘Educate us: we want more training. We need refresher training.’*
- *‘We need cyclical training on trauma, attachment and resilience. Educationalists need to be trained with us – we could all share our expertise, build relationships.’*

Take-up of some training is restricted by a variety of factors, including timing of the training event, cost to the individual and absence of any imperative to attend.

There is a clear demand for training on how to meet children's emotional needs, as evidenced by the frequent references to PACE, Confidence in Care, attachment, trauma, loss and resilience. This is a key area in which foster carers can make a significant contribution to the wellbeing of the child, before there is a need, or an opportunity, to make a referral to mental health services.

Underlying a number of emotional need issues are communication difficulties as experienced by the child or young person. There is increasing evidence that in addressing communication difficulties, unmet social and emotional needs can also be ameliorated. The updated action plan could usefully give a greater focus to those therapeutic approaches, which can be applied not just in clinical settings, but also, through training, in the school and home.

Training is seen as being linked to the status, perceived or real, of foster carers. Foster carers wish to be regarded and treated as professionals with clear standards and lines of accountability in upholding those standards. The National Fostering Framework has the potential to bring about this shift in status and professional recognition; incorporating this element into an updated Welsh Government action plan would be a positive move.

3.2 Theme: Building effective partnerships and collaboration

Partnership working - national, regional and local

Actions 12, 15, 18 and 19

Foster carers do not believe that the relationships which they have with various professionals are sufficiently well developed to constitute true partnership working. Neither is there a sense that the different professional services collaborate effectively enough to support both children and young people who are looked after and their care. On a more personal level, there are examples of good, and sometimes excellent, working relationships.

Partnership working at a national level

While some foster carers did not believe that Welsh Government had effective channels of communication in place despite, having the origins of the consultation explained, others came to appreciate that Welsh Government engaged The Fostering Network to fulfil this role, hence their involvement in the consultation. This links to a previous point that lines of communication and accountability through to a named Welsh Government minister for children and young people who are looked after are not easy to discern. One foster carer who had lived in England appreciated the fact that there was a dedicated minister for foster care.

How much do you feel involved in matters relating to your foster child's education by the Welsh Government?

Survey

	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
Number	29	4	9	1	1	44
%	66	9	20	2	2	99

I do not feel at all involved I feel very involved

Focus Groups

	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
Number	16	0	0	0	0	16
%	100	0	0	0	0	16

I do not feel at all involved I feel very involved

Foster carers felt that Welsh Government did not communicate directly with foster carers about their experiences. They said things like:

- *'Why didn't they consult with foster carers?'*
- *'Asking, what can we do for you, would have been a great question to ask us.'*

Partnership working at a regional level

Responses to the consultation were mainly focussed on health issues, in particular those relating to mental health, and issues involving the regional educational consortia, essentially to do with the deployment of the Pupil Development Grant (PDG).

How much do you feel involved in matters relating to your foster child's education by Health Professionals?

Survey

	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
Number	17	4	12	4	7	44
%	39	9	27	9	16	100

I do not feel at all involved

I feel very involved

Focus Groups

	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
Number	10	2	1	0	2	15
%	67	13	7	0	13	100

I do not feel at all involved

I feel very involved

Focus group participants made both positive and negative comments about their involvement with health professionals. Some of the points made in the focus group discussion relate more to quality of service than to the way in which health professionals communicate with or involve foster carers. However, the responses overall suggest that foster carers feel involved only to a limited extent by health professionals. There are examples of very good practice but there are also barriers to involvement, notably the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) threshold for accessing mental health support and confidentiality.

One foster carer reported the excellent work CAMHS had done with her foster child following a suicide attempt. They saw the child at least weekly; the senior psychologist wrote reports for social services and came to her home to see her. One foster carer described how her foster child reacted with self-harming when she discovered her birth father was in prison. Because she did not reach the CAMHS threshold, help was not available at the point when she needed it.

Another described how the school nurse was not trained to administer the asthma pump in school. Neither were they using a risk assessment or plan. She acknowledged that this might be related to her move from England and a delay in records being provided. Another regretted that her child had not received mental health support at an earlier age. She said:

‘My child is not involved with mental health professionals, we should not wait until they are ten, eleven or twelve years of age, it’s too late then.’

The view was also expressed that confidentiality requirements could cause problems in involving foster carers so that, sometimes, little information was shared with foster carers.

In 2017, [The Fostering Network’s](#) submission to the Inquiry into the emotional and mental health of children and young people in Wales stated:

‘Foster carers feel current mental health services for children and young people who are looked after are poor or very poor. In the common experience of foster carers, there have been no discernible improvements in meeting the needs of the children and young people in their care. There is a heartfelt call for ‘faster access to CAMHS’. While social workers and LAC nurses have a sense that CAMHS is more responsive than previously when a crisis requires their intervention, looked after children need access to mental health services as soon as they enter care. Foster carers argue that since looked after children are more likely to suffer mental health issues, the sense of loss, instability and anxiety of entering care would inevitably add to these issues: ‘This should be recognised and mental health support should be made available on the move into placement, and throughout their care.’

In 2018, the research for this report confirmed those findings. While referral to CAMHS services is not always appropriate, many feel that this is their only course of action given either the paucity of early intervention services, or difficulty in accessing them.

I think mental health support for Looked After Children (e.g. from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services – CAMHS) has improved over the last two years.

	Number	%
Strongly agree	2	4
Agree	4	9
Neither agree nor disagree	10	22
Disagree	10	22
Strongly disagree	7	16
I do not know enough about this to answer the question.	12	27
Totals	45	100

Nearly one in five of respondents who had knowledge of CAMHS agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, while half disagreed or strongly disagreed. Just under a third neither agreed nor disagreed. This finding contrasts with the view of schools’ support for emotional wellbeing where, overall, there had been a net improvement. A positive experience involving health and education professionals was reported by one foster carer:

'When my foster child was moved from a school to a Specialist Resource Base, the school 'captured' health professionals on site and conducted the assessment. He was statemented.'

Another foster carer said:

'I find out what section court order applies to the child in my care, then I get information from the Guardian, the General Practitioner, then the social worker. Each time I have got CAMHS services for my children. It's about informing yourself and applying pressure where it's needed.'

Foster carers stressed the need for early intervention to address mental health issues, but felt the threshold for accessing CAMHS services was still too high and that financial constraints were affecting the service. Although there were examples of good practice, it is apparent that foster carers feel mental health support is worse than two years ago. There is widespread agreement with the view that the threshold for accessing CAMHS should be lowered for children who are looked after and that when support is not feasible, foster carers should be sign-posted to other support services for children. The issue is the sufficiency of such services which, if early assessment of needs was effective, may obviate the need to refer cases on to CAMHS and enable suitable interventions to be put in place involving foster carers and the front-line services.

One foster carer believes that, in her experience, unless mental health needs are met, children are not receptive to learning and they cannot cope with the many transitions expected of them e.g. moving from class to class, from teacher to teacher. She has seen this in her own foster child: *'He's one scared little boy and he cannot operate.'* Another stated:

'Education is in one paper, mental health in another. Join up between the two would have been the first thing I would have suggested.'

Another foster carer said she had experience of situations where placements had broken down because a child's mental health needs had not been addressed. This resulted in further disruption and damage for the child.

While some foster carers gave examples from their own experience of situations where mental health support had not been provided adequately or early enough, one foster carer gave an example of a positive change, possibly due to the strategy, during the last two years. On balance, most foster carers feel that mental health support has deteriorated over the last two years and this concurs with the findings in [The Fostering Network's report](#) to the Welsh Government's inquiry and the more [detailed corresponding report](#).

There is very little awareness or understanding of the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) among foster carers. Focus group participants who did know about it argued strongly for an element of the grant to be allocated to meet the needs of individual children who are looked after. A large majority had not been brought into discussions into how it should best be used. At a regional

level, this is mainly due to the education consortia operating at one step removed from the experience of foster carers.

Partnership working at a local level

Actions 13, 14, 16, 17 and 20

Effective, integrated working at a local level is critical to improving the wellbeing of children and young people who are looked after and raising their attainment. Undoubtedly, foster carers are able to identify examples of good, or even excellent, practice and these serve as pointers to what can be achieved. When foster carers report no change or a deterioration in partnership working, the main contributory factors are the failure to identify all the needs of the child, unsatisfactory sharing of information between services and families and insufficient access to the right resources to meet the child's needs. On the whole, foster carers have not seen a lot of change in levels of engagement and partnership working over the last two years.

A positive finding is that most foster carers know about the role of the LACE co-ordinator, although there is scope to further increase awareness and direct engagement with foster carers. The LACE co-ordinator has more knowledge of, and better access to, different services than most and is in a good position to facilitate effective joint working on behalf of the child.

Foster carers feel that schools do not generally share information well when a foster child moves from one school to another. Networking with other foster carers is, currently, the most important form of support for them. While this clearly is of value, if there were to be better developed relationships with schools, it is more likely that the individual needs of the child would be addressed.

Other foster carers gave examples when working together did not happen e.g. one described how her foster child had been involved in an incident with a gas canister and a lighter. When a meeting was convened to discuss this, no-one from the school attended.

Some participants put forward a strong argument for services to intervene earlier and in a more holistic way. One said:

'Bad experiences do not create bad people, they damage people emotionally. It's about early intervention. If their brains cut off because they are so anxious, they cannot learn.'

Another drew on research into early intervention and this view received broad support:

'My big passion is ensuring that the emotional needs of 5-6 year olds are looked after. Research has found that one single factor would increase a child's chances of doing well in education and going on to further education, and that was emotional intelligence. Early intervention to provide mental

health support is crucial. There is no point in giving huge resources at 18 if the mental health needs have been neglected at age 5-6. Mental health and education link up around the child is essential.'

However, one foster carer spoke of the difficulties experienced in accessing support for a child who was emotionally wounded and whose behaviour was extremely challenging. The placement broke down and the next carer was a social worker who knew where to go to push for provision. As a result, the child was statemented and attended a special school. Since that time, the foster carer and her husband found that their two current foster children do have access to services which help to meet their emotional needs; how far this was as a result of the strategy is unknown.

Structured questions about involvement with education professionals were asked both by the survey and in the focus groups. When the responses were combined, just over one third gave generally negative responses, just under one third were generally positive and the remainder were neither positive nor negative.

How much do you feel involved in matters relating to your foster child's education, by education professionals?

Survey

	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
Number	11	7	14	6	6	44
%	25	16	32	14	14	101
	I do not feel at all involved			I feel very involved		

Focus Groups

	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
Number	2	2	5	4	3	16
%	12	12	31	25	19	99
	I do not feel at all involved			I feel very involved		

How much do you feel involved in matters relating to your foster child's education by social work professionals?

Survey

	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
Number	13	3	15	8	5	44
%	29	7	34	18	11	99
	I do not feel at all involved			I feel very involved		

Focus Groups

	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
--	---	---	---	---	---	--------

Number	2	6	4	3	1	16
%	12	37	25	19	6	99

**I do not feel
at all involved**

**I feel very
involved**

Across the 60 respondents in the two groups, some 40% had a largely negative view of their degree of involvement with social services, with nearly 30% being largely positive. Focus group participants felt strongly that their expertise and knowledge of their foster children should be given more recognition by social workers. They said things like:

'They need to recognise us as professionals. Foster carers have a duty of care to look after them, long-term care. Foster carers know the child, their story, their behaviour.'

'I'm looking after him for nine years, so I am committed to him. Social workers come and go.'

This feeling of not being recognised as professionals is a recurring theme and may help to explain the lower score given by focus group participants in response to the question about involvement with social services. Focus group participants differentiated between the ways they were engaged by their supervising social workers and by the children's social workers. On the whole, supervising social workers were felt to be more supportive and helpful. There was general agreement about this in one group where one participant, for example, said:

'My supervising social worker is an ally, we are both trying to get the best for the child. We have a relationship that is transparent and honest.'

Participants did not all agree that supervising social workers were more supportive. One described their supervising social worker as very proactive, but another said: *'I've had good links with the social workers I have worked with. However, they tend to be more reactive than proactive in relation to the needs of children'*. Another said: *'They haven't got the time because of high caseloads, court work and because the good ones are promoted.'*

Most of the comments about children's social workers were negative. Apart from one foster carer who said that they could contact the child's social worker whenever they wanted, typical comments were:

'My boys are on social worker number five in twelve weeks. When staff left, agency workers were taken on and they know nothing about the child. It's further disruption for the child.'

'In terms of relevance to education they don't know the child.'

'I've found them to be reactive in that they are box ticking, saying 'I've got four weeks to get this sorted for the child'; they don't know the child.'

'How much do local authorities know about the children that are in independent foster care?'

Some participants also described problems in communicating with children's social workers. One foster carer said she received no feedback from the child's social worker. Even when she sends emails there is no acknowledgement. Another said she received no information from the child's social worker.

There is a strong sense among foster carers that for services to work together more effectively, there has to be a greater degree of trust between them and their co-professionals. This would mean that social workers and school staff, in particular, could learn more about the needs of the child and that foster carers would be better supported in caring for and advocating for the child. Within services too, and especially within social services, greater knowledge of the child being shared and discussed would facilitate a more joined up approach to the care of the child.

3.3 Theme: Effective teaching and learning

Access to, and stability in, appropriate provision¹

Actions 21, 27, 28 and 29

A number of issues arise concerning transition from primary to secondary school. One foster carer said there was a difference in the way children are supported in primary school and in comprehensives.

'Fewer people can have a big impact on the child's life in primary school. In comprehensive school, the child is seen by about sixteen teachers, they don't have time to listen and learn helpful strategies.'

Her experience in further education suggested that information about a child did not always follow them through their education pathway:

'I worked in further education and worked closely with the Positive Behaviour Management Officer. Over 25 years I didn't know much about looked after children. Their issues will have followed them through the education system, but an awareness of their needs should also go through the system.'

Another foster carer had moved from Stockport to North Wales and the child who was looked after had to transfer from Year 6 to Year 7. Because of the tight time schedule in the school, the child had missed the transition meeting. This was a big disruption for the child who had known all the primary school children throughout their childhood. Another described his foster child's experience of moving from primary to secondary school: *'My eldest has gone from a small primary to a massive school. He's lost, it's like throwing him into a cement mixer.'*

Foster carers see support during transition as an important issue and, specifically, the issue of information about a child following them as they move schools. Only foster carers whose children had moved schools during the past year were invited to answer the following question.

Did schools/colleges share information about your child in a way that helped ensure a smooth transition?

	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
Number	6	2	7	4	1	20
%	30	10	35	20	5	100

They were very poor at sharing information

They were very good at sharing information

Twenty foster carers cared for children who had moved schools in the past year. Only a quarter rated the sharing of information as good or very good, with more than a quarter rating it as very poor.

Other engagement with foster carers and care leavers in the Fostering Wellbeing programme indicates that there are concerns not just with admission to schools at formal points of transition during statutory education. Foster carers are not always aware that children and young people who are looked after should be prioritised when the admissions criteria are applied. This can mean that a child is not always admitted to the most suitable provision to meet their needs. Given that children and young people who are looked after are more likely to move schools other than at the formal transition stages at the ages of 11 and 16, gaining access to the right provision at the right time becomes even more critical.

A foster carer described how she felt her school had no understanding of the needs of her foster child, who had a disability. The foster carer advocated strongly on her behalf and after a few months the child was allocated a place in an appropriate school. She commented: *'If this child had gone to mainstream education, she would have been a victim. It's about us as foster carers representing the known needs of the child. As foster carers we must be very active and very involved. I have fought more for my foster children than I have for my birth children.'*

Absence from school is not a significant issue for the great majority of children in the care system; statistics for primary aged children show that their levels of attendance are at or above the national average and for secondary pupils they are close to the national averages. Schools and foster carers usually work well together in ensuring good attendance.

Exclusions from school, both permanent and fixed-term, continue to be an issue; children and young people who are looked after, have higher than average rates of exclusion. Equally concerning is the continued practice by some schools of unofficially excluding pupils, whereby the foster carer is contacted and asked to keep the child at home for a period of time without a proper exclusion process being followed; by doing this, the statistics on exclusions for a school appear more favourable. Four out of eight foster carers in one group had been asked to remove a child to help the school manage a situation: *'I was asked to keep the child off school because the school was being inspected.'*

Foster carers report that some schools have a variety of strategies in place to reduce or eliminate exclusions altogether and some of these successes have been highlighted in the Estyn report (July 2016) on children looked after e.g. as in Tonyrefail Comprehensive School where, with 25 or more children and young people who are looked after, there have been no permanent or fixed term exclusions for the past two years.

As stated in the 'Effective leadership - roles and responsibilities' section of this report, responsibility for the oversight of the child's education is not wholly clear. Matters relating to placement, attendance, progress, wellbeing, exclusions etc. are overseen by an educational professional, the Virtual School Head, in England; the LACE co-ordinator's role in Wales does not

mirror that of the VSH and nor does it have the same degree of authority as that of a head teacher.

Some participants in the focus groups mentioned their LACE co-ordinators, but others were not aware of them or their role. The survey tried to find out whether there was a good awareness of the role among foster carers.

Do you know who your LACE co-ordinator is?

	Number	%
Yes	25	58
No	18	42
Total	43	100

Nearly 60% of respondents knew who their LACE co-ordinator was, but a large minority (42%) did not. There is, therefore, an opportunity to increase further awareness of the role among foster carers, but also to clarify the scope of that role. LACE co-ordinators are referred to in four of the action points under the Teaching and Learning theme. While there is an understanding that the role embraces matters related to attendance, training, planning, monitoring and communication, the brief is very wide and does not necessarily empower the LACE co-ordinator to act as an advocate for the child. This is an area where further consideration is needed if LACE co-ordinators are to have the capacity to track the progress of each child who is looked after, over 500 in some of the larger local authorities, and the authority to intervene when necessary.

Some foster carers felt that their schools were quite accessible and voiced caution about expecting schools to pick up social care and health issues. Another foster carer said there were three primary schools in her area and all were easily accessible: *'I can go and ask for help with a child and it's there.'*

By contrast, one foster carer described her experience of asking a school about how they handled children whose behaviour was challenging, to be told that they don't have children like that in school. Another foster carer said that systems that had been put in place to aid communication and address problems were not being implemented: *'If they've been out of the classroom 28 days, a strategy meeting is needed (to decide) what can be put in place to continue her education, in or out.'* The foster carer said that her foster child had been out of school for eight weeks and no meeting had taken place. While some schools are very committed to maintaining continuity of education, there are also those who are not proactive in ensuring that a child's entitlement to full-time education is properly met. Oversight and co-ordinated action by the local authority, through educational welfare officers, Social Services and LACE co-ordinators, would help prevent such negative experiences for the child.

Communication

Actions 22 and 26

There are indications of improved communication between schools and foster carers, which may be due to the strategy. Foster carers feel that communications with schools are better in some aspect, but improvements are modest and patchy.

There is strong evidence that foster carers believe they need to advocate actively on behalf of their foster children in order to achieve any significant positive changes. This was also a finding of previous consultations linked to the strategy.

Communication between my foster child's school/college and myself has improved over the past two years.

	Number	%
Strongly agree	5	11
Agree	14	31
Neither agree nor disagree	11	24
Disagree	9	20
Strongly disagree	2	4
I do not know enough about this to answer the question.	4	9
Total	45	99

Nearly half of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that there had been an improvement in communication with their school, while a quarter disagreed or strongly disagreed. Participants in both focus groups also noted some positive changes and felt it possible that these had been accelerated by the Welsh Government's Strategy.

'I have been very involved with the school from day one. They update me whenever there is a problem. You need to be very involved, then the school is happy to work with you.'

A number of focus group participants provided specific examples of good practice which helped communication with their school. One foster carer said the school-home book was working well; this made it possible to share things that had happened at home, either positive experiences or occurrences which could affect the child's behaviour in school. Another foster carer described how a child's behaviour is rated in each class on a scale of one to five. She found this helpful, as problems or patterns can be detected early and addressed immediately. She also receives regular emails from the LACE co-ordinator and information about the child is shared on a regular basis.

Another foster carer spoke of an App for sharing homework information whereby foster carers and teachers can log in to make comments. Other useful software allows parents not only to pay for school meals online, but to see what a child eats; this is especially important for children and young

people who are looked after and who often have not had a balanced and nutritious diet in their past.

The focus groups produced mixed responses which reflects the findings of the survey; some foster carers provided examples of good practice in communication, while others expressed concerns. One foster carer described how a deputy head had introduced a mentoring system. Care for children who are looked after are part of the deputy's role and each week she allocates half an hour to each child, so she can sort out problems immediately. She is the point of contact for foster carers and the system works well.

In respect of communication, similar points were heard as were given about other issues; foster carers feel that involvement with the school too often results when they take the initiative:

'When foster carers are pro-active, schools respond well.'

'We are involved because we have made ourselves involved. Involvement and communication are driven by us. Meetings are requested by us.'

Experiences vary, with some foster carers being fully informed and involved by the school, others will have a degree of involvement and in some they will not be involved at all.

The only way that anything improves for my foster child in school/college is if I push hard for it.

	Number	%
Strongly agree	12	27
Agree	16	36
Neither agree nor disagree	8	18
Disagree	4	9
Strongly disagree	2	4
I do not know enough about this to answer the question.	3	7
Totals	45	101

There is a strong view among respondents that they need to be active advocates for the children in their care for anything to change. A clear majority, nearly two-thirds of respondents, agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, while only a few disagreed or strongly disagreed.

This issue drew many comments from foster carers. Those who gave examples from their own experience were generally positive about their relationship with schools. However, they felt that the good relationship was due to their own efforts. One foster carer said she had developed good personal relationships with school staff. She did not see the improved relationships resulting from the strategy, but rather as a result of the efforts the foster carer made to improve communication.

Another discovered that the school was struggling to manage the child's behaviour. The foster carer went in to the school and insisted on them persevering, using research findings as a persuasive tool and giving examples of strategies to manage behaviour. The child's behaviour started to improve; the school now emails the foster carer each week and the head teacher rings the foster carer each Friday. She said: *'Teachers need to recognise that foster carers are experts on the child's behaviour. I worry about those children who do not have a strong advocate, and that the child's struggle will escalate'*.

Foster carers are able to provide examples of good practice, but also describe situations where communication has been poor. Foster carers believe strongly that skilled and determined advocacy on their part is necessary if significant and positive changes in the lives of the children are to happen. An underlying theme emerging is how the knowledge foster carers have of their children needs to be harnessed more effectively by educational professionals.

Learning opportunities for educational staff

Action 23

I think training for teachers and other education professionals has improved over the last two years.

	Number	%
Strongly agree	1	3
Agree	7	20.5
Neither agree nor disagree	14	41
Disagree	7	20.5
Strongly disagree	5	15
Totals for those responding	34	100
I do not know enough about this to answer the question.	11	24

Although participants did not necessarily have direct experience of the training of school staff, they were aware of how skills and knowledge had been taken forward. There had been examples of good quality training taking place, one of which was about the behaviour of children in care; the trainer was a foster carer and a social worker and had been in care herself. Schools could send one representative and some foster carers also attended:

'The training was brilliant, and you could see the teachers making connections with the children they teach.'

Good practice is also evident in monthly sessions, with foster carers being offered training according to needs e.g. how to help children learn, profiles, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and exclusions. Bringing together schools and foster carers on a regular basis had improved links and communication.

One foster carer said that where training was on offer, even when schools attend, there is no guarantee that the practices would be implemented. She spoke of key people that needed to be involved in such training, not only teachers but also receptionists, lunch-time supervisors and other support staff, if a change in attitude and culture were to happen.

Attachment training for teachers is taking place in many schools now. Focus group participants agreed that training that helps educators understand the significance of attachment for children who are looked after, would increase empathy and compassion and generate more positive responses to behaviour issues. Similarly, training about trauma, loss and their effects was felt to be important: *'Looked after children are all grieving.'*

It is not possible to draw a clear conclusion about foster carers' views regarding training for teachers. The examples provided show that good practice exists, but most foster carers involved in this study were not aware of

any positive improvement. Provision for foster carers and teachers being trained together is seen as very beneficial and this is supported by the evaluations from the pilot Fostering Wellbeing programme. Training for schools needs to be more inclusive of all staff, linking the meeting of social and emotional needs to learning strategies and draw more on person centred practice. One foster carer said it was important to ‘*educate the educators*’.

Assessment, planning and meeting needs

Actions 24 and 25

Foster carers report a mixed picture when commenting upon the assessment by schools of a child’s needs. There is a common understanding amongst educational professionals and amongst foster carers that unmet social and emotional needs act as obstacles to a child’s capacity to learn. What are less understood are the specifics of those needs and how they might be met. Foster carers in the Fostering Wellbeing programme masterclasses, when presented with the characteristics of Developmental Language Disorder (DLD), and how it often has a deleterious effect on both behaviour and educational achievement, could recognise some of those features of DLD in the children for whom they care.

One foster carer said some schools were not good at responding to the particular needs of each child who is looked after:

‘You have to respond to individual needs and some schools struggle with that, possibly because of lack of resources, possibly because of lack of awareness. The Home-School book can help.’

I am more involved in my foster child’s Personal Education Plan (P.E.P.) now than I was two years ago.

	Number	%
Strongly agree	3	7
Agree	9	21
Neither agree nor disagree	14	33
Disagree	12	29
Strongly disagree	4	10
Totals	42	100
I do not know enough about this to answer the question.	2	5

Just over one quarter of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were more involved in their foster child’s Personal Education Plan now than two years ago; just over one-third disagreed or strongly disagreed. In effect, three-quarters had seen no improvement or a falling back.

There are a variety of views from foster carers about their involvement in the child’s Personal Education Plan (PEP). One foster carer said the school

invited him to be involved in the PEP process and decision making, but that social services did not welcome such involvement. He went as far as to say that social services were trying to monopolise the role and ‘keep foster carers out’.

One foster carer appreciated the fact that she had been included in the development of PEPs and was able to say what she thought should be included. Another foster carer commented that though this was good practice, it was unusual to see education and social services working together in this way.

The school/college my foster child attends is more responsive overall to his/her needs than it was two years ago.

	Number	%
Strongly agree	3	8
Agree	10	27
Neither agree nor disagree	14	38
Disagree	7	19
Strongly disagree	3	8
Totals	37	100
I do not know enough about this to answer the question.	8	17

Approximately one third of respondents believe that the school or college their child or young person attends is now more responsive in meeting their needs. This is more than those who responded negatively to the question. One focus group participant, who also worked with children who are looked after in schools, said she had seen an increase in referrals; the head teacher had directed her work more to an intake of children who are looked after in the Reception class. Another foster carer reported a good school experience for her child with no stigmatising; the school was recognised by Estyn as outstanding.

Several foster carers provided examples of schools not responding appropriately to the needs of their foster children. Some believed that schools were not challenging their children enough, or were paying attention to their emotional needs but not their educational needs. One said that LAC reviews are held in school time, so children have to miss lessons to attend. As the meetings are usually not held on school premises this can result in an absence of four hours out of the school day as the child has to travel to the meeting. Another added: *‘If they have to attend a meeting they lose an attendance mark. This is wrong.’*

A number of foster carers shared a concern that their foster children were not occupied constructively and that their educational needs were being neglected. One foster carer gave the example of a child having been given colouring to do. The foster carers felt that, unfortunately, the behaviour of foster children was seen as a problem for the school, rather than a problem for the child that the school should help to manage. One foster carer simply asked that her school, which she described as *‘appalling’*, educate her child.

Another foster carer reported how, when a child moved to another local authority area, Social Services did not organise the transfer of paperwork in time for an assessment, so the child was put into a lower class. She said: *'We've knocked a few doors down to take things forward.'*

The majority of examples provided by foster carers describe a lack of responsiveness to the needs of children who are looked after. However, some examples of good practice were provided, reflecting the intentions of the strategy. The survey does show that some progress is being made in respect of meeting emotional needs.

My foster child receives better emotional support in school/college than two years ago.

	Number	%
Strongly agree	4	10
Agree	12	30
Neither agree nor disagree	14	35
Disagree	8	20
Strongly disagree	2	5
Totals	40	100
I do not know enough about this to answer the question.	5	11

Two-fifths believed that support had improved, in contrast to approximately one quarter who indicated that it was not as good. Nearly one-third saw no significant difference. This outcome is more positive than for most other evaluations of how much improvement has occurred over the two years of the strategy's implementation. It reflects a growing awareness by schools of what the concept of being 'ready to learn' means in practice for those children and young people who have significant and unmet social and emotional needs, which act as obstacles to learning.

3.4 Theme: Making better use of data

Actions 30, 31 and 32

While foster carers have not commented on the national picture with regard to the educational attainment of children and young people who are looked after, they are often acutely aware, from their own experience, of ways in which the potential of those children and young people is not being realised. Individual schools, local authorities and education consortia may have analysed the performance of children and young people who are looked after at the ends of key stages but, currently, there is little data readily available nationally to place this in context. For instance, data on the educational performance for all young people aged 16 and in care does not appear on the [StatsWales](#) website, only the performance of those leaving care at 16; even then, the data can be 18 months or more out of date.

One foster carer quoted the example of progress with young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and how this issue was progressed once a spotlight was shone on it, especially through the reporting of statistics at local and national levels. She wondered whether a similar focus on the educational attainment of children and young people who are looked after might make the issue more visible and speed progress.

3.5 Theme: Strengthening funding arrangements

Concerns were expressed that financial constraints were affecting services. One foster carer gave the example of an IRO who could not follow the course of action she wanted to as she had been told she could not make decisions with financial implications. Another foster carer expressed concern about the impact on looked after children of funding cuts. She felt that essential services, like emotional support, were being lost and not replaced.

'The postcode lottery of local authorities is not helpful, we are asked to say what we are happy to lose if we cut £35 million.'

The Pupil Development Grant

Action 33

The topic of the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) generated quite a lot of discussion in the focus groups, so the survey asked several questions about it.

The Pupil Development Grant – PDG (formerly known as the Pupil Deprivation Grant)

Have you heard of the PDG?

	Number	%
Yes	15	34
No	29	66
Totals	44	100

Do you understand what it is for?

	Number	%
Yes	7	16
Partly	6	14
No	31	70
Totals	44	100

The findings suggest there is a very low level of awareness of the PDG among foster carers. Two thirds of respondents had not heard of the PDG and most did not understand what it was for. Only 16% of respondents understood its purpose. This finding confirms the views expressed in the focus groups. Although some participants knew what the PDG was and how it could be used, many did not. They said things like:

'We do not see this'

'I don't even know what it is'

'No-one tells us what's on offer'

How involved do you feel in deciding how the PDG is used to help your child?

	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
Number	38	3	3	0	0	44
%	86	7	7	0	0	100

**I do not feel
at all involved**

**I feel very
involved**

Not surprisingly, given the low level of awareness of the PDG, foster carers who responded to the survey did not feel any degree of involvement in deciding how it is used, with the great majority placing themselves at the bottom of the graded scale i.e. *'I do not feel at all involved'*.

Concerns were expressed in the focus groups that the process of deciding the use of the PDG was not transparent. While the criteria for deploying the PDG have been amended, the residual effect for those who had some knowledge of the funding is still a negative one.

'I'd like to see what the money is spent on.'

'We found they used the money to buy iPads, but we had no choice in it.'

Another strong theme was that foster carers felt that at least an element of the Pupil Development Grant should be used to address the needs of individual children in the case of those looked after. They acknowledged that there was some benefit in using the Pupil Development Grant for more generic needs and some foster carers agreed their children were likely to benefit from this. However, all felt that at least some of the grant needed to be targeted at the needs of children with specific issues. They said things like:

'Resources should be targeted to the needs of individual children.'

'Children who are looked after have complex needs. Unless children have the support they need, they will not succeed in education. Their individual needs must be identified and addressed with resources and the Pupil Development Grant is an opportunity to do that.'

Even though most foster carers did not know about the Pupil Development Grant and did not feel involved in determining its use, two foster carers provided examples of good practice. One foster child had unmet emotional

needs and the school approached the foster carer and discussed three different options for addressing them. Another described how a teaching assistant was assigned to a child to meet his individual needs and three days of counselling was also provided.

3.6. Theme: Participation of children who are looked after

Actions 35 – 37

Foster carers were not asked directly about their views on the involvement of children and young people who are looked after. This aspect of the review is conducted separately by Voices from Care. A message which does come through strongly from foster carers in the focus groups and dialogue about system change in the Fostering Wellbeing programme, is the need for decision-makers and professionals working with those in care to listen to both the children and young people and the foster carers. These two groups are at the heart of the care system and hold the greatest knowledge of what the needs are.

3.7: Related themes

In commenting upon the effects of the strategy to date, foster carers raised a number of points which did not all relate directly to the themes and action points in the strategy.

What kind of support do you most need to enable you to help the children in your care better, with their education?

	Number	%
Training (what kind)?	6	14
Networking (with who)?	12	29
Information (what about, in what format?)	10	24
Something else (please say what)?	14	33
Totals	42	100

Training

The subjects of training which were identified by foster carers as being most needed were:

- how to make schools accountable for underachieving pupils
- how to advocate for the child
- information about how to contribute to the learning of those in care
- the PACE model
- attachment, trauma and resilience
- the Foster Carers' Guide to Education.

Foster carers also proposed that training should be made available to foster carers across agencies, no matter who they fostered for or where they lived, so that approaches to care were more consistent and 'joined up'.

'We'd like to see training available as a pooled resource, not just available through an agency or local authority, but if it's available in any department, then for it to be available to us.'

The Fostering Network with AFA Cymru, currently consulting on foster carer post approval training for the National Fostering Framework corroborate views already expressed by foster carers. One view was that a specified amount of training should be required, and that there should be clear implications for those who did not meet training requirements. This would help establish clear standards of good practice and assist the recognition of foster carers as professionals. The logistics of foster carers accessing training would be helped if it was within the school day.

Networking

Networking was the most important form of support for nearly a third of survey respondents, whether it was with schools, other education professionals, other foster carers or all those involved in the child's life. Mentoring and peer support, one to one or in groups, emerged as the most important forms of networking from the focus groups. One foster carer had a paid and trained mentor: *'Having an experienced foster carer as a mentor who can tell me how to go about things has been invaluable.'*

One foster carer who had come across [The Fostering Network's Mockingbird](#) model saw real potential in it. She felt that a set-up where foster carers and their families are clustered around a hub household, where there is an experienced foster carer, would form a fostering community which would be more supportive and robust for both those in care and foster carers. Foster carers on the Fostering Wellbeing programme were also excited by the opportunities that the Mockingbird model offered and saw how ways of working could be changed to support foster carers and their children better and reduce placement breakdowns. Evidence from the [Confidence in Care programme](#) demonstrates the value of peer support, even from something as simple as exchanging email addresses and sharing information that way.

Information

More information was most important for a quarter of survey respondents. Foster carers asked for information about:

- the Special Educational Needs statementing process
- progress at school
- their children's Personal Education Plans
- school's aims for the education of their children.

Different frustrations when trying to obtain information were evident. In one more extreme instance a foster carer had turned to a solicitor for advice. Another felt there was no single point of contact for information. As an

example, people spoke of the different ways they had become aware of this consultation e.g. through a supervising social worker, through attending a conference and through The Fostering Network. Two foster carers in one area valued a Facebook page where information is shared.

Other forms of support

The most commonly raised issue by foster carers was wanting to be more involved by the school in various aspects of their child's education. Other types of support raised included:

- relief carers to provide a break
- more help from the various professionals involved in the life of the child
- more consistent policies across schools e.g. uniform, homework
- being treated as professionals
- support with transition
- no stigmatisation of children and young people who are looked after
- better co-ordination between schools/colleges and social workers.

Suggestions were offered as to how changes to the care system might help improve the wellbeing of children and young people who are looked after and support foster carers. One suggestion was that practices should be standardised across agencies, because there are vast differences in local authorities' payments and treatment of foster carers. The National Fostering Framework, which is currently being developed, may offer a way forward on this. Another spoke of the need for education and mental health services to work together around the child. Generally, the need for more resources and more focus on children who are looked after is felt by foster carers to be a growing need. One specific example given was the absence of support for children displaying sexually harmful behaviour towards others; in North Wales support was only available from Manchester and subsequently from an outreach service run by Barnado's in South Wales.

Next steps

The Fostering Network team would welcome further dialogue on the issues raised in this consultation with foster carers and will continue to play a key role in raising the educational attainment of looked after children and young people in Wales.

We propose that further work is undertaken to:

- Disseminate the findings of this report to foster carers, policy makers, social work practitioners, health service practitioners, youth justice practitioners, third sector organisations and organisations and individuals representing education.
- Bring together foster carers, social care, health, education and youth justice professionals to discuss the issues together.
- Continue and develop the publication of foster carer resources, for example, Making it Happen, and events, such as The Fostering Network's Fostering Excellence masterclasses, to continue to inspire foster carers to help fostered children and young people in their care raise their ambitions and fulfil their potential in education.
- Encourage foster carers to consult, challenge and collaborate with schools as an integral part of the team around the child.

The Fostering Network Wales can offer bespoke and responsive consultancy - based services and interventions as Welsh Government further develops its looked after children's education strategy.

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5.0 Appendices

Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales: Action Plan 2015-16- Welsh Government

5.1 Action plan: actions 1 – 11: Effective leadership – roles and responsibilities

Action 1: support each regional consortium to identify a lead co-ordinator who will retain a strategic focus on looked after children in education and ensure the delivery of an agreed, strategic programme of work.
Action 2: develop and publish guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the lead co-ordinator.
Action 3: develop and publish guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the designated lead member of staff in schools, and on governing bodies in supporting that function.
Action 4: reinforce corporate accountability and the statutory role of the Director of Social Services.
Action 5: consider the responses to the draft <i>Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Bill</i> , with a view to developing the Bill provisions on children and young people who are looked after.
Action 6: assess the feasibility of a pilot programme that will deliver a combined educational and social care approach that will help to improve placement stability and provide a stronger and better equipped workforce in Wales.
Action 7: develop training for elected members.
Action 8: review the roles of key workers and ensure that responsibility and accountability exist in all parts of the system. This should be in accordance with a consistent national context set by the Welsh Government, to ensure that local authorities do not implement changes in isolation of one another. In particular local authorities should make arrangements to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• ensure a designated elected member, with a lead responsibility for the education of children who are looked after, is in place and equipped to undertake the role• examine the roles of social workers and IROs to ensure that plans are in place and progressed to meet the needs of the child. This includes reviewing the child's educational needs, progress and development to support and strengthen the existing process• review the roles and responsibilities of the LACE co-ordinator and the designated person with lead responsibility in schools to ensure alignment and collaboration to raise the level and quality of support provided. This should ensure that the learner's progress is properly

<p>tracked in conjunction with schools, so that interventions are quickly applied where attainment appears to be in decline. The same high quality level of service and support should be considered for former looked after children who have been adopted or are subject to a Special Guardianship Order (SGO)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support foster carers, residential child care workers, kinship carers and parents so that the promotion of education is paramount and under-performance is not accepted. All carers must be equipped – through training if necessary - with the skills necessary to challenge schools where the child’s attainment is not at the expected level and must be aware of the key personnel to approach to do so, such as seeking advocacy support through the regional education consortia and school challenge advisers.
<p>Action 9: develop proposals to support foster carers and other carers with appropriate training which has a specific educational focus on children in their care.</p>
<p>Action 10: promote the role of the looked after children link governor and encourage all governing bodies to select a governor to represent the interests of these young people, as standard good practice.</p>
<p>Action 11: all further education institutions should continue to work to meet the quality mark criteria set by Buttle UK and to build on existing good practice. Institutes should continue to demonstrate strong leadership and work in partnership with local authorities and other agencies, to secure the best possible support for learners from a care background.</p>

5.2 Action plan: actions 12 – 20: Building effective partnerships and collaboration

<p>Action 12: LACE co-ordinators To establish a national strategic group involving local authorities, in particular LACE co-ordinators and other key stakeholders to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support consistent practice in supporting children who are looked after • identify the interdependencies which exist between them • promote peer support for practitioners, sharing good practice • identify and overcome barriers to success.
<p>Action 13: to implement a ‘community of practice’ to build more effective working relationships and communications between designated lead members of staff in schools and further education institutions, LACE co-ordinators, carers and social workers.</p>
<p>Action 14: to identify information which would better support collaboration and delivery at a local level, including the production of a thematic study, providing robust case studies and underpinning, so that the LACE co-ordinators and schools can draw on successful practices to help them provide</p>

better support.

Action 15: to strengthen the role of the third and independent sectors, to ensure a more holistic approach to delivery, and provide an advocate for children who are often difficult to engage in education. The Welsh Government's Strategic Steering Group will consider how outcomes for children who are looked after, and care leavers, can be improved through prevention and early intervention, improved collaborative working across agencies and through identifying and sharing good practice and making improvements where they are needed.

Action 16: local authorities with similar learner profiles should work more collaboratively and to find more effective ways of sharing good practice, professional expertise and teaching support across authorities. Local authorities – working with regional education consortia in planning strategic actions – should actively explore opportunities for greater collaboration to support better and more consistent practice, and in sharing of good practice.

Action 17: to map and review existing local protocols, strengthening them where necessary, using service level agreements and memoranda of understanding.

Action 18: to collaborate with the third sector to map existing materials to help carers and foster parents understand the importance of engagement with schools and post-16 education providers.

Action 19: to build an effective network of all key personnel, via a series of regional events, to ensure a consistency of service provision for children who are looked after.

Action 20: to improve data sharing between schools and post-16 education providers, considering the particular needs of children who are looked after and care leavers as part of this.

5.3 Action plan: actions 21 – 29: Effective teaching and learning

Action 21: to ensure children who are looked after are prioritised in the admissions process and that unexplained absences are dealt with promptly. The key factor is stability. This also means that exclusions must be considered only in the most extreme circumstances. Schools will work closely with the LACE co-ordinator and the education welfare officer to monitor the attendance of children who are looked after and respond immediately to first day absences.

Action 22: to place emphasis on information sharing which needs to be timely. It should be accepted good practice to set up information sharing meetings prior to a pupil starting a new school or educational setting. The meetings should involve appropriate personnel from the receiving and

previous school, together with social workers and other agency staff.
Action 23: to ensure there are specific professional learning opportunities in schools and further education institutions on managing challenging behaviour and recognising the needs of children suffering from trauma and attachment issues. Schools should engage with regional education consortia and LACE co-ordinators to consider how broader awareness training for school personnel in supporting vulnerable children could be commissioned and delivered regionally funded through the PDG. Personnel from further education institutions should also be included in the training wherever possible.
Action 24: to implement arrangements to improve tracking to monitor the educational progress of children who are looked after and ensure meaningful Personal Education Plans and Individual Development Plans. Regional education consortia should work with their LACE co-ordinators to identify and share examples of good tracking and monitoring systems.
Action 25: to set realistic, but challenging targets in conjunction and consultation with children and young people and recognise that education may be low on the young person's personal agenda due to other emotional issues This information must be formalised within the education plan. Education plans must also monitor and record the personal development of the child in greater detail.
Action 26: to maintain a national contact list of key personnel, such as LACE co-ordinators, education and progression co-ordinators (EPCs), further education and higher education student support officers to improve communications.
Action 27: to ensure that the designated lead person for looked after children in further education institutions provides timely information about available courses and entry requirements to these prospective students in an appropriate environment which is non-stigmatising.
Action 28: to formalise service levels agreements and protocols between schools and post-16 institutions, to facilitate the smooth transition from school to post-16 education for children who are looked after.
Action 29: to develop mentoring schemes for children who are looked after and care leavers, to support stability in their lives and ensure they complete their studies.

5.4 Action plan: Actions 30 – 32: Making better use of data

Action 30: to review how the range of data on children who are looked after data is collected and analysed. to consolidate numerous datasets and reduce complexity. This will also include considering the availability of benchmarks
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and comparison across local authorities and regional education consortia.

Action 31: to identify and capture statistical information on the educational attainment of former children who were looked after and have been adopted.

Action 32: to collate accurate information on the outcomes for children who are looked after once they leave the school system and move into other educational settings. The Welsh Government will commission an initial analysis which uses matched data to identify post-16 outcomes for children who are looked after, including retention, attainment and progression rates. This will help to identify the baseline provision which can then be used to carry out annual analysis, and to identify any crucial gaps in the available data.

5.5 Action plan: Actions 33 – 35: Strengthening funding arrangements

Action 33: to reinforce the regional education consortia accountability for delivering results, a new reporting process will be introduced to better track and monitor expenditure. A rapid review process will be introduced to evaluate the effectiveness of the first year of a new approach to PDG funding for children who are looked after.

Action 34: to capture information on effective interventions which are proven to have the greatest impact on the educational outcomes of children who are looked after and adopted children. The Welsh Government and Adoption UK (Wales) will develop guidance to help schools support adopted children in education.

5.6 Action plan: Actions 35 – 37: Participation of children who are looked after and adopted to inform strategic approaches and operational decision making

Action 35: to review the progress made against the action plan, seek the views of children who are looked after, to measure the impact the strategy is having on their experience in education.

Action 36: to support the charter for children who are looked after and care leavers, which has been developed by the Care Forum Wales Looked After Children Network in conjunction with partners and continue to push all agencies involved with these children, to adopt a greater use of person centred thinking in delivering their services.

Action 36: to ensure the views of these children are considered when planning and delivering targeted support.

