



Department  
for Education

# **Improving the educational outcomes of Children in Need of help and protection**

**Interim findings**

**December 2018**

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## Foreword by the Secretary of State for Education

All children and young people deserve the opportunity to reach their full potential and achieve the best educational outcomes possible. Yet for some, the reality of adversity or trauma in childhood diminishes that chance, putting at a disadvantage those who lack the safety, stability, and opportunity that most children take for granted.

We, the State, have parental responsibility for children who are looked-after, yet we also have a responsibility to all those who need statutory support from children's social care. For these 'Children in Need' who have a social worker, we have a duty to provide necessary help and protection – but more than that, we must ensure that every child's education makes a positive difference to their life chances.

The injustice of poorer educational outcomes for Children in Need must change. New data shows that this afflicts more children than previously known: at least 1 in 10 pupils has been in need over the last 6 years. These children are more likely to struggle with social, emotional and mental health difficulties, more likely to attend a school that is inadequate or requires improvement, and more likely to be excluded from school. The costs of this are high, not only in terms of educational outcomes but also in the increased risk of future unemployment, poor health, exploitation, and social exclusion.

We know that the barriers preventing Children in Need from achieving are complex and often deeply entrenched. The Government is addressing some of the underlying challenges in schools through the independent review of exclusions and reforms to alternative provision and children and young people's mental health support, having already transformed support for those with special educational needs. Promoting safety and stability through children's social care, we are improving social work practice nationally to strengthen families and protect children from harm. Across Government, we have invested significantly in tackling the causes of why children are in need – be it domestic abuse, drug and alcohol misuse, mental health, serious crime or homelessness.

We must raise our ambition for change in improving educational outcomes too: ensuring that Children in Need have access to the very best education that our schools offer; that schools are incentivised and supported to be inclusive of these children, having high aspirations for their achievement; and that teachers, social workers and their multi-agency partners are equipped with the time, training and support to ensure that they are able to make a lasting difference for those who need it most.

Poor outcomes are not inevitable and we all need to work together – as a priority – to ensure Children in Need achieve their full potential. To that end, this interim report sets out both what professionals across education and children's social care have highlighted as best practice, and where the bar must be raised. Having identified what is needed, the purpose of the Children in Need review from now until its conclusion, is to determine how we make that change happen.

## Introduction

“I had different social workers coming and going [...] there was no stability in my home life and that affected my education. Finding a school that would take me on [...] was a good thing. Once I settled, things started to get better and this was really important, because you can't concentrate when you have other things going on. Not every child has the same support I did.” (Care Leaver)

The ambition of the Children in Need review is that every child should have the opportunity to realise their potential, recognising that where children have faced adversity, trauma, or are disabled, achieving high educational standards often requires high support. This publication sets out our findings so far of what is needed, and a guide for action in how schools and social care can best support Children in Need now.

The data which launched the review gave us a stark starting point from which to examine this challenge. At every stage of education, the gap between Children in Need and their peers widens. Yet variation in the data demonstrated potential for closing the difference in outcomes between some Children in Need and others, and between all Children in Need and their peers.

We have sought to understand what makes a difference to educational outcomes. Our findings explain the complex circumstances which lead children to be in need and, as a result of trauma or adversity, the long-term damage that this does to educational outcomes. Beyond immediate help and protection, we must address the barriers to children's attendance, learning, behaviour, and wellbeing. All and any of these are too important to be compromised.

Our assessment of what is needed to identify and overcome the barriers faced by Children in Need spans leadership and multi-agency working; practitioners' skills and training in assessing needs, planning support, and building relationships with children and families; and effective educational support itself – ranging from inclusive whole school approaches, to day-to-day adjustments, and targeted specialist interventions. Throughout, we have seen the importance of high aspiration and advocacy for Children in Need.

The work of bridging the gap between what is needed, and the current reality for Children in Need, is what comes next in the review. Based on these findings, we will identify where there are gaps in policy and practice, and what more Government can do to support the change that is needed. Critical to this is continuing to build the evidence: we will continue our partnership with three What Works Centres, including a new analysis of the impact for Children in Need of interventions already evaluated by the Educational Endowment Foundation. Children deserve, and need, support that works. Nothing is beyond consideration. We are prepared to change policy where the evidence shows that is what is needed, and to go further in changing practice on the frontline.

## What we've done

Since our initial publication, we have continued to develop our quantitative data and analysis, looking at children's experiences of social care over time, and how this influences their outcomes. We have conducted a broad programme of qualitative evidence gathering, to understand what lies behind the data including:

- a Call for Evidence which gathered over 600 responses from school and children's social care practitioners across England
- a Literature Review conducted by the Early Intervention Foundation
- deep dive visits and structured conversations with local authority senior managers and social workers across children's social care and health; teachers, headteachers and school designated safeguarding leads; virtual school heads; voluntary and charity sector organisations; academics; and children and young people themselves

We have involved three 'what works' centres in our assessment of the evidence – the Education Endowment Foundation, the Early Intervention Foundation and the What Works Centre for Children's Social Care. We have also worked with the Council for Disabled Children in developing our evidence on disability.

We recognise that what happens in the early years and post-16 has a significant impact on the outcomes of Children in Need. Our findings in this publication stress the importance of smooth and effective transitions between phases and long-term planning. However, so far, the review is predominantly focused on the experiences of children in primary and secondary schools. This is not to diminish the importance of early years and later interventions to children's educational and lifetime outcomes.

The balance of this publication also reflects that less focus has previously been given to Children in Need in schools and education policy than in social care. Our findings support this change, while also reinforcing the basis for the existing reform programme underway in children's social care.

## Who are Children in Need?

For the purposes of the review, we have used the broadest statutory definition of Children in Need under the Children Act 1989, encompassing all those children receiving statutory support from social workers including those on a Children in Need Plan (CINP), on a Child Protection Plan (CPP) and Looked After Children (LAC)<sup>1</sup>. Many children move

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<sup>1</sup> A child is defined as 'in need' under the Children Act 1989, where a) they are unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for them of services by a local authority; b) their health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision for them of such services; or c) they are disabled.

between these classifications, and to focus on one part of the system would not adequately reflect their experiences. We recognise that children will experience different challenges within their families or receive different levels of support from practitioners. Looked After Children, for example, are eligible for priority school admissions, support from Designated Teachers and Virtual School Heads, and the pupil premium plus. Beyond this framework of support, many of the findings identified for all Children in Need will still apply to Looked After Children.

Equally, whilst children who leave care through an adoption, special guardianship or child arrangements order are no longer classed as Looked After, or Children in Need, many of the findings of the review will be relevant to these children and professionals working with them.

Under the Children Act 1989, all disabled children are Children in Need. The areas we have identified in this paper as essential for improving the educational outcomes of Children in Need all apply to disabled children. Disabled children are often involved with children's social care for different reasons to other Children in Need, primarily for the provision of support services such as short breaks, or the allocation of a personal budget. However, disabled children remain vulnerable to safeguarding risks and there can be additional barriers in accurately identifying these. Properly understanding the distinction between support and safeguarding is important in order to identify and address disabled children's needs. Throughout, we have looked to consider this, reflecting the importance of good practice for disabled children in our assessment of the evidence.

## **Who is this publication for?**

This paper is for:

- school leaders, school staff and governing bodies in all maintained schools, academies, free schools, special schools, and alternative provision
- local authority social care and special educational needs and disability senior leaders and social work practitioners
- multi-agency practitioners working with children and young people, including early help, youth, police and health services

## **Key points for action**

Children in Need experience trauma or adversity, the lasting impact of which creates barriers to education across attendance, learning, behaviour and wellbeing.

Our findings provide an assessment of what is needed to identify and overcome these barriers. Without delay, the leaders and practitioners who work with Children in Need – in

schools, social care, early help, health, police, and beyond – can start to put into practice what is needed:

- strong leadership and shared goals that establish high aspirations for the educational outcomes of Children in Need
- skills and training to recognise the impact of trauma or adversity and to understand children's behaviour – enabling effective assessments of children's needs and long-term planning, particularly around transitions
- inclusive whole school approaches that support Children in Need, making in-school adjustments that promote educational outcomes, alongside targeted multi-agency interventions to meet children's needs – particularly health and social care
- good relationships with children and families, through clear communication, empathy and advocacy, underpinned by stability and consistency of support
- effective multi-agency working and information sharing both between agencies and in schools, with confident judgements to share information that respect the agency of children and families

The next steps for the Children in Need review are set out in full in the conclusion of this publication. Through these steps, we will determine what more Government can do to incentivise, equip and support practitioners in order to realise the change we want to see:

- we will work to bridge the gap between what is needed to improve outcomes for Children in Need and the current reality, including policy change where the evidence shows this is what is needed
- we will build more robust evidence of what interventions work to improve the educational outcomes of Children in Need, and continue to develop our data and analysis of what influences the educational outcomes of Children in Need
- we will build on existing work to improve outcomes for vulnerable children more widely, particularly to tackle domestic abuse, to address exclusions from school, and to support children and young people's mental health

## Key points from new analysis<sup>2</sup>

- we already knew that there are around 400,000 Children in Need at any given time, and 700,000 Children in Need over a year. Now we know that over three years, from 2014-15 to 2016-17, there were 1.1 million Children in Need and at least 1 in 10 pupils in state schools in 2016-17 had been in need at some point in the previous six years
- one year on after becoming in need, 48% of those on a Child in Need Plan or Child Protection Plan de-escalated to a lower level or no social care support; 43% remained at the same level of support. In contrast, 73% of Looked After Children remained in care
- from 2014-15 to 2016-17 200,000 children were in need for at least one day in all three years
- pupils who were in need for at least one day in every year from 2014-15 to 2016-17 had worse educational outcomes than pupils in contact with social care services less frequently
- pupils who were in need at any point from 2011-12 to 2016-17 had worse educational outcomes than pupils who were not, with lasting negative impact beyond the point of being in need

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<sup>2</sup> Children in Need of help and protection: preliminary longitudinal analysis 2018

# 1. Why do Children in Need fall behind?

There is no single cause of poor educational outcomes for Children in Need and some children are already able to make good progress. This publication sets out some of the barriers to education that practitioners have told us are specific to the experiences of Children in Need. Whilst these may hold true for many Children in Need, it remains an important principle that the individual needs of each child are recognised, and that social workers, teachers, early help and health practitioners offer support without making assumptions about a child's circumstances, or capacity to achieve.

## Complex family circumstances

Children who need help and protection from children's social care are likely to have, or have had, complex family circumstances that will result in them experiencing trauma or adversity, contributing to why they struggle to achieve good educational outcomes.

The majority of Children in Need experience or are at risk of emotional, physical or sexual abuse or neglect in their home environment. For many Children in Need, challenging circumstances within their families are likely to mean that their parent's capacity to meet their needs has been reduced: domestic abuse is a factor in half of cases; parental and/or child mental health in more than one in three; and drug or alcohol misuse in every one in five. Being in need can equally result from parents and carers' health conditions or disabilities, and the caring responsibilities this places on children. For others, particularly adolescents, the threats that they face may be external, such as child sexual and criminal exploitation.

Episodes of need may be characterised by chaotic home environments, instability in a child's day-to-day life, and uncertainty, inevitably influencing children's physical, mental, emotional, and social wellbeing. Whilst children are affected by such episodes in different ways, often depending on the strengths and protective factors within their families or wider support networks, research indicates that experiences of trauma or adversity in childhood are associated with atypical development and can have a profound impact on a child's ability to "think, interact with others, and learn"<sup>3</sup>.

## Long-term impact

For children who have experienced trauma or adversity, it is essential that practitioners recognise that how they engage with their peers, family and education is shaped by their experiences. Whilst there may be significant progress in addressing the issues that have caused trauma or adversity, this does not mean that the difficulties have been resolved. Equally for children who become Looked After, and those who leave care through

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<sup>3</sup> Early Intervention Foundation (EIF): A literature review on what works to improve the educational outcomes of Children in Need of help and protection

adoption, special guardianship or otherwise, this does not mean previous experiences cease to have an impact.

For example, a child who has experienced domestic abuse in the early years may struggle to understand and regulate their emotions as they get older, which may lead to outbursts, challenging behaviour, or longer-term mental health difficulties. A Joint Targeted Area Investigation into the multi-agency response to domestic abuse emphasised that experiencing abuse can have a lifetime impact, but found that agencies focussed on the short-term risk of harm needed to do more to adequately recognise and respond to it long-term<sup>4</sup>.

Immediate safety of children is paramount. However, this will not be enough to address the impact of these experiences on a child's educational outcomes.

## Transitions

The impact of trauma or adversity is compounded by the frequency of transitions that Children in Need experience. Children in Need are more likely than other pupils to move schools and to join schools at unusual points in the school year<sup>5</sup>. Other significant transitions affecting Children in Need include:

- moving between schools and/or phases in education
- moving between different stages of statutory social care support, such as a Child in Need Plan, Child Protection Plan or being Looked After
- moves to new placements, or moving out of care, including returning home, or through a permanence order
- moving home, or adults moving in and out of the home
- a change in the practitioners working to support them
- moving between children's and adults' services

During these transitions, children are likely to be worried about what is happening and why, support can drop off or be delayed, and difficulties at home or school can escalate. For many Children in Need, the stability of existing coping mechanisms or support systems is at particular risk during transitions, where parents experiencing difficulties themselves can struggle to support their children through change.

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<sup>4</sup> [The multi-agency response to children living with domestic abuse: prevent, protect and repair \(2017\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Children in Need of help and protection: Data and analysis 2018](#)

My head of year 11 actually said this to me – “we’re not gonna give you as much support this year as you need to learn what to do yourself”. It’s a very scary thought going back to school after the summer to have that all on the first day (Young Person)<sup>6</sup>.

Children’s vulnerabilities often extend into adulthood and ,if not well-planned, children can face an abrupt end to services at a time when they need support to reach their potential as young adults and beyond. For Looked After Children, local authority statutory responsibilities have already been extended from age 18 to 25, in order to reflect this. For disabled children, some local authorities are working to deliver improved transition services through their 0-25 team structures, particularly given the 0-25 focus of the Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) system introduced through the Children and Families Act 2014.

## Barriers

Children in Need want to do well, have a good education and be like their peers. However, many schools have told us that the cumulative impact of trauma or adversity, increased instability, and the frequency of transitions, results in barriers which reduce their ability to achieve. The most common reported barriers that Children in Need face are interlinked and present across four main areas of school life: attendance, learning, behaviour and wellbeing.

For most, the impact of being in need is compounded by other educational disadvantages. Approximately half of Children in Need also have identified special educational needs and/or disabilities; with social, emotional and mental health as the most common primary SEN. Around two thirds of Children in Need are also economically disadvantaged such that they are eligible for the pupil premium<sup>7</sup>. Children in Need also face a much higher rate of exclusions than other pupils and are over-represented in non-mainstream school settings such as alternative provision and special schools, where attainment is generally lower.

For Children in Need to have the opportunity to achieve good educational outcomes, they need practitioners from all agencies to understand their role, work together to identify the barriers faced, and provide support to overcome them. While aspiring to provide the best education for Children in Need, we recognise the challenge that schools face in meeting the needs of all pupils. School leaders should be encouraged by our findings, which suggest that the existing approaches taken for other disadvantaged pupils can be effective for Children in Need. Yet these can be more effective still, with an improved understanding of the impact of being in need. Where pupils are eligible for the pupil premium, or have an identified special educational need or disability, schools should continue to use existing processes to identify and support Children in Need.

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<sup>6</sup> All young people quotes are from direct engagement during the review process unless other wise stated

<sup>7</sup> [Children in Need of help and protection: Data and analysis](#)

## 2. Leadership and shared goals

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is a shared statutory responsibility between organisations and agencies in a local area<sup>8</sup>. Duties are already in place to promote the educational attainment of Looked After Children and, since 2018, those who leave care through a permanence order. Where children are receiving the most effective support, leaders recognise that safeguarding and education are inextricably linked and support practitioners to work effectively together to achieve better long-term outcomes for all Children in Need.

Senior leaders in children's social care recognise that education can be a source of stress or strength in a family, and so support social workers to understand how they can make the best use of education to drive change. Senior leaders in schools recognise that they cannot understand or overcome barriers to education for Children in Need without working closely with children's social care, health, police, and wider children's and adult's services. They recognise that emotional, social and pastoral support is key in enabling academic attainment. Crucially, senior leaders in all agencies create a culture of high aspiration for Children in Need, recognising that, with the right support, children can achieve their potential.

“We know that education is a powerful protective factor for vulnerable children and that building families' resilience can help children do well in school. This is why we have prioritised the education of Children in Need by making educational outcomes a goal for all services across the Local Authority, and created a shared model of assessment and common language used by schools, social workers, early help and beyond” (Leeds Council, Partner in Practice)<sup>9</sup>.

Too often, though, children can face delays in accessing support as agencies disagree about their responsibilities. We know that when senior leaders across agencies acknowledge their overlapping aims, they can make the best use of resources to keep children safe and improve outcomes. Practice flourishes when leaders give social workers and teachers the time and space to think about outcomes long-term, rather than responding to crises and short-term need. This creates the conditions for building effective relationships with children and families, accurate identification of need, and well-designed and targeted implementation of support.

Joint commissioning can support shared goals between agencies. Existing joint commissioning duties provide a framework to enable education, health and children's social care to work together to commission the right services for children with SEND<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018](#)

<sup>9</sup> Quotes from practitioners and professionals are from the review process unless otherwise stated

<sup>10</sup> [Children and Families Act 2014](#)

## **CASE STUDY – ISLINGTON LOCAL AUTHORITY**

Islington Children's Services have rolled out trauma-informed practice training to all social workers and teachers in many schools. This has helped agencies develop a common language and shared understanding, rather than just seeing children through their own professional lens.

An understanding of how early childhood trauma impacts on a child's cognitive process and self-regulation has facilitated a shift from a punitive to a supportive approach. Joint working between school staff and social workers has helped to identify children's needs, develop support plans, and build relationships which help children feel safe and secure in school. Teachers feel more supported by children's social care due to the collaborative approach, and other multi-agency partners have been very enthusiastic; Islington are now providing training for some police teams.

### 3. Recognising barriers

Children in Need require social workers and teachers to understand and identify how their experiences create barriers which make it difficult for them to achieve good educational outcomes, and can limit the support they receive elsewhere from parents, carers or wider support networks. Barriers will be specific to individual children, but those most commonly reported include:

- **attendance:** difficulties getting to school where parents are experiencing issues such as mental ill-health or substance misuse, or due to caring responsibilities; children having health complications; challenges in accessing school transport
- **learning:** difficulties concentrating due to worries about family circumstances; a difficult home learning environment and limited support with homework; special educational needs, including learning disabilities and developmental delays; arriving at school not ready to learn, for example due to a lack of breakfast
- **behaviour:** socially inappropriate or challenging behaviour linked to attachment issues; challenging behaviour triggered by stress or confrontation; communication difficulties; limited time spent in classroom due to behaviour
- **wellbeing:** concerns about bullying; worry and anxiety; mental health difficulties; low-confidence; fear of stigma

Any of these barriers is likely to mean that a child will struggle to access education and make progress, or may take longer to reach the same level of education as other pupils.

### Skills and training

For teachers, social workers, early help and multi-agency practitioners to be able to recognise barriers, they need the skills and training which equip them to adapt the way they communicate with children and families, and to identify where children could fall behind, and why.

The Call for Evidence found that, in supporting children who have experienced trauma or adversity, some schools are already making use of attachment theory, social learning theory, an understanding of child development, and trauma-informed approaches. In addition, children's social care responses referenced systemic interventions, and we heard from leaders that strengths-based or therapeutic practice models usefully inform their thinking about how to best identify support for children.

We found that many places share expertise across and within agencies to ensure that practitioners are confident in their role in safeguarding and supporting Children in Need. This might mean training social workers to understand education systems; training teachers in children's social care processes and thresholds; or training all agencies on

issues such as mental health or neglect. Practitioners believe that a strong training package increases their capacity to understand how a child's history may present within the classroom, and empowers them to identify barriers and engage in a process of assessment and planning for the short and long term. As well as schools, the three statutory safeguarding partners (local authorities, health and police) should take this into account within their existing responsibility to consider what inter-agency training is needed locally and ensure this is commissioned, delivered and monitored.

Where children are disabled, the Call for Evidence highlighted key specialist training around communication, sensory awareness, and behaviour support, ensuring that practitioners have, what a children's voluntary sector organisation described as:

“the skills, expertise and time to consider the multifaceted needs of disabled children and identify signs that their family may need additional support”.

We saw local authorities offering training between specialist and non-specialist disabled children's teams to improve assessment and, where appropriate, to provide high quality input into education, health and care plans.

### **CASE STUDY – THE MULBERRY BUSH SCHOOL AND WYKHAM PARK ACADEMY**

Secondary school, Wykham Park Academy works with specialist education provider, The Mulberry Bush, to support children at risk of exclusion. All staff are trained in understanding behaviour as communication, and the barriers faced by traumatised children to engaging in learning and building healthy relationships. Training focusses on reflective practice and collaborative working.

The school identifies in-need pupils and a team is built, consisting of everyone who works with them. Team meetings provide a safe space to reflect on a child's barriers. Developing a multi-disciplinary comprehensive profile for each child leads to a shared understanding of their needs, so staff can agree on specific solutions and support, and communicate regularly to assess and evaluate what is working. This has led to children feeling heard and understood, and a consequent reduction in challenging behaviours and increased engagement with learning and school life.

## **Assessment and planning**

Continuous and dynamic assessment is already a key principle in how social workers support children and families<sup>11</sup>. It underpins whole family assessments and whole family working which aims to identify the root causes behind presenting needs. We heard that

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<sup>11</sup> [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018](#)

information about children's attendance, learning, behaviour and wellbeing is being used by some social workers, as well as teachers, to inform plans for Children in Need's safety and welfare.

There is a significant opportunity to share and consult on this information to understand and address the impact on children's educational outcomes, informing school assessments and decision-making, including importantly around exclusions. The Call for Evidence stressed the importance of continuous assessment equally for schools:

"Each morning senior staff make moment by moment assessment of how pupils and families are presenting emotionally and physically on arrival at school. Classrooms have listening stations which enable teachers and children to identify emotional issues" (Primary School Headteacher <sup>12</sup>).

We found that some schools do already have established procedures for assessing barriers for Children in Need. Alongside listening to children, actions include reviewing pupil data, observations, and assessment tools which support an understanding of social, emotional and language development, for example the strengths and difficulties questionnaire. Often, this is done in parallel, or incorporated into, existing assessment and planning mechanisms such as for children with SEN as outlined in the SEND Code of Practice.

"I ensure [... regular review[s] in pupil progress meetings with the teacher and assessment leader and termly data analysis. If they are not making expected progress or have identified Special Needs, a targeted intervention is planned" (Primary School Special Education Needs Co-ordinator and Pupil Premium lead).

Practitioners should consider the long-term impact of adverse experiences as part of their assessment; this can help schools plan long-term support they can offer. They should also pay attention to the cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds of children and families and how these may impact their needs and the kind of support they require.

Education is an integral part of considering children's developmental needs. All Looked After Children must have a care plan, of which a Personal Education Plan is an integral part: a 'living', evolving, comprehensive and enduring record of the child's educational needs, experience, progress and attainment<sup>13</sup>. Education would equally be covered in a good Child in Need or Child Protection plan, where some local authorities already promote the inclusion of educational outcomes beyond attendance as a measure of safety. However this practice is not universally adopted.

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<sup>12</sup> The Children in Need of help and protection Review Call for Evidence: Analysis of responses 2018

<sup>13</sup> Statutory guidance '[Promoting the educational outcomes of Looked After Children](#)' (2018)

## Understanding behaviour

For children who have experienced trauma or adversity expressing their emotions or needs through actions might be the only way they know how to communicate. This might be through learned behaviour and/or speech and language difficulties. Understanding behaviour as a means of communication is crucial in recognising barriers to education for Children in Need.

“I feel like the focus was on the fact that I was naughty, or I had issues rather than the bigger problem at home... you are not taught how to communicate effectively because you live in a household where all they do is scream and shout.” (Care Leaver).

Challenging behaviour is immediately visible but it is important to recognise that a child acting in a withdrawn manner also communicates need. A Joint Targeted Area Inspection into the multi-agency response to neglect in older children found that too often practitioners focus on adolescents presenting ‘risky behaviour’ rather than the underlying reasons. It can also be harder for younger children to communicate concerns and identify where their situation is different to other children’s.

Effective behaviour support approaches often see behaviour as an expression of an unmet need and teachers and social workers should remain curious about the underlying causes behind a particular behaviour. This type of support can prevent unnecessary escalation in challenging behaviour, allowing children to re-engage with their education.

“Having emotional intelligence and appreciating the lived experience of the child is vital to understanding the behaviours that they are using to communicate.” (Primary School Headteacher <sup>14</sup>).

This can be exacerbated for disabled children with communication difficulties, sensory impairments, or challenging behaviour stemming from their disability, recognising a high prevalence of challenging behaviour among children with learning disabilities<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> The Children in Need of help and review Review Call for Evidence: Analysis of responses 2018

<sup>15</sup> Challenging behaviour Foundation, [Estimating the number of children in England with learning disabilities and whose behaviours challenge, 2014](#)

## **CASE STUDY – CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR FOUNDATION**

Child S is a 9 year-old boy with a diagnosis of an Autistic Spectrum Condition and a severe learning disability. His communication was delayed and in school, he frequently became physically aggressive. Through a functional behavioural assessment, school staff were able to identify that child S's aggressive behaviour often occurred when demands were placed on him, as a means of communicating "I don't like this and want it to stop".

A positive behaviour support programme was implemented that, over a month, taught child S to sign 'finish' in response to unwanted demands. Teachers had been worried that this would lead him to refuse to do anything, but the result was a drop in aggression levels that improved the atmosphere and quality of relationships in the classroom. Child S was cooperating and engaging more with his education, and no longer needed to use aggression to communicate when presented with unwanted demands.

## 4. Overcoming barriers

Well-designed support, based on an assessment of children's needs, can help overcome significant barriers to education. Children will require individualised support based on their exact needs and barriers, and social workers and teachers are best placed to identify the right approach and intervention for the children they work with. However through our evidence gathering we have identified some key elements which school staff, social workers and other multi-agency professionals feel facilitate effective support.

### Inclusive whole school approaches

In both primary and secondary, all Children in Need are less likely than other pupils to attend outstanding schools and more likely to attend schools that require improvement or are inadequate. This holds less strongly for those who are Looked After Children, who have priority in admissions<sup>16</sup>.

Like all pupils, Children in Need benefit from high-quality school performance and school improvement; schools must ensure the fundamentals of good teaching are in place in order to raise their outcomes. We have heard that schools effective in supporting Children in Need are ones which promote learning and high aspiration across the whole school.

Senior leaders in these schools recognise the complexity of the barriers faced by disadvantaged pupils more widely and drive a holistic support strategy, embedding an ethos which motivates all school staff to think about children's needs. They ensure that Children in Need benefit effectively from the existing support to which the majority are already entitled, particularly SEND provision or pupil premium funding. Whilst creating a culture in which all children feel like a valued member of the school community, school leaders fully explore the causes of a child's behaviour or lack of attendance and exhaust all efforts to address underlying issues before considering the exclusions process.

“My school made the biggest impact on me. They could have kicked me out at any time, [they] probably had a right too, but they gave me more chances than what a normal student might have had. This changed my whole life.” (Care Leaver).

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<sup>16</sup> [Children in need of help and protection: data and analysis 2018](#)

## CASE STUDY – CARR MANOR SCHOOL

Carr Manor Community School is an all-through school, with a high proportion of disadvantaged pupils. Across the whole school, restorative leadership and practices help all pupils to be successful in their academic achievement, whilst learning about equity, respect, tolerance, self-regulation and community. Every child is part of a mixed-age coaching group, which builds trust and strong relationships between all pupils and staff. Working together to build, maintain and restore these relationships gives the school the capacity to include all pupils, regardless of need or background, and the ambition to secure positive outcomes and destinations for all.

## Having high aspiration

Practitioners supporting Children in Need must believe in their potential; too often low expectations act as a barrier and hinder Children in Need's achievement. As a care leaver said:

“if a child is doing well, they still need to push them - I feel like if they see [you have] done alright, they just leave it at that...there is always room for improvement” (Care Leaver).

Having high aspirations should be balanced with understanding the stress and anxiety felt by young people who have fallen behind, especially when they face examination pressure. Beyond immediate attainment, high aspirations will involve teachers and social workers promoting long-term education, employment outcomes, and preparation for adulthood. In creating an environment where vulnerable children believe they can achieve, schools must strike the delicate balance between maintaining high expectations and an individualised supportive approach.

## Adjustments to promote educational outcomes

Educational providers have a duty to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ to make sure all disabled students, including those who are Children in Need, are not discriminated against<sup>17</sup>. We have heard that schools who provide effective support for all Children in Need have expanded the concept of reasonable adjustments – using their assessment of the barriers faced by children to adapt their policies and teaching towards achieving better outcomes. With the right information and senior-led ethos, this does not necessarily require significant additional spend; small changes can make a big difference in helping children cope with trauma or adversity, supporting learning as a result.

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<sup>17</sup> [Equality Act 2010](#)

We know that it is difficult to balance making adjustments for an individual child, whilst ensuring consistent standards for all. This was well described by one care leaver:

“I think that [the school’s] mind-set is that if we let one child do it, then the rest of them want to do it”(Care Leaver).

However, making proportionate adjustments for Children in Need can enable them to engage in education and prevent behaviour from escalating, to the benefit of all pupils. For example, a teacher who knows that a child has witnessed domestic abuse and is particularly sensitive to shouting, could adjust how they use a raised voice and be alert to their emotional needs. Teachers who are aware of a child’s situation can use this to adjust their approach when covering difficult topics. Knowing that a child is suffering neglect, a school can speak to the family and social worker about arriving at school in the correct uniform, instead of sanctioning the child. A Call for Evidence response in relation to children who have complex special educational needs and disabilities told us that:

“where such adjustments are put in place (e.g. allowing a child to move between classrooms a little earlier when corridors are not crowded) it can markedly improve the experience of school for a child and their teaching staff<sup>18</sup>”.

Social workers can also adapt their practice to help promote educational outcomes: for example by visiting a child in school outside of the time they are in lessons; or by holding Child in Need or Child Protection meetings in the venue best suited to a child and family’s needs.

Throughout, it was stressed to us that adjustments must be tailored to individual needs. Children and young people have talked consistently about the fine line between making adjustments that do not make them feel different from their peers, but that give them the time, space and direction needed to do well at school.

“Teachers should check your background to see what you’re like and I think there are different ways of approaching different people.” (Young Person).

## Targeted intervention

For many Children in Need, taking a holistic whole school approach and making adjustments will need to be accompanied by specific support. Some schools are already implementing targeted academic, social and emotional interventions to support Children in Need. In doing so, school staff work with multi-agency teams and use research on Looked After Children, and broad evidence including the Education Endowment Foundation toolkit. Call for Evidence responses highlighted that theory around

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<sup>18</sup> The Children in Need of help and protection Call for Evidence: Analysis of responses 2018

attachment and trauma-informed practice can be effective in supporting Children in Need. However, it remains that our Literature Review found a significant lack of robust evidence for targeted interventions that have been robustly evaluated; practitioners are largely relying on their own knowledge and experience in deciding what interventions to put in place.

Where schools are receiving the pupil premium for economically disadvantaged pupils who are also Children in Need, they should consider how to make the best use of the grant. Research shows that using the grant to meet individual learning needs and to provide social and emotional interventions are important elements of effective pupil premium use<sup>19</sup>. For Looked After and previously Looked After Children, designated teachers should work with their Virtual School Head to effectively maximise use of the pupil premium plus.

Our Call for Evidence found that school staff felt effective approaches involve “tailored support taking into account both academic matters and emotional ones”<sup>20</sup>. Helping children attend school, be ready to learn and supporting their emotional and social needs can be crucial to raising educational outcomes and schools should continue to provide such support. At the same time, school staff should be aware that the barriers faced by Children in Need and their families are often long-term, and should not wait for risk to be reduced before implementing support. They should further avoid assuming that it is always necessary to address solely pastoral needs first. An effective approach can be to deliver pastoral and academic support side-by-side.

Schools cannot address the barriers faced by Children in Need in isolation and those effective at doing so make full use of the local multi-agency support offer. This requires local areas to have services in place across a spectrum of needs, with the capability and capacity to meet those needs, particularly including mental health services. The efforts of schools can be hampered if they are unable to signpost or refer to specialist support, or work effectively with social care in doing so.

Social workers have a key role to play in providing targeted interventions to support the long-term educational outcomes of Children in Need. Supporting families to function better, for example through interventions which aim to improve parents’ and carers’ abilities to set appropriate boundaries and use positive reinforcement behaviour techniques, can have a significant impact on a family’s ability to support a child’s education. In achieving this, social workers require an evidence base of interventions that work, and the knowledge and skills to use evidence effectively.

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<sup>19</sup> [Supporting the attainment of disadvantaged pupils 2015](#)

<sup>20</sup> The Children in Need of help and protection Call for Evidence: Analysis of responses 2018

## **CASE STUDY – THE GREENWICH VIRTUAL SCHOOL**

The Greenwich Virtual School Head helps local agencies to have a joined-up approach to supporting children who are looked-after. Live data on progress, attendance and exclusions is used to identify potential problems as soon as they arise, working with schools, carers and social care to resolve them.

The Virtual School Head has helped Designated Teachers to evaluate their schools' support. A Child and Adolescent Mental Health 'in-reach' service is accessible in schools and the Virtual School also has two dedicated Educational Psychologists who can offer additional specialist support. Social workers and foster carers have been trained on what good school support looks like and how to help children at home. Over time, Greenwich has seen attendance for Looked After Children increase and days of fixed-term exclusions decrease.

## 5. Building relationships with children and families

Effective support to improve the educational outcomes of Children in Need cannot be accomplished without developing stable, trusting relationships with children and families. Children and families need to be heard, to have their voice shape decisions about their care and support, and to be confident that any concerns are taken seriously. This communication builds trust, enabling children and families to better engage with support.

### Communication and advocacy

Our Call for Evidence highlighted that school staff and social workers recognise the importance of empathy, and giving children the space and time to talk. Children highlighted, however, that this doesn't always happen:

“I feel like there is no communication, they just have meetings and then you just have your say for about two minutes, they have made a decision for you” (Care Leaver).

Listening to children and understanding their wishes and feelings requires teachers and social workers to adapt their communication to a child's age, ability and circumstances, along with having the confidence and time to do so. In some cases, it will be necessary to use alternative communication techniques, for example those established for disabled children with communication difficulties such as through facial expressions, objects, signing, pictures and symbols, or technology.

Children and families are not always clear about the roles and responsibilities of the practitioners working with them. When social workers enter the lives of families, it is often during a time of crisis and the involvement from various agencies can feel overwhelming. Where children's social care, schools and other agencies clearly communicate what their role is, when, why, and who else is available to support the family, it provides the foundation for a relationship based on trust and respect, where children and families have agency in what is happening to them.

In navigating social care and school procedures, the families of disabled children have extensive knowledge of how their child's disability creates additional educational barriers and parents may be able to act as strong advocates for the support needed. For Looked After Children, this is often provided by carers, who are able to advocate for a child alongside the Virtual School Head and designated teacher. For others, who are in need precisely because of reduced parental capacity, children may lack anyone to help have their voice heard. Social workers and teachers should make the most of the expertise of parents and carers where appropriate and be sensitive to the voices of children whose parents are less able to articulate their needs.

## CASE STUDY – JUST FOR KIDS LAW

In the advocacy services provided by Just for Kids Law, what makes a real difference is when positive relationships are built effectively. In school, it is vital that children have a trusted member of staff who knows them well and can attend meetings with them; in some cases, schools employ staff mentors in this way. Equally, children value social workers who make themselves available and answer them when they get in touch.

In the absence of this, children consistently feel that social workers do not talk to them frequently enough, speak about them as though they are not present in meetings and don't really know them, meaning their relationship can be strained. This can be when advocacy is needed – supporting a young person to make sure their views, wishes and voice are heard, and so that they know what is happening around them and are better equipped to engage in the process of addressing the concerns raised by agencies.

Call for Evidence responses showed that practitioners tended to associate work with parents and carers with formal processes like meetings. Unlike when asked about their work with children, most responses did not unpack the significance of empathy and emotional sensitivity in interacting with parents and carers.

We know that building relationships and encouraging change in families requires a delicate balancing of empathy and boundary setting. Families' engagement can be limited due to practical barriers, such as when the use of school transport reduces the pick-up and drop-off opportunities for parents to meet school staff, or when a parent's health or disability limits their ability to attend meetings. Barriers may also be emotional, where parents or carers have had their own difficult experiences of education. Parents and carers who are experiencing domestic abuse may face barriers to engaging with school staff due to the risk to their safety and the psychological impact of abuse. Practitioners should communicate empathically so victims feel supported and are not blamed for the abuse, while working safely with perpetrators to take responsibility for change. Some schools have designated key workers for families, and are happy to meet away from school, which allows adults a safe space to discuss their own anxieties and difficulties. Teachers and social workers should consider the needs of parents and carers in order to build effective relationships with families.

## Stability

Within the course of a year, most Looked After Children experience a placement move or school move, which are risk factors for their educational outcomes<sup>21</sup>. Our Call for Evidence further highlighted examples of children and their families being supported by multiple social workers within an episode of need, associating instability with a detrimental impact on trust and engagement with support.

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<sup>21</sup> [Children's Commissioner Stability Index 2018](#)

Practitioners and children alike stressed the importance of Children in Need having a consistent adult who they can talk to about their situation; this was reinforced by our literature review which found that the presence of an unconditionally supportive, consistent adult can help promote the resilience of Looked After Children. Children themselves told us that, as well as the support of peers, they feel more able to talk about what is worrying them when they can trust and rely on a key adult or mentor. For example, a child may feel more confident about disclosing their caring responsibilities, and be assessed as a young carer as a result, if they have access to a consistent trusted adult in school. Our literature review further supported this.

“Consistency is absolutely essential for the child. They need to build up a relationship of trust with the person and not have to repeat everything again and again.”  
(Secondary School Headteacher).

Given how vital stability is to Children in Need and their families, senior leaders in children’s social care should look to avoid unnecessary changes in support – even if the involvement of a social worker in a child’s life can be short term. Social workers have a responsibility to ensure that their involvement with a family is proportionate and does not continue for longer than is necessary<sup>22</sup>. It is inevitable that all practitioners will enter and leave children’s lives – and therefore important that they recognise and mitigate the impact this has on children.

Our Call for Evidence responses bore out that school staff are likely to have longer term involvement in a child’s life. School staff will also often have far more frequent contact with a child than a social worker, and are more likely to be immediately available when a child needs someone to confide in. In schools effective in supporting Children in Need, senior leaders create the conditions that facilitate workforce stability and recognise the important role that school staff can have as stable, trusted adults for Children in Need.

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<sup>22</sup> [Article 8, Human Rights Act 1998](#)

## 6. Multi-agency working and information sharing

No one agency can identify or address the complex needs of Children in Need in isolation and it is crucial that children and families receive support in a co-ordinated way. Effective multi-agency working sees all services contributing to the processes of assessing, planning, and delivering support to improve outcomes – with the right information shared to achieve this. Recent reforms to safeguarding arrangements<sup>23</sup> strengthen partnership working, with local authorities, police, and health needing to set out how they will work together and partner with other relevant agencies such as schools, to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. A joined up approach can sometimes be achieved within agencies and we have seen promising results in local authorities which have co-located practitioners with differing expertise in multi-disciplinary teams<sup>24</sup>.

### Sharing information within and between agencies

Effective information sharing is central to multi-agency working and facilitates best practice in all the areas we have identified. Serious case reviews have long proven that information sharing is vital in keeping children safe; evidence from the Children in Need review now shows that it is equally vital to educational outcomes. Clear strategies and processes should be in place both within and between agencies to monitor and share information, particularly a two-way exchange between schools and social care.

Schools' frequency of contact with a child means that they can offer vital information around both safeguarding and educational needs to other agencies.

“If we have a good relationship with the family, we end up being the conduit through which a lot of information is shared with other professionals.” (Primary School Headteacher<sup>25</sup>).

However, without the right information from children's social care, police and health, school staff are less able to identify the impact of the barriers facing children, and may mistake them for a lack of motivation to learn.

The Call for Evidence showed regular communication and meetings remain the most common format for schools working with other professionals, most often attended by social workers, educational psychologists, school nurses and virtual school heads for looked-after children. Personal Education Plans for Looked After Children, and Education, Health and Care plans for Children in Need with special educational needs and disabilities can facilitate strong multi-agency support. For all other Children in Need, social workers, teachers, police and health practitioners should use the assessment process and Child in Need and Child Protection Plans and meetings to build strong

<sup>23</sup> [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#)

<sup>24</sup> [Children's Social Care Innovation Programme: final evaluation report 2017](#)

<sup>25</sup> The Children in Need Review Call for Evidence: Analysis of responses 2018

working relationships across agencies, and adopt a consistent and complementary approach to supporting families and children.

We have also come across innovative methods of different agencies sharing up-to-date information with schools, to help them provide support beyond that necessary for immediate safety.

### **CASE STUDY – OPERATION ENCOMPASS**

Operation Encompass promotes appropriate, timely information sharing between police and schools when a pupil has been exposed to domestic abuse. After an incident of domestic abuse, police will contact a lead safeguarding professional in the school by the next morning.

This gives the school the opportunity to consider the impact on the child and to offer support in response, including through adjustments to help support the child's education. This can mean giving the child space to calm down, not reprimanding them for lateness, or if the child has exams, the option to sit the exam in a quiet space or deciding to apply to the exam board for special consideration. Some schools offer pastoral support for pupils, and make plans for them to complete homework before or after school, rather than at home.

Once information is provided to a school, some are implementing simple but effective internal information sharing mechanisms in line with the safeguarding provisions outlined in General Data Protection Regulations<sup>26</sup>, for example through email updates or morning meetings. Some schools have utilised software to help streamline information sharing, reduce the burden on staff and to identify common problems.

### **CASE STUDY – SCHOOL DATABASES**

John Taylor Free School is a secondary school in Staffordshire that uses an IT system to capture information about children's safety and wellbeing. Instead of using paper forms to share safeguarding information which is often time-consuming and ineffective, the IT system allows staff to share safeguarding information in a timely manner across the whole school. Staff can access an up-to-date chronology of significant events in a child's life and senior leaders can review data to ensure they have clear oversight of any patterns within the school and community. This information is helping the school work more closely with children and families and consider how they target support to address vulnerable children's needs.

We have also heard of schools implementing systems to share information about the long-term needs of Children in Need. For example, some schools create 'Pupil Centred Passports' which hold key information on children's needs, such as social and emotional

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<sup>26</sup> [Data Protection Act 2018](#) - Government guidance outlines the key principles behind appropriate information sharing for [safeguarding practitioners](#) and [schools](#)

difficulties or any attachment issues. The 'All About Me' page of a child's Education, Health and Care Plan can also be used to perform this function. Documenting a child's wishes and feelings or conducting life story work can serve as a good opportunity to give a child agency in what long-term information is held about them, where safe and appropriate.

## Agency and consent

Given the reasons for children being in need, personal confidential information is highly likely to be relevant. In deciding how to share and respond to this information, it is essential that all practitioners know how to make good judgments, and exercise this judgement confidently – even when indicators, for example around neglect, may be subtle or appear over time.

In safeguarding children, the Data Protection Act 2018 is clear that information can be shared even without consent if necessary<sup>27</sup>. But equally, sharing information about the impact of a child's experiences, without any confidential details, may be sufficient to help teachers make reasonable adjustments – for example, the fact that a child may be particularly sensitive on a given day. Wherever possible, respecting children's agency means children having an understanding of, and where possible a say in, who knows what about them.

Children want information about them to be treated sensitively; particularly when they already feel different to their peers. This is about maintaining the trusting relationships that support educational outcomes, and it does not always happen consistently enough now. As one care leaver told us:

"I didn't want people to know I was in foster care – and I'm dead open with it now and if people ask me about it I say 'yeah, I am' – but when I started at this school in year 8 and I had to go to LAC meetings or review meetings, everyone would ask why I was going to the office and if it was because I was in trouble" (Young Person)

Social workers and school staff alike have a critical role in helping children and families to understand why and how sharing information about them can support positive outcomes, and to use existing processes to seek their consent where whenever this is appropriate.

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<sup>27</sup> [Data Protection Act 2018](#) - Government guidance outlines the key principles behind appropriate information sharing for [safeguarding practitioners](#) and [schools](#).

## Conclusion

Our findings through the review so far, provide an assessment of why the educational outcomes of Children in Need are so poor, and what is needed to improve them. Without delay, the leaders and practitioners who work with Children in Need – in schools, social care, early help, health, police, and beyond – can start to put these findings into practice. From now until the review's conclusion and beyond, we will use these findings to identify, target, and implement changes in support of this, using evidence of what works to improve the experiences and outcomes of all Children in Need.

### Raising aspiration through a focus on educational outcomes:

- poor educational outcomes for Children in Need are not inevitable. We have seen this through the data, and it has been reinforced through all our discussions, including with children themselves
- agencies working with Children in Need, including schools and social care, can increase their focus on educational outcomes. This is not a change in direction, but an injection of aspiration; safety will always come first but is not an end goal

### A call to action:

- we want senior leaders in local authorities to promote educational outcomes as an important part of the role of social care and multi-agency working, and as an important progress measure for Children in Need
- we want school leaders to create a culture of high educational aspiration for Children in Need, and to be evaluating how this is being achieved, including through support that recognises the impact of children's experiences

### What's next?

- we will work to bridge the gap between what is needed to improve outcomes for Children in Need and the current reality, including policy change where the evidence shows this is what is needed
- we will build more robust evidence of what interventions work to improve the educational outcomes of Children in Need, including by:
  - funding the What Works Centre for Children's Social Care to test innovative ways to support Children in Need, including through pilot projects co-locating social workers in schools due to launch by spring 2019
  - producing, with the Education Endowment Foundation, a new analysis of the existing evidence base of EEF studies to determine the impact of interventions for Children in Need, starting by January 2019

- testing effective support for the early language and literacy of Children in Need through the Home Learning Environment trials in the North of England, running by autumn 2019
- we will continue to develop our data and analysis of what influences the educational outcomes of Children in Need, to ensure future changes are targeted correctly and address the long-term impact of being in need, by:
  - expanding our longitudinal dataset and analysing how child, family and school level factors make a difference to outcomes over time by the end of the review
  - supporting academic research and analysis by the Rees Centre (University of Oxford) and the University of Bristol on the educational trajectories, attainment and progress of Children in Need and the factors related to positive outcomes by January 2020
- we will build on our existing work to improve outcomes for vulnerable children including through
  - the Government response to the domestic abuse consultation – where we will set out action to intervene early and help children affected by domestic abuse, including funding the national rollout and evaluation of Operation Encompass
  - the Exclusions Review which is exploring the over-representation of Children in Need in exclusions – where we will consider why and what is needed carefully in our response due to be published in early 2019
  - our work to provide earlier mental health support for all children and young people, including Children in Need – where we will consider the involvement of children’s social care as we test our new Mental Health Support teams in trailblazer areas and support all schools and colleges to put in place a Designated Senior Lead for Mental Health by 2019-20
- we will focus the final stage of the review on identifying and addressing gaps and systemic barriers, and determine what more Government can do to incentivise, equip and support practitioners in order to realise the change we want to see

### Thank you:

We are extremely grateful to the local authorities, schools, charities, academics, enterprises, and care-experienced young people and children, who have kindly hosted us and given us their time and knowledge over the last few months, as well as to all those who responded to our Call for Evidence.



Department  
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