Education and Culture Committee Inquiry on the Education Attainment Gap

CELCIS written responses

Contents

Introduction

The Education and Culture Committee of the Scottish Parliament is conducting an Inquiry into the educational attainment gap and called for written submissions in response to consultation questions, with closing dates during February and March 2015.

The Inquiry was announced on the Committee's web pages on 12 January 2015 as follows:

> *The progress being made by the Scottish Government in reducing the attainment gap will be explored by the Scottish Parliament's Education and Culture Committee as it begins a year long piece of work on the issue.*
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> *Recent figures show a large difference between the average attainment of pupils in the most and least deprived areas. For example, 28% of pupils from poorer families perform well in numeracy, compared to 56% of those from advantaged backgrounds. Children from poorer families are also more likely to leave school early and without a qualification.*
>
> *The Scottish Government has recently committed to "pick up the pace" in closing the differences in attainment between children from the most and least disadvantaged backgrounds. The Committee will monitor progress and consider how successfully this commitment is being delivered by all bodies.*

The written consultation phase was conducted in three stages: the first consultation was about the implications for schools, teachers and pupils of the Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce (the Wood report); the second considered the role of the third sector and the private sector in improving attainment and achievement for all school pupils, particularly those whose attainment is lowest; and the third considered how parents (including guardians) and schools can work best together to raise all pupils' attainment, particularly those whose attainment is lowest.

CELCIS provided written responses to all three written consultations, prefacing each with the following introduction:

> *We welcome this opportunity to submit evidence to the Education and Culture Committee's inquiry into Scotland's educational attainment gap. Established in 2011, CELCIS is the Centre for excellence for looked after children in Scotland. Our remit is to work with service providers (such as schools and colleges) to improve the experiences and outcomes of children and young people who are (or have been) 'looked after' by local authorities. For this reason our responses to the questions posed by the Committee are framed in consideration of the particular circumstances of looked after young people and care leavers.*

Consultation 1: Implications for Schools, Teachers and pupils of the Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workface (Wood report)

Question 1: If the Wood report were fully implemented, what would be the likely impact on attainment in schools and which pupils would benefit most?

While we broadly welcome the conclusions of the Wood report, we believe that full implementation of its recommendations would have only a limited impact on 'attainment in schools'. This view is based on a number of factors. First, an important precursor of the 'attainment gap' for young people is the 'literacy and numeracy gap' among pre-school and primary school aged children. As the recent report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *Closing the Attainment Gap in Scottish Education*[1], shows, this literacy and numeracy gap starts to be evident at a very young age. The primary focus of the Wood report is a group of young people aged 14-plus whose attainment is likely to be significantly impacted by gaps in their foundation academic skills. Increased emphasis on providing support for children (and their families and carers) in reading, writing and mathematics at the primary stage will be required if significant and lasting improvement is to made at the secondary and post-school stages, a point acknowledged by the Government's Scottish Attainment Challenge[2] with its focus on primary schools.

Second, the Wood report presents a compelling picture of 'employer retreat' from Scotland's young people (with fewer opportunities into employment being made available) without providing a satisfactory explanation of 'why' this may have happened. Through our work with organisations providing support to looked after young people and care leavers we suggest that one possible explanation for employers' apparent preference for young people with 'qualifications' is that qualifications act as a guarantee of the basic foundation skills (literacy and numeracy). As the annual tariff scores for 'looked after' school leavers confirm, many young people are leaving school at 16 with limited skills. In such a context employers' reluctance to carry the cost of bringing skill levels up to the required standard may be understandable. Unfortunately the result is a recruitment process which disadvantages those already disadvantaged in education, and risks the loss to skilled and higher-paid employment of young people whose 'capacities' are not evidenced by traditional qualifications.

Furthermore, the barriers faced by some young people are not restricted only to school attainment or a lack of training and employment opportunities. Children from more socio-economically advantaged homes have better access to opportunities to learn about career options, but they also have better access to social and cultural opportunities which, while not directly vocationally oriented, help to develop the psychological attributes (self-belief, persistence, sociability) which enable individuals to succeed in the modern work environment. In considering how to develop Scotland's young workforce, all aspects of the

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[1] http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/closing-attainment-gap-scottish-education
[2] http://news.scotland.gov.uk/Speeches-Briefings/First-Minister-speech-on-Scottish-Attainment-Challenge-15d6.aspx

'senior phase' (not just the vocational) must be considered, and the broad principles underpinning Curriculum for Excellence kept at the centre.

The third reason why full implementation of Wood may only have limited impact on school attainment relates to the way 'attainment' is measured in Scotland (i.e. pupils' performance during the senior phase). Although Modern Apprenticeships do contribute to attainment measures through the Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF), the SCQF is weighted heavily towards 'academic' qualifications. The Wood recommendation of increasing the availability of Modern Apprenticeships to pupils in schools could have a positive impact on school attainment figures (as young people at risk of disengagement from education continue in school). But it may also divert some young people from the 'academic' qualifications which contribute more heavily to a school's 'tariff score measure' of attainment. This point suggests there is a need to consider adapting the current approach to measuring student 'performance' and 'outcomes'.

If the Wood report recommendations are implemented in full, we believe the pupils who would benefit most will be young people whose school attainment is likely to be slightly below the national average. This group may include young people who do not complete the senior phase of school (or do so with only limited 'attainment' success) and who, although able and possessing the necessary basic skills, lose out to their peers in an increasingly competitive jobs market. Implementing Wood's recommendations should lead to growth in opportunities for this group. However, if there is a desire to improve the range (and uptake) of opportunities available to those young people who have disengaged from education at an earlier stage, significant additional support may be required. The cumulative effect of social, emotional and educational difficulties acts as a barrier to engagement in training and employment opportunities. To increase the engagement of this group it will be necessary to have a triple-track approach: first helping the most vulnerable and disengaged families to benefit from pre-school and primary education; second, having suitable arrangements for meeting the additional support for learning needs of individual children throughout school stages; third, providing flexible and continuing social and emotional support (potentially in partnership with the third sector) as they take up educational, employment and training opportunities. The new national mentoring scheme for looked after children, recently announced by the Scottish Government, has the potential to make a significant contribution to achieving this triple-track approach. But it is important that looked after children (including those in kinship care and 'at home') receive the additional support at school to which they are entitled under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004.[3] It should be regarded as unusual for a looked after child not to have a Coordinated Support Plan, and the Scottish Government (through its agencies) should regularly monitor the type and range of additional support for learning provided to this population.

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[3] As amended by Section 8, Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009

Question 2: The report aims to significantly enhance vocational content "without splitting young people off into separate streams at school age". What would be the disadvantages of such an approach and how could they be avoided?

We welcome Wood's proposals for school-college partnerships. These 'dual-enrolment' arrangements have been available in some parts of the United States for many years. For example, Massachusetts instituted the Commonwealth Dual Enrolment Partnership in 1993, allowing students to attend college classes while continuing in high school[4]. Benefits cited by State education officials were better grades, higher staying-on rates and improved access to employment opportunities[5]. In 2012 the James Irvine Foundation published a review of dual enrolment, which reported that students who participated had better academic outcomes relative to a comparison group (who followed traditional pathways)[6]. The Massachusetts programme was suspended in 2001 due to budget cuts (a reminder that such initiatives are vulnerable in the search for immediate savings) but was restored in 2008.

Dual enrolment offers advantages to young people from a looked after background (more than 80% of whom typically leave school at 16 or earlier) in that the school where they are known and have built good relationships would maintain responsibility for their welfare and for monitoring progress. Transitions are particularly problematic for looked after young people, who can easily become lost in the post-school education system. While college is currently an important first destination for a high proportion of looked after school leavers, annual statistics suggest that they are at a high risk of dropping out.[7] Dual enrolment might help to avoid this problem, allowing colleges and schools to demonstrate their corporate parenting responsibility, as set out in Part 9 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. The particular circumstances of residential and day special schools need to be considered in arranging such partnerships.

To mitigate the risk of 'splitting off,' and the negative consequences of low status being accorded to vocational education, opportunities should be provided in a broad range of occupational areas (particularly in high skill occupations found within the renewables, Information Technology and hospitality sectors). Thought should also be given to how dual enrolment is configured in a way that is non-stigmatising, perhaps by ensuring it is attractive to more than the most disadvantaged, and that options for re-engaging in traditional 'academic' subjects are both available and accessible.

We endorse Wood's recommendations in relation to countering the effects of gender stereotyping in career options. We think that one way to do this is to resist approaches which attempt to match vocational courses in the senior phase too closely to intelligence about local employment needs, but rather to help young people to gain a broader set of modern, transferable skills and aptitudes while also learning about different employment possibilities (through high quality placements and internships). Another valuable influence

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[4] http://www.mass.edu/strategic/read_cdep.asp
[5] http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2014/07/20/state-aims-boost-awareness-program-allowing-high-school-students-earn-college-credit/YejTr3qnHjd6Dos0XeYjuN/story.html
[6] https://www.irvine.org/youth/linked-learning/broadening-the-benefits-of-dual-enrollment
[7] Scottish Government (2014) Looked After Children's Educational Outcomes Statistics, Additional Table 2.1

is for young people to have direct contact with people who themselves represent the opposite of gender stereotyping, such a women engineers and men in caring roles.

It is also important that vocational tracks in the senior phase permit – and encourage – opportunities for participation in sport, music, drama, travel and other activities that help young people to develop confidence and other social skills. There is considerable evidence that the most disadvantaged are not distinguished from the most advantaged in terms of aspiration, but they may need more support to develop the social capital which is valued by employers alongside formal qualifications[8].

The SCQF framework facilitates progression to more advanced education, principally by allowing progression from non-advanced further education to higher education within colleges. While this arrangement also extends to progression from higher national-level qualifications to degree-level provision, there are significant barriers which continue to impede equality of access. For example, while many college-university articulation arrangements exist, the range of opportunities may be limited in particular areas, and the 'rules' surrounding progression tend to be variable and in some cases highly idiosyncratic.

The barrier whereby a student progressing from a Higher National Diploma qualification to a vocational degree programme (e.g. in law or teacher education) would not receive SAAS funding for the first year has now been removed, but this still leaves students having to meet the other costs associated with an extra year (or two years) of study, and raises questions of equity (in respect of the fair treatment of entrance qualifications) across courses, between and within institutions. As a simple first step, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) should ask Scottish universities to end the practice of designating HNC/HND qualifications under the heading 'non-standard entry' or similar, and explicitly indicating that holders of these qualifications will be treated on an individual basis when applying for entrance.

Question 3: Are any measures other than those advocated in the report needed to ensure more young people leave school with "high level vocational qualifications which have strong currency in the labour market"?

We think that a logical extension of the Wood proposals is for the 'education' leaving age in Scotland to be raised to 18. This is the approach adopted in England, where from June 2014 all Year 11 (S4 in Scotland) school leavers are legally required to remain in education or training up until their 18th birthday.[9] This would represent an unequivocal statement of how important Scotland considers the education and training of our young people. While we acknowledge that 'compulsion' can sometimes be associated with low motivation and disengagement, and that an 'entitlement' approach (such as currently available in Scotland) ensures active participation, in view of the scale of challenge identified by Wood, bolder measures are now necessary. Moreover, in relation to looked after children and care leavers, an extension of compulsory education and training should help prevent school staff (and other professionals) from colluding with young people's view of the

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[8] e.g. http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/influence-parents-places-and-poverty-educational
[9] UK Government website, Raising the Participation Age (accessed on 25 Feb. 15)

senior phase as 'not for them,' an effect our contacts tell us is not uncommon. The academic Stephen Ball describes such attitudes as the 'economy of student worth,' a condition which compromises the fundamental purposes of education[10].

We endorse Recommendation 37 (p.66) in Wood which calls for 'educational and employment transition planning for young people in care to start early'. First, we suggest that Government must be vigilant for any arrangements which use a narrow definition of 'care' and thus exclude young people looked after 'at home' or in formal kinship care. Second, we think that all looked after children should have access to *bespoke* and *frequent* career education (including meaningful work visits and placements) before the senior phase, in order to help them to make informed and supported choices. We also think that career education for looked after children needs to involve families and carers. In view of the obligations placed on many publicly funded organisations as 'corporate parents' (Part 9 of the 2014 Act), these aims should be relatively easy to achieve.

Question 4: Does the report – which includes a section on improving equalities – place enough emphasis on pupils' socio-economic inequalities and how these could be overcome?

While we welcome the Wood s conclusions and recommendations on equalities, and we are particularly pleased that the report recognised 'care leavers' as a special group, we believe the issue needs greater emphasis and exploration. For instance, emphasis must be given to the fact that the term 'care leaver' includes children who were looked after at home, or in formal kinship care. While these children have equivalent needs to their accommodated peers, traditionally they have received a much more limited package of support. One outcome of this is a growing attainment (and educational engagement) gap between children 'looked after at home' and those who have been accommodated. Working with children who are 'looked after' but cared for by families is challenging, but it must be done if outcomes for all care leavers in Scotland are to be improved.

The notion of guaranteed employment for a year put forward by Wood has merit, but we restate our concern that, for such opportunities to be successful, they must be buttressed by considerable mentoring/coaching support. This would relate to the practicalities of maintaining employment, and in dealing with the continuing effects of childhood trauma and intrusive family difficulties that characterise a looked after background. Local authority 'aftercare' and youth employment teams are currently not adequately resourced to provide such support, so detailed consideration needs to be given to how it would be made to work.

The provision of supported employment and training for looked after young people, such as ring-fenced Modern Apprenticeships offered by a number of public-sector and third-sector agencies (e.g. Glasgow City Council's Commonwealth Apprenticeship Scheme) is a welcome step, but there are still too few examples of this kind of activity. The introduction of a corporate parenting duty to 'provide opportunities […] to participate in activities designed to promote their wellbeing'[11] should result in more of these work-

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[10] http://classonline.org.uk/docs/2013_Policy_Paper_-_Education,_justice_and_democracy_(Stephen_Ball).pdf
[11] Section 58(1)(d) of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014

related opportunities, but if the needs of all care leavers are to be met there is also a need for sustained commitment from private-sector companies to provide placements and apprenticeships.

We think there could be merit in having specific initiatives aimed exclusively at the most disadvantaged young people, for example, focusing on STEM-related opportunities, acknowledging to be successful these would require additional support in maths and science. While we welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to providing supported employment opportunities in the third sector and access to mentoring, we are disappointed that Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy does not take the opportunity to restate a firm commitment to the Government 's own 2011 report, *Our Family Firm*[12], and to support reasonable resource allocation which could ensure that the principles and standards articulated in that report could be realised to open up a broader range of employment opportunities to young people from a looked after background. We think there should also be a commitment to provide regular reports so that progress can be evaluated.

Finally, overcoming the inequalities associated with having a 'care experience' requires further attention in two related ways. First, while support to address inequalities in education or health should be available across the life course, an increasing level of resource must be targeted at early years and primary school stages. Second, shifting towards a preventive model will require an additional resource commitment (e.g. in investing in specialist teachers) in the short to medium term. The mandatory preparation of Children's Services Plans in each local area presents the Scottish Government and Parliament with a valuable opportunity to audit how well service leaders are achieving this objective.

Question 5: Would there have to be significant reorganisation in schools to accommodate all the proposed changes (for example, to enable more links with colleges / to have a greater focus on work placements)?

It seems reasonable to assume that there would have to be some reorganisation of schools to accommodate all the changes proposed by Wood. There is already a culture of collaboration between schools in relation to meeting the requirements of the senior phase, and many schools have long-standing, constructive relationships with colleges. It will be important to ensure that such partnerships are available across Scotland so that they can be accessed by all young people. There is also a need to consider ways in which residential schools, secure care units and youth custody (i.e. HMYOI Polmont) are accommodated in the senior phase arrangements. This illustrates a more general point, which is that the aim of equality of access to the senior phase means that every young person, wherever they are placed in education, should have a right of access to a broad range of vocational and academic options. The residential school and youth custody sectors have developed creative ways of providing learning opportunities consistent with the principles of Curriculum for Excellence, but they have also typically offered a narrower curriculum, though it is generally broader than in the past. These sectors must not be marginalised in the new arrangements. There are organisational challenges

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[12] http://www.celcis.org/media/resources/publications/Family_Firm_SG_2011.pdf

associated with the fact that these institutions are not within local authorities, but it is vital to address these challenges to avoid the young people who are placed in them missing out.

In implementing of Wood's recommendations (and the necessary reorganisation of schools) there is a risk that we create a map of Scotland on which 'vocational' schools are clustered in low income neighbourhoods (where fewer pupils have traditionally studied for Highers) and 'academic' schools in more affluent areas. Parents in more affluent neighbourhoods may be less likely to value vocational aspects of the curriculum in the senior phase and may exert pressures on schools to avoid reorganising in ways that would facilitate equal valuing of vocational and academic courses[13]. The development of a two-tier school system should be actively avoided, suggesting an important role for Education Scotland and other national agencies.

It is important to guard against an assumption that because a young person is looked after or a care leaver that he or she is best directed to a vocational route. It may be more challenging to support a looked after young person with significant additional needs to obtain Highers, but this should not determine that a vocational option is best. The most disadvantaged young people have a right to realise their academic potential, and while vocational qualifications offer enhanced employment opportunities, with commensurate financial benefits, traditional 'academic' routes into the professions still offer efficient and effective ways out of poverty.

Finally, if Wood's recommendations were implemented there may be additional administrative requirements placed on schools, associated with making more complex curriculum arrangements for pupils, and tracking their progress. Assuming the school is the principal point of pupil registration (an arrangement we would support) it likely that the school would need to employ professional staff whose qualifications and backgrounds are more varied, for example, in counselling, youth work or human resource development.

Question 6: What action and resources would be required to deliver the specific recommendations aimed at schools and teachers?

As mentioned earlier in this submission, we support the Wood report's proposals for school-college partnerships, since dual registration offers significant advantages to young people who traditionally disengage with education at the earliest opportunity. We also favour schools retaining the primary responsibility for their students. Both of these developments will have resource implications, particularly during the set-up stage, and we also recognise that much is being asked of schools currently in reforming the curriculum more generally. Therefore Wood's proposals have little chance of success without the implementation being carefully costed and the additional costs met.

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[13] Parity of esteem was a major issue which impacted upon the effectiveness of vocational education qualifications in England in the 1990s, and more broadly across Europe. See, e.g.

1. http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/
2. http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/sites/default/files/files/Nuffield%20Report28-04-09%20final%20to%20print.pdf
3. https://royalsociety.org/~/media/Royal_Society_Content/policy/publications/1996/10207.pdf
4. http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED402455

The changes proposed by Wood will also have implications for teachers' skills and knowledge base, and therefore for high quality in-service training opportunities. Initial teacher education and CPD will need to include opportunities to learn more about the effects of disadvantage and childhood trauma on education, and about the evidence base for interventions, including approaches being tested in other schools. As teachers work with children in relatively short time frames, it is also important that they learn about the life experiences of young adults who were not conventionally successful at school, but who have subsequently made significant achievements academically or vocationally. The House of Lords report, *Make or Break: The UK's Digital Future*[14], highlighted the need for teachers to adapt in order to provide education in a way that young people can relate to, and also to keep up with the requirements that they should have useful skills in digital technology.

We do not think it is necessary for teachers to become careers advisors, or to tailor the curriculum to data about local employment opportunities. Schools are – and must remain - about more than just employability, and they must continue to have a lead role in helping young people to acquire the transferable social and emotional skills on which a successful and satisfying life depends.

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[14] http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201415/ldselect/lddigital/111/111.pdf

Consultation 2: Role of the third sector and the private sector in improving attainment and achievement for all school pupils, particularly those whose attainment is lowest

Question 1: What is the scale of the third and private sectors' involvement in schools, in terms of improving attainment and achievement, and what is the appropriate dividing line between their role and the role of education authorities?

Due the relative autonomy of schools, and the range of national and local community groups relevant to education, establishing an accurate estimate of the scale of third and private sector involvement in mainstream schools will be challenging. However, as Education Scotland concluded in its report on the use of 'external experts' in schools, published in November 2012, their involvement is definitely widespread.

> *"In a review of recent inspection evidence, reference is made to external experts and/or partners in almost all secondary school records of findings and in the majority of those from primary schools."* [15]

The Education Scotland report defines 'external experts' broadly, to include college and local authority staff, and concentrates on the contribution of external experts in working alongside teachers, in and beyond the school setting. [16] The focus of the Committee's question is on third and private sector partners, but even with this more restricted group the scale of involvement is likely to be considerable. Much of the involvement of third and private sector partners may be linked to the provision of 'extra-curricular' and 'pastoral' activities, rather than direct 'subject' delivery (e.g. maths), but in line with Curriculum for Excellence such activities should not be seen as unrelated to a school's plan for improving attainment and achievement. In fact for vulnerable and disengaged pupils, whose attainment is often lowest, we believe the provision of alternative educational opportunities (such as sport or the creative arts), combined with high-quality pastoral support within schools, is essential to improving attainment levels.

As a growing body of educational and biological evidence attests, an individual's capacity for learning (and by association 'attainment') is contingent on their emotional wellbeing. [17] For children who are experiencing instability at home, or who have suffered trauma, loss or neglect, activities and opportunities which help them to build relationships and regulate emotions are essential precursors to any meaningful engagement in learning. This demands a whole school approach, with class teachers suitably knowledgeable and skilled to respond to the needs of such children. However, third and private sector organisations can (and do) make a vital contribution, such as through the provision of physical activity options (e.g. Youth Sport Trust and Outward Bound Trust), mentoring

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[15] Education Scotland (November 2012) The Involvement of External Experts in School Education (online resource), p.3

[16] Ibid, p.4

[17] For a summary of relevant literature, please see: Geddes, H (2005) Attachment in the Classroom: The links between children's early experience, emotional well-being and performance in school: A Practical Guide for Schools, Worth Publishing

(e.g. MCR Pathways), counselling services (e.g. Place2Be) or personal and skills development (e.g. Skills Force and The Princes Trust). Others also play an important role in upskilling the school workforce to meet the needs of vulnerable learners who may present (from the teacher's point of view) challenging behaviour in the school setting.

A UK government report on third sector innovation[18] identified a range of personalised education and learning services offered by third sector organisations to children and young people, including:

- providing alternative education for young people who have been excluded from or who are disengaged with mainstream education;
- supporting learners to maintain engagement with mainstream education;
- working with schools and colleges to offer out-of-school learning opportunities as part of a learning "package" for learners;
- working in schools on one-off or ongoing personalised learning projects; and
- providing advice and support to schools which are moving to more personalised learning provision.

The third sector was noted as being particularly important when it comes to reaching vulnerable groups and identifying unmet needs that may otherwise remain unnoticed as it has developed expertise in working with the most disengaged and hardest to reach children and young people.

The scale of the third and private sectors' involvement in delivering such services (and therefore in improving the attainment and achievement of school pupils) is likely to be a reflection of limited financial resources in schools, and an appreciation by school leaders of the value such organisations can bring in terms of new opportunities, people and perspectives. But in respect of vulnerable pupils, the use of third and private sector organisations may also be driven by a scarcity of necessary skills among school staff (particularly teachers). 'Attachment aware' and 'trauma sensitive' approaches to teaching and school management are not yet embedded as mainstream practice, so where school leaders have realised such skills are necessary to securing the engagement of vulnerable learners, third or private sector organisations are 'commissioned' to provide enhanced pastoral and education support (such as through nurture bases, school-based counselling and teaching assistants).

This leads us onto the second part of the Committee's question, about the appropriate dividing line between third and private sector providers and education authorities. In respect of looked after children, it is important to note that some third and private sector agencies are education providers in their own right, operating residential and day school services. In its submission to the Committee's earlier inquiry (2013) into the attainment of looked after children, the Scottish Children's Services Coalition said that, in its view, there had been 'inconsistent and inadequate implementation' of the recommendations of the 2010 Audit Scotland report *Getting it Right for Children in Residential Care*.[19] We

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[18] McGuire, A. (2010). The role of third sector innovation: personalisation of education and learning services: recommendations. Cabinet Office Advisor on Third Sector Innovation http://www.turning-point.co.uk/media/24071/the_role_of_third_sector_innovation.pdf

[19] Scottish Children's Services Coalition (2013). Education and Culture Committee Inquiry into the educational attainment of looked after children. http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_EducationandCultureCommittee/Inquiries/Scottish_Childrens_Services_Coalition.pdf

think it is important to know, five years later, whether the Audit Scotland recommendation that '*councils, in partnership with providers, identify intended outcomes for all children in residential placements, specify these in individual care plans and set out the actions required in a clear SMART44 action plan against which progress can be monitored'* has been satisfactorily implemented.

In relation to mainstream schools, we think the issue is not so much about 'dividing lines' and demarcation (which implies that education authorities contract out services), but rather about how we can encourage more 'co-production' between schools, local authorities and third / private sector organisations. In such a model all partners would work together to design, deliver and evaluate a service in response to a particular issue. The ownership and learning from such projects would accrue to all involved (rather than being retained just in the third / private sector provider), and initiatives would be less susceptible to sudden cuts in funding. Moreover, according to research by the University of Edinburgh, an important feature of co-production in public services is involvement of users in the design stage.[20] In this respect third sector agencies have a particular advantage, because of their expertise in engaging with young people and families.

An interesting example of co-production is the 'Inclusion Plus' partnership formed between Dundee City Council, Includem, Apex Scotland and Skillforce, aimed at young people in secondary schools who are at risk of exclusion.[21] The interim findings of this study by the Robert Owen Centre at the University of Glasgow reported a 36% fall in exclusions; a final report is due in summer 2015. In the area of further and higher education the Scottish Funding Council has played a critical role in facilitating the involvement of third sector organisations, enabling Buttle UK to work alongside colleges and universities, and the Who Cares? Trust in the development of resources designed to help care leavers access further and higher education.

Question 2: Have their approaches been particularly successful in improving achievement and attainment for school pupils? If so, could their methods be more embedded in the curriculum?

In its recent (2014) report on school education, Audit Scotland notes that a range of factors are important for improving attainment.[22] The report identifies factors within the control of schools and local authorities (teacher quality, leadership and systems for tracking pupil data), and also factors where schools could collaborate with partners: increasing parental involvement, and developing pupil motivation and engagement. The third sector has particular strengths which can be harnessed in seeking to improve these latter factors. We are aware, for instance, of positive evaluations of the Place2Be model

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[20] Osborne, S., and Strokosch, K. (2013) It takes two to tango? Understanding the co-production of public services by integrating the services management and public administration perspectives. *British Journal of Management*, *24.* http://www.research.ed.ac.uk/portal/files/12492845/OSBORNE_It_takes_two_to_tango_Understanding_the_co_production_of_public_services_by_integrating_the_services_management_and_public_administration_perspectives.pdf
[21] http://www.includem.org/content/inclusionplus/
[22] Audit Scotland (2014) *School Education*. Accounts Commission. http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/local/2014/nr_140619_school_education.pdf

of pupil support, an approach which could be more embedded in the curriculum and mainstream school practice.[23]

Schools often find it difficult to engage with parents who do not respond to traditional methods of reporting and monitoring pupils' progress (e.g. at parents' evenings). Given the importance of the home in consolidating learning, schools could exploit the trust with which third sector agencies are regarded, particularly in approaches which help parents and carers to support learning at home. For instance evaluations of 'paired reading' schemes involving carers have been shown to be effective in improving literacy rates and engagement in education.[24] These are methods which could be more widely integrated into mainstream practice, with the support of third sector organisations.

Motivating pupils who have already disengaged poses particular challenges for schools and education authorities. The third sector has two particular strengths in helping to respond to this: specialist knowledge of the circumstances of children and families dealing with a diversity of difficult circumstances, and the capacity to tailor responses which suit individual children and their families. For instance Who Cares? Scotland has direct knowledge of the barriers looked after children face in education (both at a population and individual level), but also some of the solutions, having worked with many schools and colleges over the years. Other examples of relevant work include the Barnardo's *16+ At Home Project* in Edinburgh, and Includem's *Intensive Support Service for Vulnerable Young People*.

Finally, an example of long-term collaboration between a local authority and a third sector agency, which attempts to realise aspects of the curriculum for certain sub-groups of leaners, is the residential outdoor learning programme provided by Outward Bound Loch Eil and North Lanarkshire Council. Research by the University of Edinburgh examined the role of residential outdoor learning in raising pupils' achievement in the context of Curriculum for Excellence.[25] The findings reported are equivocal in establishing conclusively whether pupils who participated in a residential experience improved in 'life effectiveness skills (e.g. achievement motivation) compared to control groups, but the qualitative findings in this study were more encouraging.

Our observation is that the most important aspect of this partnership is the willingness of the partners to develop a model which meets the needs of certain children, accepting that traditional school-based approaches to learning are not always appropriate. Robust evaluations of such initiatives should be undertaken and made available, including those of small-scale school-based activities. The work of the Scottish Government's Raising Attainment for All (RAFA) team, supporting schools to develop 'tests of change', is relevant in this respect.

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[23] Lee, R et al (2009) 'The Place2Be: Measuring the effectiveness of primary school based therapeutic intervention in England and Scotland', *Counselling and Psychotherapy* Vol 9, Issue 3, pages 151-159

[24] Osborne, C., Alfano, J. and Winn, T (2010) 'Paired reading as a literacy intervention for foster children', *Adoption and Fostering* 34: 4, 17-26

[25] Christie, B., Higgins, P. and McLaughlin, P. (2013) "Did you enjoy your holiday?' Can residential outdoor learning benefit mainstream schooling?' *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*.
http://www.research.ed.ac.uk/portal/files/15163540/Did_you_enjoy_your_holiday_Jan_2013.pdf

Question 3: Is the full potential of the third and private sectors in helping to improve children's attainment and achievement being realised?

Unfortunately the answer is probably 'no'. Through our work across Scotland we have observed that the potential of the third and private sectors is not always realised by national and local government, and positive examples tend to be associated with schools where individuals (or groups of key staff) have developed good relationships with the third and private sectors.

The failure to realise the full potential of the third and private sectors is linked to a number of issues. First among these is the way in which initiatives are funded. Short-term (1 or 2 year) funding arrangements, tied to broad objectives, put the sustainability of initiatives at risk. The 'Reading Rich' programme, involving the Scottish Book Trust and NCH Scotland, is a good example of this. The evaluation published by Scottish Government highlighted many positive features of the programme, but the programme was not sustained beyond the initial grant funding (although a number of local authorities have established similar programmes of their own).[26] A better approach to maximising the potential of the third and private sectors in education would be to 'commission' services (rather than 'procure' or 'grant fund'). Schools, having a clear understanding of what their school population needs, are often best placed to do this, and are in position to work alongside the external partners to develop and deliver a service over the long term.

A second reason why the potential of the third and private sectors is not realised relates to the attitudes of school staff. Where there is a suspicion about the role of third sector providers (interpreting their involvement as either unnecessary or a challenge to their day-to-day practice), or where support for 'inclusive education' is not widespread, the result can be a school environment uninterested (or even hostile) to certain forms of external involvement.[27] Many looked after children require significant additional support if they are to engage with and succeed in school. Often managing considerable internal distress, some looked after children can present challenging and disruptive behaviour (particularly if teachers do not have an understanding of the impact of trauma, or use strategies for responding to its manifestations). The result can be, as we have recorded in our work with schools, staff attitudes that some young people are 'unteachable', only able to manage a limited 'flexible' timetable (sometimes just a few hours a week) or full-time support in a residential school. While it is certainly the case that some children (including some looked after children) require the intensive, specialist support provided away from mainstream schools by third sector or private providers, we believe that mainstream schools could do much more to learn from (and integrate into practice) the attitudes, techniques and approaches utilised by external partners. In doing so, many of our most vulnerable learners (most of whom remain full-time in mainstream schools) would benefit from what the third and private sector have to offer.

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[26] Finn, M. (2008). Evaluation of Reading Rich: NCH Scotland's Reading Rich Programme delivered by the Scottish Book Trust. The Scottish Government. http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/publications/e/publication_tcm4534928.asp
[27] Avarmidis, E & Norwich, B (2002) 'Teachers' attitudes towards integration / inclusion: a review of the literature', *European Journal of Special Needs Education* Vol 17, Issue 2

Question 4: How successful have schools been in reporting on pupils' wider achievements (i.e. not just examination results) such as those the third sector helps to deliver? Are such achievements valued by parents, employers and learning providers' as much as formal qualifications?

In view of the fact that Scotland's political discourse continues to privilege 'attainment' (and exam results especially), it is very challenging for schools (or local authorities) to report on the wider achievements of pupils. As the UK Parliament's Children, Schools and Families Select Committee noted in 2009:

> 'the data currently available is heavily weighted towards academic attainment, and while data which places pupil and student attainment and progress into context [...] is published by the Government, it is typically not reported by the press, or given much lower prominence than "raw" attainment scores.' [28]

The predominance of 'attainment' over 'achievement' may be a reflection of wider parental and societal attitudes. For instance reports from the Association of Accounting Technicians (2013) and others suggest that parents do not understand or value apprenticeships, favouring paths which lead from school directly to University. [29] In this context, efforts by schools to publicise their work around 'wider achievement' (often delivered in partnership with third and private sector organisations) may be met with limited enthusiasm by the public. Indeed for some sceptical parents a school's focus on 'achievement' may seem like an effort to distract from poor performance in respect to 'attainment'. Our contacts who work with young people, carers, teachers and families, report that it is not uncommon to hear the view that 'achievement' is related to a lower tier of education, reserved for children unlikely to obtain academic qualifications.

On a related point, Audit Scotland has highlighted the lack of information on overall pupil performance at both a local and national level. [30] Current measures focus on attainment of secondary pupils at S4-S6 level, and there are no comparable measures of wider achievement (or the performance of pupils in P1-S3) available either at local authority (with some exceptions) or national level. As such, existing measures do not fully capture a pupil's performance throughout their time at school, and this weights the national debate towards school-assessment based attainment scores. The achievements of pupils who take vocational courses at local colleges, for instance, are not typically captured by existing attainment measures, an omission which could be addressed if the Wood commission's recommendation on developing school-college partnerships is accepted.

Audit Scotland also found that there are increasing opportunities for pupils to participate in activities that aim to improve 'soft skills' and employability skills such as confidence, and to help them develop the skills required as they leave school and move into employment, training or post-school education. We agree with Audit Scotland that schools

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[28] House of Commons Children, Schools and Families Committee (2009) School Accountability. House of Commons London: The Stationery Office Limited http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmchilsch/88/88i.pdf

[29] AAT (2013) Two thirds of parents don't understand apprenticeships [website accessed on 11 March 2015]

[30] Audit Scotland (2014) School Education. Accounts Commission. http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/local/2014/nr_140619_school_education.pdf

and local authorities should ensure that they can scrutinise the outcomes of these activities to ensure that they meet the needs of pupils.

An example of an approach to assessing wider achievements gained through life experiences (often referred to as 'recognition of prior learning') is the My Skills My Future toolkit developed by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) partnership. The toolkit, linked to SCQF level descriptors and Curriculum for Excellence 'experiences and outcomes,' represents a way to recognise the wider achievements of learners who are at risk of leaving school with no or few qualifications. CELCIS piloted the toolkit with looked after young people in West Lothian and East Renfrewshire.[31] More recently, the approach has been utilised with looked after young people in Stirling / Clackmannanshire, and with vulnerable learners in East Renfrewshire. Findings suggest that the approach can lead to increase in resilience and engagement, and better recognition of skills and awareness of career choices.

Question 5: Given the strong policy focus on the early years, have the third and private sectors been able to work equally effectively with pupils of all ages?

We agree that a concerted focus on the early years is vital to raising the attainment of all school pupils. The third and private sectors play a very significant role at these stages, as providers of nurseries and other pre-school opportunities, and government (at all levels) must work collaboratively with these sectors to ensure quality is high across the country, and the needs of disadvantaged children adequately met.

In respect of school age children, transitions are particularly sensitive times, particularly for looked after children. Like the early years, it is important to focus efforts (including work with the third and private sectors) at these life stages too. For example, on average, fewer looked after children move on to post-school education than their peers in the general population. Compounding this issue is the fact that some widening access programmes only target students from low-income households who have a high likelihood of attaining the required grades to go to college or university. [32] Similarly, the transition between primary and secondary school can be the start of a process of disengagement from education (which leads, for some, to becoming 'looked after'). However support for vulnerable children at this transition is limited, and although some schools collaborate effectively to reduce risk, the statistics (on attendance and exclusions at early secondary stages) suggest that the needs of many children go unnoticed until it is too late. Enhanced involvement of the third and private sectors, offering 'follow-through' mentoring or therapeutic support, may reduce the anxiety and difficulty of such transitions, and have a positive impact on pupils' engagement and educational achievement.

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[31] Hennessy, A. and Connelly, G. (2012) Recognition of Prior Learning and Looked After Young People.   Research   Briefing.   CELCIS. http://www.celcis.org/media/resources/publications/Recognition-of-Prior-Learning-Research-briefing.pdf
[32] Sosu, E., & Ellis, S. (2014). Closing the attainment gap in Scottish education. *Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York*. http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/education-attainment-scotland-full.pdf

Consultation 3: How parents (including guardians) and schools can work best together to raise all pupils' attainment, particularly those whose attainment is lowest.

Question 1: Do schools always explain clearly to parents how children learn throughout their school years? How can parents help their children's development (e.g. with reading and wider literacy approaches)?

Scottish schools use a wide range of approaches to inform parents about 'what' children learn, including school handbooks and websites, meetings on aspects of the curriculum, and inviting parents to be classroom helpers. These approaches are complemented by the online resources provided by Education Scotland; in particular the recently updated *Parentzone Scotland* website.[33] A number of these approaches and resources also provide an opportunity for schools to explain the 'how' children learn, and the role parents and carers have in supporting them.

However, while schools and their partners (especially third sector organisations) are increasingly aware of the need to support the home to understand children's learning stages and styles,[34] we believe that schools (and managing local education authorities) could do more to enable parents and carers to help with children's development. Increased support in understanding (and adapting to) 'how' children learn would be of particular benefit to parents and carers from more disadvantaged backgrounds, who may not appreciate how important the 'home' environment is to a child's school success. In a seminal review of the impact of parental involvement on children's education, Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) concluded that:

> *"Parental involvement in the form of 'at-home good parenting' has a significant positive effect on children's achievement and adjustment even after all other factors shaping attainment have been taken out of the equation. In the primary age range the impact caused by different levels of parental involvement is much bigger than differences associated with variations in the quality of schools. The scale of the impact is evident across all social classes and all ethnic groups."[35]*

This strong link between the 'voluntary expression of parental involvement' and school outcomes has been found in other, subsequent meta-analyses of the research, and it is now widely accepted by educationalists.[36] But more recent research has also highlighted the need for, and positive effects of, 'school and community led parental involvement'

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[33] http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/parentzone/

[34] For example, please see the 'Learning at Home' section of the Parentzone website, or the Scottish Book Trust resources.

[35] Desforges, C & Abouchaar, A (2003) *The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievement and Adjustment: A literature Review*, Department for Education and Skills (UK), p.4

[36] http://www.uk.sagepub.com/oleary2e/study/Journal%20Articles/Article%209%20-%20Jeynes.pdf

approaches.[37] An example would be teachers training parents how to teach their children to read.[38] In a study carried out by the University of Strathclyde for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), the authors found that parents with low incomes or who live in poverty mostly have high aspirations for their children, but that they need support in specific ways of supporting their children in learning.[39]

The JRF research suggests that many of the traditional methods of engaging with parents (e.g. parents' meetings in school) have little impact on supporting parents (and therefore pupils) from more disadvantaged backgrounds. The degree to which parents are able (or the degree to which they *feel* able) to provide active support to their child's literacy or numeracy development varies significantly, and families are not always aware of the literacy practices and skills valued by schools. Close (2001) is among many authors to stress the critical importance of raising the self-confidence of parents and carers in relation to their role in supporting children's development.[40]

A number of effective approaches (to supporting parents and carers) have been identified in a systematic review carried out for UK Department for Education (DfE).[41] These include helping carers of young children to use developmental activities (e.g. reading, games) and supporting parents of older children to participate and engage with children's learning at home. In relation to looked after children specifically, organisations such as The Fostering Network have developed programmes such as 'Fostering Achievement' (currently in operation in Northern Ireland and London), where teachers and schools work to promote the role of foster carers as 'first educators'.[42] However, it should be noted that the DfE report was unequivocal in its conclusion that good, effective practice was not tied to a specific programme or approach, but rather with:

> "[…] schools which were proactive, had listened to parents, and refined their strategy to take account of their suggestions and built on activities it considered successful. Where there is effective parental involvement the single most important factor was found to be the enthusiasm of the head-teacher."[43]

The authors go on to highlight the need for school approaches to 'parental engagement' to be integrated into the core of its approach to teaching (not a 'bolt on' to mainstream activities), and for programmes to have a clear focus on raising children's achievement. (Many schools, they found, prioritised their relationship with parents over promoting pupil achievement.)[44] The report's authors also suggest that "interventions are more likely to be effective when they are informed by the views of parents identified by means of thorough needs assessment".[45] This applied in particular to marginalised groups, which in

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[37] Jeynes, W (2012) A meta-analysis of different types of parental involvement programs for urban students, Urban Education 47(4), pp. 706 - 742

[38] Goodall, J & Vorhaus, J (2011) Review of best practice in parental engagement, Department of Education Research Report

[39] Sosu, E & Ellis, S (2014) Closing the Attainment Gap in Scottish Education, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

[40] http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0000/0423/Parental_involvement_2001.pdf

[41] Goodall, J & Vorhaus, J (2011) Review of best practice in parental engagement, Department of Education Research Report

[42] Fostering Achievement (Northern Ireland) Fostering Achievement (London)

[43] Ibid, p.24

[44] Ibid, p.25

[45] Goodall, J & Vorhaus, J (2011) Review of best practice in parental engagement, Department of Education Research Report, p.26

the Scottish context would include kinship carers and the parents of children 'looked after at home'.

In the current context of 'Children's Services Planning' and mandatory consultation in respect to 'early learning and childcare' provision (Parts 3 and 6, respectively, of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014), Scottish local authorities have an unparalleled opportunity to carry out just this kind of 'thorough needs assessment' described in the DfE report. We strongly urge the Scottish Government to emphasise (through statutory guidance and secondary legislation) the need for every Community Planning Partnership to carry out such assessments. Potential models for the process (and how to carry out the necessary analysis of the data) already exist in Scotland, in the form of the *Improving Children's Outcomes*[46] programme operated by Perth & Kinross and Dundee, the *Realigning Children's Services* programme recently commissioned by the Scottish Government, and the *Glasgow Indicators Project*[47].

To improve the level and quality of parental / carer engagement in children's education we believe it is critically important that schools and local authorities are motivated and equipped to support parents. Approaches should be localised, and sensitive to individual and community needs. Introducing such approaches on a significant scale is likely to require additional resources (or redeployment of existing resources) and skilled professionals trained to work with parents in the home and other community settings. In the interests of raising the attainment of looked after children, and closing the attainment gap more generally, supporting parents and carers to understand 'how' children learn (and how they can support children's development) should be a priority area for the resources soon to be made available to Scottish schools through the *Attainment Scotland Fund*.[48]

Question 2: Are schools always flexible enough to allow parents to be involved in their children's education (given parents' work commitments, for example)?

Through our engagement with carers, teachers and other educational practitioners we have encountered a wide variety of practice, with some schools flexible and accommodating of parent / carer needs, others much less so. What we have observed, in line with the conclusions of the DfE Evidence Review, is that the leadership of the head teacher is central to the priority given to involving parents and carers. The head teacher has a key role in prescribing the parameters of engagement and, critically, its tone; teacher attitudes towards parents are an important barrier to effective and inclusive practice.[49]

An example from a recent focus group with kinship carers illustrates this point. A kinship carer had an arrangement with the head teacher of her grandson's primary school whereby she was on-call to visit the school at short notice if the boy's behaviour became

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[46] Dartington Social Research Unit, Improving Children's Outcomes programme
[47] Understanding Glasgow: The Glasgow Indicators Project
[48] SG website news story (09/02/2015) Smart money on attainment [website accessed on 20/03/2015]
[49] Goodall, J & Vorhaus, J (2011) Review of best practice in parental engagement, Department of Education Research Report, p.48

difficult for the class teacher to manage. This approach was usually successful in calming and re-engaging the child, and both carer and teacher felt supported through the process. Unfortunately, however, a new head teacher disapproved of the arrangement, and brought it an end. The child's behaviour subsequently led to several exclusions. Although this story reflects the experiences of only one carer (and presents just one side of the story) it is consistent with other reports, and the academic literature. At the same focus group, a representative of a third sector agency told us:

> *"We often hear from young people that the only communication between their parents and their school is when something negative has taken place; this must be a barrier to parent engagement as well as heightening the young person's resentment. Many of the parents we work with already feel that they have failed as parents and have this re-enforced by reports of negative behaviour from school. Parents need positive re-enforcement of their skills and hearing regular positive feedback about their kids, however small, can help achieve this."[50]*

Some parents and carers (including foster carers) of looked after children will have had a negative experience of school themselves, and may, as a result, not prioritise the children's education, or be anxious about engaging with the school. Some will have literacy and numeracy issues, leading to embarrassment and fears of stigma. These factors act as barriers to successful engagement between school and carer, and serve to reinforce the practical challenges faced by many, such as work commitments, access to transport, child and other caring responsibilities.

To meaningfully engage with all parents and carers (not just those willing and able) schools need to develop approaches which are flexible, sensitive and responsive to need. This requires school staff to have had appropriate training and coaching, particularly when working with parents / carers whose backgrounds are very different to their own. 'Parental engagement' should therefore be a core element of initial teacher training, and continuing professional development.[51] Suitably trained staff (including head teachers) should understand that effective 'parental engagement' will look different to different people, according to the skills and values of parents and carers. Schools strategies must be flexible enough to respond to the variety of parenting styles, and not impose a one-size-fits-all approach. This again highlights the need for proper assessments of pupil and family need, and for schools to have systems in place with which they can measure the efficacy of their interventions.

In an unpublished thesis Rhona McKinnon suggests that schools must also have clarity of purpose regarding their activities to involve parents.[52] For example, an 'open-door' approach to engagement, without clear parameters on what can be discussed, carries the risk that the engagement quickly becomes about 'student progress,' reflecting the school's priorities, not the parents. This limits the potential of the engagement to break down barriers between home and school, and to provide a richer picture of the child and their social environment. In one school included in McKinnon's research, issues about children's academic progress were excluded from the drop-in surgery available to parents.

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[50] CELCIS and Pupil Inclusion Network (2014) focus group for kinship carers, exploring issues of exclusion

[51] Goodall, J & Vorhaus, J (2011) Review of best practice in parental engagement, Department of Education Research Report

[52] MacKinnon, R. (2013) *Practising Power: Parent-Teacher Consultations in Early Years Settings*. Unpublished Ed D thesis, University of Stirling.

Finally, we would recommend that greater emphasis is placed on outreach work, facilitating parental engagement within the home or community spaces, rather than within the school itself. The DfE Evidence Review finds that children's centres can be particularly effective in involving parents and families.[53] In interviews parents reported that these centres helped them to become more confident in speaking to teachers, and in developing an understanding of how children learn. Moreover, parental support programmes which focused on both academic outcomes and training in parenting skills was found to be more effective than interventions that do not include such 'parent' training.[54]

For looked after children there are additional reasons for taking an outreach approach, including potential breaches of children's confidentiality if work is carried out in groups, and the distance carers can live from schools children attended. In the development of the Parental Engagement Act 2006, focus groups indicated that home-link workers had a positive impact for children looked after at home, helping to build and maintain relationships between their family and the school. From our experience, home-link workers also allow the school to better understand what parents and carers already do with their children, and how they (parents / carers) are most likely to respond positively to attempts to engage them in their children's learning. An example of an initiative developed in response to parent / carer feedback is the use of text and social media to report regular (weekly) good news stories about children's progress to parents or carers. Elsewhere, we are aware of a Scottish head teacher who arranged for parent-teacher meetings to take place in a pub situated near the homes of parents who had previously struggled to attend. Without systematic evaluation we cannot confirm whether such initiatives have directly improved parental engagement, but at a minimum they reflect a willingness to be flexible in approach, and responsive to need. The research would suggest that success in engaging disengaged or disadvantaged parents and carers is contingent on these qualities being at the core of a school's approach.

Question 3: To what extent do schools offer particular support to the parents of pupils from the most disadvantaged communities, in order to improve the attainment of those pupils?

Our experience of school approaches to engaging and supporting parents / carers of looked after children is mixed. A recent action research project, undertaken by CELCIS in the City of Edinburgh, involved schools redesigning the way they communicated with parents of children looked after at home. From a periodic, problem-orientated model (where parents were informed of bad behaviour), the new system was built on regular, positive communication (the content focused on aspects of the child's week which were promising). As a result, improvements in the parent's relationships with the school were reported, and the process was also found to help teachers to focus on children's strengths

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[53] Goodall, J & Vorhaus, J (2011) Review of best practice in parental engagement, Department of Education Research Report, p. 77
[54] Ibid, p.7

and abilities. Children were seen to be more engaged in education, which should, if maintained in the long term, have implications for their attainment.[55]

Such approaches are not uncommon in Scotland, but nor are they sufficiently widespread. Too often we encounter statements along the lines of 'they [the parents] are too difficult to engage with' or 'they don't want to be involved'. In a research piece for Enquire, Pilkington (2010) suggests that parents of children who are looked after away from home are often excluded from the school process entirely, because of a prevailing view that they are too 'complex and difficult'. This results 'in [parents] being overlooked as potentially significant contributors' to the child's education[56]. Which is a serious concern when it is considered that many accommodated looked after children return to live with their parents and families before school leaving age. MacKinnon suggests that if schools and teachers could acknowledge the richness of pupils and parents backgrounds, an important 'fund of knowledge' would be made available to them, helping them to better engage the child in learning. [57]

In line with the conclusions of the DfE Evidence Review, we find schools offering particular support to disadvantaged parents and pupils are nearly always led by a head teacher who is personally committed to helping vulnerable learners, and who is determined for the school to be 'owned' by all parts of the community it serves. These head teachers, often supported by depute heads with responsibility for pastoral support, make partnership and multi-agency arrangements an essential component of their strategy for parental engagement.[58] The *Getting it Right* approach is evident, with information shared between partners, and external expertise (such as educational psychologists) utilised strategically.

While the extent of tailored support for disadvantaged parents (or the carers of disadvantaged pupils) is probably insufficient across Scotland as a whole, we are currently involved with a number of local authorities who are actively considering how to improve their provision for this group. Moreover, rather than simply mandating an increase in the amount of support available, these authorities are giving careful attention to the quality and form of support they provide. Investment by local authorities will be needed if they are to understand the needs of disadvantaged communities, followed up by a critical appraisal of what works to help parents and carers help children. As noted by the DfE's review, effective parental engagement with disadvantaged communities depends on 'strong leadership, clear strategic direction, collecting, monitoring and sharing data, and pro-actively engaging with and reaching out to parents and families'.[59]

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[55] Hennessy, A & Connelly, G (2014) *Improving Educational Outcomes for Children Looked After at Home: Use of Improvement Methodology*, CELCIS Research Briefing
[56] Pilkington, K. (2010) *Parental and Carer Involvement for Looked After Children: Messages from Research*. Paper presented at: Enquire annual conference 'Families as Learning Partners' March 9, 2010. Workshop 'Parental and Carer Involvement for Looked After Children'.
[57] MacKinnon, R. (2013) *Practising Power: Parent-Teacher Consultations in Early Years Settings*. Unpublished Ed D thesis, University of Stirling p. 35/36.
[58] Goodall, J & Vorhaus, J (2011) Review of best practice in parental engagement, Department of Education Research Report
[59] Ibid, p.64

Question 4: Is there evidence to demonstrate which approaches used by schools have been most successful and are these being used, as appropriate, throughout Scotland?

A review from 1997 indicated that even the most well-planned and well-intentioned school programmes for parental engagement fail if they do not address issues of 'parental role' construction and parental efficacy (in relation to helping children succeed in school).[60] In informing our work with schools we therefore make reference to programmes and approaches which have shown (either in a UK or other English speaking context) significant outcomes in respect to parent / carer skills and knowledge. Examples include school based counselling services which work with child and parent / carer, paired reading schemes underpinned by a 'parent' tutoring element (to raise skills and confidence), and regular, positive updates from teachers on children's progress (as used in our Edinburgh project).[61] Research from the US also indicates that special 'home work' clubs, where teachers and parents are both engaged in supporting the child with a specific task, not only improves the child's academic performance, but also school-parent relations and the skills of the parent.[62]

On the basis of the available literature these combined approaches to intervention, which focus on supporting both children and carers, appear to be particularly effective in improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils (when based on planning for individual needs and an understanding social and environmental context). We are currently testing their efficacy in the Scottish context through our 'test-of-change' projects with schools, as part of wider Scottish Government efforts to improve the involvement of parents, currently being led by the Raising Attainment for All (RAFA) team. This should provide further evidence about the success of certain approaches. But while there are gaps in the evidence base, there is now a sufficient body of information on which schools can develop their own interventions, and a number of well-evaluated 'off-the-shelf' approaches (particularly in relation to building home-school links).[63] The reasons why these approaches are not more widely used in Scotland (or existing approaches evaluated) is probably linked to insufficient resources (perceived and actual), a lack of leadership at school and local authority levels, and attitudes of school staff.

In relation to staff attitudes, it is important to acknowledge that engaging with families from disadvantaged communities can be challenging, requiring skills and competencies not necessarily associated with class room teaching. School teachers should not simply be required to 'do things differently' without appropriate development opportunities, and support from other professionals (such as community and adult teachers, family-link works and social workers).

Furthermore, while schools have a critical role to play in improving outcomes, for the attainment gap to be closed educational inequality must be assiduously tackled at the pre-school stage. High-quality pre-school provision is consistently shown to positively influence

[60] http://vanderbilt.edu/peabody/family-school/papers/1997.pdf
[61] Liabo, K et al (2013) A systematic review of interventions to suppot looked after children in school, Child and Family Social Work, 18, pp. 341 - 353
[62] Jeynes, W (2012) A meta-analysis of different types of parental involvement programs for urban students, Urban Education 47(4), pp. 706 - 742
[63] Please see Goodall, J & Vorhaus, J (2011) Review of best practice in parental engagement, Department of Education Research Report

children's intellectual and social behavioural development, and for this reason we welcome the additional 'early learning and childcare' support which should now be available to every 'looked after' two year old under Part 6 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. We urge the Scottish Government to monitor implementation of this legislation closely, to ensure that local authorities and their partners tailor their provision so that it meets the specific educational and care needs of looked after children, and their parents and carers.

Question 5: Has greater parental involvement in school education through the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 led to an improvement in pupil attainment?

In 2009 Consumer Focus Scotland carried out research into the impact of the *Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006*.[64] This provided some evidence that a wider group of parents were becoming engaged with schools, due to the introduction of parent councils. However, there was no relationship identified with improved pupil attainment, and in a review of the relevant academic databases we found no other research related to this specific legislation. Our expectation is that the 2006 Act has had little direct impact on student attainment, as the wider literature from parent engagement suggests that resources deployed in this form of school-parent interaction have little to no impact in terms of enhancing children's learning; particularly for children from the most disadvantaged families.

Question 6: Are there any new measures that could be realistically taken (for example, by the Scottish Government, local authorities, parents' forums, the voluntary sector etc.) to help parents raise their child's attainment?

The conclusions of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report identifies a number of ways in which schools and local authorities can better help parents and carers of children who are disadvantaged by poverty, or by being looked after.[65] Mediating these through our experience working across Scottish local authorities, we believe the necessary measures should be:

a) Focused on developing meaningful, two-way relationships between schools and carers. Research from the US, such as the Harvard Family Research Project, have found that a positive home–school relationship can help to buffer against the negative effects of poverty, in terms of its impact on children's language, social,

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[64] Consumer Focus Scotland (2009) *Making the Difference? The impact of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006*. Consumer Focus Scotland.
[65] Sosu, E & Ellis, S (2014) Closing the Attainment Gap in Scottish Education, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

motor, adaptive and basic school skills. In this model schools listen to and learn from parents / carers, and vice versa. [66]

b) Helping to build capacity at home, through practical support for parents / carers in reading and maths. Sénéchal has found that training parents to teach their children to read is more than twice as effective as programs which encourage parents to listen to their children to read, and six times more effective than those which encourage parents to read to their children.[67]

c) Facilitating educationally rich relationships between carer and child (through the completion of shared activities, for instance).[68] An example of one such activity, which has shown promising results with looked after children, is 'paired reading'. This involves a structured approach to helping carers to read with their children. A study by Osborne et al. (2010) found that the use of paired reading methods with foster carers and primary schools improved the reading age of children (on average each child in the study made one year's progress in just over four months). [69]

Outside of these, the University of Strathclyde's School of Education has been engaged in a 'literacy clinic' with undergraduate education students, supporting children in a Glasgow primary school who have experienced reading difficulties[70]. If evaluations support the approach, it would indicate the valuable contribution that undergraduate teacher education students could make to closing the attainment gap in Scotland, while also gaining professional experience and course credit.

Finally, as has been mentioned above, it is important that schools and local authorities plan and develop their parental engagement strategies on the basis of systematic assessments of parent and child need. This requires an investment of time and money, but the benefit is the selection of approaches which are meaningful to the communities they are targeted towards. Moreover, in view of the statutory requirements on Community Planning Partnerships (to develop Children's Services Plans) these assessments would appear to be both essential and unavoidable. The Scottish Government has a key role in supporting local areas to prioritise and implement such activities, particularly through the statutory guidance currently being developed for Children's Services Planning and the Child's Plan. Education Scotland has a valuable contribution to make too, supporting schools to identify (and evaluate) successful approaches to parental engagement, providing practical guidance on how to develop strategies, and enabling schools across the country to learn from each other.

[66]http://www.google.ie/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=2&ved=0CCsQFjAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.hfrp.org%2Fcontent%2Fdownload%2F1182%2F48686%2Ffile%2Felementary.pdf&ei=MYX4VL-cEemu7AaXooDwCA&usg=AFQjCNEjP6Hp0DqKCmJSRwRtWoBAGTYQWg&bvm=bv.87519884,d.ZGU
[67] Sénéchal, M. and L. Young (2008). "The Effect of Family Literacy Interventions on Children's Acquisition of Reading from Kindergarten to Grade 3: A Meta-Analytic Review." Review of Educational Research 78(4): 880.
[68]http://www.effectiveservices.org/images/uploads/file/publications/Childrens%20Learning%20Report%20final%20feb%202013.pdf
[69] Osborne, C., Alfano, A. & Winn, T. (2010). *Adoption & Fostering, 34* (4), 17-26.

[70] http://www.strath.ac.uk/humanities/schoolofeducation/education_projects/literacy_clinic/