Supporting looked after children in education

Consultation results
May 2013
Introduction

Looked after children as a group often do not do as well in school as their peers and are at risk of experiencing further disadvantage in adulthood.

A consultation with foster carers was undertaken to explore how Hounslow, other agencies and professionals can improve educational achievement and our joint services for this vulnerable group.

Hounslow is grateful to all foster carers who took part in the survey and their commitment to further raising educational outcomes for children who are looked after.

Respondents Profile:

a. How long have you been a foster carer?

A total of 36 responses were received from a wide range of foster carers. This equates to approximately one quarter of Hounslow’s fostering households. Some had been carers for over 20 years compared with newly recruited foster carers with just under one year’s experience. The median years of experience between those surveyed were 6.5 years.
b. How many children do you currently have in your care and how old are they?

55% of foster carers look after one child and 39% had two children in their care. 6% looked after three children. 30% of children in foster care are aged between 13-16yrs. As the chart shows, the ages of children in foster care is varied and relatively evenly spread.

c. How well do you feel that your foster child/children are currently doing in school?

A majority of foster carers feel that children in their care are doing ‘Good’ or ‘Very good’ (67.7%) at school. However nearly one fifth (19.6%) feel that they require further support in raising their educational attainment.
d. How confident do you feel that your foster child/children will:

![Pie chart showing foster carer confidence in achieving educational milestones.]

Foster carers were asked about their expectations of their child reaching key educational milestones. Nearly 50% felt that they would ‘not meet the expected levels for his/her age group’ (48.4%).

e. Do you think that they are achieving their potential/best?

![Pie chart showing foster carer perspectives on achievement.]

Interestingly, whilst the majority of foster carers felt that their foster children would ‘not meet the expected levels for his/her age group’, 64.7% of carers felt that they were presently ‘achieving their potential’. Nearly a third of these respondents, (32.4%) felt that they could do better and 8.8% responded ‘Don’t know’. Of these, all had children under four years old and it may be due to their young age that foster carers felt unable to comment.
f. What are some of the issues or barriers facing your foster child in achieving their best in education?

Cloud text analysis below shows key areas of concern for foster carers in supporting children in care and their educational achievement. In particular, barriers include; lack of confidence, socio-emotional problems, concentration and self harming. Some responses seem to infer that these concerns may be linked to the often chaotic circumstances facing children in care and the ongoing unsettling impact caused by family contact and influence.

“Academic ability”

“Behavioural problems”

“Learning English as an additional language”

“More 1:1 support and tuition”

“Inherent socio-emotional problems (confidence)”

“Lack of focus”

“Improved support for children with special needs and their foster carers”
How confident do you feel in your ability to support your foster child/children in:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very confident</th>
<th>Confident</th>
<th>Slightly unsure</th>
<th>Not confident</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Their educational attainment</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their attainment in English and Maths</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
<td>42.4%</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their special education needs (if applicable)</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting boundaries and discipline</td>
<td>42.4%</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing a positive learning environment at home</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raising their aspirations</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
<td>52.9%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking help from others to get the most from their education</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking and attending extra curricular activities and hobbies</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>57.6%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Foster carers were asked to rate their level of confidence with regards to key aspects of raising educational attainment. Positively, most foster carers that responded felt ‘Very confident’ or ‘Confident’ in all aspects outlined in the survey. 100% felt ‘Very confident’ or Confident’ in ‘providing a positive learning environment at home’ and 96.9% concurred in ‘setting boundaries and discipline’. There seems to be less certainty around more specialist areas in improving education such as ‘Special Education Needs’ and ‘English and Maths’.
h. What things do you do with your child to support their learning?

Cloud text analysis highlights the key methods foster carers adopt in supporting the education of children who are looked after. Practical support, such as checking their homework, providing maths tuition and reading rank the most popular means of supporting children and their learning. Softer approaches also feature, such as providing encouragement, raising confidence and self-esteem and asking about their day.

“Computer and internet skills”
“Spelling” “Ask about their school day”
“Check homework and ensure their understanding”
“Building their confidence”
“Encouragement” “Attend PEPS”
“Reading” “Maths”
“Seek extra curricular activities and tuition”
j. How often do you do the following:

Responses show that many foster carers prioritise ‘reviewing education progress’ and ‘attending Personal Education Plans’ 72.7% and 69.7% respectively said they ‘always’ undertook these activities. Internal and external training however is comparatively less well attended.
k. Are your foster child/children experiencing any of the following problems and if so, how confident do you feel in supporting the young person through these challenges?

The results suggest that 75% or more of children in foster care experience some or more of the challenges listed, except leaving care, where 41.9% said this was not a cause for concern. ‘Emotional and mental health issues’ and ‘bullying in school’ are comparatively high at 91% and 75.8% respectively. Foster carers felt secure in supporting children through these issues, with more than half rating themselves as ‘Very confident’ or ‘Confident’.
I. How would you rate the quality of support you and/or your foster child have received from the following professionals?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class teacher</td>
<td>53.9%</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head teacher</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designated teacher</td>
<td>52.2%</td>
<td>34.8%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social worker</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEN coordinator</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychologist</td>
<td>43.1%</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech therapist</td>
<td>57.2%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LACEs caseworker</td>
<td>41.1%</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YES supervising SW</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
<td>47.3%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nearly all foster carers surveyed said that the services used in terms of input and support to raise educational attainment were ‘Satisfactory’ to ‘Very Good’. Only one person reported that the service received from the speech therapist and social worker were ‘Poor’ which have slightly skewed the figures in the latter case.

m. Thinking specifically in regards to the Looked After Children Education team (LACEs), please tell us what support you have had and how useful you found it?
Feedback from foster carers regarding the services provided by LACEs team is positive. The majority of responses rated the service generally ‘Very good’ or ‘Good’. A smaller percentage felt that ‘help with tuition’ (8.7%) and ‘training for understanding PEPs’ were poor (4.5%).

**n. How useful do you find PEP meetings? What would make it more helpful?**

Personal Education Plans (PEPs) are a statutory requirement and are to help all those involved gain a clear understanding about the teaching and learning provision necessary to meet the educational needs of a child who is in care. Nationally there has been criticism of some practices of implementing PEPs, However in Hounslow, feedback from foster carers appears very positive. Some of the key themes are highlighted below.

1 The Education Matters in Care inquiry
o. With regards to education, how helpful did you find the LACEs team? What help have you received from them and what other areas would you like support in?

The comments received from foster carers are very positive about the help, support, and advice provided by the LACEs team. Some of the comments received are highlighted below:

“We found the laces team invaluable - we have been supported in all areas listed in 12 above”

“LACES are brilliant - they have helped me with my 7 year old who has needed a lot of support, assessment, financial assistance, change of school. They have been safe hands to call on when needed.”

There were also some comments for reflection and development too.

“With past placement the member dealing with my children had suddenly left and the homework clubs had come to a abrupt end with no other communication or contact details to follow up what needed to be done.”

“I would like someone to take the children to the Uni Open days that get emailed around by various people (usually fostering team admin I think). I feel this day should be coordinated and carried out by a dedicated professional in LACES?”

“Continuous contact via mobile and face-to-face to encourage and to get the most out of the child.”
p. With regards to education, how helpful did you find the child’s social worker? What help have you received from them and what other areas would you like support in?

Responses show that feedback from foster carers regarding social workers is mixed. Key areas for improvement include continuity of social workers and the time they have available.

“My child’s social worker is very helpful and supports us in every way”

“The child’s social worker has been very active at helping with any issues regarding the child, and has been supportive when needed.”

“Change of social worker so often it’s hard to judge most of the time”

“Social workers are too busy to concentrate on each individual child’s education.”

q. With regards to education, how helpful have you found the school and designated teacher? What input have you received from them, and what other areas would you like support in?

Foster carers’ comments of schools and designated teachers have been well received. There are some concerns over the consistency of support, transferring from school-to-school and from primary to secondary. Below are some of the responses received.

“There is good contact and communication via phone and email! Which is brilliant to address whatever issues arise! There is no gap and delay in dealing with it!”

“Very good. They are always there if we have any worries.”
r. What support is needed to ensure your foster child reaches their potential and expected level of educational attainment? Are there any areas of support which need development?

On the whole, feedback has been positive with comments such as:

“All the support is in place for the child to enable her to achieve to the best of her ability”
“ It has worked very well so far”
“ Both are getting reasonable support by professionals”

However, common themes to be explored include the availability of extra and consistency of tuition, targeted support for teenagers and more support for children with disabilities and/or special needs.

Key points for consideration:

- Foster carers are active in supporting children looked after and their education, and engage in various means to encourage learning
- They report overall confidence about their skills and capacities to support children looked after and raising their educational outcomes. From providing a supportive learning environment to being able to source professional help, to resolving behavioural issues and reviewing home work and educational progress
- Areas for development and support for foster carers may be around more specialist advice and guidance with regards to SEN and social and emotional health problems
- There is a discrepancy between nearly 50% of foster carers who felt that their child will ‘not meet the expected levels for his/her age group’ compared with 64.7% felt that they were presently ‘achieving their potential’. It is unclear whether this is due to expectations, unrealistic national standards, anticipated difficulties or a range of other factors, which can have implications for interventions and support
- Incidences of emotional and mental health issues and bullying among looked after children are significant at 91% and 75.8% respectively
• A range of professionals involved in supporting education achievement for children looked after are well accessed by foster carers. Importantly, the services provided by the range of professionals and agencies involved were well received, particularly class teachers and designated teachers.

• Feedback from foster carers about PEPs was very positive, informative and useful.

• Foster carers views of the LACEs services was positive. Comments for improvement centred on continuity and communication.

• Several foster carers reported excellent relationships with their social workers, however, this was not always consistent. Key areas for concern for foster carers include changes in social workers, and accessibility and time they have available.

• Designated teachers were well regarded by foster carers.

• Responses to perceived barriers in raising educational aspirations focussed on extra and/or consistent tuition available, targeted support for teenagers and more support for children with disabilities and/or special needs.