

Supporting children living in residential child care in school

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Find out more about the factors that impact on the education of children living in residential care, the professionals who support them in school, and how you can help create an environment that gives them the best chance to achieve their potential in education.

What factors impact on the education of children living in residential care?

You have a vital role in making sure the children you care for get the most out of their education. In this way, you can help prepare them to live safe and independent lives as adults.

We know that children who are looked after in Wales have a lower educational achievement than other children, from foundation stage through to university.

Children who are classed as 'Looked After Children' may be living with extended family, with adopted family, in foster care, or living in residential child care. There isn't enough research about the educational outcomes for each of these categories but it's likely that the children living in residential care achieve the lowest outcomes of all the groups above.

This isn't because they're less capable than other children but because of the opportunities and structure they have around them, including:

- unstable and disruptive environments
- time spent out of school
- starting school part-way through an academic year
- poor additional educational support

- lack of understanding by educational staff of their specific mental and emotional health needs.

Moving to a new home usually means a change of school and research shows that any pupil moving schools will achieve less than those pupils who stay in the same primary and secondary schools.

The additional impact of [trauma and abuse](#) on the children you care for can mean they face significant educational disadvantages compared to other children.

But with the right support children living in residential care can do well in education and you have a valuable role in ensuring they have positive experiences and reach their full potential.

To best support your young person, you will need to work together with a number of professionals in their school.

The designated person to support children and young people who are looked after in school

The children you support may attend a maintained school (run by the local authority) or an independent one (run by a care organisation).

Under [Section 20 of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008](#) all maintained schools must have a 'designated person' to promote the educational achievement of care experienced children and ensure the school meets their needs. It's important that you keep in regular contact with the designated person for the child you're caring for, to understand the expectations on you,

them and on the child.

Independent schools may have another system of supporting children; they're likely to be smaller schools, where every teacher knows every child well. If your young person attends an independent school, your role is to ensure there are clear lines of communication between the school and the staff in your home.

Personal Education Plans

Every child you support will have a Personal Education Plan (PEP), which is part of their overall Care and Support Plan. You should contribute to reviewing the PEP every school term by sharing your views about on how your young person is progressing at school and how you and the school can reduce any barriers to learning they may be experiencing.

Looked after children's education co-ordinator (LACE)

Each local authority has a looked after children's education co-ordinator (LACE) to co-ordinate PEPs and monitor the progress of care experienced children in that authority. The co-ordinators make sure children who are looked after get any additional educational support they need and you should keep in regular contact with the co-ordinator for your local authority.

[Contact details for all LACE co-ordinators in Wales](#)

Children and young people can also access an [Independent Professional Advocate](#) to speak on their behalf and provide additional information and

support around their education.

Additional learning needs co-ordinator (ALNCO)

The children you look after should complete assessments when they arrive at a new school. This is important to get a 'baseline' of their educational level. They may have experienced gaps in their education and if they move to a different local authority, their new school may not be able to see their outcomes from their previous school.

If they need extra support in school, this could be provided by the ALNCO or an educational psychologist. Schools should also work with LACE co-ordinators to offer or direct you to educational counselling services for your young person. Voices from Care also offer a free counselling service.

You can help ensure your young person has a voice in their Individual Development Plan (IDP) by discussing their progress with them outside school and attending review meetings.

Ensuring teachers are aware of children's circumstances and individual needs

You need to share information with teachers about any changes in a child's circumstances. This can help the school anticipate and deal with the impact of these changes and offer better support to the child when they need it.

You should speak to the designated person (or senior member of staff in an independent school), who can pass the message to other teaching staff to ensure the information is shared promptly between relevant agencies and individuals.

Supporting young people with school life and homework

Care experienced children have reported that people sometimes underestimate their abilities and don't always encourage them to fulfil their potential. You and every other professional involved in their education should share and support high expectations for them by reinforcing a 'can do' attitude towards classwork and homework.

Take an active interest in their learning by discussing their school day and what they're studying. Make sure they have a quiet place to study and any equipment they need to complete homework.

Help your young person celebrate successes, as well as supporting the school with any sanctions against them. Your young person needs to see that you value education and that the rule in the home is homework first, activities afterwards.

You should also involve yourself in school life, such as attending parents'/carers' evenings, answering requests for information or feedback, as well as attending school trips where possible.

You can read more about care experienced children's views of how to improve their experience of school in Exchange's [#messagestoschools](#) project.

Avoiding being labelling as ‘different’

Being labelled as ‘different’ can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy for the children you care for. When discussing positive experiences at school in the [#messagestoschools](#) project, children talked about the people who believed in them, recognised their potential, and expected them to engage, do their homework and be like everyone else.

By believing in their potential, you can be an invaluable resource for the young people you care for, as one student who is now in university commented:

When I’d come home crying because my teacher said I’m not going to be able to do it, [my carer] used to say no, you can, you can. She was really supportive ... it kind of just put a little bit of more belief in me [and] made me want to do it that little bit more.

[#messagestoschools project](#)

Exclusion from school

Children who are excluded from school face further disruption to their education. It can be difficult for schools to maintain a high standard of behaviour without support from external agencies and children’s homes. Communication between the school, the child, residential child care workers, and other agencies, is key to reducing exclusions, so children feel supported throughout their education. Discussions around avoiding exclusion should focus on solutions and making sure the child’s needs are at the centre of planning.

Useful resources

[Our work to support children who are looked after](#)

[Our chosen or 'curated' research about the number who are looked after](#)

[Coram Voice. Advocacy and you: Information for children and young people](#)

[Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales](#)

[Making a difference: A guide for the designated person for looked after children in schools](#)

[ThemPra Social Pedagogy](#)

We want your feedback

Help us to improve the Residential child care worker resource by telling us what you think about it in our short [four question survey](#).