



Summary of the key themes discussed at the All Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers

Wednesday 22nd October 2014

5.00pm – 7.00pm

Committee Room 11, House of Commons, Westminster

- Chair: Natasha Finlayson, Chief Executive, The Who Cares? Trust
- Panel: Amanda Allard, Assistant Director, Council for Disabled Children
Amanda Harvey, Assistant Director, Council for Disabled Children
Rachel Knowles, Senior Education and Community Care Solicitor, Just for Kids Law
Natalie-Jane Macdonald, CEO, Acorn Care and Education
Alex McLean, care leaver, Leicester Children in Care Council
- Present: Craig Whittaker MP, Chair of the APPG for Looked After Children and Care Leavers
Stephen Kingdom, Deputy Director, 0-25 Special Educational Needs and Disability, Department for Education
Michael Allured, Lead on Education and Health for the Children in Care Portfolio, Department for Education
Rachel Cook, Principal Policy Advisor (Care and Protection), Office of the Children's Commissioner for England.
- Topic: 'How can carers, teachers and other professionals support children in care who have special educational needs?'

1. Introduction from the Chair

Natasha Finlayson welcomed the 95 children, young people, professionals and carers attended the meeting.

2. Panel comments

- There is often a difficulty translating policy and legislation into what this means in practical terms for young people.
- Foster carers need to act as advocates for children in the way good parents would advocate on behalf of their children.
- School support is variable and a more consistent approach to support is needed.
- Organisations should be measured and assessed by the support they provide for looked after children.
- Early intervention is important. Professionals should work with young people very early on and ask them about their future aspirations and goals.
- Professionals working with looked after children need to work more closely together and communicate better.
- Professionals should have the right training and skills to work with children in care with special educational needs (SEN).
- Support needs need to be more young person centred and young people should be consulted about what is offered locally in their area.



- Young people should be helped to communicate their choices even if they cannot use words.

3. Discussion (the floor was opened to questions)

Key themes:

i. Bullying and the need for additional support in schools

One of the main issues raised at the meeting was the need for additional support in schools for young people in care with special educational needs. The panel suggested that mentors were a good idea and stressed the importance of 1-1 support and resilience building. One young person suggested extending support to the weekends.

A number of young people said they had been bullied at school for being in care and having special educational needs, and many gave examples of this. A care leaver said young people in care with social and mental emotional issues are not given enough support in education. He said he felt he was 'always knocked down'. Another said he used to be called names but said as his teacher had experience of looked after children he knew what to do and supported him. He said 'It's good to have someone who believes in you'.

There was a discussion on the types of support schools can provide. Suggestions from the panel included: training the workforce to meet the needs of young people; teachers having training on mental health and emotional support and training teachers to understand how and to whom to refer young people in care who need extra support. One young person said informal learning should be encouraged and stressed the importance of life skills and emotional health education. Another young person said all children should be educated about a range of topics including mental illness, disabilities and children in care. He said it is no use relying on IROs and professionals and that educating children about these issues in school is more important. Rachel said it was important to speak with the designated teacher if young people in care are experiencing any problems.

ii. Training and early intervention

Attendees spoke about the need for early intervention and better training for the professional workforce. One care leaver said before he was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome he was thought of as an 'awkward child'. He said the diagnosis was not good enough and he needed support earlier. The panel said that professionals working with children in care need better training and it was important that professionals find out about the support needs of young people as early as possible. Rachel added that she quite often comes across young people who have been arrested for bad behaviour who haven't received an assessment. One young person said children should be assessed when they come into care. One professional said children with the most complex needs often are supported by those who have the least qualifications. He said highly qualified teachers need to give their time to the young people that need the most support.



iii. Lack of communication

There was a discussion on the lack of communication between professionals regarding the support needs of young people. One ex-social worker said transition planning was always very difficult as it was fragmented. The panel said that the new system was trying to address this by ensuring professionals share information appropriately and this system will create a more coherent system.

There can be communication issues between professionals and young people. One young person said he has mental health problems and his views were ignored because he did not have visible needs. A professional said that screening for SEN is very difficult for unaccompanied asylum seekers due to language barriers.

iv. Lack of knowledge

There was a discussion on the lack of knowledge around what support young people with special educational needs are entitled to. One professional said the pupil premium plus is not always used in the right way and there is the need to work with schools to make sure it is. One young person said he had to find out about the support he was entitled to on a website as his social worker did not know. Amanda Allard said the Council for Disabled Children has produced a young person friendly leaflet which helps explain the reforms. You can find the leaflet on their website [here](#).

4. Closing remarks from the Chair

Craig Whittaker MP thanked everyone for coming and awarded prizes to the youngest person in the room and the person who had travelled the farthest.

Chloe Cockett, senior clerk to the APPG said 'The Entitlements Inquiry – One Year On' report would be launched at the next meeting of the APPG on 10th December.

Appendix: votes – there were three votes held during the meeting.

1. Do you think looked after children with SEN have a particular problem with bullying? 100% of young people in the room responded yes.
2. When young people come into care should they be immediately assessed on whether they have learning needs? 5 nos, with the remainder voting yes.
3. When young people come into care should they be immediately assessed on whether they have mental health needs? 1 maybe, 7 nos and the remainder voted yes.