

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is two-fold. At the heart of it, we are seeking to better understand the educational barriers and issues looked after children and young people experience. However, we also want the report to act as a catalyst in driving forward positive solutions.

Looked After Children and Young People: We Can and Must Do Better is intended for everyone who is concerned with looked after children and young people and their families; elected members, local authority staff, staff in voluntary organisations, private providers, foster carers, health professionals and those involved in developing and improving children's services.

The main impetus behind the report was a desire to see a step change in outcomes for looked after children and young people. To this end **Looked After Children and Young People: We Can and Must Do Better** reflects the discussions which took place during the meetings of the Ministerial short-life working group and refers throughout to the views and experiences of looked after children and young people.

However, looked after children and young people are not a homogenous group. The term 'looked after' includes children who are subject to supervision and live with family members as well as looked after and accommodated children who live with foster carers or in residential schools or care homes. **Looked After Children and Young People: We Can and Must Do Better** is concerned with all of these looked after children and young people; where the report refers to looked after children and young people, it means all looked after children and young people unless indicated otherwise.

The group's deliberations raised many important issues regarding all looked after children and young people. The depth and range of these issues and the group's views and concerns are reflected in both the structure and also the content of the report, and in particular, in the 'What the group said' section of each chapter. Thereafter, where 'We' and/ or 'our' is used, this refers to Scottish Ministers.

An additional useful term which is used in the report is:

- **Corporate parent** – meaning the formal and local partnerships needed between all local authority departments and services, and associated agencies, who are responsible for working together to meet the needs of looked after children and young people

Looked After Children and Young People: We Can and Must Do Better also builds on the excellent work contained within **More Choices, More Chances: A Strategy to Reduce the Proportion of Young People not in Education, Employment or Training in Scotland (More Choices, More Chances)** and the Social Work Inspection Agency's 2006 report, **Extraordinary Lives – creating a positive future for looked after children and young people in Scotland (Extraordinary Lives)**. It looks forward to the children's services reform signalled by **Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)**.

Crucially, **Looked After Children and Young People: We Can and Must Do Better** sets out 19 specific and targeted actions that we will deliver under the 5 key themes we identify in the report: working together; becoming effective life long learners; developing into successful and responsible adults; being emotionally, mentally and physically healthy; and, feeling safe and nurtured in a home setting.

The report highlights and addresses 8 notable messages:

- The importance of the corporate parent role;
- The need to raise awareness of the educational needs of looked after children and young people and improve training for all foster carers, residential workers, lead professionals, support workers and associated professionals;
- The need for clarity regarding the role and responsibilities of the designated person within schools and residential establishments;
- The importance of providing flexible and appropriate support before, during and post transitions;
- The importance of physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing in facilitating positive educational outcomes;
- The need for good quality accommodation, which supports the education, training or employment of looked after children and young people;
- The importance of clear advice and a range of emotional, practical and financial support for looked after young people as they make the transition to adulthood/ independent living; and,
- The vital importance of stability and continuity within education and care settings.

Further information on the actions and on how these will be delivered can be found in the main body of the report.

As **Extraordinary Lives** points out “there is nothing inevitable about looked after children doing less well in education”. We do see success stories and there are examples of both sound and also innovative practice in local authorities.

For children and young people who are looked after, it is our job to ensure that we are creating as many opportunities for success as it is possible to create; and that we put in place safety nets at every stage of their journey, which can help safeguard each child or young person when they come across barriers to success. It is our job to create a safe environment for Scotland’s children and young people and to assist them as they navigate their potentially trickier journey through life. We are committed to ensuring that this happens for all of Scotland’s looked after children and young people both now and also in the future.

Looked After Children and Young People: We Can and Must Do Better provides an opportunity to take forward this debate; to look more closely and in more detail at some of the factors outside of school which may impact on not only educational outcomes but also later, on the wider outcomes for these vulnerable children and young people. It has been an opportunity for us to understand the issues relating to educational outcomes in all of their complexity, and to respond to them in a way that acknowledges and takes account of this complexity. This has been an opportunity for us to set out how we will take forward positive and definitive action.

In **Looked After Children and Young People: We Can and Must Do Better** we build on both the positive work that has been previously undertaken and that which is ongoing. It is not, however, intended to be a final response. Rather **Looked After Children and Young People: We Can and Must Do Better** is the next chapter of a longer story; it sets out our next steps as we continue to work together to build improvement in the educational outcomes of Scotland's looked after children and young people.

We hope you will agree that this report marks an important shift in not just how we view the issues and barriers faced by looked after children and young people, but also a shift in our emphasis on how we intend to make an impact on these educational outcomes. Together we can improve educational and life outcomes for Scotland's looked after children and young people.

The membership of the working group is detailed in Appendix A.

