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Joint Ministerial foreword

Every child in Wales – including those who are looked after – has the right to expect an excellent education regardless of their circumstances. We all recognise that good educational attainment can provide the gateway to future stability, security and an independent, fulfilling life. However, we also know that outcomes for looked after children rarely compare favourably with other children. They are less likely to achieve good educational qualifications, have greater health and housing needs and are more likely to come into contact with the criminal justice system.

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 presents an opportunity to address ways in which services are delivered and to improve the life chances of children in the care system. Work is underway on a national strategic approach to improving outcomes for looked after children which will focus on promoting and improving collaborative working across agencies, identifying and sharing good practice and making improvements where they are needed. It will also recognise that the majority of children are most likely to thrive and achieve good outcomes if they are cared for within their own families. Preventative services and early intervention to support children in need and their families will therefore be key to giving them every chance to stay together. A stable and committed school placement can also play an essential role in achieving this goal.

This joint strategy will drive improvement in educational outcomes, but only if key partners collaborate effectively. Pivotal ‘life’ factors will inevitably impact on a young person’s education. There has to be seamless integration that starts at the highest level of the Welsh Government and which reaches into the classroom to ensure that each and every looked after child receives effective help and support.

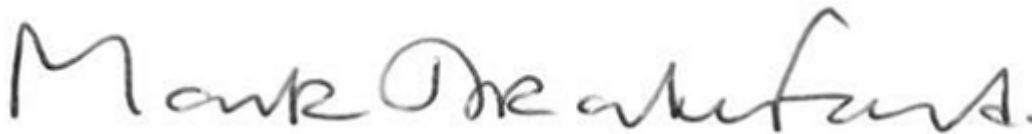
We have worked constructively with a wide range of stakeholders and they have helped us identify actions to better support our learners. Crucially we have taken on board the views of the children and those who care for them to properly understand how the actions we take impact on their lives. This would not have been possible without the help of the Fostering Network and Voices From Care and the in-depth research undertaken by Children’s Social Care Research and Development Centre, CASCADE – Cardiff University.

This document sets out a series of actions we need to take together to tackle the challenging issues which exist and drive up educational performance at pace. Close collaboration at Ministerial level – across education and social services functions – is essential to delivering improved outcomes. Ministers and officials have worked collaboratively on this strategy, and we will ensure that continues through the implementation arrangements.

Young people must reach their full potential. We can not accept that children who are looked after achieve less than we would wish and hope for our own children. We will ensure that the action plan which accompanies this strategy is rigorously monitored on an annual basis to ensure that this happens.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Huw Lewis'.

Huw Lewis AM
Minister for Education and Skills

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Mark Drakeford'.

Mark Drakeford AM
Minister for Health and Social Services

Introduction

The educational attainment of looked after children and young people is improving slowly but there is too much variation in attainment, inconsistent support and a lack of clearly defined outcomes against which progress can be assessed.

Wales Audit Office, August 2012

1. This is a joint strategy between the Welsh Government's Department for Education and Public Services and the Health and Social Services Group to ensure that all those whose work, responsibilities and lives bring them into contact with children who are looked after work with us to raise the educational ambitions and aspirations of children in care. Unless all parts of the system – working effectively with children and their carers – collaborate effectively we will not succeed in this very important task.
2. The strategy has been developed in full consideration of the rights of children and young people and in particular of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and could not have been possible without the constructive engagement of all stakeholders who contributed to the 2015 consultation.
3. It has been informed by:
 - the results of consultation with key stakeholders - <http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/deprivation/educational-attainment-of-looked-after-children/?lang=en>
 - research conducted by Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre, [CASCADE](#) – Cardiff University and accompanying audio video resources
 - the results of engagement with foster carers and children who are looked after, undertaken by the [Fostering Network](#) and [Voices From Care](#).
4. We would like to extend our thanks to all those who have responded to the consultation exercise, and to CASCADE, Voices From Care and the Fostering Network for their invaluable support and work.
5. Helping children in care and care leavers to reach their full potential will only be possible if education services, social services and others work effectively together to ensure:
 - all children receive help and support to enable them to achieve educational outcomes at least on a par with their peers and which secure opportunity for future study and employment

- a system within which all service providers are accountable for the delivery of effective support and interventions, and
 - robust monitoring arrangements to check progress.
- 6.** This strategy focusses on actions required of all key partners to drive better educational outcomes and offer a range of options that best suit the ambitions, abilities and circumstances of each child who is looked after. These educational outcomes relate to both academic attainment and vocational achievement.
- 7.** The following high level strategic objectives will provide a framework for future action for these children to:
- raise educational aspirations and attainment and the ability of those who care for them to support their educational development
 - reinforce collective accountability and effective leadership across the Welsh Government, regional education consortia, local authorities, schools, further and higher education institutions for their educational outcomes
 - make education a priority and point of focus and stability, especially during the periods of upheaval and uncertainty
 - ensure the necessary support to enable positive life and career choices and reduce the chances of entering the youth justice system
 - identify data that will aid practice, policy making and monitoring of educational outcomes, and
 - ensure excellent practice is identified, promoted and shared wherever it exists.
- 8.** There is growing recognition that the needs of children in the care system who go on to be adopted do not disappear when an adoption order is granted. As a consequence, we have taken steps to introduce flexibility for practitioners to fund appropriate support which benefits children who have been adopted or are subject to a Special Guardianship Order as it would with children who are looked after.
- 9.** While this strategy expressly focusses on the needs of children who are in the looked after system, we will also consider how the actions to be developed can incorporate all children who have similar life experiences which present specific challenges in education. We urge all our partners to adopt a similar approach to benefit a wider group of learners.
- 10.** This is our collective opportunity to build on the discussions of the past year and to effect real change in the lives of all looked after children in Wales. We must not let this opportunity pass.

Overview

This strategy is organised into 4 chapters:

- **Chapter 1** - describes the current legislative and policy position and statistics for children who are looked after.
- **Chapter 2** – outlines the case for change setting out the performance of the children and the challenges they face.
- **Chapter 3** – provides the legislative and policy framework to help support children and promote their educational attainment.
- **Chapter 4** – identifies a range of actions to be taken at all levels to strengthen educational outcomes.

The strategy is supported by an associated **action plan** which sets out the commitments the Welsh Government is making and the actions that we want schools, local authorities and regional education consortia to take forward.

What will happen next?

We expect all partners to be involved in delivery of the on-going actions to strengthen approaches to supporting the education of these children in line with the arrangements set out in this strategy.

We will publish an **annual update** outlining the progress made against the **action plan** by all key stakeholders and setting out any new commitments to help achieve our collective ambition. The first annual report will be published in January 2017.

Defining attainment

Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales refers to attainment using a number of common measures which are defined below.

Level 2 inclusive (L2 inc) refers to the achievement of a volume of qualifications equivalent to five GCSEs at grade A* to C including English or Welsh First Language and Mathematics.

Core Subject Indicator (CSI) refers to the achievement of the expected level in each of English or Welsh Language, Mathematics and Science at the end of a key stage.

Expected levels are measured against teacher assessments which measure progress and expected attainment at each key stage.

The expected level at the end of:

- Foundation Phase is Foundation Phase Outcome 5
- Key Stage 2 is National Curriculum Level 4
- Key Stage 3 is National Curriculum Level 5

Chapter 1: The landscape in Wales

1.1 The negative impact of poor educational attainment of children who are looked after can, and often does, result in these children failing to take advantage of opportunities to progress to post-16 education, training and meaningful employment.

1.2 The majority of children who have spent time in the care system are from families who are unable to provide a level of care that meets their emotional and well-being needs. Children can be taken into care in a number of ways. The most common is through a care order under the Children Act 1989 (see Part 4 of that Act). The local authority will apply to the court for a care order if it considers that a child is in imminent danger of harm and it will present evidence to court to support its case. The court will grant a care order if it agrees with the view of the local authority. Neglect or abuse is the most common reason why a child or young person is taken into care.

1.3 The second most common reason is where a family requests that the local authority looks after the child on their behalf, voluntarily. This is typical where there are temporary family problems which mean the parents are unable to care for their child until their problems are overcome. This may be short term parental illness or drug or alcohol related problems. In such cases the local authority will work with the parents to alleviate these problems and reunite the child with their parents.

1.4 The life of a looked after child is often characterised by trauma and stress in their home life. Their continuum of learning is often interrupted by foster placement changes and time out of school. Self esteem and confidence are inevitably compromised. This lack of continuity is exactly why all parts of the system must act in a coordinated and coherent fashion to ensure significant changes in the life of the child are minimised and managed sensitively, always with the child at the centre of decision-making.

1.5 When a child becomes looked after, the local authority as corporate parent has a legal duty to safeguard and promote their well-being. Alongside secure and reliable care and responding to the child's need to be well and healthy, authorities must support the child's educational attainment.

1.6 As responsible parents we would not have low aspirations or expectations for our children, or accept low educational attainment without challenge. Corporate parents must adopt a similar approach. We have learned through consulting children as part of our evidence gathering that the majority were not lacking aspiration. It was noticeable that younger children in particular often had lots of clear ambitions. We need to ensure that the right support is in place in all parts of the system so that they have every opportunity to realise that ambition.

1.7 There is a clear link between lower educational achievement and general well-being. If learners are unhappy, anxious or have difficulty forming relationships they are unlikely to perform well and will achieve poor outcomes. In cases where there is evidence of mental health issues, this can further compound the difficulties in education.

When asked about being a looked after child in school, a female participant in a 16+ focus group, responded “Obviously if your life is unstable your education is unstable, and then that’s your future ruined” (*Understanding the educational experiences and opinions, attainment, achievement and aspirations of looked after children in Wales – a research report by CASCADE, Cardiff University*).

On the same point, a male participant in a 16+ focus group concluded “Being made to feel like an outcast because I was in care and not getting enough private support, one to one. And that made me feel alienated, frustrated, lonely and vulnerable” (*Understanding the educational experiences and opinions, attainment, achievement and aspirations of looked after children in Wales – a research report by CASCADE, Cardiff University*)

1.8 We recognise that some schools and other learning providers have put in place effective practices and are able to demonstrate that the performance of their looked after learners has improved as a result. This is not common enough practice, however, and it is an approach that we have to embed consistently throughout Wales.

1.9 We know that there are often a number of ‘life’ factors which, due to the child’s personal circumstances, can hinder their ability to learn and perform well in school. However, we must also explore the notion that the care system may itself be contributing to poor outcomes. In its response to the consultation, the Fostering Network identified seven factors that contribute to poor outcomes:

- a lack of ambition for the children which appears to exist within the public care system
- placement instability
- high rates of school exclusion and poor quality educational provision
- a lack of remedial help
- leaving foster care too young
- the low educational achievement of foster carers, and
- the failure of corporate parenting.

1.10 We need to overcome these barriers to ensure that the experiences of education are positive and fruitful and deliver better results. Only a small number of children for example progress to further or higher education. There are many challenges relating to transition and the need for support does not end when children and young people leave care.

1.11 It is a particular concern that children who are looked after are vastly over-represented in the youth justice system. Less than 1% of the UK’s child population is looked after by local authorities but almost 50% of children in custody are, or have been, in care (Prison Reform Trust 2014). The risk factors associated with offending behaviour and disengagement from education are closely related. Under-

achievement in school, disengagement, poor literacy and numeracy skills and a significant prevalence of special educational needs are evident in the youth justice population. It is clear that engagement in education or training is a major protective factor in preventing and reducing offending.

1.12 Children who are looked after who enter the youth justice are particularly vulnerable, especially if they live in secure accommodation or are placed in 'out of area' accommodation.

1.13 The [Programme for Government](#) and the [Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014](#) set out the importance the Welsh Government attaches to improving the lives and well-being of looked after children. The 2014 [Act \(section 78\)](#) places a responsibility on a local authority to safeguard and promote the well-being of any child in the care of the authority and sets out ways in which the authority would be required to support these children and young people. It also places a positive duty on the authority to promote educational achievement of these children and amends the Children Act 2004 (section 25) to provide for local authorities and relevant partners to co-operate to improve the well-being of children, including educational outcomes.

1.14 In July 2007, the Welsh Government published [Towards a Stable Life and a Brighter Future](#) to strengthen the placement, health, education and well-being of these children. The guidance, which is still valid and relevant, outlined actions to strengthen educational arrangements including the need to designate a Looked After Children in Education (LACE) Coordinator to oversee the education plan and address the educational needs of these children and care leavers in the local authority area.

1.15 In identifying an appropriate care placement for children, authorities are required to take account of the availability of a suitable educational placement. Unless there are exceptional circumstances, this means a full-time place in a local mainstream school *commencing without delay*. Other than for clear safeguarding reasons, for example, when a child needs a place of safety immediately, care placements should not be made unless an appropriate level of education can be provided. Education services should assist the child's social worker and carer to identify an appropriate educational placement, including out of authority placements.

1.16 Other key education aspects included:

- the prime consideration when arranging the placement of a child is the child's health and education needs and in particular any mental health needs
- the development of an effective and high quality Personal Education Plan (PEP) within 20 days of entering care or joining a new school that planning should begin prior to placement
- the prompt transfer of education records
- a requirement for every residential home to designate a link worker responsible for promoting the child's educational achievement.

1.17 The [Children and Young Persons Act 2008 \(section 20\)](#) introduced arrangements which require the governing body of a maintained school in Wales to designate a member of staff as having lead responsibility for promoting the educational achievement of these children who are looked after in the school.

1.18 [If this were my child: A councillor's guide to being a good corporate parent to children in care and care leavers](#) published jointly by the Welsh Government and the Welsh Local Government Association in 2009 reminded elected members of their responsibility to act as good corporate parents to children and care leavers.

1.19 Each year we publish an array of statistics relating to children who are looked after including the annual statistical release [Adoptions, Outcomes and Placements for Children Looked After by Local Authorities](#), which presents information on children who are subject to care orders and other children provided with accommodation by their local authority. The [Wales Children in Need Census](#) provides us with the educational outcomes at four key stages of the Children in Need categories (of which one is children who are looked after) together with the general 'Pupils in Wales' data.

1.20 Based on data from the 2014 Children in Need Census and the children looked after statistical release for 2015, this section provides a breakdown of the characteristics of these children and shows their educational performance compared to the mainstream school population. The results demonstrate that the system is failing most children who are looked after in education and we must recognise that these figures are the outcome of learners' needs not being met.

1.21 The children looked after statistics for 2015 show:

- 5,617 children were looked after by Welsh local authorities at 31 March 2015.

Gender

3,020 boys

- 155 - under 1 year
- 545 - 1-4 years
- 770 - 5-9 years
- 1,060 - 10-15 years
- 490 - 16-17 years

2,595 girls

- 135 - under 1 year
- 450 - 1-4 years
- 580 - 5-9 years
- 980 - 10-15 years
- 450 - 16-17 years

Ethnicity

- 5,115 children identified as White
- 175 children identified as Mixed
- 75 children identified as Asian or Asian British
- 55 children identified as Black or Black British
- 40 children identified as other ethnic groups
- 155 children with unknown ethnicity.

Note: Data has been rounded to the nearest 5 for disclosure reasons.

Placements

- 71% of children had one placement during the year
- 20% of children had two placements during the year
- 9% of children had three or more placements during the year.

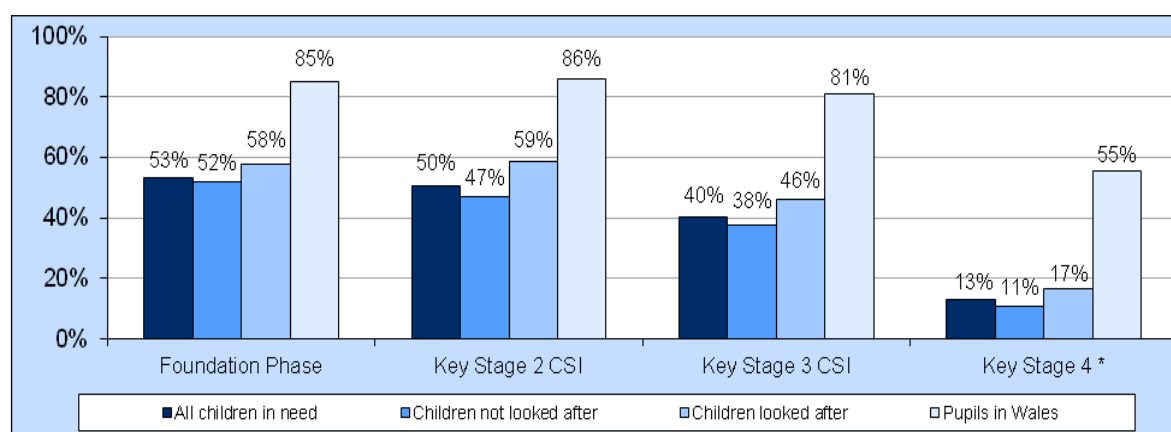
1.22 The Wales Children in Need Census confirms a breakdown of children who are looked after into the following groups for 2014:

- 92% of children aged 5 -15 are in mainstream schools
- 8% of children aged 5 -15 are in special schools – however, many of these children would not be expected to achieve at the expected Core Subject Indicator level
- 14% of children have a disability.

Eligibility for free school meals and special educational needs

- 26% of children were eligible for free school meals
- 32% of children had no special educational needs
- 68% of children had some form of special educational needs.

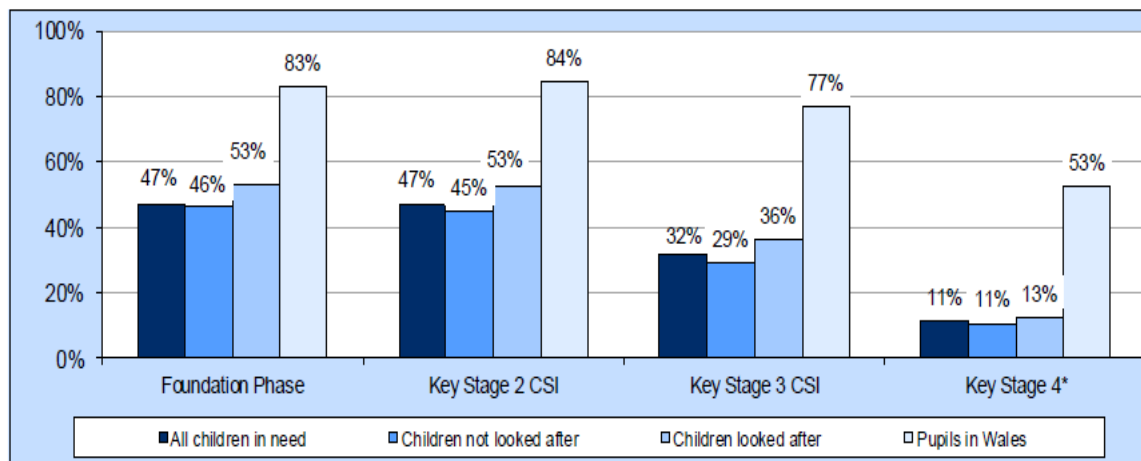
Chart 1: The gap at Foundation Phase and Key Stages between the educational outcomes of children in need, children who are looked after and all pupils at 31 March 2014



Source: Children in Need Census

* Key Stage 4: 5 GCSEs at grade A*-C including a GCSE grade A* - C in English or Welsh first language and mathematics

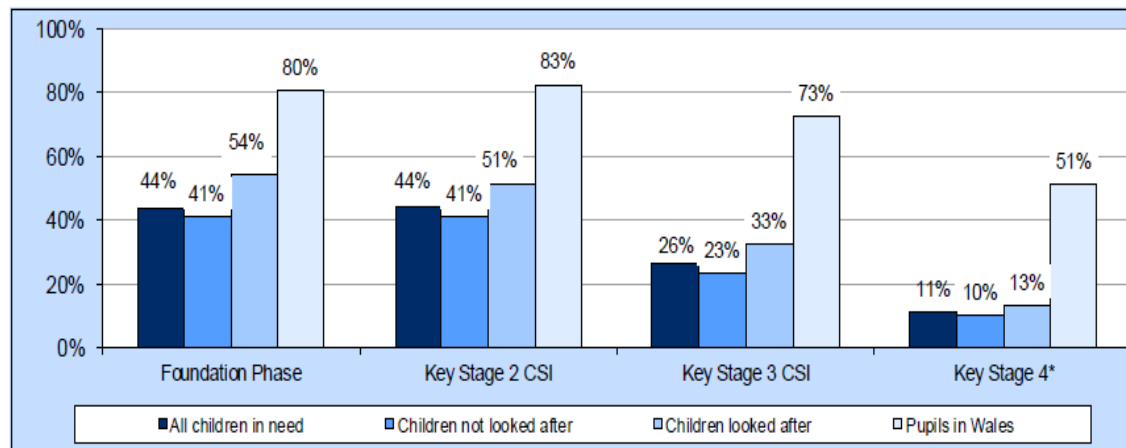
Chart 2: The gap at Foundation Phase and Key Stages between the educational outcomes of children in need, children who are looked after and all pupils at 31 March 2013



Source: Children in Need Census

* Key Stage 4: 5 GCSEs at grade A*-C including a GCSE grade A* - C in English or Welsh first language and mathematics

Chart 3: The gap at Foundation Phase and Key Stages between the educational outcomes of children in need, children who are looked after and all pupils at 31 March 2012



Source: Children in Need Census

* Key Stage 4: 5 GCSEs at grade A*-C including a GCSE grade A*-C in English or Welsh first language and mathematics

Chapter 2: The case for change

- 2.1** We need to take effective and sustained action to address educational under-performance, while ensuring a strong focus on supporting personal, social and emotional development (well-being).
- 2.2** Current levels of performance are unacceptable and year on year insufficient progress is made. Too many leave compulsory education with few or no qualifications and are being failed by a system which can all too often lead them to become NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) or enter the youth justice system. This is not always the case, but we need to improve their life chances within a system that all too often accepts poor performance with some inevitability.
- 2.3** The statistics for 2015 show that of the 405 care leavers in touch with the local authority who had their 19th birthday during the year to 31 March 164 (40%) were NEET. A good education with successful exam results may not prevent these children from making the wrong life choices, but having a strong foundation in education will stand them in good stead for life and will help open up opportunities and inform better life choices.
- 2.4** One of the six key principles in [Qualified for Life](#) is that learners are at the heart of all we do. We have high aspirations for their achievements and well-being and a child or young person's background must never limit their achievements. To put the learner at the centre of our education system we must ensure relevant, challenging and valued learning, delivered by inspiring teachers, lecturers and support staff who create inspired learners.

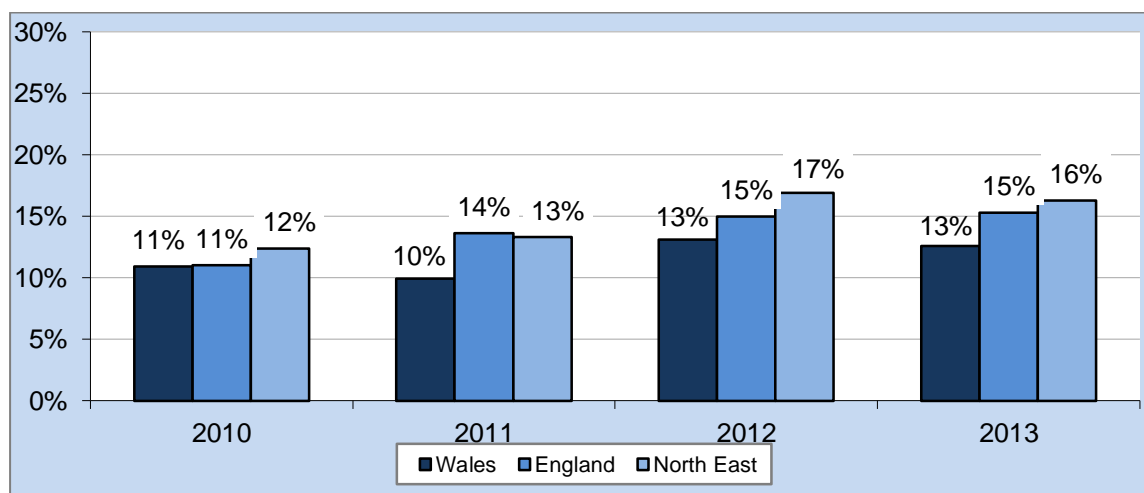
Statistical trends

- 2.5** This information is a comparison of attainment rates between years, not a comparison of the same children. It is recognised that the high percentage of learners who have special educational needs or behavioural, emotional or social difficulties has a strong bearing on attainment rates.
- 2.6** At Key Stages 2 and 3 there was a noticeable improvement in 2014 on the previous year. At Key Stage 2 the increase was 6 percentage points - 53% to 59%. At Key Stage 3 the improvement was 10 percentage points - from 36% to 46%. At Key Stage 4, the improvement was 4 percentage points - 13% to 17%.
- 2.7** Although performance has improved, when compared to the overall performance of pupils in Wales the difference in attainment rates at all Key Stages is significant. For instance in 2014, at Key Stage 3 the overall pupils category had an attainment rate of 81% compared with 46% for children who are looked after. We must continue to improve educational outcomes of children in all key stages.
- 2.8** The Children in Need Census statistics were first captured in 2010. We do not currently have enough historic census information to follow the educational journey of a specific child from the Foundation Phase through to Key Stage 4. However, compiling that historic information on individual children will be critical to inform future policy and practice.

2.9 The rate of improvement seen in the proportion of children who are looked after in Wales achieving qualifications over the last four years mirrors the general trend across the UK. Because of the differences in the education systems it is not possible to compare all of the qualification levels of these children. However, we can make a comparison with England and its regions at Key Stage 4.

2.10 The comparison in attainment between England, the North East of England and Wales at Key Stage 4 from 2010-2013 is shown in the table below. The North East region has been included as it is the most socio-economically comparable to Wales. We cannot provide statistics post 2013 as the education systems in England and Wales have become too dissimilar to compare. The statistics demonstrate low educational attainment is prevalent in England as well as Wales.

Chart 4: Comparisons in children who are looked after attainment: Percentage achieving 5+ GCSEs A*-C or equivalent including English/Welsh & Mathematics



Source: Children in Need Census

2.11 Low educational attainment is a long-standing problem which has been resistant to change even with the support offered. The improvement in educational performance recorded between 2013 and 2014 is welcome and is a positive step forward that must continue. Through the research conducted to evidence this strategy we are aware of the high aspirations children themselves have. We can not let the historic or relative position of peer performance feed into low aspirations and expectations of the children and young people by those closest to them. We need to find better ways to support improved educational performance such as creating greater stability in the care setting.

2.12 This strategy recognises that much is in place to support children who are looked after, including the commitment of those who work with them to improve their educational attainment and life chances. However, there is clear evidence that we need to strengthen policy and practice and improve leadership and collaboration.

Chapter 3: What is already in place?

- 3.1** The Welsh Government is committed to improving the life chances and outcomes of all children in Wales regardless of their family background and start in life.
- 3.2** We know targeted early interventions make a positive impact to changing outcomes for children identified as being 'in need'. A number of programmes and policies already help and support families who may be experiencing difficulties, often caused by living in areas of deprivation, and struggling to provide the necessary care for their children. Only by ensuring effective multi-agency support can we help prevent these children becoming looked after, though there are circumstances where the most appropriate action is for the child to be taken into care and supported accordingly.
- 3.3** Our early years programme is designed to provide strong support and guidance for families who find themselves in difficult circumstances and facing great challenges. Our primary aim is to support families to care for their children. Where that is not possible, we expect greater stability for those children who are looked after, in their friendships, school lives and for those who provide them with support. Our Families First programme plays a key role in supporting children on the cusp of care, children being reintegrated back with their birth parents, contact arrangements or who no longer have looked after status following a period in care.
- 3.4** The Welsh Government has set out its requirements of social services and other agencies in the [Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014](#).
- 3.5** The new legislative framework underpins the delivery of improved outcomes for children and their families. The 2014 Act will come into force in April 2016 and is supported by a package of Regulations and Codes of Practice which local authorities must act in accordance with, when exercising their social services functions.
- 3.6** The **National Outcomes Framework** for people who need care and support and carers who need support has been published. It will provide a coherent and comprehensive context to drive improved outcomes for children who are looked after as well as the wider child and adult population who need care and support. It sets out what well-being means, what matters to people and the outcome indicators used to measure whether well-being is achieved.
- 3.7** A performance measurement framework for local authorities has been developed to underpin the National Outcomes Framework. This is set out in the Code of Practice in relation to measuring social services performance. The framework includes quality standards and performance measures that evidence the contribution local authorities make to supporting people to achieve well-being.
- 3.8** Part 6 of the 2014 Act introduces a range of provisions to strengthen placement choice and stability for children who are looked after which will:
- require that they are accommodated close to their home or neighbouring community unless there is good reason not to do so and meets the needs of the child
 - enable them to be placed with their prospective adopters
 - provide for them to remain with their foster carers after the age of eighteen.

3.9 The Code of Practice on Part 6 of the 2014 Act require local authorities to have special regard to the education and training needs of a looked after child when making a placement and to ensure that the placement does not disrupt a child's education or training. In addition, regulations made under the Act impose particular requirements on local authorities when making placements for looked after children in Key Stage 4, recognising that moving children in the middle of a GCSE course may seriously damage their opportunity to gain the qualifications they need to enter further or higher education, or to gain employment¹. Local authority support for children and young people up to the age of 25, continuing in or re-engaging with education will be set out in their pathway plan.

3.10 [Qualified for Life – an education improvement plan for 3-19 year-olds in Wales](#) confirmed our commitment to raise standards and set out our vision that all learners will enjoy learning that inspires them to succeed. We have a simple aim that every child and young person, regardless of their background and start in life, should benefit from excellent teaching and learning. An independent review - [Successful Futures](#) - published in February 2015 made recommendations for new curriculum and assessment arrangements. The recommendations were accepted in full in June 2015 and an implementation plan, [A Curriculum for Wales, A Curriculum for Life](#), was published in October 2015. The plan sets out how the new curriculum will be developed with education professionals across Wales, with the aim of it being available to settings and schools by September 2018.

3.11 The [Education \(Admission of Looked After Children\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2009](#) place a duty on admission authorities to admit children who are looked after where an application for admission is made outside the admissions round by a corporate parent. The corporate parent must consult the relevant admission authority prior to making the application and make every effort to ensure the appropriateness of the school in the light of the child's needs.

3.12 The [School Admissions and Schools Admissions Appeals Code 2013](#) sets out arrangements for the admission of children, including those who are looked after, to schools. In addition, children who are looked after and previously looked after should be ranked first in the oversubscription criteria for schools where applications for admission exceed the admission number for the school.

3.13 Whilst it is essential that children who have no school place are found one quickly, section 433 of the [Education Act 1996](#) does permit the deferment of admission to the start of a subsequent school term to minimise disruption. Where this option to defer admission is used, it must not prejudice vulnerable children, such as those looked after.

3.14 [The Learner Travel Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance 2014](#) sets out arrangements to allow children who are looked after to remain in the same school, wherever practicable, even when there are residential placement changes.

¹ The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015

- 3.15** Support for learners should, as a matter of routine, involve input from local authority home to school transport services in addition to a range of other relevant services, such as social services and education services. This is key to forming a holistic approach to the concept and practice of corporate responsibility.
- 3.16** The [Learner Travel \(Wales\) Measure 2008](#) places a statutory duty on local authorities to assess the travel needs of learners up to the age of (and sometimes including) 19 and to provide free transport, in specified circumstances. Local authorities decide which school is the nearest suitable school by considering a range of criteria, such as a learner's age, ability, aptitude, including any learning difficulties. Under the Measure children who are looked after can have free transport to schools, other than the nearest suitable schools, due to the need to maintain continuity in education or contact with siblings or friends to promote well-being.
- 3.17** The [Learner Travel Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance 2014](#) recommends that local authorities consider the needs of those who are vulnerable to becoming NEET so that they have reasonable opportunities to choose between places of learning and training.
- 3.18** In July 2015, the [Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal \(Wales\) Bill](#) was published for consultation. This sets out a proposed unified legislative framework to replace the existing separate legislative frameworks surrounding special educational needs (SEN) and the assessment of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) in post-16 education and training.
- 3.19** It is proposed that Individual Development Plans (IDPs) replace statements of SEN, post-16 assessments (under section 140 of the [Learning and Skills Act 2000](#) and non-statutory Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and post-16 plans for all learners with ALN who attend or wish to attend a maintained school, pupil referral unit, Further Education institution or specialist post-16 provision. The draft Bill also includes a provision which would permit regulations to be made about support from local authorities to promote the educational achievement of looked after and formally looked after children, and about any Additional Learning Provision required by them in relation to any Additional Learning Needs. The intention is to provide for a single educational plan for looked after children that integrates the existing Personal Education Plan (PEP) with the IDP.
- 3.20** Although it is recognised that not all of these children and young people will have ALN, the draft Bill follows a White Paper published in 2014 which contended that the cross over between the likely contents of an IDP and an existing PEP, and the significant proportion of children and young people who are looked after who have ALN, provides a rationale for bringing these two plans together.
- 3.21** The Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) is the Welsh Government's principal means of providing financial support to improve the educational outcomes for children who are looked after. The PDG is allocated to the regional education consortia to deliver strategic and evidence based support and in April 2015 we introduced flexibility into the terms and conditions of funding to enable consortia to support interventions aimed at children who have been adopted or are subject to a Special Guardianship Order. We are working with partners to understand what effective interventions could have the greatest impact for these learners.

- 3.22** We know that children who are looked after face particular barriers which may affect their successful transition into further learning. They are more likely to have lower educational achievements than their peers, and may need additional advice, guidance and encouragement to understand and access the different options available to them. Once in post-16 learning, they may be reluctant to disclose their status as a looked after child or care leaver. This highlights the importance of a holistic approach by different agencies involved in supporting these children, so that information can be shared securely on a 'need to know' basis and the individual learner's needs met.
- 3.23** To help ensure that learners stay on their course and achieve their learner goals, information must be clearly signposted by the college. Arrangements for learner support in FE institutions are generally effective, with tutors, mentors, learning coaches and student services departments providing a strong network. However, children in care and care leavers may have multiple and complex needs which require more tailored support, underpinned by staff training and awareness-raising. FE institutions play an important role in identifying young people at risk of dropping out and providing support to help keep them engaged.
- 3.24** The Education Maintenance Allowance provides a £30 per week incentive for young people to continue in education after leaving school. The Assembly Learning Grant FE (for 19+) is an income-assessed grant of up to £1,500 that aims to encourage more people to continue with their education, where otherwise this may not be possible. To make this support more accessible for children in care and care leavers the application process to access the grant has been simplified and their applications are fast tracked by the Student Loans Company which administers both grants.
- 3.25** In 2010, Buttle UK extended its Quality Mark to the FE sector to build on its successful implementation in higher education. The Quality Mark has been awarded to institutions that demonstrate robust strategies to support learners from a care background. It includes criteria relating to effective partnership working, accessibility of provision and support for care leavers, impartial guidance and staff training.
- 3.26** In April 2014, Buttle UK announced its decision to cease awarding the Quality Mark and to focus instead on working with the FE and HE sectors to embed provision for the children and care leavers. We expect all educational settings in Wales to follow the principles of the Buttle UK Care Leavers Quality Mark. This includes providing impartial advice and guidance, clear information on the financial and other support available to care leavers, and having a designated member of staff to act as a point of contact for care leavers. While the Quality Mark has been withdrawn, we are continuing to work with the FE sector to embed these principles and build upon best practice. Buttle UK has produced guidance materials for further education institutions which draw on best practice from across the UK: [Supporting Learners in Further Education](#)
- 3.27** The [Corporate Strategy of the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales \(HEFCW\)](#) sets out its commitment to children who are looked after and care leavers within the context of its widening access strategic theme which seeks to *secure inclusion, progression and success in higher education*. HEFCW's strategic [Approach to Widening Access](#) and [Child Poverty Strategy](#) also recognise the contribution that higher education can make to supporting people with a care background.

- 3.28** Universities support these children and care leavers into and through higher education as part of their fee plan and widening access strategy commitments. One mechanism for widening access is the Wales-wide [Reaching Wider Programme](#). The three regional [Reaching Wider Partnerships](#) deliver educational aspiration and skills-raising programmes to schools and communities, in partnership with further education and other education providers.
- 3.29** As a result of the [Buttle UK Quality Mark](#) more work is being undertaken in higher education to collate and monitor data relating to care leavers. Many care leavers experience disrupted education and require further learning opportunities before they are ready to succeed in higher education. While data collection is at an early stage, the number of care leavers progressing into higher education is still small. Universities recognise that preparing young people to leave local authority care is pivotal to their future life chances and provide a number of interventions including opportunities to visit university campuses, mentoring, FE and HE information, advice and guidance and HE workshops for carers and supporters of these children.
- 3.30** In March 2011, the [Higher Education Bursary Regulations](#) imposed a duty on local authorities to pay a bursary of £2,000 to any former looked after young person who wishes to undertake a course at university. Universities' commitment to widening access to individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds mean many offer a range of targeted financial support packages on an individual needs basis. The Higher Education bursary is in addition to such support packages.
- 3.31** Local authorities should provide a personal adviser to act as a mentor to the care leaver, taking account of the individual support requirements of the individual, in discussion with the care leaver. The personal advisor is vital for those in the youth justice system who may not be accomplished in accessing the financial support to which they are entitled to help them into post-16 education or employment.
- 3.32** Our [Youth Engagement and Progression Framework](#) has been developed to support those at risk of not making a positive transition when they leave school. The framework brings together key elements of effective practice proven to help deliver positive outcomes for young people and provides a systematic mechanism for local authorities to identify those in need of support, establish the support available, and to track progress of young people as they make the transition from compulsory education into further education, training or employment. The framework introduced the:
- offer of a lead worker within a relevant organisation who can provide continuity of support and contact for the most at risk young people
 - [Youth Guarantee](#) which is the offer, acceptance and commencement of a suitable place in education or training for young people making the first time transition from compulsory education at age 16
 - Engagement and Progression Coordinator (EPC) function within a local authority which guides the early identification process, facilitates the allocation of lead workers as appropriate and brokers an understanding between partners on roles and responsibilities.
- 3.33** [Together for Mental Health \(2012\)](#) seeks to improve the mental health of all the people of Wales and recognises that by identifying and tackling mental illness in children and young people we can ameliorate more serious illness later in life. Health services

are provided on the basis of clinical need and equality of access for all. There is, however, a need for agencies to work together to ensure the right services are provided for the individual in a timely manner. In 2015 the NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) instigated a major service change and reconfiguration programme. Among other things this seeks to reshape and refocus the role of specialist NHS CAMHS and how it works with other service providers of emotional help and support, such as local authority counselling to provide for the needs of young people. In October 2015 we launched a consultation on draft guidelines for [CAMHS and counselling services on collaborative working](#).

3.34 The mental health and emotional well-being of children who are looked after should not be seen as a stand alone issue and needs to be embedded within all aspects of provision, recognising that many external factors can impact positively or negatively. Specialist CAMHS is expert in dealing with those with very complex and severe mental ill-health, but this is not just a health issue and for the majority of young people who will suffer low level emotional problems, general practice, counsellors, school staff and nurses, the Education Welfare Service, educational psychologists and youth workers are all able to provide help and support.

Chapter 4: What more must we do?

4.1 The Welsh Government has since early 2015 been engaged in informative and constructive conversations with key stakeholders within and beyond the formal consultation process. This has helped confirm the areas where further action needs to be targeted to support higher levels of education performance.

4.2 These areas – strategic and operational - are explored further in this chapter. They provide the basis for this strategy, and the supporting action plan, which will be reported against annually.

Strategic:

- promote a consistent national approach to raise aspirations at every level
- provide stronger corporate leadership committed to improving the education of children who are looked after
- clarify roles and responsibilities of all involved in the lives of children who are looked after
- strengthen and reinforce arrangements and partnerships of all agencies - improve communication between all those involved in the lives of these children and care leavers
- ensure corporate commitment to find ways of doing things better to positively influence educational outcomes
- more effective use of data to understand how attainment can be balanced with the individual's personal, social and emotional development (well-being)
- strengthen the level of collaboration between the Welsh Government, regional education consortia, local authorities, schools, educational settings, foster carers and looked after children to ensure that decisions impact positively on learners.

Operational:

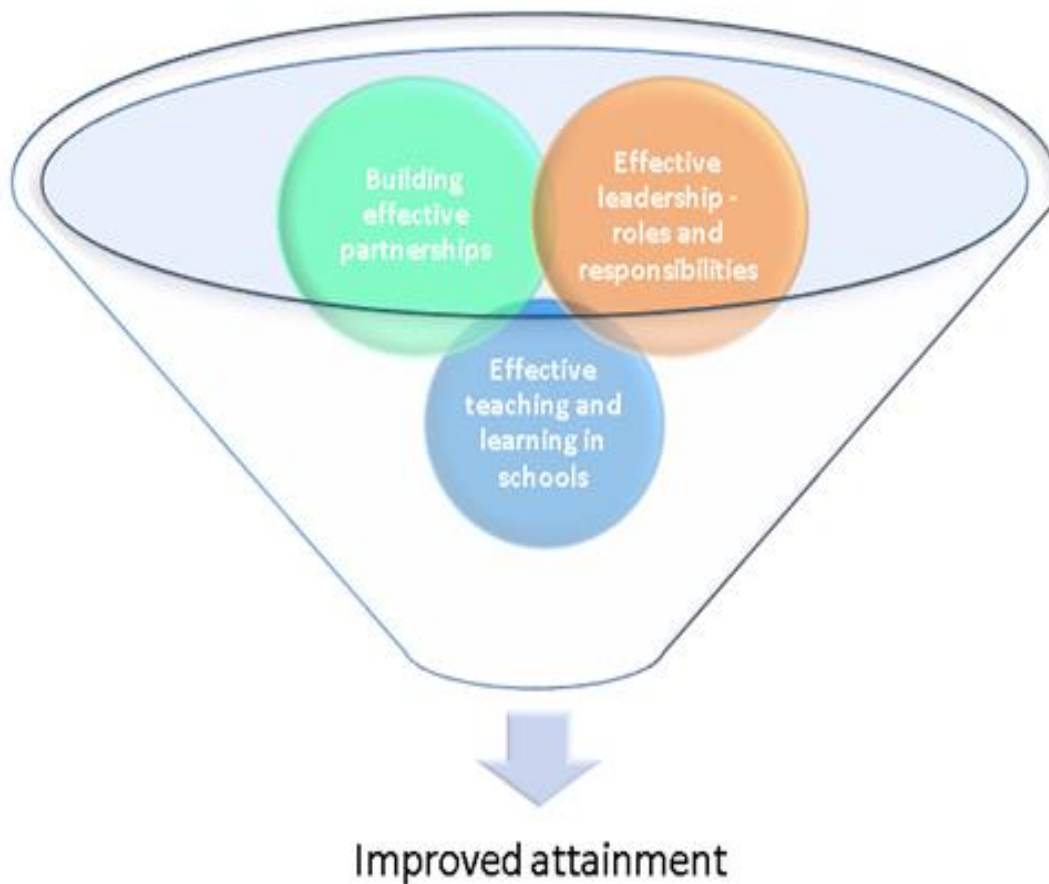
- identify and implement practical action needed to overcome barriers to delivery
- robust challenge of under-performance
- clarity and alignment of expectations of the key roles in supporting children who are looked after
- share good practice and ensure interpretation of existing guidance is consistent
- monitoring of outcomes for funding available to support children
- information exchange within local authorities between social services and education departments, particularly LACE Coordinators.

4.3 Using these areas as the foundation, this chapter identifies a range of actions to strengthen arrangements based on 3 main themes:

A. Effective leadership – roles and responsibilities

B. Building effective partnerships and collaboration

C. Effective teaching and learning



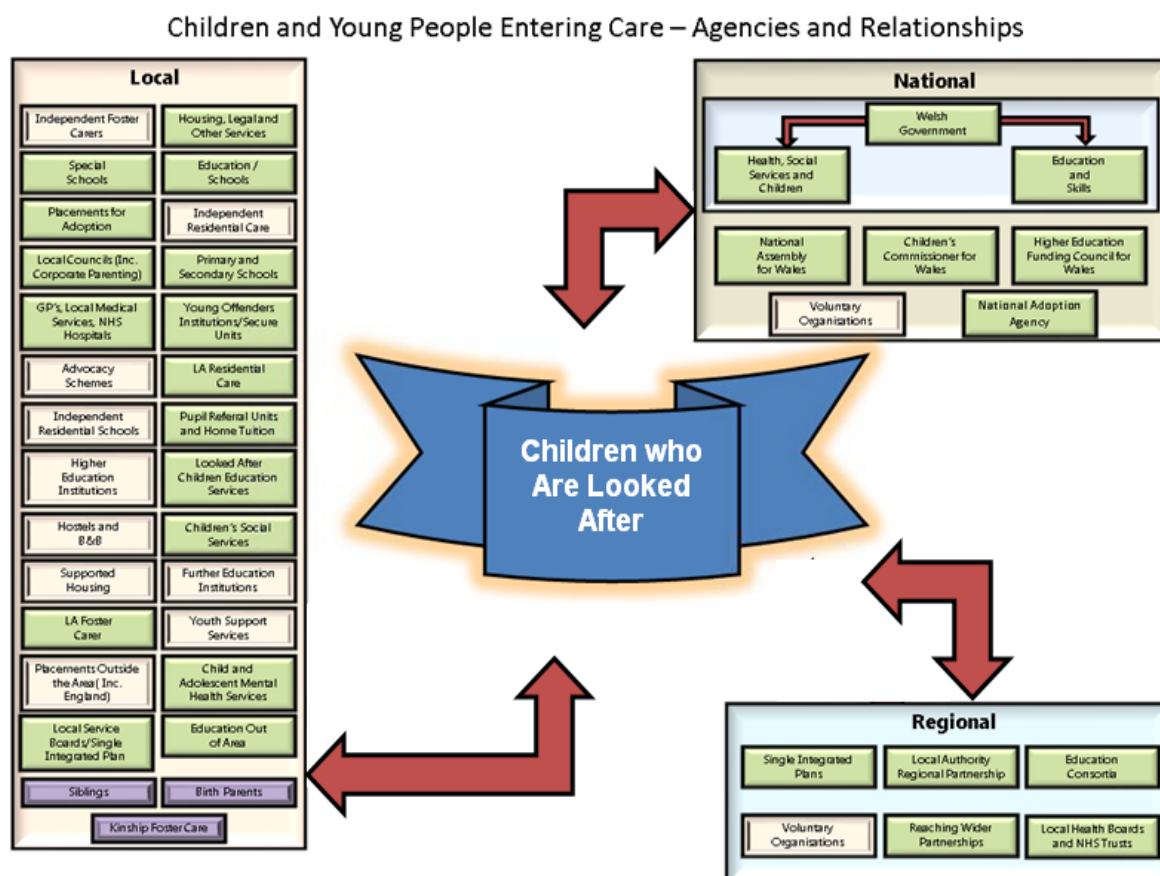
4.4 These areas must work seamlessly together to generate improvement and are all integral to improving educational outcomes. They are supported by 3 other important areas:

- making better use of data
- strengthening funding arrangements
- participation with children to inform strategic approaches and operational decision making.

A. Effective leadership – roles and responsibilities

4.5 A range of professionals across a number of disciplines exist to support children who are looked after. These span all sectors, with a leading role for local authority social services and education services. To ensure the right outcomes are delivered, everybody needs to execute their function and responsibility for these children with the child at the centre of activity.

4.6 The diagram illustrates the complex multi-agency linkages in place to support these children. If any of the relationships is not managed effectively the child's well-being and education is likely to suffer. All parts of the system need to understand and be accountable for their responsibilities and undertake these in an appropriate and timely fashion.



4.7 Leadership must provide challenge, be subject to challenge, and result in improved outcomes for children. A clear line of accountability is essential at every level of the local authority – officers and elected members – to the governing body, regional education consortia, head teacher and those designated with specific responsibilities, teachers and involving at every step carers, foster parents and the children themselves. Without clear lines of accountability (enforced through robust scrutiny) and a strong commitment to support education attainment and outcomes will remain unsatisfactory.

4.8 Informed by the work we have undertaken through consultation the following section identifies where future action must be strengthened to improve leadership and clarify roles and responsibilities involving the Welsh Government, regional education consortia, local authorities, schools and educational settings.

The Welsh Government

4.9 The Welsh Government will work with partners to ensure a clear framework within which agreed roles and responsibilities can be undertaken effectively to support delivery. We will facilitate strategic improvement. Working collaboratively we will ensure that there are clearly defined outcomes that are shared nationally, regionally and locally by all those working with the children who are looked after.

4.10 We have already introduced regional education consortia which add value to what local authorities can achieve on their own, allowing them to share good practice, knowledge and skills, magnify local strengths and build capacity.

4.11 Regional working is a key element of the national implementation plan – [Improving Schools](#), designed to deliver the improvements necessary to enable learners to achieve their potential. We have introduced new arrangements in the delivery of the Pupil Deprivation Grant to enable the delivery of strategic, regional services to support this group of learners. We expect to see the consortia, local authorities and schools working collaboratively – and with the third sector - to develop a range of innovative and effective activities and interventions to support learners.

4.12 We have explored the concept of the Virtual School Head (VSH) model which exists in England. The VSH acts as a local authority co-ordinator and champion to bring about improvements in the education of children who are looked after. In England, the VSH also manages the Pupil Premium funding. It was suggested in our consultation document that we consider adopting a similar approach to the VSH in Wales. Our stakeholders told us that a lead co-ordinator role based in each regional education consortium would be the preferred way forward rather than to replicate the local authority based model.

4.13 Action No. 1: The Welsh Government will support each regional consortium to identify a lead co-ordinator who will manage funding and ensure the delivery of an agreed, strategic programme of work. The post holder's responsibilities might include:

- planning the grant expenditure and ensuring that the grant arrangements work effectively to improve the educational outcomes for the children
- promotion of good practice which currently exists within local authorities throughout the region to ensure a consistent delivery of service
- arranging appropriate training for joint audiences of teachers, social workers, schools and foster carers
- working with key stakeholders to monitor the impact of training and support and the educational outcomes of the children across the region.

4.14 Action No.2: The Welsh Government will develop and publish advice on the roles and responsibilities of the lead co-ordinator.

4.15 Existing arrangements for funding can be used to meet the costs of this post, or part costs if the role is not full-time.

4.16 Section 20 of the [Children and Young Persons Act 2008](#) introduced arrangements requiring the governing body of a maintained school to designate a member of staff as having lead responsibility for promoting the educational achievement of children who are looked after in the school.

4.17 Action No.3: The Welsh Government will develop guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the designated lead member of staff in schools, and on governing bodies in supporting that function. This will ensure consistency in the role in a national context.

4.18 To support the implementation of the guidance, we will:

- undertake a mapping exercise to establish what training is available for the designated lead member of staff and disseminate examples of good practice
- commission appropriate training modules to support schools and further education staff with a responsibility for young people who are looked after
- deliver stakeholder events to promote the new guidance and training modules.

4.19 The [Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014](#) provides an opportunity to re-examine the statutory roles to support children who are looked after. The Act includes provisions which will strengthen requirements to ensure children receive a more fulfilling experience of education and an improved level of educational attainment consistent with their mainstream counterparts.

4.20 Action No.4: The Welsh Government will reinforce corporate accountability for looked after children through a revised Code of Practice on the statutory role of the Director of Social Services.

4.21 Action No.5: The Welsh Government will consider the consultation responses to the draft [Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal \(Wales\) Bill](#) with a view to developing further the provisions on children and young people who are looked after. In particular, we will look at the scope for ensuring that the planning of education provision for these children is streamlined, promotes continuity and consistency and is open to appropriate challenge and scrutiny.

4.22 The Scottish Government is developing work on improving outcomes for children who are looked after. We will work closely with the Scottish Government to explore where alternative approaches are being taken and consider how these might help support the children within Welsh structures. We will also further explore examples of good practice internationally.

4.23 We are exploring opportunities to learn from other countries where excellent outcomes for children who are looked after are achieved, including the social pedagogy approach used in Germany and Denmark. Social pedagogy is an approach to caring for children which combines education and care, focussing not just on schooling but on social lifelong educational processes.

4.24 Action No.6: The Welsh Government will work with key partners to assess the feasibility of a pilot programme that will deliver a combined educational and social care approach that will help to improve placement stability and provide a stronger and better equipped workforce in Wales.

Local authorities & regional education consortia

4.25 The role of the local authority is a crucial one especially in view of responsibilities placed on elected members by [If this were my child: A councillor's guide to being a good corporate parent to children in care and care leavers](#). The guidance invited all elected members to consider '*would I do it this way if this were my child?*'

4.26 Action No.7: A marketing, promotional and training drive will be developed to

ensure all elected members are aware of the expectations placed on them to support the children. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) will be engaged in taking this action forward.

4.27 Action No.8: Local authorities should review the roles of key workers and ensure that responsibility and accountability exists in all parts of the system. This should be in accordance with a consistent national context set by the Welsh Government to ensure that local authorities do not implement changes in isolation of one another. In particular local authorities should make arrangements to:

- ensure a designated elected member with a lead responsibility for the education of children who are looked after is in place and is equipped to undertake the role
- examine the roles of social workers and Independent Review Officers (IRO) to ensure that plans are in place and progressed to meet the needs of the child. This includes reviewing a child's educational needs, progress and development, to support and strengthen the existing process
- review the roles and responsibilities of the LACE Coordinator and the designated person with lead responsibility in schools to ensure alignment and collaboration to raise the level and quality of support provided. This should ensure that the learner's progress is properly tracked in conjunction with schools and educational settings, so that interventions are quickly applied where attainment appears to be in decline. The same high quality level of service and support should be considered for children who have been adopted or are subject to a Special Guardianship Order
- support foster carers, residential child care workers, kinship carers and parents so that the promotion of education is paramount and under-performance is not accepted. All carers must be equipped – through training if necessary - with the skills necessary to challenge schools where the child's attainment is not at the expected level, and must be aware of the key personnel to approach to do so, such as seeking support through regional education consortia and school challenge advisors.

4.28 Foster carers, through the Fostering Network, have told us they need:

- improved training, including joint training with residential social workers
- improved partnerships between foster carers and designated school staff
- foster carers to be recognised as educators of children in foster care
- improved access to remedial and supplementary education/coaching.

4.29 Action No.9: Regional education consortia - and their partners - should consider how to support foster carers and other carers with appropriate training which has a specific educational focus on the children in their care.

Schools and educational settings

4.30 Appropriate focus must be maintained in all schools, the level closest to children who are looked after on a day to day basis. Key personnel, with the right skills and expertise, need to be designated to lead in work with children who are looked after. An understanding of the care system and the impact that being in care can have on a child's

education, and ways in which this can be overcome, is clearly an advantage.

4.31 Action No.10: Many governing bodies already nominate a designated lead governor, more commonly known as the looked after children link governor. This role is important in acting as an advocate, scrutinising and challenging arrangements and in providing support to the designated lead member of staff for children in the school. Appropriate training for school governors provided by local authorities will reflect the needs of the children and guidance will set out how the roles of the designated lead member of staff and the designated governor align. We will promote the role of looked after children link governor and encourage all governing bodies to select a governor to represent the interests of these young people as standard good practice.

4.32 Working with the head teacher, appropriate resources, support and training should be provided to ensure that people who undertake these key roles are able to do so effectively. Governors Wales should also be engaged closely with this work.

4.33 Action No.11: Some further education institutions in Wales have undertaken excellent work to achieve the Buttle UK Quality Mark for their support for care leavers. While Buttle UK has ceased to administer the Quality Mark, all institutions should continue to work to meet its criteria and to build on existing good practice. Institutions should continue to demonstrate strong leadership and work in partnership with local authorities and other agencies to secure the best possible support for learners from a care background. A designated lead person for these young people should be in place as part of the student support provision in every further education institution.

B. Building effective partnerships and collaboration

4.34 We need to work better and more effectively together to support children who are looked after in education and engender partnership and collaboration. The important and significant role of foster carers, residential child care workers, kinship carers and parents needs to be reflected in supporting and motivating children to value, access and attend school or educational and training placements.

4.35 We need to ensure arrangements build on good examples of partnership working and the desire held by all those who are involved in the lives of children to drive up the educational performance of learners. It is essential that adequate support is put in place to create an environment which is fully conducive to effective collaboration. The Youth Engagement and Progression Framework is a good example of partnership working which, through a plan, brings together critical elements of NEET reduction in one place.

4.36 Children and young people entering care become part of a series of complex systems and relationships. Given the complexity of agencies and professionals that support the lives of these children, effective joint working is critical. Collaboration across all levels will help partners share strong practice, and identify weaknesses and potential barriers.

4.37 Social services and education services must collaborate effectively to enable young people to remain in education and fulfil their potential. We know that a child's progress and attainment can be affected significantly when they have undergone a placement change at a critical point in their school life. Exams and transition from primary to secondary and secondary school to further education are key times.

4.38 Action No.12: The Welsh Government will work with local authorities - particularly LACE Coordinators - and other key stakeholders to establish a national strategic group to support consistent practice in supporting children who are looked after and the interdependencies which exist between them. Our focus will include promoting peer support for practitioners, sharing good practice and identifying and overcoming barriers to success.

4.39 Action No.13: We will work with the WLGA and Association of Directors of Education Wales (ADEW) to implement a 'community of practice' to help build more effective working relationships and communications between designated lead members of staff in schools and further education institutions, LACE Coordinators, carers and social workers.

4.40 Action No.14: The Welsh Government will work with Estyn to examine what information would help better support collaboration and delivery at a local level. Work areas will include the production of a thematic study, providing robust case studies and underpinning so that the LACE Coordinators and schools can draw on successful practices to help them provide better support.

4.41 Action No.15: Strengthening the role of the third sector and the independent sector will ensure a more holistic approach to delivery, and provide an advocate for children who are often difficult to engage in education. The Welsh Government's Strategic Steering Group will consider how outcomes for children who are looked after and care leavers can be improved through prevention and early intervention, improved collaborative working across agencies and through identifying and sharing good practice and making improvements where they are needed. The third and independent sectors are represented on the Group and will be the voice of these children in developing arrangements that will support their educational attainment and improve their overall well-being.

4.42 Action No.16: Local authorities with similar learner profiles should work more collaboratively and to find more effective ways of sharing good practice, professional expertise and teaching support across authorities. Local authorities – working with regional education consortia in planning strategic actions – should actively explore opportunities for greater collaboration to support better and more consistent practice, and in sharing good practice.

4.43 Action No.17: Local authorities should map and review existing local protocols, strengthening them where necessary using service level agreements and memoranda of understanding. Where agencies fail to work coherently together, the impact on children and their education can be extremely damaging. To avoid disruptions, social services and education departments should consider ways in which the child continues to attend the same school even if residential placement changes happen. Transport costs and arguments over who pays must not be barriers to the school placement stability of learners.

4.44 Action No.18: Regional education consortia and local authorities should work with schools, educational settings and the third sector to map existing materials to help carers and foster parents understand the importance of engagement with schools and post-16 education providers. They should then collaborate to develop material which is not

already in place and identify where it is needed. Any costs arising from this strategic activity may be met through the children who are looked after element of the PDG.

4.45 The Reaching Wider Partnerships could be the mechanism for promoting the material and ensuring that the higher and further education sectors are sufficiently represented.

4.46 LACE Coordinators and Engagement and Progression Coordinators should work collaboratively with partners including Careers Wales, schools, FE Institutions, Work Based Learning providers, Youth Offending Teams and Care Leavers Activities and Support Services (CLASS) Cymru to ensure children at risk of becoming NEET are identified and supported through the transition from compulsory education and into further education, training or into employment. This will also benefit young people in the youth justice system.

4.47 Action No.19: The Welsh Government will work with all parties through a series of regional events and help build an effective network to ensure consistency of service provision.

4.48 Young people who are looked after or are care leavers are required to declare their 'looked after' status upon enrolling at a higher education institution to receive their Higher Education Bursary of £2,000, which is paid by local authorities. This process often discourages young people who are looked after or are care leavers from taking up their entitlement on account of the stigma they may feel in having to do this.

4.49 To ensure that looked after children and care leavers receive the right support, it is important that FE and HE institutions are able to identify them. However, careful consideration needs to be given to respecting the learner's wishes and ensuring the security of their personal information.

4.50 Action No.20: The Welsh Government is undertaking work to improve data sharing between schools and post-16 education providers, and will consider the particular needs of children who are looked after and care leavers as part of this.

C. Effective teaching and learning

4.51 Schools and further education institutions understand the powerful role they can play in significantly improving the quality of life and the education of children who are looked after. Many have already put in place excellent sustainable practice and are generally better informed than before and better able to recognise the children's needs.

4.52 The life experiences of children can often result in behaviour that might be categorised as erratic and irrational. They can suffer from attachment disorders and other emotional problems which teachers need to be able to manage as sensitively as possible. [Right to Learn](#) found that 9% of children and young people attending pupil referral units are looked after and systems and measures to support pupil well-being through effective behaviour management need to be improved.

4.53 The priority should be to maintain the learner in school seeking local authority and other professional advice as necessary. This includes having access to psychological and/or psychiatric services in the most severe cases. Social services and the LACE Coordinator should be involved at the earliest opportunity, working with the school and other professionals to avoid the need to exclude the learner.

4.54 The educational journey of children who are looked after must be better tracked so that rich information, and not just data, can be exchanged when a child moves school and to keep an accurate record of their learning. Better tracking also helps identify where there are gaps in the child's educational development and where additional support is needed – this is particularly important when monitoring children who are placed out of county/country and those who attend independent special schools linked to children's homes.

4.55 The Personal Education Plan (and/or Individual Development Plan) must be timely, accurate and meaningful and belong to the child and developed jointly by education and social services. By creating an environment where a child feels part of the process, they are less likely to become disaffected. Many young people have told us they would like to be involved in designing and developing their educational plans from the outset. Those who were involved in their plan, felt more supported and happier in their education. There was also a strong call for the plan to contain equal focus on their personal development as much as educational attainment. The principles of person centred planning (PCP) should be used as a matter of course in undertaking this important duty.

4.56 Schools should pay particular attention to the actions in this strategy and ensure that any gaps which exist are addressed quickly. The role of the lead member of staff and the lead governor will be pivotal in the delivery of these arrangements, but all staff should be aware of support arrangements. The research undertaken by CASCADE – Cardiff University informs us that peer mentoring, in many cases, can really help children. Providing emotional support when they are going through a difficult time can have a real impact on education experience. Schools should explore the concept of offering peer group support, which would be taken up on a voluntary basis.

4.57 For some time the primary focus has been on the academic attainment of children who are looked after. However, this should not diminish the importance of supporting individual's personal, social and emotional development (well-being). The two elements should be recognised as interconnected and be given equal status. Well-being and attainment of these vulnerable children are not exclusive of each other.

4.58 Action No.21: Schools will ensure children who are looked after are prioritised in the admissions process and that unexplained absences are dealt with promptly. The key factor is stability. This also means that exclusions must be considered only in the most extreme circumstances. Schools will work closely with the LACE Coordinator and the Education Welfare Officer to monitor the attendance of these children and respond immediately to first day absences.

4.59 Action No.22: Schools will place emphasis on information sharing which needs to be timely. It should be accepted good practice in transition planning to set up information sharing meetings prior to a child starting a new school or educational setting. The meetings should involve appropriate personnel from the receiving and previous school together with social workers and other agency staff. It is essential that confidentiality and privacy is adhered to and professionals have access to information on a 'need to know' basis. All schools should have appropriate protocols in this respect.

4.60 Action No.23: Schools and further education institutions will ensure there are specific professional learning opportunities on managing challenging behaviour and recognising the needs of children suffering from trauma and attachment issues. Regional education consortia and LACE Coordinators should engage with schools and educational settings to consider how broader awareness training for school personnel in supporting vulnerable children could be commissioned and delivered regionally funded through the PDG. Personnel from further education institutions should also be included in the training wherever possible.

4.61 Action No.24: Arrangements should be made to improve tracking to monitor the educational progress of children who are looked after and ensure meaningful Personal Education Plans and Individual Development Plans. There are examples of good practice in some local authorities where systems are in place to track and trace every child's progress. This is especially important in cases where a child is placed and educated out of the host local authority. Regional educational consortia should work with their LACE Coordinators to identify and share examples of good tracking and monitoring systems.

4.62 Action No.25: Schools should set realistic, but challenging targets in consultation with children and young people and recognise that education may be low on their personal agenda due to other emotional issues. This information must be formalised within the education plan. Education plans must also monitor and record the personal development of the child in greater detail.

4.63 We will know that we are making a real difference to educational attainment if we see a greater proportion of children choose to continue with their education after the compulsory school age. There is more to be done in terms of schools and post-16 education providers working together in a far more joined up way to assist the children in the transition to further and higher education. There is more practical help which could be offered and provided. Further Education and Higher Education personnel need to know who to contact within social services to ensure the children participate and do not drop out of post-16 education.

4.64 Action No.26: The Welsh Government will work with partners in CLASS Cymru and local authorities to host and maintain a national contact list of key personnel such as LACE Coordinators, Engagement and Progression Coordinators (EPCs), further education and higher education student support officers to improve communications. It is suggested that the contact list is reviewed and updated every six months.

4.65 Action No.27: It is expected that schools arrange for year 11 pupils to undertake away day visits to educational settings to find out more information on available courses and entry requirements. We expect all further education institutions to have a designated lead person for children who are looked after and for this member of staff to support prospective students in an appropriate environment which is non-stigmatising.

4.66 Action No.28: Schools and post-16 institutions should formalise service level agreements and protocols to support information sharing to facilitate the smooth transition from school to post-16 learning for children who are looked after. Schools and local authorities have a responsibility to ensure that children and young people are made aware of the full range of available options, including vocational and work-based learning and to help support their transition into other education and training settings.

4.67 Action No.29: Higher education institutions should develop mentoring schemes for children who are looked after and care leavers to support stability in their lives and ensure they complete their studies.

4.68 While overall performance of the majority of children needs to be improved, we can not overlook where exemplary work is being undertaken in schools. Some of this good practice is being shared but in an ad hoc manner. We all want to gain the benefits from good practice and apply this accordingly.

Making better use of data

4.69 The Welsh Government has sought to improve the quality and reliability of data it collects on vulnerable groups. The Children in Need (CiN) census introduced in 2008-09 covers children receiving support services continuously for three months to 31 March in the year of the census. The support is financed from children's social services budgets, including those supported in their families or independently, children on the child protection register and children who are looked after.

4.70 The census data is matched with education data to provide an overview of attainment across the Foundation Phases and all Key Stages. Local authorities are able to use the census data in conjunction with other information to analyse and plan their patterns of activity for children's social and education services and compare their children in need populations with that of other local authorities.

4.71 Whilst improvements have been made in the quality of the data collected, we will ensure the data is used robustly so that the interventions put in place to support these children are timely and effective.

4.72 Action No.30: Working with our partners, the Welsh Government will review how the range of data on children who are looked after is collected and analysed to consolidate numerous datasets and reduce complexity. This will also include considering the availability of benchmarks and comparison across local authorities and regional education consortia.

4.73 Action No.31: The Welsh Government is committed to ensuring that children who were formerly looked after and have been adopted succeed in education and reach their full potential. Currently, the Children in Need (CiN) census does not identify and capture the educational attainment of former looked after children who have been adopted. As a result, we are unable to monitor their educational progress. Working with the National Adoption Service and Adoption UK (Wales) we will consider ways in which we might capture this important statistical information.

4.74 Action No.32: Currently there is a lack of information on the outcomes for children who were looked after once they leave the school system and move into other educational settings. We will commission an initial analysis which uses matched data to identify post-16 outcomes for these young people, including retention, attainment and progression rates. This will help to identify the baseline position which can then be used to carry out annual analysis, and to identify any crucial gaps in the available data.

Strengthening funding arrangements

4.75 Since April 2015, the regional education consortia have been responsible for managing and administering the Pupil Deprivation Grant to deliver strategic support and ensure improved educational attainment for children who are looked after. Former looked after children who have been adopted, or are subject to a special guardianship order, can also be supported should consortia choose to take advantage of the discretion we have introduced within the eligibility criteria.

4.76 The general consensus from education providers is that this arrangement has provided a real opportunity to take a more holistic approach to strategic resource allocation which benefits whole populations of vulnerable children, including children who are looked after or have been adopted, within their region. The Welsh Government will work closely with regional education consortia to ensure the funding is utilised as intended and is making a real impact in driving up the educational performance of these children which is consistent with the objectives of this strategy and the associated action plan.

4.77 Action No.33: To reinforce the consortia accountability for delivering results, we will work with regional education consortia to introduce a new reporting process to better track and monitor expenditure. From April 2016, we will introduce a rapid review process to evaluate the effectiveness of the first year of new funding arrangements.

4.78 Adoption UK (Wales) and LACE Coordinators have described how the complex issues that impact on the child's ability to achieve their educational potential often continue with them once they are adopted. This poses a challenge to both the adoptive family and schools.

4.79 Action No.34: We will continue to work with partners to capture the effective interventions which are proven to have the greatest impact. We are working with Adoption UK (Wales) to produce guidance which is designed to give teachers and adoptive parents an insight into how early relational trauma affects brain development, why schools can be challenging for adopted children, and how we can help to improve the experience of all children by paying attention to the needs of the most vulnerable. Although the focus is adoption, the information also applies to children who are looked after by the local authority and other children who live with loss and early trauma.

Participation of children who are looked after and adopted children to inform strategic approaches and operational decision making

4.80 Local authorities have a duty to promote and facilitate participation by children and young people in decisions that might affect them. The legal basis for this duty is [Section 12 of the Children and Families \(Wales\) Measure 2010](#). It requires local authorities to make such arrangements as they consider suitable to promote and facilitate participation by children in decisions of the authority which might affect them.

4.81 To meet the requirements of the legislation local authorities are expected to work with relevant partners to ensure that a range of opportunities to support effective participation is provided. These opportunities should be integrated into day to day services as well as specific participation structures such as forums for children, forums for young people, or groups/forums which represent children and young people who are marginalised, vulnerable or have a special interest in a particular issue.

4.82 In accordance with Article 12 of the UNCRC, we expect that all those involved with the well-being and education of these children to treat them with respect, listen to their views and are reliable and trustworthy.

4.83 The young people who were interviewed as part of our consultation said that education is vital in gaining a 'positive future' not just through educational learning but the development of the life skills and development of opportunities that are needed to succeed. In summary, the young people said:

- they are often frustrated about how they felt not listened to by adults and support services. Although aware of their advocacy entitlement, some young people said they were never offered it
- not all teachers understand what it is like to be looked after or adopted. They should all receive awareness training
- they would like the opportunity to contribute to and influence the teacher training in raising awareness about the issues they face
- they want a greater say in deciding what is in their PEP/IDP
- they do not want meetings relating to their care circumstances being held during schools hours, especially during lessons, which is disruptive
- if they have to move school they want to be fully consulted and feel part of the decision making process
- they want more support and information to be able to make the transition from school to post-16 education.

4.84 The views of these learners have been used to inform the actions in this strategy.

4.85 Action No.35: The delivery of actions contained in this strategy will require the support of third sector organisations that represent the interests of children who are looked after. In reviewing the progress made against the action plan, we will also seek the views of children who are looked after to measure the impact our strategy is having on their experience in education.

4.86 Action No.36: We will support the Charter for children who are looked after and care leavers, developed by the Care Forum Wales Looked After Children Network in conjunction with partner organisations, and continue to push all agencies involved with children who are looked after to adopt a greater use of person centred thinking in delivering their services.

4.87 Action No.37: We will work with regional education consortia to ensure the views of those children who are looked after and adopted children are considered when planning and delivering targeted support.

Conclusion

4.88 The improved educational attainment of children who are looked after is essential and it will only be possible if education, social services and others collaborate effectively.

4.89 There has to be seamless integration that starts at the highest level of the Welsh Government and which reaches right into the classroom to ensure that each and every looked after child receives effective help and support.

4.90 This strategy reaffirms the importance of this work and sets out the actions we must take collectively to ensure all of our young people reach their full potential.

National objectives

1. The accompanying action plan sets out the Welsh Government's commitment to improve the educational outcomes of looked after children which must be shared by all key stakeholders including local authorities, education consortia, schools and educational settings supported by the third sector. The case for action is compelling as there is a need for the system to work in partnership and at pace to deliver improvements.
2. The strategy and action plan are designed to drive considerable progress in the educational attainment for these children in all Key Stages and we need to continue the noticeable improvement in results between 2013 and 2014. This upward trend must continue at an even greater pace. We must not allow educational performance to decline and we are introducing a national attainment target to ensure we keep a strong focus on performance.
3. Based upon the improvement rate of 4 percentage points between 2013 and 2014 at Key Stage 4 – Level 2 inclusive threshold, we have seen a rise in attainment to 17% in 2014 for children who are looked after.

The Welsh Government has set a national target in the educational attainment of children who are looked after by raising the attainment of 15 year-olds at Key Stage 4 of the Level 2 inclusive threshold from 17% in 2014 to 25% in 2016 as reported in the Children in Need Census.

The Welsh Government has also set a national target to ensure that 75% of care leavers on their 19th birthday are in education, employment or training by 2018. The actions set out in this strategy will make a major contribution to the achievement of that target.

4. Performance will be closely monitored each year, using the Children in Need Census and other data sources to check progress and ensure the support which is in place is working effectively and we will align the use of PDG from April 2016 to deliver this target. These monitoring arrangements will be used by the Welsh Government to instigate further measures in circumstances where improvements are clearly not being made.

.....a new and potentially more effective framework for policy delivery is emerging. The Welsh Government has set out its proposals for greater regional and national delivery of education and social care. Additionally, local authorities are continuing to develop local planning partnerships. Together these developments provide a new framework with potential to develop clearer, co-ordinated strategies for young people with a focus on outcomes. The risk however, remains, that vulnerable children may not receive the necessary detailed and individual attention they require.

Wales Audit Office, August 2012

Annex: Related documents

Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales – the Action Plan (2016)

<http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/deprivation/educational-attainment-of-looked-after-children/?lang=en>

Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales – the Strategy (Youth Friendly Version) (2016)

<http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/deprivation/educational-attainment-of-looked-after-children/?lang=en>

Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales - the Consultation (2015)

<http://gov.wales/consultations/education/raising-the-ambitions-and-educational-attainment-of-children/?lang=en>

Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales – Summary of responses (2015)

<http://gov.wales/consultations/education/raising-the-ambitions-and-educational-attainment-of-children/?lang=en>

CASCADE Research – Looked after Children and Education

<http://sites.cardiff.ac.uk/cascade/looked-after-children-and-education/>

Fostering Network Report

<https://www.fostering.net/wales/educationreportenglish>

Voices From Care Report

<http://www.voicesfromcarecymru.org.uk/news/201512/education-looked-after-children-report>