

Supplementary evidence submitted by Will Quince MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families

Following the final evidence session of the Committee's Children's Home inquiry on Tuesday 1 March, I promised to write to the Committee with more information on several strands of the Department's work. As well as providing additional information and clarifications, I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Committee for undertaking an inquiry into children's homes, and to reiterate on behalf of Government my aspiration to take action to improve the experience and outcomes for looked after children.

Closing the attainment gap between children in care and other children

As I set out in the evidence session, the Department is committed to improving the lives of children who live or have lived in a children's home. As part of this, we are determined to close the attainment gap between children in care and other children. However, we are clear that this is an issue that goes far beyond the school the child attends. Many children and young people enter care with complex needs and, for many, this is a direct result of their pre-care experience - with abuse or neglect being the biggest factor as to why children enter care. Such children are likely to have significant disruption to education, be behind in terms of education progress and attainment, and have disproportionately high levels of SEND. These factors combined may, in part, account for the gap in attainment compared with non-looked-after children – we know that over 56% of children who have been in care for at least 12 months have an identified SEND.

The Government has a range of interventions in train to seek to improve the education outcomes for looked after children. Virtual Schools Heads (VSHs) are making an impact through their expert leadership and support to the cohort as a whole, as well as to individual children, including through their use of Pupil Premium Plus funding. The vast majority of children in care are in the best schools with schools highly valuing the support provided by VSHs. The impact is evident when we compare children in care to those on Child Protection and Children in Need plans. At Key Stage 2, looked-after children with no identified SEN typically make better progress in reading, writing and maths than other children in need and non-looked-after children.

At Key Stage 4, we can see that those who have been in care for longer make better progress than those who have entered care more recently and, again, they compare positively against children on Child Protection and Children in Need plans. Research published by the Department at the end of March into *how local authorities are ensuring sufficient places and supporting vulnerable children* cited very positive feedback about the Virtual School as a model for supporting the education and development of children in care, both from school and trust leaders. Furthermore, VSHs have overseen a significant impact in the reduction of permanent exclusions (as noted by the Timpson Review) and children in care have some of the lowest levels of persistent absenteeism of any children – in stark contrast to children with a social worker. This is why we are taking forward key recommendations in the Children in Need Review to extend the VSH role to this wider cohort.

Our Schools White Paper has set out our vision to ensure that every child in every part of the country gets the support they need to reach their full potential but, as the Committee is aware, we already set out clear expectations for looked-after children to be in good and outstanding schools. At present, the vast majority of children in care do attend schools with only a small difference when compared to the wider population (and again numbers are better than other children with a social worker) but in order to ensure there were no gaps, we amended the Admissions Code in 2021 to tighten the in-year admissions process, where most problems arise. However, the picture is not straightforward – our guidance is clear that other schools can be used where the local authority is confident the school can best meet the child's needs and there is a very strong argument for maintaining current school provision on entry to care, even if the school is not in a good or outstanding category.

The Department acknowledges that we need to do more, especially in post-16, given how many children now enter and are in care at an older age. This is why we are testing the use of Pupil Premium Plus style funding for VSHs to support young people in further education. The additional funding has already had a positive impact in pilot sites, including the development of post-16 Personal Education Plans, designated post-16 staff in Virtual Schools and enhanced roles in further education colleges. We are keen to build on this and are working with the Rees Centre at Oxford University to evaluate the pilot, with findings due to be published in the Spring.

Social care 903 data and school census data

I also note the Committee requested supplementary information following further questions which emerged from the evidence session in relation to social care 903 data and school census data, and national data on how many looked after-children are missing in education or in unregulated provision. To confirm, the Department does consolidate 903 and school census data annually to produce statistics on the attainment, absence, and exclusions outcomes of looked after children. I can also confirm the Department produces annual, national data which shows the number of looked after children who are missing from school due to absence, exclusions or suspensions. The latest data on the above can be found at: [Outcomes for children](#)

[in need, including children looked after by local authorities in England, Reporting Year 2020 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](#). As I said in the oral session, we are open to considering recommendations from the Committee on how best to improve data in children's social care generally and on outcomes for looked after children specifically.

Education recovery - school spend on pupil mental health and wellbeing

In the evidence session, several questions were asked about the Department's work to support children and young people's mental wellbeing as part of the wider education recovery work including whether we monitor the proportion of un-ringfenced funding for education recovery in schools that is spent on mental health.

In 2020/21, the Department delivered a £650 million catch up premium to schools to support education recovery. This has been followed by a time-limited recovery premium from 2021/22 to 2023/24, worth over £1.3 billion. Schools can use both grants, alongside pupil premium, to deliver evidence-based approaches to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of their pupils.

In January 2022, the Department published an interim research report into school recovery strategies; this can be found at: [School Recovery Strategies: year 1 findings](#). It reported on how schools responded to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in the 2020/21 academic year, including mental health approaches.

Schools are required by conditions of grant for this academic year to report on their use of recovery premium and pupil premium on their school websites by 31 December 2021. The Department is in the process of undertaking monitoring checks on a sample of schools' published reports.

Alongside the additional funding provided to schools through the catch up and recovery premiums, we have invested £15 million into Wellbeing for Education Return and Recovery, departmental programmes set up in response to the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. Of the £15 million, £8 million was provided for Wellbeing for Education Return. This funded advisers in every local authority in England to provide free expert training, support, and resources for education staff to help them understand and respond to the mental health wellbeing issues faced by children and young people as a result of the additional pressures they have faced over the last few years.

An additional £7 million funding was given in May 2021 to Local Authorities to provide further support to schools and colleges under Wellbeing for Education Recovery. We issued a delivery support pack alongside the funding suggesting four types of activities they might want to spend the funding on:

- help local schools and colleges navigate existing local provision and support
- expand Wellbeing for Education Return training
- ongoing support and advice

- support schools and colleges to assess their needs and provision.

Overall, information from Local Authorities indicates that up to 12,000 schools and colleges in England received additional free expert training, support and resources for staff dealing with children and young people experiencing additional pressures from the last year, including trauma, anxiety or grief.

Obesity and neglect

The Committee also raised the issue of obesity, as a result of serious neglect. We are clear that everyone looking after or working with a child has a role to play in safeguarding and promoting their welfare, including their physical health. *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (2018) is statutory guidance which safeguarding partners (the local authority, the police and clinical commissioning groups) and other agencies involved in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children must follow.

Raising concerns about a child's weight is a sensitive subject. However, where there are concerns that the child may be at risk of significant harm including through neglect, the matter should be addressed to prevent any further escalation of risk. Concerns of this type should be raised with the local authority's children's social care service. Local authorities and their partners, including health and education, have a range of mechanisms outside of the safeguarding system via which they might provide help to a family including through universal, early help and targeted services.

Education Investment Areas and Opportunity Areas

At the evidence session, the Department's work on Education Investment Areas (EIAs) and Opportunity Areas (OAs) was also raised. As you may already be aware, the Education Investment Areas cover the third of local authorities in England where educational outcomes have been weakest or where existing place-based programmes are in place in Local Authorities. In these areas:

- schools that have been judged less than Good in two or more successive Ofsted inspections could be moved into strong trusts to help drive up standards. The Department is currently consulting on plans to support schools not making necessary improvements;
- we'll be offering a Levelling Up premium, worth up to £3,000 tax-free for eligible maths, physics, chemistry and computing teachers in years 1-5 of their careers, to reward teachers working in disadvantaged schools;
- we'll make available up to £86m in trust capacity funding over the next 3 years, particularly focussed on EIAs; and
- we will extend the Connect the Classroom (CtC) programme with £150m, with a particular focus on investing in EIAs, to support schools to reach our minimum Wi-Fi standards.

The selection approach for the 55 EIAs used outcomes across primary and secondary schools to select areas of the country with sustained low performance at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4. The Department has published the full data set

that has been used to select these areas and a note explaining the selection methodology, which is available at: [Education Investment Areas: selection methodology - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-investment-areas-selection-methodology).

In addition to this, we have now identified 24 Priority Education Investment Areas, including areas where attainment is very low and rates of disadvantage are high. All 12 of the existing Opportunity Areas will be included in this programme, to ensure that the work of the OAs is properly embedded. These priority areas will benefit from intensive investment to address entrenched underperformance – in addition to the support offered to all EIAs – including:

- a share of around £40 million additional funding to address local needs;
- a MAT CEO development programme for aspiring trust leaders;
- additional support for digital connectivity through CtC; and
- priority access to other DfE programmes – e.g. bids for free schools.

The Timpson Review of School Exclusions: attachment and trauma awareness in schools

Finally, the Committee asked for follow up information about the Timpson Review of School Exclusions, in particular regarding the recommendation that the Department should ensure meaningful training on behaviour is a mandatory part of Initial Teacher Training (ITT) and embedded in the Early Career Framework (ECF).

Since September 2020, all courses leading to qualified teacher status offered by (ITT) providers have been aligned to a mandatory core content framework (CCF), which was published in November 2019. The framework sets out a minimum entitlement for all trainee teachers. In September 2021, the ECF reforms were implemented, entitling all early career teachers (ECTs) to 2 years of development support and training based on the content of the ECF.

The Core Content and Early Career Frameworks contain the same key evidence statements of what makes great teaching and set out practice statements which have been tailored to the needs of trainees in the CCF and of ECTs. This deliberate alignment has established an entitlement to at least a three-year structured package of support for all those entering teaching. The evidence base that underpins both the ECF and CCF was independently assessed and endorsed by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) prior to publication in 2019.

Both frameworks have been designed to support trainee development in 5 core areas – behaviour management, pedagogy, curriculum, assessment and professional behaviours. Together, the frameworks make training on behaviour management mandatory during initial teacher training and through the first two years of their careers. This includes learning that ‘establishing and reinforcing routines, including through positive reinforcement, can help create an effective learning environment’, and that teachers can develop a positive, predictable and safe environment for pupils.

In July 2021, we published the Government Response to the ITT Review which set

out new quality requirements for all ITT from September 2024 and aim to ensure that all trainee teachers experience consistently high-quality ITT that incorporates the ITT Core Content Framework in full.

I hope that you find this letter useful and do not hesitate to write if me or my officials can provide anything further detail on the above. I am very keen to engage further on this and ensure the Department's work is open and transparent.

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