

## IMPROVING THE EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS OF LOOKED-AFTER CHILDREN

### Executive summary

- 1 This paper summarises what we know about the reasons for the very poor educational achievements of looked-after children and makes a number of recommendations designed to significantly improve these achievements and consequently the long-term outcomes for looked-after children.
- 2 Looked-after children mostly come from a very disadvantaged population and many have had disrupted schooling before they became looked after. In the past this has been used as an 'excuse' as to why looked-after children have such poor levels of attainment. Increasingly it is being recognised that the public care system may itself be contributing to these poor outcomes. Even when this is not the case, it is unarguable that the public care system is not doing enough to ensure that looked-after children achieve their potential.
- 3 There are seven factors that contribute to poor outcomes for looked-after children
  - A lack of ambition
  - 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 achievements of foster carers
  - The failure of corporate parenting.
- 4 No single measure or activity will transform outcomes for looked-after children. To achieve this will require sustained investment in the foster care system and it will require action to improve stability. In addition we believe a number of measures are required that will equip and enable foster carers to deliver improved outcomes.
- 5 Foster carers are the key to ensuring that all looked-after children achieve their potential. But foster carers must be trained and equipped for this job.
- 6 The Fostering Network wants to see co-ordinated efforts to increase the skills, status and authority of foster carers. These will include:
  - Foster carers being registered with the General Social Care Council
  - Improved training for foster carers, including joint training with residential social workers
  - Guidance that clarifies the authority of foster carers to make decisions with regard to the children they foster
  - Improved partnerships between foster carers and designated teachers
  - Foster carers having access to funds to purchase supplementary activities for children in foster care
  - Foster carers seen as educators of children in foster care
  - Designated services for the sons and daughters of foster carers
  - Improved access to remedial and supplementary education/coaching
  - An increase in the number of 18 -21 year olds living with foster carers.

- 7 Looked-after children have the same desire to succeed as other children. They are not doing so at present and we should not rest until they are achieving their full potential.