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## Poverty and children's education



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# Poverty and Children's Education

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This briefing provides an overview of the research evidence on the impact of poverty on children and young people's education and out-of-school learning opportunities. It focusses on evidence on the impact of poverty on children's readiness to learn before they enter early years education, their achievement at school, and the factors that influence poor children's education outcomes and their parents' ability to engage in their children's learning. Access to good quality education in and out of school, through other services, is also addressed. The briefing identifies key recommendations for tackling the underachievement of poor children, to increase their chances of success later on in life.

## Key points

- Poverty has devastating effects on children's well-being, education and life chances.
- Currently, 1 in 5 children, or over 220,000 children, grow up in poverty in Scotland.
- Family poverty in early years is linked to increased risks of delays in cognitive development, emotional and social skills and school readiness in children as young as 3.
- There are substantial differences in the literacy and learning environments that children are exposed to at home, from birth, depending on their parents' social class.
- The achievement gap in language and maths skills between children from more advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds exists before children enter primary school and the gap gets wider as children progress through school.
- Children from deprived areas are less able to access leisure opportunities and clubs because of the additional associated costs, even if activities are 'free' at point of use, and they are also more likely to feel unsafe in their local areas.
- Poor children experience feelings of stigma, shame and low self-esteem due to their families' economic situation, in the same way that poor adults do.
- Young people in disadvantaged areas often report limited opportunities for community involvement and volunteering.
- Scotland has one of the highest rates among the OECD countries of young people in the 15–19 age group in the NEET category, with most of them coming from deprived backgrounds and having no qualifications.
- Looked after children are at very high risk of underachievement and social exclusion,

## Key recommendations

- Invest in high-quality early years interventions to benefit the most vulnerable children and help tackle the achievement gap early.
- Support families to increase the quality of children's home learning environments.
- Local authorities should make the tackling of the achievement gap a priority, with appropriate resources allocated to support interventions.
- Schools need better mechanisms for timely identification of children affected by poverty and understanding the visible and invisible barriers that families face in supporting children's learning.
- Interventions to tackle underachievement should be backed up by existing evidence, and sustained and supported by specialist staff, when needed.
- Schools and local authorities should ensure that children in deprived areas benefit from available out-of-school learning opportunities, by making provision affordable, flexible and safe to access.
- To avoid the risk of young people exiting school into the NEET category, preventive interventions are required earlier, when young people are still in school, to target transition to positive routes and highlight opportunities for volunteering.
- Tackle the high rates of underachievement and social exclusion among the looked after children as a priority to reduce their further marginalisation.

## 1. Introduction

Currently in Scotland, over 220,000 children live in poverty. Poverty has a devastating effect on children's well-being, education and life chances. Low income is associated with delays in cognitive development, social skills and school readiness in children as young as three. Later on, in school, the achievement gap between poor and non-poor children gets wider. This also means that poor children are more likely to leave school early and with low or no qualifications, which leads to the transmission of poverty over generations.

Despite the fact that previous UK governments have made a commitment to the eradication of child poverty by 2020, current approaches to austerity and welfare cuts are likely to plunge more children in poverty in the next decade. Addressing the educational underachievement of poor children needs to become thus a greater priority for education services, notwithstanding the need to tackle the more substantial, structural barriers to children's achievement. At the same time, the issue of education and poverty 'is about more than just academic qualifications' (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2015:6). How schools work together with other children's agencies is significant in acknowledging the wider impact of education on individuals and communities, e.g. for child health, wellbeing and social justice (Forbes & Watson, 2012).

This briefing examines the current situation of child poverty in Scotland. It first defines poverty and identifies the factors that contribute to child poverty. It then examines the current policy context and the impact of poverty on children's education, concluding with some implications for policy and practice.

## 2. Poverty and social justice

Peter Townsend, the sociologist who did so much to advance our understanding of poverty and its relationship to the wider society, and one of the founders of Child Poverty Action Group, defined poverty as follows:

*Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged and approved, in the societies in which they belong. (1979: 31)*

Poverty is thus more than income and material deprivation, although it includes these. Lack of money plays a key role in how people participate in society, in relation to resources they can secure (such as food, fuel and housing), but also in relation to the level of access to services, leisure activities and political participation. Also, poverty is qualitatively different, depending on the customary practices of each society.

Tackling poverty is an issue of social justice and equal opportunities. The United Kingdom has one of the highest associations between social class and educational performance and life opportunities among the countries in the OECD, according to a PISA survey (OECD, 2010). Young people in the United Kingdom are also among the most likely to adopt risky behaviours (use of drugs, drink, or being sexually active), as well as reporting low levels of satisfaction with their relationships and happiness (Unicef, 2007). In their book, *The Spirit Level*, Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) demonstrate that several health and social problems (e.g. obesity, teenage pregnancies, mental illness, life expectancy) and social issues (e.g. educational performance, trust, imprisonment rates) depend on how equal (or unequal) a society is rather than its levels of wealth. Tackling social disadvantage is thus a matter of addressing the distribution of wealth to reduce the gaps between rich and poor, and increasing access to opportunities and civic representation of all groups.

### 3. Measuring poverty

Low income is considered a clear indicator of poverty. Across Europe, a family's income is judged in line with a threshold value, which is agreed at 60 per cent of the median income. Based on this measurement, almost one million people in Scotland are living in relative poverty, of which, 630,000 are in absolute poverty, with limited access to basic resources, such as food, fuel and clothing (McKendrick *et al.*, 2014). Children are at greater risk than adults of living in poor households, with 1 in 5 children – that is over 220,000 children – currently living in poverty. Despite a misinformed general opinion that poor children live in workless households, more than half (57 per cent) live in households with at least one adult in work. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) has forecasted that by 2020, planned tax and welfare reforms, resulting in a further decrease in income for families, will have pushed up to 100,000 more children into poverty in Scotland.

What are the implications of these figures for schools? The fact that most poor children have one or both parents in work makes it more difficult to identify children affected by poverty. As this is often low pay, insecure work, parental employment may give the false impression that families can cope with the daily demands, when in reality their income may be very limited and insecure. Using children's entitlement to free school meals or clothing grants as indicators of families' circumstances is often the best proxy that teachers have to identify children. However, many families do not claim these even when entitled to do so, to hide their circumstances or out of embarrassment. This means that children's home circumstances may be unknown to their teachers.

### 4. Policy context and anti-poverty initiatives

*The Child Poverty Act (2010)* sets out a duty on the UK Government to monitor targets to eradicate child poverty and on devolved governments to develop regional strategies. The Scottish Government issued its own *Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland (2011a)*, which identifies three key principles:

- *early intervention and prevention*, with a focus on targeting effective interventions at early years and concentrating on prevention of families falling into poverty,
- *an assets-based approach*, meaning that individuals' own skills, knowledge and views will be prioritised in any initiatives of support,
- *a child-centred approach*, promoting the rights of children to be involved and heard in decisions affecting their lives.

The child-centredness and multi-agency approach in tackling disadvantage are aligned with the principles promoted through the *Getting it Right for Every Child* (GIRFEC). This promotes a clearer system of planning and delivering services by ensuring that an effective multi-agency approach is adopted whenever several services are involved with the child. The GIRFEC approach puts the child at the heart of children's services and provides seven indicators for practitioners to ensure that children are: Safe; Nurtured; Healthy; Achieving; Active; Respected and Responsible; Included (SHANARRI indicators).

Three other frameworks are seen as pivotal in providing a shared approach for the Scottish Government and its partners (local authorities, NHS, third sector, community planning partners). These include:

- *Achieving our Potential: A Framework to tackle poverty and income inequality in Scotland* (2008) includes a concordat with local authorities, giving them responsibility for targeting anti-poverty strategies locally. The document identifies a range of actions aimed at supporting people to find work and make work pay, tackle health inequalities and discrimination, improve children's life chances and ensure better housing.
- The *Early Years Framework (2008)*, also developed in the context of the concordat, calls for 'transformational change' in how early years provision and support for families with young children is delivered. This is 10-year plan aims to deliver a 'radical improvement in outcomes', and actions suggested. It includes a coherent approach to service delivery, better quality of pre-school provision, improved collaboration between agencies and empowerment of families and children.
- *Equally Well* is the first Scottish policy setting out the government's commitment to tackle social inequalities in health. It promotes approaches like early and targeted interventions, as well as universal services.

Together, the above three frameworks, all launched in 2008, aim to provide the basis for tackling inequality and social disadvantage, despite the challenging current financial climate and the Scottish Government's limited autonomy in decisions on matters reserved to Westminster.

More recently, the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014* gives recognition to the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC 1989) in Scottish legislation. From 2015, the relevant Scottish Government Ministers and public bodies will issue reports on how they have taken into account the UN Convention. The Act will require local authorities and health boards to develop joint children's services plans, with other service providers (part 3); implement a 'named person' for every child, including duties for public bodies to share information with the 'named person' (part 4) and create a statutory definition of 'wellbeing' (part 13).

## 5. What causes family poverty and which children are more likely to be poor

### Factors that contribute to family poverty

A range of factors contribute to people being in poverty (McKendrick *et al.*, 2014):

- *Individual factors* refer to people's choices and behaviours. Blaming individuals for not trying 'hard enough' to get out of their situation is often used as a political strategy, to distract from the wider socio-economic barriers. For example, evidence shows individuals' willingness to work, but not having work in the local area is a major barrier.
- *Social factors* may be a cause of poverty. For lone parents, usually women, the cost and availability of childcare and the gender pay gap are major barriers to employment and significant causes of poverty.
- *Political and economic factors*, such as the strength of the economy and initiatives put in place to tackle poverty are key issues impacting on poverty levels.

It is important to see these factors as inter-related and to examine individuals' circumstances as a combination of both their own agency and structural aspects which may be outside an individual's control.



## Geographical distribution of poverty

One key aspect of poverty in Scotland is its geographical distribution. Poverty is most prevalent in Glasgow, where 47 % households are income deprived, according to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. Furthermore, within the city, the distribution of poverty is unequal. Almost half of Glasgow's population live in the 20 % of the most deprived areas in Scotland (see [www.understandingglasgow.com](http://www.understandingglasgow.com) for more data on the city). Poverty also affects the local authorities around Glasgow, with West Dunbartonshire, Inverclyde, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire and South Lanarkshire having among the highest rates of poverty in Scotland (see McKendrick *et al.*, 2014, for detailed figures). However, these areas sit close to local authorities with relative affluence, like East Dunbartonshire and East Renfrewshire, which suggests that geographical distribution is not the sole explanation for what affects people's opportunities.

## Children are at a significantly higher risk of poverty than other groups

Based on the Households Below Average Income Data 2012/13, children's risk of experiencing poverty is increased if living in lone-parent households (41 % of children in these households are poor) and in households where no one works (68 % of children in these households are poor) or works part-time (64 per cent). In households with three or more children, 40 % of families are poor, and households with young children are also at a higher risk.

Children with disabilities and from certain ethnic background are more likely to be poor. In Scotland, Asian children are twice as likely as White children to be poor (43 % of Asian households, versus 21 % of White ethnic groups) and 34 % of children from 'other ethnic groups' live in poor households. These risk factors must be understood in the wider context and with acknowledgment that belonging to one group does not automatically place individuals in poverty. The fact that some groups are more at risk is significant, as it needs to inform anti-poverty initiatives and, in the context of education, alert those involved with children to their potential challenges.

## 6. How does poverty impact on children's education?

### Developmental difficulties and readiness for school

Poor children disproportionately have development and language problems (21 %, compared to 12 % among non-poor children), as well as being three times more likely than their non-poor peers to experience social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (Barnes *et al.*, 2010; Willis *et al.*, 2015). These differences, present since birth, have an impact on children's readiness for school, as by the age of 3, children whose parents have low or no qualifications are already behind their more advantaged peers in terms of cognitive, social and emotional development (Bradshaw, 2011). At age 5, those with a degree educated parent are around 18 months ahead on vocabulary and 13 months ahead on problem-solving ability compared to their more disadvantaged peers. This gap in achievement widens as children grow older.

### Differences in home learning environments

There are substantial differences in the environments that children are exposed to at home, since birth, depending on their parents' social class. Young children from poor

families are less likely to be read to every day (42%) than children from more affluent families (79%) and less likely to engage in other formative activities, such as arts, sports or musical activities in the home or at local play groups (Goodman and Gregg, 2008). These differences in parental approaches to caring for their children were found to account for some of the cognitive gaps at the age of three. Other factors which impact on the chances of a positive home environment are the mother's age and education level, number of children in the family and father's employment status (Sylva *et al.*, 2008).

The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) study followed over 3,000 children aged 3–11 to examine if pre-school, primary and home learning could reduce social inequalities (Sylva *et al.*, 2008). Families in which parents were engaged in activities with their children strongly promoted children's intellectual and social development. The behaviours identified as especially significant included reading together, playing with numbers, painting and drawing, singing and using rhymes. Attending pre-school was shown to be especially beneficial for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially if the early years settings were of high quality. Although the parents' socio-economic status and education are important factors, the quality of the home learning environment seems more important (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010), highlighting the importance of supporting parents at home, for example through health visitors and early interventions.

### **Access to leisure spaces and neighbourhood safety**

Low income also means that people are likely to live in poor quality housing, and areas with less adequate services, limited transport and poorly resourced local leisure spaces. Poor housing means that many children live in overcrowded accommodation, with no space to study. The 2013 Scottish Household Survey showed that living in a deprived neighbourhood has an impact on children's leisure activities (Scottish Government, 2014). Overall, children had less access to playgrounds and parks and were more likely to perceive their local area as unsafe. They are also less able to access leisure opportunities and clubs because of the additional costs of transport or equipment required, even if activities may be offered 'free' at point of use (Child Poverty Action Group, 2014). In areas of deprivation, young people are also more likely to feel unsafe as their local areas are affected by vandalism and gangs (Scottish Government, 2013).

### **Impact of poverty on children's participation, learning and achievement**

Differences in parental expectations (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010) and children's opportunities for learning at home and at school (Sime and Sheridan, 2014) may be two of the reasons why, overall, children from lower socio-economic groups do less well academically. Analysis of data on children's achievement show that from the early stages of primary school, children from disadvantaged homes have lower rates of literacy and numeracy than their more advantaged peers.

An analysis of the tariff scores recorded in 2011/2012 for S4 children and the profiles of the areas in which they live, based on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, shows that the scores of children living in the most deprived areas (130) were almost half of the tariff scores of children living in the least deprived areas (238) (Sime, 2013). This clearly shows that living in poverty is for many children the source of their academic underachievement.

Low achievement has also an ethnic dimension, with certain minority groups (e.g. Black Caribbean, Roma and Gypsy Traveller) doing considerably worse in exams than others (Sime *et al.*; 2014). Gypsy Travellers are also most likely to report incidents of bullying and racism at school. However, other ethnic minority groups, like Indian and Chinese, do much better than all other groups, including White, which suggests that minority ethnic status, on its own, is not a risk factor.



Another aspect of inequality relates to the prospects young people have after leaving school. On average, poor children are more likely to leave school early and with no qualifications than their better off peers (Scottish Government, 2011b). After young people leave school, the inequality in educational achievement leads to long-term limitations in terms of other opportunities, such as going into higher education or finding good employment.

### Opportunities for community involvement and volunteering

Young people in disadvantaged areas often report limited opportunities for community involvement and volunteering, and increased concerns for their safety in their local neighbourhood (Ridge, 2002; Mason *et al.*, 2011). For many young people, the idea of a close-knit local community has little resonance, as they may move often or may perceive local communities as fragmented and discriminatory towards young people. Exclusion from community is a feeling young people reported often in research and schools were often identified as places where the feelings of exclusion start.

Research has also documented differences in opportunities between affluent and deprived areas and in attitudes to volunteering. A study of disadvantaged young people's perceptions of various work-related activities found that unemployed males in particular were most likely to dismiss the idea of volunteering and were unwilling to work for no money, even if they needed the experience for future employment (Ellis, 2004). Mason *et al.* (2011) reported on a subsample of young people (aged 11–21) as minimally engaged and maximally excluded, who were characterised by significant disadvantage and did not view the prospect of volunteering as an appealing option. However, attitudes to work and volunteering change over time. Other studies reported on limited access to information on volunteering opportunities (Nichols & Ralston, 2011; Hustin, 2008).

### Young people in the NEET category

Within the OECD countries, Scotland has one of the highest proportions of young people in the 15–19 age group not in education, training and employment (the so-called NEET group), most coming from deprived backgrounds. The proportion of NEETs peaked in 2011, with 16.9% of school leavers in this category, but has seen a decrease in recent years, to 13.8% in 2014 (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2014). Being in the NEET category for a longer period of time has been linked to later criminal activity, early parenthood, long-term unemployment and substance misuse (Griggs and Walker, 2008). Moreover, educational disadvantage is likely to be transmitted to the next generation, with the children of low-skilled parents vulnerable to low educational attainment. However, other data suggests that many of the NEET young people are transitioning to EET or are likely to have caring responsibilities (as many as 15% do so). Mason *et al.* (2011) reported that many NEET young people may experience difficulties in school–EET transitions and may benefit from low level interventions.

### Looked after children and young people

Research and national statistics have shown that looked after children tend to be over-represented in terms of living in areas of deprivation (Scott and Hill, 2006), lower levels of educational attainment and higher levels of school exclusion (Scottish Government 2014 b) and a lower likelihood of being in a positive destination after they leave school (more likely to be classified as 'NEET') (Scottish Government, 2015). In 2012–2013, looked after children achieved an average tariff score of 116 compared to an average tariff score of 407 for all children. Children who are looked after are also more likely to be excluded from

school, with 233 exclusions per 1000 children compared to 33 for all other children in 2012–2013 (Scottish Government, 2014 b).

During 2012/2013, 79% of looked after children who left school were aged under 16, compared to 30% of all school leavers. This trend of poor achievement continues after children leave care, with 74% in positive destinations compared to 90% of all children 9 months after leaving school (Scottish Government, 2014 b). However social work statistics reveal that of eligible care leavers aged 15–21 (rather than only 9 months after leaving school), only 27% were in education, training or employment. A further 31% were not in education, training or employment, while 30% were not receiving support from services (Scottish Government, 2015). For looked after children who secure a place at university, it can be difficult to sustain places because of lack of support from services and education institutes (O’Sullivan and Westerman, 2007; Connelly and Kinloch, 2013).

## 7. Recommendations for policy and practice

The impact of poverty on children’s achievement and learning to achieve is significant, with long-term effects on their health, well-being and lifelong opportunities. The fact that the attainment gap between poor and non-poor children has remained unchanged over the last decade and is present even before children’s third birthday suggests that current policies of tackling underachievement in schools need a radical overhaul. With current UK Government plans to increase cuts to family support through welfare reform, and to reduce funds for support services, rates of child poverty are likely to increase by 2020 to over 300,000 children in Scotland.

Findings from the evidence analysed in this briefing suggest the following recommendations:

- **Invest in high-quality early years interventions to benefit the most vulnerable children and help tackle the underachievement gap early**

Given that the gap in achievement is manifest before children’s 3<sup>rd</sup> birthdays, there needs to be more investment in high quality early years provision, with extended entitlement for all children. Currently, children in Scotland are entitled to free, part-time early-years provision of 16 hours a week after their third birthday. The current entitlement comes too late for many children and is still considerably less than the entitlements to childcare in other European countries. This also means that parents are often unable to return to work or education and become deskilled, due to the crippling costs of childcare. Also, the high quality training of early years staff mentioned in the *Early Years Framework* (2008) is key to increasing their ability to tackle educational disadvantage.

- **Support families to increase the quality of children’s home learning environments**

The vast majority of poor parents strive to buffer the effects of poverty on children’s well-being and development. It is important to build on parents’ willingness to support their children by providing them with better information on activities they can do at home to enhance the quality of their children’s learning environments and making materials freely available (books, age-appropriate educational games, audio-tapes etc.), to allow parents to engage in home-based learning activities. Parents’ attitudes and beliefs about parenting duties and cultural values around ‘school-like’ parenting need to be explored, as often parents may have awareness of educational activities, but may find these incongruent with their own child-rearing values.

- **Local authorities should make the tackling of underachievement a priority, with appropriate resources allocated to support interventions**

Given the well-documented fiscal cost of poverty, through providing formal family support services for those who need them long-term due to ongoing underachievement, local authorities must focus their efforts and resources on tackling the achievement gap early. Anything else than substantial involvement in services with young children (pre-birth to 5) and early primary would be false economy, as long-term effects of early underachievement are likely to be more costly and resource-intensive.

At school level, the *Curriculum for Excellence* aims to offer a more holistic approach to children's education, by recognising that children may require different levels of support. Children's ability to achieve well across its four capacities is clearly impaired when growing up in disadvantage. Currently, there are no clear mechanisms to tackle underachievement through targeted support, especially when the underachievement is a result of children's socio-economic background. Teachers do not have access to information on pupils' family background, as home visits are not common practice, and rely on information volunteered by parents to gain a sense of the barriers to learning due to children's home circumstances.

- **Schools need better mechanisms for timely identification of children affected by poverty and understanding the visible and invisible barriers that families face in supporting children's learning**

Schools need more explicit mechanisms to identify children at risk, including those in temporary poverty, in order to plan support needed and tackle academic underperformance. Teachers need to consider the implications of individual family situations for the curriculum and additional support required by every child, to ensure their full and equal participation. Many of the invisible barriers to engagement, such as parents' stress, illiteracy issues, negative experiences of schooling, fear of stigma etc. need significant ground work to ensure that parents trust practitioners first before tackling their involvement in children's education.

Education, health and social care professionals need to understand the relevance of the GIRFEC approach for children living in conditions of poverty. Key for all practitioners and agencies is the implementation of clearer mechanisms for identifying children affected by poverty (especially as families' situations can change suddenly), shared knowledge and understanding of the conditions of child poverty, resilience factors and equalities. The GIRFEC- *National Practice Model, Resilience Matrix* should be used when considering the needs of children affected by poverty.

- **Interventions to tackle underachievement should be backed up by existing evidence, and sustained and supported by specialist staff**

Interventions to tackle underachievement should be supported by targeted funding, through a 'pupil premium' for schools with a high proportion of disadvantaged children, to recognise the increasing challenges and resource-intensive demands. Interventions that have been shown to have a positive impact on tackling the achievement gap include:

- parental programmes promoting home-based learning,
- nurture groups,
- collaborative work in groups, with teaching the skills required,
- peer-tutoring,

- metacognitive training and one-to-one tutoring with highly qualified and experienced staff,
- academically focussed after-school activities,
- whole-school reforms focused on improving attainment (Sosu and Ellis, 2014).

Schools should also work collaboratively with other agencies, to address the complex needs of families in holistically, as academic underachievement cannot be separated from the need to address more substantial, structural barriers. For example, the Scottish Government's (2010) *Guidance on Partnership Working Between Allied Health Professions and Education* sets out a series of aims for services allied to health in their work with education and schools to jointly support children. The policy recommends that health and education professions work together to ensure that children and young people are healthy, confident and included.

- **Schools and local authorities should ensure that children in deprived areas benefit from available out-of-school learning opportunities, by making provision affordable, flexible and safe to access**

Schools and other children's services must act to buffer the effects of poverty on children, including the avoidance of potentially stigmatizing and marginalizing practices in schools and children's services, such as those related to the cost of the school day (Child Poverty Action Group, 2014) and out-of-school learning opportunities. Because they are not able to access local services, due to direct and indirect costs, children growing up in disadvantaged families learn to self-exclude (Ridge, 2002) and are likely to develop low self-esteem and an increased sense of stigma and marginalisation. Families may also need support to access information on services available and financial schemes in place to ensure low cost access to services.

- **To avoid the risk of young people exiting school into the NEET category, preventive interventions are required earlier, when young people are still in school, to target transition to positive routes and highlight opportunities for volunteering**

Re-engaging young people not in education, training and employment is very challenging, because of the complex needs that marginalised young people develop the longer they are excluded. Initiatives should be targeted at identifying young people at risk of being NEET while still in school, by working collaboratively with the school staff and targeting support early. This support may be provided by voluntary or third sector organisations, through schemes such as mentoring or one-to-one support, to identify young people's aspirations and help them identify local opportunities for volunteering as a route to engagement, and other opportunities for employment or further training.

### **Tackle the high rates of underachievement and social exclusion among the looked after children as a priority to reduce their further marginalisation**

Low attendance of children looked after at home must be seen priority for action by schools and management. Staff in schools should have access to training focused on the needs of traumatised and disadvantaged children, and the specific needs of the looked after groups. Although staff are often familiar with GIRFEC, evidence shows that consistency is needed in implementing the multi-agency plans developed, with more clarity in who should take main responsibility for addressing concerns in each case. Services provided by voluntary agencies are seen as particularly important by many looked after children and their involvement should be sustained.

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