Chapter 11
A Holistic Approach to Educating Children in Care: Caring Schools

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11.1 Introduction

In England, there is a statutory duty on all local authorities to promote the education of children in their care. This legislation came into force with the Children Act 2004 (s.52) after several decades of research and advocacy and in the context of a government which had placed 'education, education, education' at the core of its message (The Guardian, 2001). This Act also 'joined up' education and care services at the level of local delivery, and in doing so addressed a fundamental problem for those who had sought to bring the need for improved school attendance, and attainment, for so called 'looked after' children to the forefront of social work attention. This elimination of a split between responsibilities for the care of young people and their education in theory heralded a new holistic approach, and one conceptually more in line with the responsibilities of parents, as one Director of Children's Services was ultimately in charge. Since 2004 there has been considerable policy development so that now, as Connolly observed (2013, p107), 'teachers, social workers and carers would need to confess to having lived on another planet' not to have noticed the plethora of advice and guidance about educating children in care and the risk of poor educational outcomes.

In 2015, Cameron, Connolly and Jackson argued that a twinned approach was needed to enhance the education of children in care:

> in order for young people in care to thrive, learn and emerge from care with the level of education and skills they need to achieve a good quality of adult life, they need both learning placements and caring schools. … [in learning placements] those who look after chil-

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> dren are 'experts in everyday life'; they use all opportunities to be in dialogue with children, to make meaning out of everyday events, to calculate and imagine in collaboration, to exercise empathy and set high expectations of children, as achievers, and themselves, as continually, learning, reflecting on and analysing practice.
>
> … Caring schools implies not just caring about looked after children in terms of procedures, but having an ethos of ethical care than runs through the whole school, generating a sense of belonging to, and mutual respect for, all its members … [where children] own their learning … [and] the centrality of trusting relationships for learning [are recognised and promoted] (Cameron, Connolly, & Jackson, 2015, pp222–3).

This chapter will focus on developing the concept of Caring Schools. It will draw on data from mainstream primary and special schools, and from foster carers, collected as part of an evaluation of a local authority's *Caring2Learn* programme. First, we set out some of the policy context, and the child outcomes, for primary school aged children in local authority care in England, before focusing on *Caring2Learn*.

11.2 The Policy Context

England[1] is organised into 152 local authorities each with responsibility for the children in care in their area. However, legislation, guidance, and regulation of its implementation is organised centrally, through ministerially led departments and mandated agencies, such as Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) responsible for inspection of schools, and foster care agencies, among others). Legislation is framed through 'Green' and 'White' Papers that set out government intentions and plans, usually informed by the views and experience in relevant professional sectors and advocacy organisations. There are National Minimum Standards (NMS) for foster care agencies (Department for Education (DfE), 2011), which set out an intention that 'children should have an enjoyable childhood, benefiting from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life'. The standards go on to detail that children in care should be able to participate in a full range of educational and social activities. The standards make no mention of foster carers' own educational attainment (other than job related training), which might be surprising given the well-established link between parental education and that of their children (Desforges with Abouchar, 2003), and the intention in the Standards that fostered children should have an educationally rich environment.

In relation to schools, there are several relevant policy measures beyond procedural requirements. Since 2010, there has been an allocation of funds (£2300 at the time of writing), called a 'pupil premium', for each looked after child on the school roll, which is 'for the benefit of the looked-after child's educational needs as described in their personal education plan' (DfE, 2017). These funds are adminis-

[1] England is the largest of the four countries of the United Kingdom. The educational and social care policy environment is diverging across the countries. In this chapter we focus on England.

tered by a senior officer in each local authority, called a Virtual School Head (and her or his team), who has responsibility for closely monitoring children's progress, providing training to teachers and other school staff, and promoting educational aspiration and attainment to looked after children, much as a 'pushy parent' would. Virtual Schools were given statutory backing in the Children and Families Act 2014 and, while the seniority of the Head role is crucial for its success (Berridge et al., 2009), this point is not given emphasis in statutory guidance. At the local, school, level, there is a Designated Teacher, who is either a head teacher or someone with appropriate training, who has overall responsibility for each looked after child's progress. Introduced in the Children and Young Persons Act 2008, the role, and the pupil premium, has recently been extended to include children formerly in care and now adopted or subject to another legal order (DfE, 2017), which, in a climate of austerity and serious budget cuts to public services, represents an additional workload to schools. These policy led resources to support the education of children in care in school should have removed some of the barriers to wider educational participation and focused attention in school on specific practices and approaches that help. However, there is a stubborn and clear attainment gap between children in care and those never in care.

11.3 Child Outcomes

Although the compulsory school starting age is five, nearly all 4 years olds in England are in school, mostly in reception classes in primary schools. By age seven, when school pupils complete Key Stage 1, those children who are looked after are seriously educationally disadvantaged. Official statistics record that, in 2017, looked after children were 23–29 percentage points behind their non-looked after peers in teacher assessments of reading, writing, mathematics and science (Table 11.1).

At the age of 11, at the end of primary schooling, children in England take Key Stage 2 national curriculum tests. The gap in attainment continues. While 61% of all children achieve the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics, only

Table 11.1 Teacher assessments of children looked after and not looked after, age 7

Key stage 1 (age 7) percentages	Looked after children	Non-looked after children	Attainment gap
Reading English	51	76	25
Writing English	39	68	29
Mathematics	46	75	29
Science	60	83	23

Note: Children in care were counted as those looked after for 12 months or more
Source: DfE, (2018a)

32% of children who have been in care for 12 months or more do so. This is about the same as those children who live with their families but are designated 'in need' of assistance from local authorities, so being looked after in care has not accelerated their educational attainment. By age 11, there are clear differences between those identified as having a special educational need (SEN) and those who do not have an SEN. A special educational need might be designated for reasons of 'social, emotional and mental health' or a 'moderate learning difficulty' or 'autism spectrum disorder'. The first two categories are particularly likely for children in care. At age 11, more than half, 59%, of children in care, have a recognised special educational need, compared to 49% of children in need and 17% of children who are not looked after (DfE, 2018a). SEN children have lower attainment scores and the gap between those who are not looked after, and those who are, is much smaller – only five percentage points, so the educational attainment outcomes of children with an SEN is more or less the same whether they are in care or not. Among those children without a special education need, the gap in attainment of expected levels of reading and writing and mathematics is 13 percentage points (57% vs 70%) (DfE, 2018a).

In Melkman's (2018) longitudinal analysis of administrative data held on 1600 children who were in care at the age of 5 for at least a month, and followed to age 11, the same patterns of general educational disadvantage can be observed. Looked after children started primary school about 17 percentage points below the general population of the same age, and ended, at age 11, about 23 points below. There were four distinct trajectories. About 15% of the looked after children were described as 'stable and high', that is, their attainment was good at the start and remained commensurate with other children of their age through primary school.

Half of children looked after (51%) were considered 'average and decreasing'. They started at just below their peers and lost ground over the primary phase. This pattern also occurred for those children with low ability (26%). The fourth pattern was 'lowermost' and represented 8% of children, who started on the first percentile and ended primary school on the third (Melkman, 2018). These analyses demonstrate that primary school does very little to positively change the educational trajectory that children start school with and in fact for many children there is a decline in attainment compared to their non looked after peers. Having a special educational or other need was clearly associated with those children who had lower attainment – but 14% of those who were in the 'stable and high' group had an SEN.

Children were more likely to be in the 'stable and high' group if they had few changes of placement, were in care for less time, and attended highly inclusive and high performing schools at Key Stage 1. Interestingly, the time spent in care placements up to the age of five appeared to be significant: among the stable and high group, children had been in care for the longest time pre-five, whereas in the 'lowermost' group, children had spent the least time in care. This might be an argument for early intervention and certainly for closer attention to what is happening in children's lives at the preschool stage.

11.4 Interventions That 'Work'

There has been very little research on primary school-based interventions for children in care, and while there are benefits, they do not make strong claims as to effectiveness (Forsman & Vinnerljung, 2012; Liabo et al., 2013). One to one tutoring, paired reading and promoting a love of learning through a book gift scheme called Letterbox all have promise, but the main message from intervention studies is that individualised and flexible approaches work best, along with support from, and partnerships with, the home environment (Carroll and Cameron, 2017). One important finding from the largest study in England of educational attainment for looked after children compared to those in need and those not in care or in need was the central principle of inclusion: schools which enable children in care to thrive are schools which are good for all children (Sebba et al., 2015). This means that a whole school approach is required to underpin any individualised interventions attending to specific learning or social needs. Such a whole school approach might be called a 'Caring School'.

11.5 *Caring2Learn*

In this context, where there are no universal, robust, evidence based solutions to the persistent problem of low educational attainment for many children in care, a large, mostly rural, local authority in the east of England created a project based on the principles of bringing education into care placements (learning placements) and raising expectations of schools as places where care and nurturing relationships that foreground wellbeing of children (and staff) (caring schools).

The project aims to raise the educational attainment of primary school aged children relative to their starting point (referred to as 'better than expected progress'). The project activity was set out as:

1. A clearly defined strategy to support schools to promote and nurture attachment relationships for children looked after
2. Developing a concept of and indicators for 'caring schools' for looked after children, informed by school staff, foster carers and children
3. Create schools as hubs of best practice, developing and sharing innovative practice
4. Developing foster care champions to act as mediators between school and foster care, and to nurture a learning culture among foster carers.
5. Training for foster carers and residential workers that builds confidence in working with schools and understanding looked after young people's lives in school (personal communication *Caring2Learn* team).

The UCL research team was asked to undertake both an evaluation of the project and to build capacity for the project through creating two audit tools (one for foster carers, one for primary schools) that would support practitioners to evaluate their

own practice against research findings, policy and local practices and invite them to create action plans to address identify gaps they wished to see addressed. The aims of the evaluation were to:

(a) gather baseline data on current good practice around improving outcomes for looked after children taking place in schools
(b) study changes in policy and practice brought about by the *Caring2Learn* programme, including inter-professional practice in supporting looked after children and engagement in sharing practice
(c) study the impact of *Caring2Learn* on looked after children's attainment and wellbeing

The local authority, which we shall call Eastland, has about 365 children in care of compulsory school age (5–15). There are approximately 600 foster carers and five residential children's homes, 280 primary schools and 55 secondary schools. Schools are increasingly diverse in their management arrangements and specialisms, and include academically selective schools. Leaders in the Children's Services Department aimed, through the project, to bring about closer working relationships between foster carers and schools and to develop a coherent philosophy of care and education for all looked after children and young people.

11.6 Research Data

The initial focus for the evaluation was on establishing current practice in schools and foster care, and in inter-professional working between key professionals working with children in care. We conducted four phone interviews with foster carers and 17 face to face interviews with school professionals in five schools. We included a case study school to investigate what constituted very good practice, and two Network Analysis focus groups to establish what characterised working together practices. While all of the schools involved in the evaluation were identified by the Virtual School as demonstrating good practice in working with looked after children and families, the case study school was nominated on the basis that the Virtual School Head had identified a number of areas in which he felt the school was engaging in excellent practice which might form the basis of a benchmarking tool to inform practice in other settings. In the case study school, we interviewed the Head teacher, Deputy Head teacher, the SENCO, Pastoral Support Advisor, a teacher, a teaching assistant and spoke to two looked after children and a group of six 10–11 year-old pupils. We also took some illustrative photographs. There were four participants in each of the Network Analysis groups, each representing a different professional perspective on a particular looked after child. We intended to collect child level data from teacher assessments carried out in schools on looked after children and two matched peers but, at the time of writing, this had not been achieved. Participants were recruited through volunteering at a launch conference in July 2017 and through nominations from managers and the *Caring2Learn* team.

Interviews were recorded, transcribed and thematically coded for the purposes of both creating audit tool indicators to be trialled, and an understanding of practice at the start of the *Caring2Learn* project. For reasons of space we focus here on findings in relation to characteristics of Caring Schools, drawing largely on a case study school, supported by the findings from other evaluation schools and inter-professional working. Four domains of Caring Schools were created: (i) Leadership and School Ethos; (ii) Child-focused practice; (iii) Working with parents and carers and (iv) Inter-agency working.

11.7 A Whole School Approach to Caring Schools

The case study school was a medium-sized, local authority run primary school in an Eastland industrial town. The school's catchment area is a large housing estate with high levels of deprivation. Most pupils are White British, with few children from minority ethnic backgrounds, and very few who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is three times the national average. The number of pupils joining or leaving the school part-way through each year is twice the national figure. The school meets current government standards in terms of minimum expectations for pupil attainment and progress. The case study example will highlight details of good practice identified in each of four audit tool domains of practice.

11.7.1 Leadership and School Ethos

The case study school ethos was characterised by 'empathy, aspiration and excellence' (The school motto was 'Reach for the stars'). The head teacher was a highly significant figure in creating the ethos. She had been in post for 12 years and had created a team around her who shared her vision that all children should be included and all should have opportunities to 'thrive and shine'.

School leaders (the Head, Deputy Head, Pastoral Support Advisor and Special educational needs coordinator (SENCo)) were committed to creating a caring ethos, described as 'a real family feel' (SENCo), an ethos underpinned by a culture of trust, both among staff, and between pupils and staff. The Pastoral Support Advisor noted that:

> *Children think of this as a safe place…there's always someone they can come and see for whatever reason, somebody that will actually listen to them and take on board what they are trying to say.*

Senior staff modelled the whole school approach by ensuring they were physically available for informal consultation, and approachable. They inculcated a staff team focus, with daily meetings of all staff including assistants, and regular

opportunities to discuss practice to ensure everyone felt fully supported to manage difficult situations and to reflect on their own practice. This was quite different to other schools, according to the SENCo:

> *…friends in other schools … say to me 'Oh your school sounds amazing' with the stuff that I tell them … and especially in the leadership side of it … they just feel like they're islands in (other schools) because they don't have staff meetings, they don't meet every morning like we do to share and communicate.*

School leaders actively promoted the school's place in, and contribution to, the local community to help children experience a range of influences and experiences to broaden their horizons; children had recently visited London and the Houses of Parliament. The school's physical environment is also an important part of the ethos. Leaders recognised that how children feel is related to the physical environment and have created spaces both inside and elsewhere on school grounds, to facilitate children's learning and to support them in times of distress or crisis (Photos 11.1 and 11.2). As one teacher said, "We'll always find a space for a child" and another:

"Good teachers are good listeners".

Photo 11.1 Focus on thinking and reflection

Photo 11.2 Space to express feelings outside

11.7.2 Child Focused Practice

Children in the case study school said they felt a meaningful sense of belonging to the school community through forums where sharing ideas was welcomed. Focus group children reported that being on the "school council … it's really nice cos we get to hear … all of our class makes creative ideas" and [we] "like to share stuff". Beyond the school council there were multiple opportunities to take an active role in decision-making. Children reported feeling highly valued by all staff at the school; staff made the effort to get to know them as individuals and would listen to any concerns they might have. School was seen as a safe place, illustrated by the following extract from the focus group:

What do you think it's like in this school if you've got a problem at home? Would anybody help you?

R: Yeah teachers.
R: The head teacher.
R: …like Miss (Pastoral Support Advisor), she's …
R: She's very nice.
R: She helps with problems.
R: And sometimes some of our friends they go speak [to her] and have a little game or something.
R: Yeah if they have a family problem.

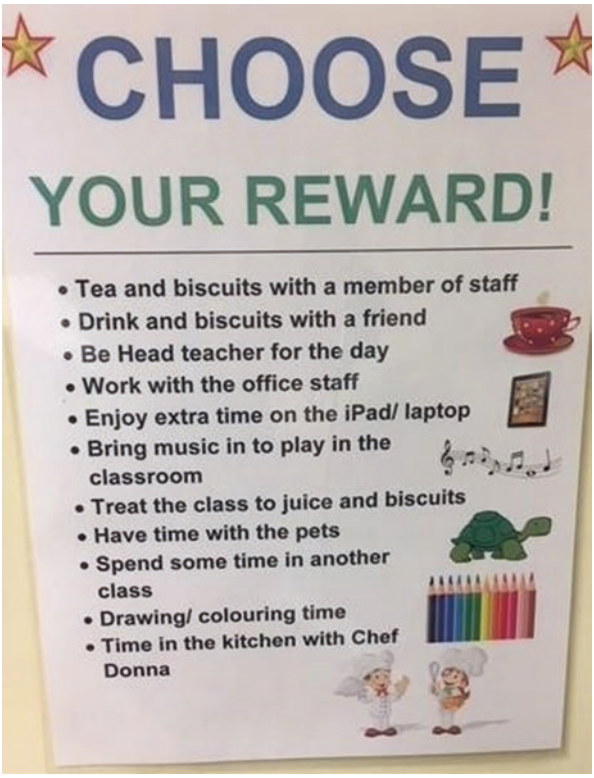

Photo 11.3 Choose your reward!

Children's achievements were acknowledged and celebrated, both in small ways, such as house points and reward charts, and in larger ways, such as celebration assemblies and trips. Achievements were considered in a broad sense and include academic success, behaviour, and social and emotional achievements. Children's integration into decision making was enhanced by giving them the opportunity to choose their rewards from a list (Photo 11.3).

The school had an expectation that children demonstrate high standards of behaviour but included them in decisions about what constituted acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, and what kinds of sanctions should be in place for when standards are not met. Furthermore, children were encouraged to practise caring in their own right, by taking on the role of play leaders, or 'buddies' to younger children in the school, by caring for the environment, taking part in community projects, and by taking on caring responsibilities for animals in the school.

11.7.3 Relationships with Parents and Carers

The third domain of practice is concerned with the relationships between parents/carers and the school. A teaching assistant reported: "Top to bottom, we're all very encouraging of parents". School leaders and staff worked hard to encourage and maintain communications with parents and carers. They used a range of channels of communication to reflect the needs of the parent/carer population, including home-school diaries, phone calls and text messages, newsletters, social media channels and in-person school gate presence. School staff reported that they craft messages carefully to ensure that "We always put positives in there. We never just highlight any negatives". They are keen to ensure minor issues are flagged before developing into more serious concerns. The teaching assistant said: "We do communicate if we've had a bad day with them…so if there's anything that does come to light further down the line, it doesn't come as a total surprise".

All staff had an 'open door' policy and encouraged parents to seek help or advice. They said, "We're there to be approached", and "Parents know that they can come in and they can see any of us… sometimes they need us there and then, and that's fine". This is part of a policy of maintaining relationships with families, especially when circumstances are difficult, in order to keep children engaged in school and to support their learning. As one teacher said:

> Obviously, the children are going to hear what the parents hear at home, so if the parents don't think that they've got a good relationship with the school, then children are going to know that, and that's going to have a knock-on effect in school.

11.7.4 School and Carers' Partnership in Supporting LAC

Looking beyond the case study school, the evaluation identified some effective practice in relation to schools and carers working in partnership to support looked after children. Schools were committed to engaging parents and carers in home learning and provided them with a range of opportunities and the tools to do so (e.g., Tapestry,[2] home-school projects, parent/carer learning afternoons, open sessions, parent/carer reading sessions) as well as actively working with parents and carers to support them to help children with homework and reading (called 'family learning').

> *that's when family learning helps, because I think...probably because of their own experience at school, some are quite nervous about getting involved in school again* (Teaching Assistant, Case Study School)

[2] Tapestry is an online Learning Journal tool used in the Early Years Foundation Stage for tracking children's progress and sharing learning between home and school.

Regular and effective communication between parents/carers and the school took place in all the evaluation schools which facilitated joint understanding of the child's needs and ensured consistency between home and school in learning approaches and in addressing emotional and behavioural difficulties which is important for the child's attainment and progress.

In several schools, including the case study school, there was a system in place whereby carers could notify a named contact person at the school before the school day starts to advise them if their child was having a difficult day, or if there had been any particular issues or incidents at home that the school should be aware of. Similarly, a few of the schools routinely completed a short daily memo letting carers know what kind of day the child has had. This included any achievements, progress or concerns, not just in relation to academic work but also around behaviour and the child's emotional state. This daily memo was also useful for letting carers know about any homework that had been set and the due date.

The evaluation found that study schools and carers recognised and took steps to ensure that day to day routines around school were as consistent as possible and that any changes were discussed with the child in advance so they are aware ahead of time and could be reassured. There was also evidence that schools and carers worked together to encourage and support children to participate in physical and creative activities not just during the school day but also at home and at before/after school clubs. These activities are important as they can have positive effects on children's self-esteem and confidence, can alleviate stress and can help to identify children's wider skills and strengths.

When foster children moved schools or transitioned to secondary school, carers were usually fully informed and involved in this process, which was described as a particularly daunting transition. The study schools worked hard to ensure that, where the school had sufficient notice, carers and children were thoroughly prepared for transitions and a gradual and staged introduction took place to new situations and circumstances, such as visits to the new schools with their carer and/or a key member of school staff.

11.7.5 Interagency Working

The fourth and final domain of practice is inter-agency working. The case study school maintained detailed and up to date records including details of incidents and evidence pertaining to the child at school and, where known, home. School held records and evidence are highly significant sources of information in court decisions made about particular children. Members of school staff know individual children and carers well and have established trust with them, which puts them in a key position to advocate for the child where the school felt that their best interests are not being met. While within the case study school information sharing was seen as streamlined and on a 'need to know' basis, the leadership team reported that working with other agencies was hampered by lack of timely information sharing which

hampered children's transitions into school and moving on from the school. Planning for children was also difficult when professionals from other agencies did not attend scheduled meetings. The deputy head teacher summarised their perception as:

> *I would say too many times it is a battle, and we will always fight that battle for our families and children, but it shouldn't be that hard.*

Further light was shed on primary schools' interagency practice with children in care by examining cases of inter-professional working via Network Analysis (NA). For this, two specific cases of looked after children were selected by the *Caring2Learn* team (not from the case study school) and the researcher convened a focus group with school professionals, social worker and foster carers to map out what the inter-professional relationships were in each case and how they worked together. **Case 1** was a 7 year old girl attending a mainstream primary school. She became a looked after child at age 4 after a short period of respite foster care. At the time of fieldwork she was in long term foster care with her respite care family and was in an improving situation following intervention work and school support. Her school progress was on a par with her classmates who had not been in care. The network of professionals involved in her case is illustrated in Fig. 11.1. Even a relatively straightforward case requires considerable professional support.

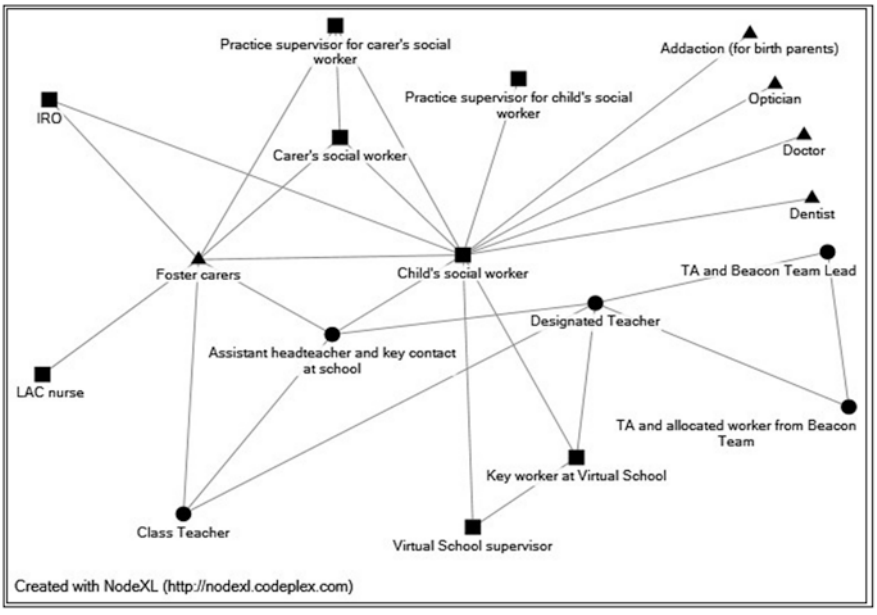

Fig. 11.1 Network Analysis Case 1: Girl attending mainstream primary school (Key to symbols: Circles = school based professionals; Squares = social care professionals; Triangles = health professionals. TA (Teaching Assistant); IRO (Independent Reviewing Officer); Beacon Team (supports pupils with challenging behaviour and provides a nurturing environment for those with more complex needs to develop social and interaction skills))

Case 2 was a teenage girl attending a special school who entered care following the death of her parents. She had significant physical disabilities, a learning disability and some behavioural issues. The main focus of work was addressing her emotional needs and behaviour, creating strategies to allow her a way to express her feelings and needs, and developing opportunities for her to engage and participate in activities to help build her self-esteem. Fig. 11.2 illustrates the highly complex interagency and inter-professional working required in Case 2.

In both cases, the child's social worker was an important *network hub* linking to, and between, the foster carers and a range of other professionals from across social care, education and health services. Excellent working relationships had been established between the foster carers, the child's social worker and the school with regular, open communication, demonstrating trust in each other's judgements based on past experience of reliability and consistent presence. In both cases the social worker had been in post, and allocated to the case, for some time, and in both cases there had been discussion and agreement at the outset on the best forms and frequency of communication between parties. This had served to establish and maintain direct lines of communication with clear expectations around roles, responsibilities and response times for each professional routinely involved in the child's network. Highly developed communication strategies meant there was no need to go through the social worker allocated to support the foster carer, and so issues could be raised and dealt with in a more timely and effective manner.

A second key finding was the importance of *minimising the number of lead 'hub' professionals* in contact with one another. For the domain of social care, the child's

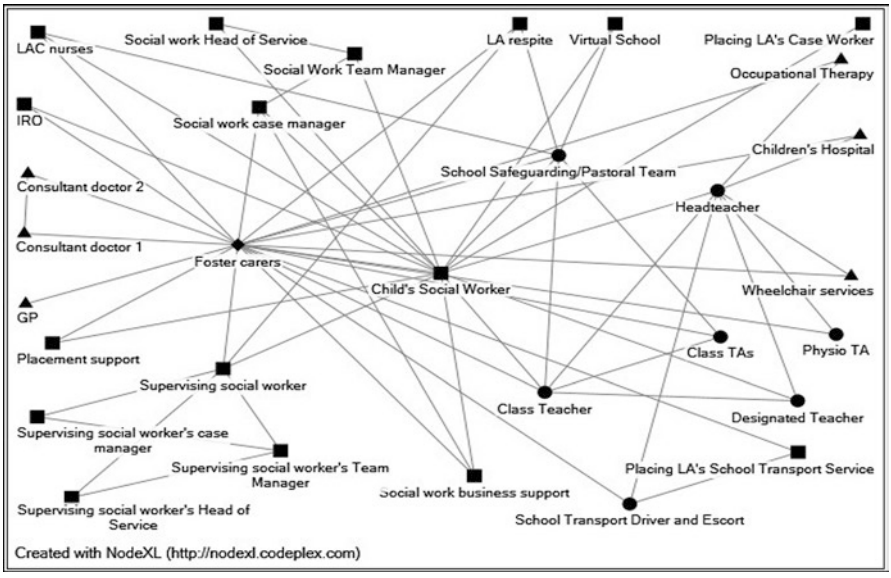

Fig. 11.2 Network Analysis Case 2: girl attending special school (Key to symbols: Circles = school based professionals; Squares = social care professionals; Triangles = health professionals)

social worker was the 'hub', and the carers, school and other services were clear that they were their main point of contact. Across the schools visited for the research, there was usually a single key person on site who worked closely with the carers and social worker, maintaining regular communication. However, for Case 2 there were three lead professionals within the school, each with responsibility for different areas of inter-agency work to support the child, all of whom regularly communicated with the carers and child's social worker. Exploring this further with the focus group participants, they stated that this was necessary due to the complexity of the child's needs and the number and range of external professionals that were involved, making inter-professional working unmanageable for a sole person within the school.

Regardless of whether there was a single lead person within the school or more than one, the critical importance of establishing a collaborative working relationship between the carers, the child's social worker and school, with regular communication, was hard to overstate. In both cases there was at least weekly contact between lead professionals. The form of communication varied according to was agreed preferences (e.g. text, phone or email). Bespoke arrangements for communication, particularly between foster carers and the school, were common:

> *when it comes to family obviously we have those channels of communication that are open to all families, but we really try to make it very bespoke to families… it's very, very individual on top of the established communication channels we do extra when needed* (Head teacher)

In relation to the lead person (or persons) within the school, inter-professional working was deemed to be more effective if they were someone who had a close, trusting relationship with the child and carers, knew their situation and needs well and if they were someone who had the authority to get things done:

> *[key contact at school] knows [child] really well. So, I'm talking to a person who has the power to do what I need her to do, she can speak to everybody … but she knows her [the child], and that's very different where you go to other schools where you're speaking to a designated teacher who has got all these children who they don't particularly know* (Child's social worker)

Here the social worker quotes the role of the designated teacher (DT) in schools. While the official guidance for the DT role includes 'proactively engaging with those involved in the child's case' (DfE, 2018b), interview and NA focus group data showed that in practice, the DT was often not the school lead for carrying out inter-professional work, nor did they routinely have a day-to-day, hands-on working relationship with the foster carers, child's social worker or other key external professionals involved in the child's case. The role of the DT was often primarily internal within the school, one of oversight and co-ordination of their colleagues, including the lead contact within the school.

The evaluation also highlighted the difficulties that can arise in relation to inter-agency working. Two particular issues were working across administrative borders and sustaining continuity of care when key workers left their posts. In cases where a child lives in one local authority and goes to school in another, extensive negotiations are needed about who is responsible for what. There can be significant

bureaucratic delays in arranging funding and services from a neighbouring local authority, especially where there is a lack of flexibility and effective cross-local authority communication and willingness to support children who are not their legal responsibility. For example, the child in Case 2 lived in a care placement across the border in a different local area to her school and this had caused problems with arranging transport, specialist support services for mental health, arranging home visits from health services, and the child's wheelchair repair company would not cross the border to go to the child's school even though it was only 10 min away. These everyday quality of life issues were eventually settled after significant time and effort was invested to establish effective communication between school, social care and health services in both local authority areas. Other difficulties in inter-agency working that were identified during the course of the evaluation included the need for improved transitions and handovers when key professionals working with looked after children left their role, particularly social workers, and absence of attendance at key planning and review meetings, leading to a lack of effective progress for children.

11.8 Conclusions

The persistent attainment gap for children of primary school age who are looked after demands renewed and vigorous examination. In this chapter, we have argued that a fundamental part of the solution is to create 'Caring Schools' where children's wellbeing is twinned with educational attainment as a foundation for learning and enjoyment in school. The Caring School practices discussed here align with the work of Noddings' (1992) care theory, and Schaps et al.'s (2004) 'creating a caring community of learners', for which the key components are (i) demonstrating warm, respectful relationships; (ii) developing a shared ethos and a sense of a shared endeavour through dialogue; (iii) practicing collaboration and caring; and (iv) opportunities to influence what happens and gain rewards from participation in school life (Cameron et al., 2015).

The methodological approach adopted in this evaluation allowed us to collect rich data from a range of sources and include the perspectives of children, foster carers, and school and social work professionals in order to obtain a comprehensive picture of good practice within schools, and to explore how existing policy and practice are experienced by schools and families. One of the more challenging elements was the collection of peer matched teacher assessment data to track the attainment progress of looked after children. This was problematic due both to reliance on schools to extract the relevant data, and the transitory nature of the looked after children population. The number and status of looked after children in schools changed frequently, making consistent matching and tracking across time difficult to achieve. Hence this data is not available here. However, one clear outcome of the evaluation data was the construction of an audit tool, which is available for roll out.

We found that in a whole school and highly inclusive approach it is not the looked after child's status that is first priority, but the identification of the particular needs (and talents) of all children and attending to them in a timely and compassionate way. While some looked after children have very clear requirements for extra support, others do not, and would prefer to be considered as 'the same as' any other child. Establishing this degree of personalised support requires a school culture where staff are encouraged to develop meaningful and warm relationships with children (and parents/carers), characterised by trust, and being the person a child (or parent/carer) chooses to 'go to' when in need. In the case study school this ethos was described as a 'real family feel'. At the same time, clearly, children in care (and others) need to know school staff hold high attainment aspirations for them and that whole school (and, indeed, multi-professional) commitment to their learning is in place. High aspirations can be promoted not just through academic subjects but also through activities that build self-esteem such as participating in decision-making forums. Finally, communication and developing shared understandings are important for all children but critical for looked after children, for whom information sharing across multiple professional agencies is required.

This is often 'harder than it should be', in the words of one of the study participants, and reflects a frequently unstable system around children in care. Key lessons from where it is working well suggest that successful interagency working is built on three main components: (i) reliable, durable, and trusted professional relationships; (ii) a 'hub' model with a central information sharing point; and (iii) key actors who have the authority to get things done.

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