

# PUPIL PREMIUM FOR ADOPTED CHILDREN

## CASE STUDIES

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Department  
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**BAAF**  
ADOPTION  
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BAAF is the UK's leading membership organisation for people who have an interest in fostering, adoption and the well-being of children. It supports, advises, and campaigns for better outcomes for children who are or have been in care.

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# INTRODUCTION

The Department for Education (DfE) asked the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) to undertake case studies to illustrate the early use of the Pupil Premium for adopted children. The case studies described here aim to promote adopted children's educational and personal development through appropriate use of the Pupil Premium. The messages are intended to enable adoptive families and schools to consider the potential application of innovative approaches facilitated by the availability of this new resource. Two case studies describe strategic approaches to supporting the education of adopted children and give a different but equally constructive perspective.

## Background

The Pupil Premium provides schools in England with additional funding to help them raise the attainment of disadvantaged children and close the gap with their peers. It is paid to schools in respect of children from Reception to Year 11. In April 2014 the Pupil Premium was extended to include children adopted from care on or before 30 December 2005.

The Government extended the Premium in recognition of the trauma and loss many adopted children have experienced early in their lives. It stated:

*... teachers and schools have a vital role to play in helping these children emotionally, socially and educationally by providing specific support, to raise their attainment and address their wider needs<sup>1</sup>*

To enable a child's school to claim the Premium of £1900, adoptive parents must inform the school about their child's adoptive status and provide supporting evidence (e.g. an adoption order). Schools are then responsible for deciding how it should be spent and accountable for the achievement of the pupils who attract the Premium. The additional funding can be spent directly on the children who attract it, or on a group basis including those who are eligible for the Premium.<sup>2</sup>

## Case study approach

To identify potential cases to be studied, BAAF requested nominations via:

- DfE's Adoption Support Policy Team
- BAAF's Facebook and Twitter accounts
- Other national adoption organisations, such as Adoption UK and PAC-UK
- Virtual School Heads for looked after children

To complete the case studies concerning individual children, BAAF conducted telephone interviews with adoptive parents and Head and Deputy Head teachers. The interviews explored:

- The school's context e.g. staffing levels, the populations served, Ofsted grades, and understanding of adoption
- Disclosure of children's adoptive status
- Adopted children's needs at school
- The interventions, services and support your school has provided using the Pupil Premium, and how these relate to adopted children's needs
- Children's view of the interventions, services and support they have received.
- The impact the interventions, services and support have had on the children so far.
- The effects of the interventions, services and support that are hoped for in the future.

To ensure the protection of the families' and schools' privacy, pseudonyms have been used and potentially identifying details have been changed in the reporting of the first five cases.

BAAF also met with and interviewed key people involved in the development of two strategic projects that aim to promote the education of adopted children – one led by PAC-UK and the other by the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.

1 See: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/283193/Pupil\\_Premium\\_CoG\\_2014-15.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/283193/Pupil_Premium_CoG_2014-15.pdf)

2 See: <https://www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings>

# CASE STUDY FOR CHILD 1

*'Teachers are happy to be on a learning curve and do the best for our children'*

## Family context

Luke is living in a two-parent adoptive family with his two younger brothers from his birth family. His adoptive mother is a teacher who currently works with adopted and looked after children. She has a deep knowledge and understanding of the needs of adopted children in school.

## Child's pre-adoptive experience

Luke experienced chronic neglect and witnessed domestic violence between his birth parents during the first two-and-a-half years of his life. When he was two-and-a-half a younger sibling died in an accident which was attributed in part to his parents' alcohol abuse and drug taking. After being removed from his birth family he then experienced multiple foster placements before being placed for adoption at the age of five.

## School context

Luke is now eleven years old and currently in year seven. He attends a middle school in the North East of England. The school has 370 pupils on roll and a staff of 25.

## Discussion between the adopters and school

Soon after the Pupil Premium for adopted children was announced, Luke's adoptive parents were invited to meet with school staff to explore ways in which it could be spent. His adoptive mother drew on her professional knowledge and expertise during the discussions and went 'armed with information about a range of things that they could put in place and made lots of suggestions'.

## Child's needs at school

Luke and his brothers all experience difficulties in the school environment. During his early experiences of school, Luke was unable to access education properly because he was in a constant state of heightened anxiety. He started his year two at age six with nursery school levels of attainment. Subsequently Luke has 'been playing catch up' and succeeded in finishing his

year six at the national average in everything, except his writing.

Prior to the introduction of the Pupil Premium for adopted children, Luke was assessed by an Educational Psychologist as having traits of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder at aged nine. The school, however, supports his adoptive mother's view that Luke's main issues relate to his executive functioning<sup>3</sup>. He has particular difficulties with his working memory, planning and organising, with moving from one activity to another, and initiating new tasks on his own. He also has difficulties transferring learning from one area of the curriculum to another and compartmentalises his new knowledge and skills. For instance, he finds it hard to use his literacy skills in science.

Luke is also immature in his behaviour and expressing his emotions. He finds transitions within school extremely difficult and needs to be well prepared for, and supported through, any changes. In class he often fidgets and occasionally shouts out. He has difficulties with his peer relationships but has two or three good friends who 'accept him for who he is' and 'stick with him'.

## Supports, interventions and services provided by using the Pupil Premium

The school understands the need for Luke to have continuity and consistency in his relationships with adults. It has also 'acknowledged how key it is for him to have that one relationship with somebody on his side...somebody who will support him no matter what'. It has therefore used the Pupil Premium to fund one-to-one mentoring for Luke. The mentor has a thorough understanding of his background and is sensitive to his needs. The mentor is a named Learning Support Assistant who spends time with him at least once a week for 20 to 25 minutes. More particularly, the mentor usually 'bookends' Luke's week by meeting with him at the beginning and end of the week to

<sup>3</sup> 'Executive functioning' is an umbrella term for the management (regulation, control) of cognitive processes, including working memory, reasoning, task flexibility, and problem solving as well as planning and execution.

prepare for the new week and reflect on the past.

In addition to mentoring, Luke is attending a literacy group that includes an extra adult who is funded by the Pupil Premium to provide additional support. He also attends a Friendship Group to support the development of his peer relationships. To enable Luke's participation in a trip to France and to try to ensure he has a positive experience, the school is providing funding for an extra adult to accompany the children.

The school is working on a 'Pupil Profile' for Luke. The profiling involves Luke, his teachers and adoptive parents in various assessments to inform the planning of his teaching and learning. It will lead to a 'Provision Plan' which will summarise the help he will need to address particular problems and state how his progress will be measured.

The Provision Plan may include investment in resources which will be of benefit to other vulnerable children in the school as well as to Luke. Resources which are being considered include:

- *A Toolkit for Teachers* produced by Family Futures<sup>4</sup>. This is a CD ROM resource for use in the classroom with children who have executive functioning difficulties. (See: <http://www.familyfutures.co.uk/product/a-tool-kit-for-teachers-cd-rom/> )
- *Jungle Memory* – a computer based resource which trains the working memory of seven to 16 year olds. (See: <http://junglememory.com/> )
- *Friends for Life* program – an Australian cognitive-behavioural therapeutic program designed to be used in the classroom that aims to increase the resilience and happiness of children (See: <https://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/primary/programs/friends-life/>)

The school's Special Educational Needs Coordinator has attended Adoption UK's<sup>5</sup> training 'Learning Connect: Life in the Classroom: Helping Adopted Children in School' and has cascaded her learning about the needs of adopted children to other school staff.

### Links with other support

The family values the on-going adoption support it receives from its placing adoption agency, DFW Adoption. The agency contacts the family at least once a year to check how the adoption is going. The adoptive parents also text their social worker regularly. In addition Luke has had support from After Adoption, Newcastle. He received play therapy to help him deal with the loss of his sister. Luke's adoptive mother coordinates the support he receives.

### Children's views of help

Luke seems to experience his support at school positively. His time with his mentor is viewed as particularly good time and he does not seem to feel singled out in any way. This may be because many other children in the school receive various interventions – some to address difficulties, others to support the development of their particular strengths.

### The impact

The family has noticed that Luke is much more relaxed at weekends than he was in the past and this change is attributed to his meetings with his mentor on Friday afternoons. He seems to benefit from the opportunity to reflect on his past week. He is newly able to enjoy his weekends and not worry about the week ahead.

<sup>4</sup> Family Futures is an adoption and adoption support agency based in London. It specialises in providing therapy services for children who are traumatised or have attachment difficulties, as well as providing support to adoptive parents, special guardians or foster carers.

<sup>5</sup> Adoption UK is a national charity run by and for adopters. It provides information, training and guidance at all stages of the adoption process.

## CASE STUDY FOR CHILD 2

*'I can't fault the school – they're so aware ... they put the children first and foremost. Therefore he has good support at home and school'*

### Family context

Sam is seven years old. He is an only child living with his adoptive mother. His mother has extensive child care experience. She is currently working as a deputy head of a pre-school and previously worked as a NNEB-trained nanny and a parenting adviser.

### Child's pre-adoptive and post-experience

Sam was two-years-and-three-months old when he was placed with his adoptive mother. He had experienced chronic neglect while living within his birth family during the first eighteen months of his life. He then spent nine months in foster care before being placed with his adoptive mother.

Almost two years after being placed for adoption, Sam and his mother experienced an additional move and change of family name as a consequence of social workers accidentally disclosing Sam's adoptive mother's name and address to his birth family.

### School context

Sam attends a small local primary school with 150 pupils on roll. His mother chose it partly on the basis of the staff having been trained about attachment issues. This training was important given that, before starting school, Sam had been assessed by CAMHS as having problems with attachments. Sam was referred to CAMHS by his GP after new emotional and behavioural problems became evident after his hurried move with his adoptive mother and further change of name.

### Discussion between the adopters and school

The school's Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) has consulted Sam's mother and the school's other adoptive parents on an informal basis about how best to spend the Pupil Premium funding.

### Child's needs at school

Given his pre-and post-adoptive experiences, Sam's mother felt he was not ready for pre-school until he was about four years old and also that he would benefit from being kept down a school year. She said, 'There's no way he could have started school when he started pre-school. He could barely cope with three hours of pre-school before needing a long sleep.' He therefore spent one year at pre-school before moving into a school reception class three months after his fifth birthday. (He has a July birthday and is just eight weeks older than the next oldest child in his class.)

Sam was anxious and hyperactive in pre-school but within that context his behaviour was considered to be 'within the bounds of normality'. However, his transition from pre-school to reception was difficult despite his mother's efforts to prepare him. Sam's home life deteriorated over his first term in reception. He became self-critical and destructive of his toys and possessions. He developed habitual and repetitive physical clicks, ticks and grunts, and pulled at his hair. He became hyperactive to the extent that he needed five-mile walks with his adoptive mother to expend his energy and calm himself down.

In school Sam is not particularly disruptive, although he often finds it hard to stop talking and fidgeting. Very occasionally, his behaviour is more extreme including, for instance, spitting at a teacher. He is also been hyper-vigilant and on guard if someone unfamiliar enters the classroom.

It is not immediately obvious to others that he has difficulties with peer relationships. He has one particular female friend with whom he plays well. However, he does not generally get asked to parties unless his whole class is invited and he is not invited to play at friends' houses unless his mother is friendly with the other children's parents. He is rather awkward socially and the better he knows someone the more controlling and defensive he becomes'.

Sam's mother also explained, 'He still doesn't believe that I'll pick him up from school. When I drop him off he assumes I won't see him again. He'll receive hugs

but no way will he give a hug to anyone unless he doesn't know them. The more he knows someone the less affectionate he becomes.' He has particularly low self-esteem and confidence.

### Supports, interventions and services provided by using the Pupil Premium

The school uses the Pupil Premium to fund a key worker for Sam. To ensure that he is not left in the playground at the start of the school day, his mother takes him to his key worker in the special needs room or to a named person in the Breakfast Club. The key worker also spends time with Sam outside the classroom on a one-to-one basis at least once a week, usually on a Thursday afternoon. She engages with him through board games and art activities with the specific aim of boosting his confidence and self-esteem. Occasionally his key worker is also available to support him in class. Sam also has access to the school's Rainbow Room<sup>6</sup> with the school's Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) and his key worker one day a week and can choose a friend to accompany him. Sam has also attended a Rapid Readers course to build his confidence as a reader. This involved him reading one-to-one with an adult a couple of times a week.

The school's SENCO, Sam's teacher and his adoptive mother are also working on an Action Plan for Sam. It will have a focus on the steps that need to be taken to address his emotional issues that are barriers to his learning.

Sam's teacher or the SENCO also consults his adoptive mother if any activities are being considered or planned that may disturb or upset Sam, such as autobiographical story telling or watching DVDs with an adoption-related story line.

### Children's views of help

It is difficult to assess Sam's views of the additional support he receives because he rarely expresses his emotions verbally. However, being accompanied in to school by his mother to meet with his key worker does

not seem problematic and he appears to relish the one-to-one attention of his key worker and the SENCO. He similarly enjoyed his Rapid Reader course.

### The impact

Sam's mother has become aware that recently Sam appears to go into school 'more happily than ever before' and his confidence and self-esteem are obviously growing. She attributes these changes and his thriving to the introduction of a key worker for Sam. She added, 'It's just doing him so much good. He knows he's got this special person that he knows he can go to at any time.' Also, Sam's confidence as a reader has grown significantly. He has recently discovered a joy of reading and begun to pick up books at home to read without any prompting.

<sup>6</sup> There is no single model for school 'Rainbow Rooms', but they are often small, quiet and calm rooms where staff can take individual children and small groups to get ready for the school day, talk about concerns and worries or to calm down if something has upset or angered them. Schools work hard to ensure that they are not seen as a time out or naughty rooms, and that there is no stigma attached to their use.

## CASE STUDY FOR CHILD 3

*'In a different school, in a different environment my little boy would just be looked at as naughty'*

### Family context

Jack is living in a two-parent adoptive family with a sister from his birth family. He has three older siblings who are living in two other permanent placements. His adoptive parents contribute to the work of the adoption agency that placed Jack and also attend the agency's adoption support events.

### Child's pre-adoptive experience

Jack was fourteen months old when he and his four siblings were removed from their birth family. All five children in the family had experienced chronic neglect and witnessed domestic violence while living at home. After being removed, Jack lived in two foster placements before being placed with his adoptive parents.

### School context

Jack is five-years-old and currently in Year One. He and his sister attend the same small local Catholic primary school in a semi-rural location in the north of England. The school serves a village and its surrounding area. It has 233 pupils on its roll and a staff of 11. It was graded as 'good' after Ofsted's most recent inspection in February 2014. Jack is in a large class of 35 pupils.

### Discussions between the adopters and school

Jack's adoptive parents met with the Head Teacher before their children were offered school places. They were particularly attracted to the school's kind, nurturing, and child-centred approach to the education and care of its pupils. Jack's parents have always been very open with the Head and other staff at the school about their children's early life experiences. His mother said, 'I know loads of people who don't tell school and I think they're absolutely insane... You need to be open.' The Head planned a meeting with Jack's parents during his first term. Subsequently, regular meetings have been held to discuss Jack's progress involving all the key people involved in his education and care – his parents, Head Teacher, teachers, teaching assistants, therapist, and adoption support social worker. His

parents have also given permission for key information to be cascaded to all the staff who deal with Jack.

### Child's needs at school

Jack's adoptive mother described him as 'three, five, seven' explaining, 'He's five years old, he can talk to you like he's seven, but he behaves like he's three. He's very clever but very emotionally delayed.' His emotional and behavioural difficulties were not particularly apparent in pre-school, but soon after starting in Reception his contemporaries 'stepped up' their behaviour and Jack got left behind. The structure of the school day and environment seemed to cause him to feel anxious and stressed which meant that he then found it difficult to learn. After a couple of weeks in Reception Jack began to nip, bite, smack, and kick other children, and to throw things. His mother said, 'He was a general nuisance. I'm his mother – I love him very much – but that's how I'd have described him'. The Head also described him as controlling. He was also distressed by the noise of large groups of children in the school hall during dinner times and assemblies, although he was very loud himself.

### Supports, interventions and services provided by using the Pupil Premium

The Head explained that her staff group's understanding of contemporary adoption has only developed since Jack and his sister joined the school. The whole group has learned from the advice of both the family's social worker and Jack's therapist about the impact of attachment issues on children in school. They have read and collectively discussed Dan Hughes' and Louise Bombèr's publications. The Head employs an Inclusion Consultant, a specialist in children's special educational needs, one day a week. The Consultant assesses individual children, advises staff on meeting individual children's needs and educates the staff group about special needs. She has provided the staff with confidence to work through behaviour management strategies that will work with Jack. The staff have been helped to understand his behaviour as a form of communication.



To support Jack to fulfil his learning potential, the school has been working on Jack's social skills and sense of belonging. Soon after starting school the Inclusion Consultant gave Jack a baseline assessment. Strategies were then put in place to build his self-esteem, including a 'book of success' to record his achievements. The book is shared with his parents every evening and they can add to and comment on it. Anything negative that happens at school goes home on a sticker that can be destroyed after it has been read by his parents. The school day is also broken down into small segments for Jack so that he has the potential to achieve well in each one and start afresh if a previous session has not gone well for him. Also, the school's various small groups that support learning and development, including those for social skills, memory, reading, and spelling, are all open to Jack. He has been supported through the 'Every Child A Reader' programme.

Jack is also accompanied into the dinner and assembly halls before other children enter so that he can gradually adjust to the increasing noise levels as the hall fills. In assembly he sits side ways at the end of a row so he is not distressed by having children behind him. Also, the Head has educated Jack's fellow pupils to support him in appropriate ways, for instance, by being quieter and not crowding around him. A school counsellor will be available to Jack when he finishes his therapy.

After Jack's first term he was provided with one-to-one support from a teaching assistant who has also become his 'key person'. The assistant has chats with Jack when he arrives at school and at the beginning of each session throughout the school day. She accompanies him as he moves from one teaching group to another. She works with other children in addition to Jack but is generally available to him if he is experiencing difficulties, and is able to remove him from the classroom environment in the short term if necessary. The Head described her as highly skilled and professional. Jack's mother said she was exceptionally good at handling him. She added that the assistant is particularly empathetic and understanding and said, 'It's not just a person doing that job that matters – it's her doing that job.' The Assistant moved from Reception to Year One with Jack to provide him with some continuity in relationships through a major transition. The Head explained she has had to draw on several sources of funding to pay for the assistant but that in recent months the Pupil Premium has made a

welcome contribution to the costs of her continuing employment.

### **Other support**

Jack and his adoptive mother have weekly 'Theraplay' from the local Supporting Carers and Youth Team which used to be linked to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). Jack was assessed for the service before he started school and his assessment indicated that he has significant problems with attachment. The assessment informed the school's approach to supporting Jack.

### **Child's view of help**

Jack's mother is confident that he generally experiences the support he receives positively. After 16 months in school he seems happy to go and takes pride in sharing his 'success book' with his parents. He has on one occasion said that he would like to be able to go into the dinner hall with everyone else but has not given any other indication that he perceives himself as being treated differently from others.

### **The impact**

According to the Head, Jack has the potential to do extremely well academically. After 16 months in school Jack has begun to enjoy his work and is much less disruptive than he was in Reception. His social skills are improving and his self-esteem seems to be growing. He has made significant progress with his reading which in turn seems to be having a positive impact on his behaviour. Jack's mother said, 'He had the best week ever last week. I was just so proud of him. He had a fabulous, fabulous week ...' His need for support from his teaching assistant are gradually diminishing.

### **The potential for interventions, services and support to be adapted for use by other schools**

The adoption agency that placed Jack has put other schools in touch with the Head to enable them to learn from her growing knowledge and experience. The Head's key message is that her school's approach is all based on good practice for any child with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

## CASE STUDY FOR CHILD 4

*'If she continues as she is, it's our hope that she'll go on to grammar school'*

### Family Context

Beth lives with her adoptive mother and has exceptionally close relationships with her extended adoptive family, including a cousin she regards as a sister. She is particularly keen to know exactly 'who is who' within her family and to spend time with extended family members. Her mother is currently head of a local primary school and has previously worked as a school inspector.

### Child's pre-adoptive experiences

Beth was assessed as being at risk of significant harm before birth. She was exposed to alcohol, possibly drugs and a poor diet in utero, and lacked pre-natal care. She was placed with a foster carer after being discharged from hospital as a new-born baby. She remained in the care of her foster carer and foster-carer's adult daughter for about ten months before being placed with her adoptive mother.

Beth has two older brothers who have also been removed from her birth parents after experiencing neglect and abuse at home. The boys now live with their paternal grandparents who have Special Guardianship Orders. Beth and her adoptive mother have occasional letter box contact with her birth siblings and grandparents.

### School context

Beth is in Year Three of a very large primary school in an urban area in the north west of England. The school has 850 on roll including six known adopted children and 15 looked after children, and is full in most year groups. It currently employs 40 teachers and 30 teaching assistants. It aims to offer its pupils a caring, nurturing and supportive environment.

The school serves a socially and economically diverse population. It has low indicators of deprivation and overall the pupils have lower levels of special educational needs than the national average. Some of the school's looked after children and those receiving free school meals are particularly academically able. Generally the school's pupils tend to leave with above average levels of academic attainment. The school was

graded as 'good' by Ofsted 18 months ago.

The school staff have a particularly strong commitment to their continuing professional development. As the Deputy Head explained, this reflects a strong belief that, 'We're only as good as our training'. Staff have recently been trained on attachment issues. The sessions were particularly relevant to the care and teaching of adopted and looked after children, as well as other children who have experienced separation and loss. (The Deputy Head arranged 12 chairs in the training room for a 'twilight' session but quickly had to find additional chairs for the 60 staff who attended.) The training was provided by staff from the region's maintained special school which caters for primary children with a range of needs which impact upon their behaviour. This special school also offers a consultancy service for addressing children's emotional and behavioural difficulties on an individual child and classroom basis.

### Discussions between the adopters and school

Beth's adoptive mother has been very open with the school about Beth's early experiences of family life and adoption. She shared information when she registered Beth, during induction days and when she completed an 'All about me' book for school. The school alerted parents to the extension of the Pupil Premium to adopted children via a school newsletter, and invited adoptive parents to make contact with a named administrative officer. According to Beth's mother, the school has subsequently handled the confidential documentation relating to Beth's entitlement to the Pupil Premium for adopted children with great sensitivity and respect.

### Children's needs at school

Beth attended pre-school from the age of 18 months. She seemed happy and settled. She enjoyed other children's company and had a strong preference for playing outdoors. Beth had some early breathing problems but these gradually resolved. She was a little slow to start to walk and her fine motor skills took longer than expected to develop. There were also

concerns about her language development, especially her expressive language. A referral was made to a speech therapist by her health visitor at her mother's request. Although Beth's language development was assessed as being within the normal range for her age, her mother still detected some difficulties in her use of tenses and words.

Beth's learning at nursery was supported through play by her adoptive mother at home and Beth started her Reception class on a par with her peers. Her peer-relationships remained strong. She generally behaved well and rarely got into trouble. However, on occasions she lacked confidence and was easily led by others. She continued to make progress through Reception and Year One but began to struggle with reading, writing and mathematics. She began to lose some interest in school work as she experienced difficulties and was reluctant to do anything related to school work at home. However, she did not qualify for teaching assistance or any other additional support because other children within her year had greater needs. However, the Head agreed with her mother that Beth's needs for support would be re-considered at the start of her Year Two.

### **Supports, interventions and services provided by using the Pupil Premium**

Once Beth's Pupil Premium funding became available, her mother requested a meeting with the Deputy Head. It was decided that some funding would be used to support Beth on an individual basis and the rest of the money would contribute to support provided on a school-wide basis, from which Beth would also benefit. In particular, Beth would be encouraged to make use of a range of 'enrichment activities' related to the school's 'Arts Award'<sup>7</sup>. Subsequently, Beth has been provided with one-to-one teaching-assistant support and interventions for the development of her hand-writing, writing, reading and mathematics. For instance, Beth participated in the 'Successful Reading Partnership' programme which involved her reading and discussing the content of her reading with an adult three times a week for a ten-week period. Beth has also been given priority to attend various school clubs including the choir, board game club, arts club and friendship club. Her mother is contributing to the costs of subsidised

violin lessons. A teaching assistant is also available to Beth some lunch times if she wants some additional one-to-one adult attention. Her fees for before and after-school clubs are also subsidised.

### **Child's view of help**

According to Beth's mother and the Deputy Head, Beth appears to enjoy and be engaged in the additional work involved in the interventions she receives. The school gives a strong message to all its pupils that it is not unusual for them to need additional help with learning and that having interventions is a normal part of school life.

### **The impact**

Generally Beth seems to be happier than she was in the past. Socially she is a little more chatty and assertive and beginning to express some of her own opinions. Occasionally she even risks being mischievous. Her mother and Deputy Head agree that Beth expresses a 'lovely attitude to her learning', and is always willing to apply herself to her work. At home she volunteers information about her learning, has become a 'book worm' and enjoys discussing what she has read. Her handwriting is fluent. Beth's mother was delighted when Beth recently said, 'I love writing'. Her mother commented, 'To my mind that's just wonderful. This is a child who never used to want to put pen to paper'. Her mother added, 'It might not all be down to the Pupil Premium. It might be that she has really clicked with her class teacher. But some of it has got to be that she's having a lot of extra support – that one-to-one support – and that has built her confidence'. The Deputy Head now hopes that Beth will go on to grammar school. The school will offer her the extra support that it now offers to all its looked after and adopted children for the eleven plus exam.

<sup>7</sup> Arts Award develops creative learners and supports student achievement. It can be delivered as a universal offer or part of a targeted project.

See: <http://www.artsaward.org.uk/site/?id=1989>

## CASE STUDY FOR CHILD 5

*'Our priority is that she comes to school, enjoys school and accesses all the learning on offer'*

### Family context

Ella is living in a two-parent adoptive family with her younger sister from her birth family.

### Child's pre-adoptive experience

Ella experienced chronic neglect and witnessed domestic violence while living with her birth family until she was two years and nine months old. After being removed, she and her sister lived with a foster carer for 18 months before being placed for adoption.

### School context

Ella is now six years old and in Year One. She goes to a small primary school in the centre of a market town in the South East of England. The school has an intake of 26 pupils per year. There are 182 pupils on roll and the classes for younger children are full. The school has proportionately more pupils receiving the Pupil Premium than might be expected for a school in a small market town. It spends some of its Pupil Premium funding on the employment of a teacher specifically to provide one-to-one support. The school has generally good staffing levels with at least one teacher and one full-time teaching assistant in each class. The school was graded as 'good', with 'outstanding' for its early years' provision and some other features, when last inspected by Ofsted in 2012.

The Head and her staff regard every child as 'special' and endeavour to find out about children's backgrounds to understand their needs. The school then tries to offer programmes of support which are bespoke for individual children. The Head is also keen to engage with all the relevant agencies involved in vulnerable children's lives and tries to attend all relevant meetings.

### Discussion between the adopters and school

Ella's adoptive parents were open with the Head about the Ella and her sister's pre-adoptive experiences before the children were offered school places. They took all available opportunities to get to know the school staff prior to the children's registration, during open

mornings and evenings, 'songs and rhymes' sessions for children in the summer before the start of the first school term, and private meetings with the Head. The Head feels their openness has enabled helpful sharing of information among her staff. Ella's parents continue to have regular meetings with the Head and other staff and professionals who are involved in Ella's education and care in school. They have referred staff to publications by Amber Elliot, Louise Bombèr and Dan Hughes. The Head said that she and her colleagues rely on Ella's parents' expertise and particularly need to know what they have tried at home. She also explained she is in constant dialogue with the parents because, 'Everyone needs to pull in the same direction'.

### Child's needs at school

Both the Head and Ella's mother describe Ella as an academically able little girl. She also, however, has significant emotional difficulties and low self-esteem. She gets on well with her peers, although other children are a little wary of her. Ella settled quite well in her Reception class, but found the transition to Year One very difficult. She had had a strong attachment to her Reception class teacher and did not respond well to the more structured day and environment in Year One. In the first term of Year One Ella became increasingly anxious and violent towards adults. She had almost daily outbursts during which she would kick, hit, and punch the staff. She would also shout and scream, and need to be removed from the classroom. When she eventually calmed down she would be upset and remorseful. Ella also found particular aspects of the curriculum stressful, including French lessons, which were not taught by her usual class teacher, and having to get changed for physical education.

## Supports, interventions and services provided by using the Pupil Premium

The Head has employed a Teaching Assistant to work one-to-one with Ella. It is hoped that in time this assistant will be able to offer more support to other children in Ella's class. However, Ella is her priority for the time being. The Head has also sought advice from the local Behavioural Support Service and Educational Psychologists. One of the local psychologists, who had a particular understanding of adoption and attachment issues, had previously supported the family. (She had provided Ella's adoptive parents with some 'video interaction guidance' to build their confidence as parents. This involved them being filmed playing with her and given feedback on their verbal, physical and emotional responses.) The same Educational Psychologist was able to provide some Pupil-Premium-funded group training sessions for Ella's school staff on the impact of adoption and attachment issues in the classroom. The Head explained, 'I need my staff to understand that this isn't just a little child that has poor behaviour. There are some very deep and significant reasons why she behaves like this'.

The Educational Psychologist and the Behaviour Support Service workers were also able to give clear guidance for the management of Ella's behaviour to Ella's class teacher and the teaching assistants, including the assistant who works particularly closely with her. The assistant accompanies Ella into the classroom at the beginning of each day before the other children arrive. She and Ella work through a visual timetable each morning to prepare Ella for the day. A special area in the classroom has been provided for Ella where she can go when she feels anxious. It offers her calming activities and objects. Ella is also encouraged to bring in objects from home to help her to feel connected to her home and adoptive family during the school day. During a debriefing at the end of each school day, the teaching assistant encourages Ella to take home stories of school to share with her parents.

Ella's Pupil Premium has also been spent on providing specific resources for her including, for instance, a set of the Todd Parr Feelings Flashcards<sup>8</sup> to develop her emotional literacy. The Pupil Premium is also

being spent on supporting her drumming lessons and participation in a school-based music group.

## Links with other support

The School Nurse has also referred Ella to CAMHS. There are particular concerns that Ella hits herself as well as others. The Head and Ella's parents are disappointed that Ella has not met the threshold for services. Ella's parents now plan to try to access CAMHS services through the family General Practitioner. In the meantime, in liaison with Ella's parents, the Head is exploring the possibility of art therapy for Ella to be provided from a local voluntary agency that supports children who have witnessed domestic violence.

## The impact

Reflecting on the previous three months or so, the Head said, 'We think things are much, much better. She is much more settled in class.' Ella is more engaged with her learning than she was previously. Ella's mother also reflected that Ella is calmer at home. The Head thought that Ella 'adored' her teaching assistant. The social aspect of her music lessons is having a positive impact. Ella is benefiting from working as a part of a group to produce music. The drumming also helps her to release frustration and tension. Ella's mother explained that the increase in understanding of the adults around Ella, '... has had a massive effect on her self-esteem.'

Ella's support in the classroom is also having a positive impact on Ella's adoptive family. For instance, Ella no longer regularly needs to be collected early from school. This in turn has a positive impact on Ella's mother's capacity to earn and the family's finances, which means that she and her husband can take better care of themselves. Consequently, Ella's mother is no longer regularly awake at four in the morning worrying about the family's future.

<sup>8</sup> These are 20 sturdy flash cards featuring 40 different emotions. Each card shows two opposite feelings, one on each side, in words and pictures. For instance, They help children to learn what it means to feel silly and serious, calm and nervous, brave and scared..

# PAC-UK'S EDUCATION PROJECTS: SUPPORTING PERMANENTLY PLACED CHILDREN IN EDUCATION

*We keep our PAC-UK head on and remember the need for a secure base. We are much better now at always holding a student in mind, and put their needs at the centre of what we do.*  
**(Participant feedback)**

In announcing the extension of the Pupil Premium to adopted children in 2013, the Department for Education (DfE) emphasised the importance of teachers' and schools' roles in supporting permanently placed children. DfE emphasised that permanently placed children need emotional, social and educational support in schools to raise their attainment and address their wider needs. PAC-UK's<sup>9</sup> Education Projects specifically aim to develop good practice and robust systems for understanding and supporting the needs of permanently placed children in schools.

The projects are provided on an adoption consortium or individual local authority basis. Each one is bespoke to ensure that it meets local needs.

## The challenges

PAC-UK's Education Projects have to challenge assumptions, including:

### **Looked after children are a discrete category of children:**

The education system generally does not recognise that most permanently placed children (i.e. those in adoptive and special guardianship placements) have previously been looked-after, and may have very similar needs for support to those currently in care. Yet we know that the children who cannot return home are those looked after children most likely to have experienced trauma and loss. We should therefore expect them to experience some of the same kinds of difficulties that looked after children experience in school.

### **Adoption offers children 'happy endings':**

An out-of-date perception that adoptions have fairy-tale endings still persists within the education system. The complex nature of contemporary adoption is not always fully understood. Adoptive parents report educational professionals' misconceptions and express frustrations that some schools lack insight into the long-term impact of trauma and loss on children. Parents are frustrated, for instance, when they are told by school staff that their adopted child is 'lucky now' and 'won't remember – she was only a baby when that happened'.

## The evidence base

PAC-UK's Education Projects are informed by what we know from psychology and neuroscience about the needs of children who have experienced trauma and loss. We know adopted children may have difficulties in school with:

- hyper-vigilance
- emotional and behavioural regulation
- relating to adults
- social skills and peer relationships
- executive functioning
- learning

Some of these difficulties may particularly relate to children's attachment issues.

<sup>9</sup> PAC-UK is an independent national registered Adoption Support Agency. PAC-UK's primary aim is to relieve distress, strengthen family relationships and inform and improve professional practice in relation to adoption and other permanent placements.

PAC-UK has been listening to adoptive parents who have reported that within schools there is:

- very little understanding of the enduring impact of trauma and loss
- nothing about attachment in teachers' initial training
- inappropriate management of adopted children's behaviour in schools (with inflexible systems based on limited rewards and consequences which are not effective for some permanently placed children and can lead to them being excluded from schools)
- insufficient support for children's transitions
- insufficient information sharing within schools meaning that staff are unaware of key information about individual children

PAC-UK has also been listening to schools. Schools have reported that it is very difficult to manage:

- children's behaviour outside the normal reward and consequences model (aggression is particularly challenging)
- children's emotional immaturity
- children's needs for a high level of adult input
- adoptive parents' high expectations of their children and the school
- information (which is sometimes missing) about children's backgrounds

## The aims of the projects

PAC-UK's Education Projects aim to get the best possible support in place in schools for permanently placed children. The projects' objectives include:

- building the capacity of schools to support whole school populations, facilitating stronger partnerships between schools and adopters and special guardians
- building professional capacity (i.e. knowledge, skills and confidence) to enable adoption support social workers to provide education-focused support
- strengthening the links between virtual schools and adoption support teams

The projects take a strategic approach which aims to effect systemic change.

## The recruitment of schools

PAC-UK's first Education Project was developed with the North London Adoption Consortium. PAC-UK is currently working on other education projects with the West London Consortium and Wandsworth local authority.

It is difficult to identify adopted children in schools because their identification depends on their parents disclosing their adoptive status. Schools are therefore invited to work with PAC-UK via the local authorities' adoption agencies. Agencies then pass the Centre the contact details of adoptive families who have agreed to participate and consented to their children's schools being invited to take part. Schools vary in their initial enthusiasm about the project, but once they hear about attachment and trauma, they tend to respond keenly, recognising the project's relevance for large portions of their school populations.

## The content

The Education Projects do not offer direct work with children and young people. Instead they develop models of good practice that vary across schools.

The Centre finds ways of working with all parties involved in the education of permanently placed children and the projects include:

- training and consultation sessions for schools
- education-focused groups for adoptive parents and special guardians
- continuing professional development for adoption teams
- the development of local networks of Adoption Advocates within schools, and
- consultations with children and young people about their educational experiences

### **Training and consultation sessions for schools**

The training and consultation encourages an understanding of children's behaviour and difficulties in the context of their early experiences and ongoing needs. The training explores interventions and strategies that have been tried with particular children to support their learning, and carefully considers what is and is not working.

Consultations about challenges within systems are also offered. Staff are supported to consider and make changes to promote more adoption- and attachment-friendly schools. The training and consultation also emphasises that things that are good for permanently placed children are usually good for all children in schools

### **Education-focused groups for adoptive parents and special guardian**

Education-focused groups for parents and carers of permanently placed children meet on a monthly basis. The meetings are facilitated by PAC-UK but the agenda is set by the parents and guardians. The ideas and suggestions they generate then filter down to schools. The challenges they discuss include uncertainties about the relative importance of the qualities of schools when choosing a school, and how to work effectively with schools. The groups have produced resource packs for other parents and guardians.

### **Continuing professional development for adoption teams, adoption support teams and virtual school staff**

Continuing professional development is provided for social workers in adoption teams and adoption support teams in local authorities. Most social workers are well versed in the impact of trauma and loss on family life, but are less sure about how it plays out in school. The training also involves demystifying the education system for social workers. It strengthens their confidence to challenge the use of jargon and acronyms within the education system and encourages them to ask for information. It covers the brokering of difficult relationships between the parent or guardian and the school.

The Education Projects also try to link up adoption teams with virtual schools, which in some instances are co-located. Adoption teams can then tap into the virtual schools' local knowledge and resources and the virtual school has opportunities to learn more about the nature and complexity of adoption and how they can support permanently placed children.

### **The development of local networks of Adoption Advocates within schools**

Each school involved in the North London Adoption Consortium project identified an adoption champion. These champions now call themselves Adoption Advocates. The Advocate role was analogous to that of the designated teacher for looked after children.

PAC-UK facilitated meetings of the network of Advocates to encourage and support their sharing of good practice and problem-solving. Together they considered how to promote an understanding of, and commitment to, adopted children within their schools. They developed a policy for permanently placed children similar to that for looked after children. They also developed guidelines for information sharing. In addition the network considered the use of tools such as the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire for assessing permanently placed children's well-being and monitoring their outcomes.



### **Consultations with children and young people about their educational experiences**

Children and young people were consulted and their educational experiences were explored through role-play, filming and photography.

### **The impact**

PAC-UK has collected stories and other qualitative information about the impact of the projects on children and is exploring ways of collecting more quantitative data on the children's outcomes.

The projects have resulted in better support for permanently placed children in schools including:

- improved systems to support transitions throughout the school day, and between year-groups and schools
- new systems to monitor children's outcomes and well-being
- revisions to approaches to behaviour management suited to children who have experienced trauma and loss
- new nurture groups in primary and secondary schools
- improved partnerships between adoptive parents and special guardian, and school staff
- improved information-sharing systems
- social workers' increased knowledge, skills and confidence to address educational issues
- more collaboration between adoption teams, Virtual Schools and Educational Psychology Services

### **Remaining challenges for PAC-UK's Education Projects**

- Schools need to be encouraged to communicate more with all their parents and guardians about changes they are making to support children who have experienced trauma and loss.
- A system of accreditation for schools needs to be developed so that parents and guardians can feel confident when selecting schools for their children.
- Local networks across schools need to be encouraged to share good practice.
- Virtual schools are often struggling to meet their statutory duties. They acknowledge that it makes sense to recognise that permanently placed children are previously looked after children but many do not have the necessary spare capacity.

### **Contact:**

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# ROYAL BOROUGH OF WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD CASE STUDY

*“We recognise that adopted children were once children in care – so we’ll offer them the same support”*

The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead is taking a strategic approach to the use of the Pupil Premium for adopted children. This strategy is the result of strong collaborative working between:

- Gareth Marr, an adopter with a passion for improving the educational experiences and attainment of adopted children
- Alyson Graham, an adoption service manager who embraces opportunities to draw on the energy, enthusiasm, professional skills and expertise of adopters
- Anne Bunce, a Virtual School Head<sup>10</sup> who supports early intervention and is determined to improve her schools’ understanding of adopted children as children who have previously been in care
- Carol Pearce, a service leader for educational standards who is ensuring that the strategy has an impact on all school staff
- Gary Daniels, who designs software and whose personal records of his time in care were destroyed in a fire and is driven to protect those of current and future generations

Crucially, the approach also has the full backing of Alison Alexander, the authority’s Strategic Director of Children’s Services. Alison is a care leaver who attributes her successes in her personal and professional life to the educational support she had from key people earlier in her life. She strongly advocates that a good education can transform the lives of vulnerable children.

The strategy is sensitive to one of the critical differences between children in care and adopted children. It recognises that the local authority makes decisions

about the education of the children it looks after as their ‘corporate parent’, and that with adopted children the same responsibilities for decision-making lie with their adoptive parents.

## The origins of the strategy

Six Berkshire adopters, including Gareth, attended a consultation meeting about proposals to establish a joint adoption service covering four local authorities. During the meeting they all expressed significant concerns about their children’s educations. Alison Alexander’s initial response was to extend Windsor and Maidenheads’ Virtual School and role of the Virtual School Head to cover adopted children for the first year after their adoption order.

At a further meeting with Gareth soon after, additional changes to local policy and practice were agreed to support the education of adopted children. More particularly, a structure was put in place to manage the spending of Pupil Premiums. The changes included:

- a further extension of the remit of the Virtual School for looked after children and Virtual School Head to include adopted children beyond the first year
- the offer of personal education planning to all adopters to try to ensure that the Pupil Premium for adopted children is spent appropriately
- a commitment to train all the authority’s school staff on the needs of adopted and other vulnerable children in schools
- the appointment of Gareth as a Governor of the Virtual School to help with the development of personal education planning for adopted children and the training programme for staff.

<sup>10</sup> All local authorities must have a Virtual School Head to promote the educational achievement of the children looked after by the authority that appoints them. The Head must know how the looked-after children are doing and help school staff and social workers to explore the children’s additional needs.

## The strategy itself

### The Virtual School and the Virtual School Head

The extension of the role means that Anne's extensive knowledge of the schools within the local authority area is available to adoptive parents. This can be invaluable to adopters when they are faced with the difficult task of selecting schools for their children. She will also act as an advocate for adoptive parents in meetings with education professionals. Anne is introduced to adopters when a child is placed who is at or near school age. However, her services and those of the Virtual School remain optional for adoptive parents.

The extension of the role has also meant that Anne is now accountable for the education of about 50 adopted children in addition to the 100 or so looked after children for whom she was already responsible. Her hours and those of a colleague have had to be extended.

### Personal Education Plans

Personal education planning is a team effort. For looked after children the process usually involves the child, their carer, social worker, and the Designated Teacher responsible for looked after children located in the school that the children attend on a daily basis. For adopted children, it usually involves the child, their adoptive parent(s), the Designated Teacher and can involve the Virtual School Head. There is no social work involvement unless the adoptive family has an adoption support worker they wish to invite to participate.

To guide the planning the authority uses an E-Personal Education Plan that has been developed by Gary. It enables the child to make their contribution via a computer and also for information to be stored and backed up on remote servers.

The plan describes the child's current situation, academic attainments, special needs, and sets out a plan for the management of their education. It identifies any support they need and determines how the Pupil Premium will be spent according to the child's individual needs. It helps to ensure that Pupil Premiums are only used to fund 'bespoke' interventions and support for adopted children.

The professionals' decision making about the provision of interventions and support is informed by research findings published by the Sutton Trust<sup>11</sup>. The authority is also rigorous in its approach to monitoring the effectiveness of the interventions and support services that are provided.

### Staff training

Windsor and Maidenhead is very aware of the need for staff training in schools to increase their understanding of that impact of trauma and loss on children's educational experiences. As Alyson explained, 'The trauma course that we've done – the teachers on the course with adopters have been astounded and astonished by what they don't know about these children'.

The authority has therefore made a commitment to provide training on:

- Trauma and Recovery (based on training materials published by BAAF) for adopters, foster carers, social workers and occasionally teachers. It is to be provided on an annual basis. (This is led by Alyson.)
- Trauma and its impact on Child Development for senior leadership teams in all the authority's schools in early 2015. The training is delivered over three one-day workshops. (This is led by Adoption UK.)
- Trauma and its impact on Child Development for all staff in all schools together with designated governors. (This will be led by Adoption-UK trained 'ambassadors' from senior leadership teams on 'inset' days. The 'ambassadors' will attend two-yearly refresher courses with Adoption UK.)
- E-Personal Education Planning for Designated Teachers at their annual conference.

### Appointment of an Adopter as a Virtual School Governor

The authority is keen for the Virtual School to operate in the same way as any other school with a senior leadership team and governing body. Gareth was therefore appointed to the governing body to reflect its new responsibilities for adopted children.

<sup>11</sup> The Sutton Trust is a 'do' tank. It commissions regular research to influence policy and to inform programmes to improve social mobility through education.  
See <http://www.suttontrust.com/>

## **Impact of the strategy**

Windsor and Maidenhead is keen to have an independent evaluation of the impact of its approach to the use of the Pupil Premium for adopted children and other aspects of its strategy to support them in their education. In the meantime, it continues to use personal educational planning to monitor educational outcomes for individual children. It also prides itself in its policy of not permanently excluding children in care.

## **For more information about Windsor and Maidenhead's strategy contact:**

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## CONCLUSION

This short report describes the schools' innovative approaches to spending the Pupil Premium for adopted children. It does not tell schools how the Premium should be spent. Instead it tells inspiring stories of adoptive parents and schools working closely and creatively together to try to ensure that the funding is being used well to address the individual emotional, social and educational needs of adopted child

The stories outline the children's adverse pre-adoptive experiences and describe the various and significant ways in which these have negatively affected their experiences of school and capacity to learn. They highlight the need for adoptive parents to share key information about their children's pre-adoptive experiences with schools, and for schools to respond with sensitivity and respect. The stories also show how assessments of children's needs, followed by the provision of targeted services and interventions, can have a significant and positive impact on the children's experiences of, and progress at, school.

Almost all the adoptive parents who participated in the project's interviews worked as professionals in the fields of child care or education. They were steeped in the literature on the effects of early trauma and loss on children's well-being. They had all played an invaluable

part in building the capacity of their children's schools to understand the complex nature of contemporary adoptions and their own children's individual needs. Professionals acknowledged that they had relied on adoptive parents' expertise to inform their decision making about the provision of support and spending of the Pupil Premium. However, not all schools will have adoptive parents who want or are able to play similarly educational roles.

The report therefore includes case studies of two strategic approaches to assessing and supporting the educational needs of adopted children provided on a local authority-wide basis. The first involves the delivery of projects which aim to develop good practice and robust systems for understanding and supporting the needs of permanently placed children in schools. The projects are bespoke to adoption consortia or individual local authorities to ensure that they meet local needs. The second strategic approach has the virtual school at its core and has been designed specifically to inform the allocation of Pupil Premium funding. It is hoped that this will inspire other authorities to consider the possibility of extending the remit of their virtual schools, and individual educational planning, to include adopted children.