

News story: Education Secretary vows to boost vulnerable children's outcomes

Teachers and social workers will get advice to improve vulnerable children's wellbeing, behaviour and school attendance, as the Education Secretary vows to tackle their significantly worse educational outcomes.

The adversity and trauma experienced by children in need of help from social workers, alongside the instability in their home lives, is shown to have a lasting impact on their educational outcomes, which has a knock on impact on their adult life.

New data shows that that in 2016/17 one in 10 state school pupils had a social worker within the previous six years of their life, and data published early in the year showed that the average GCSE attainment for these children is nearly half that of other pupils.

To tackle this, today (Monday 10 December) the Department for Education has published [findings](#) of how professionals who work with vulnerable children can better identify children in need, understand the impact of their traumatic experiences, and what schools and social care can do to help these children benefit from a positive experience of education that opens up future opportunities.

Today's publication provides teachers and social workers with advice to help improve attendance, behaviour and wellbeing, such as adjusting how they manage vulnerable children's behaviour and adapting how they speak to the child.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds said:

It's a measure of a good society how we treat children who are most in need of our support. If we truly aspire for all children to succeed, whatever their background, we cannot ignore the stark reality of the poorer outcomes for this group of children who have already been through more than we would want our own children to experience.

There is no reason why we should have a lower aspiration for a child in need of help or protection than we do for their peers. Whether it is making sure a child has a consistent and trusted member of staff or taking the time to speak to a child the morning after they have witnessed domestic abuse, I hope this practical advice can help those leaders in schools and social care, alongside our hardworking teachers and social workers, understand how we can collectively do more to support these children. Together, we can

help them have greater opportunities to fulfil their potential.

The department launched a [call for evidence](#) in March and heard from over 600 school and social care professionals about how they support children in need of help and protection in education.

The vast majority of these children already receive support in school, but by better understanding their needs and backgrounds, this support can be better targeted. The interim Children in Need of Help and Protection review published today shares a new bank of extensive good practice that professionals have identified to support children to thrive in education and achieve better outcomes.

The findings highlight effective ways to achieve this, including:

- training for professionals to recognise the lasting impact of trauma and adversity on children's school attendance, learning, behaviour and wellbeing;
- better information sharing and multi-agency working between schools and other local agencies on the child's family circumstances; and
- inclusion in school and making proportionate adjustments to promote better outcomes – such as teachers adapting how they communicate with vulnerable children and how they manage their behavior.

The most common factor in children needing help and protection from social care is domestic abuse, which was identified in more than half of social workers' assessments last year.

The findings highlights how one initiative, Operation Encompass, has helped children exposed to domestic abuse, with police swiftly alerting a school safeguarding lead of an incident by the next morning. School staff will then speak to the child that day and decide how to best support the child, such as giving them time to calm down or not reprimand them for being late or missing homework.

Katie Ghose, Chief Executive of Women's Aid, said:

An estimated 160,000 children in England are currently living in households where domestic abuse is taking place. Children do not just witness domestic abuse, they experience it. It has a devastating impact on them, affecting their wellbeing and development and sometimes even putting their lives at risk. No child should face domestic abuse alone and their voices must now be heard. That's why we welcome the Education Secretary's pledge to change this.

We look forward to working with the Department for Education to ensure that there is an improved awareness about domestic abuse and its impact on children among school staff; specialist training for all school staff is the first step to achieve this. Our partnership with Operation Encompass shows how better information sharing and

collaboration between agencies, like the police and schools, can greatly improve the support made available for children. By working together, we can ensure that all child survivors are listened to, believed and supported.

In addition to having poorer academic attainment on average, children in need of help and protection are three times more likely to have special educational needs (SEN), at least five times more likely to be excluded, and three times as likely to not be in education, employment or training after the age of 16.

Alongside the Children in Need review, the department is working to improve support for children with additional needs in school – through an externally-led review of exclusions, improved special educational needs (SEN) support, and transforming support for children and young people's mental health. Action across government is also tackling the causes of why children are in need – through the domestic abuse bill, tackling serious violence, and prioritising prevention of health problems.

Sam Royston, Director of Policy and Research at the Children's Society, said:

Vulnerable young people who have had difficult childhoods need better help as they prepare for adult life and too often, the help they do get falls away when they turn 18 – even though their difficulties do not.

This important review recognises the challenges that children in need face during this tricky transition to adulthood and how these can harm their education.

The department is also investing in a What Works Centre for Children's Social Care, which aims to develop and test new approaches, such as placing social workers in schools to provide holistic support for vulnerable children.

A similar initiative exists in Stoke-on-Trent, partly funded through the department's £72m, Opportunity Area programme, where the 'Better Together' project ensures that every primary and secondary school in the city is linked with a social worker and an educational psychologist.

The Education Endowment Foundation is also working with the What Works Centre to gather evidence on improving the educational outcomes of children in need and the department will continue to work with both on building a robust evidence base of best practice.