

PAC-UK Education Service

Supporting Permanently Placed Children in Education

Partnership Projects with North London Adoption Consortium, West London Adoption & Permanence Consortium and London Borough of Wandsworth



Why is our work needed?

In its description of Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) the DfE emphasized the role of teachers and schools in supporting permanently placed (PP) children. Crucially, the group's social and emotional needs were highlighted alongside their learning needs.

At PAC-UK we have identified that there are several barriers to the effective support of PP children:

- A lack of recognition of their needs; many school staff do not understand contemporary adoption, and perceive adopted children as 'lucky', and their early experiences as things 'they won't remember'
- A lack of understanding about their needs; attachment is not addressed in teacher training, and few staff have thought about the impact of trauma and loss
- A clash of culture in some instances, as the strategies which support permanently placed children to thrive sometimes require schools to examine their values, beliefs and behaviours at a systemic level e.g. in their approach to behaviour management
- An absence of robust structures to monitor, champion and meet their needs; Designated Teachers and Virtual Schools have vital understanding about attachment and trauma, but have no remit with permanently placed children
- A lack of joined up working; Virtual Schools and Educational Psychology Services have crucial relationships with schools, and important local knowledge about support systems and services, but adoption services within the same LA are not aware of or do not access these resources
- A lack of knowledge and confidence in some adoption and adoption support services in terms of how to navigate the complex education and education support systems

Our project targets these barriers directly, by:

- Facilitating a monthly group for adoptive parents and special guardians. As well as having a supportive function, the group offers valuable lived experience and strategic perspectives which shape the project work
- Providing training for all school staff which provides education about contemporary adoption, attachment and the impact of trauma and loss. The training offers a framework within which children's difficulties can be understood, and provides evidence-informed implementable strategies.
- Providing child-focused and school-focused systemic consultations for groups of school staff, in which schools can develop their good practice. This can include developing supervision for school staff to manage the emotional impact of working with children with high levels of emotional needs.
- Identifying an Adoption Advocate within each school, in a role analogous to that of Designated Teacher. PAC-UK facilitates an Adoption Advocate Network, in which groups of committed local schools can share good practice and develop resources.
- Providing Continuing Professional Development jointly to the Adoption Teams and Virtual Schools, in order to increase the services' knowledge, skills and confidence in education and adoption issues respectively, and to improve relationships and joint working between the two services.
- Encouraging children to share their views and experiences of education, which shape the work of the project. Children and young people can contribute in several ways, including through a creative group where they work together to create a resource (e.g. film) which can be shared with schools
- Ensuring that all project work is steered by an Advisory Group made up of Local Authority representatives including adoption social workers and heads of service, Virtual Schools and Educational Psychologists; this ensures that ownership of the challenges remains with the LA, and increases the capacity of the LA to address the needs of PP children in the longer term. Advisory Groups also include adoptive parents and special guardians, to encourage LAs to learn from lived experience and to build parents' confidence in the LA.

Our progress

- A 2013/14 one year collaboration with the North London Adoption Consortium, incorporating 15 families and schools, and five adoption teams and Virtual Schools.
- Ongoing 2014/15 collaborations with the West London Adoption & Permanence Consortium, incorporating 25 families and schools, and with Wandsworth, providing services to families and schools across the borough
- Discussion with the Leeds & Humber Consortium and the East London Consortium regarding collaborations in 2015/16

What are our outcomes?

The outcomes of our completed project in North London were celebrated at our Conference in December 2014, which was attended by Kevin Woods, Assistant Director at the DfE. Schools, adoption teams, Virtual Schools, adoptive parents and young people gathered to share the changes they had observed over the year.

Key changes have been:

1. Better provision for permanently placed children in school; specific examples include:

- Improved systems to support transition between schools and throughout the school day and school life
- Adoption of systems to measure and monitor children's outcomes and wellbeing
- Revision of behaviour management approaches so that permanently placed children are no longer being further traumatised by detention, isolation and exclusion
- Newly developed Nurture Groups at both primary and secondary schools to meet children's emotional and attachment needs
- Improved partnership with adoptive parents and special guardians, including consultation about the effective use of PP+
- Groups of staff meeting regularly to reflect on how to understand children's difficulties, and to provide and receive support
- New systems to ensure that key information about children's lives is shared across the staff group

2. Increased knowledge, skills and confidence amongst all school staff

3. An established network of Adoption Advocates in North London, which is now facilitated by the schools themselves and is being widened to schools who did not participate in the project.
4. Increased knowledge, skills and confidence amongst adoption teams and adoption support teams in addressing educational issues which arise when families seek adoption support
5. Increased collaboration within the LA- between the adoption team, Virtual Schools and Educational Psychology Services.