

University of Wolverhampton, Institute of Education, Primary Teacher Education
**An investigation into Teacher Opinions on the Effectiveness of Statutory Guidelines for Looked-
after Children, within a mainstream Primary School.**

By

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2019

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Abstract

This research project investigates the effectiveness and importance of statutory guidance for Looked-after children (LAC). The investigation will focus on statutory guidance for LAC, including the roles of designated teacher (DT) and virtual school head (VSH) and will draw on previous investigations to evaluate the effectiveness of this support system. The investigation will then take findings from both quantitative and qualitative research methods to give relevant evidence to help gain an informative and different insight into LAC's needs. The findings will be based on the opinions of teachers from a school within the West Midlands. The research undertaken consists of questionnaires, an interview and document analysis; the conclusions reached will allow for a deepened knowledge of how statutory guidance is implemented within schools, and how it benefits LAC.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the members of my family for their compassion and support throughout the entirety of my journey as a student teacher. Without the untiring support of my father, I would not have accomplished everything that I am proud of today. I would also like to thank my boyfriend Aaron, whose love and support has allowed me to grow in confidence and achieve so much.

Research issue

This research project investigates the effectiveness and implications of government-advised provision for LAC, based on the opinions of teachers. The research will reflect on the influence of statutory guidelines, while also considering the impact of expectations for LAC's academic attainment.

This project will reflect on the work of Harper (2018).

Justification

National and International Justification

The vulnerability of children has been recognised by the British Government since the Children's Charter of 1889, which allowed authorities to intervene in order to protect children from abuse at the hands of their parents (Family Matters, 2011; Wright and Potter 2012). Since then, legislation, policy and guidance have been continuously adapted in order to better the outcomes of children who have been subject to abuse and neglect (Rolands and Statham, 2009; DfE and Skills 2007; DfE, 2009). The 2003 government initiative green paper; *Every Child Matters* highlighted a need for change in order improve educational outcomes for LAC. Moreover; the continuous revision and adaptation of policy for LAC in schools, since the release of this green paper, infers that some approaches have been found to be substandard (DfE 2009; 2014; 2018A). The Children and Families Act (2014) first implemented the role of VSH (virtual school head) to advocate the importance of high expectations for LAC (DfE, 2018B). It is clear that many countries around the world face similar barriers to improving the outcomes for LAC and internationally, LAC are often not a priority for Governments (Gilligan, 2007; Mendis, 2015). In spite of government initiatives, statistics have shown no tangible benefit to the attainment of LAC in primary schools (DfE, 2018A).The Australian government take a similar approach by commissioning the state as LAC's 'parent' while Durbeej and Hellner (2017) highlight the lack of intervention studies in Sweden, despite the alarmingly low attainment of LAC. The attainment of LAC is clearly a globally significant topic.

Professional Relevance

The number of LAC in the UK has increased steadily over the past eight years and as of the 31st of March 2018, there were 75,420 LAC in England, in comparison to just 64,400 in 2010 (Department of Education, 2018C). In consideration of this, it is clear many teachers will have the opportunity to

teach a LAC in their initial years of teaching. The steady increase of children entering care over the past two decades has called for new statutory guidance for schools, following extensive research and piloting (Berridge, 2012). In spite of this, researchers have highlighted that teachers often feel that not enough guidance is given, to improve attainment of LAC. There is no specific training program in place to equip teachers with the skills and knowledge necessary to benefit LAC, who may have requirements other than generalised educational needs (Welbourne, 2012). However, I hope to benefit my knowledge of this topic by meeting Teachers' Standard 3b; demonstrating critical understanding of developments in education (Department of Education, 2014). The research of this topic will also assist my ability to meet Teachers' Standard 5b, by investigating how inhibiting factors faced by LAC can be effectively mitigated by provision implemented in local schools.

Personal Interest

As the chosen topic for my research project, the academic attainment of looked after children is a personal interest of mine. For many years, I have had the opportunity to care for and tutor looked after children, who have become part of my family. This opportunity has allowed me to see the way in which emotional abuse and neglect can affect the development of LAC. I believe this research will offer the opportunity to understand how as a teacher, I can support LAC to overcome inhibiting factors to achieve academic success.

Literature review

Throughout this review, I aim to develop my knowledge of provision and potential strategies for teaching LAC and to take a more informed approach when conducting my research.

Looked after children

A 'looked after child' is defined in Section 22 of the Children Act 1998 as any child that is looked after by local authority due to a care order, or a child that has been cared for by children's services for more than 24 hours. These children are considered by the Department for Education (2009) as disadvantaged, and many have complex needs that can act as a catalyst for barriers to learning.

In 2017, it was calculated that just 31% of LAC reached the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics, in comparison to 61% of Non-LAC (DfE, 2018A). It has been stated by many researchers of this topic, that the difficulties in gaining higher attainment for looked after children should not be underestimated (Hayden, 2005). Despite this, The Department for Education (2014) and Dann (2011) both outline the powerful role teachers can play in improving the educational experience of LAC. Suan (2010) acknowledges that this can be done by combining the government's statutory advice, with a strong school ethos and provision tailored to each individual child.

School Provisions

The Department for Education and Employment first stated in 2000, that all LAC are to be allocated a Designated Teacher (DT). The role of DT was created with the intention of promoting higher expectations for LAC, establishing positive relationships with carers and social workers, and devising clear and achievable targets within their Personal Education Plans (PEPs) (DfE, 2009). A role of VSH was also created, with the purpose of managing the way in which pupil premium funding provided for LAC, is used within schools (DfE, 2009). Since the implementation of this statutory advice, aspects of the provision have been both acclaimed and criticised by teachers, researchers and social care professionals alike (Driscoll 2011; Welbourne and Leeson, 2012; Whitehouse 2014).

Personal Education Plans

The DT is considered responsible for ensuring the LAC's PEPs are rigorously reflected on, and developed to meet the needs of the LAC, in order to promote accelerated progress (DfE, 2009). However, in some cases the local education services may take on a greater role in producing the PEP (Personal Education Plan) (DfE, 20018). Hayden (2005) comments the high levels of SEN in this group means that many LAC have both a PEP and IEP (Individual Education Plan), thus remarking that

similarities in these plans makes the implementation of both pointless. Berridge (2017) persuasively argues that the PEPs differ from IEPs in their aim to address not only educational attainment, but also the social and emotional needs of LAC, regardless of academic ability. Emotional trauma is considered a significant contributing factor in the delayed social development of many LAC, which can lead to barriers for learning (DfE, 2007; Francis, Bennion, and Humrich, 2017; Manny, 2017 ;). Contrary to IEPs, PEPs also commonly contain strategies for behaviour in and out of school, and consider how care professionals can support these strategies at home (Jackson, 2017; Berridge, 2017) PEPs offer opportunities for DTs to discuss and implement intervention activities personalised to each LAC, such as nurture groups and play therapy (McClung and Gayle, 2013; Francis, Bennion, and Humrich, 2017; Webber, 2017). Liabo, Gray and Mulcahy (2013) researched positive outcomes for LAC when introduced to nurture groups set up through referral to PEPs. In contrast, Hayden (2005) argues that PEPs are often regarded as formal paper-work and are not referred to in enough detail by professionals. Martindale (2018) suggested that in order to combat this, LAC would benefit from involvement in the creation and adaptation of their PEPs, as it offers opportunity to capture pupil voice. This Loss of control is listed by Francis, Bennion and Humrich, (2017) as one of the explanations for challenging behaviour in LAC, so their contribution to their PEP could equate to a more settled understanding of expectations, and an opportunity to express academic ambition (Cann, 2012; Jackson, 2012). While the Department for Education (2018B) statutory guidance gives clear strategies for monitoring attainment of LAC in a general sense, it is clear that raising attainment for individual LAC is open to interpretation (Berridge, 2012; Cann, 2012; Martindale, 2018). Liabo, Gray and Mulcahy (2013) carried out a study on provision for LAC, and tutoring for reading was found to have a positive effect; the average increase of reading age was seventeen point five months over a seven month period. This idea is supported by the Department for Education (2009) that identified that one-on-one tuition from teachers can be beneficial to LAC, and should be deployed wherever appropriate. In contrast, Mannay (2017) describes how intervention groups can lead to LAC feeling rejected by teachers, leading to possible exacerbation of attachment disorders. It can be concluded that PEPs can promote strategies to improve the emotional wellbeing of LAC as well as raise attainment, in accordance with Maslow's Hierarchy (Gilligan, 2007; Cann, 2012; Berridge, 2017).

The Role of Designated Teacher

Part of the role of DT is to build trusting and professional relationships, not only with LAC within the school, but also with care givers and social services (Berridge, 2012; Jackson, 2015). The DT often acts as the port of call between school staff and multi-agencies and is expected to advise the LAC's

class teachers' on meeting the needs of the LAC they teach (Driscoll, 2013). However, McClung and Gayle (2013) argue that with no direct government advice detailing the expected arrangements for informal meetings, they only occur when a problem arises, rather than during transition or in order to celebrate achievements. Harlands (2015) also raises the issue that many class teachers feel under-qualified in understanding the complex needs of LAC, and rely heavily on the input of often over-worked DTs. Whitehouse (2014) explains that the DT should uphold a whole school culture that promotes high expectations and opportunities for personalised learning for LAC, while also maintaining professional relationships with the LAC and multi-agency involved. Martindale (2018) goes on to highlight the importance of the seniority of this role and identifies that DTs should have the opportunity to influence school policy. Jackson (2012) argues that in schools with many LAC, their PEP although personalised, can become a one size fits all program and Pupil Premium Funding (PPF) is often used to benefit the majority rather than each individual. The DfE (2009;2018D) highlights that establishing and maintaining working relationships with teachers, local authority and care givers are vital for DTs, when ensuring stability and progress for LAC.

The Role of Virtual School Head.

Maintaining a close relationship with the VSH is considered vital in ensuring LAC gain positive experiences within school (Martindale, 2018). Berridge (2012) highlighted that the introduction of VSH had raised the profile of the education of LAC. Conversely; other studies concluded that many teaching professionals were unsure of the exact purpose of the role (Harland, 2014; Webber, 2017). Jackson (2015) also highlighted concerns that the VSH may not always have a good enough knowledge of each school to know how PPF should be spent in order to benefit LAC. This point again highlights the importance of links made between local authority and the DT (Berridge, 2012; Jackson, 2015). Many researchers share the belief that the VSH should act as an advocate for education, in the same way that parents would (Berridge, 2012).

Academic expectations for LAC

For many years attainment of looked after children has been considerably low in comparison to the rest of the population, and while 68% are recognised as having special needs, there is no explanation for the remainder. It is clear that the welfare and protection of LAC is the main agenda for many social care professionals; however teachers often feel their academic progress is therefore overlooked. Jackson (2013) noted that social workers often attribute poor academic attainment to individual characteristics rather than holes within the education system. Harland (2014) argues persuasively that stereotyping and low expectations are significant factors that contribute to low

attainment levels. This idea has also been strengthened by Liabo, Gray, and Mulcahy (2013), by identifying that previously low expectations for LAC meant that they had not been receiving the support they need and may otherwise acquire. The role of DT has been adapted to raise the expectations of LAC's academic attainment (DfE, 2009; 2018B). Although this position has been found to have a positive effect on the teaching of LAC in school, it is also important to consider how other multi-agencies' expectations of LAC may affect their attainment. Jackson (2013) supports this viewpoint and explains that educational research since the end of the Second World War promotes the significance of the home background for academic attainment, based on the interests and expectations of parents. The DfE (2015) has since introduced 'The Education Standard' promoting residential care workers to work in conjunction with the child's DT, to help LAC achieve targets set in their PEPs. The importance of continuous expectations was again strengthened by a revised guidance for VSH and DTs published by the DfE (2018B) by indicating the importance of upholding these expectations for children who leave foster care (Carroll, 2016).

For decades the attainment of LAC has been focused on by researchers and it is clear that a collaborative approach by professionals is a key component in raising attainment (Berridge 2012). While Jackson (2013) noted that social workers often attribute poor academic attainment to individual characteristics, rather than holes within the education system, Carroll (2016) persuasively proclaims the significant intangible effect teacher's guidance and provision can have on the progress of LAC. This is signified by the role of DT and their responsibility for the LAC's academic progress (DfE 2000). The DfE (2009; 2017) therefore emphasises the view that when teaching looked after children we must do what we do for all children, but more so.

Research questions

Research questions are required to indicate clear direction for research and to be used as a framework when formulating methods of research (Denscombe, 2014).

- What are the expectations for academic achievement of LAC amongst teachers and how do the teachers and SLs within the case study believe the statutory guidance for LAC influences expectations?
- How is the statutory guidance being used within the case study and is this guidance considered to be sufficient and effective by teachers and SLs?
- How do teachers and SLs believe the statutory guidance provided to them can be improved?

Methodology

The research methods used in this investigation will be questionnaires featuring both open and closed questions, an interview with a SL (Senior Leader) and document analysis of statutory guidance for LAC.

Semi-structured interviews are a useful means of gaining qualitative data for the research project (Walliman, 2011). The interview, with a SL from a school in the West Midlands, was conducted in a semi-Structured format. During the semi-structured interview, pre-prepared questions were asked, however the participant had opportunities to raise different points that may be relevant to the question asked (Lambert, 2012 Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011; 2017). The aim of this interview was to gain an understanding of the provision implemented by the DT for LAC and their opinion of how effective the statutory guidelines are. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) highlighted the importance of a non-biased approach, in order to reach valid inference, which can be achieved by conducting a highly structured interview. In contrast, Galletta (2013), states that open-ended interviews enable the interviewee to express their opinions more easily. As my research agenda is based on opinions, the semi-structured approach was found to be effective. Bell (2010) comments that if the interviewee feels they have a professional investment in being interviewed, their answers may be given only to reflect how they wish to be perceived, as opposed to exposing their true feelings drawn from experience. By conducting a semi-structured interview, the participant may feel more able to explain their personal experience and qualify their response (Robson, 2011; Galletta, 2013). A face-to-face interview is preferred as use of body language and visual signs can encourage insightful responses (Gregory, 2003; Walliman, 2011; Leavy, 2014).

Questionnaires

Questionnaires provide an efficient means of collecting qualitative and quantitative data for larger scale data collection (Walliman, 2011; Sargeant, J. and Harcourt, 2012). Questionnaires are structured, quick to complete and easy to draw an immediate conclusion from, so will be more suited to larger groups of participants (Robson, 2011). A larger number of participants also allows for more reliable data (Black, 2002; Denscombe, 2014). Xerri (2017) highlights that questionnaires are a particularly beneficial research tool when investigating sensitive topics. By allowing the participant to complete the questionnaire in their own time away from the researcher, there is less risk of the participant feeling pressured or influenced. Often participants feel pressure to provide answers that

they will represent them in the best light (Pattern, 2016). The anonymous nature of the questionnaires, encouraged respondents to give truthful answers without fear of repercussion (Black, 2002; Layder, 2014; Pattern, 2016). In contrast, Denscombe (2014) argues that questionnaires do not enable the researcher to gain depth of knowledge or ask further questions. Questionnaires are less useful at providing in-depth insights into opinions and do not reveal the context behind answers given by respondents (Wilson and McQueen 1994; Pattern, 2016). In order to allow for more context, parts of the questionnaire therefore contained some open ended questions, allowing the participants to answer and provide qualitative data, without influence from the researcher (Robson, 2014). In regards to the reliability of this type of data, piloting has proven to be very beneficial. During this piloting session, it was found that as the researcher would not be present to discuss the questions with the participants, the wording of questions may cause ambiguity. This potential problem was discussed by Robson (2012) who noted that careful consideration of the wording, through piloting, will diminish the potential for invalid results. It was also noted that some participants would give answers they felt were the most acceptable, therefore it was important to stress the anonymity of the questionnaire to the participants (Layder, 2014).

Questionnaires for this study have been presented to the teachers within the school, regardless of whether there is currently a LAC in the class that they teach. This will allow for answers that give an insight into more generalised opinions, rather than those influenced by current personal experience.

Document analysis

Document analysis will also be used to gain greater knowledge of how PEPs are used for LAC within schools. By analysing the statutory guideline and PEPs, a more informed viewpoint can be taken before formulating questionnaires and interview questions (Bell, 2010; Robson, 2012; 2014). Inference can also be drawn from these documents and a greater understanding about how this policy affects the learning of LAC in the classroom.

Ethics, Validity and Reliability

Ethics

Ethical consideration is vital when carrying out real world research involving people, and there is a responsibility of ensuring all research undertaken is conducted in a moral manner (Farrell, 2005). This responsibility falls upon the researcher (Robson, 2014). The sensitive nature of this research topic means that careful consideration of ethical implications must be applied to the means of obtaining research.

This research topic focuses on school provision and expectations for LAC who are considered to be a vulnerable young group (DfE, 2018A; E). In order to ensure all research conducted was done in an ethical manner, full ethical approval was granted from the ethics board prior to contact with the case study school.

Due to the sensitive nature of the chosen topic, the ramifications of potential harm to participants must also be considered. As the focus for investigation is LAC, the participants will have a vested interest in the wellbeing and progress of these children. This means that there is a potential for the participants to be effected by the questions asked. I have diminished the potential ramifications of this by allowing participants to opt out at any time (Robson, 2014; Xerri, 2017). The right to confidentiality was also expressed to every participant before they consented to involvement in the study. The identity of all participants will be protected and the Senior Leader (SL) interviewed will not be referred to by role, in accordance with Robson (2014).

I have protected the integrity of my investigation by ensuring all data gathered was used exclusively for the research project (Schostak, 2008). I have also ensured that data collected was kept within a locked filing system and on computer hardware that only I have access to. Information gathered from this investigation has not been shared with any third parties.

Reliability

It is impossible to eradicate the threat to validity and reliability when conducting research of any type (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2017; Sargeant and Harcourt, 2012). In spite of this, careful

consideration prior to conducting research has allowed for valid and reliable data to be collected in order to investigate this topic. Reliability relates to the consistency of data, if more was to be obtained (Bell, 2010). The reliability of research is vital when drawing inference from an investigation, because unreliable results would make the research invalid. Alignment of research will be used in order to directly compare quantitative and qualitative data, which allows for reliability of data and clarifies opinions given within closed questions. It is also important that the approach is relativist, because conclusions have been drawn from analysis of language and meaning (Walliman, 2011; Johnson and Christensen, 2004). The response rate of questionnaires may also be a cause a concern, as a diminished amount of data could also threaten the reliability of this research (Robson, 2011). To prevent this, I have ensured that the questionnaires are given out personally and at a convenient time (Bell, 2010). When conducting research involving interviews, it should be acknowledged that as researchers are inherently part of the world they are investigating, perceptivity and sensitivity will have an effect and influence on the conclusion they take from findings (Black, 2002).

Validity

Validity is the extent to which a test represents the reality it is investigating (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2011). Triangulation will be used when investigating to ensure the validity of inference taken (Leavy, 2014). Triangulation is achieved by using two or more sources as research strategies for a common phenomenon (Robson, 2011; Scott and Morrison). Each research method has also been piloted before use in this investigation. Following this piloting session, many questions within the questionnaire were adapted in order to lessen the risk of ambiguity and therefore diminish the possibility of invalid results. Research methods that are found to be flawed or unreliable have not been viewed as a failure; this insight has given the opportunity to refine ideas (Bell, 2010). When considering the validity of questionnaires, it is important to use a large sample that is representative of the target group, to prevent any distortion of data (Johnson and Christensen, 2004; Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2011). By conducting the research involving all teachers, including those who do not currently teach LAC, corresponding viewpoints can be considered to be more reliable and thus valid to the conclusion of the investigation.

Presentation of data and discussion of research findings.

Question 1

What are the expectations for academic achievement of LAC amongst teachers and how do the teachers and SL within the case study believe the statutory guidance for LAC influences expectations?

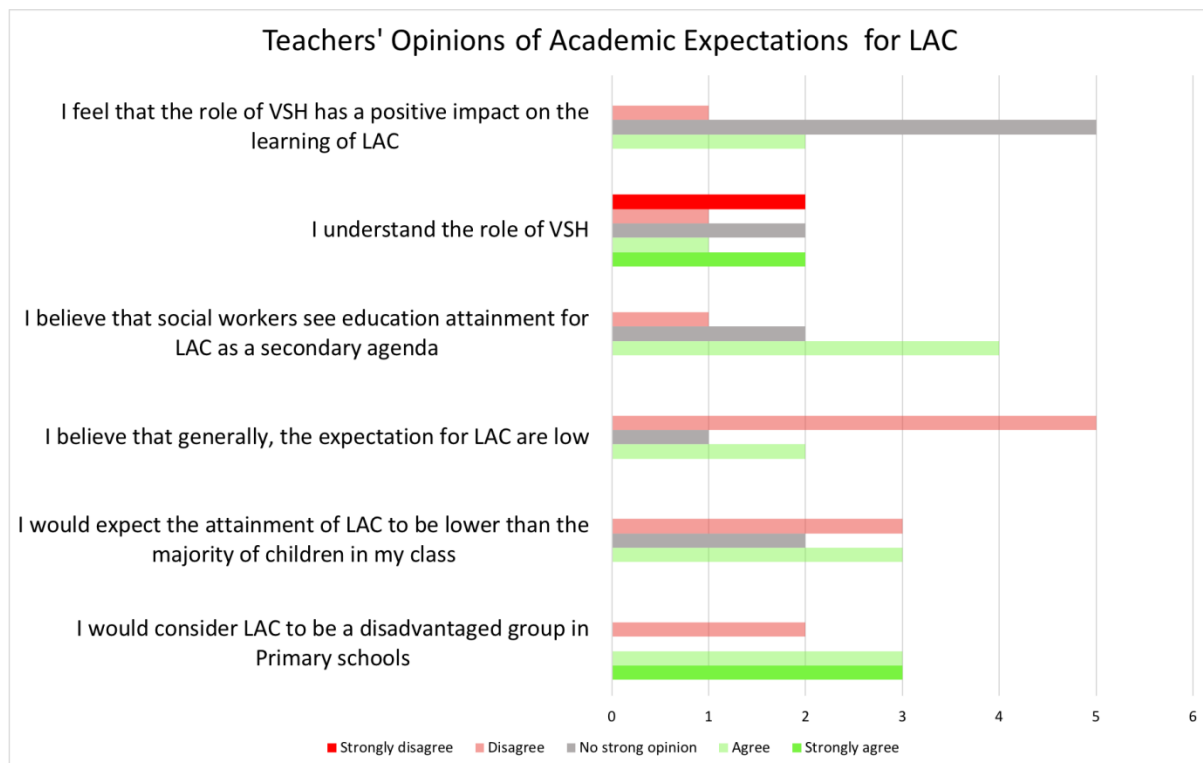
Expectations in the case study

In order to answer this research question, the questionnaire was used to highlight teachers' understanding of the academic expectations of LAC. A Semi-structured interview was then conducted with a member of the senior leadership team (SL) to gain a deepened understanding. It was clear that the majority of responders, supported a common understanding that LAC are regarded as a disadvantaged group (Berridge, 2007; Jackson, 2010; Berridge, 2017). However only half of the teachers asked believed that the attainment of LAC would be lower than non-looked after children, disbite the current statistics (DfE, 2018A). This contradicts research by Harland (2014) who held low expectations and stereotyping accountable for the low attainment of LAC. Five out of eight of the respondents did not agree that expectations for LAC are low. This highlights the partial success of the DfE's notion and implimentation of the roles of DT and VSH, whose primary purpose is to promote the academic expectations for LAC (DfE, 2009). This finding challenges the view point of many researchers, who believe that low expectations amongst professionals and care givers are partly responsible for low attainment (Jackson, 2012; Mannay, 2017). Similarly, the interview with the DT revealed that from experience, on a national level, the expectations for LAC's educational attainment amongst social workers were low. This viewpoint was strengthened by the results of the questionnaire highlighting that, most of the responders believe that social workers see the attainment of LAC as a secondary agenda. The SL further emphasised the lack of focus on tracking educational attainment by social workers and the unmanagable work-load they often experience. In contrast however, the SL explained that locally, the VS display high expectations by striving to support LAC to overcome their barriers. The SL also did not hold expectations responsible for low attainment, rather the failings of the system and lack of stability implemented by local authority in placing these children in school. The findings support the DfE's (2018A;B;E) notion that although LAC are considered to be disadvantaged because of many contributing factors, this must not

therefore mean that expectations of these children should be low. These barriers to learning should be overcome by using the government provided initiatives in conjunction with the support of the professionals that work with each LAC.

The influence of Statutory Guidance on the Expectations

Although the expectations for LAC amongst teachers in the case study was not low in all cases, less than half of the responders agreed that they understood the role of VSH, highlighting the need for more training for teachers. This supports the view points of Dann (2011) and Webber (2017) who found that teachers need more support in improving outcomes for the educational attainment of LAC. The majority of responders also confirmed that they feel that they had no strong opinion of the VSHs role impacting LAC, again highlighting the lack of understanding of the role. This viewpoint contradicts the influence many researchers believe the VSH has on the education of LAC (Jackson, 2015; Berridge, 2017). None of the teachers in the study agreed that they were happy with the provision for LAC. This information is supported by the perspective of Martindale (2018) who identified the relationship between VSH and school staff as vital in improving provision. The SL also strengthens this research by identifying within the questionnaire the 'ignorance of LAC in school' as one of the difficulties of the job role. Accordingly, Mannay (2017) sites a lack of teacher appreciation of the impacts of multi-agencies, as an issue when supporting LAC to achieve academically. The lack of recognition of this role however, does not devalue or diminish the achievements made by the VSH. The interview with SL revealed that the VSH has a positive impact on the expectations of LAC by deploying additional funding and training to teachers who will support LAC, and creating opportunities for academic success to be valued and celebrated on a wider level.



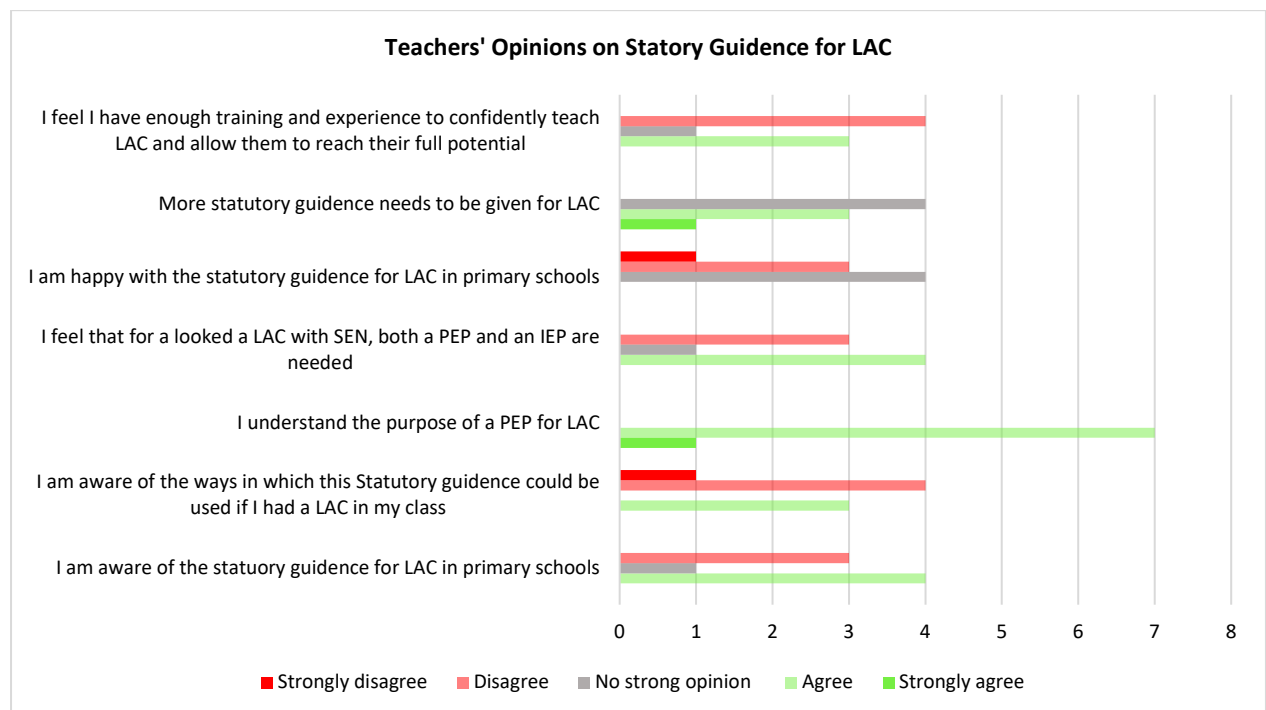
Question two

How is the statutory guidance being used within the case study and is this guidance considered to be sufficient and effective by teachers and SL?

The answer to this research question was obtained through questionnaires completed by teachers, and a semi-structured interview with a SL. It was clear from the questionnaire completed by teachers that they did not consider the statutory guidance for LAC to be satisfactory and felt that they needed more guidance in order to support LAC academically. This familiar viewpoint has been prevalent amongst researchers and participants in research for a number of years, despite the revision of government initiatives (Kaganas, King and Piper, 1995; Martin and Jackson, 2002; Walker, 2017, DfE, 2007; 2011; 2014; 2018B; E). During the semi-structured interview with the SL, many positive approaches to provision at the school were discussed, including the use of play therapy, a strategy that was acclaimed by Liabo, Gray, and Mulcahy (2013) and Francis, Bennion and Humrich (2017) in supporting children who face emotional instability. However, the SL also discussed the difficulty in obtaining funding for these projects, due to statutory requirements of agreement from social workers for this type of provision. This then highlighted the difficulty the DT faces in the

inconsistencies of contact with social workers, as staff shortages and lack of communication often means LAC wait longer for the provision they need. This finding consolidates the work of Berridge (2007; 2012; 2018) and Jackson (2010) who profess the need for positive and stable relationships between agencies when supporting LAC. The current government initiative however, does not identify such provision as statutory, other than termly PEP meetings (McClung and Gayle, 2013). This suggests that the statutory guidance lacks support for DTs who do not have consistent contact with agencies nor authority to implement strategies independently. Due to the continuous revision of statutory guidance for LAC (DfE,2007;2004;2018B;E) the SL also expresses the need for training to be biannually, a belief supported by Rolands and Statham, (2009) and Walker, (2017) who admit that the changing provision is challenging for teachers and also adds to their workload.

Despite three out of eight teachers believing that both a PEP and IEP are not needed, the SL explained during the interview that both are beneficial. The PEP enables guidance from the VSH, something that the interviewee values. The SL also highlighted the important role the VSH plays in transitions for LAC, whether that is between care givers or schools, and how this supports children to feel valued and understood. This suggests that VSH also play a clear role in ensuring that the mental wellbeing of LAC is personally cared for when they are between school and carers, and no LAC is overlooked.



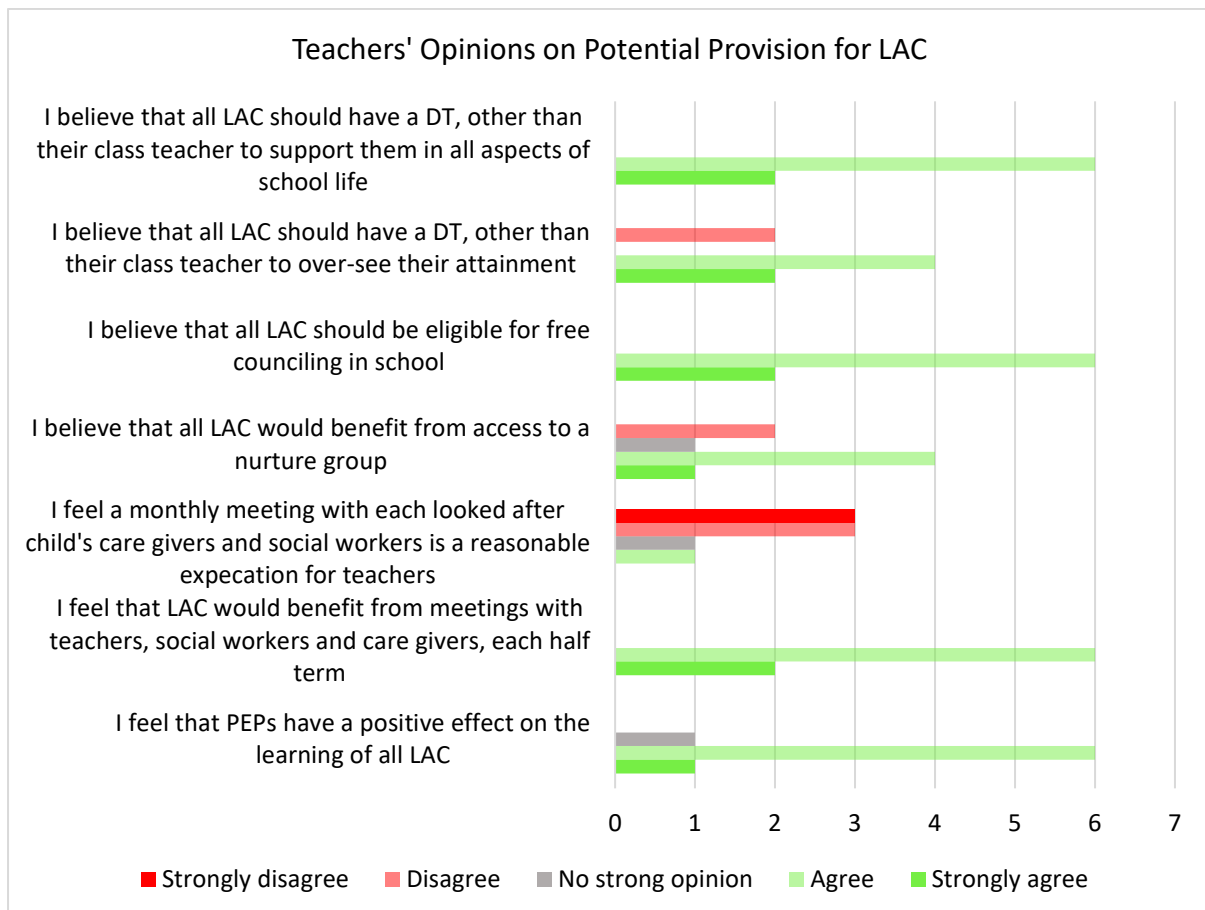
Question 3

How do teachers believe the statutory guidance provided to them can be improved?

Teachers within the case study used the questionnaire to express which strategies they deemed to be most effective in raising attainment. The answers were then consolidated by a semi-structured interview with SL and questionnaire completed by the VSH. Just two out of the eight teachers asked, felt they were able to confidently teach LAC. Although the current number of LAC within the case study was not disclosed, and teachers may not currently have a LAC within their class, the interview with SL revealed that LAC can be relocated quickly, resulting in a school move with little forewarning. Accordingly, the SL stated it would be beneficial for all teachers to have access to specialised training for the teaching of LAC from university level, and later in their career, as part of their professional development. This finding is supported by Walker (2017) and Mannay (2017) who both highlight the importance of awareness of the implications of emotional trauma amongst teachers. Mannay (2017) goes on to highlight that teachers often have little knowledge of the implications of school experiences on LAC, and their opinions on the provision they encountered. Correspondingly, the SL highlighted the importance and effectiveness of opportunities for LAC to influence goals within their PEPs. This is also recommended by Martindale (2018), and the Department for Education (2018D) who highlight that pupil voice not only improves outcomes but builds relationships between children and professionals.

All of the participants in the questionnaire agreed that LAC should have a DT to support them in all aspects of school life, however two respondents disagreed that the DT for LAC should oversee the attainment of LAC. In contrast, differences in the opinion of what the role of DT should be, is not prevalent in literature (Harland, 2014; Martindale, 2018; Jackson, 2015; Berridge, 2017). This denotes the potential lack of training amongst teachers. The SL within this case study explained that part of the role involves holding school staff to account for the progress of LAC and comments that 'if monitoring is poor, standards tend to slip'. This highlights the importance of the seniority of the role, an idea that Martindale (2018) advocates. The interview with SL also revealed that the role of DT is often combined with the role of SENCO, an option not documented by the Department for Education or previously cited literature. This notion is believed by the SL to come with disadvantages, as children with SEN and LAC have different needs. Jackson, Whitehead, and Wigford (2010) believe that LAC need support with comprehension of identity and belonging. The SL also described the statutory guidance as being 'vague and open to interpretation' and highlighted the need for training for all DT, with a similar focus on emotional welfare and

attachment. This viewpoint was supported by literature (Lipscombe and Pears, 2011; Berridge, 2012) and all of the questionnaire respondents, who believed that all LAC should be eligible to counselling in school. This is a belief supported by Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, a theory deemed relevant to LAC by the SL and researchers alike (Harker, 2004; Gilligan, 2007; Cann, 2012; Berridge, 2017). It can be concluded that a strong focus must be made on the emotional wellbeing of LAC, before provision for attainment can be addressed. It is clear that feelings of belonging and high self-esteem are regarded as high priority to teaching staff, before educational attainment, showing their acknowledgement of factors that inhibit learning, and methods used to overcome these.



Conclusion

The findings of this research suggest that there are generally high expectations for LAC within the case study and the SL displays a substantial knowledge of strategies to improve the experience of school for LAC, which they believe will in turn benefit the academic attainment of these children.

This suggests that neither low expectations, nor unawareness of inhibiting factors account for low attainment within this case study. The teachers have found flaws within the system and feel they lack support from the government in fulfilling their roles and duty to the attainment of LAC.

Although the teachers within the school displayed positive feelings towards aspects of the provision provided by the DT and VSH, it is clear they lack direction from the statutory guidelines provided by the Department for Education (2018B;E), with some having little knowledge of provision. It is clear that the role of VSH does not have a high enough profile within the school, and the teachers rely heavily on the influence and input of the DT, which in turn puts constrictions on their ability to fulfil the role.

Within the case study, there is a clear focus on the wellbeing of LAC, as the school aims to support LAC to feel valued and encouraged to thrive in any aspect of education, regardless of their academic results. LAC within the case study, are given opportunities to express their individuality by voicing their likes and dislikes, and influence aspects of their PEP. It is clear that the school would value more guidance in how to support LAC with their social and emotional wellbeing needs, as the school's goal is to equip them with the skills they will require throughout their life, and give them the stability they need to thrive academically.

Recommendations:

- In order to further my professional development as a teacher, I will take inference from this research topic to ensure the needs of all LAC in my future classroom are met, from a new and informed viewpoint. In doing so I will also meet Teacher standards 3b and 5b (DfE, 2014).
- The school that took part in the case study should facilitate CPD training to ensure all teachers have a full knowledge of the statutory guidance available to them, and the way in which it can be implemented in the classroom. They should also consider using a staff meeting/inset day to discuss provision and strategies that could be introduced to support their LAC.
- The Department for Education should consider adapting their guidance regarding provision for LAC in Primary Schools; by including specific statutory strategies to support the emotional and mental wellbeing of looked after children, regardless of their ability or experiences. They should also consider introducing specialist courses for student teachers, class teachers of LAC and DT to better equip them in supporting LAC in education. Funding should also be made more readily available to schools that have difficulty in meeting the needs of LAC, without the agreement of social workers, if sufficient evidence can be provided by the DT.

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