Dear Stewart,

INQUIRY INTO EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

I would like to thank you and the Education and Culture Committee for their consideration of this important issue. I welcome the Committee's report and the attention it brings to an area that continues to need sustained effort by all corporate parents, if we are to see long term improvements in the outcomes of looked after children, young people and care leavers.

Further to our letter of the 1st December, I would like to reiterate The Scottish Government’s commitment to improving the life outcomes, including educational outcomes of all children and young people. We want Scotland to be the best place in the world to grow up. As Corporate Parents, we all have an obligation to ensure that Looked After children and young people achieve their full potential.

The Committee’s report recognises that attainment of looked after children and young people cannot be improved by changes to the education system alone. I am reassured to see that the Committee recognises the importance of the early years and early intervention, and that it welcomes the Scottish Government’s efforts in this area.
Indeed, despite the numbers of children in care in Scotland reaching its highest level since 2001 (at 31 July 2011 there were 16,171 children looked after by local authorities¹), this hides a downward trend in new referrals into care and an increase in the numbers leaving care. Furthermore, children are entering the care system at an earlier age. Taken together, these are evidence of local professionals becoming better at intervening earlier, providing preventative family support and helping children leave care sustainably and permanently in ever greater numbers.

We are clear about the nature of the issues facing families in need, children who are at risk of care and those who need formal care and this means recognising the association between early years and all life outcomes. So we have established the Early Years Task Force to co-ordinate policy across Government and the wider public sector to ensure that early years spending is prioritised. And we are providing £1.5m per annum for the next three years to local authorities to fund childcare for all looked after 2 year olds and work with their parents. We published a Permanence Plan in June 2011 to reduce drift and delay in care planning for looked after children to promote early permanence and we have amended the Additional Support for Learning Act so that all looked after children are deemed to have additional support needs unless assessed otherwise.

But we are not complacent – we will do more to improve the attainment outcomes of looked after children, young people and care leavers. For example, we are committed to launching a Parenting Strategy this autumn which will speak to parents and kinship carers of looked after children in common with all parents. We will strengthen CELCIS’ role in the coming months to increase support to local authorities and other corporate parents – increasing the pace of change.

On 4 July we launched the consultation for the proposed Children and Young People Bill which I believe will provide real and sustained long term benefits to children and families. Through the legislation, we propose to place Getting It Right for Every Child on a statutory footing, ensuring public bodies play their part to focus services around each child. We will also strengthen the role of the Children’s Commissioner to allow for investigations into individual concerns.

The consultation also seeks views on our proposals to strengthen support for looked after children, young people and care leavers. This includes:
- raising the maximum age for young people leaving care who ask for help from a local authority from 21 to 25;
- applying a new corporate parenting duty to public bodies;
- introducing a new family law order (“Kinship care order”) to support the parenting role of kinship carers; and
- to take powers to make compulsory the use of Scotland’s Adoption Register by local authorities.
Finally, the Scottish Government welcomes the recent announcement of an additional inquiry into decision making on whether children should be taken into care. This is a priority area for the Scottish Government and we looked forward to contributing to the inquiry in due course.

I am pleased to attach the Scottish Government’s response to the Committee’s recommendations.

AILEEN CAMPBELL
SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT’S RESPONSE

Recommendation 1: The Committee heard often disturbing evidence about the consequences for children if they do not have sustainable, loving, secure and stable relationships with their parents or carers from a very early age. In devising its forthcoming national parenting strategy and in its work on the early years more generally, the Scottish Government must therefore consider the particular needs of looked after children. The Committee understands that engaging with some parents, including those of children who are looked after at home, can be extremely challenging but it is also the area where there is the greatest scope for improvement to be made. Given the scale of the problem identified in this report, the national parenting strategy and any other policy flowing from it must be properly resourced. (Paragraph 36)

Scottish Government’s Response

The Scottish Government agrees that the National Parenting Strategy has to take into account the needs of the parents and carers of looked after children, and we are looking into how this can be best achieved.

The Scottish Government is committed to improving outcomes for children looked after at home. The committee’s work is a welcome addition to a range of evidence that will inform policy development on this subject. More work is clearly needed to better understand the circumstances of children looked after at home. We have sponsored a PhD on how Home Supervision Requirements work (this is the provision under which children are looked after at home), which will include information on the type and extent of social work, education and other professional support provided. The PhD is at viva stage, and the final report is due in later this year.

In addition, we recognise the parenting role undertaken by kinship carers and the support many play to the parents of children looked after at home. As part of our approach, in 2011 we introduced Scotland’s first national support service for kinship carers in partnership with Children 1st, and whose aim is to help build carers’ capacity by providing advice, support and help accessing services. The service is informed by a network of over 190 kinship carers and will continue to evolve throughout the initial 3 year period of the service. To further promote the role of kinship carers, the Scottish Government has proposed a new type of legal arrangement (“Kinship Care Order”) within the proposed Children and Young People Bill, designed to reduce the likelihood of a child needing to, or remaining, formally looked after. The order is designed to offer kinship carers greater legal certainty about their parenting responsibilities and rights and to trigger additional support as appropriate.

Recommendation 2: During its joint event with the Centre for Excellence for Looked after Children in Scotland (CELCIS), several participants discussed existing early interventions such as employing more health visitors, expanding family nurse partnerships and teaching parenting skills to those who may become parents soon. Interventions of this kind may help to prevent children from becoming looked after in the first place. The Committee considers that,
whatever interventions are made, they should be based on evidence of successful outcomes. (Paragraph 37)

Scottish Government’s Response

The Scottish Government agrees that interventions should be based on evidence of successful outcomes. The Early Years Taskforce is committed to evidence based practice, and has established a workstream on “Evidence based interventions”. The workstream has been tasked with providing guidance for Community Planning Partnerships on those interventions that should be prioritised along the pathway of care for all families, and those that should be de-prioritised, based on sound evidence of effectiveness in promoting positive outcomes and reducing the risk of negative outcomes. There is already a wealth of good practice across Scotland in a range of areas: nurture and attachment, parenting, family support, early development and learning and play. The challenge is to embed this as standard practice and consistently to drive up our aspirations and performance.

The Scottish Government is committed to rolling out the Family Nurse Partnership programme across Scotland. In addition to the programme being delivered in NHS Lothian and NHS Tayside, five new NHS Boards have are being brought on stream between now and end of 2013. One of the aims of the programme are to improve child health and development by helping parents provide competent care for their children. There is an extensive range of evidence that the programme supports these outcomes, including improved educational achievement of the children and a reduction in child abuse and neglect.

Recommendation 3: The Committee endorses the principles behind the Early Years Taskforce in providing support and sharing good practice in relation to early intervention. Given the particularly strong benefits that looked after children may realise from effective early interventions, the Committee calls on the Scottish Government to consider how the Taskforce and CELCIS can work together where there is any overlap between the issues that they are addressing. In particular, the Scottish Government should consider whether CELCIS should be represented on the Taskforce. (Paragraph 38)

Scottish Government’s Response

The Scottish Government has considered the Committee’s recommendation. It believes that the most effective way for CELCIS to be engaged in the work of the Early Years Taskforce would be through representation on one of the themed workstreams within the Taskforce. Work is underway to identify an appropriate workstream for CELCIS to join.

Recommendation 4: There is no doubt that children looked after at home have poorer levels of attainment than other looked after children. As a first step, the Committee requests further information from the Scottish Government on the type and extent of social work support that is currently provided to children looked after at home and their families or carers, for example by children's service workers or similar individuals. The Committee believes that adequate
resources and support should be available and therefore also calls for the Scottish Government's views on—

- whether the current support for children looked after at home produces satisfactory outcomes, bearing in mind the evidence presented throughout this report on the particular difficulties facing this group; and

- whether resources are available to provide greater social work support to all looked after children, where required, given the Government's commitment to the preventative spending agenda. (Paragraph 45)

Scottish Government's Response

Our efforts to improve support for children looked after at home are set out above in this response [see Recommendation 1].

The Scottish Children's Reporters Administration (SCRA) is near to completing a piece of work on Supervision Orders that last beyond 5 years which will also play a key part in identifying those impediments in the care planning system that need to be addressed. We are exploring ways of providing better educational support to those children and young people, by expanding on existing good practice and supporting Corporate Parenting.

The Scottish Government is committed to aiming resources toward preventative spending and early intervention. We will draw on existing good practice and discussion with our partners, such as City of Edinburgh Council's Early Years Change Fund Core Group. The group applies evidence based methods to build and sustain family capacity pre and post birth, working with communities to increase resources and opportunities at a neighbourhood level and across the city. The consultation on the proposed Children and Young People's Bill also provides an opportunity to hear about ideas to improve outcomes for this group. The consultation includes measures that are likely to positively impact on support offered to children looked after at home, such as the new duty on a wide range of public bodies to be good corporate parents. Our approach recognises that children looked after at home are cared for by their parents and therefore the route to improved support must be through effective deployment of universal services such as health services and schools.

In addition, we have asked the Scottish Government led Looked After Children Strategic Implementation Group (LACSIG) to prioritise the looked after at home agenda by considering a) how the care planning system and b) education system can better meet the needs of children and young people. Through the forthcoming Parenting Strategy we also seek to support the parents of children looked after at home.

Recommendation 5: Considerable evidence has been provided to suggest that the voluntary sector could play an even greater role in supporting looked after children. The Committee agrees and therefore calls on the Scottish
Government – in conjunction with local authorities, NHS boards and the voluntary sector – to bring forward proposals on how volunteers could help deliver greater, more coordinated, nationwide support to looked after children, particular those looked after at home. The Committee stresses that such support would not be provided as a replacement for the services of trained professionals, but should complement their input, particularly where families prefer to receive more informal support. (Paragraph 46)

Scottish Government’s Response

The Scottish Government agrees with the Committee’s recommendation that we need to explore further how we can better use volunteers in providing support to the looked after children and young people.

The LACSIG Care Planning Hub has recently been tasked to develop proposals on how the third sector can help deliver greater, more coordinated, nationwide support for looked after children at home. This work will be based on existing evidence and good practice.

Recommendation 6: The Committee fully appreciates that striking the balance between supporting families and intervening to remove children from harmful situations raises extremely sensitive and difficult issues. As a result, the Committee considers that these issues are worthy of more detailed investigation and is therefore minded to carry out a further inquiry into this area prior to the introduction of the children and young people bill. (Paragraph 52)

Scottish Government’s Response

The Scottish Government welcomes the Committee’s recently announced inquiry into decision making when taking children into care, which has been a priority for the Scottish Government for some time.

Recommendation 7: Considering the concerns expressed by witnesses about placement moves, the Committee welcomes the Scottish Government’s commitment to reducing placements. The Committee is not clear at this stage on how this commitment will be achieved, given the complexities of the issues involved. The Committee therefore seeks more detail on the approach the Scottish Government plans to take and confirmation that it is supported by local authorities. (Paragraph 56)

Scottish Government’s Response

The Scottish Government has a care and permanence plan, which was launched in June 2011 and endorsed by the former president of the association of directors of social work (ADSW), Andrew Lowe. This is aimed at reducing the number of
placements for looked after children, and finding a permanent, loving and stable home as early as possible after becoming looked after. This requires a systemic approach and will be achieved over a number of years. In the medium term we have a number of pieces of work to address the issue which will be implemented over the coming months:

- We fund British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF), which runs Scotland’s National Adoption Register. The Register seeks to increase the number of adoptions by matching children and parents from across Scotland, and the diversity of adopters and adoptees.
- We fund CELCIS to explore what works in practice for those organisations that have reduced placement numbers. It will achieve this by working closely with councils on projects aimed at identifying blocks in the system, carrying out research on what works and holding events for a range of practitioners across Scotland – the findings from these are directly influencing policy and practice.
- In addition, we have recently expanded CELCIS’ role to offer bi-lateral support to local authorities and their partners to undertake systemic change to the delivery of care – ensuring the full and coherent implementation of key policies such as Getting It Right and Corporate Parenting as well as reducing drift and delay in care and permanence planning. The Permanence team will be led by Elizabeth Brabender, Depute Director of Children’s Services at Action for Children UK and will be fully staffed by September 2012.
- The LACSIG care planning hub has gathered evidence on the importance of placement stability (and impact of multiple moves) and this forms part of the Scottish Government’s work to improve the care planning and permanence system.
- Through LACSIG we are working with the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) and Children’s Hearings Scotland, the Scottish Legal Aid Board (SLAB), the Care Inspectorate, and are feeding in to the Report of the Scottish Civil Courts Review to improve the quality and efficiency of decision making about placements, and to reduce the number of placement moves for looked after children and young people.

Recommendation 8: The Committee believes that all professionals should work towards reducing the likelihood of such disruption (of emergency referrals to the study patterns of children accommodated in residential units) occurring and invites the Scottish Government to report back on the extent of the problem and the steps it is taking, along with local authorities, to ensure that all residential units provide the best possible environment for children. (Paragraph 57)

Scottish Government’s Response

The principle of early intervention should ensure that families receive services at an earlier stage which aims to prevent crisis and placement disruption. The national vehicle for promoting and establishing effective planning systems is Getting It Right For Every Child.
There will however always be circumstances where children and young people need to be accommodated at very short notice. What will help reduce the impact on children and young people in long term placements is the availability of a range of services which can best meet individual needs. Under the umbrella of LACSIG the Commissioning Activity Hub has promoted local strategic commissioning to ensure local authorities are best using resources to meet the needs of children and young people in their area. For some local authorities this will mean commissioning additional services to meet the needs of children and young people in emergencies. This will hopefully minimise emergency admissions in longer term resources.

Registration and regulation have been used as vehicles to ensure quality of care. All services are registered with and inspected by the Care Inspectorate using the national care standards. Where services are not providing the best possible environment for young people, problems will be identified and recommendations or requirements made at the point of inspection. All services will then have to produce an action plan for meeting these recommendations or requirements. The current standards will be reviewed this year with consultation beginning in the coming months. Central to the standards are the rights of young people to a safe and secure environment within which each young person is treated with respect and dignity. Where young people feel their rights are not being respected they have access to a complaints procedure and independent advocacy.

**Recommendation 9:** The Committee appreciates that it may be too early to evaluate fully the effectiveness of initiatives such as Place2Be in tackling the underlying causes of exclusion. The Committee calls on the Scottish Government, in partnership with local authorities, to ensure that such an outcomes-based evaluation is carried out at the earliest opportunity and to publish a plan for the wider roll-out of such initiatives as appropriate. (Paragraph 67)

**Scottish Government’s Response**

The Place2Be approach provides children and young people with an opportunity to explore their emotional wellbeing and to understand and deal with their emotions. This principle has long been at the centre of the Scottish Government’s policy on improving relationships and promoting positive behaviour. Education Scotland’s Positive Behaviour Team works with authorities and schools to support them in improving relationships and promoting positive behaviour for children and young people. The team provide a range of approaches outlined in the *Building Curriculum for Excellence Through Positive Relationships and Behaviour* [http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/06/25112828/0](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/06/25112828/0). The use of approaches such as restorative approaches, solution oriented approaches, nurturing approaches, staged interventions and approaches to promote emotional literacy not just in children and young people, but also in staff, parents and carers. In addition, curricular programmes have been developed which promote and enhance emotional health and wellbeing across the curriculum, such as *Being Cool in School, What’s Going On?*, and *Creating Confident Kids*. The selection of the approaches used is informed by the local needs and circumstances of the school or authority. These approaches are not exclusively available to schools, the Positive Behaviour Team
are also working with local authorities to deliver these approaches within children's units and providing support/training to foster carers.

The approaches used by the Positive Behaviour Team have been evaluated and the approach to improving relationships and promoting positive behaviour is monitored as part of the Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research which is carried out every three years.

**Recommendation 10:** There is a clear consensus among witnesses that the use of part-time education, where no other provision is put in place, is unsatisfactory as every child has a right to a full-time education, however that may be provided. While this issue is not just relevant to looked after children, it may have a disproportionate impact on them. Therefore, the Scottish Government should investigate the extent to which part-time education without alternative provision exists. Further, the Scottish Government should set out, in conjunction with COSLA and the relevant professional organisations, how this practice can be ended, how more satisfactory arrangements can be put in place and the resources that this would require. (Paragraph 73)

**Scottish Government's Response**

'Included, Engaged and Involved part 2: a positive approach to managing school exclusions' was published by the Scottish Government in March 2011. This document replaced previous guidance published in 2003. The guidance focuses on prevention of the need for exclusion through early identification, early intervention and the staged intervention model. Each stage of the intervention model will include identification of learning need, planning mechanisms and types of provision which may be put in place. Movement between the stages usually follows exhaustion of the provisions at the level below. A range of strategies, programmes and support provision are used by local authorities and schools throughout this model, both within and beyond the school. "Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research 2009" found that all local authorities operated a form of staged intervention.

The guidance recognises that it may be appropriate for a learner to return to school after a period of exclusion on a part-time basis for a short period of re-admission. Guidance is clear that any such plans should be considered within the staged intervention framework and documented within the appropriate planning mechanism. The arrangements should be an interim step to expedite a prompt return to full-time education and should have a clear timescale attached. The length of this arrangement should be kept to an absolute minimum and there is a legal requirement to mark time in school as attendance and time out of school as exclusion. Local authorities, who have a duty to provide education, should be aware of and monitor carefully any part-time provision including targets for full-time provision.

The Scottish Government is exploring with Education Scotland and ADES how we can alter the recording system to ensure part-time provision described above can be recorded in a more readily identifiable way. Providing we can come to a practical
agreement on how this can be achieved, this will allow more accurate monitoring of the frequency of this practice across Scotland.

**Recommendation 11:** The Committee calls on the Scottish Government to monitor more closely the implementation of its existing guidance on exclusions and considers that the practice of “informal exclusions” should be used with sensitivity. (Paragraph 74)

**Scottish Government’s Response**

The Scottish Government and Education Scotland facilitated workshops in June 2012 on the exclusion guidance, via the Pupil Inclusion Network (PINS). The events were designed to explore implementation and impact of the guidance with professionals from education, social work and the third sector. A report summarising the findings of the events will be published on the PINS website in due course.

Education Scotland’s Positive Behaviour Team (PBT) work with schools and local authorities across Scotland on promoting positive behaviour and tackling negative behaviour. This includes providing training and support on implementation of approaches as well as assistance and support in developing local policies on behaviour and exclusion. The PBT also have ongoing dialogue with local authorities about their approach to managing exclusions and support the implementation of national guidance.

‘Included, Engaged and Involved Part 2: a positive approach to managing school exclusions’, was published by the Scottish Government in March 2011. It makes clear that where a pupil is being sent home for periods of time to ‘cool down’ or for longer term assessment (commonly referred to as ‘informal exclusion’), they must be formally excluded, in line with the procedures laid out in the Schools General (Scotland) Regulations 1975. Any decision to exclude that does not conform to these regulations may leave the authority open to legal challenge. Recording these periods as exclusion allows this practice to be carefully monitored.

**Recommendation 12:** The Committee recognises that good relationships between key professionals and looked after children play a vital role in ensuring the wellbeing of looked after children in school and contribute to their learning. Excellent school leadership can facilitate this in shaping the ethos of the school. The Committee therefore considers that the Scottish Government should stress the importance of this area in its wider policies, in developing school leaders and in training teachers, recognising that building such relationships is an integral part of quality teaching rather than an additional part of teachers’ job descriptions. (Paragraph 80)

In terms of teacher-specific training, the Committee asks the National Planning Group and other bodies taking forward the recommendations of the Donaldson Review of Teacher Education, to consider how training in issues around attachment theory, nurturing and the needs of looked after children could best be provided. (Paragraph 132)

**Scottish Government’s Response**
In relation to committee recommendations at paragraphs 80 and 132, the Scottish Government is broadly satisfied that the current teaching standards adequately reflect the need for teachers to be aware of and to respond to the particular circumstances of all children, including looked after children.

However, Teaching Scotland's Future (the report of the Donaldson Review of Teacher Education) included a recommendation that the suite of teaching standards should be reviewed, and this is currently in hand. The General Teaching Council for Scotland, whose statutory functions include establishing (and reviewing and changing as necessary) the teaching standards, are due to consult on revised standards in autumn 2012. We will ensure that these elements of the Committee’s report are drawn to their attention and invite them to consider whether the inclusion of explicit references to looked after children would be appropriate.

Recommendation 13: The Committee notes that in the current financial climate, resources are relatively scarce. The Committee is not able to evaluate fully the specific suggestions set out above (in paragraph 82) and invites the Scottish Government to consider the viability and merit of such proposals, in the context of its preventative spending agenda. (Paragraph 83)

Paragraph 82:

- school staffing formulae ought to be weighted according to the number of looked after children in each school;

- each local authority should have a dedicated looked after children teaching and health resource, and that all residential units should have a link education officer or teacher;

- pooling of local authority budgets, citing the example of the early years fund in South Ayrshire generating positive education and health outcomes.

Scottish Government's Response

- school staffing formulae ought to be weighted according to the number of looked after children in each school.

The Scottish Government notes this recommendation. We believe that weighting school funding using as proposed could lead to large and unsustainable swings in resources, which do not reflect the wider needs of schools and the curriculum. It is a matter for local authorities to determine the staffing arrangements in each of their schools bearing in mind the resources available and any legislative or nationally agreed class size limits.

- each local authority should have a dedicated looked after children teaching and health resource, and that all residential units should have a link education officer or teacher;

The Scottish Government notes this recommendation. The LACSIG (Looked After Children Strategic Implementation Group) Learning hub is working on a range of
activities to improve the educational attainment of looked after children. Often children and young people living in the same residential unit attend different schools. Therefore a range of approaches is required to support their educational attainment. These must be determined at a local level to meet both the needs of individual young people, and the configuration of local services. These approaches may include designated teams within education or social work to focus on educational attainment, and will complement the 'Designated Managers in educational and residential establishments in Scotland'.

The Scottish Government is working to improve the health of looked after children in residential units through a range of initiatives including Health promotion guidance for children and young people in residential care settings (2011). Additionally, NHS Health Scotland is supporting the development of health promotion and improvement activities in residential units.

- pooling of local authority budgets, citing the example of the early years fund in South Ayrshire generating positive education and health outcomes.

The Scottish Government notes this recommendation. In the example cited, South Ayrshire pulled together two budgets within the local authority to develop a new fund in order to deliver the early years framework. They merged their early years and sure start funds in late 2008. This proactive approach enabled the local authority to use existing funds creatively to meet emerging pressures.

The Scottish Government welcomes this innovative approach and encourages local authorities to continue to work creatively, particularly collaboratively (such as through joint strategic commissioning of children's services), to ensure that existing funds are matched to current priorities.

Recommendation 14: It is not unreasonable to consider that differing views in this area (of measuring wider achievement as well as attainment) may influence expectations of looked after children and the Committee therefore considers that developing a common viewpoint across all relevant stakeholders is important. (Paragraph 89)

In this regard the Committee welcomes the emphasis in Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) on recognising broader achievement, for example through the P7 and S3 profiles, and hopes that this will enable both attainment and achievement to be recognised for all pupils at an individual level. However, while attainment is reported nationally through SQA results, there is no national information which summarises the extent of broader achievement. Collating such information would be an important contribution to recognising its worth alongside the attainment of exam results. The Committee therefore considers that the Scottish Government should develop a method of monitoring and reporting this aspect of CfE at a national level. (Paragraph 90)

Scottish Government's Response
The Scottish Government is working with partners to develop a new senior phase benchmarking tool. From its introduction in 2014, this will capture and recognise the achievement of Scottish school leavers in a broad range of SCQF-levelled awards as well as their SQA qualifications. Examples might include awards offered by ASDAN and Youth Scotland.

Whilst it would not be practical or indeed desirable to capture all forms of wider achievement at a national level, the broadening of the benchmarking tool is another demonstration of the Scottish Government's commitment to promoting opportunities for personal development for young people. CELCIS and Education Scotland are undertaking a project to see whether a Recognition of Prior Learning approach works for looked after young people. Two local authorities, West Lothian and Renfrewshire, are taking part in the project. A presentation on the findings will be given at the Scottish Learning Festival in September 2012.

Recommendation 15: The Committee welcomes this work (that the Scottish Government has begun tracking the status of each cohort to give a fuller picture of a child’s status throughout their journey through primary and secondary school), which will help to identify more clearly looked after children’s paths through education, giving a more accurate picture of their attainment and where support is required. (Paragraph 91)

Scottish Government’s Response

The Committee might also wish to note that the Scottish Government, together with CELCIS, is undertaking a research looking into educational attainment of looked after children. This study is particularly concerned about support arrangements for children looked after at home – the group that has particularly poor educational outcomes.

Recommendation 16: Children’s plans should be accessible, practical, working documents, driven by the need to secure better outcomes for looked after children. The Committee believes that improvements can be made to deliver a more joined up approach and calls on the Scottish Government to bring forward proposals for addressing this. (Paragraph 98)

Scottish Government’s Response

The Scottish Government is actively promoting the single planning framework under the GIRFEC approach. The current consultation on the Children and Young People Bill sets out proposals to embed this approach through proposals for duties on public bodies to clarify and strengthen the single planning process for all children who need help, including looked after children. At a practical level officials have drawn together a working group from practitioners and managers across Scotland’s public sector to consider and recommend core data standards for the Child’s Plan.
Recommendation 17: While the issues raised above (about the implementation of Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) and Additional Support for Learning (ASL) legislation) do not solely relate to looked after children, the Committee notes that some concerns have been expressed about the complexity of existing legislation, and that there are differences of opinion amongst senior professionals on how additional support for learning and GIRFEC sit together. While the Committee considers that there are strengths in the existing legislative and policy framework, it does have some concerns about how this is being implemented. The Committee considers that the Scottish Government, before introducing any further children’s legislation, should carefully consider the concerns expressed above and how the new bill can build upon the best elements of the existing framework. (Paragraph 107)

Scottish Government’s Response

The consultation paper on the Children and Young People Bill and the GIRFEC approach set out, through a combination of duties and best practice, how public bodies can strengthen support for individuals through specific professional responsibilities while maintaining a holistic approach to meeting the needs of individual children. Children who need help range from those who require extra support from universal services to those who have the most complex needs. As the overarching approach, GIRFEC seeks to establish the planning framework within which all such activity fits whether plans are statutory, professional or administrative. Through leadership at CPP level agencies have demonstrated that plans can be brought together into a single planning process which meets the various statutory requirements. Such activity has to follow a review of business processes and go along with training and awareness raising among staff, including how the GIRFEC framework applies.

Recommendation 18: The Committee considers that greater efforts are required to embed the corporate parenting approach amongst all staff in schools and that this should be emphasised in the revised guidance. The Committee notes that training is being provided for councillors on their role as corporate parents but believes that local authorities should consider ensuring that all councillors receive such training. (Paragraph 111)

Scottish Government’s Response

The Scottish Government, through the proposed Children and Young People Bill, is seeking to develop a shared understanding around the definition of Corporate Parenting and clarity around how the concept translates to professionals working within health, housing and education.

The Scottish Government funds Who Cares? Scotland to deliver the Corporate Parenting National Training Programme. This programme is now in its third year. To ensure that training is offered to all councillors in the future, work is underway to integrate the training into the Improvement Service’s induction training programme. Furthermore, work is underway to develop a second phase of the national training
programme to reach a wider Corporate Parenting audience. We would welcome the committee's views on the content and focus for any possible second phase.

Recommendation 19: Trying to establish better joint working between relevant agencies is a perennial concern across the public sector, is by no means an issue unique to this inquiry and is an area where significant efforts have been made. Nevertheless, the preceding paragraphs have made it clear that barriers still exist, often to the detriment of looked after children. The Committee therefore considers it necessary to restate the importance of strong working relationships between relevant agencies as a vital means of improving looked after children's attainment, especially in the early years and at key points in the child's life such as the transition from primary to secondary school. The Committee appreciates that the Scottish Government, in the context of possible future legislation, is seeking views on joint working and calls on it to set out how it could help to resolve some of the outstanding barriers described above. (Paragraph 123)

Scottish Government's Response

The Scottish Government welcomes the Committee's emphasis on strong working relationships. The recently published core competencies and the work to implement the GIRFEC approach help all practitioners understand better each other's role, skills and contributions that can be made to improving outcomes of children and young people. Evidence from the GIRFEC pathfinder, the learning partners and CPP areas where the approach is at a more mature stage shows that the approach improves the culture of working better together. It promotes a partnership approach that fully involves not only services working with children and their families and carers, but children and their families and carers as key partners to a Child's Plan, including for children who are looked after. The legislation consultation paper sets out proposals for duties on public bodies to clarify and strengthen how services can work more effectively together.

Recommendation 20: The Committee agrees that better training on the particular needs of looked after children should be provided to all relevant children's services professionals. The Committee notes the on-going work by CELCIS and Who Cares? Scotland, and asks the Scottish Government to provide an update on how this work is progressing, how it is being co-ordinated and how the specific concerns discussed above are being addressed. (Paragraph 131)

Scottish Government's Response

The Scottish Government has recently worked with partners through the LACSIG Workforce Hub to identify activities which promote integrated training opportunities focusing on the needs of looked after children. As a result, CELCIS will host an event in September specifically focusing on pre-qualifying training and one in early 2013 focused on integrated continuous professional development.
The professional development needs of foster carers and integrated training across the workforce will be priority areas for the LACSIG Workforce Hub over the next 12 months.

The Scottish Government is currently working with CELCIS to refresh the We Can and Must Do Better training materials for front-line staff, and will bring them into line with GIRFEC principles.

The Scottish Government also funds Who Cares? Scotland to run a National Training Programme for Local Authority Elected Members and Health Board Members to raise awareness amongst corporate parents of their duties and responsibilities towards looked after children, young people (see recommendation 18 above).

Furthermore, 'The Common Core' on the Scottish Government website asks all those working with children to reflect how well they demonstrate the characteristics outlined in the common core. Of particular note is the expectation that the workforce will "be aware of how children and young people develop", expanding on this expectation the report emphasises the importance of an understanding and awareness of the impact of early attachment experiences.

Activities aimed at improving outcomes for looked after children are brought to the attention of the LACSIG main group whose membership includes leaders from across the care sector and which next meets in October 2012. The group will consider the full range of activities and where appropriate, the group may choose to alert stakeholders, including Scottish Ministers, to issues of importance. If specific further work is required to help the sector build capacity and to lead and demonstrate what works, the group may also commission work from its activity hubs or partner organisations (such as CELCIS, Care Inspectorate, SCRA and so on).

**Recommendation 21:** While all looked after children face barriers, the Committee has noted the particular challenges facing those children who are formally classed as being looked after at home. Given these challenges, the Committee was very concerned to read the views of directors of education and social work that there had not been sufficient attention paid to the needs of this group. (Paragraph 135)

**Scottish Government's Response**

The Scottish Government welcomes this recommendation. Please see response above to Recommendation 1, which sets out our plans to address the challenges facing children and young people looked after at home. We will continue to update the committee on progress.