Introduction
Over the past 12 years since the Scottish Parliament came into being in 1999 Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education (HMIE), now part of Education Scotland, has maintained a focus on how well the needs of looked after children are being met.

Information from inspections and aspect tasks relating to children and young people who are looked after

Identifying children and young people’s needs
In 1999-2000, Her Majesty’s Inspectors worked with colleagues from the then Social Work Services Inspectorate to evaluate social work and education services provided by local authorities to meet the educational needs of looked after children living away from home. The following were three of the recommendations for improvements given in the report Learning with Care: The Education of Children Looked After Away from Home:

- Schools should take particular care to identify the learning needs of all looked after children. A senior member of staff in each school should maintain an overview of looked after children’s progress.
- Local authorities should keep accurate statistics on a range of aspects of the education of looked after children.

Ten years later in 2010, HMIE published a report on how the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 (“the Act”) was affecting five particular groups of children and young people including those who are looked after. The report, Additional Support for Learning Act: Adding Benefits for Learners (HMIE 2010) contains recommendations for improvements that are similar to those above and include the following.

- Education authorities, partner agencies and establishments should improve approaches to identifying and addressing the needs of children and young people who are looked after, who are young carers and those with mental health issues.
- Scottish Government and education authorities should ensure that relevant data and information are collected and managed effectively to help children receive, and benefit from, appropriate support.

To ensure that children and young people can achieve their best, barriers to learning have to be minimised or removed. This means that children and young people’s needs have to be identified promptly and actions taken to provide the right types of support.
Improving Scottish Education (HMIE 2009) highlighted the need in the pre-school sector for better identification of children’s individual learning needs and for staff to make effective use of assessment information and staff intervention to ensure that all children make appropriate progress.

In 2010, when looking at how the Additional Support Act 2004 was impacting on children and young people, HMIE found that in both mainstream and residential special schools, there is still much work to be done to ensure that barriers to learning are removed or minimised, as far as possible, and that children are engaged in relevant, enjoyable and stimulating learning experiences. Staff in establishments are not always sufficiently alert to the multiple barriers to learning that children who are looked after, either away from home or at home, may be experiencing. A child who is looked after may have a sensory impairment or be a young carer. Looked after children are four times more likely to experience mental health problems than their peers.

Throughout the past decade, statistics have continued to highlight the gap that exists between the attainment levels of looked after children and their non-looked after peers. Rates of exclusion from school remain high for looked after children and in particular for those looked after at home.

Corporate Parenting
In line with the key Scottish Government priority to improve outcomes for children and young people who are looked after, over the past ten years, there has been a significant number of publications providing guidance and advice to children’s services. The publication of Extraordinary Lives (Social Work Inspection Agency 2006) and We Can and Must Do Better (Scottish Executive 2007) called for authorities to evaluate all of their services for looked after children against what good parents do. The message was reinforced in These Are Our Bairns (Scottish Government 2008) and Count Us In: Improving the education of looked after children (HMIE 2008). HMIE published an improvement guide “How good is our corporate parenting?” in 2009.

The issue of staff at operational levels not being sufficiently aware of their corporate parenting responsibilities has been highlighted by HMIE through several aspect inspections and subsequent publications. In 2008, Count Us In: Improving the Education of Our Looked After Children reported that:

‘However, not all staff at operational levels were aware of their corporate parenting responsibilities, particularly in relation to looked after children living at home. Too often teaching staff did not know who were the looked after children in the school. As a result relevant information was not always shared, which had an impact on how well the individual needs of looked after children were being met’.

In 2010, information gathered by HMIE during its task on the implementation of the Additional Support for Learning Act found that education authorities have put in place a range of posts with specific responsibilities for monitoring the progress of looked after children. In best practice, these posts involve monitoring children’s progress across
education and care, and working with colleagues across the council area to bring about better outcomes for those children and young people who are looked after. Arrangements also include reports to education committees and council members on the progress being made by looked after children. However, overall, staff in schools do not yet have a clear understanding of their corporate parenting responsibilities. Those in leadership positions, at authority and establishment level, need to implement more effectively corporate parenting strategies and continue to promote positive attitudes and high expectations for this group. There is considerable scope to improve approaches to supporting those who are looked after at home or in kinship care.

**Professional Development**

The ‘Learning with Care’ report of 2001 recommended that local authorities should provide joint professional development for education and social work staff and carers. There have been similar recommendations on the need for professional development opportunities in *Missing Out: A report on children at risk of missing out on educational opportunities* (HMIE 2006), in HMIE’s first *Report on the Implementation of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004* (HMIE 2007) and in *Count Us In: Improving the Education of Our Looked After Children* (HMIE 2008).

All of the reports highlighted the importance of ensuring that staff are fully aware of their responsibilities and of how best to meet the needs of children and young people who are looked after. Again, the 2010 HMIE report, *Additional Support for Learning Act: Adding Benefits for Learners* found that there are still issues relating to staff development and makes the recommendation that:

- Education authorities, partner agencies and establishments should ensure that staff have appropriate training to help them meet the needs of children and young people with additional support needs.

**Residential Special Schools**

Inspections of residential special schools and secure services highlight the complex and wide range of difficulties and needs that young people may experience. In the examples of best practice, services have clear and rigorous approaches to initial assessments followed by effective approaches to planning to meet young people’s care and learning needs. Staff are well-trained and are skilled in supporting young people to be in a position to engage in learning. A few establishments have specialist services on site that provide individually tailored interventions to meet young people’s needs and build on their strengths. There is a strong emphasis on nurturing young people and building positive relationships. In these situations, young people are achieving well, despite having had long periods of interrupted learning. Effective multi-disciplinary working plays a key role in achieving successful outcomes for young people.

**Getting it right for every child**

In carrying out our work in looking at how the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 (“the Act”) was affecting five particular groups of children and young people, we found that authorities have established staged intervention processes that are promoting and strengthening multi-agency working and better
targeting of resources. Staged intervention, in conjunction with the GIRFEC practice model, is helping to ensure that children’s needs are being addressed more holistically. Importantly, this is also helping to secure a better say for children and parents in the decision-making processes. However, evidence from inspections across the sectors shows that *Getting it right for every child* approaches are not yet sufficiently embedded in practice. Although there are examples of good practice, particularly for more vulnerable children and those with complex needs, there is considerable scope to apply *Getting it right* practice principles more rigorously and effectively.

Education Scotland is maintaining a focus on outcomes for children and young people who are looked after. HM Inspectors are currently carrying out two aspect tasks that are taking a closer look at how, in education settings, *Getting it right for every child* approaches and the Additional Support for Learning Act are helping to bring about better outcomes for children and young people. The school inspection arrangements launched in August 2011 allow for a focus on specific aspects of the school’s work including outcomes for children who are looked after. The Positive Behaviour Team, now part of Education Scotland, maintains strategic links with local authorities, to support the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence with regard to positive relationships and behaviour. The team has also developed effective links with the LAC education forum. Education Scotland in represented on the Looked After Children Strategic Implementation Group and is part of the learning activity hub focussing on improving educational outcomes for looked after children and young people.