The educational expectation of looked after children

Until recently, educational issues for looked after children have been a largely neglected area of research. The current study by Amber Elliott aimed to investigate one factor that may contribute to the under-achievement of children in care. A group of high school teachers were selected to participate in the study to examine whether there were differences in teacher expectations of looked after children and their peers, as measured on seven educational factors. Participants were divided randomly into two groups and given one of two questionnaires. One asked about children with whom the teacher generally had contact, the other asked specifically about looked after children. There was found to be a significant difference in teacher expectations on questions measuring the likelihood of handing in homework consistently and the propensity to be the victim of bullying. Teachers did not have significantly different expectations of looked after children and non-looked after children on three other measures of behaviour: academic performance, attendance and being the perpetrator of bullying behaviour.

Introduction

The English Draft Guidance on the Education of Children Looked After by Local Authorities (Department for Education and Employment and Department of Health, 1999, section 1.3) states that there are no accurate national statistics on the educational achievements of looked after children, but quotes some care leaver statistics. Seventy-five per cent of this group leave formal education with no qualifications, with 12–19 per cent going on to further education as opposed to 68 per cent of the general population. One government goal for looked after children is therefore to raise their educational attainment, ‘by increasing to at least 50 per cent by 2001 the proportion of children leaving care at 16 or later with a GCSE or GNVQ qualification; and to 75 per cent by 2003’ (section 2.8). Blyth (2001) expressed concern about the progress towards these goals given that only 15 English local authorities met the 50 per cent target in the 1999–2000 academic year.

In an abridged version of her report to the Economic and Social Research Council in 1983, Jackson (2001) identified five potential causes of the educational under-achievement seen in looked after children. Some of the factors have been investigated through research, but one of the more neglected areas has been adult expectations of looked after children. Fletcher-Campbell (1997) highlighted low educational expectation as a problem for looked after children, which she illustrated with a quote from the head of a learning difficulties unit: ‘At the end of the day, just getting kids to school is an achievement . . . we don’t have any high flyers.’ (p 52)

The importance of teacher expectations

In 1968 Rosenthal and Jacobson published a theory concerning the effects of teachers’ expectations of their pupils on children’s ability to learn. They did not claim that teachers were intentionally providing a preferential learning environment to any group of children above any other, but were exploring the subtle differences in teaching caused by what the teacher expected of the child. They called this phenomenon the Pygmalion Effect derived from Bernard Shaw’s play (1914) Pygmalion.

Rosenthal and Jacobson’s (1968) theory suggested that preconceived ideas about how people should perform can create a self-fulfilling prophecy. Prior knowledge and assumptions may lead to an expectation that can create and maintain a child’s performance level. Teachers’ assumptions and estimates as to a child’s performance are generally based on previous experience and are, in the majority of cases, accurate. However, the
Pygmalion Effect means that the cycle of expectation and performance will not be broken without greater awareness and intervention.

Rosenthal and Jacobson’s (1968) original research into the Pygmalion Effect, the Oak School Experiment, produced some very persuasive results. Teachers were told that the experimenters had identified 20 per cent of the children as likely to experience a dramatic learning spurt in the next year. In fact, the children had been randomly assigned to this condition and to the control condition. The children were tested one year later, ostensibly to check whether the learning spurt had been successfully predicted but actually to test whether teacher expectation had had an effect. The IQ increase for those children who the teachers believed to be deserving of high expectations was significantly higher than the control group.

Cooper (1984) proposed a model which may explain different teacher–pupil interactions. The model claims that expectation allows teachers to minimise interaction with pupils believed to be of low ability because they can exercise less control over the interactions. The subject matter introduced by ‘lows’ is typically not material that teachers want to discuss. ‘Highs’, however, present teachers with a situation in which they have a higher degree of control because they tend to address subject matter that teachers themselves are eager to discuss. Cooper’s model suggests that a more rewarding exchange for a pupil is also more rewarding for the teacher and teachers naturally veer towards a more positive classroom environment.

 Similarly, expectation may have its effect on attainment through its creation of differential learning environments. Chaikin et al (1974) observed more positive non-verbal communications – smiling, head-nodding and eye contact – from teachers who believed they were interacting with bright pupils than those who believed their class to be less able.

Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) examined the effects of expectation on minority ethnic groups and concluded that this group did not respond any differently to positive expectation than any other demographic group investigated. No studies have been conducted specifically to determine whether or not looked after children respond differently to positive expectation than other groups. There are several reasons, presented by previous research, why looked after children may in fact be more prone to the effects of teacher expectation than their peers.

Good and Brophy (1977) found that in class greater verbal output chances were afforded to children who were believed to be brighter. These research findings suggest that positive expectations offer children a more positive view of their own ability to answer correctly. In relation to Cooper’s (1984) model, expectation may have the biggest impact on performance in subjects where there is greatest scope for teacher–pupil interaction. Looked after children are very often exposed to a greater degree of attention in school because of their home-life situation. They may therefore be particularly susceptible to the Pygmalion Effect (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968).

Matthews (1982) demonstrated how a preconceived idea is more likely to be the cause of teacher expectation effects than actual observed performance. She investigated classes that had reputations for bad behaviour and academic failure in some subjects, but on pre-test scores were found to demonstrate a normal distribution of ability in chemistry. She found that by the end of the year the distribution of scores was skewed towards the lower end of the scale and attributed this to the effect of the teachers’ expectation based on bad reputation. If, as Matthews’s (1984) model suggests, teacher expectations are based on a static preconceived idea formed at the beginning of the teacher–pupil relationship, this presents another reason why looked after children may be more susceptible to them than other groups.

There are several criticisms that can be made jointly of all of the research. Firstly, due to the nature of the phenomenon under investigation many of the methods used to gather data were observational (Chaikin et al, 1974; Good and Brophy, 1977; Matthews, 1982). Although in most
cases efforts were made to ensure inter-rater reliability, observational studies leave a big margin for individual differences of observers and behaviours may be noted because they are looked for, which is indeed another form of expectation effect. For these reasons it was felt that the current study should use a more robust measure and therefore quantitative data were to be generated. The lack of ecological validity is another criticism that can be levelled at previous research. In all of the studies previously mentioned an artificial expectation was forced upon teachers, sometimes possibly an unrealistic one. However, overall, the theoretical background of these studies is well established and despite minor methodological concerns the research produces important results with a very high degree of validity and reliability.

**Teacher expectations and looked after children**

The current study utilises teacher expectation and self-fulfilling prophecy research as a theoretical base from which to investigate whether or not teachers have a lower expectation of looked after children than they do of children who are not looked after by a local authority. If the theoretical link that low teacher expectation causes or maintains poor attainment is accepted, then the next logical step is to ascertain whether teachers do in fact have lower expectations of looked after children (as proposed by Fletcher-Campbell, 1997 and Jackson, 2001).

Heath et al (1994), in their longitudinal study of foster children's educational attainment, asked teachers to place children into one of three expectation bands: high, medium and low. Their results suggest that teachers did have lower expectations of looked after children than did the children themselves, their carers and their social workers. Nevertheless, Heath and colleagues suggested that these expectations, although low, were accurate. They observed that the scores of the looked after children and those of the comparison group did not become more polarised, over time, which would have happened if a self-fulfilling prophecy was in effect. Their sample was drawn from a population of foster children who had been in care for at least six months and many of whom had been in their home placements (and therefore presumably school placements) for several years. It appears then that Heath et al's (1994) findings could have been the end result of a consistently low expectation, the prophecy already having been fulfilled. If their findings are accepted and low (but accurate) teacher expectations are harboured about looked after children, but they do not contribute to falling attainment, it could be argued that they may still serve to maintain already established low attainments.

This situation presents a problematic circular argument in which looked after children perform at a relatively low level (possibly due to lower expectations) and therefore teachers legitimately expect this level of performance. Fletcher-Campbell (2001) suggests that this situation, together with a feeling that pressure to achieve is the least of a looked after child's worries, has become accepted within the educational system and produces an unintentional ‘malevolent effect’ on children (p 147). She calls for widespread systemic reform through positive discrimination as the only way to break this cycle. Blyth (2001) makes similar suggestions about systemic reform. He comments that the education of looked after children should be prioritised, replacing the ‘non-achieving welfare culture’ (Stein, 1994, p 358, cited in Blyth, 2001 p 212) with a ‘culture of achievement’.

**Aims of the current study**

The examination of the effects of teacher expectation on looked after children is therefore much less straightforward. It is far more difficult in the case of looked after children to categorise expectation and attainment as cause and effect respectively. Recognising the interaction between expectation and attainment, the study outlined in this paper attempted to determine whether teachers have lower expectations of the looked after children they teach than of those who are not looked after by local authorities.
Expectation research to date has been limited by its narrow focus on academic attainment (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968; Chaikin et al., 1974; Good and Brophy, 1977; Matthews, 1982). Therefore in order to gain a richer picture of the expectation of looked after children, four other issues that contribute to the learning environment have been highlighted. Jackson (2001) and Firth and Fletcher (2001) have drawn attention to behaviour issues, which are investigated in the current study in terms of bullying (both victim and perpetrator of). Firth and Fletcher have also raised homework and attendance issues.

Therefore the research investigated five areas of the education process that may influence academic success or failure:

1. **Academic performance**
   - This factor was broken down into three discrete areas:
     a) staying on task;
     b) accuracy of work;
     c) completing the task.
2. **Homework**
3. **Attendance**
4. **Bullying (subject of)**
5. **Bullying (perpetrator of)**

**Method**

**Design**

Two methods were employed in the current study: quantitative data were generated via questionnaires and qualitative data generated by semi-structured interview.

A questionnaire design was chosen for the bulk of the study after several other alternatives were assessed. Five scenarios were presented to the participants. In the introduction they were told either that the questionnaire related to ‘the children that you teach’ or ‘the general looked after population’. The two questionnaires were identical and neither group of teachers was aware that another questionnaire existed. The two questionnaire types constituted the two independent variables. The questions did not include the word ‘expectation’ in an attempt to avoid leading teachers into giving socially desirable responses.

Questionnaire responses were collected and quantified by asking teachers to mark a cross on a 103mm line between two extremes to indicate the extent of their feeling about the scenarios presented. The dependent variables were, therefore, the mean measurement (in millimetres) of the marks made along the line related to each scenario.

In addition to the questionnaires the majority of year heads of looked after children in the schools studied took part in a semi-structured interview. This provided some qualitative, descriptive data.

Informed consent was obtained as much as possible without compromising the integrity of the results. The senior member of staff involved was informed as to the precise nature of the study and their permission was sought and received before it commenced. Full debriefing notes were made available after the questionnaires had been administered. No pressure was placed upon the participants to take part. The questionnaires were completed anonymously and collected by the senior teacher involved in order to maintain confidentiality. Permission was received from the social services Children and Family Services Manager who has overall responsibility for looked after children in the borough. The senior educational psychologist for looked after children was also in agreement that the research was valuable and should go ahead.

**Participants**

The population investigated was sampled from schools in an urban borough in England. The sampling procedure began with defining which children were looked after for the purposes of the study. The Children Act (1989) (section 22 (1)) defines the term ‘looked after’ as all children for whom the local authority has some degree of formal responsibility. Fletcher-Campbell (1997) suggests that variations in care could potentially have an influence on the child’s educational experience, so an operational definition was essential. For the purposes of this study, to avoid the effects of including some children living with their parents, it was decided to investigate those in the sole care of the local authority. Looked
after children were defined as those in long-term foster care or residential placement.

High school children were investigated because the majority of children in the care of the local authority are aged between ten and 15 (Fletcher-Campbell, 1997). Secondly, and most importantly, the Local Education Authority (LEA) had identified this age group of the looked after population as those falling furthest behind their peers.

The five schools with the largest population of looked after children were approached to take part in the study. Three of these agreed.

One-hundred-and-sixteen questionnaires were distributed in the three schools and 53 of those were returned: 27 of the ‘not looked after’ questionnaires and 26 of the ‘looked after’ questionnaires. In the school where the senior staff member knew the identity of participating teachers, random number tables were used to assign who would receive which questionnaire. In the two schools where all teachers participated, questionnaires were arranged in alternate order in unmarked sealed envelopes and the senior staff member was left to distribute the questionnaires with no instruction as to how this should be done.

Senior school staff involved in the initial discussions all felt that year heads were most familiar with looked after pupils. Therefore semi-structured interviews were conducted with as many year heads as possible. Due to time constraints it was only possible to speak to seven heads of year in two of the schools.

Materials and procedures
Two questionnaires were used, one for each condition. The questionnaires both contained one question each asking about the five areas. The first, educational attainment, was further broken up into three sub-questions. Questionnaires were identical except for the instructions, which varied according to which population the questionnaire pertained to. In order to standardise the procedure the only instructions given were those printed on the questionnaires. The batch of questionnaires in sealed envelopes was given to the senior member of staff in each school who distributed and collected the questionnaires via pigeon-holes. A between subjects two-tailed t-test was conducted for each of the questions.

A prompt sheet was used in the semi-structured interviews although participants were generally left to talk freely about the children in question. Notes were taken under the headings listed on the prompt sheet.

The semi-structured interviews with year heads were conducted on a one-to-one basis. The interview began with a brief explanation of the aims of the study and the year head was then asked to speak freely about the looked after children they personally knew. The questions on the prompt sheet were used to direct the interview.

Results

Quantitative
The means and the standard deviations of measured expectations of ‘on task’ behaviour for looked after and not looked after children are shown in Table 1.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not looked after</td>
<td>48.074</td>
<td>20.834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looked after</td>
<td>49.923</td>
<td>18.706</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1.1
Comparison of teacher expectation of ‘on task’ behaviour

*as measured on 103 mm scale ranging from ‘no pushing at all’ to ‘constant pushing’

Table 1.1
Means, standard deviations and variance of ‘on task’ behaviour

*All data are ratio level and are independent. Normal distribution and variance assumptions were not violated on any of the seven measures. In the one case where the homogeneity of variance assumption was violated the corrected t-test was used. The t-test (or corrected t-test) was the inferential statistical analysis used on all seven measures.
children are shown in Table 1.1 and Figure 1.1, for task accuracy in Table 2.1 and for task completion in Table 3.1.

Teachers showed that they would push an upset looked after child to maintain accuracy slightly more than they would an upset child who was not looked after, although the result was not significant ($t(52) = -0.196$, $p = 0.845$ two-tailed test).

Teachers showed that they would push an upset looked after child to complete tasks slightly less than they would an upset child who was not looked after; however, again, the result was not significant ($t(52) = 0.277$, $p = 0.783$ two-tailed test).

The means and the standard deviations of measured expectations of homework deadlines for looked after and not looked-after children are shown in Table 4.1 and Figure 4.1. In this instance the result was particularly significant. Teachers showed that they would exercise a significantly stronger punishment for late homework to a child who is not looked after than a child who was looked after ($t(51) = 2.122$, $p = 0.039$ two-tailed test).

Teachers showed that they would push an upset looked after child to attend school slightly more than they would an upset child who was not looked after; however, the result was not significant ($t(46.257) = -1.099$, $p = 0.278$ two-tailed test).

Teachers showed that they would expect a looked after child to be deserving of a lesser punishment than a child who is not looked after when suspected of bullying; however, once again, the result was not significant ($t(50.3) = -1.478$, $p = 0.146$ two-tailed test).

Teachers showed that they would expect a looked after child to be the subject of bullying significantly more often than a child who is not looked after ($t(52) = 2.508$, $p = 0.015$ two-tailed test).

Interview data
Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven year heads with regard to 12 children. The results are summarised in Table 7.2.

One of the original concerns expressed by some of the senior school staff in initial discussions was that teachers may not actually be aware of who the looked after children in their classes are. When asked, it seems that all of the teachers who participated in the study were aware...
Table 4.1
Means, standard deviations and variance of homework deadlines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not looked after</td>
<td>67.259</td>
<td>20.942</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looked after</td>
<td>54.846</td>
<td>21.653</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.1
Comparison of teacher expectations of homework deadlines

*as measured on 103 mm scale ranging from 'no action taken' to 'most severe action available to you'

Table 5.1
Means, standard deviations and variance of attendance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not looked after</td>
<td>72.259</td>
<td>22.823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looked after</td>
<td>77.308</td>
<td>14.422</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.1
Comparison of teacher expectations of attendance

*as measured on 103 mm scale ranging from 'not at all serious' to 'extremely serious'

NB. The Levene test = 0.031 therefore the homogeneity of variance assumption has been violated so the corrected t-test was used.
Table 6.1
Means, standard deviations and variance of bullying

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not looked after</td>
<td>38.630</td>
<td>18.715</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looked after</td>
<td>46.423</td>
<td>14.667</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6.1
Comparison of teacher expectation of bullying

*as measured on 103 mm scale ranging from ‘no action taken’ to ‘most severe action available’

Table 7.1
Means, standard deviations and variance of being bullied

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not looked after</td>
<td>56.296</td>
<td>17.479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looked after</td>
<td>46.462</td>
<td>12.510</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.1
Distribution of teacher expectation of likelihood of being bullied

*as measured on 103 mm scale ranging from ‘total truth’ to ‘total lie’
of at least one looked after child who they regularly dealt with. This preliminary analysis revealed that with this criteria satisfied the study could legitimately proceed.

Year heads were almost unanimous in their belief that looked after children generally performed less well academically than children who were not looked after.

**Discussion**

There were two significant results from the questionnaire study. Firstly, teachers expected that looked after children would not meet homework deadlines as consistently as children who are not looked after. This expectation, using Pygmalion theory (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968) and Cooper’s model (1984), indicates that those looked after will respond to this self-fulfilling prophecy and will in future be less likely to hand homework in on time. This is demonstrative of the way in which teachers show awareness of the difficult home and personal situation in which looked after children are placed, but may be symptomatic of the ‘welfare culture’ referred to by Stein (1994).

Secondly, teachers expected looked after children to be the victim of bullying more often than children who were not in the care of the local authority. If Pygmalion theory (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968) is utilised in this instance then it could possibly be argued that greater expectation of this behaviour from the peers of looked after children may lead to its greater prevalence. There were no significantly different expectations from teachers on questions about any of the three levels of academic performance, attendance and being the perpetrator of bullying behaviour.

The current study did not attempt to discover the thinking behind teachers’ lower expectations of looked after children with regard to homework deadlines and being the victims of bullying. A thorough investigation of this area is essential if current trends are to be reversed. However, some possible reasons for this mode of thinking can be surmised from previous research.

The two significantly different teacher expectations (ability to meet homework deadlines and vulnerability to being bullied) may arise as a result of teachers’ well-meaning assumptions about looked after children’s very real difficulties. Looked after children are likely to be particularly vulnerable to the lack of opportunity to complete homework successfully as it is their home lives that are generally the most unsettled. They may also be especially vulnerable to

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**Table 7.2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Majority view</th>
<th>Other views</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Placement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-term placement (75%)</td>
<td>Long-term placement (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The majority of looked after children in the schools studied were not included in the study because of their placement status (only children in long-term placements were included).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental co-operation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year heads commented that foster parents were generally supportive but those children in residential placements did not experience as much support.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive (83%)</td>
<td>Unknown (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The group of parents had not made themselves known to year heads.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic attainment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low ability (75%)</td>
<td>Middle ability (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of the children commented upon were considered to be of generally low ability.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under-achievers?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes (58%)</td>
<td>No (42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year heads commented in 71% of these cases children were under-achieving no more than their peers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good (83%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most were good attenders.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good (83%)</td>
<td>Poor (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most were good attenders.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour with other pupils</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outgoing (58%)</td>
<td>Aggressive (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most children were believed to be outgoing in their behaviour towards teachers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour with staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawn (33%)</td>
<td>Outgoing (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year heads felt that looked after children behaved equally in these ways.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive (25%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawn (8%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Percentages refer to children.
bullying as their home background can lead to poor interaction and social skills (Essen et al., 1977).

There are several reasons that the design may have allowed the generation of inaccurate results. The items in the questionnaire were hypothetical to allow a greater degree of ecological validity rather than enforcing an artificial situation upon participants as in the Oak School Experiment (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968). However, this may have required teachers to speculate, thus allowing the potential for inaccuracy.

It is essential, if changes for the benefit of looked after children are to be made to the current system, that further research be conducted into the expectations of children who have made multiple moves (both home and school). This would require a different operational definition of what looked after children are and therefore a different sample to the current study. It is also crucial that the cognitions underlying teachers’ lower expectations of looked after children are examined.

Research may be needed to determine whether looked after children are specifically susceptible to the effects of expectation. There is no reason to believe that this particular minority group will be immune to its effects, but it may be revealing to examine the precise dynamics of the effect. Other minority groups have been investigated with positive results (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968).

There may of course be sub-groups of looked after children who might be differently susceptible to the effects of teacher expectation. For instance, it could be beneficial to investigate the effects of teacher expectation on children in different racial groups. Study of gender could also reveal differential effects.

Heath et al. (1994) found that teachers had the lowest expectation of looked after children when compared to expectations of the children themselves, carers and social workers. However, further research could also be conducted into the expectations of others involved with looked after children, as it is not only from teachers that children will receive feedback about their educational adequacy.

Different age groups could also be investigated. It may be that teachers’ expectations have already exerted their strongest effect by the time children have reached high school (as assessed in the current research). Indeed Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) found that teacher expectation effects were stronger in younger groups of children.

Relating Cooper’s (1984) model to the current research matter, it may be revealing to study the relationship between contact time and teacher expectation effects on looked after children.

The results of the questionnaires given to class teachers did not reveal lower expectation of looked after children on the three measures of academic performance, but interviews with year heads did. Results from the homework deadline aspect of the questionnaire demonstrated that teachers expected looked after children to hand homework in on time less often than their peers. This result is somewhat more striking in the light of year heads’ comments that foster carers (and presumably therefore home environments) were very supportive in 83 per cent of cases.

These findings, when considered in the light of Pygmalion theory, support the call from various writers on the subject (Stein, 1994; Blyth, 2001; Fletcher-Campbell, 2001; Jackson, 2001) for systemic reform and the utilisation of schemes involving various forms of positive discrimination. Fletcher-Campbell (2001, pp 152–53) suggests ‘learning mentors’ and ‘target setting’ while Blyth (2001) talks in some detail about the Who Cares? Trust’s ‘Equal Chances Project’.

The current research findings suggest that teachers do have a lower expectation of looked after children in some (but not all) areas of the education process. By applying Pygmalion theory (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968) to these results it can be concluded that calls for positive discrimination programmes may be one point at which initial leverage can be found to begin the process of reversing the educational plight of looked after children. However, more research must first be conducted to inform this process,
in particular emphasis on where negative expectations come from and therefore how they can be changed.

Acknowledgements
Thanks to Allison Bayliss (senior educational psychologist), who helped with the collection of information about looked after children; Bob Whittome (senior educational psychologist), for providing supervisory support and making the time available for this study to be conducted; and Angela Hobday (consultant clinical psychologist), who assisted with the write-up of the study.

References
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