



**RESPONSE TO EVERY SCHOOL A GOOD SCHOOL: A
STRATEGY FOR RAISING ACHIEVEMENT IN
LITERACY AND NUMERACY**

“If I’d had one person to help me when I was younger it would have changed it all – if I had’ve learnt to read or write better I wouldn’t be in this situation now, wouldn’t be here in jail.”

November 2008

Introduction

Include Youth promotes best practice with young people in need or at risk. We achieve this through the development and promotion of resources, the provision of training, information and support of practitioners and organisations. We also undertake activities aimed at influencing public policy and policy awareness – both locally and nationally.

Include Youth promotes the development of positive choices and opportunities for vulnerable and challenging young people in the community, residential care or custody. Include Youth promotes the use of community alternatives to care and custody for children and young people.

Amongst the young people at risk with whom, and on whose behalf, Include Youth works are young people from socially disadvantaged areas, those with a learning disability, those with special needs, those who have been truanting, suspended or expelled from school, those from a care background, those who had a negative parenting experience, young people who have committed or are at risk of committing crime, misusing drugs or alcohol, undertaking unsafe sexual behaviour or other harmful activities, or of being harmed themselves.

Include Youth runs the Young Voices project, a participation project for young people who have been involved or are at risk of becoming involved in the criminal justice system, with the aim of supporting these young people to become involved in decision-making processes which impact on their lives. Currently the Young Voices Project supports young people in two groups – one drawing its members from the Greater Belfast area, and the second based in the Juvenile Justice Centre, Bangor.

Include Youth manages the LACE (Looked After Children in Education) Project which is a multi-agency partnership with the aim of promoting better educational outcomes for children and young people in care.

The Give and Take Scheme aims to improve the employability and increase the self esteem of young people in need or at risk from across Northern Ireland. The Scheme works with approximately 135 young people from a care or criminal justice

background. The Scheme aims to support young people to overcome particular barriers that prevent them from moving into mainstream training or employment and towards independent living. 75% of people on the Scheme are care experienced and we have strong partnership with all Trusts, YJA, PBNI and Careers service. The Scheme provides essential skills training (ICT, English and maths) to all of the young people.

In addition, Include Youth runs the YOYO Practitioners Forum, which draws together professionals from a range of statutory, voluntary and community organisations working directly with young people in need or at risk, and meets on a quarterly basis.

General Comments

Include Youth welcomes the publication of ‘Every School a Good School: A strategy for raising achievement in literacy and numeracy’, and is pleased to have this opportunity to make this response.

In the course of preparing our response to the consultation, we held a number of consultations with young people (aged 15- 17) from Young Voices Project and the Give and Take Scheme. Therefore all the overwhelming majority of young people we talked to had negative educational experiences and/or poor educational attainment. One group of young men aged 14 years to 17 years from Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre in Bangor participated in the consultation, as well as two other groups from Hydebankwood YOC. The three other groups from the Give and Take Scheme in Ballymena, Armagh and Belfast. We have used the young people’s comments (in italics) to inform our response to the specific consultation points in the policy document. The young people have addressed some issues regarding literacy and numeracy but in many cases their discussions were focussed on their general experiences within education. We believe their comments are insightful and relevant and have much to offer any strategy designed to promote inclusive education. To improve the life chances of these young people we must understand their lives in entirety and consider how all their life experiences impact ultimately on their experience of school.

We have outlined below a number of general issues relating to the educational experiences of young people at risk or in need. We believe it is important to set the debate in context to better understand the characteristics of the group of young people we represent. We have made a number of general recommendations relating to the education of young people at risk, and while these are not directly associated with literacy and numeracy we believe addressing them is a prerequisite to improving these young people's education. The response then addresses the specific consultation points from 'Every School a Good School: A strategy for raising achievement in literacy and numeracy', using the young people's direct statements.

Setting the Context

The Aims of Education

While we welcome the Department's commitment to improving the educational attainment of all children we would firstly like to stress the need not to overemphasize the priorities laid on literacy and numeracy as a benchmark for evaluating improvements. Improving literacy and numeracy is a key function of education but we believe that education is a much broader concept. The key goal of education as set out in general Comment No 1 on the Aims of Education, requires:

“the development of the individual child's personality, talents and abilities, in recognition of the fact that every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs... education must also be aimed at ensuring that essential life skills are learnt by every child and that no child leaves school without being equipped to face the challenges that he or she can expect to be confronted with in life. Basic skills include not only literacy and numeracy but also life skills such as the ability to make well balanced decisions, to resolve conflicts in a non violent manner, and to develop a healthy lifestyle, good social relationships and responsibility, critical thinking, creative talents, and other abilities which give children the tools needed to pursue their options in life.”
(UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2001)

Educational Experiences of Young People at Risk

In their Concluding Comments on the UK Government's compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Committee highlighted the continued concern over the failure of many children to reach their full potential. The Committee drew particular attention to those children from low income families who are overrepresented in the numbers of children failing in school. It was recommended that the government:

“Invest considerable additional resources in order to ensure the right of all children to a truly inclusive education which ensures the full enjoyment to children from all disadvantaged, marginalised and school – distant groups² (UNCRC, 2008: 15).

Young People in Care

A significant number of young people in care experience disruption in their education. They are also more likely to experience suspension and expulsion and poorer educational attainment in comparison to the school population generally.

- In 2002 -2003, nearly two-thirds of looked after children who sat Key Stage One English (64%), and Key Stage one Maths (66%) achieved level two or above, compared with 95% of children in the Northern Ireland's general school population
- In 2002-2003, 30% of looked after children who sat Key Stage Two English achieved Level Four or above compared with 76% of the general school population and 31% of looked after children who sat Key Stage Two Maths achieved Level Four or above compared with 78% of the general school population.
- In 2005-2006, only 9% of looked after children attained five or more GCSEs at Grade A* - C, compared with 64% of the general school population in Northern Ireland.

- Care leavers were almost 20 times more likely to leave school without gaining any qualification – more than half of all care leaver (55%) left school with no qualifications, compared with 3% of all school leavers.
- In 2005-2006, 27% of those looked after for a year or more and 18% of young people leaving care had received a statement of Special Educational Need, compared with 4% of Northern Ireland's general school population.

(Save the Children and Children's Law Centre, 2008: 53)

The reasons why these young people underachieve are many and varied. For young people in care frequent moves prove a disconcerting and distracting factor which undoubtedly interrupts the educational experience. Research has shown how stressed young people feel during school moves, when they have to adapt to a new set of friends and a new set of teaching staff (McAuley and Bunting, 2006). This research also highlighted the fact that the young people understood the importance of education in terms of their future life chances but unfortunately this realisation often came to late, as they were preoccupied with other things previously. Where carers and staff had spent time supporting them in completing homeworks, this was appreciated by the young people.

Many of the issues raised in the previous research were also highlighted in a participative research project examining the educational experiences of children and young people in care (McLaughlin, 2002). The young people reiterated the negative impact changes in placement have on their educational experiences.

Issues of privacy and confidentiality proved to be a major issue for young people in care. They wanted to be treated like any other pupil and were not happy about their personal information being shared amongst a staff team. Young people would be most happy with limited information being given to one dedicated member of staff.

Include Youth believe that the school principal should be the named contact for sharing of information and that there should be a robust protocol for the sharing of information between education teams, schools and the Trusts. Include Youth recommends that an additional contact person in the school, the Pastoral Care Co-

ordinator, should be the designated teacher for looked after children and this role is made a statutory requirement, in order to maximise the involvement of the education component of a child or young person's care plan. We also recommend that a training module should be incorporated into teacher training syllabuses to raise awareness and promote better understanding of care related issues for children and young people.

The young people who took part in the consultation for this document talked about issues of confidentiality in relation to schooling. They spoke of '*everyone slabbering*' in the school staff room and believed that very little was kept private at school.

"When they are talking about your family life in the classroom, in front of everybody, like asking questions "How's your mummy?"

"I felt that everyone in my 5th year knew about me being in foster care and I was mentioned in assembly which I didn't think was fair."

To understand how to best support young people in care we must firstly understand the reasons why they have come into care and learn more about the complexities of their lives. Research has also shown that these young people are struggling with enormous issues about their early life and their relationship with birth family members and yet too often their emotional and mental well-being has not received adequate attention. Children in long term care have often experienced neglect and/or abuse prior to coming into care with many suffering physical, emotional and sexual abuse. The main reason for children entering care in NI is neglect associated with the alcohol addiction of one or both parents. All of these experiences impact on the young people's emotional and mental health (McAuley and Bunting, 2005; McAuley and Bunting, 2006). If we are to improve these young people's educational attainment we must first address the wider issues affecting them and specific services must be provided to address their emotional and mental well-being.

Education can be a turning point for these most vulnerable children. It is one area in which real breakthroughs in improving outcomes can happen. It is the one area that has the potential to retain normality and stability for children. We note that the main message from the consultation response by WMTD (2007) was:

‘the need for stability, at school and at home.’ and that, ‘children with stability were more likely to feel confident and their education was less likely to suffer.’

There are examples of young people in care who have used education as a pathway to a better life. In a longitudinal study of young people in care, McAuley (2005), spoke to a number of young people who had achieved in this way. Two of the more troubled young people who took part in the study had gone on to achieve at school and go to university. The self-esteem of these young people had grown with their achievements at school. They had a determination to achieve a better life no matter what effort it would take.

‘In many ways, their educational pathway had served as a protective factor even in the absence of a close family or substitute family experience.’ (McAuley, 2005: 9)

Education and Poverty

Many of the children involved in Include Youth grew up in areas experiencing high levels of deprivation and conflict. It has long been recognised that social disadvantage impacts on a child’s educational attainment (DENI, 2001; Horgan, 2007). Young children living in high areas of deprivation score less well on verbal skills, early number concepts and general cognitive skills.

This is most evident when we consider the attainment levels of those children in the most disadvantaged schools compared to those in the least disadvantaged schools. Gallagher (2006) notes that in the most advantaged schools 50% of pupils received level three in Key Stage One Maths compared to 21% in the least disadvantaged and 42% of pupils in the most disadvantaged schools received level three in Key Stage One English compared to 12% in the least disadvantaged.

There a wide body of evidence which indicates that family income has an impact on a child’s ability to learn or to even acquire the language required to learn. Children who have a long lasting experience of living in poverty have slower cognitive and social development and poorer physical and mental health than those who in live in poverty for a short time (Horgan, 2007). In her study, Horgan found that there was a very poor

level of speech and language development amongst the very youngest children in most of the schools she visited, but it was particularly shocking in the least advantaged schools.

Horgan (2007) further outlines what a dramatic impact the context in which a school operates has on a child's educational experiences. She notes that the context impacts on the ability of the teaching staff to give children similar experiences to their counterparts in more advantaged schools and areas.

'In all the poorest schools there was a significant minority of children who were unhappy, anxious, angry and generally in need of care more than teaching, and a smaller minority who had significant behavioural difficulties.' (Horgan, 2007: 6)

She goes on to say that the pressure of dealing with the issues which come with working in a disadvantaged school - such as behavioural problems, hungry children, angry parents, welfare problems - clearly showed in the teachers behaviour and actions. Children in the most disadvantaged schools complained of being shouted at a lot. Children attending the more advantaged schools did not complain about being shouted at. Also, it was only in the disadvantaged schools that the length of the school day, and the amount of work, combined with teachers shouting at them, made the boys say they hated school or be vehement about not liking it. Teaching and learning is undoubtedly considerably more difficult in more disadvantaged areas.

'The combination of the legacy of the conflict and behavioural problems associated with poor language development and poor nutrition meant that teaching staff in some of the most disadvantaged schools spent much of their time fire fighting rather than concentrating on lessons.' (Horgan, 2007: 52)

While teachers blamed parents for a lack of involvement in their children's education, it is clear that no amount of parental involvement can counteract the worst impact of poverty on a child's life. Include Youth believes that teachers need to be better informed about the difficulties faced by parents.

While focussing on literacy and numeracy is important and a vital factor in the educational process for many children, there are a number of children for whom there are more pressing issues needing to be dealt with before we can talk about improving their literacy and numeracy. It is these most vulnerable of children who would benefit from improved literacy and numeracy programmes but other factors must be addressed before or in tandem with any efforts to improve reading and writing.

Education and Behavioural Problems

There continues to be a lack of information on the prevalence of mental health disorders in the general child and adolescent population in Northern Ireland as well as in relation to looked after children.

It has long been accepted that there is inadequate levels of provision for those children who have learning difficulties. Interviews with key professionals identified the need to get help for children before their behaviour ends up being treated as a matter of discipline and the child is excluded from school. As behavioural problems are now emerging from an earlier age there is an increasing need for support in the primary sector (NICCY, 2004). There is also concern over the underprovision of speech and language therapy (NICCY, 2006). A review of speech and language therapy showed that even the most determined parents find it hard to access speech and language therapy. Children cannot learn to think, read or write if they have not developed language skills. The scarcity of speech and language therapy is a burning issue (Horgan, 2007). We welcome the efforts by the Board to address this issue by committing additional resources to the project 'Early Intervention for Children with Speech and Language Difficulties' and await with interest the results from the Task Force report (NICCY, 2008).

The incidence of mental health problems is disproportionately high amongst vulnerable groups, including children leaving care and children in conflict with the law. These young people continue to experience difficulty in accessing specialist support services which are a prerequisite do them achieving in an educational setting. The 2006 Independent Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability (Bamford Review) included a review of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

(CAMHS), describing the situation as “wholly inadequate ... characterised by overwhelming need and chronic underinvestment”. We welcome the intention to introduce counselling to post primary schools but would stress the need for intervention at a much earlier stage. Staff in schools require training to identify mental health difficulties and to refer children on to the appropriate services. Many of the young people who take part in Include Youth projects have suffered as a result of a lack of CAMHS. Intensive support should be offered when needed to the entire family circle during a time of family crisis, not just focussed on the individual child on the edge of care. This support must be tailored to meet the needs of children and young people who have been brought up in a society which has emerged from conflict.

Education Beyond the Mainstream Sector

While we acknowledge that this report is targeted at those in the mainstream school sector, we would like to draw attention to the needs of those children and young people not attending mainstream education. Research published in 2007 found that while community alternative education projects (AEPs) were successful in re-engaging disaffected young people they were poorly resourced. Furthermore, the report found that teaching staff within these projects did not have automatic access to professional development courses; the projects did not have access to educational psychology or welfare services; access to physical resources, such as ICT equipment and work related learning was limited or non-existent. Many of the young people attending the projects did not understand why they had been placed there and perceived it as a ‘sin bin’ for ‘the stupid’. (Kilpatrick, 2007)

Whilst Include Youth believe that AEP’s have a role to play we are aware that young people rarely return to mainstream education and would strongly urge that EOTAs and AEPS are only used as a very last resort and that there is a presumption that all children will be educated in mainstream school.

General Recommendations

Through direct work with young people at risk of social exclusion and practitioners Include Youth have developed a general set of recommendations in relation to educational improvement. We would wish to reiterate these in setting a wider context for this policy on literacy and numeracy.

These recommendations are outlined in the recently published ‘A Manifesto for Youth Justice in NI’ (Include Youth, 2008):

- inclusive, mainstream education for all (other than in exceptional circumstances) aimed at developing the individual abilities and interests of all children
- sufficiently flexible curricula to: respond to the needs of a diverse school population, encourage personal and social development, safeguard physical health and emotional well-being (including provision of sex and relationships education)
- resources to respond to challenging and disruptive behaviours
- suspension and exclusion is used in the most exceptional circumstances and then as a last resort, for the shortest period of time
- alternative provision for the few not in mainstream education which is responsive to individual needs and abilities
- discreet, high quality therapeutic services including specialised counselling
- children/young people are involved in school decision-making processes, including those relating to discipline and policy or practice development.

Include Youth believes that fulfilment of these principles will ensure a more inclusive education system one that ensure better educational outcomes (including literacy and numeracy attainment) for all children in NI.

There are additional areas requiring further attention as highlighted by the LACE project concerning children in state care, namely: further joined up working between agencies; long term resourcing of services; full partnership of school representatives; information on accessing opportunities and consistency of workers. The importance of corporate parenting should not be underestimated in relation to improving the educational outcomes of these young people. As one participant in the WMTD seminar commented:

‘Good corporate parenting is the key to breaking the cycle of underachievement in this vulnerable group of young people.’ (WMTD report, 2007)

Include Youth recommends that the all looked after children and young people should have personalised education plan (PEP) as a statutory requirement of their care planning and that they should be fully involved in the meaningful participation of this process under Article 12 UNCRC.

Consultation Response

Consultation Point One

Do you agree that, in order to improve the literacy and numeracy levels of our young people, we can and should create a post-primary system without any element of academic selection?

Include Youth acknowledge that all children do not possess the same level of ability but we firmly believe that all children, regardless of academic ability should be valued by society and should be given the opportunity to reach their full potential. We believe that the current system of selection is discriminatory in a way that impacts on the most disadvantaged and vulnerable young people. Evidence has shown that there is a clear link between performance in the test and social disadvantage, with those living in poverty performing less well (Gallagher, 2006). We are also concerned that preparation for the test impacts on the learning experience in the classroom resulting in a less than complete delivery of the curriculum. There is also concern that those pupils not sitting the test do not have their wider educational needs met. Research has also highlighted the unnecessary stress sitting the test puts on young children. The recently released Kids Life and Times Survey, which surveyed over 3000 children in P7, found that only 23% of the sample felt no pressure at all doing the 11 plus (ARK, 2008).

The young people from Include Youth who were consulted on this policy document agreed that preparing for and sitting the 11 plus was a stressful time for children.

'It puts ones under stress.'

'You are too young – you are still a child.'

'It was crap, doing all the work at that age.'

*'It's hard as f***, that's what's bad about it.'*

'Don't agree with it – it stresses kids out, instead of getting upset, especially if children have learning difficulties.' (Give and Take)

'The 11 plus means taking it too seriously too young. It's too much responsibility to think what school to go to and what job to do.' (Give and Take)

'What's the sense of it – I didn't do it.' (Give and Take)

The majority of the young people from the Young Voices project had not sat the transfer test and did not see any worth in the exam.

'It was a waste of time.'

'There's no point in it.'

'I didn't do it, no point.'

'I was never in school, so I didn't do it.'

Furthermore, the young people believed that there was a stigma attached to those children who do not sit the exam, as if they were seen as second class citizens because they were not being put forward to sit it. One young woman cited the example of classmates who *"were put into a different class, P6 - people made fun of them and slagged them."* This was the young woman's understanding of the situation whilst the exams were going on and she said that it was humiliating and made her feel inferior to her peers who were sitting the exam.

'You felt a failure if you didn't do it.'

The young people were very aware of the divide between those who went to grammar school and those who did not.

'I just don't think it's fair, dividing the kids up like that.' (Juvenile Justice Centre Young Voices)

'It's a bad thing – the 'snobs' look down at you - if you are in a different uniform or a cheaper uniform (if you go to a secondary school and not a grammar school) they look at you in a bad way.' (Give and Take)

'They look at us like we are druggies.' (Give and Take)

'aye, cos all the smart ones go to grammar school and all the dunces like us go to high school.' (YOC Young Voices)

'People look at you better if you go to a grammar school.' (Give and Take)

The perceptions of class divide and the impact of poverty on education also came through.

'The richer people go to grammar schools.' (Give and Take)

'It's just all posh people go to grammar schools – you wouldn't want to be in with them.' (Juvenile Justice Centre Young Voices)

'My foster father had to pay a chunk of money for his daughter to go to grammar school and if he didn't pay it by a certain time in September, otherwise she would loose her place.' (Give and Take)

'It's posh vs. poor'. (Give and Take)

'We sit in different parts of the school bus – we sat at the back, they sat at the front of the bus and they wouldn't dare come to sit near the back with us. You don't see people mixing that often.' (Give and Take)

*'You always get snobby ***** who go to posh schools and do well and ones who can't attend go to shite schools and do badly – like Loughshore and Jaffe. They're b***** cos I used to go for only about an hour a day and I learnt f*** all – I just messed about, going mad basically.'* (YOC Young Voices)

Most of the young people did not want to keep the 11 plus and did not think it was the best method of selecting which school you go to. They felt that there should be more of an opportunity to educate children of mixed abilities in the same setting and were also supportive of continuous assessment rather than one definitive test.

'You shouldn't need to do a test – all schools should be able to accept you.' (Give and Take)

'In my imaginary world I would have one big school complex where we could all go to and pick the things we wanted to learn and pick the days we would go.' (Give and Take)

'Everyone should have the same chance.' (YOC Young Voices)

'I think we should all be taught together – why don't they mix children and young people together in schools.' (Give and Take)

'The teachers in the grammar schools and the teachers in the secondary schools – if they all have the same qualifications, why can't they teach the same?' (Give and Take)

'The teachers in primary school would look at the children's weekly work for one year and look at their learning levels and decide from there.' (Give and Take)

'In the first days or weeks in high school, you should do a test in English and Maths and then decide what level of classes you go into.' (Give and Take)

Others however, thought there was merit in identifying and selecting pupils on their ability.

'I think it's good cos you get to see what level you are at.' (YOC Young Voices)

'Yes, cos some people are serious about getting a good education, so they may as well go somewhere everyone wants to do well, instead of just messing about all the time.' (YOC Young Voices)

'You could prove people wrong if you went into a grammar school.' (Give and Take)

'Yes, I think you have to split people up – some people might just be better than others, more gifted.' (Juvenile Justice Centre Young Voices)

One young man thought that this division between schools could be the very reason why some young people come into contact with the juvenile justice system.

'People in posh schools get educated and people who go to bad schools get in trouble, become a criminal, like I did. I reckon if I hadn't got chucked out of secondary school, if I hadn't gone to Jaffe and Loughshore, I wouldn't be in here.'

It is clear from these comments that young people have much to offer to the debate on post primary selection and they have clearly illustrated the impact selection has had on their lives. Most telling was their perception of the clear divide between those who sit the 11 plus and those who do not, and in turn those who attend grammar school and those who do not. The young people appear to carry the stigma of not attending a 'good' school with them for a long time and it evidently becomes a process of self labelling, where they see themselves as second class citizens.

Given the amount of change that these young people have to deal with in their lives on a daily basis it is imperative that the effects of moving into the post primary system be limited as much as possible. We would ask that a working principle be considered that no looked after child should change schools at Primary 6 or into their Primary 7 year at school, at that crucial time of change between Primary and Post Primary Education. We suggest that child friendly information could be developed to support all children in their change of schools and that these specific details would be included in the overall information that children and young people would get upon coming into care.

Consultation Point Two

Do you agree with the aims and objectives of the proposed strategy?

We do agree with the aims and objectives of the proposed strategy and our discussions with the young people have highlighted the importance of some specific points.

We agree that there needs to be a more effective use of school performance data. While we welcome the efforts made to collect statistical information on looked after children, Include Youth would recommend that the mechanisms for collecting such data between Trusts and the relevant services within education are revised to better encapsulate more recent and up to date information provided on an annual basis on looked after children. Children and young people in need or at risk are not a homogenous group, coming from different backgrounds, following different pathways and are at different life stages. Breakdown of data would help to highlight the specific areas that need more focused support from services. Include Youth recommends that data bulletins should contain qualitative information such as categories for the reason why some children and young people in care do not fully uptake pre-school places nor sit their Key Stage assessments or final examinations. We also recommend that the OC data bulletins should reconsider the benchmark of 5 GCSE's or more to include vocational qualifications and that information is gathered in a disaggregated format to reflect the range of care placements.

The young people who took part in the consultation strongly agreed that schools need to improve reading, writing and mathematical skills of children.

'Get kids help when they are younger.' (YOC Young Voices)

'Teach them better, give them more help.' (Juvenile Justice Centre Young Voices)

'Teachers should help you more and not push you away.' (Give and Take)

'They should ask what you need help with.' (Juvenile Justice Centre)

'Yes, things definitely need to improve. Maybe you could also learn French at primary school but you need to learn the basics first.' (Give and Take)

The policy document refers to the underachievement of boys in particular. The young people had some light to shed on this debate. One group of girls identified the influence of boys as having a negative impact on their learning.

'Girls and boys are given the exact same work but they 'carry on' too much in class.' (Give and Take)

'The guys were messing about and I didn't get to do my work and ended up not getting my GCSE's. The teachers got distracted.' (Give and Take)

The young people, boys and girls alike believed that girls were more interested in getting a good education and were more inclined to listen in school and not get into as much trouble as boys.

'Girls listen, boys choose not to.' (YOC Young Voices)

'Girls have more of a head for it in school, they listen more.' (Juvenile Justice Centre Young Voices)

'Girls want to get better jobs, they're more interested in school, boys just want to get a trade and they can pick it up in tech – that's what they think anyway.' (Juvenile Justice Centre Young Voices)

'Girls listen more, they don't mess about, carry on like boys do.' (Juvenile Justice Centre Young Voices).

'That's the only good thing about school, getting into trouble, it was the only reason I went to school, for the craic torturing the teachers.' (YOC Young Voices, male)

'Girls can keep their concentration better.' (YOC Young Voices)

'Girls care more about their future, think about it more, they want to do better – boys don't care.' (YOC Young Voices)

'Girls don't do crime as much, not as interested in it as boys, so they can focus better.' (YOC Young Voices)

The boys who were consulted agreed that the characteristics of their peer group were often a defining factor in how they viewed education.

'Your friends – whether they're going to school or not, what they think of school.'
(Juvenile Justice Centre Young Voices)

The young people agreed that improvements need to be made to help pupils read, write and do maths, but some of them were less hopeful about what change could really come about. A number of the young people appeared to have already accepted that there was little that could be done to help some who were simply not willing to learn.

'Some people just didn't care, didn't want to learn, in there just to mess and carry on.' (Juvenile Justice Centre Young Voices)

'If people want to do well, if they want to learn to read and write, they'll put their mind to it, they'll learn.' (YOC Young Voices)

'It's just boring doing work and I didn't care about school. If I'd wanted to learn I probably could have, but it wasn't important to me at the time.' (Juvenile Justice Centre Young Voices)

One young person felt that it was more about being willing to accept some help and support at school when it was needed, something which is not always easy, especially for boys.

'If boys could accept help – I would have before if someone had offered it now, years ago when I was 13, when I was kicked out of school, I wouldn't now though, it's too late. I just wouldn't be bothered it – help to improve my reading and writing and all that.' (YOC Young Voices)

Consultation Points 3 – 5

Do you agree with the approach for Wave One, Two and Three?

While the young people did not address each specific point of the various Waves suggested, they were able to give helpful insights into what they felt would help them improve their reading and writing and mathematical skills. They supported teaching in smaller groups and on a one to one level, but as their comments show their relationship with the teacher is a critical factor. Many of the young people have had problematic relationships with teaching staff and as a result have not gained from additional support. However, some were able to give examples of teaching staff whom have helped and inspired them to do better and drawing on these experiences they have summarised what characteristics they believe make up good teachers and bad teachers. The young people also considered what methods of teaching are most likely to elicit the involvement and enjoyment of pupils. The discussions also drew out the young people's views on why they think some children achieve within education and others do not and how important social background is in this regard. They discussed what motivates some children to excel while others do not. The young people also provided some insight into the importance of providing a safe learning environment. The issue of bullying came up and it is clear that for some young people, any talk of improving their literacy and numeracy pales into insignificance when we understand how unsafe and unprotected they feel within the school setting. Finally, they have provided some extremely insightful comments on their regrets at not achieving academically.

- **Smaller Groups and One to One Support**

The young people were of the opinion that teaching would be better if done in smaller groups and also if they were grouped with those of a similar ability.

'Have smaller classes. See in here (Woodlands), there's one teacher to 3 to 4 pupils, that works better.' (Juvenile Justice Centre, Young Voices)

'There's more craic in here, with the teachers, cos there's not as big a crowd – 4 people in each class at the most, you can get on with them.' (Juvenile Justice Centre, Young Voices)

'It's easier if it is in smaller numbers – smaller groups.' (Give and Take)

'You do things better at different levels – if you are in the right level for your ability and not to be in too hard a level where you can't cope and slip back.' (Give and Take)

'Smaller class sizes – less people to teach but better for the young people, will get more time and more attention.' (Give and Take)

The young people had varied experiences in receiving additional support.

'I didn't find the teachers gave me extra help when things got extra hard – my LSA (Learning Support Worker) helped most of the time and made a difference.' (Give and Take)

'I had a Learning Assistant for help with English and Maths which made a real difference for me.' (Give and Take)

'One to one support was a good help, but it was me who ruined it.' (Give and Take)

'In my IN Unit (Individual Needs Unit) in school, the teacher was able to spend more time with me.' (Give and Take)

'I spent pretty much the last three years of my school in the unit. Sometimes you were expected to sit there on your own and do silly workbooks like back in primary school.' (Give and Take)

'They should treat you fairly. They put you at a table on your own, if you were a slow learner, which isn't fair and I think they gave you harder questions.' (Give and Take)

'One to one tuition for boys if they fall behind could help. I got and it helped me get the 2 GCSEs I have. I wouldn't have got them in class, I just messed about, didn't care, told the teacher to fuck off, but with the tutor there weren't any of my friends there to show off to, so I would concentrate.' (YOC Young Voices)

'If I'd had one person to help me when I was younger it would have changed it all – if I had've learnt to read or write better I wouldn't be in this situation now, wouldn't be here in jail.' (YOC Young Voices)

'If they know kids who aren't learning fast enough, they just let them fall behind and concentrate on the others, not all teachers, but most of them – but some of them stop and help you – that's what they should be doing with kids who fall behind, give them the help, concentrate on them.' (Juvenile Justice Centre Young Voices)

'In here [JJC] it's better cos there's less in class and the teachers can work better, they have time for everybody - that's the way all schools should be like.' Juvenile Justice Centre Young Voices)

'Need more key workers, like in here, people who'll help you with your work, explains things to you when you don't understand stuff.' (Juvenile Justice Centre Young Voices)

Some of the young people talked about how difficult it was to ask for help and said that they often did not have the confidence to put their hand up and ask for additional support. Some of them worried that if they asked for help they would be ridiculed by the other children in the class. Others had asked for help but had found the teacher unwilling to give them extra support.

'Some people are afraid to ask for help – I wouldn't do it.' (Give and Take)

'When you ask the teacher for help, they say to you, "It's on the board" or "Look at that, read that."' (Give and Take)

'Teachers went through things on the board, but didn't take time to go through things if you didn't really understand something.' (Give and Take)

'One to one support is really good if you can get it and if it works for you. I had one to one for a while but it didn't work cos' I didn't like the teacher and I couldn't really say that to anyone.' (Give and Take)

Those young people who had been suspended from school explained how difficult it was to catch up with work after suspension and had some suggestions for ensuring these young people are not left behind from the education system.

'When you're out of school, when you're suspended, you're shut off from any education, so you get behind, and you never really catch up when you go back, so you get even more behind and you do even worse in school. Instead of being suspended they should have a back up plan – like you go in for an hour a day just, but get special help with your work.' (Juvenile Justice Centre Young Voices)

'They should send work home with you – at least then if you get more behind it's your fault and not theirs.' (Juvenile Justice Centre Young Voices)

A number of the young people had experience of receiving tutoring. Again, their experience of this was varied and its success appeared to hinge on the type of tutor they got and whether they felt they were supportive or critical. Where they were paired with an 'understanding' tutor, there were positive results both in their academic achievement and their level of self esteem.

'The Maths tutor - I didn't like him. I had no-one to talk to. If it is not working well (the tutoring) then they assume it's the subject you don't like or that you are resentful. I liked the English tutor; if I got miserable, he sensed this and understood.' (Give and Take)

'My English tutor, he really wanted me to succeed and do well. He actually listened to me and had a general understanding that something was wrong as to why I was out of school and he understood. He wanted you to do well, for you to want to do well for yourself and for them and it was all about going the extra mile.' (Give and Take)

'The French tutor was very positive with my learning and would try his best with me.'

From the young people's comments it is clear that they believe that at times additional support is required to help pupils learn and keep up with the class. Seeking that support within the body of the larger class is not always straightforward and the young people are not always willing to identify themselves as a struggling pupil. They support smaller groups as a method for learning and think there should be more support from teachers for those pupils who are having difficulty. The majority of the young people who had had one to one support had benefited from that engagement. However, the nature of the relationship with the teacher providing that support was seen as critical to it being a success. Teachers who are patient, understanding and willing to take the time to support pupils have the most chance of achieving success in their teaching. Providing a member of staff with whom these vulnerable young people can connect with and trust is the first step in improving their educational experience.

- **Relationship with Teachers**

Their relationships with particular teachers whom they found supportive were critical and if they were lucky enough to find that type of relationship their education improved as a result.

'That teacher praised me – it made me feel proud because she recognised that I'd done something good and not ignored it.' (Give and Take)

'One teacher took the time to explain maths to me, but not English – the teacher just sat the work down in front of you and told you to get on with it. Or sometimes in another class you got a video and had to work from that.' (Give and Take)

At the opposite end of the spectrum they were unfortunately also able to cite examples when teachers had only served to undermine their confidence and draw attention to their inabilities. Some of the young people's comments are quite shocking with regard

to how they were spoken to by teaching staff and it is clear that some of these comments play on the young people's minds for a long time afterwards.

'Another teacher's favourite expression was: 'I'm the one with the education – not you.' (Give and Take)

'If teachers hated you, say you came into class and they would say [name of young woman], I know what you and your friends are up to', then they made you leave class and so you didn't learn anything because you were out of that class.' (Give and Take)

*"Some teachers just couldn't give a f*** about you, just worry about the smart ones, the ones doing well.'* (YOC Young Voices)

*'Teachers make a d*** out of you, shout at you, say things in front of the class that embarrass you.'* (Give and Take)

'One teacher would put her hand to her ear, pretending she couldn't hear you, embarrassing you.' (Give and Take)

'Our Principal called me a lowlife.' (Give and Take)

'The secondary school Headmaster was serious and he used to always say that all of our class "is going to amount to nothing"'. (Give and Take)

The young men who were at Woodlands JJCNI said their experience of teaching and education was very different from what they had received in the mainstream sector. There is clearly something to be learnt by how teaching is carried out in this setting and how it is adapted to meet the needs of these specific young people.

*'If ordinary schools were more like Woodlands, boys would do better in school. See in there, you can have a bit of a laugh, have craic with the teachers – but normal teachers are w*****. The teachers in Woodlands know the score, they're decent, but*

in normal schools teachers just shout at you – I've seen teachers bounce kids off desks and all.' (YOC Young Voices)

'If the school was more like Woodlands – I got 2 GCSEs in there but I wouldn't have got them in a normal school.' (YOC Young Voices)

'It's a gift in there – I wouldn't even call it a school – teachers help you when you fall behind, they're sound.' (YOC Young Voices)

'I got help in there that got me a double GCSE in car mechanics.' (YOC Young Voices)

'If teachers were better, different. Teachers melt your head, it's all work, work, work.' (YOC Young Voices)

The personality of the teacher was seen as having a critical effect on whether they were liked by their pupils. Qualities they felt would make a good teacher were:

'If they took a bit of time to really teach you something, especially if it was something you found hard to understand at that time.' (Give and Take)

'To listen to you properly.' (Give and Take)

'Some could understand you.' (Give and Take)

'Patient people and teachers who could also have a laugh.' (Give and Take)

'When the teacher had a good sense of humour.' (Give and Take)

'Some just don't know how to work with children – they are only in it for the money.' (Give and Take)

'A positive thing would be to have teachers who are really interested in kids and not in their wages at the end of the month.' (Give and Take)

'Whether you've got a good teacher that cares about you and takes time, or whether you've got some old bastard of a teacher who just puts you in detention all the time.'
(*Juvenile Justice Centre Young Voices*)

'Having someone that you could go to in confidence if you were in bother, to go to one teacher.' (*Give and Take*)

- **Method of Teaching**

A research project examining children's experience of education in Northern Ireland, found that unfortunately many of the children were able to give examples of lessons which were boring. The children appreciated lessons which were about 'learning by doing' and their definition of a good teacher was one used '*plenty of games when you're learning*'. All of the children liked teachers who involved them in their own learning, who consulted them regularly about what they wanted to do. Some children complained about teachers interrupting learning to meet timetabling requirements, such as the literacy hour (Horgan (2007:14)).

In Horgan's study, a good deal of the reason why children stopped liking school and started to see it as something they were forced to attend seemed to be the way they feel they are treated in school. The clearly wanted more involvement in decisions about the school.

Kilpatrick's (2007) research into alternative education projects (AEPs) concluded also that students responded very positively to the teaching style, methods and learning environment of AEPs. The challenge for the education sector is to transfer the understanding, skills and expertise from the alternative sector into mainstream education.

However, it is clear that if teachers are to have the time to develop new, fun ways of interactive learning they need to be freed up from their 'firefighting role' they are forced into on many occasions. Some schools in London have developed dedicated welfare and care worker positions within schools to deal with low attendance. A

similar position could be considered to deal with the additional caring work and administrative tasks related to a high number of pupils growing up in poverty and at risk (Horgan, 2007).

The young people agreed that classes need to be made more interactive and fun.

'Make classes better – it's boring as fuck, so you don't pay attention, don't concentrate.' (YOC Young Voices)

'When you are a child all you want to do is have fun, you don't want all that work – if they made classes at primary school better, more fun, kids wouldn't be put off school so much.' (YOC Young Voices)

- **Motivating Factors to Do Well in Education**

The young people highlighted various reasons why they think some children achieve at school while others do not. For some, it was all about trying to make young children understand the importance of education to have a better life.

'Give boys a better understanding of education, explain to them why it's important – you don't see that when you're young, when you're at school, that you need qualifications to get a job when you leave.' (YOC Young Voices)

Others disagreed with this point of view and in contrast believed that you do not need to gain qualifications to get a decent job. They gave examples of individuals they knew who had not done well at school but had gone on to learn a trade or achieve a good standard of living.

'Are you saying you need to have GCSEs to get a good job? That's balls, sure there's people earning loads of money with no qualifications at all.' (YOC Young Voices)

'You can get into tech to be a plumber or electrician, to do a trade with no qualifications – they do all the maths and English and shit with you when you're there in tech, so you don't need a GCSE in it.' (YOC Young Voices)

The young people were in agreement that children from poorer backgrounds do less well at school than those from more well off backgrounds. The reasons cited for this varied, from the distraction of crime and anti social behaviour, to not being taught by parents that education is important and to the belief that children in better off families go to better schools.

'Because of crime – in a poor area kids are into crime and drugs and all – they still go to school, but they take drugs and they don't care about education, it's not important to them.' (YOC Young Voices)

'Kids from rich families want to make their Ma's and Da's proud of them, so they work hard at school, do well in exams, get GCSEs and all – kids from poorer areas aren't going to do that – that's not how they think, or how their Ma's and Da's think.' (YOC Young Voices)

'There's more trouble in the area you live in, so you end up getting in to it yourself.' (YOC Young Voices)

'Other things in your life – like drink and drugs and all – if you care more about them than you do about school.' (Juvenile Justice Centre Young Voices)

'If you're poor, you don't care about education, it's not as important.'(YOC Young Voices)

'Some people just don't care what they get out of life, so don't care about their education. It's just the way some people are brought up, not to care.' (Juvenile Justice Centre Young Voices)

'They haven't been taught to care about education, about doing well in exams – their parents haven't taught them.' (Juvenile Justice Centre Young Voices)

'Probably cos their parents never taught them to care about school either.' (Juvenile Justice Centre Young Voices)

'If a child is doing bad at school, the Ma and Da should sit down with them.' (Give and Take)

'They do better, cos they go to better schools, do better in education – that's it, just the schools they go to are better.' (YOC Young Voices)

- **The Importance of a Safe Environment**

A number of young people talked at length about their experiences of bullying. This topic was not introduced by the facilitator but emerged from discussions about their general experiences in school and what impedes their learning. Clearly, if a young person is fearful about being bullied and feels unsafe within school, their chances of learning are severely effected. We were shocked by the levels of violence described within the school setting and spending a large part of ones day within such an atmosphere was taking its toll on the young people involved. To dismiss the young people's concerns as being irrelevant to the topic of improved education would be wrong and we have included these comments because we strongly believe that the Department should be made aware of the reality of a normal school day for some of our young people.

'There were positive things I learnt, but I was pushed around and didn't want to come back the next day. There was nothing else on my mind except learning but I was always thinking about how to get safely from one classroom to another. You see, there would be a group of friends who would fall out with each other, then the person would get pushed around, even though technically they were their friends, so they would be standing out waiting for you and you'd get bullied.' (Give and Take)

'In the music class, it was the boys more than the girls who were violent. There would be pushing you down the stairs, against the corners of the tables, hitting your school bags, even chairs were sent flying across the room (when the teacher wasn't there for a long time or you were waiting on the sub coming). You would crouch down at the back of the room to keep out of the way. It was in your own best interest not to get

injured; more would have happened to you and I mean, who deliberately wants to get hit by a chair or something?’ (Give and Take)

‘School was so horrible, that’s why I felt miserable and I was trying to survive there. You learn to keep your head down, but that doesn’t mean people don’t notice you. My mum would always say “try to do your best and just ignore the”. It’s not ‘playground stuff’, they were very violent threats. I was just crushed by the things that happened in school.’ (Give and Take)

‘I couldn’t hope to learn anything. My goal was to get out of there alive because of other pupils bullying. Teachers don’t want to seem to do anything about it cos it was rife, it wasn’t isolated incidents. The teachers learnt to accept it and so the young people learnt to accept it and that’s really why I left school early.’ (Give and Take)

‘You got pushed around, running around the school, it was rampant; no-one seems to know how to deal with it all.’ (Give and Take)

‘If teachers got hit, all hell broke loose. If pupils were hitting other pupils, then this was seen to be okay or it went unnoticed.’ (Give and Take)

Few would agree that working in an environment like this is acceptable. No adult would accept such a level of fear or violence in their workplace. These quotes demonstrate that in some cases bullying can result in a young person opting out of education altogether. We would urge the Department to review discipline policy within schools and to urgently work towards a situation where all schools are safe places for children and young people. One young person said that she thought being in a grammar school would be ‘safer’.

‘I think it would give you more help, it would be a safer, quieter place to learn.’ (Give and Take)

It is unacceptable that some young people are expected to learn within an unsafe, unregulated environment. The aftermath of such an experience can be devastating for

young people and this consultation has clearly highlighted that much work needs to be done to address the continued problems of bullying and discipline within schools.

- **Regrets**

All of the young people who were asked if they regret not doing well at school replied that they did, and the main regret was that they were now less likely to get employment.

'I regret not working now cos it'd be easier getting a job if I had qualification.' (YOC Young Voices)

'It's hard enough for us to get jobs because we've got a criminal record and cos you didn't do well in school and have no GCSEs its even worse.' (YOC Young Voices)

'I should have stayed in primary school – I got chucked out of the first one and then out of Brookfield. Now I do, but not when you're younger - you regret it when you're older though.' (YOC Young Voices)

'I wish I'd stayed in school, I'd love to be in school now – when I was younger I didn't care, but see now, I do care and I just wish I could be in school again.' (YOC Young Voices)

'If there were other kids like me and I got to talk to them, I'd want to help them, help them stay in school.' (YOC Young Voices)

'Now I do, but not when you're younger - you regret it when you're older though.' (YOC Young Voices)

'Education's important, but you only know it when you have none – when you're on the dole.' (Juvenile Justice Centre)

The young people's comments throw down a real challenge to educationalists. We can see that these young people have many issues to contend with which impact on their learning in the classroom. The impact of living in an area of high social

deprivation and the associated pressure to become involved in anti-social behaviour has a knock-on effect in how they view school and education. It is a sad indictment that many of the young people are so fatalistic about their future and feel almost powerless to change their situation. The fact that all of them regret not doing better at school highlights the importance of early intervention within education. There is a clear need for schools to connect with the reality of these young people's lives and find ways of making school safe, relevant and interesting.

Consultation Point 6

Do you agree with the proposed support measures to facilitate professional learning and help ensure effective implementation of the strategy?

While the young people did not suggest specific ways in which teachers could be supported to improve their teaching in literacy and numeracy, they did make some valuable comments about the standard of teaching in general. Their comments suggest that there is much work to do in improving teachers understanding of how to get the best from their pupils. Often it is not about the mechanics of teaching but about how teachers view and respect their pupils and in turn how that respect, or lack of respect is demonstrated in the classroom. The young people were asked about the good things and bad things about teachers and they gave the following responses:

- **Good things about teachers:**

'To be a bit more laid back and chilled!' (Give and Take)

'To be a bit strict but fair – so that you can understand why they make decisions affecting you they way they do.' (Give and Take)

'Being respectful to you – for example, not keeping you waiting for nearly the full period outside the class door because the teacher is off and they couldn't get cover – that's disrespectful.' (Give and Take)

'It sounds so obvious, but having people who understood.' (Give and Take)

'Treating you like an adult.' (Give and Take)

'They should take time with you.' (Give and Take)

'They should consider the school environment and take into account the things about the young person's home.' (Give and Take)

- **Bad things about teachers:**

'They can't be too soft either.' (Give and Take)

'When they don't listen.' (Give and Take)

'Who shouts too much!' (Give and Take)

'Who doesn't let you go to the loo when you need to – it's like you all have to use the time at lunchtime and we can't always go then.' (Give and Take)

'Being impatient with you.' (Give and Take)

'Being sarcastic.' (Give and Take)

'Getting hit across the head.' (Give and Take)

'Throw things at you.' (Give and Take)

'They make you think that you are intolerable.' (Give and Take)

'Picking on you.' (Give and Take)

One young woman talked about it being 'against her human rights' to have to wait in a classroom when needing to go to the toilet and sometimes how embarrassing this is.

'Favouritism makes a bad teacher, because when you do good things, when it goes unnoticed, that can make you feel down and think, well, why bother?' (Give and Take)

'If a teacher didn't like you from day one, then it lasted right through the five years you were there.' (Give and Take)

'Teachers always have a favourite in class which is a bad thing.' (Give and Take)

'I felt that every teacher in my school hated me because of my auntie and what she did when she was at school.' (Give and Take)

A group of young men from the Juvenile Justice Centre had a discussion about that makes a good teacher. The following is an excerpt from that conversation:

'A good teacher shouts at you, makes sure you learn, that you listen.'

'You think that someone who shouts is good!?! Rather than someone who sits down and talks to you, explains things to you? That's what makes a good teacher, not shouting!'

'If someone shouts at you, like bad teachers do, you're going to rebel against it, you won't learn – they tell you to do one thing and you do the opposite, cos they shouted at you.'

Some of the young people drew attention to discipline procedures within their schools and how inappropriate and ineffective they appeared to be. Include Youth are particularly concerned by some of the methods of discipline described as they are without doubt in contravention of the children's rights and furthermore, only serve to put the children even further behind in their learning.

'In our English class, people were constantly talking and you used to be put behind the blackboard to stand there for the length of the class. Or you would be threatened to be sent to the Principal or to stand out in the corridor. Then you couldn't learn anything about English because you were out of the class and also because the teacher couldn't really teach you.' (Give and Take)

'If you were "playing up" you were put into the store or out into the corridor. Sometimes the teacher locked the store door and not let you out and so you used to just look at all the writing on the table and read it.' (Give and Take)

If we are to create an environment in which children can achieve their full potential we must first address how children are being treated in classrooms and understand

what a massive impact this has on their learning. Include Youth recommends that a module be introduced into teacher training to create a better awareness of the issues surrounding children and young people at risk.

Consultation Point 7

Do you agree with the proposed targets and milestones?

We do agree with the proposed targets and milestones, but would also welcome updated information on an annual basis, in order to assess progress. We would also welcome the breakdown of this information for specific groups of young people at risk. We would also request educational targets to be set for those children and young people within the juvenile justice system.

Consultation Point 8

Do you agree with the roles and responsibilities detailed?

We note that in the main body of the consultation document there is a section entitled ‘The need for more effective partnership with parents and local communities’, but there does not appear to be an associated objective in relation to this section. We concur that improvements in standards in schools in areas of high social disadvantage is influenced significantly by factors that are not within the schools control. For this reason we believe that improved parental engagement is critical and that schools need to better understand the needs of the areas in which they are based.

- **School as part of the community**

We asked the young people what role they thought their school played in improving their area and attempted to get some sense from them of how the school interacted with the local community, parents and carers. They did not think that schools did anything in particular to help their area, but did suggest that the school building could be used out of normal school hours.

'To have a youth club or a drama club or some evening activity, even for one evening per week.' (Give and Take)

'Having open nights for parents or foster carers to come to, especially for 1st Years coming to a new school.' (Give and Take)

'Need more lunchtime, breakfast and after schools clubs.' (Give and Take)

'They should have a better choice of classes or activities to do after school.' (Give and Take)

'In our school, bits of it were used outside school – the sports hall by the youth club and the boxing club a wee bit.' (Juvenile Justice Centre, Young Voices)

- **Support for parents**

The young people felt strongly that more should be done to support parents to in turn support their children's education. Some of the young people stated that the only times they could remember their parents going to school was when something was wrong. However, some of the young people's comments highlight how important they see the support of the parents to do well in education. In many instances, parents are seen as the significant influencing factor in shaping a young person's views on education. Several of the young people also highlighted the need for more financial support in general.

'More support for parents – help them to help their kids at school.' (YOC Young Voices)

'Help for parents – someone to help them and show them how to help their kids do well – most parents don't know how to do that.' (Juvenile Justice Centre Young Voices)

'The longest I was in school, my Ma and Da never went in once – but I was hardly ever there in school.' (Juvenile Justice Centre)

'It's not just down to the teachers. It's up to the Ma's and Da's to do things with the child and get the books and take time to sit down and do homework with them if they don't understand something.' (Give and Take)

'Your Ma and Da are your starting point, the way you're brought up, some are brought up not to care about school – that's just been passed down from their parents and from their parents – it just goes on and on back.' (Juvenile Justice Centre Young Voices)

'My cousin's Ma sits down and works with him and he's as smart as anything now.' (Give and Take)

'Money – get poor families more money' (YOC Young Voices)

Conclusions

Include Youth welcomes the opportunity to comment on this policy document and we hope that our comments prove constructive in moving the debate forward. The young people's comments have highlighted the fact that children's experience of school is very much determined by their family background and the area in which they live. There are clear links between social disadvantage and educational disadvantage and the challenges for teachers working in disadvantaged schools. These multiplicity of factors result in the chances of doing well at school being stacked up against our most vulnerable children and young people. The young people appear to become disaffected from an early age and very often their experience at school only serves to reinforce that alienation. While we acknowledge that many of these disabling factors lie outside the control and responsibility of the Department of Education, we never the less present a challenge to all those working in the school system to make every effort to minimise their effects. Schools can effect change within a young person's life and as the young people who took part in the response have indicated, they want a system which respects and supports them, even in their most difficult times. Only in their

later years did the young people recognise the importance of learning to read, write and do mathematics – we hope that the suggestions from these young people will in some way inform a strategy which will help those children for whom it is not too late.

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