

**Children’s Views from Care and
Residential Education**

**on proposals in the Green Paper
“Every Child Matters”**

Report of the Children’s Rights
Director

Background

1. Under Regulation 3 of the Children's Rights Director Regulations 2002, I am personally and statutorily required to "ascertain the views of children about regulated services provided to them" and to "report such views to the Commission." This report is published by the National Care Standards Commission. It presents the views of children in settings inspected by the Commission (mainly settings where children live away from their original home) about key proposals contained in the government's recently published Green Paper "Every Child Matters".
2. The consultation period for comments on the Green Paper ends on 1 December 2003. This report of children's views is being submitted to the Department for Education and Skills as a children's response to that consultation.
3. Six workshops were held with children from different settings of the type inspected by the National Care Standards Commission, to discuss the government's proposals. Four workshop meetings were held with children from boarding schools of different types, by visiting the schools themselves. In one of these, pupils of two different schools joined together, and in another, students from a residential further education college joined in, so that children from a total of six schools and colleges were involved in the workshops. Two workshop groups were made up of children from children's homes and foster care, who were invited to meetings held at an interesting location (a zoo) they could spend the rest of the day visiting.
4. These Green Paper workshops were part of my continuing programme of consultations with both children in care and from residential education settings under the Children's Rights Director Regulations, which began in November 2002. This currently includes three forms of consultation: firstly, visits to randomly selected children's establishments, schools, colleges and services to consult with workshop groups of children and young people; secondly, children's workshops on specific topics to which children are invited from randomly selected establishments, schools, colleges and services; and thirdly, national children's rights conferences to which children were invited from randomly selected services. Two national conferences have been held so far, and a third is planned for Spring 2004. Services to visit, and services to invite children from, are chosen at random to make sure that the the views given are representative, more than would be achieved by a standing young persons' consultative group or consultation through other organisations.
5. The children were sent a copy of the children's version of the Green Paper, together with the list of the proposals we especially wanted them to comment on. At each workshop session children were then asked their views by a combination of open ended questions asking for views on each of these proposals, plus open "brainstorming" for original ideas from the children. As happens in many groups, some children stayed behind after the session formally ended, to give further thoughts they wanted to add to what had been said in the group.
6. Views reported here are either common themes across different groups, or ideas or views put forward by young people in a particular group which then received full support from that group. Quotations from young people are given where they sum up either a common theme or a group-supported view. My own comment in

the text aims to categorise and summarise, but not to amend or amplify what the children themselves said.

7. This report is being sent to each of the establishments and services from which children came to the groups, so that the children who took part can see what was reported from what they said. A children's summary is also being produced.

CHILDREN'S VIEWS ON THE GREEN PAPER

8. Each group of children was asked whether they agreed with the government's list of five important issues for children, and whether they would add any more main headings to the government's list. We then asked each group what they thought should be done for children under each of the five headings. Overall, the children **agreed with government's five main headings of important issues for children**. The children's views of what should be done now under each heading are set out below.

Being Healthy

9. Children thought **better school food, better cooked and with more choice** was central to being and staying healthy, together with **exercise and sports**, with good school health services or a sanatorium to treat you if you became ill at school. Many at boarding schools thought that they were encouraged to do a lot of exercise already, but that this was important for all children, outside school as well. Factual information on healthy eating was important. It would be helpful to reduce easily available **junk food** and to make a balanced diet more usual. It was suggested that **advertising for fast food should be banned** on health grounds.
10. There was concern that with so much fast food, "people have forgotten how to cook", and there needed to be **cooking lessons for adults as well as children**.
11. One idea was that children could be given **vouchers for good health products** to encourage them to use them.
12. It was important **not to go too far on health issues**. What was needed, for example was a balanced diet – but not fruit and veg alone. You should not become fanatic about special diets, special slimming foods, counting various sorts of points in what you ate, and worrying about what you looked like all the time. As one person put it "don't overboil on the healthy stuff." As with so many things, you needed to balance enjoyment and staying healthy – but needed sometimes to go for being happier rather than healthier. You really needed to understand properly what was and was not healthy eating – one said that "people think that you can have a burger meal but that's OK if you have a vitamin tablet as well". On supporting people, you needed to "spread accessible opportunities for health support" rather than making everyone health worried.
13. The problem of **anorexia** was discussed by one group, who (as with other problems that involved making choices) thought it would be helpful for young people to meet someone suffering from the problem face to face so that they

would be able to see the problem for themselves before they found themselves caught up in it.

14. The problem of mental health for children was raised – with concern that some children suffer mental health problems as a result of **examination stress**, and this needed to be addressed.
15. Boarding pupils thought that when you were living away from home, you could have more nurses and doctors available than there were now – boarding schools could be required to have a **nurse in charge of health for each house**. For children generally, **regular health checkups** were helpful (though the doctors needed to be interested in dealing with anything you wanted to ask, rather than just filling in a checklist on you). Making **‘flu jabs** more widely available as a choice for all might help too.
16. The children in a number of groups thought that it should be **easier to get health help**. There needed to be more dentists available to you, more frequent eye checks, and less waiting time in hospitals.
17. The suggestion was made that there needed to be a better **campaign against drugs**, which damaged the health of children. More than one group thought that there should be more shocking, though factual, information to **frighten people against starting to use drugs and cigarettes** – it was better to avoid children starting these, than to try to stop them later, and the sort of health message printed on cigarette packets was not really powerful enough. People could choose for themselves whether to start using drugs or smoking, so information was important to help them make informed choices. It was harder to force someone to stop later, to change a choice they had already made and would therefore try to keep to - “children are stubborn”.
18. Many said you had to give messages against drugs and alcohol abuse that were stronger than the pressures to do those things to rebel against parents, or from peer pressure – you had to go so far as to **scare children against drugs**. A suggested way of doing this was to bring children to meet a real person who had suffered from something like drug abuse, so that they could see and hear the results for themselves – not just to show videos or advertisements. Seeing and speaking to a real person was moving. The strongest message was to be able to see yourself in 10 years’ time if you took the wrong choice now.
19. On many of the issues we discussed about the Green Paper, children warned against assuming that the same thing would suit everybody. Helping children stay healthy was no exception – it was important not to base health support on a “model person”, but to **help as individuals needed**.
20. There was a view from one group that health for children was a personal issue for children and parents, best approached by **improving the NHS services for everyone**.

Being Safe

21. **Parents making the right decisions** on things like where you could go on your own was vital, and parents might need more help with this. In boarding schools,

children thought there should be **very regular checks for safety hazards** – and proper warnings of even minor hazards like hooks that you might catch yourself on.

22. One very practical step to help keep you safe was always to carry a **mobile phone** so you could contact someone for help if you needed to. Some groups discussed the idea of installing more **CCTV in schools**. On balance, this was seen as a good idea, but opinions were strongly divided and some were against it because of privacy worries. When you went out, it was helpful if you had **emergency money** with you, and if it was dark, a **torch**.
23. Many children ride cycles, and many are injured on them, so one group suggested **free cycle helmets and pads**, plus a law that made wearing a helmet compulsory on any sort of bike – “not wearing a helmet is not acting cool, its acting stupid.”
24. As often raised by children in our consultations, more needed to be done to keep children safe from **bullying**. More use of mentors in schools was suggested.
25. A key to keeping children safe was **making children aware of risks from an early age**. Children needed to know why they needed to stay in groups when out in town, for example, and therefore less likely to put themselves at risk of trouble by being silly in a group. One idea to help children learn about what was safe and what was not in their area was to provide **kids maps** of a town or area, showing things there for children to do, safe and less safe places, and safer routes from one place to another. Easily read maps showing how to get to and from places children often went to, might help children not to get lost.
26. One of our groups was very clear that “you can’t make everything safe”, that everyday life has risks to it (including getting to and from school), and that you can take the fun out of life if you try to make everything too safe. What you have to do is to be aware of risks, and to be helped to learn to **balance fun and risks**. This group pointed out that this meant balancing two of the government’s objectives – staying safe, and enjoying life. They thought that the balance should often work itself out – taking too many risks ended up spoiling the fun anyway, so you should want to get the balance right.
27. Balancing risks and fun was not something that adults could make children do just by making rules. There was the risk then that children would not learn how to balance risks for themselves, but would instead be tempted just to break the rules – “too many safety rules lead to breaking them”, and for many, “breaking rules gives adrenalin rush”. For anyone, adult or child, instructions lead to temptations – “Don’t touch! So you touch.” Children needed to learn how to think about the facts and dangers for themselves.
28. Adults needed to decide how far to trust a child. Many underestimated children, and sometimes relied on imposing rules rather than **helping children to earn trust**. “Children have to earn trust”, but adults needed to see how good they were at thinking the facts through about something before deciding how far to trust them.
29. One particular part of the issue of trust was children **learning which adults they could – or could not - trust**. You needed to protect children from people like

drug dealers trying to contact them, and to help them to “avoid dodgy people around”.

Enjoying Life

30. Most of the workshop groups said that it was important that children had **affordable places to go** – but many also said that **transport** was essential. Transport had to be available and affordable too, otherwise where you could go and what you could do was very limited. Cost was a major problem – often when you added the cost of something like visiting the cinema to the cost of getting there and back, the outing was beyond many children’s means.
31. Some were concerned that the age at which you have to pay adult rather than child entrance fees or transport fares are different in different places, and they thought there should be a **standard age for paying adult entry and fares**. Some had been caught out by being charged half entry fee to somewhere, but at the same age being expected to pay full fare on public transport to get there. They thought a standard age would also lead to better compliance with charges, which now just seemed illogical. Some proposed that **extending child rate fees and fares** might be a way of encouraging older children and young people to do worthwhile things.
32. Children in some boarding school settings commented that their genuinely free time was reduced by Saturday morning school and compulsory homework periods on Sundays, and that **how much free time you get is often controlled by coursework**, so that sometimes you have hardly any, and at other times more than perhaps you need. The children in a number of groups raised the issue of **examination pressures** affecting your enjoyment of life at times. One group suggested replacing the existing examination system with the International Baccalaureate, and one child described how she had been helped by being able to take a break from studies.
33. There was much discussion of the **AS examination** system in one group. Many were concerned that the present examination system, with three years of examinations, makes for a lot of stress and little enjoyment for children going through it. Ideas were mixed about this though – some thought that A levels should be harder, and AS levels scrapped, while others thought you could keep the AS level year as a preparation for A levels, but make the AS examinations matter less in themselves.
34. One of our groups came up with a list of seven key things they thought you needed to have in order to enjoy life. These were: food, money, safety, freedom, friendship, trust, less examination stress.
35. A vital point made by many was that there is no one solution to providing the means for children – or anyone else – to enjoy life. As one child put it **“everyone’s definition of free time is different”**.

Making a Contribution for Others

36. All the groups agreed that making a contribution to others was an important part of life for children. One said it makes you feel good about yourself.
37. The children saw two main ways that they could and should make a contribution to other people. One was to society at large, by things like **social services or charity work**, and many said that they already had opportunities to do this. Most agreed that it was important for children to have the opportunity to do a variety of charity work, to help others who might be less fortunate than themselves. The other main way of contributing was at a more personal level in their own daily contacts with others – for example, **helping one's friends through a rough patch**. Others would like to see more opportunities for children to **fund raise** to help others.
38. One practical suggestion was that young people could be helped make a genuine contribution to others by being given far more **training in first aid, accident awareness and lifesaving**.
39. Another major idea was that children should make a **special contribution to help elderly people**. One of our groups thought that the young and the old had some things in common – “young and old alike get less taken notice of by middle aged groups”, yet both young and old deserve respect and to be listened to as they are going “through the mill at their stages” of life. They believed “children need to respect elders for what they've achieved”, and could very usefully do practical things to help older people.
40. One group was concerned that this report should not just list things for children to do, but also some needs of others in society that the children thought needed special help. Their particular example was **more help for homeless people**, who they thought needed more sympathetic handling by the police, and more provision of shelters and food kitchens with “proper dinners, not soup”.
41. It was important that adults and society generally made **opportunities for children and young people to help others**, but this should remain voluntary if it was to work – “**make it easier for people, but not make people, to help people**”.

Getting over any Problems

42. The children thought it important that children should have someone they can trust to turn to. Some would not want to talk to a stranger. In schools, they thought this should ideally be someone not directly associated with the school, as **it is not so easy to talk to someone in authority over you about personal problems**.
43. The person you went to at school also needed to be someone with the time to help you – **not a teacher who would find it hard to take the time off lessons**. The children pointed out that many children do not find some of the people provided for them to contact for problems very approachable, and sometimes they do not know how to contact them when they want to. It was positive that some schools have an “**independent listener**”.

44. It was essential to **ask children themselves who they would approach for help with problems** – and to know that different children will of course find different people approachable. **Choice of who to talk to** is important. Some would usually try to keep problems to themselves, though may be able to talk to another young person. It was important to accept that **young people will select not only who they talk to, but what they are prepared to talk about**. You were only likely to talk freely to **someone you already knew and trusted**.
45. Many felt that there should be more **trained counsellors**, but warned that children should choose for themselves whether to approach a counsellor – “someone else sending you to the counsellor makes you feel like a freak.”
46. A good **tutor system at school** was important. Tutors needed however to be approachable, have time, make effort to find out about you and your problems and views, and to follow things up when you raised them, rather than giving “monosyllabic comments”. It was important that tutors were chosen as the right people for the task of helping with problems – not “just random teachers” given the tutoring job. Not all teachers are good at being helping tutors too.
47. One of the key concerns of many was that anyone provided at school or anywhere else to help children with problems must **keep information confidential**, and not chat about children’s personal problems or fail to take them seriously. (We did discuss whether there were times when it was right to pass on information, as this is covered in the Green Paper. The children’s views on this are given below).
48. Many of the children did not think they would be likely to contact children’s **helplines** as their first contact point for worries or problems, but might do so if desperate. As one put it, summarising what others said, “who’s going to call up a stranger and tell them about their personal life, unless its really serious and they’ve no-one to talk to.” You needed someone near to where you were, who you already knew and trusted, to talk to about problems, and having to phone a helpline meant that those looking after you had not provided this for you.
49. Similarly, although if desperate some might call in to a children’s advice centre in the community, most also thought this second best to **having someone you already knew with the time and task of hearing and helping with your problems**. One was concerned that many help and advice centres for young people “seem to be down a back alley somewhere” and are not in fact so easy to drop in to.
50. Some of the children thought the **best help would be by someone young, nearer your own age**, who would understand your problems and your point of view. Counsellors should ideally be younger rather than older – more likely to understand, and less likely to be shocked or embarrassed. **Help from friends** was extremely important, and sometimes you just needed time and somewhere private to be able to discuss something with a friend without interruption.

Any other important issues the government should have included

51. Most groups were content with the list of five major important issues, which seemed to cover a lot of things between them. One group thought that the list didn't say enough about some of the most important things in life generally – **love, support, the family, friendship, and children earning trust.**

Children's Identity Numbers

52. We asked the workshops what they thought of the government's idea that each child and young person could be given their own ID number, so people who need to help them could get information about them easily.
53. Many children were surprised at this proposal – they said that **you already have numbers anyway** – on your medical records, school records, social security, social services records, and many other places – so having the same number for all these didn't seem a very great step. Few were worried that police could look your details up more easily – they thought the police were already very able to look up details about you if they needed to.
54. The main worry however was that if the whole point was to make it easier for people who needed information about you to get it easily and quickly, then that also made it **more likely that someone who had no right to information about you could get it too**, by finding out your number and how to hack into the information on you. One summarised the need for sufficient security - **"quickly needs safely too."** A particular worry was if the number made it easier for people to find out your address as well. A number of groups used the same words to describe their worry – **"access by weirdos"**.
55. Some were also concerned that any system linking information to numbers would have **errors** in it, and you could end up with incorrect information always being linked to you.
56. For many, it was more important to be told exactly **what use would be made of your number**, and by whom, rather than just thinking about having a number as such. Whether the idea was all right depended on what use would be made of the information with your number on it.
57. Children raised the question of whether or not the number might become linked one day to an **identity card**. ID cards might be used as proof of age, which clearly had both advantages and disadvantages, but on balance would be more useful than not. A main worry however of any ID card that bore your information number was what might happen if you lost your ID card, which many would do. It might mean your personal information being not very confidential at all.
58. Most objected very strongly to any idea of being reduced to a number. **"Just being given a number kind of strips your identity."** Most groups asked if the system could **use your name rather than a number** – perhaps with numbers you could choose for yourself to add to your name to separate you from others with the same name. That way you would not lose your identity. It was important to have some choice about this – some said they would be happy with a number if they could choose it for themselves.

59. There was a view that adults could have a single number each, as well – which raised the question that if the number was at the moment being considered for children only, **was there an age at which you lost your number again?**
60. One group wondered whether the ID number idea would be helpful very soon, as it sounded as if it would need very complicated computer systems that might take a very long time before they worked properly.

Ideas on how to stop people harming children

61. An announcement had been made shortly before we held our Green Paper children's workshops, that many internet chatrooms were being closed down to prevent their use by dangerous adults to contact children. The majority of the children fully welcomed this, and were very aware of the risks of adults in chatrooms. Many commented that it was important for **internet messaging systems to be kept, and risky chatrooms closed**, so that children could more safely keep messaging those whose addresses they knew already, free from unknown adults. This move was important as there was a special risk to younger children from strange adults on the internet, as they may be less able to spot "weirdos" and be less able to block particular contacts. **Parental awareness of internet safety measures** needed to be greater for the protection of their own children.
62. Generally, most thought that safety for children from all sorts of risks required **increased security** measures around places young people go to, with **increased and more visible police who would actually do something** around places like clubs. Increased use of **streetlights** in dark (including country) areas, and more use of CCTV would help, in places like shopping centres and trains. However, this was not enough on its own – as one put it, "children get abducted in fields, not where a CCTV camera is watching."
63. It was important that **social services always listen**, and that **people in schools keep alert for signs of injury**.
64. The majority of the children consulted were clear that strong punishment for people who abuse children was absolutely essential in protecting children from harm. The **penalties for abusing children should be very heavy** – "people caught should be prosecuted hard" - "lock them up" (though not every group felt that jail was the answer). One group said you should always "name and shame" child abusers. Some felt that children should be free to defend themselves against possible abusers, with weapons if necessary.
65. Other ideas for helping to protect children included more **telephone** helplines, having **safe places to go in each community for children to raise worries**, rather than using the telephone, **helping younger children talk about worries to teachers**, and more **visiting houses of very young children** to check on them. There was concern amongst some that people visiting families needed to be more aware than they are about the risks to children – although you can visit the families of young children, it is still too easy to cover up abuse so that the visitors do not find out.

66. Practical things to help included wearing **alarm watches**, and **taking a dog with you** when you were out alone. Children should also help defend each other against dangerous adults.
67. One in care group commented that some children were harmed physically by the way they were restrained. There needed to be **less harmful restraint** when you did need to be restrained. One group said that **smacking** should still be for parents to decide, but this wasn't really the issue - parents needed to learn more about how to **parent responsibly**, although this wasn't always something that could be taught.
68. Some groups thought that people are too worried about frightening children about dangerous people being around. We need to be more open about risks, and **children needed to be made very much more aware of exactly what might happen** to them. One said "if you scare children, you make them more aware." It was the government's responsibility to increase the awareness of children generally about risks of abuse.

Activities for Children

69. We asked children's views about what sorts of activities and things to do for young people should be developed from the money the government proposes for this, particularly to help keep young people out of trouble with the law.
70. The children generally agreed that **lots to do keeps you out of trouble with the law**. This has been said in many other of our consultations with children. Boredom led to getting into trouble, and also into problems like bullying. What was needed was a mixture of **somewhere to meet with your friends** – like a young persons' shelter, or more youth clubs – and **activities to go to**. It was important that **activities and transport to them should not be too costly** – the children were clear that not all children have much money to spend on themselves, that some activities are very expensive, as is transport in some areas, and that as with anything, if you really wanted people to attend something then one way to encourage them was to make it more affordable.
71. One clear proposal was that you should **survey what the local young people want first** – this would be different in different communities, and some of the money should be spent on finding out to get it right. It would also help to avoid "putting loads of money where children are already happy". Another idea would be to have **local committees of young people to help decide how the money is spent**. One group thought that the law should say that **young people should be consulted on how money was spent on activities meant for young people**.
72. One warning was that you should not assume that just providing lots of activities would make people automatically happy. However, as one group put it, if you were serious about helping people to enjoy life, then that meant in practice **"trying to help everyone to find something they enjoy"**.
73. Common proposals included more **youth clubs** and **leisure centres**, and more **swimming pools**. It was important that young people had somewhere to go outside school – as one said, "after school, you might either go to youth clubs, or get involved in drugs". Facilities could include bowling, and one in care group

suggested **more unusual sports** for all, like clay pigeon shooting. Fun places to go to like **theme parks** were generally popular – but others would be interested in going to other sorts of places like **theatres**.

74. It was important again, as in so many things, to provide for **individuals and not just the average person**. You needed to provide sports facilities for those who wanted them, skate parks for those who wanted those, but also to provide **activities for people who did not like sports** – and not just the usual alternative of computers. Ideas included **debating, drama and libraries**. Also on computers, it would be helpful to have **more non-violent games** to play on them.
75. Some stressed the need to keep facilities that already existed in a good state – for example, **doing parks up**, and removing glass from play areas. You probably needed more park wardens to keep them in a good condition after that.
76. Another proposal was that there should be more **teaching real skills for life** that young people could attend and would find useful – like how to cook. One group thought many would be interested by intensive training opportunities, in sports or as in army training. A number of groups favoured more **challenging activities** like outward bound, diving, climbing and canoeing, which were both enjoyable and were a good and exciting learning experience. One suggested giving every school a climbing wall.
77. One group questioned whether all the money should be spent on activities – they thought that some should be spent on better **drugs and alcohol counselling** to persuade children to stop, or not to start, dangerous activities too.
78. Boarding school pupils in particular were concerned that there should be full days of free time, but that there should be more activities to choose from at weekends if you did not go home from school, and facilities to follow your own hobbies outside school.
79. Some of the children from care settings were worried that they knew people did not like giving money to children in care, and preferred giving it to other groups like disabled people. They felt that it was important that this government money did do **something specially for activities for children in care**.
80. A completely different idea, raised entirely by a number of groups themselves, was that **it should be made easier for children and young people to get paid part time jobs**. Many felt that the law is wrong to stop older children from doing small jobs they could do and would enjoy, where they would be doing something useful to others, where they could get money to afford more activities, and which would be useful experience for later work. Being able to do some paid work at a younger age should be added to ideas about providing activities to keep young people out of trouble. In discussing why the law stops younger children from being employed to protect them from being exploited, most felt that the world was different now, and the law could now safely be relaxed and both children themselves and their parents, staff or carers trusted more to decide whether a particular job was safe and reasonable for a child to do. There could still be safety rules and rules to make sure that children were not made to work compulsorily, but not such strict age rules.

81. Some thought that activities for children should include challenges so that children would not soon become bored with them – “something to keep the mind in gear”.

Other ideas for keeping children and young people out of trouble with the law

82. We asked if the groups had ideas, other than about activities, that might help keep children and young people out of trouble with the law. Most made it clear that they did think activities and keeping you busy and not bored was the best way to keep children out of trouble with the law – “keeping you busy reduces temptation.” Some thought that it was important that **the law should make sense** – some changes in the law might make it fairer. The example of fare dodging was quoted, where at the same age you could find yourself legally paying half or full fare on different types of transport, or child or adult entrance fees to local facilities, you could get caught out not realising that full fare ages were different, and the illogicality and unfairness of different age rules encouraged people to try to get around unreasonable rules.
83. Another important message was that **the law needs to be better known** – many thought what was and was not legal (eg what age you could legally do different things at) was not very well known, by children or adults, and generally people were less likely to break laws they knew well than ones they were uncertain about. Laws would be better kept if they were both well known and seen to be fair.
84. One pair of children who stayed behind from one group to discuss some issues in more detail understood that there was a definite age at which you were expected to know whether what you were doing was right or wrong. They were concerned that this assumed you suddenly understood this all at once, but that no-one suddenly changes like that. You needed to accept that **children understood more or less at different ages**, not all at once at the same age.
85. One group added that it might help keep children out of trouble with the law if there were **more psychiatrists** to help children who had real problems.
86. Another group thought that keeping out of trouble with the law should be a more central part of Personal, Social and Health Education lessons at school.
87. One of our groups were concerned about the relationships between the police and young people. Usually, the only time most young people met the police was when they got into trouble. It would be helpful to have **more opportunities to meet the police before you got into trouble**, to help young people learn to trust the police. There should be more visiting of schools and young people’s groups by police on an informal basis.

Extended schools

88. We asked what the children thought of the government’s idea of establishing more schools offering different sorts of help – such as breakfast clubs, after school clubs, and professional help with health and other personal problems.

89. Those already attending boarding schools or residential colleges pointed out that their schools already provide a range of extra services like this, so saw this as extending a very familiar idea to more day schools.
90. One group was concerned that what schools provided should be fair – one school should not be able to have more than all the others for its pupils alone.
91. There was a real concern for some that if the people you had to visit about personal problems were based in your school, **other children could easily know that you needed to be seen for personal help**, and could bully you about it. This was especially likely if you were taken out of lessons to go to see someone for a problem. One group was concerned that providing healthcare and help with problems all at school “could stigmatise some groups of young people”.

Helping parents to help their children

92. The children agreed with the government’s intention to do more to help parents to support their own children. They however warned that there is no one sort of parent, and that children need different sorts of support, so **different parents and children needed different sorts of help** from outside the family. Two quotations illustrating this, typical of others, were “everyone looks for something different in their parents” and “there’s no such thing as a perfect parent.” You could not provide a standard course on how to be a parent.
93. Parents might need help simply to **talk to their children more**. Parents and children communicating was vital. “Parents need to know what’s in a child’s head, the child what’s going on in an adult’s head, to help create an environment good for both.” Parents needed to understand what the differences between adults and children really meant – as one said “kids are more active than adults – that’s why they go wild.”
94. Having said that, most thought that there could be more courses for parents in particular things that some parents might find helpful. One common idea was to give parents **courses in what goes on in schools nowadays**, because many parents try to help their children as if schools and school work are the same now as they were in their own schooldays. Some told us that their parents often referred to “O levels”, and some parents from abroad tried to press their children to do what would have worked in the educational system of their original country rather than this one.
95. It was important that any training or advice for parents was for **both Mum and Dad**, not just one parent all the time.
96. While there seemed to be a lot of talks and courses on marriage, or childbirth, there seemed to be less about **bringing up older children**, and more information and courses would be helpful on this.
97. Training in being a parent needed to **teach parents to balance things** – like balancing being over-protective with not protecting your children enough.
98. Some thought that parents sometimes tried to help or press their children in ways that did not really help. Older children for example wanted their parents to be

less involved in their school work than most parents wanted to be – and had noticed that teachers often said different things about their school work to their parents than they said to the children themselves, which never helped.

99. Practical help for parents with particular needs was needed; for **single parents** and for **parents who both work**. **More day care** was needed for under-school-age children. Some parents simply needed **more money**.

The best ways of finding out children's views

100. The Green Paper is clear that it is important to find out what children think, and to take their views into account in making decisions. We asked each group what they thought were the best ways of doing this. All agreed that it is important that children are asked more, and that their views are not ignored. Many felt that their opinions as children were often put aside.

101. Most thought that the way we were doing this consultation worked well for them – that is **discussing things in a group**. It was important to be informal rather than formal, and it was helpful to mix children from different places (such as different schools) so that a wider range of points of view would be raised. The idea of a mixed age group (within a reasonable range) was liked. You needed however to be careful that you could get wrong answers from some groups, and not everyone feels comfortable speaking up in a group.

102. Some thought it would be helpful to use a **survey questionnaire**, giving everyone a chance to say something if they wanted to. Many suggested using **computers** – such as a website you could enter your views on in answer to important questions – and pointed out that school computers could perhaps be available for this. One advantage of a survey, either on paper or on a computer, was that everyone's view could get counted – which was better than many **school councils**, which didn't represent everyone's views and were often not very effective. It was important to have proper **consultation meetings in schools** – just expecting children to be able to tell their teacher or social worker their views was not enough. These were often not the right people to ask or represent their views.

103. One group felt strongly that reporting things up a representative system, where like a school council one pupil represented many others, were not the right way to consult children – “**issues just get lost**” Better was the **person in charge of something listening directly to each group of children** involved. Another group thought it wasn't enough to listen to “just one kid from an area” – you needed to give lots a say.

104. Many said how important it is that you got **feedback from what you had said – and what was being done with your views**. It was not enough just to be asked and then go. This is why this report is being sent to the children who gave us the ideas for it in the workshops. It is important that if the government asks children for their views, it tells them what it is going to do about what was raised, or explains why it cannot do things. One said “don't just listen, write it down, then do nothing.” What happened about your views was as important as being asked your views in the first place.

105. It was important that anyone asking and listening to children took their **age into account** – and “the child’s ability to understand is also important.”
106. One group felt angered that children are often not listened to in their own right as children, are treated as less important than adults, and are not being listened to because they are not yet adults. One child summed this up powerfully – “they think we’re there to become adults – you’re only a child because you can’t be born as an adult.”

When is it all right for professionals to tell each other about you?

107. One of the tricky issues in the Green Paper is that although it is important to have maximum **confidentiality about personal information on children**, there may be times when professionals like teachers, doctors, social workers or the police need to tell each other information about a child in order to protect that child, or someone else, from serious harm. We asked the children for their advice on this.
108. Most of the children thought that **permission should always be asked where possible, but that there could be times when information about you may have to be passed on** by one professional person to another, even without you having to give your permission first. Examples of when this might be right were if you were very ill and unable to decide about it for yourself, or if there was a very serious problem that put you at serious risk, or generally a life and death situation. Generally, **information sharing should depend on seriousness**. One group thought that if you had broken the law genuinely and knowingly, then that was your fault and you could expect information about that to be passed on.
109. Many thought that if information was going to have to be passed on about you for a very serious reason, then if possible you should always be **told and consulted** about it, even if in the end the professionals had to decide.
110. If you went to see a counsellor or other professional where you were bound to discuss very personal and confidential things, there should be a **consent form** you and your counsellor signed saying what they could, and what they could not, share with others. The **circumstances for sharing information should be agreed before you started giving the information**.
111. Some thought the same principle should apply even in life and death situations – **children who were old enough could be asked to sign a consent form** to information being shared if they later had an accident or were in a coma.
112. There was a concern about sharing certain sorts of records – some did not think that schools should be able to have medical information about you, for example. Others were concerned that **knowledge of any criminal record could prejudice people against you**. This wasn’t just that you would prefer to keep a criminal record to yourself – in serious situations, there was the worry that it might make a difference to important decisions being made about you. One said that if you needed a transplant in order to survive, criminal information about you shared with medical staff might lead them to decide to give it to someone they thought was a more deserving person than you. The group said that this would

be against basic rights – but there was still the worry that **information might influence people in ways that went against your rightful interests.**

The most important things every adult working with children should be taught

113. The Green Paper says how important it is that every adult – whatever their profession or service – who works with children in any way, should have proper training in how to work with children. We asked our consultation groups what they thought were the most important things that these adults should all be taught.
114. One very strong theme was that adults working with children should ask children and listen to what they said – **“listen to children like they matter and so you believe it”**. This needed patience. One strongly spoke for many in saying “children aren’t idiots – they have viewpoints”. Some stressed that adults working with children should **not patronise children**. Those working with children should be taught to **see through a child’s eyes** and talk their language. The idea needed to be put across that **children can often be right about things**, and that adults “are not always right simply because they are adults.”
115. Another common theme was that those working with children should treat children as individuals, not as just children who were all the same. Adults working with children should be taught **“that every child is different”**. It was also very important that people working with children understood children of different ages, and could **“treat them like their age.”** Treating older children as if they were younger was unhelpful and patronising.
116. Staff looking after children should be trained to get to know the personality of each child, and then **respond to different things for different children in the different ways they need**. They need to know how to judge when to shout, when to encourage, and what works for who. It was also vital to be creative, find out what each child is good at, and find out how to help them with that to fulfil their potential.
117. It was also important to know what children could and could not decide for themselves, and **not to decide things for children** that they could reasonably decide for themselves.
118. Adults needed to be taught that **hitting is not allowed** – “adults shouldn’t be allowed to hit kids, and kids not allowed to hit adults.” Hitting children may turn them into bullies.
119. Those working with children also need to understand how small they can sometimes make a child feel – “its like they’re a big rhino and the child’s a tiny mouse”. Also, in terms of strength, it is very easy for an adult to harm a very small child.
120. It was also important that adults working with children were taught how to be nice to children and to understand them. There were some important parts to this general understanding though – it was important for the safety of everyone that the adults were taught to **“understand where crossing the line is”** in things like whether you were allowed to touch a child.

121. Some specific ideas on what should be taught were **basic child psychology**, how to cope in particular situations like **how to cope with a child crying or breaking down**, basic **care responsibilities**, and **first aid**. Where adults were likely to physically restrain children, it was essential that they were taught how to **restrain properly**. Adults working with children also needed to learn how **not to lose their temper**. It was important that they also understood that **they might find some children abusive**, and needed to know how to cope with this.
122. There was also concern that those chosen to work with children should be chosen for **how they deal with children, not just their qualifications**. The comment was made that it helped if staff had children of their own – it helped them to understand children’s minds. It was also important that staff looking after, or teaching, children should **not be overloaded** with work so they could not cope properly.

How to find more foster carers

123. We asked groups from care settings for their ideas on how more foster carers could be recruited. Some saw it as basically to do with **money** – foster carers did not get paid enough for the difficult job they did. “Carers should get more money, like footballers.” Other ideas were much more **advertising about fostering**, on all the time, and putting pictures of foster children and children wanting foster homes on the TV.
124. One group thought that more foster carers would stay fostering if they were **told more about the children they are going to foster**. It was essential that foster carers knew what they were going to be taking on before they took a placement – and that they didn’t either see foster children as all evil, or think it was going to be easier than it ever was. More **training for foster carers** would help, to give them more ideas and share ideas.

The idea of a Children’s Commissioner

125. Groups were asked what they thought of the idea of a Children’s Commissioner to speak for all children in England, and what exactly they would like such a Commissioner to do for them.
126. A number of children questioned the idea of just one adult to speak for so many children. Some questioned why a children’s spokesperson had to be an adult, and thought a way could be found to **let children be chosen as spokespersons for other children**. Some rejected the whole idea of an adult to speak for children, and thought **children should speak for themselves, with adults looking after them being expected to listen**. One said pointedly “you speak up for yourself – why shouldn’t we?”
127. Others thought it was a good idea to have adults specifically to speak for children, but were not sure that one could do this for all children – some thought there should be **two Commissioners – one male, one female**, while others suggested that as the views of children are very different at different ages, there should be **different Commissioners for different age groups**.

128. The sort of person who could be a Commissioner was someone who **speaks to lots of children**, and **has had children of their own**. They would be someone who would do their best to **say what the children think**, and would **quote the children's views not their own**. They must not twist what children said. Beyond this, a Commissioner would need to know what it feels like being a child, not just quote things. One group thought the Commissioner should be a young person to do this, not "any old geezer".
129. A Commissioner should **keep talking to children**, and not just quote the latest child or one group they had met some time ago. They should be aware that children's views change too - as one child put it "that child might have said they like beans, but now they like peas instead." Any Commissioner needed to be very careful to speak from a "popular vote" of what children thought, and not to say "I think children like ..." without asking them first, and keeping asking them to check. A Commissioner must speak to lots of different children, **not just listen to a group of specially chosen children**. The Commissioner would need some way of making sure that he or she spoke to representative children, and might need a system of picking one child at random from every school to ask for views. There would need to be a representative system of some sort – "the Commissioner should be part of a rerepresentative structure for hearing young people's views." He or she could also make sure that children knew about groups and organisations that existed already to represent their views.
130. Many children themselves raised the question of how close the Commissioner should be to the government. Some groups were clear that a Commissioner must **not be appointed by the government, but by children themselves**. He or she would have to **speak to the government**, but should **not work for the government**. They would however need to be close enough to the government not to be "blanked". One group summarised their idea of a Commissioner as "the person between children and the government, who tells the children what's the government up to, and the government what the children want."
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A final point to report is that one of the six workshops were very concerned that they should have a clear response back from the government to children who had given their views. They were promised a copy of this report, but asked me to pass on to the government their request that there should also be a **government response to children's views** they had received about the Green Paper, that could be sent to the children themselves. I therefore pass this request on.

Roger Morgan
Children's Rights Director