

# COMPASS/CATCH UP LITERACY INTERVENTION PILOT FOR LAC

Andy Fraser  
Glenda Barratt  
Janet Beverley  
Julie Lawes

October 2005 – October 2006  
(also including 'Compass Summary, Spring 2008')

# **Contents**

1. Contents
2. Introduction
3. Why Literacy Is Important
4. Compass/Catch Up: The Organisations
5. Catch Up Literacy Intervention
6. Pilot Study Details
9. Results
11. Conclusion
12. Observations
14. Appendix 1 Carer Calendar
15. Appendix 2 Catch Up Summary Sheet
16. Appendix 3 Carer Comments
18. Appendix 4 Student Responses
19. Bibliography

## **Introduction**

The initial question, on which this pilot study was based, was:

“Would it be possible for foster carers delivering Catch Up to Looked After Children (LAC) in the home environment be able to replicate the success that teaching assistants have experienced in school when working with secondary students?”

The year-long study was based around an initial cohort of ten looked after children and young people, living with foster carers, throughout the Midlands. All the LAC were attending local mainstream schools and all appeared to present significant difficulties with literacy.

Given that Catch Up expects 85% of children receiving the Catch Up intervention to make significant gains and that 15% of students will not make the same gains because of specific difficulties, for example, social, behavioural, and emotional issues, the sample group selected were clearly from the group least likely to make substantial progress.

## **Why Literacy Is Important**

The report '*Close the Gap for Children in Care*' (NCH report 2006) states that in England over one million children have difficulties with learning to read.

Despite the adoption by primary schools of the National Literacy Strategy and the introduction to secondary schools of various DfES initiatives, many secondary schools continue to have difficulties with identifying struggling readers and finding useful and successful interventions to support these young people.

Within secondary schools, the educational achievement of Looked After Children (LAC) still remains very low. The Green Paper '*Care Matters*' (Oct 06) informs us that over 60,000 young people are currently in care and that the number of these children has risen by over 10,000 in the last decade. Of these young people, 63% are in care because of abuse and neglect.

According to the NCH report, in 2004 only 6 per cent of Looked After Children gained five or more GCSEs, compared with over half of all other pupils.

Although the achievement of LAC has improved over recent years, it has not improved at the same rate of other children. In 2005, only 11% of LAC attained 5 good GCSE qualifications compared to 56% of other children.

In the Green Paper, the authors comment that it is not just learning or behavioural problems that are preventing children in care from achieving but a wide ranging systems failure - from unstable placements to insufficient training for teachers and carers.

In the last 20 years there has been an unprecedented focus on literacy with many initiatives from government agencies. Despite this, it can be difficult to find a universally accepted definition of what literacy is; a useful one is found within the publication '*The National Literacy Strategy*' (1998) where it is defined as the 'unification of the important skills of reading and writing'.

There can be no doubt that reading is an essential skill needed for all areas of the curriculum. If children and young people are unable to understand the written word, they are prevented from participating fully in classroom work. Struggling readers are likely to fall behind in their work. Not only do they often fail to make normal chronological progress; they often make no progress or go backwards. It is not unusual for this to lead to frustration, low self-esteem and associated behavioural problems, all features that carers of LAC will recognise.

## **Compass/Catch Up: The Organisations**

### **Compass**

Compass Children's Services is an independent fostering agency working throughout the Midlands, with the head office based in Loughborough, Leicestershire. It employs social workers, support workers, educationalists and carers and currently cares for 96 young people. Compass works in partnership with Local Authorities to provide fostering services for vulnerable children and young people from a range of backgrounds and ethnic origins. Additionally, Compass provides planning, support and training for carers in order to develop their personal and professional skills. Their role is to work in partnerships with Local Authorities to ensure that the agreed plans for LAC are implemented successfully.

### **Catch Up**

Based in Thetford, Catch Up is a not-for-profit charity that aims to help as many children with reading difficulties as possible. Catch Up developed and now co-ordinates the literacy programme for struggling readers. This programme, which is founded upon rigorous academic research, is currently used in more than 4000 schools across the UK.

Originally designed for delivery by teachers, in 2002 the Catch Up Programme, its training and resources, were further developed to enable effective delivery of the intervention by teaching assistants.

A Catch Up Secondary School Programme was launched in 2006. This is designed specifically for struggling readers in Years 7 and 8. It has already been shown to help students achieve a Reading Age gain of 22 months\* and a Comprehension Age gain of 28 months\* over an average intervention of just 10 months.  
(\* using standardised tests).

## **Catch Up Literacy Intervention**

The Catch Up literacy intervention is a structured one-to-one programme that teaches children how to read. Designed to respond to the needs of each individual struggling reader, the Programme is rigorously grounded in research and proven in schools across the UK. It is also straightforward to deliver and very successful.

Catch Up begins with easily administered diagnostic assessments. These assessments are used to establish individual strengths and weaknesses, to set literacy targets and to identify the most appropriate Catch Up book level (books that the individual pupil/student can mostly read without problem).

For secondary school students on the Catch Up Programme, there are two individual one-to-one 15 minute sessions per week. In a session, the child reads a book of the appropriate Catch Up level and carries out a linked writing exercise (most often based on words or sentences that the child found difficult to read during the session). Continuous monitoring and assessment ensures that the children make steady progress.

The Catch Up Primary School Programme (available in English and Welsh language) is currently used in more than 4000 schools across the UK and has been successfully implemented across clusters of schools by more than 50 Local Education Authorities. Many children from areas of social deprivation have especially benefited.

## **Initial liaison between Compass/Catch Up**

In the summer of 2005, Catch Up was approached by Compass Children's Services. The Head of Compass Educational Services attended an educational exhibition at which Catch Up was presenting. From that point and after subsequent meetings, the association between the two organisations developed further.

Compass was seeking to improve their educational provision in line with the 2004 Children's Act, 'Every Child Matters' and felt that Catch Up could help achieve this. After a number of exploratory meetings, it was jointly decided to undertake a pilot study.

This jointly funded pilot was to explore the possibility of replicating the success of teaching assistants in delivering Catch Up in schools, with foster carers delivering in their own homes.

The crucial differences would be that the literacy intervention would be delivered by foster carers and that it would be delivered out of school time in the home environment. This fitted in with the model of development that Catch Up had used in extending delivery of the intervention from teachers through to teaching assistants.

It was now to be extended to a new cohort of deliverers, namely foster carers.

## **Pilot Study Details**

Initially, Compass selected ten students based on reported National Curriculum levels.

- 5 boys
- 5 girls
- Age range 11.6 – 14 years
- Reading age range 8.09 years – 11.09 years

Geographic location throughout the Midlands:

- 2 Birmingham
- 3 Leicestershire
- 2 Northampton
- 1 Coventry
- 2 Staffordshire

Compass Children's Services held a presentation to all their carers and supervising social workers to explain the Catch Up Programme and the planned pilot study. Subsequent to this meeting, an individual letter was sent to the carers of the selected cohort explaining the purpose of the proposed pilot study in more detail and inviting them to become involved. Additionally, all the schools that the young people attended were visited by the Catch Up Coordinator and the appropriate year heads or SENCOs were informed of the pilot.

In order to verify the data collected throughout the pilot, standardised assessments were used: NFER Group Reading Sentence Completion and Context Comprehension. If the school had obtained a recent assessment, this information was utilised; if not available, those assessments were administered by the Catch Up Coordinator before the diagnostic Catch Up testing was done.

### **Key Personnel**

Catch Up Approved Trainer/Coordinator  
*To manage the pilot*

Andy Fraser

Compass Education Service Manager  
*To oversee the pilot*

Glenda Barratt

Catch Up National Director  
*To authorise and monitor the pilot*

Julie Lawes

Catch Up Deputy Director  
*To liaise and advise during the pilot*

Janet Beverley

The pilot study was programmed to last for one calendar year from October 2005 to October 2006 and was to be continued over the period of the school summer holidays.

## Training

The training was delivered over three half days in September 2005 in Birmingham, a central location for Compass. The training was essentially delivered as prescribed in the Catch Up Secondary School Programme training folder and was included in the carers' internal professional development programme.

The training was followed up by individual home visits to ensure that all carers had an adequate understanding of the underlying principles and processes. Where necessary, additional training was given to specific individuals in their own homes. This sometimes involved a practical demonstration of a Catch Up session with a pupil.

After the initial Catch Up training of the foster carers, other members of Compass staff were trained. This was due to very specific circumstances. One pupil with a significant attachment disorder demanded extra Catch Up time with her carer; with a consequent negative effect on the placement. Training a new deliverer meant that the Programme could continue. Additionally, other carers asked to become involved with the Programme, even though the young people in their care were not included in the original pilot study. These results are included in the chapter detailing the pilot study results.

## Resources

All Catch Up course delegates were given an individual folder containing course notes, photocopiable masters, instructions and all of the necessary work sheets for the duration of the course. The pupils were given a Catch Up working folder with their name and details printed on the front cover, together with sufficient work sheets for the duration of the pilot. For close monitoring of this particular pilot study, a calendar record sheet was designed and attached to the folder. This was to enable the carers to note the frequency and dates of the delivery of the individual sessions: Appendix 1. Furthermore, a summary sheet was designed as an aide memoir. This was a laminated single sheet of A4 card detailing key aspects of delivering the Catch Up Programme: Appendix 2.

Compass had initially allocated £150.00 to spend on books. These were purchased through Sheels Bookshop of Enfield, a company that had developed a professional working relationship with Catch Up. With the disparate geographical cohort it soon became obvious that the books purchased would not be sufficient. Consultation with Catch Up resulted in an extra supply of appropriate books. Fortuitously, at this stage, there was a further donation of several hundred Scholastic books. After sorting and grading by the Catch Up Coordinator, the total number of books in the pilot study was then 175. All the books were recorded on an Excel spreadsheet, which was distributed to the Catch Up carers.

The books were selected for the individual pupils following the normal Catch Up procedure, as described in the Catch Up Secondary School Programme training folder. The initial distribution of the books took place during a routine training visit to the carers. Subsequent book exchanges were planned and distributed by Compass staff visiting the participating homes, or delivered by post.



## Management

Throughout the period of the pilot study, the role of the managing agent in the normal school setting was taken by the Catch Up Coordinator. This role involved regular telephone contact, home visits, exchanges of books and additional training and support where necessary. All telephone calls and visits were recorded on Foster Track; the database used by Compass. This system of communication and liaison ensured that the other professionals working with the pilot group had access to any progress or specific difficulties, e.g. a placement move between two Compass carers who were Catch Up trained, enabled continuation of the Programme for the young person.

## Results

In March 2006, after guidance from the Catch Up Approved Trainer, mid-point assessments were administered by the carers using the NFER Sentence Completion and Comprehension tests. Initial data collection indicated positive progress.

The final assessments and questionnaires were administered by the Catch Up Coordinator.

At the end of the pilot study, a celebratory lunch with an open discussion was held in the Compass head office. The purpose of this was twofold: to thank the carers and celebrate their success and to obtain their verbal evaluations in a structured discussion.

All comments were recorded: Appendix 3.

### NFER standardised test results

(Tests C/D measure Reading Age, Tests X/Y measure Comprehension Age)

Child	Start	Mid Point	Final	Gain
A	C=9.04	D=10.02	N/A	N/A
	X=9.06	Y=9.11	N/A	N/A
B	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
C	C=6.08	D=8.10	C=10.00	3.04
	X=9.00	Y=9.00	X=10.08	1.08
D	C=9.10	D=11.6	C=11.00	1.02
	X=10.03	Y=12.09	X=12.09	2.06
E	C = 10.0	N/A	N/A	N/A
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
F	C=8.09	D=10.11	C=12.09	4.00
	X= Not known	Y=11.03	X= 13.02	2.11
G	C=9.10	D=13.11	C=10.08	0.09
	X=9.09	Y=11.03	X=11.05	1.08
H	C=9.11	D=10.11	C=11.00	1.1
	X10.02	Y=11.00	X=10.08	0.6
I	Estimated 8.00	N/A	N/A	N/A
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
J	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

### Comments relating to results table

Child A. Sessions delivered, then subsequently child refused to participate.

Child B. Never began pilot, carer elected not to participate.

Child C. Delivery ran throughout pilot study.

Child D. Study concluded after 9 months, child moved placement.

Child E. Placement ended after 4 weeks of pilot study.

Child F. Study concluded after 9 months, child moved placement.

Child G. Delivery ran throughout pilot study.

Child H. Delivery ran throughout pilot study.

Child I. Carer declined to participate in pilot. Estimated reading age taken from school predictions of National Curriculum level 2A. School had no hard data.

Child J. Initial academic levels inaccurate, child unsuitable for pilot study.

### Additional work with students not included in main pilot study cohort.

Data based on Revised Salford Reading Test.

	Pre intervention RA	Post intervention RA	Period of intervention
Child K	7.3 years	7.6 years	(July – October)
Child L	7.9 years	9.4 years	(Jan – October)
Child M	8.00 years	8.9 years	(June – October)
Child K	Work didn't always include a linked writing activity.		

## **Conclusion**

This pilot study clearly demonstrated that Catch Up can make a difference for Looked After Children and that it can be delivered effectively by foster carers in the home environment. However, delivering Catch Up to LAC proved to be complex.

The emotional, social, behavioural and educational difficulties demonstrated by these vulnerable young people are manifold. Examples in the pilot included: problems in school and at home, exclusion, stealing, bullying, possession of drugs, possession of a knife, a placement move, a school move, in addition to their inherent extreme emotional problems resulting from previous trauma, abuse and negative attitudes towards education.

In the school setting, there is a routine and structure to the day. Within this structure, Catch Up can be timetabled. This discipline is not present in the home environment; consequently, sessions may be missed or interrupted. Research has shown that Catch Up works in schools; further analysis indicates that it works most effectively when supported by effective management. This element of management is crucial within the home as well. It is no coincidence that the results show a direct correlation between committed and organised carers and high levels of success.

The successful delivery of Catch Up by foster carers, in the home setting, has to be supported by a strong commitment from the whole organisation.

It is fortunate that the two organisations in this pilot study have been completely committed and have demonstrated their determination for success with both encouragement and financial support. With this level of commitment, the Compass/Catch Up pilot study has shown that Catch Up delivered in the home setting, with effective management and dedicated carers, can make a difference to the educational achievement and, therefore, the lives of looked after children and young people.

## **Observations**

- Accurate initial identification of participants is essential. Child J did not participate in the study, as it became apparent that the original data received was inaccurate and that the young person was operating at an academic level that was higher than appropriate for the pilot.
- It was found that in some situations where a child presented a specific difficulty, in the home setting, with the carer as the deliverer, it was possible to train another member of Compass staff to continue the work.
- Some carers found it difficult to be positive towards a Catch Up session when the young person had experienced problems at school, for example, when a child had been excluded from school for poor behaviour. This was not an uncommon occurrence and is reflected in the fact that LAC experience higher rates of exclusion than others.
- There seemed to be a higher level of achievement in the mid point assessments when carers administered them. This questioned the validity of the assessment.
- Significant barriers to the achievements of LAC are instability and placement moves. Three of the pupils on the pilot study moved placements within the duration of the pilot.
- One of the differences between the delivery of Catch Up in the home and the school setting, involved the background knowledge of the deliverers. Carers had little or no prior knowledge that enabled them to make appropriate selections of books. The Excel spreadsheet listing books, authors, publishers and Catch Up levels was unnecessary as it proved to be inaccessible to the majority of carers. Personal support was more effective.
- Carers have little or no prior knowledge of reading ages and National Curriculum Levels.
- Carers reported that delivering sessions in the home environment on a regular basis could be difficult. The home environment lacks the rigour and discipline of a school timetable that structures the delivery of the Catch Up sessions, therefore the pilot study group received fewer sessions than specified in the school programme.
- The simple aide memoir of the Catch Up delivery process proved to be invaluable to the majority of carers.
- It was probably an unreasonable expectation for the Programme to run through the school holidays. No carers managed to do this.

- If the carer did not engage with the Programme, delivery of the sessions did not take place. There is also no managing agent permanently in place in the home to drive the delivery of the sessions at a given time and place.
- Management of the pilot study was complicated by the geographical distribution of the carers. This was costly in both time and mileage. It made visiting several carers in one day extremely difficult.
- Some carers found it difficult, particularly at the beginning of the pilot, to understand how a young person could have a good sight vocabulary but poor comprehension.
- Students were sometimes resistant to engaging in Catch Up sessions as they felt as though they had already completed enough work throughout the school day.

# Appendix 1

## Carer Calendar

## Appendix 2

### Catch Up Summary Sheet



### **Appendix 3**

#### **Carers' Comments Recorded at the Celebration/Evaluation Meeting**

##### **Training**

Carers felt the venue was too small and needed desks.

DVD clips demonstrating work with young people in the training were felt to be extremely useful for carers.

Training spread over 3 x ½ days meant travelling was difficult for some carers with other fostering commitments.

Some educational concepts/terminology/vocabulary were difficult for some carers to understand.

Delegates felt the training should be delivered to all carers.

##### **Resources**

Catch Up books were considered to be good; regular library books previously used by carers were often not appropriate.

Individual student folders with work pages already enclosed were felt to be essential.

Having a calendar/timetable in folder helped monitor sessions.

Carers felt it was important to have the contact number of the Catch Up Approved Trainer in the folder.

A box file for each carer to keep all resources in would have been useful.

The database listing book details was not felt to be useful for carers.

Carers needed to handle the books in order to select.

The single sheet A4 laminated " Delivering Catch Up" was useful.

##### **Delivery**

2 sessions a week was sometimes difficult to maintain.

Sessions were sometimes sporadic.

There were difficulties in delivering through summer holidays.

It was not always possible to find a quiet area in the home environment.

Interruptions such as friends calling/telephone ringing/bad day at school/sibling rivalry impacted on the delivery of the sessions.

Other suitable venues for deliverers other than the carers were booths in shopping centres and cafes

All children enjoyed the rewards at the end of session.

The timing of 15 minutes was good.

Carers felt that the Catch Up technique could be carried over to other work with children and young people.

##### **Assessments**

Carers felt that it was beneficial to administer the diagnostic assessments themselves.

Children were very reluctant to complete assessments (particularly mid-point)

### Support

Training and ongoing support were adequate to deliver sessions.

Schools were not as involved as envisaged.

It would be useful to have details of other carers involved in the Programme to form a Compass/Catch Up network.

### Benefits

Improved reading and writing

Helped self esteem of carer and child.

Carers enjoyed delivering the sessions; they provided "quality time" together.

Children were 'amazed' at their own ability.

The sessions encouraged the use of library.

The Programme provided a tool; a constructive way to help and engage with difficult young people.

The Programme was user friendly

Carers were pleased that Compass had acknowledged a problem and had been active in addressing it.

The Programme was transferable once the carers had acquired the key skills.

### Actual Comments by carers.

"It's the best thing that Compass have done for me with training."

"The school have commented on the progress."

"When I did the training I was actually interested and listening."

"It gives the nuts and bolts to reading, I've always listened to children read but this takes away some of the scare factor."

"All Compass Carers should do it"

"My skills have increased."

"It's given me more confidence, I can help with other subjects like Maths now."

"I'm spending the same time working with X but getting better results."

"You personally get a great deal of satisfaction out of doing it."

"I have no doubt that it would make a difference to all carers but not all carers are as good as others, you need to be interested yourself to do it."

## **Appendix 4**

### **Student personal responses to questions.**

#### **1. Have you enjoyed doing Catch Up?**

All 5 students that completed the pilot said that they had enjoyed it.

#### **2. Has it helped you?**

All 5 students that completed the pilot said that it had helped them.

#### **3. How has it helped you?**

"It has helped me improve my reading and writing."

"I feel more confident in myself; I can now read aloud in class."

"I look forward to reading books now."

"I read a book on my own in the summer holidays."

#### **4. What have you enjoyed the most about doing Catch Up?**

"I've really enjoyed just taking part."

"I've enjoyed working with (the foster carer) on my own."

"I really liked getting the sweets if I got it right at the end."

"I liked the good books that you brought."

## **Bibliography**

HM Govt. October 2006. Care Matters. Crown Copyright

NCH. 2006. Close The Gap For Children In Care.

DfEE. 1998. The National Literacy Strategy. Crown Copyright

## **Compass Summary Spring '08**

### **Introduction**

Following the success of the joint Compass/ Catch Up pilot (in 2006), (in which selected foster carers from Compass Children's Services, were trained by Catch Up to deliver the Catch Up Literacy intervention to children and young people in their care), Catch Up has become an integral part of a rolling programme of foster care training at Compass. Catch Up Numeracy has also been introduced

In Spring 2008 Compass and Catch Up circulated a jointly compiled questionnaire to 27 foster carers employed by Compass (attached). The aim was to investigate how well Catch Up had become embedded at Compass and the sustainability of the reported benefits to foster carers and learners.

### **The findings**

All of the carers felt that the Catch Up training received had equipped them to deliver the literacy intervention to looked after children and only 3 felt that the accreditation attached to the training was not valuable to them as a foster carer. 23 carers have both delivered and enjoyed delivering Catch Up.

Of those carers who have youngsters who have recently, or who are currently using the intervention, 21 scored the learners' enjoyment of the intervention (on a scale of 1 to 10); with 5 rating the enjoyment level as 10, 3 as 9, 7 as 8, 3 as 7, 1 as 6, and 2 as 5. All carers delivered Catch Up in the evenings with 2 carers adding daytime and week end delivery to the routine.

When questioned about learner attitude to reading and improvement in reading, the feedback from carers was very positive indeed. Qualitative evidence suggests that all but two learners, (one who is still using Catch Up and one who has moved placement) have made progress in both areas. In many instances carers reported that school reports and teacher comments were more positive.

Comments included by carers:

'He is less disruptive because as he explains he is less worried about getting things wrong'

'Grew in confidence & would look forward to CU time

'Reads for pleasure & doesn't groan about school'.

'Asks to read for longer'

'My young person's reading has improved, so have all of her subjects'.

The comments included in the questionnaire indicate that foster carers derived benefit from the Catch Up training:

'I found the training interesting, it has helped me a lot and I'm now more confident in working with children now.'

'I do believe that CU has helped me & the children in my care a great deal. I am really happy with the progress made'.

'We are waiting for the right time to do CU with our current placement.'

I did use the skills from CU with other foster children and still do at times now.

We have used CU to help a 16 year old girl with learning difficulties. We have also used it successfully with another young person with special needs.

Having been a TA I found it easy to do. If I was working in a school it would benefit more children.

It has given me a better insight into helping them access reading.

I found the training interesting, it has helped me a lot and I'm now more confident in working with children now.

Qualitative evidence suggests that Catch Up not only benefits both carers ( by increasing confidence and delivery of reading skills) and learners, but that these benefits are sustainable within this setting.