

Written Parliamentary Question 22nd May

Education and Skills: Adoption

Q: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the impact of progress towards adoption targets for local authorities on children and families.

A: The Government have set a number of targets on adoption.

The following target was included in the Department of Health publication 'Improvement, Expansion and Reform: The Next Three Years (Priorities and Planning Framework 2003-06)':

"Maintain current levels of adoption placement stability (as measured by the proportion of placements for adoption ending with the making of an adoption order) so that quality is not compromised whilst increasing the use of adoption as follows:

By 2004-05 increase by 40 per cent. the number of looked after children who are adopted, and aim to exceed this by achieving, if possible, a 50 per cent. increase by 2006, up from 2,700 in 1999-2000. All councils will bring their practice up to the current level of the best performers.

By 2004-05 increase to 95 per cent. the proportion of looked after children placed for adoption within 12 months of the decision that adoption is in the child's best interests, up from 81 per cent. in 2000-01, and maintain this level (95 per cent.) up to 2006, by locally applying the timescales in the national adoption standards, taking account of the individual child's needs."

The period during which this target operated came to an end in March 2006.

The target helped significantly to raise the number of adoptions of looked after children, where adoption was in the child's best interests. Between 2000-01 and 2004-05 the proportion of looked after children placed for adoption within 12 months of the decision that adoption was in the child's best interests remained stable at around 80 per cent.. We will be reviewing the factors that influenced performance against this target in light of the full implementation and bedding down of the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

In addition, in 2004, the following Department for Education and Skills Public Service Agreement target was introduced:

"To narrow the gap in educational achievement between looked after children and their peers, and improve their educational support and the stability of their lives, so that by 2008, 80 per cent. of children under 16 who have been looked after for 2.5 or more years will have been living in the same placement for at least two years, or are placed for adoption."

The percentage of looked after children under 16 who have been looked after for 2.5 or more years and who have been living in the same placement for at least two years, or placed for adoption, has remained stable at around 65 per cent. since this target was introduced. As a result, we have undertaken intensive targeted work with a number of local authorities to help support them in improving placement stability.
Parmjit Dhanda (Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Department for Education and Skills)