
Reaching for the best?

What Children in Care and their Carers Really Think About Education



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Contents

Foreword, Andy Elvin CEO	5
1. Executive summary	6
2. Introduction	8
3. Sample Profile	9
4. School	10
5. Safety	15
6. Support	16
7. Educational Experiences	19
8. Being Heard	22
9. Aspirations	24
10. The Best Thing I've done at School	26
11. Recommendation's	30



Foreword, Andy Elvin CEO

Like good parenting, education can be transformative for children's life chances. It is beholden on us all who care for, or are responsible for, children who cannot live with their birth parents to ensure that they have the best education possible.

This involves so much more than securing a good school place for our children.

Research has shown that the home is equally and sometimes more important than the school in terms of children's academic achievement. Therefore, it is vital that families who look after children through foster care, adoption, special guardianship orders or similar arrangements, are given every support to allow them to maximise their child's life chances through education.

This survey shows the excellent work that our foster carers are doing and how much this is valued by the children and young people they look after. What we also learn is that education works best for the child when their carer is fully involved by the school in their child's education. The carer, be their foster carer, adopter or relative, is the expert on their child. It is therefore crucial to the child's success that the school and family work closely together to support the child's education.

We also need to ensure that these families are supported through training and advice to be able to advocate for their child's education, providing support and encouragement.

Far too often, our children's life chances and education are disrupted by the state not being a good enough parent. We need to work far harder to ensure placement stability for all children, disrupted placements and multiple moves very often lead to disrupted and unsuccessful education. The legacy of this can live on with children throughout their lives.

Stability, consistency, care and love are the vital ingredients of good family life. This can provide the bedrock upon which the child can be successful in their education whether that be academically or vocationally.



1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of TACT's annual survey of our children and young people, and their foster carers, on their experience of education. We spoke to 81 children and young people, through face to face interviews carried out by social workers and resource officers. A total of 89 TACT foster carers were surveyed, using Survey Monkey, about their experience of navigating the education system and supporting their foster children. The survey has given us a rich vein of information and helps us to re-evaluate our approach to education.
- 1.2 Most of the children and young people that we spoke to saw school positively and enjoyed it. Many enjoyed socialising much more than learning, and this finding is common to their fellow pupils not in care. More needs to be done for the majority of children in care to fully realise their potential in the current school system.
- 1.3 In our survey, 54% of children and young people said they had a choice of school but 43% said they had no choice. By contrast 69% of foster carers said they had a say in which school their foster children went to, with 30% saying they did not. While there may be a range of reasons for these results, they do not reflect positive changes in the admissions process for looked after children, which now enable looked after children to get their first school choice.
- 1.4 These positive policy measures on admissions, along with the Pupil Premium, do not appear to have made a difference for every child or young person we spoke with. Almost half said they had no control over which school they attended. Knowledge of the Pupil Premium was disappointing, with 59% of young people not even knowing what it was. Even among those who were broadly aware of it, the Pupil Premium was not especially well understood by the children, young people or carers responsible for its application.
- 1.5 This lack of transparency seems to be exacerbated by the fact that young people are not always involved in the development of their own education plans. 33% of foster carers with children in receipt of Pupil Premium did not know what it was used for. Of those that knew what the Pupil Premium was spent on, 30% were unhappy with where the funds went. One troubling finding was that of the 89 foster carers we surveyed, 18 said that they were not involved in their children's education plans. Over half the foster carers surveyed did not know what a multidisciplinary team was. The role of the designated teacher solicited a more positive response, with 84% of foster carers knowing who their child's designated teacher is. This shows that foster carers, children and young people could be better involved in the design of policies that are intended to improve outcomes for children in care.
- 1.6 It is important that education professionals respect the foster carers as the experts of their child and involve them fully in their child's education as they would in any other family. The findings that foster carers are not invited to meetings or involved in planning are unacceptable. For the child to succeed educationally the foster carers must be fully involved by the school.
- 1.7 While school is seen as a safe place by the majority of looked after children, a significant number do not feel safe at school and have experienced bullying. Some 9% of the children and young people that we spoke to face physical or psychological intimidation. More positively, the majority of children and young people feel supported with their education in the home and at school. 92% were able to name someone in school that they could talk to if they had a problem. Examples of trusted adults they identified included the designated LAC teacher, headmaster, classroom teacher, student support worker, youth worker, mentor, or tutor.
- 1.8 When asked if they are being heard, 75% thought they were, but 11% said they are not and a further 7% said they did not know.
- 1.9 When young people were asked "Do you feel your educational experience is different than other children in your class?" the 70 respondents were divided, with 46% saying yes and 54% saying no. When asked to elaborate, responses included being pulled out frequently for LAC/PEP meetings, missing class for services, perceived stigmatisation by teachers, language barriers, cultural differences, bullying, falling behind in coursework, and unwanted special attention from teachers. Additionally, one respondent stated, "I feel different because I have stuff to think about."
- 1.10 What about foster carers' support? We asked the carers about the educational support they give children and young people in their home, and 60% said that they gave a lot and 35% give some (although a worrying 5% said that they did not give any support). Most foster carers (76) give help with homework but 10 said that they do not give any support with homework at all.
- 1.11 Are the carers getting the support they need? Three quarters of those surveyed said they feel they are being supported in the educational support they give their child. However, 25% felt that they were not supported by their placing local authority - which raises questions for the overarching role of the corporate parent.
- 1.12 The ambitions of the children and young people that we spoke to range from wanting to be a nurse, policeman, social worker, foster carer, mechanic, professional footballer, paramedic, librarian, beautician, veterinarian, chef, actor, business owner or nanny. Educational goals varied and did include university.
- 1.13 Unfortunately, some of the children and young people we interviewed were simply unable to articulate dreams, goals or aspirations. This was because their immediate needs took precedence. Answers on aspiration from foster carers were polarised, from carers emphasising the academic progress made by their young people since being in care, to the other extreme where carers said their young people's aspirations were too high given the level of effort they put into school and the abilities they possessed. There was general acceptance that personal issues relating to the young people's histories can negatively impact their appreciation for education, lead to a lack of motivation or ability, or result in barriers to learning.
- 1.14 Low aspirations were seen as a direct result of falling behind due to periods of missed education and a lack of confidence. All of these issues were raised at TACT's Children's Champions meetings which bring young people together from across the UK to seek their views on the charity's policy, procedures and initiatives. Two of the Champions received good GCSE grades. However, when it comes to choosing a university, conversation does not focus on their educational needs or the reputation of the institution (Oxbridge, Russell Group etc.) but more about the willingness of the universities to waive a proportion of the tuition fees to make higher education financially accessible.
- 1.15 The study highlights the need for a better understanding of what is available to assist the educational attainment of children in care. At the same time, many children stressed that they want to go about their time at school and beyond without stigma and without being singled out, even for positive initiatives that are geared to help them.
- 1.16 To close the gap between newly available resource and persistently low attainment, we need to further provide every foster carer with detailed knowledge of what is available for children in care, and offer them more support to get the best possible deal for their foster children from the education system.

2. Introduction

Background

- 2.1 This report presents the findings of TACT's research into the thoughts of the children and young people at TACT, and their Foster Carers, about education. Each year TACT conducts a survey on an issue chosen by our Children's Champions group – this year the group of children and young people picked education as the key issue that they wanted us to scrutinise.
- 2.2 The national picture on the education of children in and leaving care supports closer scrutiny. While many children in care do well in education, there are still too many who have poor educational outcomes. It is now thirteen years since the Children Act 2004 when local authorities were given a duty to promote the educational achievement of looked after children. But new figures show the new improvements are not happening quickly enough to make a positive impact on the overall life chances of children in care.
- 2.3 The study highlights the need for a better understanding of what is available to assist the educational attainment of children in care. At the same time many children stressed that they want to go about their time at school and beyond without stigma and without being singled out, even for positive initiatives that are geared to help them.
- 2.4 We also need to ensure that the school fully respects the foster carer as the parent and expert on the child. The best results are achieved where this happens.
- 2.5 This report is the result of the survey and summarises the stories, views and educational aspirations of the children and young people who we support. The report will be of interest to anyone with links to the care system from a service user or service provider perspective. It is a must read for anyone in education, children's services, politics and policy making.

The National Context

- 2.6 The most up to date figures on education for children in care can be found in the DfE annual report, 'Outcomes for Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England,' 31 March 2016, published in March 2017. Attainment is slightly increasing for maths and writing and is stable for reading. But compared to non-looked after children, levels of achievement are much lower. Last year only 63% of looked after children achieved a level two or above for their writing compared to 88% of non-looked after children. Yet, at key stage 2, attainment between the ages of 7 and 11 continues to improve, especially in grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
- 2.7 In key stage 2, children in care achieve slightly higher than children in need by 1-3%. This is a 3% improvement for children who are taken out of a situation of need and placed with a family. But achievement levels for both are far too low. On average, they are doing 29% more poorly than non-looked after children. The situation is worse at key stage 4 in maths and in English there is a 40% gap between looked after children and their non-looked after counterparts. Positively, there is a better attendance rate for looked after children, with only 9.5% absent from school, compared to 10.5% of children not in care. But, if they are in school, why is their achievement not improving to mirror that of their peers?
- 2.8 Adoption UK published their schools and exclusions report in November 2017. The charity's survey shows that a quarter of adopted children have been excluded from school. In other words, adopted children are around 20 times more likely to be permanently excluded from school than their classmates. The survey, which was responded to by more than 2,000 adoptive parents, found that 1.63% of adopted children were permanently excluded in 2015-16 – 20 times higher than the rate for the overall pupil population (0.08 per cent). Department for Education statistics show that looked-after children and children with special educational needs and disability (SEND) are more likely to receive exclusions than their classmates.

3. Sample profile

- 2.9 Once young people leave care, the statistics on their education and employment remain grim. In the DfE's recent report 'Children Looked After in England,' 31 March 2017, released in September, the comparative gap increases from the age of 19-21 when care leavers are unemployed and are not in training or education at three times the rate of other young people. Forty percent of care leavers do not have a job and are not in any training or education versus the 13% of other youth. This number was the same last year and the year before. With care numbers rising by 3%, an increase from the steady 1% rise in previous years, the gap in education will not change on its own. The percentage of care leavers who go on to higher education, is still only 6% as the DfE reported in March 2015.
- 2.10 However, the care system is not simply 'bad for children' and research by the Rees Centre on the education of children in care (2015) shows that outcomes can be good when the care system works properly.
- The ADCS, under Dave Hill's leadership, launched a campaign called 'Changing the Narrative' to overcome perceptions that 'care is bad for children'. Ofsted has reported that inspection findings regularly see many great examples of foster carers, social workers, virtual school staff and others working together with passion and commitment to achieve brilliant things.
- While the experience of foster carers and children and young people at TACT is also positive in general, their voices highlight how standards for looked after children in education should and could be raised further.
- 3.1 The Children and Young People's Survey is based on face to face interviews with 81 of children and young people in TACT care. These were carried out by Social Workers and Children's Resource Workers who were provided with guidelines for conducting the interviews. There were 44 males and 37 female respondents who completed the survey. The average age of respondent was 13.
- 3.2 In the interests of balance - we also took the time to survey our Foster Carers about their understanding, viewpoint and role in the education of the children and young people in their care. 89 TACT Foster Carers completed paper surveys.
- 3.3 In each case the survey explores the key resources that are 'available' to children and young people in care, intended to close the achievement gap, like the Pupil Premium. The research also explores what are perceived as the key issues that confront children and young people in care, both negative and positive. As a result issues such as bullying, mental health and aspiration are all dealt with.
- 3.4 The survey also engages with children, young people and Foster Carers on their relationship with the school, and their involvement with the Personal Education Plan.



4. School

This section of the report looks at pupil and carers' choice and enjoyment of school. This is followed by a look at the Pupil Premium as the major vehicle to address the needs of looked after children. The Pupil Premium is funding available to schools in England to help raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils of all abilities and to close the gaps between them and their peers. Significantly, looked after children are amongst those pupils entitled.

What children and young people said about starting school

- 4.1 Out of the 81 children we asked about their choice of school, a total of 80 answered the question: "Did you have a choice of schools you could attend?" Of those, only 54% reported that they had a choice, while 43% said they did not.
- 4.2 Young people were asked, "Do you enjoy school?" and 89% responded yes, while 11% responded no. While survey participants were divided on the merits of P.E., arts, and maths, the majority agreed that socialising was the most enjoyable aspect of school.

One pupil told us:

"Yes, I like it. I want to learn. Learning is difficult in another language. They say it takes 3-5 years to learn a language well and be fluent. So it's difficult for me, if I asked you or most people they don't know two words in my language [Pashtu]. If I had been to school in the past maybe it would have been easier. So I find it stressful... I get good support."

What foster carers said about their involvement with school

- 4.3 Foster carers were asked if they had been involved in choosing the school that the children in their care attended. 69% of foster parents said that they had been involved in choosing the school that the children in their care attended. 30% said that they had not. Sometimes the child has a pre-existing school when they come to the foster carer, but no choice of school or change of school decision should be made without the involvement of the foster carer.

Pupil Premium

- 4.4 All of the children and young people in the survey were asked if they know what a Pupil Premium is. Around 38% of the 69 respondents said yes, while 59% said no. A group of 5 respondents were asked if they feel the school spends it in the right way. Only 1 out of the 5 said it is not, however, many young people anecdotally expressed desire for additional services or the continuation of services that have run out of funding. Resources that young people commonly requested included laptops, tablets, and one-to-one tuition.

The children and young people told us:

- "I have no idea what the money is spent on. I would like to choose what they spend the money on."**
- "Yes, it's that thing that you get stuff with. At my old school I had one-to-one tuition, but I haven't had anything in my new school yet and I've been here 6 months. I'm hoping to get a laptop so I can do my homework instead of having to share the computer with my sisters."**
- "Yes, I get maths tuition and school trips from my pupil premium. I don't think the maths tuition should come out of the pupil premium because if I wasn't in care and struggling with maths I would get extra tuition for free."**
- "I've just read about the pupil premium on that information sheet. I have a personal tutor in English once a week after school. I think school is spending it in the right way as I am given opportunity to ask for support. I think I am getting a computer next year."**

- 4.5 Foster carers were asked about the Pupil Premium:
 - 61% knew what it was, however 38% did not know about the Pupil Premium training. Additionally, 73% of this figure were already supporting children and young people in receipt of Pupil Premium in their school.
 - 66% of foster carers knew what their child's Pupil Premium was being used for.
 - 33% of foster carers with children in receipt of Pupil Premium did not know what it was used for.
 - Of those that knew what the Pupil Premium was spent on, 70% were happy with it while 30% were unhappy with where the funds went.
- 4.6 A follow up question asked foster carers if they were happy with how the pupil premium is spent. Of the 18 who responded, four said that they did not know what pupil premium was. Four other carers stated that they were in the midst of discussions about the use of pupil premium with the school. Two carers said they did not have a say in how it would be used and did not think

it had gone far enough in helping their young person. Another two carers said the money should be used for individual children, and two said they were aware it was being used to provide resources for the whole class at their child's school.

- It is clear that more work needs to be done about raising awareness of the Pupil Premium, but also, that foster carers should be involved in decisions about how this money is allocated.

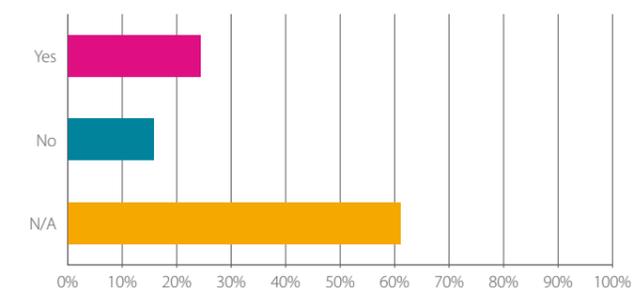
Personal Education Plans

- 4.7 When asked if they were involved in the development of their foster child's Personal Education Plan (PEP), 71 foster carers said that they were and 18 said that they were not. Some plans may have been pre-existing, but no PEP should be developed without the input of the foster carer.

Multidisciplinary working

- 4.8 Joint working between professionals is widely understood as critical to the experience of all looked after children. The task of helping children achieve 'the sense of security, continuity, commitment, and identity' (DCSF, 2010) that they need, is a shared one. Following Government guidance, professionals are expected to work with each other and with children and their families to ensure the best possible outcomes. This means working as part of a team to jointly plan and deliver services..

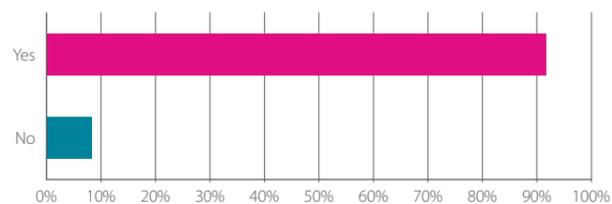
Are you involved in the multidisciplinary team (if there is one)?



Of the foster carers that were asked, 21 said that the question as to whether they had been involved in a multidisciplinary team was not applicable..

Foster Carer intervention

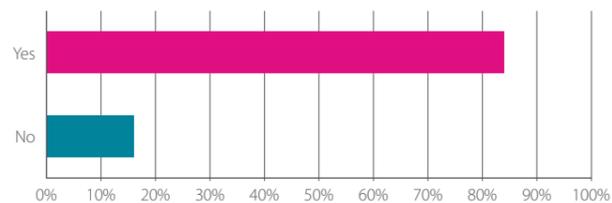
4.9 Foster carers were asked if they are called in when there is an issue at school with children in their care. 82 said that yes, they are called into school when there is an issue with children in foster care and 7 said that they were not.



Designated teacher for looked after children

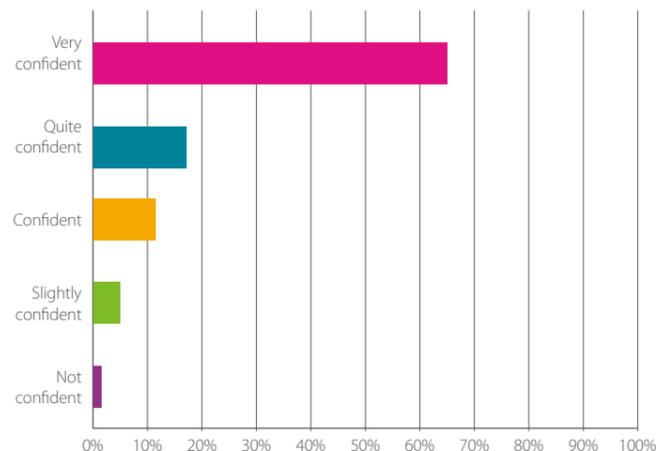
4.10 A designated teacher is responsible for the educational achievement of any 'Looked After Children' in their school, this can be the head teacher or other member of a school's senior management team who. This role has been a legal requirement for all maintained schools since September 2009.

Do you know who the designated teacher for 'Looked After Children' is?



When asked if they knew the designated teacher for their 'looked after child'. 84% of the foster carers said yes, while 15% said they did not know the designated teacher. Of those who answered yes, 85% said that they had actually had contact with the designated teacher.

4.11 Foster carers were asked how confident they felt advocating for the children in their care with the school if they were required to do so. The responses were as follows:



5. Safety

Do children and young people in care feel safe in school?

5.1 When asked "Do you feel safe at school?" 91% of TACT young people responded yes. However, 9% responded no. Bullying and frequent fighting were identified as the primary causes for an unsafe school environment.

Bullying

5.2 Children and young people were asked, "Have you ever experienced bullying?" Of the 78 respondents, 51% told us that they had experienced bullying at some point in their education and 49% responded that they had not. Many young people, who reported that they had not experienced bullying, stated that they have witnessed it take place.

5.3 Respondents described experiencing physical and verbal bullying. A few respondents noted specific reasons for why they were targeted by bullies, which included their race, religion and religious dress, as well as living situation.

How safe do Foster Carers think children are in school?

5.4 The 89 foster carers in this survey were asked if the children and young people in their care felt safe at school. 83 said that the children and young people in their care did feel safe at school. However, six of the foster carers said that their children or young person did not feel safe at school.

Bullying

5.5 Foster carers were asked if there had been issues of bullying. The responses differed slightly from those of the children and young people, 30 carers reported that there had been issues of bullying, while 58 said that there had not.



6. Support

What children and young people said about support at school and home

6.1 This section of the survey asked young people about their experiences and aspirations, the services currently available to them, and any additional resources they would like to receive.

Supported by teachers and peers

6.2 Survey respondents were asked, "Do you feel teachers understand the needs of Looked After Children?" Of the 74 who answered, 78% responded yes, 12% responded no, and 10% were unsure. A follow up question asked whether they feel schools should provide training for staff so they better understand the needs of LAC. Roughly 61% of the 28 respondents said yes, training should be provided, while 25% said no it should not. One respondent stated that they did not think training should be provided because they did not want to be treated any differently by the teachers at their school.

6.3 Young people were asked to describe how teachers can better support them at school. Several responses referenced the unique experiences of LAC, such as "listening to me," "showing interest," "being kind and empathetic," "less stereotyping and judgment," and having a "better understanding of what it is like to be a LAC."

6.4 The children and young people told us:

"I was always open about being in care but I always felt different from the other children. It was the little things; because I was open about my situation, the teachers referred to me being in care on occasion. I think the teachers could be more sensitive."

"I think some do [understand the needs of looked after children] and some don't. The ones that don't, need to learn and I think in the teacher training days they should have a day where they listen to the experiences of kids in care. I would do it, tell them about me."

"Yes I do [feel that teachers understand the needs of looked after children]. If I get upset they will help me and ask me what's wrong."

"Teachers need to be more patient."

6.6 The vast majority of survey participants (92%) were able to name someone in school that they can talk to if they have a problem. Examples of trusted adults identified by young people include the designated LAC teacher, headmaster, classroom teacher, student support worker, youth worker, mentor, or tutor. One of the most common reasons that young people gave for why they feel comfortable talking to that person was the length of time they have known them.

6.7 The survey asked young people if there is somewhere in school where they can go if they need some space. 80% of respondents, said yes, and were able to describe the location. Spaces included counselling offices, the designated LAC teacher's classroom, and a special room in school for calming down. A few young people named outdoor areas on school grounds, as well. About 16% of participants responded no and 4% said they were unaware of such a space.

6.8 Survey participants were asked if counselling is offered at their schools. Approximately 41% said yes, 36% said no, and 23% were unsure. A follow up question asked if they think all schools should offer counselling. Of the 37 who answered, 32 replied yes, one replied no, and four were unsure. One young person who described having a particularly difficult time in school stated, "No, would have used if it was available."

6.9 The children and young people told us:

"Counsellors tried to work with us to get us to stop messing about. They really made me think about things like getting inside my head. I'd leave their room with a headache from thinking too much about stuff. But it helps me as I think about stuff all the time, why things happen to me."

"There was a counsellor who I used to go to talk to, but then she left and no one replaced her. I knew her well and found it easy to talk to her."

"Pupil Learning Support is helpful, understands what I need, and helped sort out a college day every week."

6.10 The Survey asked young people how they feel about schools offering a peer mentor program. The responses ranged drastically from "Sounds like a good idea," and descriptions of similar programs they have participated in, to "Don't want it," and "Don't want to tell a stranger about my life." A follow up question asked if a peer mentor should have care experience. Of the 28 young people who responded, 10 answered yes, 14 felt no, it's not necessary, and four said they were unsure



7. Educational Experiences

7.1 Young people were asked “Do you feel your educational experience is different than other children in your class?” The 70 respondents were divided, with 46% saying yes and 54% saying no. When asked to elaborate, responses included being pulled out frequently for LAC/PEP meetings, missing class for services, perceived stigmatization by teachers, language barriers, cultural differences, bullying, falling behind in coursework, and unwanted special attention from teachers. Additionally, one respondent stated, “I feel different because I have stuff to think about.”

7.2 The children and young people told us:

“Yes, in primary it was really hard. Having meetings all the time makes you different. I used to feel rubbish some days and found school really hard.”

“Yes [I feel my educational experience is different], but in a good way. I think being in care gives you more opportunities than other children have.”

“My teachers know that I am in care and understand me, but I am treated the same as everyone else.”

“I think there is a lot of favouritism and I am not treated equally. Some teachers make judgments. They should have more empathy.”

7.3 To explore access to resources, young people were asked, “Are out of school activities and school trips available to you?” The majority of respondents (92%) replied yes, while only 8% said no.

7.4 Of the 77 who answered the question, “Do you have friends in school?” 75 responded yes, while 2 reported that they do not. Both young people who responded, no, indicated that they have friends outside of school.

7.5 One of the most enlightening survey items was when respondents were asked if they have had periods of missed education. Approximately 45% of the 75 respondents indicated that they had and 54% said they had not. Those who responded yes stated that they missed a significant portion of education due to care-related circumstances. For instance, switching placements and having difficulty finding a school, missing instruction due to appointments (counselling,

play therapy, physiotherapy), being allowed to stay home by a former guardian, not having access to education in their previous countries, and transience or homelessness were all reasons given.

7.6 Respondents were asked whether they have ever experienced exclusion, either temporary or permanent. Of the 73 young people who answered the question, 18% responded yes, 81% responded no, and 1% (one individual) said they would rather not answer the question. Reasons for having been excluded were fighting, swearing, and absconding from the building.

7.7 Similar to the item regarding missed education, the question, “Have you ever fallen behind in school?” elicited significant responses from young people related to being in care. Around 59% indicated that they had, while 41% said they had not. Examples of reasons why respondents had fallen behind in school included being taken out of class for counselling and meetings, not having a formal education prior to coming to the UK, language barrier, difficulty understanding the work, falling behind because of stressful events at home, falling behind when first coming into care, experiencing multiple exclusions, and challenges related to being born prematurely. Young people who fell behind listed help from their carers, one-to-one tuition, after school tutors, extra lessons in English, and hard work as things that helped them catch up. Utilising Foster Carers to help offer remedial literacy and numeracy support should be universally offered to children in care.

7.8 The children and young people told us:

“Yes [I fell behind], because of the amount of school I missed before I came into care. It took a few years for me to catch up, but I did it with the support of my school and carers.”

“Before I came into care I missed a lot of education. I used to live in hostels with my mum and moved around a lot. My attendance has been good since I’ve been in foster care.”

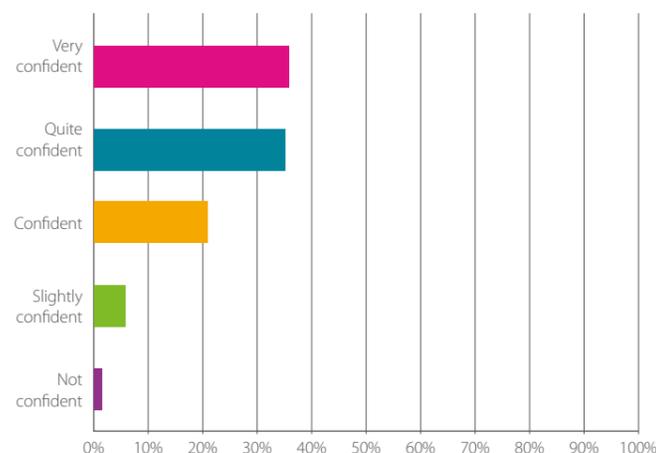
“I have had a lot of appointments like play therapy, physiotherapy, orthodontist and meetings and had to be off school.”

7.9 When asked, "Do you feel your foster carer(s) support you educationally at home?" 97% of respondents said yes and 3% said no. Of the young people who responded no, one stated that she attends homework club so her carers rarely offer help with schoolwork and another stated that he doesn't ask for help with homework so his carer does not provide it.

What Foster Carers say about support at school and home

7.10 Foster carers were asked about the educational support that they give children and young people in their home. 60% of foster carers said that they give a lot of educational support to children and young people at home. 35% said they give some support and 5% said that they didn't give any support. 76 foster carers said that they give help with homework and 10 said that they didn't give any support with homework at all.

7.11 All foster carers surveyed were asked to score themselves on confidence in giving help and support with homework. The graphic below demonstrates that the majority of carers feel at least confident when providing homework support.

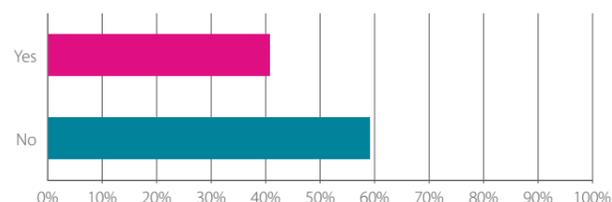


7.12 Foster carers were asked if they would take advantage of education support for foster carers if it was available. 63 said they would take advantage of education support, while 24 said they would not.

7.13 Foster carers were asked on a scale of 1 – 10 how well they thought the school was meeting the needs of young people. 70% of carers responded with a 7 or higher. Of that 70%, roughly 28% gave the school a 10 out of 10 for their efforts..

1	2.30%	2
2	1.15%	1
3	4.60%	4
4	8.05%	7
5	4.60%	4
6	9.20%	8
7	10.34%	9
8	18.39%	16
9	13.79%	12
10	27.59%	24

Should the school provide more support for looked after children?

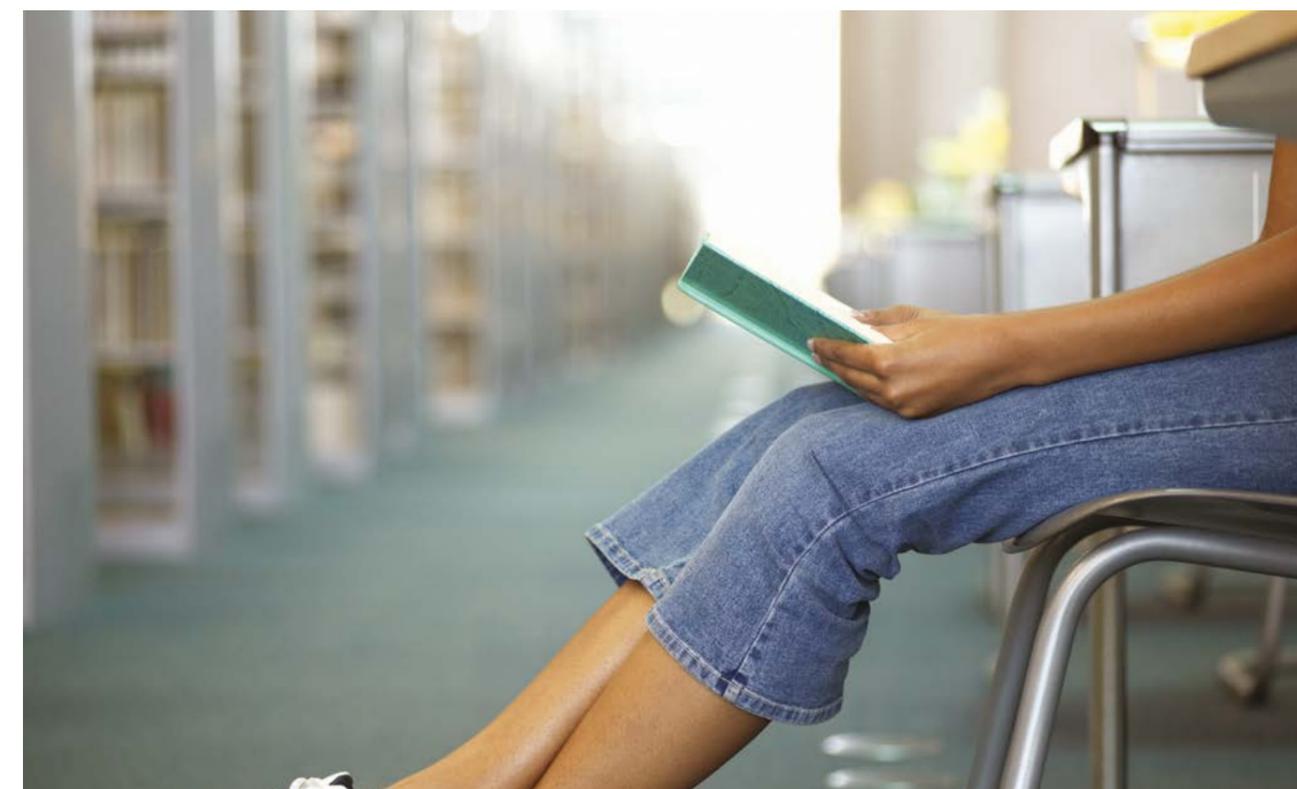


7.14 Foster carers were asked the question, "Do you feel the school should provide more support for looked after children?" to which 36 replied yes and 52 replied no. Carers were offered the opportunity to make comments in response to this question:

- Nine carers stated that there is a need for schools to better understand the emotional, developmental, and psychosocial needs of looked after children, and support pupils in those areas. One carer elaborated that there was a need for additional funding to provide relevant support staff, such as educational psychologists.
- Four carers named one-to-one support, including tuition and informal conferences, as a service they would like to see for young people in care.
- Three carers identified the need for school staff to assess and understand children's unique, individual needs.

• Other forms of support identified by carers were early intervention to prevent students from falling behind and teacher training in behaviour management for troubled pupils who may require alternative instruction techniques.

7.15 Foster carers were asked if the child or young person that they supported had ever been statemented. 28% responded that their child had, while 72% said they had not. Those who replied no stated that they had requested assistance, but were either not involved in the process or not listened to, or replied that there was other support in place, such as assessments, carer involvement in education decisions, working with CAMHS and a Social Worker, extra tutoring, and an assigned mentor.



8. Feeling Heard

8.1 This section of the survey asked young people about their involvement in determining their educational path as well as the role their foster carers play.

8.2 To get to the heart of this inquiry, young people were explicitly asked, "Do you feel your opinion is heard when it comes to your education?" Of the 74 respondents, 81% replied yes, while 11% said no. Another 8% were unsure, with a couple of young people explaining that they do not have an opinion on their education.

8.3 Approximately 57% of respondents indicated that they were involved in developing their education plan, 36% said they were not, and 7% stated that they were unsure if they were involved. Responses to the question "How involved is your foster carer in your education?" typically described active and present carers with descriptions such as, "as involved as a parent," "supports all my needs," and, "goes to all my meetings." The follow up question asked 22 young people if their foster carer was involved in developing their education plan. Only 2 said no, while 20 said yes.

8.4 The children and young people told us:

"You have to be loud and clear and then you are heard. It is easier when you are older and get help to make yourself heard."

"I sometimes go to my PEP meetings, but sometimes I am not asked. I would go if I was asked to."

"I haven't been to my PEP this year. I would go if I was invited."

"I don't think my teachers listened to me, but I felt supported by everyone else."

8.5 Survey participants were asked, "Do you feel your foster carer should be more or less involved in your school life?" About 77% of the 73 respondents said no, and further elaborated that their carers' involvement is alright as it is or that they can't be more involved than they already are. Those who replied no, were divided between 65% who wanted their carers more involved and 35% who wanted them to be less involved. Those who replied more involved indicated that they needed more help with schoolwork, while those who replied

less involved varied between, "It's my life," and "I get in trouble all the time, he is always at school."

8.6 The children and young people told us:

"I think [my carer] does everything she possibly can for me. I just wish I'd moved to hers sooner, perhaps I would have achieved more than I did."

"They are amazing. [My carer] helps me with everything; anything that comes up I just need to ask her. She asks me every day how school is and knows what's going on. They go to every parents' night, stuff at the school, they get involved. She has talked through [education] plans with me and helped me. They want the best for me."

"We do my homework together. My carers also make sure that I get one-to-one tuition in maths."

8.7 Focussing on their accomplishments, young people were asked, "What is the best thing you have done in school and/or the achievement that you are most proud of?" Responses varied from academic achievements (passing BTEC or GCSE exams, creating projects, 100% attendance, Head Girl) to athletic achievements (participating in the national championships for cross country, winning events at 'Sports Day', best footballer in school) to personal achievements (making good friends, privileges for good behaviour).

8.8 The children and young people told us:

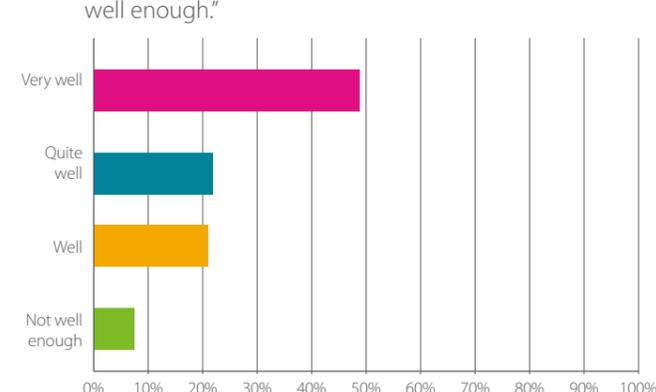
"I work hard and I have improved a lot. I have improved my English. I am proud when the teachers give me appreciations when I do something well and I am happy about that. It was difficult but we did everything we were asked and the proud thing will be if we achieve being an engineer or a doctor or a mechanic. This is the proud thing."

"[I am most proud of] completing my Duke of Edinburgh Bronze award."

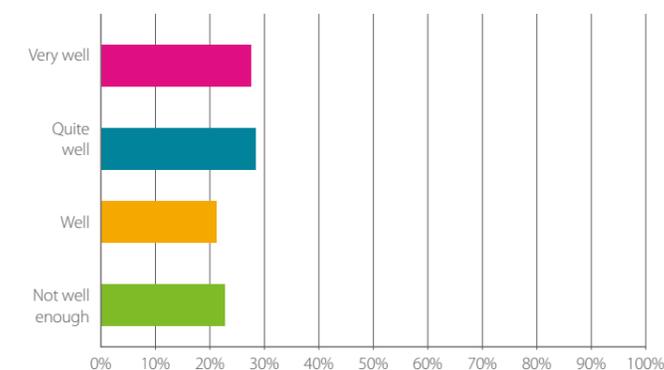
"I was Head Girl and won a trophy for Kindest Pupil."

8.9 Do foster carers feel heard and supported?

Foster carers were asked how well they thought TACT assists them with education issues. The vast majority feel that TACT assists them well, quite well or very well with education issues. Less than 10% responded "not well enough."



8.10 Foster carers were asked how well they thought their local authority supported them with education issues. While the majority of carers feel they are supported well, quite well, or very well, nearly 25% responded that they were not supported well enough by their local authority.



9. Aspirations

What children and young people say about aspiration

- 9.1 To understand how TACT young people view their current schooling in the context of their future, the Survey asked, "Do you think your school will help you achieve your ambitions?" Of the 73 young people who responded, 86% said yes, while 7% replied no, and another 7% said they were unsure.
- 9.2 Many of the survey participants elaborated on aspirations were for the future were, but those who did not were asked a follow-up prompt, "What is your educational goal?" Respondents' ambitions included becoming: a nurse, policeman, social worker, foster carer, mechanic, professional football player, paramedic, librarian, beautician, veterinarian, riding instructor, marine, chef, actress, artist, business owner, and nanny. Educational goals varied from passing GCSEs, earning high marks, and pursuing further education to studying computing, performing arts, and engineering at university.
- 9.3 However, not all young people were able to name career-specific ambitions, as more immediate needs took precedence. Rather, their responses reflected the overall lives they wish to have once they transition into adulthood or independence.
- 9.4 One survey participant said, "I want to get an education to have a good life and I want to do well and I want my parents to be proud of me." Another young person simply stated, "To be able to have a stable life when I'm older." The aspirations of TACT children and young people thus demonstrate the variety of backgrounds and life experiences they have had.
- 9.5 Additionally, when asked how involved their foster carer is in their education, many young people described instances where their carer helped them accomplish goals. For example, one respondent stated that his foster carer is "Very involved, she helped me a lot to get into college." Overall, the majority of TACT young people appear to have positive, goal-oriented visions for their futures and feel well-supported by their carers in achieving their ambitions.

Do foster carers think that children and young people in their care have high aspirations?

- 9.6 Foster carers were asked, "Do you feel the young people in your care have high aspirations for their education?" Of the 80 respondents, 25 simply stated yes, 24 stated no, and 4 replied somewhat.
- 9.7 Nine carers said that they emphasize the importance of education at home and help their young people achieve their potential. Five carers explained that their young people have made great academic progress since being in care. Three additional carers felt that their placements provided young people with guidance, facilities, opportunities, and confidence. Four carers said low aspirations were often a result of falling behind due to periods of missed education and a lack confidence.
- 9.8 Four carers stated that their young people were too young to have aspirations at the moment, but all enjoyed learning. Three carers indicated that personal issues related to young people's histories can negatively impact their appreciation for education, lead to a lack of motivation or ability, or result in barriers to learning. Finally, three carers felt that their young people's aspirations were too high for the level of effort they put into school and the abilities they possessed.

Additional comments on education

- 9.9 The final question asked Foster Carers to comment on any other aspects of education that were not covered by the survey. The 37 respondents raised a variety of concerns, ranging from issues with available support services at school to suggestions for improvement.
- 9.10 Overall, carers:
- Described having great difficulty in meeting their young person's needs, after a concern has been raised by support staff at school.
 - Expressed frustration over teachers misunderstanding the motivations behind their young person's disruptive behaviour and the need for more training.
 - Noted the need for increased support for young people with additional needs, including more time and patience, which they said are not always allotted by the school.

- Emphasized the importance of outside tutoring to fill in any educational gaps, as well as the opportunity to promote soft skills and self-esteem development that outside tutors can provide.
- Stated that children should not have to remain in their school when they enter care, as the community may be associated with negative memories. They posited that long term placements should provide children with fresh starts and the opportunity to make friends in their new locality.
- Maintained that more needs to be done to raise awareness among young people in care that they can continue their education even if they struggle on their GCSEs, and that services exist to help support them in university if they choose to attend.



10. The best thing I've ever done at school

10.1 Finally, we asked the children and young people to tell us the best thing that they had ever done in school?

10.2 This study exposes a general acceptance that personal issues relating to the young people's histories can negatively impact their appreciation for education, lead to a lack of motivation or ability, or result in barriers to learning.

10.3 More positively, analysis of the final question "What is the best thing you have ever done in school?" 74 had positive answers, three had negative answers and six had no answer, teaches us an important lesson. It shows that the school experience for looked after children, can be built upon to improve their outcomes in education. But in order to improve their life chances through education, then only the best will do.

10.4 How children and young people said was the best thing that they'd ever done at school...

"Making a lighting up miniature duke box for ipod, it's called the busta botics".

"PE tie, for outstanding in sports"

"When I was in PE, I done 400 metres run and won the race. I am doing well in maths, I can now do angles"

"Skiing trip, good report overall."

"I achieved in my maths and I enjoyed going to PGL"

"I like painting and arts."

"The best thing I did was going on a school trip and seeing peacocks. It was a lot of fun."

"Learning to speak English"

"I won a trophy for football. We came first in a tournament. There are a lot of other awards that I have received for sports and also student of the week when I was in school."

"Maths is the best thing, I have a certificate for good work in this and for PE."

"I went to London, that's the best."

"Went to get a certificate for good work and for 100% attendance, to show me"

"Proud about sport and awards won for netball"

"I went to London that's the best"

"Certificate for good work and for 100% attendance"

"Don't know but my Foster Carer said that I must have been good at cricket at my old school because I was picked for the team. I haven't been at my new school long enough and I don't ever feel proud of myself anyway. My Foster Carer says that I have done well working hard to settle into my new school and make friends."

"Everything"

"I am going to school and I am learning and I am well behaved. My teachers are happy with me"

"I work hard and I have improved a lot I have improved my English. I am proud when the teachers give me appreciations when I do something well and I am happy about that. It was difficult but we did everything we were asked and the proud thing will be if we achieve being an engineer or a doctor or a mechanic, this is the proud thing"

"I work hard and I have improved a lot I have improved my English. I am proud when the teachers give me appreciations when I do something well and I am happy about that. It was difficult but we did everything we were asked and the proud thing will be if we achieve being an engineer or a doctor or a mechanic, this is the proud thing"

"I came first in year 3 and year 4 sports day races."

"Getting a 6c in my SATS for Science"

"Getting 100% for attendance and punctuality"

"Passing my maths and English GCSE's"

"I'm good at most things and I'm always proud of the work I do"

"I haven't done anything that I'm proud of. The best thing I do in school is be a good friend."

"For being on target in all my lessons and for getting a 5b in my French test."

"Completing my Duke of Edinburgh Bronze award."

"A piece of work I did in product design. It was really good and I was very proud of myself"

"When my level went from a C to an A in Maths."

"Since being in my new school, getting commendations for my work and behaviour"

"I am most proud of my Trenches project and really proud of the letters I wrote as I got an A* and a certificate for highest grade. I have also gone up a grade in English and went out for a celebration dinner with my carers."

"Nothing, I don't feel I have achieved anything"

"That I'm good at games and PE."

"Getting the Man of the match award from Football"

"Getting a gold medal for fundraising at school"

"Going to Gambia and giving presents to the poor children at Christmas"

"Drawing a picture of King Henry in Art"

"Certificates for my good behaviour."

"Being chosen as Form Rep."

"The correct sums in one lesson, 60/60."

"Photography."

"Being the smartest person in ACT and Innovate."

"Maths and my handwriting. I have had my end of year school report and am pleased with it " My GCSE's. I did my last on 17/6/16. I won a tablet for 100% attendance."

"I am the best player on some of the school's computer games that we use in maths lessons. I'm proud that I get to school every day and don't miss days."

" My high achievement in science – my attitude to learning in my report."

"Maths grade"

"Finishing my heart shapes with different joints of wood. It took me 10 weeks but I finally finished it"

"Maths, I made progress."

"Lots of things, trips, DT, friends. If I pass my exams!"

"Front Roll/handwriting/confidence in the pool."

"Improvement in English, 100% attendance badge— went out for celebration lunch. Certificate for swimming, privileges for good behaviour."

"Art. I love it and book club."

"Food technology"

"Achieving good grades."

"I took part in the Eisteddfod in Year 9 in signing and we got points for our team. It was fun. I've enjoyed doing all the work for my art exam. I am proud of passing my BTEC level 2 child care learning and development"

"I am a Sports Leader for younger kids and last year got 4 A's, 2 Cs and a B."

"I got 'Head Girl' and a trophy for 'Kindest Pupil'"

"I am good at art and my teacher said that my pictures are really good."

"I have won at football."

"Making new friends has been good and cooking."

"I got I have represented the school in cross country national championship and also played for the football team. I am also getting good marks so this is good. an A in English and I passed my History Prelim."

"Drawing."

"Maths."

"Sports day."

"My best achievement was doing my performance."

"When I done my best piece of work my teacher gave me a good mark."

"Technology. I was bottom but now I have shot up!"

"My certificate for geography."

"Becoming a student librarian."

"Coming first for long distance running in our sports day, it was a 1500m race. Children were chosen for six different sports and I was chosen for athletics. I got a medal for coming first."

"Best footballer in school, have certificate."

"Getting a record 13 post cards in two weeks at school for good conduct and achievement."

"Making good friends."



11. Recommendations

11.1 *Quality data on educational performance to be systematically collected and analysed*

Information on exam results at GCSE, A Level, Vocational Courses and University courses to be systematically examined by all organisations providing fostering services to track how young people in our care are progressing educationally. The results can be anonymised and will lay the basis for effective performance management on educational outcomes.

11.2 *Better training Foster Carers on all existing positive policy measures to improve educational outcomes for children in care and leaving care*

Regular courses on Pupil Premium, the importance of multi-disciplinary working and the role of the virtual head teacher.

11.3 *Better relationships between policy makers and the people who those policies are meant to support*

Children, young people and foster carers must be better involved in the development and design of national policies geared to improving educational outcomes for children in care and care leavers.

11.4 *Training for teachers about the needs and experiences of looked after children*

Many children and young people do not want to be singled out or suffer from stigma related to being in care. Teachers must better understand the experiences of children in care at their school to protect them from bullying and assist their personal development.

Recent national statistics repeatedly support the important role of educationalists, most recently Adoption UK report that adopted children can be 20 times more likely to be excluded than their peers.

11.5 *Foster family tutoring*

Many children in foster care have suffered disrupted education in their early life. Outside tutoring by a QTS tutor should be conducted in the home with the child or young person and their foster family. This could empower the family to enable the child to improve their numeracy and literacy which may be not as advanced as their peers. Away from school it would protect the child from 'perceived stigma' of receiving extra support. It would also empower the foster carer to support their child's education and make an appreciable difference to their child's educational outcomes

11.6 *Joint training for foster carers and school staff on working together*

The foster carer is the expert on their child. The child performs best when the school and foster family work together. Training that allows staff and carers to understand each other's roles and promotes joint working would be extremely beneficial to children's outcomes

11.7 *Campaign for free university education for all care leavers*

Only around 6% of care leavers go on to university, a percentage which has hardly changed in recent years. Children in care have the wealthiest parent of all - the state - yet it fails them in this most fundamental aspect of child development: education. TACT will work with its partners to bring about a change in legislation that will enable free university tuition for care leavers.

11.8 *Faster and more effective access to apprenticeships for care leavers*

Almost every local authority in the country is prioritising apprenticeship programmes to deliver training opportunities to its local residents. The take up of these schemes by care leavers is low - so improvements in the accessibility for care leavers must be improved.

11.9 *Effective shared corporate parenting*

Corporate parenting is the nearest initiative that many children in care have that can mimic the actions of a "pushy parent" - someone who can ask important questions of key workers about how the children are doing at school and in their tests and exams. It is important that local authorities work closely with Foster Carers to ensure all those who can make a positive difference do so, while delivering a personalised, seamless service for the child.

11.10 *Aspirations must be raised*

Professionals have traditionally argued that the complex problems children in care face explain the achievement gap. There is now, however, an emerging consensus that our care system could achieve far more.

International comparisons show that some care homes in other European countries send 10 times as many young people to university as the UK average.

It is for this reason that TACT argues for nothing less than a high-quality policy intervention that challenges our expectations of children in care. Without it, we believe there is a risk that a culture of low expectations will become entrenched and improvements stalled. This is particularly so given the current squeeze on budgets. Children in care, a relatively small and poorly represented group, urgently require positive policy interventions to ensure all involved groups - local authorities, carers, and the children themselves - can reach for the best





Next Steps

TACT will continue to work with its staff, Foster Carers and the children and young people that we support to improve educational outcomes for all children in and leaving care.

If you are interested in working with us to this end please contact Jasmine Ali j.ali@tactcare.org.uk

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