

## Key Messages

# What is the relationship between being in care and the educational outcomes of children?

These key messages are based on an international systematic review published in September 2015 by the Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education at the University of Oxford.

### **What is the issue?**

The low educational attainment of children in care has long been a concern for policy-makers, practitioners, foster carers, teachers and young people themselves. It is an issue not just in the UK but in many other countries.

What are the reasons behind this? Could the care system itself be damaging to children's educational outcomes? This review looks specifically at this topic. It examines existing international research in detail and discusses what it can tell us.

### **Call to Action**

- Challenge the assumption that care is damaging to children's education.
- Pay attention to pre-care experiences of children and consider the ways in which these may affect education.
- Ensure that information on pre-care experiences is included in future research to understand the long term impact.
- Speak to children and young people to find out what helped them get on in education.

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An international systematic review  
Aoife O'Higgins, Judy Sebba and Nikki Luke



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The full report can be read and downloaded for free:

<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/research/publications/>

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## What did we do?

A search of the international research on this topic provided 28 relevant studies (including two reviews) from the UK, USA, Canada and Australia.

*We asked the following questions:*

Is there a link between being in foster or kinship care and educational outcomes?

What is the nature of this relationship?

Is there any evidence to suggest that being in foster care, per se, is to blame for poor educational outcomes?

## What did we find out?

- Children in care lag behind their peers in the general population on educational attainment (grades, literacy and numeracy test scores). Children in care also have lower attendance and a higher risk of exclusion.
- There is a strong link between being in foster or kinship care and educational outcomes. However, when factors such as gender, ethnicity or special educational needs are accounted for, the link between being in care and how well children do in education is not as strong. Children who are disadvantaged in education are overrepresented in care.
- When children in care are compared to similarly disadvantaged children who are not in care, the attainment gap is reduced and in several studies disappeared.
- Findings suggest that care does not appear to be damaging, on average, to children's education.
- Relatively few studies in our review found that children benefit academically from being in care.