

SCHOOL NON-ATTENDANCE BY CHILDREN WITH A SOCIAL WORKER IN THE UK:

**A rapid review of extent, risk factors and
interventions**

July 2023



Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Foundations – What Works Centre for Children & Families for supporting the research undertaken in this rapid review and to thank the independent reviewers for their time and comments.

We are extremely grateful to the three Young Advisors (Lyra Bellator Liam, Bébert Longi and Shabnam Karim) who read and commented on this report. We have done our best to respond to their comments and incorporate their suggestions in the text. Lyra, Bébert and Shabnam also prepared their own response reports, highlighting what they felt were the key findings and implications. These reports are published alongside this main report.

Authors

David Sanders-Ellis¹
Hannah Cann¹
Dr Farihah Malik²
Jessica Mitchell²
Dr Louise Mc Grath-Lone¹
Dr Jenny Woodman¹
Professor Ruth Gilbert²
Dr Matthew Jay, Principal Investigator²

¹ University College London, Institute of Education; ² University College London, Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health

Author contributions

Review element	Author involved
Protocol drafting	David Sanders-Ellis, Louise Mc Grath-Lone, Jenny Woodman, Ruth Gilbert, Matthew Jay
Search strategy	David Sanders-Ellis, Matthew Jay
Grey literature searches	David Sanders-Ellis, Hannah Cann, Jessica Mitchell
Study screening	David Sanders-Ellis, Hannah Cann, Jessica Mitchell
Manuscript screening	David Sanders-Ellis, Matthew Jay, Jenny Woodman
Data extraction	Farihah Malik, Hannah Cann, Jessica Mitchell, David Sander-Ellis
Bias assessment	David Sanders-Ellis, Hannah Cann



Funding and competing interests

This rapid review was funded by What Works for Children's Social Care. The authors declare no competing interests.

About Foundations – What Works Centre for Children & Families

Foundations is the national What Works Centre for Children & Families. Foundations researches and evaluates the effectiveness of family support services and interventions, and generates the actionable evidence needed to improve them, so more vulnerable children can live safely and happily at home and lead happier, healthier lives. Foundations was formed through the merger of What Works for Children's Social Care (WWCSC) and the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) in December 2022.

Foundations was formed through the merger of What Works for Children's Social Care (WWCSC) and the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF).

About University College London

University College London (UCL) is the second largest UK university by total student enrolment with more than 45,000 students and 16,000 staff. Established in 1826, UCL is based in the Bloomsbury area of central London with other campuses and institutes across the city. In the 2021 Research Excellence Framework, UCL was ranked 2nd in research power with 93% being graded 'world leading' or 'internationally excellent'. UCL is a diverse global community of world-class academics, students, industry links, external partners and alumni. Our powerful collective of individuals and institutions work together to explore new possibilities.

To find out more visit: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/about/about-ucl>

If you'd like this publication in an alternative format such as Braille, large print or audio, please contact us at: info@foundations.org.uk



CONTENTS

Executive summary	5
Introduction	5
Objectives	5
Methods	5
Results	5
Conclusion	5
Introduction	6
Objectives	10
Methods	11
Results	15
Discussion	36
References	41
Appendices	46
Appendix 1: Search strategy	46
Appendix 2: Data screening tool	50
Appendix 3: Data extraction tool	50
Appendix 4: Further study details	52



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

While regular attendance at school by all children is a policy priority for government, poorer attendance is known to affect several vulnerable groups, including children with a social worker (CSW) – children and young people who likely stand most to benefit from education.

Objectives

This rapid review aimed to appraise recent evidence on:

1. The extent of absence among CSW
2. Risk factors for absence
3. The effectiveness of interventions to improve attendance.

Methods

Following a pre-registered protocol, we conducted searches for studies using eight electronic social science, sociology and education databases across four platforms: EBSCOhost, Ovid, ProQuest and Social Care Online, as well as searches for grey literature. We sought studies relating to UK populations published in 2010 to provide the most up-to-date evidence. Following the searches, researchers independently screened each title and abstract, before screening full texts, extracting the data, and carrying out a global risk of bias assessment on each study that met the inclusion criteria.

Results

Twenty-three papers were included, the majority from England. CSW had higher rates of school non-attendance (absences, exclusions and non-enrolment) compared to children without social workers. In particular those with short-term social care interventions fared worse than those who had been in care or in need for longer. Risk factors for non-attendance among CSW included type of social work intervention, length of care placements, placement type, age when entering care, special educational needs and disabilities, behavioural, emotional or social difficulties, school instability, and gender. Evidence as to the effectiveness of interventions was weak owing to methodological problems.

Conclusion

Although school non-attendance is known to be worse for CSW, there is a lack of recent large-scale interventions targeting school non-attendance. Current innovative practice seems to be focused on local authority initiatives driven by their Virtual Schools. There is a particular lack of research around off-rolling and risk factors for school non-attendance.



INTRODUCTION

For children with a social worker whose lives are often beset by periods of uncertainty and change, regular school attendance can be considered a stabilising influence. Among all children, school attendance is associated with higher academic attainment (DfE, 2022a) and current government policy focuses on improving attendance to improve standards (DfE, 2022b), a call echoed by the Children’s Commissioner for England (Children’s Commissioner, 2022). Poorer attendance, however, is known to affect several vulnerable groups, including children with a social worker (CSW) – children and young people who likely stand most to benefit from education (DfE, 2022e).

School attendance and absences for CSW are an important concern for schools, local authority children’s services and central government with the Department for Education (DfE) announcing, in June 2021, £16 million to support educational outcomes, in particular attendance, for CSW. Within the population, CSW are heterogeneous in their underlying needs, social care experience and outcomes. For example, rates of absence between Children Looked After (CLA), children on Child Protection Plans (CPPs) and other Children in Need (CIN) differ considerably (DfE, 2019). Across all groups, however, poorer educational outcomes have been observed (Berridge et al., 2020; Jay & Mc Grath-Lone, 2019). As an example, a review of Children in Need conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic identified that CSW were almost three times more likely to have missed 10% of possible school sessions (and therefore be classified as persistent absentees) than children who had never had a social worker (DfE, 2019). Similarly, the subset of CSW who were in care had a higher absence rate than those not in care.

This rapid review seeks to appraise recent evidence on:

1. The extent of absence among CSW
2. Risk factors for absence
3. Interventions to improve attendance.

Rationale

Extent of, and risk factors for, absence

A recently published systematic review (Jay & Mc Grath-Lone, 2019) examined educational outcomes (including absence) among CSW in the UK, finding that CSW (defined in various ways) were more likely to be absent from school. That review, however, only described differences in absence rates and did not examine risk factors for absence. Additionally, there may be more recent research – especially since the COVID-19 pandemic not covered in that review. Our rapid review therefore examines the extent of absence among CSW as well as risk factors. Additionally, given that inequalities often cluster (i.e., are intersectional), we also sought to examine in particular any evidence on inequalities in absence rates among CSW measured by the Equality Act 2010 protected characteristics and socioeconomic circumstances.



Further, we adopted a broad definition of absence by also examining exclusions and non-enrolment. Official statistics and studies of school absence/exclusion can only include students who are enrolled. However, recent research has shown that CSW are more likely to become unenrolled from state secondary school than children without a social worker (Jay et al., 2022). Drivers of formally documented absence, exclusions and non-enrolment, all of which signal a child is missing education, may be linked and therefore – in order to fully understand the extent and drivers of school (non-) attendance among CSW, as well as possible interventions – it is necessary to account for not just formally recorded absence, but also non-enrolment and exclusions.

Interventions for improving attendance

Understanding the risk factors for school non-attendance could help to target groups of CSW at highest risk and inform the design of future interventions. Recent systematic reviews (Liabo et al., 2013; Evans et al., 2017) that have focused on interventions for educational outcomes for children in care, and school non-attendance, identified 14 interventions. Those identified by Liabo et al., (2013) span from 1989 to 2009, consist of a number of UK-based studies, and include some that have been instrumental in directing English children’s social care policy such as the Virtual School Pilot (Berridge et al., 2009). Given the length of time since this review and the policy changes since its publication, there is a need to confirm what further studies have been conducted. Studies identified more recently by Evans et al., (2017) included a majority coming from North America and of little applicability to the UK. Research on Virtual Schools in England (Ofsted, 2012) demonstrated that they have improved outcomes for children in care, although there is still a lack of robust research into their effectiveness nationally.

As yet, there has been no UK-focused review of the evidence on how to reduce school non-attendance for CSW. We therefore also aimed to describe the current evidence on interventions to improve school attendance for CSW in the UK. These interventions included, among others, Virtual Schools, whose remit has recently been extended to all CSW (DfE, 2021).

Definitions

Absences

Absences can be authorised, for example to attend a doctor’s appointment or because of illness, or unauthorised for example, through truancy, “school refusal” or being taken on holiday. In this Review, we also examine exclusion and non-enrolment (defined below) as forms of absence.

Absence rates

Researchers and official statistics can report absence rates in different ways. Commonly, the absence rate is calculated by dividing the number of sessions absent (see “School sessions”, below) by the total number of possible sessions. A student can therefore be said to have missed, for example, 3% of their possible sessions. Another way of calculating absence rates is by using the persistent absence threshold (see below).



Attendance

Being recorded as attending school (could be the morning or afternoon session, or both).

Child Protection Plan (CPP)

A CPP can be completed when a child is judged to be at risk of significant harm that may affect their health, welfare and development.

Children in Need (CIN)

A CIN is a child who needs services from the local authority to help them to achieve or maintain “a reasonable standard of health or development”. These services may include financial assistance, childcare and child protection services.

Children Looked After (CLA)

A CLA is a child accommodated by the local authority under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 or who is placed into care by virtue of a care order.

Children with a Social Worker (CSW)

CSW is collectively used for the purpose of this Review as any child that is looked after, in need or subject to a protection plan.

Exclusion

A disciplinary measure to remove the child from the school either temporarily, up to 45 days in one academic year (i.e. a fixed-term exclusion) or permanently.

Non-enrolment

Non-enrolment can occur where the child is off-rolled (i.e. the child is removed from the school without a formal permanent exclusion and where the removal is primarily for the benefit of the school rather than the child, including cases where parents are encouraged to remove the child from the school’s roll) or where a child’s whereabouts is unknown and they cannot be found. In studies using the National Pupil Database (the source for the Department for Education official statistics), non-enrolment could also be caused by transfer to private or home schooling, death or emigration.

Persistent absence

A student is said to be persistently absent where they miss more than 10% of their possible sessions (= about a month off school). In the past, this was 15% and, before that, 20%. This is a government-set threshold.

Ratios

When comparing absence rates between groups, some studies use risk ratios and odds ratios. Crudely put, these ratios indicate how much more or less likely absence is in one group compared



to another. For example, if the “risk ratio” for absence for children looked after is 1.3, compared to children not looked after, this means that children looked after are 1.3 times (30%) more likely to be absent.

School session

The school year consists of at least 380 “sessions”. A session is half a school day. Therefore, the school year is at least 190 days. However, if a student is not enrolled for the whole year (for example, where they change schools during term time), their total number of possible sessions will be less than 380. A student can be marked absent for the morning or afternoon session (or both). As such, absence rates are often calculated by dividing the number of sessions where the student was absent by that student’s total possible sessions.



OBJECTIVES

The aims of this rapid review were to answer the following questions:

1. What is the extent of school non-attendance among different groups of CSW (e.g. CIN, those on CPPs and CLA)?
2. What are the risk factors/drivers for school non-attendance among different groups of CSW, including child-, family-, social care- and school-level factors?
3. What is the effectiveness of targeted interventions to improve school attendance of different groups of CSW?



METHODS

Protocol registration

The rapid review protocol was registered in advance on the Open Science Framework (OSF) website: <https://osf.io/qvqgm8/>. We made minor changes to the database search strategy to adapt them to the databases. These changes were dependent on each database's search functionality and limit options. We also removed the third group of search terms relating to geographical extent, as the terms were often not included in the abstracts or titles of studies and instead used geographical limits set to the UK. The exact search terms and limits applied are given in Appendix 1. In addition, based on feedback from our anonymous peer reviewers, we adopted a global risk of bias assessment of included studies rather than using a checklist risk of bias assessment tool. This was because the studies were very disparate in terms of their methodology and exposure and outcome definitions and attendance/absence was not always the primary endpoint of those studies. As such, our risk of bias assessment was in relation to the attendance and absence outcomes as presented in this report. Finally, we additionally extracted data on protected characteristics, where available, as specific predictors of attendance/absence following discussion with the funder, What Works for Children's Social Care.

Study eligibility criteria

Studies were included that contained data corresponding to one or more of the research questions relating to the extent of school non-attendance for CSW, the risk factors for school non-attendance for CSW and/or interventions. In addition, the studies must have:

- Been empirical research (randomised controlled trials, observational studies, and qualitative studies)
- Been published since 2010 – given the changes in policy since 2010 for CSW more recent studies provided the most up to date evidence and accurate representation of the current state of non-attendance
- Been published in English – given that the scope for this rapid review was to provide specific evidence for the UK context, any papers not published in English were unlikely to provide relevant insight and were unlikely to be a biasing factor
- Been of a UK population (England, Scotland, Wales and/or Northern Ireland) – differences in the social care and education systems between countries limit the generalisability of international literature and its potential relevance beyond the scope of this rapid review.

Search strategy

In line with the PRISMA-P guidance, a systematic search was carried out on 8 electronic databases: ERIC & British Education Index (EBSCOhost), PsycInfo, Social Policy & Practice (Ovid), Social Science Database, Education Database, Social Services Abstracts, Sociological Abstracts (ProQuest)



and Social Care Online (SCIE). Search terms were restricted to title and abstracts related to the populations of interest and the outcomes of interest.

Limits were then applied on date, location and subject (school-age children aged 4–17). The complete search strategy is detailed in Appendix 1.

Searches of the databases were carried out by DSE on 3 August 2022 after the protocol was finalised.

Hand searches of grey literature were split up and conducted by DSE, HC and JM for studies on the following websites: What Works for Children’s Social Care (<https://whatworks-csc.org.uk/>), Rees Centre (<https://www.education.ox.ac.uk/rees-centre/>), CoramBAAF (<https://corambaaf.org.uk/>), National Children’s Bureau (<https://www.ncb.org.uk/>), Department for Education (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education>) and National Foundation for Educational Research (<https://www.nfer.ac.uk/>).

DSE also conducted a search of Google Scholar with the below key terms, searching for the first 200 results as per the recommendations of Haddaway et al. (2015):

“looked after children” OR “Children in Need”) AND (“school attendance” OR “school absence” OR “missing school”) AND (“United Kingdom” OR “England”).

Snowball searches of reference lists and papers citing were split up and conducted by DSE, FM, HC and JM of all included studies to identify further relevant studies. Due to the time constraints of a rapid review, study investigators were not contacted.

Study selection

Following the searches, exact duplicate studies were removed automatically using the database search engine (where available). The citations were then exported as RIS files and imported into a shared Zotero (reference management software) library and then deduplicated again using the automatic deduplication function. Despite this, some duplicates remained and were identified and removed by hand during screening.

A screening tool form was produced using Google Forms (Appendix 2) and was piloted by DSE and MJ on the first 20 records. All titles and abstracts were then screened twice, independently by DSE and HC. Disagreements were resolved through discussion.

The full texts of identified studies were independently screened by DSE and HC using the same Google form. Consensus could not be reached in eight cases where MJ acted as the third reviewer.

DSE searched Google Scholar on 16 October 2022. The first 200 hits were downloaded and imported into Zotero and were deduplicated and screened by JM using the screening tool. The full texts of those were then assessed independently by DSE and JM for inclusion in the report.



The hand searches of the websites and grey literature were completed between 17 and 21 October 2022 using the following search terms: attendance, absence, missing school, exclusion and off-roll. The total number of hits for each term was recorded and potentially relevant studies checked against the inclusion criteria using the screening tool.

The screening tool was also used to record the snowball searches of the reference lists and papers citing. Three independent reviewers searched the reference list of the original texts (FM, HC and JM) with each paper being assessed by two researchers to find relevant papers that may meet the inclusion criteria. A forward citation search was completed (FM, HC and JM) using Google Scholar to identify studies citing those already included. Any relevant papers were entered into the data extraction tool by FM, HC and JM. As such, each snowball and citation search was reviewed twice, independently, and then exported and reviewed by DSE for final inclusion.

Data extraction

Data was extracted by two researchers out of HC, FM and JM. Both researchers carried out a full data extraction independently using a data extraction tool also produced using Google Forms (Appendix 3). Consensus was sought where differences in the data extraction was identified. The results of the data extraction were then reviewed by DSE before inclusion in the final report. Where details differed between the independent researchers, DSE examined the original papers to confirm accuracy.

From all papers included we extracted the following information: author, study year, population, geographical and temporal extent, research questions, methods, results, and protected characteristics.

For the subset of studies corresponding to the third research question on the effectiveness of targeted interventions, we also extracted data in line with the TIDieR methodology developed by Hofmann et al., (2014). The TIDieR methodology provides a complete description of the intervention to allow for replication and aid in future implementation by describing the intervention using the below sections:

- BRIEF NAME of the intervention.
- WHY the intervention was needed, i.e. the rationale.
- WHAT (materials) were required and WHAT (procedure) was conducted.
- WHO provided the intervention, e.g. a psychologist or teacher.
- HOW the was intervention delivered.
- WHERE the intervention was delivered, whether it needed any special infrastructure.
- WHEN and HOW much, over what period, and how often the intervention was delivered.
- TAILORING, whether the intervention was designed to be personalised.
- MODIFICATIONS, whether the intervention was modified in the course of the study.
- HOW WELL (planned), whether fidelity to the study was measured.



- HOW WELL (actual), whether the intervention was delivered as planned.

Assessing the bias of studies

Given the heterogeneity and types of studies included, a standardised assessment of bias was deemed inappropriate and so a global risk of bias assessment was conducted in relation to attendance and absence data found in the included studies. Bias in the selected studies was independently assessed by two independent researchers (DSE and HC, and further checked by MJ) against a list of potential concerns for bias that covered selection and sampling bias, measurement bias (recall bias, information bias, response bias social desirability bias), attrition bias and reporting bias. Concerns and the rationale for concern were recorded on a pro forma sheet. Consensus was sought where different concerns of bias were identified.

Data analysis and synthesis

Data was synthesised narratively following the Guidance on the Conduct of Narrative Synthesis in Systematic Reviews (Popay et al., 2006). Quantitative evidence on the extent and risk factors for non-attendance (research questions 1 and 2) were summarised by sub-group of CSW and type of school non-attendance, wherever possible. This information was then synthesised narratively. Meta-analysis was not conducted given the heterogeneity of the studies that were identified.

To address inequalities, we recorded data, where possible, for individuals with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. The following are protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. In so doing, we examined whether the studies provided data on Equality Act protected characteristics as risk factors for attendance/absence among CSW. By capturing the experience of people with these characteristics we hoped to highlight inequalities, inequities, and areas where more research is required. Additionally, we paid particular attention to socioeconomic circumstances (e.g. deprivation and poverty), even though these are not protected under the Equality Act.



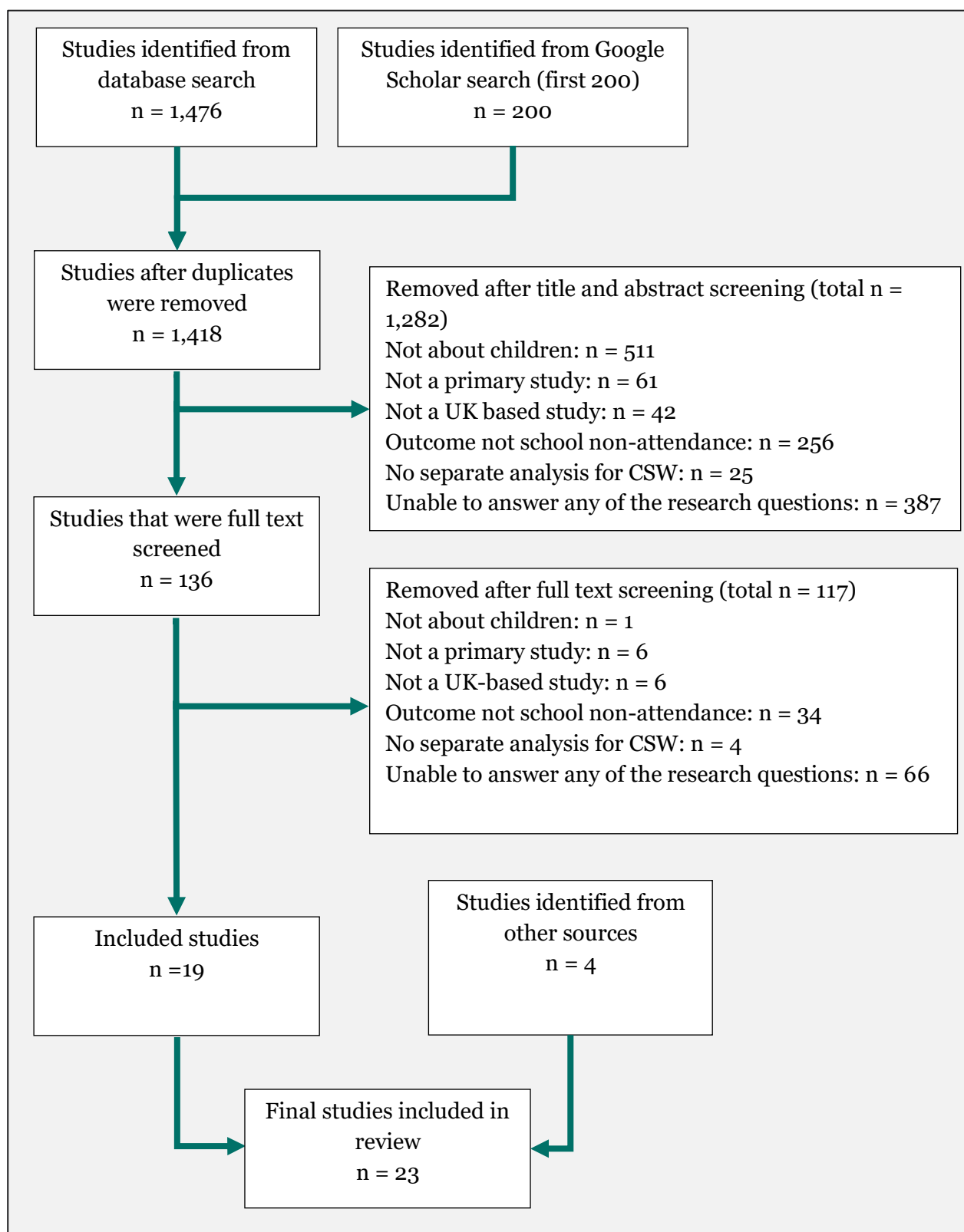
RESULTS

Search results

The online database and Google Scholar search yielded 1,676 results after limiting by year of publication, location and subject (Figure 1). An additional number of results were identified through hand searches of the websites of relevant organisations listed in the “Search strategy” section of this report, the reference lists of identified studies, and papers citing any identified studies. After deduplication 1,418 papers were screened for inclusion in the review with 23 studies being included in the review. Many study exclusions related to the topic being either adult social care, or social worker training.



Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram





Characteristics of included studies

In total, 23 studies were included in the review, consisting of 16 from England, 5 from Scotland, 0 from Wales, and 2 from Northern Ireland. The studies covered the full range of the review period from 2010 to 2022; several used routinely collected, administrative data over a longer time period (Berridge et al., 2020; Fleming et al., 2021; Jay et al., 2022; Luke & O’Higgins, 2018). The majority of studies compared outcomes for CLA, followed by CIN. Children with a CPP were the least frequently examined in the selected studies.

The studies are summarised in Table 1 (summary of observational studies providing data on the extent of attendance/absence), Table 2 (summary of observational studies providing data on risk factors and equality dimensions) and Table 3 (summary of evaluations of interventions). Following these tables is a narrative synthesis in the “Synthesis of results” section of the report. A discussion follows in Chapter 5. Further study details are provided in Appendix 4, including the TIDieR checklist for interventional studies.

Further information regarding the research questions, methods, results for all observational studies and the TIDieR checklist for intervention studies, can be found in Appendix 4.

We found no studies with data on the following Equality Act protected characteristics as risk factors for absence/attendance among CSW: gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, and sexual orientation.



Table 1: Summary of observational studies providing data on the extent of attendance/absence among children with a social worker

Study	Country (sample size)	Years studied	Data source	Exposure groups	Comparison groups	Outcome measurement	Results	Risk of bias
Berridge et al., 2020	England, (540,934)	2006–17	Administrative education data: NPD (all of England)	All CSW	Children without a social worker	Unauthorised absences (mean proportion of possible session Year 7–11)	CIN or those on a CPP <6 months = 0.03 CIN > 6 months = 0.04 CPP > 6 months = 0.07 CLA < 6 months = 0.05 CLA > 6 months = 0.03 No CSC Intervention = 0.01	Based on administrative data of children in state schools. All children with at least one year not enrolled across year 7 to 11 excluded: may have excluded more disadvantaged children.
Connelly & Furnivall, 2012	Scotland (~16,000)	2003–10	Analysis of published administrative education data: Scottish Government	CLA	Children not in care	Attendance (half days %) per year Exclusions (rate per 1,000 Exclusions) per year, including repeat exclusions	For 2009/10: CLA at home = 85% CLA away from home = 93% Not CLA = 93% CLA at home = 433 CLA away from home = 325 Not CLA = 50	Based on cross-sectional administrative data of children enrolled in state school. CLA status determined contemporaneously to absence. Only includes CLA for at least 12 months. Short-term CLA who may have poorer attendance will be included in the comparison group.
Connelly & Duncalf, 2011	Scotland (~16,000)	2009/10	Analysis of published administrative education data: Scottish Government	CLA	Children not in care	Absences (Average half days missed in the academic year)	CLA at home = 58.7 CLA away from home = 28.1 Not CLA = 25.0	Based on cross-sectional administrative data of children enrolled in state school. CLA status determined contemporaneously to absence. Only includes CLA for at least 12 months. Short-term CLA



Study	Country (sample size)	Years studied	Data source	Exposure groups	Comparison groups	Outcome measurement	Results	Risk of bias
								who may have poorer attendance will be included in the comparison group.
Fleming et al., 2021	Scotland (13,898)	2009–12	Administrative education data linked to health data: Scottish Government (all of Scotland)	CLA	Children not in care	Absences (Average number of days) Exclusions	CLA were more likely to be absent (adjusted incidence rate ratio [AIRR] 1.27, 95% confidence interval [CI] 1.24 to 1.30) and excluded (AIRR 4.09, 95% CI 3.86 to 4.33) from school. Absolute rates of absence and exclusion are not given.	Restricted to singleton births due to data linkage methods. Linkage rate was 80%, which may have introduced bias. Based on administrative data on children enrolled in school in 2009, 2010 or 2012 (years where data were available). CLA status defined across 2009 to 2012.
Jay et al., 2022	England (>1 million)	2011–17	Administrative data: NPD	All CSW	Children with no CSC history	School non-enrolment (≥1 year not enrolled % across years 7 to 11)	No CSC history = 3.8% CIN = 8.1% CPP = 9.4% CLA = 10.4%	Not possible to determine exact cause of non-enrolment: could be due to off-rolling, disengagement, emigration, transfer to private or home schooling or death (factors unlikely to account for all non-enrolment). CSC status defined to Year 4 only due to data availability
Luke & O’Higgins, 2018	England (642,805)	2012/13	Administrative education data: NPD (all of England: same sample as in Sebba et al., 2015)	All CSW	Children without a social worker	Unauthorised absences across secondary school (average sessions missed)	No CSC intervention = 1.84 CIN = 8.89 CLA >5 years = 8.93 CLA 2–5 years = 14.49 CLA 1–2 years = 17.03 CLA Short term = 17.74 No CSC intervention = 0.6% CIN = 3.9%	CSC status measured in 2012/13 only. Not clear whether these analyses were based on children with complete enrolment across secondary school or not.



Study	Country (sample size)	Years studied	Data source	Exposure groups	Comparison groups	Outcome measurement	Results	Risk of bias
						Exclusions across secondary school (% ever permanently excluded)	CLA >5 years = 1.3% CLA 2–5 years = 4.7% CLA 1–2 years = 6.5% CLA Short term = 8.0%	
Matheson & Connelly, 2012	Scotland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland (~16,000)	2012	Analysis of published administrative education data: Scottish Government	CLA	All children	Attendance in 2009/10 (school attendance rate) Exclusions in 2009/19 (rate per 1,000 pupils)	CLA = 87.8% All other children = 93.2% Exclusion rate for CLA was 365 exclusions per 1,000 pupils, approximately eight times higher than that for all school children	Based on cross-sectional administrative data of children enrolled in state school. CLA status determined contemporaneously to absence. Only includes CLA for at least 12 months. Short-term CLA who may have poorer attendance will be included in the comparison group.
Melkman, 2022	England (3,699)	2012/13	Administrative education data: NPD (all of England)	CLA	-	Exclusions in 2012/13 (Ever excluded in year 2012/2013) The author uses the term out of school suspension	19.4% of the CLA had been suspended from school in Year 9, with an average of 2.68 suspensions per child (SD = 2.20).	Includes children eligible for GCSE exam entry in 2015, enrolled in state school in Year 9 in 2013 and in care for at least one month as at 31 March 2013. No comparison group.
O'Higgins, 2018	England (167)	2012/13	Administrative education data: NPD (all of England: based on sample as in Sebba et al., 2015)	CLA – refugee and asylum-seeking children	Children not in care	Absences (average unauthorised absences)	Refugee and asylum-seeking children M=0.02, SD=0.04 Children in the general population M=0.01, SD=0.04	Refugee status may not be accurate as recorded by CSC rather than immigration services. Does not include children without a Unique Pupil Number, which is assigned on school entry and so may bias results against refugee and asylum-seeking



Study	Country (sample size)	Years studied	Data source	Exposure groups	Comparison groups	Outcome measurement	Results	Risk of bias
								children as many do not attend mainstream school in England before they are 16.
PWC, 2011	Northern Ireland (602)	2008–11	Analysis of published administrative education data: Northern Ireland Department for Education	CLA – post primary school	All children not in care	Absence rates in 2008/09 (authorised and unauthorised) Exclusions (permanent) and suspension (fixed term) rates in 2008/09	CLA = 6% Authorised and 6.2% unauthorised All school-aged children = 5.1% authorised and 2.5% unauthorised. CLA = 1% permanent and 8% fixed-term All school-aged children = 0.01% permanent and 2% fixed-term	Based on cross-sectional administrative data of children enrolled in state school. CLA status determined contemporaneously to absence. Duration of being looked after not stated. Comparison group will include CSW that are not CLA.
Roberts & Danechi, 2021	England (>1 million)	2020/21	Secondary analysis of published Department for Education daily survey estimates completed by schools	CSW	Pupils with an EHC plan, Children of critical workers	Attendance (Proportion attending school as of 11 February 2021)	CSW = 44% Children of critical workers = 69% Pupils with EHCP 38%	Estimates based on surveys of schools, not the National Pupil Database.
Rodgers & Waugh, 2017	Northern Ireland (2,213)	2015/16	Analysis of published administrative education data: Northern Ireland	CLA	All children not in care	Absence (half days missed)	Full attendance: 12% 1–24 days missed: 79% 25 days or more missed: 12% CLA = 8%	Based on cross-sectional administrative data of children enrolled in state school. CLA status determined contemporaneously to absence. Only includes CLA for at least 12 months continuously.



Study	Country (sample size)	Years studied	Data source	Exposure groups	Comparison groups	Outcome measurement	Results	Risk of bias
			Department for Education			Exclusions (suspensions) in 2015/16	All other children 1.1%	Short-term CLA who may have poorer attendance will be included in the comparison group.
Sebba et al., 2015	England (642,805)	2013	Administrative education data: NPD	CSW	Children not in care/need	Absence (Unauthorised absences in secondary school, half days) Exclusions (% ever permanently excluded in secondary school)	General population = 17.1 CIN = 70.9 CLA in care <1 year = 88.6 CLA in care >1 year = 35.6 General population = 0.6% CIN = 3.9% CLA in care <1 year = 8.0% CLA in care >1 year = 3.3%	CSC status measured in 2012/13 (but retrospectively). Not clear whether these analyses were based on children with complete enrolment across secondary school or not. May be unrepresentative of some groups, e.g. unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
Teyhan et al., 2019	England (12,868)	2007–09	ALSPAC (regional birth cohort) linked to administrative data from the NPD	CSW	Children not in care/need	Persistent absence in KS4	CLA 18.4% (7.1 to 29.6) CIN 32.8% (21.0 to 44.6) No CIN/CLA record 6.8% (6.3 to 7.3)	Based on linkage of ALSPAC linked to the NPD. Linkage to the CSC data in NPD was only available from approximately age 10 for CLA status and 17 for CiN status meaning there will have been misclassification of historic CSC status which may have resulted in under-estimates of the strength of the association. ALSPAC, a study based on sampling methodology, itself may be subject to selection bias.

AIRR adjusted incidence rate ratio; ALSPAC Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children; CI confidence interval; CIN Children in Need; CLA Children Looked After; CSC children's social care; CPP child protection plan; CSW children with a social worker; EHCP Education, Health & Care Plan; GCSE General Certificate of Secondary Education; LA local authority; NPD National Pupil Database.



Table 2: Summary of observational studies providing data on risk factors and equality dimensions

Study (outcomes)	Risk factors studied	Equality dimensions	Risk factors
Fleming et al., 2021 (absence and exclusion)	Care setting (at home versus away from home)		<p>Compared to CLA at home, CLA away from home had less absenteeism (adjusted incidence rate ratio (AIRR) 0.35, 95% confidence interval (CI) 0.33 to 0.36).</p> <p>Exclusions: Compared to CLA at home, CLA away from home had fewer exclusions (AIRR 0.63, 95% CI 0.56 to 0.71).</p>
Jay et al., 2022 (non-enrolment)	Type of CSW involvement; SEND	Disability (measured as SEND)	The odds of non-enrolment in years 10/11 were higher among those with CLA history vs children with no CSC intervention (odds ratio (OR) 4.76, 95% CI 4.49–5.05) as well as in those with CPP history (3.60, 3.39–3.81) and CIN history (2.53, 2.49–2.58). History of special educational needs further increased non-enrolment odds, including after confounder adjustment.
Matheson & Connelly, 2012 (attendance)	Care setting (foster care versus local authority homes); age; special school	Age; disability (measured as SEND)	<p>The attendance rate for CLA at home was 78.7%, while the rate for those in local authority homes was 84.9%. School attendance of children in foster care, however, was higher – 96.3% (local authority foster carers) and 95.9% (foster carers purchased by a local authority).</p> <p>The attendance rate for primary aged CLA was a little lower (percentage not provided by author), the secondary absence rate (80.5%) and special education (84.6%) was much lower.</p>
Melkman, 2022 (exclusion)	Gender; FSM eligibility; behavioural, emotional, or social difficulties; age; care duration	Gender; deprivation (measured as FSM eligibility); age; “Race”/ethnicity	<p>Children who were male, had behavioural, emotional or social difficulties, entered care at an older age, and who remained in care for a shorter period had a significantly greater risk for suspension in Year 9.</p> <p>Eligibility for FSM among CLA was negatively associated with out of school suspensions (exclusions). This may be because CLA eligible for FSM were less likely to be placed in residential care, and more likely to enter care early.</p> <p>There was no relationship between “race” and exclusion among CLA.</p>



Study (outcomes)	Risk factors studied	Equality dimensions	Risk factors
O'Higgins, 2018 (authorised absence)	Refugee or asylum-seeking status; school setting; number of care placements		Refugee and asylum-seeking children with higher Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire scores ($r = .204, p < 0.05$), those in non-mainstream schools, ($r = -0.367, p < 0.05$), and those with more placements ($r = 0.376, p < 0.01$) were more likely to be absent from school with authorisation.
Plumridge & Sebba, 2018 (absence and exclusion)	School, family and care characteristics (see results column); gender; age	Gender; age	<p>Risk factors for higher non-attendance were: peer pressure/bullying, behavioural issues, underlying social and personal issues, contact with birth parents, socioeconomic circumstances, age when entering care, placement type and stability, attitudes to education in the home.</p> <p>Suspension was more prevalent for looked after boys (12%) compared to girls (5%). Age was also a factor: CLA aged 12–15 years were most likely (15%) to be suspended from school; followed by those aged 16 and over (9%).</p>
Sebba et al., 2015 (fixed-term exclusions)	CSC involvement duration		On average CLA short-term (in care <1 year) missed more school sessions while on fixed-term exclusions (17 session), than CIN (8.7 session) and CLA long-term (in care more than 1 year) (11.8 session) compared to those not CIN or CLA (1.8 sessions).

AIRR adjusted incidence rate ratio; CI confidence interval; CIN Children in Need; CLA Children Looked After; CPP child protection plan; CSC children's social care; CSW children with a social worker; FSM free school meals; SDQ Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire; SEND special educational needs and disability



Table 3: Summary of interventions

Study	Country (sample size)	Years studied	Data source	Design	Intervention	Intervention groups	Control groups	Outcome measures	Results	Effectiveness	Risk of bias
Bhatti et al., 2022	England (100)	2021/22	Sample of Year 6 children subject to a Child in Need plan in Hartlepool Borough Council	Pilot	Transition Support (pilot)	CIN/ CPP	Same group a year later	Attendance	Average attendance increased by 3% and the percentage of pupils with an attendance rate of 85% increased by 9% between Spring 2020/2021 and Autumn 2021/2022.	Limited benefits – Nonsignificant findings.	High attrition and reduced power by excluding Year 5 pupils. Difficult to attribute effects on outcomes to intervention due to COVID-19.
Biehal et al., 2012	England (219)	2005–09	Primary data collected	Randomised controlled trial (RCT)	Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care for Adolescents (MTFC-A)	CLA receiving MTFC-A	CLA receiving treatment as usual	Absence	Approximately one-third of the young people of school age in both groups were absent either occasionally or frequently (figures not provided).	No difference.	Blinding not possible. Some allocated to control group received MTFC-A. Limited statistical data on absence.
Fancourt & Sebba, 2018	England (24 schools in 1 LA; part of a broader evaluation involving interviews)	2016	Data supplied by the Virtual School (details not provided)	Pilot	The Leicestershire Virtual School’s Attachment Aware Schools Programme	CLA	None – Compared to national averages for CLA	Attendance Exclusions	Attendance rates of 93% for 2016–17, a fall of <1% on the same period in 2016, which was also a fall of <1% on the previous year.	No difference.	Limited information on the data source and limited statistical detail make it difficult to evaluate the robustness of these findings.



Study	Country (sample size)	Years studied	Data source	Design	Intervention	Intervention groups	Control groups	Outcome measures	Results	Effectiveness	Risk of bias
									No permanent exclusions recorded by the Virtual School. The rate of fixed-term exclusions had dropped by 0.2% from the previous year.		
Green et al., 2014	England (219)	2005–09	Sample of 0–17-year-olds in 6 local authorities with complex or severe emotional difficulties and/or challenging behaviour.	RCT	Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care for Adolescents (MTFC-A)	CLA receiving MTFC-A	CLA receiving usual care	Attendance	Attendance was higher in the intervention group, but this was not statistically significant: odds ratio for attendance: 2.5 (95% CI 0.48, 13.13; p = 0.28).	No difference.	Some allocated to the control group received MTFC-A. Only 6 out of eligible 18 LAs participated in the trial. Limited statistical power: high uncertainty. Trial may further have been subject to selection bias and attrition at individual level.
Griggs et al., 2022	England (70)	2020/21	A sample of children from nursery to Year 11 targeted to	Pilot	Placing an advisory teacher in Children’s Social Care (pilot, beginning	CIN/ CPP	Same group a term later	Attendance	Average attendance increased by 12% and unauthorised absences decreased by 3% between	Indications of possible benefits –potentially confounded by COVID-19.	A sample of pupils was specifically targeted for inclusion (i.e. no



Study	Country (sample size)	Years studied	Data source	Design	Intervention	Intervention groups	Control groups	Outcome measures	Results	Effectiveness	Risk of bias
			receive the intervention.		in October 2020 to July 2021)			Exclusions	autumn term 2020/21 and summer term 2020/21. The average number of termly exclusions fell from 0.57 in autumn term 2020/21 to 0.17 in summer term 2020/21.		random sample) and so results difficult to generalise. Difficult to attribute effects on outcomes to intervention due to COVID-19.
MacRitchie, 2019	Scotland (180)	2014–18	This paper was an opinion piece by the provider’s founder on the intervention’s effectiveness.	Pilot	MCR Pathways (Mentoring)	CLA	N/A	Attendance	In a purposive sub-sample, nine of nine young people in the Glasgow Northeast re-engagement programme improved attendance.	Not possible to draw conclusions.	Conflict of interest, not explicit how data was collected. Is a single case study.
Plumridge & Sebba, 2017	England (33)	2014–16	LA routinely collected data	Quasi-Experimental Design	Birmingham City Council’s Step Down Programme (aimed at bringing people out of residential homes into foster placements).	CLA who received the intervention non-random selection	Same CLA at baseline	Attendance	Attendance data at more than two timepoints are available for 19 young people. Of these, nine increased their attendance, only three from a baseline of less than 92% at baseline. Five young people continued from 100% baseline	Not possible to draw conclusions.	Attrition post evaluation due to placement breakdown was over 50%, which may therefore underestimate absence and exclusion through survivor bias. The study may



Study	Country (sample size)	Years studied	Data source	Design	Intervention	Intervention groups	Control groups	Outcome measures	Results	Effectiveness	Risk of bias
								Exclusion	<p>to attend 100% throughout the Programme (though not all these had completed 12 months). Two who decreased from 100% attendance dropped to 98% but a further three showed greater decreases in their attendance.</p> <p>Of the 24 young people for whom exclusion data were available, seven young people experienced fixed-term exclusions.</p>		be subject to selection bias. Limited statistical data are available on these outcomes.
Rivers, 2018	England (~1089)	2015–18	This paper was an opinion piece by the provider's founder on the intervention's effectiveness.	Natural Experiment (government policy)	Virtual School/ Virtual School Head Model	CLA	N/A	Exclusions	LA had reduced permanent exclusions to zero and the number of pupils experiencing fixed-term exclusions by 25% since 2015.	Not possible to draw conclusions.	Is a single case study only.
Sebba et al., 2016	England (1,035) (9 London)	2014/15	LA routinely collected data	Quasi-Experimental Design	London Fostering	CLA	Same CLA post-	Attendance	Unauthorised absences increased between Time 1 and	Not possible to draw conclusions.	Large amount of missing and poor-quality



Study	Country (sample size)	Years studied	Data source	Design	Intervention	Intervention groups	Control groups	Outcome measures	Results	Effectiveness	Risk of bias
	boroughs – direct work in 25 schools)				Achievement Programme		intervention		Time 2 in both schools involved in direct work and schools not involved.		data from some boroughs and schools on absences and exclusions

RCT randomised controlled trial; CIN children in need; CLA children looked after; CPP child protection plan; MTFC-A Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care for Adolescent



Bias assessment

All of the observational studies relied on administrative data, either exclusively or in part. Administrative data have the advantage of scale and of covering an entire population, minimising selection and attrition bias. However, all studies had some limitations that may have resulted in biased estimates, though it is difficult to ascertain what impact the direction of bias may have been. Some studies using administrative data excluded children without complete enrolment across all years (or were not clear on this), which excludes those children who move within the UK (e.g. between Scotland and England), to a nation outside of the UK, or between independent and state education. Given that non-enrolment is associated with adversity markers (including CSC involvement and poorer socioeconomic circumstances: Jay et al., 2022), this may have resulted in underestimates of absence rates. One study (Fleming et al., 2021) relied on data linkage between education and health. With a linkage rate of 80%, this study may have been subject to bias in that those who did not link may have been different in some respect (e.g. ethnicity, deprivation) than those who did and this in turn may have affected the accuracy of results. In the one study of non-enrolment (Jay et al., 2022), it was not possible to definitively determine the true underlying cause for non-enrolment, which may be due to off-rolling or disengagement from education or due to emigration, transfer to private or home schooling or, in very rare instances, death.

While we used systematic review methodology of both peer-reviewed and grey literature, there is still a possibility that we may have missed relevant papers, including older papers. There was, in particular, limited research evidence from Scotland and Northern Ireland, and none from Wales. Of those providing data from Scotland and Northern Ireland, all in fact made use of published government statistics rather than carrying out novel analyses of underlying administrative data. Given the limited information from these regions, we retained these studies. They are limited by the fact that CSC status was measured at a single point in time and for children to be counted as CLA, they must have been looked after for a continuous period of at least 12 months. However, as other studies included in this review shows, absence rates may vary by duration of care. The need for more research from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is clear.

Intervention studies were in particular subject to a range of biases that may have resulted in findings of no difference. Sample sizes were often small, and sampling was often non-random but purposive. Two of the papers (MacRitchie, 2019; Rivers, 2018) were in fact case studies of interventions with limited statistical data and may be subject to desirability bias.

Synthesis of results

What is the extent of school non-attendance among different groups of CSW?

Absence and attendance

Although different studies report data on attendance/absence in different ways, the evidence in this review consistently shows (even between studies of varying risk of bias), that CSW are more



likely to be absent from school than children without a social worker. This evidence is in line with recent Department for Education's statistical releases (DfE, 2022e). The extent of school non-attendance among different groups of CSW has followed a similar pattern across the UK over several years. Matheson and Connelly (2012) reported that CLA had almost twice as many absences (12.2%) compared to all other children (6.8%) over the academic year. Similar findings were reported by Connelly and Furnivall, (2012), with CLA having almost twice the number of half-days absent (45) compared to all other children (25) in the academic year 2008/09. Further evidence is provided by Luke and O'Higgins (2018) who reported that of all children without a social worker, the total unauthorised absences as a proportion of possible sessions was 0.01, compared to short-term CLA (0.06), CLA for 5 years or more (0.02) and CIN (0.05) in the 2012/13 academic year. Studies from Northern Ireland reported that absenteeism is higher for post-primary CLA at 12.2% compared to 7.6% for all school-aged children in post-primary schools (PWC, 2011) and that during the 2015/16 school year, just 12% of CLA had full attendance at school (Rodgers & Waugh, 2017).

Differences in unauthorised absence data for Children in Need compared to CLA varied depending on paper and specific subgroups used for comparison. One study found higher unauthorised absence rates for children on a Child Protection Plan >6 months (0.07) than CIN >6 months (0.04) and CLA >6 months (0.03) (Berridge et al., 2020). In comparison, Luke and O'Higgins (2018), who examined average sessions missed as a result of unauthorised absences, found little difference between CIN (8.93) and CLA >5 years (8.93) whereas CLA 1–2 years had much higher rates (17.03). Unauthorised absences are known to increase with age (DfE, 2022f) but comparisons between groups of children with a social worker are complex and factors such as timing of entry into care, or CSC referral, or heterogeneity in underlying need may affect results.

In Teyhan et al.'s (2019) study, CIN had the highest persistent absence rate (defined as missing at least 10% of possible sessions), followed by CLA and then children not in care or need. By comparison, recent DfE statistical releases (DfE, 2022e) show that the persistent absentee rate for CLA for at least 12 months was 12% in the Autumn 2020 term, which was lower than the percentage for the overall pupil population (13%) and CIN (30%). The fact that the DfE figures show persistent absence is lowest among CLA, whereas Teyhan et al. (2019) found that CLA had higher rates than the general population, may be due to the fact that the DfE figures only include children looked after for a continuous period of at least 12 months.

There was weak evidence of lower in-person attendance among CSW compared to children of key workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, despite both groups being eligible to attend school in person. Roberts and Danechi (2021) reported that, during the first month of the COVID-19 national school closures in 2021, only 44% of eligible CSW were attending school, in comparison, the attendance for children of key workers was 69%. This study does not, however, provide insight as to how online classes were recorded for purposes of attendance.

Fixed and permanent exclusion

As with absence, CSW in the UK have higher exclusion rates than children without a social worker. On average, children without a social worker missed fewer sessions per year (1.84), as a result of exclusions, than all CSW groups (Luke & O'Higgins, 2018). In the other CSW groups, the number



of sessions missed in Luke and O’Higgins’s (2018) study were: CIN (8.89), CLA for 5 or more years (8.93) CLA for 2–5 years (14.49), for 1–2 years (17.03), and under one year (17.74). Berridge et al. (2020) found that in school years 7–11, CSW missed between 5 and 10 times as many sessions (lowest CIN/ CPP <6 months at 5.9 sessions; highest CLA < 12 months at 12.2 sessions) because of fixed-term exclusions compared with children that received no CSC intervention (1.19 sessions).

PWC (2011) reported that in Northern Ireland in 2008/2009 CLA fixed-term and permanent exclusions were 1% and 8% compared to 0.01% and 2% for all other pupils.

Non-enrolment

There was some evidence that CSW were also more likely to miss education due to becoming unenrolled from school before the school leaving age. In England, for a cohort of children due to be in Year 11 in 2015/16 and 2016/17, CLA were more likely to be missing from enrolment data in at least one academic year across secondary school (10.4%) than children on a CPP (9.4%), CIN (8.1%) or children without a known history of social care involvement (3.8%) (Jay et al., 2022). These results may be explicable on the basis of off-rolling (“pushing out”) or other circumstances whereby a child receives no education, through emigration, death and transfer to home or private schooling cannot be ruled out for a minority of children.

Brief periods of non-enrolment can also be attributed to changing schools, particularly where this coincides with a change in placement for CLA. Teyhan et al. (2019) found 1.4 % of all children, 7.8% of Children in Need and 12.2% for children in care changed school in KS4 which may have included a brief period where they were not accessing an educational provision. This would not be the case where there was a managed move (where there is a voluntary agreement from all parties that a new school accepts a pupil that is at risk of permanent exclusion in their current provision) in order to avoid a permanent exclusion. However, there are concerns around the effectiveness of managed moves (Trotman et al., 2019; Bagley & Hallam, 2015) and a lack of data and research on managed moves for CSW. Planned moves as part of entering care can be positive for CLA, but should be subject to the child’s wishes, feelings, and in line with their best interests (DfE, 2018).

What are the risk factors/drivers for school non-attendance among different groups of CSW?

The following were identified as risk factors for non-attendance among CSW: type of social work intervention (e.g. whether in need, on a CPP or looked after), length of care placements, placement type, age when entering care, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), behavioural, emotional, or social difficulties (BESD), school instability and gender.

Consistent findings from Scotland (Connelly & Duncalf, 2011; Connelly & Furnivall, 2012; Fleming et al., 2021) compared absence by where Children Looked After were placed. These findings demonstrated that that Children Looked After *at home* were *more* likely to be absent from school than Children Looked After *away from home* (e.g. in foster care). Additionally, in studies from England, those in short-term care (less than 1 year) had more unauthorised absences compared to



those who had been in care for over 1 year or for more than 5 years (Sebba et al., 2015; Luke & O'Higgins, 2018).

Another factor is school instability. Sebba et al., (2015) found that instability (as measured by care placement changes, school moves in Years 10 and 11, high levels of unauthorised absences and fixed-term exclusions) had a stronger association with GCSE grades for CIN and short-term CLA (in care for less than 12 months). A factor that may be particularly important in relation to school non-attendance is care placement stability, which has been shown (Mc Grath-Lone et al., 2020) to vary among different groups of CLA. Sebba et al. (2015) did find a correlation between school stability and placement stability, but did not examine how far placement changes led to school changes.

CLA may also have increased non-attendance due to reduced hours and phased return initiatives. While these are designed to encourage attendance, particularly after periods of non-attendance, it was not known how these were recorded by the schools that operate such programmes (PWC, 2011).

In the studies of Sebba et al. (2015) and Luke and O'Higgins (2016) of 642,805 children sitting GCSEs in 2013, among CLA, those in long-term care (at least 12 months) had lower absence and permanent exclusion rates across secondary school followed by CLA in short-term care (less than 12 months), while CIN and those on CPPs in the GCSE year had higher rates of absence and permanent exclusion (Sebba et al., 2015). However, the average number of days missed across secondary school due to fixed-term exclusion was similar among CIN and CLA who had been looked after for over a year whereas the amount of time missed was highest among CLA who had been looked after for shorter time-periods (Sebba et al., 2015; Luke & O'Higgins, 2016). This suggests that while CIN are less likely to receive fixed-term exclusions, they are more likely to receive permanent exclusions when compared to CLA whose fixed-term exclusions result in more missed school sessions. More research in this area would be welcome, given the expansion of Virtual School Head Duties to all CSW and the potential for a reduction in permanent exclusions.

Jay et al. (2022) found that when the cause of school non-attendance is non-enrolment, it was CLA (including those had previously been CLA from Year 4 to 6) (10.4%) that had a higher rate of non-enrolment than CIN/former CIN (8.1%) or those on CPP (or who had been on a CPP) (9.4%). In addition, CSW with SEND were even more likely to be at risk of non-enrolment. Jay et al. (2022) did not examine other potential risk factors (such as child and school characteristics or care placement length or stability) among different groups of CSW meaning that further research is needed to understand risk and preventive factors for non-enrolment among CSW.

Type of SEND was not examined by Jay et al. (2022); however, findings by several studies (Melkman, 2022; O'Higgins, 2018; PWC, 2011) indicate that one particularly strong risk factor among CLA for school non-attendance (either through exclusion or absences), is behavioural, emotional, or social difficulties (BESD) or high scores on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ).



Other risk factors for higher rates of exclusion that were identified by Melkman (2022) include being male, being eligible for FSM, entering care at an older age (also identified by PWC, 2011), and remaining in care for a shorter time-period. These risk factors should be further examined in relation to the broader measures of school non-attendance as this was the only study to identify entering care at an older age, and gender.

Risk factors identified by PWC (2011) in their qualitative analysis included peer pressure/bullying, contact with birth parents, placement type/stability, and attitudes to education in the home. PWC (2011) also identified being CLA in a residential home as being more likely to have lower attendance rates which could be caused by negative peer pressure from within the home from other CLA that were refusing to go to school. Further risks include children that have had negative experiences in school and those that suffer from anxiety and lack confidence. Parents who were identified as having a bad experience at school, negative attitudes towards and undervaluing education were also seen as risks to attendance. This is both seen as a risk for Children Looked After at home or those who have contact with their birth family where school is not seen as a priority (PWC, 2011). Quantitative work is required to understand the extent to which these risk factors may play a role in school absence among CSW.

Three studies (Jay et al., 2022, Melkman, 2022; Matheson & Connelly, 2012) found risk factors relating to protected characteristics and equality dimensions (Table 3). In particular SEND, low income (measured using FSM eligibility), higher age at care entry, higher age generally (being in secondary school), and gender were associated with higher non-attendance among different groups of CSW. There was no evidence on other equality dimensions indicating that further research is needed to understand and address such inequities.

What is the effectiveness of targeted interventions to improve school attendance of different groups of CSW?

Interventions that were studied varied in scope and aims with two studies aiming to support CIN and CPP through the COVID-19 pandemic, two looking at providing stability through moving from residential to foster placements, one developing school awareness of attachment and trauma, one book gifting, and two designed to help champion education outcomes for children in care.

The research evidence for interventions improving school non-attendance was rather weak with several studies evaluating interventions for children in foster care. Studies evaluating London Fostering Achievement (Sebba et al., 2016), transition support, (Bhatti et al., 2022), Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care for Adolescents (MTFC-A, Biehal et al., 2012; Green et al., 2014) and attachment awareness training, (Fancourt & Sebba, 2018) reported no difference in attendance, or were unable to attribute the findings to the intervention (primarily due to small sample sizes, a lack of control group or randomisation).

Other evaluations such as that by Fancourt and Sebba (2018) on an attachment awareness training intervention found particular issues relating to how the methodology for reporting national level,



English attendance data changed between the baseline measure and the post-intervention data. At the national level from 2014/15 primary school pupil absence (nationally) was 2.7%. However, by the autumn and spring term 2015/16, it was 8.8%. As such they were forced to rely on only data from CLA provided by the virtual school which showed that while secondary school authorised absences had fallen, as had unauthorised absences, there was a rise in unauthorised absences in primary school. While the Leicestershire Virtual School's Attachment Aware Schools Programme was not specifically targeted at CSW/CLA and should be considered as a whole school intervention, it is thought that CSW would benefit significantly, particularly those with BESD.

One Virtual School Head (Rivers, 2018) described how in their local authority permanent exclusions for children in care had been reduced to zero and fixed-term exclusions had been reduced by a quarter, though this was a narrative description of a single programme with limited detail. Similar findings were reported by another Virtual School (Fancourt & Sebba, 2018) who had not recorded a permanent exclusion for CLA for at least two years. Both Rivers (2018) and Fancourt and Sebba (2018) indicated that permanent exclusions had reduced to zero in their local authorities after introduction of the Virtual Schools. However, there is no evidence of whether reductions had been sustained or could be attributed to the work of the Virtual School Head. Little is known about the effects of Virtual Schools on outcomes for children where there may be issues relating to timely data sharing and a lack of joined-up working.



DISCUSSION

Summary of findings

Attendance/absence

Absence rates for CSW in the research studies included in this review were higher than children without social workers, in line with official Department for Education statistics (DfE, 2019). Rates of absence, which were reported according to various definitions, varied among different groups of CSW. There was evidence that CLA looked after at home, or who have recently entered into care, were more likely to have unauthorised absences than CIN and CPP, while CLA away from home had a similar absence rate to CIN. More research, however, is needed to understand how different care- and pupil-related risk factors affect attendance and absence rates.

There was no or only very weak evidence that the interventions studied London Fostering Achievement (Sebba et al., 2016), transition support (Bhatti et al., 2022), MTFC-A (Green et al., 2014), or attachment awareness training (Fancourt & Sebba 2018) reduced school absence or improved attendance. What is important to consider with relation to the latest data is the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on both recording of absences, and the ability to attend schools. According to a recent survey of foster carers, 78% of foster children were not attending school when schools were open to key worker and vulnerable children only, 49% deciding not to send the child and 21% due to school closure (The Fostering Network, 2020). No information was provided on the attendance of biological or adopted children of Foster Carers. Two of the interventions placing an advisory teacher in children's social care (Griggs et al., 2022) and transition support (Bhatti et al., 2022) took place in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic when lockdowns and restrictions were in place and therefore the results may not be as applicable in the current post-lockdown COVID climate. These interventions were both aimed at improving outcomes for CIN and involved the respective Virtual Schools, which since the completion of the intervention are now responsible for all children with a social worker (DfE, 2022d).

Exclusions

CSW were also more likely to be excluded from school than children without a social worker. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Virtual School Heads had a positive impact on permanent exclusion rates, though the evidence base remains weak and there was no evidence in the studies that Virtual School Heads significantly reduced fixed-term exclusions. Taken as a whole, the body of evidence demonstrates that CIN and long-term CLA have similar permanent exclusion rates and that the rate of exclusion is higher than that for children not in care or in need (Sebba et al., 2015). The most recent DfE statistical release data for children in England, however, shows that while permanent exclusions are almost the same for CLA that have been in care for one year (0.05%) compared to the general population (0.06%), it is CIN (0.43%), and those on a CPP (0.63%) who are most likely to be permanently excluded in an academic year (DfE, 2022e). Differences in patterns between the research and official data may be due to differences in inclusion criteria



(particularly the fact that the DfE figures only include children looked after for a continuous period of 12 months).

While these findings highlight the issue of fixed and permanent exclusions for CSW, it is also important to consider specific policies (change in recording, Children and Families Act 2014), philosophies (move away from zero tolerance school behaviour policies), and statutory guidance (DfE, 2022b) that has been developed over the past 12 years; factors which require further research in understanding their impact on school exclusion.

Non-enrolment

One study (Jay et al., 2022) from England found that non-enrolment rates in secondary school were significantly higher among all groups of CSW than children without a social worker. Work is needed to better understand the mechanisms of this, which may include off-rolling, as well as particular child-, family-, school- and local authority-risk factors that predict non-enrolment.

Risk factors

Several risk factors were identified for higher rates of non-attendance among CSW, including: type of social work intervention (e.g. CIN, CPP or CLA), length of care placement, placement type, age when they become CLA, SEND, BESD, and gender. There is a lack of research into understanding risk and preventive factors for non-enrolment among CSW and identification of protective factors (Matheson & Connelly, 2012; Jay et al., 2022; Melkman, 2022).

Discussion of findings

School non-attendance for children with a social worker is a complex and broad area for policy, practice and research to consider. Current guidance for attendance (DfE, 2022c) highlights that efforts should be redoubled to improve school attendance for all CSW through their Virtual School and Virtual School Head. It also reinforces the importance for cross authority working, particularly in the case where a child is looked after in one local authority but educated in another. For CIN and CPP, it recommends further joint working between children's social care services and the School Attendance Support Team to improve attendance expectations for CIN and CPP and, where required, intensify support. Where voluntary early intervention has not been successful in improving attendance for CIN and CPP, the guidance suggests the use of Education Supervision Orders as a legal intervention without criminal prosecution of the parents.

While this is important for practitioners at the local authority level, it does not provide much in the way of immediate practices or interventions that schools or parents/carers can implement. Given the importance of schools and parents/carers in encouraging school attendance, it is vital to consider what support they can be given, and how urgently they can receive it when CSW are in an episode of crisis, or their unauthorised absences begin to increase.



Although not addressed in the studies found, little attention seems to have been paid to authorised absences where CSW have appointments with children’s social services, relating to their CIN, CPP or CLA status. While this is not recommended as best practice and can result in missed education, it nevertheless continues to be highlighted in research and Ofsted inspections (Ofsted, 2017; Jones et al., 2020).

Studies that reported the extent of, and risk factors for, attendance and absence mostly used administrative data on officially recorded absence or formal exclusion. Unofficial off-rolling among CSW has received very little attention, with only one quantitative study in England examining off-rolling by using non-enrolment in administrative school records as a potential proxy (Jay et al., 2022). Due to its clandestine nature, off-rolling is difficult to detect and not formally recorded, and is therefore not assessed in the majority of studies into school non-attendance. As such, more work is needed to understand the mechanisms of off-rolling and non-enrolment among CSW.

Strengths and limitations of the review methods

Our searches were limited to studies published since 2010 in the UK and are therefore more relevant to the current policy context in the UK. International comparisons were beyond the scope of this review but may in the future provide useful evidence as to risk factors and interventions to improve school attendance among CSW. There was, additionally, very limited evidence since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and, as with all reviews, we may not have ascertained all relevant literature. However, this rapid review was conducted using a systematic review methodology, with several independent researchers screening, extracting, and conducting the quality assessment and assessment of bias. We searched eight publication databases, relevant organisational websites, Google Scholar and reference lists.

Recommendations for practice and policy

School non-attendance among CSW is not a new phenomenon and has been a key issue for policymakers and practitioners in schools and children’s social services for a considerable time. While there appear to have been positive steps made in relation to school exclusions, in the past 12 years, there is still some way to go to improve school attendance for CSW, particularly those who are looked after at home or who have recently entered care. These groups of CSW are groups with the least stability, who are in a period of great upheaval and lack consistent support from home. Recent interventions with CIN/ CPP (Bhatti et al., 2022; Griggs et al., 2022) have been run alongside the Virtual School who are responsible for supporting the educational achievement and monitoring the progress of all CLA. With these institutions sitting at the crossroads of children’s social care and education, they are in the best place to develop, support and manage interventions for these groups. Given that the statutory role of the Virtual School Head was established in 2014, it is possible that the effects of the Virtual School model were not seen in the studies included in this review.

Without knowing to what extent Virtual Schools are already working with these groups, it is hard to make specific recommendations. However, it is CLA at home and those who have just entered care



(particularly between the ages of 12 and 15) that need the most urgent support. As each Virtual School operates on its own model, it is down to the Virtual School Head to direct any remediation work aimed at these groups of CSW.

Given the recent extension of duties to Virtual Schools for CSW and care experienced young people (DfE, 2022d), appropriate statutory and financial support is essential to enable them to succeed. In the current statutory guidance for VSHs, there is no provision for off-rolling. Given their powers and relationships with schools these bodies and individuals are perhaps the best placed to prevent off-rolling and other forms of disengagement from education not currently captured in routinely published data.

At a national or local level, policymakers should look to how they can support foster carers, schools and teachers – those on the “front line” of school non-attendance. Schools can often be the only place of stability for CSW. Being forced to move school due to a placement breakdown may render it more difficult to remain engaged in education and attend school. It is currently almost impossible for the Virtual School to react to every session of school non-attendance. Reporting is usually reliant on foster carers reporting to the child’s social worker who then reports to the Virtual School. A more streamlined approach, where schools and carers can report directly to the Virtual School, may help improve lines of communication. Similar communication support is needed to help understand school movements for CLA as some Virtual Schools are not informed until after a move has taken place (Sebba & Berridge, 2019).

Recommendations for research

The studies in this review indicate that there is a lack of recent intervention-based research targeting school non-attendance among CSW in the UK. There is a particular lack of randomised controlled trials or quasi-experimental designs to evaluate the effectiveness of intervention on school non-attendance. While there may be good practice in individual local authorities, only a few reports of pilot initiatives were found for inclusion in this review (Bhatti et al., 2022; Griggs et al., 2022; Plumridge & Sebba, 2018; Sebba et al., 2016). Two of these focus on expanding the role of the Virtual School to support CIN and CPP. Independent evaluation of more local initiatives (where they exist) would not only help with knowledge exchange between Virtual Schools but would also ensure that there was more robust evaluation of effectiveness. Studies should also, in particular, investigate the first-hand experience of children and young people who are or have had social workers. Such understandings from those with lived experience of the social care and education systems can only enrich the design and evaluation of future interventions.

More research is also recommended into particular risk factors of school non-attendance and what can be done to mitigate them. This is particularly important for CLA at home, and those entering care between the ages of 12 and 15. It is important that where this research is undertaken, particular attention is directed at evaluating protected characteristics, as well as the type of CSW (e.g. CIN, those on a CPP, and CLA, both short and long term) given that evidence for such factors is often missing from the existing research. Such research would require primary data collection of protected characteristics on a large scale that is not normally collected as part of the NPD. Further



mixed methods research should be conducted in the area of off-rolling and non-enrolment so that interventions and policies can be developed to best target these problems.

Conclusion

It is vital that school non-attendance is addressed to reduce the educational disadvantages faced by children with a social worker in the UK. Given the broad scope of school non-attendance, from one-off absences, through to fixed or permanent exclusions and non-enrolment and off-rolling, and the various categories of children with a social worker, this will be a complex task.

Children with a social worker are not a homogeneous population and each individual will have their own experiences, positive and negative, that can act as driving factors for their attendance and engagement with education. Changes in policy and practice may already be sowing the seeds for improvements with initiatives taking place such as with the extension of the Virtual School Head role to support all children with a social worker. These initiatives must, however, be accompanied by political and financial support and be rigorously evaluated (Ansell et al., 2017). It is only with high-quality, independent, mixed methods research at sufficient scale that it is possible to provide an accurate evaluation into the effectiveness and efficacy of such interventions.

The biggest risk is that children will not be identified for intervention until a crisis point is reached resulting in an extended period of unauthorised absence, a fixed-term exclusion or a move in schools, either managed or as the result of a permanent exclusion or entry into care. It is at this point, particularly when a child is approaching their GCSE year that such intervention must be targeted. Policies, to improve the identification of these children and target timely support are likely to be the utmost priority in improving non-attendance.



REFERENCES

- Ansell, C., Sørensen, E. & Torfing, J. (2017) Improving policy implementation through collaborative policymaking. *Policy & Politics*. 45 (3), 467–486.
<https://bristoluniversitypressdigital.com/view/journals/pp/45/3/article-p467.xml>
- Bagley, C. & Hallam, S., (2015) Managed moves: School and local authority staff perceptions of processes, success and challenges. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*. 20 (4), 432–447.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13632752.2015.1053700>
- Berridge, D., Luke, N., Sebba, J., Strand, S., Cartwright, M., Staples, E., McGrath-Lone, L., Ward, J. & O’Higgins, A. (2020) Children in Need and children in care: Educational attainment and progress. <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/policybristol/policy-briefings/children-in-need-and-in-care-education-progress/> [Accessed 25 May 2023].
- Bhatti, S., Bristow, T., Duysak, E., Philips, M. & Takala, H. (2022) *Transition support: Pilot evaluation*. London: What Works for Children’s Social Care. <https://whatworks-csc.org.uk/research-report/transition-support/>
- Biehal, N., Dixon, J., Parry, E., Sinclair, I., Green, J., Roberts, C., Kay, C., Rothwell, J., Kapadia, D. & Roby, A. (2012) *The care placements evaluation (CaPE) evaluation of multidimensional treatment foster care for adolescents (MTFC-A)*. London: Department for Education.
- Children’s Commissioner. (2022) *Where are England’s children? Interim findings from the Children’s Commissioner’s Attendance Audit*.
<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/report/where-are-englands-children-interim-findings-from-the-childrens-commissioners-attendance-audit/> [Accessed 25 May 2023].
- Connelly, G. & Duncalf, Z. (2011) *Looked after children and further education in Scotland: A briefing paper*. University of Strathclyde. <https://pureportal.strath.ac.uk/en/publications/looked-after-children-and-further-education-in-scotland-a-briefin>
- Connelly, G. & Furnivall, J. (2013) Addressing low attainment of children in public care: The Scottish experience. *European Journal of Social Work*. 16 (1), 88–104.
- Department for Education [DfE]. (2018) *Promoting the education of looked after children and previously looked after children*.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/683556/Promoting_the_education_of_looked-after_children_and_previously_looked-after_children.pdf. [Accessed 25 May 2023].



Department for Education [DfE]. (2019) *Children in Need of help and protection: Data and analysis*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-in-need-of-help-and-protection-data-and-analysis> [Accessed 25 May 2023].

Department for Education [DfE]. (2021) *Virtual school head role extension to children with a social worker*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/virtual-school-head-role-extension-to-children-with-a-social-worker> [Accessed 25 May 2023].

Department for Education [DfE]. (2022a) *Academic Year 2018/19: The link between absence and attainment at KS2 and KS4*. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/the-link-between-absence-and-attainment-at-ks2-and-ks4> [Accessed 25 May 2023].

Department for Education [DfE]. (2022b) *School attendance: Guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools and local authorities*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1073591/School_attendance_guidance_May-2022.pdf [Accessed 25 May 2023].

Department for Education [DfE]. (2022c) *Working together to improve school attendance: Guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1099677/Working_together_to_improve_school_attendance.pdf [Accessed 25 May 2023].

Department for Education [DfE]. (2022d) *Promoting the education of children with a social worker: Virtual School Head role extension*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1086931/Promoting_the_education_of_children_with_a_social_worker_-_virtual_school_head_role_extension_2022.pdf [Accessed 25 May 2023].

Department for Education [DfE]. (2022e) *Reporting Year 2021: Outcomes for Children in Need, including Children Looked After by local authorities in England*. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/outcomes-for-children-in-need-including-children-looked-after-by-local-authorities-in-england> [Accessed 25 May 2023].

Department for Education [DfE]. (2022f) *Pupil absence in schools in England: Autumn term 2021/22*. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-term> [Accessed 25 May 2023].

Evans, R., Brown, R., Rees, G. & Smith, P. (2017) Systematic review of educational interventions for looked-after children and young people: Recommendations for intervention development and evaluation. *British Educational Research Journal*. 43 (1), 68–94. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3252>



Fancourt, N. & Sebba, J. (2018) The Leicestershire Virtual School's Attachment Aware Schools Programme: Evaluation report. <https://www.education.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/285186.pdf> [Accessed 25 May 2023].

Fleming, M., McLay, J. S., Clark, D., King, A., Mackay, D. F., Minnis, H. & Pell, J. P. (2021) Educational and health outcomes of schoolchildren in local authority care in Scotland: A retrospective record linkage study. *PLOS Medicine*, 18 (11), e1003832. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1003832>

Green, J. M., Biehal, N., Roberts, C., Dixon, J., Kay, C., Parry, E., Rothwell, J., Roby, A., Kapadia, D., Scott, S. & Sinclair, I. (2014) Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care for Adolescents in English care: Randomised trial and observational cohort evaluation. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 204 (3), 214–221. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.bp.113.131466>

Griggs, J., Bury, J., Fletcher, A., Roberts, E. & Thornton, I. (2022) *Placing an advisory teacher in Children's Social Care: Bath and North East Somerset (BANES) pilot evaluation report*. London: What Works for Children's Social Care. <https://whatworks-csc.org.uk/research-report/placing-an-advisory-teacher-in-childrens-social-care/> [Accessed 25 May 2023].

Haddaway, N. R., Collins, A. M., Coughlin, D. & Kirk, S. (2015) The role of Google Scholar in evidence reviews and its applicability to grey literature searching. *PLOS ONE*. 10 (9), e0138237. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0138237>

Hoffmann, T. C., Glasziou, P. P., Boutron, I., Milne, R., Perera, R., Moher, D., Barbour, V., Macdonald, H., Johnston, M., Lamb, S. E., Dixon-Woods, M., McCulloch, P., Wyatt, J. C., Chan, A-W. & Michie, S. (2014) Better reporting of interventions: Template for intervention description and replication (TIDieR) checklist and guide. *British Medical Journal*. 348, g1687. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.g1687>

Jay, M. A., & Mc Grath-Lone, L. (2019) Educational outcomes of children in contact with social care in England: A systematic review. *Systematic Reviews*. 8, 155. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13643-019-1071-z>

Jay, M. A., Mc Grath-Lone, L., De Stavola, B. & Gilbert, R. (2022) Evaluation of pushing out of children from all English state schools: Administrative data cohort study of children receiving social care and their peers. *Child Abuse & Neglect*. 127, 105582. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2022.105582>

Jones, L., Dean, C., Dunhill, A., Hope, M. A. & Shaw, P. A. (2020) 'We are the same as everyone else just with a different and unique backstory': Identity, belonging and 'othering' within education for young people who are 'looked after'. *Children & Society*. 34 (6), 492–506. <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12382>



Liabo, K., Gray, K. & Mulcahy, D. (2013) A systematic review of interventions to support looked-after children in school. *Child & Family Social Work*. 18, 341–353. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2012.00850.x>

Luke, N. & O’Higgins, A. (2018) Is the care system to blame for the poor educational outcomes of children looked after? Evidence from a systematic review and national database analysis. *Children Australia*. 43 (2), 135. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cha.2018.22>

MacRitchie, I. (2019) MCR Pathways’ relationship based practice at scale: Revolutionising educational outcomes for care-experienced young people. *Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care*. 18 (2). <https://strathprints.strath.ac.uk/84470/> [Accessed 25 May 2023].

Matheson, I. & Connelly, G. (2012) The education of looked after children in Scotland: Some comparisons with Scandinavian countries and Finland. Glasgow: CELCIS. <https://strathprints.strath.ac.uk/39658/> [Accessed 25 May 2023].

Mc Grath-Lone, L., Harron, K., Dearden, L. & Gilbert, R. (2020) Exploring placement stability for children in out-of-home care in England: A sequence analysis of longitudinal administrative data. *Child Abuse & Neglect*. 109, 104689. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104689>

Melkman, E. P. (2022) Predicting out-of-school suspensions among youth in care in England: A national cohort study. *Journal of School Psychology*. 93, 63–78. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2022.06.003>

O’Higgins, A. (2019) Analysis of care and education pathways of refugee and asylum-seeking children in care in England: Implications for social work. *International Journal of Social Welfare*. 28 (1), 53–62. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijsw.12324>

Ofsted. (2012) *The impact of virtual schools on the educational progress of looked after children*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/419041/The_impact_of_virtual_schools_on_the_educational_progress_of_looked_after_children.pdf [Accessed 25 May 2023].

Ofsted. (2017) *Torbay children’s services monitoring visit December 2016*. <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/2753064> [Accessed 25 May 2023].

Plumridge, G. & Sebba, J. (2018) Evaluation of Birmingham City Council’s Step Down Programme. <https://www.education.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Step-Down-Programme-Final-Evaluation-Report.pdf> [Accessed 25 May 2023].

Popay, J., Roberts, H., Sowden, A., Petticrew, M., Arai, L., Rodgers, M., Britten, N., Roen, K. & Duffy, S. (2006) Guidance on the conduct of narrative synthesis in systematic reviews. A product from the ESRC methods programme Version, 1(1), b92. <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/media/lancaster-university/content->



[assets/documents/fhm/dhr/chir/NSsynthesisguidanceVersion1-April2006.pdf](#) [Accessed 25 May 2023].

PricewaterhouseCoopers [PWC]. (2011) Study into how the education system can improve the attendance of Looked After Children at post-primary school.

https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/4251/7/no_55_2011_Redacted.pdf [Accessed 25 May 2023].

Rivers, S. (2018) Supporting the education of looked after children: The role of the virtual school head. *Adoption and Fostering*. 42 (2), 151–161. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308575918775590>

Roberts, N. & Danechi, S. (2021) *Coronavirus and schools: FAQs*. House of Commons Library, Briefing paper No. 08915. <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/37450/1/CBP-8915.pdf> [Accessed 25 May 2023].

Rodgers, H. & Waugh, I. (2017) Children in Care in Northern Ireland 2015-16. <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/children-care-northern-ireland-201516>

Sebba, J., Berridge, D., Luke, N., Fletcher, J., Bell, K., Strand, S., Thomas, S., Sinclair, I. & O'Higgins, A. (2015) *The educational progress of looked after children in England: Linking care and educational data*. REES Centre Reports. University of Oxford Department of Education/University of Bristol. <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:49b64928-4808-4898-911c-30e8981b2ffb> [Accessed 25 May 2023].

Sebba, J., Luke, N., Rees, A., Plumridge, G., Rodgers, L., Hafesji, K., Rowsome-Smith, C., McDermid, S. & Trivedi, H. (2016) Evaluation of the London Fostering Achievement Programme: Final report. <https://www.education.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Evaluation-of-The-London-Fostering-Achievement-Programme-Final-Report.pdf>

Sebba, J. & Berridge, D. (2019) The role of the Virtual School in supporting improved educational outcomes for children in care. *Oxford Review of Education*. 45 (4), 538–555. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2019.1600489>

Teyhan, A., Boyd, A., Wijedasa, D. & Macleod, J. (2019) Early life adversity, contact with children's social care services and educational outcomes at age 16 years: UK birth cohort study with linkage to national administrative records. *BMJ Open*. 9 (10), e030213. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2019-030213>

The Fostering Network. (2020) Education during the Covid-19 pandemic and transitioning back to school. <https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/policy-practice/research/education-during-covid-19-pandemic-and-transitioning-back-school> [Accessed 25 May 2023].

Trotman, D., Enow, L. & Tucker, S., (2019) Young people and alternative provision: Perspectives from participatory–collaborative evaluations in three UK local authorities. *British Educational Research Journal*. 45 (2), 219–237. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3495>



APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Search strategy

Search strategy used for EBSCOhost

((((AB("foster care" OR "foster home" OR "foster family" OR "foster parent" OR "foster carer" OR "substitute family" OR "family foster home" OR "kinship care" OR "residential care" OR "child* in care" OR "out of home care" OR "looked after child*" OR "child* in need" OR "vulnerable child*" OR "social service*" OR "social care" OR "Children Act" OR "Children (Northern Ireland) Order" OR "CIN" OR "child protection plan" OR "Child in Need plan" OR "CPP" OR "CINP" OR "social work*") OR TI ("foster care" OR "foster home" OR "foster family" OR "foster parent" OR "foster carer" OR "substitute family" OR "family foster home" OR "kinship care" OR "residential care" OR "child* in care" OR "out of home care" OR "looked after child*" OR "child* in need" OR "vulnerable child*" OR "social service*" OR "social care" OR "Children Act" OR "Children (Northern Ireland) Order" OR "CIN" OR "child protection plan" OR "Child in Need plan" OR "CPP" OR "CINP" OR "social work*")) AND (AB("educat*" OR "school*" OR "class*" OR "college*" OR "teach*" OR "learn*" OR "train*" OR "absen*" OR "truancy" OR "attendance*" OR "missing school" OR "missing education" OR "exclusion*" OR "exclud*" OR "off roll*" OR "push* out") OR TI ("educat*" OR "school*" OR "class*" OR "college*" OR "teach*" OR "learn*" OR "train*" OR "absen*" OR "truancy" OR "attendance*" OR "missing school" OR "missing education" OR "exclusion*" OR "exclud*" OR "off roll*" OR "push* out")))) AND TX (uk or united kingdom or britain or england or wales or scotland or northern ireland)

Limiters/Expanders

Limiters - Publication Date: 20100101-20221231

Expanders - Apply equivalent subjects

Narrow by Subject: - youth

Narrow by Subject: - adolescents

Narrow by Subject: - school children

Narrow by Subject: - young adults

Narrow by Subject: - children

Search modes - Boolean/Phrase

Search strategy Ovid databases

((("foster care" OR "foster home" OR "foster family" OR "foster parent" OR "foster carer" OR "substitute family" OR "family foster home" OR "kinship care" OR "residential care" OR "child* in care" OR "out of home care" OR "looked after child*" OR "child* in need" OR "vulnerable child*" OR "social service*" OR "social care" OR "Children Act" OR "Children (Northern Ireland) Order" OR "CIN" OR "child protection plan" OR "Child in Need plan" OR "CPP" OR "CINP" OR "social work*") and ("educat*" OR "school*" OR "class*" OR "college*" OR "teach*" OR "learn*" OR "train*" OR "absen*" OR "truancy" OR "attendance*" OR "missing school" OR "missing education" OR "exclusion*" OR "exclud*" OR "off roll*" OR "push*



out)).ab.ti. and (“uk” or “united kingdom” or “britain” or “england” or “wales” or “scotland” or “northern ireland”).tw.

Search strategy used for ProQuest databases

((((AB(“foster care” OR “foster home” OR “foster family” OR “foster parent” OR “foster carer” OR “substitute family” OR “family foster home” OR “kinship care” OR “residential care” OR “child* in care” OR “out of home care” OR “looked after child*” OR “child* in need” OR (“vulnerable child” OR “vulnerable children”) OR (“social service” OR “social services”) OR “social care” OR “Children Act” OR “Children (Northern Ireland) Order” OR “CIN” OR “child protection plan” OR “Child in Need plan” OR “CPP” OR “CINP” OR (“social work” OR “social worker” OR “social workers” OR “social works”))) OR TI (“foster care” OR “foster home” OR “foster family” OR “foster parent” OR “foster carer” OR “substitute family” OR “family foster home” OR “kinship care” OR “residential care” OR “child* in care” OR “out of home care” OR “looked after child*” OR “child* in need” OR (“vulnerable child” OR “vulnerable children”) OR (“social service” OR “social services”) OR “social care” OR “Children Act” OR “Children (Northern Ireland) Order” OR “CIN” OR “child protection plan” OR “Child in Need plan” OR “CPP” OR “CINP” OR (“social work” OR “social worker” OR “social workers” OR “social works”)))) AND (AB(“educat*” OR “school*” OR “class*” OR “college*” OR “teach*” OR “learn*” OR “train*” OR “absen*” OR “truancy” OR “attendance*” OR “missing school” OR “missing education” OR “exclusion*” OR “exclud*” OR “off roll*” OR “push* out”) OR TI (“educat*” OR “school*” OR “class*” OR “college*” OR “teach*” OR “learn*” OR “train*” OR “absen*” OR “truancy” OR “attendance*” OR “missing school” OR “missing education” OR “exclusion*” OR “exclud*” OR “off roll*” OR “push* out”))) AND subt.exact(“children” OR “children & youth” OR “youth” OR “adolescents” OR “foster children” OR “teenagers”) AND pd(20100101-20221231)) NOT (loc.exact(“United States--US” OR “New York” OR “Australia” OR “South Africa” OR “Canada” OR “China” OR “Europe” OR “Spain” OR “California” OR “Sweden” OR “Romania” OR “Africa” OR “Finland” OR “Germany” OR “India” OR “Norway” OR “Chicago Illinois” OR “France” OR “Florida” OR “Ireland” OR “Netherlands” OR “Nigeria” OR “Ghana” OR “Hong Kong” OR “New Zealand” OR “Chile” OR “Ohio” OR “Turkey” OR “Zimbabwe” OR “Italy” OR “Kenya” OR “Oregon” OR “Denmark” OR “Georgia” OR “Portugal” OR “Switzerland” OR “Uganda” OR “Illinois” OR “Japan” OR “Latin America” OR “Poland” OR “Russia” OR “South Korea” OR “Texas” OR “Colombia” OR “Czech Republic” OR “Massachusetts” OR “Michigan” OR “New York City New York” OR “Pennsylvania” OR “Sub-Saharan Africa” OR “Swaziland” OR “Haiti” OR “Iceland” OR “Kansas” OR “Los Angeles California” OR “New Jersey” OR “Slovenia” OR “Syria” OR “Tanzania” OR “Washington DC” OR “Afghanistan” OR “Alberta Canada” OR “Asia” OR “Beijing China” OR “Brazil” OR “Ethiopia” OR “Hungary” OR “Malaysia” OR “Missouri” OR “Ontario Canada” OR “Pakistan” OR “Quebec Canada” OR “Singapore” OR “Virginia” OR “Argentina” OR “Bangladesh” OR “Central America” OR “Connecticut” OR “Egypt” OR “Manitoba Canada” OR “Mississippi” OR “Nepal” OR “New Mexico” OR “North America” OR “North Carolina” OR “Puerto Rico” OR “Rwanda” OR “Vietnam” OR “Wisconsin” OR “Zambia” OR “Ankara Turkey” OR “Appalachia” OR “Israel” OR “Mexico” OR “Saudi Arabia” OR “Abu Dhabi United Arab Emirates” OR “Catalonia Spain” OR “Cluj Romania” OR “Colorado” OR “Indiana” OR “Indonesia” OR “Lithuania” OR “Macao” OR “Montreal Quebec Canada” OR “Riyadh Saudi Arabia” OR “Sierra Leone” OR “Taiwan” OR “Albania” OR “Amazon Basin” OR “American Samoa” OR “Anchorage



Alaska” OR “Aotearoa New Zealand” OR “Azerbaijan” OR “Belgium” OR “Botswana” OR “Buenos Aires Argentina” OR “Buka” OR “Cambodia” OR “Cape Town South Africa” OR “Cape Verde Islands” OR “Caribbean area” OR “Congo-Democratic Republic of Congo” OR “Cuba” OR “Darfur Sudan” OR “Dominican Republic” OR “Estonia” OR “Eswatini” OR “Fiji” OR “Galicia” OR “Galicia Spain” OR “Gaza Strip” OR “Grenada” OR “Guam” OR “Henan China” OR “Iowa” OR “Jamaica” OR “Jerusalem Israel” OR “Jordan (country)” OR “Kuwait” OR “Kyrgyzstan” OR “Latvia” OR “Lebanon” OR “Ljubljana Slovenia” OR “Louisiana” OR “Madagascar” OR “Madrid Spain” OR “Malaga Spain” OR “Malta” OR “Marshall Islands” OR “Midwest states” OR “Morocco” OR “Namibia” OR “Nebraska” OR “Niger” OR “Northern Mariana Islands” OR “Nova Scotia Canada” OR “Oklahoma” OR “Paraguay” OR “Peru” OR “Philippines” OR “Pine Ridge Indian Reservation” OR “Pula Croatia” OR “Queensland Australia” OR “Sacramento County California” OR “Santa Barbara California” OR “Serbia” OR “Somalia” OR “South Carolina” OR “Southern California” OR “Sri Lanka” OR “Sudan” OR “Sulawesi” OR “Thrace” OR “Toronto Ontario Canada” OR “Trinidad & Tobago” OR “Union of Soviet Socialist Republics--USSR” OR “Valencia Spain” OR “Vermont” OR “West Africa” OR “West Bank” OR “West Virginia”) AND la.exact(“ENG”))

Search strategy used for Social Care Institute for Excellence database

- AbstractOmitNorms:“foster care” or “foster home” or “foster family” or “foster parent” or “foster carer” or “substitute family” or “family foster home” or “kinship care” or “residential care” or “child* in care” or “out of home care” or “looked after child*” or “child* in need” or “vulnerable child*” or “social service*” or “social care” or “Children Act” or “Children Northern Ireland Order” or “CIN” or “child protection plan” or “Child in Need plan” or “CPP” or “CINP” or “social work*”
- AND AbstractOmitNorms:“educat*” or “school*” or “class*” or “college*” or “teach*” or “learn*” or “train*” or “absen*” or “truancy” or “attendance*” or “missing school” or “missing education” or “exclusion*” or “exclud*” or “off roll*” or “push* out”
- AND PublicationYear:“2010 2023”
- AND SubjectTerms:“young people” including related terms
- AND Location:“united kingdom” including narrower terms

Table A1.1: Number of papers identified at each stage of search strategy

	Proquest	Ebscohost	Ovid	SCIE
Full Search	53,110	16,520	6,267	42
(Proquest)	8,523			



	Proquest	Ebscohost	Ovid	SCIE
children OR children & Youth OR youth OR adolescents OR foster children OR teenagers				
(Ebscohost) young adults OR adolescents OR Children		1,877		
Ovid children 0-12 OR adolescents 12-18			4,304	
All After 1st Jan 2010	5,606	635	2,441	
(Proquest) United Kingdom/UK OR England OR Wales OR Scotland OR Northern Ireland	285			
(Ebscohost) AND TX (uk or united kingdom or britain or england or wales or scotland or northern ireland)		201		
(Ovid) English Language			2,439	
(Ovid) Journal articles			1,072	
(Ovid) Deduplicate in Ovid			1,071	
Total before Zotero deduplication			1,599	
Total after Zotero deduplication			1,476	



Appendix 2: Data screening tool

Reviewer

Author(s) and Year *Required

Screening stage? TITLE AND ABSTRACT/ FULL TEXT *Required

Include? * YES /NO *Required

Reason for exclusion?

NOT ABOUT CHILDREN/
NOT A PRIMARY STUDY (E.G. NARRATIVE OR OPINION PEICE)
NOT UK BASED STUDY/
OUTCOME NOT ATTENDANCE
NO SEPARATE ANALYSIS FOR CSW/
UNABLE TO ANSWER ANY OF THE RQS

Which Research Questions could be answered? *Required

RQ1: quantitative study which provides data on absence, exclusion or non-enrolment among CSW
RQ2: quantitative study that assesses the association between one or more risk factors and attendance among CSW
RQ3: any study that evaluates an intervention targeted at CSW/groups of CSW

Appendix 3. Data extraction tool

Extracted by

Author(s) *Required

Study Year *Required

Population *Required

Geographical and Temporal Extent *Required

Research Questions *Required

Is paper an intervention? * YES (continue with next question) /NO (skip to Methods) *Required

BRIEF NAME

Provide the name or a phrase that describes the intervention.

WHY

Describe any rationale, theory, or goal of the elements essential to the intervention.

WHAT MATERIALS

Describe any physical or informational materials used in the intervention, including those provided to participants or used in intervention delivery or in training of intervention providers. Provide information on where the materials can be accessed (e.g. online appendix, URL).

WHAT PROCEDURES

Describe each of the procedures, activities, and/or processes used in the intervention, including any enabling or support activities.



WHO PROVIDED

For each category of intervention provider (e.g. psychologist, nursing assistant), describe their expertise, background and any specific training given.

HOW

Describe the modes of delivery (e.g. face-to-face or by some other mechanism, such as internet or telephone) of the intervention and whether it was provided individually or in a group.

WHERE

Describe the type(s) of location(s) where the intervention occurred, including any necessary infrastructure or relevant features.

WHEN and HOW MUCH

Describe the number of times the intervention was delivered and over what period of time including the number of sessions, their schedule, and their duration, intensity or dose.

TAILORING

If the intervention was planned to be personalised, titrated or adapted, then describe what, why, when, and how.

MODIFICATIONS

If the intervention was modified during the course of the study, describe the changes (what, why, when, and how).

HOW WELL PLANNED

If intervention adherence or fidelity was assessed, describe how and by whom, and if any strategies were used to maintain or improve fidelity, describe them.

HOW WELL ACTUAL

If intervention adherence or fidelity was assessed, describe the extent to which the intervention was delivered as planned.

Methods *Required

Results *Required

Reference List - Any papers that might be relevant - enter each as new Paragraph

Papers Citing (Google Scholar) - Any papers that might be relevant - enter each as new Paragraph

Protected Characteristics? (e.g. Gender, Ethnicity, etc., or level of deprivation/poverty/socioeconomic inequality) *Required



Appendix 4: Further study details

Table A4.1: Observational studies: Extent and risk factors of school non-attendance

Author(s), Study Year	Research Questions	Methods	Extent of non-attendance
Berridge et al., 2020	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is the difference in educational attainment between all pupils and CLA/CIN 2. What is associated with success at age 16? 3. How can success be accounted for CLA/CIN? 4. What are the perspectives on educational progress for CLA/CIN? 	<p>Mixed methods</p> <p>Quantitative analysis using National Pupil Database.</p> <p>Qualitative interviews with 123 children, parents/carers, professionals.</p>	<p>Absences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The proportion of possible school sessions missed due to unauthorised absences was between 2 and 5 times the level in Years 3–6, and between 3 and 7 times the level in secondary school for CIN and CLA. <p>Findings from interviews:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - With the support of carers, school attendance was not a problem for Children in Care but more erratic for those living at home. - Most children in foster care were now regular school attenders and engaging with learning. In contrast, attendance for the Children in Need group was more mixed.
Connelly & Furnivall, 2012	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the policy developments in Scotland related to education of children in public care, or “looked-after” children. 	<p>Narrative review with quantitative analysis</p> <p>Quantitative analysis using Scottish government statistics.</p>	<p>Absences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CLA in Scotland had almost twice the average number of school absences from school in 2008/2009 as those not in care: 45 half days compared with 25 on average. <p>Exclusions:</p> <p>CLA away from home were 6 times more likely to be excluded from school and CLA at home were 8 times more likely to be excluded than children not in care.</p>



Author(s), Study Year	Research Questions	Methods	Extent of non-attendance
Connelly & Duncalf, 2011	1. What are the difficulties faced by young people as they transition from care?	Narrative review with quantitative analysis. Quantitative analysis using Scottish government statistics.	Absences: Absence from school of CLA at home accounts significantly for the poor overall outcome differences (mean half days' absence = 58.7) while CLA away from home have absences only a little higher than their non care peers (28.1 half days compared with 25.0).
Fleming et al., 2021	1. What are the educational and health outcomes for looked after children compared with children not looked after, adjusting for sociodemographic, maternity, and comorbidity confounders?	Quantitative.	Absences: Compared to children not looked after, CLA (1.9%) were more likely to be absent (adjusted incidence rate ratio [AIRR] 1.27, 95% confidence interval [CI] 1.24 to 1.30) and excluded from school (AIRR 4.09, 95% CI 3.86 to 4.33).
Jay et al., 2022	1. What is the proportion of children enrolled in English state schools who ever become not enrolled across secondary school (ages 11–16)? 2. What is the association between CSC history and non-enrolment in year 10 and 11?	Quantitative analysis using NPD data.	Non-enrolment: For children with no CSC history, 3.8% had ≥1 year not enrolled by year 11 compared to CIN (8.1%), CPP (9.4%) and CLA (10.4%).
Luke & O'Higgins, 2018	1. Do children in out-of-home care (“children in care” or “Children Looked After”) have lower educational attainments than other pupils?	Systematic review with quantitative analysis. Quantitative analysis using NPD data.	Absences: - Longer stays in care associated with fewer unauthorised absences. Exclusions: Longer stays in care associated with fewer exclusions.



Author(s), Study Year	Research Questions	Methods	Extent of non-attendance
			<p>On average children not in care missed 1.84 sessions, due to fixed-term exclusions.</p> <p>CIN missed 8.89 sessions, CLA for under 5 years missed 14.49–17.74 sessions and children in care for over 5 years missed 8.93 sessions.</p>
Matheson & Connelly, 2012	1. What comparisons can be made between Scotland’s performance in relation to the education of looked after children, and that of Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland?	Quantitative Comparative study. Quantitative analysis using Scottish government statistics.	<p>Absences: Attendance rate of CLA was 87.8%, compared with 93.2% for all school children; CLA had almost twice as many absences.</p> <p>Exclusions: The overall exclusion rate for CLA was 365 exclusions per 1,000 pupils, approximately eight times higher than that for all school children.</p>
Melkman, 2022	1. What predicts out of school suspensions among youth in care in England?	Quantitative. Quantitative analysis using NPD data.	<p>Exclusions: 19.4% of the CLA had been suspended from school in Year 9, with an average of 2.68 suspensions per child (SD = 2.20).</p>
O’Higgins, 2018	1. What are the implications for social work of an analysis of care and education pathways of refugee and asylum-seeking CLA in England?	Quantitative. Quantitative analysis using NPD data.	<p>Absences: Calculated as a proportion of total possible school sessions between 2009 and 2013, refugee and asylum-seeking (RAS) children had significantly fewer unauthorized absences (0.02) compared to other CLA (0.03) and CIN (0.05) $F(3; 593,707) = 4972.89, p < 0.001$. Similar findings were presented for authorized absences RAS (0.05), CLA (0.06), and CIN (0.08) $F(3; 593,707) = 2870.97, p < 0.001$.</p>
PWC, 2011	1. What are the underlying causes/influences of on non-	Mixed methods. Review of research	Attendance:



Author(s), Study Year	Research Questions	Methods	Extent of non-attendance
	<p>attendance for CLA at post-primary level?</p> <p>2. What is known about the association between non-attendance at school and underachievement?</p> <p>3. What are effective approaches and actions to improve attendance for CLA?</p>	<p>Quantitative analysis using NI government data.</p> <p>Qualitative Interviews.</p>	<p>Absenteeism is higher for post-primary CLA at 12.2% compared to 7.6% for all school-aged children in post-primary schools.</p> <p>Authorised and unauthorised absence: Rates were higher for CLA (at 6% and 6.2% respectively) than for all school-aged children (5.1% and 2.5% respectively).</p> <p>Exclusions: Exclusion (permanent) and suspension (fixed term) rates were higher for CLA at 1% and 8% respectively, compared to 0.01% and 2% for all school-aged children.</p>
<p>Roberts & Danechi, 2021</p>	<p>1. What was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on schools and pupils?</p>	<p>Mixed methods. Survey.</p>	<p>Attendance: As of 11 February 2021: The proportion of pupils with a social worker attending school was around 44%.</p>
<p>Rodgers & Waugh, 2017</p>	<p>1. What are the findings from the annual survey of children who have been in care continuously for 12 months or longer?</p>	<p>Quantitative. Statistical bulletin.</p>	<p>Absences: The overall attendance rate for CLA who had been in care for 12 months or longer and who were of compulsory school age was 94.0% of the total half days. 9% of CLA had 25 or more days of school absence for any reason. During the 2015/16 school year, 12% of CLA had full attendance at school.</p> <p>Exclusions: CLA were more likely to be suspended from school than children in the general population; 8% of CLA had been suspended in 2015/16, compared with 1.1% of the general population.</p>



Author(s), Study Year	Research Questions	Methods	Extent of non-attendance
			<p>Non-enrolment: 33 (2%) of CLA were not enrolled in NI and may be enrolled in a different jurisdiction, in private or home schools or not receiving an education.</p>
<p>Sebba et al., 2015</p>	<p>1. What are the key factors contributing to the low educational outcomes of children in care in secondary schools in England? 2. How does linking care and educational data contribute to our understanding of how to improve their attainment and progress?</p>	<p>Mixed methods. Quantitative analysis using NPD data. Qualitative interviews.</p>	<p>Absences: General population Unauthorised absences in secondary school (half days) 17.1, CIN 70.9, CLA (in care <1 year) 88.6, CLA (in care more than 1 year) 35.6.</p> <p>Exclusions: General population ever permanently excluded in secondary school: 0.6%, CIN 3.9%, CLA under 1 year 8.0%, CLA over 1 year 3.3%.</p> <p>On average CIN and CLA experienced between 4 and 13 times as many exclusions in secondary school as other children.</p>
<p>Teyhan et al., 2019</p>	<p>1. What are the educational outcomes of children who are looked-after (in public care) and in need (social services involvement), and examine the role of early life factors?</p>	<p>Quantitative.</p>	<p>Absences: Study found persistent absence rates to be considerably lower for CLA than CIN during KS4.</p> <p>Persistent absence in KS4 - No CLA/CIN record during KS4 (n = 9,432): 6.8% (6.3 to 7.3) - CIN (no CLA) record during KS4 (n = 64): 32.8% (21.0 to 44.6) - CLA record during KS4 (n = 49): 18.4% (7.1 to 29.6).</p>



Table A4.2: Interventional studies: Effects on school non-attendance

	Bhatti et al., 2022	Biehal et al., 2012 Green et al., 2014	Fancourt and Sebba, 2018
Research questions	<p>1. How feasible is it to put in place transition support for CIN and CPP?</p> <p>2. What are the indicators of success, e.g. change in children’s attainment and social and emotional outcomes?</p>	<p>To evaluate the effectiveness of Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care for Adolescents (MTFC-A)</p>	<p>How have the participants’ professional repertoire and confidence changed?</p> <p>How have schools’ organisational structures and responses changed?</p> <p>What changes have there been in pupils’ outcomes, including educational progress, attendance, exclusions and wellbeing?</p> <p>What improvements would participants suggest?</p>
Brief name	Transition Support Pilot	Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care for Adolescents (MTFC-A)	Attachment Aware Schools Programme
Why	To support CIN and CPP during the COVID-19 pandemic		To improve outcomes for children in care
What materials	The pilot involved training for schools and social workers; providing an administrative tool for schools known as the Transition Planning Profile Tool (TPPT); and Person-Centred Planning (PCP) meetings	MTFC-A provides older children with challenging behaviour with a short-term foster placement, usually intended to last around a year, followed by a short period of aftercare to support the transition to a new placement or return home.	A continuing professional development course in attachment awareness and emotion coaching for school staff.



	Bhatti et al., 2022	Biehal et al., 2012 Green et al., 2014	Fancourt and Sebba, 2018
What procedures	Person-centred Planning meetings Targeted support Resilience programmes Therapeutic interventions Buddy systems Summer school Individualised support Transition Passports	Foster carers trained in approach and given supervision, with staff for support. Weekly group meetings with foster carers and intervention team. Key features: consistent reinforcing environment in which CLA are mentored and encouraged; clear structure, boundaries and consequences; close supervision of activities and whereabouts and diversion from associations with antisocial peers. Behaviour is monitored, and positive behaviours are reinforced.	Training to help school staff recognise that behaviour is driven by feelings and is not rationally calculated. Designed to improve the appropriateness of adult's responses to the behaviour of pupils who are affected by trauma and/or abuse. Emotion coaching aimed to help school staff to distinguish between behaviour and the feelings that underlie that behaviour.
Who provided	School staff	Foster carers are supported, trained and supervised by a team of therapists, skills workers, support worker, a child and adolescent psychiatrist, a programme manager and an education worker.	Virtual School Staff and Kate Cairns Associates Ltd (KCA)
How	Face-to-face and virtual meetings	Face-to-face, short-term foster care placement	Face-to-face part-time CPD sessions and online self-directed study
Where	In schools/home	18 English local authorities	
When and how much	1 to 3 PCP meetings 60–90 minutes cited by logic model. Targeted support as required/available.	1 year intervention - assessed at baseline, 3 months into index placement (MTFC-A or Usual Care) and 1-year post-baseline.	23 sessions were held across 24 schools, of which 12 were on Attachment and



	Bhatti et al., 2022	Biehal et al., 2012 Green et al., 2014	Fancourt and Sebba, 2018
			Trauma, 9 were on Emotion coaching, and 3 were both. e-learning covering attachment and brain development, whole school behavioural strategies, and emotion coaching required a notional 10–15 hours of work.
Tailoring	Was made at the school level	In each local team, there were two additions to the US model: An education worker, and a part-time programme manager to liaise with Social Services department	NO INFORMATION
Modifications	PCP meetings were 30–45 minutes long based on observations. The pilot was designed in 2019 and schedule to start delivery in January 2021 but following a delay caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and partial school closures, it started in late February 2021 instead.	NO INFORMATION	NO INFORMATION
How well planned	NO INFORMATION	Fidelity was monitored through weekly supervision with carers and phone calls.	NO INFORMATION



	Bhatti et al., 2022	Biehal et al., 2012 Green et al., 2014	Fancourt and Sebba, 2018
How well actual	NO INFORMATION	Around half of the MTFC-A group were still in their MTFC-A placements at one-year follow-up, which limited the study's ability to assess post-placement outcomes. Placement disruptions were known to account for over half of the placement endings in both the MTFC-A and comparison groups.	NO INFORMATION
Methods	Mixed methods	Mixed methods RCT	Mixed methods Qualitative interview and surveys Quantitative analysis of Virtual School data and school level NPD data.
Results: Effects on non-attendance	Absences: Average attendance increased by 3% and the percentage of pupils with an attendance rate of 85% increased by 9% between spring 2020/21 and autumn 2021/22; however, this could not be attributed to the intervention.	Absences: There was no statistically significant effect for MTFC-A once age, time in placement and attendance at baseline were taken into account.	Impact on pupils' outcomes was hard to quantify, but qualitative findings suggest that the programme improved pupil wellbeing. Absences: Virtual School data shows that CLA had an average attendance rate of 92.73% for 2016-2017, a fall of 0.04% on the same period in 2015/16, which was also a fall of 0.86% on the previous year, suggesting little change. Exclusions:



	Bhatti et al., 2022	Biehal et al., 2012 Green et al., 2014	Fancourt and Sebba, 2018
			Virtual School's own data shows that there had been no permanent exclusions across the county, and the number of fixed-term exclusions had fallen marginally from 13.9% to 13.7%.

Table A4.3: Interventional studies: Effects on school non-attendance

	Griggs et al., 2022	MacRitchie, 2019	Plumridge & Sebba, 2018
Research questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How feasible is it to place an advisory teacher in Children's Social Services? 2. What are the indicators of success, e.g. attendance, exclusions and academic progress? 3. Costs: what resources are needed to deliver the intervention? 	What impact is the MCR model having on CLA outcomes?	<p>Did CLA benefit from the move from residential to foster care?</p> <p>What positive stability and developmental progress can be seen?</p> <p>How far has the CLA had ownership of the placement decisions?</p> <p>What have been the most important factors to this transition process?</p> <p>What recommendations can be made for the future?</p>
Brief name	Placing an advisory teacher in children's social care	MCR Pathway	The Step Down Programme
Why	To support CIN and CPP transitions to secondary school during the COVID-19 pandemic	According to government reports, in 2017 only 28% care-experienced pupils stayed on in school beyond the age 16 compared	To bring young people out of residential homes into specialist foster placements with key



	Griggs et al., 2022	MacRitchie, 2019	Plumridge & Sebba, 2018
		to the 88.4% universal rate for pupils in Scotland. Between 2015–18, nationally only 35% of S5 care-experienced pupils achieved three or more qualification at SCQF Level 5 or above, compared to the 80% three-year average universal rate for Scottish pupils.	outcome of placement stability for the young person after 52 weeks.
What materials	£1,000 per pupil for either Educational (one-to-one, pupil-led activities, off-site outdoor activities and wellbeing sessions) or therapeutic (one-to-one, pupil-led activities, off-site outdoor activities and wellbeing sessions) training materials from educational psychologist, documentation, e.g. Education plan.	Volunteer mentor	A 52-week placement in foster care.
What procedures	Advisory teachers drafted bespoke education plans for each individual pupil and identified individual interventions that suited pupils' needs.	Mentoring: matching care-experienced and disadvantaged young people with a 1:1 volunteer. This is someone who cares and commits their time to meet weekly for an hour in school. Mentors are trained, but not to be social workers, teachers or experts in child psychology. They are simply people, freely giving their time for no other reason than they care. Targeted re-engagement programmes: designed for these harder to reach pupils,	The programme involves a carefully planned matching process and high levels of support including planned respite care. It is delivered in four phases: 1) Planning (up to 6 weeks) via matching and planning processes, 2) Stabilisation (13 weeks) via fortnightly progress meetings, 3) Settlement (13 weeks) via monthly progress meetings, and 4) Maintenance (26 weeks) via monthly progress meetings.



	Griggs et al., 2022	MacRitchie, 2019	Plumridge & Sebba, 2018
		with dedicated staff working with disengaged secondary pupils. Supported case by case, the goal of re-engagement is a return to school or progression to a supported college place.	
Who provided	Advisory teachers, educational psychologists, TAs, external providers	Volunteer mentors from all walks of life to mentor, listen to and support a young person for one hour a week.	The programme is delivered by Core Assets. The programme includes the foster carer, the child's social worker, a supervising social worker, the child's mentor, a therapist to support foster carers, and programme managers.
How	Face-to-face and online (Zoom)	Face-to-face	Progress meetings
Where	In schools/home	Glasgow and in a number of schools throughout Scotland, in Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, Edinburgh, North Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire and West Dunbartonshire, with many other local authorities committed to joining.	
When and how much	October 2020 – July 2021	One hour a week.	52 weeks during placement.
Tailoring	Every child intervention was bespoke.	NO INFORMATION	Progress meetings were used differently across placements. Some teams used them much more proactively than others and this was linked to positive outcomes.
Modifications	NO INFORMATION	NO INFORMATION	NO INFORMATION



	Griggs et al., 2022	MacRitchie, 2019	Plumridge & Sebba, 2018
How well planned	A RAG-rating process monitored the progress of the CIN and CP cohort.	NO INFORMATION	NO INFORMATION
How well actual	Virtual School monitoring data suggests that a large majority of pupils completed the bespoke interventions. 81% of pupils completed most/all sessions. 15% missed more than two and were moderately engaged. 4% of pupils did not engage with the intervention.	NO INFORMATION	NO INFORMATION
Methods	Narrative review with quantitative analysis. Quantitative analysis using Scottish government statistics.	Descriptive	Mixed methods Quantitative analysis 30 qualitative interviews with foster carers, supervising social workers, and children's social workers relating to 11 disrupted placements.
Results: Effects on non-attendance	Absences: Quantitative - Average attendance improved among pilot pupils. While on average 74.4% pupils attended during the autumn term 2020/21, this increased to 86.7% in the summer term 2020/21. It increased to a greater extent for secondary school pupils (65.8% on average to 81.3%) than Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)/primary pupils (82.7% to 91.9%).	Absences: Nine of nine young people in the Glasgow North East S3 re-engagement programme last year improved attendance. Qualitative: Some young people also noted that their mentors provided support to address specific issues that led to their non-attendance at school. For example, where A young people had poor attendance due	Absences: Attendance at school was generally high, higher than at baseline, with poor attendance recorded for only five young people. Some young people began attending school again after a period of not attending. Exclusions: Seven young people had been excluded from school, three of these for more than 10 days across episodes educational attendance. Of the 24 young people for whom exclusion data were



	Griggs et al., 2022	MacRitchie, 2019	Plumridge & Sebba, 2018
	Qualitative - Despite an improvement in attendance rates, advisory teachers explained that attendance for the older cohort could be erratic. There was a view that older children’s behaviours, preferences and habits around education, which included attendance, were more difficult to change.	to difficult experiences such as bullying mentors provided them with the confidence to address the issues that were contributing to their regular absence.	available, seven young people experienced fixed term exclusions of varying lengths as follows: 1–4 exclusions 2–42 days total.

Table A4.4: Interventional studies: Effects on school non-attendance

	Rivers, 2018	Sebba et al., 2016
Research questions	1. What is the context of the role of the virtual school head?	How, and in what ways, has the intervention programme impacted upon CLA, foster carer’s, social workers, designated teachers, senior leadership teams, and managers of fostering service providers? Is there evidence of improved educational outcomes and wellbeing for CLA? What might be done to improve the intervention?
Brief name	Virtual School Head/ Virtual School	London Fostering Achievement (LFA) programme
Why	To champion the educational outcomes for children in care	LFA brings together the Fostering Network and Achievement for All. This consortium defined the overall aim as to improve the ability of foster carers and teachers to raise the educational outcomes of children in the care of London boroughs and attending educational settings in London.



	Rivers, 2018	Sebba et al., 2016
What materials	NO INFORMATION	Materials for the direct work with schools programme are included in a Toolkit for Schools that was subsequently placed on the LFA website.
What procedures	NO INFORMATION	The programme has four components: 1) generic foster carer training, 2) masterclasses, 3) direct work with schools, and 4) education champions, i.e. experienced foster carers.
Who provided	Virtual School Head and Virtual School supporting regular School	The programme included social workers, designated teachers and foster carers. An Achievement for All Coach engaged in the direct work with schools with a nominated School Champion.
How	NO INFORMATION	Foster carer trainings and master classes delivered in a group. Direct work with schools and Education Champions supporting foster carers was provided individually.
Where	NO INFORMATION	In schools/home.
When and how much	NO INFORMATION	Foster carer training is a one-day session. Masterclasses included four half-day training sessions. The direct work with schools programme received support for one year. Education Champions worked with foster carers for four hours per week.
Tailoring	NO INFORMATION	Activity was determined by the particular needs of the school.
Modifications	NO INFORMATION	NO INFORMATION
How well planned	NO INFORMATION	NO INFORMATION



	Rivers, 2018	Sebba et al., 2016
How well actual	NO INFORMATION	NO INFORMATION
Methods	Narrative account from Virtual school head.	Mixed methods
Results: Effects on non-attendance	<p>Exclusions: Reported that over the last 3 years the virtual school had reduced permanent exclusions to zero, fixed-term exclusions reduced by over a quarter for CLA. No details provided by author on specific absence rates.</p>	<p>Absences: Attendance and exclusion showed no significant differences between those pupils in schools involved in direct work and those in schools not involved.</p> <p>Unauthorised absences increased between Time 1 and Time 2 in both schools involved in direct work and schools not involved, $F(1,1036) = 6.32, p = .012, \eta^2 p = .006$. The effect of status approached significance, with pupils in schools involved in direct work having a higher percentage of unauthorised absences at both time points, $F(1,1036) = 2.97, p = .085, \eta^2 p = .003$.</p>