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Children in Care

in Northern Ireland 2020 - 21

Statistical Bulletin



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About Community Information Branch: The purpose of Community Information Branch (CIB) is to promote effective decision making in children and adult social services by providing quality information and analysis.

We collect, analyse, and publish a wide range of community information that is used to help monitor the delivery of personal social services policy. Information collected by CIB is used to assess HSC Trust performance, for corporate monitoring, policy evaluation, and to respond to parliamentary/assembly questions. All publications can be found on the [Department of Health's website](#).

Our Vision and Values

- Provide up-to-date, quality information on children and adult social services and community health;
- to disseminate findings widely with a view to stimulating debate, promoting effective decision-making and improvement in service provision; and
- be an expert voice on social care information.

Key Findings

This statistical bulletin presents findings from annual information returns of children who have been in care continuously for twelve months or longer. It details analyses relating to the child's placement and health, schooling and educational attainment. It also covers cautions and convictions and current activity for those that finished compulsory schooling.

- At 30 September 2021, 2,794 children and young people had been in care continuously for 12 months or longer;
- Of these, one sixth (15%) had experienced a placement change during the previous 12 months, which is the same as last year and the lowest of recent years;
- Having a statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) continues to be more prevalent among the children in care of school age (25%) compared with the general school population (6%);
- Some 17% of school aged children and young people had full attendance through the 2020/21 school year, while 13% missed 25 or more school days for any reason (authorised or unauthorised absence); and
- Two-thirds (66%) of young people in care for twelve months or longer and who were in Year 12 attained five or more GCSE at grades A* to G. Although not directly comparable, 97% of the general school leaver population (Year 12 – Year 14) attained five or more GCSE at grades A* to G. The equivalent figures for those achieving five GCSE at grades A* to C were 45% and 92% respectively.

Children in Care in Northern Ireland 2020–21

1. Introduction

1.1. The Children Order

[The Children \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1995](#) (the Children Order) is the principal statute governing the care, upbringing and protection of children in Northern Ireland. It affects all those who work and care for children, whether parents, paid carers or volunteers. The Children Order emphasises the unique advantages to a child being brought up within his or her own family. In practice, this means that the Order sees families as a major way of supporting and helping children. Health and Social Care Trusts have the power and in some circumstances the duty, under the Children Order, to help children by providing services to their families.

A child can be referred to social services for a variety of reasons. When a child is referred, social services undertake an initial assessment to determine if that child is a 'child in need' as defined by the Children Order. If a child is considered to be a child in need, services should be offered to assist the child's parents/carers to meet that identified need. Should there be concerns that a child may be suffering or at risk of suffering 'significant harm', Social Services will conduct an investigation under Article 66 of the Children Order and respond appropriately. A Child Protection Case Conference may be convened and the child's name included on the Child Protection Register and a Child Protection Plan drawn up to safeguard the child. If there are significant concerns that indicate authoritative intervention is required Social Services may make application to the Court for a Legal Order to enable them to afford an appropriate level of safeguarding to the child. This may include removing a child from its family and into the care of the HSC Trust.

Children are taken into care for a variety of reasons, the most common being to protect the child from abuse or neglect. In other cases their parents could be absent or may be unable to cope due to disability or illness.

1.2. The OC2 Community Information Return

This publication presents the latest figures on children and young people in care in Northern Ireland. The OC2 community information return is specifically designed to collect information on children while they are in care, expressly for those who have been in care continuously for 12 months or longer. Together with two additional returns, OC1, which collects information on educational attainment of care leavers aged 16 to 18, and OC3, which covers the circumstances of care leavers at the time of their 19th birthday¹, they provide a comprehensive series of data on children and young people in care in Northern Ireland.

¹ Please see Appendix A: Technical Notes for further details on the OC publications

The OC2 returns, first published in 2004, collects information relating to the educational qualifications², health and other key areas of children in care continuously for 12 months or more at 30 September each year. Comparisons are included where possible with the general Northern Ireland population and with looked after children in other UK countries. However, these should be treated with caution as they may relate to very different cohorts of children, or differing time periods.

² From 2015/16, the majority of the educational information has been received from Department of Education NI.

2. Children in care 2020-21

At 30 September 2021, 2,794 children and young people who were in care in Northern Ireland had been continuously in care for more than a year³. Figure 2.1 outlines how the number of children in care for at least 12 months has risen year on year since 2006. The number of children in care in 2021 was 1.1% higher than the previous year, and represented a 89% increase from 2006, when the number was the lowest of recent years (1,480).

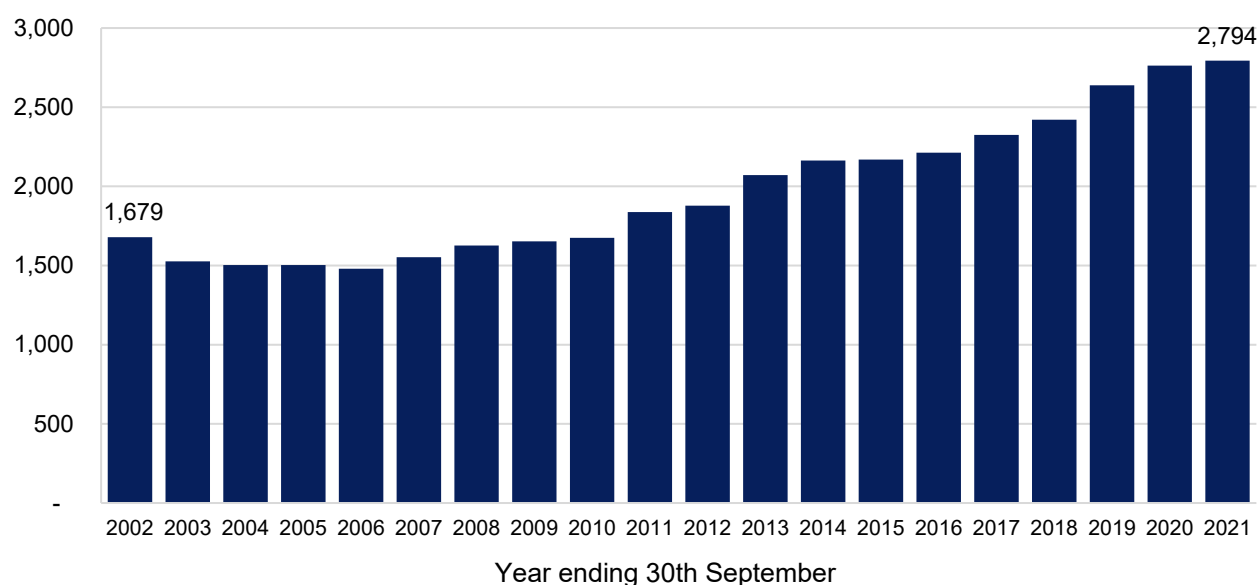
The rise in numbers of looked after children may be explained by a number of factors including an increased level of awareness of child protection issues.

The 2,794 children and young people that had been in care continuously for at least 12 months represented a rate of 63 children per 10,000 population aged under 18⁴. The rate of looked after children in 2021 was similar to that in 2020 (63 children per 10,000 population aged under 18). Of recent years, the lowest rate occurred in 2006 when 34 children per 10,000 population had been in care for 12 months or longer.

Figure 2.1 Number of children in care continuously for 12 months or longer at 30th September (2002 – 2021)

Note: Numbers are estimated for 2004, 2005 and 2007.

Number of children and young people



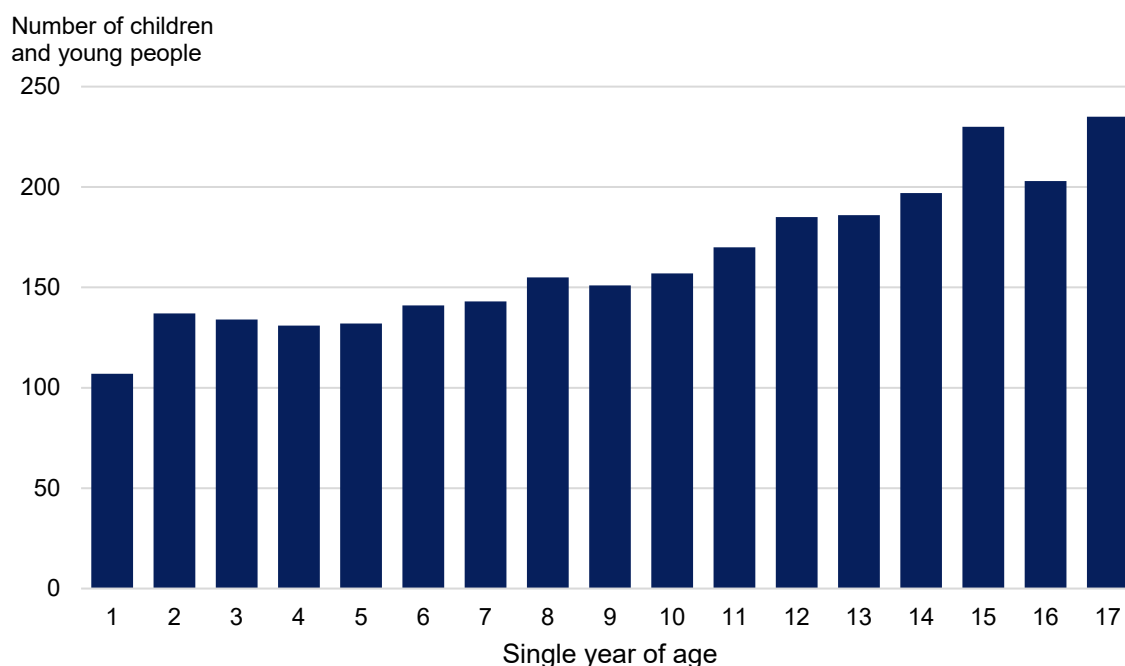
³ This figure may differ slightly from other sources due to categorisation and exclusions.

⁴ 2020 Mid-Year Population Estimates, NISRA 2021.

2.1. Age and Gender

At 30 September 2021, 54% of the children and young people who had been in care for 12 months or longer were male (1,508) and 46% were female (1,286). Similar to 2020, some 18% of the children were of pre-school age (1-4 years), 38% were of primary school age (5-11 years), 29% of post-primary school age (12-15) and 16% were 16 years or older. There were only minor differences in the age breakdown between boys and girls.

Figure 2.2 Number of children and young people in care for 12 months or longer by single year of age at 30 September 2021



2.2. Religion and Ethnicity

There was a higher proportion of looked after children from Catholic background (51%) than Protestant backgrounds (39%) in 2020/21, with 280 (10%) reported as having either 'No', 'Unknown' or 'Other' religious denomination⁵. These figures are similar to the previous year.

HSC Trust differences were observed in relation to religion, with more than four fifths of the children in the Western HSC Trusts having Catholic background (82%), compared to 25% in the Northern Trust. The Northern HSC Trust had the highest proportion of 'No', 'Unknown' or 'Other' religion (21%), whereas the equivalent figure in the Western HSC Trust was 2%.

The ethnic grouping of the children in 2020/21 indicated that 93% (2,607) were White, and of the remaining 7% (187), 45 were Irish or Roma Travellers, 27 were Black and 115 were of Mixed, 'Other' or 'Unknown' ethnic backgrounds. Belfast HSC Trust had the lowest population of white ethnic background (88%) whereas the Western HSC Trusts had 98%.

⁵ See tables for details.

2.3. Disability

HSC Trusts were asked to indicate if children were disabled in accordance with the definition below:

“The child has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his/her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities”.

Using this definition, 16% (448) of the children in care for more than 12 months were reported as disabled in 2020/21, a 3 percentage point increase from the previous year. Furthermore, a higher proportion of boys (19%) than girls (12%) were disabled. Although not directly comparable, the NI Census 2011 found that 5% of children in Northern Ireland had a limiting long term illness or disability that limited their day to day activity⁶. It would therefore suggest that having a disability is more prevalent among looked after children than the general child population.

Table 2.1 below sets out the frequency of different disability types. The majority of the disabled looked after children had autism (41%) either on its own or in combination with another disability. This was followed by a learning disability (38%) and severe learning disability (13%). Some 29% of the disabled children fell into ‘Other’ categories⁷. Of the children with a disability, 29% (128) were recorded as having multiple disabilities.

Table 2.1 Children in care with a disability and type of disability (2020/21)

Note: 128 of the children 448 with a disability were recorded as having multiple disabilities and are therefore included in more than one category.

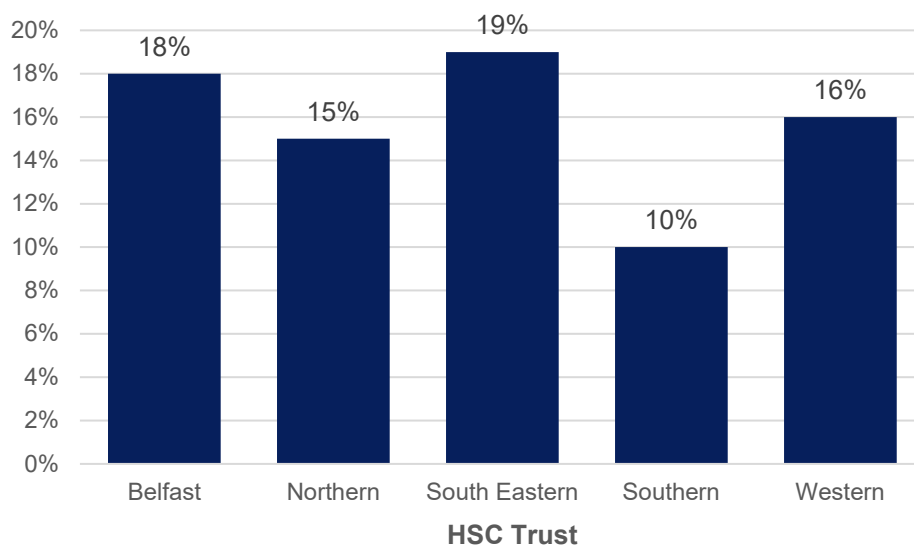
Type of disability	Proportion of children and young people with disability
Autism (including Aspergers)	41%
Learning disability	38%
Severe learning disability	13%
Physical disability	8%
Visually disabled	4%
Hearing impaired	3%
Mental health disability	1%
Other disability (including unknown disability)	30%

As a proportion of their in care children populations, the South Eastern HSC Trust was looking after the largest proportion of disabled children (19%); in comparison, 10% of the looked after children population in the Southern HSC Trust were disabled.

⁶ Findings from the Northern Ireland Census 2011.

⁷ “Other” includes chronic illness, Foetal Alcohol Syndrome, Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder, epilepsy, and other disabilities.

Figure 2.3 Proportion of children in care in each HSC Trust with a disability (2020/21)



2.4. Dependants

Becoming a parent may impact on educational and other outcomes for young people. In 2020/21, 10 young people in care had one or more dependent children, one less than the previous year.

2.5. Trust Profile

Table 2.2 sets out the number of children in care for 12 months or longer at 30 September 2021 by Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts. Overall, the Belfast HSC Trust had the largest proportion of these children and young people (26%).

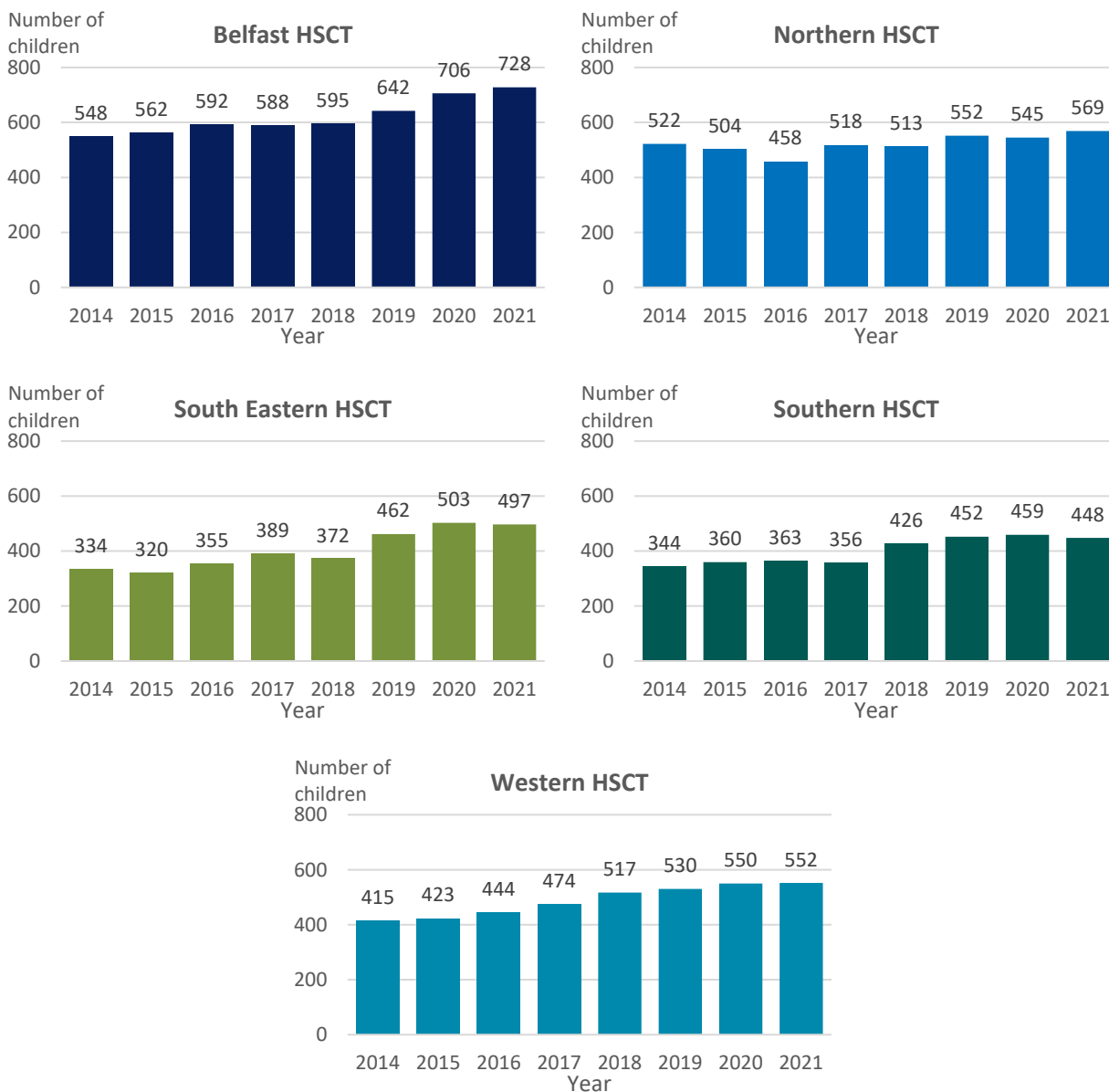
Table 2.2 Number of children and young people in care continuously for 12 months or longer at 30 September 2021 by HSC Trust

HSC Trust	Number of children in care for 12 months or longer (30 September 2021)	Change from last year (30 September 2020)
Belfast	728	+22
Northern	569	+24
South Eastern	497	-6
Southern	448	-11
Western	552	+2
Northern Ireland	2,795	+31

Figure 2.4 sets out the trend figures of looked after children between 2013/14 to 2020/21. It shows that all HSC Trusts have seen an increase in numbers of children in long-term care over this period. Furthermore, from the previous year (2019/20), the Belfast and Northern HSC Trusts saw an increase in the number of children in care for 12 months or longer, 3% and 4% respectively, whereas, the Western HSC Trust stayed relatively similar to the previous year, an increase of less than one percent. The South Eastern and Southern HSC

Trusts saw a slight decrease in the number of children in care for 12 months or longer, 1% and 2% respectively.

Figure 2.4 Number of children in care for 12 months or longer between 30 September 2014 and 2021 by HSC Trust



2.6. Multiple Deprivation Measure and Rurality

The home location of the looked after child prior to entering care was linked to the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2017⁸ (MDM) and the Urban-Rural Classification 2015⁹.

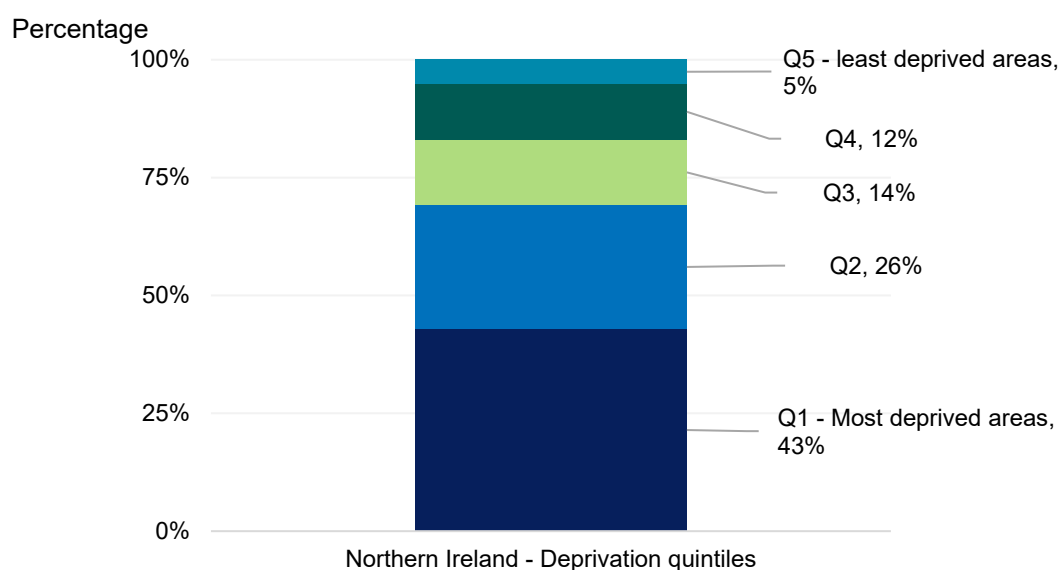
8 Source: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency – www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/deprivation.

9 "Review of the Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements", NISRA 2015.

For the children where geographical information was available¹⁰ in 2021, four in five (80%) were living in a predominantly urban area before entering care, with 20% originating from rural areas¹¹.

An analysis of the MDM quintiles showed that 43% of the children had been taken into care from the 20% most deprived areas within Northern Ireland, similar to that in 2019/20. Some 5% of the children originated from the least deprived quintile. Although there were variances between the HSC Trusts, all HSC Trusts had the highest proportion of children originating from the most deprived quintile (between 49% and 32%) and the smallest proportion originating from the least deprived quintile (between 9% and 2%). when examining the distribution of deprivation areas within the individual HSC Trusts.

Figure 2.5 Multiple Deprivation Measure - Level of area deprivation prior to entering care (2020/21)



10 Geographical information prior to entering care was collected for 95% of the children.

11 Calculations using Super Output Area to urban-rural classification. Annex B of "Technical Guidance on production of official statistics for Settlements and Urban-Rural Classification". NISRA 2015.

3. Health

3.1. Development & Health Assessments

Figure 3.1 sets out the uptake of development and health assessments by children looked after for 12 months or longer. Development Assessments and Six Monthly Assessments relates to the children who were aged four and younger at 30 September (18% or 509 of the children in 2021). Annual Health Assessments relates to children aged five and over (82% or 2,285 of the children in 2021).

Development Assessments: The majority of children aged under five (455 of 509), had their development assessments up-to-date at 30 September 2021 (89%). Some 29 children were reported to not have their development assessments up-to-date at 30 September 2021, and of these, 72% were not carried out due to reasons associated with Covid-19 restrictions. A response was not captured for a further 25 children aged four and younger. The 2021 figure was marginally lower than the corresponding figure for looked after children in England¹² (89%).

Six Monthly Assessments Of the children aged under five, 71% (361) had their six monthly assessments up-to-date at 30 September 2021. Some 124 children were reported to not have their development assessments up-to-date at 30 September 2021, and of these, almost 9 in 10 were not carried out due to reasons associated with Covid-19 restrictions (90%). A response was not captured for 24 children aged four and younger.

Annual Health Assessment Of the 2,250¹³ children aged five and over, where a response was supplied, 58% (1,301) had their annual health assessment up-to-date at 30 September 2021, a sixteen percentage point increase from the previous year. Of the 949 children who did not have their annual health assessment up-to-date at 30 September 2021, 74% of these were not carried out due to reasons associated with Covid-19 restrictions.

Additionally, it is worth noting that of the young people aged 16 and over, 62% did not have an up to date assessment; compared with 38% of those aged 5-15.

Some 91% of looked after children in England aged five and over had their health assessment up-to-date¹⁴.

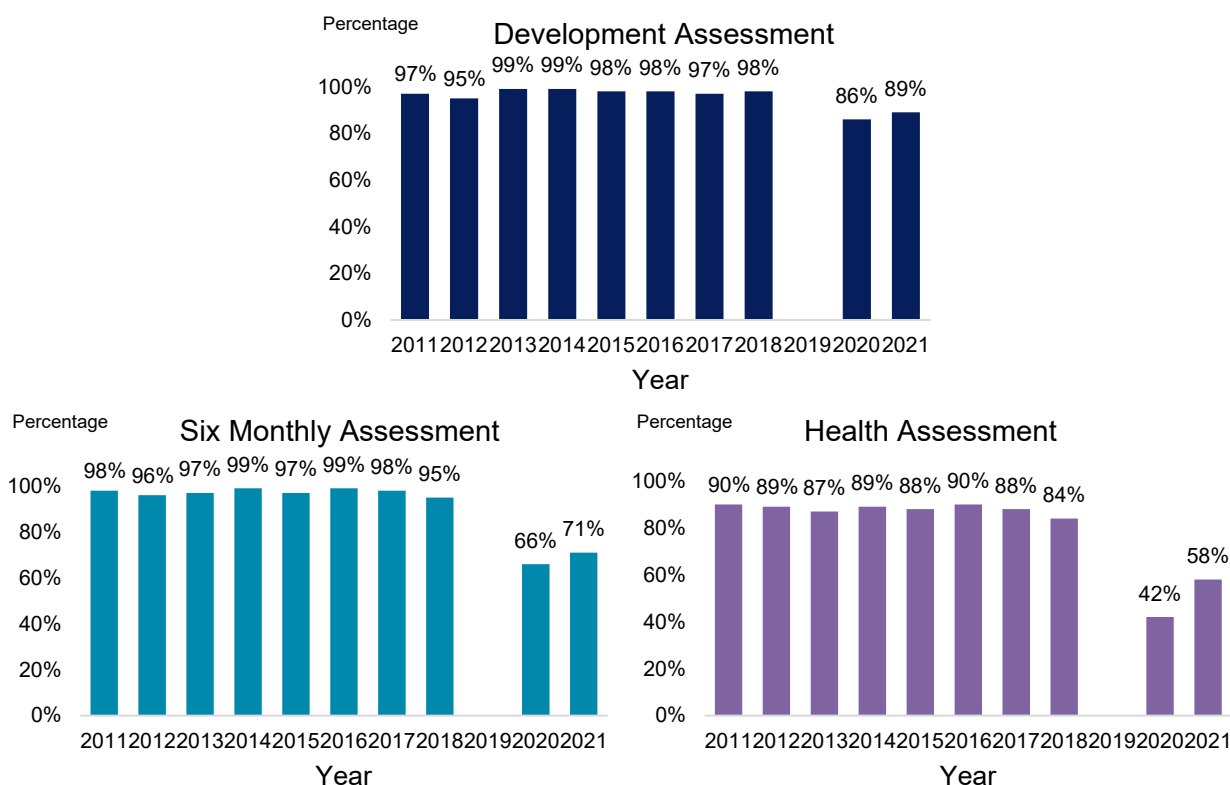
¹² "Children looked after in England including adoption. Reporting year 2021".

¹³ Figures were not supplied for 35 children.

¹⁴ "Children looked after in England including adoption. Reporting year 2021".

Figure 3.1 Development and Health Assessments for children in care for 12 months or longer at 30 September (2011 - 2021)

Note: Information on development and health assessments was not collected in 2019.



3.2. Immunisations

Information on immunisations relates to all looked after children covered in this bulletin, and not just to those that were due immunisations in 2020/21. It includes immunisations due before admittance into care and during time spent in care. For the purpose of this survey, children who did not receive immunisations for health reasons or because parents refused consent, were counted as children whose immunisations were not up-to-date.

A child’s immunisation record was considered up-to-date if the HSC Trust indicated that all relevant immunisations had been administered by 30 September 2021. From the information provided, 97% (2,714) of children in care had their immunisations up-to-date at 30 September 2021. This was considerably higher than looked after children in England¹⁵, where 86% had their immunisation up to date.

Of the 71 children who did not have their immunisations up-to-date at 30 September 2021, approximately two-fifths (41%) of these were not carried out due to reasons associated with Covid-19 restrictions. A response on immunisations was not captured for nine children.

¹⁵ “Children looked after in England including adoption. Reporting year 2021”.

Immunisation rates for Northern Ireland generally are not published on a client basis but rather by type of immunisation¹⁶ and are therefore not comparable with the way the immunisation rates are collected within this publication.

3.3. Dental Checks

This relates to all children and young people in care who had their teeth checked during the year ending 30 September 2021. For very young children, these checks may be undertaken by a dentist, a paediatrician or other health care professional and these would count as dental checks.

Of the 2,794 children in care for 12 months or longer at 30 September 2021, 61% (1,708) had their teeth checked the previous year; higher than the corresponding figure for England¹⁷ where only four in ten had their teeth checked by a dentist.

Of the 1,079 children who did not have their dental checks up-to-date at 30 September 2021, 89% of these were not carried out due to reasons associated with Covid-19 restrictions. A response on dental checks was not captured for seven children.

¹⁶ Public Health Agency Core Tables <http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/>.

¹⁷ "Children looked after in England including adoption. Reporting year 2021".

4. Placement

4.1. Placement Types

Children in care can be cared for in a variety of placement types depending on the individual child’s situation and needs¹⁸. For the purpose of this report, five main placement categories will be used; **non-kinship foster care** (including independent foster care providers and children placed for adoption¹⁹), **kinship foster care**²⁰ (including emergency foster care), **residential care, placed with parent** and **‘other’ placement types**.

At 30 September 2021, 44% (1,218) of the children in care for 12 months or longer were placed in non-kinship foster care, 41% (1,150) were placed in kinship foster care, 8% (218) were placed with a parent, 6% (172) were in residential care, and 1% (36) were in ‘other’ placement types. There was a slight increase in numbers in kinship foster care (up from 38%) and a slight decrease of those placed with parents (down from 11%), but overall the proportions were similar to those in 2020.

Of the 1,218 children in non-kinship foster care, 69 were placed for adoption.

Of the 36 children in ‘Other’ placement types, 28 were living independently, with the remaining 8 were in placements not elsewhere described.

Table 4.1 Placement type by HSC Trust year ending 30 September 2021

Note: Non-kinship foster care includes children placed for adoption and independent foster care providers.

HSC Trust	Northern Ireland	Belfast	Northern	South Eastern	Southern	Western
Non-kinship foster care*	44%	45%	44%	50%	49%	32%
Kinship foster care	41%	42%	43%	34%	32%	52%
Placed with parent	8%	6%	7%	8%	11%	8%
Residential care	6%	7%	5%	7%	6%	6%
Other	1%	0%	1%	2%	2%	2%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 4.1 above shows the main placement categories, broken down by HSC Trusts. For all Trusts, apart from the Western HSC Trust, the most prevalent placement was non-kinship foster care followed by kinship foster care. The Southern and South Eastern Trusts had the lowest proportion of children in kinship placements (32% and 34% respectively).

¹⁸ Appendix C sets out descriptions of different placement types.

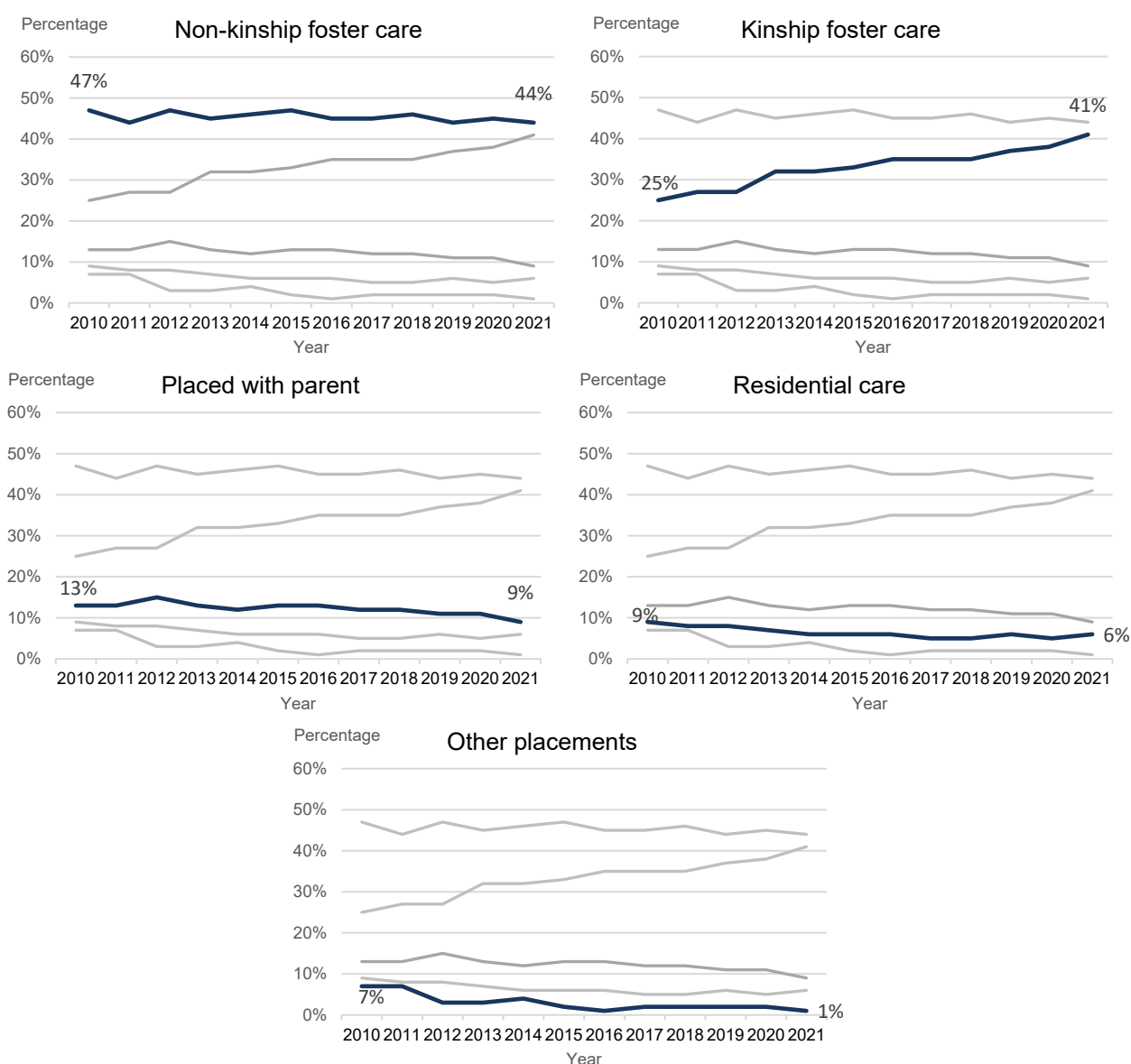
¹⁹ Being placed for adoption is a stage in the adoption process and a child will still be considered as looked after until the granting of an Adoption Order.

²⁰ In this publication “kinship foster care” covers formal kinship care arrangements as opposed to informal kinship care which are private arrangement. Please see appendix C for further details.

The proportion of children placed in kinship foster care has increased from 25% to 41% since 2010, whereas the proportion of children placed in non-kinship foster care has remained stable, between 44% and 47%. There has been a slight decrease in the proportion of children placed with parents, which has fallen from 13% in 2010 to 9% in 2021. Although the proportion of children placed in residential care was never large, it has still reduced slightly from 9% in 2010 to 6% in 2021, although this is one percentage point greater than the previous year (5% in 2020). The proportion of children placed in other placements has reduced from 7% to 1%, which may be partly due to improved recording of placement categories.

Figure 4.1 Placement of children in care continuously for 12 months or longer at 30 September 2010 – 2021

Note: Non-kinship foster care includes children placed for adoption and independent foster care providers.



The age of the child in care may influence the suitability of placement types. For all age groups, non-kinship foster care and kinship foster care were the main placement types. The circumstances of every child is unique; however, it is generally understood that where

possible children under eleven years old will not be placed in residential care. The majority of those in the age group 5-11 years in the table below, who were in residential care, were age 11 years (Table 4.2). Those aged 16 and over, as may be expected, showed the greatest variation in placement type.

Table 4.2 Placement type by age group at 30 September 2021

Note: Non-kinship foster care includes children placed for adoption and independent foster care providers.

Placement type	1-4 years old	5-11 years old	12-15 years old	16 years and older	All ages
Non-kinship foster care	49%	43%	45%	37%	44%
Kinship foster care	46%	47%	37%	29%	41%
Placed with parent	5%	8%	8%	11%	8%
Residential care	0%	2%	10%	17%	6%
Other	0%	0%	1%	6%	1%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

4.2. Placement Changes

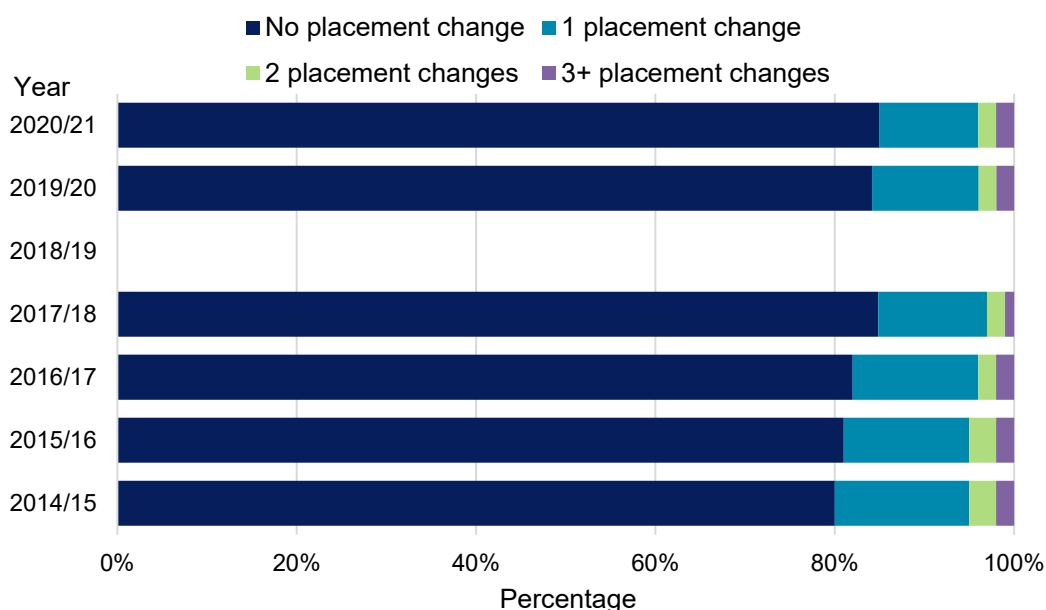
Figure 4.2 shows the proportion of children and young people who did not have a placement change during the year, and those who did have a placement change of any reason since 2014/15²¹,²². It shows that the proportion with no placement change has gradually increased over this period. In 2020/21, 85% of all children did not have a placement change, the same as last year, which is the highest proportion of recent years.

²¹ Excludes placement changes that were due to short breaks.

²² Includes those whose placement change was to be placed for adoption.

Figure 4.2 Placement changes during the year ending 30 September 2021

Note: Information was [not collected for the year 2018/19](#)



Some 15%, or 421 children, of all children in care for 12 months or longer changed placement at least once during the year ending 30 September 2021. Of those with a placement change, 75% moved once only, 14% twice only, and 11% had changed placement three times or more

A similar proportion of females and males experienced placement changes (15% for both). The Northern HSC Trust had the lowest proportion of children with placement moves during the last year (12%), whereas 17% of children in the Southern HSC Trust had a placement change.

Children aged between 5-11 years of age saw the lowest proportion of placement changes during 2020/21 (11%), whereas over a fifth of the young people aged 16 and over had one or more placement changes (22%) (Figure 4.3).

Of the children under five years of age, 15% (11 children) had a move which represented being placed for adoption. In total, 17 children’s moves represented placements of adoption²³.

²³ Being placed for adoption is a stage in the adoption process and a child will still be considered as looked after until the granting of an Adoption Order.

Figure 4.3 Percentage of children in care who experienced a placement change during 2020/21 by age group

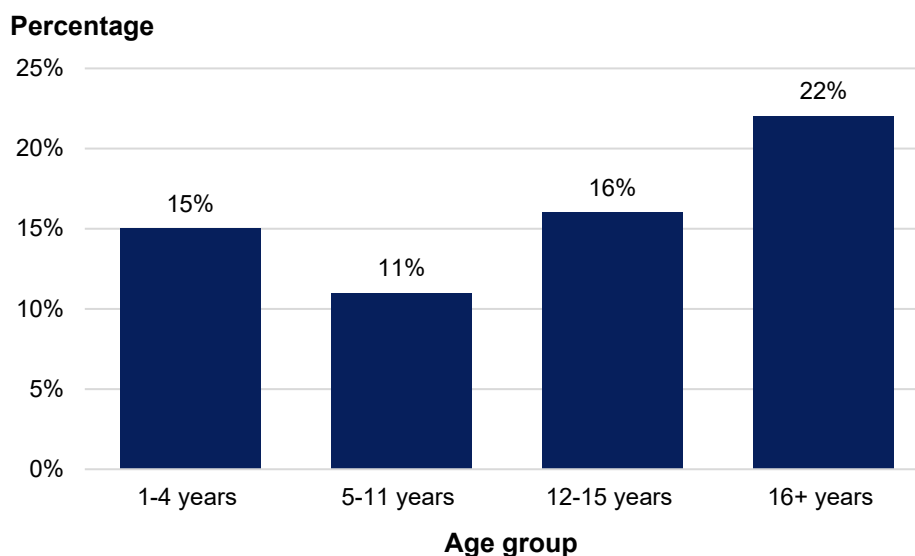
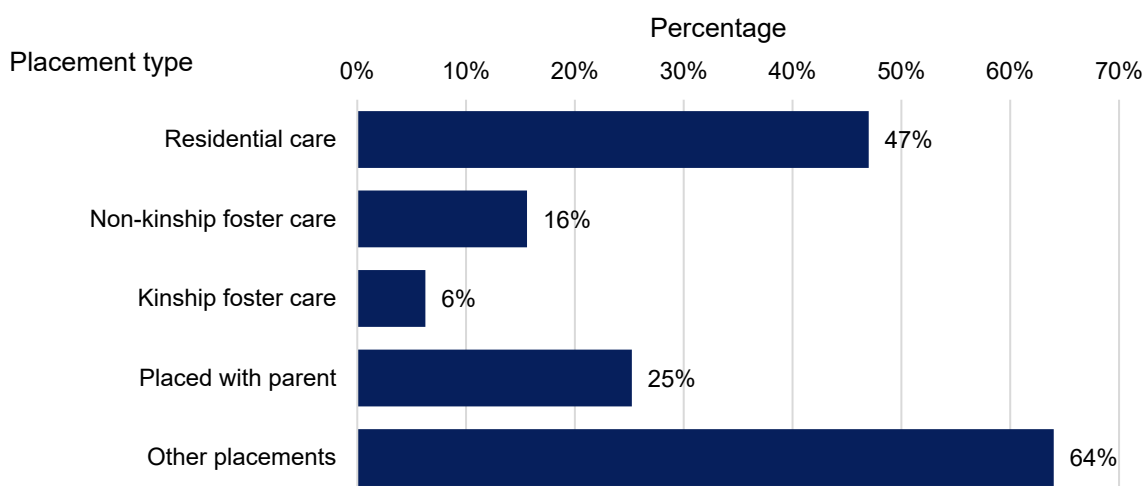


Figure 4.4 sets out the proportion of placement changes by the child’s current placement type at 30 September 2021. Of the children in care for more than 12 months, children who were in kinship foster care at 30 September 2021 had the highest stability during the previous year (6% with a placement change) followed by non-kinship foster care (16%). Some 64% of the children in ‘Other placements’ had experienced a placement change, which may be due to the nature of the placements included in this category (see appendix C for details).

Figure 4.4 Percentage of children in care who had experienced a placement change during 2019/20 by their current placement type at 30 September 2021



Many placement moves are planned as part of the child’s care plan. Other moves are the result of a placement breakdown. Of the 421 children with a placement move during 2020/21,

in 52% of cases the latest placement change was planned, 40% were due to a breakdown, and 8% for other reasons²⁴. These figures were similar to those reported in 2019/20.

Similar proportions of males and females had a placement move due to a placement breakdown (39% of placement moves due to breakdown compared to 40%). Over half of all placement moves for the 12 - 15 age group related to a placement breakdown (56%). In comparison, 19% of the placement changes for the under five year olds related to a placement breakdown.

Of the 421 children who experienced one or more placement changes during 2020/21, 52% originated from non-kinship foster care prior to the latest move. Over half of these (57%) were planned—including 17 moves relating to children placed for adoption. Those placed in residential accommodation had the highest proportion of planned moves as their last placement change (60%).

Figure 4.5 Placement prior to the latest placement change (2020/21)

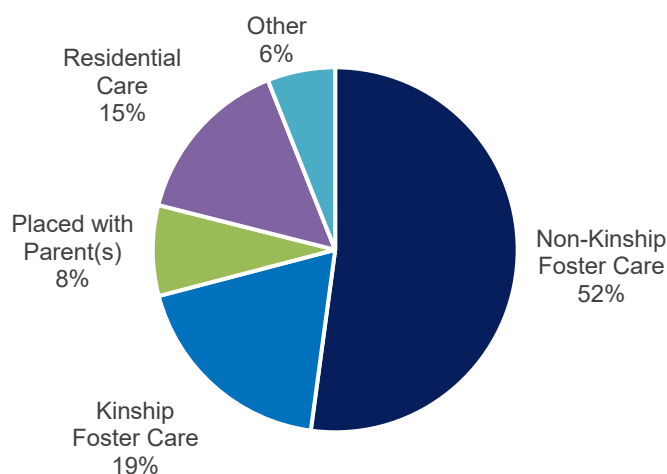


Table 4.3 Reason for last placement move by type of last placement (2020/21)

Placement prior to last placement move	Number of children with at least one placement move	Proportion whose last placement move was planned	Proportion whose last placement broke down	Proportion whose last placement move was for other reasons
Non-kinship foster care	221	57%	38%	4%
Kinship care	79	41%	44%	15%
Placed with parent	34	38%	56%	6%
Residential care	62	60%	27%	13%
Other placement	25	40%	44%	12%
All placements	421	52%	40%	8%

²⁴ Other reasons include safeguarding issues of the child/young person, young person remanded or in secure care, health concerns of carer and other reasons.

4.3. Statutory reviews

Health and Social Care Trusts are obliged to carry out reviews of the arrangements of looked after children. The first review must be carried out within two weeks of the child becoming looked after, with the next review no later than three months after the initial review. Each subsequent review should take place on a six monthly basis.

The review records the implementation of the 'Care Plan' establishing whether agreed steps have in fact been taken or not. It also records both positive and negative developments in the child's life including, health, education, developments within the birth family, and the child's relationship with members of their family.

During 2021/22, 49% (1,366) of children and young people in care continuously for 12 months or longer at 30 September 2021 were invited to attend their latest statutory review. Some 26% (354) of children invited attended their last statutory review. A further 38% of children invited did not attend but sent views in writing to the review panel, while 24% did not attend but briefed an advocate to speak on their behalf. Some 11% of children invited did not attend their review or convey their views to the review panel²⁵.

Of the 51% (1,411) children who were not invited to attend their review, almost eight in ten (77%) were considered to be too young to understand and fully participate in the process. A further 5% could not engage in the review due to the level of their disability, while 3% did not want to participate in the review²⁶.

²⁵ Some 16 children and young people who were invited to their review did not attend of 'other' or unknown reasons.

²⁶ Other recorded reasons given were that the child was at school when the review took place, potential emotional distress caused by the process and not appropriate for other reasons.

5. School Age Children

“Education is a vital component of all children’s lives and can impact on their chances for future employment and their general wellbeing. This applies particularly to looked after children who continue to have lower educational achievements than their peers in the general school population. There are a number of initiatives in place to maximise the benefit of education and make real improvements in outcomes for these children and young people.”

*Family & Children’s Policy Directorate
Department of Health*

5.1. Compulsory School Age

Compulsory school age in this publication refers to all children whose date of birth fell on or between 2 July 2004 and 1 July 2016, whether or not the child was in a position to attend school, i.e. any child who received or should have received full-time schooling during the school year.

The number of children and young people of compulsory school age, who had been in care for 12 months or longer at 30 September 2021 was 2,066. Of these, 149²⁷ children in care identified in the OC2 returns could not be linked with school data provided by the Department of Education. The total number of school aged children included in the following analyses is therefore 1,917²⁸.

Of those children of compulsory school age in care continuously for at least 12 months at 30 September 2020, 49% attended Primary School the previous school year, 37% were at Non-Grammar School, 8% were at Special School and 5% attended a Grammar School²⁹.

5.2. Personal Educational Plans

A Personal Education Plan (PEP) is a continuous record of the child/young person’s school history and identifies what needs to happen for a child/young person in care to fulfil their potential by planning and establishing clear targets for the child/young person relating to learning achievements. A PEP should be completed for all looked after children/young people of statutory school age, including children/young people in secure accommodation and in custody, at the three month Looked After Child Review, six month Looked After Child Review, and at six monthly intervals thereafter to coincide with Looked After Child Reviews.

²⁷ A number of these children were either not attending mainstream school or attending school outside of Northern Ireland.

²⁸ Please see [Technical Notes](#) for further details.

²⁹ A further 1% of children (12) either attended Prep school or the school information was not known.

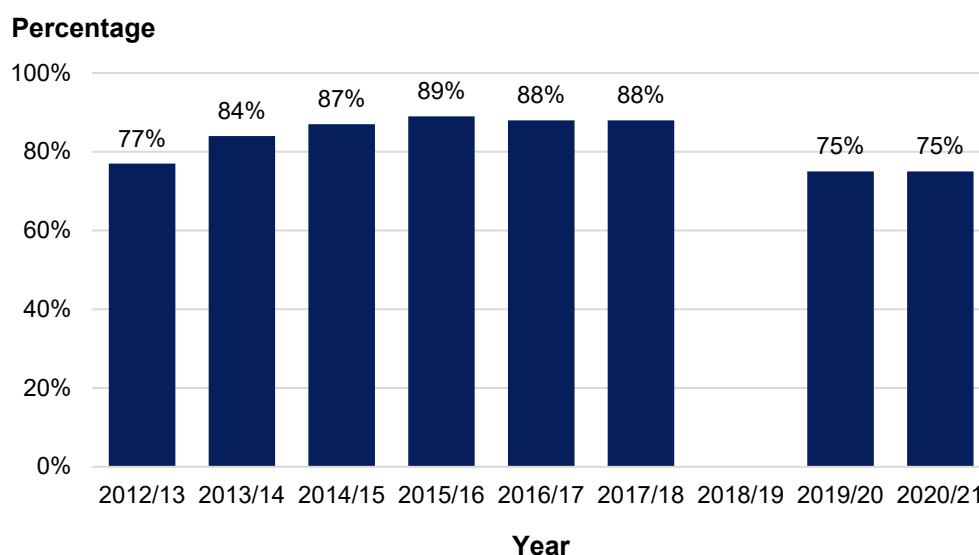
Of the school-aged children in care for 12 months or longer at 30 September 2021, 75% had a Personal Education Plan (PEP). Of those children who had a PEP, 74% had it reviewed within the previous six months.

The proportion of children with a PEP ranged from 67% in the South Eastern HSC Trust to 82% in the Northern HSC Trust. PEP Reviews within the last six months ranged from 56% in the South Eastern HSC Trust to 85% in the Southern HSC Trust.

The proportion of school-aged children with a PEP increased with eleven percentage points between 2012/13 and 2017/18. The year 2019/20, however, saw a distinct decrease completed PEPs, and the figure for 2020/21 is similar to last year. Of the 458 school-aged children in care who did not have a PEP in 2020/21, 57% (259 children) of these were due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Figure 5.1 Proportion of children in care for 12 months or longer with a Personal Education Plan (2012/13 - 2020/21)

Note: Information for year 2018/19 was not collected.



5.3. Children with statements of Special Educational Needs (SEN)

Children have special educational needs if they require special educational provision. Learning difficulty means the child has significantly greater difficulty in learning than children of similar age, and/or has a disability which hinders using everyday educational facilities (or, where the child is below school age, would hinder such use if the child were of school age). Special educational provision is different from, or additional to, that made for children of comparable age. Further information is provided in the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (SEN) published by the Department of Education NI³⁰.

³⁰ [Special educational needs:Code of Practice](#), Department of Education NI.

Of the children who had been in care for twelve months or longer and were of compulsory school age in 2020/21, 55% received some form of special educational needs support in school (SEN stages 1-5). This was substantially higher than the general school population in Northern Ireland³¹ (18%); however, similar to children in care in England³² (56%).

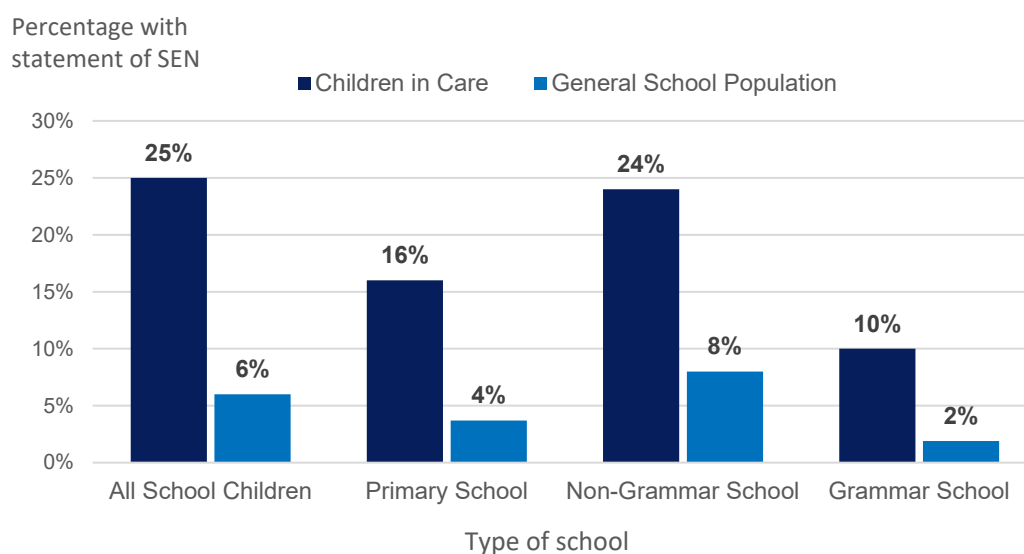
In 2020/21, a quarter (25%) of children and young people in care were covered by a Statement of SEN stage 5, of 31% of males and 18% of females. With the exception of Special Schools, where 98% of the children had statement of SEN, the proportion of children in care with a statement of SEN was most prevalent in non-grammar schools (24%).

A substantially larger proportion of children in care of school age had a statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) than the general school population in 2020/21 (25% compared with 6%³³). Having SEN can affect the educational outcomes for these children as well as inflate the educational attainment gap between looked after children and their peers. Figure 5.2 sets out a comparison with the general school population by school type.

Figure 5.2 Proportion of children in care for 12 months or longer and the general school population with a statement of Special Educational Needs, by school type (2020/21)

Source: “[Annual enrolments at schools and in funded preschool education in Northern Ireland, 2020/21](#)”, DE.

Note: “All school children” includes children in Special Schools.



³¹ Department of Education NI, [School enrolments - overview | Department of Education \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](#) 2020/21.

³² Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by Local Authorities in England, Reporting year 2021 – DfE.

³³ Department of Education NI, [School enrolments - overview | Department of Education \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

5.4. Education Other Than At School (EOTAS)

Of all looked after children of compulsory school age, 3% (70) were educated somewhere other than at school sometime during the past year^{34, 35, 36}. The reason for these children being educated outside of school was mainly due to mental health, social or behavioural problems that made it difficult to cope in mainstream school or refusal to attend mainstream school.

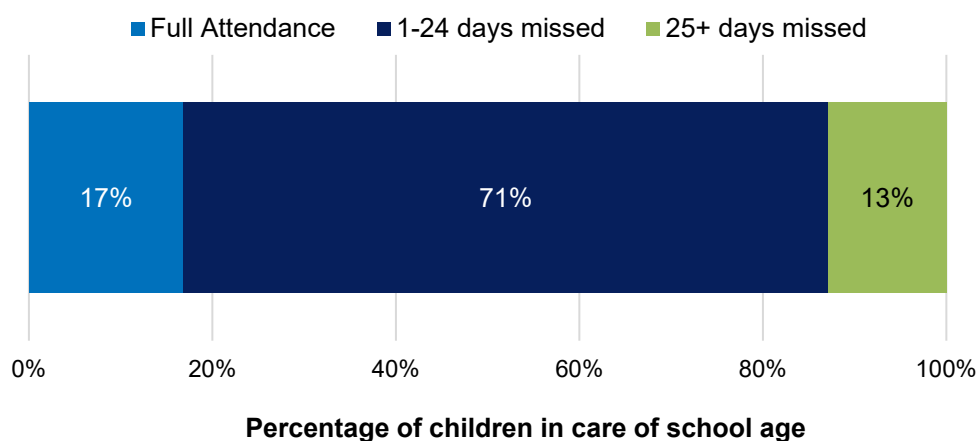
5.5. Attendance and absenteeism

Absenteeism from school, whether authorised or unauthorised, can be detrimental to a child's educational progress. Reducing the levels of school days missed can aid in enhancing the educational attainment of children in care.

During the 2020/21 school year, 17% of the looked after children of school age had full attendance at school^{37, 38}. Some 71% had missed between 1 and 24 school days. A further 13% of children in care had missed 25 or more school days for any reason, a higher proportion than in 2019/20 (7%). A similar proportion of females and males in care missed 25 days or more (13% and 12% respectively). Looking specifically at the absence for those missing 25 or more school days, some 34% of the missed days were recorded as authorised absence; the remaining 66% was recorded as unauthorised absence³⁹.

Figure 5.3 Percentage of children in care for 12 months or longer of compulsory school age who missed school days for any reason (2020/21)

Note: Excludes 5 young people who either did not attend school in Northern Ireland or for whom no absence data was recorded.



³⁴ This relates to all children of compulsory school age, and not only the cohort linked with Department of Education information.

³⁵ Please note that where no response were given, this has been interpreted as the child was not educated other than in school.

³⁶ This excludes any EOTAS due to Covid19 related issues.

³⁷ Please note that Department of Education also publish attendance information for looked after children, however use a slightly different methodology. Please see the Technical Notes for details.

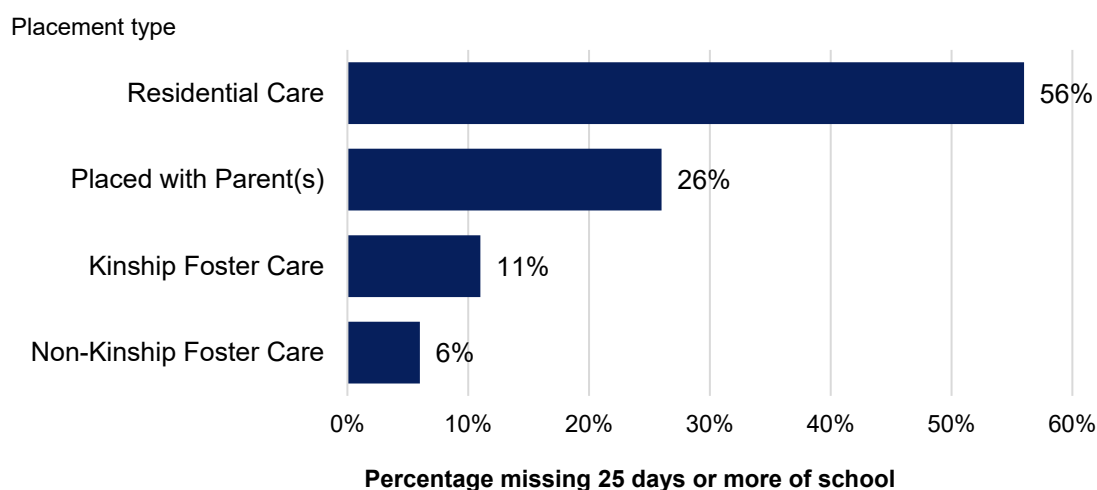
³⁸ Full attendance in this report includes anyone whose total absence is less than one full day.

³⁹ See Technical Notes for description of [authorised and unauthorised absences](#).

A substantially larger proportion of the school aged children who were in residential care missed 25 or more school days in 2020/21 compared with children in foster care (non-kinship and kinship) (Figure 5.4). However, caution must be taken when interpreting these figures due to the relatively small numbers involved.

Figure 5.4 Percentage of children in each placement missing 25 school days or more for any reason (2020/21)

Note: Excludes 5 young people for whom no absence data was recorded.



Placement stability may influence school attendance. Of the school-aged children with no placement moves during 2020/21, 11% had missed 25 or more school days for any reason. The corresponding figure for children who had experienced a placement move was 20%. This analysis cannot confirm if placement moves caused the school absence, only that there is a correlation between the two.

Note: The Department of Education reports school absence in half day units recorded as authorised or unauthorised. The following section is comparable with this data examining absence data for looked after children by half day units.

The overall absence rate for school aged children looked after for 12 months or longer at 30th September 2021 was 6.5%, slightly higher than the figure reported for the general school population of 5.4% during the same period⁴⁰. Authorised absence accounted for 2.9% of half days missed with the remaining 3.5% considered to be unauthorised. In comparison, the unauthorised absence was somewhat lower for the general school population (2.6%). Furthermore, the overall absence rate for looked after children in England⁴¹ during 2020/21 was lower than looked after children in Northern Ireland, at 5.1%, with authorised absence

⁴⁰ Attendance at grant-aided primary, post-primary and special schools in Northern Ireland 2020/21: DENI 2022.

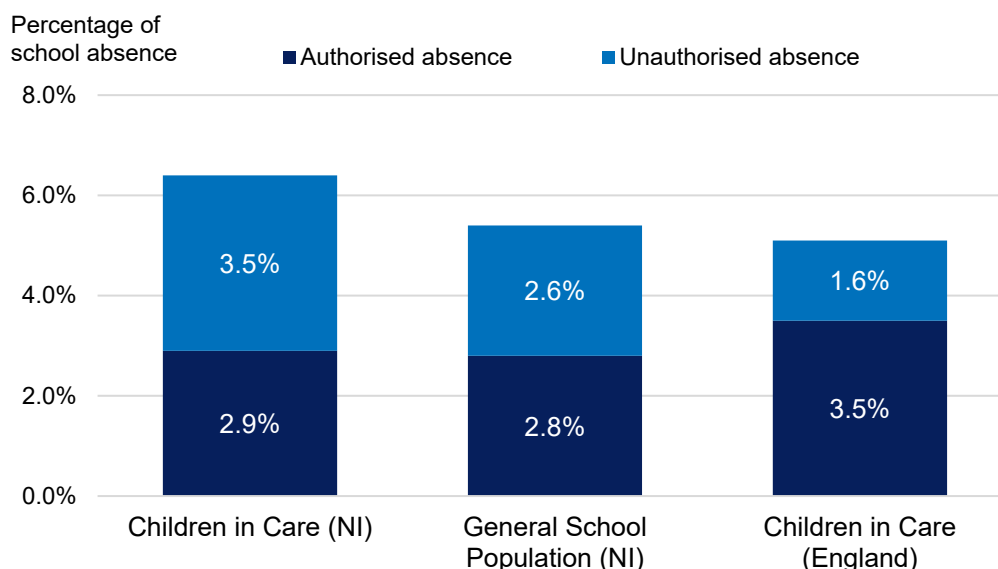
⁴¹ Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities in England, Reporting year 2021.

accounting for 3.5% and unauthorised absence 1.6% (Figure 5.5). Please note however that the methodology is slightly different⁴².

Figure 5.5 Percentage of half days missed for children in care for 12 months or longer in Northern Ireland and England and the general school population in Northern Ireland (2020/21)

Sources: School Census; “Attendance at grant-aided primary, post-primary and special schools in Northern Ireland 2020/21”; and “Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities in England, Reporting year 2021”.

Note: Figures for England relate to autumn school year only.



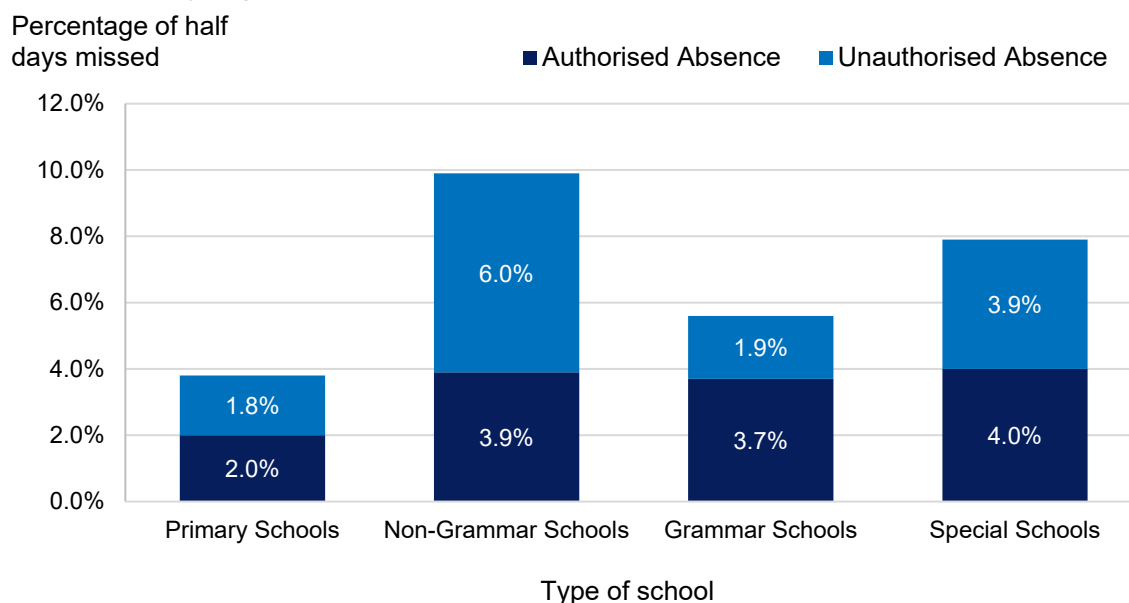
For the children in care of school age in Northern Ireland, the absence rate for females (6.7%) was slightly higher than males (6.3%), with authorised absence accounting for 2.7% and 3.1% respectively. Unauthorised absence accounted for 4.0% of all half days missed for females and 3.2% of all half days missed for males.

The absence rate for looked after children varied by school type. In primary schools 3.8% of all half days were missed comprising 2.0% authorised absence and 1.8% unauthorised absence. In contrast, in secondary schools (grammar and non-grammar combined), 9.4% of all half days were missed comprising 3.9% authorised absence and 5.5% unauthorised absence (Figure 6.6).

⁴² Children looked after for 12 months or longer in England – relates to autumn school year only.

Figure 5.6 Children in care for 12 months or longer; proportion of half day absence by school type (2020/21)

Note: Excludes 5 young people for whom no absence data was recorded



Illness was the most common reason for absence⁴³ in all school types. Illness is an authorised absence and accounted for 39% of absences in primary schools, 23% in non-grammar schools, 36% in grammar schools and 25% in special schools.

5.6. Suspensions

NOTE: Suspensions are included in absence statistics and are treated as an authorised absence

Children in care were more likely to be suspended from school than children in the general school population; 7% (134) of children in care had been suspended in 2020/21, compared with 1.2% of the general school population in Northern Ireland⁴⁴. The proportion of children in care suspended during 2020/21 was the same as in 2019/20.

As in previous years, a higher proportion of males in care were suspended from school during the academic year; 9% of males compared with 5% of females had been suspended at least once during 2020/21.

Some 16% of children attending Non-grammar Schools were suspended during 2020/21, compared to 9% of those attending Grammar School, 2% of those in Special School and just 1% of children attending Primary School.

Children in residential care were more likely to be suspended than children in any other placement types (Figure 5.7). This should be considered in conjunction with the fact that most children suspended were in older age groups (attending post-primary schools), and the majority of children in residential care were also in older age groups.

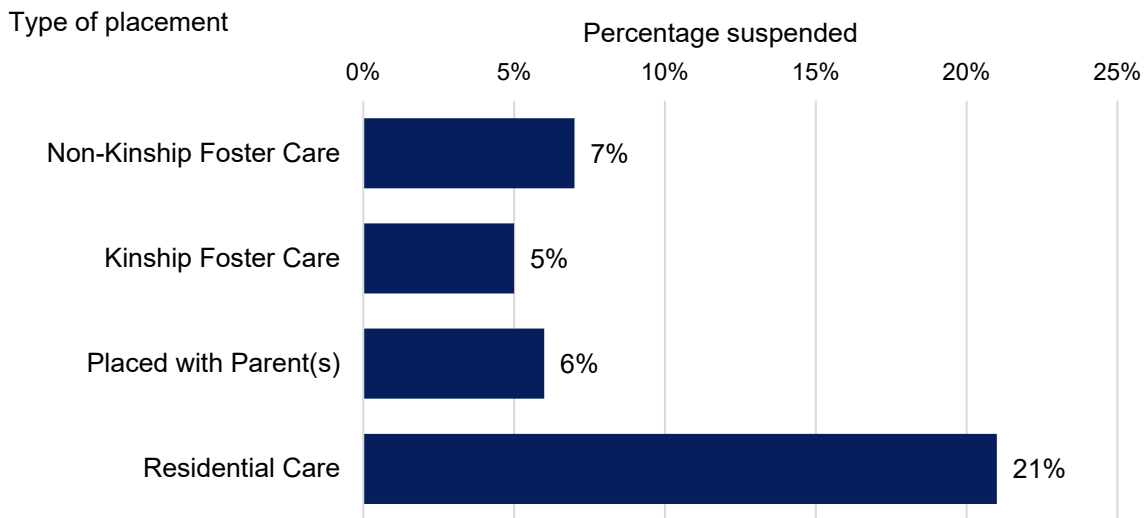
⁴³ See technical Notes for [all reasons for absence](#).

⁴⁴ Pupil suspensions and expulsion, Department of Education NI 2020/21.

Figure 5.7 Proportion of school age children in each placement that were suspended from school (2020/21)

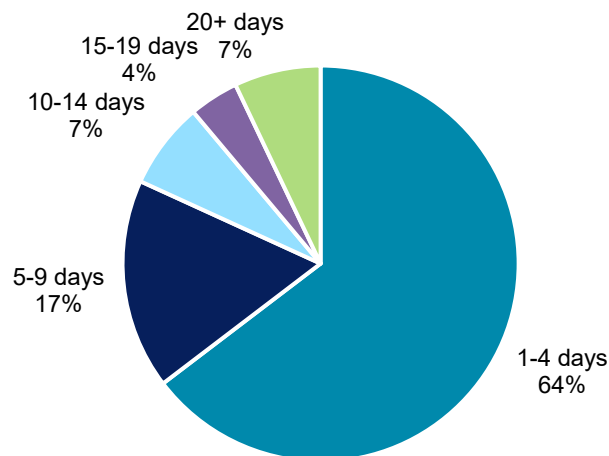
Note: Excludes 5 young people for whom no absence data was recorded.

Note: 'Other' placements is not included in the figure due to low numbers.



During 2020/21, 64% of the 134 children in care who had been suspended were suspended for less than five days; whilst 7% had been suspended for 20 days or more (Figure 5.8). This was similar to last year.

Figure 5.8 Children in care who were suspended; school days missed through suspension (2020/21)



5.7. School changes

Some 101 of children in care for 12 months or longer and of school-age had changed school at least once during the 2020/21 school year⁴⁵.

There can be many reasons leading to a change of school. One reason for looked after children can be a placement move. Of the 288 children of compulsory school age who experienced a placement move during 2020/21, the move resulted in change of school due to travel distance for 59 young people (20%).

⁴⁵ This figures are based on all children of compulsory school age and not only those that could be linked with the School Census. This is due to the fact that a school change may hamper the linking process.

6. Educational Attainment

6.1. Exams and Assessments

In this chapter, attainment for young people in care for 12 months or longer will be analysed for Year 12 GCSE results. These assessment results have in previous years been compared with the results from the general Year 12 school population in Northern Ireland. However, the collection of these results have been suspended⁴⁶. Instead, Northern Ireland School Leaver data has been used as a proxy comparison. The school leaving cohort comprises of year 12, 13 and 14 pupils leaving mainstream grant-aided post-primary schools, and as such will not be a direct comparison to the children in care Year 12 information.

Table 6.1 Educational attainment for children in care for 12 months or longer in Year 12 and the Northern Ireland school leaver population Year 12–14 (2020/21)

Source: [Qualifications and Destinations of Northern Ireland School Leavers 2020/21](#)

Educational attainment	Children in Care for 12 months or longer attending Year 12	General School Leaver Population (Year 12 – 14)
1 or more GCSEs: A* - G or other qualifications	94%	99%
5 or more GCSEs: A* - G	66%	97%
5 or more GCSEs: A* - C	45%	92%
5 or more GCSEs: A* - C including English and Maths	34%	78%

Note: Department of Education has not collected data on Key Stage assessments as these statutory assessments were dis-applied due to the Covid19 pandemic. No analysis can therefore be supplied for Key Stage assessment results.

⁴⁶ Please see [Department of Education's statement](#) regarding the suspended data collection.

6.2. GCSEs

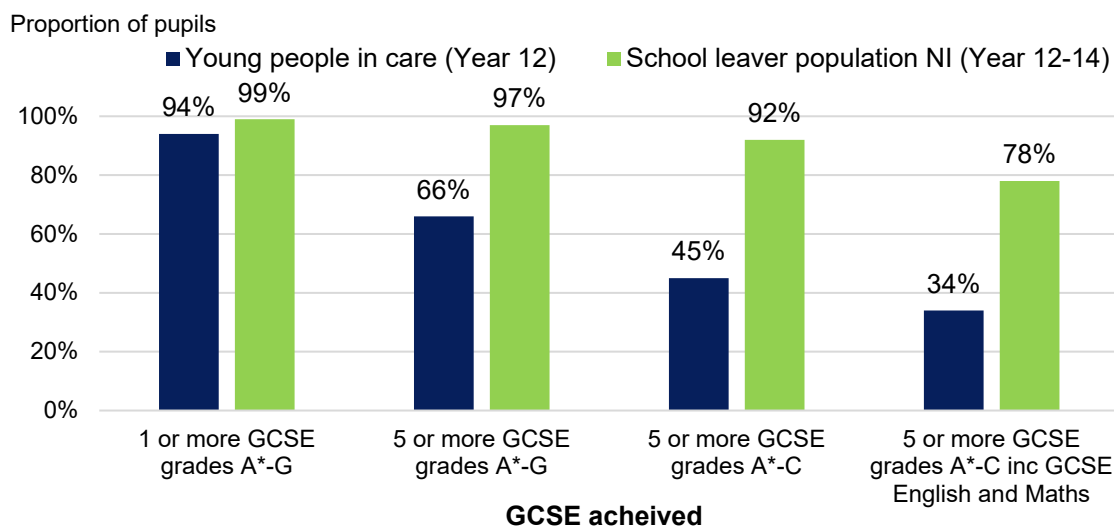
Some 115 young people who had been in care for more than a year sat GCSE exams in 2020/21. A further 46 were eligible to sit exams (e.g. they attended Year 12 in 2020/21) but did not sit these exams due to special educational needs, having been placed on the EOTAS scheme, or other welfare issues. Information was unknown for eight young people. Of those who sat exams, 33% (38 young people) had a statement of SEN. This was substantially higher than the previous year, when 17% had a SEN statement.

Figure 6.1 details the percentage of young people in care who sat exams and attained GCSE or equivalent qualifications in Year 12. It shows that 94% of the young people attained at least one GCSE at grades A* - G⁴⁷. This compares with 99% of the school leaver population in Northern Ireland (Year 12-14)⁴⁸.

Just under half (45%) of young people in care attained five or more GCSEs at grades A* - C, with 34% achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A* - C including GCSE English and Maths. These figures were substantially lower than for the school leaver population in 2020/21, with 92% achieving 5 or more GCSEs at grades A* - C and 78% achieving this feat including GCSE English and Maths.

Figure 6.1 Proportion achieving GCSE or equivalent passes for young people in care in Year 12 and the NI school leaver population Year 12-14 (2020/21)

Source: Destinations of Northern Ireland School Leavers 2020/21.



A slightly higher proportions of females (69%) achieved five or more GCSEs at grades A* - G than males (63%), similarly, a higher proportion of females achieved five or more GCSEs at grades A* - C than males (52% and 39% respectively). However, 77% of males who

⁴⁷ Includes equivalent qualifications.

⁴⁸ [Qualifications and Destinations of Northern Ireland School Leavers 2020/21](#), DE 2022.

achieved GCSEs at grades A* - C included GCSE English and Maths compared with 73% of females.

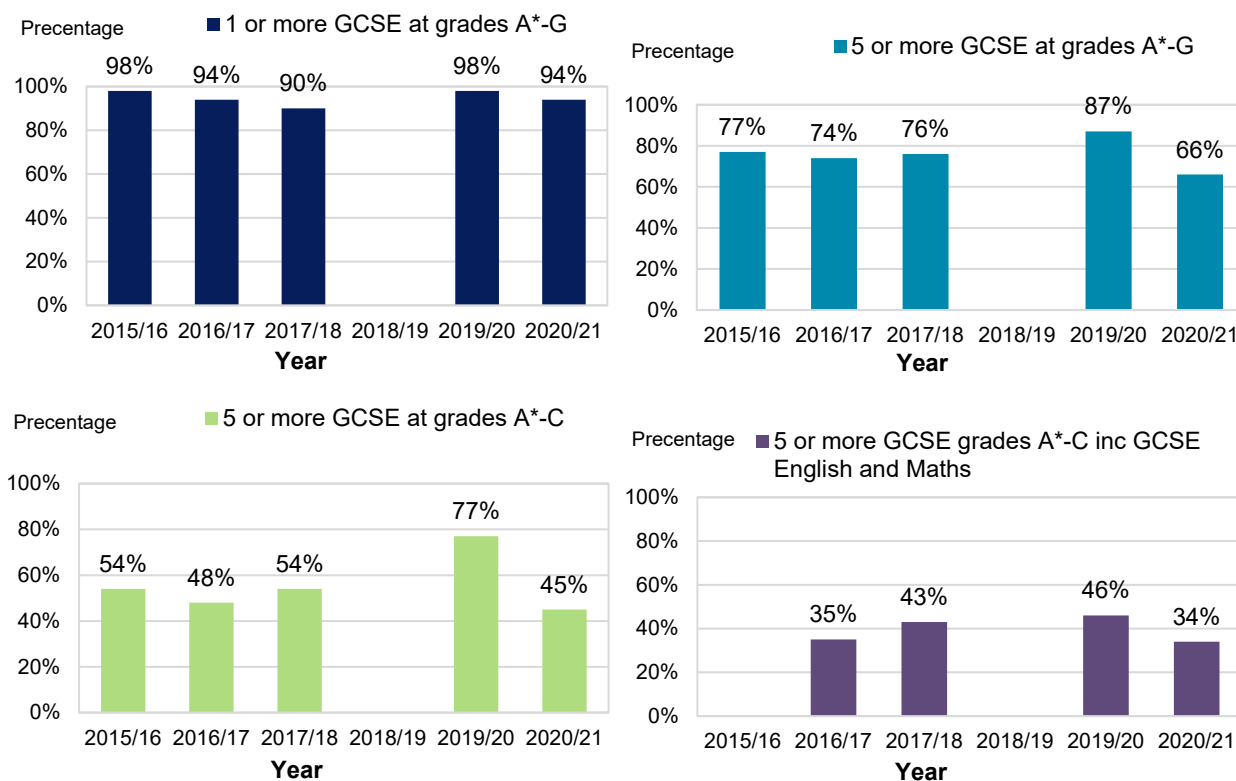
Young people in care in 2020/21 did not perform as well as in the previous year⁴⁹, with 45% of those who sat GCSE exams achieving five or more GCSE's at grades A* - C the lowest recorded over the last years (see Figure below). However, the number of young people assessed each year for these tests were small and the trend therefore may be subject to volatility due to small numbers. Furthermore, and a much higher proportion of the Year 12 students in 2020/21 had a statement of SEN compared with previous years.

Figure 6.2 Young people in care for 12 months or longer achieving GCSE Passes (2015/16 – 2020/21)

Note1: Figures for 5 or more GCSE grades A* - C including GCSE English and Maths were not available for 2015/16

Note2: GCSE results were [not collected in 2018/19](#).

Note3: Department of Education has informed that given the new method of awarding grades in 2019/20 due to Covid19, caution should be taken when drawing any conclusions relating to changes in student performance.



49 Department of Education has informed that given the new method of awarding grades in 2019/20 due to Covid19, caution should be taken when drawing any conclusions relating to changes in student performance. Year-on-year changes might have been impacted by the different process for awarding qualifications in 2019/20 rather than reflecting a change in underlying performance.

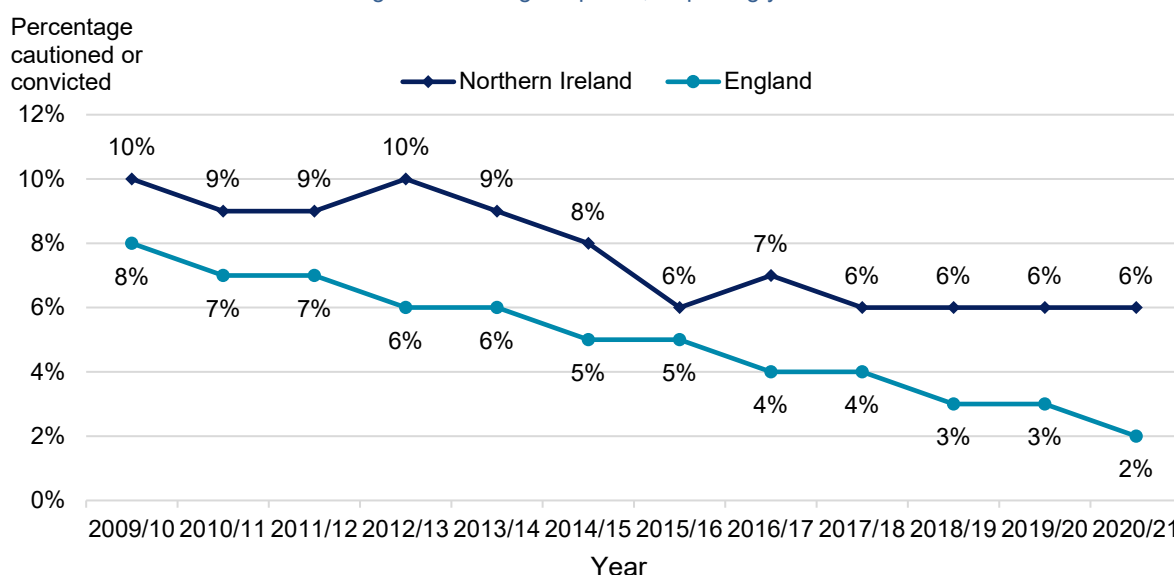
7. Cautions / Convictions

7.1. Children and young people Cautioned or Convicted

Of children and young people in care aged ten and over at 30 September 2020, 6% (86) had been cautioned or convicted of an offence whilst in care during the year⁵⁰. The equivalent figure for England was four percentage points lower at 2%^{51, 52}. Although the Northern Ireland rate has been stable the last four years, for both England and Northern Ireland, the proportion of young people in care cautioned or convicted has reduced the last ten years (Figure 7.1).

Figure 7.1 Children and young people in care for 12 months or longer, aged 10 and over, cautioned or convicted in Northern Ireland and England (2009/10 – 2020/21)

Source: Children looked after in England including adoptions, Reporting year 2021.



For young people in care aged ten and over, a higher proportion of males (7%) than females (4%) had been cautioned or convicted during 2020/21. Furthermore, cautions and convictions were more prevalent in the older age groups; some 10% of young people aged 16 and over had been convicted or cautioned compared with 4% of those aged 10 to 15 years.

⁵⁰ Information not recorded for 28 children and young people.

⁵¹ [Children looked after in England including adoptions.](#)

⁵² It's been noted that the numbers of children convicted in England may have been affected in 2020/21 by court delays during the pandemic.

Children placed in foster care were the least likely to be cautioned or convicted in 2019/20 (2%) compared with a third of young people in residential care (31%). This must however be seen in conjunction with the older age profile of those placed in residential care, and that higher proportions of older children were cautioned or convicted.

Of the 86 looked after children cautioned or convicted, offences included theft, burglary, criminal damage and behaviour, assault, possession of illegal substances, and possession of weapons.

7.2. Substance misuse

Substance misuse in this publication is defined as 'substance taking which harms health or social functioning'

Of the 2,794 children in care for twelve months or longer at 30 September 2021, 95 (3%) were identified as having a substance misuse problem; the same proportion as that for England⁵³ (3%). A higher proportion of males (4%) than females (3%) had been identified as having a substance misuse problem.

Substance misuse was most common among older children, with 14% of young people in care aged 16 and over identified as having a problem.

The majority of children identified as suffering a substance misuse problem in 2020/21 were offered intervention (97%), with almost three fifths (58%) having accepted this offer.

⁵³ Children looked after in England including adoptions, Reporting year 2021.

8. Children who finished compulsory schooling in 2020/21

Standard school progression expects children to finish compulsory schooling at age 16 after having completed Year 12. Of the young people who had been in care for 12 months or longer and information was available, 118 completed Year 12 in 2020/21⁵⁴.

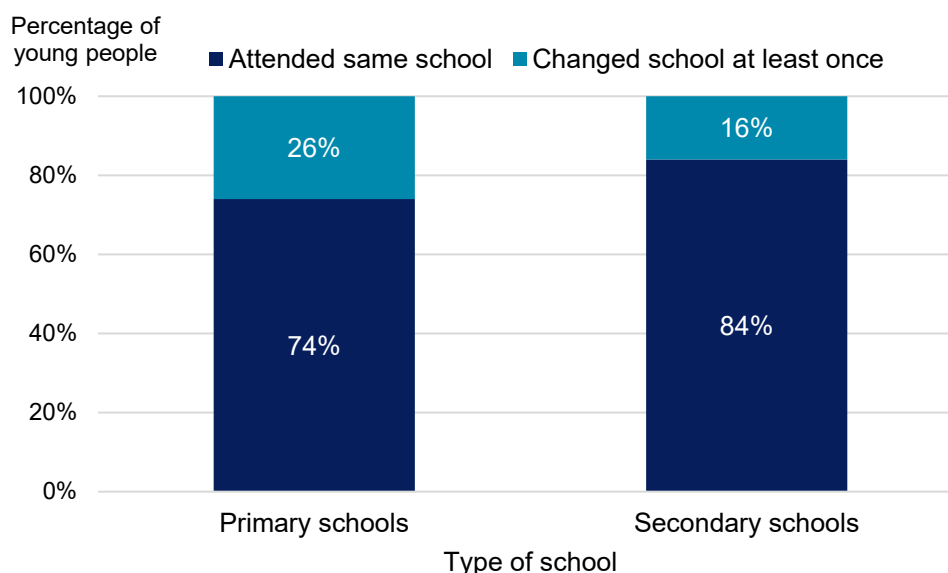
8.1. School changes

Of the 118 young people aged 16 in 2020/21, 74% had attended one primary school only and 26% had changed primary schools at least once. A similar proportion of females (25%) and males (27%) looked after had changed primary schools at least once.

Five in six (84%) of the young people attended a single secondary school, whilst 16% had changed secondary schools at least once. A similar proportion of males than females changed secondary schools at least once during their post primary school years (17% and 14% respectively).

Figure 8.1 Primary Schools and Secondary Schools changes by children in care who had completed Year 12 in 2020/21, by gender

Note: Figures exclude young people where data was not recorded.



⁵⁴ This relates to young people whose linked DE school census information indicated that they attended Year 12 in 2020/21. It excludes young people in Special Schools.

8.2. Gaps in Mainstream Education

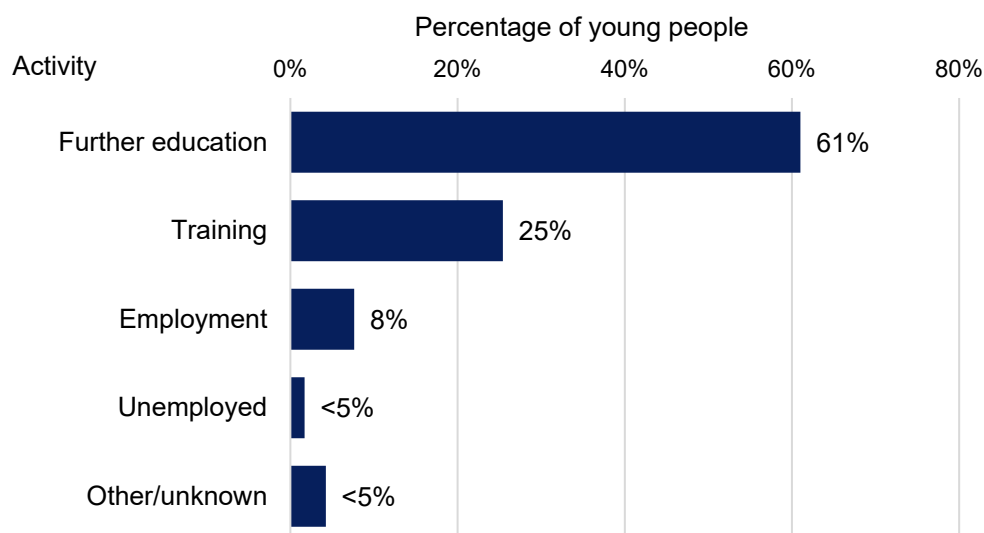
Some 9% of young people aged 16 in 2020/21, had at some stage during their school years been out of mainstream education and continued to be educated in other ways.

8.3. Current Activity

Figure 8.2 details the activity of young people in care who completed Year 12 in 2020/21. Three in five (61%) of these were still in education, and 25% were attending full or part-time training.

Females who had completed Year 12 were more likely than males to be in full or part-time education (72% and 51% respectively) (see Appendix D for details).

Figure 8.2 Current activity of young people in care for 12 months or longer who had completed Year 12 during 2020/21 in Northern Ireland



Appendix A – Technical Notes

The information presented in this bulletin derives from the thirteenth collection of 'OC2' annual returns of children and young people in care in Northern Ireland. The returns were provided by each of the five Health and Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland to Community Information Branch (CIB) in the Department of Health (DoH).

Information is entered online by nominated HSC Trust staff using a secure web-based application. Records are pseudoanonymised to ensure confidentiality and to protect the identities of individual children. Guidance notes and other documents associated with the OC2 data collection are available to view or download from the [DoH website](#).

Looked after children included in this publication

For inclusion in the OC2 returns, children had to be looked after continuously for at least 12 months at 30 September 2021. Children looked after under an agreed series of respite placements were excluded from the survey. As such, the reference period for the present survey was 1 October 2020 to 30 September 2021. This is distinctly different from other statistical collections by the DoH, which are based on the year ending 31 March. The period chosen for OC2 is designed to align with the academic school year.

The main aim of the OC2 returns is to inform on educational outcomes for children in care, however it also collects information on a range of other areas such as religion, ethnicity, disability, placement, health assessments, economic activity and criminal convictions (see appendix E for the full questionnaire). Together with its companion surveys OC1 (care leavers aged 16-18) and OC3 (care leavers at their 19th birthday), it provides a comprehensive series of data on children and young people in care in Northern Ireland.

Changes to the OC2 data collection 2020-21

Partial Electronic Data Collection: The OC2 data collection is manual and CIB is constantly working to find ways of easing the data collection burden for the HSC Trusts. For the 2020-21 data collection, CIB liaised with the five HSC Trusts to receive information held on the local IT management systems electronically. This information was linked with information inputted manually through the web-based application. This reduced the number of data items having to be completed manually and subsequently, the risk of manual input errors have been reduced.

The information held on the local IT management systems may not be as disaggregated as the traditional OC2 collection, and some of the granularity of specific items may therefore be lost (eg only main disability recorded instead of all disabilities) in exchange of improved data quality and reduced data collection burden.

OC2 Data collection 2018-19

The 2018-19 "Children in care" data collection could not be completed in full due to a number of reasons, including IT issues, industrial action and Covid-19 resource restrictions. Although all children in the cohort were included in the data collection, limited information was available for two-fifths of the children. The number of analysis completed were therefore significantly reduced compared with previous years.

Change of data source

Historically, school related information reported in this publication has been obtained from the child's school by social workers. To both ease the data collection burden on the social workers as well as streamlining information with that published by Department of Education (DE), and through this ensure improved quality and consistency of data, a data sharing agreement was put in place in

2016 between DE and DoH in regards to children in care. The data supplied from the DE relates to three sources; the School Census; Attendance and School leaver survey.

The information shared covers:

- Attendance (including suspensions)
- Special Educational Needs (SEN)
- Medical record (new in 2020/21)
- School type
- School year

The attendance, suspension and SEN information will be reported on the same way as in previous publications. However, where the new source of information allows for more scrutiny of the figures, additional analysis will be supplied. For example, reason for non-attendance can now be analysed. It also allows for comparison with the general school population on a like for like basis.

Linking rate between OC2 returns and DE data 2020-21

Unique linking variables were used to match the OC2 returns with the DE school data without compromising children's identity.

Of the 2,066 children of compulsory school age (5-16):

- 1,917 (93%) were matched (linked) between the OC2 and DE datasets;
- 64 (3%) who were not matched, were identified as not attending school in Northern Ireland, either because they were in school outside of this jurisdiction, because they were disabled, home schooled or because they had chosen to leave education. These will be included in educational analysis only where appropriate;
- 20 (1%) were not matched as no or only partial matching variables had been supplied and these will be excluded from the education analysis within this report;
- 65 (3%) were not matched for unknown reasons and will be excluded from the education analysis within this report.

Attendance

Department of Education (DE) publish [attendance information](#) for children in care. DE attendance figures relate to all children who were looked after at a specific point in time. In contrast, the "Children in Care" publication includes only children who have been looked after for a minimum of 12 months. As such, the annual school attendance figures should relate, as much as possible, to a time when the child was continuously in care. The difference cohorts of children included in the two publications will therefore result in different attendance figures.

Attendance or absence is measured for every pupil in half day sessions (am and pm). Absence can be either authorised or unauthorised.

An authorised absence is absence with permission from an authorised school representative on provision of a satisfactory explanation. This includes:

- Artistic endeavour
- Bereavement
- Suspension
- Agreed family holiday (in very exceptional circumstances)
- Illness
- Medical / dental appointments
- Other exceptional circumstances (includes an exceptional event outside control of the school, for example, travelling children, court appearance)

- Religious observance

An unauthorised absence is absence without permission from an authorised school representative due to unexplained or unjustified absence. This includes:

- Family holiday not agreed
- Other absence (includes absence not covered by any other code or a reason which is not acceptable to the school, for example, pupil's / parent's or sibling's birthday).
- No reason provided for absence
- Late (after registration closed)

Further information on attendance and absence can be found in the readers notes of DE's Pupil Attendance publications ([Department for Education: Pupil Attendance weblink](#)).

Data Quality

The data quality of the results presented in this bulletin is considered to be high. CIB performs vigorous logical validation checks as well as comparison with historic data to ensure the data input is correct. Further checks using historical data are used to assess annual variations in analyses of the data.

Using DE data for school information removes elements of manual recording and ensures inter-departmental consistency of information.

A detailed quality report for children's community statistics is available on the [DoH website](#).

Rounding/Disclosure Conventions

Percentages have been rounded to whole numbers and as a consequence some percentages may not sum to 100.

It has been necessary to suppress other figures whenever it would be possible to calculate the value of a suppressed number by means of simple arithmetic. The rule applied in these circumstances has been to suppress the next smallest data item.

A National Statistics Publication

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Services Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- are trustworthy;
- have high quality; and
- are of value to the public.

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed. The most recent assessment of these statistics is set out in [Report 265](#).

If you have any comments on this publication, please contact:

Community Information Branch
Department of Health
Annexe 2, Castle Buildings

Stormont, BT4 3SQ
Email: cib@health-ni.gov.uk
Tel: 028 90522580

Related Publications

Other statistics produced by the DoH relating to looked after children and other areas of children's social care in Northern Ireland are detailed below:

[Children's Social Care Statistics for Northern Ireland](#)

[Northern Ireland Care Leavers](#)

[Children Adopted from Care in Northern Ireland](#)

[Quarterly Child Protection Statistics for Northern Ireland](#)

Statistics on children and young people in care published by other countries in the UK (United Kingdom) can be found as detailed below.

Scotland

[Children's Social Work Statistics](#) are produced annually by the Scottish Government.

[Educational Outcomes for Scotland's Looked After Children](#) is an annual summary of the educational outcomes of Scotland's looked after children.

Wales

[Children Looked After by Local Authorities in Wales](#) is published annually by the Local Government Data Unit and the Welsh Assembly Government.

England

[Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities in England](#), is produced annually by the Department for Education.

[Children looked after in England including adoptions](#) is published annually by the Department for Education.

Appendix B – Coverage of OC2 2020-21

The table below specifies the subset of children and young people covered by each category of the OC2 collection.

Definition	Which Children were included?
Scope of OC2	All children and young people in care on 30 September 2021, and who on that date had been in care continuously for at least 12 months.
<i>Remaining items are subsets of the Scope.</i>	
Total children of compulsory school age	Children and young people whose date of birth is in range 2/7/2004 to 1/7/2016.
Key Stage 1	Children attending school year 4 in a mainstream school in 2020/21.
Key Stage 2	Children attending school year 7 in a mainstream school in 2020/21.
Key Stage 3	Young people attending school year 10 in a mainstream school in 2020/21.
GCSEs	Children attending school Year 12 in 2020/21.
Offending	Children aged 10 and over at 30 September 2021, i.e. whose date of birth is 30/9/2011 or earlier.
Pre-School Provision	Children in their pre-school year in 2020/21, i.e. whose date of birth is 2/7/2017 to 1/7/2018.
Development Assessments	Children aged under 5 at 30 September 2021, i.e. whose date of birth is 1/10/2016 or later.
Immunisations	All children covered by the OC2 collection, i.e. all children who were looked after on 30 September 2021, and who had been looked after continuously for at least 12 months.
Dental Checks	All children covered by the OC2 collection, i.e. all children who were looked after on 30 September 2021, and who had been looked after continuously for at least 12 months.
Health Assessments	All children covered by the OC2 collection, i.e. all children who were looked after on 30 September 2021, and who had been looked after continuously for at least 12 months.
Current Activity / Past Schooling Experiences	Children attending school Year 12 in 2020/21.

Appendix C – Placement definitions

Below are explanations of different types of care placements.

Foster care is when a child is placed by a Trust, or by its parents (or those with parental responsibility), with other persons who will care for, and rear the child. Foster Carers are approved by a Health and Social Care Trust and receive an allowance for their caring responsibilities from the approving Trust. In this publication it will be differentiated between those foster care placements that are *kinship foster care* arrangements and those that are *non-kinship foster care* arrangements.

Kinship care (formal) is when a looked after child is placed by a Trust with a relative (eg. grandparents, sibling, aunt/uncle), friend or other person with a prior connection to the child, who will care for and rear the child. A person with a prior connection could be someone who knows the child in a professional capacity such as a child-minder, a teacher or a youth worker although these are not exclusive categories. Kinship carers are approved by a Health and Social Care Trust and receive an allowance for their caring responsibilities from the approving Trust. *Kinship care (informal)* is when a child who is not 'looked after' is placed with a relative or friend on a voluntary basis with no involvement of social services. This group of children is not covered in this publication.

Placed for adoption refers to a child that has been approved to be adopted and is placed with his/her prospective adoptive parents pending affirmation from the courts. It is distinguished between children who are placed for adoption with their former foster carers and those who are placed for adoption with 'others' (not former foster carers). Unless otherwise stated, children placed for adoption will be included in 'Non-kinship foster care' in the analysis in this report.

Residential care is when a looked after child is placed by a Trust in a children's home. Residential care for children / Children's Homes are there to ensure that the needs of children are met when they cannot live with their own family. They are a place for children to develop and grow, as well as providing food, shelter, and space for play and leisure in a caring environment. Children's Homes look after children with many different needs.

Secure accommodation is provided for children on a short term basis when it is likely that the child, in any other setting, will injure him/herself or abscond and is likely to suffer significant harm when absconding. Unless otherwise stated, children in secure accommodation will be included in 'Residential care' in the analysis of this report.

Placed with parent refers to children for whom a Care Order exists and who are placed with their parents, a person who is not a parent but who has parental responsibility for the child or where a child is in care and there was a Residence Order in force with respect to him/her immediately before the Care Order was made, and who are placed with a person in whose favour the Residence Order was made.

Independent living arrangements refers to children placed in independent accommodation. This would refer to young people between 16-18 years old. Unless otherwise stated, children in independent living arrangements will be included in 'Other placements' in the analysis of this report due to the small number of children in these living arrangements within the cohort studied.

Other placements refers to any placement reported that are not covered by other categories given. This may include children in hospital, juvenile justice centres, assessment centres, boarding schools etc. and also special arrangements relating to one Trust. The categories included may therefore change from year to year.

Appendix D – Tables

All tables can be found in excel format at: www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/looked-after-children.

Appendix E – OC2 Survey form 2020-21

The 2020-21 survey form can be found on the [DoH website](#).

