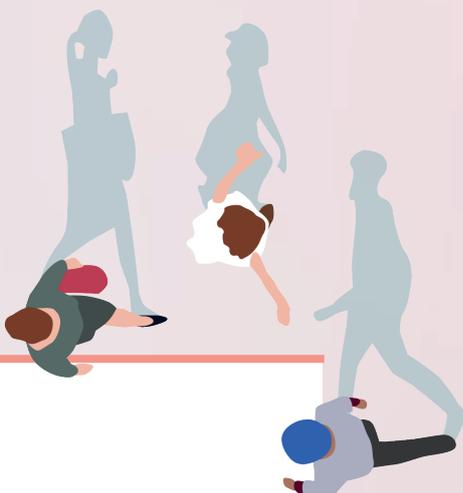




What Works for
**Children's
Social Care**



UNDERSTANDING FORMAL KINSHIP CARE ARRANGEMENTS IN ENGLAND

ANALYSIS OF ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

May 2022

Technical report





What Works for Children's Social Care

Acknowledgements

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What Works for Children's Social Care (WWCS) was commissioned to conduct this research by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care (IRCSC). During the research, we met regularly with the IRCSC, who were involved in formulating the research questions and designing the methodology. The analysis was conducted by the research team and the IRCSC did not influence the reporting of the findings.

About the Independent Review of Children's Social Care

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care was announced in January 2021 and will report in Spring 2022. Josh MacAlister is leading the review which has a wide ranging and ambitious scope. The review is a chance to look afresh at children's social care. It will look at issues through the perspective of children and families throughout their interactions with children's social care, from having a social worker knock on the door, through to children being in care and then leaving care. What Works for Children's Social Care is supporting the review by producing and commissioning evidence summaries, rapid reviews and new analysis.

About What Works for Children's Social Care

What Works for Children's Social Care seeks better outcomes for children, young people and families by bringing the best available evidence to practitioners and other decision makers across the children's social care sector. We generate, collate and make accessible the best evidence for practitioners, policy makers and practice leaders to improve children's social care and the outcomes it generates for children and families.



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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Abbreviations

LA(s)	Local Authority/Authorities
SGO(s)	Special Guardianship Order(s)
CiC	Children in Care
CLA dataset	Children Looked After Dataset (SSDA903 collection)
KS2	Key Stage 2 (School Years 3, 4, 5 and 6)
KS3	Key Stage 2 (School Years 3, 4, 5 and 6)
KS4	Key Stage 4 (School Years 10 and 11)
DfE	Department for Education
NPD	National Pupil Database
SEN	Special educational needs
UASC	Unaccompanied asylum-seeking child(ren)

Terms used in this report

Kinship care	A reference to both kinship foster care and kinship SGO populations
Kinship foster care	Fostering placements with relative(s) or friend(s) where children might be placed under Sections 20 or 31 of the Children Act 1989
Kinship special guardian	A permanent care option for a child to be cared for by relative or family friends, implemented by way of a court Special Guardianship Order
Looked after children dataset	This refers to the SSDA903 Local Authority returns on the population of looked after children



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides descriptive analysis of the experiences of children who have been in a formal kinship care placement. This report focuses exclusively on two forms of formal kinship arrangements:

- Kinship foster care, where a child in care lives in a “foster placement with relative(s) or friend(s)” (Department for Education (DfE), 2021: 61)
- Kinship special guardianship, where a child leaves care to a kinship special guardian by way of a Special Guardianship Order (SGO). This report exclusively considers SGOs granted to kin on behalf of children who are currently in care. In 2019/20, kinship SGOs made up 88% of all SGOs granted on behalf of children currently in care.

The overall objective of the project was to improve the current understanding of kinship care by providing more quantitative evidence on the experiences of children living in kinship care arrangements in England. More specifically, the project aimed to:

- Provide a quantitative overview of the numbers of children living in kinship foster care and kinship special guardianship nationally, over time
- Provide a quantitative overview of the variation in the numbers of children living in kinship foster care and kinship special guardianship by Local Authority in 2019/20

- Provide a quantitative description of the experiences of children living in kinship foster care and kinship special guardianship. This includes child characteristics, their care journeys into kinship care and after their first kinship care placement, and wider outcomes at age 16–18.

Methods

The analysis used individual-level, national data from the Children Looked After Dataset (SSDA903, CLA Dataset), linked with extracts of the National Pupil Database (NPD) between 1998/99 and 2019/20. We summarise the experiences of children who were in kinship care in 2019/20 and those that turned 18 in 2019/20 who have ever been in a kinship care placement, using descriptive statistics.

Key findings include:

1. There is a high degree of local variation in the use of kinship foster care placements and of kinship SGOs. The rate of kinship care placements ranges from 4% to 39% across Local Authorities (LAs). The rate of kinship special guardianship ranges from 2% to 27%.
2. Where kinship foster care or kinship special guardianship will ever be the most suitable care option for a child, it is realised soon into a child’s care history.



3. Children living in kinship special guardianship experience high placement stability whilst they are in care: more than half of all children leaving care to a kinship special guardian (54%) leave care immediately after their first placement. They experience an average of 1.6 placement moves in total whilst in care.
4. Children from minority ethnic groups, and Black children¹ in particular, are underrepresented among children living in kinship foster care and kinship special guardianship. Findings from other studies suggest that children from these groups are contrarily overrepresented in informal kinship care arrangements. It is crucial that we develop a better understanding of informal kinship care to ensure that both children and families are not missing out on additional support (financial and wider support) that they might need, and to understand why the current care system is placing proportionally fewer Black and Asian children in formal kinship care arrangements than children of other ethnicities.
5. Outcomes at age 16 for children who have been in kinship foster care are similar to average national outcomes for children in care.
6. Educational attainment at Key Stage 4 for children who left care to a kinship special guardian is typically higher than the attainment of all children in care.

Key figures for children who have lived in a kinship foster care arrangement:

Prevalence of kinship foster care

- In 2019/20, 17% of children who were in care in 2019/20 experienced a kinship foster placement in the same year
- There is a high degree of local variation in the use of kinship foster care placements. The rate of kinship foster care as a care option varies by a factor of 10 across Local Authorities (LAs), ranging 4%-39%.

Who are the children in kinship foster care?

- Children in kinship foster care enter care earlier than the average child in care (at age 5.5 on average), and enter kinship foster placements shortly thereafter
- Girls are over-represented in kinship foster care: relatively more girls than boys are placed in kinship foster care out of all children in care
- Children from minority ethnic groups, and Black children in particular, tend to be underrepresented among children living in kinship foster care. We assume that these groups will be overrepresented in informal kinship care arrangements given evidence from other studies. It is crucial that we develop a better understanding of why the current care system is placing less Black and Asian children in formal kinship care arrangements than children of other ethnicities.

1 We use the term 'Black children' to refer to children of Black African and Black Caribbean heritage as well as 'any other Black background' (ONS, 2011).



Journeys through care

- Where a kinship foster care placement will ever be the most suitable care option for a child, it is realised soon into their care history. Half of children entering care who ever live in kinship foster care go into kinship foster care immediately. Only 26% of children in kinship foster care in 2019/20 have been in more than one care placement before entering kinship foster care
- Placement stability for children in kinship foster placements is varied. Children in kinship foster care experience on average 2.9 placement moves. Almost half of all children in kinship foster care (46%) stay in the same kinship foster placement until they leave care
- The majority of children who left kinship foster care in 2019/20 left care to a kinship special guardian.
- For children who experience placements before or after kinship foster care, family-home care through foster care placements (kin and non-kin) are common.

Outcomes for children who have been in kinship foster care

We find that social and emotional well being and educational outcomes for children who have been in kinship foster care are on average similar to average outcomes for all children in care.

- The average SDQ scores at age 16 for children who have had a kinship foster care placement (n=2,820) is 13.3, similar to the national average for children in care.

- Approximately 29% of children (n=880) who have been in kinship foster care placements have experienced a fixed term exclusion during key stage 4 (KS4), similar to the national average for all children in care.
- KS4 attainment of children who experience kinship foster care, typically obtaining an Attainment 8 score of 23.3 (n=2,820), is similar to the national average for all children in care (20.9).

These findings do not imply that kinship care may or may not improve outcomes for children compared to other placement types, as it does not account for potential underlying differences between children in kinship foster placements and children in other placements. For example, it may be that children who go into kinship foster care have worse educational outcomes compared to other children in care prior to entering a kinship foster placement, and that their educational outcomes improve while in kinship foster care.

Key figures for children who have left care to a kinship special guardian:

Prevalence of kinship SGOs

- In 2019/20, 11% of children who left care (3,277 children out of 52,500 children who left care) left to a kinship special guardian
- There is a high degree of local variation in the use of kinship special guardianship. The prevalence of children leaving care to a kinship special guardian out of all children leaving care ranges from 2% to 27% across Local Authorities (LAs).



Who are the children on kinship SGOs?

- Children leaving care to a kinship special guardian enter care early (aged 3.6 on average) and leave care to a kinship special guardian early (aged 5.3 years on average)
- Girls are over-represented in kinship special guardianship, i.e. relatively more girls than boys leave care to a kinship special guardian compared to all children in care
- Minority ethnic groups and Black children in particular tend to be under-represented among children leaving care to a kinship special guardian. We assume that these groups will be over-represented in informal kinship care arrangements given other studies
- Most children (77%, or n=2,520 children) leaving care to a kinship special guardian leave care from a kinship foster care placement
- The majority of children (68%, or n=1,720 children) leaving care from a kinship foster care placement to a kinship special guardian were on interim care orders prior to leaving care.

High placement stability of kinship SGOs

- Where kinship special guardianship will ever be the most suitable care option for a child, it is realised soon into their care history
- On average, children leaving care to a kinship special guardian experience 1.6 placement moves while in care
- Over half (54%) leave care to a kinship special guardian immediately following their first placement.

Educational attainment at KS4

Children who leave care to a kinship special guardian tend to have higher educational attainment at KS4 (26) compared to all children in care (20.9); this is lower than the average attainment for all pupils in England, which is equal to approximately 48 (DfE, 2017b). This finding is restricted to children who had an SGO granted when they were of school age, and may differ for younger cohorts.



BACKGROUND

Introduction

Kinship care is defined as an arrangement in which a child is cared for full-time by “a relative, friend or other person with a prior connection with somebody else’s child” (DfE, 2011: 7). The definition of ‘relative’ is constrained by law to include stepparents, grandparents, aunts, uncles or siblings through s.105 of the Children Act 1989 (Selwyn & Nandy, 2012). When a child enters care, LAs have a legal requirement under the Children Act 1989, in concurrence with the Human Rights Act 1998 ‘right to family life’, to seek a kinship arrangement as the preferred care placement. This is with the aim to reduce turmoil by keeping a child within an environment which is likely to be more familiar to them (McCartan et al., 2018). Prioritising existing relationships is common practice and seen by social workers as in the child’s best interests, as well as being a requirement by law.

Practically, ‘kinship care’ can be disaggregated to two forms of legally distinct arrangements: formal and informal care. Department for Education (DfE) guidelines define a formal kinship carer as kin who have been assessed and approved by the LA to care for child in care, or kin who have acquired parental responsibility for a child through a legal order with or without the involvement of a social worker (Selwyn & Nandy, 2014). An informal kinship carer cares full-time for a child by private arrangement

with the child’s parent; this could be unknown to the LA and in absence legal intervention or by LAs encouraging an informal arrangement to avoid court proceedings taking place (Munro & Gilligan, 2013; McCartan et al., 2018; Mercer et al., 2015).

This report focuses exclusively on children living in formal kinship arrangements whilst they are in care or children living in formal kinship arrangements which were initiated by a legal order ending a period of being in care. This is due to data restrictions. Interpretation should not be extended to alternative formal or informal kinship care arrangements where carers have less statutory entitlement to financial and social service support (Selwyn & Nandy, 2012), and the circumstances under which a child came to live with kin may differ considerably.

Two specific forms of formal kinship care are therefore determined and analysed for this report:

- **Kinship foster care**, where children in care live in a “foster placement with relative(s) or friend(s)” (DfE, 2021: 61). Kinship foster care is the second most common placement type for children in care (GOV.UK, 2021a), experienced by 17% of children who were in care in 2019/20.
- **Kinship special guardianship**, where a child leaves care to a kinship special guardian by way of a Special



Guardianship Order (SGO).^{2,3} SGOs emphasise permanence by transferring parental responsibility to the guardian, and provide stability through a lifelong relationship with a carer and access to support services, whilst preserving a connection with the birth parents (Harwin et al., 2014; Selwyn et al., 2014; DfE, 2017; Glynn, 2019). Although SGOs can be granted to a broad range of applicants (Wade et al., 2014), they were initially designed for carers who are relatives or family friends of the child (Harwin et al., 2014). This report exclusively considers SGOs granted to kin on behalf of children who are currently in care. In 2019/20, this encompassed 88% of SGOs granted on behalf of children leaving care. Children living with a special guardian from an SGO as a private law order without prior knowledge or involvement from the LA are out of the scope of this analysis.

What does existing research say?

Research suggests kinship foster carers are significantly more disadvantaged compared to non-relative foster carers: they are more likely to be caring alone, experience financial difficulties, be living in overcrowded conditions and have a disability or chronic health condition (Farmer & Moyers, 2008; Hunt & Waterhouse, 2012; Mercer et al., 2015). Nevertheless, existing research primarily conducted in the US suggests that children in kinship foster care tend to have better outcomes on a range of different measures compared to those in other placement types such as residential care or non-kin foster care. For example, several studies based on

high quality evidence which were conducted primarily in the US have shown that while disruption rates for kinship foster care arrangements vary, children in kinship foster care experience high placement stability (Winokur et al., 2018), and tend to have lower levels of social and emotional problems and mental health issues (Winokur et al., 2018; Xu & Bright, 2018). Educational attainment for children placed in informal kinship foster care has shown to be on the same level as children in non-kin foster care or in some cases better (Selwyn et al., 2013), while children living in special guardianships had better educational outcomes at KS2 and KS3 (Harwin et al., 2019) and higher attainment at KS4 across all measures compared to all children in care (CoramBAAF, 2019). However, a US study found that being placed in kinship foster care is also associated with a decline in reading scores (Font, 2014). Evidence is therefore inconclusive and limited in England which differs considerably from the education and social care systems of the US, where research has thus far primarily focused.

Why is this work important?

Findings in the literature on kinship foster care and special guardianship thus far are inconclusive: impact evaluations are rare and estimating the causal effect of placements is complex because they are highly non-random. Evidence from the US suggests children who spend more time in kinship foster care are typically younger, have fewer social service-provided needs as reported by caseworkers, are more likely to be Black and female, and are less likely to have a cognitive disability (Font, 2014), suggesting children who have kinship

- 2 The Adoption and Children Act 2002 introduced the legal framework for Special Guardianship Orders which were brought into practice by the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 (Harwin et al., 2014; DfE, 2017).
- 3 Through this definition we exclude Special Guardianship Orders made through private law proceedings (Wade et al., 2014) on behalf of children who are not in care, which encompass around 30% of SGOs granted (Wade et al., 2014).



foster care placements are systematically different from children who do not have kinship foster care placements. Evidence specific to the context of England is lacking, and large cultural differences from the US education and social care system reduces the interpretation from current evidence.

Further, special guardianship orders came into effect for application in 2006. Since then, case law, Ombudsman findings and DfE regulations have developed the legal landscape of special guardianship, addressing focus areas such as financial support entitlement and carers' assessment framework in recent years (Harwin et al., 2019; Sims, 2021). Special guardianship is therefore still evolving as a permanence option for children leaving care, so understanding the experiences of children living with special guardians in most recent years is valuable to grow the knowledge base from earlier research (Wade et al., 2014; Selwyn et al., 2014). This report also provides a national overview of special guardianship, building from earlier research exposing variation in uptake by Designated Family Judge areas which developed over a decade of use (Harwin et al., 2019). This report identifies variation by geographically smaller LA areas. Future analysis evaluating factors which explain this would be valuable. Finally, previous research has focused on special guardianship orders granted to all kinds of applicants (Wade et al., 2014; Selwyn et al., 2014; Harwin et al., 2019); this report focuses exclusively on orders granted to kin in order to build a meaningful picture of the subsample of children who are living with the initial intended policy beneficiary of special guardianship orders (Harwin et al., 2019).

The availability of administrative data means that large scale analysis of children's experiences and outcomes can be carried out and important questions can be answered: this project therefore aims to utilise the administrative data to carry out a quantitative national overview of kinship foster care and kinship special guardianship, providing policy-relevant insight to children's care histories and later life outcomes (DfE, 2018b)



RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of the project is to improve the understanding of kinship care by providing more quantitative evidence on the experiences of children living in kinship care arrangements in England. More specifically, the project aimed to:

- Provide an overview of the use of kinship care at the national level
- Illustrate how kinship care is used by Local Authorities to provide care for children who are looked after.

The trial protocol set out additional research questions that are not listed above.⁴ Time constraints meant we had to prioritise which questions we would answer in this report, which was done according to the policy relevance of the research questions.

This report analyses two arrangements of formal kinship care: fostering placements with relative(s) or friend(s) where children might be placed under Sections 20 or 31 of the Children's Act 1989, henceforth referred to as "kinship foster care", and Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) made to relative(s) or friend(s), henceforth referred to as kinship special guardianship. Where "kinship care" is referenced we refer to both the kinship foster care and kinship special guardianship populations.

The analysis is limited to descriptive statistics, so it will only be able to establish correlations but not any causal effects on/of kinship care placements. This report does not assess whether differences in outcomes between children who have been in kinship care and those that have been in other types of care are the consequence of the kinship care placement or of other circumstances and journeys into the placement.

4 Determining the Local Authority characteristics that correlate with the use of different forms of kinship care and comparing the outcomes of children in kinship care to children in other forms of care



METHODOLOGY

Data

The analysis used individual-level and school-level extracts from the National Pupil Database sourced within the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Secure Research Service for the population of children in England who were ever recorded to have been in care between 1998/99 and 2019/20. LA returns on the population of looked-after children (the Children Looked After Dataset or “SSDA903” collection) was the primary data source. The dataset contains annual LA returns, where individuals’ records (within-year and across-years) are linked using a unique child identifier. This dataset has been collecting annual data returns since 1992. However, between 1998 and 2003, this data collection was restricted to a one-third sample, and returned to include all CiC in 2004 (McGrath-Lone et al., 2016).

The Pupil Matching Reference (PMR), assigned to a child upon their first entry to state-funded schooling or (if sooner) the creation of an Education, Health and Care Plan (Jay, McGrath-Lone & Gilbert, 2018), was the primary unique child identifier. This enabled us to track a child’s entire care history, as well as collect greater information by linking their records to extracts of the National Pupil Database. Where a PMR was unavailable, an alternative method was used (please see technical appendix for detail on how this was created, and the number of children affected). In absence of a PMR no school records can be linked for a child. Please see the technical

appendix for discussion on the implications of this limitation.

The following extracts of the National Pupil Database were linked to the Children Looked After Dataset:

- Annual school-level and pupil-level schools’ Spring Census to provide greater detail of relevant child characteristics
- Wider pupil-level data on attainment, absences and exclusions to understand a child’s school history.

Kinship foster care placements are identified in the Children Looked After Dataset by specific placement codes. This analysis encompassed 20 years’ of administrative data and consequently multiple iterations of codes indicating kinship foster care. The codes used were: F1, F4, Q1, Q2, U1, U2, U3 and F9. Please see the technical appendix for how this analysis used dataset codes to identify kinship special guardianship.⁵

This work was produced using statistical data from the ONS. The use of the ONS statistical data in this work does not imply the endorsement of the ONS in relation to the interpretation or analysis of the statistical data. This work uses research datasets which may not exactly reproduce National Statistics aggregates.

5 Data cleaning, manipulation and analysis was conducted using R version 4.0.2 in R Studio version 1.4.1717.



Sampling methods

For the purpose of this analysis, we constructed distinct samples from the CLA national dataset to answer the research questions as precisely as possible. We primarily conducted analysis on a 'snapshot' population for children in kinship foster care and kinship special guardianship, respectively, and supplementary analysis on a 'cohort' population. Where "kinship care" is referenced we encompass both the kinship foster care and kinship special guardianship populations. More information about the populations that will be referred to through this report is detailed below.

Snapshot samples:

Kinship foster care snapshot: The snapshot approach selects a subsample of children of all ages who have been recorded as being in kinship foster care at any point during the reporting year 2019/20 (n=18,962). This allows us to build a current understanding of the children in kinship foster care, but we cannot track their experiences and outcomes after kinship foster care placements.

Kinship SGO snapshot: The snapshot approach selects a subsample of children of all ages who have been recorded as leaving care to a kinship special guardian at any point during the reporting year 2019/20 (n=3,277). This allows us to build a current understanding of the children living with kinship special guardians, but (as with the kinship foster care snapshot) we cannot track their experiences and care outcomes after leaving care on an SGO.

The kinship foster care snapshot and kinship SGO snapshot populations are not mutually exclusive: any child who was in a kinship foster care placement whilst in care in 2019/20 who left care to a kinship special guardian in the same period will be included

in both samples; this subset comprises 77% of the SGO snapshot or 13% of the kinship foster care snapshot.

All Children in Care (CiC) snapshot: The sample of children of all ages who have ever been recorded as being in care in the reporting year 2019/20 (n=108,552). This sample includes children within the kinship foster care snapshot and kinship SGO snapshot samples, and children who never lived in kinship foster care or kinship special guardianship in 2019/20. This is used to facilitate comparisons between the kinship foster care and SGO snapshots and the wider care population.

Cohort samples:

To track children's experiences and outcomes after kinship care or at age 18, we have created additional birth cohort samples for children in kinship foster care and living with a kinship special guardian. The birth cohort approach selected a subsample of children who were born in the period between April 2001 and March 2002, hence turned 18 in the reporting year 2019/20, who have ever been in care ("all children in care cohort"), been in care in a kinship foster care placement ("kinship foster care cohort") or have ever left care to a kinship special guardian ("kinship SGO cohort"). The 'all children in care' cohort includes children in the kinship foster care cohort, the kinship SGO cohort, and children born in the years 2001/02 who never lived in kinship foster care or left care to a kinship special guardian. This allows us to track the care experiences of a cohort of children who are of the same age (however may live in care and kinship care at different time points) and analyse their outcomes at age 18. This may not provide a current picture of the children currently in kinship care, if for example a child was only in kinship care at age 5 (in 2006), their care experiences and wider outcomes may be very different to a child living in



kinship care 15 years later. Since this time, the regulatory environments of kinship foster care and special guardianship have changed.

The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 explicitly mandated authorities to consider living arrangements with kin as a “first option” for children in care, strengthening the duty from the Children Act 1989 (Munro & Gilligan, 2013: 188). Over time, this may have altered the profile and realised care histories of children living with kin as a greater number of children (more than doubling in the decade to 2019/20) are placed in this care type. Special guardianship regulation also influences this sampling methodology. The Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 came into effect from 30 December 2005 when our birth cohort were four to five years of

age. Therefore before 30 December 2005, children, families and authorities did not have special guardianship as a care option. Given that half of children who left care to a kinship special guardian in 2019/20 were aged four or younger when the SGO was granted, children born in 2001/02 who were ever in care had a very different menu of care options available for their early childhood (when special guardianship orders are most commonly granted) which could have had a considerable impact on the decisions and realised care histories of children who may have entered kinship special guardianship had it been available when they were young.

Figure 1 below provides a visual illustration of the snapshot and cohort populations.

Figure 1: Illustration of snapshot and cohort samples

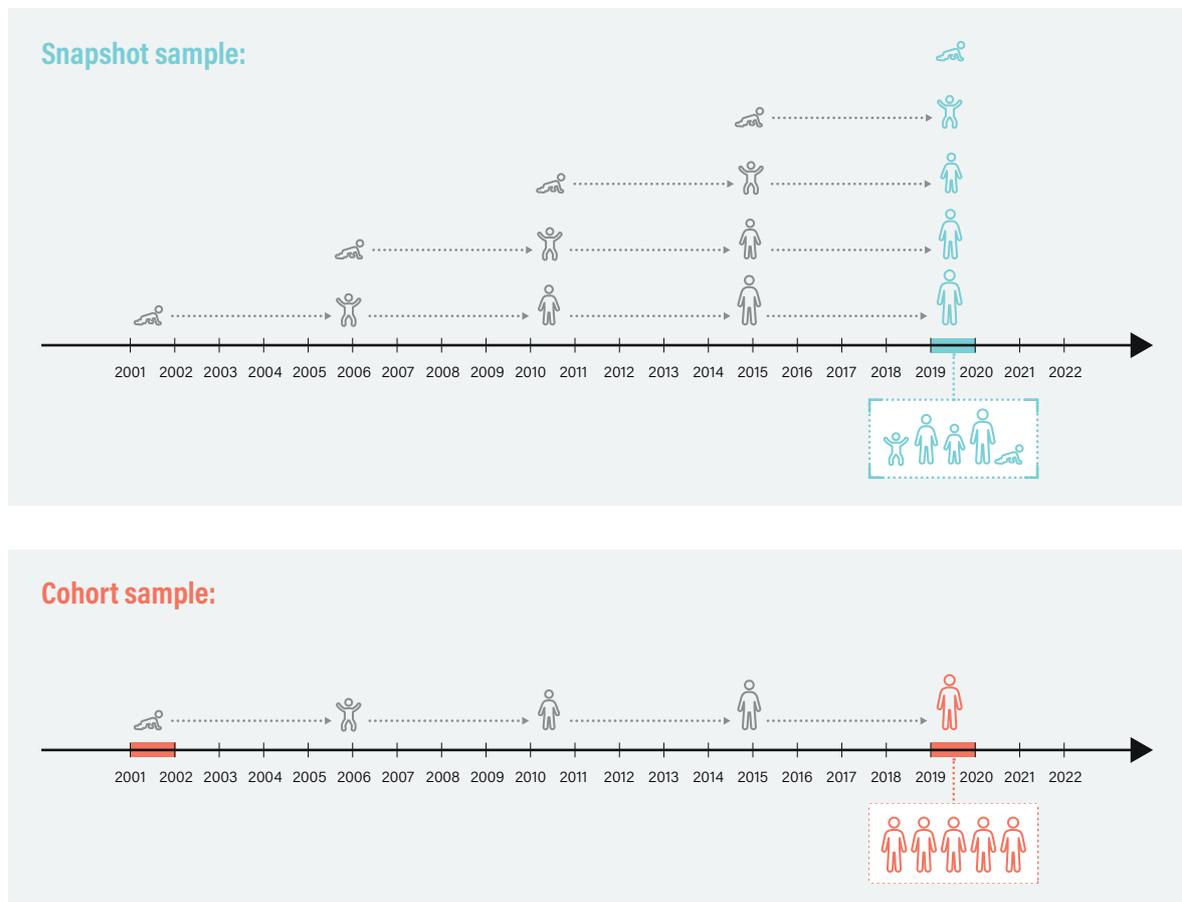




Table 1: Total sample sizes of kinship care and all children in care within the snapshot and cohort populations

Population	Snapshot Sample size (number of children in each sample in 2019/20 data)	Cohort Sample size (Number of children who turned 18 in 2019/20 who lived in this type of care)
Kinship foster care	18,962	3,676
Children who leave care to a kinship special guardian	3,277	724
All children in care	108,552	22,431

Overview of approach

Descriptive statistics:

Summary statistics were created regarding demographics of the children in kinship care, their journeys into and out of kinship care and average outcomes at age 18. These descriptive statistics were created for the kinship foster care cohort and snapshot, SGO cohort and snapshot, and all CiC cohort and snapshot in order to understand how the characteristics, experiences and outcomes of the kinship care populations compare to the overall care populations.

These statistics are presented in the form of averages, headcounts, percentages and visualisations. They do not illustrate any causal differences between groups, but rather aim to build a national picture of key themes related to kinship care.

Statistical Disclosure Policies

To ensure that the outputs discussed in this report are safe (i.e. is non-disclosive and maintains the confidentiality of the data used), our figures went through Statistical Disclosure Control Checks from the ONS Statistical Support Team. This means the following statistical disclosure policies have been applied:

- x indicates a cell is suppressed for values that are less than 10
- Percentages less than 0.5% are suppressed with a “-”
- All headcounts have been rounded to the nearest 10
- All percentages have been rounded to whole numbers.

As a result of applying these policies, cells may not exactly sum to their totals and percentages may not total to 100%.



FINDINGS

Use of kinship care

National overview of kinship care

Between April 2019 and March 2020 18,962 children, or 17% of all children in care, lived in kinship foster care. Out of all placements which occurred in 2019/20, 19,960, or 12% of placements, were categorised as kinship foster care.

In 2019/20, 3,277 children left care to a kinship special guardian. Special guardianship orders granted to kin made up 11% of children leaving care.

Prevalence of children in kinship foster care placements over time

The number of children who have kinship foster care placements has grown annually by 7% on average between 2015/16 and 2019/20; by 2019/20 approximately 19,000 children had a kinship foster care placement, 4,700 more children than in 2015/16. This was accompanied by a small increase in the proportion of children in care who have kinship foster care placements, from 16% in 2015/16 to 17% of all children in care in 2019/20, indicating that kinship foster care has become slightly more popular as a care option for children in most recent years.

Figure 2: Prevalence of looked after children in kinship foster care placements and all children in care between 2015-20

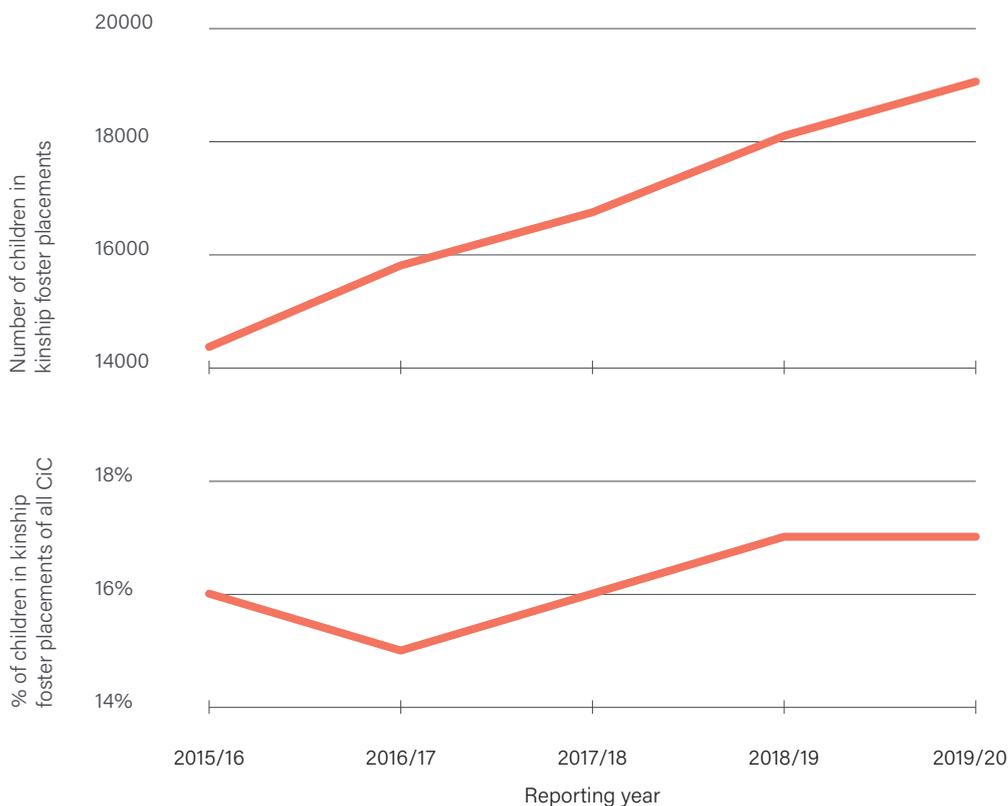
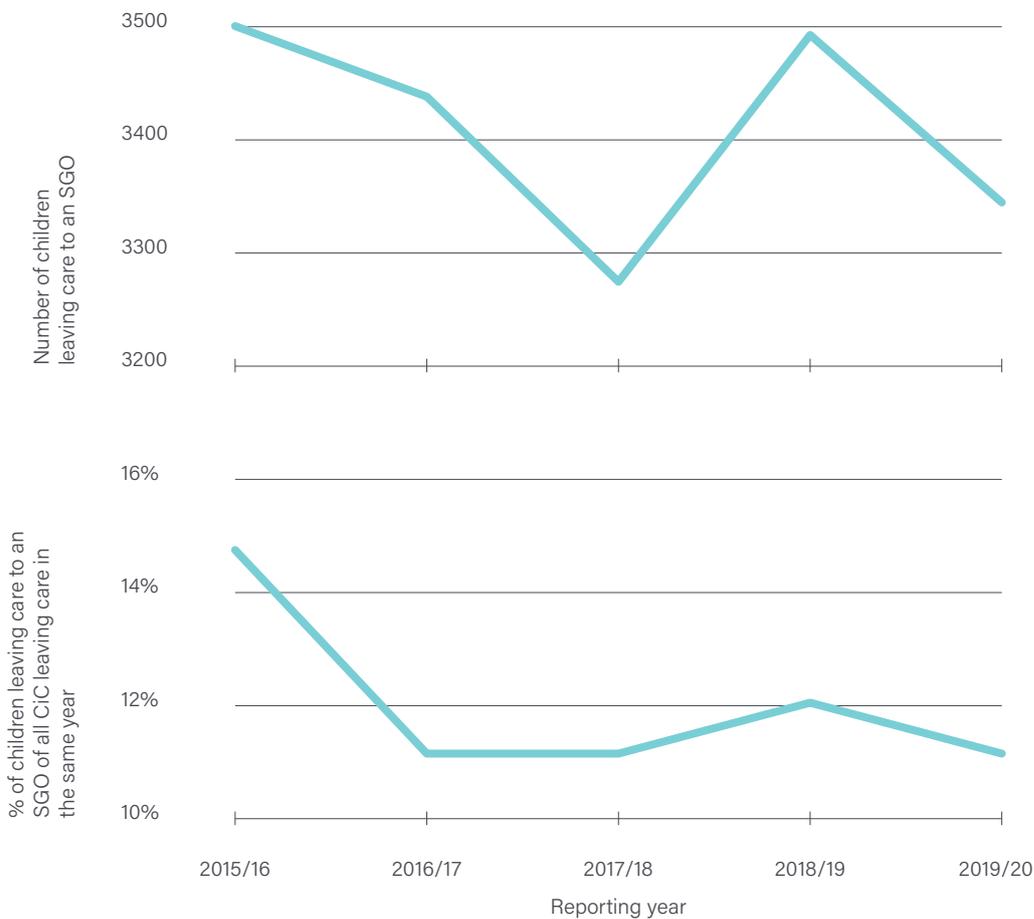




Figure 3: The number of children leaving care to a kinship special guardian between 2015-2020



Prevalence of SGOs over time

The number of children who leave care to a kinship special guardian per year has varied over the last five years. In 2019/20 3,277 children left care to a kinship special guardian. This accounts for 11% of all children leaving care in 2019/20. Over the last five years, the relative rate of kinship SGOs granted on behalf of children in care has ranged between 11% and 15% nationally, and has remained relatively stable over the last four years.⁶

Local Authority use of kinship care

LAs have diverse practices and serve diverse populations within them. We report how the use of kinship foster care and kinship special guardianship varied across England in the 2019/20 reporting year. There is no evidence of a strong correlation between LAs use of the two types of kinship care evaluated in this report, however we identify significant across-LA variation in use for both kinship foster care and kinship special guardianship. We expect this variation to reflect a wide range of factors which we aim to evaluate in scheduled future analysis.

6 The relative share of SGOs in 2015/16 may diverge when calculating the figure using official statistics of the number of children leaving care in 2015/16 due to a discrepancy between the numbers of children leaving care in 2015/16 between our dataset and the official statistics.



Figure 4: Percentage of children in care in 2019/20 who ever had a kinship foster care placement in 2019/20

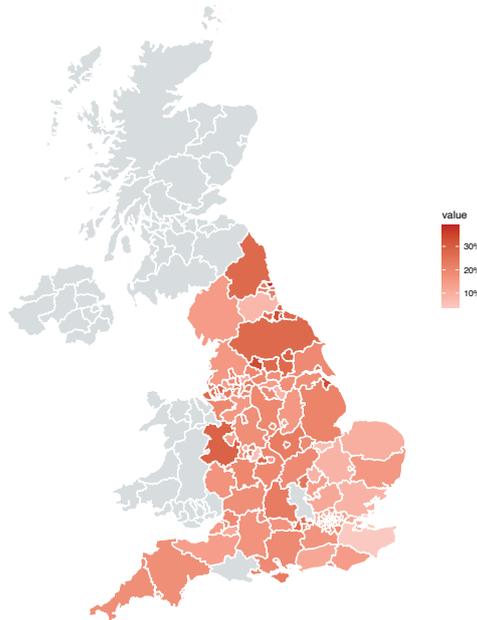


Figure 4 illustrates the LA variation in the use of kinship foster care in England. Grey indicates where data was outside of our scope (Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales) or where values have been suppressed for statistical disclosure reasons.⁷ On average, 17% of children who were in care in 2019/20 experienced a kinship foster placement during the year. However, the population of children in kinship foster care relative to the overall care population varies greatly across LAs. In some LAs 39% of all children in care in 2019/20 were placed in a kinship foster care placement during the year, while some LAs with the lowest share of kinship foster placements had only 4% of all children in care in kinship foster placements. LA variation could be linked to differences in children's specific needs, LA data reporting, and individual LA practice approaches to kinship care.

Figure 5: Percentage of children leaving care in 2019/20 who left to a kinship special guardian

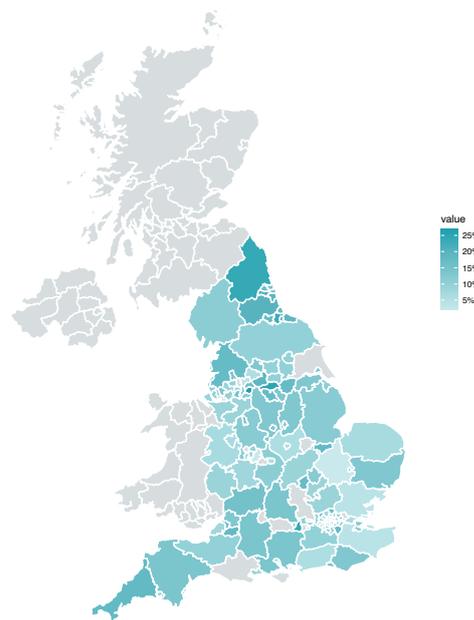
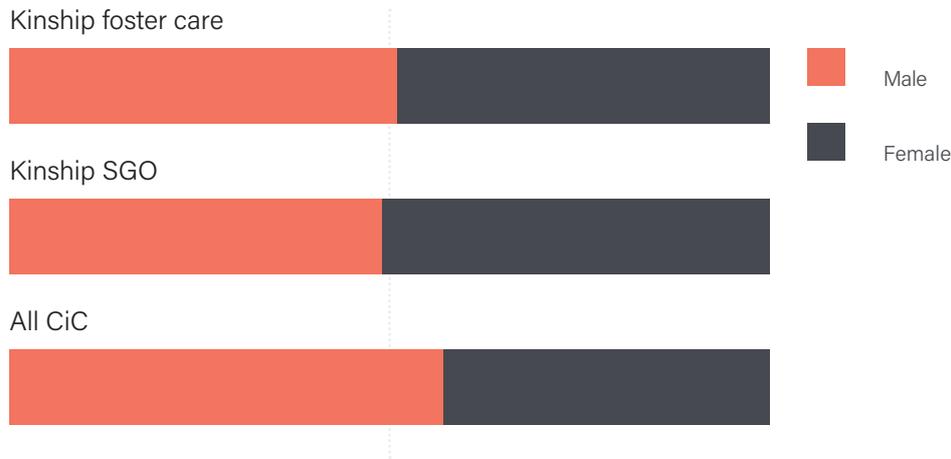


Figure 5 illustrates local differences in the number of children who leave care to a kinship special guardian, relative to the number of children leaving the care of an LA in 2019/20.⁸ In 2019/20, 11% of children leaving care left by way of an SGO granted to kin. The rate of kinship special guardianship relative to the number of children leaving care in 2019/20 varies considerably across LAs, ranging from as low as 2% to as high as 27% in some LAs. Local differences could be linked to differences in children's specific needs, LA data reporting, and individual LA practice approaches to kinship care.

- 7 This could be because the number of children in care in the Local Authority in 2019/20 was very small and/or the number of children who had a kinship foster care placement was very small.
- 8 Grey indicates where data was outside of our scope (Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales) or where values have been suppressed for statistical disclosure reasons: this could be because the number of children in care in the Local Authority in 2019/20 was very small and/or the number of children exiting care through an SGO was very small.



Figure 6: Gender distribution amongst children in care in 2019/20 by sample



Sample: who are the children in kinship care?

Gender

Figure 6 shows the gender breakdown of children in kinship care in 2019/20 relative to the wider children in care population. There is a more even distribution of gender in kinship foster care than in the wider care population; 51% of children who had a kinship foster care placement in 2019/20 are boys, relative to 57% of the wider care population. A similar pattern is observed for children leaving care to a kinship special guardian: more than half (51%) of the children leaving care to a kinship special guardian in 2019/20 were girls. Compared to the overall gender breakdown of all children in care, girls are over-represented in kinship foster care and kinship special guardianship.

This could partially be attributed to intersecting relationships between age and gender, where boys become increasingly overrepresented in the entire care population relative to the general population as they become older (Wade et al., 2014): 53% of first-time care entrants aged 1–12 are boys,

compared to 65% of care entrants aged 16+ (Children’s Commissioner, 2021). Children who ever have a formal kinship foster care placement enter care for the first time 1.9 years younger, on average, than the wider care population, therefore the gender dynamics could be attributed to younger children, who are more likely to be girls, entering kinship care.

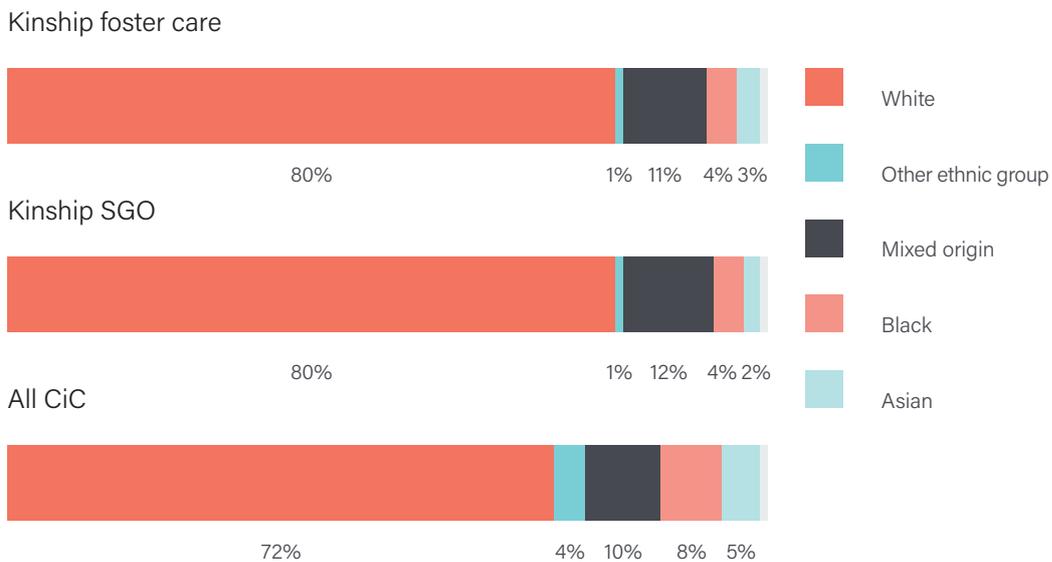
Ethnicity breakdown

Figure 7 below shows the ethnic breakdown of children in care and kinship care for 2019/20. We group children’s ethnicity by major ethnic group.⁹ White children are over-represented in kinship foster care and in kinship special guardianship: 72% of all children in care in 2019/20 are White, compared to 80% of children who had a kinship foster care placement in 2019/20 and 81% who left care to a kinship special guardian in 2019/20. Children who have mixed ethnic origin also have a slighter greater prevalence in the kinship care populations than in the wider care population, while there are proportionately less Asian and Black children in kinship foster care

9 See 2021 census groupings under <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/ethnic-groups>. This means that ‘Black children’ describes children of Black African and Black Caribbean heritage as well as ‘any other Black background’. ‘Asian children’ describes children of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese heritage or ‘any other Asian background’.



Figure 7: Ethnic breakdown of children in care in 2019/20 by type of placement



and kinship special guardianship in 2019/20 compared to their share among all children in care in 2019/20.

Asian and Black children are underrepresented among children who leave care by a special guardian granted to kin compared to their representation among all children in care; this is despite the introduction of SGOs being partially motivated by offering an alternative permanency option for children from minority ethnic groups for whom the legal framework of adoption does not meet their cultural or religious needs (DfE, 2017a).

Our findings differ from previous research using 2011 Census data which identified a considerable overrepresentation of children from minority ethnic groups living with relatives in the absence of parent(s) (Wijedasa, 2015); this encompasses both informal and formal kinship care. In conjunction with our results, the author’s findings suggest that the overrepresentation of children from minority ethnic groups living with relatives is derived from informal kinship care, which remains unobserved in the

current study, whilst children from minority ethnic groups remain underrepresented in formal kinship care. The results from Wijedasa (2015) are discussed in more detail in the “Discussion” section.

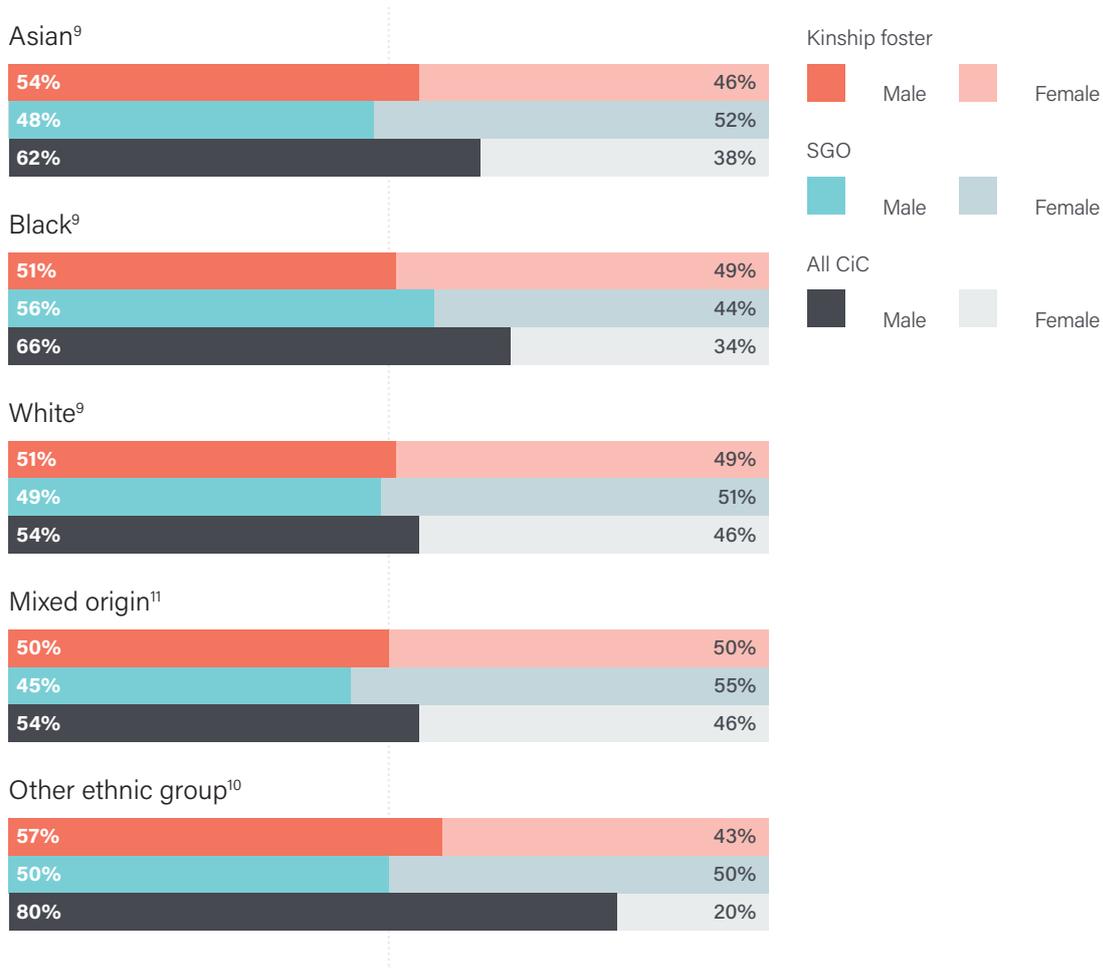
Intersectional analysis of ethnicity and gender

As discussed above, girls are overrepresented in kinship foster care and kinship special guardianship relative to their sample size within the overall care population. We explore this further through the intersection of gender and ethnicity, comparing how the representation of girls and boys varies across different major ethnic groups. There are relatively more girls in kinship foster care and kinship special guardianship compared to their share among the overall care population across all major ethnic groups, with 20% of girls in care in 2019/20 experiencing kinship foster care compared to 16% of boys; the extent of overrepresentation varies by major ethnic group, however.

Boys are particularly underrepresented in kinship foster care among children from an



Figure 8: Gender distribution within each ethnicity among children in kinship care compared to all children in care



Asian, Black or 'other' ethnic background.¹⁰ The low prevalence of boys from "other" ethnic groups in kinship foster care may in part be explained by unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) making up 61% of children from 'other' ethnic groups in 2019/20, 90% of whom are boys. By nature of their specific complex life situations UASC are less likely to have a circle of family or family friends within the country, therefore boys from other ethnic groups may be less likely to experience a kinship foster care placement because of the intersection between gender,

ethnicity and UASC status in our sample. There are also particularly few Black boys in kinship foster care: 7% of all Black boys in care are in kinship foster care in 2019/20 while 13% of Black girls are in kinship foster placements. Just over half of all Black children in kinship foster care in 2019/20 are boys while Black boys make up 66% of all Black children in care in 2019/20.

The gender distribution of children in care compared to children in kinship care placements in 2019/20 is most evenly distributed for White children and children

¹⁰ 'Other' as an ethnic group is determined by code 'OOTH' in the SSDA903 collection https://find-npd-data.education.gov.uk/en/data_elements/97d1c6c4-cb50-4708-bee4-a0ab0062f03f



who have a mixed ethnic origin;¹¹ boys and girls in care who have these major ethnic groups have the most similar likelihood of living in kinship foster care.

Boys from Asian, Black or other ethnic groups are particularly underrepresented in kinship special guardianship. While girls make up 50% of the children from 'other' ethnic groups in kinship special guardianship, only 20% of children in care from 'other' ethnic groups are girls. Similarly, among Asian children in kinship special guardianship, over half (52%) are girls, while only 38% of all Asian children in care in 2019/20 are girls.

Special Educational Needs (SEN)

SEN can affect a child or young person's ability to learn, for example by affecting their behaviour and ability to socialise, reading and writing, ability to understand concepts, concentration levels and physical ability (DfE, 2015a). Schools have a responsibility to make special education provision for children who have a learning disability or disability which significantly affects their ability to learn or use school facilities compared to the majority of children their age (DfE, 2015a). It is valuable for our analysis to understand the prevalence and specific types of need of children who live in kinship care.

To measure the prevalence of need, we identify whether each child has ever been assessed for SEN throughout their cumulative school history;¹² this is because special educational needs are commonly recognised throughout a child's school career, with the incidence of children who have ever been assessed as having SEN nearly doubling from Year 1 to Year 11 for the sample of children

who have ever been in care (Jay & Gilbert, 2021). Measuring the prevalence of SEN for the sample of children living in kinship care in 2019/20 is therefore inappropriate because it will likely underestimate the extent of need, as children who have matched school records but have not yet been assessed for SEN will not be counted. In addition, children who live in kinship care are, on average, younger than the wider care population: this limits comparability between the samples because – by virtue of age – the wider care population are more likely to have recognised SEN provision. For this reason we present statistics for children who turned 18 in 2019/20, and therefore have a full school history from which SEN provision can be extracted. Remaining missing data occurs where no matched record can ever be identified for a child in the schools' Spring Census. This affects 18% of children who ever lived in kinship foster care and 5% of children who ever left care to a kinship special guardian, largely occurring where a child left care for the final time before starting school. We report for the subsample of children who do have a matched record in the schools' Spring Census; please see the technical appendix for a table including missing data.

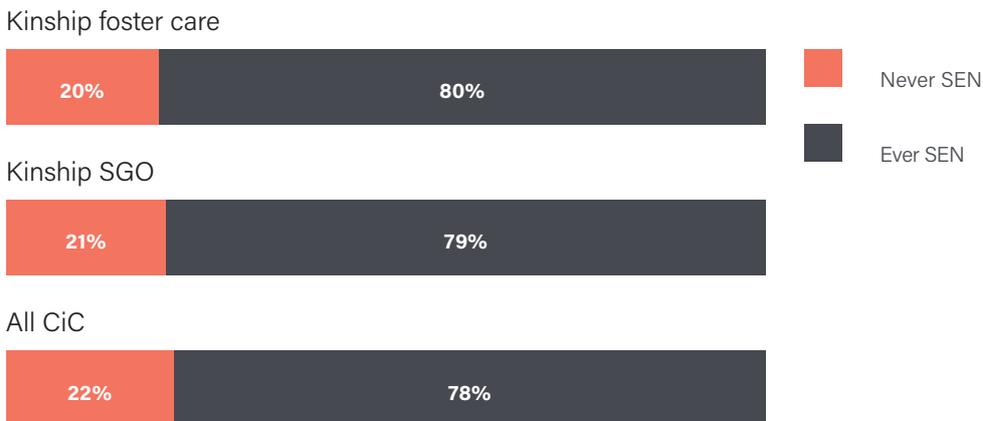
Figure 9 presents the proportions of children who have ever been assessed for SEN for children who have ever been in care, lived in kinship foster care whilst in care, or left care to a kinship special guardian. Previous analysis of the 2011 Census identified that children living with a relative (undifferentiated informal and formal kinship care as we define it) are twice as likely to have a long-term health problem or disability than children living with at least one parent

11 'Mixed' as an ethnic group is determined by codes 'MWBC', 'MWBA', 'MWAS', 'MOTH' in the SSDA903 collection https://find-npd-data.education.gov.uk/en/data_elements/97d1c6c4-cb50-4708-bee4-a0ab0062f03f

12 As defined by ever having a SEN statement or Educational, Health and Care plan, or receiving a school/early years' action/action plus or SEN support (DfE, 2015b)



Figure 9: The proportion of children who have ever received SEN provision



(Wijedasa, 2015). Our findings also identify a high incidence of need for children living in formal kinship care. For children born 2001/02 where linked school records could be identified, around 80% of children who have lived in kinship foster care, or left care to a kinship special guardian have ever been assessed for special educational needs. This is very similar to the prevalence of special educational needs for children born 2001/02 who have ever been in any placement type whilst in care, and considerably higher than the national pupil population, 37% of whom are estimated to have ever received SEN provision by Year 11 (Jay & Gilbert, 2021). This finding highlights the necessity for public services to ensure sufficient service provision and carers' support to meet the needs of children living in kinship care arrangements. It is also important to note that children who leave care (to a kinship special guardian, or other arrangement) have access to less education support – for example personalised education plans and Virtual Schools – which

may leave children with special educational needs more vulnerable to poor outcomes.

The type of primary SEN is recorded based on 12 specific categories used in the National Pupil Database. For the purposes of preserving sample sizes, we have grouped some categories¹³ to describe children's specific needs. We report every primary SEN type a child has ever been assessed for (which commonly varies over time) to understand their specific needs. Children are most commonly categorised as having an 'other' special educational need; this is largely attributed to a high incidence of children recorded as ever having No Specialist Assessment as their primary need, which can occur when assessments to determine a child's primary need are still taking place (DfE, 2018a). Social, emotional and mental health difficulties or specific or moderate learning difficulties are the second most common need type, as 23% and 16% of children in kinship foster care in 2019/20 have had these SEN respectively as their primary need at some point in their

13 Sensory/Physical needs consolidates the following codes from the NPD (DfE, 2015a): physical disability, visual impairment, hearing impairment, multi-sensory impairment. Specific or moderate learning difficulty groups together: specific learning difficulty, and moderate learning difficulty. Severe learning difficulties groups together: severe learning difficulties, and profound and multiple learning difficulties. 'Other' groups together: no specialist assessment and Other. The remaining categories described in the table correspond to a single code in the NPD.



Table 2: The percentage of children in kinship foster care and children leaving care on a kinship SGO who were ever eligible for free school meals

Population	Children in kinship foster care placements in 2019/20	Children who left care to a kinship special guardian in 2019/20
Never FSM-eligible	14% (2,760)	10% (340)
Ever FSM-eligible	57% (10,910)	42% (1,430)
Unknown	27% (5,308)	47% (1,625)
Sample size	18,962	3,277

current school history.¹⁴ These are also the two most common categorisations among the national school age population, however the prevalence of them is considerably lower: only 2.8% of pupils aged 5–16 among the general population are identified as having social, emotional and mental health difficulties in the school census, and 4.0% are identified as having moderate learning difficulties (Lindorff & Strand, 2018). More details are provided in table in Appendix 1.

Children who left care to kinship special guardians in 2019/20 most commonly had social, emotional and mental health difficulties (SEMH) ever recorded as their primary SEN throughout their school history, identified for 12% of children; excluding children for whom no data is available, SEMH difficulties has been recorded as a primary SEN for nearly a quarter (24%) of children. Moderate learning difficulties are reported for 9% of children who left care to a kinship special guardian in 2019/20, or 18% of children for whom school data is available. Kinship special guardians may require support from the relevant authorities after the SGO is granted to ensure the best possible outcomes for their child once they are no longer in the care of the LA.

Free School Meal (FSM) eligibility

Free school meal (FSM) eligibility is commonly used as a proxy for income deprivation, however proof of a parent's entitlement to income support must be provided to the school or LA before a child can be recorded as eligible (Gorard, 2012); this provides an administrative barrier underestimating the need of low-income working households and households vulnerable to macroeconomic conditions (Ilie, Sutherland & Vignoles, 2017). We therefore measure if ever in their school history a child has been recorded as eligible for free school meals to maximise sensitivity to income deprivation throughout childhood, shown in Table 2. This measure is cumulative, therefore where data is available it also reflects the age of a child at the point of the 2019/20 Spring Census. Missing data is largely attributed to where children have left care before starting school so no school records are available. Half of the sample of children who left care to a kinship special guardian in 2019/20 were aged 4 or younger at the point in time when the SGO was granted, therefore this affects a considerable proportion of our sample.

¹⁴ Variables used in this table are cumulative, such that any information from any school census is reflected. For the snapshot population any information up until 2019/20 has been recorded, which could reflect a wide range of individuals' history from age 0 to 18 in 2019/20 when they had a kinship care placement.



Of the children we have free school meal information for, more than 80% have ever been eligible for free school meals up to the 2019/20 Spring census for both children who have been in kinship foster care placements and children who left care to a kinship special guardian. This measure encompasses a child's need before, during and possibly after (if they left kinship care during 2019/20, before the 2019/20 Spring Census) living in kinship foster care or with a kinship special guardian, and indicates that income deprivation affects a high proportion of our sample.



Journeys into kinship care

Age at entry to care and types of care

Children in kinship foster care enter care for the first time, on average, nearly two years younger than children in the overall care population. On average, children who are in kinship foster care in 2019/20 entered care for the first time aged 5.5 years, compared to 7.1 years among all children who were in care in 2019/20. The average age of children entering their first kinship foster placement is only slightly higher (6.2 years), suggesting that children typically enter their first kinship foster care placement shortly after entering care. Children who left care in 2019/20 to a kinship special guardian were on average much younger when they first entered care (3.6 years) compared to children who left care in 2019/20 by different mechanisms (9.3 years at entry to care on average). Children who leave care to a kinship special guardian also do so at a young age, leaving care on average aged 5.3 years; children who ever leave care to a kinship special guardian therefore live in care, on average, for 1.7 years.

Reason for entering care

When a child enters care, their category of need is recorded to indicate the main reason why they started to receive services. Figure 12 shows the distribution of need codes used for our analysis samples. Abuse or neglect is the most common primary need recorded for children in care in 2019/20; it is more common still for children who had kinship foster care placements or children who left care to a kinship special guardian in 2019/20, with 72% and 73% of children entering care primarily for this need respectively. This is consistent with prior research (Wade et al., 2014). Children who are in kinship foster care in 2019/20 or leave care to a kinship special guardian are less likely to be in care because of absent parenting compared to the overall care population, part of which may be explained through UASC – who make up 7% of children in care in 2019/20 but 76% of children with this primary need code – being less likely to be placed in kinship care.

However, it is important to note that the categories of need are designed to identify the kinds of pressures placed on social

Figure 10: Age distribution of the age at first entry to care and age at first entry to kinship foster care for all children who were in kinship foster placements in 2019/20

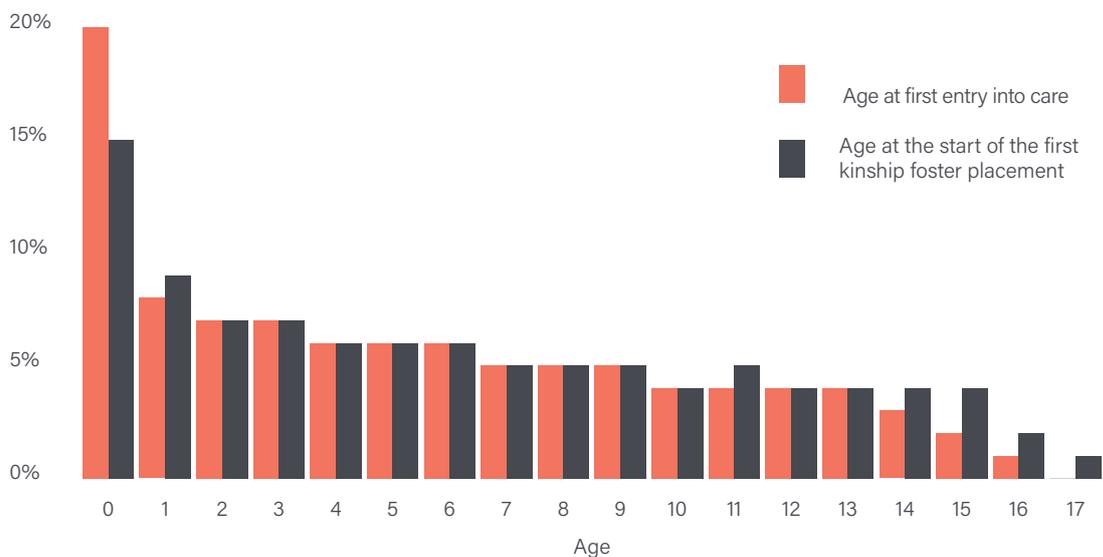
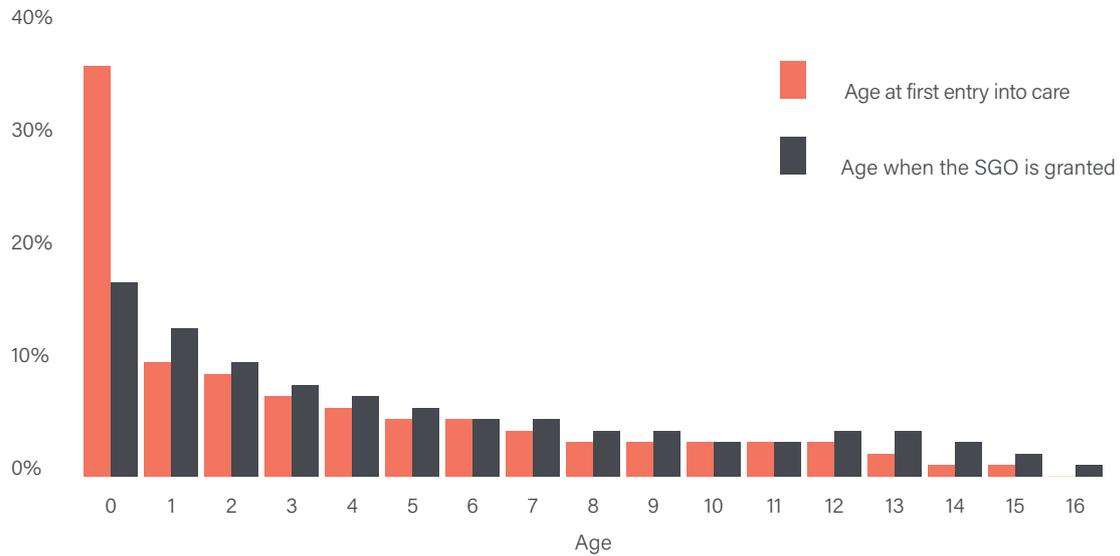




Figure 11: Age distribution of the age at first entry to care and age when leaving care to a kinship special guardian in 2019/20



services rather than having diagnostic value for the children themselves (DfE, 2015). There is considerable variation in how they are used across LAs and they are subjective to the judgement of the individual reporting them. Furthermore, children are likely to have multiple, complex, needs for services and categorising each child into just one category of need may be a simplistic reduction of their

circumstances (Farmer et al., 2004; Hood et al., 2020). The guidance for practitioners from the DfE states that when having difficulty choosing between categories, the one that scores highest in the table should be selected, which may lead to the chosen code being somewhat arbitrary.

Figure 12: Reason for entering care for children in care in 2019/20

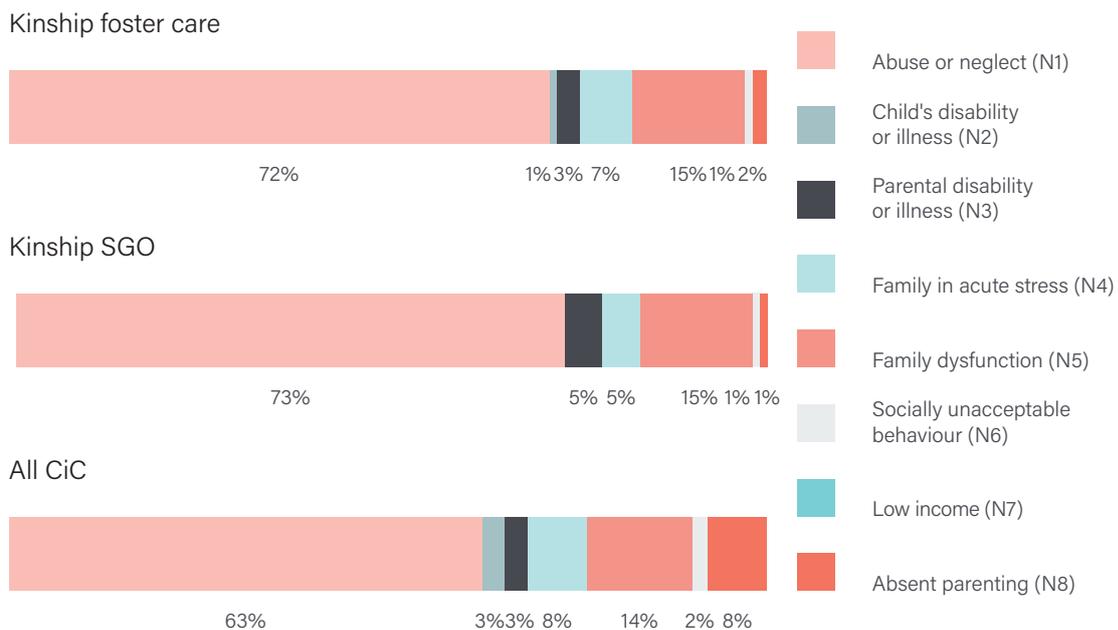
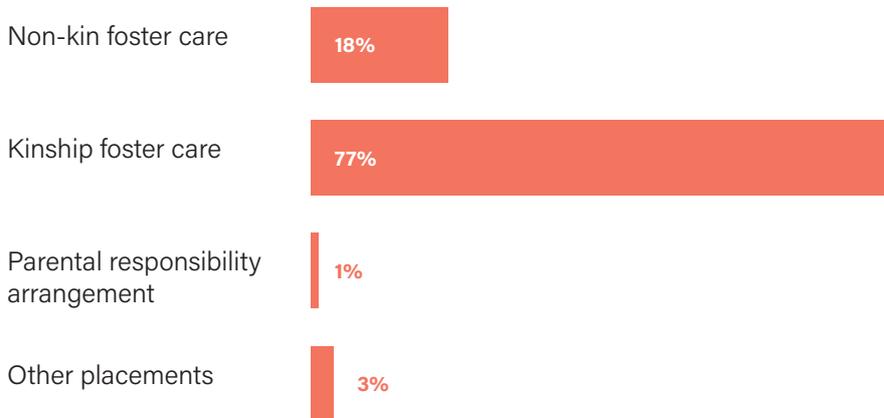




Figure 13: Type of placement children were in immediately before leaving care to a kinship special guardian in 2019/20



Transitions to a kinship special guardian

The vast majority of children (77%, or n=2,530) who left care to a kinship special guardian in 2019/20 did so leaving a kinship foster care placement, of whom 27% (n=680) left care from a long-term placement.¹⁵ Of those that were not in kinship foster care, nearly all children were in a non-kin foster care placement (18%). Recent guidelines have re-emphasised the importance of careful decision making with regard to SGOs to ensure the best possible outcomes for children, for example by allowing care proceeding extensions to allow more time for a prospective guardian to live with a child prior to an order being granted (Family Justice Council, 2021); this could lead to an

even greater proportion of children living in kinship foster care before leaving care to a kinship special guardian in future.

Legal status

Two-thirds (68%) of children leaving care to a kinship special guardian in 2019/20 were on an Interim Care Order before leaving care; this is where a court has determined a child is at a significant enough risk to become looked after and assessments of parents, family and friends are being conducted so the court can make an informed decision about the best long-term care arrangements for the child. An SGO is one of a range of orders that the court can make at the end of care proceedings and the data suggests that the largest proportion

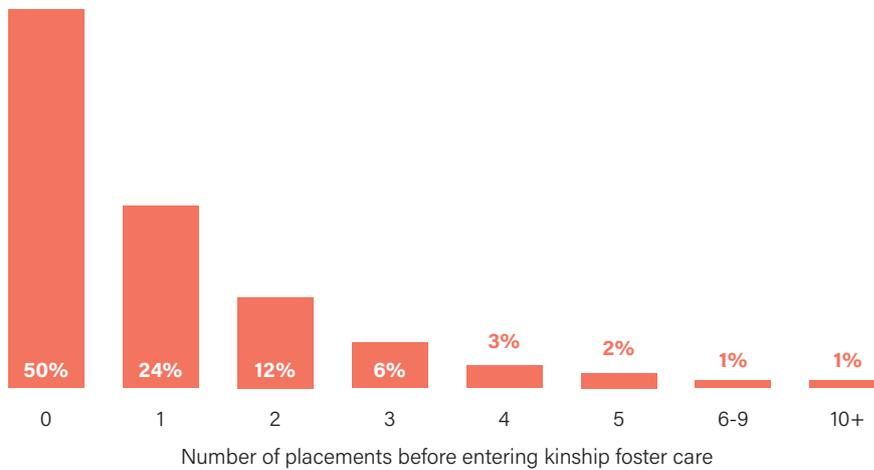
Figure 14: The percentage of children who left care through an SGO in 2019/20 from a kinship care placement based on their legal status



¹⁵ SSDA903 placement type code U1 introduced 1 April 2015 applies to a kinship foster care placement where the carer has agreed to be the child's foster parent until the child leaves care, the placement is recorded in a child's care plan as their plan for permanence, and the relevant authority has confirmed the arrangement with the foster carer, the child's birth parents and the child (DfE, 2020).



Figure 15: The percentage of children placed in kinship foster care placements in 2019/20 based on the number of placements before they entered kinship care



of SGOs (68%) are made at this juncture for both children who are already living in a kinship foster placement at the time of the order and those that are living under other care arrangements.

Number of placements and periods of care before kinship care placements

In the CLA Dataset, an episode of care describes a period of time in which a child is continuously in care, physically in the same placement with the same placement provider, and under the same legal status. This analysis does not consider changes in legal status and reports a child's care experience through placements: periods of time in which a child is continuously in care, physically in the same placement with the same placement provider. A placement move therefore represents a change in a child's physical environment, through a different placement or placement provider.

A period of care is defined as a period during which a child is continuously looked after for a duration of 24 hours or more by a LA and can consist of one or more placements. Periods of care can consist of multiple placements. Periods of care end when a child ceases to be looked after, for example

due to returning to the care of their parents/guardian, starting to live independently or transferring to the care of adult services (DfE, 2019a). This means that for a child to have two periods of care, they must have entered care, left, and re-entered at a later stage.

Journeys of children prior to entering a kinship foster care placement

Number of previous placements

For the vast majority of children, where a kinship foster care placement will ever be the most suitable care option for a child, it is realised very soon into their care history. Half of the children (50%) who were in a kinship foster placement in 2019/20 entered kinship foster care immediately upon entering care, and only one quarter of children (26%) have been in more than one care placement before entering kinship foster care. On average, children experience 1.1 placements prior to their first kinship foster care placement. The finding that half of children enter kinship foster care immediately is likely influenced by the legal requirement of LAs to consider care placements with kin before any other kind (s. 17(1)(b) and s.22C(6)(a) of the Children Act 1989).



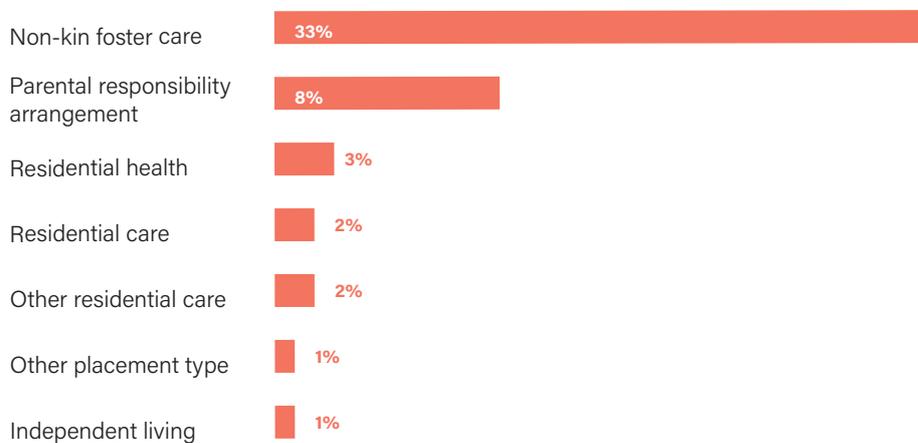
Approximately 11% of children in kinship foster care in 2019/20 experience their first kinship foster placement after re-entering care, i.e. in a second or subsequent period of care.

Types of placements experienced before entering kinship foster care

Figure 16 shows a breakdown of placement types experienced by children before entering kinship foster care. Non-kin foster care is the most common placement to experience before kinship foster care: 33% of children who lived in kinship foster care in 2019/20 had a non-kin foster care placement prior to their first kinship foster care placement; when restricting to the sample of children who had at least one placement prior to their first kinship foster care placement, this rises to

more than half of children. Other types of care placements are more rare: 8% of children were placed with someone who had parental responsibility prior to being in kinship foster care.¹⁶ This is the second most common placement type. Findings above show 50% of children have placements before their first kinship foster care placement; given the legal requirement of LAs to consider care placements with kin before any other kind (s.17(1)(b) and s.22C(6)(a) of the Children Act 1989), this raises a need to understand how and why a significant number of children are being placed with carers who are not kin before living in kinship foster care.

Figure 16: Share of children in kinship foster care who experienced each placement type before entering kinship foster care

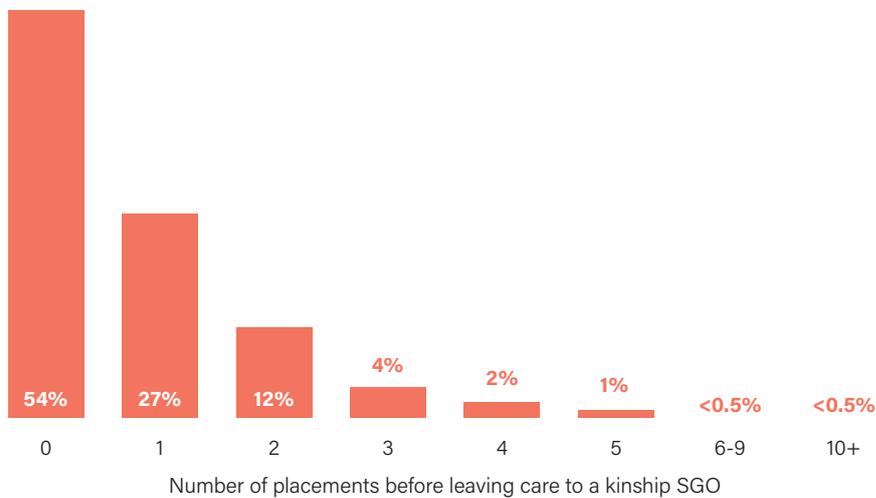


Percentages are determined based on all children who were in their first kinship foster placement in 2019/20. Not all placement types where at least one child had a placement before entering kinship foster care are presented on the graph: this is where statistical disclosure policies prevent revealing headcounts, or percentages are negligible. The placement types excluded are: placement for adoption, placement in a secure unit, placement in a young offenders' institute or prison, where a child's whereabouts unknown, placement in a residential employment setting, placement in temporary accommodation and placement in refuge.

¹⁶ Placement code P1 in the CLA Dataset: Placed with own parent(s) or other person(s) with parental responsibility.



Figure 17: The percentage of children who left care through an SGO in 2019/20 based on the number of placements, excluding their final care placement



Journeys of children prior to leaving care to a kinship special guardian

Number of previous placements

Over 80% of children who left care to a kinship special guardian in 2019/20 experienced no more than one placement move before the SGO was granted; more than half of children (54%) had only been in a single placement. For the vast majority of children, where a kinship care placement will ever be the most suitable care option for a child, it is realised very soon into a child's care history. Approximately 8% of children who left care to a kinship special guardian in 2019/20 did so after re-entering care, i.e. after a second or subsequent period of care. Wade et al. (2014) similarly report 90% of children leaving care to a special guardian are leaving care for the first time.

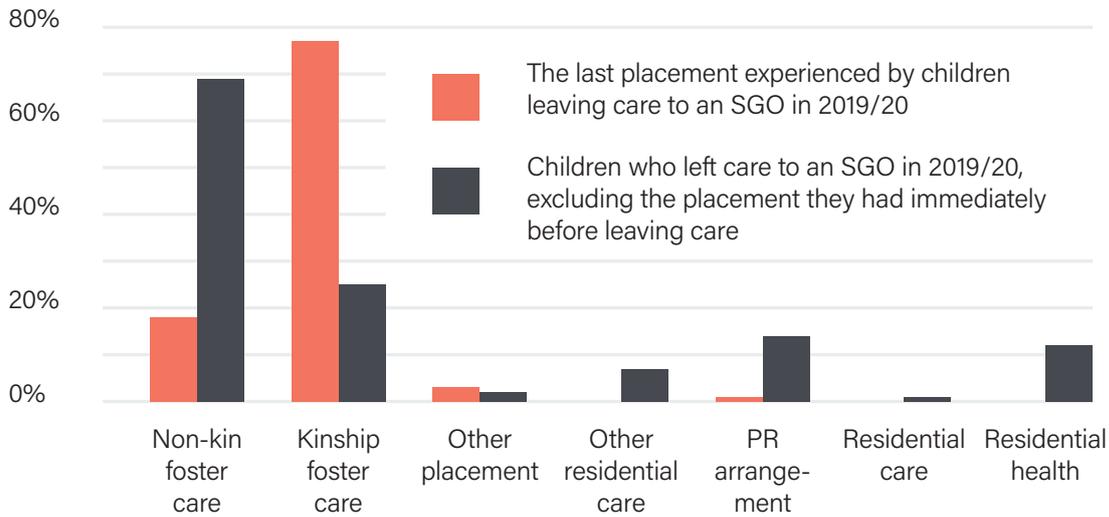
Types of placements experienced before leaving care to a kinship special guardian

Figure 18 focuses on the sample of children who left care to a kinship special guardian in 2019/20. It shows the breakdown of placements experienced up to but excluding a child's final placement before leaving care (subsample of n=1,769 who had at least two care placements before leaving care to a kinship special guardian) and the final placement experienced by children immediately before leaving care to a kinship special guardian.

Amongst the children who experience more than one placement prior to leaving care to a kinship special guardian, it is common to experience a non-kin foster care placement while in care (69%). Almost a quarter of children were placed with their own parent(s) or other person(s) with parental responsibility whilst they were in care and 14% were in a different kinship foster care placement prior to their last placement.



Figure 18: Placement types experienced immediately before leaving care to a kinship special guardian in 2019/20 and excluding the last placement before leaving care, broken down by type of placement



Other placements are those marked with code Z1 in the CLA Dataset (must be listed on a schedule sent to DfE with annual submission). Placement types have been removed where values are suppressed for statistical disclosure purposes for all columns. These are: adoption, placement order, secure units, young offenders' institutes or prison, whereabouts unknown, residential employment.

Journeys after entering kinship care

Thus far in this report, analysis has focused on the sample of children who lived in kinship foster care or left care to a kinship special guardian in 2019/20. To understand children's care journeys and later outcomes after experiencing kinship care, we need to adopt a different sampling method. The sample used hereafter are children born between March 2001 and April 2002, who hence turned 18 in the period between March 2019 to April 2020, and ever lived in kinship foster care or left care to a kinship special guardian. In doing so we are able to track children's entire care history from age 0 to 18 and their wider outcomes at age 16 and 18. This sampling methodology is limited as explained in the

'Methodology' sections, and results may differ for children in younger cohorts.

Journeys after kinship foster placements

Overall care history

Although only half of children who turned 18 in 2019/20 and ever experienced a kinship foster care remained in care for 2.1 years (766 days) or more, the average total time spent in care was 3.6 years (1,306 days); this is around 9 months longer than the average for children who live in any type of placement whilst in care.

Throughout their time in care, children who turned 18 in 2019/20 and who ever lived in kinship foster care moved from one care

Table 3: Distribution of the total time children spend in care (in days)

	1st Quartile	Median	Mean	3rd Quartile	Sample
Total time spent in care	291	766	1,306	1,847	3,676



Table 4: The percentage of children from the kinship foster care cohort with placements experienced after their first kinship care placement

Placements experienced after first kinship care placement	Children born 2001/02 who ever had a kinship foster care placement
0	46% (1,680)
1-3	38% (1,390)
4+	16% (610)
Average number	1.78
Sample size	3,676

placement to another 2.9 times; this is slightly higher than the national average of children who had any care placement type whilst in care (equal to 2.0). Nonetheless, kinship foster care placements can offer a high degree of placement stability for some children: 27% of children who turned 18 in 2019/20 had only a single kinship foster placement as their only placement while in care. Another 21% experienced only one placement either before or after going into kinship foster care (11% and 10%, respectively).

Children who live in kinship foster care therefore typically spend longer in care and move placements more frequently throughout their childhood than those who do not live in kinship foster care at all whilst in care. This could be influenced by differing care journeys, for example that children who live in kinship foster care at any point typically enter care younger than average, which reduces comparability.

Duration of placements

Kinship foster care placements are typically longer than care placements of any other type: the average kinship foster care placement has a length of approximately 1.5 years, whilst other placements experienced by children who ever live in kinship foster care (among other placement types)

average less than a year in length (314 days). However, children who have kinship foster care placements among placements of another type (n=2,570) typically spend longer (around 41 months longer) in other placements throughout their total time in care. This suggests children have few, long kinship foster care placements amongst a greater number of shorter non-kinship foster care placements. This holds true when excluding children who have ever left care to a kinship special guardian in addition to experiencing kinship foster care. Please see the appendix for the corresponding tables.

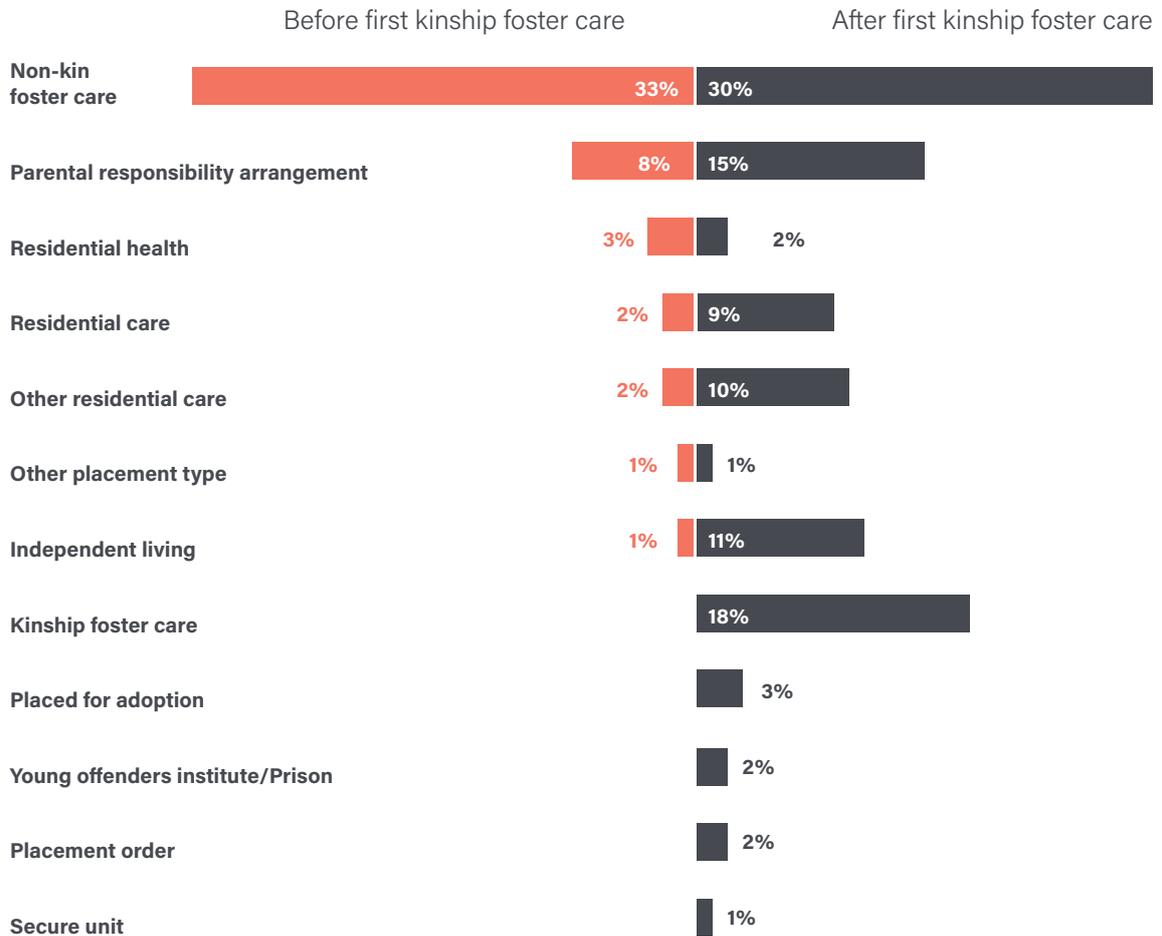
Number of placements and periods of care after kinship foster care placements

Once children enter kinship foster care they tend to experience a high degree of placement stability. Almost half of all children (46%) who were born in 2001/02 and have ever had a kinship foster placement had no other placements afterwards. The type of placements experienced after kinship foster care for the remaining 54% of children from the kinship foster cohort are discussed in the next section.

Further, 87% of children never leave and re-enter care after their first kinship foster care placement. This could consist of children who remained in one placement or remained in



Figure 19: Types of placements experienced before and after a child's first kinship foster care placement



care continuously until 18 when they 'aged out' of care, or children who left care at some point and never subsequently re-entered.

Type of placements after kinship foster care placements

Since over half of all children in our cohort experience at least one additional placement after their first kinship foster placement (54%), it is important to establish which kind of placements children experience afterwards. Figure 19 below shows what proportion of children experienced different placement types after their first kinship foster care placement.

It is common for children to live in the care of relatives or strangers in a family home

environment throughout subsequent care placements. Most children who do not remain in their kinship foster placement go into non-kin foster care placement at some point after their first kinship foster placement, with three in ten children (30%) who ever live in kinship foster care having a non-kin foster placement after their first kinship foster care placement. Nearly one fifth of children who ever live in kinship foster care (18%) have at least one more kinship foster placement during their time in care, and 15% of children experienced care placements with their own parents or another person(s) with parental responsibility.

Placements outside of a family environment are far more common for children to



Table 5: The proportion of kinship foster care placements ending in 2019/20 due to specific reasons

Type of placement	Share of placements ending in 2019/20
Remains in care - new episode	42% (3,500)
Kinship SGO	31% (2,530)
Returned to live with parents/relatives/ someone with parental responsibility	11% (910)
Returned to live with parents/relatives/ someone with parental responsibility	11% (910)
Other	6% (490)
Residence Order/CAO	5% (390)
Left care to live with someone with no parental responsibility	4% (300)
Aged out/independent living but no longer looked after	2% (180)
Adoption Order	x
Sample size*	8,390

* Observational unit: care placements. A child can occur multiple times where they had multiple kinship foster care placements in the year.

experience after their first kinship foster care placement than before: 9% were in a residential care placement at some point after their kinship foster placement, and 10% moved into other types of residential care placements such as unregulated children's homes or residential schools.

Reason placement changes

8,390 kinship foster care placements ended in 2019/20. Most commonly, children remained in care and changed placements (for 42% of placements ending). The second most common reason for kinship foster care placements ending was because an SGO was granted - this accounts for nearly one third (31%) of placements ending, or over half (54%) of all children leaving care after a kinship foster placement.

Journeys after kinship SGOs

Overall time spent in care

Children who turned 18 in 2019/20 and ever left care to a kinship special guardian spent an average of 2.8 years in care, less than the average for children from the same birth cohort who have been in kinship foster care. However, the time spent in care may well be different for future birth cohorts given SGOs were introduced after these children were born.

Number of placement moves

Children who leave care to a kinship special guardian experience few placement moves during their time in care, compared to all children in care. On average, a child who turned 18 in 2019/20 and who left care to a kinship special guardian experienced 1.6 placement moves while being looked after.



Number of placements and periods of care after kinship SGOs

The percentage of children who left and re-entered care at least once after leaving care to a kinship special guardian is 15%. This disruption rate may be very different for children currently leaving care to kinship special guardians, as this data only covers orders granted for children who turned 18 in 2019/20 who live in a different regulatory environment and may differ characteristically to children in 2019/20. The disruption rate differs from previous papers as it looks at the overall disruption rate until a child turns 18, rather than within a set time frame since the SGO was made. For example, a study that used the CLA Dataset found five year disruption rates for SGOs made on behalf of 5,921 children between 1 December 2005 and 31 March 2011 was 5.7% (Selwyn et al., 2014).



Outcome measures (descriptive statistics)

SDQ scores

The Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is widely used by LAs for measuring social and emotional well-being of children aged between 3-16 years old. It can be completed by a carer, social worker or teacher. All children entering the care system aged between 4-16 years old and who have been in care for 12 months or more are required to have a questionnaire completed on their behalf, which is then repeated on an annual basis. The questionnaire is categorised and scored using five subscale problems and behaviours including emotional problems, conduct/behaviour problems, inattention/hyperactivity, relationship with peers and pro-social behaviour. Scores from the subscales are accumulated to produce a total overall difficulty score. A score of 0–13 is considered 'normal', 14-16 is 'borderline', and 17-40 is a 'cause for concern' (Goodman, 1997).

Table 6 above shows the SDQ scores for children born in 2001/02 who have ever

lived in kinship foster care. These statistics should be carefully considered in light of the limited availability of SDQ scores for part of our sample. Only those children who have been in care for at least 12 months at the relevant time have to complete the SDQ score. In addition, the average SDQ scores at key stages (KS) 1, 2 and at age 16 reported may not include the same group of children, as only children who are in care at this stage and who have been in care for at least a year will have an SDQ score reported.

The scores illustrate broadly that for care-experienced children born in 2001/02, young people who have ever been in kinship foster care have similar SDQ scores at KS2 and age 16 than young people who have never been in a kinship foster placement. At KS1 however, SDQ scores are higher for children who experience kinship foster care. This suggests children who have been in care for at least a year in KS2 and ever lived in kinship foster care have higher service needs at a young age, as measured by lower levels of social and emotional well-being, than children who never live in kinship foster care. We do not report SDQ scores for children who have left

Table 6: SDQ scores at KS1, KS2 and age 16

	At KS1		At KS2		At age 16	
	Mean SDQ score	% Data missing	Mean SDQ score	% Data missing	Mean SDQ score	% Data missing
Children born 2001/02 who ever lived in kinship foster care	17.9	92%	13.4	85%	13.3	67%
Children born 2001/02 who were ever in care	13.7	96%	14.4	92%	13.3	74%



care to a kinship special guardian due to a very high prevalence of missing data over all measures (KS1, KS2 and at age 16).

NEET Status

The 'Activity' variable in the CLA Care Leavers dataset provides information regarding whether an individual is or is not in education, employment or training (EET or NEET) at age 18. The analysis of children not in education, employment or training (NEET) is severely limited by missing data: 58% of information is missing for children within the birth cohort who have ever been in kinship foster care, and 83% of information is missing for children who ever left care to a kinship special guardian. Missing data is due to restrictions for whom this information is collected for. LAs provide information about children who were previously looked after for at least 13 weeks after their 14th birthday, including some time after their 16th birthday. Children who form part of our birth cohort but do not meet this condition would thus not have any NEET status recorded. We therefore restrict analysis of NEET status at age 18 to children who qualify as a care leaver under the DfE definition, for whom around 1% of data is missing, reported in Table 7.

Of children who turned 18 in 2019/20 who ever lived in kinship foster care, 43%

(n=1,570) qualify as care leavers under DfE's definition; of this subsample, 62% of young people are in education, employment or training at age 18. Less than a quarter of children who are NEET at age 18 are NEET due to pregnancy/parenting or disability/illness; the large majority are coded as NEET owing to other circumstances. The rate of children who ever lived in kinship foster care and are in education, employment or training at age 18 is slightly lower than the rate for children who were ever in any type of care throughout their childhood.

Of children who turned 18 in 2019/20 who ever left care to a kinship special guardian, 17% (n=120) qualify as care leavers under DfE's definition; of this subsample, 66% of young people are in education, employment or training at age 18. This is similar to the rate for children who were ever in any type of care throughout their childhood.

Educational outcomes

Educational outcomes of absences, exclusions and secondary school attainment are measured for children born 2001/02 who ever had a kinship foster care placement or ever left care to a kinship special guardian. We report on educational attainment as a measure associated with long-term life outcomes (O'Higgins, Sebba & Gardner,

Table 7: Birth cohort education, employment or training status at age 18 for the sample of children who have ever been in care, and the sample of children who have ever been in kinship foster care

NEET status	Children born 2001/02 who ever lived in kinship foster care	Children born 2001/02 who ever left care to a kinship special guardian	Children born 2001/02 who were ever in care
EET	62% (980)	66% (80)	67% (7,230)
NEET	37% (580)	30% (40)	32% (3,430)
Unknown due to missing data	1% (10)	~ (0)	1% (90)
Sample	1,570	120	10,750



Table 8: Percentage of sessions missed in KS4 due to unauthorised absences relative to the number of possible sessions a child could have attended throughout KS4

	1st Quartile	Median	Mean	3rd Quartile	% Data missing	Effective sample
Children born 2001/02 who ever had a kinship foster care placement	0%	1.12%	6.67%	6.53%	26%	2,573
Children born 2001/02 who ever left care to a kinship special guardian	0%	0.65%	4.49%	3.12%	67%	634
Children born 2001/02 who were ever in care	0%	1.20%	7.50%	7.60%	44%	12,671

2021), and absences and exclusions as outcomes which provide insight to a child's participation in secondary education and are important levers of policy to target improving educational attainment (Liu, Lee & Gershenson, 2021; Thompson, Tawell & Daniels, 2021).

Educational outcomes are not available for all children. We are restricted to report outcomes for the sample of children for whom records could be linked to extracts of the National Pupil Database (NPD). The variable used to link a child's records between the CLA Dataset and the NPD is assigned when a child enters state-funded education for the first time (or upon the creation of an Education, Health and Care Plan if this is sooner) (Jay, McGrath-Lone & Gilbert, 2018), therefore records cannot be linked if a child left care for the final time before this happened. This is predominantly

explained by children entering and leaving care for the final time before they are of mandatory school age. Outcomes are also unavailable where a matching record cannot be identified in particular extracts of the NPD for unexplainable reasons.

Overall, we were able to link educational data for 82% of children (n=3,020 of 3,676 children) born 2001/02 who ever had a kinship foster care placement, 96% of children (n=690 of 724 children) born 2001/02 who ever left care to a kinship special guardian, and 65% of children (n=14,510 of 22,431) born 2001/02 who were ever in care.¹⁷ Analysis in this section is restricted to this subsample of children. However, there were different levels of missing data related to specific educational outcomes at KS4, thus the amount of missing data related to each outcome has been outlined in the relevant section.

¹⁷ The Special Guardianship Regulations 2005, introducing SGOs, came into effect from 30 December 2005 when our birth cohort were aged 4–5: the vast majority of children will have entered school by this time, therefore by the point of the order will have a linkable ID to the NPD. We attribute this explanation to a much lower missing data rate for children in the birth cohort who left care to a kinship special guardian.



Table 9: Exclusions at KS4 for children from the kinship foster care cohort and kinship SGO cohort

	Ever had a permanent exclusion in KS4	Ever had a fixed term exclusion in KS4	Sample
Children born 2001/02 who ever had a kinship foster care placement	1% (40)	29% (880)	3,020
Children born 2001/02 who ever left care to a kinship special guardian	1% (10)	26% (180)	690
All children born in 2001/02 who have ever been in care	2% (260)	28% (4,130)	14,510

Unauthorised absences

We measure attendance as the number of sessions missed due to unauthorised absences relative to the total number of possible sessions a child could have attended throughout KS4, or school Year 10 and Year 11. We report this outcome for children born 2001/02 who were ever in care, ever had a kinship foster placement while in care, or ever left care to a kinship special guardian; KS4 outcomes are measured for children who have already left care or have not entered care yet at this point because children enter at different ages and remain in care for different lengths of time. Practically however, 92% of children have entered their first kinship foster care placement (for children who ever live in kinship foster care) by age 16, therefore the vast majority of children will be in, or have left, their first kinship foster care placement by the time attendance is measured.

Children who have been in kinship foster care or left care to a kinship special guardian tend to have, on average, fewer unauthorised absences at KS4 compared to the national average of all children with care experience. Children born 2001/02 who ever left care to a kinship special guardian have much lower

rates of unauthorised absences compared to all children in care and those who have experienced kinship foster care: on average, they miss approximately 4% of all sessions in KS4 (approximately equivalent to 8.5 school days each academic year).

The average rate of unauthorised absences for children born 2001/02 who ever had a kinship foster care placement is 6.67%, approximately equivalent to 13 school days each academic year. Three-quarters of children have less than 12 school days of unauthorised absences, however, indicating that the mean rate is skewed (pushed upwards) by a small minority of children who have considerably higher rates of unauthorised absences. Future analysis to understand who these children are and what causes persistent unauthorised absence is important to identify what changes can be made to positively influence children's school attendance.



Exclusions

This section covers permanent exclusions and fixed term exclusions for children at KS4. Fixed-term exclusions are defined periods of time in which a child cannot enter the grounds of a school they have been excluded from; this can be for a cumulative maximum of 45 days within an academic year from all schools a child is excluded from (The School Discipline (Pupil Exclusions and Reviews) (England) Regulations, 2012). A permanent exclusion means a child is permanently expelled from a school for severe or persistent breaches of policy; statutory guidance requires headteachers to avoid “as far as possible” permanently excluding any looked after child because children in care may be particularly vulnerable to its consequences (DfE, 2017a); it is important to note this protection does not extend to children living in kinship special guardianship who have left care. Data available does not include “informal exclusions”, whereby schools temporarily transfer students to alternative provision to improve their behaviour (DfE, 2013; Malcolm, 2018).

A child will have a record in the exclusions extract of the NPD for any academic year in which they have any reported fixed term or permanent exclusion. Many children do not have exclusions (and thus do not appear in the exclusions NPD extract), therefore we estimate the prevalence of exclusions at KS4 among the samples of children who have matched records in other NPD extracts (detailed above).

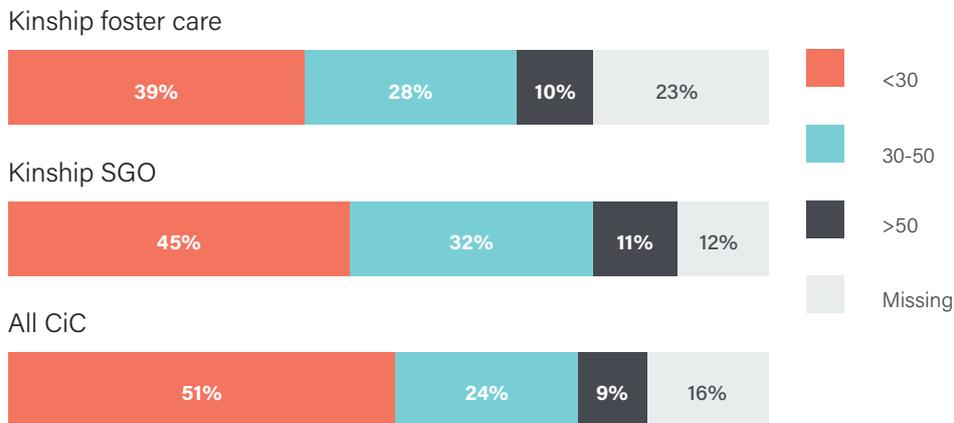
Nearly three in ten children (29%) born in 2001/02 who have ever had a kinship foster care placement experienced a fixed term exclusion in KS4, a rate similar to that for children who were ever in care throughout childhood. There is a slightly lower incidence of fixed term exclusions among children who

ever left care to a kinship special guardian, with around one in four children (26%) experiencing at least one fixed term exclusion in KS4.

Permanent exclusions are much less common among all children, with only 1% of all children born in 2001/02 who have ever been in kinship foster care or who have left care to a kinship special guardian experiencing a permanent exclusion in KS4.



Figure 20: The proportion of children who achieved an Attainment 8 score of less than 30, between 30 and 50, and more than 50 in each sample



Attainment

This outcome focuses on Attainment 8 and Progress 8 scores as measures for educational attainment. Attainment 8 measures the achievement of a pupil across eight qualifications, including English and maths GCSES, three GCSE subjects which contribute to the English Baccalaureate (excluding English and maths), and three additional GCSEs or non-GCSE equivalent subjects approved by the Department for Education (DfE, 2016). Progress 8 aims to capture a pupil's progress from the end of primary school to the end of secondary school relative to their peers by grouping a child into 1 of 34 prior attainment groups using their key stage 2 (KS2) score, and taking the net value of their Attainment 8 score against the average Attainment 8 score for their prior attainment group (DfE, 2020c).

Results are reported for the children born in 2001/02 who ever lived in kinship foster care or left care to a kinship special guardian and for whom data is available. Data is missing for 23% of children who ever lived in kinship foster care, for 12% of children who ever left care to a kinship special guardian, and 16% of

children who were ever in care. Information is largely missing where no identifier was available to link school records to a child's social care record, usually because a child left care for the final time before starting school. Results are therefore restricted in interpretation to children who ever entered state-funded education and were in care when they were of school-age.

Attainment at KS4 for children who have been in kinship foster care is on average similar to the average attainment for all children who have ever been in care. Children who left care to a kinship special guardian tend to have slightly higher academic attainment at KS4 compared to other children who have been in care. The results are discussed in more detail below. The analysis does not suggest that any differences in educational outcomes (or the lack thereof) are the consequence of the kinship care placement. Children may go into kinship placements with very different educational outcomes already, or other underlying differences in characteristics that may affect educational outcomes that are not considered in this analysis. More research is required to assess the direct effect of kinship



care placements on educational outcomes for children looked after in England.

Children who have experienced kinship foster care and who were born in 2001/02 have similar attainment at KS4 to all children who have ever been in care. The average Attainment 8 score for children born 2001/02 who ever had a kinship foster care placement is 23, which for example could be achieved from five standard pass grades in GCSE subjects.¹⁸ Children born 2001/02 who have ever lived in kinship foster care therefore typically achieved higher than children born in the same year who have ever been in any type of care, who attained 20.9 on average. However, attainment is still lower than the 2016 average score for non-looked after children (equal to 48.1) and children in need (equal to 22.6) (DfE, 2017b).

The national average Attainment 8 score for children with special educational needs is 30; 38% of children born 2001/2 who ever lived in kinship foster care achieved at or above this score. Approximately one in ten children who have been in kinship foster care (10%) achieved higher than the national average Attainment 8 score for all pupils in England (equal to 50) (GOV.UK, 2021b).¹⁹

Children who were born in 2001/02 and who left care to a kinship special guardian tend to achieve higher educational attainment at KS4 compared to all children born in the same year who have ever been in care. The average Attainment 8 score is higher than for all children who have been in care, equal to 26, and more than four in ten children (43%) who left care to a kinship special guardian achieved at or above the national average Attainment 8 score for children with special

educational needs. Approximately one in ten children who left care to a kinship special guardian (11%) achieved at least the national average Attainment 8 score for all pupils in England (equal to 50) (GOV.UK, 2021b).

The attainment results for children from our birth cohort who left care to a kinship special guardian may not be representative of attainment of the wider population of all children on kinship SGOs. SGOs were only introduced in December 2005, therefore children in this birth cohort could only leave care to a kinship special guardian at age four to five or older. However in 2019/20 half of children were granted their SGO aged four or younger due to its availability, indicating that our findings from our birth cohort may reflect a very different population to children leaving care to a kinship special guardian than in more recent years.

Analysis of younger birth cohorts is further complicated by the fact that, because many children leave care to a kinship special guardian before they are of school age, many do not have a pupil matching reference (PMR) before they leave care. This prevents matching to school records: for our snapshot population, we could only match 51% of children to the school census. Data linkage of children who leave care before they start school should be improved to allow a comparison of educational outcomes for children who leave care earlier than our birth cohort.

More than three-quarters (75%) of children born 2001/02 who ever had a kinship foster care placement or left care to a kinship special guardian have negative Progress 8 scores. This means that on average a child who experiences kinship foster care has less

18 Grade 4 is considered a standard pass by the Department for Education (DfE, 2019a)

19 Our cohort of children who turned 18 in 2019/20 will have taken their GCSEs in the academic year of 2017-2018 rather than 2019-2020. In this year, the average Attainment 8 scores were slightly lower, at 44.4 across all pupils and 27.2 for those with SEN (DfE, 2019b)



than average attainment at KS4 than their peers who had similar attainment to them in KS2 assessments. Around one in seven children experience an intervention from children's services at any point between school Years 1-11, only 13% of whom enter care at their highest level of intervention (Berridge et al., 2020). Progress 8 for a child in our sample is therefore calculated by comparing their Attainment 8 to the scores of a prior attainment group which is dominated in volume by children who never experienced intervention by children's services; children in care are commonly exposed to adverse experiences before entering or whilst in care which provides a barrier to school development (O'Higgins, Luke & Strand, 2021), and could explain why the majority of our sample make less progress than their peers. The full table on Progress 8 scores can be found in Appendix 4.



DISCUSSION

Summary of findings

This report provides descriptive analyses of two groups of children: children who have ever been in a kinship foster placement and children who have left care to a kinship special guardian. The report explores the characteristics of both groups, their journeys into kinship care and after kinship care, and their outcomes at key stage 4. While the analysis provides descriptive statistics, the findings do not imply any causality, i.e. we do not imply that certain outcomes may be the consequence of being in kinship care.

We find a high degree of regional variation in the use of kinship foster care placements and of kinship special guardianship. The rate of kinship foster care placements relative to all children in care in a LA ranges from 4% to 39%. The rate of children leaving care to a kinship special guardian relative to all children leaving care ranges from 2% to 27%. The cause of the strong regional variation is beyond the focus of this report. However, it raises questions as to how different LAs utilise kinship care options, whether kinship care options are explored differently across LAs and which factors may be associated with the large regional variation across LAs. Future research should also consider potential differences in (financial) support provided to kinship carers across LAs.

Children in kinship foster care and children who leave care to a kinship special guardian typically enter care at a younger age compared to all children who are ever in

care. Where kinship foster care or kinship special guardianship will ever be the most suitable care option for a child, it is realised soon into their care history. Children therefore enter kinship foster care or kinship special guardianship when they are young; on average, children are age six when they enter their first kinship foster care placement; on average, SGOs are granted when children are age five.

We find that children of minority ethnic backgrounds are, on average, under-represented in kinship foster care and in kinship special guardianship compared to their representation among all children in care: half as many Black children live in kinship foster care or kinship special guardianship than we would expect if they were represented equivalently to their care population, 40% and 60% fewer Asian children live in kinship foster care and kinship special guardianship respectively, and 75% fewer children from other ethnic backgrounds live in kinship foster care or kinship special guardianship.

Contrary to these results, previous research using 2011 Census data has identified a considerable overrepresentation of children from ethnic minority ethnic groups living with relatives in the absence of parents (Wijedasa, 2015). However, kinship care arrangements identified by Wijedasa (2015) in the national census do not distinguish between formal and informal kinship care as defined in this report. Consequently, the author's results, in conjunction with ours, suggests that the overrepresentation of children from minority ethnic groups in kinship care is derived



from informal kinship care arrangements which remains unobserved in the current study, whilst children from minority ethnic backgrounds remain underrepresented in formal kinship care arrangements. The reasons and associated factors for this underrepresentation should be explored further in future research.

Children who leave care to a kinship special guardian experience a relatively high level of placement stability as measured by the number of placements they have before leaving care, with a majority of children (54%) never changing care placements before the SGO is granted. Children who only live in kinship foster placements typically experience a greater number of placement moves, but analysis suggests that many children who live in kinship foster care do experience high stability: over a quarter of children (27%) stay in a single kinship foster placement throughout their entire care history.

Most children who left care to a kinship special guardian in 2019/20 were in a kinship foster care placement prior to leaving care (77%), and were in care by an Interim Care Order (68%).

While educational outcomes and SDQ scores at KS4 for children who have experienced kinship foster care are similar to those of the overall care population, children who leave care to a kinship special guardian tend to have higher educational attainment at KS4. Whether the higher educational attainment for children living in kinship special guardianship is possibly related to high placement stability or permanency at a young age is beyond the scope of this report but should be explored further. These findings do not imply that kinship care may or may not improve outcomes for children compared to other placement types, as it does not account

for potential underlying differences between children in kinship foster placements and children in other placements. For example, it may be that children who go into kinship foster care have worse educational outcomes compared to other children in care prior to entering a kinship foster placement, and that their educational outcomes improve while in kinship foster care.

Limitations

There are limitations to this study, and it is important to consider the findings in light of these.

Firstly, this study excludes several kinship care arrangements from its definition of kinship care and focuses purely on formal kinship foster care and children who leave care to a kinship special guardian. This decision was purposefully made in order to focus on specific settings and do justice to the nuanced experiences of children who live in them, rather than to look at too many categories at once. However, this inclusion criteria means that findings from this report should not be extrapolated beyond these types of kinship care settings.

Secondly, there are limitations involved with the administrative datasets used to obtain these findings. We acknowledge that even when focusing on kinship foster care and kinship special guardianship, there is an abundance of variation in the experiences of children in kinship care placements that does not get captured within administrative datasets. Furthermore, the annual data returns collected and submitted by LAs will inevitably contain some erroneous information due to the sheer volume of data recorded and variation in interpretations, such as category of need. Moreover, restrictions on the children for whom certain information is required, such as



being in care for a minimum length of time or leaving care after a certain age, results in large amounts of missing data. This has particularly influenced the amount of data available for outcomes reported in the CLA Dataset of children in kinship special guardianship, who typically leave care very young.

Thirdly, in order to identify wider outcomes of children who live in kinship foster care and kinship special guardianship, we used a sample of children who turned 18 in 2019/20 who have ever been in these types of care. Interpretation of our results is limited because outcomes for younger cohorts may be very different as the use of formal kinship care has changed considerably over time. This is particularly the case for special guardianship: SGOs are most commonly granted for very young children (our findings show half of SGOs granted in 2019/20 were for children aged 4 or younger), however our birth cohort were aged 4–5 when the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 introducing SGOs came into effect; we therefore expect to identify a very different profile to children leaving care to a kinship special guardian today.

Fourthly, as previously stated, this study is limited to descriptive findings and does not offer any causal results. Hence, they do not illustrate any causal differences between children in kinship care compared to all children in care, nor do they indicate whether outcomes are driven by the experience of kinship care or other factors. Instead, they are limited to descriptive findings and we recommend that these results are considered in tandem to build an overall picture of the characteristics, care journeys, and outcomes of children who experience kinship care.

Lastly, outcomes are compared for all children who have ever experienced a kinship care placement, rather than those currently in a kinship care placement. While this was done intentionally to provide a picture of all children who experienced kinship care at some point while being in care, the outcomes may differ between children who have not yet entered kinship care, children who have already left kinship care, and children who are still in a kinship placement at the time of measurement.

Implications of findings

We have explored the experiences of children in kinship foster placements and children leaving care to a kinship special guardian at a national level. Our findings reveal some of the varied experiences of children in kinship care placements, and some commonalities across these groups with respect to their journeys through care and beyond.

Stability

These findings provide additional evidence about the placement stability of kinship care placements. A high proportion of children leave care to a kinship special guardian from a kinship foster care placement where they were on an Interim Care Order, highlighting the stability of family care possible for some children. This underlies the potential benefits of kinship special guardianship for children, with minimal disruption in these children's lives, although 15% of children who turned 18 in 2019/20 and ever left care to a kinship special guardian did return to care at some point after the SGO was granted.²⁰

²⁰ Disruption rates may differ for children in younger cohorts, influenced by factors such as a changing regulatory environment. The Children and Social Work Act 2017, for example, introduced more stringent assessment through an explicit requirement of authorities to consider the applicant's capacity to meet the child's long-term wellbeing (Harwin et al., 2019).



Children who live in kinship foster care have, on average, 2.9 placement moves throughout their care history, but almost half (46%) never move from their placement until they leave care. Children who ever have kinship foster care placements experience more placements than all children in care, but they also spend approximately nine months longer in care on average. Notably, for children who do move to different care placements, additional placements with relatives is common: a third of children go onto other kinship foster placements, and more than a quarter are placed with their own parents or another person with parental responsibility. Family centred care is common.

The high number of children going into kinship SGOs from an interim care order and the low number of placements children experience before a kinship foster placement suggests that kinship foster placements and kinship SGOs are currently used for (mainly younger) children at the beginning of their care journey. The potential for kinship foster care and kinship SGOs to also be used for children later in their care journey, if appropriate, should also be explored.

Outcomes

Our findings reveal that SEN, SDQ scores and educational outcomes at KS4 for children who have been in kinship foster care are on average similar to outcomes for all children in care, and significantly below the outcomes for all pupils in England. This suggests that policy makers and researchers need to consider what tailored support can be provided to these children and young people and their families to support them to achieve better outcomes. Research suggests kinship foster carers are significantly more disadvantaged compared to non-relative foster carers; they are more likely to be caring alone, experience financial difficulties, live in overcrowded conditions and have a disability or chronic health

condition (Farmer & Moyers, 2008; Hunt & Waterhouse, 2012; Mercer et al., 2015). Future research should explore the link between the support kinship foster carers receive, the circumstances under which children are cared for in kinship foster care, and the experiences and outcomes for children living in kinship foster care arrangements.

Children who leave care to a kinship special guardian experience on average higher levels of placement stability whilst they are in care and higher educational attainment at KS4. This supports the use of kinship special guardianship as a permanence option for children, although no causal inference of SGOs should be drawn from this finding as we expect other factors to impact children's care and wider outcomes. Further research is needed to understand potential factors that may drive differences in outcomes between kinship foster placements and kinship SGOs, particularly in light of the different levels of support available for these arrangements.

Local Authority variation

The evidence of placement stability for children living in kinship foster care and kinship special guardianship makes the regional variation discovered in this research more concerning. The prevalence of kinship foster care relative to all placement options varied from 4%-39% across LAs, whilst the prevalence of kinship special guardianship varied from 2%-27% as a mechanism for children to leave care. Among other factors, LA variation could be attributed to differences in children's specific needs, data reporting, the relationship between LA leadership and the family justice system or policy/practice approaches to kinship care. More research is urgently needed to understand this variation and, if desirable, what interventions may work to increase usage of kinship care.



Underrepresentation of some groups of children

As well as the regional variation, the under-representation of certain groups of children within kinship foster care arrangements and on kinship SGOs should be urgently considered. Asian and Black children are under-represented among children in kinship foster care and kinship special guardianship, whilst 2011 census data found over-representation of minority ethnic children in kinship care; the lack of over-representation of minority ethnic children in formal kinship arrangements in our analysis suggests that the found over-representation in the census data derives from informal kinship arrangements. It is imperative to increase certainty and understanding of these findings to identify where current systems may require improvement.



CONCLUSION

Children who live in kinship foster care and kinship special guardianship typically enter care earlier than children who never experience these placement types. Where children are placed in kinship foster care or kinship special guardianship it is realised soon into their care history. However, Black and Asian children are placed less in formal kinship care arrangements. The underrepresentation of certain groups of children within formal kinship care arrangements should be urgently considered and explored further, to ensure children and families in kinship arrangements receive the right support and to understand why the care system is placing less Black and Asian children in formal kinship care arrangements.

Our analysis also suggests that children who leave care to a kinship special guardian experience high levels of placement stability and high educational outcomes. Despite these encouraging findings, the prevalence of kinship SGOs and kinship foster placements varies greatly across LAs. Going forward, more research is needed to explore which factors are associated with the use of kinship care arrangements within LAs, and how support for kinship foster carers and kinship special guardians varies and may be improved.



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