



For family or friends who  
step up to raise a child.

# Tackling barriers to educational opportunities

Westminster Hall debate, 13 November 2024, 2.30 – 4pm  
Tabled by Tony Vaughan MP

## Summary

- **The government's mission to break down the barriers to opportunity must include a focus on those growing up in kinship care.** Our evidence shows that too many children raised in kinship care with relatives and family friends are not getting the educational support they need to help them learn well at school and thrive into adulthood.
- **Children in kinship care have had similar experiences to those who enter local authority care, but can expect to receive far less formalised support in education or with their special educational needs.** Given the legacy of childhood trauma and the impact this has on learning and behaviour, the government should prioritise the long-overlooked needs and experiences of kinship children and equalise support.
- The debate provides an opportunity to push the government on their commitments to improving support for kinship children ahead of the Children's Wellbeing Bill.

## About kinship care

Kinship care is when a child lives full-time or most of the time with a relative or family friend, usually because their parents are not able to care for them.

The best estimate we have suggests there are **more than 141,000 children in kinship care in England and Wales** – three times the number in unrelated foster care. Grandparents are most commonly kinship carers, but they can also be older siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins and family friends. Kinship care can take many forms, and the rights, responsibilities and support available to kinship families depends largely on the type of arrangement they have.

[Learn more about kinship care](#)

A kinship carer provides a stable and loving home life where a child can grow and develop in a safe, positive environment. They also get to stay in their existing family network, which helps maintain their sense of identity and family relationships. As a result, evidence suggests that **children in kinship care go on to achieve better outcomes across education, health and employment than their peers in local authority care.**

**It makes sense to invest in kinship care:** it delivers good experiences and outcomes for children and families, as well as cost savings for the public purse. Our evidence shows that, for every 1000 children looked after in well-supported kinship care rather than local authority care, the state saves £40 million per year and increases the lifetime earnings of those children by £20 million.

## Barriers to educational opportunities for children in kinship care

The key findings and recommendations below come from our report – *Forgotten: Support for kinship children's education and mental health* – published in August this year and based on responses from more than 1,600 kinship carers across England and Wales to our 2023 annual survey.

[Read our \*Forgotten\* report](#)

### A lack of comparable educational support to children in care

**Only around half of kinship children are reported to be getting the support they need in education.**

Children looked after in local authority care, as well as those who were previously looked after, rightly receive additional support through the Virtual School and designated teacher to help them progress well in school, and are eligible for additional funding managed by the school or local authority through Pupil Premium Plus.

However, the same support isn't extended to all kinship children: **2 in 5 kinship carers told us they weren't aware of their kinship children receiving any form of educational support, rising to 3 in 5 for those with informal arrangements.** A complex and unfair hierarchy of eligibility dictates whether kinship children receive help with their learning, despite their similar needs and experiences to their peers in care.

*"It's a constant fight to get the right support in a school setting. I feel as if I am not listened to as a kinship carer. I also believe there is stigma attached to the children or teachers do not have the relevant training in supporting children like ours."*

**Aunt and special guardian**

### High prevalence of special educational needs, but less formalised support

**Nearly half of kinship children in England are reported to have a special educational need or disability (SEND).** This includes 31% with diagnosed or suspected social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) and more than 1 in 10 with diagnosed Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). As a result, kinship children are around five times more likely than all children to be learning in a special school.

**Kinship children in England are over three times more likely to have an education, health and care (EHC) plan than all pupils.** However, despite prevalence of special educational needs similar to children looked after in local authority care, far fewer children than would be expected given this prevalence receive through the SEND system. This gap between need and formalised support means the ongoing crisis in the SEND system is likely to be disproportionately disadvantaging children in kinship care.

The legacy of childhood trauma is at the core of children's experiences: **almost half of kinship carers told us their children's adverse experiences in childhood had negatively impacted on their ability to cope in education.** Kinship carers tell us they want to see better recognition and understanding, and additional training and support for teachers and others which recognises how kinship children's experiences impact on behaviour and their ability to cope in the classroom.

*"I learnt about adverse childhood experiences and thought 'that's what this is' and realised he needed to learn healthy ways to manage his feelings. The local authority finally organised for him to see an occupational therapist. But we were stunned when she thought he would become violent and advised us to think about placing him in a secure specialist unit. I cried my eyes out. This wasn't support!"*

**Sarah, aunt and kinship carer to her nephew**

## What we want to see

The UK Government should harmonise the existing patchwork of support for kinship children in England and introduce new legislation which guarantees equalised levels of support between children in all forms of kinship care and children looked after in local authority care.

### Virtual Schools

Whilst the Virtual School Head (VSH) role extension for kinship children delivered through last year's National Kinship Care Strategy is welcome, it continues to embed a hierarchy of support for kinship children based on legal order. The Department for Education should move away from further stepped extensions of the Virtual School Head role accompanied by annual grant funding and instead deliver new legislation and guidance which cohesively outlines how appropriate advice and support should be made available to all kinship families.

### Pupil Premium Plus

The government should extend eligibility for support via Pupil Premium Plus to include all children in kinship care, and issue new guidance on how local authorities and schools can best deliver support tailored to this group. In the interim, to maximise the number of kinship children in England who receive support funded by Pupil Premium Plus, schools, Virtual Schools and local authorities should take additional steps to boost awareness of the process for declaring eligibility through the School Census amongst the families of children they support or have previously supported.

### School admissions

Priority school admissions should be extended to all children in kinship care.

### Further and higher education

Further and higher education providers should extend support offers for care-experienced students to those with experience of kinship care.

### Formalised SEND support

Future SEND reform in England, including a revised SEND Code of Practice, should consider an automatic entitlement to an EHC needs assessment for children in kinship care. At minimum, it should encourage local authorities to recognise the elevated prevalence of SEND amongst kinship children similar to looked after children and ensure there are no delays to EHC needs or other assessments.

### Children's Wellbeing Bill

Kinship children and their elevated prevalence of SEND and mental health difficulties should be recognised within the forthcoming Children's Wellbeing Bill, as well as plans to deliver specialist mental health professionals in every school and Young Futures Hubs for drop-in mental health support in communities across England.

## During the debate

The debate offers an opportunity for MPs to highlight the absence of equitable support for children in kinship care which tackles their barriers to educational opportunity, and push the Minister on the government's commitments to improving support for kinship children. **We are grateful for those able to share our research and recommendations, and use the suggested questions below.**

- What steps is the government taking to tackle barriers to educational opportunity for children being raised by relatives and family friends in kinship care?
- Will the forthcoming Children's Wellbeing Bill include specific commitments to improve educational support for kinship children?
- What assessment has the government made of extending Pupil Premium Plus support to all children in kinship care, including those who weren't previously looked after?
- What assessment has the government made of the impact of the ongoing SEND system crisis on children in kinship care?

## #ValueOurLove

Every child needs love. That is why when parents can't look after a child, it's often best if they can be brought up by a grandparent, uncle, aunt, sibling or a family friend. Someone they know, who can provide the love and stability children need, rather than grow up in the care system. This is kinship care.



Kinship's #ValueOurLove campaign is calling on the UK Government to:

- Equalise allowances between foster and kinship families.
- Equalise access to training and support between kinship carers and foster carers.
- Equalise leave between adoptive and kinship families.
- Equalise support between children in kinship care and those in care.

## Kinship families in your constituency

With more children in kinship care than local authority care nationally, we know that kinship carers are at every school gate. Discover our estimate of how many children in kinship care live in your constituency and other key information at our kinship care constituency map. Don't hesitate to get in touch if we can arrange local meetings with your kinship carer constituents so you can learn more.

[Visit our kinship care constituency map](#)

## Further information

Please visit our [kinship care policy tracker](#) to stay updated on the current status of each kinship care policy area, our verdict and what we think should happen next. You can also read our collection of [recent policy reports and briefings](#) for further information and recommendations.

Please download our [information pack for MPs](#) for everything you need to know about how to support kinship families in your constituency and in Parliament. You can also visit our [kinship care constituency map](#) to learn more about the kinship families in your constituency.

[Learn about our policy and influencing work](#)

## About Kinship

We are Kinship. The leading kinship care charity in England and Wales. We're here for kinship carers – friends or family who step up to raise a child when their parents aren't able to. Together, let's commit to change for kinship families.

[Discover our support for kinship families in your constituency](#)

## Contact

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