



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

# SEND education support

Westminster Hall debate, 2.30pm on Tues 25 Feb 2025,  
led by Jenny Riddell-Carpenter MP

## Summary

- Our evidence suggests that nearly half (47%) of kinship children have some kind of special educational need or disability, most commonly social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH). This is substantially higher than the proportion of all pupils with SEN in England and broadly similar to other social care groups, including children looked after in local authority care.
- Our *Forgotten report* finds that only around half of kinship children (54%) are getting the support they need in education. Despite their elevated prevalence of SEND, kinship children are less likely to be receiving formalised support in school, including through an education, health and care (EHC) plan. This means the ongoing crisis in SEND is likely to be disproportionately impacting on children in kinship care.
- We want to see the government equalise educational support between children in kinship care and children in care, recognising their similar experiences of trauma, separation and loss and the impact this has on their learning and education.

## Special educational needs amongst children in kinship care

Nearly half (47%) of kinship children in England are reported to have a special educational need or disability (SEND). This is substantially higher than the proportion of all pupils with special educational needs in England (17.3%). 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.

Experiences of childhood adversity before coming into kinship care have a substantial impact on children's development. The higher prevalence of SEND, and particularly SEMH, amongst children in kinship care reflects the legacy that childhood trauma has on a child's ability to cope well in school and beyond.

This can lead to significant ongoing challenges for their social, emotional and physical wellbeing – and both the ability of their kinship carers, and teachers and school staff, to manage and support this in the home and educational environments respectively. Almost half (48%) of kinship carers told us that their children's adverse experiences in childhood had negatively impacted on their ability to cope in education.

*"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, Surrey**

In our [2024 annual survey](#), 13% of kinship carers told us they were concerned about their ability to continue caring for their children in the next year. The most common reason given for this concern was managing kinship child(ren)'s social, emotional and/or mental health difficulties (72%). Nearly 1 in 5 (17%) of kinship carers said they had been unable to take on the care of a brother or sister to a kinship child in their care, and nearly half (49%) of this group noted challenges managing social, emotional and/or mental health difficulties (49%) as a reason for this.

## Support for children in kinship care with SEND

**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 support through the SEND system. 30% of children looked after for more than 12 months have an EHC plan – double the proportion of children in kinship care – and a similar level is seen in children in need (28%).

The SEND Code of Practice recognises the importance of addressing special educational needs in the stability of looked after children's lives and says that local authorities *"should be particularly aware of the need to avoid any delays for looked after children and carry out the EHC needs assessment in the shortest possible timescale"*, but this is only relevant for the small group of children in kinship care who are looked after by the local authority in kinship foster care. The vast majority of children in other

The ongoing crisis in SEND support is therefore likely to be disproportionately disadvantaging children in kinship care and too their carers who continue to battle for the support they need. We hear from a number of kinship carers who find the process of getting a diagnosis and/or support through an EHC plan to be immensely difficult, often having exhausted any and all available support available from the school or elsewhere before this point, with multiple agencies, actors and processes acting as barriers to securing the help they felt their children needed.

After years of battling, Jo has managed to get an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan, which means her kinship child will finally get classroom support for a couple of hours every day.

*"However, there's still nothing for her out of school hours, or in the school holidays when she struggle the most. And I fear things will get worse with secondary school approaching and hormones kicking in. We absolutely love her and would not want our lives to be any different but it's really hard. The constant fighting to get support is exhausting. She should get the help she needs."*

**Jo, kinship carer for a relative's child, Huddersfield**

[Read more about SEND support and full case studies in our \*\*Forgotten report\*\*](#)

## Recommendations

Kinship's [#ValueOurLove campaign](#) is pushing the government to deliver additional legislation which builds on the [Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill](#) to equalise educational support between children in kinship care and those in local authority care.

- The UK government should harmonise the existing patchwork of educational support for kinship children and extend access to support through across the Virtual School, Pupil Premium Plus and the designated teacher.
- 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. This and statutory guidance on kinship care 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.

- Teachers and education professionals (e.g. SENCOs, teaching assistants, education welfare officers etc) should receive initial and ongoing training on the needs, strengths and experiences of children in kinship care and their elevated SEND and SEMH prevalence.
- Statutory and wider data collection should be improved to build understanding of the number, characteristics and educational outcomes of children in kinship care. This should include utilising the School Census and undertaking analysis across existing MoJ and DfE datasets to understand the settings in which different groups of kinship children are learning and their SEND prevalence.
- The government should encourage local authorities to signpost in their kinship local offers to appropriate advice, training and support around SEND, including Kinship's [online advice guides](#) and [relevant workshops](#) on educational support and navigating the SEND and EHCP process.

**For more detailed recommendations, please see our submission to the [Education Committee's 'Solving the SEND crisis' inquiry](#) and our [Forgotten](#) report.**

### During the debate

MPs should use the debate to highlight the elevated but poorly understood and supported SEND needs amongst children in kinship care. We're grateful to all those able to share our evidence and recommendations to push the government on their commitments to improving educational support for children in kinship care beyond the [Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill](#).

### Further information

Please visit our [kinship care policy tracker](#) to stay updated and read our collection of recent [policy reports and briefings](#) for further information and recommendations.

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

### 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. There are [more than 130,000 children in kinship care](#) in England – that's three times the number in mainstream foster care. Grandparents are most commonly kinship carers, but they can also be older siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins and family friends.

### 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.

### Contact

Sam Turner, Associate Director of Policy and Public Affairs: [sam.turner@kinship.org.uk](mailto:sam.turner@kinship.org.uk)