



Policy paper

Review of children in need

Updated 17 June 2019

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We have reviewed support for children in need of help and protection to help us understand why their educational outcomes are so poor and what further support they might require. These are children who need the support of a social worker.

We have developed the evidence to understand:

- what makes a difference to the educational outcomes of children in need
- what works in practice to improve those outcomes

The review

The review's final publication, [Help, protection, education: concluding the children in need review](#) summarises our learning, outlines our conclusions and commits us to take action following the review to improve the educational outcomes of children who have needed a social worker.

The review's interim publication, [Improving the educational outcomes of children in need of help and protection: interim findings](#) explains barriers to education faced by these children and outlines what is needed in practice to improve their educational outcomes.

Through the review we have published 3 sets of data and analysis:

- in June 2019, [Children in need of help and protection: children in need review final data and analysis](#), linking Department for Education data sets over 6 years

to look at children in need of help and protection, their characteristics, the pathways they take through children's services, and their educational outcomes in the short and long term

- in December 2018, [Children in need of help and protection: preliminary longitudinal analysis](#), linking data sets to look at this over 3 years
- in March 2018, [Children in need of help and protection: data and analysis](#), to look initially at characteristics of children in need of help and protection and their educational outcomes

Action we will take

Our ambition for children who have needed a social worker is the same as for any other child. They should be safe, benefit from education, and have the opportunity to succeed.

It is the important role of children's social care to promote safety, stability and engagement in education for these children, through protecting children and strengthening families. It is the equally important role of schools to provide children with a world-class education. Where children have experienced adversity and trauma, or are disabled, achieving high standards in education often requires support to recognise and overcome barriers that they face to attendance, learning, behaviour and mental health.

In improving the educational outcomes of children who have needed a social worker, the review's conclusion commits us to take action across 4 areas:

- to increase visibility and recognition of children in education
- to keep children in education, so that they benefit from the safety and security that this can offer
- to raise aspiration for children to realise their potential
- to ensure that children receive effective, evidence-based support in and around school

This sets the direction for long-term action, which we must take working together with schools, social care, health, police and others. Already, the government is working to prevent and address the reasons why children need a social worker. The review has ended, but this is not the conclusion of our work. The evidence from the review will continue to inform policy and practice.

Key findings from our data and analysis

The evidence showed children in need, on average have poorer outcomes at every stage of education than their peers. They start behind other children in the

early years and have a widening attainment gap throughout school. They are also more likely than other children not to be in education, employment or training (NEET) after age 18.

This publication presents analysis on an expanded longitudinal dataset, which links social care records between 2012 to 2013 and 2017 to 2018. We analyse the characteristics and interactions of children receiving social care services over this period and their educational outcomes from early years through to higher education. We present regression analysis exploring the association between their social care history and GCSE attainment, controlling for a range of other factors.

Our key findings include:

- at least 1.6 million children needed a social worker at some point between 2012 to 2013 and 2017 to 2018 – equivalent to 1 in 10 of all children
- in all but 500 schools across England, there are pupils who have needed a social worker at some point between 2012 to 2013 to 2017 to 2018
- children who have needed a social worker have poorer educational outcomes at every stage of education than those who have not, and taking account of other factors associated with attainment, are up to 50% less likely to achieve a strong pass in English and maths GCSEs
- children who are living at home with family on a child in need or child protection plan are just as likely to do poorly in education as looked after children
- beyond school, those who had needed a social worker in the year of GCSEs are less likely to enter higher education at age 18 and by age 21, half of these young people have still not achieved level 2 qualifications (GCSE or equivalent)

What we did through the review

Through the review, we conducted a broad programme of qualitative evidence gathering, to understand why children in need of help and protection fall behind and what helps them achieve their potential including through:

- a [call for evidence](#) which gathered over 600 responses from school and children's social care practitioners across England
- a [literature review](#) conducted by the Early Intervention Foundation
- deep dive visits to schools identified as achieving well for children in need of help and protection
- structured conversations with school leaders, teachers and school staff, local authority leaders, senior managers and social workers across children's social care and health teachers, virtual school heads, voluntary and charity sector organisations, academics, and children and young people themselves

The following 3 What Works Centres helped us in our assessment of the

evidence:

- Education Endowment Foundation
- Early Intervention Foundation
- What Works Centre for Children's Social Care

Background

Who are children in need?

Children in need of help and protection make up a small minority of all children, those assessed and supported through children's social care. Over the course of a year, it is estimated that around 6 percent of all children in England will be in need at some point.

Children in need are a group supported by children's social care, who have safeguarding and welfare needs, including:

- children on child in need plans
- children on child protection plans
- looked after children
- young carers
- disabled children

All of these children have needs identified through a children's social care assessment or because of their disability, meaning they are expected to require services and support in order to have the same health and development opportunities as other children.

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