

Lives in Foster Care

The educational and social support experiences of young people aged 13 to 14 years in long term foster care

Fiona Daly & Robbie Gilligan

Children's Research Centre

Acknowledgements

We are most grateful for the support we have received during the course of this study. The National Children's Office kindly provided the grant that made the study possible. Dr. Sinead Hanafin, Head of Research at the National Children's Office provided helpful comments on an earlier draft of this report. The Irish Foster Care Association provided both financial and practical support. Pat Whelan, National Secretary of the Irish Foster Care Association was generous with her assistance. The former health boards across the country supported the research and provided access to foster carers - our thanks go to the child care managers, social workers and other staff who helped us in numerous ways. In particular, thanks to Pat Dunne (Assistant Chief Executive), Sheila Marshall (Senior Manager) and Maureen Maher (Section Officer) in the former Northern Area Health Board, who gave valuable advice and support at the early stages of the research. A special word of thanks is reserved for the 205 foster carers who took part in the study and spoke so freely and honestly about the daily lives of the young people in their care. Aoife Fitzpatrick and Colm Smyth from the Children's Research Centre both helped to carry out telephone interviews with foster carers for the study, and Colm assisted in copy-editing and proof-reading the final draft report. Dr. Jean Whyte of the Children's Research Centre and Greg Kelly of Queen's University Belfast both gave comments on initial drafts of the questionnaire used in the study. In addition, Michele Clarke (Chief Inspector) from the Irish Social Services Inspectorate and Mary Meyler (Senior Social Worker) from the former Northern Area Health Board both gave comments on an earlier draft of this report. Dr. Michael Stuart and Dr. Brendan Murphy of the Department of Statistics in Trinity College provided help and guidance in relation to our queries at the data analysis stage. Finally, a special thank you to all our colleagues in the Children's Research Centre for their ongoing support and encouragement while carrying out this research study, especially to Mary Louise Corr who helped to proof-read the final draft. We appreciate all of the support we have received, but ultimately, final responsibility for the report, and any limitations, rests with the authors.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The education and schooling of young people in long term foster care is the primary focus of this research study. In addition, the nature of their social supports is also addressed. This study is about the *daily lives* of young people aged 13 to 14 years old who are in long term foster care. The study was funded by the National Children's Office with additional funding and practical support provided by the Irish Foster Care Association.

Official statistics on children and young people in the care of the State in Ireland show that foster care is the predominant type of care and that the majority of children and young people have been in care for more than one year.¹ Therefore, it could be said that *long term foster care* is one of the key features of the Irish care system.

This study aimed to tackle three main research questions:

- ▶ What are the day to day experiences of education and schooling for young people aged 13 to 14 years in long term foster care?
- ▶ What kind of social supports do these young people have available to them beyond the foster family in which they are placed? (Social supports are measured here in terms of contact with birth family, friendship networks and participation in hobbies/leisure activities).
- ▶ What relationship, if any, do placement conditions have with young people's education and schooling, as well as their social supports?

There were several rationale for carrying out this study. Firstly, to provide information for foster carers, social workers, teachers and others concerned with the well being of young people in long term foster care, and who tend to have regular contact with them. Secondly, to address the gap in research which focuses on important aspects of the lives of young people in long term foster care, both in Ireland and internationally. Thirdly, to identify potential sources of resilience in the face of adversity for young people in long term foster care.

How the study was carried out

Given the lack of literature and Irish research findings in this particular area, this present study is largely *exploratory* in nature. As this study marks a starting point into research at a national level on the educational and social supports for young people in long term foster care, it aims to provide as comprehensive a picture as possible of the relevant issues. This was one reason for taking a quantitative approach. This study differed from many others of young people in care. It was a *national* study covering *all* young people in the relevant age group, 13 to 14 years, across the whole country who were in long term foster care. Foster carers were the key informants for the study. This was largely due to the potential difficulties of obtaining consent to speak to young people directly. However, of all the adults in the lives of

the young people, foster carers were deemed to be best placed to provide the information required.

There were three selection criteria for young people to be included in the study:

- ▶ They were born in the years 1988 or 1989 (aged 13 to 14 years when the data were being collected);
- ▶ They had been in foster care for more than one year; and
- ▶ They had been in their current foster care placement for at least six months.

The process of obtaining access to foster carers to interview as part of the study took a lot longer than had been originally envisaged. The main reason for this was the need to overcome greater than anticipated legal issues in order to obtain lists of foster carers and their contact details, which consisted of the foster carer's full name, address and telephone number. The co-operation of the former ten area health boards was instrumental in making the study possible.² Each former health board nominated an individual to liaise with the research team.

There were three major phases involved in gaining access to foster carers to carry out interviews:

- ▶ **Phase 1** – Gaining health board co-operation and legal clearance for health boards to compile a list of foster carers;
- ▶ **Phase 2** – Compilation and release of the list of foster carers to the research team; and
- ▶ **Phase 3** – Consent from foster carers to participate in the study.

The first interviews with foster carers took place in October 2002. Interviews were completed in February 2003. In total, 205 interviews were carried out with foster carers (12 pilot interviews had also been carried out prior to October 2002). The primary method of data collection was telephone interviews. Practical considerations were important in making this decision, especially as foster carers were widely geographically dispersed across the whole country. Based on the three criteria as specified, 247 young people were identified by health boards as being eligible to take part in the study. Therefore, a response rate of 83% was achieved. However, as 18 carers could not be contacted based on the contact details given, the response rate for *contactable cases* was 90%.³

As the data from interviews with foster carers was largely quantitative, it was input into the statistical computer package SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for analysis. This analysis was largely based on frequency tables and the exploration of relationships between two or more variables.

1 | *Preliminary Analysis of Child Care Interim Minimum Dataset 2002*, Child Care Legislation Unit, Department of Health and Children (unpublished)

2 | The Health Service Executive took over the responsibility for running health services in Ireland on January 1st, 2005, replacing the pre-existing ten area health boards. Service delivery will be organised through Regional Health Authorities, and these new authorities will have statutory responsibility for children and young people in the care of the State.

3 | That is, 205 completed interviews out of 229 contactable cases.

Characteristics of young people in the study⁴

- ▶ **Gender:** There was a roughly even gender breakdown – 48.3% (99) of young people were male and 51.7% (106) were female.
- ▶ **Age:** The majority of young people were aged 13 to 14 years, 95.1% (195), and 4.8% (10) were aged 12 or 15.
- ▶ **Length of time in current foster care placement:** Young people tended to be in their current foster care placement for a relatively long period of time – 40.0% (82) had been with their current foster carer for more than 10 years. Young people had been in their current placement for 7.9 years on average.
- ▶ **Total length of time in care:** Similarly, 44.8% (82) of young people had been in care for more than 10 years. Therefore, a high percentage of young people had been in care for a relatively long period of time in their short lives.
- ▶ **Age at which first placed in care:** Just over one quarter of young people, 25.7% (47), had been placed in care when aged less than one year old, while just under one half, 48.1% (88), were first placed in care when aged 3 years or younger. This confirmed the above finding on the length of time in care and showed that a substantial number of young people were first placed in care at a very young age.
- ▶ **Previous care placements:** Almost one half of young people, 48.8% (100), had previous care placements prior to their current foster care placement. Given the extensive care histories of most young people in the study, this is not surprising. The majority of these young people had just one or two previous care placements, while just over one quarter of these young people, 27.9% (26), had experienced three or more other placements.
- ▶ **'Relative' care placements:** Almost one quarter of young people, 24.9% (51), were related to their current foster carer. Of these, young people were most likely to be in the care of an aunt or uncle.
- ▶ **Placed with a birth sibling:** Almost one half of young people, 48.3% (99), had been placed with a sibling from their birth family in their current foster care placement.

Characteristics of foster carers interviewed in the study⁵

- ▶ **Gender of respondents:** The majority of foster carers interviewed for this study were female, 90.2% (184), while 9.8% (20) were male.
- ▶ **Age of respondents:** The age of respondents varied quite widely. The majority of respondents, 78.1% (150), were aged between 40 to 59 years old.
- ▶ **Geographical location:** There was a fairly even breakdown between those foster carers who lived in a large city/town, small town/village or the open countryside. Therefore, young people from both rural and urban areas were included in the study.
- ▶ **Highest educational attainment:** Foster carers were most likely to have at least a primary level of education – 31.3% (63) of males and 28.9% (58) of females. Female carers were slightly more likely to have achieved an Intermediate/Group/Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate education level, while male carers were more likely to have attained a third level qualification.
- ▶ **Other young people and children in the foster family:** The majority of foster families, 78.9% (161), had other young people aged less than 18 years of age in their family in addition to the young person in foster care. Also, almost two thirds of foster carers, 61.0% (125), had more than one young person in foster care in the household.
- ▶ **Rating of 'closeness' between carers and young people:** The majority of carers, 85.4% (170), believed their relationship with young people was either *fairly close* or *very close*. Similarly, almost three quarters of respondent carers, 71.9% (141), rated the relationship between the young person and the respondent carer's partner/spouse as either *fairly close* or *very close*.
- ▶ **Number of adult foster carers:** The majority of foster care households, 88.8% (166), consisted of two adult carers. There was just one adult carer in 11.2% (21) of households.
- ▶ **Length of time as a foster carer:** Over one half of foster carers, 54.2% (110), had been fostering for more than 10 years.

4 | In some cases, the results are based on less than 205 young people or fewer than the total number of young people for whom the question is applicable because of missing data.

5 | In some cases, the results are based on less than 205 foster carer respondents or fewer than the total number of respondents for whom the question is applicable because of missing data.

Summary of main results

Education and schooling

Young people's school attendance

- ▶ Largely deemed by carers to be on a *regular* basis
- ▶ Most young people went to mainstream schools

School behaviour

- ▶ Tended to be good overall with some instances of poor behaviour most commonly indicated by contact between the school and foster carer

Academic progress

- ▶ Majority of young people were making good progress in their school subjects
- ▶ 5 out of 10 young people received some form of specialist educational provision
- ▶ Young people were more likely to receive specialist educational provision if they were first placed in care at a relatively older age

School bullying

- ▶ Experienced by just over 4 out of 10 young people
- ▶ Young people were at a higher risk where certain educational factors existed (e.g. specialist educational provision) or particular placement conditions (e.g. higher number of care placements, not placed with a birth sibling)

Change of school

- ▶ More likely to happen at the *start* of placements rather than during placements
- ▶ Significantly less likely for young people in relative care placements at the start of the placement

Positive education and schooling experiences

- ▶ Almost one quarter of young people were categorised as having positive educational experiences
- ▶ Were more likely where young people were placed with a birth sibling, in relative foster care placements and where the female carer had attained a second level of education

Contact with birth family

Likelihood of face to face contact with birth family members in the previous six months or year

- ▶ Young people were most likely to have seen siblings or their birth mother and least likely to have seen their birth father
- ▶ Young people tended to see members from two or three birth family categories (out of four)
- ▶ 1 out of 10 young people had seen *no* birth family members in the previous six months
- ▶ The likelihood of contact decreased the longer that young people were in care

Frequency of face to face contact in the previous six months

Where face to face contact took place:

- ▶ It was most likely to be on a regular basis (at least every 2/3 months), although a significant minority had irregular contact (less frequent than every 2/3 months)
- ▶ It became less frequent the longer young people were in care
- ▶ It was more frequent for young people in relative care

Beneficial nature of contact

- ▶ Face to face contact was deemed by foster carers to be beneficial for 6 out of 10 young people

Positive social support through contact with birth family

- ▶ Experienced by over one half of young people where contact was both regular and beneficial
- ▶ Most likely to be experienced by those in care for a shorter period of time, whose carer had been fostering for a shorter period of time and those who had a closer relationship with the foster carer

Friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities

Regular group of friends

- ▶ Majority of young people had a regular group of friends, usually from school or the local area

Changes in friendships over time

- ▶ 5 out of 10 young people had the same friends now compared to one year ago

Close friendships

- ▶ Over three quarters of young people were reported to have a best friend

Summary index of friendships (combination of the above three aspects)

- ▶ Over one third of young people were deemed to have friendship networks which were a good source of social support
- ▶ Friendship networks were categorised as being positive where certain educational circumstances existed (e.g. absence of school bullying, no diagnosed special need, young people did not receive any specialist educational provision and where the young person was making good progress in their academic subjects)

Spare time

- ▶ Tended to be spent either around the home or equally between the home and the local area

Participation in hobbies/leisure activities

- ▶ 9 out of 10 young people had a home based hobby, 7 out of 10 took part in an activity in the local area and 6 out of 10 participated in a school based activity (outside normal school hours)
- ▶ Higher level of participation where young people were categorised as having good friendship networks

Shared activity with carer

- ▶ 4 out of 10 young people were reported to share a hobby with their foster carer

Part-time jobs

- ▶ Only 15.1% (31) of young people had a part-time job, which in most cases tended to be babysitting related

Key themes

Potential role of relative foster care placements

Young people in relative care placements were:

- ▶ Less likely to change school when first placed in their current foster care placement
- ▶ More likely to have positive experiences of education and schooling
- ▶ More likely to have a high level of contact with birth family, which was maintained over time

Potentially protective nature of being placed with a birth sibling

Young people who were placed with a birth sibling were:

- ▶ Less likely to have been bullied at school
- ▶ More likely to have gained good social support from friendships and to participate in hobbies/leisure activities

Implications of length of time in foster care

Young people who were in care for a longer period of time were:

- ▶ More likely to have a positive educational experience and be receiving 'normal' day to day schooling
- ▶ Less likely to have seen birth family members, and for those who did have such contact, it was less likely to be on a regular basis

Link between positive educational experiences and high social support from friendship/participation in hobbies/leisure activities

- ▶ Young people who gained a high level of social support from their friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities were more likely to have a positive experience of education

Main recommendations of the study

Educational progress of young people in long term foster care

- ▶ Individualised educational plans for young people in long term foster care – in accordance with the National Standard on education for children/young people in foster care.
- ▶ Minimise the number of placement changes – recognise the potentially negative implications this can have for educational progress.
- ▶ Provision of information for teachers and schools concerning the educational experiences and needs of young people in long term foster care – so they can be aware of the circumstances, potential vulnerabilities and additional requirements of children in long term foster care.
- ▶ Provision of information and training on young people’s educational needs to those responsible for their welfare and day to day care – to adequately deal with young people’s needs.

Prevention of school bullying

- ▶ Provide training and enhance awareness about preventative strategies in relation to school bullying – so that foster carers, teachers and social workers will be more aware of the potentially higher risk to young people in long term foster care and trained in effective preventative strategies.

Family relations and contact for children in long term foster care

- ▶ Aim to place young people in care with birth siblings where possible – where this is desirable as there are potentially positive aspects associated with doing so.
- ▶ Promote the maintenance of birth family relationships in long term foster care

placements – where appropriate. In particular, importance on maintaining such contact needs to be emphasised as the level of contact with birth family was found to diminish over time.

- ▶ Provision of additional supports for young people who have had no contact with birth family members – to ensure that young people are receiving appropriate social supports.

Valuable roles of good friendship networks and participation in hobbies/leisure activities

- ▶ Acknowledge the potential value of good friendship networks and active participation in hobbies/leisure activities for young people’s educational and schooling experiences.
- ▶ Acknowledge the potentially positive influence of birth siblings and other young people in the foster care placement on the nature of friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities when making placement decisions.

Areas for further research

- ▶ The educational progress of young people in long term foster care – in particular, information on young people’s actual educational attainment.
- ▶ Exploration of the protective aspects of young people’s foster care placements in terms of educational experiences – to see how young people’s educational experiences can vary under different care conditions.
- ▶ Examine the changes in contact with birth family over time – especially the decline in contact over the length of time in care.
- ▶ Young people’s own experience of care – young people in foster care should be given the opportunity to tell their own stories about their experiences of education and social supports.

Chapter 1

Introduction

“Any alternative care system, including foster care, must endeavour to not only meet the basic physical needs of children in care, but also to provide for their emotional, social and intellectual development. The guiding values and principles of such a foster service should include..... continuity in the lives of children and young people – so their identity and education can be maintained and developed, their physical and psychological well-being promoted and their full potential achieved.”

(Report of the Working Group on Foster Care, Department of Health and Children, 2001 p.26-27)

The Report of the Working Group on Foster Care, from which the above quotation is taken, highlighted the importance of education in the lives of young people in care. The education and schooling of young people in long term foster care is the primary focus of this research study. In addition, the nature of their social supports is also addressed. This study is about the daily lives of young people aged 13 to 14 years old who are in long term foster care. It examines three main substantive issues that are likely to be major aspects of young people’s day to day lives: firstly, education and schooling; secondly, contact with their birth families, and thirdly, friendships and participation in leisure activities. This study also considers aspects of young people’s current foster care placements, as well as their care histories overall.

Funding for the study from the National Children’s Office was announced by the former Minister for Children, Mary Hanafin T.D., on 9th February 2001.

In addition, the Irish Foster Care Association gave their full support to the study, including valuable practical assistance and a donation towards expenses. The young people who were included in the study are drawn from all over the Republic of Ireland. Given its nationwide focus and the topic under exploration, this study hopes to make an important contribution to the under researched area of long term foster care.

This introductory chapter will identify the aims of the study, highlight the research questions underpinning it and discuss the rationale for the study. Some reference will be made to the relevant statistics and literature on the topics that will be explored in this study when discussing its rationale.⁶ The chapter will conclude by outlining a plan of the subsequent chapters presented in this report.

State care and foster care in Ireland

The government department with overall responsibility for the welfare of children and young people in state care in Ireland is the Department of Health and Children. The responsibility for placing children in care and attending to their well being is organised on a geographical basis. At the time that the study was carried out, there were ten area health boards around the country that had statutory responsibility for the welfare of children and young people in the care of the State.⁷ The most up to date child care statistics that were available at the time of writing this report were for the year 2002.⁸ Some of these statistics are presented and discussed below.

Table 1.1: Gender of children and young people in state care in Ireland, 31st December 2002

Gender	%	No.
Male	52.0	2,417
Female	48.0	2,227
Total	100.0	4,644

Source: Department of Health and Children⁹

Table 1.1 shows that in total, there were 4,644 children and young people in state care at the end of the year 2002. There was a fairly even gender breakdown for children and young people in state

care in Ireland at this time. Just over one half, 52.0% (2,417), were male and the remaining 48.0% (2,227) were female. Table 1.2 looks at the age breakdown of these children in State care.

6 | This publication is a research report on the study carried out and therefore does not devote an entire chapter to current literature.

7 | The ten area health boards were abolished on January 1st, 2005. A new national authority was set up, called the Health Service Executive, which took over the responsibility for running health services in Ireland. Service delivery will be organised through Regional Health Authorities, and these new authorities will also have statutory responsibility for children and young people in the care of the State. The terms ‘health boards’ and ‘Health Service Executive’ both appear in this report, the choice of the term used will depend on which is most applicable.

8 | These child care statistics represent the number of children in State care at a certain point in time. In this case, as at 31st December 2002.

9 | Taken from the *Preliminary Analysis of Child Care Interim Minimum Dataset 2002*, Child Care Legislation Unit, Department of Health and Children (unpublished at the time of writing but figures were provided by the Unit for inclusion in this report).

Table 1.2: Age group of children and young people in state care in Ireland, 31st December 2002

Age group	%	No.
Less than 1 year old	2.8	128
1 to 2 years old	3.2	150
3 to 5 years old	12.2	568
6 to 12 years old	41.7	1,937
13 to 14 years old	12.8	593
15 to 16 years old	13.6	632
17 to 18 years old	13.7	636
Total	100.0	4,644

Source: Department of Health and Children

Just under one fifth of all children in state care in Ireland at the end of the year 2002, 18.2% (846), were aged 5 years or under (first three categories in Table 1.2 combined), while 41.7% (1,937) were aged 6 to 12 years and finally, 40.1% (1,861) were aged 13 to 18 years (last three categories combined). This research study focuses on children in one particular age group, between 13 to 14 years. The official statistics show that there was a total of 593 young people in this age group, making up 12.8% of all those children and young people in state care at the end of the year 2002 (this figure represents all young people aged 13 to

14 years in all types of state care including foster care, and in all durations of care including long term care).

Table 1.3 shows that the overwhelming majority of all children and young people in state care at the end of the year 2002 were in foster care, 82.8% (3,847). The next most common type of state care was residential care, which accounted for 11.9% (551) of all those in state care in that year. Data on the length of time that children and young people have been in state care is presented in Table 1.4 below.

Table 1.3: Type of state care for children and young people in care in Ireland, 31st December 2002

Type of Care	%	No.
Foster care (including relative foster care)	82.8	3,847
Residential care	11.9	551
Pre-adoptive placement	0.7	33
At home	0.7	34
Other	3.9	179
Total	100.0	4,644

Source: Department of Health and Children

Table 1.4: Length of time children and young people had been in state care in Ireland, 31st December 2002

No. of years	%	No.
Less than 1 year	31.1	1,444
1 to 5 years	39.0	1,809
More than 5 years	29.5	1,391
Total	100.0	4,644

Source: Department of Health and Children

Table 1.4 shows that just under one third of all children and young people in state care at the end of the year 2002 had been in care for less than one year, 31.1% (1,444). However, the majority of young people had been in state care for one year or more, 68.5% (3,200) – made up of 39.0% (1,809) who had been in care for 1 to 5 years and a further

29.5% (1,391) who had been in care for more than 5 years. Therefore, the majority of children and young people in state care had been looked after by the State for a relatively long period of time. The next result looks at the number of children and young people in state care by each area health board.

Table 1.5: Children and young people in state care by area health board in Ireland, 31st December 2002

<i>Area Health Board</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>
Eastern Regional Health Authority ¹⁰	39.6	1,839
Midland Health Board	5.6	258
Mid-Western Health Board	9.0	417
North-Eastern Health Board	9.1	421
North-Western Health Board	4.6	212
South-Eastern Health Board	12.4	574
Southern Health Board	14.1	653
Western Health Board	5.8	270
Total	100.0	4,644

Source: Department of Health and Children

Table 1.5 shows that just over one third of children and young people in state care were in the care of the former Eastern Regional Health Authority, 39.6% (1,839). Compared to other regions in the country, the Eastern region comprises the highest number of people – approximately 1.4 million (Census of Population, 2002)¹¹. Therefore, it is not surprising that it also has the highest proportion of children and young people in state care. The other

health board areas that each cared for more than one in ten children and young people in state care were the Southern Health Board – 14.1% (653) and the South Eastern Health Board – 12.4% (574). Finally, in relation to the official statistics on state care in Ireland, Table 1.6 shows the type of care that children and young people were in.

10 | The former Eastern Regional Health Authority encompassed the three former area health boards in the Eastern Region – the Northern Area Health Board, the South Western Health Board and the East Coast Area Health Board. Since 1st January 2005, the ERHA is now known as the Health Service Executive Eastern Region. Similarly, the other health boards are part of the Health Service Executive. The former health board names appear here as they were applicable for the year 2002, to which the data refers.

11 | Central Statistics Office (2003) *Census 2002 – Principal Demographic Results*, Stationery Office, Dublin

Table 1.6: Type of state care for children and young people by area health board in Ireland, 31st December 2002

Type of Care	ERHA % (No.)	MHB % (No.)	MWHB % (No.)	NEHB % (No.)	NWHB % (No.)	SEHB % (No.)	SHB % (No.)	WHB % (No.)	National % (No.)
Foster care	76.7 (1,411)	91.5 (236)	89.4 (373)	81.5 (343)	89.6 (190)	80.3 (461)	89.6 (585)	91.9 (248)	82.8 (3,847)
Residential care	17.2 (317)	6.6 (17)	6.0 (25)	5.0 (21)	4.7 (10)	17.4 (100)	7.0 (46)	5.6 (15)	11.9 (551)
Pre-adoptive placement	-	0.8 (2)	1.2 (5)	0.2 (1)	2.8 (6)	1.0 (6)	1.1 (7)	2.2 (6)	0.7 (33)
At home	1.1 (21)	1.2 (3)	2.2 (9)	-	-	-	0.2 (1)	-	0.7 (34)
Other	4.9 (90)	-	1.2 (5)	13.3 (56)	2.8 (6)	1.2 (7)	2.1 (14)	0.4 (1)	3.9 (179)
Total	100.0 (1,839)	100.0 (258)	100.0 (417)	100.0 (421)	100.0 (212)	100.0 (574)	100.0 (653)	100.0 (270)	100.0 (4,644)

Source: Department of Health and Children

Table 1.6 shows that the majority of children and young people in each of the area health boards are in foster care, ranging from 76.7% (1,411) of those in the care of the Eastern Regional Health Authority (ERHA) up to 91.9% (248) of those in the care of the Western Health Board (WHB).

The main points to come out of the official statistics on children and young people in state care in Ireland at the year end 2002 are as follows:

- ▶ There are a similar number of males and females in state care
- ▶ Just under one fifth of children and young people in state care are aged 5 years or under, while the remaining children are fairly evenly split between those aged 6 to 12 years and 13 to 18 years
- ▶ Over three quarters of children and young people in care nationwide are in foster care – this trend holds for each former area health board, although the percentage is slightly lower for the eastern region compared to the rest of the country
- ▶ Over two thirds of children and young people have been in state care for one year or more.

Two clear trends emerge from the analysis of the official statistics on children and young people in state care in Ireland in the year 2002:

- ▶ Firstly, the predominant type of state care for children and young people is foster care (including non-family placements and placements with relative foster carers)
- ▶ Secondly, the majority of children and young people in state care have been in care for more than one year (according to official statistics collected at a particular point in time).

Therefore, it can be stated that *long term foster care* is one of the key features of the Irish care system.

Aims of the study and research questions

The main aim of this research study is to gain an insight into key aspects of the day to day lives of young people aged 13 to 14 years in long term foster care. For the purpose of this study, *long term* foster care was defined as spending one year or more in foster care. The three particular areas chosen for exploration in the study – education and schooling, contact with birth family and friendships/hobbies – are considered likely to be significant aspects of the daily lives of young people in long term foster care.

Three main aspects of schooling were explored:

- ▶ School attendance
- ▶ Behaviour at school, and
- ▶ Progress with schoolwork.

There were several indicators for each of the above aspects that were used to gather data on young people's day to day schooling, with a view to establishing the kind of educational experiences that young people in long term foster care may typically have. In addition, other areas of young people's schooling were explored including change of school (both at the start and during their current placement) and bullying.

The other two substantive areas, contact with birth family and friendships/hobbies, were considered because they were seen as potential sources of social support to young people beyond the supports available to them within their foster family. Measures of young people's contact with birth family members largely focused on *face to face* contact.

In addition to focusing on the nature of young people's day to day schooling and their social supports, this research study also aimed to identify whether certain factors appeared to be related to these specific areas of their lives. To this end, information on young people's placements was also collected, for example, the length of time they had been in care, whether they had been placed with a sibling from their birth family and whether they were in the care of a relative. This information was then explored in relation to whether these young people were deemed to have more desirable experiences of day to day schooling, positive contact with birth family, good friendship networks and whether they were actively participating in hobbies/leisure activities.

So, this study aimed to tackle three main research questions:

- ▶ What are the day to day experiences of education and schooling for young people aged 13 to 14 years in long term foster care?
- ▶ What kind of social supports do these young people have available to them beyond the foster family in which they are placed? (Social supports are measured here in terms of contact with birth family, friendship networks and participation in hobbies/leisure activities).
- ▶ What relationship, if any, do placement conditions have with young people's education and schooling, as well as their social supports?

Rationale for the study

The main rationale for carrying out a study on the daily lives of young people in long term foster care are summarised below:

- ▶ To provide information for foster carers, social workers, teachers and others concerned with the well being of young people in long term foster care
- ▶ To address the gap in research on important aspects of the daily lives of a group of young people in long term foster care – education and schooling, contact with birth family, friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities

- ▶ To identify potential sources of resilience in the face of adversity for young people in long term foster care, and
- ▶ To highlight the need for more longitudinal research in the area of long term foster care.

Information on young people in the Irish foster care system

Research to date has cast relatively little light on the day to day experiences of young people in long term foster care, and in particular on factors associated with aspects such as education and schooling, contact with birth family and friendships/hobbies. These areas and related issues are briefly considered below.

Educational outcomes

There is international evidence, from the English speaking world at least, that children in the care system may fare less well in education than the general population of children. In Ireland, there are no official data on the educational attainments of young people in care. There are however a number of small studies that cast some light on the situation. In Kelleher and Kelleher's (1998) study of 56 care leavers,¹² 50% left with no educational qualification compared to 4% in the comparable age group in the general population. In addition, studies by O'Sullivan (1998)¹³ and Craig et al (1998)¹⁴ suggest significant levels of educational difficulty among young people in residential care. This pattern would not appear to be an exclusively Irish phenomenon. For example, in England in 2000/1, 63% of care leavers aged 16 and over left care with no educational qualification compared to 6% in the equivalent age population a year earlier.¹⁵ Similarly in Scotland, in 2002/3, 60% of 16 and 17

year old care leavers did not achieve any qualifications compared to less than 10% for Scotland as a whole.¹⁶ In addition, studies from the US suggest a similar tendency for young people leaving care to fare less well in the education system (Festinger, 1983,¹⁷ McMillen and Tucker, 1999¹⁸). This study provided an important opportunity to explore the educational progress of a sample of Irish young people in long term foster care.

Contact with birth family

The effects of contact with birth family for children in care is something that is subject to debate in the international research that is available. On balance, it would seem that contact with birth family is generally viewed as a positive experience for children and young people in care. However, it may not be a positive experience in every case all of the time. Indeed, rates of contact vary considerably across various studies and in different countries. It has been recognised that family may remain a major pre-occupation for the young person in care. Indeed poor contact may mean that the young person is *more* pre-occupied with family issues (Emond, 2002, p.22).¹⁹ In an Irish context, there is limited evidence from various small-scale studies on the *frequency* of family contact experienced by children in care. However, there is very little information on the child's experiences of such contact and even less on the apparent relationship of such contact with other features of the life or progress of a child in care. The evidence of Irish studies suggests that the majority of children in care can expect to have contact with parents or family members. Figure 1.1 lists these seven studies and the percentage of young people who had no contact with birth family (last column), which ranged from a low of 12% to a high of 44%.

12 | Kelleher and Kelleher (1998) *Out on their own: Young people leaving care in Ireland* Dublin Focus Ireland

13 | O'Sullivan, E. (1998) 'Census Data: Overview of children in the care of the RSM and staff profile' in Clarke, M. *Lives in care: Issues for policy and practice in Irish children's homes* 138-144 (Appendix J) Dublin The Sisters of Mercy and The Children's Research Centre

14 | Craig, S., Donnellan, M., Graham, G. and Warren, A. (1998) *'Learn to listen' – The Irish Report of a European Study on Residential Child Care* Dublin: Centre for Social and Educational Research, Dublin Institute of Technology/Finglas Children's Centre

15 | Educational qualifications of care leavers, year ending 31 March 2001: England

16 | See website <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/stats/bulletins/00287-00.asp>

17 | Festinger, T. (1989) *No one ever asked us....: a postscript to foster care* New York: Columbia University Press

18 | McMillen, J.C. and Tucker, J. (1999) 'The status of older adolescents at exit from out of home care' *Child Welfare* 78, 3: 339-360

19 | Emond, R. (2002) *Learning from their lessons: A study of young people in residential care and their experiences of education* The Children's Research Centre, Dublin

Figure 1.1: Irish studies with data on family contact with children in care

<i>Study</i>	<i>Scope / focus of study</i>	<i>% of children with no contact with family</i>
Browne and Moloney (2002) ²⁰	113 children in foster care 'for varying episodes over a three-year period'	27%
Dyas (1999) ²¹	58 children in foster care	19%
O'Sullivan (1998)	100 children in residential care	12%
McTeigue (1998) ²²	10 children in care	20%
Ryan (1996) ²³	61 children in long term foster care in County Kerry	20% (previous 12 months)
Gallagher (1995) ²⁴	79 children in care in County Donegal in a study month	21%
O'Higgins (1993) ²⁵	293 children in care in the Mid-Western health board region	44%

Friendships – peer relationships

Peer relationships are seen to be particularly important for providing an environment in which young people learn a variety of emotional, social and cognitive skills (Price and Brew, 1998).²⁶ They are seen as being necessary for the course of a young person's 'normal development'. Friendships can have a particular significance for young people in foster care. Friendships can be a source of emotional support to young people in their attempt to overcome the potential difficulties of being cared for by someone other than their own parents. However, some of the research in this area suggests that being in foster care may have a negative impact on developing positive friendships. In a US study, Price and Brew (1998) argue that foster children may exhibit certain behavioural patterns that tend to undermine their peer relationships such as social withdrawal and aggression, that they have peer relationships of a poorer quality compared to other children and young people and are therefore more likely to experience psychosocial and mental health difficulties.

However, at a more fundamental level, aspects associated with being in foster care may have a more discernible impact on friendships. For instance, a change of foster care placement may

mean that a child has to move area and if so, will more than likely have to start a new school, where they will again have to try and gain social acceptance from a new peer group. This can involve losing contact with established friends and therefore, frequent placement moves do not facilitate the continuity of friendships or the development of close friendships.

Being placed in a foster family that has other young people is often an additional potential source of friends available to the young person in foster care. One study found that young people in foster care tended to make friends with the foster carer's child, another foster child in the family or a family relative (Smith, 1995).²⁷ Although it is also recognised that over dependence on the foster family for peer relationships could have potentially negative consequences for developing friendships outside the home.

There is some evidence to suggest that certain aspects of young people's placement conditions may have implications for their peer relationships. Such conditions include whether the young person is in the care of a relative or not (relative or non-relative care placement), the length of time in foster care and the number of care placements. Price and Brew (1995)²⁸ found that young people

20 | Browne, D. and Moloney, A. (2002) 'Contact irregular: A qualitative analysis of the impact of visiting patterns of natural parents on foster placements' in *Child and Family Social Work*, 7, 1: 35-46

21 | Dyas, M. (1999) *An examination of how 'reasonable access' for children in foster care, as outlined in Section 37 of the 1991 Child Care Act, is defined by social workers in one health board community care area in the Republic of Ireland* (unpublished thesis) Trinity College Dublin

22 | McTeigue, D. (1998) 'The use of focus groups in exploring children's experiences of life in care' in Hogan, D. and Gilligan, R. (eds) *Researching children's experience: Qualitative approaches* (proceedings of conference, 27th May 1997): 45-53, Dublin: The Children's Research Centre, Trinity College Dublin

23 | Ryan, S. (1996) *An examination of the contact that children in long term foster care in Kerry have with their family of origin*. Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the MSc in Child Protection and Welfare, University of Dublin: Trinity College

24 | Gallagher, S. (1995) 'Parents, families and access to children in care: The implications of the Child Care Act, 1991' in Ferguson, H. and Kenny, P. (eds) *On Behalf of the Child – Child Welfare, Child Protection and the Child Care Act, 1991* Dublin: A. and A. Farmar (chapter 7)

25 | O'Higgins, K. (1993) *Family Problems – Substitute care* Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute

26 | Price, J. M. and Brew, V. L. (1998) 'Peer relationships of foster children: Developmental and mental health service implications' in *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, Vol. 19, No. 2, p.199-218

27 | Smith, M.C. (1995) 'A preliminary description of non school-based friendship in young high risk children' in *Child Abuse and Neglect*, Vol. 19, p1497-1511

28 | Price, J.M. and Brew, V.L. (1995) *The relation between close friendships and psychosocial adjustment among children in foster care*. Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development. Indianapolis, IN

placed with a relative had more friends than those in non-relative placements. The authors suggest several possible explanations including the possibility that being placed with a relative means that the young person remains in the same area and keeps going to the same school, thus making it possible to maintain friendships. Also, relative carers may help to maintain friendships as they may be more likely to know the young person's existing peers. In addition, and based on attachment theory, being placed with a relative may give a young person a "more secure emotional base from which to explore and develop new friendships" (p.207) compared to those young people placed with people that they do not know. Other research findings by Marcus (1991)²⁹ indicate that where young people are in foster care for longer periods of time and have experienced higher numbers of placements, they are less likely to have close friendships. In particular, frequent placement change may mean that young people do not make the effort to develop new friendships in a bid to avoid the potential loss of these friendships.

Address the gap in research on long term foster care

This study aims to play a part in filling a void in research in the area of foster care in Ireland, and particularly with respect to *long term* foster care.

Limited research on foster care in Ireland overall

Much of the research carried out on children and young people in care in Ireland has looked at those in *residential care*. However, three quarters of all children and young people in care in Ireland are in *foster care* (including relative care). Therefore, foster care is an important area to explore for academic purposes but also to be informative for those who come into contact with young people in foster care, including child care practitioners, foster carers and teachers.

Lack of evidence on Irish children's experience of care

The research carried out to date has tended to be either historical in nature or else a retrospective analysis of statistical and official data at a national or regional level. In addition, much of this research has focused primarily on the carer's point of view or experience (e.g. Gilligan, 1996³⁰ and Meyler, 2002³¹). Carers are the key informants in this study, but most of the data collected refers to various aspects of young people's daily lives.

Lack of research internationally

While long term foster care is an effective and proven form of placement, it has received comparatively little research attention, certainly in relation to the day to day life experiences of young people placed in long term foster care.

Potential sources of resilience in the face of adversity for young people in care

Young people in care may face risks such as social dislocation or isolation, loss of family contact, educational failure and social stigma. Yet it is also the case that there may be protective experiences or opportunities that help young people in care to transcend the worst effects of negative experience. Positive experience at school (Jackson and Martin, 1998),³² positive family contact, close friendships and active participation in hobbies and activities (Pecora et al, 2003)³³ may be important. For example, participation in recreational and social activities may serve important functions in terms of strengthening social relationships and social experience. Such activities may also build self esteem and confidence.

This study explores the nature of educational and social support experiences of young people in care whose lives may also be touched by adversity of different kinds. Using a risk and resilience framework the study seeks to tease out more of the fine grain daily experiences of young people and the factors that may influence the quality of their care experience for better or worse.

Rationale for more longitudinal research

Increasingly, policy research and debate on children in care has recognised that for the purpose of assessing or evaluating provision, it is insufficient to rely solely on trends in national or regional snapshots of the distribution of children across placement options. It is recognised that assessing the impact of the care system at the level of the individual child or at the cumulative level of all children within the system requires a fuller picture that can offer information on what is happening for the children on different dimensions at any given point, and also over time. This implies ideally the need for a prospective longitudinal study, or at least occasional cross sectional studies examining relevant factors and where possible with an eye to key historical trends.

Plan of chapters in the report

The rest of the research report is broken down into the following chapters:

- ▶ **Chapter 2: How the study was carried out** – The principles underpinning the study and how data were collected
- ▶ **Chapter 3: Characteristics of young people and their foster carers** – A profile of young people and background information on their foster carers and their families
- ▶ **Chapter 4: Education and schooling** – Results are presented on aspects of young people's day to day education and schooling

29 | Marcus, R.F. (1991) 'The attachments of children in foster care' in *Genetic, Social and General Psychology Monographs*, Vol. 117, p.365-394

30 | Gilligan, R. (1996) 'The Foster Carer Experience in Ireland – findings from a postal survey' in *Child Care, Health and Development*, Vol. 22, No. 2, p.85-98

31 | Meyler, M. (2002) *Counting on Foster Care* Northern Area Health Board, Dublin

32 | Jackson, S. and Martin, P. (1998) 'Surviving the care system: education and resilience' *Journal of Adolescence* Vol. 21, No. 5, p.569-589

33 | Pecora, P., Williams, J., Kessler, R., Downs, C., O'Brien, C., Hirpi, E. and Morello, S. (2003) *Assessing the Effects of Foster Care: Early Results from the Casey National Alumni Study Seattle: Casey Family Program*

- ▶ **Chapter 5: Contact with birth family** – Results are presented on the nature of face to face contact between young people and their birth family members in the last year
- ▶ **Chapter 6: Young people’s friendships and participation in hobbies and leisure activities** – Results are presented on the nature of young people’s friendships and the extent of their involvement in leisure time pursuits
- ▶ **Chapter 7: Factors associated with positive experiences for young people in long term foster care** – Further analysis of some of the results in chapters 4 to 6 was carried out here with the aim of exploring whether certain aspects of foster care placements were associated with more positive and desirable experiences for the young people in this study
- ▶ **Chapter 8: Conclusions and recommendations**

Chapter 2

How the Study was Carried Out

Introduction

In this chapter, the process by which the research study was carried out will be explained, as will the methodologies used to collect the data. The main areas considered are as follows:

- ▶ General approach of the study
- ▶ Steps involved in gaining access to foster carers
- ▶ Timeframe of data collection
- ▶ Methods used in data collection
- ▶ Response rate of foster carers
- ▶ Data analysis.

General approach of the study – key themes

Exploratory nature of the study

Given the lack of literature and Irish research findings on the experiences of young people in long term foster care, this present study is largely *exploratory* in nature. As this study marks a starting point into research at a national level on the educational and social supports for young people in long term foster care, it aims to provide as comprehensive a picture as possible of the relevant issues. This was one reason for taking a quantitative approach to the study.

Quantitative dimension to data collection and analysis

The questions asked in the data collection process were of a basic and factual nature. For example, in terms of school attendance, basic information was gathered on whether young people attended school regularly in order to establish if school non-attendance was an issue of concern for this group of young people. Therefore, the majority of questions were closed – i.e. required ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answers – so that the likelihood of particular circumstances, including irregular school attendance, could be measured across all of the young people in the study.

National study – total population

This study differed from many others of young people in care. It was a *national* study covering *all* young people in the relevant age group across the whole country who were in long term foster care. It is very rare to have such an opportunity to gather information on all members of a cohort in the care population in any country, in this case young people aged 13 to 14 years in long term foster care.

Age group of young people in foster care – 13 to 14 year olds

In conducting this national cohort study, it was decided to select young people in long term foster care who were aged between 13 and 14 years old inclusive. There were two main reasons for choosing this age group. Firstly, most young people of this age would have experienced the

transition from primary to post-primary school (or were just about to at the time of data collection). This period marks an important time in terms of their schooling and should any issues concerning this transition arise, it was hoped they would be captured in the data gathered. Secondly, at this stage in their adolescence, young people would be expected to have started developing social relationships and to become increasingly involved in activities outside the home. Friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities were also explored in this research.

Key informants – foster carers

Foster carers were the people chosen to provide the information sought on the young people. It is acknowledged that interviewing the young people themselves would have provided first hand information of their own experiences. However, in practice this was not possible. The issue of consent was the main obstacle to this. In order to conduct interviews with young people, consent would have needed to come from not only the young person themselves, but also the foster carer, birth parent and the relevant health service executive area. As this research is a national study, it would have been too cumbersome and taken too long to achieve this. Even if consent could have been secured from all parties for all cases, it would have been very costly to undertake interviews because these would have had to be conducted in person. The research team considered it unethical to ask young people to participate in such interviews over the telephone as they had never met them face to face. Personal interviews in a national study would have been extremely costly and well beyond the budget of the study. Therefore, the decision was taken to ask foster carers to participate as ‘key informants’. However, while the carer was to be the informant, the young person was the central focus of the study, as the data gathered was based on events in their lives.³⁴

There were also advantages of foster carers being the key informants. Of all the adults in young people’s lives, foster carers were best placed to be able to provide the information required. The young person is part of the foster carer’s family and the carer can provide an insight into the young person’s schooling and social supports that no other adult may be able to give. For example, they see the young person’s reaction after a visit has taken place by a birth family member. As most of the information gathered was of a basic and factual nature, it was important to speak to someone who was in a position to answer questions on all of the topics including young people’s school attendance and behaviour. While the actual views of the young people themselves are not included, interviewing their foster carers provided some degree of insight into their daily lives in school and the availability of social supports to them, albeit in an indirect way. The foster carers that were interviewed were chosen on the basis of the young people in their care meeting certain criteria for inclusion in the study.

34 | In research terms, the young person was the ‘unit of analysis’ as the majority of questions in the telephone interviews with foster carers were about the young people.

Selection criteria for young people in the study

Young people were selected for inclusion in the study if they met *all three* of the following criteria:

- ▶ Firstly, they had been born in the years 1988 or 1989 (and therefore were aged 13 to 14 years old when the list of young people and foster carers was being compiled by health boards in 2002)
- ▶ Secondly, they had been in foster care for more than one year (for the purpose of this study 'more than one year' was defined as a long term foster care placement)
- ▶ Thirdly, they had been in their current foster care placement for at least six months (to ensure that the carer would be able to answer the questions in the interview).

Where young people met all three criteria, their foster carer was selected for interview. Health boards compiled contact details for the relevant foster carers in their area and there was a series of steps taken to enable the research team to obtain these details.

Steps involved in gaining access to foster carers

The process of obtaining access to foster carers to interview as part of the study took a lot longer than had been originally envisaged. Preparatory work on the study began in September 2001. The first interviews with foster carers took place in October 2002. The main reason for this delay was the need to overcome greater than anticipated legal issues in obtaining lists of names of foster carers to be interviewed and their contact details.

Discussions were held with the Data Protection Commissioner's Office to establish the health boards' responsibility in releasing this information to the research team in order to comply with the Data Protection Act, 1988. Details on the process involved in gaining access to foster carers are set out in Figure 2.1. Some information on the young person was also provided on these lists – their first name, date of birth, date of placement with current carer and date of first placement in care.³⁵ The co-operation of the area health boards was instrumental in making the study possible.

There were three major phases involved in gaining access to foster carers to carry out interviews, as shown in Figure 2.1.

35 | The purpose of this was to ensure that all three criteria for the inclusion of young people in the study had been met.

Figure 2.1: Steps involved in accessing foster carers to participate in the research study***Phase 1: Gaining health board co-operation and legal clearance for health boards to compile a list of foster carers (September 2001 to April 2002)***

- ▶ Informing the Chairperson of the Chief Executive Officers' Group (covering all ten area health boards) about the study and seeking the Group's support and assistance in carrying out the study (September 2001)
- ▶ Meeting with two representatives of the health board Chief Executive Officers' Group (November 2001)
- ▶ Securing agreement from each area health board to support the study and identify a representative from each board to liaise with the research team (November 2001 to April 2002)
- ▶ Meetings with health board liaison officers (November 2001 to April 2002)
- ▶ Discussions with the Data Protection Commissioner's Office concerning the release of foster carers' contact details to the research team (November to December 2001)
- ▶ Meeting with the health boards' legal representative to clarify issues concerning confidentiality (March 2002)
- ▶ Securing clearance from the health boards' legal representative for health boards to participate fully in the study (April 2002)

Phase 2: Compilation and release of the list of foster carers to the research team (April to September 2002)

- ▶ Health board liaison officers began to compile lists of young people and their respective foster carers based on the three qualifying criteria for the study (April 2002 onwards)
- ▶ Letters were sent to relevant foster carers from each health board (worded by the research team) informing them about the study with an opt-out slip attached (June 2002 onwards). Letters were sent by registered post to ensure delivery and included an information leaflet for carers and a flyer for young people (designed by the research team).
- ▶ Health boards remove foster carers that return the opt-out slip refusing the health board permission to release their contact details to the research team. Closing date for the receipt of opt-out slips was one month after the letters had been posted. A stamped addressed envelope was provided for the return of opt-out slips.
- ▶ After the closing date lapsed, health boards began to release the lists of foster carers' contact details to the research team (July 2002 onwards)

Phase 3: Consent from foster carers to participate in the study (September 2002)

- ▶ Letters were sent to foster carers from the research team advising them that their contact details had been passed on by the relevant health board and a member of the research team would be contacting them by telephone during the coming weeks
- ▶ Initial telephone calls to foster carers were made asking for their participation in the study by agreeing to a subsequent telephone interview
- ▶ Appointments were set up with foster carers who agreed to take part in the study (October 2002 onwards)

Consent from foster carers

Obtaining consent from foster carers involved two stages.

- ▶ *Stage 1 – Consent from foster carers to release their contact details*

Foster carers gave their consent to the respective health boards for them to release their contact details to the research team by NOT sending back the opt-out slip attached to the letter they received from the health board about the study.

- ▶ *Stage 2 – Consent from foster carers to take part in the study*

Foster carers who were on the list released by each health board were telephoned by the research team. They were given information on the study and what would be involved in taking part. They were invited to agree to be interviewed over the telephone at a convenient time.

Pilot interviews

Twelve pilot interviews were carried out in July 2002. The names of the pilot interviewees were provided by the Irish Foster Care Association after the Association had obtained the foster carers' permission. The pilot interviews were instrumental

in developing the final version of the interview schedule to be used during data collection. In addition, seven of the twelve pilot interviewees were on the list of foster carers compiled by the health boards, and therefore, were included in the final analysis.

Timeframe for data collection

Interviews with foster carers started in October 2002 and continued until the middle of February 2003, a period of just over four months. Over this time, 205 interviews were carried out with foster carers by four members of the research team.³⁶

Methods used in data collection

The primary method of data collection in the research was telephone interviews.³⁷ Practical considerations were important in making this decision as well as the aims of maximising confidentiality and minimising interviewer effects. Telephone interviews have several advantages over other methods of data collection, for a study of this kind.

Practical considerations – time

As this was a national study, foster carers were widely dispersed geographically. Therefore, collecting data through telephone interviews was much quicker than carrying out face to face interviews, which would have involved both considerable time and cost for travel.

Confidentiality – enhance anonymity

Carrying out interviews over the telephone meant that the interviewer never saw the respondent (foster carer). While the foster carer's name and address were known, they could not be identified by their physical appearance and therefore, this helped to enhance their anonymity and made it easier for the interviewer to guarantee confidentiality. This was deemed an important factor in gaining foster carers' co-operation in taking part in the study but also in encouraging them to answer the questions as honestly as possible.

Minimising interviewer effects

Interviewer effects describe the negative impact that an interviewer might have on the way that a respondent answers a question. For example, a respondent might give socially desirable answers according to what they think would please the interviewer. Such effects are less likely to occur in interviews conducted over the telephone compared to those carried out face to face. The respondent cannot see the interviewer and therefore visual clues, such as facial expressions, will not impact upon the respondent's replies (Frey and Oishi, 1995).³⁸ However, it is acknowledged that there is some potential for these effects through the language used by the interviewer or the verbal/vocal responses of the interviewer.

In addition to benefiting from the above advantages of telephone interviews, it was considered that the limitations of the method could be minimised in this study. In particular, the questions asked in the telephone interviews with foster carers were largely closed and of a factual nature and therefore avoided the potential pitfalls of asking a large number of sensitive, complex and open ended questions over the telephone. In addition, the population for this study was a specialised and interested one, i.e. foster carers, in a study about foster care. It was felt that this would help to avoid the problem of non-response that can often be an issue for general population telephone surveys. Considering the high response rate achieved for the telephone interviews, this has proven to be the case.

Response to telephone interviews

Based on the three qualifying criteria for the selection of young people in the study, there was a total of 247 young people in the final study population.³⁹ In all, 205 interviews with foster carers actually took place. Therefore, the overall response rate was 83%. This is very high for a telephone survey.⁴⁰ Figure 2.2 shows the breakdown of response for the telephone interviews.

Figure 2.2: Breakdown of the response rate for telephone interviews with foster carers

Total population	247
<i>minus</i> non-contactable cases	18
<i>equals</i> all contactable cases for interview	229
<i>minus</i> : refusals (6) and non-respondent cases (18)	24
<i>equals</i> interviews carried out with foster carers	205

Overall response rate = 83%

Response rate for contactable cases = 90%

36 | Interviews were carried out by Fiona Daly, Aoife Fitzpatrick, Colm Smyth and Professor Robbie Gilligan.

37 | A questionnaire was designed which formed the basis of the telephone interviews and is presented in Appendix 1 at the end of this report.

38 | Frey, J.H. and Oishi, S.M. (1995) *How to Conduct Interviews by Telephone and in Person* Sage One Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi

39 | Health boards across the country provided contact details for the foster carers of 247 young people who met the three study criteria.

40 | In the SAVI Report by McGee et al (2002), the Economic and Social Research Institute reported that response rates to telephone surveys of the general public tended to vary between 62-64% (p.56).

Out of the 247 young people who were on the lists compiled by all the area health boards, 18 of them had foster carers that could not be contacted by telephone either because the telephone number given was incorrect or unknown. Despite checking again with the health boards, looking up telephone directories and writing to the carer to request a contact telephone number, it proved impossible to obtain telephone numbers for the foster carers of these 18 young people (therefore, they are referred to as non-contactable cases). Thus, the response rate for contactable foster carers is higher than the overall response rate at 90% (205 out of 229 contactable carers).

The high response rate for this study shows the extent of the willingness of foster carers to participate in the research. Obviously, they have a strong interest in the area being studied. In addition, the high response is likely to be attributable to the extent of the preparatory work done prior to interviews being carried out, for example, sending letters and information leaflets to carers prior to telephoning them. The role of the Irish Foster Care Association was of significant importance here also. They endorsed the study and promoted it through their quarterly newsletter, which was sent to their members across the country.

It is notable that only six foster carers actually declined to take part in the study. Most of the remaining 18 non-respondent carers had originally agreed to do the interview when first contacted, but were not available when one of the research team telephoned them at the agreed time. A rule of thumb was employed whereby carers were telephoned at least three more times (at different times of the day) to re-arrange an interview. If they could not be contacted after a minimum of three more telephone calls, they were counted as a non-respondent.⁴¹

On average, interviews took one hour to complete. However, the length of time it took to carry out interviews ranged from half an hour to three hours. As the data were largely quantitative and factual, it was input into a statistical computer package called SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) and analysis was carried out using this package.

Data analysis

The original dataset of all the information collected from the interviews with foster carers consisted of over 200 individual variables or categories, e.g. type of school attended including primary/post-primary school, rating of behaviour at school etc. Data analysis started in April 2003 and was ongoing throughout the summer months.⁴² The analysis was largely based on frequency tables and exploring relationships between two or more variables. Further information on the data analysis undertaken is provided in Appendix 2 at the end of this report.

After establishing the basis for the study and the steps taken to carry it out, the following chapters present the findings of the research. The next chapter begins this process by presenting a profile of the young people included in the study, along with some background information on their foster carers.

41 | In practice, these carers were often contacted more often than the minimum of three times.

42 | A series of further analyses were carried out during 2004. The research team had the benefit of revising an earlier draft of the research report based on comments received by a selected group of experts in the childcare system and the National Children's Office.

Chapter 3

Characteristics of Young People and their Foster Carers

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide background information on the young people in the study, in particular, focusing on various aspects of their current foster care placements and care histories – for example, the length of time they have been in their current placement and whether they are related to their carer. In addition, some basic information on young people’s foster carers will be presented here to give some insight into the type of families that foster young people on a long term basis – for example, the number of children in the family and their geographical location. Section I presents a profile of the young people, while Section II explores the basic characteristics of their foster carers. The various aspects of young people’s foster care placements and placement histories will be themes that run throughout the chapters that discuss the findings from this research study.

Section I: Basic characteristics of young people aged 13 to 14 years in long term foster care

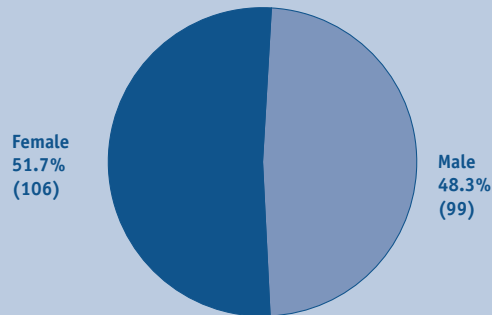
The background information presented in this chapter on the 205 young people who were the focus of this study consists of the following:

- ▶ Gender
- ▶ Age
- ▶ Length of time with current foster carer
- ▶ Total length of time in care
- ▶ Age first placed in care
- ▶ Previous care placements
- ▶ Relative/non-relative placements, and
- ▶ Placed with a sibling.

Gender of young people

Chart 3.1 shows the gender breakdown of young people in the study.

Chart 3.1: Gender breakdown of young people

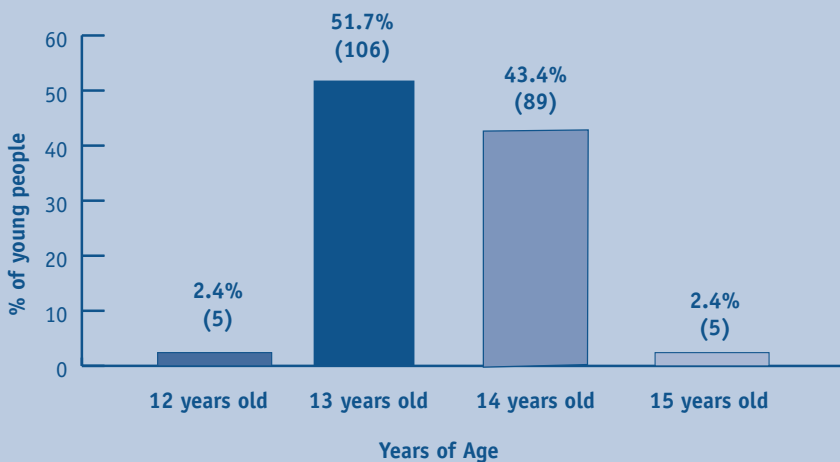


There was a roughly even number of males and females in the study. Just under one half of young people were male, 48.3% (99) and 51.7% (106) were female.

Age of young people

Chart 3.2 shows the age breakdown of young people at the time the interviews with their foster carers took place.

Chart 3.2: Age of young people as reported by foster carers

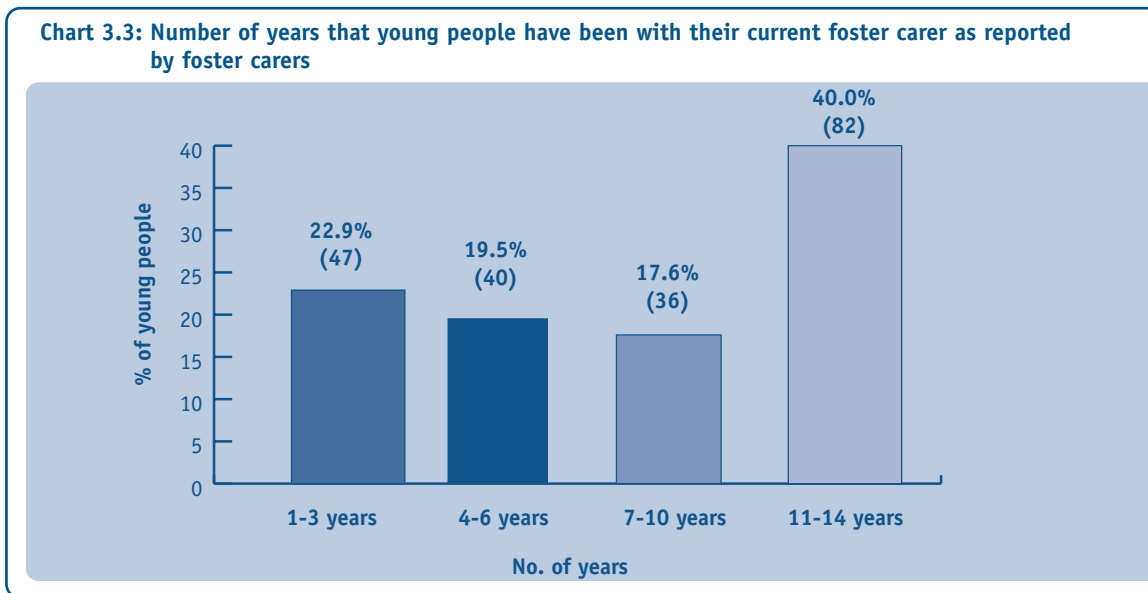


The majority of young people were aged 13 or 14 years old, 95.1% (195) (second and third bars in the chart combined). This was not surprising given that they were the target age group for the study. There was a small number of young people aged 12

or 15 years old (first and last bar respectively), largely due to the timing of the interviews taking place just before or after their birthday. As this scenario only affected 10 young people, it was decided to retain them in the study.

Length of time with current foster carer

Chart 3.3 shows the number of years that young people had been in their current foster care placements.

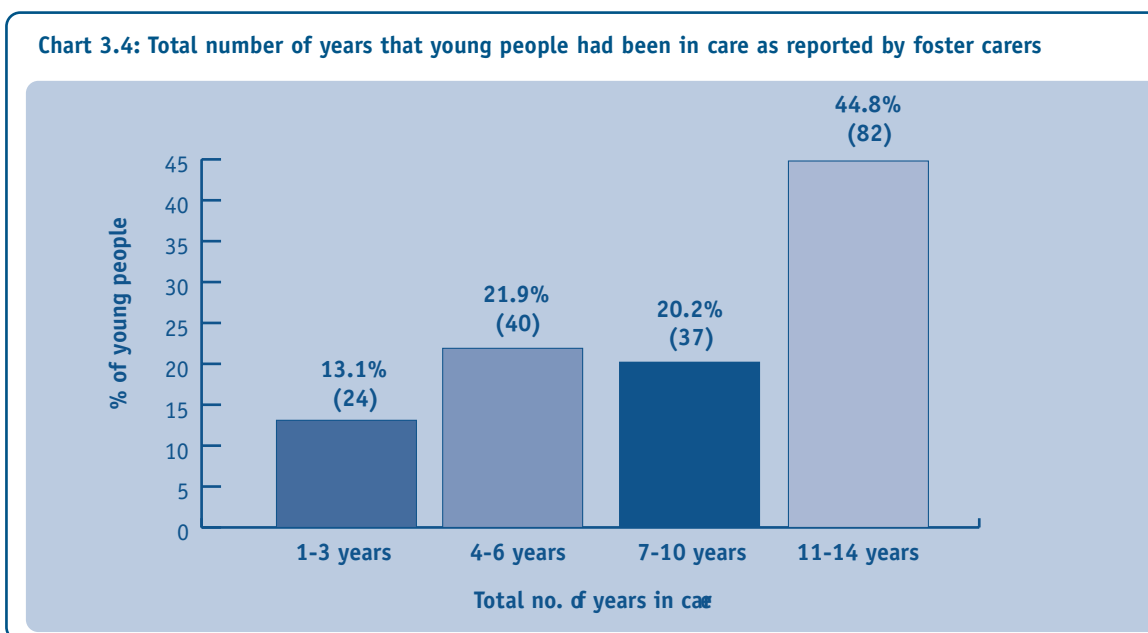


Over one third of young people, 40.0% (82), had been in their current foster care placement for between 11 and 14 years (or more than 10 years). Almost one quarter, 22.9% (47), had been in their current foster care placement for 1 to 3 years. A further 19.5% (40) of young people had been with their current carer for 4 to 6 years (second bar), while the remaining 17.6% (36) had been with

their current carer for 7 to 10 years.⁴³ Therefore, young people tended to have been in their current foster care placement for a relatively long period of time, with 4 out of 10 having been with their current carer for more than 10 years. On average, young people had been with their current carer for 7.9 years.

Total length of time in care

Chart 3.4 shows the total number of years that young people had been in care – including both foster and residential care placements.



43 | Chart 3.3 is based on 183 young people as data were missing for the remaining 22 young people.

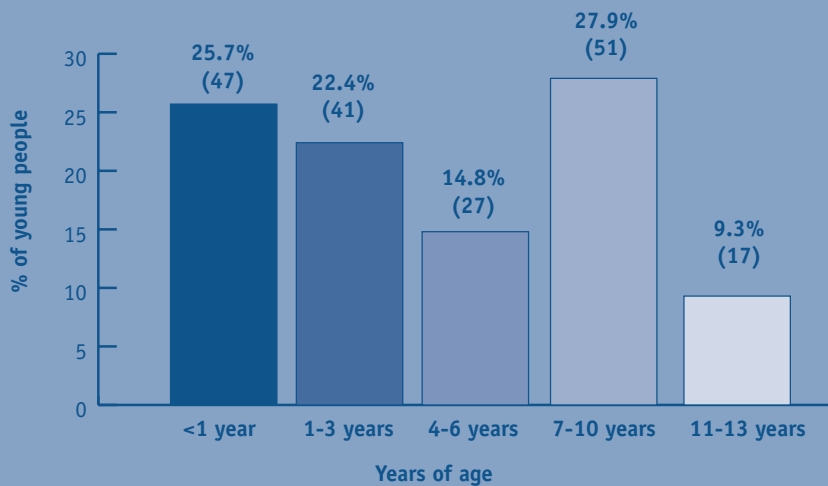
A substantial proportion of young people have been in care for a large part of their lives – 44.8% (82) had been in care for between 11 to 14 years (or more than 10 years). A further 20.2% (37) had been in care for 7 to 10 years. A relatively small percentage, 13.1% (24), had been in care for a total of 1 to 3 years.⁴⁴ One of the qualifying

criteria for the inclusion of young people in the study was that they had been in foster care for at least one year. Nevertheless, it is still notable to find that such a high number of young people had been in care for such a long period of time in their relatively short lives. On average, young people had spent a total of 8.8 years in care.

Age at which young people were first placed in care

Chart 3.5 shows the age at which young people were first placed in care – either in residential or foster care.

Chart 3.5: Age at which young people were first placed in care



One quarter of young people had been placed in care when they were less than one year of age, 25.7% (47). Combining the first two age groups in Chart 3.5 shows that just under one half of the young people for whom information was available, 48.1% (88), had been first placed in care when they were aged 3 years old or younger. Although, a further 27.9% (51) of young people had been first placed in care at a relatively older age group of 7 to 10 years. Despite this, for all 183 young people, the average age at which they were first placed into care was 4.6 years old.⁴⁵

The results on the length of time young people had been with their current foster carer and the total number of years spent in care show that a substantial number of young people had relatively long care histories considering their age. The above results on the age at which young people were first placed in care serve to reinforce this finding.⁴⁶

Previous care placements

Further information was sought about previous care placements that young people may have had prior

to their current foster care placement. Almost one half of young people, 48.8% (100), were reported to have had previous care placements. The foster carers of these young people were asked to give the number of these placements to the best of their knowledge. Chart 3.6 shows the number of previous care placements that these young people had experienced.

Of those young people who had previous care placements and for whom the number of these placements is known, almost three quarters had one or two previous care placements – 72.0% (67). A further 16.1% (15) had 3 or 4 previous care placements. Therefore, the majority of young people who had previous care placements tended to have had just one or two prior care placements. However, 1 out of 10 young people had experienced five or more previous care placements, 11.8% (11).⁴⁷ Therefore, although the phenomenon of multiple placements was not a substantial one for the majority of young people in this study, it was nevertheless an issue for a significant minority of young people who did have previous placements.

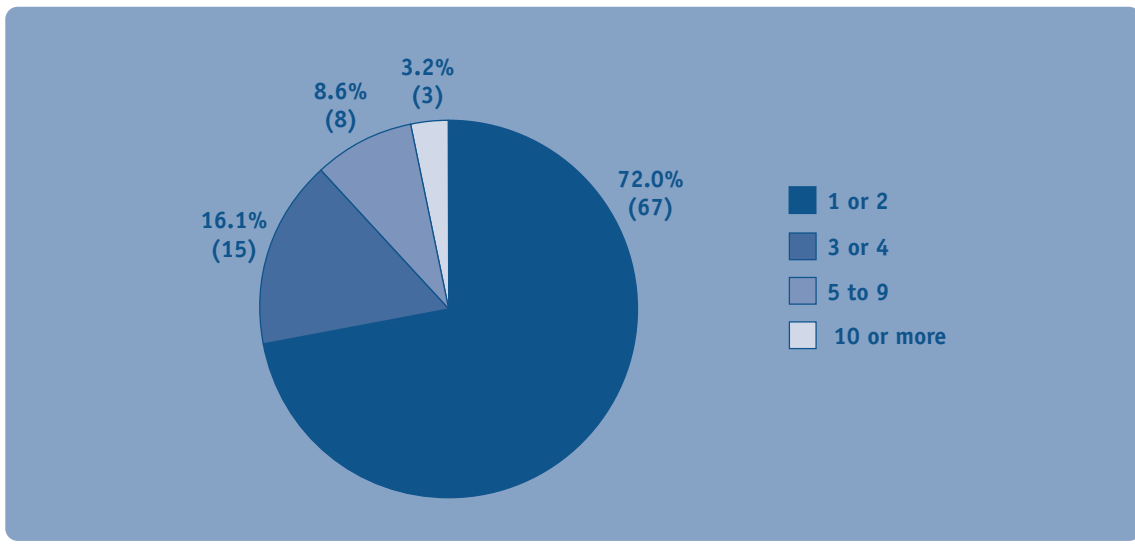
44 | Chart 3.4 is based on 183 young people as data were missing for the remaining 22 young people.

45 | Chart 3.5 is based on 183 young people as data were missing for the remaining 22 young people.

46 | Young people may have had periods of time when they were placed back with their birth families since they had been first placed in care, but the important factor here is the age at which they first came into contact with the care system.

47 | Chart 3.6 is based on a total of 93 young people as data were missing for the remaining 7 young people.

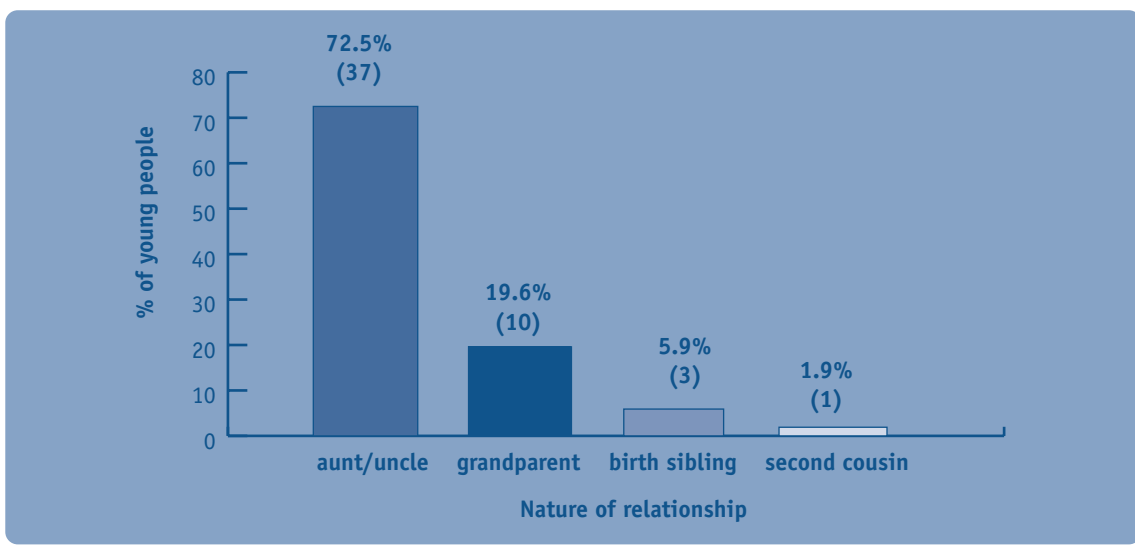
Chart 3.6: Number of previous care placements prior to current foster care placement as reported by foster carers



Relative foster care placements

Chart 3.7 shows the nature of the relationship between foster carers and the young people in relative care.

Chart 3.7: Relationship between foster carers and young people in relative care



Almost one quarter of young people in the study, 24.9% (51), were related to their foster carer. Chart 3.7 identifies the relationship between the carer and the young person in their care.

Out of the 51 young people that were related to their foster carer, the majority of them, 72.5% (37),

were in the care of an aunt or uncle. The next most common relationship between carers and young people in relative care was the grandparent/grandchild relationship, experienced by 19.6% (10) of young people.

Placement with sibling(s) in foster care placement

Finally, almost one half of young people, 48.3% (99), had been placed with at least one sibling from their birth family in the same foster care placement.

Summary of results on the characteristics of young people aged 13 to 14 years in long term foster care

- ▶ **Gender:** There was a roughly even gender breakdown – 48.3% (99) of young people were male and 51.7% (106) were female.
- ▶ **Age:** The majority of young people were aged 13 to 14 years old, 95.1% (195), although 4.8% (10) were aged 12 or 15.
- ▶ **Length of time in current foster care placement:** Young people tended to be in their current foster care placement for a relatively long period of time – 40.0% (82) had been with their current foster carer for more than 10 years. On average, young people had been in their current placement for 7.9 years.
- ▶ **Total length of time in care:** Similarly, 44.8% (82) of young people had been in care for more than 10 years. Therefore, a high percentage of young people had been in care for a relatively long period of time in their short lives.
- ▶ **Age at which first placed in care:** Just over one quarter of young people, 25.7% (47), had been placed in care when aged less than one year old, while just under one half, 48.1% (88), were first placed in care when aged 3 years or younger. This confirmed the above finding on the length of time in care and showed that a substantial number of young people were first placed in care at a very young age.
- ▶ **Previous care placements:** Almost one half of young people, 48.8% (100), had previous care placements prior to their current foster care placement. Given the extensive care histories of most young people in the study, this is not surprising. The majority of these young people had just one or two previous care placements, while just over one quarter of these young people, 27.9% (47), had experienced three or more other placements.
- ▶ **'Relative' care placements:** Almost one quarter of young people, 24.9% (51), were related to their current foster carer. Of these, young people were most likely to be in the care of an aunt or uncle.
- ▶ **Placed with a birth sibling:** Almost one half of young people, 48.3% (99), had been placed with a sibling from their birth family in their current foster care placement.

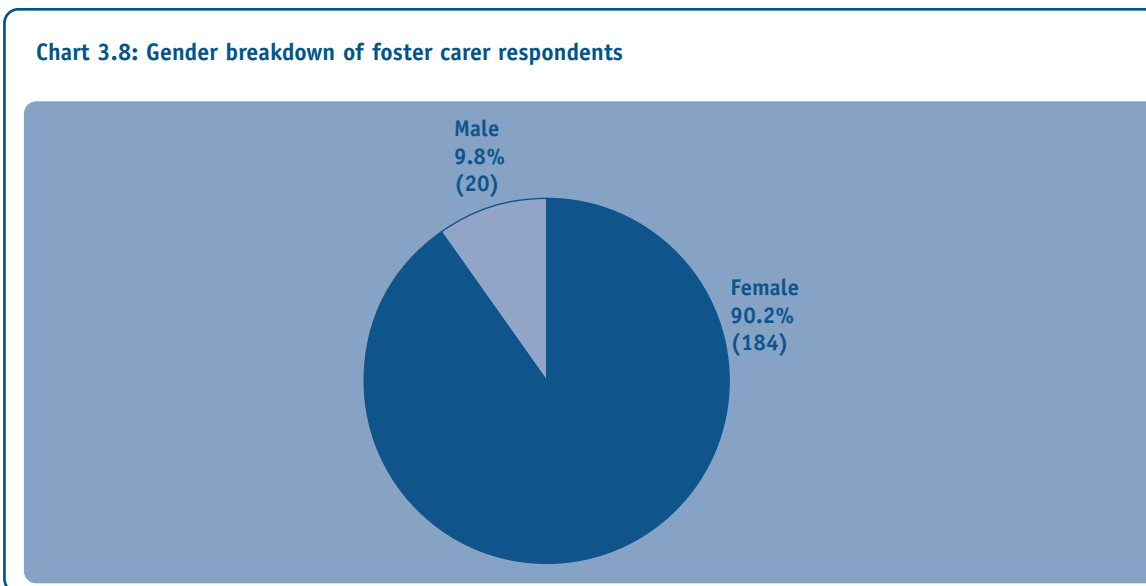
Section II: Basic characteristics of foster carers

This section presents some background information on the foster carers of the young people in this study, as well as the carer's own families. This is presented in order to give some insight into the families that young people in long term foster care become part of. The findings presented here will cover the following topics:

- ▶ Gender
- ▶ Age
- ▶ Geographical location
- ▶ Educational attainment
- ▶ Other young people and children in the foster family
- ▶ Rating of 'closeness' between carers and young people (rated by carers)
- ▶ Number of adult foster carers, and
- ▶ Length of time as a foster carer.

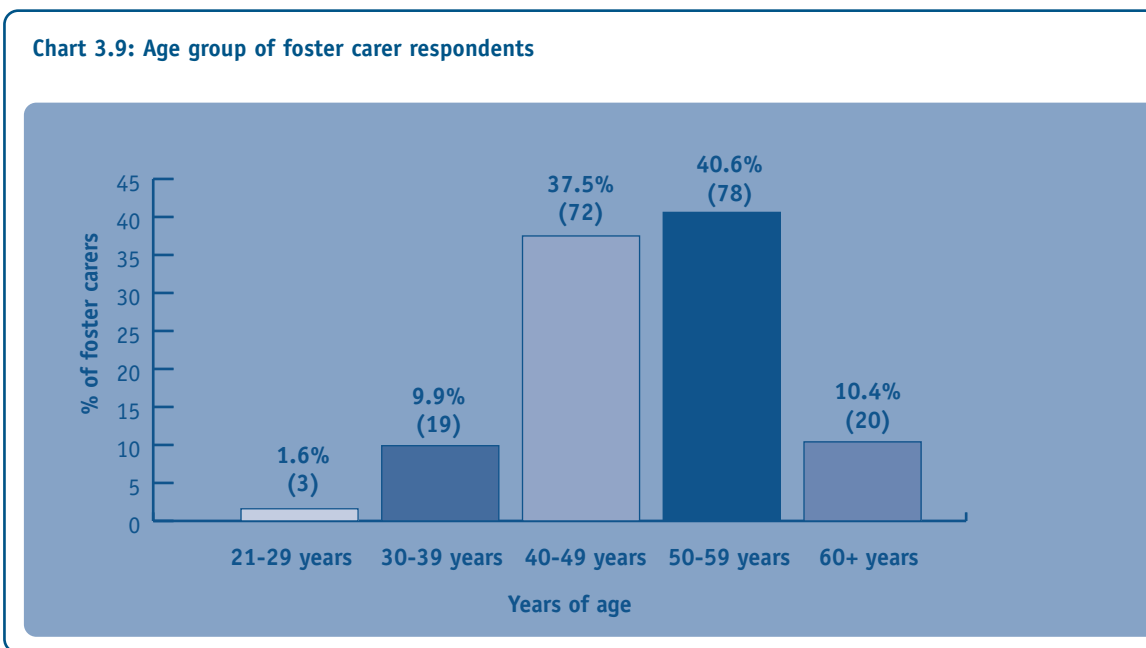
Gender of respondents

Chart 3.8 shows the gender breakdown of foster carer respondents.



The majority of foster carers interviewed for this study were female, 90.2% (184), with males accounting for 9.8% (20) of respondents.⁴⁸

Age of foster carer respondents



The age of foster carer respondents varied quite widely, as shown in Chart 3.9.

Foster carer respondents were most likely to be aged between 40 to 59 years old, a total of 78.1% (150) (combination of the third bar and the fourth bar – which represent the 40 to 49 year and 50 to

59 year categories respectively). However, 1 out of 10 respondents were aged 60 years old or over, 10.4% (20), and similarly, a further 1 out of 10 were aged 30 to 39 years of age, 9.9% (19).⁴⁹ On average, respondent carers were aged 49.3 years old at the time of interview.

48 | The gender breakdown is based on 204 respondents, as both the male and female carer of one young person answered some questions each. However, interviews were largely carried out with one foster carer for each young person that met the study criteria. Where there was more than one adult carer in the family, the choice of who took part was made by the carer themselves. In practice, this usually depended on whoever answered the telephone.

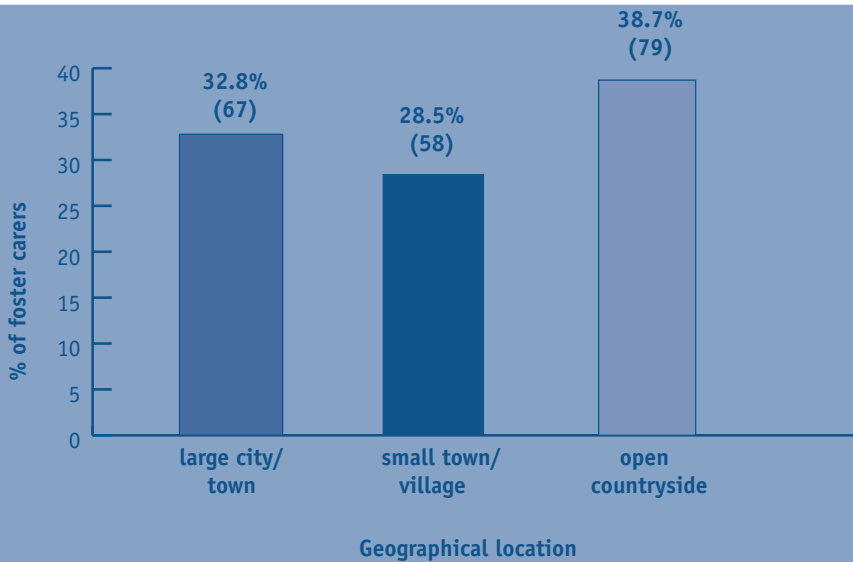
49 | Chart 3.9 is based on 192 respondents as data were missing for the remaining 13.

Geographical location

There was an even breakdown between those foster carers living in a large city/town, small town/village or the open countryside, as indicated in Chart 3.10.

Foster carers were most likely to live in the open countryside, 38.7% (79), followed closely by a large city/town, 32.8% (67), and finally, a small town/village, 28.5% (58).⁵⁰ Therefore, both urban and rural areas are well represented by the young people that are the focus of this study.

Chart 3.10: Geographical location of foster carers



Educational attainment of foster carers

Education is a key theme in the study, and therefore, respondents were asked to give some information on their own educational attainment.⁵¹ Table 3.1 shows the results for both male and female carers.

Foster carers were most likely to have completed their education at second level (when the categories of Intermediate/Junior/Group Certificate and the Leaving Certificate are combined). In

terms of highest educational attainment, carers were most likely to have achieved a primary level of education – 31.3% (63) of male carers and 28.9% (58) of female carers.⁵² Female carers were more likely to have achieved the Intermediate Certificate (or equivalent) than males – 25.9% (52) and 19.4% (39) respectively. Similarly, more female carers had achieved the Leaving Certificate than male carers – 19.9% (40) and 16.9% (34) respectively. Male carers were more likely to have attained a third level qualification than female carers – 19.5% (39) compared to 15.9% (32).

Table 3.1: Highest educational attainment of foster carers

Highest educational attainment	Male Carers		Female Carers	
	%	No.	%	No.
Primary school	31.3	63	28.9	58
Intermediate/Junior/Group Certificate	19.4	39	25.9	52
Leaving Certificate	16.9	34	19.9	40
Third Level Certificate/Diploma/Degree/Postgraduate	19.5	39	15.9	32
Other	3.0	6	8.0	16
Not applicable (no male or female carer)	10.0	20	1.5	3
Total	100.0	201*	100.0	201*

*Data was missing for the remaining cases

50 | Chart 3.10 is based on 204 respondents as data was missing for the remaining one young person.

51 | Where there were two adult carers in the family, the carer who took part in the interview gave the educational attainment for their partner also – usually the female carer gave the male carer's educational attainment.

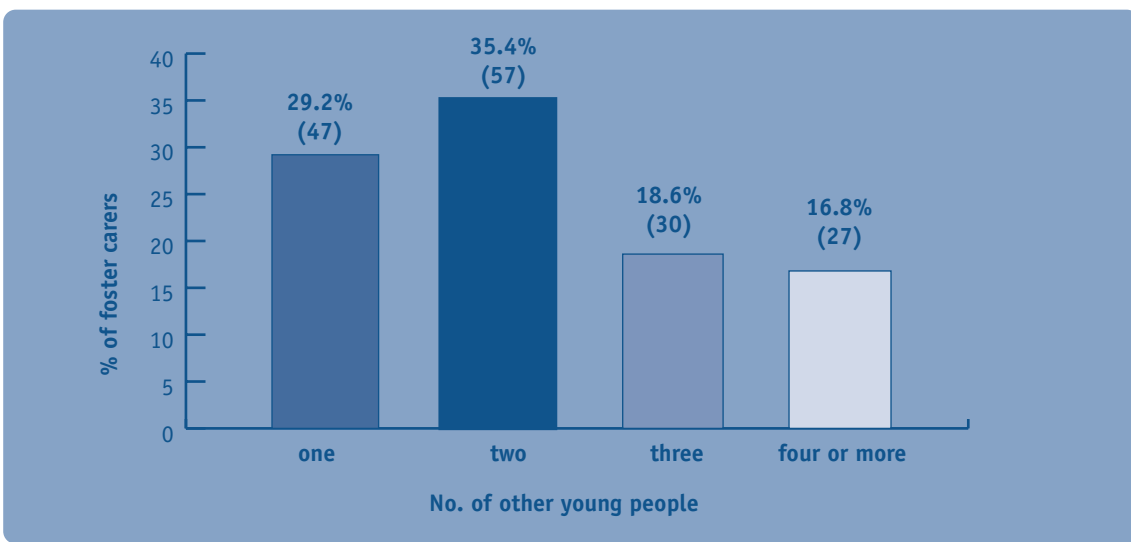
52 | Primary school in Ireland typically serves children aged five to twelve years.

Other young people and children in the foster family

The majority of foster carers had other young people and children aged under 18 years in the family *in addition* to the young person in foster care – a total of 78.9% (161). Chart 3.11 shows the number of other young people in the foster care household (excluding the young person in the study).

Of these 161 foster families, almost one quarter had one other child or young person in the household, 29.2% (47). Households were most likely to have another two children/young people, 35.4% (57). A further 18.6% (30) of households had three other children/young people. Finally, just over 1 out of 10 households had another four children/young people, 16.8% (27).

Chart 3.11: Number of other young people and children in the foster care household



Rating of 'closeness' between carers and young people

Foster carers were asked to rate the extent of 'closeness' between themselves and the young people in their care.⁵³ Respondents were asked to give a score between one and five (where one indicated a relationship that was not close at all and a score of five reflected a very close relationship). The aim here was to obtain some kind of measure of the degree of closeness perceived by foster carers in the relationship between carers and the young people.

It is clear from Table 3.2 that the majority of carers believed that their relationship with young people was either fairly or very close – 85.4% (170) of respondent carers and 71.9% (141) of partners/spouses of the respondent carers (rated by the respondent carer). It is likely that this result is influenced by the carer's own opinion. However, only a very small percentage of respondent carers rated the closeness of their relationship with young people (or that between their partner/spouse and the young person) as being low (score of one or two out of five).

Table 3.2: Rating of 'closeness' of relationship between carers and young people as reported by foster carers

Degree of closeness of relationship between carers and young people	Respondent carers		Partner/spouse	
	%	No.	%	No.
Not close at all (score of 1 out of 5)	1.5	3	2.0	4
Not that close (score of 2 out of 5)	2.0	4	2.0	4
Reasonably close sometimes (score of 3 out of 5)	11.1	22	12.8	25
Fairly close (score of 4 out of 5)	20.6	41	20.9	41
Very close (score of 5 out of 5)	64.8	129	51.0	100
Not applicable (no second adult carer)	-	-	11.2	22
Total	100.0	199*	100.0	196*

*Data for the remaining carers were missing

53 | Similar to the responses on educational attainment, where there was a second adult carer in the foster family, the respondent carer answered on their behalf.

Number of adult carers in foster care households

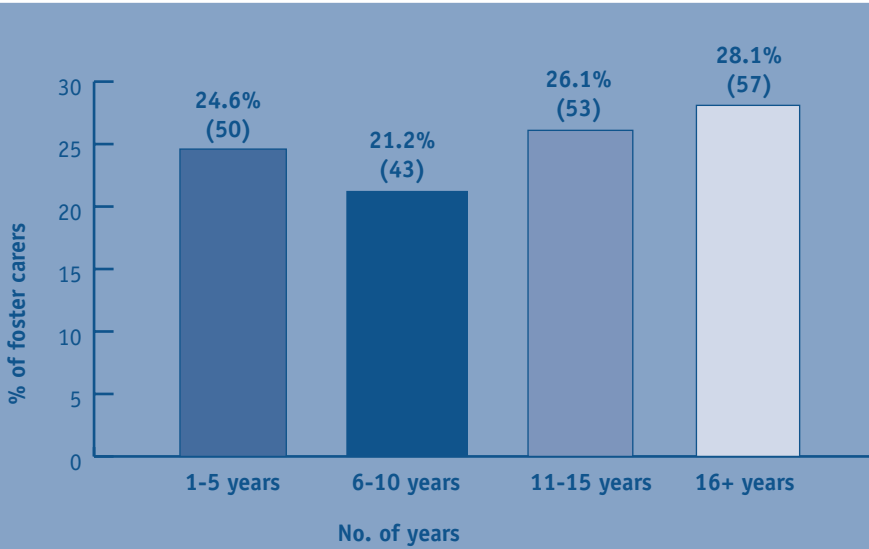
The majority of foster care households consisted of two adult carers, 88.8% (166), while 11.2% (21) consisted of one adult.⁵⁴

Length of time as a foster carer

The results on the characteristics of young people in foster care presented earlier showed that the majority of young people had been in care for a relatively long period of time given their age. Similarly, the foster carers that participated in the study had been fostering for a long time.

Chart 3.12 shows that just under one quarter of foster carers, 24.6% (50), had been fostering for a relatively short period of time of 1 to 5 years. However, for many foster carers, fostering was something that they had done for a long period of time. Over one half of foster carers, 54.2% (110), had been fostering for more than 10 years (a combination of the two categories 11 to 15 years and 16+ years, shown by the third bar and the fourth bar respectively).⁵⁵ On average, carers had been fostering for 11.4 years. The number of years ranged greatly from 1 to 37 years. Therefore, the activity of fostering was something that had obviously taken up a large extent of the lives of the foster carers in this study.

Chart 3.12: Number of years foster carers had been fostering



54 | This result is based on 187 foster carers on whom information was available.

55 | Chart 3.12 is based on 203 respondents as data were missing for the remaining two young people.

Summary of results on the characteristics of foster carers

- ▶ **Gender of respondents:** The majority of foster carers interviewed for this study were female, 90.2% (184), while 9.8% (20) were male.
- ▶ **Age of respondents:** The age of respondents varied quite widely. The majority of respondents, 78.1% (150), were aged between 40 to 59 years old.
- ▶ **Geographical location:** There was an even breakdown between those foster carers who lived in a large city/town, small town/village or the open countryside. Therefore, young people from both rural and urban areas were included in the study.
- ▶ **Highest educational attainment:** Foster carers were most likely to have a primary level of education – 31.3% (63) of males and 28.9% (58) of females. Female carers were slightly more likely to have achieved the Intermediate/Group/Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate, while male carers were more likely to have attained a third level qualification.
- ▶ **Other young people and children in the foster family:** The majority of foster families, 78.9% (161), had other young people and children aged less than 18 years of age in the family in addition to the young person in foster care. Also, almost two thirds of foster carers, 61.0% (125), had more than one young person in foster care in the household.
- ▶ **Rating of ‘closeness’ between carers and young people:** The majority of carers, 85.4% (170), believed their relationship with young people was either fairly close or very close. Similarly, almost three quarters of respondent carers, 71.9% (141), rated the relationship between the young person and the respondent carer’s partner/spouse as either fairly close or very close.
- ▶ **Number of adult foster carers:** The majority of foster care households, 88.8% (166), consisted of two adult carers. There was just one adult carer in 1 in 10 households.
- ▶ **Length of time as a foster carer:** Over one half of foster carers, 54.2% (110), had been fostering for more than 10 years.

After providing some background information on the young people that were the focus of this study, along with their foster carers, the results on the substantive issues that this study is concerned with will be presented. The first area to be addressed is that of young people’s education and schooling.

Chapter 4

Education and Schooling

Introduction

The overall aim of the questions on education and schooling was to build up a picture of the everyday schooling experiences of young people aged 13 to 14 years in long term foster care. The information shed light on three main aspects of young people's education and schooling.

- ▶ School attendance
- ▶ Behaviour at school
- ▶ Educational progress

In addition, there are some results on other aspects of young people's education and schooling towards the end of this chapter, including change of school and bullying.

The data presented here relates to a particular timeframe – that of the school year from September 2001 to June 2002. This was the last *full* school year prior to interviews taking place. Foster carers were asked to answer the questions in the interview based on the events that had occurred in the young person's life in relation to school over that year.⁵⁶ To save repetition, when the 'school year' is mentioned in the results, the period in question is always September 2001 to June 2002, unless otherwise stated.

It is important to emphasise that the data reflects the view of one stakeholder only, that of the foster carer. The reasons for interviewing foster carers and not young people themselves were outlined in Chapter 2. To recap briefly here, as young people are living with foster carers and their families, foster carers were deemed to be best placed to answer the questions on the daily lives of these young people. Obviously, the answers foster carers gave were based on their knowledge, perception

and memory. However, the majority of the questions were of a largely factual nature and often involved identifying whether certain events had occurred or not, for example, whether the child had been in detention, had been suspended or expelled in the school year. Framing the questions in this way was intended to make it as easy as possible for foster carers to be able to give an answer, which in turn would provide as much information as possible for the purposes of the research.

In addition to providing an overview of the education and schooling of young people in the study, this chapter also presents some further analysis carried out on selected results. This further analysis involved exploring different aspects of young people's foster care placements with the aim of identifying the circumstances under which young people's education and schooling experiences may differ.

Type of school attended and nature of young people's school attendance

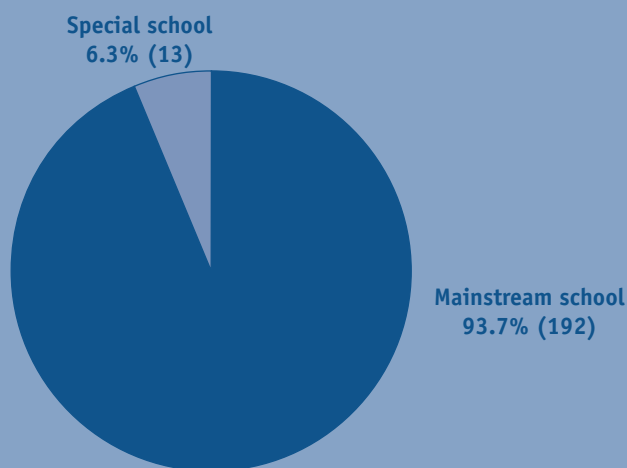
The first results in this section deal with the type of school that young people attended in the school year, including a breakdown of those attending a mainstream/special school and primary/post-primary school. Other information presented here includes the school class that young people had completed at the end of the academic year 2002 and whether they returned to the same school in the following school year, i.e. 2002/3.

Type of schooling experienced by young people

Mainstream/special school

Chart 4.1 shows that the majority of young people attended mainstream school, 93.7% (192),⁵⁷ and 6.3% (13) went to a special school.

Chart 4.1: Attendance at mainstream/special school



56 | It was important to give all respondents the same timeframe for answering the questions in order to facilitate making comparisons between the data.

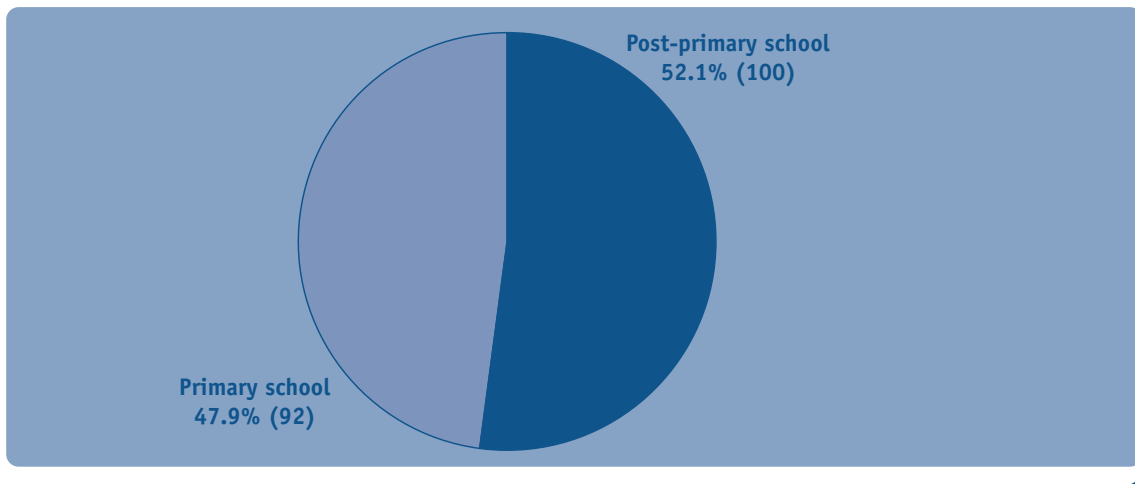
57 | Six of these young people attended 'other' schools – either Gaelscoil or boarding school. However, for the purpose of presenting the results in this report, these 6 young people are included with those attending 'mainstream' schools. The reason for this is that these two types of 'other' schools do not cater for a specific special need, such as a physical or learning disability, unlike special schools.

Primary/post-primary school

Based on the young people that were attending mainstream school (192), there was a fairly even breakdown between the number of young people attending primary and post-primary school, as shown in Chart 4.2.

Just under one half of young people, 47.9% (92), attended primary school at the time of interviews and 52.1% (100) went to a post-primary school.⁵⁸

Chart 4.2: Attendance at primary and post-primary school

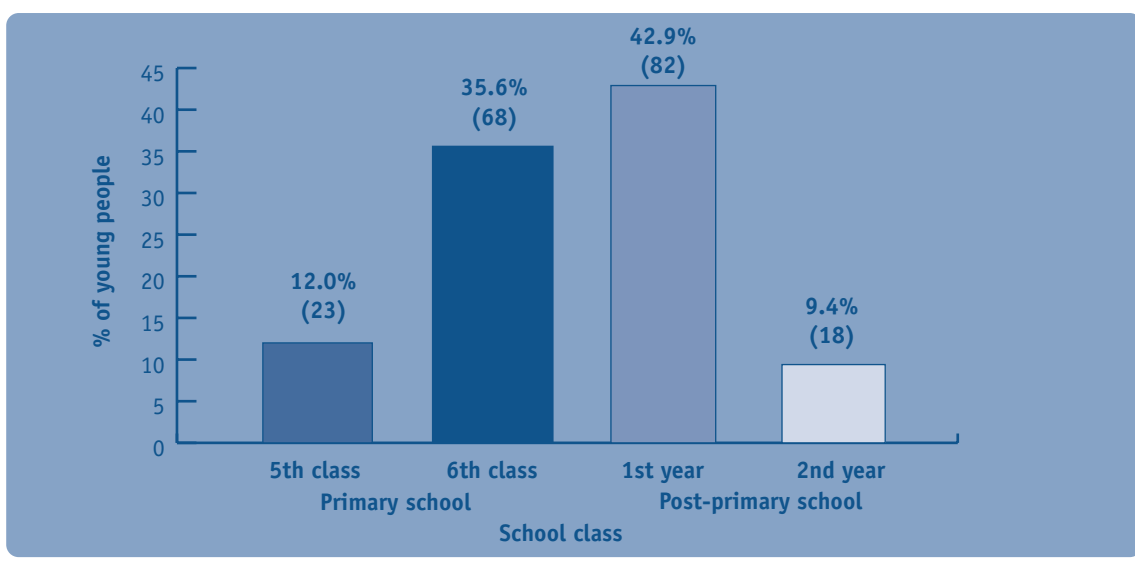


School class completed at academic year end 2002

Chart 4.3 shows the school class that the 192 young people who attended mainstream schools had completed at the end of the academic year 2002.

The majority of young people had completed either sixth class in primary school, 35.6% (68), or first year in post-primary school, 42.9% (82), at the academic year end 2002.⁵⁹ Therefore, the results presented on education and schooling in this chapter are largely based on events and experiences that happened in these two school classes.

Chart 4.3: School class completed at academic year end 2002



58 | The distinction between primary and post-primary school was seen as inappropriate for young people attending special school, and therefore, they were removed from this analysis.

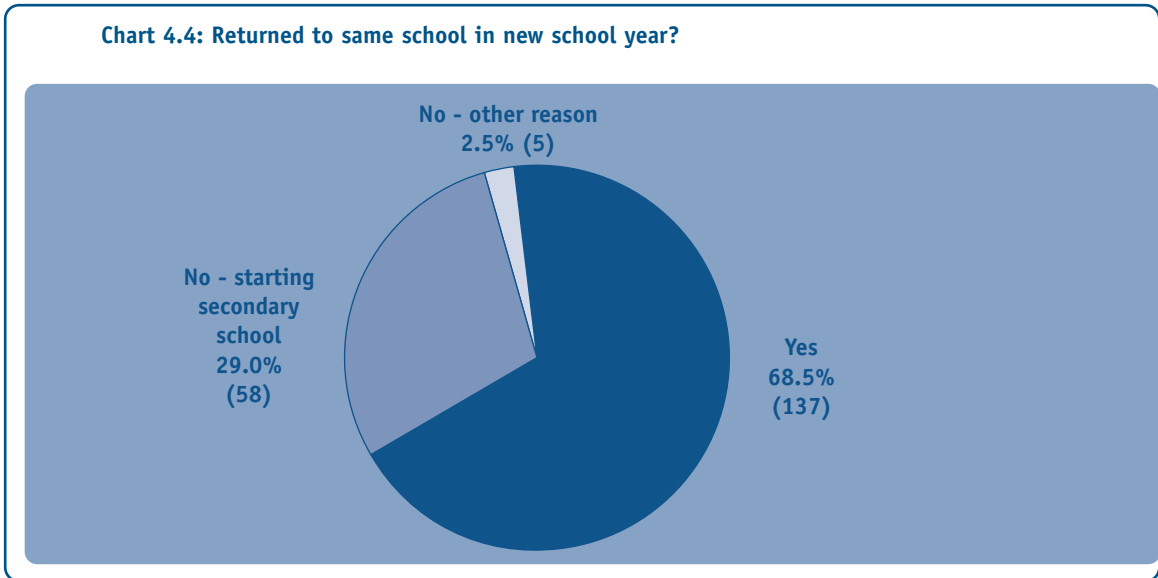
59 | Chart 4.3 is based on 191 young people as data were missing for one young person.

Continuity of schooling in the following school year, 2002/3

Chart 4.4 shows the number of young people who had returned to the same school in the following school year, i.e. 2002/3, and those who had not.⁶⁰ Chart 4.4 shows that the majority of young people had experienced no change in the school they

attended in the following academic year, 2002/3 – over two thirds of young people, 68.5% (137), had returned to the same school. Just under one third were changing school, but this was largely due to the natural transition from primary to post-primary school, 29.0% (58).⁶¹

Chart 4.4: Returned to same school in new school year?



The following results look at the nature of young people's school attendance, and where relevant, their non-attendance.

School attendance and non-attendance

Regular school attendance

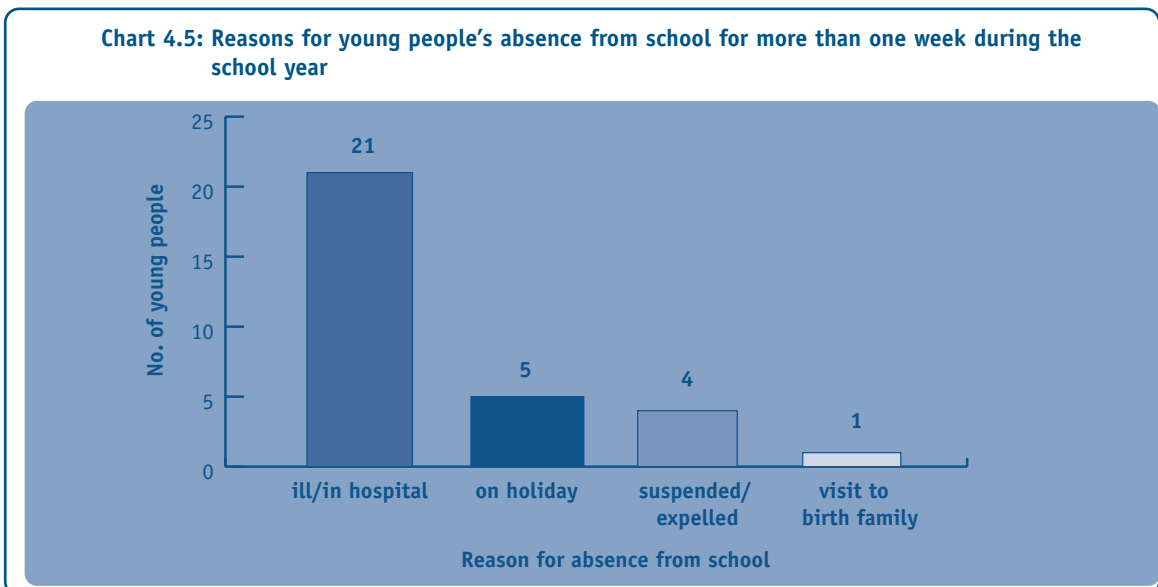
The overwhelming majority of young people, 98.0% (201), were reported to attend school on a regular basis throughout the school year.⁶²

Absent for more than one week

Foster carers reported that 16.6% (34) of young people had been absent from school for more than one week during the school year. The reasons for this given by foster carers are presented in Chart 4.5.

Where young people were absent from school for more than one week, this was largely due to them being ill or in hospital, 21 young people – the first bar.⁶³ However, being away from school for a relatively long period of time did not materialise as an issue for the majority of young people.

Chart 4.5: Reasons for young people's absence from school for more than one week during the school year



⁶⁰ | Interviews started in October 2002 so this information would have been available for all young people.

⁶¹ | Chart 4.4 is based on 200 young people as data were missing for the remaining 5.

⁶² | Of the four young people that were reported not to have attended school regularly in the school year, reasons were given by the carers of two of them. One young person was said to be having problems with their schoolwork and would reportedly say they were sick. Another young person was said to have refused to go to school when returned to their birth family for a short time during the school year. However, all four had attended school at some stage during the school year, and therefore were included in the results in this chapter.

⁶³ | Chart 4.5 is based on 31 young people as data were missing for the remaining three young people.

'Mitching'

A very small minority of young people were reported to have 'mitched' from school in the school year, 6.3% (13) – that is, they were absent from school without the foster carer's permission or knowledge. However, by virtue of the fact that foster carers may not actually know that the young person had stayed away from school during the year, this measure could underestimate the real likelihood of mitching amongst the young people in the study. Therefore, the above result is a measure of mitching that is *known about* by foster carers.

Where young people were reported to have 'mitched' from school, carers were asked if the young person had told them why they had stayed away from school. The reasons given included:

- ▶ Not wanting to go to school
- ▶ Wanting to do something else with friends
- ▶ Going along with older young people who were doing the same
- ▶ Bullying.

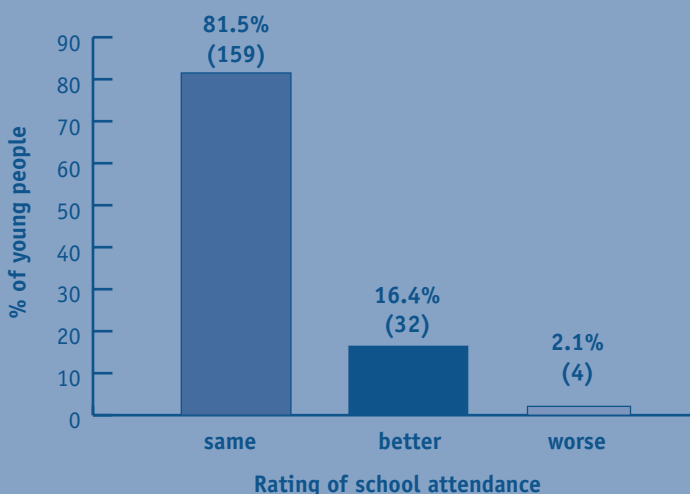
In most cases, the episodes of 'mitching' recounted by foster carers were of a short term nature and were not deemed by foster carers to have adversely affected young people's school attendance over time.

School attendance over time

Foster carers were asked if young people's school attendance had changed compared to two or three years ago, i.e. whether it had got better, worse or stayed the same. As most of the data provide a snapshot picture of aspects of young people's education and schooling, this question attempted to identify any changes over time that might not otherwise have been picked up. Looking at school attendance over time was only applicable to young people who had been with their current foster carer for the last two or three years, which was the majority of young people (198 in total).

Chart 4.6 shows that school attendance was deemed the same now as it had been a few years ago for the majority of young people, 81.5% (159). School attendance was rated as having improved for 16.4% (32) but had worsened for just 2.1% (4) of young people.⁶⁴

Chart 4.6: Rating of school attendance now compared to 2/3 years ago



Summary of results on the type of school attended and nature of school attendance

In relation to the *type of school* attended, young people in the study were most likely to:

- ▶ Attend mainstream school
- ▶ Have just completed sixth class in primary school or first year in post-primary school
- ▶ Have returned to the same school in the new school year, 2002/3.

The results on school attendance show that the majority of young people:

- ▶ Attended school on a regular basis
- ▶ Were not known to have 'mitched' from school
- ▶ Had a stable record of school attendance over time.

Where young people had been absent from school for more than one week, this tended to be due to illness.

⁶⁴ | Chart 4.6 is based on 195 young people as data were missing for three young people.

Young people's behaviour at school

The following results look at young people's behaviour at school, with some reference to their behaviour at home also. Foster carers were asked to answer questions about young people's school behaviour based on feedback they had received from teachers when attending parent-teacher evenings and also from school reports. In addition, foster carers were asked to indicate whether young people had been sanctioned for poor behaviour at

school, for example, if the foster carer had been contacted by the school, or whether the young person had been in detention in the school year.

Rating of young people's behaviour at school during the school year

Foster carers were asked to rate young people's behaviour over the school year based on information they had received from the school.

Chart 4.7: Rating of young people's behaviour at school during the school year by foster carers

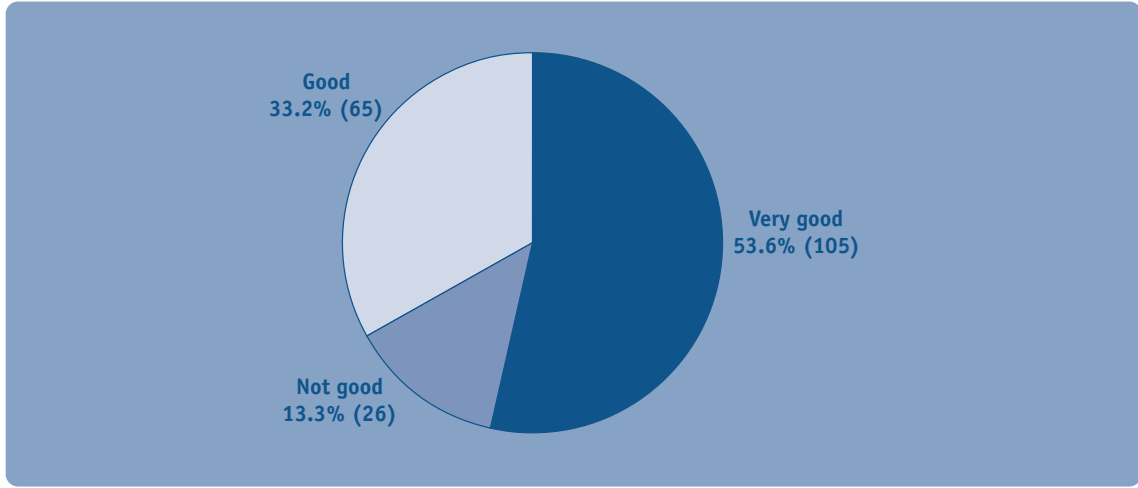


Chart 4.7 shows that just over one half of young people had their behaviour at school rated as 'very good', 53.6% (105). In addition, one third of young people's behaviour was rated as 'good', 33.2% (65), and the remaining 13.3% (26) of young people had their behaviour rated as 'not good'.⁶⁵ Therefore, carers reported that the school behaviour of over 8 out of 10 young people during the school year was either 'very good' or 'good'.

Change in behaviour at school over the year

To gain further insight into young people's behaviour at school during the school year, foster carers were asked to state whether that behaviour had got better, worse or stayed the same throughout the year.

Chart 4.8 shows that well over one half of young people, 60.4% (116), were reported to have behaved in the same way at school, neither worse nor better, during the year. Just over one quarter of young people, 27.6% (53), were said to have improved in terms of their behaviour at school,

while for 12.0% (23) of young people, their behaviour was reported to have got worse.⁶⁶

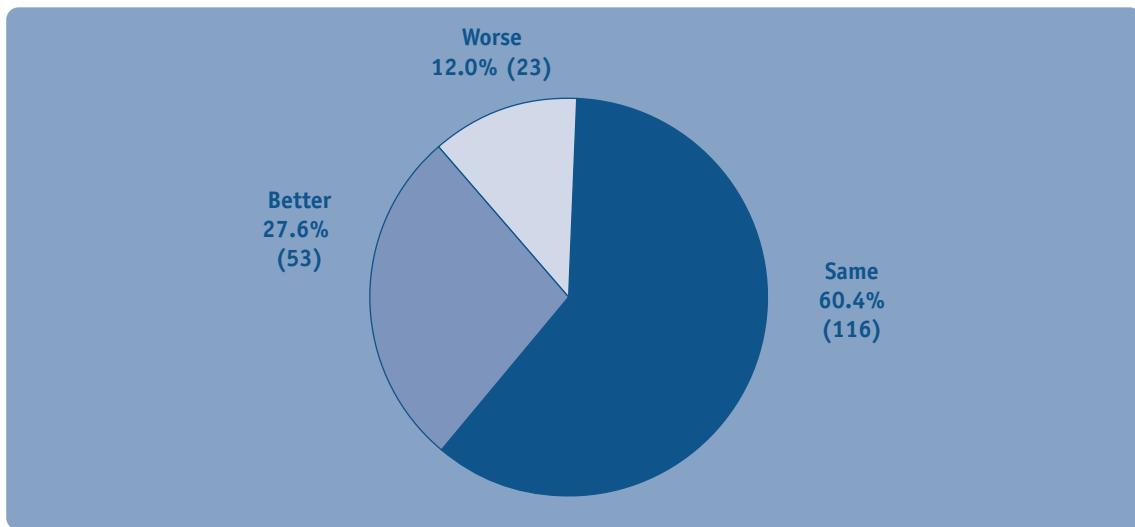
In order to provide more information on those young people who had behaved poorly, carers were asked to specify ways in which behaviour was 'not good'. Where foster carers had reported that young people's school behaviour was 'not good' and/or their behaviour had 'got worse' during the school year (previous two results), they were asked to specify the kind of behaviour exhibited by the young person. Examples given of such behaviour included being disruptive in class, disobeying the teacher and, to a lesser extent, picking on other children.

In addition to how behaviour had changed during the school year, foster carers were asked how young people's behaviour at school had changed over the last few years. The results are similar to the trends reported above where young people were most likely to have behaved the same over the last few years (just over one half), while the behaviour of a further third of young people had reportedly improved.

⁶⁵ | Chart 4.7 is based on 196 young people as the responses for the remaining nine young people were not included in the chart – the response for one young person was 'don't know' and for the remaining eight it was 'other', which often involved the carer giving more than one response.

⁶⁶ | Chart 4.8 is based on 192 young people as data was missing for the remaining 13.

Chart 4.8: Change in young people’s behaviour at school during the school year as reported by foster carers



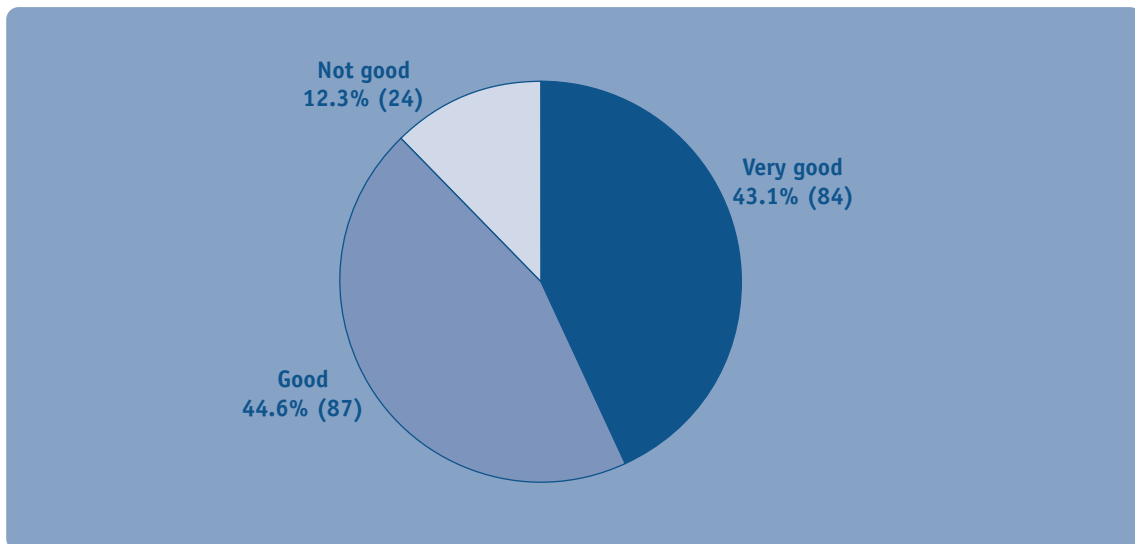
Behaviour at home

Foster carers were asked to rate young people’s behaviour at home.

Chart 4.9 shows that most young people had their behaviour at home rated by foster carers as either

‘very good’, 43.1% (84) or ‘good’, 44.6% (87), making a total of 87.7% (171) of young people whose behaviour at home was rated as ‘very good’ or ‘good.’⁶⁷ A similar percentage of young people had their behaviour at school rated as either ‘very good’ or ‘good’.

Chart 4.9: Rating of young people’s behaviour at home by foster carers



67 | Chart 4.9 is based on 195 young people as data were missing for five and more than one response was given for the remaining five young people.

Change in behaviour at home during the year

Foster carers were also asked whether the young person's behaviour at home had got better, worse or stayed the same compared to a year ago.

Chart 4.10: Change in young people's behaviour at home over one year as reported by foster carers

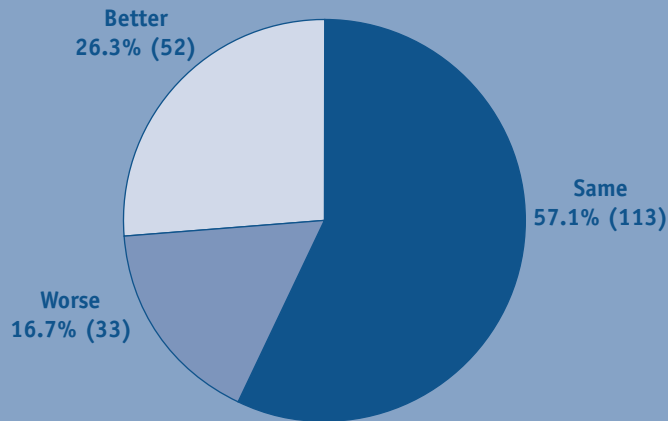


Chart 4.10 shows that the behaviour of just over one half of young people at home had stayed the same over the previous twelve months, 57.1% (113). The behaviour of just over one quarter of young people was said to have improved over this time, 26.3% (52), and for 16.7% (33), their behaviour at home was deemed to have gotten worse.⁶⁸

Some analysis was carried out to explore whether there was a relationship between young people's behaviour at home and school. However, there is a

limitation to this analysis. The information gathered on behaviour at school and home each refers to a different time period – behaviour at school over the school year 2001/2 and behaviour at home at the time of interview, which was slightly later (from October 2002 to February 2003). Therefore, strictly speaking, both variables should not be directly compared. However, this analysis does provide some indication of young people's behaviour in both environments and therefore, was carried out, while acknowledging the above limitation.

Table 4.1: Rating of young people's behaviour at school and home as reported by foster carers

		Rating of behaviour at home			
		Very good % (n)	Good % (n)	Not good % (n)	Total % (n)
Rating of behaviour at school	Very good	73.8 (62)	45.7 (37)	21.7 (5)	55.3 (104)
	Good	22.6 (19)	43.2 (35)	30.4 (7)	32.4 (61)
	Not good	3.6 (3)	11.1 (9)	47.8 (11)	12.2 (23)
Total		100.0 (84)	100.0 (81)	100.0 (23)	100.0 (188)

$\chi^2 = 45.713$, $df = 4$, $p < .01$
 $\rho = 0.405$, $N = 188$, $p < 0.0005$, two tailed

⁶⁸ | Chart 4.10 is based on 198 young people as data were missing for the remaining seven.

Table 4.1 shows that almost three quarters of young people whose behaviour at home was rated as 'very good' were also given the same rating for their behaviour in school, 73.8% (62). At the other extreme, 47.8% (11) of young people whose behaviour at home was deemed 'not good' also had their behaviour at school rated the same. This is a statistically significant relationship.⁶⁹ Therefore, it would appear that there is an association between behaviour in the two environments of the home and school, particularly where young people's behaviour was rated as 'very good'. However, it should be remembered that both variables refer to slightly different timeframes, as noted earlier.

Further information on young people's behaviour at school was collected which involved asking foster carers questions about specific instances of poor behaviour in which young people may have been involved.

Indicators of poor behaviour at school

The picture so far of young people's behaviour at school is largely positive. Additional indicators of young people's behaviour at school were gathered in interviews with foster carers. These related to certain events that could have happened in the school year, which would provide some further insight into young people's behaviour at school. These events were as follows:

- ▶ Whether the *school had contacted the carer* about the young person's behaviour in the school year

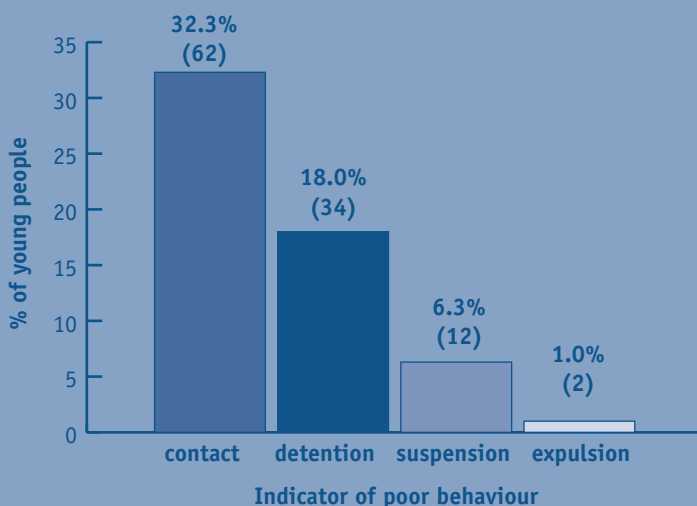
- ▶ Whether the young person had been in *detention* during the school year
- ▶ Whether the young person had been *suspended* in the school year
- ▶ Whether the young person had been *expelled* in the school year.

Chart 4.11 shows the results for each of the four indicators.⁷⁰

Out of the four indicators for poor behaviour at school, Chart 4.11 shows that foster carers were most likely to have been contacted by the school, 32.3% (62). During the school year, 18.0% (34) of young people had been in detention at some time.⁷¹ The more serious sanction of suspension was experienced by 6.3% (12) of young people. Finally, just 1.0% (2) of young people had been expelled during the school year. Reasons given for these instances of poor behaviour at school ranged from not having homework done and being disruptive in class to stealing, bullying and being involved in fights at school. Out of the four indicators of poor behaviour at school, 38.6% (74) of young people were said to have experienced at least one, with the remaining 61.4% (118) experiencing none.

Looking at the additional four indicators of school behaviour – school contact, detention, suspension and expulsion – it is clear that only a small percentage of young people, whose foster carers were interviewed, had serious issues concerning their behaviour at school.

Chart 4.11: Indicators of poor behaviour at school as reported by foster carers



69 | This is shown by the significant chi-square statistic under the table, as well as a significant positive correlation between behaviour at home and school (Spearman's rho)

70 | All the results in Chart 4.11 are based on the 192 young people in mainstream school, unless otherwise indicated.

71 | The result on detention is based on 189 young people as three young people were reported to be attending schools that did not have detentions.

Summary of results on young people's behaviour at school and home

Young people tended to have:

- ▶ Their behaviour at school rated as 'very good' or 'good'
- ▶ Been given the same rating for their behaviour throughout the school year
- ▶ Their behaviour at home rated as 'very good' or 'good'
- ▶ The same rating of behaviour at home as that for school.

In relation to the four measures of poor behaviour, young people were most likely to have been disciplined by having the foster carers contacted by the school or else to have been in detention at some time during the school year.

Young people were highly unlikely to have been suspended or expelled from school during the school year, 2001/2.

The next section of results on the education and schooling of young people aged 13 to 14 years in long term foster care looks at their educational progress.

Young people's educational progress

'Educational progress' is defined here in a broad way. While it includes academic progress with school subjects, it is not restricted to this. Additional measures of progress with schoolwork were also collected such as whether any young people were in a special class, had received any remedial education classes in the school year and if they had any extra help with schoolwork including

grinds. Some aspects of young people's individual circumstances were also taken into account, including whether they were reported to have any diagnosed special needs or a disability. The main aim of this section was to gain an insight into the prevalence and extent of educational needs that this group of young people may have.

Progress with school subjects

Foster carers were given a list of subjects that young people in their care might take at school – both academic and non-academic. The list of subjects for young people attending primary and post-primary school are given in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2: List of primary and post-primary school subjects used to measure young people's educational progress in interviews with foster carers

<i>Primary school subjects</i>	<i>Post-primary school subjects</i>
Reading	English
Writing	Maths
Maths	Irish
Irish	Other languages
Art	Science
Sport/physical education	Art/crafts
Computers	Sport/physical education
	Computers

Carers were asked to say whether in their view the young person was achieving 'above average', 'average' or 'below average' in each subject and to base their answers on school reports and other feedback from the school. The aim of doing this was to establish if there were any particular subjects that this group of young people were doing well in and those they might be struggling with somewhat – this is presented directly below. In addition, analysis was also carried out to establish how young people performed across *all* of their academic subjects – this is also presented

here. Young people who were going to a special school (13) were not included in this analysis because they were likely to follow a different educational programme to young people in mainstream school. Out of the 192 young people attending mainstream school, 92 went to primary school and 100 attended a post-primary school. The first set of results focus on the subjects that young people were likely to be doing well in and those subjects that they might require additional help with.

Ranking of school subjects based on young people's performance as reported by foster carers

As a way of presenting these results concisely a score was calculated for each subject based on whether the foster carer had responded 'above average', 'average' or 'below average'. The scoring system used was as follows:

- ▶ 'Above average' responses were allocated three points
- ▶ 'Average' responses were allocated two points
- ▶ 'Below average' responses were allocated one point.

A total score for each subject was calculated and then used to rank them in order to identify the

subjects that young people were most likely to do well in and those they had difficulty with.

In order to cancel out any bias resulting from missing data where more scores may be missing for certain subjects, the *mean score* was used to make comparisons between subjects. Therefore, the subjects with the highest mean scores indicated those subjects that young people were rated as doing relatively very well in, while those with the lowest mean scores indicated the subjects in which young people were doing relatively less well in and possibly needed extra help with. Table 4.3 shows the results for subjects taken by young people in primary school.

Table 4.3: Scores for young people's progress with subjects in primary school as reported by foster carers

Subject	Total Score	Valid cases	Mean Score (1=low, 3=high)
Sport/physical education	199	82	2.43
Art	185	79	2.34
Computers	125	57	2.19
Reading	177	90	1.97
Writing	175	90	1.94
Irish	142	83	1.71
Maths	145	90	1.61

Table 4.3 shows the total score for each subject (based on the scoring method outlined above), the number of valid cases (number of young people for whom a response was given for that subject), and finally, the mean score for each subject.⁷² When ranked by mean score, Sport/Physical education is the subject that young people are most likely to perform well in, according to foster carers. The mean score of 2.43 means that on average each young person that did Sport/Physical education scored 2.43 out of a maximum score of three (the

score allocated for 'above average' responses). Art came next, with the second highest mean score of 2.34, followed by computers at 2.19. Irish and Maths have the lowest mean scores out of all the subjects, with scores of 1.71 and 1.61 respectively. These two scores are below the 'average' score of two and therefore indicate that young people might benefit from more help with these two subjects. The above results are based on young people in primary school. The results for young people in post-primary school are shown next.

⁷² | The mean score is calculated by dividing the total score by the number of valid cases.

Table 4.4: Scores for young people's progress with subjects in post-primary school as reported by foster carers

Subject	Total Score	Valid cases	Mean Score (1=low, 3=high)
Art/crafts	181	75	2.41
Computers	149	62	2.40
Sport/Physical education	190	81	2.35
English	198	99	2.00
Science	151	77	1.96
Other languages	134	69	1.94
Maths	173	99	1.75
Irish	151	90	1.68

Table 4.4 shows that Art/crafts, Computers and Sport/Physical education were the three highest ranked subjects in which young people in post-primary school were reported to be doing well – with respective mean scores of 2.41, 2.40 and 2.35. Medium ranked subjects were English, Science and other languages – 2.00, 1.96 and 1.94 respectively. Maths and Irish were the two subjects in which young people were least likely to be performing well, with mean scores of 1.75 and 1.68 respectively.

The ranking of subjects based on how well young people were deemed to be performing in them is fairly similar for young people in both primary and post-primary school – with Sport/Physical education, Art and Computers in the top three, followed by English. For young people in both primary and post-primary school, Maths and Irish were the two subjects that they were least likely to perform well in.

Young people's individual educational progress in academic school subjects as reported by foster carers

This section presents results on young people's progress across all academic subjects.⁷³ Again, a mean score was calculated for each young person based on the total score and the number of 'academic' subjects for which a response had been given.⁷⁴ Young people were then classified into one of three categories: low score, medium score and high score. The cut off points for each category were determined by looking at the mean score and standard deviation.⁷⁵

The mean score representing young people's progress in academic subjects for those in *primary school* ranged from 1.0 ('below average' in all academic subjects) to 3.0 ('above average' in all academic subjects). On average young people had

a mean score of 1.8 (standard deviation of 0.52). Based on these two results, the cut off points for the three categories of 'low', 'medium' and 'high' were as follows:

- ▶ 'Low' – mean score of 1.0 to 1.3⁷⁶
- ▶ 'Medium' – mean score of 1.4 to 2.2
- ▶ 'High' – mean score of 2.3 to 3.0.

The range of mean scores measuring progress with academic school subjects for young people in *post-primary schools* ranged from 1.0 to 3.0, as it did for those in primary school. On average, young people had a mean score of 1.8, again the same for those in primary school (the standard deviation was 0.45). Therefore, the same cut-off points were used for young people in post-primary school as those used for young people in primary school, to determine whether they had made 'low', 'medium' or 'high' progress with their academic school subjects.

Chart 4.12 shows the percentage of young people who were classified as having 'low', 'medium' and 'high' educational progress with academic subjects. The results were similar for young people in primary and post-primary school. Approximately one fifth of young people had made 'low' progress in their academic school subjects, 22.2% (20) of those at primary school and 19.2% (19) of those at post-primary school – the first set of bars. Over one half of young people in primary school, 54.4% (49) and almost two thirds of those in post-primary school, 63.6% (63), made 'medium' progress – the second set of bars. The remaining young people were deemed to be making good progress as their mean scores fell into the 'high' category in their academic subjects – 23.3% (21) of those in primary school and 17.2% (17) of those in post-primary school – the third set of bars.⁷⁷

73 | The subjects defined as 'academic' and therefore included in this analysis were reading, writing, Irish and Maths (primary school) and English, Irish, Maths, Science and other languages (post-primary school).

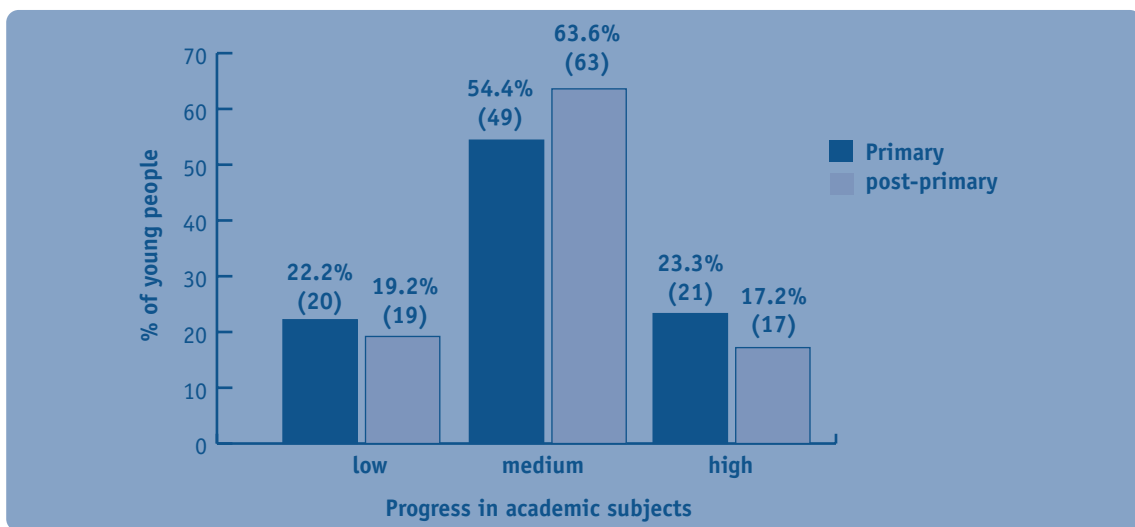
74 | This data is based on the same information that was used to rank subjects before, except that the scores based on foster carers' responses are totalled up for each young person rather than for each subject.

75 | The standard deviation is a summary measure of dispersion, in other words how widely spread the values of any given variable are. It represents how the values in a distribution differ from the mean and includes all cases.

76 | The upper limit of 1.3 represents the mean (1.8) minus the standard deviation (0.5).

77 | Chart 4.12 is based on 90 young people in primary school (data for 2 young people was missing) and 99 young people in post-primary school (data for one young person was missing).

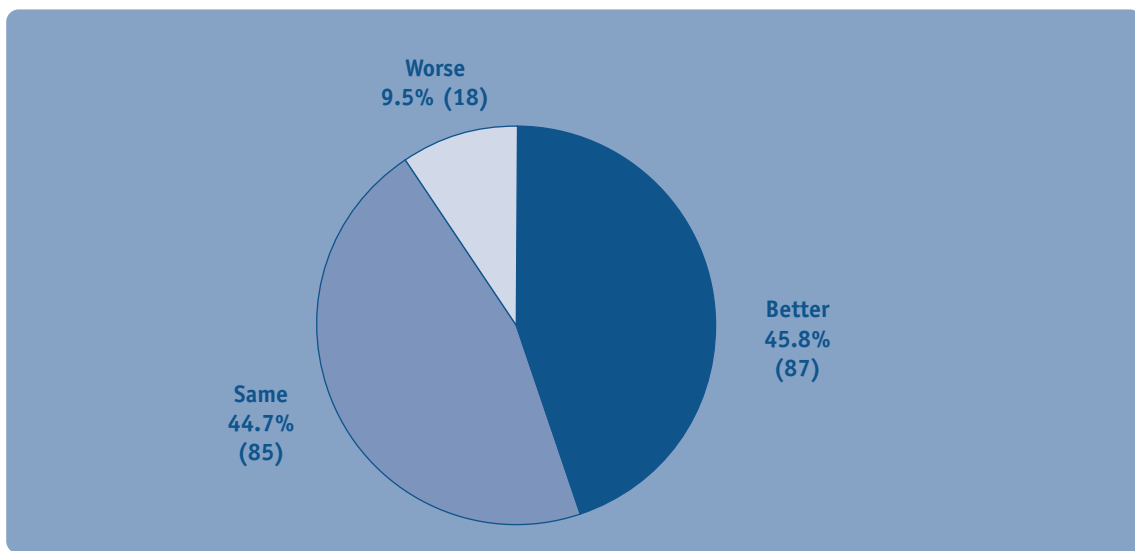
Chart 4.12: Progress in academic subjects for young people in primary and post-primary school as reported by foster carers (based on mean scores)



Considering the results on progress with academic subjects for young people in primary and post-primary school, it appears that young people were most likely to be seen as making fairly good progress in their schoolwork (over half of young

people were categorised as making ‘medium’ progress in both primary and post-primary school). However, approximately one fifth of young people in both primary and post-primary school had their progress rated as ‘low’.⁷⁸

Chart 4.13: Young people’s progress with schoolwork overtime as reported by foster carers



Educational progress over time

Foster carers were asked to state if young people’s progress with their schoolwork had changed over time. Chart 4.13 shows the results.

Chart 4.13 shows that the majority of young people had made equal or better progress with their schoolwork over time – 44.7% (85) and 45.8% (87) respectively. Just under 1 in 10 young people had been deemed to be doing less well now compared to a few years ago, 9.5% (18).

Next, the information gathered on young people’s educational provision will be discussed in relation to what this says about young people’s educational needs.

Type of educational provision and educational need

One of the key indicators of educational progress and educational need is the additional help that young people receive at school above and beyond

⁷⁸ | As each individual young person’s mean score takes account of the number of academic subjects that information was available for in relation to their progress, missing data did not have any impact on these results.

that normally provided through day to day schooling. Therefore, information was collected on the type of educational provision that young people received at school. This consisted of asking whether young people received any remedial classes in the school year (in addition to their day to day classes)⁷⁹, if they were in a special class (in mainstream school)⁸⁰ or if they attended a special school (and therefore, did not attend mainstream school). Based on this information, a new variable 'type of educational provision' was created.

Type of educational provision

This variable measures the nature of educational provision received by young people in the school year. It establishes whether young people received day to day schooling only or whether they had some assistance over and above this, either in the form of remedial help or a greater degree of specialist help by attending a special class or school. Therefore, there are three types of educational provision recorded here: day to day schooling only, remedial classes or special class or school.

Chart 4.14: Type of educational provision received by young people in the school year as reported by foster carers

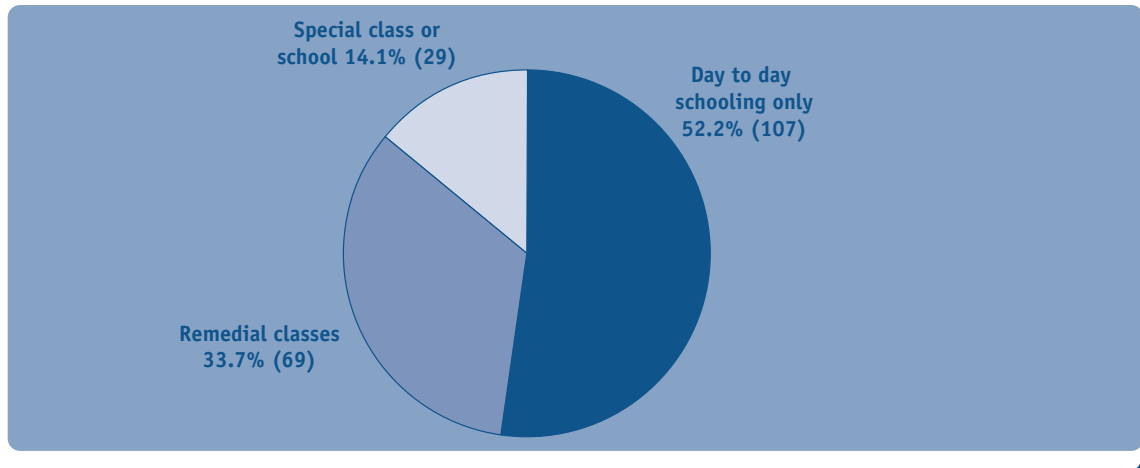


Chart 4.14 shows that:

- ▶ Just over one half of young people, 52.2% (107), had received 'normal' day to day schooling only in the school year
- ▶ One third of young people, 33.7% (69), had received remedial classes in mainstream schools
- ▶ The remaining 14.1% (29) had received specialist educational provision, either by attending a special class (within mainstream schooling) or a special school (outside of mainstream schooling).

These results show that young people were most likely to have received day to day schooling in the school year. However, there was a substantial number who had received additional help through remedial classes and a sizeable minority had particular educational needs that received specialist help (in the form of a special school or class).

In relation to remedial education, English and Maths were the two most common subjects for which young people had remedial classes – 50 and 36 young people respectively. This corresponds with the earlier finding that English was one of the two subjects that young people in both primary and

post-primary schools were performing least well in. However, the other subject that young people were doing least well in was Irish and only five young people were reported to be having remedial help with this subject. Therefore, this may be a particular need that does not appear to be met through specialist educational provision.

Using the information on the nature of educational provision, a second variable was created to provide another measure of the educational experience of the group of young people in this study – that of 'educational need'.

Educational need

Educational need is a further extension of the variable 'type of educational provision'. It collapses two of the categories in Chart 4.14 to give a percentage of those deemed to be in educational need – defined here as being those young people attending special school or special class along with young people receiving remedial education within mainstream schooling. Based on this definition:

- ▶ 47.8% (98) of young people were identified as having educational needs (they were in a special class/school or received remedial education in the school year), while

79 | Remedial classes tended to be for one or two subjects only. In the case of 8 young people, they had remedial classes in all their subjects but they were not in a special class.

80 | Being in a special class referred to a young person being taught in a separate class from their peers for all their subjects, as they require additional help. A special class is still within a mainstream school setting.

- ▶ 52.2% (107) of young people were deemed not to be in educational need (they received day to day schooling only).

The above results on the nature of educational provision and educational need are presented in Figure 4.1, which summarises the type of educational provision received by young people at a glance.

Figure 4.1: Breakdown of young people attending special school, a special class or receiving remedial education

<i>Total no. of young people in the study</i>	205	100.0%
<i>minus No. attending special school</i>	13	6.3%
<i>equals No. attending mainstream school</i>	192	93.7%
<i>minus No. in special class</i>	16	7.8%
<i>equals No. in mainstream school not in a special class</i>	176	85.9%
<i>minus No. receiving remedial education</i>	69	33.7%
<i>equals No. receiving day to day schooling only (not receiving remedial education or in a special class)</i>	107	52.2%

Figure 4.1 shows the number of young people who received additional support at school in the form of attending a special school, being in a special class or receiving remedial education in mainstream schooling. When all the young people who received extra help have been removed from the total number of young people in the study, it shows that 107 young people – just over one half of the total of 205, 52.2% – experienced day to day schooling only and did not receive any form of additional help within the formal schooling system.

Type of educational provision under different foster care placement conditions

Almost one half of young people in the study had received educational provision over and above that provided in day to day schooling. Therefore, further analysis was carried out on the type of educational provision that young people received. This involved exploring various aspects of young people's foster care placements, for example, the length of time they had been in foster care, whether they were in a relative or non-relative foster care placement etc.⁸¹ The aim of this analysis was to establish whether the type of educational provision varied under different foster care placement conditions for young people.⁸²

One particular aspect of foster care placements was found to be of great significance for the type of educational provision received by young people – the age at which they were first placed into care (either in foster or residential care).

Age at which young people were first placed into care

The results show that young people who were first placed in care at a relatively older age were significantly more likely to be receiving *specialist* educational provision compared to those who had been placed when they were younger. That is, they had received some remedial education or were in a special class or school. For those who were first placed in care when aged 0 to 2 years, 36.8% (28) had received some form of specialist educational provision, this increased to 50.0% (30) of those placed when aged 3 to 8 years and higher still to 59.6% (28) for those aged 9 to 13 years when first placed in care. Therefore, it could be argued that young people placed in care at an earlier age were more likely to follow a pattern of 'normal' schooling (i.e. mainstream schooling) without receiving further educational assistance compared to those who were placed at a relatively older age.

After carrying out further analysis by type of educational provision, *remedial help* was identified as the key factor here. Young people who had been first placed in care at an older age were significantly more likely to have had remedial education in the school year 2001/2 compared to those who were younger when placed in care. Over one half of young people who had been first placed in care aged 9 to 13 years had received remedial help, 53.7% (22), this fell to 40.8% (20) for those aged 3 to 8 years and finally, to 27.7% (18) for young people placed in care aged 0 to 2 years.⁸³

81 | These aspects of young people's foster care placements were presented in Chapter 3.

82 | The chi-square test was used to establish if a relationship was statistically significant. Where this was the case, the appropriate correlation co-efficient was also calculated. A table of the statistically significant results to support these findings and a more detailed note on the nature of data analysis carried out is included at the end of this chapter. In addition, the cross tabulations on which the analysis here is based are available from the Children's Research Centre on request.

83 | This result was statistically significant, $\chi^2 = 7.279$, $df = 2$, $p < .05$. In addition, there was a significant correlation between remedial education and age first placed in care ($\rho = 0.219$, $N = 155$, $p = 0.003$, two tailed).

Special class/school was not a factor as there was no trend for young people receiving such special education to have been first placed in care at an older age – they were as likely to have been placed in care at 0 to 2 years as at 9 to 13 years old.

There were no other significant relationships between type of educational provision and other aspects of foster care placements (including being in relative/non-relative care).

Educational progress

As would be expected, young people were significantly more likely to receive specialist educational provision where their progress in academic school subjects was relatively below average. This finding was *highly significant*. Of those young people at primary school who had a low mean score for progress with their academic subjects, 100.0% (20) had received such provision, the comparable percentage for those with a medium mean score was 55.1% (27), and finally, those with a high mean score were much less likely to have done so, at 28.6% (6).

The same result was found for young people in post-primary school. For young people with a low mean score, 52.6% (10) had received some form of specialist educational provision compared to 30.2% (19) of those with a medium mean score and just 5.9% (1) of young people with a high mean score. This was statistically significant.

Gender and age of young people

There were no significant differences in relation to type of educational provision by either gender or age. However, the results did point to a potential trend. A slightly higher percentage of males had received specialist educational provision in the last year – 50.5% (50) of males compared to 45.3% (48) of females. Also, a slightly higher percentage of those in the younger age group, 12 to 13 years, had received some form of specialist educational provision – 51.4% (57) of those aged 12 to 13 years compared to 43.6% (41) of those aged 14 to 15 years. While neither of these two results were statistically significant, it would be reasonable to suggest that these two particular groups of young people – males and those aged 12 to 13 years – may warrant further exploration in relation to their educational needs.

Issues in relation to type of educational provision and educational need are as relevant to the whole school going population as young people in long term foster care. However, after identifying certain aspects of foster care placements as being significant or at least indicative of potential trends, it is clear that being in long term foster care may potentially have certain implications for this group of young people’s education and schooling that may not be factors for other young people of the same age. A summary table of the results from this analysis is presented below.⁸⁴

Summary table of results from further analysis on type of educational provision

	<i>Very important (statistically significant)</i>	<i>Important (trend)</i>	<i>Not important (no trend)</i>
Influences on whether young people had received specialist educational provision (either remedial help, attended a special class or a special school)	<p><i>Significantly</i> more likely where a young person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Had been placed in care at a relatively older age (9 to 13 years) ▶ Had made relatively poor progress in their academic subjects at school 	<p>Was more likely where a young person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Was male ▶ Was aged 12 to 13 years ▶ Had been with their current foster carer for a relatively shorter period of time ▶ Had been in care for a shorter period of time ▶ Had carers who had completed a primary level of education 	<p>There was no relationship with the following factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Placed with a sibling in the foster care household ▶ Previous care placements ▶ Number of previous care placements ▶ Other young people in the foster care household ▶ Relative/non-relative care placement

Additional indicators of educational need besides those measuring type of educational provision were also used to gather further information on the nature of young people’s day to day education. Data were collected on various factors including whether young people had repeated a year at

school since being placed with their current carer and whether they had changed class in the last year. Following on from this, information was gathered on whether young people had special needs or a disability, as well as on their health in general.

84 | This summary table includes other aspects of young people’s foster care placements that may not have been discussed in the text but are included here for further information.

Repeated a year at school since placed

Just under one fifth of young people, 19.5% (40), had repeated a year at school since they were placed with their current foster carer. When this was explored further, it was found that the school

year repeated included any of the years in primary school from junior infants right up to 6th class.⁸⁵ The results are shown in Table 4.5 and are based on 37 young people (data were missing for three young people).

Table 4.5: School years repeated by young people during their current care placement as reported by foster carers

School year repeated	%	No.
Junior Infants	13.5	5
Senior Infants	5.4	2
First Class	16.2	6
Second Class	8.1	3
Third Class	21.6	8
Fourth Class	5.4	2
Fifth Class	13.5	5
Sixth Class	16.2	6
Total	100.0	37

Table 4.5 shows that there was a fairly wide range of school years that had been repeated, the most common of which was third class, having been repeated by 21.6% (8) of all those who had repeated a year at school since being placed with their current carer. However, there was no clear trend in the results.

The reasons for repeating a year at school were largely to do with addressing the young person's educational needs where they were judged to have fallen behind in their work. This was usually the result of the young person's poor performance or learning difficulties. However, there were other factors identified by foster carers that could act as obstacles to the young person's ability to keep up with others in their class. These obstacles included:

- ▶ Erratic school attendance prior to placement with current foster family
- ▶ Transition from primary to post-primary school (young person not being ready to move to post-primary school)
- ▶ Coping with difficulties at home (with birth family)
- ▶ Change of school (one young person moved because of bullying).

Therefore, one needs to look beyond the apparent 'symptom' of falling behind with schoolwork and recognise that there can be a variety of factors in school or in young people's family background that can contribute to their falling behind and repeating a year at school.

Change of class during the year

A very small proportion of young people had changed class during the school year, only 2.9% (6). Five of these young people had one class change only. Based on the information provided, two of these young people had been moved to a class in a higher stream because they were doing well with their schoolwork and one young person had been moved because of poor behaviour.

Special needs

Over one third of young people, 36.1% (74), were reported to have a diagnosed special need. For the purpose of the interviews with foster carers, special needs were defined as being any learning, emotional or behavioural difficulty. In order to obtain as accurate a measure as possible of the extent of young people with special needs, foster carers were asked to refer to special needs that had actually been formally *diagnosed* rather than those they suspected young people may have.⁸⁶ The type of special needs that were identified by foster carers are shown in Table 4.6 below. This information was available for 56 young people (data were missing for the remaining 18 young people).

85 | There were no years repeated in post-primary school as the majority of those who were attending post-primary school in the year 2001/2 were only in first year.

86 | It is acknowledged that the method for such a diagnosis is likely to vary depending on the professional involved.

Table 4.6: Type of diagnosed special needs experienced by young people as reported by foster carers

Type of special need	%	No.
Learning difficulties / below average IQ	62.5	35
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	12.5	7
Dyslexia	8.9	5
Speech and language difficulties	8.9	5
Emotional problems	1.8	1
Behavioural problems	1.8	1
Hearing impairment	1.8	1
Currently being assessed	1.8	1
Total	100.0	56

Table 4.6 shows that the majority of special needs reported as being experienced by young people consisted of learning difficulties or below average IQ – identified for 62.5% (35) of young people with a diagnosed special need. A further 12.5% (7) of young people had Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, followed by 8.9% (5) who had dyslexia and another 8.9% (5) who had speech and language problems. Additional results showed that more than half of the young people who were reported to have a special need had been assessed by a psychologist/educational psychologist (39 young people). Other people involved in the identification of special needs included remedial teachers, other staff at school, GPs, health board personnel and staff in child guidance clinics.

Comparison with rate of special needs in the national population

Statistics are available from the Department of Education on the number of pupils attending first

level education who have special needs. These results are broken down by age group. The figures show that 463 young people aged 13 and 14 years old (as at 1st January, 2001) who were attending primary schools were deemed to have special needs, out of a total of 4,435 young people in the same age group.⁸⁷ These figures can be used to *estimate* the proportion of young people aged 13 to 14 years old in first level education with special needs – 10.4%. In this research study, there were 87 young people who were aged 13 to 14 years old in first level education. Just under half, 48.2% (41) were reported to have a diagnosed special need.⁸⁸ It appears that the likelihood of having special needs is far higher amongst young people aged 13 to 14 years in long term foster care attending first level education in this study compared to that for the same age group in the wider population.⁸⁹ Table 4.7 presents the appropriate figures used in this comparison.

Table 4.7: Comparison of young people with special needs in first level education to that in the wider population

	Young people aged 13 to 14 years in this study	Young people aged 13 to 14 years in the wider population*
Number of young people with special needs in first level education	41	463
Total number of young people aged 13 to 14 years in first level education	87	4,435
Percentage of young people with special needs	48.2%	10.4%

*Source: Department of Education and Science, 2003

87 | These figures are taken from Table 1.2 in the *Statistical Report 2001/2* (Section I: An Overview of Educational Statistics), Government of Ireland, 2003, p.5.

88 | This percentage of young people with special needs is based on those in primary school only and therefore differs to the overall percentage for all young people in the study.

89 | The definition of 'special needs' is not clarified in official data presented here. There was no definitive definition in the survey either. However, these figures can be used to provide some approximate indication of the rate of special needs amongst both groups of young people – those in the study and in the wider population.

Disability

A small percentage of young people were reported to have a disability, just 4.4% (9).⁹⁰ The forms of disability identified by foster carers included cleft palate, emotional difficulties and intellectual disabilities.

General health

Foster carers were also asked about young people's general health. The vast majority, 93.2% (191) of young people, were said to be in good health. This question did not aim to measure all of the illnesses or health conditions that young people may have. However, some of the examples of illness given included asthma, repeated chest infections, TB, poor immune system, epilepsy, food intolerance

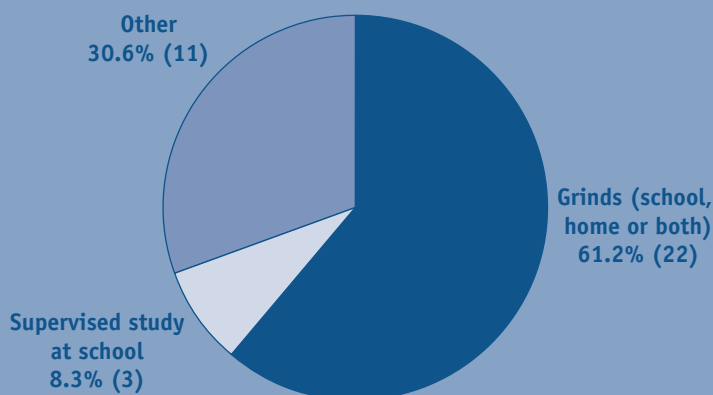
(coeliac) and overactive thyroid. In particular, asthma was a problem that five carers of young people highlighted as affecting school attendance, either at present or in the past.

Assistance with schoolwork and homework

Help with schoolwork

Apart from receiving specialist educational provision in the form of remedial education or being in a special class, 17.6% (36) of young people were reported to have had some form of extra help with their schoolwork during the school year. The forms that this extra help took for the 36 young people are presented in Chart 4.15.

Chart 4.15: Type of help with schoolwork received by young people as reported by foster carers



Over one half of young people who were given help with their schoolwork during the year had received grinds either at school, at home or both, 61.2% (22). A small percentage received supervised study at school, 8.3% (3). The remaining young people had 'other' kinds of help, which included homework clubs and attending Irish language summer college in the Gaeltacht.⁹¹

received regular help with their homework from someone at home. Almost two thirds of all young people, 62.9% (129), had received help with their homework on a regular basis during the school year. Foster carers were asked to identify the person that helped young people with their homework and the results are shown in Table 4.8 below.

Regular help with homework

Another measure of help with schoolwork was obtained by asking foster carers if young people

⁹⁰ | It is acknowledged that disability was not specifically defined in the questionnaire, hence it was subject to foster carer's interpretation. There was a discrepancy between the number of young people with special needs and a disability. It is possible that carers may have interpreted 'disability' as a physical disability. Therefore, it is likely that the prevalence of disability was underestimated in the study given the previous results on young people with special needs.

⁹¹ | The Gaeltacht refers to certain parts of Ireland where Irish is the main language spoken. During the summer, children and young people can attend Irish language schools in these areas.

Table 4.8: Person who helped young people with homework as reported by foster carers

<i>Person who helped with homework</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>
Foster carer	67.4	87
Carer's son or daughter	27.9	36
Young person's birth sibling	4.7	6
Other foster child in the home	1.6	2
All the family	0.8	1

Note: As some carers gave more than one response, the table adds up to more than 100%.

Therefore, out of the 129 young people who had some help with their homework, over two thirds of them, 67.4% (87), received help from their foster carer. This was followed by the carer's son or daughter, who had assisted 27.9% (36) of these young people.

Foster carers' expectation about young people's future educational progress

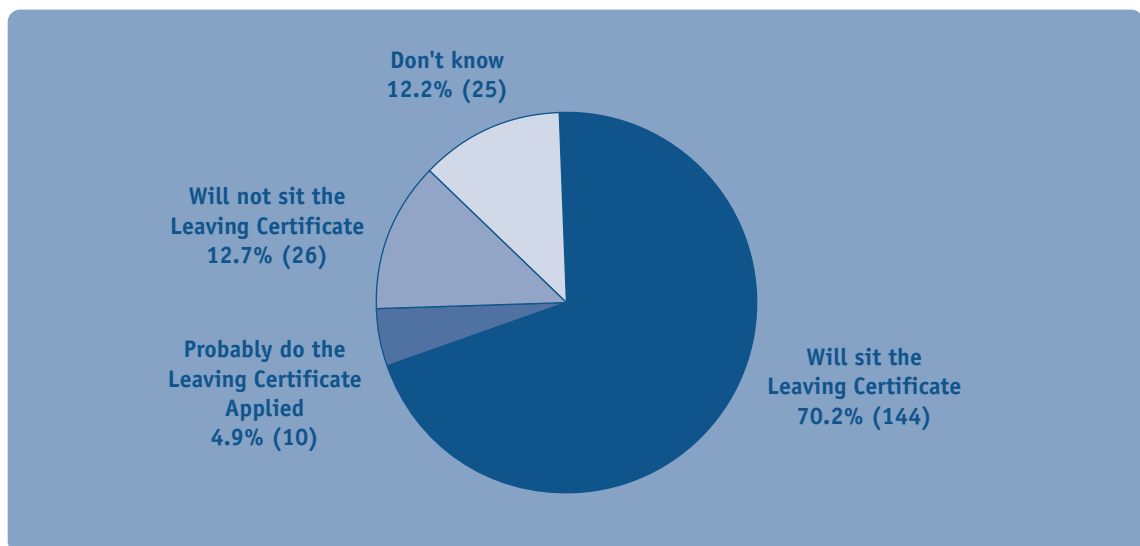
Finally, foster carers were asked their opinion on whether the young person in their care would stay on at school to sit the Leaving Certificate examination.

Table 4.16 shows that the majority of foster carers, 70.2% (144), expected the young person to sit the standard Leaving Certificate examination, while a further 4.9% (10) felt they would do the alternative Leaving Certificate *Applied*. Therefore, three quarters of young people, 75.1% (154), were expected to obtain a school leaving qualification.

It is acknowledged that the foster carer's response could have been influenced to some extent by their own desire to see the young person sit the school leaving exam. However, this question was intended

to give an indication of the number of young people who *might* stay on at school until this level. Such expectations can have a potential impact in terms of supporting young people's motivation and performance or otherwise. The question on carer's expectations was the final one in the section on educational progress and it was hoped that the responses would be based to some degree on the information that the foster carer had given prior to this question, most notably on progress with schoolwork.

Where foster carers said that they did not expect the young person to sit the Leaving Certificate, they were asked to give a reason for their answer. These reasons ranged from the carer saying that they felt the young person would not be interested in doing it themselves to their belief that the young person did not have the ability to do it, or would not make the required effort. It was clear from some of these responses that carers took into account how the young person was currently doing at school when giving their answers. In addition, it was obvious that some foster carers had already discussed the Leaving Certificate exam with the young person themselves as a few foster carers

Chart 4.16: Foster carers' expectation about young people's prospects in the Leaving Certificate examination

qualified their comments by saying the young person wanted to do something else. One example of this was that a foster carer stated that a young

person had expressed the desire to apply for an apprenticeship to learn a trade when he/she was old enough.

Summary of results on young people's educational progress

Progress with school subjects

Young people were most likely to:

- ▶ Be making average progress with their schoolwork
- ▶ Have the same record of progress over time
- ▶ Do well in Sport/Physical Education, Art and Computers, and least well in Irish and Maths.

Type of educational provision and educational need

In relation to the type of educational provision received:

- ▶ Just over one half of young people had 'normal' day to day schooling
- ▶ Just under one half had received some form of specialist educational provision, either in the form of remedial classes, being in a special class or attending a special school.

Further analysis showed that young people were significantly more likely to have received specialist educational provision where they had:

- ▶ Been first placed in care at a relatively older age (9 to 13 years old)
- ▶ Made relatively poor progress with their academic school subjects.

In terms of special needs, young people in the study in first level education were found to be more likely to have a *diagnosed* special need compared to the estimate for the wider population.

Assistance with homework

Young people tended to receive help with homework on a regular basis from someone at home.

Foster carers' expectation about young people's future educational progress

The majority of young people were expected to sit the Leaving Certificate examination.

Additional aspects of schooling and foster care

This section explores some additional aspects of young people's education and schooling, which have particular significance for young people in foster care. The results discussed here include the following:

- ▶ Change of school – both at the start of the current foster care placement and during the time of the placement
- ▶ School awareness of the young person's care status
- ▶ Bullying – emotional, psychological and physical – and the extent to which it may be linked with the young person being in foster care
- ▶ Assessment of the value of schooling experience for the young person.

Change of school

Foster carers were asked whether the young person had changed school at two critical points in time:

- ▶ When they had *first* been placed with their current foster carer

- ▶ At any stage *during* the current foster care placement.

Young people in foster care may be more likely to have changed school if they have had a series of different placements, as this is likely to involve moving to a different area to live.

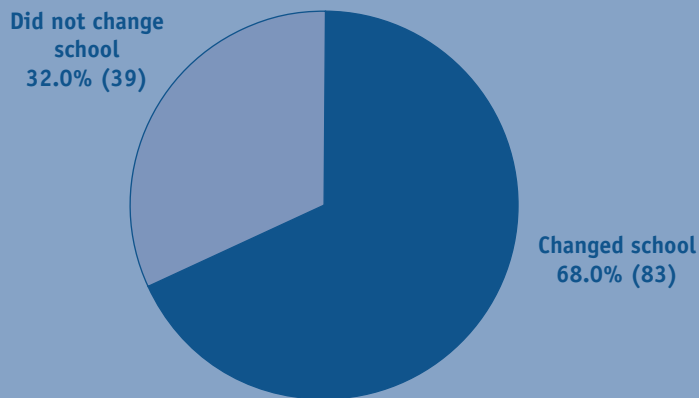
Change of school at the start of the current foster care placement

Chart 4.17 shows the number of young people who changed school at the start of their current foster care placement.

Over two thirds of young people, 68.0% (83), had changed school at the start of their current foster care placement. Only three of these cases are explained by the natural transition of moving from primary to post-primary school, which happened to coincide with the start of the current foster care placement. Therefore, the relatively high tendency for young people of school going age to move school when they had been placed in their current foster care placement cannot be attributed to this factor.⁹² One factor that was found to be related to whether young people changed school at the start of their current foster care placement was if they were in a relative or non-relative foster care placement.

92 | Chart 4.17 is based on 122 young people as the remaining 83 young people were placed with their current foster carer *before* they reached school going age, and therefore, the question did not apply to them.

Chart 4.17: Change of school at the start of young people's current foster care placement (N=122)



Young people who were related to their current foster carer were significantly less likely to have changed school when they were first placed with their current carer.⁹³ Over one half of young people in relative care placements, 55.8% (24), changed school when first placed with their relative carer, but this tendency rose to almost three quarters, 74.4% (58), for those in non-relative care placements. Therefore, it could be argued that being in relative care may provide less disruption to

young people's schooling (and related friendships), especially at the start of the foster care placement.

Change of school during the current foster care placement

During the current foster care placement, 13.2% (27) of young people were reported to have changed school (excluding moving from primary to post-primary school). Some of the reasons given for this change are given in Table 4.9 below.

Table 4.9: Reasons for change of school during the current foster care placement as reported by foster carers

<i>Reason for change of school</i>	<i>No.</i>
New school nearer home/moved area	7
Young person's poor behaviour/expulsion	5
Moved back to mainstream schooling or gone to special school	2
Young person's needs not being met	2
Improve prospects for young person's educational progress	2
Bullying	1
Young person did not like teacher	1
Total	20*

**Data were missing for the remaining 7 young people*

There were varied reasons why young people had changed school during their current placement, ranging from moving to a different area to live to changing school to ensure that their needs would be met. Of those that did change school during the current placement, the majority of young people moved school just once but five young people had attended more than two different schools during their current placement. These school changes were not attributable to any move from primary to

post-primary school as they occurred at the same level, either at primary or post-primary. For two of these young people, the school changes involved moving from mainstream to different special schools at primary level. One young person moved from a special school to more than one mainstream school at primary level.

From the results shown above, young people were five times more likely to change school at the start

93 | This result is based on young people who were of school going age when first placed with their current foster carer.

of the current placement than during it (68.0% compared to 13.2%). Of those young people that were placed when they were of school going age, almost 7 out of 10 had changed school at the start of their current placement. This has great implications for the young people involved. Not only did they have to try to adjust to a new foster family but at the same time, they had to get used to attending a different school and being faced with having to make new friends.

This result is particularly relevant for child care practitioners when considering what is involved in moving children and young people to a new foster care placement. Adapting to a new living environment often includes starting a new school as well as moving to a new foster family.

School awareness of the young person's care status

The overwhelming majority of foster carers said that at least one individual adult at the young person's school knew about their foster care status, 97.1% (199). However, this did not necessarily mean that *all* the teachers and staff in the school knew that the young person was in foster care.

School bullying

Bullying is something that can affect any young person at school. It was seen as an important factor to consider when looking at young people in foster care in particular and attempting to gain an insight into their day to day lives at school. The results presented here look at the prevalence of school bullying and the extent to which it was an issue for the young people in the study, how the foster carer found out about it, and whether the foster carer felt the bullying was linked to the young person being in foster care.

Prevalence of bullying

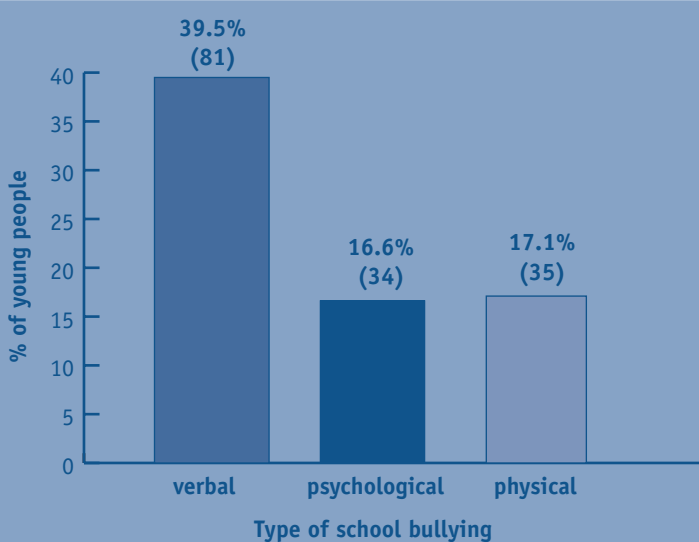
Foster carers were asked to identify whether the young person had experienced any of the following three scenarios whilst at school during the year 2001/2:

- ▶ Called names or teased by other children – defined here as *verbal bullying*
- ▶ Left out or excluded by other children – defined here as *psychological bullying*
- ▶ Physically pushed around or hit by another child – defined here as *physical bullying*.

The word 'bullying' was not used in the question wording to try to obtain as accurate a measure as possible of the prevalence of each form of bullying amongst this group of young people. Even though foster carers were probably aware that the question was about bullying, the phrase was not used in case they gave an overall yes/no response, which would fail to distinguish between the three measures used. The three sub-questions are three different indicators of bullying in their own right. The results are shown in Chart 4.18.

Verbal forms of bullying, including name calling and teasing, were the most common form reportedly experienced by 39.5% (81) of young people. Physical forms of bullying were just as prevalent as psychological forms, experienced by 17.1% (35) and 16.6% (34) of young people respectively, but less prevalent than verbal bullying. It is acknowledged that this measure is unlikely to be totally accurate because foster carers could only report instances that they were aware of, and research into the area has tended to show that children and young people under-report instances of bullying to adults. However, the data shows the extent to which different forms of bullying, *known about by the foster carer*, were experienced by young people aged 13 to 14 years in long term foster care.

Chart 4.18: Prevalence of school bullying by type experienced by young people as reported by foster carers



An analysis was carried out using the responses to the three categories of bullying above to measure the likelihood of young people experiencing bullying overall. This was done by creating another variable. Where young people were said to have experienced any one of the three forms of bullying measured, they were said to have been bullied during the school year.⁹⁴ Just under one half of young people, 45.8% (93), experienced some form of bullying during the school year.⁹⁵ There was a fairly equal likelihood of being bullied for those in primary and post-primary school, 44.6% (41) and 46.9% (46) respectively.

The rate of bullying found in the study is relatively higher than the national rate for bullying in the school student population, which is estimated at 31.3% for children in primary school and 15.6% for young people in post-primary school.⁹⁶ The present study used a longer timeframe of a *school year* compared to a *school term* in the O'Moore (1997) national study, as well as focusing on young people in a particular age group, i.e. 13 to 14 years old. In addition, the O'Moore study used a different method of data gathering – questionnaires filled in by the children and young people themselves. Nevertheless, the divergence in the national rate and that found for the young people in this study, particularly for those attending post-primary school, seems worthy of note and further exploration.

After establishing the number of young people in the study who had experienced some form of bullying during the year, the same information can also be used to show how many young people

experienced more than one type of bullying (i.e. verbal, psychological and physical).

Chart 4.19 shows that for those young people who experienced some form of bullying in the school year, just over half, 52.7% (49), were reported to have experienced one form of bullying (out of the three types measured). Less than one third of young people, 31.2% (29), were said to have experienced two different forms of bullying. Finally, 16.1% (15), were reported to have experienced all three forms of bullying identified in the interview schedule. Therefore, these results show that young people can be prone to more than just one form of bullying.

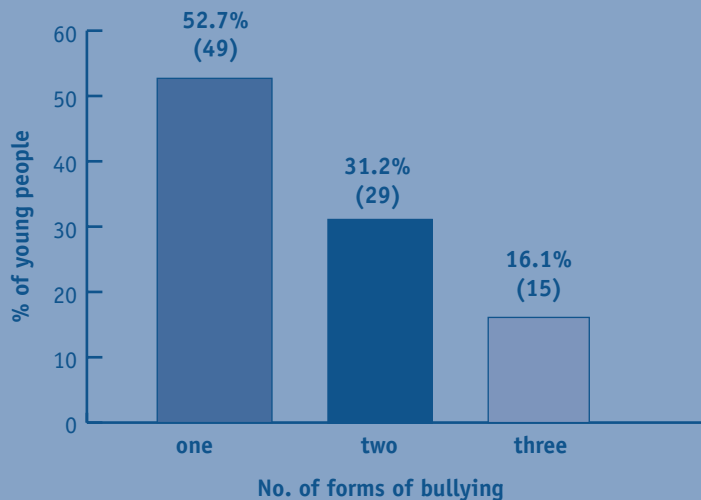
Person who told the foster carer about bullying

Out of the 93 young people who were said to have experienced some form of bullying in the school year, foster carers were most likely to have been told about what was happening by the young person themselves. Almost three quarters of foster carers, 72.0% (67), said that it was the young person who had first told them about the bullying. Others had learned about it from a teacher/the school, 5.4% (5), the young person's sibling, 4.3% (4) (this could be a birth sibling, the carer's child or another foster child in the family), and friends of the young person, 4.3% (4).

Carer's opinion on whether school bullying was linked to the young person being in foster care

Foster carers were asked to give their opinion as to whether they thought any of the instances of

Chart 4.19: Number of types of bullying experienced by young people who had been reportedly bullied (N=93)

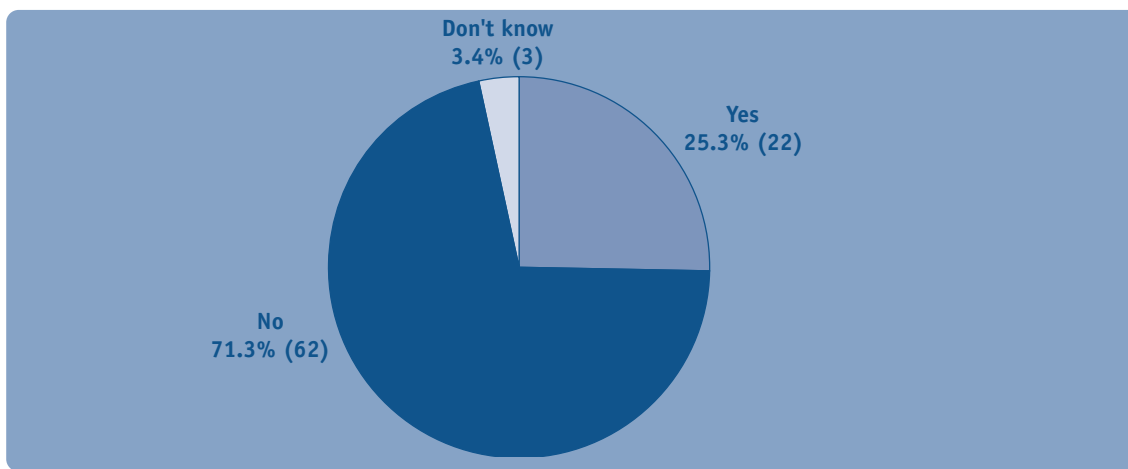


94 | Each young person was only counted once in this new variable, even if they experienced all three forms of bullying.

95 | This finding is based on 203 young people as responses for 2 young people were missing.

96 | See O'Moore, A.M., Kirkham, C. and Smith, M. (1997) 'Bullying behaviour in Irish schools: a nationwide study' in *Irish Journal of Psychology*, Volume 18, No. 2, p.141-169.

Chart 4.20: Link between school bullying and being in foster care?



bullying were related to the young person being in foster care.

Chart 4.20 shows that one quarter of foster carers, 25.3% (22), reported that they felt that the bullying experienced by young people was related to their foster care status. However, a majority of 71.3% (62) of foster carers felt that there was no link between the two.⁹⁷ Where carers felt that there was some link, they were asked to say in what way the bullying incident(s) were linked to young people's care status. Some of the reasons given were as follows:

- ▶ Comments were made about the young person's circumstances, in particular about the foster carers not being the young person's 'real' parents or similarly, the young person not having a mum and dad (15 young people).
- ▶ Comments were made about the young person's birth family (e.g. parental problems) and their background (e.g. being a Traveller) (four young people).
- ▶ Other young people found out about the young person's birth family surname (one young person).
- ▶ Jealousy experienced by a carer's child towards the young person in foster care in the foster care household (one young person).

Further analysis on school bullying for different educational experiences and foster care placement conditions

As seen above, just under one half of young people were reported by their foster carers to have experienced some form of bullying (verbal, psychological or physical) in the school year 2001/2. Further analysis was carried out to establish whether bullying was more or less likely

to occur across different educational and schooling experiences. Three aspects of young people's education and schooling were found to be *significant* in relation to bullying:

- ▶ Type of educational provision
- ▶ Special needs
- ▶ Behaviour at school.

Type of educational provision

Young people who had received specialist educational provision in the form of remedial help or being in a special class or school were found to be *significantly*⁹⁸ more likely to have been bullied at school compared to those young people who received day to day schooling only. Of those young people who had not received any specialist educational provision, 38.7% (41) were reported to have been bullied. However, the comparable percentage for young people who had received specialist educational provision was higher at 53.6% (52).⁹⁹ After separate analysis was carried out for each element of specialist education provision, it was found that the significant factor in relation to bullying at school was *remedial education*. Young people who had received remedial classes were significantly more likely to have been bullied than those who did not – 53.6% (37) compared to 36.9% (38).

Special needs

Young people with special needs, ranging from learning disabilities to behavioural problems and sensory impairments, were significantly more likely to have been bullied than those who did not have such special needs.¹⁰⁰ Over half of young people with special needs, 56.9% (41), had been bullied compared to 38.3% (49) of those who were not reported to have special needs.

97 | Chart 4.20 is based on 87 young people as data was missing for the remaining 6.

98 | Where a result is described as being 'significant', this means statistically significant and is based on statistical tests that were carried out.

99 | The statistically significant results are presented in a table at the end of this chapter. This table presents both chi-square results and correlation co-efficients. The cross tabulation tables are available from the Children's Research Centre on request.

100 | As stated earlier, there was no standard definition of 'special needs' used in the questionnaire. However, carers were asked to refer to *diagnosed* special needs only, which it was hoped would decrease the likelihood of them giving a response that was based on their own interpretation.

The significant relationship between school bullying and special needs is not surprising, given the earlier result between bullying and specialist educational provision as special needs include needs such as learning disabilities. These needs tend to be responded to through such educational provision as remedial help and placement in a special class.¹⁰¹

School behaviour

Young people whose behaviour at school was rated as relatively poor by foster carers were significantly more likely to have experienced bullying at school compared to those whose behaviour was rated as 'good' or 'very good'. Almost two thirds of young people whose behaviour was rated as 'not good' had been bullied, 64.0% (16), this fell to 49.2% (32) for those whose behaviour was 'good' and further still to 36.5% (38) for young people whose behaviour was 'very good'.

Therefore, as one might expect, the reported incidence of bullying at school amongst young people is likely to be greater for those receiving specialist educational provision and those with special needs. In addition, young people who were relatively poorly behaved at school were more likely to be reportedly bullied. These findings could, of course, be just as relevant for all young people aged 13 to 14 years attending school as well as those in long term foster care. In order to ensure that this discussion is relevant to this group of young people in long term foster care, the incidence of bullying was explored while considering certain aspects of foster care placements. One significant factor that was identified through this analysis was the number of previous care placements that young people had prior to being placed with their current foster carer.

Number of previous care placements

Whether or not a young person had previous placements in care was not an important factor in relation to bullying, rather the *number* of previous placements was the significant variable. For those who had a relatively small number of previous care placements, that is one or two, 40.3% (27), had been bullied. However, young people who had three or more previous care placements were significantly more likely to be reported as having experienced bullying, 65.4% (17).

Another aspect of foster care placements considered when looking at the incidence of bullying was whether a young person had been fostered with a relative or non-relative carer.

Relative/non-relative care placements

It was found that a slightly lower percentage of young people in relative care had reportedly been bullied at school compared to those in non-relative care – 40.0% (20) and 48.3% (73) respectively.

Although this result was not statistically significant, it is worthy of note and may be indicative of a potential trend whereby young people placed with relative carers may be less at risk of bullying at school.

Another aspect of young people's foster care placements was found to have a potentially protective influence – that of being placed with a birth sibling.

Placement with a birth sibling

Young people who had a sibling (at least one) placed with them in the same foster family were found to be *significantly* less likely to have been bullied at school compared to those who had not been placed with a sibling – 37.8% (37) and 55.2% (53) respectively.

Looking at relative/non-relative placements and being placed with a birth sibling together, it was found that young people who were placed with relatives were significantly more likely to have been placed with a birth sibling compared to those who were in non-relative placements – 64.0% (32) and 46.5% (67) respectively.¹⁰²

Gender and age of young people

The experience of being bullied did not vary by gender or age of young people. A similar percentage of males and females had reportedly been bullied at school – 45.9% (45) of males and 45.7% (48) of females. In addition, age did not appear to be an important factor. Young people were divided up into two age groups – 12 to 13 and 14 to 15.¹⁰³ There were no significant differences found in the likelihood of bullying by age group and no trends to report.

Length of time with current carer

Young people's experience of being bullied did not vary according to the number of years that they had spent with their current carer. A similar percentage of young people who had been with their carer for a relatively short (1 to 3 years), medium (4 to 9 years) or long period of time (10 to 14 years) had been reportedly bullied at school – 40.4% (19), 48.6% (34) and 46.5% (40) respectively.

Educational progress

Finally, in relation to bullying, a result of note is the relationship between bullying at school and educational progress. The indicator used for educational progress in this analysis was the mean score for young people's progress in their academic school subjects (presented earlier).¹⁰⁴ These mean scores ranged from 1.0 (low) to 3.0 (high). Looking at the mean scores for progress in academic subjects at primary school, young people with low mean scores (and making the least

101 | Indeed specialist educational provision and special needs are highly significantly related ($\chi^2 = 58.755$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$).

102 | This result was statistically significant, $\chi^2 = 4.534$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$. In addition, there was a significant correlation between relative/non-relative placements and being placed with a birth sibling ($\phi = 0.153$, $p = 0.034$, $N = 194$).

103 | While the majority of young people were aged 13 to 14, there were a small minority aged 12 and 15 at the time of the interview with their foster carer (a total of 10).

104 | Where young people were deemed as making little progress in academic subjects in the school year (represented by a low mean score), this does not necessarily mean that they were not making progress in other aspects of their schooling, such as in the development of social skills etc. However, for the purpose of presenting these results, the focus is on academic rather than non-academic progress.

progress), were more likely to have been bullied at school compared to those with relatively high mean scores. As the mean scores increased, the percentage of young people at primary school who had been bullied decreased – 60.0% (12) of those with a low mean score had been reportedly bullied, compared to 49.0% (24) of those with a medium mean score and just 19.0% (4) of those with a high mean score.¹⁰⁵ However, these results are based on small numbers.

In relation to young people at post-primary school, there was a similar trend whereby those with high mean scores for their academic progress were less likely to be reported as having been bullied

compared to those with low mean scores. Over two thirds of young people who had a low mean score had been bullied, 68.4% (13), this fell to 44.3% (27) of those with a medium score and further still to 35.3% (6) of those with a high score.¹⁰⁶ So, the overall trend in the results on bullying and educational progress show that young people who under-perform in terms of their academic educational progress are more likely to have reportedly been bullied than those who are making relatively good progress.

The table below summarises the findings from the further analysis carried out on school bullying.

Summary table of results from further analysis on school bullying

	<i>Very important (statistically significant)</i>	<i>Important (trend)</i>	<i>Not important (no trend)</i>
Influences on whether young people had been bullied at school (where they had reportedly been called names or teased, been left out or physically hit by another child)	<p>Significantly more likely where a young person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Had received specialist educational provision (in particular, remedial education) ▶ Had a diagnosed special need ▶ Had their behaviour at school rated as 'not good' ▶ Had made relatively poor progress in their academic subjects at school (borderline significance for post-primary school) ▶ Had a higher number of care placements ▶ Had not been placed with a birth sibling 	<p>Was more likely where a young person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Was in a non relative foster care placement 	<p>There was no relationship with the following factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Gender ▶ Age group of young people ▶ Length of time in current foster care placement ▶ Age first placed in care ▶ Having had previous care placements ▶ Other young people in the foster care household ▶ Attended primary or post-primary school

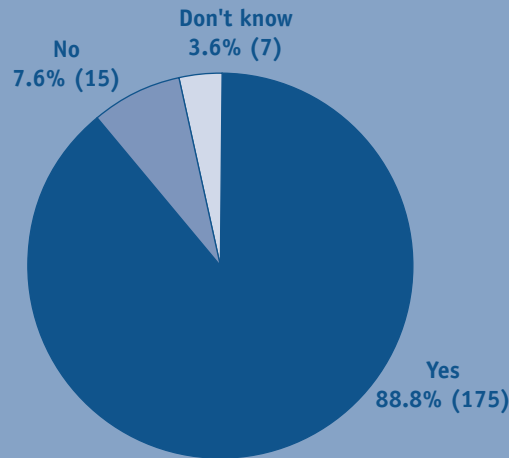
As well as identifying those conditions under which young people may be more likely to have been reportedly bullied at school, this information can be used to see which circumstances are likely to lessen the risk of school bullying for the young people in the study. Based on the results presented here, such protective factors include:

- ▶ Receiving day to day schooling only (no specialist provision)
- ▶ Having no diagnosed special needs
- ▶ Being fairly well behaved at school
- ▶ Making reasonably good progress with their academic subjects
- ▶ Having relatively fewer previous care placements (prior to their current placements)
- ▶ Being placed with a birth sibling in the foster care household.

105 | Mean scores were recoded into 'low', 'medium' and 'high' categories based on the mean and standard deviation of all scores (as explained in the section on educational progress earlier in the chapter).

106 | However, this result was of *borderline* statistical significance based on the chi-square test but there was a positive correlation that proved to be statistically significant (see Table 4.10 at the end of the chapter for the chi-square and correlation co-efficient).

Chart 4.21: Was education and schooling beneficial for young people or not?



Overall experience of education and schooling

Despite the results on bullying, foster carers viewed school to be a largely positive experience for most of the young people concerned.

Chart 4.21 shows that the overwhelming majority of foster carers, 88.8% (175), said that schooling had been a beneficial experience for the young person overall. Just 7.6% (15) felt that the young person's schooling experience had not been a good one for them.¹⁰⁷ Again, it needs to be emphasised here that this is the view of the foster carer and not of the young person, but the carer sees him/her every day and presumably is most likely to have a better impression than any other person about how the young person feels about school and reacts to daily events that may occur.

Carers were asked to give reasons for their answers about the beneficial nature of school. The following points below were just some of the ways in which school was seen as a positive experience for young people in long term foster care:

- ▶ They can make friends
- ▶ They have the chance to take part in activities at school that they enjoyed
- ▶ They get used to having a routine
- ▶ They become more outgoing and confident
- ▶ They have come to terms with reality – “brings normality to life”
- ▶ They can see their own potential
- ▶ They enjoy learning and find school interesting
- ▶ They get on well with the teachers
- ▶ They have additional responsibility sometimes (e.g. care for anyone who is sick, supervise a class of younger children from time to time) and can be proud of themselves.

Where foster carers said that school was *not* a beneficial experience for young people, some of the reasons they gave were as follows:

- ▶ They found it hard to cope in school and hated it
- ▶ They had problems at the school
- ▶ They had difficulties with young people older than themselves
- ▶ They were not ‘cut out’ for school (carer’s perception)
- ▶ They had a very short attention span and was described as being ‘academically hostile’
- ▶ They were in the wrong school for them
- ▶ They refused to go to school
- ▶ They were being bullied
- ▶ They did not see their local friends as they went to a special school far away.

107 | Chart 4.21 is based on 197 young people as data were missing for the remaining eight.

Summary of results on other aspects of schooling and foster care

- ▶ Young people were more likely to have changed school at the start of their current placement rather than during it. Young people in relative care placements were significantly less likely to have changed school at the start of their placement compared to those in non-relative placements.
- ▶ At least one member of staff at school was aware that the young person was in foster care – this held for the majority of young people.
- ▶ School bullying was found to be more prevalent amongst young people in the study compared to those in the national student population.
- ▶ In relation to school bullying, it was most likely to take the form of verbal bullying. In addition, carers felt it was not linked to the young person's foster care status for the majority of young people but it was deemed to be related for a substantial minority of them.
- ▶ Further analysis showed that school bullying was reportedly more likely where young people:
 - had received specialist educational provision (especially remedial classes)
 - had been assessed as having special needs
 - had their behaviour at school rated as 'not good'
 - were making relatively poorer progress with their academic subjects
 - had a higher number of previous care placements before their current foster care placement, and
 - had not been placed with a birth sibling from their birth family.
- ▶ School was said to be a beneficial experience for the majority of young people.

Summary of results on young people's education and schooling

Type of school attended

- ▶ 93.7% (192) of young people attended mainstream school and 6.3% (13) went to special school.
- ▶ 47.9% (92) were in primary school and 52.1% (100) in post-primary school in the relevant school year.
- ▶ 78.5% (150) had either finished sixth class in primary school or first year in post-primary school.
- ▶ 68.5% (137) were returning to the same school and 29.0% (58) were starting post-primary school in the new school year, 2002/3.

School attendance and non-attendance

- ▶ 98.0% (201) of young people attended school on a regular basis.
- ▶ 16.6% (34) had missed school for more than one week in the school year, mostly due to illness.
- ▶ 6.3% (13) had been known by the foster carer to have 'mitched' from school.
- ▶ Over time, school attendance was deemed to have been stable for most young people – attendance for 81.5% (159) was the same now compared to a few years ago.

Ratings of behaviour at school and home

Based on foster carer's interpretation of school reports and feedback from teachers:

- ▶ 8 out of 10 young people's behaviour at both school and home was rated as either 'very good' or 'good'
- ▶ Over one half of young people had shown consistent behaviour at both school and home throughout the school year – behaviour at school had remained unchanged for 60.4% (116) of young people and behaviour at home was rated the same for 57.1% (113) of young people
- ▶ On the whole, where young people were well behaved at home, their behaviour at school also tended to be very good
- ▶ Over the last two or three years, behaviour at school was deemed to be the same for 5 out of 10 young people, while for 1 out of 8 young people it was said to have worsened.

Indicators of behaviour at school

- ▶ Foster carers of 3 out of 10 young people had been contacted by the school during the school year about their behaviour.
- ▶ Almost 2 out of 10 young people attending mainstream schools had been in detention at some stage during the school year.
- ▶ 6.3% (12) of young people in mainstream schools had been suspended in the school year.
- ▶ 1.0% (2) of young people in mainstream schools had been expelled in the school year.

Progress with school subjects

- ▶ The subjects that young people were *most* likely to be doing well in were Sport/Physical Education, Art and Computers, followed by English, Science and other languages. The two subjects that young people were *least* likely to be doing well in were Irish and Maths.
- ▶ Looking at foster carers' ratings of young people's progress with their academic subjects, the young people were most likely to be making 'medium' progress with their schoolwork. However, approximately one fifth had their progress rated as 'low'.
- ▶ Compared to one year ago, young people were most likely to be doing better now, 45.8% (87), or performing the same, 44.7% (85), in their school subjects overall.

Type of educational provision and educational need

- ▶ 52.2% (107) of young people received 'normal' day to day schooling only.
- ▶ 33.7% (69) had received remedial education.
- ▶ 14.1% (29) were in a special class or attended a special school.

Based on these results, just under one half of young people, 47.8% (98), were deemed to be in *educational need*, that is were receiving educational provision beyond day to day schooling (specialist educational provision).

Summary of results on young people's education and schooling (continued)

Further analysis showed that young people were significantly more likely to have received specialist educational provision where they had:

- ▶ Been first placed in care at a relatively older age (9 to 13 years old)
- ▶ Experienced relatively poor progress with their academic social subjects.

Other indicators of educational need showed that:

- ▶ 19.5% (40) of young people had repeated a year at school since they were placed with their current foster carer
- ▶ 2.9% (6) had changed class in the school year
- ▶ 36.1% (74) were reported to have a diagnosed special need, which tended to be a learning difficulty or below average IQ. There was a higher rate of special needs amongst young people in long term foster care compared to the estimate for the wider population (first level education).

Assistance with schoolwork and homework

- ▶ 17.6% (36) of young people received additional help with their schoolwork, usually in the form of grinds.
- ▶ 62.9% (129) received help with their homework on a regular basis from someone at home.

Foster carers' expectation about young people's future educational progress

- ▶ 75.1% (154) of young people were expected to sit the school leaving examination.

The above results on educational progress show that:

- ▶ Young people were most likely to be making fairly *average progress* with their school work and the majority were expected to stay on at school; and
- ▶ Almost 5 out of 10 young people were receiving some form of *special educational provision* (either remedial help or attending a special class or school).

Other aspects of schooling and foster care

- ▶ Young people were five times more likely to have changed school at the start of the current placement rather than during it – 68.0% (83) of those of school going age compared to 13.2% (27) respectively. Further analysis showed that young people in relative care placements were significantly less likely to have changed school at the start of their current foster care placement compared to those in non-relative care placements.
- ▶ Most young people were attending schools where at least some staff knew they were in foster care, 97.1% (199) (at least one adult at the school was aware of the young person's care status).
- ▶ Just under one half of young people, 45.8% (93), had experienced bullying in some form during the school year. Verbal bullying (being called names or teased) was the most likely form of bullying to be experienced. One quarter of foster carers of young people that had been bullied during the school year felt that it had something to do with their being in foster care.
- ▶ Further analysis of school bullying showed that young people were significantly more likely to have reportedly been bullied where:
 - They had received *specialist educational provision* (especially remedial classes)
 - They were assessed as having *special needs*
 - Their *behaviour* at school had been rated as 'not good'
 - They were making relatively *poorer progress* with their academic subjects
 - They had a higher number of *previous care placements* before their current foster care placement
 - They had *not* been placed with a *birth sibling* from their birth family in the current foster care placement.
- ▶ Overall, school was seen as a largely beneficial experience for 88.8% (175) of young people.

Table 4.10: Statistically significant results to support findings on young people's education and schooling

<i>Experienced bullying at school</i>	<i>Independent variable</i>	<i>Chi-square result</i>	<i>Correlation co-efficient</i>
	Type of educational provision	$\chi^2 = 4.547, df = 1, p < .05$	$\phi = 0.150, p = 0.033, N = 203$
	Remedial education	$\chi^2 = 4.703, df = 1, p < .05$	$\phi = 0.165, p = 0.030, N = 172$
	Special needs	$\chi^2 = 6.485, df = 1, p < .05$	$\phi = 0.180, p = 0.011, N = 200$
	School behaviour	$\chi^2 = 7.110, df = 2, p < .05$	$\rho = 0.187, N = 194, p = 0.009, \text{two tailed}$
	Number of previous care placements	$\chi^2 = 4.729, df = 1, p < .05$	$\phi = -0.225, p = 0.030, N = 93$
	Placed with a birth sibling	$\chi^2 = 5.940, df = 1, p < .05$	$\phi = -0.175, p = 0.015, N = 194$
	Progress in academic subjects (primary school)	$\chi^2 = 7.854, df = 2, p < .05$	$\rho = 0.280, N = 90, p = 0.007, \text{two tailed}$
	Progress in academic subjects (post-primary school)	$\chi^2 = 4.607, df = 2, p > .05$ (borderline significance)	$\rho = 0.206, N = 97, p = 0.043, \text{two tailed}$ (significant at $p < .05$ level)
<i>Type of educational provision</i>	Age first placed into care	$\chi^2 = 6.348, df = 2, p < .05$	$\rho = 0.155, N = 183, p = 0.018, \text{two-tailed}$
	Progress in academic subjects (primary school)	$\chi^2 = 22.225, df = 2, p < .001$	$\rho = 0.488, N = 90, p = 0.0005, \text{two-tailed}$
	Progress in academic subjects (post-primary school)	$\chi^2 = 9.286, df = 2, p < .05$	$\rho = 0.306, N = 99, p = 0.002, \text{two tailed}$
<i>Change of school at start of current foster care placement</i>	Relative/non-relative care placement	$\chi^2 = 4.364, df = 1, p < .05$	$\phi = -0.190, p = 0.037, N = 121$

Note on the data analysis methods used:

The chi-square test (χ^2) has been used in this section to identify results that are statistically significant. The combination of cross tabs and chi-square is regarded as appropriate for exploring relationships between two nominal variables or one nominal and one ordinal variable (Bryman and Cramer, 1997, p.168). While this tells us the likelihood of there being a relationship between variables, it says nothing about the *strength* of this relationship. Therefore, where a statistically significant result has been identified by chi-square, an appropriate measure of association has been run to give some information on the strength of the relationship and also to verify the chi-square result. The measure of association depends on the nature of the variables being explored.

Phi measures the *strength of association* between variables. The phi value given lies between zero (no relationship) and one (perfect relationship) and is thus treated similarly to a correlation co-efficient. Phi is presented here because it is particularly appropriate for *dichotomous nominal* variables, such as those being explored here, that is where a variable has only two categories, e.g. yes/no. Where variables have more than two categories, a similar co-efficient is used, *Cramer's V*. Phi or Cramer's V is presented here to provide an additional summary measure of the relationships being explored here with a view to supporting or questioning the results based on the chi-square test of statistical significance.

Where one of the two variables is an ordinal variable, e.g. school behaviour (categories 'very good', 'good' and 'not good'), a different correlation co-efficient is appropriate. *Spearman's rank order* correlation (ρ) is a common measure used to explore the strength of a relationship between two ordinal variables and can also be used to look at a nominal variable with only two response categories (e.g. yes/no) and an ordinal variable (e.g. school behaviour). The value of ρ ranges from zero (weak relationship) to one (strong relationship), N indicates the number of cases and the *p value* shows the level of statistical significance. Correlations can be either one or two tailed, the latter is used when the direction of the relationship is not known, i.e. whether the co-efficient will be positive or negative.

Chapter 5

Contact with Birth Family

Introduction

After education and schooling, the second main substantive issue in this research study was contact between young people and their birth families. The aim was to establish the nature and extent of such contact, particularly over the previous six months but also in the last year, and to explore some of the issues associated with this contact. This information is useful because it provides an indicator of one potential source of social support that is available to young people aged 13 to 14 years in long term foster care, beyond that provided by their foster family, and which may be available to them in the future.

The results presented in this chapter provide information on various aspects of young people's contact with their birth families. These aspects are as follows:

- ▶ Composition of young people's birth families – members alive and known about by the foster carer
- ▶ Likelihood and frequency of face to face contact in the previous six months¹⁰⁸
- ▶ Likelihood of face to face contact in the last year
- ▶ Reasons for lack of face to face contact
- ▶ Young people's preference on the frequency of face to face contact (as reported by foster carers)
- ▶ Likelihood of other forms of contact apart from face to face
- ▶ Beneficial nature of contact for young people (as reported by foster carers).

In addition, at the end of this chapter there is some discussion of the results of further data analysis carried out which explores whether certain aspects of young people's foster care placements appear to be associated with the nature of their contact with birth family.

Before moving on to look at the results on young people's contact with birth family members, a note should be made about the key informants who provided the information on young people's contact with their birth family members – the foster carers. It is acknowledged that the foster carer may not have full information on the young person's contact with their birth family because they may not always know when the young person sees them or hears from them. In addition, contact between young people and members of their birth family may not always involve face to face meetings. Increasingly today, young people have their own mobile phone, and therefore some forms of contact may not be known to a third party. However, despite this potential limitation, the young person is living in the foster carer's family household, therefore the carer is the person most likely to be best placed to provide as accurate information as possible on visits with birth family members. Such visits tend to be organised between the foster family, the

young person, birth family members, and more often than not, a social worker. Nevertheless, the foster carer is likely to know about scheduled visits, especially if they are supervised. They may not always be aware of an informal visit, particularly where visits do not have to be supervised. However, talking to the foster carer is second best only to asking the young person themselves. The foster carer's opinion on how the young person felt about contact with members of their birth family was also obtained in the interviews. After all, the foster carer sees the reaction of the young person after such visits and is well placed to comment on whether it is beneficial or not for the young person concerned.

The results presented here focus on four main categories of birth family:

- ▶ Birth mother
- ▶ Birth father
- ▶ Siblings (including step-brothers/sisters)
- ▶ Extended family (e.g. grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins etc.).

The first result shows the composition of the young person's birth family.

Results on the nature of young people's contact with birth family members

Composition of young people's birth families

Foster carers were asked who made up young people's birth family members, namely which members were alive and *known about* by the foster carer out of the four birth family categories given above.

Table 5.1 shows that the majority of young people's birth mother was alive, 83.4% (171), while the birth mother for the remaining young people was deceased. Just over two thirds of young people, 68.8% (141), had a birth father who was alive and known about by the foster carer. The remaining young people were evenly split between those whose birth father was deceased or 'not known' – 16.1% (33) and 15.1% (31) respectively in each category. Most young people had at least one sibling – 95.6% (196) – and extended family member – 91.7% (188) – that the foster carer had known about. Therefore, out of the four birth family member categories, birth fathers were least likely to be around for the young people in the study, either because they were deceased or because they were unknown.

After establishing who were the members of young people's birth families, foster carers were asked questions on the nature of the contact between them. The results that follow are based on those young people who have a birth family member alive and known about by the foster carer for each of the four birth family member categories. For example, results on the nature of contact with birth mothers is based on the total of 171 young people who had

108 | The timeframe of 'previous six months' refers to the six month period immediately prior to carrying out the interview each with each foster carer.

Table 5.1: Composition of young people's birth families as reported by foster carers

<i>Birth family member</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>
Birth mother	83.4	171
Birth father	68.8	141
Siblings	95.6	196
Extended family	91.7	188

a birth mother around¹⁰⁹ – and not out of all the 205 young people that are the focus of this research study as the birth mothers for some young people were deceased. The first result looks at whether young people had seen birth family members in the previous six months.

Face to face contact in the previous six months

Foster carers were asked if young people had seen each category of birth family member in the previous six months. These results are based on birth family members who are known to be around by the foster carer.

Table 5.2: Likelihood of face to face contact between young people and birth family member categories in the previous six months as reported by foster carers

<i>Young person saw family member in the previous six months?</i>	<i>Birth mother % (n)</i>	<i>Birth father % (n)</i>	<i>Siblings % (n)</i>	<i>Extended family % (n)</i>
Yes	71.9 (123)	50.4 (70)	82.6 (147)	65.2 (116)
No	28.1 (48)	49.6 (69)	17.4 (31)	34.8 (62)
Total	100.0 (171)	100.0 (139)*	100.0 (178)*	100.0 (178)*

**Some data were missing: birth fathers, two young people; siblings, 18 young people; and extended family, 10 young people*

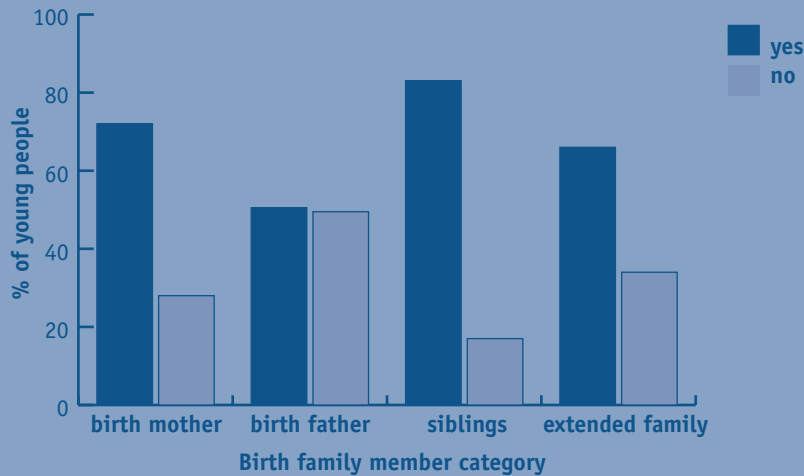
From Table 5.2, it is clear that young people were most likely to have seen their siblings and birth mother in the previous six months out of all four birth family member categories. Where information on contact in the previous six months was available, 82.6% (147) of young people had seen at least one sibling in the previous six months.¹¹⁰ Almost three quarters of young people, 71.9% (123), had seen their birth mother. A relatively

high percentage of young people with extended family members had seen at least one of them in the previous six months, 65.2% (116). One half of young people had seen their birth father in the previous six months, 50.4% (70). The contrast in the likelihood of contact in the previous six months can be more easily seen in the form of a bar chart in Chart 5.1.

109 | The term 'around' is used to refer to birth family members who are alive or known about by the foster carer.

110 | The percentage of young people that had seen a sibling is based on two other results. Firstly, 50.0% (89) of young people were said to have seen all their siblings in the last six months, and secondly, an additional 32.6% (58) were reported to have seen some of them. Therefore, in total, 82.6% (147) of young people had seen at least one sibling.

Chart 5.1: Likelihood of face to face contact between young people and birth family member categories in the previous six months as reported by foster carers



The first set of bars in Chart 5.1 represent the percentage of young people who were reported to have seen each birth family member category in the previous six months, while the second set of bars show those who did not. After identifying the relatively high percentage of young people who had seen their siblings and birth mothers in the previous six months, it is worth looking more closely at the trend in young people that had seen their birth father. The results show that the percentage of young people who had *not* seen their birth father in the previous six months was almost the same as those that had seen him in this time. Of all four categories of birth family members, young people were least likely to have seen their

birth father in the previous six months. This result is based on the number of young people who have a birth father alive or known about by the foster carer. Therefore, this result cannot be explained by the birth father being deceased or unknown to the foster carer.

After establishing whether young people were likely to have seen birth family members in the previous six months, the next set of results explore the *frequency* of such contact over this time.

Frequency of contact

Table 5.3 shows how often young people had seen birth family members in the previous six months.¹¹¹

Table 5.3: Frequency of face to face contact between young people and birth family member categories in the previous six months as reported by foster carers

<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Birth mother</i> % (n)	<i>Birth father</i> % (n)	<i>Siblings</i> % (n)	<i>Extended family</i> % (n)
Once a week or more often	27.6 (34)	25.4 (17)	28.1 (41)	17.3 (18)
Every 2 weeks	14.6 (18)	16.4 (11)	9.6 (14)	8.7 (9)
Once a month	25.2 (31)	16.4 (11)	25.3 (37)	22.1 (23)
Every 2/3 months	13.0 (16)	11.9 (8)	17.8 (26)	13.5 (14)
Irregular contact	19.5 (24)	29.9 (20)	19.2 (28)	38.5 (40)
Total	100.0 (123)	100.0 (67)*	100.0 (146)*	100.0 (104)*

**Some data were missing: birth father, three young people; siblings, one young person; and extended family, 12 young people*

¹¹¹ | The total number of young people is based on those who had seen each category of birth family member in the last six months for whom data were available.

From Table 5.3 it can be seen that approximately one quarter of young people who have seen their birth mother, father and siblings in the previous six months, tend to do so on a weekly basis:

- ▶ 27.6% (34) of young people saw their birth mother at least once a week
- ▶ 25.4% (17) of young people saw their birth father at least once a week
- ▶ 28.1% (41) of young people saw at least one sibling once a week or more
- ▶ A lower proportion of 17.3% (18) saw at least one member of their extended family on a weekly or more regular basis.

Looking at less frequent contact, young people were most likely to see birth family members once a month – birth mother, 25.2% (31); birth father, 16.4% (11); siblings, 25.3% (37); and extended family, 22.1% (23). Well over one half of young people who had seen their birth mother, birth father or at least one sibling in the previous six months had seen them on a weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis (i.e. once a month or more often). While these results indicate that a high percentage of young people saw birth family members fairly frequently in the previous six months, Table 5.3

also shows that there was a fairly significant minority of young people who were reported to have *irregular contact* with birth family members. This category refers to contact that has taken place less often than once every 2/3 months in the previous six months. Therefore, in comparison to the other frequency categories, this level of contact is fairly irregular (i.e. less than twice in the previous six months). To summarise the trends in frequency of contact over the previous six months, the five frequency categories in Table 5.3 were collapsed into two categories and the results presented in Table 5.4 below. The two new categories for frequency of contact are:

- ▶ *Regular contact* – which combines the categories ‘once a week or more often’, ‘every two weeks’, ‘once a month’ and ‘every 2/3 months’, therefore indicating where young people had seen birth family members on a fairly regular basis in the previous six months.
- ▶ *Irregular contact* – which consisted of the single category of the same name in Table 5.3 – this referred to instances where young people had no regular or ongoing contact with birth family members in the previous six months and had seen them less often than every 2/3 months in this time.

Table 5.4: Frequency of face to face contact between young people and birth family member categories in the previous six months – regular versus irregular contact – as reported by foster carers

Frequency of contact	Birth mother % (n)	Birth father % (n)	Siblings % (n)	Extended family % (n)
Regular contact	80.4 (99)	70.1 (47)	80.8 (118)	61.5 (64)
Irregular contact	19.5 (24)	29.9 (20)	19.2 (28)	38.5 (40)
Total	100.0 (123)	100.0 (67)	100.0 (146)	100.0 (104)

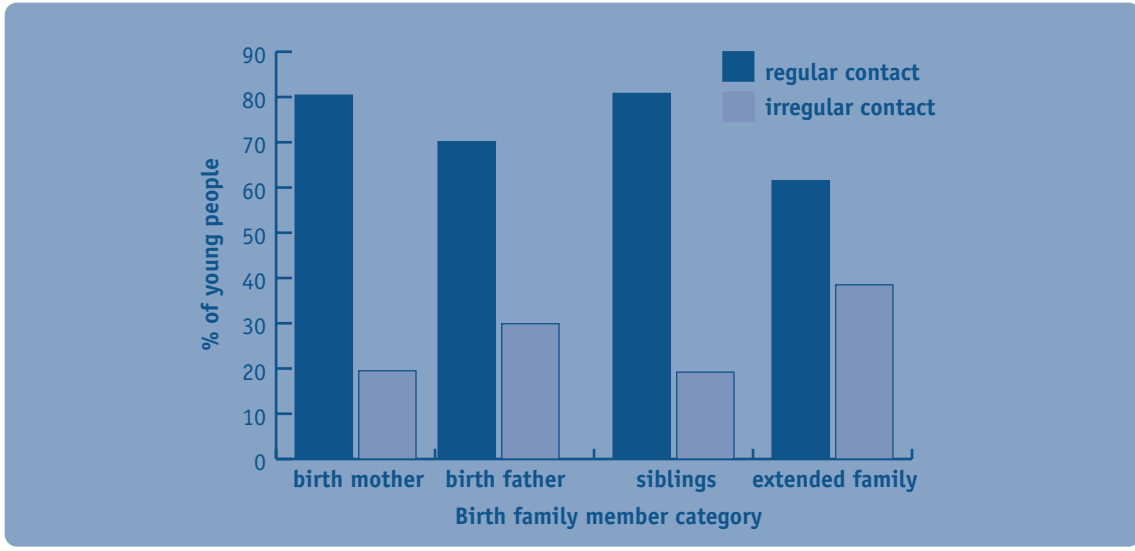
It is clear from Table 5.4 that the majority of young people that had seen birth family members in the previous six months had fairly regular contact with them, particularly with their siblings and birth mother – 80.8% (118) of young people saw their siblings regularly and 80.4% (99) of young people saw their birth mother on a regular basis.¹¹² However, there was a significant minority of young people who had irregular contact with birth family members – even when they had seen them in the previous six months – especially with their birth father and extended family members. Of those young people that had seen their birth father in the previous six months, almost one third, 29.9% (20) had irregular contact with him – that is they saw him less often than every 2/3 months (or less than twice over the previous six months).

These trends are clearly visible from Chart 5.2 on the next page, which graphically presents these contrasting results on regular and irregular or ongoing contact.

Chart 5.2 shows the divergence between regular (first set of bars) and irregular contact (second set of bars) with birth family members over the previous six months across all four family member categories. It can be clearly seen that young people are less likely to have regular contact with their birth fathers and extended family members compared to their birth mothers and siblings, as stated earlier, represented by the comparatively larger first set of bars.

¹¹² | While visits with birth mothers and siblings sometimes took place at the same time, this was not always the case. The frequency of contact was measured separately for birth mothers and siblings during interviews with foster carers.

Chart 5.2: Frequency of face to face contact between young people and birth family member categories in the previous six months – regular versus irregular contact – as reported by foster carers



Looking at the results presented above, it has been shown that young people are more likely to have seen siblings or their birth mother in the previous six months compared to birth fathers and extended family members. In addition, young people tend to see their siblings and birth mother more regularly.

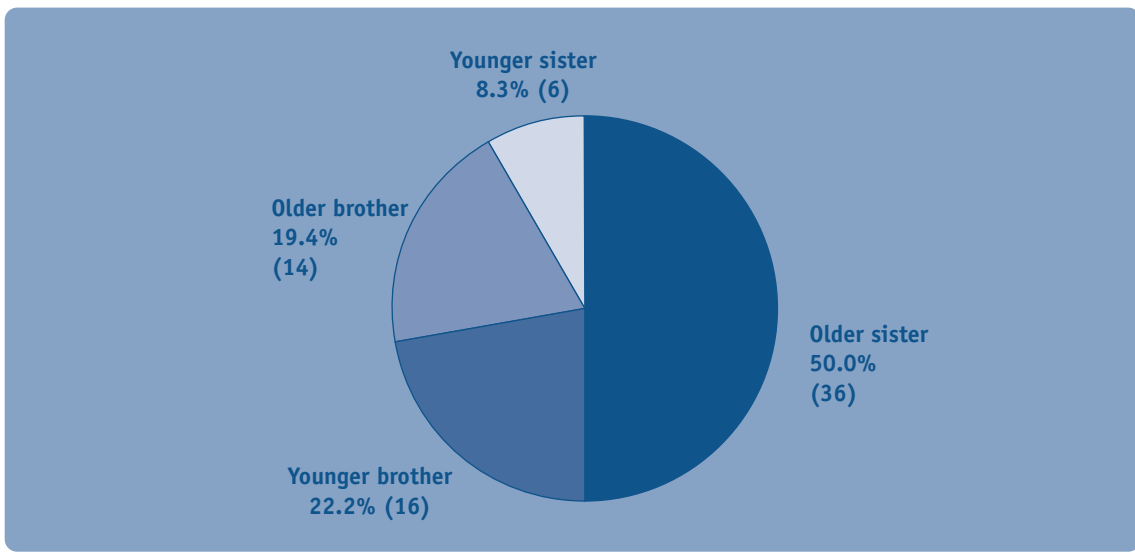
Sibling seen most often

In relation to contact with siblings, out of the young people that had seen at least one of their

siblings in the previous six months (147), over one half – 54.4% (80) – were reported to see a *particular* sibling more often than other siblings. Foster carers were asked to identify this sibling for these 80 young people.

Chart 5.3 shows that the sibling that young people were most likely to see more often was an older sister, 50.0% (36). This was followed by a younger brother, 22.2% (16).¹¹³

Chart 5.3: Sibling that young people had seen most often in the previous six months as reported by foster carers (N=72)



113 | This chart is based on 72 young people as data were missing for the remaining 8.

Extended family member seen most often

Similarly, the same question was asked concerning extended family members. Just over two thirds of young people, 68.1% (79), that had seen at least one member of the extended family in the previous six months saw one particular person most often. Chart 5.4 identifies who this person in the extended family tends to be.

Chart 5.4 shows that out of all the extended family members, young people were most likely to have seen an aunt or uncle most often in the previous

six months, 53.9% (41). Grandparents were the second most likely member of the extended family that young people had greatest contact with, 39.5% (30).

As a summary of the level of contact between young people and birth family members in the previous six months, Chart 5.5 presents the number of birth family member categories (out of a maximum of four) that young people had seen in this time.

Chart 5.4: Extended family members that young people had seen most often in the previous six months as reported by foster carers (N=76)

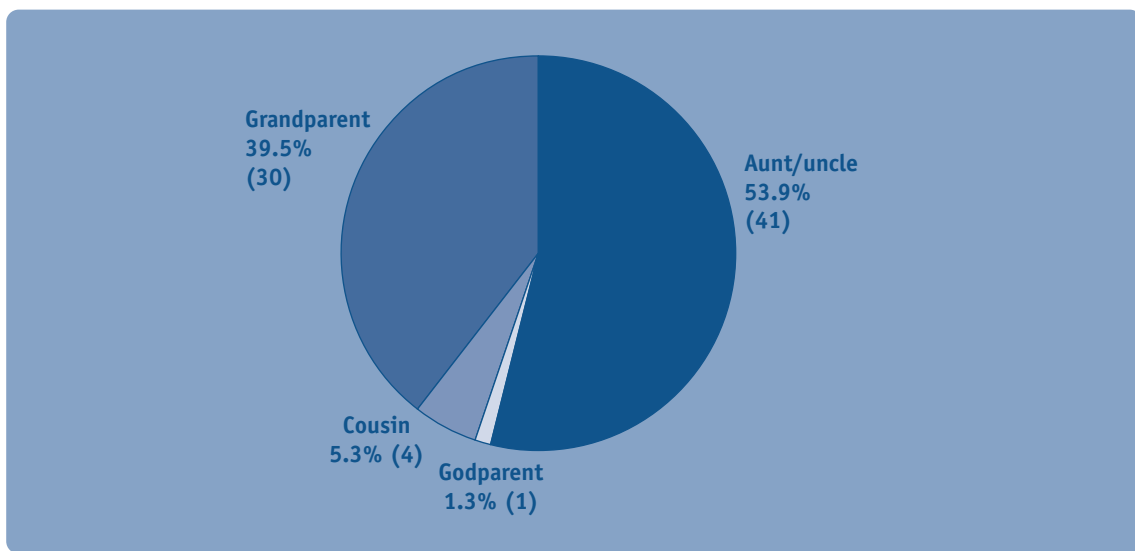


Chart 5.5: Number of birth family member categories that young people had seen in the previous six months as reported by foster carers

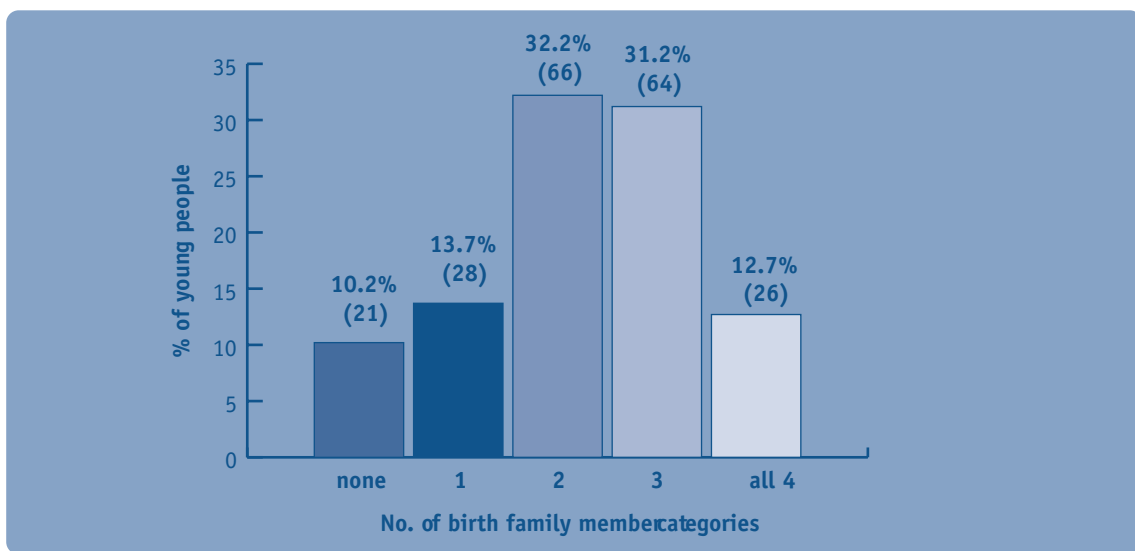


Chart 5.5 shows that young people tended to see either two or three family member categories out of the total of four (birth mother, father, siblings and extended family) in the previous six months –

32.2% (66) and 31.2% (64) respectively. However, 10.2% (21) of young people had seen no members of their birth family in the previous six months, suggesting that this group may be vulnerable to

isolation and lower social support.¹¹⁴ A similar analysis was carried out for the number of birth family member categories seen by the young person over the last year. This data would be useful in establishing whether the percentage of young people who had not seen any birth family members at all would be different over a longer timeframe,

especially as extending the timeframe to include a further six months would include Christmas. The number of young people did reduce slightly but still 7.8% (16) of young people had seen no birth family members in the last year. The results that follow look at young people's contact with birth family members over this longer timeframe of one year.

Summary of results on composition of birth family and contact in the previous six months

Composition of birth family

- ▶ The majority of young people had a birth mother, at least one birth sibling and extended family members as possible sources of social support.
- ▶ Out of the four birth family member categories, young people were least likely to have a birth father around, either because he was deceased or unknown (to the foster carer).

Face to face contact in the previous six months

- ▶ For young people who had birth family members alive or known about by the foster carer, they were most likely to have seen their siblings and birth mother in the previous six months and least likely to have seen their birth father in this time.
- ▶ The majority of young people who had seen birth family members in the previous six months had fairly regular contact with them (which tended to be weekly or monthly), especially with their siblings and birth mother.
- ▶ However, a significant minority of young people had irregular contact with their birth family members in the previous six month period.
- ▶ Of those who saw a particular sibling more often than others, this was most likely to be an older sister.
- ▶ Similarly, uncles/aunts were the extended family members that young people were most likely to see, followed by grandparents.
- ▶ Young people were most likely to have seen either two or three birth family member categories in the previous six months.
- ▶ However 1 out of 10 young people had seen no birth family members whatsoever in the previous six months.

Face to face contact in the last year

Where young people were reported to have seen no birth family members in the six months immediately prior to the time of interview, foster carers were asked if they had seen them at all in the last year. This would give some information on whether face to face contact was likely to occur over a longer time frame (i.e. one year) for those young people who had not seen any birth family in the short term (i.e. the previous six months).

114 | All young people in the study, except one, had a birth family member alive or known about by the foster carer, therefore this result cannot be attributed to this factor.

Table 5.5: Likelihood of face to face contact between young people and birth family member categories in the last year (where there was no contact in the previous six months) as reported by foster carers

<i>Young person seen birth family in the last year</i>	<i>Birth mother % (n)</i>	<i>Birth father % (n)</i>	<i>Siblings % (n)</i>	<i>Extended family % (n)</i>
Yes	25.5 (12)	26.1 (18)	25.8 (8)	25.0 (15)
No	74.5 (35)	73.9 (51)	74.2 (23)	75.0 (45)
Total <i>(no. of young people that did not see family member in previous 6 months)*</i>	100.0 (47)	100.0 (69)	100.0 (31)	100.0 (60)

**Taken from Table 5.2. Some data were missing: birth mother, one young person; and extended family, two young people.*

The main result from Table 5.5 is that where young people had not seen birth family members in the previous six months, they were highly unlikely to have seen them in the last year.¹¹⁵ For all four categories of birth family, approximately one quarter of young people who had seen no birth family members in the previous six months had seen them in the last year. For example, 25.5% (12) of those who had not seen their birth mother in the previous six months had seen her in the last year, while 74.5% (35) had not seen her in the last year. Therefore, the majority of young people who had not seen birth family in the previous six months were unlikely to have seen them in the last year.

The importance of this result is that it suggests that where face to face contact between young people and birth family members did not take place in the immediate short term period (the previous six months), it is highly unlikely to have occurred in the medium term (the last year).

Reasons for lack of face to face contact

The reasons given for no face to face contact between young people and birth family members in the last year were quite varied. By far, the most commonly cited reason for lack of contact during the last year was that young people had lost contact with family members or had never established contact in the first place. The second most cited reason was that the young person did not want contact with a particular family member and refused to see them. This was closely followed by the family member being 'unknown' (most often in the case of fathers). Other reasons cited by carers for lack of contact included:

- ▶ Family member was ill
- ▶ Barring order in place
- ▶ Family member had never met the young person (especially for siblings and extended family)

- ▶ Family member lived in another country
- ▶ Family member stopped turning up for visits
- ▶ Lack of contact with parents meant no contact with siblings and/or extended family
- ▶ Family member in prison
- ▶ Parental separation.

It is useful to explore the reasons for the lack of contact as it indicates the circumstances that may prevent or act as obstacles to young people maintaining contact with birth family members. In particular, this information could be used to help prevent deteriorating contact between young people and birth family members where similar situations may be currently occurring, such as parental separation, a parent being imprisoned and a parent becoming ill. Obviously this excludes instances where a barring order is in place prohibiting contact. However, it is helpful to identify the situations that have a potentially negative impact on contact and make additional efforts to maintain such contact – where this is desirable. In addition, the reasons for lack of contact in the last year show that young people took some control over the situation themselves, as the second highest reason cited by carers was that the young person did not want to see the birth family member. The following section explores young people's choices in relation to contact with birth family in more detail.

Young people's preference for face to face contact with birth family

Where young people did not see birth family members in the last year, carers were asked to say if the young person had asked to see that particular birth family member(s). This is an indirect measure of young people's preferences but provides some way of exploring whether young people's lack of contact with birth family members (as found above) is due to their own choice or not.

¹¹⁵ | Foster carers were asked if young people had seen birth family members in the six month period before interviews took place. Where there was no face to face contact in this time, carers were then asked if young people had seen them six months prior to this – this period is referred to as 'the last year' in the results.

Table 5.6: Young people's preference for face to contact with birth family (where there was no face to face contact in the last year) as reported by foster carers

<i>Did young people ask to see birth family member(s)?</i>	<i>Birth mother % (n)</i>	<i>Birth father % (n)</i>	<i>Siblings % (n)</i>	<i>Extended family % (n)</i>
Yes	5.7 (2)	12.5 (6)	9.5 (2)	13.2 (5)
No	94.3 (33)	87.5 (42)	90.5 (19)	86.8 (33)
Total <i>(no. of young people that did not see family member in last year) *</i>	100.0 (35)	100.0 (48)	100.0 (21)	100.0 (38)

**Taken from Table 5.5 above. Some data were missing: birth father, three young people; siblings, two young people; and extended family, seven young people.*

Table 5.6 shows that a relatively small percentage of young people who had not seen birth family members in the last year were reported to have asked their foster carers to see them. This ranged from 5.7% (2) of young people who were reported to have asked to see their birth mother to 13.2% (5), who were said to have asked to see their extended family – both very low percentages. Where young people had not seen birth family

members in the year prior to interviews with their foster carers, they were highly unlikely to ask their foster carer to see them. Therefore, from these results, it would appear that most young people who did not see birth family members in the last year did not particularly want to do so insofar as they did not request to see them. However, clearly this evidence needs to be interpreted with caution.

Summary of results on face to face contact in the last year, reasons for lack of such contact and young people's preference about contact

Likelihood of face to face contact in the last year

- ▶ Young people who had not seen birth family members in the previous six months were more than likely *not* to have seen them in the last year. On average, only one quarter of young people who had not seen birth family members in the previous six months had seen members in the last year. Therefore, where contact had not taken place in the immediate short term (previous six months), it was highly unlikely to have occurred in the medium term (the last year).
- ▶ 7.8% (16) of young people had no face to face contact with any birth family members in the last year.

Reasons for lack of face to face contact

- ▶ There were various reasons for no face to face contact between young people and birth family members in the last year. By far the most commonly cited reason was that contact had been lost between family members or had never been established in the first place.

Young people's preference for face to face contact with birth family

- ▶ Where young people had not seen birth family members in the last year, they rarely asked their foster carer if they could see them.

The results that follow provide some more information on the nature of the contact that took place between young people and birth family members. In particular:

- ▶ Young people's reported preference on the frequency of contact
- ▶ Other forms of contact
- ▶ The beneficial nature of contact.

Young people's reported preference on the frequency of face to face contact

Foster carers were asked to indicate if young people would like to see birth family members more often, less often or the same as at present. This data is based on the carer's own perception of how young people felt about the frequency of face to face contact with birth family members at the time of interview. Therefore, it is acknowledged that the foster carer's own opinion may also be reflected in

their answers but the carer does see the young person's reaction after visits, and therefore, is in a good position to comment on how the young person may be feeling after seeing birth family

members. The results are based on the number of young people that saw each birth family member category over the last year. Table 5.7 presents the results below.

Table 5.7: Young people's preference on frequency of contact with birth family member categories as reported by foster carers

<i>Frequency of contact</i>	<i>Birth mother % (n)</i>	<i>Birth father % (n)</i>	<i>Siblings % (n)</i>	<i>Extended family % (n)</i>
More often	27.2 (34)	28.2 (22)	35.5 (50)	22.4 (24)
Less often	19.2 (24)	16.7 (13)	3.5 (5)	2.8 (3)
Same as at present	53.6 (67)	55.1 (43)	61.0 (86)	74.8 (80)
Total*	100.0 (125)	100.0 (78)	100.0 (141)	100.0 (107)

**Some data were missing: birth mother, 10 young people; birth father, 10 young people; siblings, 14 young people; and extended family, 24 young people.*

Table 5.7 shows that between one half and three quarters of young people were reported to desire the same frequency of contact with birth family members as that taking place at the time of interviews with foster carers. For example, 53.6% (67) of young people that had seen their birth mother in the last year were reported to want to maintain the same frequency of visits. Where young people were reported to prefer more frequent visits, this was most likely to be with siblings than any other family member – over one third, 35.5% (50), of young people were reported to prefer to see siblings more often than at the moment. Where young people were said to prefer less frequent contact with birth family, this was most likely reported to be with birth parents. Of the young people that had seen their birth parents in the last

year, 19.2% (24) and 16.7% (13) were reported to prefer seeing less of their birth mother and birth father respectively. So, overall young people who had seen birth family members in the last year were reported to be fairly satisfied with the current frequency of visits.

Other forms of contact

The results so far have focused on face to face contact between young people and birth family members. However, to provide information using a more comprehensive definition of contact, foster carers were asked if there had been forms of contact (other than face to face) between young people and birth family members in the previous six months.

Table 5.8: Other forms of contact between young people and birth family members (apart from face to face contact) in the previous six months as reported by foster carers

<i>Did young people have other forms of contact with birth family members apart from face to face?</i>	<i>Birth mother % (n)</i>	<i>Birth father % (n)</i>	<i>Siblings % (n)</i>	<i>Extended family % (n)</i>
Yes	46.1 (76)	29.5 (39)	45.0 (77)	34.6 (55)
No	53.9 (89)	70.5 (93)	55.0 (94)	65.4 (104)
Total*	100.0 (165)	100.0 (132)	100.0 (171)	100.0 (159)

**Some data were missing: birth mother, six young people; birth father, nine young people; siblings, 25 young people; and extended family, 29 young people*

Table 5.8 shows that young people were most likely to have had other forms of contact (apart from face to face) with their birth mother – 46.1% (76) – and siblings – 45.0% (77). This is consistent with the earlier results on face to face contact where young

people were found to most likely have had such contact with their siblings and birth mother out of all their birth family members. The forms that these other types of contact took are presented in Table 5.9 below.

Table 5.9: Breakdown of types of other contact between young people and birth family member categories in the previous six months in descending rank order as reported by foster carers

<i>Other type of contact</i>	<i>Mother % (n)</i>	<i>Father % (n)</i>	<i>Siblings % (n)</i>	<i>Extended family % (n)</i>	<i>Total No.</i>
Telephone	56	25	64	31	176
Birthday/Christmas cards	19	9	8	11	47
Letters	5	-	-	7	12
Text messages	-	1	4	-	5
Emails	-	-	1	1	2

Table 5.9 shows that contact by telephone was the most common form of contact other than face to face contact. Across all four birth family member categories, a total of 176 contacts with young people by telephone were recorded over the six months prior to interviews with foster carers. The next most popular form of other contact was birthday/Christmas cards, followed by letters, text messages and finally, emails. So, it is important to recognise that contact between young people and birth family members can take different forms, with face to face visits being supplemented by speaking over the telephone in particular as a way of maintaining contact.

In some cases, other forms of contact apart from face to face were the only means of communication between the young person and birth family member. Out of all four birth family member categories, this was most likely for birth fathers,

where 26.3% (10) of those who had other contact with their birth father, had not seen him in the previous six months. Given this result, further analysis was carried out to see if the group of 21 young people who had no face to face contact with a single birth family member in the previous six months (see Chart 5.5) had any other form of contact with them. This was found to be unlikely and only a scenario for 4 of these 21 young people.

Beneficial nature of contact

Finally, foster carers were asked to consider whether the contact that young people had experienced with their birth family had, in their view, been beneficial to the young person. Again, this is based on the carer's perception but they are likely to have a good idea of how the young person feels about contact with their birth family.

Chart 5.6: Was contact with birth family beneficial for young people or not? (N=177)

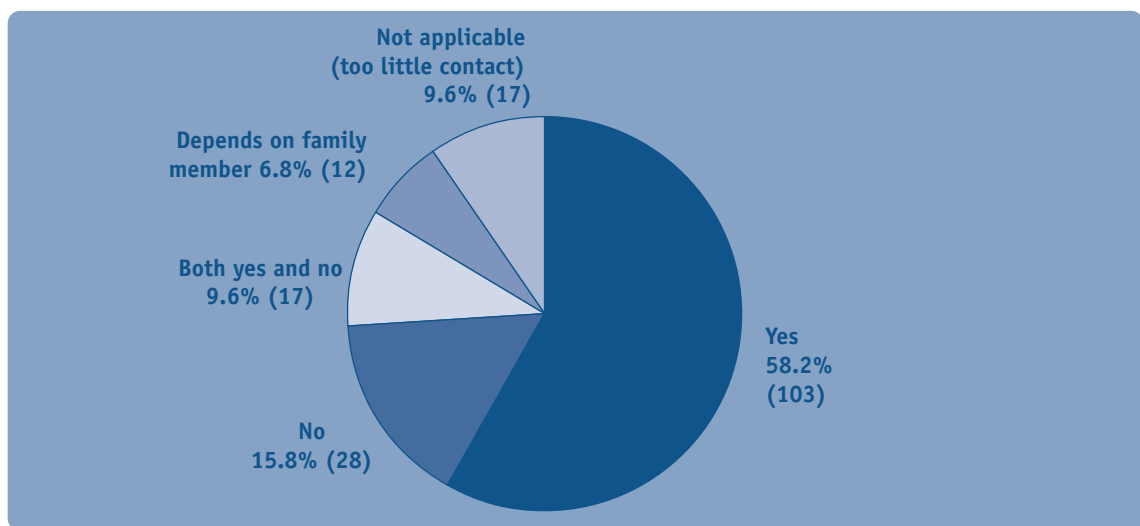


Chart 5.6 shows that carers reported that contact with birth family members was generally beneficial for over one half of all young people, 58.2% (103). Such contact was deemed as being negative for 15.8% (28) of young people. There was some uncertainty expressed by some foster carers with

9.6% (17) responding ‘both yes and no’ and a further 6.8% (12) replying ‘depends on the family member’.¹¹⁶ Overall, contact between young people and their birth family was more likely to be viewed by foster carers as more positive than not for the young person concerned.

Summary of results on young people’s reported preference on the frequency of face to face contact, other forms of contact and the beneficial nature of contact

Young people’s reported preference on the frequency of face to face contact

- ▶ Approximately 5 out of 10 young people were reported to want the same frequency of face to face contact with their birth mother and birth father as that at the time of interview with foster carers (6 out of 10 for siblings and 7 out of 10 for extended family). Therefore, young people appear to be fairly satisfied with the current frequency of visits.
- ▶ Where young people were said to prefer more frequent visits, this was most likely to be with siblings than other family member(s).

Other forms of contact

- ▶ The telephone was the most common means of other contact between young people and birth family members.
- ▶ Young people were more likely to have had contact in ways other than face to face with their birth mother and siblings compared to their birth father and extended family.

Beneficial nature of contact

- ▶ Contact with birth family was most likely to be viewed as positive for young people by foster carers.
- ▶ Almost 6 out of 10 young people were deemed to benefit from the contact they had with birth family members. However, 16.4% (29) of carers expressed uncertainty over the beneficial nature of contact giving a ‘yes and no’ response or else saying that it depended on the individual birth family member.

Trends in young people’s contact with birth family by foster care placement conditions

This section examines in more detail some of the findings presented earlier in this chapter. In particular, it aims to find out the circumstances under which young people’s contact with their birth families may vary. Certain aspects of young people’s placements could have possible repercussions for the nature of their contact with birth family members. Three aspects of foster care placements are selected for further analysis here. These are:

- ▶ Length of time in care (both in the current foster care placement and in care overall)
- ▶ Age at which young people were first placed into care
- ▶ Whether young people were in a relative or non-relative care placement.

The results presented here focus on trends in the nature of young people’s contact with birth family members over the six month period prior to interviews with their foster carers.¹¹⁷ The discussion involves looking in more depth at the results presented earlier in this chapter on the likelihood

of such contact, as well as the frequency of such contact. Variations in the nature of contact with individual birth family member categories – birth mother, birth father, siblings and extended family – are also explored.

Length of time in care

There were two measures of the length of time young people had been in care:

- ▶ The number of years that young people had been in their current foster care placement
- ▶ The total number of years that young people had been in care (including all care placements, whether in foster or residential care).

Where young people’s current foster care placement was their only care placement to date, the length of time they had been with their current carer and in care overall was the same. However, for almost one half of young people, 48.8% (100), their current foster care placement was not their first placement, and therefore, trends in the nature of contact with birth family were analysed using both measures, i.e. length of time in the current foster care placement and the total length of time in care.

116 | Chart 5.6 is based on 177 young people as data was missing for the remaining 28 young people.

117 | Questions on the nature of contact between young people and their birth families were asked in relation to each of the four birth family member categories: birth mother, birth father, siblings and extended family.

Length of time young people had been in their current foster care placement

The first result presented here looks at whether young people had face to face contact with each birth family member category in the previous six months taking account of how long they have been with their current foster carer. The general trend was that young people who had been with their current foster carer for a relatively long period of time were less likely to have seen birth family members in the previous six months. For example, in relation to birth mothers, 94.6% (35) of young people who had been with their current carer for 1 to 3 years had seen her in the previous six months. This fell to 75.8% (47) of those who had been with their carer for 4 to 9 years, and finally, to 56.9% (41) of young people who had been in their current placement for the longest period of time, between 9 to 13 years.¹¹⁸ This result was highly statistically significant.¹¹⁹ The same trends and statistically significant results were found for siblings and extended family, but not for birth fathers.

In relation to birth fathers, the percentage of young people who had seen their birth father in the previous six months remained relatively constant over the length of time that young people had been in their current care placement and did not follow the general downward trend for other birth family members. As stated in the findings at the beginning of the chapter, out of all four birth family member categories, birth fathers were the least likely member to have had any face to face contact with young people in the previous six months (even after taking account of cases where the birth father was deceased or unknown).

Analysis was also carried out to explore how the frequency of contact with birth family members changed over the length of time young people had spent in their current foster care placement. The results of this analysis add further support to the earlier finding that contact wanes over time. For the purpose of this analysis, the frequency of contact was measured by two categories: *regular* contact (where young people had seen birth family member categories ranging from once a week to every 2/3 months) and *irregular* contact (where young people had seen birth family member categories less often than every 2/3 months, i.e. only once) or else had no ongoing contact with the birth family member. A consistent trend for each birth family member category emerged where the percentage of young people who had been categorised as having regular contact with the respective birth family member category fell as the number of years spent in their current care placement increased.

The decline in the number of young people who had regular contact was particularly noticeable for those who were in their current foster care placement for

10 years or more. For example, in relation to birth mothers, 88.6% (31) of young people in their current foster care placement for 1 to 3 years had been categorised as having regular contact. The tendency to have such regular contact fell slightly to 85.1% (40) for those in their current placement for 4 to 9 years, but the real decline came for those young people who were in their placement for 10 years or more, to 68.3% (28). This result in relation to birth mothers was of *borderline* statistical significance.¹²⁰ Results for the other birth family members followed this trend. These findings were statistically significant for siblings and extended family, but not for birth fathers.

Finally, the *number* of birth family member categories that young people had face to face contact with in the previous six months (out of a total of four birth family member categories) was explored taking account of the length of time they had been with their current foster carer. As the number of years spent in their current foster care placement *increased*, the number of birth family members seen by young people in the previous six months *decreased*.¹²¹ It is also worth noting that almost all of those young people who had seen no members of their birth family in the previous six months had been with their current foster carer for 10 years or more – 20 young people out of a total of 21.

Based on the above results, it can be said that not only is the likelihood of face to face contact less likely for young people who had been in their current foster care placement for a relatively longer period of time, but also that these young people were less likely to have had regular contact with individual birth family members. To verify these results, a similar analysis was carried out using the second measure of duration in care, the length of time young people had been in care overall.

Length of time young people had been in care

The results on the nature of contact with birth family members discussed above are largely repeated when analysis is carried out on the nature of young people's contact with their birth family members over the total length of time they have been in care. When looking at the likelihood of young people having had face to face contact with each individual birth family member category in the previous six months, young people were increasingly *less likely* to have seen each birth family member category as their time in care increased (but markedly so after being in care for 10 years or more). For example, in relation to siblings, 90.5% (19) of young people in care for 1 to 3 years had seen at least one sibling in the previous six months, this increased slightly to 96.6% (57) of young people in care for 4 to 9 years, however it fell to 73.1% (57) of those in care for 10 to 14 years. This was statistically significant. The result was also statistically

118 | The cross tabulation tables from which this result and all the results in this section are taken are available from the Children's Research Centre on request.

119 | Where a result is described as being 'significant', this means statistically significant and is based on statistical tests that were carried out. Statistically significant results are presented in Table 5.10 at the end of this chapter. This table presents both chi-square results and correlation co-efficients.

120 | Nevertheless, there was a positive correlation between the frequency of contact with birth mothers and the number of years that young people had been with their current carer.

121 | There was a negative correlation between the number of birth family member categories seen by young people in the last six months and the number of years they had spent in their current foster care placement.

significant for birth mothers and extended family but not birth fathers, although the results for birth fathers followed the overall downward trend overtime.

One point concerning the results for birth fathers is worthy of note here and follows on from the results based on the length of time young people had spent in the current foster care placement (as above). The decline in the likelihood of young people to have seen birth family members the longer they had been in care, was not as marked in relation to birth fathers compared to other birth family members. Out of the young people who had been in care for 1 to 3 years, 64.3% (9) had seen their birth father in the previous six months, this percentage fell slightly to 56.6% (30) for those in care for 4 to 9 years and then finally to 44.3% (27) for those in care for 10 years or more. Therefore, the likelihood of young people having seen their birth father in the previous six months did not fall to the same extent over time compared to other birth family member categories. However, this result needs to be qualified. The percentage of young people who had seen their birth father in the short term, i.e. in the 1 to 3 years since being placed in care, was by far the lowest for all of the birth family member categories. Therefore, while the percentage of young people who had seen their birth father in the previous six months remained the most constant over time, it should be remembered that out of all birth family members, young people were least likely to have seen their birth fathers in the previous six months.

In relation to the *frequency* of contact between young people and birth family members and the total length of time spent in care, young people were increasingly *less likely* to have *regular* contact with birth family members in the previous six month period, the greater the total number of years they had been in care. For example, in relation to siblings, 100.0% (19) of young people in care for 1 to 3 years had had seen at least one sibling regularly (ranging from once a week to every 2/3 months) in the previous six month period, this decreased to 85.7% (48) of young people in care for 4 to 9 years and finally, to 68.4% (39) of young people in care for 10 to 14 years. Therefore, as young people spent a higher number of years in care, face to face contact with siblings became less regular. This was statistically significant for siblings only, though the overall downward trend also held for birth mothers (borderline significance), birth fathers and extended family members.¹²² Further evidence that supports this result was that as the number of years in care increased, young people saw relatives from fewer birth family member categories in the previous six months.

Based on the results discussed above, not only was the length of time that young people had spent in care related to the *likelihood* of whether they saw their birth family members in the previous six months, but also to how *frequent* this contact tended to be.

Age at which young people were first placed into care

The age at which young people were first placed into care is an indirect measure of the length of time that young people had been in care (as above). Therefore, it is not surprising to find similar results. However, it does serve to add further weight to the trends already discussed and is therefore included here.

Looking at the trends in face to face contact between young people and each individual birth family category, it is clear that young people who were relatively older when first placed in care were more likely to have seen birth family members in the previous six months. For example, 89.7% (35) of young people who were first placed in care when aged 9 to 13 years had seen their birth mother in the previous six months. This percentage fell to 78.9% (30) for those aged 4 to 8 years when first placed, and further still to 58.3% (42) for young people aged 0 to 3 years old when first placed in care. This result was statistically significant. Results for other birth family members followed this trend and were also statistically significant for siblings and extended family but not birth fathers.

Looking at the *frequency* of contact with birth family members, this also varied by the age at which young people were first placed into care. For example, in relation to siblings, 90.0% (36) of young people placed in care at age 9 to 13 years had regular contact with at least one sibling in the previous six months. Young people who were first placed in care when aged 4 to 8 years were just as likely to have had such regular contact, 89.5% (34). However, for young people aged 0 to 3 years when first placed in care, they were *least* likely to have had regular contact with a sibling, 66.7% (36). Nevertheless, it is worth noting the fairly substantial proportion of young people who still had regular contact with siblings even when they had been in care from such an early age.¹²³ This result was statistically significant. As the age first placed in care increased, i.e. as young people got older when placed in care for the first time, they were more likely to have had regular contact with siblings in the previous six months. A similar trend held for other birth family members. The result was also statistically significant for extended family members but not for birth mothers and birth fathers, although a similar trend was found.

Finally, where young people were first placed in care at a relatively older age, they were more likely to have seen relatives from a higher number of birth family member categories compared to young people who had been first placed at a comparatively younger age. It is also worth pointing out that almost all of the young people who had *not* seen any birth family members in the previous six months had been first placed in care when they were 3 years old or younger – 16 out of 17 young people in total.

122 | Based on the chi-square results, which are presented in Table 5.10 at the end of this chapter.

123 | It should be remembered here that these results do not include siblings who may be in the care of the same foster carer as the young person in question.

The above analysis has found that the age at which young people have been placed in care can have potential repercussions for the nature of contact that young people have with birth family members. These results add further support to the conclusion reached earlier that the likelihood and frequency of contact with birth family members declines over the period of time spent in care.

Relative and non-relative care

Almost one quarter of young people in the study were in the care of relatives, 24.9% (51). Being placed in relative or non-relative care is one potential factor that could be associated with variations in the nature of contact between young people and members of their birth families. It might be reasonable to expect that young people placed with relative carers might have a greater opportunity for contact with their birth family members. One reason could be that relative carers may be more likely to be living in the same geographical area as young people's birth families. Therefore, young people may live quite near to their birth family when placed in foster care. This idea will be explored in the following discussion.

The first issue under consideration looks at whether young people were more or less likely to have had face to face contact with individual birth family members, taking into account whether they were in relative or non-relative care placements. Young people in relative care were found to be significantly more likely to have seen their birth mother in the previous six months than young people in non-relative care – 84.6% (33) and 67.7% (88) respectively. This trend was statistically significant. Similarly to the results for birth mothers, a higher proportion of young people in relative care had seen their birth father in the previous six months than those in non-relative care – 60.5% (23) compared to 47.0% (47) – but this was not statistically significant. Results for siblings and extended family followed the same trend. This result was statistically significant for extended family and of borderline significance for siblings.

Looking at the *frequency* of contact with birth family members in the previous six months, the results based on whether young people are in relative or non-relative care placements are not entirely consistent. Young people placed with relative carers were more likely to have regular contact with their birth father, siblings and extended family compared to those placed in non-relative care. This result was statistically significant only for extended family. The trend was different for birth mothers in that young people placed with relative carers were slightly *less likely* to have regular contact with their birth mother than those in non-relative care – 75.8% (25) and 83.0% (73) respectively.

Finally, young people in relative care were more likely to see relatives from a higher number of birth

family member categories (out of a total of four). If the number of birth family member categories seen in the previous six months is seen as giving some indication of the level of contact that young people have had in this time, this result lends support to the contention that young people in relative care had a greater level of contact with birth family members in the previous six months, compared to those in non-relative care placements. In addition, almost all of the young people who had *not seen* any birth family members in the previous six months were in non-relative care – 20 out of 21 young people.

So, whether young people were placed with relative carers or not appears to have some relationship with the likelihood of contact with individual birth family members. Young people in relative care were more likely to have seen each birth family member category in the previous six months compared to those in non-relative care (statistically significant for birth mothers and extended family). In relation to the frequency of contact, young people in relative care were more likely to have 'regular' contact with their birth father, siblings and extended family compared to those in non-relative care. The result for birth mothers did not follow this trend. The results for birth mothers are a little contradictory, in that young people in relative care were significantly more likely to have seen them in the previous six months but less likely to have had regular contact with them in this time, compared to young people in non-relative care placements. However, overall being placed in relative care would appear to be more conducive for contact with birth family members to take place and for it to be a *regular* occurrence.

To bring the discussion in this section to a close, the nature of contact between young people and their birth family members in the six month period prior to data collection has been shown to vary in relation to certain aspects of their foster care placements. In general, face to face contact with birth family members is more likely to happen and to be a regular part of day to day life for young people where they have been in their current foster care placement (and in care overall) for a relatively shorter period of time, and therefore, were relatively older when first placed. Conversely, the longer the period of time that young people were in care, or had been with their current carer, the less likely it was that contact with birth family members occurred, and where it did happen, such contact was less likely to be on a regular basis. Overall, the likelihood of contact is greater, and its frequency more regular, for young people in relative as opposed to non-relative care placements (the result on the frequency of contact with birth mothers is an exception to this). These results raise some issues that could be of interest to practitioners when they are making decisions about placing young people in foster care.

Summary of findings from further results on young people's contact with birth family

Length of time in current foster care placement and in care overall

The longer that young people had been in their current foster care placement and in care overall, the less likely they were:

- ▶ To have *seen members from all birth family categories*¹²⁴ at all in the previous six months (except for birth fathers) (significant for birth mother, siblings and extended family)
- ▶ To have had *regular contact with members from all birth family categories* in the previous six months (significant for siblings in relation to both measures of length of time in care).

Young people in care for *10 years or more were particularly less likely* to have seen birth family members in the previous six months compared to young people in care for a shorter period of time. Where such contact did occur for young people in care for 10 years or more, they were *less likely to have regular contact* with them. Also, these young people were likely to have seen members from *fewer birth family member categories* in the previous six months.

Age at which young people were first placed into care

In contrast to young people who had been first placed in care at an earlier age, those who had been placed in care at a relatively late age (and therefore, in care for a fairly short period of time) were more likely to have:

- ▶ *Seen members from all birth family categories* in the previous six months (significant for birth mother, siblings and extended family)
- ▶ Had *regular contact* with members from all birth family categories in the previous six months (significant for siblings and extended family)
- ▶ Seen members from a *higher number of birth family categories* in the previous six months.

Relative and non-relative care

In contrast to young people who were in non-relative care placements, those in relative care were more likely to have:

- ▶ *Seen members from all birth family categories* in the previous six months (significant for birth mother and extended family members only); and
- ▶ Had *regular contact* with their birth father, siblings and extended family in the previous six months (significant for extended family), but not with birth mothers.

Also, young people in relative care were more likely to have seen members from a higher number of birth family categories in the previous six months.

124 | 'All birth family categories' refers to the four birth family categories of birth mother, birth father, siblings and extended family. Any exceptions in the summary of results for a particular birth family category are noted above.

Summary table of findings from further results on young people's contact with birth family

	<i>Very important (statistically significant)</i>	<i>Important (trend)</i>	<i>Not important (no trend)</i>
Influences on whether young people had face to face contact with birth family member categories in the previous six months	<p>Significantly more likely where a young person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Had been with their current foster carer for a relatively shorter period of time (in the case of birth mother, siblings and extended family) ▶ Had been in care overall for a relatively shorter period of time (in the case of birth mother, siblings and extended family) ▶ Had been placed in care at a relatively late age (in the case of birth mother, siblings and extended family) ▶ Was in a relative care placement (in the case of birth mother and extended family) 	<p>Was more likely where a young person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Had been in care overall for a relatively shorter period of time (in the case of birth fathers only) ▶ Had been placed in care at a relatively late age (in the case of birth fathers only) ▶ Were in a relative care placement (in the case of siblings – borderline significance, birth father – trend) ▶ Was placed with a birth sibling (in the case of birth mother and extended family) ▶ Had no previous care placements (in the case of birth fathers only) ▶ Had a higher number of previous care placements (in the case of birth fathers only) ▶ Had a lower number of previous care placements (in the case of extended family only) 	<p>There was no relationship with the following factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Length of time with current foster carer (in the case of birth fathers only) ▶ Placed with a birth sibling (in the case of birth father and siblings) ▶ Previous care placements (in the case of birth mother, siblings, extended family) ▶ Number of previous care placements (in the case of birth mother, siblings)

Summary table of findings from further results on young people's contact with birth family (continued)

	<i>Very important (statistically significant)</i>	<i>Important (trend)</i>	<i>Not important (no trend)</i>
Influences on whether young people had frequent (regular) contact in the previous six months (i.e. at least every 2/3 months)	<p>Significantly more likely where a young person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Had been with their current foster carer for a relatively shorter period of time (in the case of siblings and extended family) ▶ Had been in care overall for a relatively shorter period of time (in the case of siblings) ▶ Had been placed in care at a relatively late age (in the case of siblings and extended family) ▶ Was in a relative care placement (in the case of extended family) 	<p>Was more likely where a young person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Had been with their current foster carer for a relatively shorter period of time (in the case of birth mother – borderline significance, birth fathers – trend) ▶ Had been in care overall for a relatively shorter period of time (in the case of birth mother – borderline significance, birth father and extended family) ▶ Had been placed in care at a relatively late age (in the case of birth mother and father) ▶ Was in a relative care placement (in the case of birth father and siblings) ▶ Had been placed with a birth sibling (in the case of birth mother, birth father, siblings, extended family) ▶ Had previous care placements before their current placement (in the case of birth mother) ▶ Had no previous care placement before their current placement (in the case of birth father, extended family) ▶ Had a higher number of previous care placements (in the case of birth mother, birth father, extended family) 	<p>There was no relationship with the following factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Previous care placements (in the case of siblings) ▶ Number of previous care placements (in the case of siblings)

Summary table of findings from further results on young people's contact with birth family
(continued)

	<i>Very important (statistically significant)</i>	<i>Important (trend)</i>	<i>Not important (no trend)</i>
<p>Influences on whether young people had seen a higher number of birth family member categories in the previous six months (birth mother, birth father, siblings and extended family)</p>	<p><i>Significantly more likely where a young person:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Had been with their current foster carer for a relatively shorter period of time ▶ Had been in their current foster care placement for a relatively shorter period of time ▶ Had been placed in care at a relatively late age ▶ Was in a relative care placement 		

Table 5.10: Statistically significant results to support findings on young people's contact with birth family members

	<i>Independent variable</i>	<i>Chi-square result</i>	<i>Correlation co-efficient</i>		
<i>Likelihood of face to face contact in previous 6 months</i>	Length of time in current foster care placement	$\chi^2 = 17.883, df = 2, p < .0005$ (BM) $\chi^2 = 23.306, df = 2, p < .0005$ (S) $\chi^2 = 17.679, df = 2, p < .0005$ (EF)	$\rho = 0.322, N = 171, p = 0.0005, 2$ tailed (BM) $\rho = 0.349, N = 178, p = 0.0005, 2$ tailed (S) $\rho = 0.315, N = 178, p = 0.0005, 2$ tailed (EF)		
	Length of time in care overall	$\chi^2 = 11.087, df = 2, p < .01$ (BM) $\chi^2 = 14.689, df = 2, p < .001$ (S) $\chi^2 = 19.701, df = 2, p < .0005$ (EF)	$\rho = -0.347, N = 188, p = 0.0005, 2$ tailed (BM) $\rho = -0.259, N = 149, p = 0.001, 2$ tailed (S) $\rho = -0.340, N = 161, p = 0.0005, 2$ tailed (EF)		
	Age at which young people were first placed into care	$\chi^2 = 13.613, df = 2, p < .01$ (BM) $\chi^2 = 15.895, df = 2, p < .0005$ (S) $\chi^2 = 24.603, df = 2, p < .0005$ (EF)	$\rho = 0.302, N = 149, p = 0.0005, 2$ tailed (BM) $\rho = 0.297, N = 158, p = 0.0005, 2$ tailed (S) $\rho = 0.390, N = 161, p = 0.0005, 2$ tailed (EF)		
	Relative or non-relative care placement	$\chi^2 = 4.225, df = 1, p < .05$ (BM) $\chi^2 = 3.336, df = 1, p > .01$ (S) (borderline significance) $\chi^2 = 18.248, df = 1, p < .0005$ (EF)	$\phi = 0.158, N = 169, p = 0.040$ (BM) $\phi = 0.138, N = 176, p = 0.068$ (S) $\phi = 0.322, N = 175, p = 0.0005$ (EF)		
	<i>Frequency of face to face contact in previous 6 months</i>	Length of time in current foster care placement	$\chi^2 = 5.977, df = 2, p > .05$ (BM) (borderline significance) $\chi^2 = 18.163, df = 2, p < .0005$ (S) $\chi^2 = 6.724, df = 2, p < .035$	$\rho = 0.206, N = 123, p = 0.022, 2$ tailed (BM)	
		Length of time in care overall	$\chi^2 = 5.098, df = 2, p > .05$ (BM) (borderline significance) $\chi^2 = 10.785, df = 2, p < .01$ (S)	$\rho = 0.220, N = 123, p = 0.023, 2$ tailed (BM) $\rho = -0.285, N = 132, p = 0.001, 2$ tailed (S)	
		Age at which young people were first placed in care	$\chi^2 = 10.747, df = 2, p < .01$ (S) $\chi^2 = 6.176, df = 2, p < .05$ (EF)	$\rho = 0.261, N = 132, p = 0.002, 2$ tailed (S) $\rho = 0.236, N = 95, p = 0.021, 2$ tailed (EF)	
		Relative or non-relative care placement	$\chi^2 = 16.851, df = 2, p < .0005$ (EF)	$\phi = 0.401, N = 102, p = 0.0005$	
		<i>No. of birth family member categories seen in the previous 6 months</i>	Length of time in current foster care placement	n/a	$r = -0.382, N = 205, p < 0.0005, 2$ tailed*
			Length of time in care overall	n/a	$r = -0.398, N = 183, p < 0.0005, 2$ tailed
Age at which young people were first placed in care			n/a	$r = 0.400, N = 183, p < 0.0005, 2$ tailed	
Relative or non-relative care placement			n/a	$\rho = -0.162, N = 203, p = 0.021, 2$ tailed	

Note: BM = Birth mother, BF = Birth father, S = Sibblings and EF = Extended family
 Only statistically significant results are included in this table, therefore some chi-square results and correlation co-efficients may be missing for some birth family members.
 *r refers to Pearsons test of correlation (r) and is used where both variables are continuous.

Chapter 6

Young People's Friendships and Participation in Hobbies and Leisure Activities

Introduction

This chapter presents results on two further aspects of young people's lives – the nature of their friendships and their participation in hobbies/leisure activities. The purpose of collecting this information was to explore another potential source of social support for young people outside of their birth and foster families – that of young people's friendship networks. In addition, data on the kind of hobbies and leisure activities that young people were involved in provides some insight into the extent to which they participated in social activities, both in the home and the community.

These two aspects of young people's daily lives are interrelated in various ways. Young people may participate in certain leisure activities with their friends and they may also make friends through taking part in hobbies. Therefore, friendships and hobbies/leisure activities are inextricably linked together and it makes sense to consider the results on both topics at the same time. The results on the nature of young people's friendships will be presented first.

Part I: Nature of young people's friendships

The results on friendships refer to young people's network of friends at the time of interview with their foster carers. The following aspects of young people's friendships will be discussed:

- ▶ Regular group of friends – source of these friendships, comparative age of friends and change in these friendships over time (the last year)
- ▶ Best friends
- ▶ Close friendships with adults
- ▶ Beneficial nature of friendships.

Regular group of friends

Foster carers were asked if the young person had a particular group of friends that they spent some time with most days.

Chart 6.1: Prevalence of having a regular group of friends amongst young people as reported by foster carers

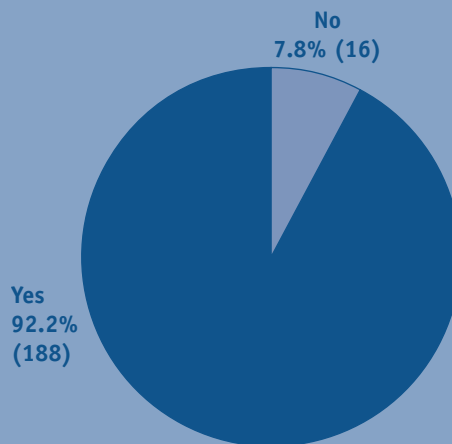
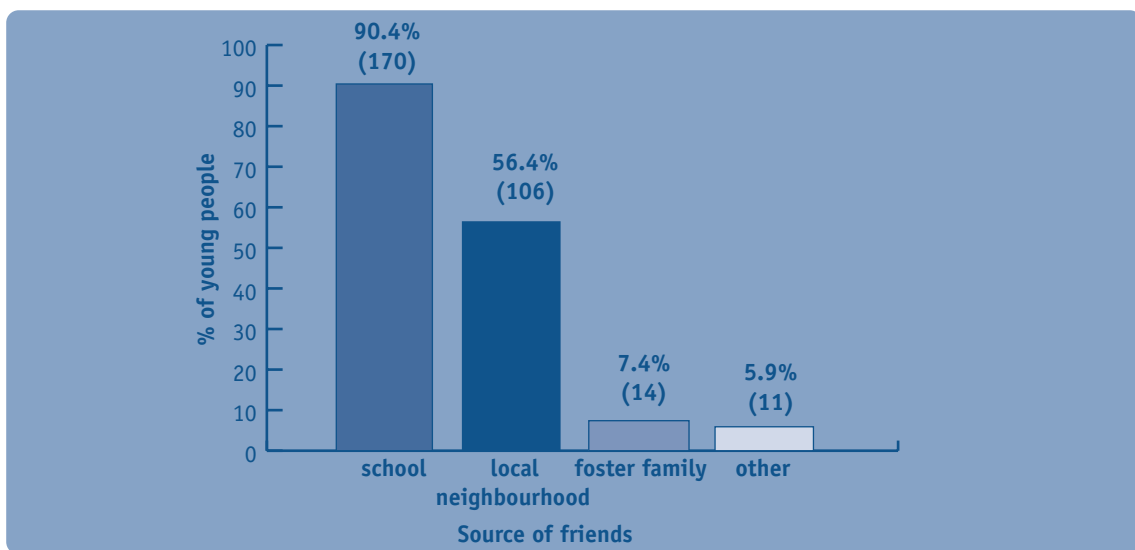


Chart 6.1 shows that the majority of young people, 92.2% (188), had a group of friends that they were reported to see on a fairly regular basis. The remaining 7.8% (16) of young people were said not to have a regular group of friends.¹²⁵ Further information about the friendship networks of the

188 young people was collected from foster carers. This focused on the source of friendships (e.g. school, local neighbourhood), comparative age of friends and change in young people's friendships during the year prior to interviews with foster carers.

¹²⁵ | Chart 6.1 is based on 204 young people as data was missing for one young person.

Chart 6.2: Source of young people’s regular group of friends as reported by foster carers



Source of regular friends

Foster carers for the 188 young people who were reported to have a regular group of friends were asked where these friends were drawn from given a choice of school, local neighbourhood and the family.¹²⁶

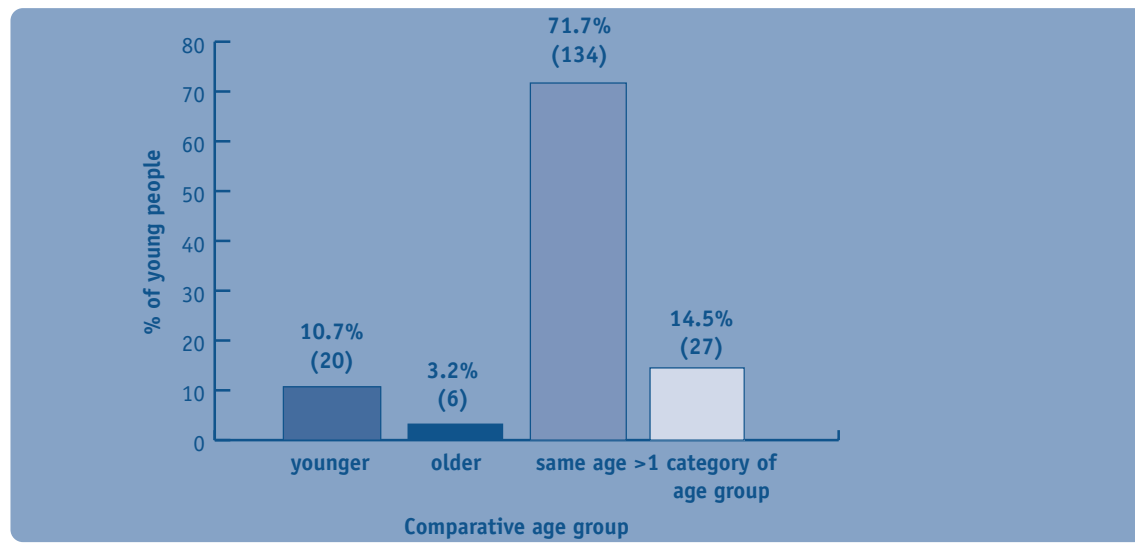
Chart 6.2 shows that school was the most likely source of ‘regular’ friends for young people, with the majority of them reported to have friends going to the same school as themselves, 90.4% (170). Over one half of young people were said to have friends from the local neighbourhood, 56.4% (106). Just 7.4% (14) of young people were reported to have friends living in the foster family – either their own birth sibling (9 young people) or other young people who were part of the foster family (carer’s children) or the carer’s extended family (such as grandchildren, cousins) (5 young people

in total). Finally, 5.9% (11) of young people were said to have regular friends from ‘other’ sources. This was largely made up of young people who had friends through hobbies/leisure activities (10 young people) and one young person who was said to have elderly neighbours as friends.

Comparative age of group of friends

Another aspect of young people’s group of friends that was explored was the age of these friends compared to the young people themselves. The aim here was to find out if young people tended to have friends who were older, younger or around the same age as themselves. As the majority of young people were reported to have school friends within their group of regular friends, it would be expected that young people would tend to have friends around the same age as themselves. This turned out to be the case, as Chart 6.3 shows.

Chart 6.3: Comparative age of friends for young people with a regular group of friends as reported by foster carers



126 | Carers could give more than one answer and therefore the total percentage in Chart 6.2 exceeds 100%.

The majority of young people, 71.7% (134), had friends of the same age in their group of friends. Where this was not the case, young people were more likely to have younger friends, 10.7% (20), than older friends, 3.2% (6).¹²⁷

Friendships over time

Foster carers were asked whether young people had the same group of friends now compared to one year ago, or some different friends or totally different friends. The aim of this was to explore whether young people's friendships were stable over time – at least during the year prior to the interviews being carried out.

Chart 6.4: Change in friendships over the last year for young people with a regular group of friends as reported by foster carers

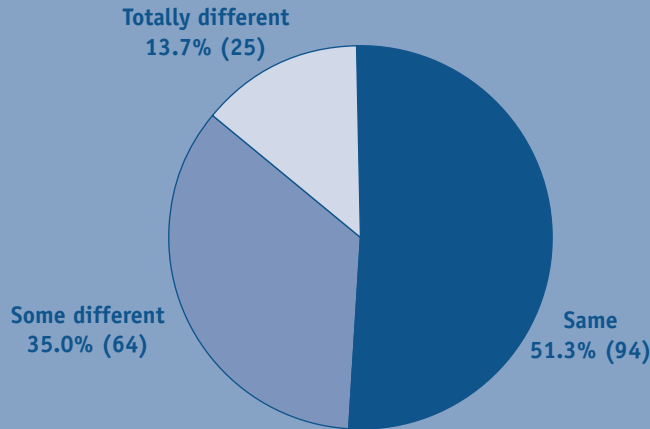


Chart 6.4 shows that friendships were fairly stable over the last year. Just over one half of young people, 51.3% (94), were reported to have the same friends now compared to a year ago. Just over one third, 35.0% (64), had some different friends now.¹²⁸ One factor worthy of consideration here was whether young people had moved from primary to post-primary school in the last year, as this is likely to impact on the continuity of friendships. Given that 28.3% (58) of young people were reported to be starting post-primary school in the following academic year, 2002/3, this

could certainly account for young people having some different friends over this time, and quite possibly a set of completely different friends.¹²⁹

After gaining some insight into the above aspects of young people's regular groups of friends, information was gathered on young people's close friendships, in particular whether they had a best friend and if there were any adults that they were very close to.

127 | Chart 6.3 is based on 187 young people as data were missing for one young person.

128 | Chart 6.4 was based on 183 young people as data were missing for five young people.

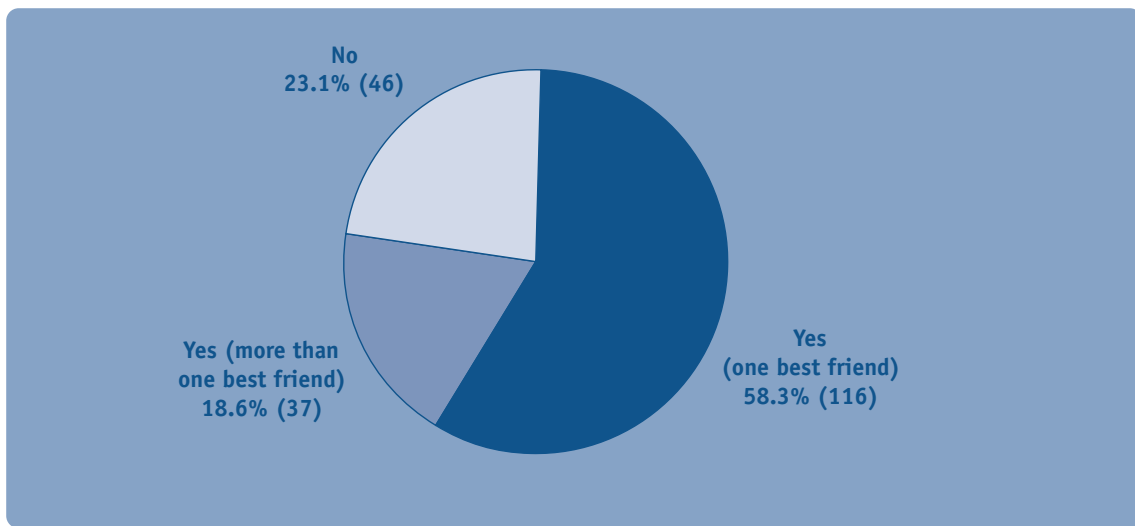
129 | When the two variables of friendship over time and change of school in the year 2002/3 were explored in a cross-tabulation, young people who had changed school were found to be less likely to have the same friends now and slightly more likely to have some different and totally different friends compared to young people who had not changed school in 2002/3. However, this difference was not large enough to be statistically significant.

Close friendships with peers – ‘best friends’

The purpose of asking foster carers whether young people in their care had a best friend was to explore if the young person had a reasonably close friendship with someone of their own age. A best friend is often someone that one can confide in and is potentially a good source of social support. Chart 6.5 shows the results below.

Just over one half of young people, 58.3% (116), had one best friend and a further 18.6% (37) had more than one best friend. Therefore, just over three quarters of all young people, 76.9% (153), had at least one best friend. The result for those young people who did not have a best friend needs to be qualified here. It does not mean that 23.1% (46) of young people had no good friends, rather they did not have a particular friend that they were close to at the time that interviews with foster carers took place.¹³⁰

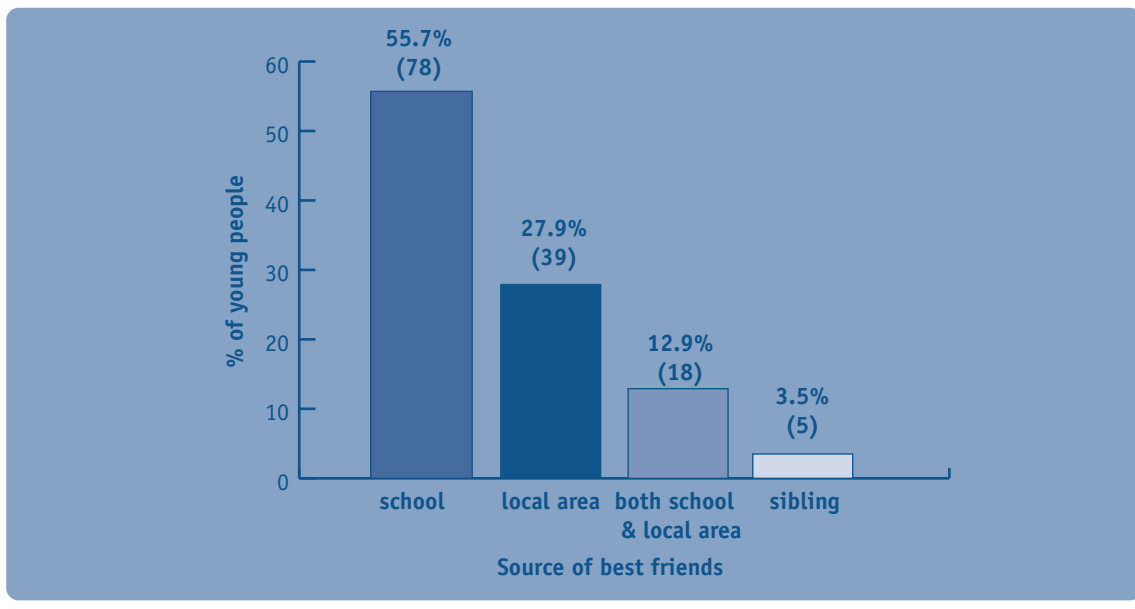
Chart 6.5: Prevalence of young people having a ‘best friend’ as reported by foster carers



The next result looks at whether the best friend was from school, the local neighbourhood or the foster family (birth sibling, foster sibling or other foster

child in the family). This data is based on the young people that were reported to have at least one best friend, as Chart 6.6 shows.¹³¹

Chart 6.6: Source of best friends for young people as reported by foster carers



130 | Chart 6.5 was based on 199 young people as data were missing for 6 young people.

131 | For those young people who had more than one best friend, the carer was asked to consider the one friend that the young person saw most often.

Just over one half of young people, 55.7% (78), had a best friend from school, followed by just over one quarter, 27.9% (39), who had a best friend in the local neighbourhood. So, school and the local neighbourhood were the most common settings in which young people established close friendships with those around their own age.¹³² The extent to which young people had a good friendship with adults in their lives is the subject of the next discussion.

Friendships with adults

Foster carers were asked whether young people were particularly close to an adult in their lives. Almost three quarters of young people, 71.7% (147), were reported to 'look up to' an adult, either within the foster family or outside, e.g. school teacher, sports coach. The people that were identified as a 'significant adult' by the foster carers of these 147 young people are listed below in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1: 'Significant adults' that young people were close to as reported by foster carers

'Significant adult'	%*	No.
Carer's grown up son/daughter	34.0	50
Other relative of carer (e.g. carer's parents, sister/brother, nieces/nephews)	19.7	29
School teacher/other adult at school	11.6	17
Foster carer themselves	9.5	14
Sports coach/instructor for hobby/youth club leader	7.5	11
Birth sibling (now 18 years or older)	6.8	10
Previous foster carer/respite carer/health board care worker	6.1	9
Neighbour of foster family	4.8	7
Carer's friend	2.7	4
Other foster children of carer (aged 18 years or older)	2.7	4
Adult member of birth family	1.4	2
Godparent	0.7	1
Babysitter	0.7	1
Friend's parent	0.7	1
Adult participant in shared hobby	0.7	1

**As some carers gave more than one response, the % column adds up to more than 100%*

Therefore, there was a wide range of adults that young people were said to get on particularly well with and to look up to. In particular, the grown up members of the foster family were identified fairly frequently. However, as the foster carers provided the information, this could have had a bearing on these results.

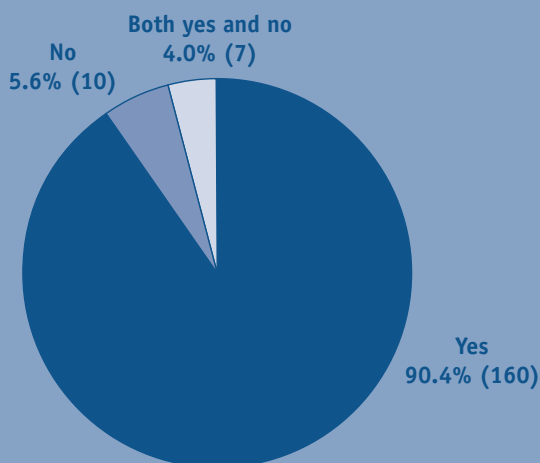
132 | Chart 6.6 is based on 140 young people as data were missing for 10 young people.

Beneficial nature of friendships

By way of completing the section on friendships, the last result is based on foster carers' opinions on whether young people's friendships had been beneficial or not.

Chart 6.7 shows that carers reported that friendships were beneficial for the majority of young people, 90.4% (160). Only a small minority of 5.6% (10) of young people were said to have friendships that were not beneficial, while a further 4.0% (7) gave a mixed response.¹³³

Chart 6.7: Were friendships beneficial for young people or not?



Summary of results on the nature of young people's friendships

Regular group of friends

- ▶ 92.2% (188) of young people were said to have a *regular* group of friends, mostly from school and the local neighbourhood.

Out of these 188 young people:

- ▶ 71.7% (134) had friends of the same age
- ▶ 5 out of 10 young people had the same friends now compared to a year ago, while just over 3 out of 10 had some different friends and just over 1 in 10 had totally different friends now.

Close friendships

- ▶ 76.9% (153) had at least one best friend, usually a friend from school or the local neighbourhood.
- ▶ 71.7% (147) were particularly close to a certain adult in their lives – this was most likely to be the carer's grown up son/daughter or another relative of the carer.

Beneficial nature of friendships

- ▶ the vast majority of carers said that the young person's friendships were largely beneficial for them, 90.4% (160).

Therefore, the information gathered on the friendships of young people in long term foster care is largely positive. The majority have a regular group of friends who are of a similar age and have been fairly consistent over time. There is also a tendency to have developed close friendships with adults as well as peers.

¹³³ | Chart 6.7 is based on 177 young people. Data were not available for 28 young people (missing for 20 young people and 'don't know' responses were given for a further 8 young people).

Further analysis on the nature of young people's friendships

Additional analysis was carried out on the information gathered on young people's friendships. The aim of this analysis was to identify the factors, if any, that were associated with some of the results on friendships outlined above. This section presents selected findings based on this analysis. In addition, a new variable for friendship was created, based on some of the data shown earlier. Before moving on to discuss the results of further analysis on young people's friendships, the compilation of this new variable is explained below.

Summary index of young people's friendships

Three individual indicators of young people's friendships were used to compile a single measure or index for the purpose of carrying out further analysis – regular group of friends, friendships over time and having a best friend. Where responses given by foster carers met certain criteria for each of the three indicators, a score of one was given. These criteria were met where young people were reported to have:

- ▶ A regular group of friends that they saw most days
- ▶ A best friend (or more than one best friend)
- ▶ The same group of friends compared to one year ago.

These criteria were chosen because each could be argued to be a desirable component of friendships, and for the purpose of this research, are therefore taken to be indicative of reasonably good friendship networks. Friendships are unlikely to act as a potential source of social support if young people do not have a regular group of friends, a close friend or if they experience a lot of change in the composition of their friends over time. By including these three criteria, the summary index reflects the tendency for young people to have an established network of friends, have developed a close friendship and have experienced continuity in the composition of their friends during the year prior to interviews taking place with their foster carers.

The aim of the summary index was to distinguish between young people who had a good source of social support from their friendships – i.e. they had a regular group of friends, a best friend and the same group of friends over the last year, representing a score of three – and those whose friendships could be said to provide a lesser source of social support, i.e. they were less likely to have a regular group of friends, did not have a best friend and whose friendships had changed overtime, representing a score of zero.¹³⁴ These were the two extreme possible scenarios. The resulting scores for the summary index of friendship were coded into three categories: low (scores of zero to one); medium (score of two); and high (score of three).¹³⁵

Table 6.2: Extent of friendships as a source of social support for young people – Summary index of friendships

<i>Extent of social support</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>
Low (score of 0 or 1)	22.0	45
Medium (score of 2)	40.0	82
High (score of 3)	38.0	78
Total	100.0	205

Table 6.2 shows that the majority of young people were categorised as having friendships that provided a medium or high level of social support, in total 78.0% (160) – the last two categories combined. Just under one quarter of young people, 22.0% (45), were deemed to have friendships that gave a relatively low level of support. These

percentage results are based on the three criteria used to make up the summary index of friendships. This summary index of friendships was one of the variables used in the further analysis carried out on the nature of young people's friendships. The next section highlights selected findings that came out of this analysis.

134 | Information on the changing composition of friends overtime was only applicable for those young people who were reported to have a regular group of friends. However, the overwhelming majority of young people were reported to have a group of regular friends, 92.2% (188). Therefore it was decided to include the third criteria of changing composition of friends in the summary index because the amount of missing data for this variable was fairly small and would not adversely affect the scores on the summary index of friendship for the majority of young people.

135 | The mean score of the friendship index for all young people was 2.1. This informed the decision about which scores to include in the low, medium and high categories.

Selected findings from further analysis

Certain factors were selected and analysed in conjunction with the results on young people's friendships presented earlier. Four factors of young people's educational experiences were found to be significantly¹³⁶ associated with aspects of young people's friendships, which were:

- ▶ Special needs
- ▶ Type of educational provision
- ▶ School bullying
- ▶ Educational progress in academic subjects.

Special needs

Young people with special needs were significantly more likely to have a low score on the friendship index than those who did not have special needs – 33.8% (25) and 14.1% (18) respectively.¹³⁷ Similarly, young people who did not have special needs were significantly more likely to have a medium or even a high score on the friendship index compared to young people that had special needs.

Type of educational provision

Young people who had received some form of specialist educational provision in the school year, either in the form of remedial classes or being in a special class or school, were significantly more likely to have a low score on the friendship index compared to those who had received 'normal' day to day schooling only – 29.6% (29) and 15.0% (16) respectively. Young people who had received specialist educational provision were also less likely to have a medium score on the friendship index, 27.6% (27), compared to 51.4% (55) of those who did not receive such educational provision. This is not surprising given the similar result shown above in relation to special needs. However, the trend is not entirely consistent as young people who had received some form of specialist educational provision were found to be *more likely* to have scored *highly* on the friendship index, 42.9% (42), compared to 33.6% (36) of those who had day to day schooling. Therefore, young people who had received educational assistance over and above day to day schooling were more likely to have scored low and high on the friendship index, compared to young people receiving day to day schooling only.¹³⁸ Despite the contradictory result, young people who have had specialist educational provision in the school year are more likely to have a low score on the friendship index, which supports the earlier finding in relation to young people with special needs.

School bullying

Young people who had been bullied at school (emotionally, verbally or physically) as reported by their foster carer were significantly more likely to

have scored low on the friendship index compared to those who had not been bullied – 35.5% (33) and 10.9% (12) respectively. Similarly, those who had not been bullied were significantly more likely to have a medium or high extent of friendship than those who had been bullied.

Educational progress in academic school subjects

Young people who had a low academic mean score, which summarised their progress in academic subjects, were significantly more likely to also have a low score on the friendship index compared to those with a high academic mean score – 35.9% (14) and 5.3% (2) respectively. Similarly, 39.5% (15) of young people with a high academic mean score had a high score on the friendship index, compared to 30.8% (12) of those with a low mean academic score. This result is based on small numbers but it indicates that educational progress and friendship may be linked.

The relationships between each of the three individual indicators that made up the summary index of extent of friendship were explored in relation to special needs, specialist educational provision, bullying and educational progress, to check the validity of the above findings. A significant relationship was found between having a *regular group of friends* and both special needs and bullying. Young people who had special needs or had reportedly been bullied at school were significantly less likely to have a regular group of friends compared to those who did not have special needs or who had not been bullied. There was also a significant relationship between the two variables *having a best friend* and *school bullying*, where young people who had been bullied were significantly less likely to have a best friend compared to those who had not been bullied. Young people who had received some form of specialist educational provision were slightly less likely to have a regular group of friends (not significant), but there was no trend with either having a best friend or the same friends over the last year. Finally, young people who had made good educational progress in their academic subjects were significantly more likely to have a regular group of friends compared to those with relatively lower scores, and were slightly more likely to have a best friend.

With respect to the overall association found between the summary index of friendship and the four aspects identified above, the significant result is largely based on the friendship variables of *regular group of friends* and *having a best friend*. While there was a similar trend found in the result between the two variables of special needs and bullying with the third friendship indicator of change in friends over time, neither was statistically significant. The nature of young people's friendships was also found to be related to their behaviour at home and school.

136 | Where a relationship is described as being 'significant', this means that it was found to be statistically significant based on statistical tests carried out.

137 | The cross tabs upon which this result and the other results in this section are based are available from the Children's Research Centre on request. A table of the chi-square statistics and correlation co-efficients for the statistically significant results is included at the end of this section – Table 6.3.

138 | As the friendship index is made up of three different variables, each one could interact differently with type of educational provision, which may explain the inconsistent result.

Rating of behaviour at home and school

Further analysis using the summary index of friendship and the two indicators of rating of behaviour at home and school found that young people whose behaviour was rated as 'very good' were more likely to have scored highly on the friendship index compared to those whose behaviour was rated as 'not good'. In relation to young people's behaviour at school, 45.7% (48) of young people whose behaviour was rated as 'very good' had a high score on the friendship index compared to the relatively lower percentages of 32.3% (21) and 23.1% (6) of young people whose behaviour was rated as 'good' and 'not good' respectively. Similarly, in terms of behaviour at home, 50.0% (42) of young people whose behaviour was rated as 'very good' scored highly on the friendship index, compared to those whose behaviour was rated as 'good' – 32.2% (28) – and 'not good' – 16.7% (4). Conversely, young people whose behaviour was rated as 'not good' at school or home were significantly more likely to have scored low on the friendship index. Similar to the results on special needs and bullying, it was found that the friendship indicator of having a regular group of friends was significantly related to the rating of behaviour at school and home, while having one best friend was significantly related with the rating of behaviour at school only. Therefore, these two friendship variables accounted for most of the significant relationship between the summary index of friendship and young people's behaviour at home and school.

So, special needs, type of educational provision, bullying, educational progress and rating of behaviour at school and home were factors that had a significant association with aspects of young people's friendships. Young people aged 13 to 14

years in long term foster care who had a special need, had received specialist educational provision, had been bullied in the school year, made poorer educational progress or were poorly behaved at home or at school tended to score relatively poorly on the friendship index constructed to represent the potential social support of friendship networks. This is based on the definition of friendship networks used here, which refers to having a regular group of friends, a best friend and the same friends over the last year.

Some analysis was also carried out between friendships and the various aspects of young people's placement conditions. One factor that was significantly related to the friendship index was whether young people had been placed with a birth sibling in the same foster family household.

Placed with birth sibling in the foster family household

Young people who were placed with a birth sibling in the foster family household were almost twice as likely to have scored highly on the friendship index compared to young people who had not been placed with a birth sibling – 48.5% (48) and 28.9% (28) respectively.¹³⁹ At the other end of the scale, young people placed with a birth sibling were slightly less likely to have scored low on the friendship index, 19.2% (19) compared to 24.7% (24) of young people who had not been placed with a birth sibling. Therefore being placed with a sibling in the same foster family household could have a potentially positive association with the nature of young people's friendships. Being placed with other young people in the foster care household had a similar result but was not significant.

139 | The overwhelming majority of young people had at least one birth sibling, 95.6% (196). Given that such a small percentage of young people had no birth siblings, this factor was unlikely to have had any impact on these results.

Summary of findings from further results on young people's friendships

Summary index of friendships

A summary index of young people's friendships was created, based on three criteria: regular group of friends; best friend; and change in the composition of friendships over the last year. This index incorporated aspects of young people's friendship networks and was used as an indicator of the potential source of social support available to them through their friendships.

- ▶ Over three quarters of young people scored high (all three criteria applied) or medium (two out of the three criteria) on the index, and therefore, could be deemed to have reasonably good friendship networks and be more likely to benefit from this potential source of social support.
- ▶ Just under one quarter of young people scored low on the friendship index (none or one out of the three criteria) and hence, could be said to be less likely to experience a great deal of social support through their friendships.

Important factors for young people's friendships

Young people were significantly more likely to have scored high on the friendship index where they:

- ▶ Did not have special needs
- ▶ Had not experienced being bullied at school
- ▶ Made good educational progress in their academic subjects
- ▶ Had their behaviour at home or school rated as 'very good'.

In relation to *type of educational provision*, young people who had received remedial or special education were more likely to score low on the friendship index than those who had 'normal' day to day schooling. However, young people who had received some form of specialist educational provision were also more likely to have scored high on the friendship index. Although this is an inconsistent finding, it does show that young people in long term foster care who had educational needs may be at risk of relatively poor social support through their friendships.

Particular components of the friendship index were found to account for a large amount of the significant relationships. Having a regular group of friends was significantly more likely for young people who had no special needs, had not been bullied, made good educational progress or whose behaviour at home and school was rated as 'very good'. Having a best friend was significantly more likely for those who had not been bullied and whose behaviour at school was rated as 'very good'.

Looking at various aspects of young people's placements, young people were significantly more likely to have scored *highly* on the friendship index where they had been placed with a birth sibling in the same foster family household.

Summary table of findings from further results on young people's friendships

	<i>Very important (statistically significant)</i>	<i>Important (trend)</i>	<i>Not important (no trend)</i>
Influences on whether young people scored <i>high</i> on summary index of friendship (regular group of friends, best friend and same friends overtime combined)	<p><i>Significantly</i> more likely where a young person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Had no special needs ▶ Had received some form of specialist educational provision (inconsistent result) ▶ Had not been bullied at school ▶ Had made good educational progress in academic subjects ▶ Had their behaviour at home or school rated as 'very good' ▶ Had regular contact with birth family (birth mother, siblings) ▶ Had been placed with a birth sibling ▶ Spent less time on their own at home 	<p>Was more likely where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ There were other young people in the foster care household as well 	<p>There was no relationship with the following factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Number of birth family members seen in the previous six months /year ▶ Young person had a part-time job outside the home ▶ Length of time in current foster care placement ▶ Age first placed into care ▶ Previous care placements ▶ Number of previous care placements ▶ Relative/non-relative foster care placement ▶ Geographical location ▶ Gender ▶ Age group
Influences on whether young people had a <i>low</i> score on the summary index of friendship	<p><i>Significantly</i> more likely where a young person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Had received some form of specialist educational provision 		
Influences on whether young people had a regular group of friends	<p><i>Significantly</i> more likely where a young person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Had their behaviour at home or school rated as 'very good' ▶ Had no special needs ▶ Had not been bullied at school ▶ Had made good educational progress in academic subjects 	<p>Was more likely where a young person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Did not receive any form of specialist educational provision ▶ Had regular contact with birth family in the previous six months (birth mother, siblings) 	<p>There was no relationship with the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Number of birth family members seen in the previous six months

Summary table of findings from further results on young people’s friendships (continued)

	<i>Very important (statistically significant)</i>	<i>Important (trend)</i>	<i>Not important (no trend)</i>
Influences on whether young people had a best friend	<p>Significantly more likely where a young person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Had not been bullied at school ▶ Had regular contact with birth family in the previous six months (birth mother, siblings) 	<p>Was more likely where a young person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Had their behaviour at home or school rated as ‘very good’ ▶ Had no special needs ▶ Had made good educational progress in academic subjects 	<p>There was no relationship with the following factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Number of birth family members seen in the previous six months ▶ Specialist educational provision
Influences on whether young people had the same friends over time (in the last year)	n/a	<p>Was more likely where a young person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Had regular contact with birth family (birth mother, siblings) ▶ Had no special needs ▶ Had not been bullied at school 	<p>There was no relationship with the following factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Specialist educational provision ▶ Number of family members seen in the previous six months ▶ Behaviour at home or school ▶ Educational progress in academic subjects

Table 6.3: Statistically significant results to support findings on young people's friendships

<i>Summary Index of Friendships</i>	<i>Independent variable</i>	<i>Chi-square result</i>	<i>Correlation co-efficient</i>
	Special needs	$\chi^2 = 11.302$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.01$	$\rho = 0.147$, $N = 202$, $p = 0.037$, two tailed
	Type of educational provision	$\chi^2 = 13.409$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.01$	$\rho = 0.017$, $N = 205$, $p = 0.804$, two tailed Not significant
	School bullying	$\chi^2 = 17.772$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.0005$	$\rho = 0.211$, $N = 203$, $p = 0.003$, two tailed
	Educational progress in academic school subjects	$\chi^2 = 11.883$, $df = 4$, $p < 0.05$	$\rho = 0.154$, $N = 189$, $p = 0.35$, two tailed
	Rating of behaviour at school	N/a (both ordinal variables)	$\rho = 0.169$, $N = 196$, $p = 0.018$, two tailed
	Rating of behaviour at home	N/a (both ordinal variables)	$\rho = 0.206$, $N = 195$, $p = 0.004$, two tailed
	Placed with birth sibling in the foster family household	$\chi^2 = 8.020$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.02$	$\rho = 0.174$, $N = 196$, $p = 0.015$, two tailed

Part II: Young people's participation in hobbies and leisure activities

This section aims to provide an insight into how young people spent their spare time, in particular the kind of hobbies and leisure activities that they participated in. The results look at the following:

- ▶ Location where young people spent their spare time (i.e. home, neighbourhood, school)
- ▶ The extent to which young people spent much time *alone* at home
- ▶ The individuals that young people spent most of their spare time with
- ▶ Young people's participation in hobbies and leisure activities at home, school and in the local community
- ▶ Shared hobbies between young people and their carers
- ▶ Young people's involvement in household chores
- ▶ Young people's involvement in employment in the local community

- ▶ The beneficial nature of hobbies and leisure activities for young people.

The results presented here are intended to give a snapshot picture of how young people spent their spare time over a particular time period (the last twelve months prior to interviews with foster carers). This information provides some insight into the kinds of activities that these young people take part in during the course of their daily lives. In addition, these results will be particularly helpful in identifying the *location* where young people took part in leisure activities, both at home but also outside the home (the local neighbourhood and school).

Location where young people spent their spare time

Foster carers were asked to say where young people tended to spend most of their spare time outside of school hours, i.e. in the evenings and at weekends. In particular, they were asked whether young people spent their spare time in the home, out in the neighbourhood or equally between the two.

Chart 6.8: Location where young people spent their spare time as reported by foster carers

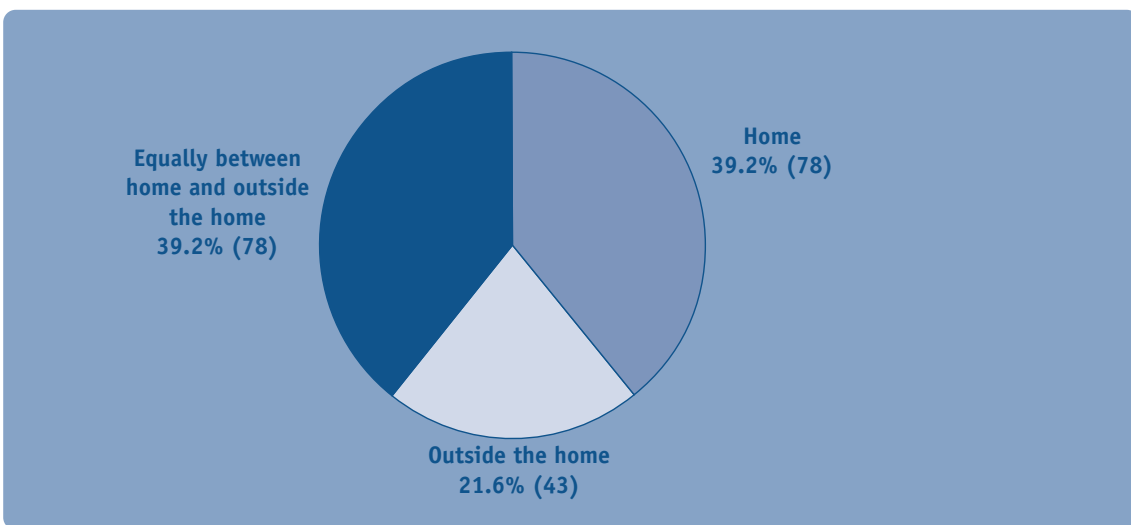


Chart 6.8 shows that over one third of young people, 39.2% (78), were reported to spend most of their spare time around the home, while 21.6% (43) were reported to spend most of their spare time outside of the home environment, which tended to be in the local neighbourhood. This included time spent by young people taking part in local

activities outside of the home as well as spending time with friends. A further 39.2% (78) were said to spend their free time equally between the home and in the neighbourhood.¹⁴⁰ So, young people tended to spend their spare time either in the home environment or split fairly evenly between the home and the local area.

140 | Chart 6.8 is based on 199 young people as data were missing for six young people.

Time spent alone at home

Carers were asked to say how much time the young person spent by themselves when at home. This

served as an indicator of whether young people were likely to spend time with the other family members of the foster family while in the home.

Chart 6.9: Time spent alone at home by young people as reported by foster carers

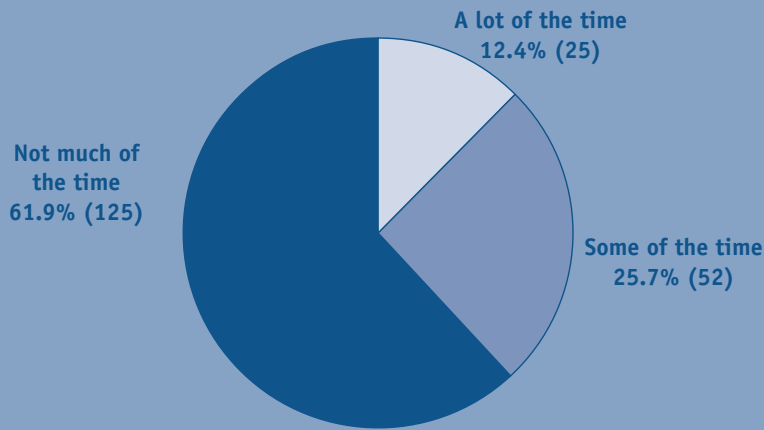
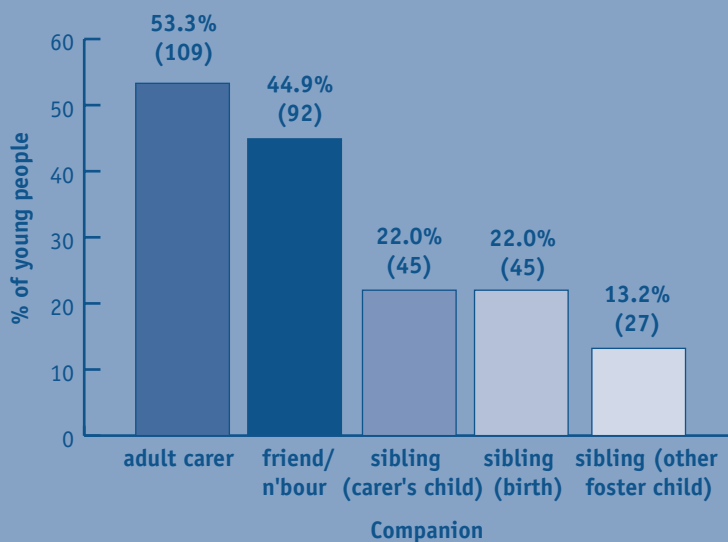


Chart 6.9 shows that a relatively small percentage of young people, 12.4% (25), were reported to spend 'a lot of time' by themselves at home. The majority of young people were said to spend 'not much time' by themselves while at home, 61.9% (125). A further quarter of young people, 25.7% (52), were reported to spend 'some of the time' alone at home. However, this is often seen as fairly typical behaviour for the average 13 to 14 year old, according to most foster carers.¹⁴¹

Young people's key companions

Foster carers were asked to identify the individuals with whom young people tended to spend a lot of their spare time, thus indicating perhaps those people who are important in young people's lives. A pre-defined list of possible individuals that foster carers could identify included friends/neighbours, adult carer, sibling (carer's child), birth sibling, other foster child in the foster family and 'other'. Carers could select more than one person.

Chart 6.10: Young people's key companions as reported by foster carers



¹⁴¹ | Chart 6.9 is based on 202 young people as data were missing for 3 young people.

Chart 6.10 shows that young people were most likely to spend a lot of their spare time with their adult carer – 53.3% (109). Adults carers were closely followed by friends/neighbours – 44.9% (92). Again it needs to be remembered that foster carers provided this information and this may have had an impact on these results.¹⁴²

Location of hobbies and leisure activities

Carers were asked whether the young person took part in a hobby or leisure activity in any of three different locations: the home, at school (outside of normal school hours) and in the neighbourhood. Responses were to be based on hobbies/activities that young people had taken part in during the last year. Carers often gave more than one response.

Chart 6.11: Location of hobby/leisure activity by young people as reported by foster carers

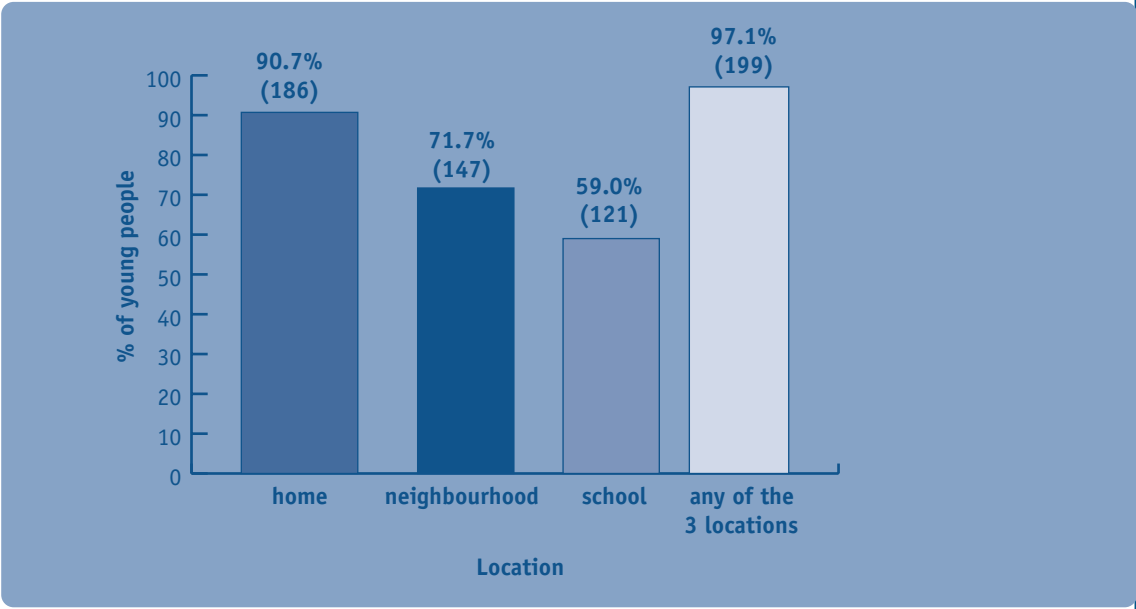


Chart 6.11 shows that young people were most likely to take part in hobbies/leisure activities in the home environment – 90.7% (186), followed by the neighbourhood – 71.7% (147), and finally at school, 59.0% (121).¹⁴³ Almost all young people, 97.1% (199), were reported to have taken part in

an activity in at least one of the three locations over the last year (last bar). The following results give more information on the nature of these activities that young people participated in for each of the three locations.

142 | As some carers gave more than one response, the chart adds up to more than 100%.

143 | As some carers gave more than one response, the chart adds up to more than 100%.

Hobby/activity at home

The majority of young people, 90.7% (186), had a hobby/activity that they did at home. Of these 186 young people, a breakdown is provided which gives the kind of hobby/activity they took part in. Some carers gave more than one home based hobby.

Table 6.4: Type of hobbies/activities that young people participated in at home as reported by foster carers

<i>Home based hobby/activity</i>	<i>%*</i>	<i>No.</i>
Music (listens to music or plays an instrument)	45.2	84
Playstation/computer	42.5	79
Reading	30.6	57
Watching tv/films/sport	19.4	36
Pets/animals	18.3	34
Art/drawing/crafts/woodwork	15.1	28
Cooking	4.3	8
Singing/dancing	2.7	5
Fixes/restores machines	1.6	3
Football/sports	1.6	3
Playing with other children in the house	1.1	2
Board games	1.1	1
Works on farm	1.1	1
Darts	1.1	1
Weights	1.1	1
Make up	1.1	1

**As some carers gave more than one response, the % column adds up to more than 100%.*

Table 6.4 shows that the most popular home based hobby was music (listening to music or playing an instrument). Almost one half of all young people, 45.2% (82), who had a home based hobby took part in some kind of musical activity. Music was followed by Playstation/computer, reported for 42.5% (79) of young people, and thirdly reading, which was said to be a hobby for almost one third of young people, 30.6% (57).

Over one half of young people, 59.0% (121), took part in extra-curricular activities at school in the year 2001/2. Table 6.5 gives a breakdown of the activities in which these 121 young people were involved. Again, some carers gave more than one response.

Table 6.5: Type of activities that young people participated in at school as reported by foster carers

<i>School based hobby/activity</i>	<i>% *</i>	<i>No.</i>
Sport	77.7	94
Drama/speech/school productions	11.6	14
Choir/voice training/singing	7.4	9
Music lessons	7.4	9
Dancing	4.1	5
Art	2.5	3
Cooking	1.7	2
Metal work	0.8	1
Board games	0.8	1
Gardening	0.8	1
Student council member	0.8	1
Hill walking	0.8	1
Debating	0.8	1
Computers	0.8	1
Young entrepreneurs competition	0.8	1
Homework club	0.8	1

**As some carers gave more than one response, the % column adds up to more than 100%*

The majority of young people who took part in an activity at school participated in a sport – 77.7% (94), by far the most popular activity. Being involved in drama/speech/school productions was the second most popular school based activity, something which 11.6% (14) of young people had taken part in during the last year.

Local neighbourhood

Almost three quarters of young people took part in activities in the neighbourhood, 71.7% (147). The kind of activities in which these 147 young people were involved are given in Table 6.6.

Table 6.6: Type of activities that young people participated in based in the local neighbourhood as reported by foster carers

Hobby/activity in the local neighbourhood	%*	No.
Sport	70.7	104
Youth club/Foreige**	19.0	28
Cheer leading/majorettes/dancing	8.8	13
Marching band/music	7.5	11
Horse riding/taking care of horses	6.1	9
Drama/speech and drama	5.4	8
Scouts/guides	5.4	8
Choir	3.4	5
Community activities	2.0	3
Playing with friends	1.4	2
Cinema	1.4	2
Art & crafts	1.4	2
Skateboarding	1.4	2
Parish group ('Growing Together')	1.4	2
Disco	1.4	2
St. John's Ambulance	0.9	1
Computers	0.9	1
After school club	0.9	1
Group outings	0.9	1
Driving range	0.9	1
Walk dogs	0.9	1
Mass server	0.9	1
Local library	0.9	1

*As some carers gave more than one response, the % column adds up to more than 100%.

** Non-uniformed youth organisation

Again, activities in the local neighbourhood were dominated by sport with 70.7% (104) of young people taking part in these activities. Youth clubs/Foreige involved almost 2 out of 10 young people who took part in activities in the local neighbourhood.

Looking at the results on young people's participation in hobbies/leisure activities overall, it is clear that most young people were likely to be involved in an activity or hobby. Even outside the home, many took part in activities in the local area and in the school, with sporting activities being most popular.

Carer's participation in hobbies with young people

Over four in ten carers said that they shared some involvement in hobbies/activities with the young

people in their care – 41.0% (84). Table 6.7 shows the kind of activities in which carers and these 84 young people were involved in together.

When collecting this information, an attempt was made to distinguish between *passive* participation by carers, i.e. carers bringing young people to activities and watching them take part, and *active* participation, where the carer actually took part along with the young person. The reason being that the latter represents a greater degree of participation on the carer's part. This gives a better sense of the *extent of shared participation* by carers and young people. From the results in Table 6.7, it can be seen that the majority of carers *actively* participate with the young people in their care in a hobby/activity – just 13.1% (11) of carers had brought young people to an activity and watched them participate.¹⁴⁴ Just under one quarter of carers who said they shared a hobby/activity

144 | This information was collected by asking carers in what way they actually got involved in the activity/hobby with the young person, after they had identified the shared hobby/activity.

with young people stated that they took part in sporting activities together, 22.6% (19), and a further 17.9% (15) of carers said they had jointly taken part in other outdoor activities. 'Other' activities included cooking, hunting, sewing, bingo, gardening, computers and art.

Table 6.7: Type of hobbies/activities that young people share with their carers as reported by foster carers

<i>Shared hobby/activity</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>
Sports (both participate together)	22.6	19
Other outdoor activities	17.9	15
Animals – take care of them together	9.5	8
Play games together (home based)	8.3	7
Musical activities/dancing	5.9	5
Film/cinema	4.8	4
Fixing machinery at home	3.6	3
Go to sporting events together	2.4	2
Other	11.9	10
Carer brings young person to sport/ activity and watches them participate	13.1	11
Total	100.0	84

Household chores/jobs

Almost three quarters of young people were said to carry out household chores/jobs on a regular basis, 72.2% (148). These chores ranged from tidying their own room to doing general household jobs like vacuuming, dusting, emptying the dishwasher and bringing in turf/coal.

Part-time jobs in the local neighbourhood

A small percentage of young people, 15.1% (31), were said to have a part-time job in the local neighbourhood – paid or unpaid – at the time of the interviews with foster carers. The type of job was given for 27 of these young people and is shown in Table 6.8.

Table 6.8: Type of part-time jobs carried out by young people as reported by foster carers

<i>Part-time job</i>	<i>No.</i>
Babysitting	15
Odd jobs for neighbours	5
Attendant at local petrol station	2
Washing cars	2
Waitress	1
Stacking shelves in local shop	1
Plumber's mate	1
Total	27

Table 6.8 shows that the most popular part-time job amongst young people was babysitting, with over one half of young people who were reported to have part-time jobs taking part in this activity, 15 young people in total (14 of whom were female).

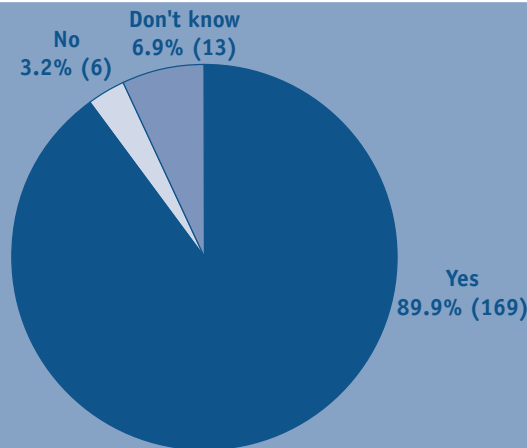
Given the age range of the young people in the study, the majority being 13 to 14 years old, it is not surprising that only a small proportion of all young people were reported to have had a part-time job.

Beneficial nature of hobbies and leisure activities

Finally, carers were asked to consider the kind of hobbies and leisure activities that young people did in their spare time and to say whether they felt these activities were beneficial for the young people. Not surprisingly, perhaps, there was a strong vote in favour.

The majority of young people, 89.9% (169), were said to benefit from their participation in hobbies and leisure activities. Only 3.2% (6) of young people's carers said the experience had not been positive with the remaining 6.3% (13) responding 'don't know'.¹⁴⁵ So, overwhelmingly, participation in hobbies and leisure activities was deemed to be a largely positive experience for young people.

Chart 6.12: Was young people's participation in hobbies and leisure activities beneficial or not?



Summary of results on participation in hobbies/leisure activities

Results on how young people spent their spare time

- ▶ The majority of young people spent their spare time either in or around home, 39.2% (78), or equally between the home and the local neighbourhood, 39.2% (78).
- ▶ Only 12.4% (25) of young people were reported to spend 'a lot of the time' by themselves at home.
- ▶ Young people were reported to spend a lot of spare time either with their adult carer, 53.3% (109) or with friends/neighbours, 44.9% (92).

Participation in hobbies/activities at home, school and in the local neighbourhood

- ▶ 9 out of 10 young people were reported to have a hobby based at home. The top three hobbies were music (listening to or playing an instrument), playing Playstation/computers and reading.
- ▶ Almost 6 out of 10 young people were said to take part in a school related activity, sport being by far the most popular.
- ▶ Just over 7 out of 10 young people were reported to participate in an activity in the local neighbourhood – sport again dominated here. Also 2 out of 10 young people were involved in youth clubs.

Shared hobby/activity with carers

- ▶ 41.0% (84) of young people were reported to participate in a hobby/activity with their carer, most likely to be a sport or outdoor activity.

Household chores/jobs

- ▶ 72.2% (148) of young people were said to carry out household chores/jobs on a regular basis.

Part-time job

- ▶ 15.1% (31) of young people had a part-time job, with babysitting being the most common.

Beneficial nature of hobbies/leisure activities

- ▶ Participation in hobbies/leisure activities was deemed as beneficial for 89.9% (169) of young people and not beneficial for only 3.2% (6).

¹⁴⁵ | Chart 6.12 is based on 188 young people as data were missing for 17 young people.

Further analysis on young people's participation in hobbies/leisure activities

A single indicator of young people's participation in hobbies and leisure activities was created in order to provide a summary measure of participation, which could be used to establish if young people's participation in hobbies and leisure activities varied under certain conditions. This single indicator consisted of the following three variables:

- ▶ Participation in a hobby while at *home*
- ▶ Participation in a leisure activity at *school* (outside of normal school hours)
- ▶ Participation in a leisure activity in the *local neighbourhood*.

In order to distinguish between young people who had a *low* level of participation in hobbies/leisure activities and those who had a *high* level of participation, a score of 1 was allocated for each of the three variables above. Therefore, young people were divided up into groups based on their total score. Where they had a score of zero or one, they were categorised as having low participation, a score of two indicated a medium level of participation and a score of three was deemed to show a high participation in hobbies/leisure activities (being the maximum score).¹⁴⁶ Where young people took part in a hobby/leisure activity in all three locations, they were taken to be more likely to participate in such activities compared to other young people in the study with a lower score.¹⁴⁷ Table 6.9 shows the results for this single measure of participation in hobbies/leisure activities.

Table 6.9: Young people's participation in hobbies and leisure activities

Level of participation	%	No.
Low (participated in activities in none or one out of the three locations)	17.1	35
Medium (participated in activities in two out of the three locations)	41.5	85
High (participated in activities in all three locations)	41.5	85
Total	100.0	205

Table 6.9 shows that the majority of young people had a medium or high level of participation in hobbies and leisure activities – 41.5% (85) for both categories of participation – a total of 83.0% (170). A relatively small percentage of young people, 17.1% (35), had a low level of participation in these activities. This single measure was used to explore whether there were certain conditions under which young people may participate to a greater or lesser extent in hobbies/leisure activities in all three locations (home, school and local neighbourhood). Selected results from this analysis are presented below.

Selected findings from further analysis

Level of friendships

As this chapter looks at both friendships and hobbies/leisure activities, the first analysis presented here explores whether participation in hobbies/leisure activities varied according to whether young people had a low, medium or high extent of friendship (as measured earlier). It was

found that young people who scored high on the summary friendship index were more likely to be involved in activities and hobbies in all three locations: home, school and local neighbourhood. In total 48.7% (38) of young people who scored high on the friendship index participated in hobbies in all three locations compared to 42.7% (35) of young people who had a medium score on the friendship index, and finally, 26.7% (12) of those who had a low score on the friendship index.¹⁴⁸ Therefore, young people who scored highly on the friendship index were more likely to participate in hobbies/leisure activities both in and outside the home environment.

Potential relationships between hobbies and aspects of young people's placement conditions were also carried out. Interestingly, significant relationships were identified for two placement conditions: firstly, being placed with a sibling, and secondly, living with a foster family who had other young people aged under 18 years.

146 | The mean score was fairly high at 2.2, therefore young people with a score of two were allocated to the medium level of participation category.

147 | It is acknowledged that one limitation in making such an inference is the absence of information on the *number* of individual activities and their *frequency*. However, this was not a primary research question in this study. The information that has been gathered can be used to provide some basis on which to distinguish between young people who are more likely to participate in hobbies/leisure activities both within the home and beyond, compared to other young people.

148 | The cross tabs from which this result and the other results in this section are taken are available from the Children's Research Centre on request. A table of the chi-square statistics and correlation co-efficients for statistically significant results is included at the end of this section – Table 6.10.

Placed with a birth sibling in the same foster family household

Young people who were placed with a sibling were significantly *less* likely to have a *low level* of participation in hobbies/leisure activities – that is participation in hobbies/leisure activities in none or just one of the three locations measured – compared to those who were not placed with a sibling, 11.1% (11) and 24.7% (24) respectively. Young people placed with a sibling were also significantly more likely to have participated in two of the three locations measured (medium level of participation) compared to young people who were not placed with a sibling. There was no difference in the percentage of young people who had a high level of participation based on whether they had been placed with a sibling or not – 42.4% (42) of young people placed with a sibling had a high level of participation compared to 41.2% (40) of young people who were not placed with a sibling. Therefore, the difference in participation levels for those placed with and without a sibling occurred at the low and medium levels of participation.¹⁴⁹

Other young people aged under 18 years in the foster family household

Young people who had been placed with foster families that did not have other young people aged under 18 years of age were significantly more likely to a *low level* of participation in hobbies/leisure activities compared to those that had other young people in the foster family. Almost one third of young people who were the only young person or child living in foster family households, 30.2%

(13), had a low level of participation in hobbies/leisure activities compared to just 13.0% (21) of young people who were in households with other young people. Young people who were placed with other young people aged under 18 years old were significantly more likely to participate in hobbies/leisure activities at a medium level compared to those young people in foster family households where they were the only young person – 44.7% (72) and 30.2% (13) respectively. There was very little difference in the percentage of young people who took part in hobbies in all three locations according to whether they had been placed with other young people or not – 42.2% (68) of those placed with young people had a high participation level compared to 39.5% (17) of those who had not. Therefore the differences in participation levels existed for those young people who had a low or medium level of participation but not high.

There were no notable trends in young people's participation in hobbies/leisure activities by bullying, educational progress, type of educational provision or behaviour at school and home (although some patterns emerged in relation to two individual indicators of behaviour – contact from school and behaviour at home). However, the above results indicate that being placed with a birth sibling or having other young people in the foster care household may be conducive to facilitating young people to participate in hobbies and leisure activities, both in and outside the home.

Summary of results from further analysis on young people's participation in hobbies and leisure activities

Young people's participation in hobbies and leisure activities

A single measure of young people's participation in hobbies and leisure activities was created based on the locations that young people had taken part in these activities, the home, school and local neighbourhood.

- ▶ The majority of young people had a high or medium level of participation in hobbies and leisure activities, that is they had taken part in hobbies/leisure activities in two or three of the locations in the year prior to interviews taking place.

Important factors on young people's participation in hobbies and leisure activities

Further analysis showed that young people were more likely to have a *high* level of participation in hobbies and leisure activities where they scored highly on the summary index of friendship

Young people were more likely to have a *low* level of participation in hobbies and leisure activities where:

- ▶ They had *not* been placed with a birth sibling in the foster family household compared to those who had been placed with a sibling
- ▶ They had *not* been placed with foster families that had other young people aged under 18 years of age.

¹⁴⁹ | As already noted in the results on the further analysis of young people's friendships, most young people in the study had at least one birth sibling, 95.6% (196), and therefore, the likelihood of not having a birth sibling is unlikely to be large enough to have any impact on these results.

Summary table of results from further analysis on young people's participation in hobbies and leisure activities

	<i>Very important (statistically significant)</i>	<i>Important (trend)</i>	<i>Not important (no trend)</i>
Influences on whether young people had a <i>high</i> level of participation in hobbies and leisure activities (<i>home, school and local neighbourhood</i>)	<p><i>Significantly</i> more likely where a young person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Had a high score on the summary index of friendships (borderline statistical significance) 	<p>Was more likely where a young person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Was in a non-relative care placement ▶ Lived in a rural area ▶ Was in the younger age group (12 to 13 years old) 	<p>There was no relationship with the following factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Experience of bullying at school ▶ Educational progress in academic subjects ▶ Type of educational provision (mainstream/specialist) ▶ Length of time in current foster care placement ▶ Age first placed into care ▶ Number of years in care overall ▶ Previous care placements ▶ Gender
Influences on whether young people had a <i>low</i> level of participation in hobbies and leisure activities	<p><i>Significantly</i> more likely where a young person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Had not been placed with a birth sibling ▶ Had no other young people in the foster care household with them 	<p>Was more likely where a young person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Had a higher number of previous care placements 	n/a

Table 6.10: Statistically significant results to support findings on young people's participation in hobbies/leisure activities

<i>Summary Index of participation in hobbies/leisure activities</i>	<i>Independent variable</i>	<i>Chi-square result</i>	<i>Correlation co-efficient</i>
	Level of friendships	$\chi^2 = 8.897$, $df = 4$, $p > 0.05$ Borderline significance	$\rho = 0.156$, $N = 205$, $p = 0.026$, two tailed
	Placed with a birth sibling in the same foster family household	$\chi^2 = 6.997$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.05$	$\rho = -0.083$, $N = 196$, $p = 0.245$, two tailed
	Other young people aged under 18 years in the foster family household	$\chi^2 = 7.785$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.05$	$\rho = -0.094$, $N = 204$, $p = 0.181$, two tailed Not significant

Chapter 7

Positive Experiences of Education and Social Support for Young People in Long Term Foster Care

Introduction

This final results chapter has two objectives. Firstly, to build on the findings which have been presented in the previous three chapters. Secondly, to explore some of this data in order to identify factors that are associated with *positive experiences* of young people's education and schooling, their contact with birth family members, friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities.

The results presented in this chapter will aim to answer three main questions:

- ▶ Which aspects of young people's foster care placements are associated with them having desirable and positive experiences at school?
- ▶ Which aspects of young people's foster care placements are associated with young people having social supports that are deemed positive?¹⁵⁰
- ▶ Do young people who have more desirable educational experiences also have more positive social supports?

The constituents of 'positive educational experiences' and 'positive social supports' will be defined here. Each concept is based on selected data from the interviews carried out with foster carers and includes answers to a number of questions. The aspects of young people's foster care placements examined include the *length of time in care*, *age first placed in care* and *whether young people are placed with a relative* (relative foster care placement) or not (non-relative placement). The findings in this chapter will provide some of the basis for the recommendations, which will be discussed in the final chapter in this research report.

Factors associated with young people's positive educational and schooling experiences

Before tackling the question of which aspects of young people's foster care placements are associated with positive educational experiences, exactly what constitutes a definition of such

desirable educational experiences needs to be agreed. A single measure was compiled to represent the nature of young people's educational experiences. This single measure was made up of four separate criteria relating to certain aspects of young people's education and schooling. Each single criterion was chosen because it was deemed to be a *desirable* and *positive* indicator of young people's educational experience – either in terms of their educational progress or their every day experience of going to school.¹⁵¹ The four criteria selected were:

- ▶ Young people had received 'normal' *day to day schooling* only in the school year (i.e. no remedial help, nor were they in a special class or school)
- ▶ Young people were deemed to be making *good progress* with their *academic subjects* in the school year
- ▶ Young people had *not been bullied* in any form in the school year (as reported by foster carers)
- ▶ Young people's carers had not been *contacted by the school* about their behaviour in the school year.¹⁵²

The number of criteria that each young person met was ascertained and a score of one was allocated for each criterion. At the end of this process, each young person had a score that ranged between zero (where they met none of the four criteria) and four (where they met all four criteria). These five categories were then reduced to three: young people met none or one of the criteria (least desirable educational experiences); young people met two or three of the criteria (some desirable educational experiences); and finally, young people met all four of the criteria (most desirable educational experiences).¹⁵³ All four criteria were based on events in young people's educational experiences over the school year 2001/2. Therefore, the information collected represents young people's educational and schooling experiences at a particular point in time rather than throughout their schooling careers.

150 | The social supports considered here are those derived from young people's contact with birth family members and their friendships/participation in hobbies and leisure activities.

151 | There are many other factors that could be deemed to indicate a positive experience of schooling, but for the purpose of this research report, selected criteria from the information given by foster carers were used.

152 | The choice of criteria that made up this single measure was based on several rationale. Firstly, these issues had been explored in the chapter on education and schooling (Chapter 4) and thus it was seen as appropriate to bring this analysis one step further here. Secondly, three of the four variables chosen are nominal variables (except *progress with academic subjects*, which is an ordinal variable) and therefore, they are clear cut indicators of young people's schooling, in that young people have either met the criteria or not. There is no answer in between a 'yes' and 'no' response. It is easier to compile a summary measure for further analysis based on such definite criteria. Finally, missing data did not have an impact on the summary measure. Only one of the four variables that made up the summary measure had any missing data – information on bullying was missing for two young people only. Missing data could potentially affect the summary measure by artificially depressing young people's scores where information was not available, but this was not the case here.

153 | The number of categories in the summary measure was reduced to ensure that there were enough cases in each category when carrying out bivariate analysis using cross tabulations. The mean score was used to help determine the cut off points for the three categories. The mean score was 2.5. Therefore, it was deemed appropriate to include young people who had a score of 2 with those who had a score of 3 in the same category in the summary measure (the category representing *some* desirable educational experiences).

Table 7.1: Summary measure of young people's positive educational experiences

<i>Positive nature of educational experiences</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>
<i>High</i> (most desirable educational experiences – met all four criteria)	22.9	47
<i>Medium</i> (some desirable educational experiences – met two or three criteria)	54.6	112
<i>Low</i> (least desirable educational experiences – met none or one of the criteria)	22.4	46
Total	100.0	205

Table 7.1 shows that just under one quarter of young people, 22.9% (47), met all four of the criteria that represented a positive experience of schooling, and therefore, they were deemed as having the most desirable educational experiences (and allocated to the 'high' category). As would be expected, the largest group of young people were located in the 'medium' category, 54.6% (112), which means that they met two or three of the four criteria, and thus were seen as having *some* desirable educational experiences. Finally, the remaining 22.4% (46) of young people met none or just one of the four criteria, and therefore, were deemed to have had the least desirable educational experiences, and allocated to the 'low' category. Therefore, based on this classification, young people in the 'high' category were seen as having the most positive educational experiences, while those in the 'low' category were deemed as having the least positive schooling experiences.¹⁵⁴

The summary measure of young people's positive educational experiences was explored in terms of several aspects of their foster care placements and care histories to date. Three aspects of young people's placements were found to be *significantly*¹⁵⁵ associated with their educational experiences:

- ▶ Whether they had been placed with a birth sibling in the same foster family household or not
- ▶ Whether they had been placed in a relative or non-relative care placement
- ▶ The educational attainment of female carers.

Aspects of young people's placements that were significantly associated with positive educational and schooling experiences

Placed with a birth sibling in the same foster family household

Young people who had been *placed with a birth sibling* in the same foster family household were

significantly more likely to have scored 'high' or 'medium' on the summary measure of positive educational experiences, compared to those who had not been placed with a birth sibling. Over one quarter of young people who had been fostered with a birth sibling scored 'high' on the summary measure of positive educational experiences, 26.3% (26), compared to 18.6% (18) of those who had *not* been placed with a birth sibling. At the other end of the scale, young people who had been fostered with a birth sibling were significantly less likely to have scored 'low' on the summary measure of positive educational experiences – 16.2% (16), compared to 30.9% (30) of those who had *not* been placed with a birth sibling.¹⁵⁶ Therefore, being placed with a birth sibling was associated with more positive educational experiences for young people as these young people were significantly more likely to have had positive schooling experiences (as defined here) than those who had not been placed with a birth sibling.

Relative care placements

Young people who were in *relative care placements* were significantly more likely to have scored 'high' or 'medium' on the summary measure of positive educational experiences than those in non-relative care placements – 29.4% (15) of young people in relative care scored 'high' compared to 19.7% (30) of those in non-relative care. Conversely, just 9.8% (5) of young people in relative care scored 'low' on the summary measure of positive educational experiences compared to 27.0% (41) of those in non-relative care. Therefore, whether young people were in relative care or not was found to be related to the positive nature of their educational experiences, where those in relative care were found to be significantly more likely to have had a positive educational experience than those in non-relative care placements.

Educational attainment of female carers

Young people whose female carer had completed *second level education* were significantly more likely

154 | It is acknowledged that this is a subjective measure. The underlying assumption made here is that mainstream schooling provision, good educational progress and the absence of both poor behaviour (measured by school contact with foster carers about behaviour) and bullying (the young person being bullied themselves) are positive indicators of young people's education and schooling. It is reasonable to suggest that the criteria chosen are more likely to create conditions that are more conducive to young people performing well at school (mainstream schooling provision only, good educational progress and absence of poor behaviour), as well as helping to create an educational environment which they are more likely to enjoy (absence of bullying).

155 | Where a relationship is described as being 'significant', this means that it was found to be statistically significant based on statistical tests carried out.

156 | The chi-square results and correlation co-efficients for statistically significant results are presented in Table 7.4 at the end of this chapter. The cross-tabulations on which this result, and the rest of the results in this chapter are based, are available from the Children's Research Centre on request.

to have scored 'high' on the summary measure of positive educational experiences, 33.7% (31), compared to young people whose female carer had attained a primary education or third level education – 15.5% (9) and 12.5% (4) respectively. Young people whose female carer had a primary or third level education were more likely to have a 'medium' score on the summary measure compared to young people whose female carer had attained a second level education. Therefore, the result for the educational attainment of female carers is not consistent across *all categories* of the summary measure of positive educational experiences, which makes it impossible to draw any general conclusions about the association between female carer's educational attainment and the positive nature of young people's educational experiences. Nonetheless, this does not change the above result

that young people with female carers whose highest educational attainment was second level were significantly more likely to have scored *highly* on the summary measure of positive educational experiences, and perhaps most notably, were more likely to have done so than young people whose female carer had attained a third level qualification.

In relation to the educational attainment of male carers, there was a similar trend found whereby young people being looked after by a male carer who had attained a second level education were more likely to have scored 'high' on the summary measure of positive educational experiences compared to those whose carers had a primary or third level education. However, this trend was not statistically significant.

Summary of significant aspects of young people's placements associated with positive educational and schooling experiences

A single measure was compiled which represented young people's positive educational experiences. This measure consisted of four criteria, where:

- ▶ Young people had received 'normal' day to day schooling (no remedial help or attendance in a special class/school)
- ▶ Young people were deemed to be making good progress with their academic subjects
- ▶ Young people had not been bullied in any form
- ▶ Young people's carers had not been contacted by the school about their behaviour.

After exploring this single measure with aspects of young people's foster care placements, young people were found to be *significantly* more likely to have had positive experiences of education and schooling (based on the above criteria) where:

- ▶ They were *placed with a birth sibling* in the same foster family household
- ▶ They were in *relative foster care placements*
- ▶ The highest level of education completed by female carers was *second level*, rather than primary or third level.

Trends in the summary index of positive educational experiences

Some relationships were found between young people's positive educational experiences and other aspects of their placements and background characteristics, but these were not statistically significant. Nevertheless, given that differences emerged in the results, they are briefly discussed here. These aspects were:

- ▶ Duration in care
- ▶ Number of previous care placements¹⁵⁷
- ▶ Other young people in the foster family household
- ▶ Gender.

Duration in care

There were three different measures of duration in care – the number of years that young people had

spent in their *current foster care placement*, the *total number of years spent in care*, and the *age at which young people had first been placed in care*. The following results relate to the second measure, the total number of years spent in care. However, the analysis carried out produced a similar trend when using the other two measures of duration in care.

Young people who had been in care for the *longest period of time*, that is 10 to 14 years, were more likely to have scored 'high' on the summary measure of positive educational experiences, 26.4% (42), compared to young people who had been in care for 1 to 3 years and 4 to 9 years – 20.8% (5) and 19.1% (13) respectively. Conversely, just 14.3% (13) of young people in care for 10 to 14 years scored 'low' on the summary measure of positive educational experiences, compared to 20.8% (5) of those in care for 1 to 3 years and 30.9% (21) of those in care for 4 to 9 years. Therefore, there was a trend

157 | The number of previous care placements was recorded for those young people who had experienced foster care placements prior to their current one.

where young people who had spent a longer period of time in care were more likely to have met all the criteria that were deemed to indicate positive educational experiences.¹⁵⁸

Number of previous care placements

Young people who had relatively *fewer placements* in care prior to their current foster care placement, i.e. one or two, were more likely to have scored 'high' on the summary measure of positive educational experiences – 26.9% (18) of young people who had just one or two placements before their current placement scored 'high' on this measure compared to 15.4% (4) of young people who had three or more previous placements. Conversely, 34.6% (9) of young people with three or more previous placements scored 'low' compared to 22.4% (15) of those with only one or two placements prior to their current placement. While this result was not statistically significant, it does point to a potentially positive aspect of keeping the number of care placements experienced by young people as low as possible.

Other young people in the foster family household

Young people who were placed in foster family households with other young people (aged under 18 years) were more likely to have scored 'high' on the summary measure of positive educational experiences, 24.2% (39), compared to 16.3% (7) of those who did not have other young people living with them. Therefore, there was a trend where young people who were placed in foster care placements where there were other young people around their age were more likely to have positive educational experiences than those who were not placed with other young people, although this was not statistically significant.

Gender of young people

Females were more likely than males to have scored 'high' on the summary measure of positive

educational experiences – 27.4% (29) and 18.2% (18) respectively. Conversely, 27.3% (27) of males scored 'low' compared to 17.9% (19) of females on the same measure. A similar percentage of both males and females also scored 'medium' on this measure. These gender differences were not statistically significant but showed a trend where females were found to be more likely to have met the criteria for positive educational experiences compared to males.

In addition to considering various aspects of young people's foster care placements with respect to positive educational experiences, it was deemed appropriate to explore whether young people's positive educational experiences were associated with whether they had changed school during their current foster care placement or not.¹⁵⁹

Change of school during current foster care placement

Where young people had *not* changed school during their current placement, they were more likely to have scored 'high' on the positive educational experiences summary measure – 24.2% (43) compared to just 14.8% (4) of those who had changed school. Similarly, young people who had changed school during their current placement were more likely to have scored 'low' on the measure – 33.3% (9) compared to 20.8% (37) of young people who had *not* changed school.¹⁶⁰ The likelihood of having a 'medium' score on the positive educational index was similar for young people who had changed school during their current placement and those who had not. This result was not statistically significant but does indicate that young people's experiences were more likely to be positive (as defined here) if they had not changed school during their current placement, and points to the potentially negative impact that a change of school may have on young people's educational experiences, as might be expected.

Summary of trends in the summary index of positive educational experiences

Young people were found to be more likely to have positive educational experiences where they:

- ▶ had been in care for a relatively longer period of time
- ▶ had fewer care placements prior to their current placement
- ▶ had other young people in the foster care household
- ▶ were female, and
- ▶ had not changed school during their current foster care placement.

These findings are based on trends in the results and are not statistically significant. However, these factors show that the likelihood of positive educational experiences may vary under different circumstances and may help to further our understanding of what circumstances may be more conducive to young people in long term foster care gaining such positive educational experiences.

158 | The lack of a statistically significant relationship between the summary measure of *positive educational experience* and *duration in care* does not undermine earlier findings that showed the *length of time in care* to be an important factor in relation to certain aspects of young people's education. In particular, the result that the longer young people were in care the less likely they were to have received remedial help in their schooling still stands, which was itself statistically significant. The summary measure variable comprises four criteria (three in addition to *type of educational provision*). Despite the lack of a statistically significant result, the trend found here reinforces the earlier finding on remedial help that young people in care for a relatively longer period of time are more likely to have fared favourably in terms of the nature of their educational experiences (as defined here) compared to those who have been in foster care for a shorter period of time.

159 | The variables that made up the *summary measure of positive educational experiences* were based on events that had occurred during the school year leading up to data collection, i.e. 2001/2. Whether young people had changed school during their current placement often involved consideration of a timeframe longer than one year (depending on how long they have been in their current placement for). However, this analysis was carried out to provide some indication of how young people's present educational experiences may differ according to past or present disruption in their schooling.

160 | This result does not count the natural transition from primary to secondary school as a change of school.

Other aspects of young people's placements

The above analysis has concentrated on those aspects of young people's placements and their background characteristics that either showed up as statistically significant or produced trends in relation to the summary measure of positive educational experiences. Other factors were also considered but no significant associations or trends in the results were found. These factors which were found to have no relevance were:

- ▶ Whether young people had previous care placements or not¹⁶¹
- ▶ Geographical location of the foster family household (large city/town, small town/village, open countryside)
- ▶ Length of time the carer had been fostering
- ▶ Age of respondent carer (at the time of interview)
- ▶ Closeness of relationship between the carer and the young person (rated by the respondent foster carer).

Young people's social supports – factors for consideration

This section considers some of the results on young people's social supports and aims to identify factors that may be associated with certain aspects of these social supports. Two composite measures of young people's social supports have been compiled for this analysis – the first measure is based on young people's contact with their birth family, and the second represents the nature of their friendships/hobbies.

Regular and beneficial contact with birth family members

A summary measure of young people's contact with their birth family was compiled based on two criteria:

- ▶ *Regular* face to face contact with *two or more* categories of birth family members in the previous six months (out of a total of four: mother, father, siblings and extended family)¹⁶²
- ▶ *Beneficial* nature of contact with birth family (as reported by the foster carer).

The first criterion of regular face to face contact with two or more birth family members represents *consistent* face to face contact for young people. However, this in itself cannot be taken to be positive for the young people concerned. Therefore, the second criterion of beneficial nature of contact with birth family was also included in the summary measure to avoid making such an assumption. By doing this, regular contact with birth family members is only seen as positive where such contact is deemed as being beneficial for the young person (by the foster carer). While the beneficial nature of this contact is based on the foster carer's own opinion, they are in a good position to gauge young people's feelings following such contact.¹⁶³ For the purpose of this analysis, where young people met both criteria, contact with birth family was deemed as being a positive source of social support for them, and therefore they were categorised as 'high' on the summary measure representing the positive nature of social support from contact with birth family. Where young people met just one of the two criteria they were deemed to derive *some* benefit from contact with their birth family, and were therefore allocated to the 'medium' category in the summary measure. They were classified as such because these young people had either had regular contact with two or more birth family member categories in the previous six months *or* were said to benefit from contact with birth family overall. Finally, where young people did not meet either criterion, the positive nature of their social support from contact with birth family was categorised as 'low'.

Table 7.2: Summary measure of positive nature of social support from young people's contact with birth family

<i>Positive nature of social support through contact with birth family</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>
High (met both criteria)	52.3	68
Medium (met one criterion only)	36.2	47
Low (met neither of the criteria)	11.5	15
Total	100.0	130*

**Data on both criteria were missing for 75 young people. To prevent any bias in the results from missing data, young people were only included in this analysis where data were available on both variables. The results are based on almost two thirds of all young people in the study, 63.4% (130).*

161 | This was a different variable to the *number* of previous care placements discussed earlier. All the young people in the study were divided into two groups based on whether they had any care placements prior to their current one or not (regardless of the number of these other placements). Of those young people who had experienced care placements prior to their current one, the number of these previous care placements was recorded to make up the second variable.

162 | *Regular* contact was *face to face* contact that had taken place at least every 2/3 months in the six month period prior to interviews with foster carers. Therefore, young people would have seen the birth family member at least twice in this six month period. This is a new variable created for the purpose of this analysis. This criterion was based on the combination of responses to two questions asked in the interviews with foster carers on whether young people had seen each of the four birth family member categories in the last six months and, if they had, the frequency of such contact.

163 | It is acknowledged that carers' opinions may be influenced by their feelings about birth family members, but given the complex consent issues involved in gaining access to young people to interview (as stated in Chapter 2), selecting carers as the key informant in the study was seen as the next best alternative.

Table 7.2 shows that just over one half of young people, 52.3% (68), met both criteria for positive social support from birth family members and were classified as ‘high’, that is they had regular face to face contact with two or more categories of birth family members in the previous six months *and* their contact with birth family members was deemed to be beneficial for them by the foster carer. Contact with birth family for over one third of young people, 36.2% (47), was deemed to be positive to a reasonable extent, as they met one of the two criteria for positive social support through contact with birth family, and thus their support was categorised as ‘medium’. Finally, just 11.5% (15) of young people met neither of the two criteria and were seen as unlikely to have positive social support through contact with birth family – given that they did not have regular contact with two or more birth family member categories, and any contact that did occur was not deemed as beneficial by their foster carer. Therefore, these young people were allocated to the ‘low’ category.

There were three aspects of young people’s placements that were associated with the summary measure for positive social support from contact with birth family. These were:

- ▶ Duration in care
- ▶ Length of time the carer had been fostering
- ▶ The respondent carer’s rating of the closeness of the relationship between themselves and the young person.

Duration in care

Each of the three measures of duration in care (number of years with current foster carer, total number of years in care and age first placed into care) were significantly associated with positive social support from contact with birth family members. The results were the same for each of the three measures and showed that young people who had been *in care for a shorter period of time* were significantly more likely to have been categorised as gaining a ‘high’ level of positive social support from their contact with birth family. For example, in relation to the measure of the number of years young people had spent with their current carer, 76.5% (26) of young people who had been in their current care placement for 1 to 3 years scored ‘high’ on the summary measure of positive social support from contact with birth family. This percentage fell to 60.8% (31) for those young people in their current care placement for 4 to 9 years, and further still to 24.4% (11) for those with their current foster carer for 10 to 14 years. Therefore, the longer that young people had been in their current placement, the less likely they were to have positive social support from their contact with birth family.

Length of time carer had been fostering

Young people were significantly more likely to be deemed to have ‘high’ positive social supports from contact with birth family where their foster carer had been fostering for a *shorter period of time*.

Almost three quarters of young people being looked after by carers who had been fostering for 1 to 5 years, 73.7% (28), had met both criteria for positive social support through contact with birth family, i.e. regular contact that was deemed to be beneficial for them. The comparable percentages fell for young people in the care of foster carers who had been fostering for a longer period of time – 49.2% (30) of young people with carers who had been fostering for 6 to 15 years had ‘high’ positive social support from contact with birth family, and this fell further still to 33.3% (10) for those young people whose carers had been fostering for more than 16 years. Therefore, young people were less likely to have positive social support from contact with birth family, the longer their carers had been fostering.

Rating of closeness of relationship between respondent carer and young person

Carers were asked to indicate how close they thought their relationship with the young person was on a scale of one (low) to five (high). These five categories were recoded into three categories: low (scores of one to three), medium (score of four) and high (score of five).¹⁶⁴ Young people were significantly more likely to have ‘high’ positive social support from contact with birth family where their *relationship with the respondent carer was rated as very close* (score of five), 60.2% (53) of young people. The comparative percentage fell to 52.4% (11) of young people who were said to have a medium degree of closeness with the respondent carer, and further still to 15.8% (3) for those who had a low rating of closeness.

Whether young people were in relative or non-relative care placements was found to be a significant factor in relation to young people’s educational experiences, as discussed earlier. Was it an important factor in relation to positive social support from contact with birth family?

Relative/non-relative care placements

Young people in *relative care placements* were more likely to have ‘high’ positive social support from contact with birth family compared to those in non-relative care – 66.7% (24) and 47.3% (44) respectively. This finding was of *borderline* statistical significance but is still worth noting here because there was quite a difference in the percentage results for those in relative and non-relative care. Furthermore, of the 15 young people who met neither of the two criteria for positive social support from contact with birth family (from Table 7.2), 14 of them were in non-relative care placements.

Further analysis on young people in relative and non-relative care placements

Some further analysis was carried out, with a particular focus on young people in relative and non-relative care placements. Almost one quarter of all young people in the study were in relative foster care placements, 24.9% (51), and additional analysis was carried out to see whether the experiences of young people in relative and non-

164 | The low category includes scores one to three because there were very few scores of one and two (only seven young people in total). It was necessary to combine the scores one to three together so that there would be enough cases in the ‘low’ category to facilitate distinguishing between different degrees of closeness of relationship.

relative care might differ, particularly in relation to their contact with birth family.

The chapter on contact with birth family (Chapter 5) highlighted that young people in relative care were more likely to have seen individual birth family members in the previous six months, have regular contact with birth family members over time (except birth mothers) and to have seen a higher number of birth family members in the previous six months. In relation to the positive nature of social support from contact with birth family, the likelihood of experiencing this was found to decline over the length of time that young people had been in care (as stated earlier). Further analysis was carried out to see whether being in a relative or non-relative care placement made any difference in relation to this finding. For young people in relative care, the percentage who were deemed to have 'high' positive social support from contact with birth family *increased slightly* over time, from 66.7% (10) for those with their current carer for one to three years to 75.0% (12) for those in their current care placement for four to nine years.¹⁶⁵ For young people in non-relative care, the general trend held as the likelihood of having high positive social support from contact with birth family decreased over the length of time they had been in their current foster care placement.¹⁶⁶ Therefore, young people in relative care placements were more likely to have been deemed to have gained 'high' positive social support from contact with birth family as

they remained in their current (relative) care placement over a longer period of time compared to those in non-relative care placements.

Another result was identified earlier where young people were significantly more likely to have gained positive social support from contact with birth family where their foster carer had been fostering for a relatively shorter period of time. Did this relationship hold for young people whether they were in relative or non-relative care placements? Further analysis showed that the length of time that *relative carers* had been fostering did not have such a marked difference in terms of the percentage of young people who were deemed to have 'high' positive social support from contact with birth family compared to non-relative carers. The results were similar for young people in relative care where their carers had been fostering for 1 to 5 years, 65.2% (15), or 6 to 15 years, 66.7% (8). In contrast, where young people were in non-relative care, the greater the number of years that their carer had been fostering, the less likely they were to have been deemed to have 'high' positive social support from contact with birth family (as per the overall trend).¹⁶⁷ Therefore, in terms of young people being deemed to have 'high' social support from contact with birth family, the length of time that carers had been fostering was not such an important factor where young people were cared for by relative carers, as it was found to be for those in non-relative care.

Summary of significant factors associated with positive social support from contact with birth family

A single measure was created which represented the social support that young people gained from their contact with birth family. This was based on two criteria:

- ▶ *Regular* face to face contact with two or more categories of birth family members in the previous six months (out of a total of four birth family member categories)
- ▶ *Beneficial* nature of contact with birth family (as reported by foster carers).

Young people were deemed to have 'high' positive social support from contact with birth family where they met both criteria.

Young people were *significantly* more likely to have been deemed to have 'high' positive social support from contact with birth family (based on the above criteria) when:

- ▶ They had been in care for a *shorter* period of time (more likely for young people in non-relative care placements than those in relative care placements)
- ▶ Their carer(s) had been fostering for a relatively *shorter* period of time (more likely for young people in non-relative care placements than those in relative care placements)
- ▶ They were deemed to have a *closer relationship* with the foster carer (as rated by the foster carer)
- ▶ They were in *relative* care placements (borderline statistical significance).

165 | This result is based on a fairly small number of cases. However, it should be remembered that there was a total of 51 young people in relative care placements. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight this result as it does not follow the overall downward trend in the percentage of young people deemed to gain positive social support from birth family contact over the length of time they spent in care.

166 | This result was still highly statistically significant for young people in non-relative care but no longer significant for young people in relative care.

167 | This relationship was still statistically significant for young people in non-relative care but not for those in relative care placements.

Trends in social support from contact with birth family

Some trends were also found when exploring positive social support from contact with birth family in relation to other aspects of young people's foster care placements. Although these were not statistically significant, there were some patterns in the results that are worthy of discussion here. The aspects of young people's foster care placements that will be examined are:

- ▶ Placed with a birth sibling in the same foster care household
- ▶ Number of previous care placements
- ▶ Geographical location
- ▶ Educational attainment of female carers
- ▶ Gender.

Placed with a birth sibling in the same foster care household

Young people who had a birth sibling in the same foster care household were more likely to have met both criteria for positive social support from contact with birth family, 59.4% (38), compared to 46.8% (29) of those who had not been placed with a birth sibling. While this was not statistically significant, this trend shows that the experience of contact with birth family appeared to be more likely to be positive for young people placed in care with a birth sibling compared to those who were not.

Number of previous care placements

Young people with three or more care placements prior to their current foster care placement were more likely to have been categorised as having a 'high' level of positive social support through their contact with birth family, 66.7% (10), compared to 52.3% (23) of young people who had only one or two prior care placements. This appears to contradict other findings that have found that a higher number of previous placements in care are associated with negative factors, one being a greater likelihood to have been bullied (see Chapter 4). While no broad sweeping conclusions can be drawn from one single result, especially considering the small number of cases involved, this finding indicates that a high number of placements in care

may not always necessarily be associated with irregular or non-beneficial contact with birth family members, at least for the young people in this study.

Geographical location

Young people living in urban areas were more likely to have met both criteria for positive social support from contact with birth family than those living in rural locations. Over one half of young people living in a large city/town had a high level of positive social support from contact with birth family, 60.5% (23), compared to 52.8% (19) of those who lived in a small town/village and 46.4% (26) of young people who lived in the open countryside. One of the criteria for positive social support through contact with birth family was whether young people had *regular* face to face contact with two or more birth family member categories in the previous six months. It would be reasonable to suggest that young people who lived in urban areas might be more likely to have more regular face to face contact with birth family members because of such factors as better transport links which would facilitate this, and could therefore go some way to explaining this result. However, after running further analysis, there was little difference in the percentage of young people who had regular contact with each of the four birth family member categories according to whether they lived in an urban or rural location. So, this explanation does not explain this finding.

Educational attainment of female carers

Young people who were in the care of female carers who had attained a primary or post-primary level of education were more likely to have a 'high' level of positive social support through contact with birth family – 57.1% (20) and 56.7% (34) respectively, compared to just 25.0% (5) of those who had obtained a third level qualification.

Gender

Males were more likely than females to have a 'high' level of positive social support through contact with birth family – 57.1% (36) of males compared to 47.8% (32) of females. This was not statistically significant, but indicated that there may be a potential gender dimension to the experience of positive social support from contact with birth family.

Summary of trends in relation to social support through contact with birth family

Young people were more likely to have gained positive social support from contact with birth family where:

- ▶ They had been placed with a birth sibling
- ▶ They had a higher number of previous care placements
- ▶ They lived in urban areas
- ▶ Their female carer had a primary or second level of education
- ▶ They were male.

While these findings were not statistically significant, they point to certain circumstances in which young people may be more likely to have positive social support from contact with birth family, where such contact is both regular and deemed to be beneficial for the young people.

Friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities

The second element of social support that was explored in the study was young people's friendships and their participation in hobbies/leisure activities. Basic data on young people's participation in such activities have been presented in Chapter 6. The aim in this section is to explore whether certain factors can be identified as being associated with more favourable aspects of young people's friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities. A measure was created to represent young people's friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities. It was based on four questions in the interviews with foster carers – two relating to young people's friendships and a further two on their participation in hobbies/leisure activities. The four criteria were as follows:

- ▶ Having a regular group of friends (that the young people saw most days)
- ▶ Having a best friend (or more than one)
- ▶ Taking part in a hobby/leisure activity in the local neighbourhood
- ▶ Taking part in a hobby/leisure activity in school (outside of normal school hours).

A score of one was allocated for each criterion and a total score was compiled for each young person.

The scores ranged from zero (met none of the four criteria) to four (met all of the four criteria).¹⁶⁸ The aim of this exercise was to create a summary measure that would show if other potential sources of social support were available to young people through their friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities. This index is based on friendship networks, close friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities outside of the home.¹⁶⁹

Table 7.3 shows that over one third of young people, 34.6% (71), met all four criteria and thus were categorised as having 'high' positive social support through their friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities. Over one half of young people, 57.6% (118), were deemed to have 'medium' positive social support from both their friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities as they met two or three of the four criteria (i.e. *regular group of friends, best friend, hobby in the local neighbourhood and hobby at school*). Finally, the remaining 7.8% (16) met none or just one of the four criteria, and therefore were categorised as having 'low' positive social support through the same means. The summary measure of positive social support from friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities will be referred to as the *friendships/participation summary measure* hereafter.

Table 7.3: Summary measure of positive social support from friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities

<i>Positive nature of social support through friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>
High (all four criteria)	34.6	71
Medium (two or three criteria)	57.6	118
Low (none or one criterion)	7.8	16
Total	100.0	205

The friendships/participation summary measure was not significantly associated with any aspect of young people's foster care placements. However, there were some trends found in relation to the following factors:

- ▶ Duration in care
- ▶ Being placed with a birth sibling in the same foster care household
- ▶ Number of previous care placements
- ▶ Other young people in the household
- ▶ Closeness of relationship between the respondent foster carer and young person
- ▶ Length of time carer(s) had been fostering
- ▶ Age of respondent carer.

168 | There was some missing data for each of the four following variables: *regular group of friends* (one young person); *best friend* (six young people); *hobby in the local neighbourhood* (one young person); and *hobby at school* (eight young people). However, this was unlikely to have an impact on the summary measure because for most of these young people data were only missing for one of the four criteria. The only exception being that for one young person, where information was missing on two criteria (*hobby in the local neighbourhood* and *hobby at school*). Therefore, information for all 205 young people was included in this analysis.

169 | Like the other summary measures compiled for the purpose of this chapter, the summary measure of *positive social support from friendships/participation in hobbies/leisure activities* is subjective but the criteria chosen are likely to represent positive aspects of young people's friendships, i.e. having a regular group of friends and close friendships. Participation in hobbies/leisure activities could be viewed as beneficial for young people's personal development in many ways and are possible avenues through which they can develop good sources of social support.

Trends in social support through young people's friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities

Duration in care

Young people who had spent the highest number of years in care, 10 to 14 years, were most likely to have scored 'high' on the *friendships/participation summary measure*, 37.4% (34), that is the longer that young people had spent in care, the more likely they were to have been deemed to have positive social support through their friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities. The comparable percentage for young people in care for 4 to 9 years was 30.9% (21) and for those in care for 1 to 3 years, 33.3% (8). As these figures show, the percentage of young people who scored 'high' on the friendships/participation summary measure did not consistently fall across the three different categories for the number of years in care. This trend was not found for the other two variables measuring duration in care – *number of years with current foster carer and age first placed into care*. Nevertheless, this result points to the possibility that the higher the number of years spent in care, the more likely that young people are to have positive social support through their friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities, which was defined here as consisting of having a regular group of friends, developing close friendships and participating in hobbies/leisure activities outside the home.

Placed with a birth sibling in the same foster care household

Young people who were placed with a birth sibling were more likely to have scored 'high' on the friendships/participation summary measure compared to those who were not placed with a birth sibling. In other words, young people placed with a birth sibling were more likely to have a regular group of friends, have a best friend and to participate in hobbies/leisure activities outside the home, compared to young people who were not placed with a birth sibling. Over one third of young people placed with a birth sibling, 38.4% (38), were found to have scored 'high' on the summary measure of friendships/participation compared to 30.9% (30) of those who were not placed with a birth sibling. A similar percentage of young people placed with and without a birth sibling had a 'medium' score on the summary measure of friendships/participation – 55.6% (55) and 58.8% (57) respectively. While 10.3% (10) of young people not placed with a birth sibling scored 'low' on the summary measure of friendships/participation compared to just 6.1% (6) of young people who were placed with a birth sibling. This result coincides with one of the findings from a previous chapter (Chapter 6) where young people who had *not* been placed with a birth sibling were significantly more likely to have a *low* level of participation in hobbies and leisure activities overall (at home, in the local neighbourhood and at school).¹⁷⁰

Number of previous care placements

Young people with just one or two previous care placements were slightly more likely to have scored 'high' on the friendships/participation summary measure, 35.8% (24), compared to 30.8% (8) of those who had three or more prior care placements. Also, young people who had three or more previous care placements were more likely to score 'low' on the summary measure, 15.4% (4), compared to just 7.5% (5) of those with just one or two previous care placements. Therefore, where young people had fewer placements, they were found to be more likely to have a regular group of friends, have a best friend and to participate in hobbies/leisure activities outside of the home. While this result was not statistically significant, it shows the potential benefit of keeping the number of care placements down in relation to young people's friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities.

Other young people in the household

Young people who were placed in a foster care household which had other young people were more likely to have scored 'high' on the friendships/participation summary measure than those who were not placed with other young people in the household. Over one third of young people who were in a household with other young people, 36.6% (59), were found to have scored 'high' on the summary measure of friendships/participation compared to 27.9% (12) of those in households that had no other young people. A similar percentage of young people who had other young people in the household and those who did not were categorised as 'medium' on the summary measure of friendships/participation – 57.1% (92) and 58.1% (25) respectively. While 14.0% (6) of young people who were not placed with other young people scored 'low' on the summary measure of friendships/participation compared to 6.2% (10) of those placed in a foster care household that had other young people in it. Similarly, this result corresponds with a finding in a previous chapter (Chapter 6) whereby young people who had *not* been placed in a foster family with other young people were found to be more likely to have a low level of participation in hobbies/leisure activities in general (at home, in the local neighbourhood and at school).

Closeness of relationship between respondent foster carer and young person

Where carers rated the closeness of their relationship with the young person as 'medium' or 'high', the young person was more likely to have scored 'high' on the friendships/participation summary measure – 34.1% (14) and 38.8% (50) respectively. These percentages compare to just 17.2% (5) of young people whose carer felt their relationship was characterised by a low degree of closeness who also scored 'high' on the summary measure of friendships/participation. At the other end of the scale, 13.8% (4) of young people whose relationship was deemed as not close by their foster carer scored 'low' on the summary measure of

170 | Therefore, this result is not surprising as participation in hobbies/leisure activities in the local neighbourhood and school are two of the criteria in the summary measure of friendship/participation.

friendships/participation compared to just 2.4% (1) of those whose relationship was seen as *reasonably* close and 8.5% (11) of those whose relationship was deemed *very* close. While the number of cases is small for the 'low' category of the friendships/participation summary measure, these results correspond with those found for young people who scored 'high' on the summary measure of friendships/participation.

Length of time carer had been fostering

Where foster carers had been fostering for a relatively shorter period of time (1 to 5 years), the young people in their care were more likely to have scored 'high' on the friendships/participation summary measure, 40.0% (20). This percentage fell to 35.4% (34) for those fostering for 6 to 15 years, and further still to 29.8% (17) for those fostering for sixteen or more years. Carers fostering for sixteen years or over were more likely to be caring for young people who had a 'medium' score on the

summary measure of friendships/participation, 66.7% (38), compared to those who were fostering for 6 to 15 years, 55.2% (53), and 1 to 5 years, 50.0% (25).

Age of respondent carer

Carers who were relatively *younger* were more likely to have young people in their care who scored 'high' on the friendships/participation summary measure.¹⁷¹ Over one third of young people, 39.4% (37), whose carer was aged between 21 to 49 years scored 'high' on the summary measure of friendships/participation compared to 28.6% (28) of young people being looked after by a carer aged 50 years or more. Respondent carers who were aged 50 years or over were more likely to care for young people who scored 'medium' on the summary measure, 62.2% (61), compared to 53.2% (5) of those aged 21 to 49 years.

Summary of trends in relation to young people's social support through their friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities

A summary measure was compiled to explore relationships and trends in young people's social support gained through their friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities. It was based on four criteria:

- ▶ Having a regular group of friends they saw most days
- ▶ Having a best friend (or more than one)
- ▶ Taking part in a hobby/leisure activity in the local neighbourhood
- ▶ Taking part in a hobby/leisure activity in school (outside of normal school hours).

Young people were more likely to have scored 'high' on the *friendships/participation summary measure* (based on the criteria above) where

- ▶ They had spent longer in care (typically 10 to 14 years)
- ▶ They were placed with a birth sibling in the foster family household
- ▶ They had fewer previous care placements (usually one or two)
- ▶ They were placed in a foster care household which had other young people
- ▶ They were viewed as having a close relationship with the respondent carer
- ▶ The carer had been fostering for a shorter period of time
- ▶ The carer was relatively young.

While none of the above findings were statistically significant, they point to circumstances in which young people may be more likely to gain positive social support through their friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities.

The summary measure of young people's friendships/participation was not related in any way to:

- ▶ The length of time spent in their current foster care placement
- ▶ Age first placed into care
- ▶ Whether they had any previous care placements or not
- ▶ Whether they were in relative or non-relative care placements
- ▶ The gender of the young person.

Positive educational experience and social support

The final question posed at the start of this chapter asked whether young people who were deemed to have more desirable educational experiences were also likely to have had more positive social support experiences. Two separate analyses were carried out in an attempt to answer this question. Firstly, the summary measures for *positive educational experiences* and *positive social support through contact with birth family* were explored to see if young people who had 'high' positive social support from contact with birth

171 | The carer's age was based on the age of the respondent carer who participated in the interview over the telephone.

family (defined as being both regular and beneficial) were more likely to have more positive educational experiences. Secondly, the summary measures for *positive educational experiences* and *positive social support from friendships/participation* were examined to see whether young people who were deemed to have a 'high' degree of social support from their friendships/participation in hobbies/leisure activities were more likely to have positive educational experiences.

Positive educational experience and positive social support through contact with birth family members

There was no association between the summary measure of young people's positive educational experiences and that for the positive nature of their contact with birth family. Young people were equally as likely to be seen as having positive educational experiences whether they were categorised as having 'high' social support through contact with birth family, 22.1% (15), or 'low' social support through contact with birth family, 20.0% (3). Therefore, young people were just as likely to have a positive experience of school whether they had both regular and beneficial contact with their birth family or not. The nature of young people's contact with birth family was not associated with the type of educational provision they received, their progress in academic subjects, prevalence of bullying or whether their carers were contacted by the school about their behaviour (the variables which comprise 'positive educational experience'). Young people were most likely to have a positive educational experience where they had a 'medium' score on the positive nature of social support measure from contact with birth family, 31.9% (15), that is where they had either regular contact with birth family or it was deemed to be beneficial by the foster carer (but not both).

Positive educational experience and positive social support through friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities (friendships/participation measure)

There was a significant relationship between young people's positive educational experience and the positive nature of social support through friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities. Young people who scored 'high' on the friendships/participation measure – that is they had a regular group of friends who they saw most days, had a 'best friend' and participated in hobbies/activities outside the home – were significantly more likely to score 'high' on the positive educational experiences summary measure, 28.2% (20), compared to those who had a 'medium' score, 20.3% (24) or a 'low' score, 18.8% (3), on the friendships/participation measure. Therefore, young people were more likely to have desirable educational experiences where they had an established friendship network, had developed at least one close peer friendship and took part in hobbies/activities outside of the home. Where these three factors existed for young people, they were more likely to be making good educational progress and less likely to require additional educational supports, not to have experienced bullying nor be poorly behaved at school (the criteria which indicate 'positive educational experience'). Similarly, at the other end of the scale, young people who scored 'low' on the friendships/participation measure were significantly more likely to have been deemed to have scored 'low' on the summary measure of positive educational experiences.

Summary of main points in relation to positive educational experiences and social supports

Positive educational experience and positive social support from contact with birth family

- ▶ There was no relationship between positive educational experience and positive social support from contact with birth family. Young people were found to be just as likely to have positive educational experiences whether they had both regular and beneficial contact with birth family members or not.

Positive educational experience and positive social support from friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities

- ▶ There was a significant relationship between positive educational experience and the friendships/participation summary measure. Young people were most likely to be deemed to have a positive educational experience where they have an established friendship network, had developed at least one close friendship and participated in hobbies/leisure activities outside of the home.

Summary of results in relation to young people's positive experiences of long term foster care

	<i>Very important (statistically significant)</i>	<i>Important (trend)</i>	<i>Not important (no trend)</i>
Influences on whether young people scored 'high' on positive educational experience	<p><i>Significantly</i> more likely where a young person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Had been placed with a birth sibling ▶ Was in a relative care placement ▶ Had a female carer who has completed second level education 	<p>Was more likely where a young person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Had spent a relatively longer period of time in care ▶ Had been in their current care placement for a longer period of time ▶ Had been first placed in care at a younger age ▶ Had a fewer number of previous care placements (prior to their current placement) ▶ Was placed in a foster care household which has other young people ▶ Was female ▶ Had a male carer who has completed second level education 	<p>There was no relationship with the following factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Previous care placements ▶ Geographical location ▶ Length of time carer had been fostering ▶ Age of respondent carer ▶ Closeness of relationship between carer and young person
Influences on whether young people scored 'high' on positive social support through contact with birth family	<p><i>Significantly</i> more likely where a young person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Had been in care overall for a relatively shorter period of time (except for those in relative care) ▶ Had been in their current care placement for a shorter period of time ▶ Had been first placed in care at an older age ▶ Had a carer who had been fostering for a relatively shorter period of time (except for those in relative care) ▶ Was deemed to have a closer relationship with the respondent carer 	<p>Was more likely where a young person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Was in a relative care placement (borderline statistical significance) ▶ Had been placed with a birth sibling ▶ Was male ▶ Had a higher number of previous care placements ▶ Lived in an urban geographical location ▶ Had a female carer who had completed a primary or second level of education 	n/a

Summary of results in relation to young people's positive experiences of long term foster care (continued)

	<i>Very important (statistically significant)</i>	<i>Important (trend)</i>	<i>Not important (no trend)</i>
Influences on whether young people scored 'high' on friendships/participation summary measure		<p>Was more likely where a young person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Had been in care for a relatively longer period of time ▶ Had been placed with a birth sibling ▶ Had a higher number of prior care placements ▶ Had other young people in the foster care household ▶ Had been deemed to have a close relationship with the respondent carer ▶ Had a carer who had been fostering for a relatively shorter length of time ▶ Had a carer who was relatively younger 	<p>There was no relationship with the following Young</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Number of years with current carer ▶ Age first placed into care ▶ Previous care placements ▶ Relative care ▶ Gender

Table 7.4: Statistically significant results to support findings on young people's positive experiences

	<i>Independent variable</i>	<i>Chi-square result</i>	<i>Correlation co-efficient</i>
<i>Positive educational and schooling experiences</i>	Placed with a birth sibling in the same foster family	$\chi^2 = 6.299$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.05$	$\rho = 0.166$, $N = 196$, $p = 0.020$, two tailed
	Relative care placements	$\chi^2 = 6.969$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.05$	$\rho = 0.174$, $N = 203$, $p = 0.013$, two tailed
	Educational attainment of female carers	$\chi^2 = 11.482$, $df = 4$, $p < 0.05$	$\rho = 0.021$, $N = 182$, $p = 0.777$, two tailed Not significant
<i>Positive social support through contact with birth family</i>	Duration in care	$\chi^2 = 23.883$, $df = 4$, $p < 0.0005$	$\rho = -0.416$, $N = 130$, $p = 0.0005$, two tailed
	(Non-relative care placements only)	$\chi^2 = 20.386$, $df = 4$, $p < 0.0005$	
	Length of time carer had been fostering (Non-relative care placements only)	$\chi^2 = 13.889$, $df = 4$, $p < 0.01$ $\chi^2 = 13.057$, $df = 4$, $p < 0.0005$	$\rho = -0.320$, $N = 129$, $p = 0.0005$, two tailed
	Rating of closeness of relationship between respondent carer and young person	$\chi^2 = 12.487$, $df = 4$, $p < 0.05$	$\rho = 0.260$, $N = 128$, $p = 0.003$, two tailed
	Relative/non-relative care	$\chi^2 = 5.573$, $df = 2$, $p > 0.05$ Borderline statistical significance	N/a
<i>Positive educational and schooling experiences</i>	Social support from friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities	$\chi^2 = 10.627$, $df = 4$, $p < 0.05$	$\rho = 0.192$, $N = 205$, $p = 0.006$, two tailed

Chapter 8

Main Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter sets out to highlight the main conclusions from the results presented in this research report. This information will form the basis of the recommendations that follow regarding both policy and practice in areas that affect the lives of young people in long term foster care in Ireland. The overall aim of this chapter is to summarise the information gathered concerning aspects of the daily lives of the group of young people in the study and to suggest ways in which their day to day experiences may be enhanced. In some cases, the recommendations identify concrete steps that could be taken by policy makers and practitioners. In other instances, they aim to raise awareness about certain issues that have been identified and discussed here in relation to the educational and social support experiences of the young people in this study.¹⁷²

Education and schooling

Young people's school attendance

Regular school attendance

The vast majority of young people, 98.0% (201), were deemed by foster carers to attend school on a regular basis throughout the school year 2001/2. Very few young people, 6.3% (13), were reported to have 'mitched' from school during the year, and where this happened it tended to be of a short term nature. Where young people had been absent from school for a continuous period of one week or more – 16.6% (34) of young people in total – this appeared to be largely due to illness.

Type of school attended

Young people were most likely to be attending a mainstream school, 93.7% (192). Just over one out of 20 young people attended a special school, 6.3% (13). The number of young people in the study attending primary and post-primary schools was fairly evenly balanced – 47.9% (92) and 52.1% (100) respectively.¹⁷³ The majority of young people in this study were either in sixth class in primary school (35.6%) or first year in post-primary schools (42.9%).

Young people's behaviour at school

Over the school year as a whole, school behaviour was reported by foster carers to be 'good' or 'very good' for almost 9 out of 10 young people. The following instances of poor behaviour at school were reported during the school year:

- ▶ Where foster carers had been contacted by the school about the young person's behaviour, 32.3% (62)
- ▶ Where young people in mainstream schools had been in 'detention' (after school), 18.0% (34)

- ▶ Where young people in mainstream schools had been suspended, 6.3% (12).

However, in general, behaviour at school did not emerge as a serious issue in relation to the education of the majority of young people in the study. In addition, young people's behaviour at school tended to correspond with their behaviour at home – where school behaviour was 'very good', behaviour at home was likely to be rated 'very good' also.

Young people's educational progress

Academic school subjects

Young people were most likely to be making 'good' progress in their academic school subjects. However, almost one out of five young people had their progress rated as 'low'.¹⁷⁴ The subjects that most young people were most likely to be reportedly doing well in were traditionally non-academic subjects: sport/physical education, art and computers. Irish and Maths were identified as the subjects that young people were least likely to be performing well in.

Type of educational provision

Almost 5 out of 10 young people were receiving some form of specialist educational provision. One third of young people, 33.7% (69), had received remedial education in at least one subject. In addition, a further 14.1% (29) of young people were either in a special class or attended a special school. Therefore, a total of 47.8% (98) of young people had educational needs above and beyond those that could be responded to through 'normal' day to day schooling.

Young people were significantly more likely to have received specialist educational provision where they were making relatively **poor progress in their academic school subjects**. Of some note was the finding that young people who were **first placed in care at a relatively older age** were significantly more likely to have had some form of specialist educational provision in the school year. Therefore, this finding indicates that young people first placed in care at an earlier age were more likely to follow a path of 'normal' day to day schooling provision. In addition, trends emerged whereby young people who received specialist educational provision were more likely to be male, were aged slightly younger (12 to 13 years old), had been with their current foster carer and in care overall for a relatively shorter period of time or their carer had a primary level of educational attainment – but none of these factors were statistically significant.¹⁷⁵

172 | Where the term 'young people' is used in relation to the main results noted in this chapter, it refers to the group of 205 young people aged 13 to 14 years who were included in this study.

173 | These percentages are based on the 192 young people attending mainstream school.

174 | Carers were asked to answer questions on educational progress based on feedback they had been given by the school in the form of school reports, meetings with teachers etc.

175 | Although the trends were not statistically significant, they are noted here because they are based on differences in the percentage results, which emerged from the analysis. Therefore, it was deemed relevant to identify the factors that produced such differences in the results as these could contribute to a better understanding of aspects of young people's day to day lives.

Diagnosed special needs

Over one third of young people, 36.1% (74), were reported to have a *diagnosed* special need.¹⁷⁶ This was most likely to be attributed to a learning difficulty or a below average IQ. Young people in first level education in this study were found to be more likely to have special needs, 48.2%, compared to young people in the same age group in first level education in the wider population, estimated at 10.4%.¹⁷⁷

Young people's experience of bullying at school

Just under one half of young people, 45.8% (93), were reported to have experienced some form of school bullying throughout the school year, which is far higher than the estimate for the national student population. Emotional forms of bullying at school were deemed the most common (e.g. being called names or teased), followed by physical and psychological forms of bullying (e.g. being excluded by other young people). Foster carers reported that school bullying was related to the young person's foster care status in 1 out of 4 school bullying cases.

Young people were found to be at a higher risk of school bullying not only under certain schooling circumstances but also given particular placement conditions. School bullying was significantly more likely to be reported for young people who had received **specialist educational provision**, had a **diagnosed special need**, who were **poorly behaved at school** or who had made relatively **poor academic progress** in the school year. In relation to young people's foster care placements, a **higher number of previous care placements** was found to increase the risk of school bullying significantly, as did **not being placed with a birth sibling**. Based on these results, keeping the number of care placements to a minimum and placing young people with a birth sibling in the same foster care household (where possible) could be seen as two potentially protective placement factors in relation to school bullying. Young people in relative care were also found to be less likely to have been reportedly bullied at school (not significant).

Change of school

At the start of the current foster care placement

Of those young people who were school going age when first placed with their current carer, 68.0% (83) had changed school at the start of their current foster care placement. Being in **relative foster care** was found to make changing school at the start of foster care placements significantly less likely for young people.

During the current foster care placement

Just over 1 out of 10 young people had changed school during their current placement (excluding the natural transition from primary to post-primary school).

Positive experience of education and schooling

A summary index of young people's educational and schooling experiences was created.¹⁷⁸ Almost one quarter of young people, 22.9% (47), scored highly on the summary index, that is they met all four criteria and were therefore categorised as having positive educational experiences. Young people who were most likely to be deemed to have had some desirable educational experiences, 54.6% (112) – met two or three of the relevant criteria. This single measure was used in further analysis carried out to identify factors that were related to positive educational and schooling experiences. Certain aspects of foster care placements were found to be more conducive to young people having a positive experience of education and schooling. Young people who were **placed with a birth sibling**, were in **relative foster care placements** or whose **female carer had completed a second level of education** were all significantly more likely to have scored highly on the summary index. In addition, trends emerged where young people were more likely to have had a positive experience of education and schooling when they had been in care for a relatively long period of time, had fewer care placements, were with other young people in the foster care household, were female and had not changed school during the current foster care placement (not significant).

Contact with birth family

Results on young people's contact with their birth family referred to four birth family member categories: birth mother, birth father, siblings and extended family.

Likelihood of face to face contact in the previous six months/year

Out of the four birth family member categories, young people were most likely to have seen their siblings – 82.6% (147), and birth mother – 71.9% (123), in the previous six months. They were least likely to have seen their birth father in this time – 50.4% (70).¹⁷⁹ Young people were most likely to have seen two or three of the four birth family member categories in the previous six months. However, 1 out of 10 young people had seen no birth family members at all in this time. Where young people had not seen a particular birth family member category in the short term (the previous six months), they were highly unlikely to do so in the medium term (the last year). The main reasons for lack of contact given were that it had diminished over time or that it had never been established in the first place.

The **length of time that young people had been in care** was a key factor in terms of whether young people had seen birth family members in the previous six months or not. Young people were significantly more likely to have seen their birth mother, siblings and extended family in the previous six months where they had been with their

176 | It is acknowledged that the method for such a diagnosis is likely to vary depending on the professional involved.

177 | This percentage is based on figures taken from Table 1.2 in the Statistical Report 2001/2 (Section I: An Overview of Educational Statistics), Government of Ireland, 2003, p.5.

178 | This summary index consisted of four criteria: 'normal' day to day schooling provision, good progress in academic subjects, absence of school bullying and no contact by the school about poor behaviour. These criteria were deemed to be more conducive to creating conditions in which young people could perform well at school and were more likely to enjoy the experience.

179 | The result for contact with birth fathers is based on all young people whose birth father is alive and/or known about by the foster carer.

current foster carer or in care overall for a relatively short period of time, or similarly where they had first been placed in care at a relatively late age. Therefore, the likelihood of face to face contact diminished over the length of time in care. Another important aspect of foster care placements that was conducive to young people having seen their birth mother and extended family in the previous six months was if they were in a **relative care placement** (significant).¹⁸⁰ A shorter length of time in care and being placed with a relative carer were also both significantly related to young people seeing members from a higher number of birth family member categories in the previous six months. In addition, there was a trend where if young people had been **placed with a birth sibling** in the same foster care household, they were more likely to have seen their birth mother and extended family members in the previous six months.

Frequency of face to face contact in the previous six months

The majority of young people who had seen birth family members in the previous six months had fairly regular contact with them (usually weekly or monthly), especially with their siblings – 80.8% (118), and birth mother – 80.4% (99).¹⁸¹ However, a significant minority of young people had irregular contact (only seen once in the previous six months) with birth family members – ranging from a low of 19.2% (28) recorded for siblings to a high of 38.5% (40) for extended family members. Almost one third of young people had irregular face to face contact with their birth father – 29.9% (20).

Similarly to the results for the likelihood of face to face contact in the previous six months, the significant factors related to the frequency of such contact with birth family members were the **length of time in care, age first placed in care** and **relative/non relative care placement**. Regular contact with birth family members was significantly more likely where young people had been in their current care placements or in care overall for a shorter period of time, were relatively older when first placed in care or had been placed with relative carers.¹⁸² As young people spent a longer period of time in care, they were significantly less likely to have regular contact with birth family members. In addition, being **placed with a birth sibling** emerged again as a factor worthy of note. There was a trend whereby young people who were placed with a birth sibling in the same foster care household were more likely to have had regular contact with each of the four birth family member categories.

Other forms of contact between young people and birth family members

Young people were most likely to have had other forms of contact (in addition to face to face contact) with their birth mother – 46.1% (76), and siblings – 45.0% (77). The telephone was the most

common means of other contact. Those young people who had not seen any birth family members in the previous six months were highly unlikely to have had contact in other ways with them either, just four out of twenty-one young people.

Beneficial nature of contact with birth family

In general, contact with birth family was most likely to be viewed as positive for young people by foster carers. Almost 6 out of 10 young people were deemed by foster carers to benefit from the contact they had with birth family members. However, 16.4% (29) of carers expressed uncertainty over the beneficial nature of contact giving a ‘yes and no’ response or else saying that it depended on who the individual birth family member was.

Positive social support through contact with birth family

A summary measure for positive social support through contact with birth family was created.¹⁸³ Over one half of young people, 52.3% (68), met both criteria for the summary measure and were therefore deemed to gain a high level of social support from their contact with birth family members. Again, the **length of time in care** was a significant factor. Young people who had been in care for a shorter period of time were significantly more likely to have gained positive social support through contact with birth family. In addition, two other factors that were related to the foster carer(s) themselves emerged as being significant: young people being looked after by **carer(s) who had been fostering for a shorter period of time** were significantly more likely to have positive social support through contact with birth family; and the same result was found where young people were deemed to have a **closer relationship with their foster carer**. In addition, trends emerged whereby young people were more likely to have gained positive social support through contact with birth family where they were in **relative care placements** (of borderline statistical significance), had been **placed with a birth sibling**, had a **higher number of previous care placements**, lived in **urban areas**, had a **female carer who attained a primary or second level of education** or where young people were **male**.

Friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities

Friendships

Regular group of friends

The majority of young people, 92.2% (188), had a regular group of friends whom they saw most days, typically from school and the local neighbourhood.

180 | Being in a relative care placement was of borderline statistical significance for having seen siblings in the last six months. In relation to birth fathers, the same trend applied but the result was not significant.

181 | Regular contact is defined as being at least every 2/3 months in the last six month period.

182 | These factors tended to show up as being statistically significant for one or two of the four birth family members. However, trends for the remaining birth family members showed the same patterns in the results.

183 | This was based on two criteria: where young people had regular face to face contact with two or more of the birth family member categories and where such contact was deemed to be beneficial for them.

Change in friendships over time

Of those young people who had a regular group of friends, 5 out of 10 young people had the same friends now compared to one year previously, while a further 3 out of 10 had some different friends at the time of interview.

Close friendships

Over three quarters of young people, 76.9% (153), had one best friend (or more than one), usually from school or the local neighbourhood.

Summary index of friendships

The above three aspects – **regular group of friends, change in friendships over time** and **close friendships** – were combined into a single measure of young people’s friendships. Overall, 38.0% (78) of young people met all three criteria and were deemed to have favourable friendship networks that appeared likely to be a good source of social support. Certain aspects of young people’s educational experiences were found to be of significance in relation to young people’s friendship networks. Young people were significantly more likely to score highly on the summary index of friendships where they **did not experience school bullying, did not have special needs, made good academic progress** and were reportedly **well behaved** (at home as well as at school). Another aspect of young people’s schooling, **type of educational provision**, was significant but not in a consistent way.¹⁸⁴ Also, being **placed with a birth sibling** was a significant factor where young people were more likely to score highly on the summary index of friendship. Being **placed with other young people in the foster care household** had a similar result but was not significant.

Beneficial nature of friendships

Friendships were deemed to be beneficial for the vast majority of young people, 90.4% (160).

Participation in hobbies/leisure activities

How young people spent their spare time

Most young people spent their spare time either in or around the home, 39.2% (78), or equally between the home and local neighbourhood, 39.2% (78).

Participation in hobbies/leisure activities

The nature of young people’s participation in hobbies/leisure activities at home, school (outside normal school hours) and in the local neighbourhood was explored. Nine out of ten young people had a hobby based at home. The most popular activities were music, Playstation/computer and reading. Just over 7 out of 10 young people took part in an activity in the local neighbourhood, which was most likely to be a sport. Finally, 6 out of 10 young people participated in a school based activity, again usually involving sport.

A summary measure of the level of young people’s participation in hobbies/leisure activities was compiled based on whether they took part in such activities in the three areas explored: **at home, school** and **in the local neighbourhood**. Just over 4 out of 10 young people took part in activities in all three locations and were deemed to have a high level of participation in hobbies/leisure activities, for the purpose of this analysis. Friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities were related. Young people who scored **high on the summary friendship index** were more likely to have a **high level of participation in hobbies/leisure activities** (of borderline statistical significance). Trends also emerged where a **high level of participation in hobbies/leisure activities** was also more likely where young people lived in **rural** areas, were **younger** (12 to 13 years) and in **non-relative care placements** (not significant).

Shared activity with carer(s)

Carers reported that 4 out of 10 young people participated in a leisure activity/hobby along with them. This tended to be a sport or outdoor activity.

Part-time jobs

Just 15.1% (31) of young people had a part-time job, babysitting being the most common.

Beneficial nature of hobbies/leisure activities

Not surprisingly, participation in hobbies/leisure activities was deemed to be beneficial for 89.9% (169) of young people.

Positive social support from friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities

Combining some aspects of young people’s friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities, a single measure was created which indicated the level of social support young people were deemed to gain from their friendships and such participation.¹⁸⁵ Overall, 34.6% (71) of young people were categorised as having a high level of social support through these means. When carrying out further analysis to see if there were any significant factors in relation to this summary measure, none were found. However, trends were established whereby young people were more likely to have high social support from their friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities where they had spent **longer in care, been placed with a birth sibling, had fewer previous care placements**, there were **other young people in the foster care household**, were viewed as having a **close relationship with the carer(s)**, the **carer had been fostering for a shorter period of time** and the **carer was relatively young**.

Key themes to emerge from this research study

Certain themes have emerged from the main set of conclusions presented above. Particular aspects

184 | The results showed that young people who received specialist educational provision were significantly more likely to have scored both high and low on the summary index of friendship compared to those who did not have such educational provision.

185 | This consisted of four criteria: having a regular group of friends, having at least one best friend, taking part in a leisure activity in the local neighbourhood, and being involved in a school based activity.

have continually been reported to be significant factors in relation to young people's educational and social support experiences. These aspects include relative care placements, being placed with a birth sibling and the length of time in care. In addition, the link between educational experiences and friendships/participation in leisure activities will be discussed here.

Key theme 1: Potential role of relative foster care placements

Almost one quarter of all young people, 24.9% (51), were in relative foster care placements. One of the key messages to come out of this study is the different foster care experiences that young people may have depending on whether they are in a relative or non-relative foster care placement, especially with regard to their education and contact with birth family members. Young people in relative care have been found to be:

- ▶ Significantly less likely to experience the disruption of changing school when first placed in their current foster care placement
- ▶ Significantly more likely to have a higher level of contact with birth family members – in terms of having more regular contact and seeing a greater number of birth family member categories in the previous six months.

In relation to the results on positive educational and social support experiences, again differences emerged for young people in relative and non-relative care placements. Based on the criteria selected, young people in relative care were deemed to be significantly more likely to have a positive experience of education and schooling compared to young people in non-relative care placements. A positive educational and schooling experience consisted of young people receiving 'normal' day to day educational provision only, making good academic progress, *not* being bullied and foster carers not being contacted by the school about their behaviour. In addition, young people in relative care were more likely to be deemed to have gained positive social support through contact with birth family (of borderline statistical significance), and therefore, they were more likely to experience contact with birth family that was both consistent and beneficial in nature.

In some instances, some of the results in this study were found to differ for young people in relative and non-relative care placements, especially in relation to the positive nature of contact with birth family. It has already been noted here that young people were significantly more likely to have received positive social support through contact with birth family under two conditions: where they had been in care for a shorter period of time; and, where their carer(s) had been fostering for a relatively shorter period of time. However, when these two findings were broken down further by relative/non-relative placement, the results differed. Young people in relative care were deemed to gain positive social support from contact with birth family over a longer period of time into their placement compared to

those in non-relative care. Also, the length of time that relative foster carers had been fostering did not have such an impact on whether young people in relative care were deemed to gain positive social support through contact with birth family or not, this was a more important factor for those in non-relative care. Therefore, for those young people in relative care placements, the positive nature of contact with birth family was more likely to exist regardless of the length of time that relative carers had been fostering.

It is not being claimed here that relative care placements automatically guarantee positive educational and schooling experiences and greater social support from contact with birth family. However, based on some of the results, being in a relative foster care placement was found to have several potentially positive implications for certain aspects of young people's day to day lives.

Key theme 2: Potentially protective nature of being placed with a birth sibling

Almost one half of all young people, 48.3% (99), had been placed with a sibling from their birth family in their current foster care placement. Being placed with a birth sibling in the same foster care household was found to have a potentially protective function for young people in long term foster care. Young people placed with a birth sibling were:

- ▶ Significantly less likely to have experienced bullying at school
- ▶ Significantly more likely to have gained good social support from their friendships
- ▶ Significantly less likely to have a low level of participation in hobbies and leisure activities
- ▶ More likely to have had regular contact with family members from all four birth family member categories in the previous six months (trend).

Therefore, being placed with a birth sibling in long term foster care made a number of potentially negative aspects of education and schooling less likely. In addition, young people fostered with a birth sibling were more likely to gain positive social support from both their friendships and contact with birth family.

Key theme 3: Implications of length of time spent in foster care

The young people in this study were all in *long term* foster care (defined here as more than one year). It could be said that a substantial number of young people had very long care histories considering their age. On average, young people had been in their current foster care placement for 7.9 years. More than 4 out of 10 young people had been in care for more than ten years.

It is clear from the results in this study that the length of time spent in care is associated with a particular set of experiences for young people in

their every day education and also has implications for their social supports. In relation to young people's schooling, those who were in care for a longer period of time were less likely to have received specialist educational provision (trend) and more likely to have a positive educational experience (trend). In relation to contact with birth family, such contact was less likely to be maintained at a high level overtime as young people spent longer in their current foster care placement and in care overall (significant). The likelihood of seeing individual birth family members, having regular ongoing contact and seeing a greater number of birth family member categories all decreased over the length of time in care. In addition, young people were significantly less likely to have positive social support through contact with birth family the longer they spent in their current placement and in care overall (except for those in relative foster care placements). This

could have potential implications for young people's social supports as they continue through their care placement. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that young people's experience of long term foster care can vary according to the length of time they have spent in the care of the State.

Key theme 4: Link between educational experiences and social support from friendships/participation in leisure activities

Young people who were deemed to gain a high level of social support from their friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities (made up of having regular friends, a best friend and taking part in a leisure activity both in school and the local neighbourhood), were significantly more likely to have a positive experience of education and schooling. Therefore, this finding shows how these two aspects of young people's lives interact and how they may be related in positive ways.

Summary of main results

Education and schooling

Young people's school attendance

- ▶ Largely deemed by carers to be on a *regular* basis
- ▶ Most young people went to mainstream schools

School behaviour

- ▶ Tended to be good overall with some instances of poor behaviour most commonly indicated by contact between the school and foster carer

Academic progress

- ▶ Majority of young people were making good progress in their school subjects
- ▶ 5 out of 10 young people received some form of specialist educational provision
- ▶ Young people were more likely to receive specialist educational provision if they were first placed in care at a relatively older age

School bullying

- ▶ Experienced by just over 4 out of 10 young people
- ▶ Young people were at a higher risk where certain educational factors existed (e.g. specialist educational provision) or particular placement conditions (e.g. higher number of care placements, not placed with a birth sibling)

Change of school

- ▶ More likely to happen at the *start* of placements rather than during placements
- ▶ Significantly less likely for young people in relative care placements at the start of the placement

Positive education and schooling experiences

- ▶ Almost one quarter of young people were categorised as having positive educational experiences
- ▶ Were more likely where young people were placed with a birth sibling, in relative foster care placements and where the female carer had attained a second level of education

Contact with birth family

Likelihood of face to face contact with birth family members in the previous six months or year

- ▶ Young people were most likely to have seen siblings or birth mother and least likely to have seen birth father
- ▶ Young people tended to see members from two or three birth family categories (out of four)
- ▶ 1 out of 10 young people had seen *no* birth family members in the previous six months
- ▶ The likelihood of contact decreased the longer that young people were in care

Summary of main results (continued)

Frequency of face to face contact in the previous six months

Where face to face contact took place:

- ▶ It was most likely to be on a regular basis (at least every 2/3 months), although a significant minority had irregular contact (less frequent than every 2/3 months)
- ▶ It became less frequent the longer young people were in care
- ▶ It was more frequent for young people in relative care

Beneficial nature of contact

- ▶ Face to face contact was deemed by foster carers to be beneficial for 6 out of 10 young people

Positive social support through contact with birth family

- ▶ Experienced by over one half of young people where contact was both regular and beneficial
- ▶ Most likely to be experienced by those in care for a shorter period of time, whose carer had been fostering for a shorter period of time and those who had a closer relationship with the foster carer

Friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities

Regular group of friends

- ▶ Majority of young people had a regular group of friends, usually from school or the local area

Changes in friendships over time

- ▶ 5 out of 10 young people had the same friends now compared to one year ago

Close friendships

- ▶ Over three quarters of young people were reported to have a best friend

Summary index of friendships (combination of the above three aspects)

- ▶ Over one third of young people were deemed to have friendship networks which were a good source of social support
- ▶ Friendship networks were categorised as being positive where certain educational circumstances existed (e.g. absence of school bullying, no diagnosed special need, young people did not receive any specialist educational provision and where the young person was making good progress in their academic subjects)

Spare time

- ▶ Tended to be spent either around the home or equally between the home and the local area

Participation in hobbies/leisure activities

- ▶ 9 out of 10 young people had a home-based hobby, 7 out of 10 took part in an activity in the local area and 6 out of 10 participated in a school-based activity (outside normal school hours)
- ▶ Higher level of participation where young people were categorised as having good friendship networks

Shared activity with carer

- ▶ 4 out of 10 young people were reported to share a hobby with their foster carer

Part-time jobs

- ▶ Only 15.1% (31) of young people had a part-time job, which in most cases tended to be babysitting related

Key themes

Potential role of relative foster care placements

Young people in relative care placements were:

- ▶ Less likely to change school when first placed in their current foster care placement
- ▶ More likely to have positive experiences of education and schooling
- ▶ More likely to have a high level of contact with birth family, which was maintained over time

Potentially protective nature of being placed with a birth sibling

Young people who were placed with a birth sibling were:

- ▶ Less likely to have been bullied at school
- ▶ More likely to have gained good social support from friendships and to participate in hobbies/leisure activities

Summary of main results (continued)

Implications of length of time in foster care

Young people who were in care for a longer period of time were:

- ▶ More likely to have a positive educational experience and be receiving ‘normal’ day to day schooling
- ▶ Less likely to have seen birth family members, and for those who did have such contact, it was less likely to be on a regular basis

Link between positive educational experiences and high social support from friendship/participation in hobbies/leisure activities

- ▶ Young people who gained a high level of social support from their friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities were more likely to have a positive experience of education

This study yields much information about the lives of these young people in long term foster care and demonstrates how the young people’s experiences of education and social supports can differ according to particular aspects of their current foster care placement and care history to date. But, if one message is to be taken from this study, it seems to be this: that foster care appears to be making a valuable contribution to the lives of the young people in the study. Many of the young people seem to be doing quite well in key dimensions of their lives – educationally and socially. However, this study presents only a snapshot picture of their lives at the moment. A broadly favourable picture at age 13 to 14 is, of course, no guarantee of how their lives will be at age 17 or 18 years, or 21 and beyond. In research and policy terms, it seems important to track the progress of this cohort of young people as they grow up in the care system and beyond, something this research team hope to secure the support to do.

Main recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of this research study. They concern young people’s educational progress, the prevention of bullying at school, family relations and contact with birth family and the valuable roles of both friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities.

Educational progress of young people in long term foster care

Recommendation 1: Individualised educational plans for young people in long term foster care

There is a need to recognise the high level of special educational needs that may be found in the population of young people in foster care, particularly amongst those who are first placed in care at a relatively older age. Almost one half of all the young people in this research study had received either remedial education or had been in a special class or attended a special school, at some time in the school year. Young people who were first placed in care aged 9 to 13 years were significantly more likely to have received such specialist educational provision. In addition, young people aged 13 to 14 years in first level

education in this study had a higher tendency to have special needs compared to young people in the same age range in the wider population.

Based on the findings in this study, it is recommended that an educational plan for each individual young person in foster care is developed in conjunction with schools. An individualised plan should take account of each young person’s particular circumstances as well as aiming to address their specific educational needs. This recommendation is in accordance with the National Standards for foster care, one of which focuses on education specifically and recommends that ‘children’s educational needs and progress are considered and recorded in assessments, care plans and reviews.’¹⁸⁶ Therefore, this study shows the importance of ensuring that this Standard is strictly adhered to. In addition, the content of such plans should be regularly reviewed and updated as a child/young person progresses through the educational system to ensure that young people receive the appropriate educational supports.

Recommendation 2: Minimise the number of placement changes

There is a need to acknowledge the disruptive impact that changing placements can have on the education of young people in long term foster care. Seven out of ten young people in this study had changed school at the *start* of their current foster care placement, particularly where they were in non-relative foster care placements. A change of school can have negative implications for educational progress, as well as other undesirable effects, such as undermining the continuity of friendships. This was seen in this study where young people were less likely to be categorised as having a positive educational experience (as defined here) where they had a higher number of care placements (trend). Therefore, there is a need to plan to minimise the number of placement changes so that young people are less likely to change school and experience the potentially negative implications of doing so.

186 | Department of Health and Children (2003) *National Standards for Foster Care*, Dublin, The Stationery Office, p.27

Recommendation 3: Information for teachers and schools concerning the educational experiences and needs of young people in long term foster care

Young people in long term foster care have been found to be at a higher risk of school bullying. In addition, almost one half of young people in the study had received some form of specialist educational provision. Therefore, there is a need to offer specific guidance and information to teachers on the circumstances, potential vulnerabilities and additional requirements of children in long term foster care. This is particularly important for teachers as they are likely to come into direct contact with young people in long term foster care at some time.

Recommendation 4: Provision of information and training on young people's educational needs to those responsible for their welfare and day to day care

In addition to providing information to young people's schools and teachers about the potentially greater educational needs experienced by young people in long term foster care, there is a need to provide training to those responsible for their welfare, as well as those who care for them on a daily basis. Information and training on the greater educational needs of young people in long term foster care, as well as considering the possible ways to adequately deal with these needs, should be provided to social workers and foster carers.

Prevention of school bullying

Recommendation 5: Awareness and training on preventative strategies in relation to school bullying

Young people in long term foster care appear to be at a comparatively higher risk of school bullying than young people in the wider population – more than 4 out of 10 young people were reportedly bullied at school at some point during the school year. Such bullying may be related to their general vulnerability in many cases or to their care status in particular. Young people in the study were found to be at a significantly higher risk of bullying where they had experienced a higher number of care placements and where they were not placed with a birth sibling. In light of this, it is important that foster carers, teachers and social workers are sensitised to this risk and trained in effective methods for preventative strategies for use with the young people themselves and with their social groupings.

Family relations and contact for children in long term foster care

Recommendation 6: Aim to place young people in care with birth siblings where possible

Where appropriate, there is a need to plan to place siblings together, given the apparently positive aspects of such joint placements. Being placed with birth siblings was found to be beneficial for young people in relation to the absence of school bullying and positive experiences of education and

schooling overall. Where this is not possible, extra efforts need to be made to maintain strong relationships between siblings.

Recommendation 7: Promote the maintenance of birth family relationships in long term foster care placements

There is a need to promote family relationships for all young people in long term foster care, *where this is deemed desirable*, since contact with birth family appears to be largely beneficial for young people in care (as reported by foster carers). It needs to be recognised that even where young people have experienced very long term foster care placements, contact with birth family members continues for a substantial number of them. However, there needs to be a renewed emphasis on the maintenance of such contact over time as the level of contact with birth family members was found to diminish the longer that young people had been in their current care placement or in care overall. Contact with birth family has a role to play in acting as a valuable source of social support to young people in long term foster care.

Recommendation 8: Additional supports for young people who have had no contact with birth family members

One out of ten young people in this study was reported to have had no contact with any birth family members in the previous six months. Additional efforts may be required to ensure that these young people are receiving adequate levels of social support from other sources. The potentially greater social support needs of this group should be acknowledged and responded to.

Valuable roles of good friendship networks and participation in hobbies/leisure activities

Recommendation 9: Acknowledge the potential value of both good friendship networks and active participation in hobbies/leisure activities for young people's educational and schooling experiences

The nature of young people's friendship networks and the extent of their participation in hobbies/leisure activities outside the home were found to be beneficial for certain aspects of their education and schooling. In relation to friendships, an absence of school bullying, good academic progress and good ratings of behaviour were significantly associated with good friendship networks. In addition, this research study found that young people were significantly more likely to have been deemed to have a positive experience of education and schooling where they gained a high level of social support from their friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities. The potentially valuable contribution of friendships and participation in activities to young people's educational experiences needs to be acknowledged by schools, social workers and foster carers.

Recommendation 10: Acknowledge the potentially positive influence of birth siblings and other young people in the foster care household on the nature of friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities when making placement decisions

This research study found that young people were more likely to have good friendship networks where they were placed with a birth sibling (significant) or where there were other young people in the foster care household (trend). In addition, *not* being placed with a birth sibling and *not* having other young people in the foster care household were associated with a low level of participation in hobbies/leisure activities (both significant). Therefore, these results may have implications when making placement decisions. Living with other young people in the foster care household, whether they are birth siblings or not, potentially has a valuable role to play in young people's friendships as well as their active participation in hobbies/leisure activities.

Areas for further research

Recommendation 11: Further research on the educational progress of young people in long term foster care

Further research on the educational progress of young people in long term foster care is advocated. This study represents a start in finding out more about certain aspects of the lives of young people in long term foster care but there are still many questions to be answered. There is no information on young people's actual educational attainment. Repeating this study for the same group of young people to record their Junior and Leaving Certificate results would provide more concrete information which could also be used for comparative purposes.

Recommendation 12: Further exploration of the protective aspects of young people's foster care placements in terms of educational experiences

Certain aspects of young people's foster care placements have been found to be beneficial in relation to young people's educational experiences. As already noted above, young people were found to be at lesser risk of school bullying where they had a lower number of care placements or were placed with a birth sibling (both significant). In addition, young people were deemed to have a more positive experience of education and schooling where they had been placed with a birth sibling (significant), were in a relative care placement (significant) or had spent a longer period of time in care (trend). These findings are worthy of further research in terms of how young people's educational experiences can vary under different care conditions.

Recommendation 13: Further research on changes in contact with birth family over time

The level of contact that young people had with birth family members was found to decline the longer they were in their current foster care placement and in care overall. Given the largely positive endorsement of family contact in this study, the reasons for this trend are worthy of further exploration. In particular, the reasons why young people in relative care placements are less likely to experience such a decline in contact with birth family overtime, compared to those in non-relative care placements, would be interesting to consider.

Recommendation 14: Further research on young people's own experiences of care

Young people in long term foster care should be given the opportunity to tell their own stories about their experiences of education and social supports, particularly in relation to some of the issues highlighted in this report including school bullying, educational needs and contact with birth family.

Summary of main recommendations

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Relevant actor(s)</i>
Recommendation 1: Individualised educational plans for young people in long term foster care	Schools, Health Service Executive, foster carers
Recommendation 2: Minimise the number of placement changes	Health Service Executive
Recommendation 3: Information for teachers and schools concerning the educational experiences and needs of young people in long term foster care	Schools and teachers
Recommendation 4: Provision of information and training on young people's educational needs to those responsible for their welfare and day to day care	Health Service Executive, foster carers
Recommendation 5: Awareness and training on preventative strategies in relation to school bullying	Schools, foster carers
Recommendation 6: Aim to place young people in care with birth siblings where possible	Health Service Executive
Recommendation 7: Promote the maintenance of birth family relationships in long term foster care placements (where these are judged to be beneficial)	Health Service Executive, foster carers
Recommendation 8: Additional supports for young people who have had no contact with birth family members	Health Service Executive
Recommendation 9: Acknowledge the potential value of both good friendship networks and active participation in hobbies/leisure activities for young people's educational and schooling experiences	Schools, foster carers
Recommendation 10: Acknowledge the positive influence of birth siblings and other young people in the foster care placement on the nature of friendships and participation in hobbies/leisure activities when making placement decisions	Health Service Executive
Recommendation 11: Further research on the educational progress of young people in long term foster care	Research funding agencies, Government departments
Recommendation 12: Further exploration of the protective aspects of young people's foster care placements	Research funding agencies, Government departments
Recommendation 13: Further research on changes in contact with birth family over time	Research funding agencies, Government departments
Recommendation 14: Further research on young people's own experiences of care	Research funding agencies, Government departments

This research study has attempted to provide a better understanding of the daily lives of young people aged 13 to 14 years in long term foster care, with a particular focus on their education and schooling and aspects of their social supports. The insights provided in this report have painted a fairly positive picture of how this group of young people are progressing in their daily lives, while certain issues do warrant further exploration, especially greater vulnerability to school bullying and higher educational need. It could be argued

that the group of young people in this study are a relatively privileged group of young people in the care system as the majority of them are in very long term foster care placements, which are stable. Notably, many of the foster carers interviewed for this study commented that the young person was 'just like one of the family'. It would be interesting to see how this group of young people progress throughout their education and further still into their adult lives.

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Appendix 1

Questionnaire Used in Interviews with Foster Carers

SURVEY OF FOSTER CARERS

THE EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL SUPPORT EXPERIENCES OF CHILDREN IN LONG TERM FOSTER CARE

INTRODUCTION TO SURVEY

- ▶ Thank you for agreeing to take part in the research study on children aged 13-14 in long-term foster care.
- ▶ As you know, the focus of the study is on the child's schooling and their social supports, in particular, contact with their birth family, friendships and hobbies/leisure activities.
- ▶ Any information you give over the phone will be kept strictly confidential. The information will be stored safely in the office of the Children's Research Centre. No names of carers or children will be printed in the final report.
- ▶ There are four main sections in the interview:
 1. *Your foster child's schooling*
 2. *Contact with their birth family*
 3. *Their friendships and leisure activities*
 4. *Some general questions on their time in care and background questions on the household.*
- ▶ The interview will take about one hour. If you have any additional comments to make about a question, I would ask you to wait until the end of the relevant section. This means that the interview will take up the least amount of your time as possible. Is that ok?
- ▶ Before we start, do you have any questions you would like to ask me?
- ▶ OK, we'll start – Firstly, can you tell me the first name of your foster child

▶ How old is he/she? _____

INFORMATION ON RESPONDENT / INTERVIEWER

ID Number: _____

Male carer _____ or Female carer _____

Date of interview: _____

Time of interview: _____

Duration of interview: _____

Start time: _____ Finish time: _____

Completed interview? Yes / No

If incomplete, time/date of follow up interview: _____

Name of interviewer: _____

SECTION 1: EDUCATION

Part A. School Attendance

The first set of questions on education looks at school attendance in the last school year. Some foster children may not be going to school for various reasons. In relation to x's [name] school attendance.....

Q.1 In the last school year, did x [name] attend school on a regular basis?

Yes No

Q.2 Did he/she miss school for more than one week at any one time in the last school year?

Yes No

Please specify why:

Tick one box only	
	Waiting to find a new school
	Mitching from school
	Suspended or expelled
	Suffering from anxiety
	Sick/fill
	Other (please specify)

Q.3 Why did he/she not attend school regularly? Was he/she ...

Q.4 Did he/she attend school at all during the last school year?

Yes No

Go to Q.28

Q.5a Was the school that he/she attended last year a primary or secondary school?

Primary Secondary

Q.5b Was this school a mainstream or a special type of school?

Tick one box only
Mainstream
Special school (needs)
If special school, please specify what type
Other (please specify)

Q.5c What year was he/she in at school last year? eg. 6th class (primary), 1st year (sec)?

Q.6 Has he/she gone back to the same school as last year?

Yes No, starting secondary school No (specify why opposite)

Q.7a As far as you know, did he/she mitch from school in the last school year?

Yes No

Go to Q.8a

Q.7b Did he/she say why he/she did not want to go to school?

Yes No

If yes, please specify

INTERVIEW NOTES

Part B. Behaviour The next set of questions focus on behaviour at school. Schools normally tell parents about their child's behaviour in different ways, for example parent-teacher evenings, end of term reports, etc.

Tick one Get better Get worse Stay the same Don't know	Q.8b During the last school year, did his/her behaviour at school....	Very Good Good or Not good Other Don't know	Tick one Q.8a Based on what the school has told you, would you say that x's [name] behaviour at school during the last school year was....		
Interviewer note: Ask Q.8c if responded 'get worse' (Q.8b) or 'not good' (Q.8a) above – if neither go to Q.9a					
Q.8c According to the school, has he/she done any of the following...					
Tick the appropriate responses (you may tick more than one)					
Been disruptive in class					
Disobeyed the teacher					
Picked on other children at school					
Other (please specify – behaviour related only)					
Turning back to school, in general a child's behaviour at school may be ok. However, there may be times when they do get into difficulty					
Q.10 Has the school contacted you at all in the last school year about his/her behaviour?					
Yes		No		Don't know	
Can you briefly describe x's behaviour the last time this happened?					
Q.11 Was he/she ever kept back after school as a punishment during the last school year?					
Yes		No		Don't know	
What for?					
Q.12a Was he/she ever suspended during the last school year?					
Yes		No		Don't know	
Why?					
Q.12b Was he/she ever expelled from school in the last school year?					
Yes		No		Don't know	
Why?					

INTERVIEW NOTES

INTERVIEW NOTES

Q.15a Since you have been caring for x [name], has he/she ever repeated a year at school?

Yes No

Not applicable – placement began less than one year ago

Which year at school was repeated (e.g. 6th class, 1st year)?

Why?

Q.15b Did he/she change class at all during the last school year?

Yes No

Interviewer note: e.g. move from a special needs class to a mainstream class or vice versa

Q.15c How many times did he/she change class in the last school year?

Tick one

Once	Three times or more
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Twice	
<input type="checkbox"/>	

Q.15d What was the reason for the change? (If more than one, reason for the most recent change)

Tick one

Doing well with school work	Poor behaviour
Doing poorly with school work	Other
Good behaviour	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	

Interviewer note: Special needs refer to any learning, emotional or behavioural difficulty e.g. dyslexia, anger management

Q.16 As far as you know, has he/she been assessed as having any special needs?

Yes No Don't know

Please specify:

Q.17 Does he/she have a disability?

Yes No

Why not?

Who assessed him/her as having this difficulty

Specify:

Q.18 Does he/she generally enjoy good health?

Yes No

Probably do the LC Applied

Q.19 Do you think that he/she will stay at school to complete the Leaving Cert?

Yes No Don't know

Why not?

Part D. Other Questions on Schooling

The following questions complete the section on education.

Interviewer note:
check if this was a change from primary to secondary school. If yes, tick here

Q.20. When x [name] was first placed with you, did he/she change school?

Yes No Placed prior to reaching school going age

Q.21 In the time since he/she has been placed with you, has he/she changed school? (apart from moving from primary to secondary school)

Yes No

How many different schools has he/she attended while they have been with you?
At primary level?..... OR
At secondary level?.....

What was the main reason(s) for the change?

Interviewer note:
If no to all 3 – go to Q.24
If yes to any of the 3 scenarios, please ask Q. 23b & Q.23c below

Q.22 Do any of the teachers at his/her school know that he/she is in foster care?

Yes No Don't know

Q.23a As far as you know, during the last school year did he/she experience any of the following situations at school?

Called names or teased by other children	Yes / No / Don't know
Left out or excluded by other children	Yes / No / Don't know
Physically pushed around or hit by another child	Yes / No / Don't know
Other similar experience (please specify)	

Interviewer note:
Q.23b Thinking about the last time this happened, who first told you about it? Was it...

Q.23c As far as you know, did it have anything to do with him/her being in foster care?

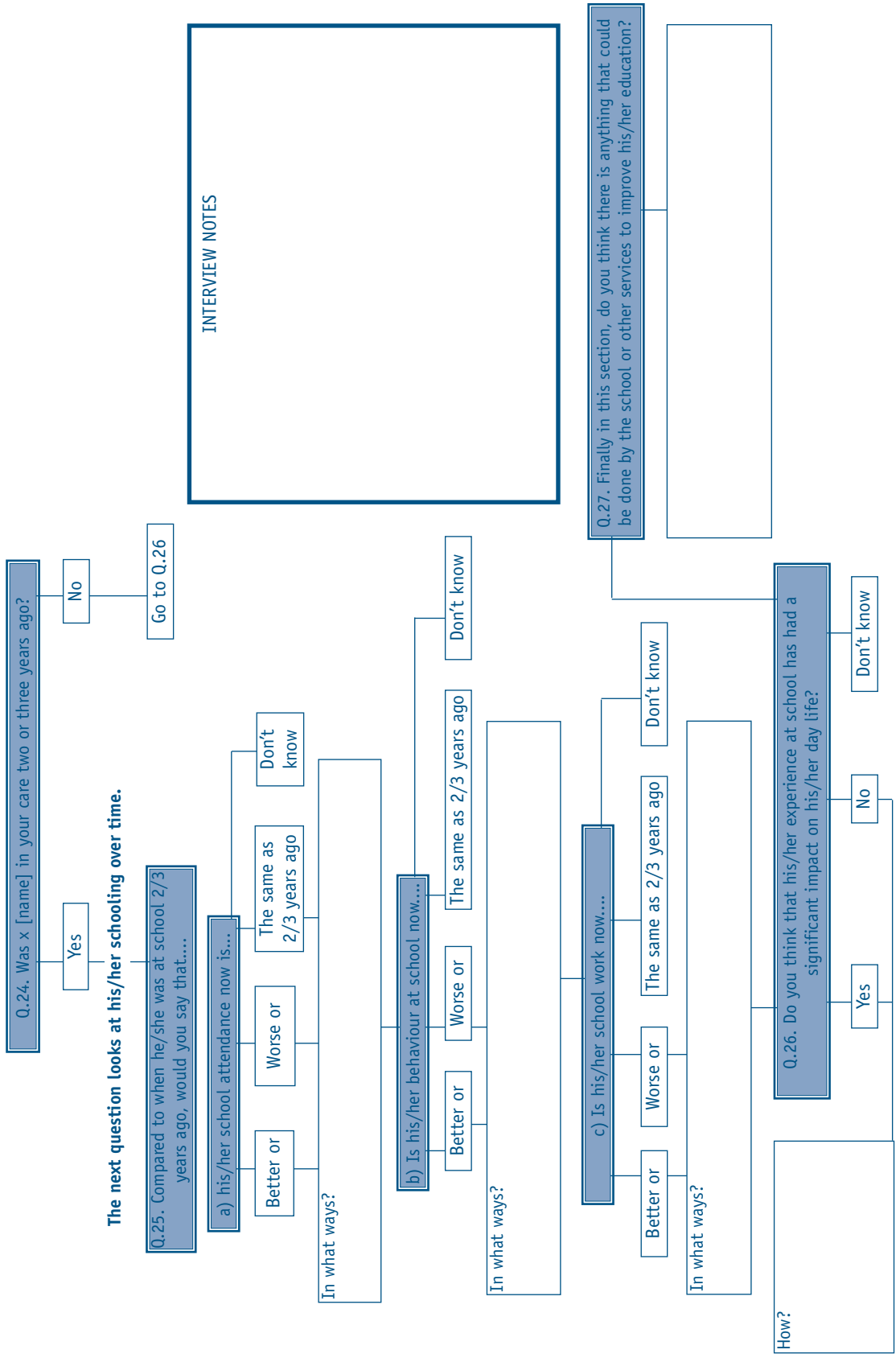
Yes No Don't know

Please say in what way:

Interviewer note:
Please tick one response only

The child himself/herself
Sibling (foster family)
Friend of the child
The teacher/school
Carer asked the child
Other (please specify)

INTERVIEW NOTES



INTERVIEW NOTES

SECTION 2: FAMILY CONTACT
 This section looks at the contact that x [name] has with his/her birth family. One of the aims of the research is to look at the kind of social supports that he/she has.

Q.28 As far as you know, does x's [name] birth family include the following members?

Interviewer note: Please exclude any deceased family members

Tick one response for each family member

a) Mother	Yes / No / Don't know
b) Father	Yes / No / Don't know
c) Brother(s)/Sister(s)	Yes / No / Don't know
d) Grandparents/aunts/uncles or other extended family	Yes / No / Don't know

Q.29 The following questions look at the kind of contact that he/she has had with members of his/her birth family.

a) BIRTH MOTHER

i. Has x seen her in the last 6 months?

Yes No Don't know

ii. How often has x seen her in the last 6 months?

Tick one only

Once a week Every 2 weeks Once a month Every few months Not regular No ongoing contact

iii. Who normally asks for the visit to take place?

The child Birth mother Foster carer Social worker Other

iv. Do you think that x would like to see her....?

More often Less often About the same

v. Has x had contact with her in other ways over the past 6 months, e.g. phone calls, letters, b'day cards?

Yes No DK

vi. In what ways?

a) BIRTH FATHER

i. Has x seen her in the last 6 months?

Yes No Don't know

ii. Has x seen him in the last year?

Yes No Don't know

iii. Do you think that x would like to see him?

More often Less often About the same

iii. Does x ask to see him? Yes No

iv. Has x had contact with him in other ways over the past 6 months, e.g. phone calls, letters, b'day cards?

Yes No DK

v. In what ways?

INTERVIEW NOTES

a) BROTHERS/SISTERS

Interviewer Note: Before asking the main questions, please complete the grid below:

- a) Total number of x's brothers & sisters (include step=brothers/sisters) _____
 b) Are any of his/her sisters fostered with you also? Yes / No
 c) If yes: How many? _____ Brothers _____ Sisters _____ Ages: _____

i. How many brothers/sisters that he/she doesn't live with has he/she seen in the last 6 months?
 ALL Some None Don't know

ii. Is there a particular brother/sister that he/she sees more often?
 Yes No

Who? *brother/sister & younger/older?* _____

iii. How often has x seen this brother/sister in the last 6 months?
 Tick one
 Once a week Every 2 months
 Every 2 weeks Not regular
 Once a month No ongoing contact

Go to Q.v

iv. Who normally asks for the visit to take place?
 The child Parent
 Siblings Other
 Carer

v. Do you think x would like to see his/her siblings?
 More often Less often About the same

vi. Has x had contact with siblings in other ways over the past 6 months, e.g. phone calls, letters
 Yes No DK

iii. Has x seen any of them in the last year?
 Yes No Don't know

Why not?

iii. Does x ask to see any of them?
 Yes No

iii. Do you think that x would like to see any of them...?
 More often Less often About the same

iii. Has x had contact with any of them in other ways over the past 6 months?
 e.g. phone calls, letters
 Yes No DK

vi. In what ways?

v. In what ways?

d) GRANDPARENTS/AUNTS/UNCLES OR OTHER EXTENDED FAMILY

i. Has x seen any of his/her extended family in the last 6 months?
 No Don't know

ii. Is there a particular person that he/she sees more often?
 Yes No

How?

Tick one
 Once a week Every 2 months
 Every 2 weeks Not regular
 Once a month No ongoing contact

Go to Q.v

iv. Who normally asks for the visit to take place?
 The child Parent
 Siblings Other
 Carer

v. Do you think x would like to see and ext'd family?
 More often Less often About the same

vi. Has x had contact with any extended family in other ways over the past 6 months, e.g. phone calls, letter
 Yes No DK

vi. In what ways?

iii. Does x ask to see any members of his/her extended family?
 Yes No

Why not?

iii. Do you think that x would like to see them...?
 More often Less often About the same

iii. Has x had contact with any extended family in other ways over the past 6 months?
 e.g. phone calls letters
 Yes No DK

vi. In what ways?

Q. 30 do you think that x's contact with his/her birth family has had a significant impact on his/her day to day life?
 Yes No

How?

Depends on family member Don't know

There are 2 more sections left in the interview. Is it ok to continue?

SECTION 3: FRIENDSHIPS AND LEISURE TIME

This third section looks at x's [name] friendships, which is another measure of his/her social supports. It also explores how he/she spends his/her leisure time. Friendships and leisure time are closely related as children may participate in certain activities with his/her friends.
Part A. Friendships

So, firstly friendships. It may be difficult for foster children to make friends, particularly if they have had many different placements in different areas.

Q.31 At the moment, does x [name] have a particular group of friends that he/she spends time with most days?

Tick more than one

- Friends from school
- Friends from the area
- Sibling
- Other

Yes

Q.32 Is this group of friends that he/she sees made up of any of the following:

Tick one response

- Younger than x [name]
- Older than x [name]
- The same age as x [name]
- Some younger, some older
- Some younger, some same age
- Some older, some same age

Q.33 Thinking about this group of friends, are they generally....

Tick one response

- The same friends
- Some different friends now
- Totally different friends now

Q.34 Compared to the friends that he/she had a year ago, are the friends he/she has now ...

Q.35a Does he/she have one best friend?

- Tick one response**
- A friend from school
 - A neighbour in the area
 - Sibling (birth family)
 - Sibling (carer's child)
 - Sibling (other foster)
 - Other

Yes

More than 1

More than 1

Don't know

Q.35b Are they

Please specify who:

Yes

No

Go to Q. 37

Go to Q. 37

How?

INTERVIEW NOTES

Q.37 Do you think that his/her friendships have had a significant impact on his/her day to day life?

Yes

No

Don't know

Part B. Leisure Time

The following questions look at how x spends his/her spare time (that is the time outside school and at weekends). The aim here is to get an insight into the kind of activities that x does. Some children may prefer to spend more time on their own at home while others spend a lot of time going out with friends.

Tick one response		Q.38 Does x spend most of his/her spare time ...	
In the house or garden	Roughly equal between the two		
Tick one response		Q.39 When he/she is at home, how much time does he/she spend being by themselves, say in his/her bedroom?	
A lot of the time	Not much of the time		
Tick more than one			
		Friends/neighbours	Sibling (birth)
		Adult carer	Sibling (foster)
		Sibling (carer's child)	Other.....

<p>Q.40 Who does he/she spend most of his/her spare time with?</p> <p>Q.41 In the last year (including the summer holidays), has he/she got involved in any activities or hobbies....</p> <p>a) At home? (e.g. reading, computers, music, pets) If yes, what hobbies does he/she do most often? (Up to three – most frequent first) Yes / No / Don't know</p> <p>b) In the neighbourhood? (e.g. sport, youth club?) If yes, what are the activities that he/she does most often? (Up to three – most frequent first) Yes / No / Don't know</p> <p>c) At school? (outside of school time) (e.g. sport, drama, other clubs?) If yes, what were the activities that he/she did most often? (Up to three – most frequent first) Yes / No / Don't know</p>	
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Name the hobbies:		
How do you/carer get involved?	Yes	No
Please specify:	Yes	No
Please specify:	Yes	No
How?	Yes	No

<p>Q.42 Does he/she have any regular hobbies that involve you or another adult carer?</p> <p>Q.43 Does he/she do any chores or jobs in or around the house regularly?</p> <p>Q.44 Does he/she do any jobs in the local area (e.g. babysit, paper round)?</p> <p>Q.45 Do you think that his/her hobbies/activities have had a significant impact on his/her day to day life?</p>	Yes	No
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INTERVIEW NOTES

Q.46 The following is a list of ten items (things that he/she may do). Can you please give one of three answers to each item - that is 'no' (which means never), 'sometimes' (which means applies a little) or 'yes' (meaning definitely applies).

	No (Never)	Sometimes (Applies a little)	Yes, definitely (Applies a lot)	Don't know	N/A
Tries to be fair in games					
Is considerate of other people's feelings					
Will try to help someone who has been hurt					
Volunteers to help around the house or garden					
Is kind to younger children					
Comforts a child who is crying or upset					
Tries to stop quarrels or fights					
Shares out sweets with friends					
Helps other children who are feeling ill					
Is kind to animals					

SECTION 4: BASIC INFORMATION

And finally, this section asks some questions on x's [name] time with you and some basic questions about your household.

Part A. Foster Child's Care History

Years **Q. 47** How long has x [name] been in your care? *Interviewer note: Period of time in current placement only*

Q. 48a As far as you know, has he/she had any other care placements in either foster or residential care before coming to you?
 Yes No Don't know

Q. 48b How many other care placements (both foster and residential care) has he/she had that you know of (excluding this one)?

Tick one response	
1 or 2	10 or more
3 or 4	Don't know
5-9	

Q. 48c How old was he/she when they first went into care? Age Don't know

Part B. Nature of your Relationship with your Foster Child

Q.49 Are you (or your partner) related to x [name]?

Please state what relation you (or your partner) are to x

Yes No

Own rating

Interviewer note:
 Key: 1=not close at all,
 2=not that close
 3=reasonably close sometimes
 4=fairly close, 5=very close

Q.50a On a scale of 1-5, how close would you say your relationship with him/her is?
Where 1 is not close at all and 5 is very close

Where there are two adult carers: Q.50b And similarly, the other adult carer?

Part C. Foster Family Characteristics

Q.51a Do you have any other children aged under 18 years, apart from x [name]?

Yes No

No

Q.51b Are any of these children foster children (apart from x)?

Yes

No

Go to Q.52

Please state how many (excluding x)

How many (excluding x)

Q.51c In general, how does he/she get on with the other children in the foster family?

i. Carer's own children		
Very well	Very well	
Reasonably ok	Reasonably ok	
Not that well at all	Not that well at all	
iii. Other foster children who are siblings		
Very well	Very well	
Reasonably ok	Reasonably ok	
Not that well at all	Not that well at all	

INTERVIEW NOTES

Tick one response

One	<input type="checkbox"/>	Two	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (specify)	<input type="text"/>		

Q.52a How many adult carers living in the household are involved in caring for him/her?

Q.52b Are there any other adults that share these responsibilities with you?

Yes No Don't know

i) How many?

ii) Who? (tick more than one)

Son/daughter	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Neighbour/friend	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>

The following information will be used to compile some socio-economic data. All the information given remains confidential.

Q.53 Please state the current occupation of each adult carer in the household

Male carer:

Female carer:

Q.54 What is the highest level of education completed by each adult carer

Tick one response		Tick one response	
Female Carer		Male Carer	
Primary	<input type="checkbox"/>	Primary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leaving Cert	<input type="checkbox"/>	Inter/Junior/Group Cert	<input type="checkbox"/>
Primary Degree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Third level Cert/Diploma	<input type="checkbox"/>
Postgrad Degree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Postgraduate Diploma	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

Tick one response

Large city or town or Open countryside

A small town or village or

Q.55 Do you live in a....?

Years

Q.56 How long have you been a foster carer?

No

Q.57 During this time, how many foster children have been in your care for more than 1 year?

Interviewer note:
Reassure carer if necessary by saying that most surveys ask the respondent's age for basic information purposes only.

years

Q.58 Just for the purpose of the survey, would you mind stating your age?

Q.59 Finally, would you like to make any other comments about any of the issues that have been discussed in this survey?

INTERVIEW NOTES

Appendix 2

More Information on Data Analysis

Analysis of frequency tables

Data analysis started with running basic frequency tables, showing the response to each question asked in the telephone interviews – for example, how many young people were going to a mainstream or special school. Frequency tables gave a count of the number of times a category had been selected by respondents for each variable. For example, the frequency table for bullying at school showed the number of young people who had been bullied at school during the school year, as reported by foster carers.

Bivariate analysis

Analysis of frequency tables was followed by selecting a series of two variables to explore whether there were any relationships between each set of variables. For example, the issue of school bullying was explored in more detail by running a cross-tabulation between the two variables of school bullying and the number of years that young people had been in foster care. This type of analysis was useful to help identify factors that may be related to aspects of young people’s education and social supports (such as the length of time in foster care).

In order to explore the importance of relationships between two variables, a test of statistical significance was used. In general, the choice of an appropriate test depends on the nature of the data gathered. Most of the data gathered in this study was *categorical data* (consisting of both nominal and ordinal data), where the responses to each question was grouped into categories – for example, yes/no, primary/post-primary school, mainstream/special school etc.¹⁸⁷ Therefore, the chi-square test of statistical significance was used.¹⁸⁸ The results of this test were used to identify statistically significant relationships between each pair of two variables.

A significant chi-square result emerges where there is a large enough difference between the expected results and those that are actually observed in the frequency distribution for each variable. If there was no relationship between two variables, the distribution of values for one variable would be randomly distributed for the values of a second variable – no pattern would emerge. However, chi-square gives no information on the *strength* of a relationship between two variables. Therefore, appropriate tests of correlation were run to provide an indicator of this, as well as lending further support to any significant chi-square results.

Findings that were statistically significant are identified throughout the results chapters in this report. Where patterns emerged in the distribution of values for two variables, but where they did not show up as statistically significant, these were also presented as they could be seen as being indicative of potential trends and were deemed worthy of discussion.¹⁸⁹

One important point to note here is that a statistically significant relationship does not mean a *causal* relationship exists where a variation in one variable directly results in a change in a second variable, rather that the two variables are related in some way.¹⁹⁰ This research report is an *exploratory* study and aims to describe the educational and social support experiences of the group of people in the study as well as exploring possible relationships between the various aspects of young people’s experiences as represented by the data. More sophisticated statistical tests (known as parametric tests), which can help to establish causal relationships, do exist but they are not appropriate for categorical data (non-parametric data), which makes up most of the data in this research report.

Multivariate analysis

In addition to bivariate analysis, some multivariate analysis was also conducted to explore relationships between more than two variables. This consisted of introducing a third variable into the analysis. Therefore, the relationship between two variables was considered for each category of a third variable. For example, the relationship between positive social support from birth family contact and the number of years in care could be distinguished for young people in relative and non-relative care. However, the bulk of data analysis carried out in this study consisted of examining frequency tables and bivariate analysis.

187 | The distinction between nominal and ordinal data is that ordinal data involves categories that can be put into some kind of meaningful order, e.g. age groups, educational attainment. Nominal variables involve categories that are known by name only (as the name implies), e.g. gender.

188 | The chi-square test of statistical significance is appropriate for exploring relationships between either two nominal variables or one nominal and one ordinal variable (Bryman and Cramer, 1997, p.168).

189 | The actual cross-tabulations are not included in this report. However, they are included in a technical report, which is available from the Children’s Research Centre on request.

190 | So, chi-square cannot be used to establish the *direction* of a relationship or to prove *causality*.