

Experiences of Education for Children in Care

Part 1: Voices of children in care in Aotearoa New Zealand

July 2019



VOICES
of Children

EVIDENCE CENTRE
TE POKAPŪ TAUNAKITANGA



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TAMARIKI**
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The Voices of Children and Young People team at Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children (Oranga Tamariki) supports the organisation to understand children and young people's experiences, needs and aspirations. The team helps to ensure children and young people's voices are heard throughout Oranga Tamariki. It also assists Oranga Tamariki to engage effectively and safely with children and young people of different ages, stages, communication abilities and cultures.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents a synthesis of findings on the experiences children in care have in mainstream education. The findings are drawn from interviews with 23 children in care and key adults in their lives. It contributes to a mixed-method study about the educational experiences, achievement, engagement and outcomes of children in care. The broader study is designed to explore:

- experiences
- the factors that impact on these experiences
- what role Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children (Oranga Tamariki) and other government agencies can play to support positive educational experiences and outcomes for children in care.

Interview transcripts were coded in Nvivo, a qualitative software analysis programme, to complete a thematic analysis across the dataset. Six core topics about children's experiences of education were identified and these sit alongside discussion about the impact of adults' relationships on experiences of education, achievement, exclusion, pathways to re-engagement and the impact of education on longer-term outcomes.

Children's experiences of education

- Some children experience stigma and bullying in educational settings on account of their status as in care. Social workers' practice of visiting and transporting children to school while beneficial in terms of school engagement, minimising the number of changes in schools and checking in on wellbeing, could also be detrimental as children may encounter unwelcome attention, questions, teasing and bullying from peers.
- Many children in care change schools as a result of care placements and movement through the education system. These changes disrupt children's learning and relationships.
- Engagement in extracurricular activities contribute to children's wellbeing as it provides an opportunity to engage with peers, belong to a group and feel a sense of achievement. Children's access to extracurricular activities depends on the capacity and support of caregivers and social workers' attentiveness to resourcing.
- Educators are cognisant of the importance of understanding and meeting children's individual needs, especially as these pertain to children's broader circumstances and wellbeing. Educators share their difficulties with managing the behaviour of some children in care in classroom settings and believe one-to-one pastoral support is an important resource for children and teachers.
- Some children in care have difficulty with social interactions, managing emotions, trust and attachment, which makes forming and keeping friendships hard. Unlike their peers, children in care have limited opportunities to engage with friends outside of school.
- Children do not typically view caregivers and social workers as contributing to their education. Some children talked about doing their work on their own at school and at home.
- Children note that educators who support learning are those who are available to answer children's questions and tailor work to individual needs.

The impact of adults' relationships on children's education experiences

- Some educators see variable engagement from caregivers with children's education. Engaged caregivers attend school events and meetings, extend children's learning in the home, and connect with teachers.
- Teachers have limited contact with social workers. Relationships are typically held by pastoral support staff.
- There are a range of views and practice around educators being informed about children's care status and circumstances. Some feel this contravenes children's privacy, while others feel it is important to share to enable teachers to support children and to understand their behaviours.
- Some participants feel social workers can play a more active role in children's education by communicating with schools and coordinating resources to meet children's educational needs.
- Changes in social workers impact children's education as services can be disrupted and children need to get used to a new social worker. Participants see variability in social workers' responsiveness to children's educational needs.
- Social workers see it as important to share information with caregivers about children's educational needs and the ways caregivers can support these.

Achievement

- Educators see a broader concept of achievement than academic success for children in care.
- Children undervalue their achievements and abilities.
- When home is stable and school is safe achievement could occur.
- It is important to meet children's emotional needs so they can achieve.

Exclusion and pathways to re-engagement

- Some children in care experience exclusion from school, which may mean they have difficulty returning to mainstream schooling.
- Difficulty with social interactions and managing behaviour can lead to exclusions.

Impact of education on longer-term outcomes

- Some participants are concerned about children losing the structure and security provided by school when it was time for them to move on.
- Children in care need support to raise their aspirations and value education.
- Qualifications can make a difference in children's lives beyond school.

Factors that have an impact on the educational experiences of children in care

The following table provides an overview of the factors identified in interviews that can have an impact on the educational experiences, achievement, engagement and outcomes of children in care.

Factor	Description
Information sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It is important to manage the way information about children in care, their circumstances, and their learning and behavioural needs is shared.• Only people needing the information should receive it and this should remain protected within the school environment.• Information needs to be shared in a timely manner (i.e. prior to changing schools).
Relationships/Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children's relationships with the key people in their lives can impact on their education.• Relationships between the adults in children's lives can facilitate information sharing and support requests and provision of resources.• Supporting children's engagements with peers is important to their wellbeing and education.
Meeting learning and behaviour needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Caregivers and educators play a key role in identifying and informing people of the need for resources to meet children's individual learning and behavioural needs.• Social workers play a key role in providing access to these resources.• Educators require training and support to manage learning and behaviour needs.
Role clarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is a lack of clarity about who is responsible for coordinating children's educational resources, and monitoring their educational progress and needs.
Pastoral support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children in care may need pastoral support in order to participate in education.• Pastoral support can come from teachers, dedicated pastoral support workers, caregivers and social workers.• Pastoral support can help meet children's social and emotional needs, build social skills and support them to deal with (or avoid) bullying and stigma.

Attitude of adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults' attitudes to children in care, to education and to privacy impact children's education. The aspirations of children in care are impacted on by the attitude of adults to education.
Capacity of adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The capacity of adults to support children in care to engage with learning and access extracurricular activities has an impact on their education. When adults do not have the capacity to support learning and extracurricular activities children in care can miss out on opportunities.
Understanding the education needs of children who have experienced trauma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When caregivers, educators and social workers understand the education needs of children who have experienced trauma and the impact of this on behaviour, children are more likely to be able to participate in education.
Meeting material needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When caregivers and social workers communicate to meet material needs, children in care can attend school and have what they need to learn.

INTRODUCTION

The Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children (Oranga Tamariki) Voices of Children and Young People Team conducted this study to gather insights about the experiences children in care have of mainstream education. These insights contribute to the implementation of services through the joint Oranga Tamariki and Ministry of Education work programme, Care Standards and the ongoing work of the Chief Social Worker/Professional Practice group.

The Expert Advisory Panel (MSD, 2015) found that educational outcomes for children and young people who come into contact with Child, Youth and Family were poor and that there were high rates of disengagement and under-achievement for these children.

Previous research and data shows that children in care, when compared with their peers who have had no care experience, fall behind on a number of measures including educational achievement, attendance and exclusion. In turn, these factors may contribute to poorer short and long-term educational success among children and young people in care (Higgins, Sebba & Luke, 2015).

The purpose of this study was to collect the voices of children and the key adults who support children with their education, as it provides insight into the lived experiences of children in relation to their educational experiences, engagement, achievements and outcomes.

The overall study involves three components, a literature scan of national and international literature, a data review of government administrative data and qualitative research.

The literature scan provides up-to-date evidence about the educational experiences of children in care, the data review provides a description of the engagement and educational outcomes of children in care in New Zealand and the qualitative research provides insights into the lived experiences of children in care and their educational experiences.

This report outlines findings from the qualitative research component.

Research Questions

To understand the educational experiences of children in care we interviewed a range of groups involved in children and young people's education to answer the following eight research questions:

- What experiences do children and young people in care have of education?
- What do children and young people in care achieve in education?
- What influences children and young people's experiences of education?
- What influences educational achievement and engagement of children and young people in care?
- What impact do educational experiences have on outcomes for children and young people in care?
- What impact does educational achievement and engagement have on outcomes of children and young people in care?

- How can government agencies improve educational experiences of children and young people in care?
- How can government agencies improve educational achievement and engagement for children and young people in care?

METHOD

Participants

Fifty nine participants took part in the study overall. Twenty three of these were children in care aged seven – 15. Children included in the study had been in care for at least two years. In addition 13 caregivers, 10 social workers and 12 education staff¹ were interviewed as part of the project. Participants came from two geographical regions, one large city and one provincial region.

Table1: Number and characteristics of children interviewed

Characteristic	Number of participants
Ethnicity	
Māori	16
NZ European	4
African	1
Māori / Pacifica	1
NZ European /Māori	1
Gender	
Male	13
Female	10
Age	
7 – 11 years	11
12 – 15 years	12
Total	23

Criteria for selection

Children aged between 6 and 15 years, being in care two or more years, enrolled in a mainstream school were eligible to be selected; unless the site manager or social worker felt they were currently in a complex situation that would make engagement challenging for them.

Recruitment of children

Initial contact was made through the Oranga Tamariki site managers at two sites. These sites were nominated in consultation with senior staff at national office (Deputy Chief Executives, Regional Managers

and General Managers) to help facilitate the engagements. Individual participants were then identified by site managers and social workers who generated a list of children from their site that met the criteria and who they believed would be interested in taking part in the interviews.

A social worker known to the child made contact with them and their caregiver and/or parents to provide information about the interviews and invite the child to participate. The social worker provided child-friendly information sheets to potential participants, along with information sheets for their parents/guardians/caregivers and social workers (see Appendix A).

The information sheets covered the purpose of the interviews and the relevant ethical considerations such as confidentiality, privacy and consent, including consent for audio recording. Social Workers read through the information sheet with the child to ensure they understood it and to answer any questions they had.

¹ The term education staff or educator is used to describe a number of different roles participants held including Principals, teachers, Special Education Advisors (Senco), whānau liaison worker and Resource Teacher Learning and Behaviour (RTLb).

Prior to taking part in the interviews, young people aged 15 years and under required written informed consent from the person who had custody of them. Young people aged 9 – 15 years also gave written consent and had an opportunity at the beginning of the interview to give their verbal assent.

Children aged seven – nine years gave their assent to their parent or guardian, caregiver or social worker. They were also given the opportunity at the beginning of the interview to give their verbal assent.

Caregivers were informed throughout the process.

All children received a koha of a \$20 Warehouse voucher at the end of the interview.

Recruitment of caregivers

Social workers were asked to identify caregivers who they believed would be interested in participating in the interviews. In some cases these were the caregivers of children who were also being interviewed, in other cases they were caregivers who were keen to participate but did not necessarily care for children involved in the project. The social worker provided caregivers with information sheets, discussed the project with them and answered any initial questions. The information sheets covered the purpose of the interviews and the relevant ethical considerations such as confidentiality, privacy and consent, including consent for audio recording.

As we were not directly triangulating data it was not necessary to only interview caregivers who were caring for the children we were also interviewing. Any caregiver who had experiences of supporting a school-aged child was eligible to take part in the interviews.

Caregivers were asked to sign a consent form prior to their involvement in the interviews. They were also given the opportunity at the beginning of the interview to ask any questions and confirm their agreement to be involved.

All caregivers received a koha of a \$25 Warehouse voucher at the end of the interview.

Recruitment of social workers

Site managers at each of the sites identified social workers to support the project. This support included social workers being interviewed for the project.

Site managers shared information sheets and consent forms with social workers and they were also given the details of the project leader to contact with any further questions.

Social workers were asked to sign a consent form prior to their involvement in the interviews. They were also given the opportunity at the beginning of the interview to ask any questions and confirm their agreement to be involved.

Recruitment of education staff

Social workers shared information sheets with all of the schools that had children attending who had been selected for the study.

The project leader then contacted the principals of these schools to provide additional information and invite staff who had experience of teaching and/or supporting children in care to be interviewed for the project.

The principal shared the information sheets and consent forms with staff who expressed an interest in being involved. The project leader then liaised with the principal to arrange times for the staff interviews.

Education staff were asked to sign a consent form prior to their involvement in the interviews. They were also given the opportunity at the beginning of the interview to ask any questions and confirm their agreement to be involved.

Procedure

Overview

An internal ethics assessment of this project was completed by the Voices of Children and Young People team and peer-reviewed by the Oranga Tamariki Research and Synthesis team in May 2018.

A total of 45 interviews were conducted. Most interviews were with individuals, but in some cases people were interviewed in pairs or a group of three. On two occasions two siblings were interviewed together. On three occasions two education staff were interviewed together and on one occasion two social workers were interviewed together. Three children were interviewed with their caregivers.

Interviews were conducted in a range of locations. This was to accommodate the needs of the people being interviewed and to increase their ability to access the interview. Participants were given the opportunity to state where they would like to be interviewed. Interview locations included the Oranga Tamariki site office, child or caregiver's home, school or a community centre.

Table 2: Number and geographic location of interviews

Participants	Location 1	Location 2	Total
Children aged 7–11	4	7	11
Children aged 12–17	4	8	12
Caregivers	9	4	13
Social workers	5	5	10
Education staff	4	9	13
Total			59

Interview design and rationale

The interviews were semi-structured and were designed to allow participants to share their stories of being a child in care and their experience of school or of supporting children in care with their education.

The interviews were based on the eight key research questions and five interviews guides were designed for the differing groups being interviewed (children age 6-8 years, children aged 9 years and over, caregivers, social workers and education staff). Examples of the interview guides can be found in Appendix B.

All the interviews started with introductory questions to help participants feel at ease. At the end of the interviews all participants were asked if they wanted to add to or change any of their responses and if there was anything else they would like to say.

The interview guides were written by members of the Voices of Children and Young People Team and were peer reviewed by other members of the team.

Interview procedure

Interviews were carried out by five Oranga Tamariki senior advisors. All interviewers had previous experience with engaging with children and were not personally known to any of the participants.

Interviews varied in length but were planned for up to an hour for adult interviews and up to 45 minutes for children's interviews.

At the beginning of the interviews the purpose of the interview was outlined to participants and they were all asked if they had received previous information about the interview and the process. Participants were again asked if they wanted to take part in the interviews.

Some adult participants had previously signed a consent form that had been shared with them by a social worker or a member of the research team. For any that had not completed a consent form prior to the interview they were asked to complete it at the beginning of the interview.

Age-appropriate scripts were used to help explain the purpose of the interviews.

Materials

For the interviews the interview guides were used and notes were taken by the second interviewer. An audio recorder was also used to record the interviews for transcribing.

For the interviews with children a range of materials were used to help engage them in the discussion and share their views. This included art materials and children's games.

Participant rights and pastoral support plan

At the beginning of the interviews all participants were given the opportunity to opt out of the interviews.

For children it was explained to them in an age appropriate way that they did not have to take part and the alternative to taking part was described to them. Children under the age of nine were also shown a visual prompt of symbols showing thumbs up and thumbs down sign and they could point to the signs to indicate if they wanted to continue or opt out. These signs were discussed with the child to ensure they understood their meaning.

Opt out

One child did choose to opt out. He expressed this by shaking his head and pointing to the thumbs down sign. The interviewer then walked with the child back to class and explained to the teacher that he had opted out and no longer wanted to be involved. The teacher reinforced that it was okay for him to opt out and gave him options of activities to take part in instead.

Disclosures

While not raising safety concerns, two children expressed information that the interviewers felt needed to be followed up on. In both cases the child was asked if they agreed to the interviewer talking to an adult and they were informed of which adult. Information was discussed with a senior member of staff in school who had responsibility for pastoral care of the child.

Distress

One child became upset during the interview. The audio recording was stopped and the participant was given a break and a drink and was asked if she wanted to continue. She chose to continue and the audio recorder was started again. Throughout the remainder of the interview the participant was asked if she felt she wanted to continue and the interviewers also used behavioural cues to assess her emotional wellbeing.

Pastoral support

A key adult that could be available for the child prior to and after the interview was identified. For all children the key adult was a caregiver, social worker or teacher.

The key adult helped prepare the child for the interview and shared information with them about the purpose of the interview and what to expect. They were also given the opportunity to let the interviewers know about any specific needs the child had that might need to be planned for prior to the interview. For example, some children chose to be interviewed in a self-chosen location, for one child the interview was adapted to allow for his difficulties with attention and concentration.

During the interview all children were offered refreshments and breaks.

Feedback to participants

Verbal feedback was provided to social workers during the week following the engagements. In the following months, social workers, educators and caregivers who participated in interviews received written feedback, which summarised key findings across the study. A tailored pamphlet was also developed for children and young people who participated in interviews. Social workers in each region made this feedback available to participants.

Analysis

Each transcript was imported into a Nvivo project and coded to a case with location and participant group attributes (child, caregiver, social worker, educator). Each transcript was coded to a set of 15 themes. Some of these themes were developed to capture data in response to particular research questions (interview questions). Other themes emerged from the data (i.e. data-driven).

Six themes related to children's experiences of education emerged from this data:

- Stigma and bullying.
- Changing schools.
- Extra-curricular activities.
- Learning and behavioural needs.
- Relationships with peers.
- Relationships with adults.

In addition, further themes relating to engagement, achievements and outcomes emerged:

- Impact of adult relationships on experiences of education.
- Supporting achievement in education.
- Experiences of exclusion and pathways to re-engagement.
- Impact of education on longer-term outcomes.

Presentation of findings

A summary of each theme is presented at the beginning of each section and this is then discussed and supported with verbatim comments that offer evidence, examples and give voice to the experiences of children in care. Children and young people's comments are highlighted in pink boxes throughout the report to give prominence to their voice. At times, in grey boxes, we draw together a number of excerpts from one interview transcript to provide a more detailed example.

CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES OF EDUCATION

Stigma and bullying

Summary: Stigma and bullying

Participants were not asked direct questions about experiences of stigma and bullying. However, participants from all groups spoke about children in care experiencing stigma and bullying in school environments:

- Some children in care feel anxious about being stigmatised due to peers finding out about their care circumstances.
- Children's care status can be revealed to peers when social workers visit them at school, transport them to and from school or teacher aides work alongside them.
- The provision of uniforms and equipment can be protective of stigmatisation.
- Participants hold different views about maintaining children's privacy and ensuring school staff are appropriately informed to support children.
- Children in care are aware of bullying occurring in their schools and some had experienced being bullied, retaliated to bullying and been known as bullies.
- Children in care may reach out to friends, siblings, pastoral support workers and caregivers when they experience bullying.
- Some children in care and caregivers feel that schools are ineffective at dealing with bullying.

Being identified as a child in care can cause unwelcome attention, anxiety and bullying

Children in care raised the issue of unwelcome attention and bullying in relation to their care circumstances. While some children felt comfortable sharing their circumstances with friends, others were cautious about whom they shared with.

"I don't even tell people at school that I live at [care home] cos I hate it when they ask questions. If they know then they can ask questions. They ask questions like "why are you in care , blah, blah, blah?" and they go on "where do you live, did your parents not feed you, did your parents hit you?" *[African female, age 11]*

Some social workers noted that children were anxious about their peers finding out that they lived in care. Caregivers noticed that children did not want their peers to know they lived at a care home.

"From the child's point of view, I think there is a real anxiety about the other kids at school finding out that they are in care. It is stigmatising, and they think they are going to be treated differently in a negative type of way. A lot of children have told me that they don't want me to see them at school for that very reason because they feel they could be bullied or they could

be asked who is coming to talk to you all the time. They almost want to be invisible.” *[Social worker]*

“We had a funeral here and some kids came from the high school... and she [a child in her cottage] said ‘oh no they saw me here... now they know I am from here.” *[Caregiver]*

Connection with social workers can contribute to stigma

Some participants felt that the practice of social workers visiting children in schools or transporting children to and from school could contribute to stigma. Some children raised their concern about this practice, saying that it drew unwanted attention to their personal circumstances. Other children were not concerned about being visited at school.

One girl described how other children behaved when they saw her social worker come into school.

“Cause like my school, some girls are like really dramatic and they’re like really nosy, so I don’t really like, so I wish she [social worker] could come out [to her home], but I just don’t want her coming out at that time.” *[Māori female, aged 15]*

Some social workers were aware that children could be the target of peer pressure and bullying if their social workers visited them in school and it became known that they were in care.

“Then, there’s other young people or children who might have been older coming into care and if I go and pick up a child from school, you’ve got other kids going, ‘Is that your mum?’ ‘No, it’s ...’ Then, they have an interesting time trying to explain that to their peers, who are these random people picking them up. It depends on different age groups. I think for the child having to try and figure out what to say in that scenario or being worried about being judged if they understand what my role is in their life. Then, other times, it might just be like, “[Social worker’s name] picking me up” kind of thing and they’re quite happy with that and sometimes not so much. I’ve experienced that with a group of siblings that I picked up from the school one day and I just happened to be waiting. I had my tags hidden away but a group of older boys walked past and were just like, ‘There’s a CYFS social worker. Are you in CYFS?’ to these kids. I just turned around and said, ‘That’s none of your business.’ Then, they had their heads hanging low, which wasn’t nice.” *[Social worker]*

“I think a child’s at risk of a lot of peer pressure, if it’s made known that they’re a child in care or their parents haven’t been able to manage them. When that information gets around, other children can be quite cruel and use that. Bullying is a big factor in schools, so straightaway they could be a target and be vulnerable to bullying. I think that stigma is from their peers.” *[Social worker]*

Social workers noted that as children became older they tended to become more averse to being visited in school.

“I think it depends on the child’s age. If the child is older, I’ll have a discussion with them and say, ‘Do you want me to meet you at school?’ Obviously, they’ll be aware that I communicate with the teachers but I don’t want all their friends turning up knowing that there’s the social worker. It’s about being respectful, I think, for the child as well.” *[Social worker]*

A caregiver noted that children’s engagement with teacher aides and other supports in school could identify them as children in care, which could be uncomfortable.

“That often means some special attention with a teacher aide or even more people on board to help that person cope. I think I know for some boys on hand that has been a real issue

because they feel like they have been singled out and you can tell if they are a part of Oranga Tamariki because they all have the same people around them. Some boys find it challenging because it is obvious but for others like (child's name) not so much. So, I think it just really depends." *[Caregiver]*

On the other hand, an educator spoke about children in care at a primary school not being concerned about RTLB's and social workers visiting because there were so many children being visited and supported by adults in the school that it was not unusual.

"I don't think they see it necessarily seen as being so different cos there's probably another buddy in your class in a similar situation. I mean, we have social workers in and out of the school and no one blinks. Even the other kids though, don't blink an eyelid cos we have quite a few. We have RTLBs coming, RT Lits come in and social workers come in and then [Pastoral support staff] in our other class. No one really blinks an eyelid." *[Educator]*

In contrast to being stigmatised, some social workers and caregivers noted that the entitlement of children in care to resources that support their education could help protect them from stigmatisation. A social worker spoke about the importance of providing children with school uniforms and the equipment they need before starting at a new school so they are not identified as different. Two caregivers spoke extensively about the opportunities afforded to the children in their care through Oranga Tamariki funding. These caregivers chose to involve children in activities being organised through their school rather than through the family home to ensure children felt they had the same opportunities as others.

Caregiver A: That's what I was going to say, is that that's where, whether I'm right or wrong, I prefer that they go with their school class, with their schools, rather than a lot of the times, they do things with the family home and that. It just reinforces that they're those people instead now I'm fitting in, I am a part of the community, I can do what everybody else does. I can lift my head high and I'm happy, so we don't go to many of them for that purpose alone because I do not want them to feel like they're just a ...

Caregiver B: It becomes a stigma.

Caregiver A: They have been supported by the state to do better. That's why I feel that that's really important, that they do stuff in schools that everybody else is doing, like (child's name), like 30 people can do. She's got that opportunity and that's really good for her.

Sharing information about care status is complex

Participants held different views about whether or not children's care status should be shared with staff in schools. Some felt it was important to honour children's privacy and ensure they could not be stigmatised through their association with Oranga Tamariki. However, two social workers noted a sense that for children in care, their information is more likely to be available/shared than other children's.

Social worker A: I think it's also quite important that their information is theirs and it's not common knowledge that that child is part of us.

Social worker B: I think that's a really important thing. I wonder whether our kids' information is less privileged than other kids. It seems like people feel more entitled to a child in care's information – everybody.

"You do get some high-end ones but I think to keep it personal and private for those kids as well, because they don't want to be labelled. They just want to be like everybody else at the

end of the day, so we try really, really hard to make sure that that's how they feel.... I think it's important that we all do know but to treat them just like everybody else." *[Social worker]*

In contrast to these social workers, other participants felt it was important to share children's information, albeit carefully so that school staff members could support children when required. An educator even spoke about sharing a child's situation with her class to build empathy among peers. The practice of protecting or sharing information about children's care status did not appear to be consistent for educators or social workers.

Another social worker spoke about the importance of teachers knowing children's background prior to them starting at a new school but also the tension around protecting children's privacy and enabling them to enter school without stigma.

"they might only be in that class three months and then they move on but there needs to be a mechanism somehow that without pigeonholing the child, that this is their background, without divulging their secrets and all the rest of it cos they want to start on an even playing field, somehow this knowledge, this understanding of what makes that child tick needs to be conveyed, in a way that's really appropriate. You don't want a child to ... another CYFS kid cos then they're in a box, they're going to be trouble from the word go, so you don't want that. There needs to be that shared understanding somehow. I've always said, if you want to treat a child equally, you can't treat them all the same. We have to create that equal by having that shared understanding and I don't really have any answer to that because you've got privacy and you've got their rights and all the rest of it but there has to be a way." *[Social worker]*

Some children in care experience bullying

A number of children in care were aware of bullying occurring in their schools and some had experienced being bullied, retaliated to bullying or were known as bullies.

"Because this boy is really mean to me. Heaps of people are really mean to me and I am just one of those people who can't put up with it. I just get really angry cos things hurt me and I just get really angry when I ask them to stop and they don't stop. I get into fighting and stuff like that. I can't handle things like that and I hurt people because it hurts me about what they say to me."
[Māori female, age 14]

Children in care shared their strategies for dealing with bullying and articulated their desire to attend schools where bullying was dealt with effectively by school staff. Caregivers were concerned about bullying affecting the children in their care.

Schools have variable success dealing with bullying

Children reported wanting bullying in their schools to be dealt with. There were a range of views about schools' success at dealing with bullying. A young person was impressed with the way her secondary school dealt with bullying.

"The school, it doesn't put up with violence or any bad behaviour. I know one girl last year, in my class, she was very bad and her friends ganged up and beat up this girl after school one day. The next day, she got expelled. The dean said, "Right, bye bye" which I thought was quite good because she wasn't a very nice girl all the time. It doesn't put up with bullying. I like the school because it has clear, firm boundaries, rules and expectations". *[NZ European female, age 14]*

Two social workers recalled that, despite experiencing bullying, another young person had successfully settled into secondary school after a long absence from schooling because she had been encouraged to speak with her teachers and they had dealt with the situation.

Pastoral support staff, friends and siblings were important resources to deal with bullying. One young person noted reaching out to the school's pastoral support worker to help her deal with bullying.

Children and caregivers also shared that schools did not always respond to bullying effectively. Some children told their teachers but did not believe they responded.

"I got bullied twice this year. When I went and told the teachers they told me to go and talk to the person who bullied me and see if I could speak to them. What was the point in me telling the teacher?" *[Māori female, age 15]*

"Bullies make school difficult. It gets annoying because they start questioning, they go on and on [about being in care] and they don't stop. They hurt my feelings. I walk off and tell the teacher but most of the time the teacher does nothing about it. They say "ahh it's ok, just forget about it". It's really annoying so I just guess I just forget about it. My carers know and I am pretty sure they talk to the school. I tell the school but I am not sure what they do about it after that."
[African female, age 11]

"Like one of our kids had a fall out with another child at school and they got into a scrape. The child reported it to the teacher and the teacher did not do anything about it and the child came back and told us, so why should I have to go back to the school to chase up? Even if the teacher does not think that it was bullying, at the very least the teacher could email and say 'hey just a heads up, your child was in a thing, we have dealt with it, and we don't think that there should be any further action' but you just get nothing. They [the teachers] just think, 'it's only that kid, that child in care again, always causing trouble' and so don't bother to tell the carer."*[Caregiver]*

For other children, more work needed to be done to respond to bullying. When offered the opportunity to imagine being the principal or Prime Minister and asked how they would improve school, children in two different interviews talked about dealing with bullying.

"[If I was the principal] I'd say that if you bully people that they stay in the office. They would stay off school for a year. I'd change their class." *[Māori male, age 11]*

"Tell people to leave me alone and not get smart and that if people get smart to me I will get smart back and if people leave me alone then I am happy by myself and working".
[Māori female aged 14]

Changing schools

Summary: Changing schools

Participants were not explicitly asked about the impact of change in schools on education, however approximately 30 participants made reference to this issue.

- Many children in care experience numerous changes in school on account of their care arrangements. In addition to this, children change schools as they advance through the school system.
- Changes in school can negatively impact children's relationships, learning, supports and achievement.
- Some educators feel they have limited information and no prior warning about the complex situation and needs children in care may have when they arrive in their school. Changes in school work well when social workers take on a bridging role gathering information from previous schools and relevant information about the child from social workers' files and sharing this with the school prior to the child starting. It is also preferable that children have visits to the school prior to attending full-time.
- Educators demonstrate manākitanga towards children in care moving to their school. This can be in the form of empathy, a cuddle, transport to school, and preparing other students to be accommodating.
- In contrast to social workers and educators who think it is very important for children and young people to remain in their school, some caregivers feel that a fresh start in a new school is beneficial for children's education.
- Some participants note that remaining at the same school can provide stability for children and young people moving to new care placements.

Children experience multiple changes in school

Many children in care indicated that they experienced a number of changes in school in order to accommodate their care arrangements. The following two excerpts highlight the transient nature of education for some children in care.

"I have had four school changes. My first school was [A] then I went to this school in [Place] called [B] and then I went [C] and then [D]. This was because first I was with my mum and dad then we moved to a different house – so went to different school. After that I got taken and went to [B]. Then I got taken again and then I went to [C] and stayed with caregivers, went to [D], moved everywhere, stayed with these other caregivers ... went from there, came to [care home] ... had a little visit, made friends, left, came back." [Māori male, age 14]

"I just hate it [starting different schools], I'd like to just stay at one school, I don't like having lots of other schools." [Māori male, age 11]

In addition to school changes related to care placements, children also needed to change schools as they progressed through the education system.

"They wouldn't have said they were anxious, they wouldn't have said they were nervous but sore tummies and headache. It was just all too much on that first day. We'd done the transition [from intermediate to high school] with [child's name] but she was just so anxious the year before when she came in for a visit. It's a hard thing. It's a big day for all of the girls but for them, it was particularly hard." *[Educator]*

Educators were concerned about children's shift from primary school into intermediate and secondary school. They noted that children in care could lose the relationships they had developed and the funding and support arrangements that were in place in primary school.

"Transition from primary school to college is important as relationships are different in college and they can lose those close relationships. Sometimes their important people are sports people, caretakers. This is something we need to be really aware of. The transition is so important for children in care. We need to think how we are going to support them through adolescence." *[Educator]*

"I watch kids leave at the end of their year six and off to intermediate and I know support structures will drop off because that's just what happens... If a child leaves the school, it can be the same year, we can have them under full IWS, full HCN, the moment they leave, HCN will follow them obviously but IWS doesn't. A school process has to start right from the beginning again. RTLB service drops off, MoE, their behaviour falls off." *[Educator]*

Changing schools can have a negative impact on children's learning

"If children are quite transient, moved to different placements, of course, that's going to affect their school. A new school means, obviously, introducing themselves to where they are in the curriculum, new teachers, new friends. That's a trauma in itself for a child, just moving to different school placements." *[Social worker]*

Participants raised the impact that changes in school and care placement can have on children's learning. At times children had already learnt material and at other times they did not understand material or had missed too much to achieve. Some children in care who had changed schools during the year missed the opportunity to have their work assessed and/or credited.

"I got like achieved and not assessed like probably cause I came into school too late and not achieved, but I was proud of myself cause like in four years, I hadn't been at school." *[Māori female, age 15]*

"It would be better if we had just stayed at the same schools because when you leave schools you end up learning different things. You are working on something and you have that all in your mind, then you go to another school and they probably teach you something you already know." *[African female, age 11]*

In addition to changes in schools, the impact of change in care placements can play out within the school context. Changes in care could have a social/emotional impact that meant children were unable to engage with their school work.

"They didn't know [I was in care] until they started seeing me get upset or angry because I didn't know where I was going. I went to this place called [care home]. It was a boy's home and I kept feeling worried because I didn't know where I was going to go. Sometimes I wouldn't do any school work. I would listen to music a lot because I wasn't depressed, but I was worried about where I was going to go and what placement I was going to be with and really just thinking about are they going to be nice to me?" [Māori male, age 14]

In the following excerpt an educator recounts how a child would share information about the experience of care placements changing with her and how this impacted on herself and the child.

"It was much better when she was in stable care or what we thought was stable care. When it became unstable again, so she's gone from a home that she'd been in for about six months, into three different homes within a month, she has regressed to the state she was in at the beginning of the year when she first came. All the good work that was done and to me, it all stemmed around her coming to school one morning and saying, "I'm not going back to such and such place tonight." I was just gobsmacked. I just looked at her and said, "When did you find out?" She said, "This morning." She came to school not knowing where she was going to be at the end of the day and we'd had that same situation periodically through the six months when she'd go to respite care on a Friday and she would be sitting in the office and she wouldn't know where she was going until somebody came to pick her up. Then, she'd come back on Monday morning, often in a different mindset, depending on who she'd been with in the weekend." [Educator]

School changes can disrupt friendships

Participants across all groups spoke about the loss children in care experience when they leave friends and the difficulty some children have making new friends each time they moved school.

"It was hard moving around. You had to try and fit in with learning or they were learning things you hadn't done before. It was annoying." [Māori female, age 15]

"You don't know anyone so you have to make friends all over again." [Māori female, age 12]

"It felt weird because the people didn't know me and I didn't know them." [Māori male, age 9]

A social worker shared an experience of working with a boy who was attuned to the possibility that he would move schools and associated the presence of his social worker with these moves.

"It is more moving schools. That is big. They have already been disrupted by moving families. I had this little boy that would say when I would pick him up from school. He turned around and said to his friend, 'bye I might not see you later. I might not come back'. I would say, 'where are you going'. He said 'I never stay at one school for long'. He said he liked his social worker, but he knows when he sees her that mummy did something wrong. He is only six. Every day I would pick him up and he ran up to his teacher and hugged his teacher and said I will miss you all. Every Friday he would treat it as if it was his last day. That was his experience. He knew when he saw the social worker, he was quite mature for a 6-year-old. He said, 'I don't like moving schools', if he had one dream it would be to stay at one school until he was big." [Social worker]

An educator noted that it was more difficult for children in care to develop new friends as they became older as other children had already formed their friendship groups.

"The social side of it is far more of a concern than learning, because particularly as you go further up the school, the children have been together for a long time and they're set in their friendships. For a child coming in and trying to fit in socially is really, really hard for the children. Sometimes you attach a buddy to the child to help them, to give them some support but once again, it's the child concerned that has the problem, more so than me personally."
[Educator]

Changes in schools could also influence children's sense of belonging to the school.

"Often, with a few of the kids I've had anyway, this is not school number one, school number two or school number three. That is an issue because I think they haven't settled into a school, probably with that feeling that this is my school, this is where I'm going to stay. I think there's always that little bit of how long am I here for?" [Educator]

For some, changing schools can improve experiences of education

In contrast to most participants who pointed to negative impacts associated with changing schools, two caregivers spoke about experiences where they thought children should have been moved from their current school to afford them a fresh start in their education. In these instances, school changes were understood as positive for children.

"We had the brothers who just came in with a lot of history from the school where they were. They were not approved to the school close to [care home] when they moved here. The guardians – Mum and OT asked for them to remain in their old schools. But there is a lot of history there. A lot of relatives, people who they are not supposed to have access with. They pop into the school and see the children. We go in and there are problems. So we have been requesting that the children move and it's finally going to happen. ... hopefully with this fresh start we can start from the beginning like we do with our other kids." [Caregiver]

"We have sat in education group meeting with the principal and teacher aides and every other person that they have there. They all sat there complaining about the children from the moment we got there. My suggestion was that they should move the kids out of the school. I was shot down but the kids have been labelled as 'problem kids' and nothing will change unless you move them out to somewhere where they have no history, where the teachers are not scared of the children." [Caregiver]

Preparing children and schools can reduce the impact of changing schools

One social worker interviewed had a clear idea about how social workers could support children as they moved to new schools. This focused on preparing the child for starting the school.

"I know kids get taken from school to school but if they are changing school, working through that process of going into the next school. Not sudden, you are going here and here are your uniforms. Setting them up, especially the little kids. When I work with the little kids it is easy. When they talk to me I talk to them back to match their tone. Even if they are going to move schools it is walking them through the process. For me, my kids that have gone into care, talking with them beforehand and taking the social worker with you to do the transition."
[Social worker]

An educator also noted how important information about each child was when they moved into a school. They spoke about the variability of available and timely information from Oranga Tamariki.

"There is a time delay. When they first start in school it needs to be a good transition. If it goes right then it's a good building block. If it doesn't then it takes a long time to get it back. We often have parents and social workers not tell us the full extent of the child's issues. There needs to be strong transitions into school especially when they have been bounced around. It's not the children's fault." *[Educator]*

"It's easier to join the dots if they aren't always transitioning to different schools. It took eight months to get to the bottom of the needs of [child's name], it took a long time to work out if information had been transferred to the local office and then to get the information given to us. But it's different when kids are with whānau. [Child's name] was in the [site name] office then [it] took a while to get all the information through and get the reins passed over and get her a new social worker. She didn't come with a whole lot of information." *[Educator]*

The following excerpts highlight the variability in social worker practice that an educator experienced when children changed school. One social worker had been very supportive and the move had gone smoothly and in the other instance the social worker had been absent in the process and children arrived with schools having no information about their needs to support their move into school. This educator also spoke about the potential for Oranga Tamariki to improve changes in schools by having a meeting between educators and social workers prior to children starting school and providing funding for one-on-one support for children to settle if they are likely to have behavioural needs.

A teacher's experience of variable support from social workers when children change schools

"I think if it's a kid that's coming with a lot of needs, which they tend to a lot of the time, then I think that is important that something's in place. There was no transition. He just suddenly appeared ...

Whereas with the boy [child's name], that we had last year, who had come to us from [place], I think he'd been taken from his family in [place] and we had a real transition. He was high end and he had a couple of visits and then I think he did mornings for a week.

[Child's name] didn't need that but there should've probably been some transition. We didn't know he was coming, he was just here and, to me, that wasn't fair on us or him.

He came out of the district, I thought that Oranga Tamariki [site], which would be where he was from, would've communicated to the care here, that he was moving to aunty here and then I don't know. I thought that he would then be picked up by a social worker, who would then, I guess, touch base with [pastoral care worker] but they just literally came. Everything went backwards, so we were back-peddling right from the start. What happens then is the behaviour that he exhibited in that first couple of weeks, other kids in the class straightaway then identified him as a pain in the arse. He was trying to fight. In his defence, he was being annoying – absolutely, he was – but he was trying to find his feet as well.

What's happened now is that emergency – whatever they called it - funding came in and gave him a person until he's settled more into the programme.

Three weeks, I think, we got funding, that he had a one on one person because he was just taking off out of the classroom. Whenever he didn't get your attention, he was gone and when there's 46 kids in the class, cos it's a collaborative class, you can't give him all of that. There had to be someone with him to start with.

... with [child's name], I don't even know if I've met his social worker. There does seem like there's a missing link sometimes. You feel like you're going blind for a while until you figure it out for yourself. Like I said, I never want to criticise cos far out, I know how many kids there are in the system, how difficult it is to find care ... there is something messy in the way it happens, whether there should be a sit down first and say, "What do we need sorted before this kid can start?" This, this, is cool. Then, is there any funding that could help for the first two weeks, to help this transition cos we think they'll need it or there are some kids that we don't think they'll need it and just maybe sit down before they're suddenly here and get a programme in place."

Educators spoke about the kind of relationship and support they would like to have from social workers during school changes.

Educator A: What we are trying to set up is for social workers to have meetings with schools straight away so there is initial understanding. In the past people have not known what is going on and people are trying to unravel it but we want more transparency. There are gaps in what a child needs. We try and help identify where the gaps are.

Educator B: It would have been nice if there was somebody else helping or saying, "What can we do?" or a social worker bringing them up. Rather than us having to arrange the intermediates doing those things, maybe the social workers could have said, "Can I help in any way?"

Interviewer: The visits beforehand, you mean.

Educator B: Yeah, "Can I help with this?" We'd have said, "Yes, can you do this, this and this." That would have been nice.

Some social workers described the way they were using this kind of practice. They also noted concern about the need to disrupt educators' potential preconceived ideas about children in care.

"The little boy I was with today, we had quite a big interagency meeting in May, to see if he should come to school. We had somebody from the school, we had the Ministry and we had the speech language therapist. We had everybody there who was involved in it and it was a really good meeting, just teasing out exactly what he would be taking to school, what his needs might be, a little bit about his background, a little bit about his behaviour." *[Social worker]*

Interviewer: What helps when a child does have to change school? What helps make that transition work or feel comfortable or successful?

Social worker A: Well, I think obviously for me, meeting with the school prior to that happening, having some form of discussion with me and the teachers. Obviously, relaying a little about that young person's learning needs to the school, look at what works, what doesn't work. Effectively, it's that communication, relaying what support network is around the child.

Social worker B: I think for me just when you're talking about the teachers, the possibilities of the teachers having a preconceived idea about what the child is or could be or what it brings, I think it's more around the teachers' preconceived ideas around the Ministry and the trust in the relationships that they have and the experiences they've had, positively and negatively. Often, you hear about the negative stuff so the child's already compromised by the relationships and the reputation of the Ministry in a sense.

Educators thought it was important for children to have school visits prior to starting school, including meeting pastoral support staff and knowing where to go in the school to ask for help.

"Having the visits, they came up here the year before they started a few times and got to know who [teacher] was, who I was, vaguely knew their way around, knew where this room (learning support) was, so they had somewhere safe to go all the time, knew where my office was, all that stuff just to make it a bit safer." *[Educator]*

Educators and students can offer care and empathy during school changes

Participants spoke about the ways they were able to show manākitanga to children in care who were changing schools. Educators spoke about the ways they individually offer support to children in care who are moving to their school through:

- awhi and empathy
- a practical approach of picking children up to ensure they could be at school
- developing empathy among children's peers by sharing information about their situations and encouraging them to acknowledge positive behaviour.

"I totally understand it that there are not enough carers out there but it seems a real pity when the turnover of care just seems, for some of them, so much. I think of gorgeous little [child's name] and every day, she comes up and gives me a cuddle. We chat about it and even though she's in my syndicate, I'm not directly her teacher but I see her and I always have that feeling with her, you could be going home one day and suddenly it's somewhere completely different." *[Educator]*

"With the children in a class, I am actually quite open with them because I think they appreciate your honesty and they're very forgiving. If you give a little bit of background information, like if a child has been in several different homes ... these kids, when they know what's going on, they show an amazing amount of empathy and acceptance. ... they will go out of their way, that if they see her doing the right thing, they will come and tell me or they'll give her one of the classroom reward systems or something like that. I think that says a lot for our general school community, that they are able to show empathy towards children if they're not as lucky as they are." *[Educator]*

A social worker identified the importance of meeting children's material needs as soon as they start school to ensure they are not stigmatised.

"It's about getting things right from day one. It's about making sure that that child goes to school with the right uniform, the right equipment so, straightaway, they don't appear to be the odd one out. I think it's also quite important that their information is theirs and it's not common knowledge that that child is part of us." *[Social worker]*

School can be a place of stability among care placement changes

A number of participants noted that school could offer children in care stability during changes in care placements. Some children moved between carers, whānau and temporary care and school provided an important constant for these children.

"Security, safety and boundaries, all of those things are so important to children, to feel safe, to feel secure and to have boundaries, to have people that care about them." *[Educator]*

The following excerpts from an interview with two educators highlight the concerns some educators held about children in care experiencing multiple changes in school. In this situation:

- a young person had experienced 21 care (and school) placements
- she was aware that she was unlikely to stay at her present school
- her caregiver was actively trying to move her to a different school
- educators were trying to keep this young person at their school in order to offer her stability through her schooling.

"She's on her 21st placement. ... She's never been at a school for more than two years. She's been moved all around. She's been to about a similar number of schools and even though she wags here in the corner, I think she should be here. I think she needs stability."

"I actually said to her, 'Should we get you a school jacket?' We've got a bit of budget for that sort of thing and she said 'I'm going to another school next year' I do joke with her about it and I said, 'Well if you promise you'll stay, I'll get you a jacket'".

"Nana is very determined to change schools because she doesn't like driving here, the traffic, the hill, the steps. I think personally, Nan doesn't feel comfortable here. She feels much more comfortable at those other schools."

"She comes to me quite regularly and she says "I don't want to go to another school, Nan wants me to go."

"Give her five, well, she won't last at school five years, four years of a stable secondary school, with the same people. That would be the longest she's ever been anywhere. I think that will set her up a lot better if we can keep her just cos we know her and we've got her sorted, than going somewhere new and having to do all that jockeying for position thing when kids start again. I just think no, no." *[Educators]*

Providing transport can help children remain in the same school

Social workers noted that a key means of achieving stability in a school was to arrange transport for children. In some instances educators were also stepping in to provide transport. Sometimes the person transporting children formed important relationships with them as they were a familiar and constant person in their lives.

"He spent a good part of a year bouncing around motels because of his age and level of maturity there was no place that was good for him. ... what worked was we got some really good trackers for him ... There was one that was really good and a good fit for him. He picked him up and took him to school daily. He had a stable person for him even though he was bouncing around from motel to motel and nothing working there was one guy he would see on a daily basis that was there for him." *[Social worker]*

"It's incredibly important and then that stability of staying in the same place. Even when this child moved from the first home she was at when she came here and she thought she was going to have to go to another school, you could see that it had a huge impact on her. The case worker said emphatically every time, 'No, we're doing everything we can to keep her staying in the same school.' They'd been picking up in [place], picking up over in [place], bringing her here, so that she's not having the changes in her life with her schooling that she's having with her home life." *[Educator]*

Stability in schooling and care was identified as key to children's success.

"The longer they can be in education the better platform they have for success and more tools in their kete. It can't be piecemeal. It's about stability that was why we had [child's name], I didn't want to see her going through a transition to another school and another caregiver if we change it again she will go backwards and we will lose momentum." *[Educator]*

Extracurricular activities

Summary: extracurricular activities

- Many children in care are engaged in extracurricular activities, particularly sport, through their schools or community clubs.
- Some participants see extracurricular activities as a positive experience for children in care that have a positive impact on educational experiences.
- When children have opportunities to access extracurricular activities, this extends opportunities to socialise with friends and provides additional opportunities to experience success.
- The caregiver role includes enabling children and young people to access extracurricular activities but at times resources and time could be a barrier.
- Social workers can facilitate children's engagement in extracurricular activities by providing access to funding for activities and equipment.

Engagement in extracurricular activities contributes to children's wellbeing

Participants in this study recognised the value of extracurricular activities in the lives of children in care as an important means of supporting social engagement and offering a sense of direction. One child spoke about how extracurricular activities held such value that it was important to provide funding for them.

"Probably more funding for kids that are really struggling in certain areas. Even socially, maybe they could fund activities that kids could do. Maybe they could have a club at school...

Yeah or something like that or maybe even a club where kids can go out and do things. I know there is a club at one of the schools I went to and it didn't exclude certain people but for people like me, it was a weekly thing. It was once a week, it was like \$10 a week and everyone brings \$10 and then we all go and do activities and things, social things that we can all do together, like laser force or something like that, something really socially enriching. I like that word...

Maybe just something like that, rather than just in school too, a bit of both maybe. Maybe the government can fund something like that or just fund something for people who are socially struggling a bit too because school's not just about learning." *[NZ European female, age 14]*

Taking part in extracurricular activities provided a time for children in care to feel connected to their peers and that they were part of a group. A caregiver felt that attending extracurricular activities together provided an opportunity for children at a care home to feel like they were part of a family.

"And what it does for the cottage as a family... they are all doing this together (going to each other's games etc.) We may all be from different parents but in this cottage we are one family because we all do things together and support each other... if one child is playing rugby then the whole cottage goes to support – cos that's what you do as a family – the whole family goes... of course sometimes you need to split up but majority of the time, it's letting them know that it's all about family together... and we take food, so we are going to watch [child's name] play soccer and we have a big picnic lunch". *[Caregiver]*

Engagement in extracurricular activities can have a positive impact on education

Some participants talked about how engagement in extracurricular activities had a positive effect on school engagement. This could be through recognising the importance of education on being able to pursue a career in their chosen extracurricular activity or that wider community and whānau members who support extracurricular activities may become interested in engaging with and supporting, a child's schooling.

"I am in the sports institute at school. It teaches you about rugby and sport and yeah we learn rugby skills as well as social and mental skills. It motivates me too cos if I don't do well in school I can't do that subject." *[Māori male, age 13]*

"... he is really into rugby but not so into school work. We tell him all the time that he needs to work on school work because one day when he is an All Black, 'if you break your leg, what are you going to fall back on... are you going to go work at a freezer works or something? cos you won't have any qualifications'. We talk to him about 'that All Black is a teacher... he is a lawyer... doctor...' everyone has something.... he needs something..." *[Caregiver]*

"It could be the kids are really keen on sports. It could be a coach at soccer. It doesn't always have to be within school, it could be an extracurricular activity, but that person becomes more involved within the child's life than they might with another child. They get interested in their education and might go to some stuff at school." *[Social worker]*

Caregivers need to support children to engage in extracurricular activities

The importance of caregivers being able to support extracurricular activities was discussed by all groups of participants. It was important that caregivers provided the practical support to access extracurricular activities as well as encouraged interest and motivation among children.

"Our caregivers help us with everything... like we need anything... they provide it... like rugby... he provides me with rugby gear, like if you need boots, they will get them for me." *[Māori male, age 14]*

"I have plans for each week. I have things going on. Then on Sunday I go to church and that gives me a good thing just to do. It's kinda fun church coz the little kids have their own room then from 14 or well the high school kids are in the big room with the other people learning about the bible and stuff and then the younger kids do fun stuff but they still learn about the bible but they are intermediate. ... my aunty got me into doing it and my little cousins they do it too so we go there every Sunday to learn and have fun and well just to get out of the house." *[Māori female, age 14]*

"It all comes down to the caregivers and how much passion they have for the kids doing sports and activities." *[Caregivers]*

"Some friends of mine who are foster parents, if they wanted to get their foster boy to get into some sport it would be really easy because they are great caregivers, they would take them out and do that." *[Social worker]*

Some participants spoke about the challenges caregivers faced when supporting children's engagement in extracurricular activities. Caregivers could have difficulty:

- finding the time to support these activities, particularly when they were caring for more than one child
- accessing the funding and resources required for extracurricular activities.

"But it does all depend on the caregiver's ability to juggle all the children's activities and fit it all in.... it may be a case of 'ahh sorry I can't come this week but I will be there next week..."[Caregiver]

"I had to fight tooth and nail to get them to fund a family reunion we had to take the kids to which I thought was beneficial. I had to pay for it. Not everyone can afford it." [Caregiver]

"If you have six or seven in the house it can be quite trying to, especially if you have got one at one school and they are all going to different schools it can be quite hard trying to interact with each school's activity. In the weekend it can be a bit of a challenge to get them around to everything." [Social worker]

Social workers can enable engagement in extracurricular activities

Social workers could play an important role supporting children's engagement in extracurricular activities by accessing funding to cover costs.

"...the one that we've got, [social worker's name], he's really good. One of the things that I said to him recently ... is that I was concerned about the kids, at their lack of water knowledge, safety and ability. I asked him, could I get them into swimming lessons. They're footing the bill for that and so each Saturday, the three go." [Caregiver]

Some social workers felt frustrated with the process to access funding.

"I have said this woman has been promised all this stuff, but nobody is coming to the party. I have assessed her again this morning. So really it is a hold up from a social worker." [Social worker]

Learning and behavioural needs

Summary: Learning and behavioural needs

- Many children in care have individual needs that require additional assessment or support in order for them to fully access education.
- Some participants note the importance of educators supporting individual learning needs.
- Some educators find the behaviour of some children in care challenging to manage in the classroom and note that children need additional support staff to work with them in the school environment.
- Some educators are not aware of children's individual needs or did not know how to meet these needs.
- The needs of some children are not being met, which impact on their ability to access or make progress in education.
- Foetal alcohol spectrum disorder impacts on children's learning and their engagement in the wider school environment. Educators are not always trained or well-prepared to manage the needs of children with foetal alcohol spectrum disorder.
- Professionals need to work together to meet children's needs and work with caregivers to ensure assessments are undertaken.
- Sometimes assumptions are made that children in care will have particular needs, which is not necessarily the case.

Educators need to support individual learning needs

Participants noted the importance of educators accommodating the individual needs of children in care. This included supporting children to learn behavioural or social skills, supporting their learning through a specific intervention or making allowances for behaviour (such as being absent from a class).

A child in care commented that his school encouraged him to listen to music when he was having a difficult time at school.

"I normally watch YouTube when I feel like I am not in the best mood that day. If I woke up on the wrong side of the bed or if I was just a little bit too tired for some reason, I don't know why. If I am thinking about something that is bad or sad I'll end up watching YouTube. If I'm getting picked on in class, which doesn't happen as much as it used to, I'll end up just listening to music and that is the way that they have told me to do it. ... It's normally the school that is telling me to because they know it works for me." *[Māori male, aged 14]*

A caregiver spoke about the way a child in her care was offered an opportunity for learning beyond the classroom to support his classroom learning.

"That's like with [child's name], he's got high needs. We've gone through IEPs with him and that and the school have processes on certain programmes now to try and help him as much as they can. ... There was him and this other girl in the class who are strugglers, so they were trying to give them more opportunities, experiences so that they can write about them, give

them something that they can use in school. It was to take them fishing ... The school tries to meet their needs as well." *[Caregiver]*

An educator reflected on what was working well at their school for children in care. For this educator being able to accommodate a child's individual needs through their own learning resource person was a success.

"I'm pleased with where I have [child's name], that's she got someone with her all the time because it allows her to be in a proper classroom. If we can spot the signs that she's going out of control, that one person can move her and go off and do something else. They've got other things. I think that's fantastic in terms of having that one person, so you're not always just managing that child cos then you'd never get anything done." *[Educator]*

A social worker explained that effective schools have relationships with caregivers in addition to children, which means they are aware of children's situations; "so they can see a full picture of the child, not just the child that turns up to school at 8.30am in the morning and leaves at 3pm".

Another social worker spoke extensively about what effective teachers and schools do to support children in care. This support ranged from enabling a child to spend time in the library, working one on one because the classroom environment was too overwhelming to having a wobble board for a boy to keep him occupied when he finished his work quickly.

"The little boy today is mad on dinosaurs and he's mad on jigsaw puzzles. He's the cleverest boy I've ever known with a jigsaw puzzle. Some of his compliance stuff today, they're going to give him a dinosaur picture, cut it up into jigsaw pieces and then every day when he comes in and does what he's supposed to do, they will give him another piece of that puzzle, so he can create a puzzle. ... She's found something. He's really good at numbers, he's really good at number patterns, so how can we use this to encourage him to do the things he's not quite so keen on? They've just found something, a skill, an interest, a passion of his, that they can then build on. If his Nana and if everybody in his life can give him those opportunities, then he will go far, so will they all." *[Social worker]*

A social worker described the way that educators came to understand children's individual needs.

"... have a bit of a chat to either myself, caregivers or family members, to learn about this child first, depending on their needs but just meeting the child for who they are, rather than like what's on paper as well. On paper, you can see a whole lot of problems, rather than the child. Then, trying to get to know them in the child's timeframes and work with the child around what they need and let the child lead the way cos they're the expert of their experience." *[Social worker]*

Some schools were also noted to be struggling to support children's individual needs.

"When she was at school last year, she wasn't learning because I think she was so anxious and on the lookout, looking for issues or what could possibly come at her, she just didn't take anything in. ... she didn't feel safe in the classroom. She's got such high needs. She needs something in that environment where she feels safe, whether it's a relationship with that teacher or a teacher aide or somebody that she can feel that they've got my back. If anything goes wrong here, they'll protect me. The teacher would go, "Don't talk to her like that" or try and manage it but as soon as that teacher turns their back, they'd start up again. I think it's processes, communication, all of that stuff. I don't know because what works for one child doesn't work for another. It's really hard actually. ... whether it's that they need to give her work and send her to the library, to sit in a quiet corner with a teacher aide to help her, rather

than being in a classroom. Can we think outside the box, rather than, "You must sit in a classroom with 20 other children" or whatever and learn this way?" *[Social worker]*

Educators need support to manage challenging behaviour of children who have experienced trauma

Educators and social workers shared their experiences of children in care exhibiting challenging behaviour in schools. A number of references were made to this behaviour coming to the fore when children felt threatened/overwhelmed and they would be in 'flight or fight mode'. Social workers pointed out that these behaviours were connected to trauma experienced by children and that this was not always well understood by teachers and caregivers.

"Often, I think they have foetal alcohol, they've got meth. There's all these other behaviours. Some kids who aren't in care aren't well behaved, but it comes from a trauma level. Our kids, I think, it comes from that fight or flight. It's real primal and I don't think that people see that. I think they see just a kid acting out and it's not just a kid acting out, it's actually they've gone back to right at the base of their brain where they are just going on instinct. ... I think there are some teachers that don't get it. Honestly, I think some caregivers don't get it. I think there's a lot of people that aren't aware of that and it's not their fault, it's just that they've never been told that. I think it is within the school sometimes, where maybe they haven't had training on it." *[Social worker]*

"Kids in our care often have a lot of baggage that they come with and sometimes it's seen when they misbehave. It's seen as being naughty rather than them reacting to whatever context they're in because of the baggage they've brought with them. It's misunderstandings and schools sometimes don't get that because they haven't had the experience of children that have been through trauma. They see behaviour being 'you're not complying or you are complying', rather than understanding the baggage because they don't have the baggage to understand." *[Social worker]*

Teachers spoke about the challenges they faced managing the behaviour of children in care in their classrooms because it could be disruptive and volatile. Teachers used a range of strategies to manage behaviour and make it possible for children in care to engage in classrooms but they also noted feeling unprepared to deal with these behaviours. Strategies that worked one day would not work the next and teachers commented they were not psychologists. Social workers were also of the view that teachers did not have training to support them in the management of behaviour that stems from trauma.

Educator A: Yeah, cos you've got one child whose anxiety will cause one problem and then you've got another child that just a slight off the rail comment will send that one off. As a teacher, we just don't have the knowledge. We do what we can as a nurturing mother, teacher, psychiatrist. It's all in one package but you manage.

Interviewer: Those emotional and social needs, how does that impact on their learning?

Educator A: It's not prefrontal cortex – is it?

Educator B: No, it's not.

Educator A: They're back in survival mode and it's [click fingers] like that, it's fight or flight. It's I'm gonna attack you with my words before you even have a chance, even if there was nothing going on. To expect some learning to happen, it's a challenge.

"The behaviour's definitely more erratic. ... You don't know so much what's happened before school that has made the emotion be up here before you've already got here and not the same control of their emotion and in control of their behaviour, more needy of attention

definitely ... Definitely those higher end ones struggle socially a bit because their behaviour is frustrating. I think with [child's name], he's incredibly demanding of my time. There's been a big improvement but when he wants your attention, he wants it now. 'No, go, back of the line, wait like everybody else'. He'd be like ... so, he'll just leave the classroom. We've had to put a lot of things in place but there is improvement. They seem to come in with a lot more baggage, I guess and fair enough, it's not their fault. ...Just out of the blue, you'll think you're doing alright and it'll just go again. When they lose it, they seem to lose it so quickly. They don't have that ability to manage that emotion. That's the only way I can really think of it. Someone has said something; that mentality about someone's called their cousin a name, so straightaway, they're in there and they react. It's like, 'hang on, first of all, two sides to every story, trying to find out or come for help'. That's another thing I always say to them, 'We'll always help you.' They're a lot more reactive." *[Educator]*

At another school a teacher spoke in depth about the strategies she used to support a young person in care to be part of the classroom environment.

"When I'm dealing with an individual and for example [child's name], if I find that she's not in that place, I have to measure it carefully, I really do have to make a quick ... how do I approach this? A lot of the time, what I have found with her is she can swing really easily from being this distraught, angry mess of an individual to, I'm okay now and I'm fine, I'll go off and play. It literally swings like that quite quickly. I'm very mindful of that, so I know that she can be resilient but it also concerns me because is that a true resilience that I'm seeing? I don't know, I'm not a psychologist but just from a teacher's perspective, I know that most of the time, I'll go in with an easy no and be really firm and be really careful about the language that I use. A lot of the times, if she is in a place where she's loud, shouting and clearly upset, I'll say, "Go outside." Outside seems to be a place, because there's stuff going on. Also, it's just fresh air, it's a new environment and she quite quickly ... so, I'm talking within about a five minute timeframe, will come back in ready to talk sometimes. Sometimes I have to remind her to go back out again. I've said to her before, "I need to calm down now." I have actually said that to her. When she calms back down, she's very good at articulating and talking but I don't believe it always. Sometimes it's in a manipulative way, so she knows what to say. She knows what I'm expecting her to say. Again, I'm having to make that snap judgment of are you being sincere and ready to move on or do we need to do a little bit more work around this?" *[Educator]*

It was understood to be important to manage social and emotional behaviour that makes it difficult for children in care to relate to their peers and conduct themselves in a classroom/playground environment, so that children were able to focus on their learning and, indeed, attend school. At the extreme, where behaviour was not managed or teachers feel threatened, children could be excluded.

Social worker: The children, depending on the child obviously, can have quite hard behaviours. I think sometimes some teachers get it and some principals, they really get it sometimes and then others don't. The general picture I've seen, not just from my caseload but overall, is that schools give up quite easily on kids. Some don't, some are really good, "We're gonna try this, we're gonna try that" but some kids [they] are just like, "We don't have the resource to meet this need, so this kid's gotta find another school to go to."

Interviewer: What do you think they mean by resource?

Social worker: The support for the child, I think. They don't have the support for their behaviour, they don't know how to manage the behaviour or they can't get an extra person in to try and manage that child. *[Social worker]*

In the following excerpt a social worker describes the behaviour of a child in care and the response from the school who did not have the tools to manage the behaviour. In this instance the school was at the point of suspending the child because the behaviour was recurring.

Social worker: I know one kid she used to climb trees and it was to get high, to get away from people. The school was just like, "We don't know why she's doing it, she won't come down. You guys have gotta come and deal with this." ... for this one particular child and she was that typical trauma behaviour. I think with that tree climbing stuff, she went into that primal fight or flight and would bolt up the tree cos I'm high, nobody can get me up here. We had to go down there and stand at the base of the tree, "Can you please come down?" We ended up having to call the police. Honestly, I think from the school's point of view, they were like, we can't manage this, you guys just deal with it. That's how it came across to me. I guess it could be that a social worker has a better relationship with the child, the child might listen to the social worker. I don't know what went through their head but when we saw the deputy principal, she was just like, "I've tried, you're the next port of call, then it's the police. We're really over this happening." She did it quite often so, "We're really sick of this, she's going to get suspended if she carries on."

Interviewer: Okay, so what do you think was needed? What do the school need to be able to manage that situation?

Social worker: I think they need to have the techniques or maybe they need to really build that relationship with the child. I know they can't do it with all children but I think that might have been lacking, as if they had built that relationship and tried to get to know her and understand her, then maybe it might have helped or just ring the police straightaway. Skip us cos she'd never come down for us, to a point that the social worker had to climb the tree to help her come down.

At another school, teachers were scared of the behaviour of some children in care.

"The teachers were scared of the kids and their behaviour problems.... straight up! Even the principal said... it's sad to admit but there are some of our teachers who are scared of the kids. They had psychologists and everyone working in there with the children...." *[Caregiver]*

Management of behaviour was a common topic raised by educators and is clearly something they feel they require more support with. Schools with pastoral care workers were able to draw on this resource to work one on one with children in care if their behaviour meant that could not be in the classroom or they needed some additional care and attention.

An educator spoke about the benefit of having an adult to support children in care who have difficulty managing their behaviour in school. These adults help children learn how to manage socially and emotionally.

"I think the biggest thing is social and emotional cues and how to react in certain situations. It's all to do with their social, emotional state, especially for the kids in care. ... Essentially, I guess it's almost like a caregiver to model good parenting. You've got an adult or a learning support worker with them in the playground, not telling them what to do but showing them how to respond, react or the same type of thing really." *[Educator]*

Another educator spoke about the need for mentors to work with children in care as they enter secondary school to support them with social and emotional coaching.

Educator A: I think resourcing needs to come with these children cos ... they have probably an extra load of baggage than the rest. We're not trained psychologists. They just need that big brother or big sister, that mentor that perhaps they haven't had, that person being there and a

voice saying, "That's probably a better choice." Someone to guide them through. Secondary is a very different landscape compared to primary.

Educator B: You need someone with that kind of experience of that child's needs because it's okay giving them a teacher aide or someone to follow them around and be with them but at the end of the day, that child still needs that mental care and physical care. You can't just be a babysitter, that child needs someone.

Educator A: It's that social and emotional coaching.

Foetal alcohol spectrum disorder impacts on education and friendships for children in care

A number of participants described individual needs associated with foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). Some education staff talked about the increasing number of children with FASD and the impact of this on individual children's learning and on the wider school environment. An educator also spoke about the effect FASD can have on children's ability to engage with and form friendships with their peers.

Educator A: We're seeing more and more kids who have high needs. I think they're saying two in five school-aged children have some form of FASD. In [Location name], that's high. You combine that with being in care.

Educator B: The numbers are going up, of students who have all these things that are going on. Soon, our classes will be probably half and half, rather than two or three, if this continues. We get the fine line between being a teacher and being a social worker ourselves.

"The worry for these children with FASD is they are growing and developing so much more slowly than their peer group yet they are kept with their peer groups through their educational life. If they are making friendships, they are two or three years younger than themselves where they are more cognitively situated socially. Some of these children would be benefited to be held back a year or two years at school to give them a chance to catch up from the social perspective. ... and the academic stuff as well. With this girl this teacher her comments are that every year you can see a widening gap between her and what she is achieving academically versus her classmates. The more that's become obvious we can help but wonder if that is feeding into her behaviour because that is starting to escalate. We are having to look at why is this happening, and it could well be an element of being confronted by the fact that she is not doing so well as her peers and she doesn't have any friends her age." *[Social worker]*

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and FASD were cited by one social worker as the cause of behaviours that could be misunderstood as naughty in the school context. This social worker noted that an approach akin to mentoring was useful.

"I would talk to him. He would usually say one thing and not do it unless you sat there with him. I think he would listen to people that meant something to him. His social worker and mentor are like big brother to him. I find it is better if I bonded at their same level. I had no knowledge about ADHD or FASD. When I got to learn about it I understood why he did the things he did. He would go on inappropriate websites and make inappropriate comments. Other people would see him as naughty, but he can't help his behaviours. Most of the kids that come into care have ADHD or FASD. They need a different approach to deal with them around his behaviour and how they punish him. It makes him want to do it more. He finds the thrill of people getting angry at him amusing. I didn't get angry. I find I ignore him he comes right eventually. I don't use that psychological stuff on him. I just treat him like my little brother." *[Social worker]*

Some education staff described not feeling trained or equipped to meet the needs of children with FASD.

"It's not going to be easy and it's not going to get any better because I remember when I first got my first FASD child, I was like, my God, what's this? I never knew anything about it. I'd heard of it but never actually known. They didn't actually set us up to go on any courses or do anything or learn about it." *[Educator]*

These views were reinforced by social workers who felt that children with FASD had a different experience of school and that schools were not always able to meet their needs.

"I do worry with my children that have foetal alcohol syndrome. I think their experiences of school are different." *[Social worker]*

Relationships with peers

Summary: Relationships with peers

- School friends are important to children in care.
- Often children in care can't spend time with friends outside of school, so time with friends in school is important.
- Children may struggle to form and maintain friendships on account of their difficulty with social interaction and the likelihood of changing schools.
- Caregivers can support children's friendships by helping them to see friends outside of school.
- Educators can support children to form and maintain friendships through pastoral support groups and one to one guidance to build social skills.

Many children in care do not have friends

Many children in care did not have friends. Some visibly shut down in interviews when discussion turned to friendships.

Interviewer: What about friends? Who are your friends in school? Who do you spend time with?

Child: Ummm (clicking fingers) Jeff! Yes, ah he's my friend.

Interviewer: Ok so at break time who do you spend time with?

Child: Jeff You couldn't tell ... couldn't you tell that I was lying? I have no friends. *[Māori female, age 12]*

Friends are important to children in care

The following excerpt highlights the significance of friendship for children in care. The following excerpt is from a young person who had been home schooled for a number of years; she shared her experience of making a friend at her new school.

"While I'd been getting taught home schooling, in those days it was really hard cause like I didn't have any friends and I couldn't cope properly because the person who was teaching me was really hard on me, and stuff like that, but ever since I've been in school I've made a lot of friends and there's like a lot of nice people who could actually help me with my things. ... what I've learnt is that communicating is the key. Like, if you don't have that communicating in yourself then you probably won't make any friends. ... before I met this girl, she, before I met her I was really, I was really lonely, not talking to other people, and just not yeah not talking to people ... so when I did meet her she just changed my vibes towards other people like in a happy, exciting way." *[Māori female, age 15]*

This young person's social worker noted that school was an important opportunity for socialisation. Another social worker was of the view that when children in care are disengaged with school it is often connected to difficulty forming friendships. Part of the difficulty some children in care face when making friendships is a lack of social skills.

Children in care need support with social skills to help form and maintain friendships

Educators noticed that children in care often had limited social skills, which inhibited their ability to make and maintain friendships. An example of this was offered by educators who spoke about two young women in care who had started high school, one was able to make many friends but struggled to navigate friendship and often needed support to manage these friendships, the other was shy and could not make friends. The teachers noted that social skills were their weakest point. The school developed a lunch club to support children who found it difficult to socialise and both of these young women regularly attended it. The social worker of one of these young women commented:

“She’s had friends. I remember last year, they had a friendship club and she would go in her lunch break cos she had no friends. She didn’t know how to make friends. Now, she’s starting to learn what friends are. She’s 14, learning about friends. They’ve really nurtured her and developed her as a person and they have gone out of their way to support her and she’s doing really, really well.” *[Social worker]*

This young person was interviewed and acknowledged the support of the lunch club.

“[name of school] it’s about the students mainly but everyone in school has support. No one is left without support. I go to lunch club on Tuesday lunchtimes and that’s for girls who don’t have many friends, need somewhere to hang out quietly or just want to meet some new people. It’s in the learning support room, just a small room and we just get to chat, hang out and do whatever during our lunch hour. It’s quite nice.” *[NZ European female, age 14]*

Another educator recalled the experience of one girl who struggled to form friendships with peers.

“It’s the social skills; it’s how to make friends, how to keep friends, how to socialise with your own peer group or as my little girl, spends her whole time heading over to the juniors, to play with the little kids or playing in the sandpit. She’s happy there, whereas she’s out of her depth with her peers socially, experiences, her own confidence level. She didn’t have any ability to play games with other children and she even in organised games, she would hide or she’d use avoidance tactics of some sort. We worked out she actually didn’t know how to play and when you get them in year five, it’s actually quite hard. If they’d come in as five year olds or six year olds, they’d do a play-based learning programme, which would have given her the chance to develop those skills but when you get them in year five, most of the kids are way past wanting to play all the time and not knowing how to play. They all know how to play, they are involved in team sports but she’s much better now.” *[Educator]*

FASD was also noted to affect children’s social skills and impact capability to form friendships. A social worker recalled a child who struggled with friendships and connected this to FASD and social skills.

“I have one girl, where every discussion I have with the caregiver is worried about her having no friends. She has FASD. She has what we call monkey bar hands, she has calluses because all she does is play on the monkey bars on her own at break time. She is so horrible to the other kids in terms of her lack of social skills, bossiness and inappropriate conversations that the children avoid her, but you can’t avoid that.” *[Social worker]*

School changes can disrupt friendships

Changes in schools compound difficulties forming friendships for children in care. With each change, children in care typically lose their friendships and need to form new friendships. Some children noted that they found it difficult to make new friends when they changed schools. Others were used to it and relied on their friendly nature to talk with people and make friends or engage with others through sport.

"I just made my own friends (teachers did not help). I just wandered around and met people. I just roamed around and people started talking to me. It started from there. Whenever I move schools I just do the roaming around thing and I make new friends." *[African female, age 11]*

An educator spoke about the difficulty children in care could have making new friends as they get older because other children have stability in their school and have formed strong friendship groups. A social worker also noted that children who move from school to school may develop trust issues.

"If you drop out and go from school to school, you don't make long-term friends. If you have to make new friends all the time that will impact on you as a person with levels of trust. If you go past three months with a person you start getting worried because they might learn the real you." *[Educator]*

Maintaining contact with friends is difficult for children in care

"I've never seen any of my friends outside of school. I wouldn't really call them my best friends, they're just friends. I've never really had best friends before." *[NZ European female, age 14]*

Few children in care spoke about being able to engage with their friends outside of school. Caregivers at a contracted care home spoke passionately about the efforts they made to support children's friendships.

"Friendship it is something that we really celebrate in our house, like if a child comes home and says 'I got invited to a birthday' we go 'oh yay! Let's organise that!'. We have a store room here at [name of place] where children can go in and choose a gift for their friend. Sometimes we can ask for money to buy something." *[Caregiver]*

"That's down to us [caregivers] we really go out of our way to organise and promote friendships for our kids.... we are currently working hard to organise play dates for one of our boys with his school mates... That was my big thing when I first started as a carer – helping our kids to make friends. I was like 'what, these kids really don't have any friends?' *[Caregiver]*

Some caregivers noted that they struggle to offer children in their care the opportunity to spend time with friends outside of school because they had been asked to complete Police checks².

² Requests to complete police checks are not part of Oranga Tamariki guidance, which is that caregivers can exercise their discretion, as any parent would, when allowing a child in care to have a sleepover at a friend's house. Police checks or social work visits are not required.

"If our kids go to anyone's house they need a police check [for a day or night visit]. Most parents are OK with their kids coming here. We just talk to them and say, [child's name] is in foster care, we are his carers, as long as you don't want them to be police checked – that's the offensive bit. We have one lucky child where the friend's parents have done police checks and so she gets to stay over there a lot." *[Caregiver]*

"Our boy [child's name] had had the experience of the social worker talking to a friend's mother about being police checked and then the parents were like 'you can't hang out with [child's name] any more'. We get our kids in to the sticky situation of his friends parents saying 'that's not the kind of kids we want you to hang out with, stop hanging out with [child's name] now!' so why would we put out kids through that?" *[Caregiver]*

A social worker also recognised the difficulties children in care have maintaining friendships outside of school. She acknowledged that it was unlikely children would be able to see friends outside of school because social workers could not prioritise the checks that need to be made. This was disappointing for her because it impacted children's relationships and contributed to their stigma of being different to other children.

Social worker: I would have to check the people out first because you send someone there or you could be endangering their wellbeing. You would have to go through the process that we do here and police checks. It can take a couple of days. We do a lot of that stuff before we go out. Normally if something is critical we would go straight out. A few days. If there is a crisis we will go out.

Interviewer: So, would it be fair to say a request like that to sleep at a friend's place would fit in the important but not urgent.

Social worker: Too hard basket but then the kids miss out. They are the ones that suffer in the end. You want them to have as normal a life as they can instead of making them feel like they are in care.

Relationships with adults

Summary: Relationships with adults

- Caregivers' attitudes towards education and their ability to support children to engage are important to support children in care to have positive experiences of education.
- The way children experience education is closely connected to the way educators engage with them, understand them and support them.
- Educators' relationships with children in care, including the pastoral support they provide through these relationships, are important to enable children to feel safe and be able to learn.
- Social workers are not visible to children as supports for their education except in crisis situations (e.g. exclusions). Social workers' practice of visiting children in schools varied, as did children's response.

Children's relationship with caregivers can impact on education

Caregivers' efforts to support children's education were not very visible to children. They spoke about caregivers helping with homework and making school lunches but rarely about engagement in school activities or communicating with teachers. Some children also spoke about the way their caregivers supported them to deal with social issues occurring at school.

Supporting homework, sports and cultural activities

Children had mixed experiences with caregivers supporting their learning in the home. For some children they did not need caregiver's help because they did not have homework to do, others felt competent doing the work on their own. Children in Oranga Tamariki family homes and contracted family homes often noted there were carers who supported their learning.

Interviewer: Who else helps you?

Child: Do you mean like Aunty and Uncle?

Interviewer: Yes, that would be a good example.

Child: Well we didn't read before we came here. We didn't have books but now we read all the time. Aunty has taught us that it's good to read and now we really like it. [Māori female, age 12]

Interviewer: Who helps you with work at home?

Child: I just do it on my own. [European female, age 14]

Some caregivers spoke about supporting children with their homework. When teachers had not set homework they would take it upon themselves to provide homework. These caregivers were of the view that homework was essential for children to maintain routine and keep learning, catch up on learning or research new areas of learning.

"The kids come home from school but then they either bring homework that is below par for what they could be achieving, as far as we are concerned, or they don't bring home

homework at all....if the teacher did not have time to allocate homework... they sometimes just say 'oh read a book'... or 'go to this website because I did not have time to print it out'. That's not good enough so we need help to offer the right support to our kids at home. We are picking up a lot of slack from the schools. We are sitting down and saying to the kids 'have you read this book already' and the kids are saying 'the teacher read it once but I don't understand it'. The teacher reads and everyone has to listen... she does not know that they understand. So we pick up all this slack from school and there are only two of us for seven children." *[Caregiver]*

"They (the school) don't really encourage homework there. What they want is to get the children to work hard at school but when they are home they can do their chores. I think they are on their computers all the time but what I get him to do is to research, especially with history. There are some great movies. I actually love watching historical movies and you can watch and learn a lot.... One of the things with his English is he needs to be reading more. He has a library card, so we try to encourage him to get library books out instead of being on the computer 24/7. ... I am not one to shove things down their throat. If they don't enjoy it or can't be self-disciplined themselves, well I can't be around for them all the time, so I am trying to use that, that is why they go to school and be more proactive in their approach to things." *[Caregiver]*

On the other hand, a social worker noted that some caregivers don't take up a role of continuing children's learning in the home.

"If it doesn't seem important to them they are not going to push it onto the child. If you aren't passionate about the kids, their learning and needs and don't enforce to the children as some rule or routine then they are not going to do it as they don't like doing homework." *[Social worker]*

In addition to supporting homework, caregivers spoke about attending children's school sporting and cultural activities. This was important because it made children feel proud and supported their relationships.

"Even with the connection and relationship between us and the child, it's a big difference when we attend their sports during the day. It's just you sitting there watching and they look over every five minutes and feel so proud." *[Caregiver]*

"Tonight we have a night market at school ... the kids have had to prepare all sorts of things to sell at the market... so last night we were making slimes and all sorts of things. So tonight I will take my whole cottage to the night market... [care home] does not know about this... it's just us [as carers] being proactive... things like this we report back on at our weekly meeting... telling [care home] leaders what we have been doing." *[Caregiver]*

Providing for children's material and emotional needs

Educators spoke about their experience with some caregivers who were not providing what children in care needed to attend school and learn; they also spoke about caregivers that really demonstrated their care and love for the child in their care.

"She comes with sweatshirts that she shouldn't be wearing because nobody will buy her a jacket or she doesn't have food because there's no food in the house. That shouldn't happen." *[Educators]*

"They do really, really care for her. She's not just staying there. [Child's name] wrote a thing once, that she denied writing, about how no one loved her and people only looked after her

for the money. It said something like that. I think that she probably doesn't feel that anyone really, really cares. I think that makes a difference, whereas [child's name] knows that they really do love her and they really do care for her. If you asked [child's name], I don't think she'd say that. I honestly feel that deep down, she probably doesn't feel loved. I think that that's also part of the difference as well." [Educator]

Educators spoke about caregivers' role modelling good parenting and taking on the role of the parent. This meant not attempting to be professionals trying to understand children's issues, but focusing on delivering the basics that children need. The following excerpt outlines the importance of meeting the basics on learning and engaging with peers.

"... whānau, providing that child with the necessities of life, to set them up so that they can come along, enjoy a school day, so they've got a full puku, so that they've had a good night's sleep, so that they are clean and have good hygiene, so they're set up, so that socially they can interact. This is all shared, of course, the social aspect of it. We've all got a part to play in that but that stuff that every child should be entitled to, that basic stuff, you are wanted, you are cared for, you are important, you deserve to be fed, clothed, sheltered and safe. ... It means they can learn, it means they are in the right place. When I say learn, it's not just academic, this is such an important age group and so it is setting them up so that they can confidently and comfortably just be in their zone with their peers. It means that they are tuned in, so that they can learn and have a love for learning". [Educator]

A social worker also spoke about the importance of caregivers' role modelling positive behaviours so that children could emulate these in the school environment.

"I think it's just the way they generally are at home. When there's any issues at the home, they have a massive whānau hui, sit down and talk about it. It is teaching the kids to take responsibility, talk it out. It's a really cool model that they work by. If they want to have one-on-one chats, they'd be always there to talk to the kids and they talk to the children like they're adults. They talk to them at a level where they can understand, [name of child] but they also push them to understand a bit more, where [name of child] spoken to her like she is an adult. It's like, "This is what you've done, this is the consequence. Maybe next time, what are you gonna do?" "I don't know." "Well, think about it and come back to me." It's really good parenting of the kids. I think that is done well with [name of child] at school. ... because of the way they speak to her if something's going wrong for her, even when something's going positively for her, the way they talk to her is very mature cos she is quite a mature girl. Now, when she's at school, when she has a problem, it's like, I'll just go and talk to somebody. She's got more of a mature mindset, I think, which has been reinforced at home." [Social Worker]

Children's relationships with educators can impact on education

Child: So, there's lots of nice teachers there

Interviewer: So the nice teachers there, what do they do that makes them nice?

Child: They're not really as grumpy, and teachers that can like sit down and help me with my school work. [Māori female, age 15]

Interviewer: Do you have dreams about what you'd like to do when you're finished school, when you are a bigger person?

Child: Yep be a teacher and teach everyone about the [topic]

Interviewer: Would you be a teacher like the teacher you've got now

Child: No

Interviewer: How would you be different?

Child: By showing what is good and giving people in my class heaps of certificates, I only got two. [European female, age 9]

"[If you are struggling at school] it's important to ask for help from someone who will help and don't judge you, sometimes I ask if they can help me spell a word and they ask, 'Can you not spell?' and you just get annoyed and you go home and ask, and they are there for you basically, they never get tired of it too, they are like willing." [Māori male, age 13]

Children in care spoke about the ways their teachers supported their learning. Children were receptive to:

- feedback, challenges and tailoring work
- one-to-one learning opportunities with teachers and teacher aides
- supportive school cultures, including teachers, teacher aides, counsellors, pastoral support workers and social workers in schools who helped them with their interactions in school
- rules and boundaries and teachers acting to manage behaviour from students that did not meet these standards
- compliments from their teachers - they were proud of achievements that were acknowledged by their teachers through credits, stickers, certificates, and positive reports.

Children described some teachers as grumpy; these descriptions included teachers who yelled and growled and punished children. Some teachers were also noted to choose favourites, which was perceived to be unfair.

A number of children noted that no one helped them with their learning; they did their learning by themselves. This may reflect some children's capabilities to do their work alone, but in other cases may signal difficulties with social interaction with peers and teachers.

High expectations

Educators appeared to hold one of two positions on expectations around achievement and behaviour of children in care. Some educators were of the view that it was critical to hold high expectations of children in care and ensure children were aware of these expectations.

When asked what a school should do if a child in care was starting at their school and they had no experience with this situation, a teacher stated: "Expect the best from them because they can do it. As teachers, we shouldn't be deficit thinking, thinking she can't do it. If we're doing that, we have a problem. We don't do that, we've got to think that they can achieve the best and then they think it". Other educators shared similar views.

"This one has got real skills and has got so much family support with the foster parents, that it's really amazing. Her potential is out of this world to be an amazing young lady. I make sure I tell her that. I know that the foster parents will be doing that but it can't hurt to hear it from someone else." [Educator]

"It's the same, if you treat everyone equally, that doesn't mean treating them the same. It's the same sort of thing; you know your student, you know how to build on success and you know how to encourage and give them that sense of you can do it. Too often, it's you can't do it, but you can do it, and instil in that child, that actually, you might need a little bit of help but you can do this, we're in this together and that works. I've seen it work in so many different children across 10 years." [Educator]

Children and young people were also aware of the high expectations their teachers held of them.

"Yeah and if you're struggling in an area, like say for example, I'm struggling with my maths, they'll really help you to improve and they'll give you work that you can do that's at your level and then you just build up as you get better. They will always encourage you to challenge yourself. ... Well, they've got lots of activities in class, that we do as a class but it's also focusing on an individual student as well. If we're doing English, we might do a game where the whole classroom splits up into pairs and we have a script that we have to read from to each other or practise the lines or something. There's learning support in most classrooms, to help some students if they're not focussing in class or if they're struggling a bit. We get a good amount of work homework to do. If we don't finish our work in class, we do it as homework." [NZ European, female, age 14]

On the other hand, some educators felt it was important to be realistic about expectations for children in care and make allowances for their learning and behaviour in line with their circumstances.

"Absolutely and I guess I'm thinking of my recent cases, they haven't got security of knowing how long they're going to be there and that makes it hard for them. It's hard for the children in the class as well because they see behaviours that normally wouldn't be acceptable but they're very good when you talk to them, in understanding that there are different situations and that sometimes you have to change the expectation, depending on the child and what they've been through." [Educator]

Manākitanga for children in care

Educators commonly spoke about the relationships they built with children in care and through these relationships the support they provided to meet their needs and enable them to learn. Children needed the opportunity to bond with staff in schools and receive special attention and care. In response to the interviewer asking what a school would need to do if they had a child in care starting with them, an educator responded:

“Make connections with the child, give them some TLC because that’s often so important. Well, it is always so important because some of them have come from situations where they don’t feel like they belong or are loved by anyone.” *[Educator]*

At another school a learning support teacher offered a room for students to spend time in during their lunch. In this room she helped students learn behavioural and social skills and provided a safe space for students to spend their time and meet new people. The teacher noted that two girls in care used the room and spent time with her. Her colleague also explained that pastoral support for one of the girls in care was also offered through manākitanga from administrative staff.

“[Staff member’s name], who was working in our office, [child’s name], last year would go and see her pretty much every morning, to say that she had a sore back or sore leg, she didn’t have this. She would give her a little ice pack or she’d give her whatever, then send her on her way. She started off going to see either her, me or [staff member’s name] every single day and then it stretched out.” *[Educator]*

These educators also spoke about a situation where a child in care was not receiving what they needed to learn at school. They noted that in this kind of instance they stepped in and supported the child.

“I mean, we’re all here for the same thing; we all want them to have the best experience that they can. That means not being cold and it means a working computer and getting to school on time and all of those basics. They should have the same as everyone else. It’s not their fault and so we probably do more cos they don’t do it. We do make a real effort to look after them.” *[Educator]*

A social worker also spoke about the importance of children in care having a relationship with their educators because this promotes achievement.

“I believe, in a connection with an educator or teacher who inspires or has that connection with a kid in care. It can happen for any kid, I think, in the school setting but kids in care that have had that connection do achieve a whole lot better.” *[Educator]*

Young people also described how they benefited from relationships with school staff.

“At [school name], they’re a lot more focused on their students’ needs cos at my old school, they were focusing on the really high achieving students, the really brainy ones and then the ones that were struggling, they’d just leave them. They wouldn’t bother with them but at [school name], everyone gets taught the same thing. If you struggle with something a bit, the teacher will come and help you out and make sure you understand what you’re doing. They might even set you some work that’s a bit easier for you, if you’re struggling with what the rest of the class is doing but then they will always get you to try and challenge yourself and do a bit harder work too, which I like. ... The teachers are like really accessible, so if you’re not in class and you need to ask them a question or talk to them about something, you can flick them an e-mail or, even at lunchtime, you can go and see them. They’re always there to talk to, if you have any questions or you need support for something. ... Yeah, the teachers are just really friendly and my dean is really friendly too. She’s helped me a lot with my being sick and all that.” *[NZ European female, age 14]*

The following relationship between an educator and child in care (as described by a social worker) highlights the significance that educators can have in the lives of children in care.

"She got a William Wallace award last year and she has really struggled with [illness]. One of the things she recognised early on was that she was good at learning and she excelled at that stuff. Her English teacher took a particular interest in her and started coming to some of our meetings as her support person. That was incredible. She has had people in education take an interest in her, encourage her and she wanted to do the best she could for the people she respected. That made the difference for her. She had someone who was a role model that she looked up to. She said that to me that she inspired her to do better. Some of the things that make a difference are not things about systems they are about people with hearts that say that kid is worthwhile, and I am going to dedicate and make time for that child. Somehow if schools could do that in an authentic kind of way with our kids in care and buddies up with a kid for their entire time at that school not someone each year. I think it would make a difference. The feedback as I am reflecting are those kinds of experiences that have made the biggest difference." *[Social worker]*

One teacher spoke about her experience teaching a child in care that involved developing a relationship with this child so that when she was upset the child could let her know and she could support her. The child in her class was able to share her anguish when she received a report that detailed how her mother had died and the teacher was able to support her with this and reach out to her caregivers. This teacher considered forming a relationship where children can reach out for help as part of the job. The teacher was unhappy about Oranga Tamariki placing a child in the position of having information about the death of her mother and felt it was important to inform her caregivers. The child was upset that the teacher had reached out to her caregivers. The teacher was placed in a difficult position of needing to maintain a trusted relationship with the child and also ensure her wellbeing by reaching out to her caregivers.

"That happened when I was in class, starting class. That was like, hell, this is big. I then e-mailed the parents and then they got really upset and were worried that the kids would be taken off them because they said they felt that they had done something really wrong or she had. She'd done nothing wrong. I felt sorry for the young girl because she was saying, "Why did you tell them?" I said, "Hun, I was just trying to see that you were okay." That was pretty crappy for her." *[Educator]*

The relationship that the educator above had with this child and her sister was one centred on aroha, empathy and mana-enhancement.

"I look at both of these two girls and I think they're winners. Man, they're awesome. If I had daughters like them, I'd be proud of that. I think it's huge, our role as teachers, to build their confidence, to support them, to also understand what they're dealing with. I think it's huge for us, our role in education, to offer them hope that they can be supported, loved, amazing, cos they are. They really are." *[Educator]*

A number of educators spoke about the importance of praising the achievements of children in care and noted that the children crave this acknowledgement. Children were also aware of moments when their teachers had praised their efforts and signalled they valued this.

"All those kids seem to really want praise though, so you can actually win them over by forming that relationship but just really praising what they do, even if it's not to the level that you expect at all but initially anyway, just really praising." *[Educator]*

Interviewer: So if I asked [teacher's name] what you were good at in school what would he say?

Child: ... Little bit good at maths though, ahh handwriting, reading I am the best in my group ... [teacher's name] said that and I am the only one that doesn't get stuck. *[Māori male, aged 8]*

Role of pastoral support

Some of the schools involved in this study employed staff in pastoral support roles. These staff members:

- played key roles in the education and support of children in care
- offered children one-on-one support that teaching staff might not be able to provide
- were familiar to children in care and recognised as people they could go to for help
- formed relationships with caregivers and social workers and were often involved in coordinating meetings to support children's behaviour or learning needs
- provided a key resource to support children's social, emotional and behavioural needs.

In the following excerpt a teacher explains how the pastoral support staff member at her school supported her in her teaching role.

"I think social workers in schools is gonna become an absolute must or at least a pastoral care whānau liaison but even more so with a social worker in schools because of the issues that we're dealing with, with the kids, whether it be getting them to school, whether it be taking them to appointments but then dealing between. What happened before school with [child] and another kid, that could have taken up the next hour of my day, but at the same time, I think it's really important that teachers are still involved in the process of what's happened there and involved in some restorative chat or whatever. The reality is we can't spend that amount of time, so being able to hand it over to someone else to deal with it and make the phone calls with the families."

"Some of these are tough families. Some of these are not families that I feel that I'm going to rock on up to and yet, he's [pastoral support staff member] got a fantastic relationship with a lot of these families. I've got a really good relationship with [child's name] family but there are other ones that I don't know so well and having that support person. It's cool to have that support person for yourself as well, cos usually, then once you talk to her and there's the tears and everything, they're having a hard time. It's so complex."

"... I know from the minute he comes in the door if he's had medication or not. That's just something too that I would just say to [pastoral support staff member], "Can you ring home?" rather than it taking up my time or my teacher aide does it. We have medication kept at school as well. "Can you touch base with aunty and make sure he hasn't had it cos I don't wanna make him a zombie either?" but ensuring that we can administer that." *[Educator]*

Another teacher at this school stated they call on the pastoral care worker when a child's behaviour in the classroom indicates they could do with some one-to-one support.

"Even if you don't know why they specifically need it, you know that the need is there because of the behaviour, the body language, the facial expressions or their responses, just their general demeanour. If they're in a bad space and they're inside, they can become quite

difficult to handle in a classroom. We can only do so much when we've got 20 something other children there as well and some of them have got needs." [Educator]

This teacher felt that their school had everything they needed through a pastoral care worker to cater for children in care. "As long as there is a person specifically in the school that's available virtually at the drop of a hat, to come and give support, I think that we've got what we need."

At another school the pastoral care worker was noted to be the key manager of relationships between agencies and providing information about children's situations.

"I guess the schools that I have taught at, most of the schools, to be fair, have been quite large schools. We have a large number of staff and because of that, I think we have had people appointed, for example [staff name's] position. She's a pastoral person, so she is pivotal. She's really quite important to being that point of contact person, being a person who can communicate with agencies that need to be communicated with. She's brilliant and I think that makes quite a difference to the child coming in because we can have those conversations about the situation of the child. I know as a classroom teacher, that's not me alone, that's having to nurture or have wrap around, I guess for this student or this learner who's coming in to our class and it's really nice. I think it makes such a huge difference." [Educator]

Children's relationships with social workers can impact on education

Social workers variable engagement in education

According to some participants, social workers had minimal engagement in education. One boy described the role of his social worker around supporting his education as being there when something goes wrong rather than proactively supporting his learning.

"Social workers only get involved in school if you do something bad. Lately we haven't, and I'll keep it up aye." [Māori male, age 14]

"They [social workers] don't do much at all. All that's there is just to have a backup if something bad happens. It's not really a learning tool as it is just used as a backup if I get kicked out of school. We have a backup reason why I can come back to school, so they don't really help at all for schooling, or I don't see them help." [Māori male, aged 8]

In many ways this description aligns with that provided by a social worker when reflecting on her engagement with schools. The social worker focused on stepping in when there was 'a pressing issue' but otherwise checked in with caregivers in a passive monitoring role.

"It depends on the needs of the children. When there is a real worry or concern around children I will be talking to the school weekly, sometimes not. It depends on the child. If a child is reasonably settled at school and there are no pressing issues, I may speak to them once every eight weeks or once every three months. Although I may not speak to the school when I do my weekly visits I will ask the caregiver how things are going at school. So there is that behind the scenes check. If anything comes up that is a worry or concern I am in there making contact." [Social Worker]

A perceived lack of engagement was echoed by caregivers who did not think social workers were able to understand the needs of the child in their care because they did not know the child in the

education context. Beyond an individual child's needs, an educator noted that social workers do not understand the education system, although they do come to the educator to ask questions and try to understand how it works.

Social workers visiting children at school [see also Stigma section]

Some children did not want/like their social worker visiting them at school. They were concerned that other children would find out that they were in care, which could be embarrassing or result in bullying. One child noted missing out on lessons due to having to see a social worker.

"I don't like it when the social workers visit us in school, you can do it somewhere else! Why do they have to come to school, it's embarrassing. Everyone is like 'who's that?'" *[African female, age 11]*

Interviewer: What about at school, did she come to see you at school?

Child: No, oh yes she did.

Interviewer: Did she, and how did you feel about that?

Child: Angry.

Interviewer: Angry. What happened?

Child: Crying. *[Māori male, age 7]*

Some caregivers also noted that children in their care did not want social workers to visit them in school.

"Our social worker here was meant to go into her school to explain her role and [Name] completely blew her stack ... She just lost it ... she got mad ... she did not want our social worker going anywhere near school. She did not want [care home] to add any more people. She said 'I already have an OT social worker who comes to school sometimes, then I have my caregivers, then there was [Name] last year who was doing the educational stuff and now you are going to send in another social worker'. So she just lost it." *[Caregiver]*

The practice of visiting children at school also made it difficult for caregivers to keep abreast of children's interactions with social workers and what they were being told. Young children were noted to be confused when social workers had conversations with them without caregivers present.

"Getting pulled out of class to see an OT social worker – excuse me – they hate that, especially the older ones. Then the younger one's tell us, 'oh my social worker came to see me today' and they get confused 'cause they don't even understand what it's all about and then we get notified a week later why they went there ... and we are like 'we told you not to go to school – come to the home to talk to them in front of us so that we all get the same message and we all understand what you are actually telling the children – especially the younger ones.'" *[Caregiver]*

Some children were not bothered by their social worker visiting them at school as other students had this experience too.

"Lots of people have them arriving. I know I am not the only one that gets it." *[Māori/Tongan male age 14]*

Some social workers were acutely aware of the impact of visiting children in school on their relationships, safety and comfort at school. Others took a more pragmatic approach noting that visits during school hours fitted their own schedule and did not disrupt children's after-school routine.

Social worker: I'm in there quite a bit seeing the kids cos often, it's easier to do your eight weekly in a school, have a chat to the kid and then go and talk to the caregiver separately. Occasionally, you want to see them with the caregiver as well, but just to mix it up.

Interviewer: Why does it feel easier to do the eight weekly in the school?

Social worker: I think because it's during the day. For me, personally, doing a visit after 3.30, cos it's near the end of the day, I know I'm not my best. I'm not at my best at that the end of the day and it depends. It could go over five o'clock and then the kids come home from school, they're tired. They've got a routine, you're ruining their routine cos you're going in, going, "Heh, how are you?" Sometimes it's easier. I try not to have a long chat, maybe a 10/15 minute chat with them at school, "How's it going?"

One child recommended that social workers ask children a wider variety of things about their education, not just "how are you doing at school"?

"They probably do it most of the time anyway but make sure to ask the kids how you're doing at school, do you have everything you need? Are you making friends and things? Just make sure that they ask the kids themselves, is there anything that they want to improve? ... Encourage the kids to do activities that the school offer, maybe a sport or join a club, like I joined lunch club or do something like that. Encourage them to do lots of activities at school cos it might help them break the cycle of just going to school, doing work, coming home and then saying, "I didn't really like school that much cos it's just boring." ... I think what I'd like to see is asking the kids, not just saying, "How you doing at school?" just really asking them what they think about the environment and do they like the quality of education, do they like that? Is that good enough for them? If not, maybe the social workers could talk to the school or talk to the teachers and maybe arrange something or something like that." *[NZ European female, age 14]*

Impact of adult relationships on experiences of education

Summary: Impact of adult relationships on experiences of education

- Educators are pivotal to positive experiences of education for children and young people in care. Effective educators meet children's individual needs and build relationships so they can support children's learning and behavioural needs. Educators have variable relationships with caregivers, some are positive and supportive, others are characterised by schools not being communicative or valuing the perspective of caregivers.
- Social workers and schools also have variable relationships. In some cases strong communication enables social workers and schools to work collaboratively to solve behaviour issues and identify opportunities to support children's education. In other cases one party is not communicative and relationships don't flourish.
- Participants hold different views about the need for educators to be informed about children's care status and circumstances. For some this is important so educators can appropriately support children, for others this is of concern because it can result in educators treating children in care differently to other children.
- Many children experience changes in social workers. While participants did not speak directly about the impacts of changing social workers on children's experiences of education, they note that changes mean disruption to relationships and services. Social workers from different Oranga Tamariki sites practice in different ways with variable support for children's needs in education.
- Social workers and educators hold a shared view that caregivers' engagement with schools, including supporting homework and attending sports and cultural activities, is important to meet children's educational needs. Some educators feel that caregivers are not engaged.
- Caregivers feel they need to be advocates for children's educational needs and that social workers are not best placed to do this because they do not have regular contact with children and schools.
- Social workers and educators note the importance of caregivers role modelling good parenting, including ensuring children have what they need to learn and engage with their peers and supporting them to problem solve difficulties at school.

Educators' roles and relationships impact on education

Relationship with caregivers

There were two views about the relationship between educators and caregivers. Some participants were of the view that schools maintained contact and built relationships with caregivers that supported them to meet children's needs in school. Supportive relationships even extended to pastoral care of caregivers during difficult times. The second view from some caregivers was that schools were non-communicative and did not value caregivers' input and views about the children in their care.

Caregiver A: Our school's really supportive. Even when they found out that we got the boys and we didn't even have single beds, then one of the teachers goes, "We've got some beds on TradeMe and we'll take them off." They were delivered that weekend.

Caregiver B: With [child] going to intermediate, even her teacher has offered to take her and her older sister up to [place] for a weekend, just to have a break, just time out. Even at the old school, [school name], they were very supportive of the kids.

"Something will happen [at lunch time] and the children will come back [home] and say 'at morning tea, I was in the sick bay for an hour' and no one had told us, no note, nothing. It's like why has no one told us... it could be anything... like if the child has asthma, it could be down to the cold. It could be he has the flu...but unless they tell us, how do we know to do anything about it." [Caregiver]

Engagement with social workers

Teachers in this study did not generally have contact with the social workers of children in care who were members of their class. Pastoral care workers were more likely to hold these relationships. One teacher noted contacting a social worker when she was concerned about a child being sent to spend time with whānau that were not on their contact list and noted this was the first contact she had with the social worker.

Educator A: We have her for a lot of time and we know her quite well and you care about them.

Educator B: Yeah you do and that's exactly it. That's why I was really scared that she'd just get lost up in [place] and she'd never come back. The background, it's pretty rough, if you're actually all taken off your parents, so I really was concerned about her going back to it and what she'd be like when she came back to school.

Educators noted that social workers were important mediators who speak on behalf of the child and bridge conversations between schools and caregivers.

"The voice of the child, they know the background and not from a family perspective. They're not personal. The one's I've dealt with, you're on the phone to them quite often and they're bridging. ... mediators between the school, the parents and the student, that whole connection that they bring, that evenness. It's not like they're taking sides, it's because they're here for that one child. ... the social worker will see the full picture, knows all the background and won't make judgment and only wants what's best for the student." [Educator]

Social workers were also noted to support schools when they needed to have conversations with caregivers about children's behaviour in school.

"Social workers can help families understand that school is there to support child but can only deal with so much (behaviour) until it hinders other's learning." [Educator]

Pastoral care workers noted the importance of their relationship with social workers and the local site office. Being part of a care and protection resource panel helped build that relationship.

Social workers thought that relationships with schools were variable. Where relationships were positive they involved staying in contact and working together to resolve issues and create opportunities.

"If there are any concerns with behavioural matters, we are brainstorming ideas about how we can support those children to make sure that learning is a positive experience for them and that they are doing well in the classroom as best they can. This also includes looking at extra-curricular activities and how we can facilitate that including trying to take some of the burden off the caregivers by letting them know that if there are any expenses that need to be covered that we could potentially meet these instead of having children worried about how they are going to pay for the stuff." [Social worker]

A social worker noted that when children are in forever homes, their relationship with the school is limited as the primary relationship is between the caregivers and the school.

"I think that if they're in a forever home, that's their primary relationship and I come and go and I'm monitoring but I don't need to have the primary relationship. I'm very much reliant on the people who are in that primary role, to tell me what he needs, to see what we can help with." [Social worker]

The appropriateness of educators being informed about children's care status and circumstances

Educators held different views on the appropriateness/importance of teachers being informed about children's care status. Some felt teaching staff only needed to know about children's learning and behavioural needs and other information should be limited to pastoral staff and management. A second group of educators felt teachers should know when children were in care so they could be mindful of potential needs. A third group of educators felt teaching staff needed to be informed of children's background and circumstances to the extent that these affect their behaviour and learning in the classroom but to be mindful not to divulge information that meant teachers could not treat children in care like other children (i.e. not be over protective or stigmatise).

A dean and learning support teacher at one school noted that they would share more detailed information about a child's circumstances if their behaviour was disruptive or they needed some extra care and attention.

Educator A: I don't think most teachers really understand. We tell them but it's not on their radar. They know that [child's name] is limited. I think especially as she's not wearing hearing aids, they're probably not aware of that. They just know that she struggles but most of them probably don't know that she lives with her Nan. They know that [child's] been sick but then that's just like any other kid, who would have been sick at school. We've got other kids with the health school, so she's just one of three or four at the moment.

Educator B: I think also there's an awful lot of children who aren't in care but live with their grandparents or live with an aunty or someone else. There's actually an awful lot.

Educator A: That's true.

Educator B: In that way, that's probably no different to a heck of lot of our kids.

Interviewer: Would staff generally know that those two children are in care?

Educator B: I have told them if they need to know, a bit of a need-to-know basis.

Educator A: It's not really relevant for teaching or stuff.

Educator B: No, I don't think it really is. Sometimes I would say, if they're having a rough time, I would just send out a message, a bit of extra TLC would be ...

Educator A: You do that for other kids anyway.

Educator B: I do that for other kids as well and it's not anything extra special because these days, so many kids live in those sorts of fluid family situations.

Another educator noted that all staff know when children are in care but the child's background is not shared so that teachers can just treat the child like other children rather than being overly concerned/protective.

Interviewer: Would all staff know about which children are in care? Would that be individual to each child?

Educator: No, all our staff know. I think it's important that we all do know but to treat them just like everybody else. I think that's the biggest thing, too, because I don't share everything with the staff insofar as their background because that's really, really difficult to not treat a child with extra love or you just want to wrap them up and keep them safe, knowing their history. Some staff do know, our key staff know.

"Yeah, so it's that sort of stuff, just keeping people informed, not over informed but just what they need to know, so that when they have those interactions, there's a greater understanding there." *[Educator]*

In contrast to this, a teacher at another school felt it was important for teachers to know the background to the children in their class and ensure they keep this confidential. Knowing this information could help the teacher support the child when they were upset and help the teacher understand where the child's behaviour might be coming from.

"I think also having teachers knowing the story. It's not to gossip and it doesn't have to be all the teachers. I know all of this because I have been their teacher. I think maybe we all know that they're in care but I think they knew because something happened with the dad before. We all knew. They knew the year before. That makes you just go, there's something. If we don't know, we could look at some behaviour as just being defiant or them just being little tarts or not very nice, as opposed to there's a story. Knowing their back story helps. That's it." *[Educator]*

Interviewer: If there was a school that had never had a child in care before and a child in care was starting with them, what would you advise to that new school or that new teacher?

Educator: I would advise that people know their story and of course, as professionals, we've got to keep that confidential. We're not going to go and have wine and tell all our friends about these kids. Keep that, just so that you can understand and we have that circle of love around them, of caring, to understand because they might have issues, like the young girl did, where she was just upset. You can tell with her when she's upset, where it's all too much. She's like a little thunder cloud. Well, there's a reason and sometimes, with kids, you realise it's just defiance. You can understand where they're coming from, what they're grappling with. What she grappled with as an 11-year-old kid was pretty crap, even before that actually. She mentioned her mum and what happened and what she used to see. That makes you just have a new light, my goodness, your resilience is amazing.

Educators were also of the view that it was important for children in care to be able to be like any other child in school. This may mean not informing staff about their circumstances.

A social worker noted that it is important to strike a balance between educators knowing enough to be able to support children but not knowing so much that they treat children differently on account of them being in care. This social worker also spoke about a successful approach to sharing information with educators where family are involved in a meeting with professionals.

Interviewer: A way of sharing information, that you've highlighted some of the difficulties with that. When it works, what does that look like?

Social worker: The ones that I have the IEPs³ for, where I've got the family sitting in the room and we can talk about some of this stuff because they're there, it's with their consent, then we have really good outcomes because the teachers then understand and they can put some things in place as well.

Social workers' role and relationships

Social workers' engagement varies according to the relationships they have with each school

Social workers' engagement in education varies according to the relationship they have developed with each school that children in care attend. One social worker noted that having a good relationship with the Special Education Needs Coordinator was important. One social worker noted that three-way communication between themselves, caregivers and schools was important to support children's education.

"The key word for me is communication. It's about communicating with teachers so that they understand that you have that child's best interests foremost in your work. You're able to quickly respond to any issues that they raise but it's having that three-way between the social workers, the caregivers and the school. If the child is central to that, then that's what works."
[Social worker]

Social workers talked about being left out of important meetings about children's needs in education. Sometimes this could be because children are in whānau placements and the caregivers have not alerted the school to their status as children in care. At other times schools overlooked the role of Oranga Tamariki in children's care and education.

Social worker: I'm embarking on an IEP process at another school. The next meeting is in a couple of weeks' time. I haven't been to one of those because sometimes schools just leave us out. If I don't know that there is that process and the caregiver doesn't tell them that the child's in our custody, particularly if it's a family placement, then they don't invite me and they don't understand that actually, as the social worker, I should be there. ...

Interviewer: What would help them know that they should invite you?

Social worker: I don't know. I haven't quite worked that out yet because they know the child's in our custody because we pay the bills, so they know to send us the accounts and they know to send us the school reports but somehow they deal with the caregiver and they don't think of us. Somehow, we get left off and the caregivers don't necessarily think they want the

³ An IEP is an Individual Education Plan, which is developed by the school and sets out the individual learning needs of the child.

social worker around, particularly our family placements. They don't want the school to know that the children are in our custody because there is that stigma attached, so they don't tell them. [Social worker]

Social workers should act like parents

In terms of social workers' role in education, an educator viewed social workers as the parents of children in care and in that role expected them to inform the staff if children were being taken out of school, just as any other parent would. In one instance a child was taken out of school for two weeks to visit whānau but the school was informed by the child rather than the social worker. The educators stated "I would have liked to have been informed. She should have rung me rather than the other way around."

Social workers should coordinate resources to meet children's education needs

A caregiver was very understanding of social workers' workloads but noted that in an ideal world they would be the conduit ensuring that children had what they needed for their education to be successful.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you think the social workers should be doing to help [Name] in school?

Caregiver: The social workers are run off their feet and frazzled with their work and caseload. It is hard for them to be effective. It is not their fault. ... In an ideal world the social worker would be in charge of ensuring that everything the [Children's names] of this world need is in place. They would follow up and make sure everything they need is happening and be the coordinator of his resources in education, understand what he needs and know him in the school environment and make sure that the resources are being used properly.

Impact of change in social worker

Many of the children in this study had experienced changes in their social worker.

"They could stop changing and giving us a hard time." [Māori male, age 11]

"I've had heaps of social workers, thousands, I don't even remember their names. When I was born I already had a social worker." [African female, age 11]

"I have not met my new social worker. I always have a new social worker. I have had about eight. I have not seen mine in ages, beginning of term one I think." [Māori female, age 10]

Children indicated that they do not like social workers changing and that the frequency with which they change means that some do not feel they know their social workers.

One of the caregivers interviewed noted that when social workers change there is an impact on children's education as the new social worker comes up to speed with the child's situation.

"It's a lot [the impact of social worker changes on children's education]. Because the new social worker has to go into school, then it's like, 101 social worker all over again. That social worker has to get to know the whole case again. They never know what the last social worker knew or put in place. All of a sudden when they have learnt it, they are gone and another one comes along in their place so you start again!" [Caregiver]

One social worker spoke about a child in the care of their friend. In this situation, the young person had multiple changes of social workers and with that came different approaches to providing him support. The social worker suggested that this lack of continuity in service had contributed to the young person being excluded from school.

"I knew his social worker because they came from [Place]. Then she went on parental leave, he got another social worker – he got a role as a supervisor, he got another social worker – he got transferred to [Place], and then he got another social worker and then something happened to that one and he got another social worker. So, in the course of 2 years he has been there he has had 5 social workers so really hard to get traction. Great that he has great caregivers and they can do what they can but when you have that many social workers there will be different opinions around what is going to work for him, supports and without that real consistency. I think that high turnover has been so bad for him." *[Social worker]*

One of the educators noted that social workers change frequently and, as a consequence, children receive a disconnected service. This educator is also a caregiver and when reflecting on the situation with the child in their care, they noted that the child's social worker had changed and this concerned the child because the social worker provided contact with her whānau and the new social worker may not know her whānau.

A caregiver described how facilitating relationships with new social workers and the child in their care can result in the child losing trust in the caregiver.

Social workers were also aware of the impact that changing social workers can have on children. One social worker noted that with all the change, children lose their history.

"You lose it, they lose it, they lose their history in our care. ... Yeah, they do, their history and their education gone, as well as their life gone and their whānau gone and all that and their experience gone. That's the thing about our kids, they leave. They have to leave. Everything's cut. They leave experiences behind. It's our responsibility to keep it there and we're slightly better but they leave things behind, like their Christmas at so and so's place or their first year at so and so school. Your parents and whānau carry that for you 'til you're old enough to link it all together when you're older but our kids lose that. They lose the skill of engagement and they become survivors. They're skimming along, trying to make friends the best they can or whatever it is that they're trying to do, stay invisible or whatever. They're constantly relearning all that stuff with practitioners who are constantly trying to get to know them." *[Social worker]*

Social workers' variability in responsiveness

According to some educators participating in this study, some social workers were providing a disconnected and unresponsive service. Social workers were unavailable by phone to schools and did not turn up to meetings. When they did come to meetings they were perceived as bringing problems rather than solutions and passing their responsibilities to Social Workers in Schools (SWiS).

"They do come to our needs meeting. We all sit around with other agencies – they all seem really lax with their paperwork or want to palm things off. Now that schools have SWiS workers they seem to think that is a great way to get rid of some of their workload. I think if they are here they are here for a reason. Come with something concrete, not just problems. For some of the kids we see very little of the social worker and even the high needs kids, we have a couple and they have had a disconnected service." *[Educator]*

A young person held the view that what made the difference about their social worker supporting their education was their responsiveness to her needs. She also noted that in the past one of her social workers had been responsive to her caregiver but not to her own needs.

"I think it's responsiveness, so when you talk to the social worker, what I like is to be able to contact them relatively easily, not like that [clicks fingers] but I'd like to get a response back as soon as possible and put my thoughts into action, what I want to get done. With my social worker at the moment, she's pretty darn good. Before, in the past, I've had some pretty slack social workers. I call them slack because you can never get a hold of them." [NZ European female, age 14]

This young person's caregiver noted that they currently had a very responsive case worker who went out of her way to get what they needed, however in the past they had young case workers who were ineffective. When another pair of caregivers shared what a good social worker 'looks like' to them, responsiveness to needs was also at the fore:

Caregiver A: Somebody that listens.

Caregiver B: And achieves stuff. You say, "The kids need those sorts of things" and it's done.

Caregiver A: Follows through.

Caregiver B: They don't wait for three weeks or is it gonna happen? They're used to that, it not happening. They're used to it and it always brings it back. Here we go, disappointment. If they're onto it, it's sorted, they go, phew, this is good.

Another caregiver described inconsistent practice across Oranga Tamariki sites and social workers as problematic for children's education.

"We have three different children and three different OT sites so three different ways of doing things educationally for your children. One that goes this way and will give the children whatever they want/need in terms of their education. Another that will be like 'oh no why do we need that psychology report, oh no we will give them one in six months'. Then another that goes 'oh who cares about education?' So it all depends on which OT site they are at will depend on how they operate with the children in school." [Caregiver]

Two educators spoke about the variability in their experience with social workers for different children, whereby one was able to access the things they needed for school without difficulty with a proactive social worker, while the other family was left unsupported.

Caregivers' engagement with education

The following narrative drawn from the shared interview of two caregivers highlights a range of activities that caregivers need to undertake to successfully support children with their learning and education. These include:

- being present in the school and at children's activities
- role modelling a positive attitude towards learning and education
- supporting children's learning by encouraging an interest in an activity, such as reading
- caregivers asking teachers what they can do to support children's learning at home and in the holidays

- communicating; keeping the classroom teacher informed about potential emotional state of child to help manage behaviour
- attend parent interviews
- caregivers letting children know they are proud of them.

What a new caregiver would need to do to support children with their learning and education.

Definitely, they need to go in and see the school. They need to have a positive attitude towards learning. Promote that education is good.

The main thing is to immerse **yourself into the school system** cos they're there and if you're not there with them, they're probably just gonna think it's just play time.

They want to know about everything and as long as they have that desire and **if you can spark it up, like perhaps a bit more reading**. I mean, they all read now, books.

Anybody that wants their kids to do well, pushes them through school and supports them.

Also, **ask what can we do?** They suggest, can you do this with [child], in the holidays? He gets sent home with a pack of books just to keep his reading up and so **we try to support in any way that the teacher suggests**.

It's important for them to **keep in touch with the school and the classroom teacher**. Sometimes, as [caregiver] was saying, with that emotional side of things, the children can display behaviours, not all but sometimes they can. If the caregiver is able to **communicate that with the teacher as well, it's also about being informed**. If they can inform the teacher, like what we do when the kids were about to have a meeting with their dad for the first time in 18 months. We noticed that there are triggers prior. We always keep the children informed but we notice that the boys started having nightmares prior, screaming in the night and things like that and [child] started wetting, ... As long as you are open with the school and say, "There's been changes." I went to both teachers and said, "They're gonna be seeing their dad on Monday, I'm not sure what's gonna happen. It could be positive or it may not but I'm letting you be aware." It just makes the teacher be aware. **It's just communication really**.

Our four are doing well at school but I'm not being big headed here but it's because [name] and I do have that **positive attitude towards education and we are supportive**. ... we try to go and support them in things and let them know that they are important. It's at the point now where **we've been to so much stuff, that if we miss something, it's not a problem, we'll catch up next time**. They have that **foundation built that they're secure enough**.

One of the things that [name] and I make sure we do is that we **attend the parent interviews**. When we had our niece, she was blown away. She cried cos none of her family had ever done it. It was the first time someone had been and so that is something that we think is important, that we attend those and we see how the kids are going.

It's also good to get their teachers' feedback. These kids are doing well or even when they're not, when they've done something that's not been right, we hear what they're saying and **we say to them, "We're really proud of you and the teacher's proud of you."** Then, the kids sit up and we think that's important too.

This description of an ideal caregiver relationship with children in care to support their education was provided by two caregivers based on their own experience. These caregivers describe an engagement with schools that informs teachers, supports learning in the home and supports children to feel cared for and proud about their educational achievements.

A social worker also noted that caregivers make all the difference to children's educational achievement. Caregivers need to value education and recognise children's successes. Caregivers from a contracted group home stated that they attend parent teacher interviews, email teachers about children's progress, meet all teachers at the beginning of the year and make sure they are known to teachers. They noted the importance of communication and being on the same page so that if something happens teachers will reach out straight away.

Caregivers' advocating for children's educational needs

Caregivers also saw themselves as having a role to advocate for children's educational needs. Where caregivers identified that children were not doing well at a school or in a subject area they would bring this to the attention of the school and/or social worker so that remedial support or a change in school could be arranged.

"We know the downfalls of the school. This year I went for a first interview with a teacher at [name of school] and she did not even know the reading age, had not done the tests, did not know the maths age.... the report told me nothing and the teacher told me nothing."

[Caregiver]

"Unless they go to school they don't really understand what is happening on the ground ... The social worker we are working with they try their best, but it is my responsibility as a parent to identify areas. I am not a maths teacher, but I noticed it was an area he was lapsing in. I said if you don't catch up in that area it is an area you are always going to be hindered or behind, so I mentioned to them that [child's name] needed help in that area if he was to pass his exams. He has a goal to go to university and obviously do well at school and you need English and Maths to move forward." *[Caregiver]*

In the following excerpt a caregiver speaks about the way he advocated for a move to high school to better meet the needs of a child in his care.

"It will be good for Oranga Tamariki and someone in education to talk to some carers. I think there are things we see that would be better for young people than standard approaches. We are running a trial at the moment where he is failing miserably academically. He is in year 8 and at high school next year and he is so not ready. If he goes into high school, like he is going to be a statistic. But the school is not willing to do anything different, so I went into bat for him and they finally agreed. The approach is he spends three days at school but one day one-on-one with my daughter to catch up. That is what they did for [child's name] and it was really successful. What we are doing for him is he stays here. If he keeps going back to his environment, his mum is really good, but she can't get him to school on time and he doesn't always come with food and all those basic things. We are running an experiment; we have got some investors to invest in it to see that difference it makes when a kid is fed correctly, clothed and gets to school on time and feels safe. Even after two weeks he feels better about it. He is going to school. He has never made it to homeroom and homeroom lets you know what is happening for the entire day. He has been kicked out of school five or six times. I have only had one complaint and that was on his first day and I haven't had any since. His teachers are noticing a big difference and it is just that one-on-one approach and he is learning a lot. Oranga Tamariki should think about that for special cases. Think outside the box." *[Caregiver]*

Caregivers' lack of engagement with schools

Interestingly, educators were more likely to speak about experiences of caregivers who are not engaged with schools or children's learning and achievements.

A number of educators spoke about caregivers' lack of engagement with schools. This may be in relation to non-attendance at school meetings, not engaging with classroom teachers to enquire about or support learning or not partnering and communicating with teachers to provide a joined up approach to manage behaviour and support learning.

"I probably haven't had caregivers that are overly engaged in the school. They'll turn up to the meetings they need to turn up to but I haven't had ones that are maybe popping in asking how the kids are going or is there anything that they could do at home to help? Then, sometimes I think far out, I take my hat off to you, even taking these kids in. It's not a criticism but for me, if I go home, with my youngest girl especially, it'd be what's your homework? What do you need to do? Is there anything you need to show me in your class? There doesn't seem that same interest but then, to be fair, a lot of these carers are getting a friggin' hard go of it and maybe school is actually seen as you guys deal with him at school, I'll deal with him at home. That is not a criticism but I don't think there's quite the ... unless it's behaviour related. Were they in trouble? Yes or no. I don't think there's the same buy in. What about socially? Have they got some friends or something new they learned today, that kind of thing. There doesn't seem, in my experience, the same connection with the school than for kids but then that's a little bit true of this community too." *[Educator]*

A social worker also noted that when children are in transitional placements, caregivers may not go to school meetings because they don't think it is their role as children are only with them for a short period of time. The social worker felt this could affect children's sense of belonging and create instability. Another social worker noted that non-kin caregivers require more input from social workers around day-to-day activities, including education.

"They don't necessarily see their role completely as working with the school, they see that as being the social worker's role. If there are issues or worries they will contact the social worker of course. They have a huge expectation around the social worker in terms of partnering them around what is happening day by day for that child. Whereas whānau caregivers don't care if you are the social worker or not, we are in there and we will do what we have to do. It is completely different." *[Social worker]*

Supporting caregivers with information about children's educational needs

Two social workers spoke about the potential to assess caregivers on the way they value education and ways that information could be provided to caregivers to support their understanding around the importance of supporting children's education. They also noted that caregivers needed to be prepared for children's experiences of trauma to make learning more difficult for them.

"At the top, it's education is important for our children. Everybody knows that intrinsically. Anybody out there knows that intrinsically but do we actually say it out loud and do we think it all the time? It's a big issue. I think maybe we could do more in terms of when we place young people, we do have an All About Me, which is a care plan. I think maybe there could be more information on there about a child's educational needs, so the caregiver's prepared. Wider than that, I've come across examples where caregivers, perhaps they've done well academically and often they think that the young person should too. What's that about? Is it about their lack of understanding around attachment issues? Is it a lack of understanding around a childhood trauma and the effect that has on education? If there was more training

for caregivers, we'd love it - wouldn't we? It's about understanding that children come with a whole heap of different issues than their own children would possibly have." *[Social workers]*

SUPPORTING ACHIEVEMENT IN EDUCATION

Summary: Achievement in education

Participants across all groups were asked about the educational achievement of children and young people in care. Participants were asked what achievement looks like, what supports achievement and what the barriers to achievement are.

- Participants view achievement in its broadest sense when thinking about children in care.
- Some children in care are not sure what achievement looks like or if they have achieved in school.
- Participants note that home environments that offer stability alongside encouragement and expectations about learning support children's achievement.
- School can be a safe place to achieve when the home environment is unstable.
- Some participants feel that children's emotional needs must be met before they can learn and achieve.

A wider view of achievement than academic success is required to support children in care

The term achievement can be perceived as limited to learning, but in this study, for many children in care and those that support them, achievement was recognised in a broader way. For example, achievement could be regular school attendance, managing emotions and behaviour, group participation or developing friendships.

For some, achievement was the child feeling motivated and wanting to learn more. For others, achievement included attending school, changing behaviours, communicating, participating in teams or passing exams.

Child: I got an achieved in physical education. Like cause I really like sports. Like sports is one of my biggest things that I've always wanted to do.

Interviewer: And which sports do you like?

Child: We take volleyball, rugby, basketball, and netball and sometimes, we take dodge ball.

Interviewer: Oh, that's loads of sports.

Child: Yeah.

Interviewer: So what did you need to do to get achieved?

Child: Communicating well with other students, participating in whatever sports we were given out to us, and, yeah. *[Māori female, age 15]*

"I think the other day, we had a piece on coordinates, pictures and she had to find them. She had it done. She was like, "Can I have another sheet?" That, to me, was achievement cos she brought it up and said, "Have you got another sheet?" It was just a fun starter but she enjoyed it because she could achieve it and it wasn't too tough. I set her up on the computer so she went away and did those. [name] said she was just great. She was happy, she was focused.

She does have something up top, you gotta find her passion that she can be focused on.”
[Educator]

“Well, sometimes it could just be attendance. It just could be thinking have that child going to school every day. That’s massive for some kids. For others, it is about getting their NCEAs or getting over behaviours. Maybe the school implemented some strategies and they’ve worked, that’s really good. Let’s celebrate that.” [Social worker]

Some participants discussed the education system as being traditional or inflexible and that many children in care required a school experience that accommodated more creativity and met their individual needs. An educator spoke about the limitations of secondary school to meet children’s individual needs.

“Giving them a lot of choice, I think is important because their experiences can be very different to their classmates or to mine. Their education, I think we really have to look at it. You’ve gotta look at it as a holistic approach. There’s absolutely no way those kids will survive, but not just them, I feel a lot of our kids won’t survive in that traditional ... I worry about these kids going through into the secondary system because I don’t think the secondary system is set up anywhere near as well as a primary system for the diverse range of kids. You’ve gotta fit the mould. There’s so many kids here that don’t fit the mould and those kids in care, a lot of them don’t fit the general mould. That’s cool, you’ve gotta think how you can do it differently, a bit more creatively, find their strengths.” [Educator]

Some children in care do not recognise their achievements

Children often found it hard to recognise their achievements or what achievement looks like. Some children talked about not knowing if they were the sort of people who achieved at school and or feeling that they needed to work harder than other children in order to be recognised for achieving.

This narrative from one child provides an example of feeling that it’s difficult to have achievement recognised even ‘if you are eligible to get an award’.

“Basically, another thing that keeps me focused too is the fact that I’ve achieved a lot already and I can add to that. I’ve got lots of badges and things in my room from my old school that I worked really hard to get cos only the top students could get those sorts of things. I think I did a writing competition or something and I got in the top 3 per cent of Australasia.

Well, I had to work really hard to get those badges because at the time, I wasn’t really the brightest student out there. There were smarter kids out there than me. The reason why I said only the top students get them is because basically the really, really smart kids would get them really easy and everyone else would either not get them or, like me, would have to work really, really hard to get them.

Even if we were eligible to get them, some teachers, they would pick and choose who they’d give them to anyway. The principal would pick and choose and if you weren’t that popular or they just didn’t really wanna choose you, they wouldn’t choose you, even if you were eligible to get an award.” [NZ European female, age 14]

Other children found it difficult to identify anything they were achieving at or minimised their achievements when these were pointed out to them.

Interviewer: What would your teacher say you're good at? [child's name] is really good at ...?

Child: Writing ... running the lap of the school.

Interviewer: So good at running hey and other sports as well.

Child: We've got cross country coming up but I don't want to do that. We did a duathlon last term, I almost won but I didn't. *[European female, age 9]*

Interviewer: So how do you know, what else are you good at, anything at school that you can think of?

Child: Running. Nothing

Interviewer: You're good at nothing?

Child: Oh I am good at playing rugby

Interviewer: If I asked your teacher, what would they say?

Child: Running, math *[Māori male, age 11]*

The home environment impacts on achievement

The home environment of the child was often referred to when educators, social workers and caregivers considered what supports or hinders children's achievement. Participants described a stable home environment as supporting children's achievement. For others it was the home environment offering stability alongside encouragement and expectations about learning.

"Generally, they will be where they need to be, if they're in a stable home environment. The moment they're not and they're moved around a little bit, their academic levels deteriorate and they drop. That's because their self-esteem drops and then all of sudden, they are not sure. A lot of those kids that move from home to home, caregiver to caregiver, we have some kids here, they could be an eight year old and we're their ninth school and things like that because they're moved around all the time. That's so hard, that's awful, so they just don't care. Again, depending on the child, I would say kids in care, generally their achievement levels are lower than ones not in care, if that makes sense." *[Educator]*

"She had an assessment done when she was very little talking almost in terms of global development delays in cognitive issues. She is one of the top academic students at her school now at secondary level. I think the difference for her was stable care. She was placed back with her dad. She didn't grow up knowing her dad, but she is in an environment too where she is expected to achieve. She is in a stable placement, but she is in a placement where there are some aspirations around achievement. She enjoys school and gets awards. She likes to be liked. She likes to be doing well. There is also the flip side of that where this child has been through trauma. In spite of this she is doing remarkably well because there is a lot of encouragement and belief in her. It is instilled in her all the time and she wants something different for her life. You know you can't get away from that fact that if there is one person who takes an interest, connects with you as a young person, walks alongside you and encourages you that can make all the difference. Of course, you don't have to talk about the school keeping an eye on her, she is visible to them for all the right reasons. When I ring them, they say she is one of our star students, she is doing really well." *[Social worker]*

Children need school to be a safe place in order to achieve

For some children if the home environment was not able to offer stability and encouragement, school would become the place they would find safety from which they could start to achieve.

"I have a few kids on my caseload at the moment that are doing amazingly well academically at school. Because of all the things that are happening at home to me it is their safe place. They are doing so well and excelling academically. It is not coming from home. I think it is coming from a really caring principal and taking one step further and looking out for kids. They call us if there are any problems." *[Social worker]*

"I think school would have been a safe place for her when she was younger because she has changed placements a few times. She loves learning and reading books. That is her escape. It is her personality, it is who she is, and it is how she copes with stuff. She loves reading books. She will go and read a book and school is all about reading books and learning, English and literature and she has a passion for all that type of stuff." *[Social worker]*

Children need their emotional needs met before they can achieve

Many participants described the need for children in care to have their emotional needs met before they could demonstrate areas of wider achievement. This example from a discussion with two teachers demonstrates the impact of trauma on children and the importance of viewing these children as having the same learning abilities as other children but needing support with managing emotions in order to then focus on learning.

Interviewer: One of the other areas we're looking at is what achievement looks like for children in care?

Educator A: I think probably key competencies, those life skills, the ability to self-manage, to self-regulate. I think that's probably the biggest area of need for kids in care that I see.

Educator B: We shouldn't look at kids in care as if they've got a learning disability. They're there for the emotional support and the things that have happened in their lives. They still come with very good other mechanisms. They're not students who can't achieve. They can still do the same thing, the achievement for some will be the same as what the rest of the class is doing.

Educator A: It's often the emotional side – isn't it?

Educator B: Yeah, it's just coping with that one thing that makes them snap and suddenly, it's all on for a teacher and a student.

Meeting children's emotional needs in at least one area of their lives (home, school, or through a supportive adult) can be the foundation on which children can begin to demonstrate achievement in education.

EXPERIENCES OF EXCLUSION AND PATHWAYS TO RE-ENGAGEMENT

Summary: Experiences of exclusion and pathways to re-engagement

Some children in care have difficulties with their interpersonal relationships at school, which may mean:

- having a lack of strategies to deal with teasing and bullying
- not being able to form friendships
- forming friendships that encourage them to break school rules.

These relationship issues can lead to children behaving in ways that result in them being excluded. Children in care may also experience difficulties in learning associated with health and trauma, which can lead to behavioural issues and exclusion.

Some primary school teachers are concerned that as children in care move from primary school, where there is more tolerance for mistakes, through to intermediate and secondary school, where more responsibility is placed on the individual to behave appropriately and less support to achieve this is offered, some children may be excluded from school.

To avoid exclusion:

- schools need to communicate with social workers when they identify a problem and have exhausted their strategies for solving it
- the social worker, child, caregiver and school staff need to work together to identify strategies to support children in care to stay in school and avoid exclusion
- social workers need to work with Boards of Trustees to help them understand the needs and behaviours of children in care, so that they can understand this context when they are making judgements about exclusions.

At times, offering a child a teacher aide support can make the difference between them being excluded or not. Participants think it is important to provide children and young people who have been excluded from school with routine and structure. Re-engagement requires supports to be put in place and a transition period where students can attend part days until they are comfortable and cope with school.

This project included questions about what influences children's engagement in school and the impact of that engagement on outcomes for children in care. Participants in the study spoke about experiences of exclusion from school. There was very little discussion of truancy or absence across the interviews. One educator spoke about his efforts to transport children so they could attend school and noted that children in care have high attendance rates perhaps because they like the routine and structure of school in their lives.

Mereana's experience of exclusion from school

Following is a chronological narrative generated by reordering verbatim commentary from one child's interview. This narrative outlines the journey that one child experienced leading up to and through exclusion from school followed by their return to school. It highlights some of the factors that lead to exclusion, pathways to re-engagement and signals ways to prevent exclusions. Mereana is a pseudonym created by the research team to protect anonymity. Mereana is a 14 year –old young Māori female.

"This boy is really mean to me. Heaps of people are really mean to me and I am just one of those people who can't put up with it. I just get really angry coz things do hurt me and I just get really angry when I ask them to stop and if they don't stop I get into fighting and stuff like that. I can't handle things like that and I hurt people because it hurts me about what they say to me.

Well I tried to stab someone. He was just like in my face and annoying me. The teacher didn't care what he said but as soon as I like threatened him I got into trouble more. So I got sent home, then had a meeting and then got kicked out for three months.

I went back into school and I kind of shut down because heaps of people were surrounding me and I didn't like to think that I had to go back to school and learn and so I was kind of off for a couple of weeks and off what I was really having to do. Then I slowly got used to myself being in school.

Then I did like one hour or two hours at school then that slowly became a good thing then I got back into school for half of the periods.

We had a big meeting after I was doing my one or two hours to see if I could go back to classes and they all combined together to say yes we would like Mereana to come back ... it was good for me, it was really nice thinking that that came from the teachers and all that.

They said I shouldn't have done that; I could have made it better by coming to the office and explaining it and that's better than taking it on yourself so you end up in trouble.

I had a teacher aide helping me so she was on my side helping me ... she sits next to me and she helps me with my work ... When I am angry at school I usually tell my teacher aide and she helps me through it." *[Māori female, age 14]*

Mereana's experience reacting to the way other students were treating her is not dissimilar to other experiences shared in this study. A number of participants talked about children in care experiencing negative interactions with peers in school. Interaction with other students was noted to be an area where some children struggled and needed more support, from forming friendships, to engaging with students their own age, and reacting appropriately to teasing and dealing with bullying. In this study, participants noted that children in care were vulnerable to bullying because of their status as children in care and their inability to manage their behaviour towards those who initiated the bullying.

In her interview, Mereana spoke about her transition from exclusion back into school, which involved a meeting with school staff. She recalled learning about reaching out to staff instead of taking on issues alone and felt good that teachers wanted her to come back to school. This signals that children in care are amenable to new strategies to manage interpersonal relationships. It also shows the importance of children knowing they are accepted by the school community.

Identifying a teacher aide to support Mereana was an important part of her transition plan. She could work with this person one to one and also spoke about working in the library, a place where she could be by herself. With supports in place Mereana was able to engage in education and talked positively about the challenge of learning through schoolwork – “so if you do one thing one week, the next week you do something different to go with what you learn the other week and it just goes on.”

Factors that can lead to exclusion

In Mereana’s situation, relationships with peers resulted in her physically reacting and being excluded from school. Other participants talked about a range of other factors that could lead to children in care being excluded from school. As detailed below, these included health and trauma issues inhibiting learning, children breaking school rules in order to be part of friendship groups where they felt they belonged and children moving to intermediate and secondary school environments that were less tolerant of transgressions and had fewer supports in place for children in care.

A social worker described the chain of events that could result in exclusion from school for children in care with “foetal alcohol syndrome or hyped trauma”.

“... they have fallen behind in their education, end up with low self-esteem, can get angry, frustrated and then there becomes behavioural issues. At the extreme I was involved with a child that was in care briefly who was excluded from primary school and they never re-entered mainstream education because of the accumulative harm caused from the environment he had been living in and the impact on his learning and it all just became too hard.” *[Social worker]*

Another social worker spoke about an experience with a child who had been excluded from school following many chances to change behaviour and considerable support from caregivers and school staff.

“I think some of that is just that he has found belonging amongst a bunch of fringe kids that have had him bringing marijuana to school. The foster caregivers are doing as much as they can to work on that with him but that is where he feels he fits. He doesn’t need to because he is a great kid and he is studious. He is easy to get along with and doesn’t need to be in that group, but I think for him something about that group make him feel at home. ... I think there is an amount of pull for him to hang out with those kids. If I think about his past, he has spent a lot of time at care homes, he has spent a lot of time with kids that have had care experience and behaviour challenges prior to coming to these caregivers. I think there is a lot of that wanting that belonging that he is pulled towards. He bounces between the two worlds where he can fit with the caregivers their boundaries and rules but goes to school and doesn’t fit with the schools and push that.” *[Social worker]*

A primary school educator shared their concern about children in care moving from primary school to intermediate and secondary school where they may not have supports in place that were available in primary school.

"I watch kids leave here to go to intermediate and I freak out for the ones that I haven't managed to successfully help or change because I know the minute they get to intermediate, they're less tolerant. As a school. I'm meaning in their head. You are not 11/12 years of age, you know what's right and wrong, so it's stand down, stand down, stand down, exclusion. High School's worse. I know that if we don't try and help that child while they are at their prime years of schools, five to 10, it's not going to. I guarantee you if someone could sit there and do a survey, I guarantee you 80 per cent of those children not being in school anymore. It's really sad." [Educator]

A social worker noted that when children in care are excluded from school around the age of 13 they may not return to mainstream education because they end up too far behind in their studies and can't return to be with their peers.

Pathways to re-engagement

One of the social workers interviewed in this study noted that when children are excluded from school it is important that re-engagement with school happens quickly because Oranga Tamariki does not have a place for these children to go during their period of exclusion. While the Ministry of Education has obligations to provide education for these students, they may not find a school to attend, or be engaged in correspondence school. The social worker stated that some children may be unsupervised and not receiving any education.

When discussing experiences with exclusion, a social worker shared their view that children in care need better pathways to return to engagement in school to avoid ending up doing correspondence school. Two social workers mentioned the importance of structure and routine in the lives of children in care. This can be provided through school. One social worker felt that when children are excluded from school they need a space away from drugs and alcohol where routine and structures can be put in place and school is not negotiable. They felt the threshold for accessing this type of service was currently too high. In their view, the time to take action was when a child's behaviour meant they were on the verge of being excluded and their caregiver was not coping; in other words early intervention was important.

Social workers were involved in the re-engagement of children in care in school following exclusion. A child noted that their social worker "helps if I get kicked out; we have a backup reason why I can come back to school". Two social workers talked about how they regularly find themselves advocating for children in care in front of school Boards of Trustees to try to prevent exclusion. Schools were also noted to help children find placements in other schools if they had been excluded.

Avoiding exclusion

Social workers made the following suggestions about ways to avoid exclusions:

- Investigate how Kura Kaupapa in the region manage themselves to avoid excluding children – there is an opportunity to understand the philosophy behind this – investing in whānau - and apply this wider in mainstream schools.
- Social workers need to socialise and educate the needs/behaviours of children in care with Boards and Chairs because they are the people that make judgements about exclusion.
- Oranga Tamariki funds for teacher aides need to be available when needs arise (rather than based on budgets of different Ministries).
- Schools need to communicate when they have identified a problem and exhausted their strategies to deal with it. A 'care team' would then take action, meeting before problems

became insurmountable. A care team would include the social worker, the child, the carer and any other professional at the school.

When asked what helps to get over mistakes and make your way back to engaging with school, one child noted the importance of his caregiver.

“Feeling like I am at a really loving place and that they care for me just gives me more self-esteem. Anything that I do I can fix it, I am able to because I have a support in life right now”. [*Māori male, aged 14*]

IMPACT OF EDUCATION ON LONGER-TERM OUTCOMES

Summary: Impact of education on longer-term outcomes

Participants were asked about their thoughts on the longer-term outcomes for children in care and how education could influence these outcomes. Many talked about school and education as a protective factor for children and that their longer-term outcomes are influenced by not having the security around them that education can bring. Analysis of conversation about the impact of education on children's life outcomes identified the following sub-themes:

- Losing structure and security.
- Aspirations.
- Valuing education.
- The impact of qualifications.

Losing structure and security

School was often regarded as providing children with structure and security. Educators and social workers felt long-term outcomes were impacted by the loss of structure and security that education can offer and that children could experience a lack of structure when they leave education, which can have longer-term implications for them.

Educator A: I think school gives them safety and security and it gives them structure. Once they leave, who's going to keep those walls up for them? Who's gonna be that support? When do social workers stop being that person? I do wonder cos we give them so much, right up to year 13. They've all got the security and there's assistance in place, that everything's got a balance.

Educator B: I mean even for kids that are coping, finishing school is quite unsettling and scary.

Educator A: I think that's why so many go off to university, cos that's all they know. It's that institution to the next thing because, I'll go here cos the big wide world's too scary. Imagine a child who's come from care.

Interviewer: Yeah, so who continues that support and the predictability of school and the routines?

Educator A: It's no longer the teacher's job, it'll be back on the family and the carer. Has that student had a chance to recover a little bit over those five years here or has it just worsened their behaviour?

Interviewer: That's interesting, so school, that period of time will potentially be the time to recover from earlier experiences.

Educator A: Yeah and for some of them, they'll come in, they'll make some good friends, they'll start getting structure in their life.

Educator B: They'll perhaps find a pathway.

Educator A: Yeah, they do.

Educator B: Well, it's the only thing that's going to take them beyond what they'd probably grown up with. It's their pathway to a better future.

For others it was having the security and consistency of a key person in their lives that supported successful long-term outcomes:

"One of my girls has gone onto university. I have a feeling one of my others if she keeps doing academically well will have that as a possibility. I have another girl who is 18 she left quite early on, but she has gone off and done courses in hospitality. She is picking up work and is semi-independent now. She wouldn't have done that without her sister supporting her. Again, it is that significant other person, having that belief, pushing her along not to give up. The outcomes for the kids that have left early, a number of them end up in Youth Justice."
[Social worker]

Aspirations

Aspirations and dreams were considered an important factor influencing children's longer-term outcomes. However, many participants felt that children needed to be encouraged to have aspirations and to recognise the options and potential in their future.

"Then I think for these kids, their idea of what they can be is probably quite limited. If you're gonna go into a decile 10 school and ask these kids what they're gonna be, they're gonna be doctors, lawyers and business owners and this and that and that, whereas I think a lot of these kids wouldn't even be able to tell you what it is they wanna be." *[Educator]*

"I think some children don't realise that they do have access to more than just to 18, that they can go off to university or they can have dreams as big as they want. I sat down with a 17 year old who was like, "I want to go and work in a factory." I was like, "Well, that's great. That's cool if that's what you want to do. If you could, what's your biggest dream?" They couldn't even identify that so I think, longer term, kids need to be encouraged to have big dreams, even if they've been in care." *[Social worker]*

Key adults in a child's life could influence aspirations and remind children of their potential and the pathways towards that.

Child: While I was at mum's last time I asked her, I am not sure what I should be taking, and she made me research, but I couldn't find anything. All I know is that the main ones are English and Maths.

Caregiver: They are the main subjects, but the most important thing is finding something that you enjoy. There is no point in taking something you hate just to make money because you might be a bad maths teacher. If you are happy doing that you might make money. You could be a good businessman, you have a good brain on you. You don't need to pinpoint that right now, have a go at a few things and see what you like, you have plenty of time.
[Māori female, aged 10]

“Trying to sell the idea of education, you have to be consistent, you have to keep ploughing on and having those inspirational visits with children, to try and build that resilience.” *[Social worker]*

Valuing education

Alongside encouraging children to have high aspirations, participants talked about the long-term impact of encouraging children to value education. At times they talked about children coming from backgrounds where adults might not have valued education but that the impact of supporting children to recognise the value of education can have a lifelong impact for them.

Interviewer: What impact can education have on a child’s long-term outcome?

Social worker: It’s the beginning and ending of everything. If a child has the opportunity to become a lifelong learner, at whatever level that is going to be, whatever that theorist is that says you’ve got a limit – I can’t think who that was.

Interviewer: Vygotsky.

Social worker: Yeah, whatever that limit. If you can instil in a child, that whole love of learning at the beginning, they can go wherever they want to go. It doesn’t mean that every child goes to university but it means that they’ve got the ability and the belief in themselves, that they can go to a job and they can learn how to do it or they can learn a skill later or they can do anything. I think that’s what primary school’s about, it’s about learning to learn and college, to me, is about what you’re learning. That’s how I see it. If you can get that love of learning right at the beginning, there’s no stopping them, no matter who they are or what level they’ll ever get to.

The impact of qualifications

One social worker described the long-term outcomes of attending alternative education and the impact of not attaining qualifications. They described this in the context of a high proportion of children in care going to alternative education during their secondary school years.

“If you think of the percentage of kids who come out of alternative education with level 1, it is quite low and that is level 1. You can’t get very far with level 1. The moment they drop out of high school and go to alternative education they really lose a lot of their future opportunities because you can’t become much more than you can get at pre-trade training stuff. You would have to go through a whole bunch of extra programmes to get your level 3 to get into university if you wanted. By then most kids are sick of it and don’t have much routine.” *[Social worker]*

“The same as everyone else. If you are in education you are going to do better, it doesn’t matter if you are in care or not. If you are in high school and you do Level 3 and go to university like all research would suggest you are going to come out of there with higher wages. If you come out with higher wages you aren’t going to be in poverty. Your education is going to help you with budgeting and even socially fitting into a certain crowd. If you drop out and go from school to school, you don’t make long-term friends.” *[Social worker]*

The long-term outcomes for children in care were often described in negative terms with outcomes being viewed as poor. Children in care were often described as achieving poor qualifications, having difficulty managing lack of structure and security when they leave education and having limited aspirations. However a number of factors were highlighted that can have a positive impact on

children’s long-term outcomes and these included supporting them to value education, helping them raise their aspirations and achieve qualifications.

DISCUSSION: INFLUENCES ON EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

This study explored educational experiences, achievement, engagement and outcomes for children in care. Interviews with 58 participants provide rich insights about the way children in care experience stigma and bullying in school settings, are impacted by changing schools, engage in extracurricular activities and how their education is affected by learning and behavioural needs.

Data also shed light on the relationships children in care have with peers, caregivers, educators and social workers, and the way relationships between adults affects their education. The following is an overview of the factors identified in this study that can have a positive and negative impact on educational experiences, achievement, engagement and outcomes of children in care.

Factors that have an impact on the educational experiences of children in care

Factor	Description
Information sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It is important to manage the way information about children in care, their circumstances, and their learning and behavioural needs is shared.• Only people needing the information should receive it and this should remain protected within the school environment.• Information needs to be shared in a timely manner (i.e. prior to changes in school).
Relationships/Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children's relationships with the key people in their lives can impact on their education.• Relationships between the adults in children's lives can facilitate information sharing and support requests and provision of resources.• Supporting children's engagements with peers is important to their wellbeing and education.
Meeting learning and behaviour needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Caregivers and educators play a key role in identifying and informing people of the need for resources to meet children's individual learning and behavioural needs.• Social workers play a key role in providing access to these resources.• Educators require training and support to manage learning and behaviour needs.

Role clarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a lack of clarity about who is responsible for coordinating children's educational resources, and monitoring their educational progress and needs.
Pastoral support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children in care need pastoral support in order to participate in education. Pastoral support can come from teachers, dedicated pastoral support workers, caregivers and social workers. Pastoral support can help meet children's social and emotional needs, build social skills and support them to deal with (or avoid) bullying and stigma.
Attitude of adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults' attitudes to children in care, to education and to privacy impact children's education. The aspirations of children in care are impacted on by the attitude of adults to education.
Capacity of adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The capacity of adults to support children in care to engage with learning and access extracurricular activities has an impact on their education. When adults don't have the capacity to support learning and extracurricular activities children in care miss out on opportunities.
Understanding the education needs of children who have experienced trauma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When caregivers, educators and social workers understand the education needs of children who have experienced trauma and the impact of this on behaviour, children are more likely to be able to participate in education.
Meeting material needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When caregivers and social workers communicate to meet material needs, children in care can attend school and have what they need to learn.

REFERENCES

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Ministry of Social Development (2015) *Expert Advisory Panel Final Report: Investing in New Zealand's Children and Families*. Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Social Development.

GLOSSARY

<i>Term</i>	<i>Description</i>
<i>RTLB</i>	<i>Resource Teacher Learning and Behaviour</i>
<i>RT Lits</i>	<i>Resource Teacher Literacy</i>
<i>IWS</i>	<i>Intensive Wraparound Service</i>
<i>HCN</i>	<i>High and Complex Needs</i>
<i>OT</i>	<i>Oranga Tamariki</i>
<i>IEP</i>	<i>Individual Education Plan</i>
<i>ADHD</i>	<i>Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder</i>
<i>FASD</i>	<i>Foetal alcohol spectrum disorder</i>
<i>SWiS</i>	<i>Social workers in schools</i>

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Information sheets

Appendix B: Example interview guides

Appendix C: Example consent forms

Appendix A: Information Sheets

Information Sheet for Children aged 6 years to 9 years

Oranga Tamariki Education Interviews – August 2018

This information is for an adult to talk to children about so they can decide if they want to take part in the interviews.

Who are we?	We all work with children and whānau in this area and are interested in how school can be even better for you.
Why are we having these discussions?	So you can tell us what you like and don't like in school.
Who is being asked to take part in the group discussion?	Children aged 6 – 15 who live with their caregivers.
Do I have to take part?	No. It's completely up to you whether or not to take part.
What will we be asked to do?	We will meet you in school with some other children and we will talk while we do some drawing, making thing with play doh and playing some games. You can have anyone with you that helps you feel comfortable.
What do I get out of being part of the group discussion?	You can tell us what will help you in school and we can then help other children. You will also receive a \$20 voucher as a thank you for helping us.
What if there are things I don't want to talk about?	You only have to talk about the things you want to talk about.
What kind of information will be recorded?	While we are talking we will write things down so we don't forget them and we will also record them so we can listen to them later.
Who will know what I said?	Just the people who are there when we meet.
Will I get to see the results?	We will come back and tell you what everyone told us and let you know what we will do next. If you are worried about any of these things, you can tell your caregiver or social worker, and they will tell us. They can email the person in charge (Karen) at karen.harris@ot.govt.nz .
Can I change my mind about being part of the discussion?	If you start joining in but then don't want to that's ok.

<p>What if I have any questions?</p>	<p>If you are worried or want to ask questions, your caregiver or social worker can help you. They can contact Karen, who is the person from Oranga Tamariki in charge of the group discussions: Karen Harris, karen.harris@ot.govt.nz</p>
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Information Sheet for Young People

Oranga Tamariki Education Interviews – August 2018

This information is to help you decide if you want to take part in a group talk we are having with some young people who are in care. It's up to you whether you take part.

Who are we?	We all work with children and whānau in this area and are interested in how school can be even better for you.
Why are we having these talks?	We want to hear what children and young people who are in care think about school, so we can make things better for them. We think the best way to get ideas about this is to ask young people, so we're having small group talks to find out what you think.
Who is being asked to take part in the group talks?	The group talks are for people aged 9 – 15 who have been in care. People from Oranga Tamariki will talk to you. We will make sure you feel safe to share your ideas and thoughts.
Do I have to take part?	No. It's up to you to take part.
What will I be asked to do?	There will be between two and five young people there and we will talk together as a group for about an hour and a half. The main thing we will talk about is what you think about school. It will be up to you how much you talk and what you say. It's not a test, and there are no right or wrong answers.
What do I get out of being part of the group talks?	What you say will be used to come up with ideas to make things better for children and young people involved with Oranga Tamariki. Your experiences can help us understand what needs to change. You will also receive a \$20 voucher as a thank you for helping us.
What if there are things I don't want to talk about?	Sometimes it can be hard to talk about stuff. If there's something that you don't want to talk about, you don't have to. If you feel upset, and want to talk to someone about it, you can tell the people running the talks or your social worker and they can find the right person to help you.
What kind of information will be recorded?	If you agree, we will write notes during the talks and also audio record what people say so that we can remember what was said. The information from the audio recordings will be typed out, but no names will be written down. No one will know that the notes are yours. The audio recordings will be destroyed after notes have been taken from them. Notes from the interviews will be stored securely in a locked cabinet at the Oranga Tamariki office in Wellington for seven years. After that time, the notes will be destroyed.
Who will know what I said?	Anything you say, and all information about you, will be kept private. No one except the researchers working on this project will see it. We may write down things you say, but we won't write your name anywhere, so no one will know who said it. Your name will not be shared with anyone unless we are worried about your safety or the safety of someone else, or a serious crime has been committed. If this happens, and we need to share something you said, we will tell you before we do it.

	Other young people may say things in the group talks that they don't want anyone else to know about. Please don't share what they say with anyone.
Will I get to see the results?	After the group talks, we will write the main ideas that people shared and will send a copy of that to you. If you decide after the talks that you want to change something you said, you can tell your social worker, and they will tell us. You can also email the person in charge of the group talks (Karen) at karen.harris@ot.govt.nz .
Can I change my mind about being part of the talks?	You choose whether or not to take part. If you decide that you don't want to, even after we've started, you can stop at any time without having to give a reason.
What if I have any questions?	If you have any questions and would like to talk to someone, your social worker can help you. And you can contact Karen, who is the person from Oranga Tamariki in charge of the group talks: Karen Harris, karen.harris@ot.govt.nz .

Information Sheet for Social Workers

Oranga Tamariki Education Interviews – August 2018

The purpose of this sheet is to give you information about some upcoming Oranga Tamariki interviews, which are aimed at better understanding the educational experiences of children and young people in care.

Why am I being asked to participate in an interview?	We have been charged with helping the organisation gain an in-depth understanding of children and young people's experiences in education and how those experiences affect outcomes. We are also looking to identify system improvements that could lead to better educational outcomes for children in care. To this end, we are interviewing care-experienced children and young people as well as social workers, caregivers, and education professionals.
Who is being asked to take part in interviews?	These interviews are for Oranga Tamariki social workers who work with care experienced young people aged between 6 and 15 years.
What is involved?	The interview will last for about one hour at a time and location that is convenient to you. Oranga Tamariki staff will conduct the interview. We will talk about your experiences as a social worker in relation to education for children and young people in care. It is up to you how much you want to say; you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to.
Do I have to take part?	No. It's completely up to you whether or not to take part.
What are the benefits of participating?	What participants say will be used to identify system improvements that could lead to better educational outcomes for children in care. Your experiences and insight can help us make a positive difference for those children and young people.
What kind of information will be recorded at the interview?	With your permission, we will audio record the conversation and write notes during the interview. The information from the audio recordings will be typed out, but no names will be recorded. The audio recordings will be destroyed after notes have been taken from them. Notes from the interviews will be stored securely in a locked cabinet at the Oranga Tamariki office in Wellington for seven years. After that time, the notes will be destroyed.
Will my privacy be protected?	Yes. All information collected during this project will be anonymised so that the information participants share cannot be linked back to them.
Will I get to see the results?	After all interviews have been conducted, we will write a report and send a copy of that to you. If you decide after the discussion that you want to change or correct something you said, you can email Karen Harris at karen.harris@ot.govt.nz .
Can I change my mind about participating?	If you decide that you don't want to participate, even after we've started, you can stop at any time without having to give a reason.
What if I have any questions?	If you have any questions, you can contact Karen, who is the person from Oranga Tamariki in charge of this project: Karen Harris, karen.harris@ot.govt.nz .

Appendix B: Example of interview guides

Interview Questions for children aged 6 – 8

The following questions can be phrased to ask children directly about their experiences or about general experiences of children in their school.

We only need to refer to children in care if that feels appropriate.

Prompts – *what do you like to bring to school, what makes you happy / sad / angry / excited in school, who do you like to play with, what do you like to play / do. Lunchtimes. Food. Friends. Going home. Carpet time. Listening to teachers. Leaving caregivers / parents in the morning. Being told what to do. How long you spend in school.*

Introductory questions

- Any discussion about school such as which class they are in, who they like working with, what they do at lunchtimes etc.

Experiences

RQ1. What experiences do CECYP have of education?

- What do you like about school?
- What don't you like about school?
- What would you say to help a new child (or child in care) coming to this school?

RQ2. What influences CECYP experiences of education?

- Who helps you in school?
- Who helps you outside of school to come school?
- Who knows what you need in school?
- Who can you talk to in school?
- Where do you put your things in school?
- Who helps you in school if you don't feel well?
- Who helps you in school if you don't feel happy?

RQ3. How can Government agencies improve educational experiences?

- What do you like about the teachers in this school?
- How do the teachers help you?
- Who do you talk to if you aren't happy in school?

Achievements and engagements

RQ4. What do CECYP achieve in education?

- What do you like to do in school?
- What are you learning in school?
- What are you good at in school?
- What do you find hard in school?

RQ5. What influences CECYP achievements and engagement in education?

- Who helps you learn in school?
- Do you like reading? Drawing? Writing? Building things? Dressing up? Playing with cars? etc., etc.
- Who knows your name in school?
- Who are your friends in school?
- What do you like to bring to school?

RQ6. How can Government agencies improve educational achievements and engagements?

- What would you like your teachers to be like/do?
- What would you like your social work to be like/do?
- What would make school better?

Summary

- Is there anything else you would like to tell us about what school is like for you?

Interview Questions for children aged 9+

The following questions can be phrased to ask children directly about their experiences or about general experiences of children in their school.

Introductory questions

- Any discussion about school such as which class they are in, who they like working with, what they do at lunchtimes etc.

Experiences

RQ1. What experiences do CECYP have of education?

- What do you like about school?
- What don't you like about school?
- What advice would you give to a new child (or child in care) coming to this school?

Prompts – transitions, homework, friendship groups, school trips, lunches, attendance, relationships with staff

RQ2. What influences CECYP experiences of education?

- Who helps you in school?
- Who helps you outside of school to come school?
- Who knows what you need?
- Who can you talk to?
- How do the adults in school get to know you?
- How do the children in school get to know you?

Prompts – what is it about being in care that specifically influences experiences in school?

Transitions, knowledge of child, attachment needs, communication with care givers, access to after school activities

RQ3. How can Government agencies improve educational experiences?

- What could teachers do to make school better?
- What could social workers do to make school better?
- If you were the Principal of the school what would you change? What would you change for children in care.

Prompts – Gateway assessments, communication, joint working, understanding of child's needs

Achievements and engagements

RQ4. What do CECYP achieve in education?

- How do children in school know they are learning?
- How do children in school know they are doing well?
- What are you pleased with about how you are doing in school?

Prompts – learning, homework, exams, NCEA, wider achievements, sporting, kapa haka, community involvement, social skills

RQ5. What influences CECYP achievements and engagement in education?

- What helps you feel part of this school?
- What helps you want to come to school?
- What helps you learn in school?
- What else are you doing well in?

RQ6. How can Government agencies improve educational achievements and engagements?

- What do teachers do to help you learn in school?
- What should teachers do to help you learn in school?
- What do the other adults in your lives do to help you learn in school? (e.g. social worker, youth worker, caregiver)
- What should other adults in your life do to help you learn in school?

Summary

- Is there anything else you would like to tell us about what school is like for you?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell us about what you would like to school to be like?
- What do you hope to do when you leave this school?

Interview Questions for Social Workers and Education Staff

Introductory questions

- Tell me about your role
- Tell me about how your interactions with caregivers/schools/Oranga Tamariki would look during a typical week.
- What age children do you normally work with?

Experiences

RQ1. What experiences do CECYP have of education?

- Thinking of CECYP you know, how do you think they experience school?
- How might a child in care's experience of school be different to that not in care?
- How does staff in school know what a CECYP needs in order to fully participate in school?

Prompts – *transitions, homework, friendship groups, school trips, lunches, attendance, relationships with staff*

RQ2. What influences CECYP experiences of education?

- What things within school impact on the experiences that children in care have of school?
- What things outside of school / at home impact on the experiences children in care have of school?
- Tell me about the things that make school a positive experience for children in care?
- What would children in care say influences their experiences of education?

*Prompts – what is it about being in care that specifically influences experiences in school?
Transitions, knowledge of child, attachment needs, communication with care givers, access to after school activities*

RQ3. How can Government agencies improve educational experiences?

- What could OT staff do to improve the educational experiences of children in care?
- What could education staff do to improve the education experiences of children in care?
- What do you think would give CECYP positive experiences in school?
- What does OT currently do well to help CECYP have positive experiences in school?
- What would children in care say would improve their experiences of education?

Prompts – Gateway assessments, communication, joint working, understanding of child's needs

Achievements and engagements

RQ4. What do CECYP achieve in education?

- Tell me what enables children in care to learn in school.
- How would you say CECYP achieve in school? What are some of the things that might help CECYP achieve?
- Are there any barriers to learning for a child in care and if so what are they?
- What do schools currently do well when supporting CECYP?
- What could schools do better in supporting CECYP?

- What do caregivers need to consider in order to best support children in care with learning?

Prompts – learning, homework, exams, NCEA, wider achievements, sporting, kapa haka, community involvement, social skills

RQ5. What influences CECYP achievements and engagement in education?

- What helps children in care feel included at school?
- What helps children in care feel engaged at school?
- What helps children in care to learn in school?
- What helps children experience success in school?
- What helps children in care to achieve in wider aspects of school life (e.g. sport, friendship, social skills) aside from learning?

RQ6. How can Government agencies improve educational achievements and engagements?

- What can OT staff do to improve education achievements of children in care?
- What can Education staff do to improve the educational achievements of children in care?
- What can OT staff do to improve education engagements for children in care?
- What can Education staff do to improve educational engagements for children in care?

Outcomes

RQ7. What impact does educational achievement and engagement have on the outcomes for CECYP?

- How can education enhance the outcomes for children in care?
- Tell me about a child in care who has had success in term of achievements in education and how this has impacted on them long term.
- Tell me about a child in care who has been supported with taking part in school and how this has helped them in the long term?

RQ8. What impact do educational experiences have on outcomes for CECYP?

- Tell me about how the experiences CECYP have in school impacts on the long term (post school) outcomes for children in care.
- Tell me about a child who has had positive long term outcomes related to their school experiences.

Prompts – exam results, life skills, resilience, managing behaviour and feelings, ability to work

Appendix C: Example consent forms

Consent form for Children Aged 6 years to 8 years

_____ has talked to me about why I am meeting with you today.



I would like to answer some questions that you have for me.



I know I can stop whenever I want.



I don't mind if you record my voice.



Consent form for Young People

Oranga Tamariki Education Interviews – August 2018

This form is designed to be talked through by an adult with the young person.

- Taking part in the small group talk is totally my choice, and I can change my mind about taking part at any time without having to give a reason.
- Some things I say will be written down and audio recorded, but my name won't be kept with the information, so no one will know it was me who said them.
- But, if I say something that makes people think that I or someone else is in danger the person running the group discussions will tell the appropriate person. They will let me know what is happening before they do this.
- The people running the group talks will write notes and also audio record what people say. We will listen to the audio recording and take some notes, then the recording will be destroyed. Notes from the discussion will be stored in a locked cabinet at the Oranga Tamariki office in Wellington and destroyed after seven years.
- I get to decide what I want to talk about. If I don't want to talk about something, I can just tell the people running the group or my support person. If I feel upset and want to talk to someone about it, I can tell the people running the group or my support person and they will find the right person to help.
- I will receive a \$20 voucher as a thank you.
- Information gathered in the group discussions will be used to work out how school can be made better for children and young people. A report on the main ideas that people shared will be sent to me once the project is completed.
- Other young people may say things in the group discussion that they don't want anyone else to know about. I agree that I won't share or tell anyone else.
- If I have any questions before or after the group discussion (or if I want to change something I said in the discussion), my social worker can help me. I can also contact Karen from Oranga Tamariki who is in charge of organising the talks:
Karen Harris, karen.harris@ot.govt.nz
- I will also get the chance to ask any questions on the day of the group discussion.
- If I am worried about how information about me is treated, I can complain to the Privacy Commissioner. I can contact them on 0800 803 909 or online <https://www.privacy.org.nz/about-us/contact/>.

I have read this form and agree to take part in this workshop

Yes / No

Name:

Signature:

Date:

If you are 15 years or younger

Parent or guardian to complete

I agree to _____ (name of young person) taking part in this workshop

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Consent Form for Social Workers
Oranga Tamariki Education Interviews

I have read and understand the Information Sheet. I know that:

- Taking part in the interview is entirely voluntary, and I can change my mind about taking part at any time without having to give a reason.
- All information collected in the interviews will be anonymous so that it cannot be linked to me.
- The interviewer will write notes during the interview and the conversation will be audio recorded. The audio recordings and notes will be stored in a locked cabinet at the Oranga Tamariki office in Wellington and destroyed after seven years.
- I can decide what I want to talk about. If I don't want to talk about something, I can just tell the interviewer.
- Information gathered in the interviews will be used to improve the educational experiences and achievements of children and young people in care. A report on the main ideas that people shared will be sent to me once the project is completed.
- If I have any questions before or after the interview (or if I want to change something I said in the discussion), I can contact Karen from Oranga Tamariki:
Karen Harris, karen.harris@ot.govt.nz
- If I am worried about how information about me is treated, I can complain to the Privacy Commissioner. I can contact them on 0800 803 909 or online at <https://www.privacy.org.nz/about-us/contact/>.

I have read this form and agree to take part in the interview	Yes / No
Name: _____	
Signature: _____	
Date: _____	

**Tamariki needs and aspirations
are listened to and delivered on**



WHAKARONGO

LISTEN