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Private Fostering Survey 2026

Findings and analysis

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Introduction

Private fostering is defined by section 66 of the Children Act 1989 and means looking after (care and accommodation) a child under 16 (or under 18 if they have a disability) for more than 28 days in the home of someone who is not their parent, a person with parental responsibility (PR) for the child, or a relative. A relative is defined by section 105 of the Children Act 1989 and means grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt, or step-parent. The familial or birth relationship can be full or half, for example half-brother.

Private foster carers may be from the extended family such as a cousin or great aunt. A private foster carer may be a friend of the family, the parent of a friend of the child, an unmarried step-parent or someone previously unknown to the child's family who is willing to privately foster the child.

The period for which the child is cared for and accommodated by the private foster carer should be continuous but can include the occasional short break. The local authority in which the private foster carer lives must be notified of the arrangement.

The Department for Education stopped collection of any data about private fostering in 2015 and therefore the exact number of children who are privately fostered is not known. The Department for Education stated that the data collected was of limited value as it was numerical only, and did not offer any information about the quality of the private fostering arrangements, and therefore it did not contribute in any way to keeping children safe. Their hope was that improved future analysis of child-level data in the children in need census would identify children in need or those requiring protection living in private fostering arrangements.

The Children in need census 2026 to 2027 guide sets out "Children in need who are also privately fostered should be included. However, being privately fostered does not automatically mean the child is a child in need. To be included, the privately fostered child must have been assessed to be in need and requiring children's social care services in addition to receiving the required statutory visits because they are privately fostered. If a privately fostered child is only receiving the required statutory visits from children's social care services, then the child is not included in the children in need census" (p12). Therefore, it was hoped that this data would help provide more information and insights into the profiles of private fostering arrangements that needed additional support and this would lead to policies and practices that are more effective in identifying privately fostered children in the longer term.

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Information from the Children in need census 2024-25 states that "factors identified at the end of a (child in need) assessment are additional factors that social workers record as being relevant in a case." This included 1,950 privately fostered children who were subject to a child in need plan during the year to end March 2025. When considering this data, the guidance points out the need for some caution when considering these returns:

> "Each unique factor is counted once against a given episode, irrespective of the number of times the same factor was recorded in that episode. However, as a child can have more than one episode of need during the year (ending 31 March), the same child can be recorded more than once for a given factor. The majority of children have more than one unique factor recorded for each episode of need. It should be noted that not all episodes have factors recorded, but this has improved over time. Nonetheless, there can be differences in the recording practices between local authorities ***therefore this data should be treated with caution and shouldn't be taken to represent the national, regional or local authority level prevalence of particular issues.***" (Our emphasis)

The available data does not indicate the primary reason for an assessment of these children in need. We are also aware that some local authorities automatically consider any child or young person living in a private fostering arrangement to be a child in need. The children in need data were collected from all 153 local authorities in England and would therefore suggest that the numbers of privately fostered children is larger than the total of 860 children reported by the 48 respondent local authorities to our survey. This is the same conclusion that we have reached over the previous two years of undertaking this survey but it remains difficult to draw any concrete conclusions given the limitations of interpreting children in need data as set out above.

Practitioners working in private fostering continue to be concerned about the lack of data. At a basic level, it is hard to feel confident that policy makers can effectively consider the needs of privately fostered children when there is no central data about numbers, nor about their characteristics, such as age, gender, ethnicity, faith or duration of arrangement other than limited data that comes from the children in need census. We also know local authorities want to compare their own data about privately fostered children with geographical and statistical neighbours, as this could be one indicator of their success in identifying, assessing and supporting children in private fostering arrangements.

The definition of kinship care as set out in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 includes children who are privately fostered by individuals (as opposed to those privately fostered by organisations such as language schools and football academies). Children living in

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private fostering arrangements and their private foster carers are therefore eligible for any universal support available to kinship families. This includes both the universal training and support commissioned by the government and delivered by Kinship, as well as the extension to the virtual school head role. The Act also requires local authorities to publish a kinship local offer which must include support that will be provided to all kinship carers, including private foster carers.

It seems important that such policy initiatives can appropriately reach privately fostered children and their carers. The Law Commission has just concluded an extensive period of consultation and is due to publish recommendations for changes to the legislation relating to kinship care in autumn 2027. The Law Commission consultation document referenced CoramBAAF's private fostering survey report and asked questions about the term 'private fostering' and whether this was confusing; whether regulations for private fostering should apply for children being cared for in their own home (as opposed to a private foster carer's home); and whether private fostering should apply to all children aged 16 and 17. You can read CoramBAAF's response to the Law Commission's consultation here. The questions posed by the Law Commission accurately reflect the regular discussions in the private fostering practice forums and highlight issues connected to raising awareness, identification of private fostering and support that should be available.

CoramBAAF continues to advocate for a better understanding of this often hidden group of children. We launched a Private Fostering Survey in July 2024, and this report provides information from the third survey that was completed in July/August 2026.



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Methodology and responses

Drawing on our experience of data analysis from the previous two years of survey data and listening to feedback from our members who completed it, we refined the survey questions with the support of a working party from the private fostering practice forum. The working party consisted of social workers and managers with extensive experience of private fostering. Explanatory guidance was circulated at the same time as the questions. The intention was to provide local authorities with clearer information about the purpose of each question and the data that was required. Future surveys will have the same questions and we hope local authorities will be able to build data reports knowing there will be consistency of questions year on year, to simplify the data collection process. With consistent questions and clear guidance, we anticipate future surveys should provide more comparable responses year to year.

The survey was open to all local authorities in England and Wales, sent to the private fostering practice forum mailing list, publicised several times through membership communications and information shared at training and membership events. The survey was open for a total of 10 weeks. We publish the survey annually in early summer to enable local authorities to use data they may have collected for their annual reports published in spring. We asked for data for the period 1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026.

We received 55 responses in total; however these included some duplicates and other test responses that were removed from the final analysis, which is therefore based on 48 responses. The response rate is lower than previous year, however there were fewer duplicate responses and responses received contained more usable and consistent data. This suggests that if future surveys ask the same questions, future response rates should provide even more consistent data as respondents become more familiar with what is being asked.

We designed the survey to ask key questions about private fostering. We tried to limit the number of questions to encourage a higher response rate. We used a different survey platform to last year but tried to keep the questions as similar to last year's as possible, to ensure continuity and to enable as much comparison as possible. We also required an answer to each question to try and rectify an issue in previous years where responses did not tally with overall numbers given to key questions, such as notifications and numbers of children living in private fostering arrangements. We asked general questions about the number of notifications received, how many actual children were living in private fostering arrangements, and questions about age range, ethnicity, faith, disability, relationship to the private foster carer, duration of the arrangement and the reasons why a private fostering arrangement had ended during the previous year.

This year, we also ensured that respondents were able to start the online survey and save a partially completed response and return to it when they had access to the data needed. We're aware survey questions asked may not correspond to data usually collected which can make

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We're aware survey questions asked may not correspond to data usually collected locally, which can make extracting data more challenging for those completing the survey. We again ensured that respondents were able to start the online survey and save a partially completed response then return to it when they had access to the data needed. We also asked for contact details so that we could follow up on data-related issues/questions, but were clear that we would not share any identifying details about local authorities or the private foster carers or children in their care. We needed to follow up on fewer responses this year, which may indicate that respondents are more familiar with the survey, and were able to access data more easily than in

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previous years. Requiring answers in each field also meant that the data were more complete and consistent as responses to each of questions on identity characteristics tallied with overall numbers of privately fostered children within each local authority.

Survey responses

A total of 55 responses were received to this year's data collection exercise. We followed up where possible on any duplicate or partially completed responses to confirm which responses should be used. As a result of this process, we were able to use 48 responses for the analysis.

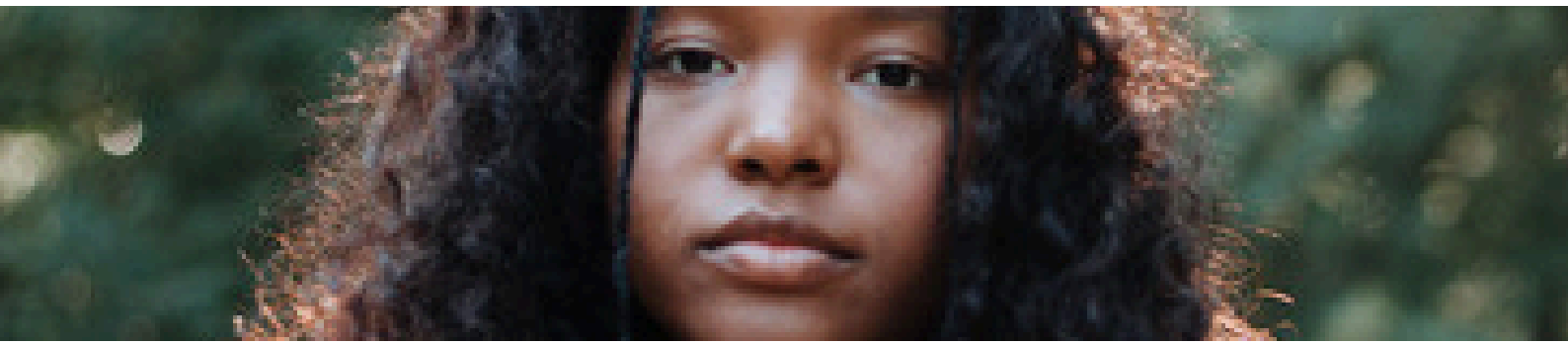
Local authorities

In 2024, we were able to use data from 18 local authorities and in total received data from 33 local authorities in England and one in Wales. This represented 21.6% of the 153 local authorities in England and 4.5% of the 22 local authorities in Wales, so 19.4% overall. We noted that the responses came from local authorities across England and Wales, with responses from all regions apart from the North East of England.

In 2025, we received useable responses from 57 local authorities in England and 4 local authorities in Wales. This represents 37.25% of local authorities in England and 18% of local authorities in Wales, which were significant increases from 2024.

In 2026, we received useable responses from 47 local authorities in England and one local authority in Wales. This represents 31% of the 153 local authorities in England and 5% of the 22 local authorities in Wales. This is a decrease from last year but as with previous years, responses were received from a wide geographical spread in England.

The number of responses, including commentary provided within the survey, indicates ongoing challenges faced by local authorities in either accessing data about privately fostered children, or about providing it in the breakdown or format we requested. Although we circulated guidance with the questions this year, it may not have been in sufficient time to build the data reports to align with questions asked in the survey. We will discuss this with members and explore whether there is anything further that CoramBAAF can do to support data collection around private fostering.



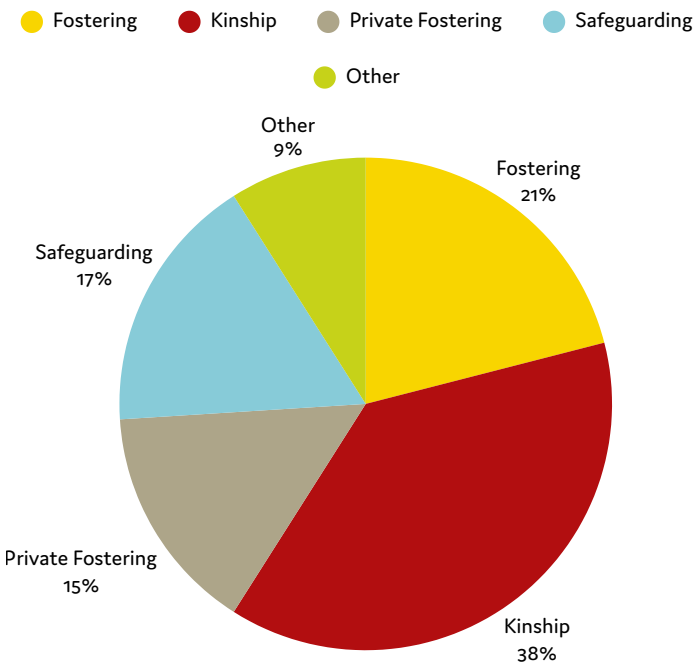
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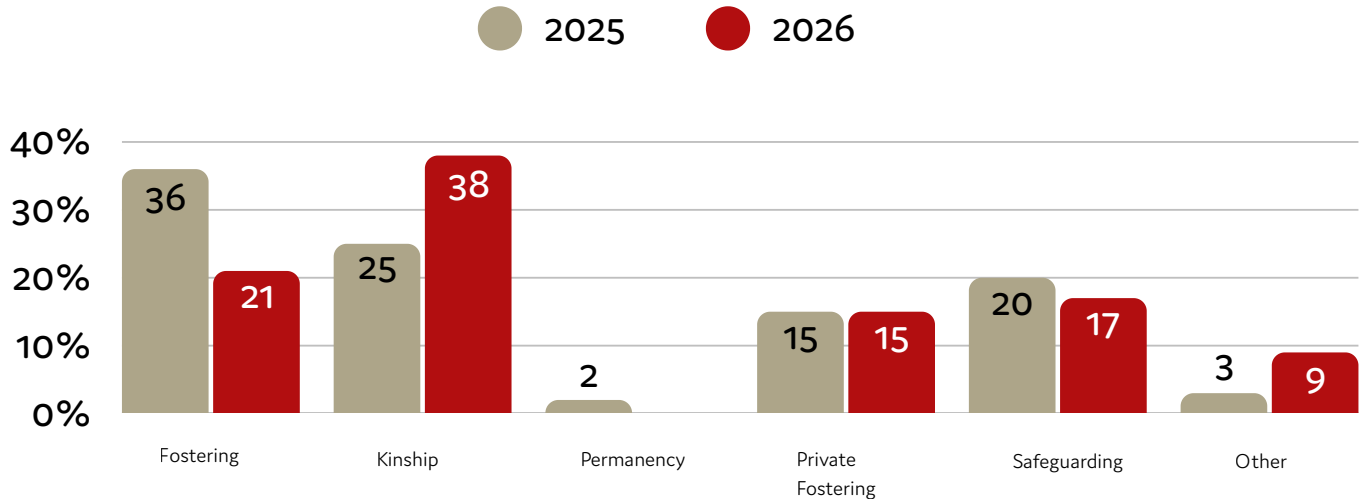
Which team takes the lead on private fostering?

The responses we received show that responsibility for private fostering continues to sit across a large range of teams. There was a drop-down list of teams responsible for private fostering for respondents to choose from.

Team responsible for private fostering

There appears to have been a shift in responses with more kinship teams now having responsibility for private fostering than fostering teams (see table below). Private fostering does not share any regulatory or legislative frameworks with mainstream fostering, and crucially the children are not in the care of the local authority. It is not possible to comment on whether some of the fostering services are also responsible for kinship fostering. The conclusion drawn previously was that there was a logic to private fostering responsibility sitting in kinship teams, given the inclusion of private fostering in the definition of kinship care stated in the Kinship care: statutory guidance for local authorities and the commonalities shared by a child who is living with private foster carers and a child living in informal kinship care with a close relative. But of course, many kinship teams only support formal kinship carers, although this may change over time. Formal kinship carers are also assessed and supported across a variety of teams too.





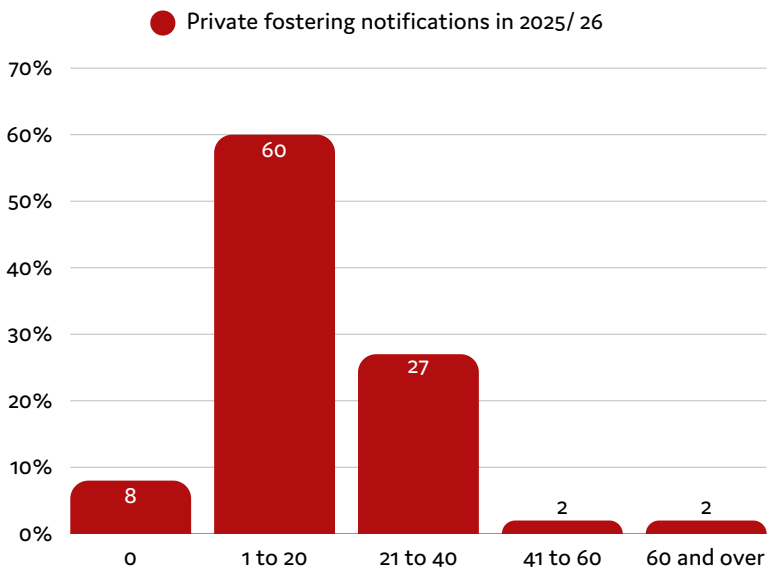
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The variance in where responsibility sits is perhaps most important for policy makers and those who provide universal services to all kinship carers, including private foster carers, as required in the kinship local offer. Multi-agency partners who may become aware of a private fostering arrangement would likely refer to the 'Front Door'. Variance in team responsibility may be a potential barrier to either parents or private foster carers knowing 'who to tell' about a private fostering arrangement, but we have no evidence of this as our survey is aimed at local authorities only.

Private fostering notifications

CoramBAAF regularly facilitates a Private Fostering Practice Forum, where our members come together to discuss professional practice, and share knowledge and expertise with colleagues. We therefore know, from our members, that most local authorities have small numbers of children living in private fostering arrangements at any given point in time; the number of children ranges from 5 – 25 on average. At CoramBAAF, we wanted to know about the numbers of notifications received over a year and who those notifications came from.

We received responses to this question from all 48 local authorities. 8% of responding local authorities (n=5) received no notifications in the year to end March 2026. This is the same response rate as last year.



60% of local authorities (n=39) received between 1 and 20 notifications, which compares to 61% last year, showing very little difference.

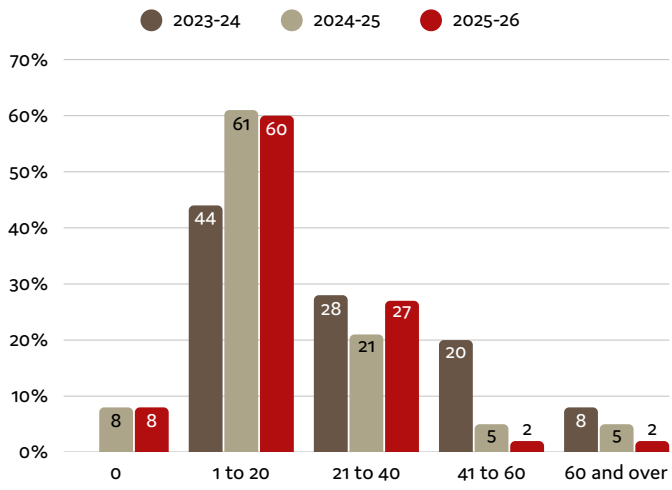
7% of local authorities (n=13) received between 21 and 40 notifications, compared to 21% last year therefore there has been an increase of 6% in this range, but a very similar number to the 28% reported in 2024.

2% of local authorities (n=1) received between 41 and 60 notifications, a decrease from last year's 5% and a continued significant difference from 20% reported in 2024.
2% of local authorities (n=1) received more than 70 notifications, which was a very similar figure to last year. As per previous years, we surmise that the local authorities that had the highest rates of notifications may also have a prevalence of language schools in the area

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Private Fostering Notifications 2023/24 to 2025/26

The nature of private fostering arrangements means that some local authorities are likely to receive more notifications than others, and this will also depend on levels of awareness in local communities. Language schools should always be aware of their responsibility to notify the local authority of any student who will be staying with a host family for more than 28 days.

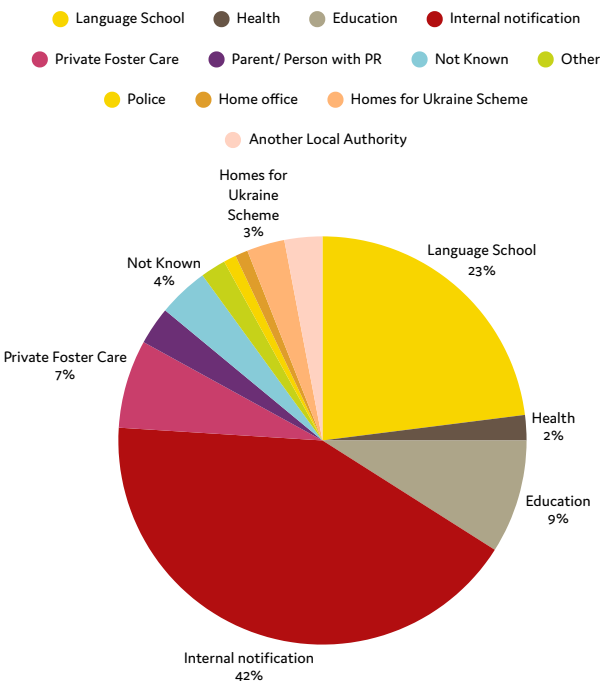


This chart shows changes over the three-year period of the surveys with little difference amongst the overall percentages of notifications but an increase in the range of 1 – 20 notifications. There are some potential external influences that may impact numbers of private fostering notifications, for example the introduction of the Homes for Ukraine visa schemes which required unaccompanied children or young people living with sponsors to be considered as privately fostered, even where it did not meet the statutory definition. A local authority could potentially see an increase in notifications following a specific awareness raising campaign. But from the data over three years it simply suggests there is a relative consistency and little fluctuation in the numbers of notifications per local authority.

Source of notifications

Source of notifications 2025/26

We provided the same list of sources of private fostering notifications as previous years. Interestingly, there is a very similar pattern of notifications overall (see comparison table below). Similar to last year, there continues to be low numbers of new notifications of children or young people living with sponsors via the Homes for Ukraine Scheme but it is worth noting that there are still children being newly privately fostered under this scheme (n=25): data available here.

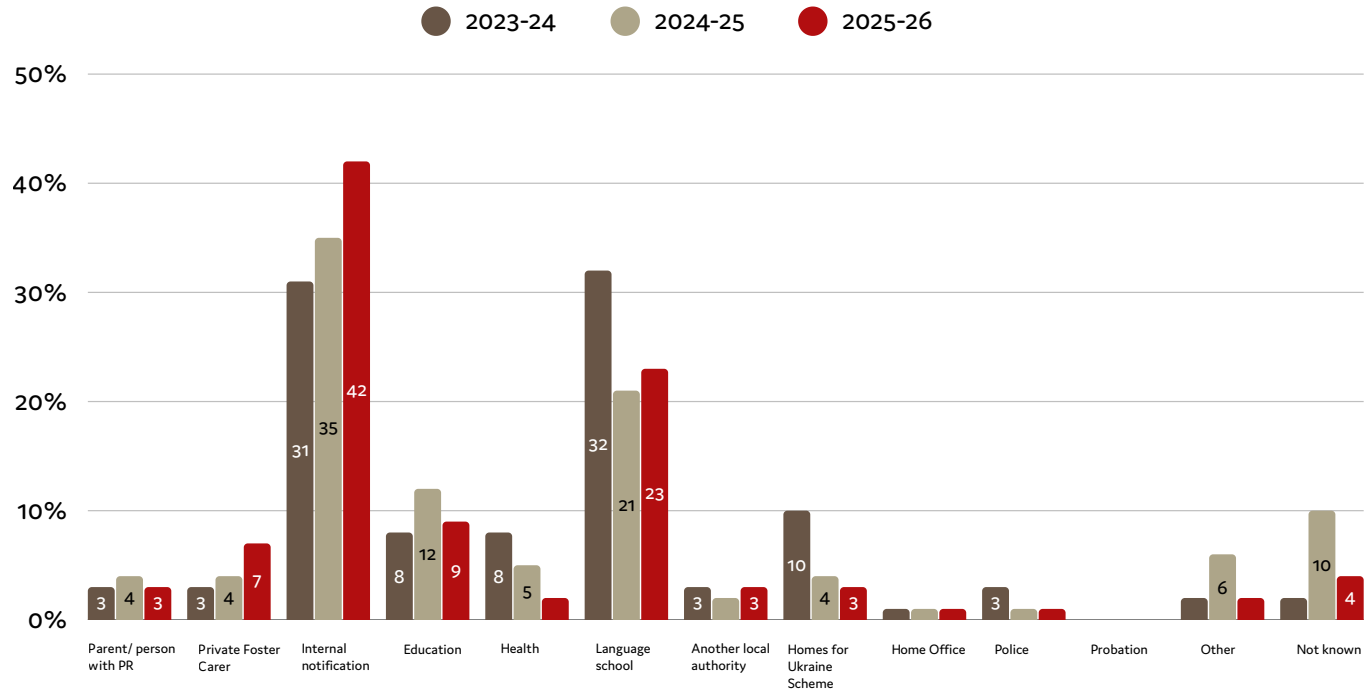


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As in the previous year, notifications came from a range of sources with most being internal from other children's teams (42%) with the next highest number being from language schools (23%). This year, we received information about other sources of notifications, which included a Guardianship Agency, local International College, an agency for students from abroad and a host family agency which does indicate some level of 'professional' private fostering. There were also a few notifications from a community organisation, a sports club, football academy and one member of the public.

Interestingly, very few came from parents or private foster carers themselves (10% in total). This continues to support the hypothesis that we need to continue to raise awareness of private fostering. It seems evident that many parents and individual private foster carers may not be aware of their responsibility to notify the local authority of the arrangement, hence notifications coming primarily from other sources. It also highlights the ongoing need for local authorities to continue to raise awareness; not just in their in their local communities but across multi-agency partners as the percentage of notifications from health and education was also lower than might be expected and very similar to last year's figures.

Source of notifications 2023/24 to 2025/26





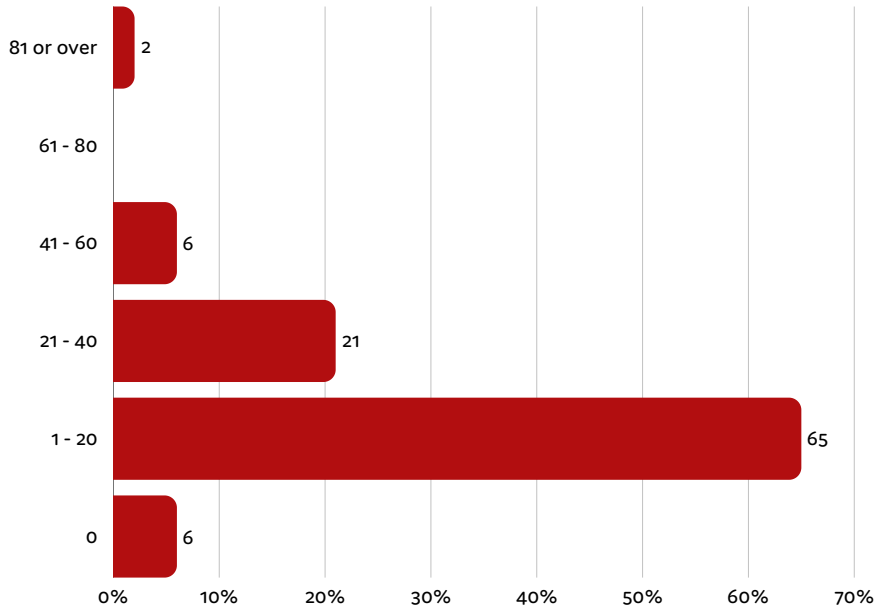
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Numbers of children privately fostered

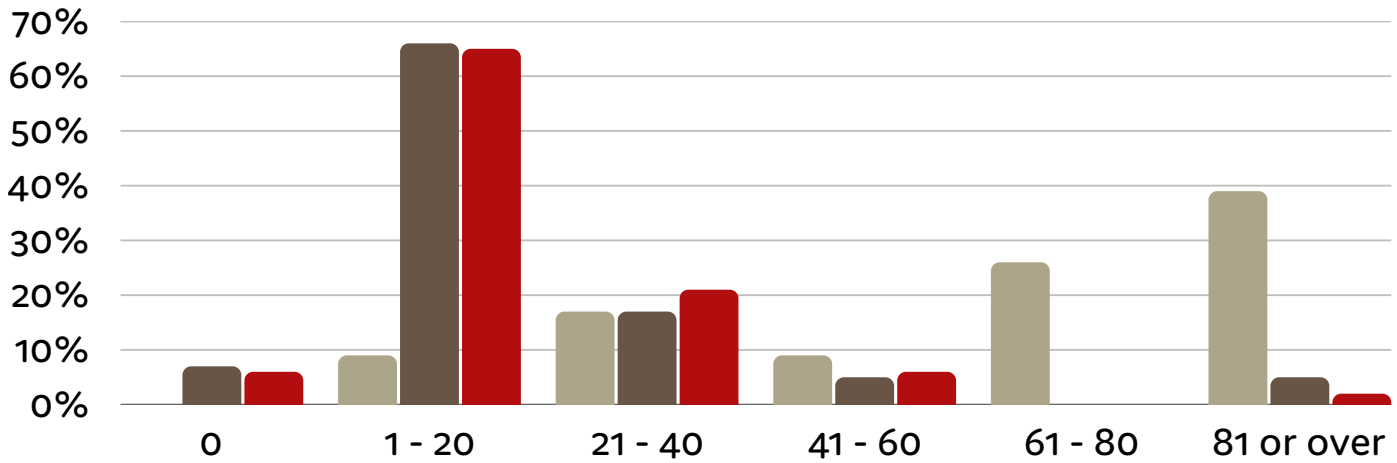
We asked for the numbers of children who were privately fostered as this could differ from the number of notifications received (one notification might relate to more than one child). This question captures all children who were privately fostered at any point in the year i.e. those in pre-existing arrangements (from the previous years) as well as new arrangements (made in this year and including those that are ongoing). 6% (n=3) of local authorities reported no children living in private fostering arrangements, 65% (n=31) reported between 1 and 20 children, 21% (n=10) between 21 and 40 children, 6% (n=3) reported between 41 and 60 children, no local authorities had between 61 and 80 children, and 2% (n=1) having over 81 children living in private fostering arrangements.

Children in private fostering arrangements 2025/26

These figures are notably similar to last year's as shown in the table below. The exception is the number of local authorities who had more than 81 children living in private fostering arrangements. We believe this is due to lack of data this year from local authorities who may have a higher number of language schools, based on our knowledge of the geographical location of responding local authorities.



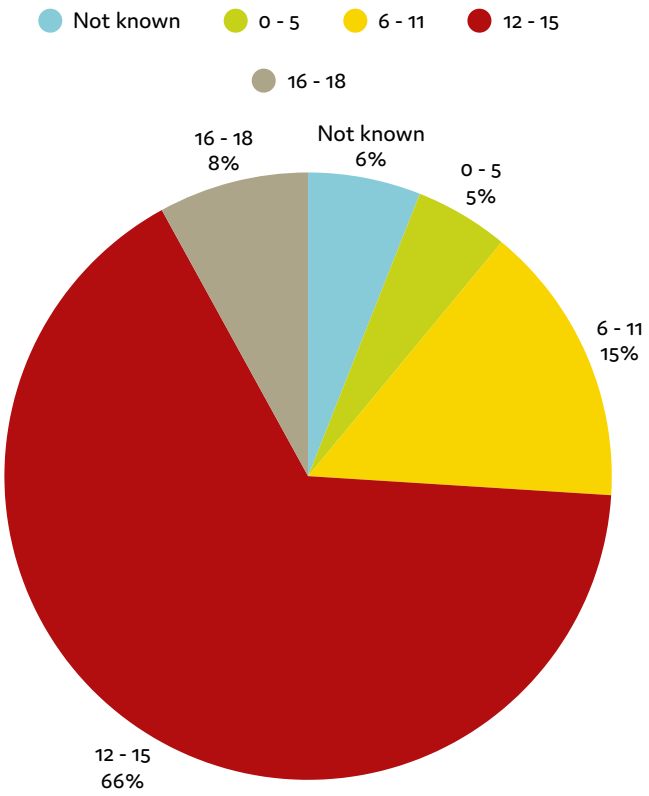
Children in private fostering arrangements 2023/24 to 2025/26



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Age of children privately fostered in 2025/26

According to the local authorities who responded to this question, 66% of children (n=567) were aged between 12 and 15, compared to 69% last year, but this remains the largest number of children living in private fostering arrangements. 5% of children (n=44) were aged between 0 and 5 and 15% (n=127) were aged between 6 and 11.

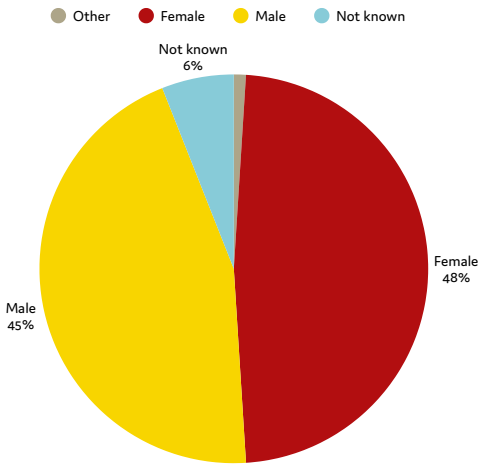


8% (n=69) were aged between 16 and 18, compared to 9% last year. Private fostering arrangements end at the age of 16 unless a child is disabled or is a child from Ukraine. Children from Ukraine living in private fostering arrangements are entitled to be considered as such until they are 18 years old which may account for the overall percentage reduction in this age category.

It is of note that the largest numbers of children again are in the 12–15 age group. We know from practice experience that children who experience relationship difficulties with parents in adolescence sometimes 'place themselves' in private fostering arrangements, perhaps living with a friend of the family or their friend's family, and this may account for the numbers. This year there was a significant number of 'Not known' (6%, n=53) and we understand from comments received that this is due to data management systems not easily being able to provide this information for the survey respondents, and therefore a 'Not known' response was given instead. We also understand that it is not that this information is not gathered, just that systems do not enable easy access.

Sex of children privately fostered

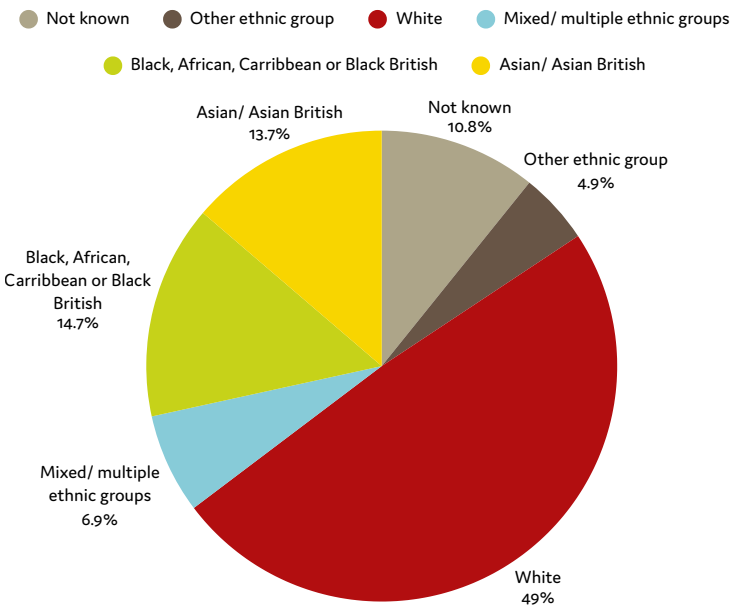
The table shows an almost equal split between male and female (we asked about sex based on census guidelines) with 48% female (n=413) and 45% male (n=388) with 6% (n=53) not known (please refer back to comment in previous section relating to data access). 1% (n=7) were described as Other, but no further information was provided. We had included non-binary as a category last year so direct year on year comparison is not possible.



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Ethnicity of children privately fostered

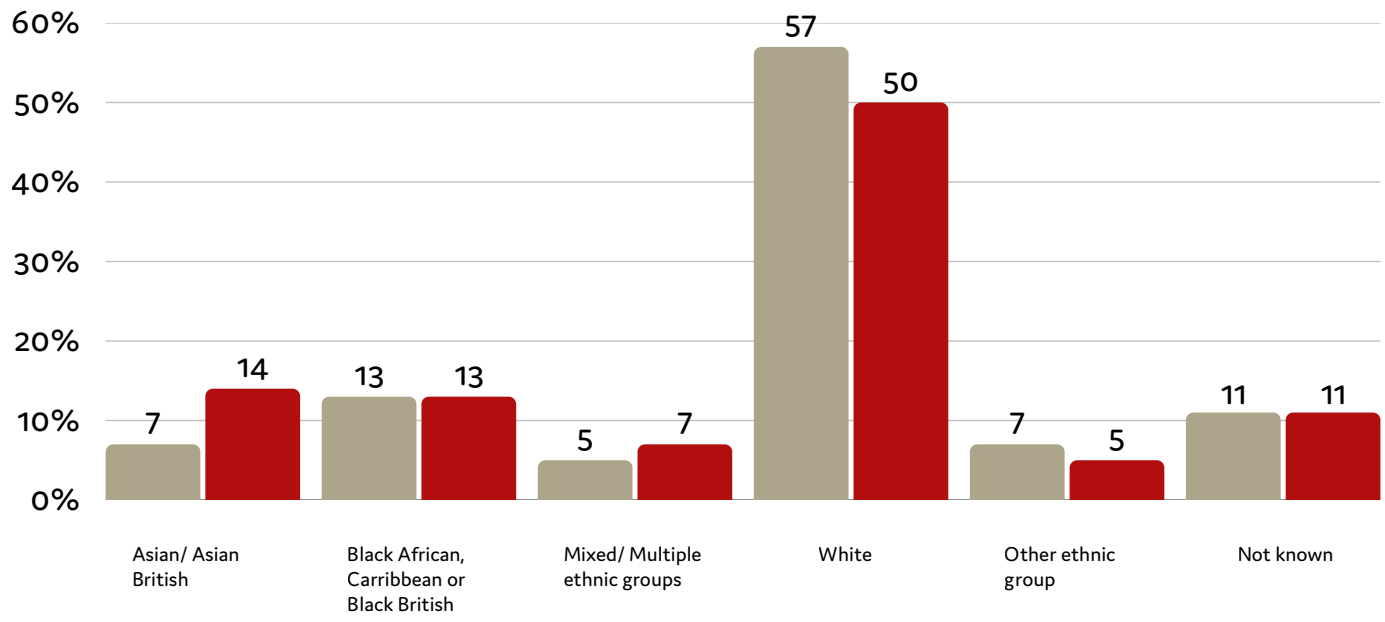
Out of the total number of children that we received data about, the majority - 50%, n=417 - were of White ethnicity. This compares to 77% of children in local authority foster care who are of White ethnicity (total number of children in care 75,240 on 31 March 2025. Figures for 2025 - 26 are due to be released later in November 2026). We do know that children from mixed ethnic groups are overrepresented and children from Asian ethnic groups are underrepresented in the looked after child population.



We also know that Black children are overrepresented in informal kinship care and underrepresented in formal kinship care (Understanding Formal Kinship Care Arrangements in England). The 2021 census data states that 9.3% of the population are from Asian ethnic groups, 4% from Black ethnic groups, 2.9% from mixed ethnicity and 2.1% from other ethnic groups.

The survey data for this question therefore suggests a similar pattern - with children from Black identities in this data set being overrepresented in private fostering arrangements, and children from Asian ethnicities being underrepresented. This has not changed significantly from last year's survey.

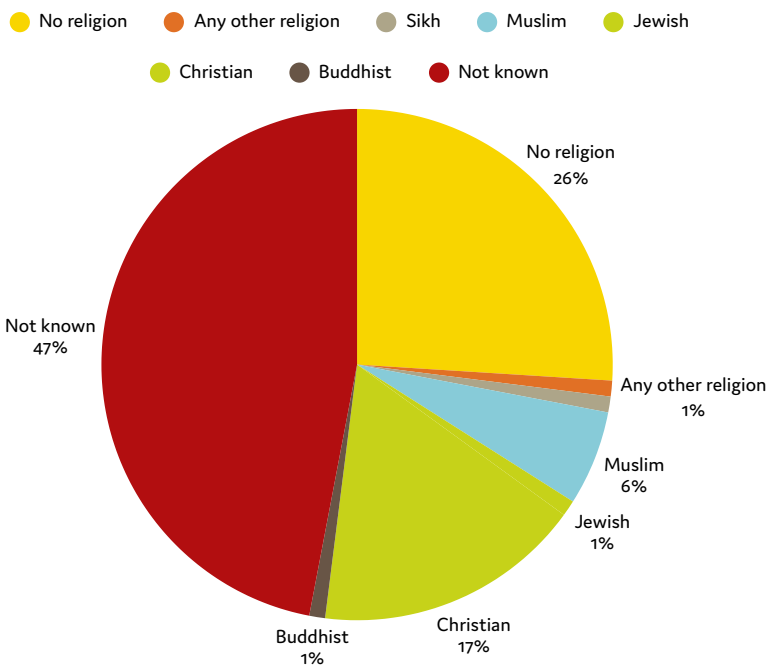
Ethnicity of children privately fostered in 2024/25 and 2025/26



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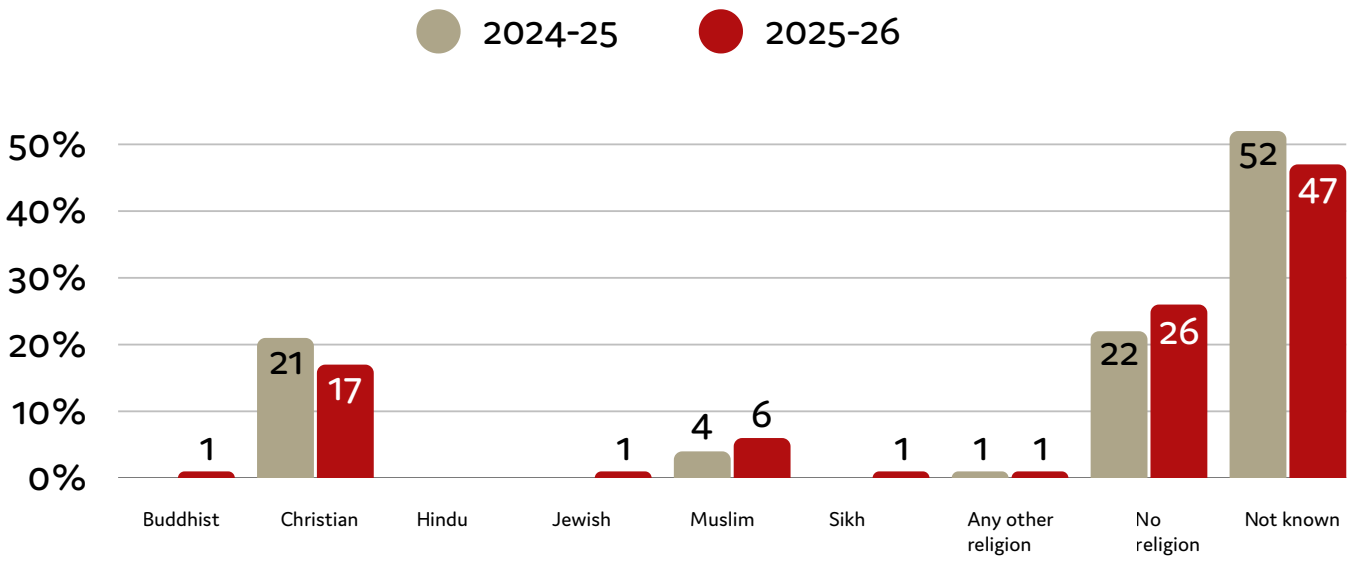
Faith of children privately fostered in 2025/26

The majority (47%) of children's faith is described as 'Not known', with 17% being recorded as Christian, 26% with no religion and 6% of children being identified as Muslim. In our practice experience, this lack of data is not uncommon, either because the information is not known, shared or asked for. We believe that there are issues with capturing known data for use in this survey and therefore hope that this may change in future years if data reports can be built to better collate this information in relation to children who are privately fostered.



It is again noteworthy that the figures are very similar to last year:

Faith of children privately fostered in 2024/25 and 2025/26

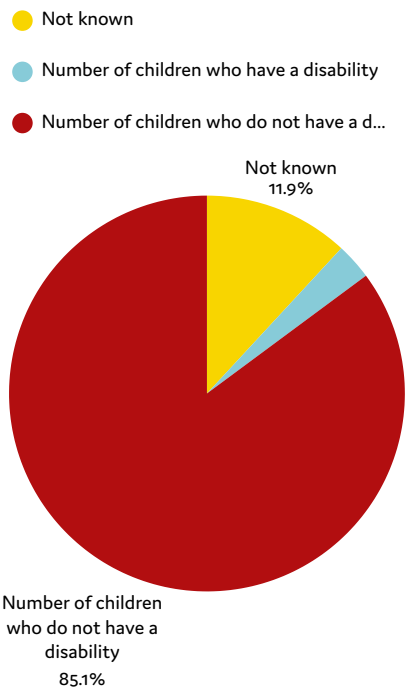




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Children with a disability who are privately fostered

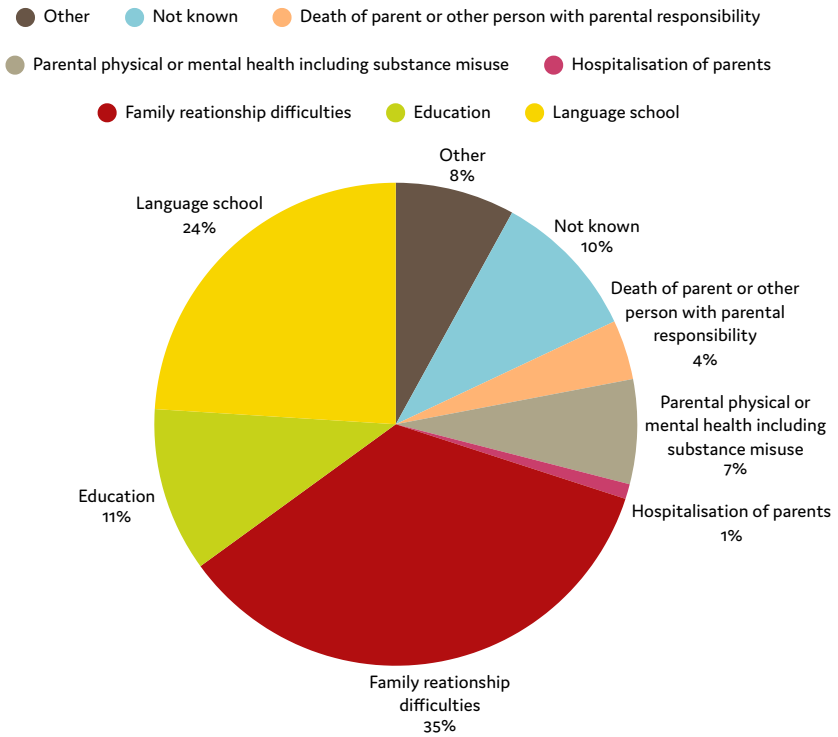
From responses received this year, we were told that 21 children (3%) were children with a disability which are similar numbers to last year (n=28). However, the response size was larger last year so it is not possible to make a direct comparison. Please note that we did not ask a question about the categorisation of disability. A question that arises in our practice forums is whether neurodivergence can be considered as a disability – it is our understanding currently that this would not be the case when considering private fostering regulations but local authorities should be guided by local practice and it is likely that practitioners adopt a social model of disability based on need rather than an explicit focus on diagnosis.



Main reason for private fostering arrangement

This was a new question added to this year's survey. We agreed with members of the working party that it would be interesting to consider and we also adapted the question about the ending of private fostering arrangements.

Family relationship difficulties was the largest category with 35% (n=308), with attendance at language schools being the next largest with 24% (n=24%). Arguably, there may be some overlap between language schools and education (11%, n=95) but the intention behind the question was to understand numbers of children who come to live in the UK for educational purposes rather than those who attended language schools for a shorter period of time.



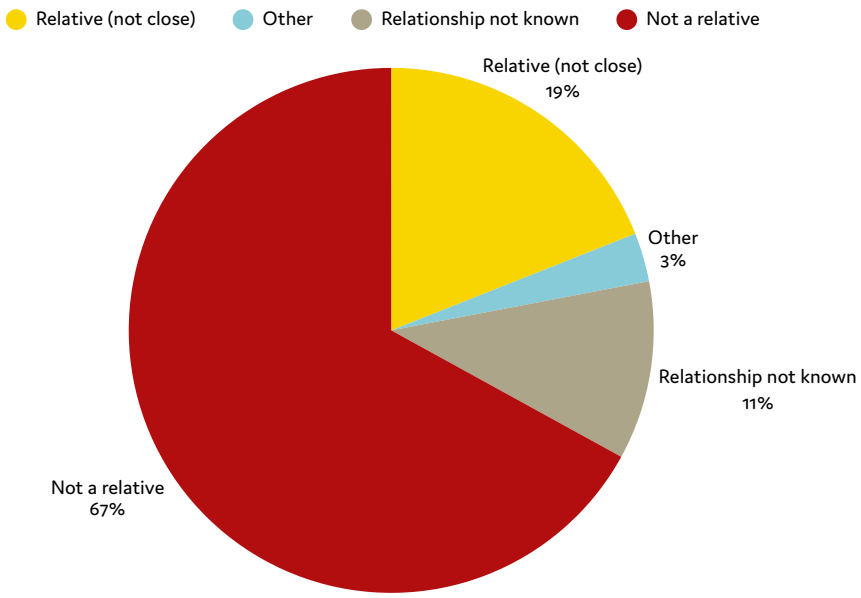
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Parental physical or mental health, including substance misuse, accounted for 7% (n=62) of arrangements, with hospitalisation of parents for 1% (n=9) and death of a parent or someone else with parental responsibility for 4% (n=35). 10% (n=88) and 8% (n=68) were 'Not known' and 'Other' respectively. Some of the reasons given for 'Other' include adoption from abroad, family needing to move from abroad, parental imprisonment, immigration issues, a relinquished baby and a number of children connected to the Homes for Ukraine scheme. This demonstrates the wide variety of reasons why children may be living in private fostering arrangements, and it will be interesting to compare this data in future years.

The data provided corresponds to our existing knowledge of reasons why children may be living in private fostering arrangements. What we do not know is whether family relationship difficulties also corresponds to those larger numbers of children aged 12 – 15. Whilst it would be fascinating to understand this, our desire to keep questions as simple as possible precludes us from trying to explore this data in more depth.

Relationship to private foster carer

Out of the local authorities who responded to this question, the majority of private foster carers, where the relationship was known (67%, n=559), were not related to the child, whilst 19% (n=158) were related but do not fit the definition of a close relative. Those with another connection to the child amounted to 3% (n=25) with the relationship not known accounting for 11% (n=89).

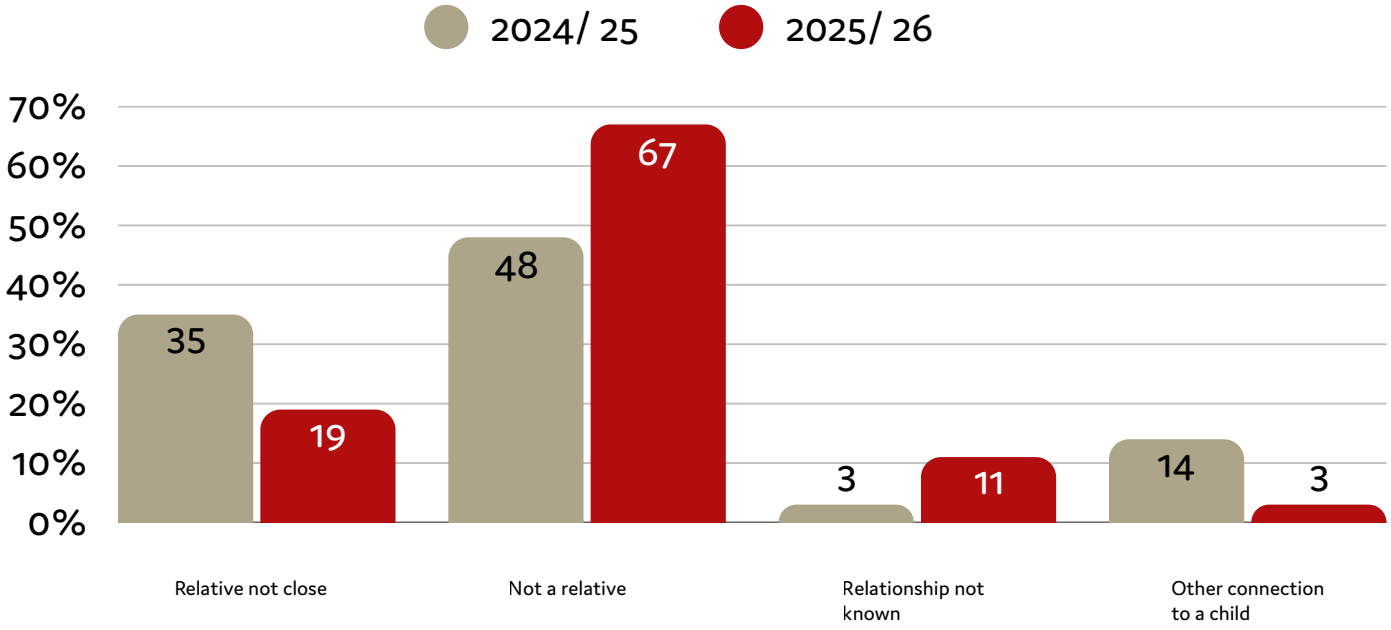


It is evident however that the majority of children in private fostering arrangements are living with carers who are not related to them and this may include a variety of scenarios including arrangements organised by a third party, but also arrangements where children are living with a friend's family or with friends of/adults known to their parents. Situations described included language school hosts, children remaining with a landlady, a half-sibling's parent or a girlfriend's parent.



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Relationship of children privately fostered in 2024/25 and 2025/26

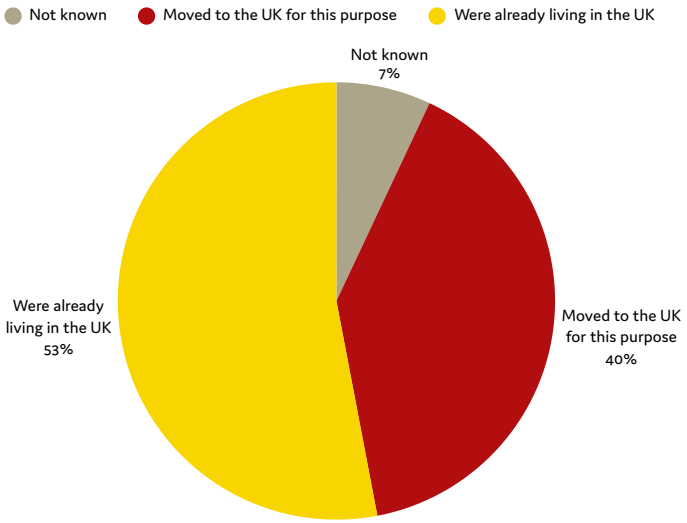


Location of children prior to becoming privately fostered

We asked about the location of where children were living prior to becoming privately fostered as there has been a presumption in the past that children were being 'sent' to the UK by parents who lived overseas, often to enable their child to receive an education in the UK. The results from this year's survey indicate that a third of children did move to the UK in order to live with private foster carers but the majority were resident in the UK beforehand.

The way that the question was asked does not allow further analysis of whether children were privately fostered due to attending language schools or whether plans were being made for more long-term arrangements.

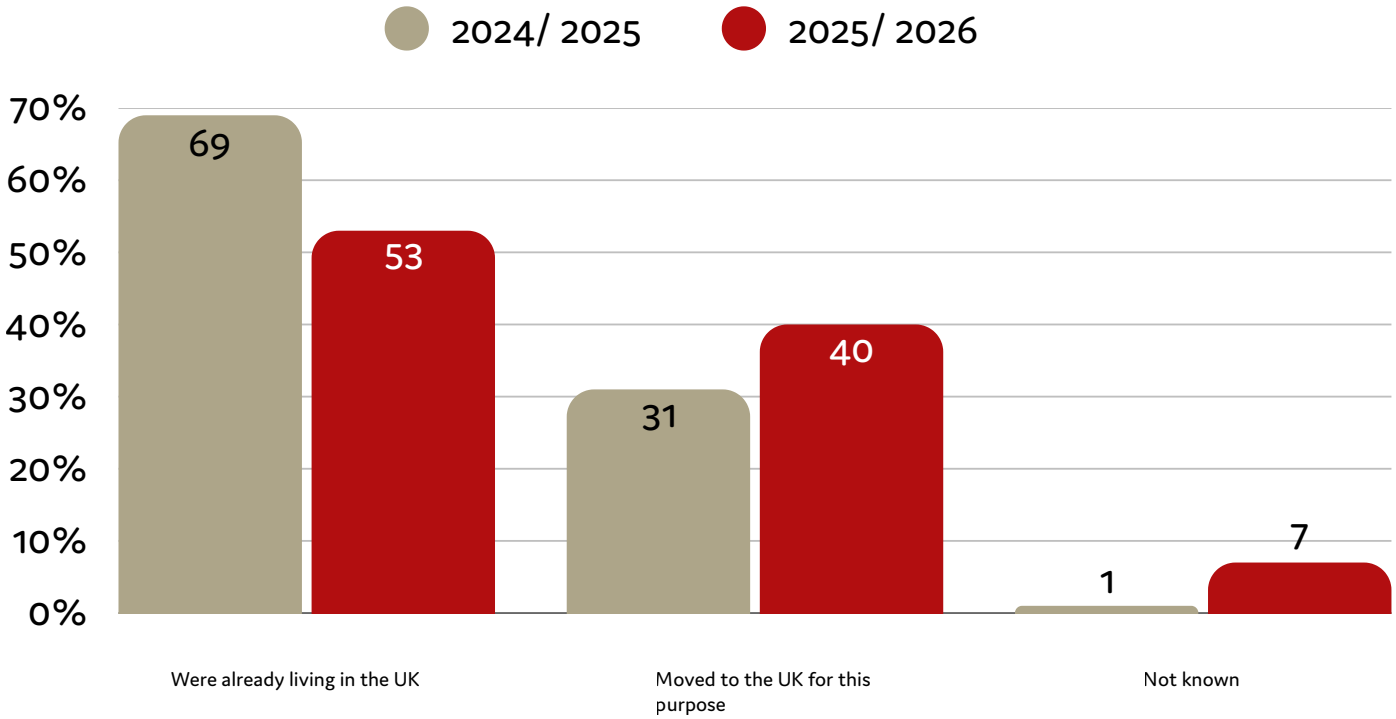
There does appear to have been a shift over the last year with a higher percentage of children moving to the UK in order to live with private foster carers. A comparison over the next few years will be needed to see whether this is a definite trend or whether this varies year to year.





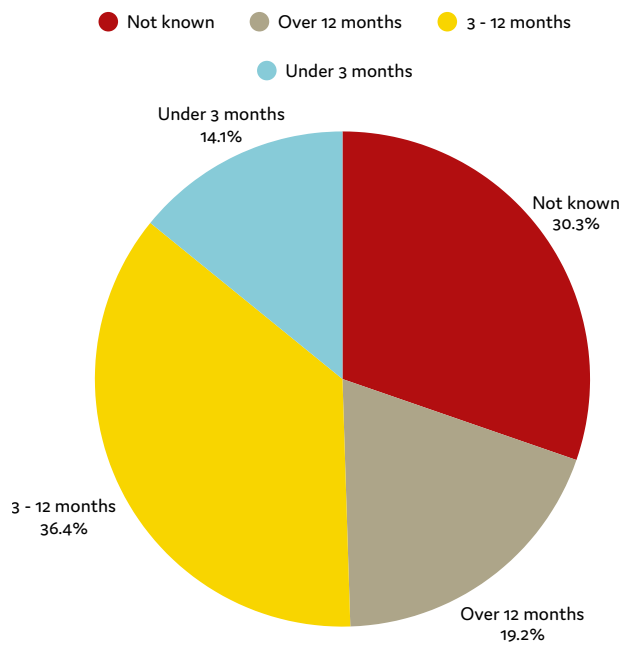
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Location prior to being privately fostered for children privately fostered in 2024/25 and 2025/26



Duration of arrangement with private foster carer

14% (n=117) of private fostering arrangements lasted for less than 3 months, 36% (n=296) lasted between 3 and 12 months, with 19% (n=157) of arrangements lasting for more than a year. 30% (n=249) did not know how long the private fostering arrangement had been in place. These figures are not dissimilar to last year's returns apart from the increase in the number of arrangements where the duration was not known.

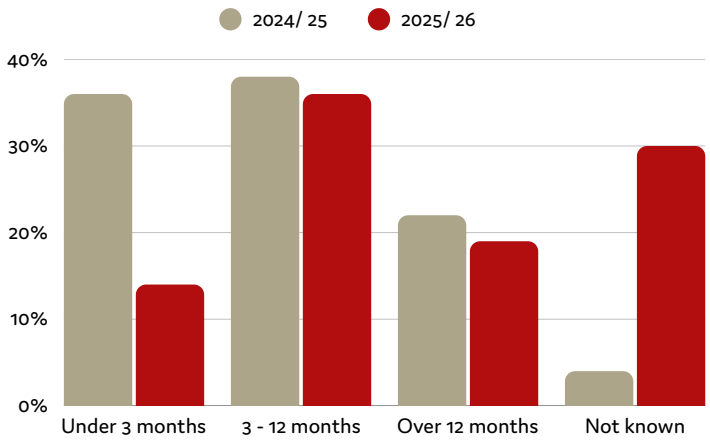




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Duration of private fostering arrangement for children privately fostered in 2024/25 and 2025/26

Private fostering regulations state arrangements should be reviewed regularly and at a minimum annually. We know from our members that reviews can be a challenge, although many local authorities work hard to establish review protocols. There is a need for permanency planning for children in private fostering arrangements that last for extended periods, and this can be a challenge, particularly if a child's parents are not actively involved in their life.



Main reason for end of private fostering arrangement

Last year, we asked about permanence and numbers of children for whom either a special guardianship or child arrangements order had been granted. Of those who responded to this question, 56% (n=25) were subject to a special guardianship order and 44% (n=20) children were subject to a child arrangements order. Many private fostering practitioners are aware of children's need for permanence but the private fostering regulations themselves impose no duty around thinking about permanence for children as these are private arrangements, and therefore a local authority's duty to think about permanence needs will fall under their Children in Need duties.

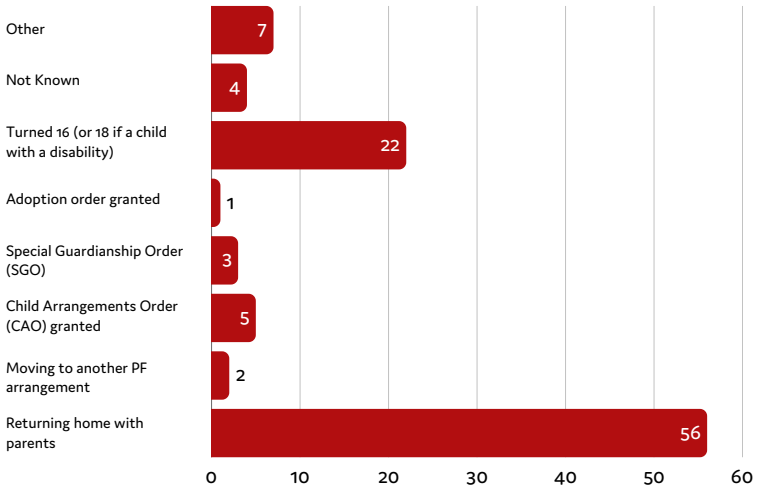
This year following feedback, we asked about the main reason why a private fostering arrangement had come to an end during the year.



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Main reason for arrangement ending for children privately fostered in 2025/26

The majority of children (56%, n=355) returned home to their parents, with 22% of arrangements (n=137) ending as the privately fostered child turned 16 (or 18 for a child with a disability) and therefore no longer classed as privately fostered. In terms of children where orders were granted, an adoption order was granted in 1% (n=6) of cases which correlates to comments received about children moving from overseas prior to being adopted in the UK.



5% (n=29) became subject to child arrangements orders and 3% (n=19) became subject of special guardianship orders and we presume that these children continued to live with their carers. 2% of children (n=13) moved to another private fostering arrangement and for 4% of children (n=23) the outcome was given as 'Not known'.

For 7% of children (n=47) other reasons were provided which included children moving into foster care under s 20 arrangements; moving to a close relative following the breakdown of the private fostering arrangement; moving out of area; the child moving following assessment that the private fostering arrangement was not suitable and in one case, the arrangement becoming a kinship fostering arrangement. It is interesting to note the reasons for children not remaining with their private foster carers, particularly children who became looked after by the local authority and this is an additional question that we will consider adding to next year's survey.

Conclusions and next steps

This is the third private fostering survey undertaken by CoramBAAF. Whilst there was a lower response rate compared to 2025, we provided accompanying guidance with the questions this year and surmise that this helped with the responses we received in terms of completeness and less duplication. Based on comments received, data management systems do not always lend themselves to easy collection of data required by this survey. We appreciate that this can be frustrating for practitioners completing the survey and hope that by confirming the questions will remain the same for 2027, that changes to data management reports could be implemented before the survey is circulated next year, thereby making it easier to complete the survey. We are also aware that there may be some anomalies with for example data systems recording nationality rather than ethnicity and this was certainly apparent in the comments that we received in the ethnicity question.

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As a result of not all the questions being exactly the same as last year, it has not been possible to provide comparisons in all areas, but with consistent questions in future years, year on year comparisons will be possible and hopefully provide increasingly useful information for local authorities.

Whilst we intend to use the same questions in future surveys, we also received reflections about areas that could be considered including whether annual reviews are undertaken when a child has lived with the private foster carer for more than a year and whether we should include children moving to local authority foster care as a reason for the private fostering arrangement ending. One comment also wondered whether children who move in and out of private fostering arrangements would be captured, and whilst we think that these children would be included in total number of children in private fostering arrangements, this is a good point for us to consider.

There were various reflections on the ongoing need to raise awareness about private fostering, with some feeling that there has been an improvement particularly among partner agencies, but with some people feeling that they don't have the capacity to focus on raising awareness alongside the other demands of their roles.

What remains clear from this year's survey is that there is an ongoing need to raise awareness about private fostering and the children living in those arrangements. Notifications from parents and carers remain low, as do those from partner agencies and other community groups. We recognise that there has been significant work undertaken by local authorities to raise awareness about private fostering, including private fostering awareness days and weeks; regional events and groups; and practitioners attending cross-departmental team meetings to share information about private fostering and the needs of the children living with private foster carers.

One key finding again is the confirmation that private fostering sits in many different teams and services in children's services. Our members have told us this can lead to practitioners feeling isolated. It can also contribute to a sense that private fostering is an 'afterthought', or not a priority. In reality, private foster carers may be caring for vulnerable children with many of the needs of other children living away from their parents, such as children in other types of kinship care.

Most local authorities do not have the need for a dedicated private fostering team due to the small numbers of children living in private fostering arrangements. There may be only one social worker with responsibility for these children. It can therefore be hard to share practice ideas and ponder dilemmas with colleagues. It is likely to be a reason for the high numbers attending our practice forums, where practitioners appreciate the opportunity to share knowledge and experience with others in the same role.

Private fostering is now included in the legal definition of kinship care as highlighted in the recently published Kinship care: statutory guidance for local authorities which states that local

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authorities must include what support is available to private foster carers and the children they are looking after in the kinship local offer.

Next steps

- CoramBAAF to continue to liaise with the Department for Education about these findings and engage with them about the scope for national data collection about children living in private fostering arrangements.
- CoramBAAF will review the questions and adjust as necessary but are committed to them remaining largely the same to enable year-on-year comparison.

CoramBAAF is encouraged by the responses received in this year's survey and very appreciative of those people who took the time to respond and to the working party members who contributed to the formulation of the questions. It highlights the fact that there are significant numbers of children living in private fostering arrangements and the need for more data collection.

It also raises questions about how we could begin to explore the hypothesis that there are significantly higher numbers of children in private fostering arrangements that are not known to local authorities, and therefore whose arrangements are not assessed or supported. There remains an ongoing need to raise awareness of private fostering and local authorities need to incorporate this in their kinship local offers. CoramBAAF will continue to support their members with awareness-raising information and resources and continue to discuss local networking and information sharing opportunities to support local authorities in working more closely together to support children and private foster carers.

The kinship sector has seen significant progress over the last few years, but these changes have taken sustained effort to achieve. We would encourage all local authorities to keep prioritising raising awareness, recognising that meaningful and lasting improvements do not happen quickly. The data collected this year highlights the ongoing need for wider awareness of private fostering to ensure that the potentially vulnerable children living with private foster carers do have their needs identified and supported. The recent Law Commission review of kinship legislation included a welcome and much-needed focus on private fostering, informed by both this survey and discussions with practitioners through our practice forum. We know that the term 'private fostering' remains widely misunderstood, and the majority of practitioners we consulted believe that all children living in private fostering arrangements should be entitled to support until the age of 18. The Law Commission is expected to publish its recommendations in autumn 2027. CoramBAAF will share these with members and consider next steps in light of the Government's response.

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Children in need census: guide to submitting data - GOV.UK

Department for Education consultation response re private fostering data 2015

Kinship care statutory guidance for local authorities: October 2026

Children looked after in England including adoptions -.GOV.UK

Release home - Children looked after in England including adoptions - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK

Ukraine Family Scheme, Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme (Homes for Ukraine) and Ukraine Extension Scheme visa data - GOV.UK



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How will I recognise if a child is privately fostered?

If you're aware of a child under 16 years of age (or 18 if they have a disability) who isn't residing with their parent(s), they could be in a private fostering arrangement if they've been away from home for more than 27 days and are living with an adult who isn't a close relative.

- Has the child mentioned that they are no longer living at home / living with someone else?
- Is the child accompanied to school by someone other than a parent/recognised carer?
- Has a patient turned up at the GP surgery with a new child/ series of different children?
- Is a child frequently absent from school?
- Is there anything unclear on files/records about the child's living arrangements?
- Is it clear who the child is living with, and what relation the person is to the child?
- Has the child come from overseas? Do you know the reason for the child's entrance to the UK?
- Is the child in the UK for the purpose of education?
- Is the child an unaccompanied asylum seeker?

#PFAD #privatefostering #kinship

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