

6

Children's childcare and educational experiences

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This chapter explores the childcare and educational experiences of children in OOHHC, two important factors that influence wellbeing outcomes. Childcare can vary in quality, amount and type. High quality childcare (reflected in adult-to-child ratios, size of groups, and childcare workers' training and experience) has been associated with more highly developed cognitive and language capacities, as well as more cooperative and less oppositional or aggressive behaviour (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 1998, 2000, 2003a). While long hours of childcare have been linked to poorer outcomes among children (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development 1998, 2006), this finding is mainly observed when childcare quality is lower. Indeed, longer hours were found to be associated with better outcomes when quality was high, pointing to the interconnections between quality and quantity (Love et al, 2003). Research on differing types of childcare (e.g., formal, informal, centre based, family day care) shows that formal centre-based care is associated with higher levels of cognitive and language development than informal, home-based care (Harrison & Ungerer, 2002; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2002), although inconsistent findings have been found in relation to child behaviour problems (Harrison & Ungerer, 2002; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2003b). Overall, research confirms that childcare type, quality and quantity can be significant influences on children's development.

School is an important environment for children (Gutman & Feinstein, 2008; Marin & Brown, 2008). School is a place where children learn academic and social skills that will influence many aspects of their wellbeing, development, and later lives (Gilliam &

Gulløv, 2014; Hattie, 2008; Seefeldt, 2005). The poor educational performance of children in OOHC has been a concern, internationally, for a number of decades. In Australia, the limited research to date has found the following issues to be more common for children in OOHC: spending significant time away from school, falling behind academically, behavioural issues, social issues, suspension, expulsion, bullying, early school leaving and leaving without qualifications (CREATE Foundation, 2001, 2004; de Lemos, 1997; NSW Office of the Children's Guardian, 2003 in Townsend 2012). A recent study by Townsend (2012) in NSW found that some children in OOHC were doing well academically; however, the educational outcomes for children in OOHC were significantly poorer than those of students in the general population. This was evident in their literacy and numeracy results during their primary and early high school periods. A key conclusion from this research is that the educational underperformance of children in OOHC cannot be solely attributed to the individual child; a significant proportion of the reasons lie in the ways in which the home, school, and particularly the care and education systems prioritise and support children's education (Townsend, 2012).

The Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study (POCLS) gathered information on children aged 9 months to 5 years on the provision of learning and social activities; and childcare type and quantity. For children aged 6 to 17 years¹, information was collected about their primary and secondary school experiences; caregivers' support for learning; and caregivers' perceptions of the child's school progress and work experience. Children's own perceptions of school life were also obtained. This chapter provides information relevant to the POCLS Key Research Question *"In what ways do the characteristics of the child, carer, home/family and community affect the children's and young people's developmental pathways, and how do these differ from similarly situated children in the general population?"*².

6.1 Children's childcare experiences

Types of childcare attended³

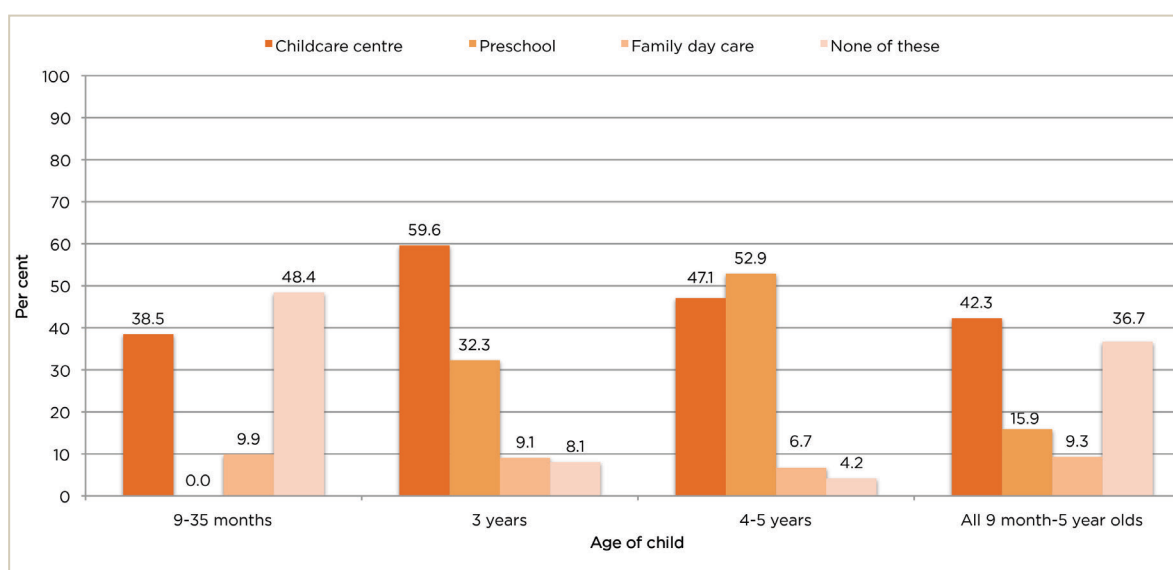
Figure 6.1 shows that, among 9–35 month olds, 52% attended one or more of the types of childcare about which information was sought, with considerably more children attending a childcare centre (39%) than family day care (10%). More than 90% of 3 year old children attended childcare, most commonly at a childcare centre (60%) or preschool (32%). Among 4–5 year olds, 96% were in some form of childcare, with 53% attending preschool and 47% a childcare centre. Only a small proportion of 4–5 year olds attended family day care. It is not possible to determine the total proportion of POCLS children who were receiving an early childhood education (preschool) program from these data, as we do not know how many children attending a childcare centre that offered this type of program were receiving preschool education.

¹ Includes 44 children aged 5 years who were attending school.

² Please see Chapter 2 for a description of the data analysis undertaken in this report.

³ While numbers and percentages are shown for each separate type of childcare, children could have attended more than one type (e.g., at a childcare centre and at family day care); hence there may be some overlap.

Figure 6.1: Caregiver reports of types of child care currently attended by children, by child age¹



1 n=566 9–35 month olds; n=99 3 year olds; n=119 4–5 year olds; n=787 all 0–5 year olds. Percentages do not add up to 100% because children could have been attending more than one type of childcare.

Comparing these findings to Australian national data collected in 2008 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008), shows that a higher percentage of POCLS children were attending some form of childcare than Australian children in general.⁴

Childcare arrangements appear to be very similar for Aboriginal children and other Australian children (Table 6.1); however, fewer children from culturally diverse backgrounds were attending a childcare centre or preschool. A higher percentage of children from culturally diverse backgrounds (57%) did not attend childcare as compared with all other children (34% of Aboriginal children and 37% of other Australian children).

Table 6.1: Caregiver reports of types of childcare attended for children aged 9 months–5 years, by child’s cultural background¹

Childcare type	Aboriginal		Culturally diverse		Other children	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Childcare centre	133	44.5	17	28.3	162	42.3
Family day care	28	9.4	5	8.3	35	9.1
Preschool	48	16.1	5	8.3	64	16.7
Did not attend any of these types of childcare	103	34.4	34	56.7	140	36.6
Total	299		60		383	

1 Percentages do not add up to 100% because children could have been attending more than one type of childcare.

⁴ Australian national data collected in 2008 (ABS, 2008) shows that 24% of 0–2 year olds experienced ‘long day care’ (most likely a childcare centre) and 7% experienced other types of informal care (e.g., family day care, occasional care). Rates for 3–5 year olds in the Australian general population were 26% and 6% respectively.

Attendance at a childcare centre was less common among children in foster care (37%) compared with those in relative/kinship care (48%). Just under a third (30%) of children in relative/kinship care were not attending any of the types of childcare listed compared with just under half (42%) of children in foster care (Table 6.2).

Table 6.2: Caregiver reports of types of childcare attended for children aged 9 month–5 years, by placement type¹

Childcare type	Foster care		Relative/Kinship care	
	n	%	n	%
Childcare centre	164	37.4	169	48.4
Family day care	40	9.1	33	9.5
Preschool	66	15.1	59	16.9
Did not attend any of these types of childcare	185	42.2	104	29.8
Total	438		349	

¹ Percentages do not add up to 100% because children could have been attending more than one type of childcare.

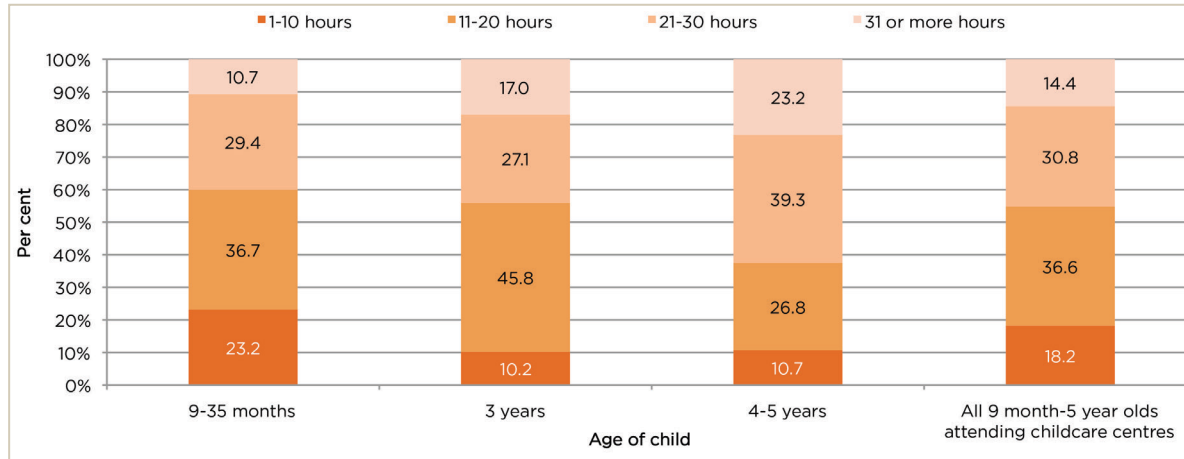
Number of childcare hours per week

Figure 6.2 shows that among the 9–35 month olds and 3 year olds, the most common amount of time spent at a childcare centre was 11–20 hours per week. Among 4–5 year olds, the most common length of time spent in this type of childcare per week was 21–30 hours. The percentage experiencing few hours (i.e., 1–10 hours) was highest among 9–35 month olds (23%) compared with older children (10–11%). Conversely, the percentage experiencing 31 or more hours was progressively higher at each age band.

Figure 6.3 shows the range of hours spent by children of differing ages in family day care. It should be noted that the actual numbers are quite small and therefore trends should be interpreted with caution. Most children in each age group spent between one and 20 hours per week in family day care, with 11–20 hours the most usual.

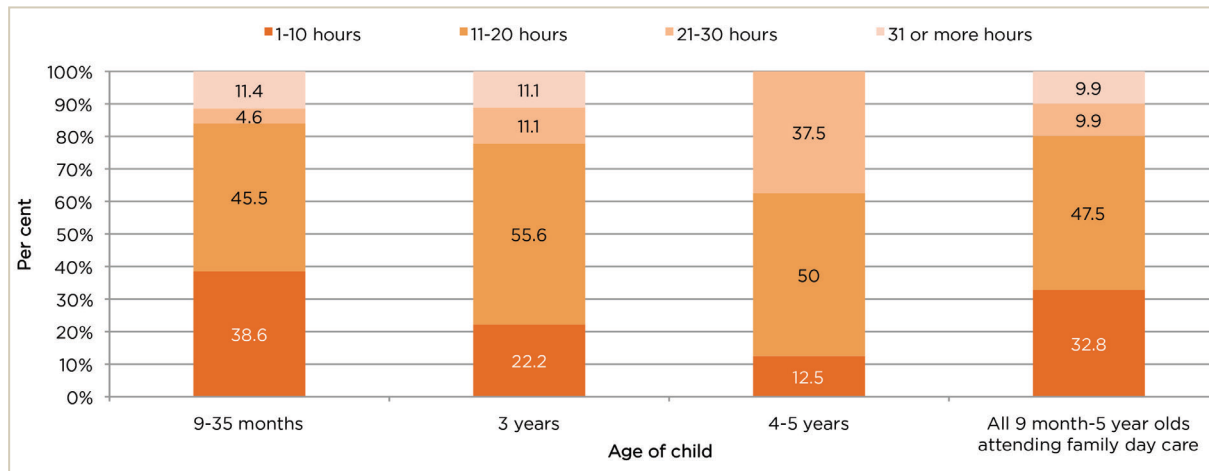
Lastly, with regard to time spent in preschool (not shown), 28% of 3 year olds spent 1–10 hours, 56% spent 11–20 hours, and a further 16% of 3 year olds spent 21–30 hours in preschool. Among 4–5 year olds, 15% spent 1–10 hours in preschool, 48% spent 11–20 hours, 32% spent 21–30 hours, and 5% spent 31 or more hours. Thus, as might be expected, as age increased, so did hours spent in preschool.

Figure 6.2: Caregiver reports of the typical number of hours per week spent at a childcare centre, by child age¹



1 n=177 9-35 month olds; n=59 3 year olds; n=56 4-5 year olds; n=292 all 9 month-5 year olds.

Figure 6.3: Caregiver reports of the typical number of hours per week spent attending family day care, by child age¹



1 n=44 9-35 month olds; n=9 3 year olds; n=8 4-5 year olds; n=61 all 9 month-5 year olds.

Table 6.3 suggests that children in foster care tended to spend a smaller number of hours in childcare than children in relative/kinship care. For instance, 63% of children in foster care spent between one and 20 hours per week in a childcare centre compared with 47% of those in relative/kinship care, while 11% of those in foster care spent 31 or more hours per week in this type of care compared with 18% of children in relative/kinship care. Results were similar for family day care and preschool.

Findings on hours spent in childcare for children in differing care arrangements are likely to be slightly biased for the youngest age groups, as there was a higher proportion of 9-35 month old children in foster care (49%) than in relative/kinship care (41%).

Table 6.3: Caregiver reports of the typical number of hours per week spent in differing types of childcare currently attended, by placement type

	Foster care		Relative/Kinship care	
	n	%	n	%
Childcare centre				
1–10 hours	29	19.7	24	16.6
11–20 hours	63	42.9	44	30.3
21–30 hours	39	26.5	51	35.2
31 or more hours	16	10.9	26	17.9
Total	147		145	
Family day care				
1–10 hours	14	40.0	6	23.1
11–20 hours	18	51.4	10	38.5
21–30 hours	2	5.7	4	15.4
31 or more hours	0	0.0	6	23.1
Total	35		26	
Preschool				
1–10 hours	12	19.4	12	21.1
11–20 hours	36	58.1	23	40.4
21–30 hours	12	19.4	19	33.3
31 or more hours	2	3.2	3	5.3
Total	62		57	

6.2 Children aged 9 months to 5 years participation in social and learning activities

Considerable research shows that the home learning environment is an important influence on children's cognitive and language development (Linver, Brooks-Gunn & Kohen, 2002; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2003b; Yeung, Linver & Brooks-Gunn, 2002). Data from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) showed that parents' engagement in activities such as reading to the child, telling the child stories, and doing musical activities together were associated with greater school readiness, as well as social and emotional wellbeing (Smart, Sanson, Baxter, Edwards & Hayes, 2008).

Caregivers reported how many days in the past week they (or someone else in the family) had engaged with the child in a range of activities in the home (Table 6.4). This information was collected in relation to 9–35 month old and 3–5 year old children. The most frequently cited activity was playing with toys or games indoors, with 88% of caregivers of children aged 9–35 months and 75% of caregivers of children aged 3–5 years indicating that this had occurred on six or seven days in the previous week. Playing music, singing songs, or dancing with the child were also common activities, with 79% of 9–35 month olds and 66% of children aged 3–5 years participating in these activities on six or seven days in the past week. Eighty-nine per cent of caregivers

of children aged 9–35 months had read to the child from a book on one or more days in the past week, compared with 94% of children aged 3–5 years.

Table 6.4: Caregiver reports of the frequency of activities undertaken at home with child in the past week, by child age¹

	Not in past week		1–2 days		3–5 days		6–7 days	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
9–35 months								
Played with toys or games indoors, for example with dolls or toy cars, with the child (n=567)	5	0.9	9	1.6	54	9.5	499	88.0
Played music, sang songs, danced or did other musical activities with the child (n=565)	8	1.4	28	5.0	83	14.7	446	78.9
Played a game outdoors or did exercise together, like walking, swimming, cycling (n=565)	33	5.8	62	11.0	134	23.7	336	59.5
Read to the child from a book (n=565)	61	10.8	89	15.8	139	24.6	276	48.8
Involved the child in everyday activities at home, such as cooking or caring for pets (n=566)	220	38.9	45	8.0	91	16.1	210	37.1
Drew pictures or did other art or craft activities with the child (n=566)	200	35.3	116	20.5	121	21.4	129	22.8
Told the child a story, not from a book (n=566)	247	43.6	96	17.0	101	17.8	122	21.6
3–5 years								
Played with toys or games indoors, for example with dolls or toy cars, with the child (n=264)	16	6.1	9	3.4	40	15.2	199	75.4
Played a game outdoors or did exercise together, like walking, swimming, cycling (n=264)	6	2.3	27	10.2	51	19.3	180	68.2
Played music, sang songs, danced or did other musical activities with the child (n=264)	14	5.3	27	10.2	49	18.6	174	65.9
Involved the child in everyday activities at home, such as cooking or caring for pets (n=264)	42	15.9	25	9.5	54	20.5	143	54.2
Read to the child from a book (n=264)	17	6.4	34	12.9	73	27.7	140	53.0
Drew pictures or did other art or craft activities with the child (N=264)	28	10.6	50	18.9	83	31.4	103	39.0
Told the child a story, not from a book (n=263)	87	33.1	46	17.5	54	20.5	76	28.9

¹ Percentages do not add up to 100%, as children could have been involved in multiple activities.

Figure 6.4: Caregiver reports of activities undertaken at home with the child in the past week, by child age¹



¹ Percentages do not add up to 100%, as children could have been involved in multiple activities.

Comparison of foster and relative/kinship carer reports of the activities undertaken with the child (Table 6.5) showed that foster carers appear to have slightly higher rates of very regularly participating in most activities with the child (i.e., on 6–7 days in the past week). The largest differences appear to be in reading a book to the child on 6–7 days in the past week (56% of foster carers and 43% of relative/kinship carers) and playing with toys or games indoors with the child (89% and 78% respectively).

Table 6.5: Caregiver reports of the frequency of activities undertaken at home with child in the past week, by placement type¹

	Not in past week		1-2 days		3-5 days		6-7 days	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Foster care								
Played with toys or games indoors, for example with dolls or toy cars, with the child (n=459)	7	1.5	3	0.7	41	8.9	408	88.9
Played music, sang songs, danced or did other musical activities with the child (n=458)	11	2.4	31	6.8	66	14.4	350	76.4
Played a game outdoors or did exercise together, like walking, swimming, cycling (n=457)	21	4.6	32	7.0	104	22.8	300	65.6
Read to the child from a book (n=458)	36	7.9	54	11.8	110	24.0	258	56.3
Involved the child in everyday activities at home, such as cooking or caring for pets (n=458)	144	31.4	36	7.9	72	15.7	206	45.0
Drew pictures or did other art or craft activities with the child (n=458)	133	29.9	86	18.8	118	25.8	121	26.4
Told the child a story, not from a book (n=459)	183	39.9	81	17.6	87	19.0	108	23.5
Relative/Kinship care								
Played with toys or games indoors, for example with dolls or toy cars, with the child (n=372)	14	3.8	15	4.0	53	14.2	290	78.0
Played music, sang songs, danced or did other musical activities with the child (n=371)	11	3.0	24	6.5	66	17.8	270	72.8
Played a game outdoors or did exercise together, like walking, swimming, cycling (n=372)	18	4.8	57	15.3	81	21.8	216	58.1
Read to the child from a book (n=371)	42	11.3	69	18.6	102	27.5	158	42.6
Involved the child in everyday activities at home, such as cooking or caring for pets (n=372)	118	31.7	34	9.1	73	19.6	147	39.6
Drew pictures or did other art or craft activities with the child (n=372)	95	25.5	80	21.5	86	23.1	111	29.8
Told the child a story, not from a book (n=370)	151	40.8	61	16.5	68	18.4	90	24.3

¹ Percentages do not add up to 100%, as children could have been involved in multiple activities.

A range of benefits can be gained from children's participation in learning, social or cultural activities external to the caregiving home. These activities can foster children's intellectual, emotional and creative development, and build persistence and self esteem (Crnec et al, 2006). The experiences gained may be broadening and enhance children's understanding of their world. Increased opportunities to interact with peers and other adults can also enrich children's communication and social skills (Ladd, 2005).

Information on the activities children took part in outside the home was collected from caregivers of children aged 9 months to 5 years old (Table 6.6). The most common activity was attending playgroup, with 26% of all caregivers of children aged 9 months to 5 years indicating that the children had participated in this activity. A higher percentage of children aged 9–35 months (31%) attended playgroup than older children (17% of 3 year olds and 18% of children aged 4–5 years). This is likely to be attributable to the age of the child and the fact that older children tended to be attending preschool. One quarter of caregivers reported that children attended a different type of organised play or other activity type to those specified in the survey (e.g., going to church or Sunday school, and physical activities such as dancing, swimming or gymnastics). Fewer than 10% of children had attended the other types of activities listed in Table 6.6 and, overall, approximately half (53%) had not been involved in any of the activities. There was a modest but consistent trend for children in foster care to have higher rates of participation in out-of-home and within-home activities than those in relative/kinship care.

Table 6.6: Caregiver reports of children’s current participation in activities outside of the home, by child age¹

	9–35 months		3 years		4–5 years		All 9 month–5 year olds	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Playgroup	136	30.6	17	17.2	21	17.6	174	26.2
Library story time or other reading program	40	9.0	7	7.1	13	10.9	60	9.0
Parent and child lessons or programs ²	20	4.5	2	2.0	4	3.4	26	3.9
Toy library	16	3.6	4	4.0	7	5.9	27	4.1
Other organised play or group activity (specify) ²	109	24.5	27	27.3	31	26.1	167	25.2
None of these	224	50.3	59	59.6	66	55.5	352	53.1
Total	445		99		119		663	

1 Column percentages do not add up to 100%, as children could have participated in multiple activities.

2 As the categories ‘parent and child lessons or programs’ and ‘other organised play or group activity’ are similar, there may be some overlap in the percentages reported as engaging in these activities.

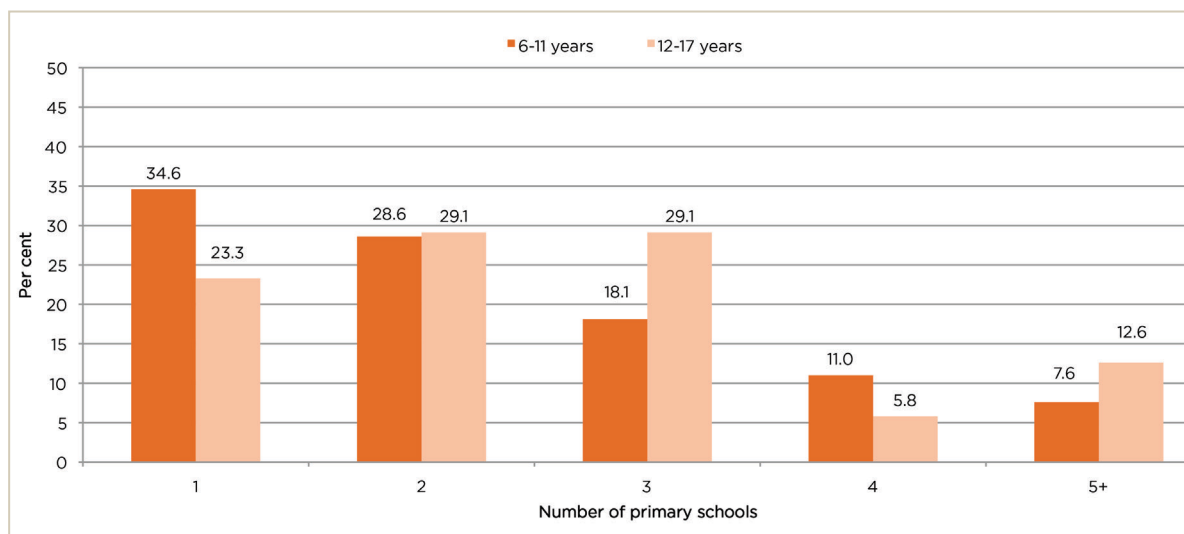
6.3 Children's primary and secondary school experiences

Number of schools attended

Figure 6.5 shows that at the time of the Wave 1 interview, approximately two thirds of 6–11 year olds⁵ had experienced at least one change of primary school during their school careers, as had three quarters of 12–17 year olds. Almost one fifth of all children had attended more than three primary schools by the time of the Wave 1 interview. It should be noted that caregivers may not be aware of any school changes prior to placement with them, so these figures may underestimate the total number of schools attended throughout the child's school life.

Figure 6.6 shows the number of secondary schools attended by 12–17 year olds during their school life. The majority (52%) had experienced one or more changes of secondary school, with approximately one fifth having attended three or more secondary schools.

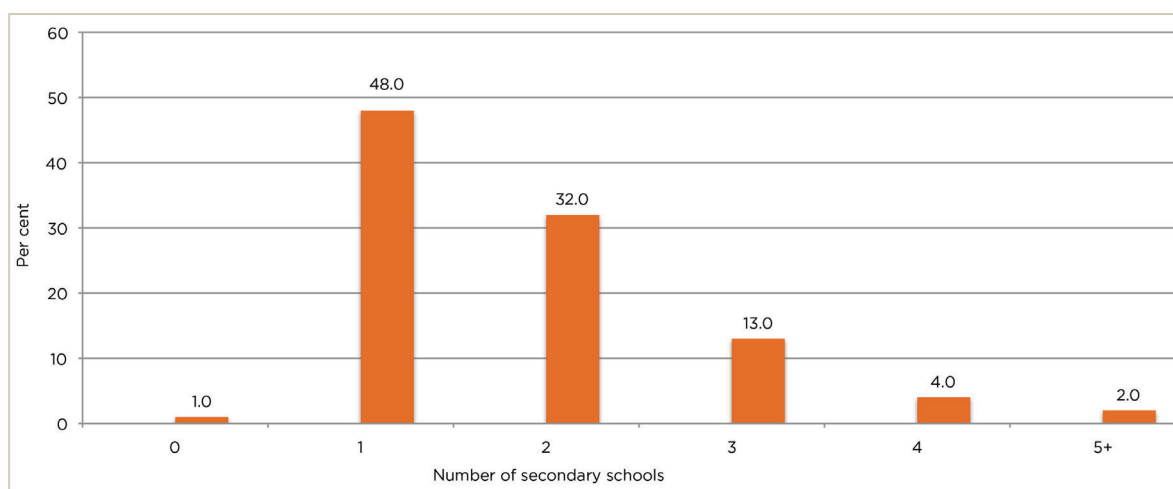
Figure 6.5: Caregiver reports of the number of primary schools attended, by child age¹



1 n=353 6–11 year olds; n=103 12–17 year olds. The 6–11 year group includes a small proportion of 5 year olds for whom data was provided (see body of report for the explanation).

⁵ A total of 313 children aged 6–11 years were attending school at the time of the Wave 1 interview. There were also 44 children aged 5 years (16% of 5 year olds in the POCLS) who were attending school. In the next section, the 6–11 year old group includes all 6–11 year olds who were attending school and the small percentage of 5 year olds who were also attending school. For reader ease, the group is still described as 6–11 years.

Figure 6.6: Caregiver reports of the number of secondary schools attended by 12–17 year olds^{1,2}



1 n=100 12–17 year olds.

2 Zero means no secondary school attended.

As shown in Table 6.7, over half (56%) of 6–11 year olds and two thirds (66%) of 12–17 year olds had changed schools when first placed with the current caregiving family. Some children had changed schools since coming to live with the caregiving family (8% of 6–11 year olds and 22% of 12–17 year olds). Reasons for changing schools since being placed included: being out of the area, moving from primary to secondary school, peer issues and child behavioural issues.

Eleven per cent of 6–11 year olds and 13% of 12–17 year olds were reported to have repeated a grade during their school life (again, this may be an underestimate, since caregivers may not have knowledge about the child repeating grades prior to the child coming into their care). This is higher than the rate reported by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2013)⁶. However, as the OECD and the POCLS data are not equivalent (e.g., the age spans differ), this comparison should be interpreted with caution.

Type of school attended

As shown in Table 6.7, most children were currently attending a government school (90% of 6–11 year olds and 75% of 12–17 year olds). The more diverse schooling arrangements for children aged 12–17 years included home schooling (2%), distance education (2%), attendance of a different type of school (3%; e.g., a special school), as well as attendance at a non-government school (13%). Very few children were not currently attending school (less than 1% of 6–11 year olds and 9% of 12–17 year olds).

⁶ Research conducted in 2012 revealed that the proportion of Australian 15 year olds who had repeated a grade at some stage in their school life was 8.5%.

Children's education plans

As shown in Table 6.7, approximately one quarter of caregivers of 6–11 year olds and 30% of caregivers of 12–17 year olds reported that an OOHC education plan was in place for the child (8% of carers of 6–11 year olds and 11% of carers of 12–17 year olds did not know whether a plan had been developed). About one third of children were reported by caregivers to receive some type of special education or remedial services at school or attend a special school. A smaller proportion (16% of 6–11 year olds and 26% of 12–17 year olds) were receiving additional help or tutoring from someone outside the household, with this most commonly occurring once a week. The majority of children (63%) in residential care appear to have an OOHC education plan; however, the sample size was small.

Child absences from school

As shown in Table 6.7, approximately two thirds of 6–11 year olds had not missed any days from school in the previous month. However, fewer 12–17 year olds had not been absent (48%). The most common number of days missed by children was 1–2 days, although approximately one fifth of the older group had been absent on more days. The most common reasons for school absence reported by caregivers of 6–11 year olds were illness (62%) and appointments (17%), with only a small number reported to be absent because they had been suspended or expelled (6%). Similarly, the most frequent reason for school absence among 12–17 year olds was illness (41%) and appointments (29%), with 15% being absent because they had been suspended or expelled.

Table 6.7: Caregiver reports of schooling history, by child age

	6–11 years ¹		12–17 years	
	n	%	n	%
Child has repeated a grade	34	10.7	14	13.0
Total	318		108	
Current grade in school				
Kindergarten	32	9.9	0	0.0
Year 1–3	179	55.2	0	0.0
Year 4–6	112	34.6	12	10.6
Year 7–9	1	0.3	78	69.0
Year 10–12	0	0.0	23	20.4
Total	324		113	
Child changed schools when first placed with family	207	56.4	76	66.1
Total	367		115	
Child changed schools since placed with family	29	7.8	26	22.4
Total	370		116	
Reason for school change since placement				
School out of area	18	60.0	10	38.5
To change peer group	0	0.0	1	3.8
Other	12	40.0	15	57.7
Total	30		26	
Type of school currently attended				
A government school	335	90.1	90	75.0
Non-government or private school	30	8.1	15	12.5
Home schooled	0	0.0	2	1.7
Distance education	0	0.0	2	1.7
Other school ²	5	1.3	4	3.3
Not attending school	2	0.5	11	9.2
Total	372		120	
Services received				
Child has OOHC education plan	90	26.4	31	30.1
Total	341		103	
Child receives special services at school ³	114	34.7	43	35.3
Total	329		122	
Child has additional tutoring from outside the household	24	16.0	24	25.5
Total	150		94	
More than weekly	8	33.3	8	33.3
Once a week	14	58.3	14	58.3
Less than weekly	2	8.3	2	8.3
Total	24		24	

	6–11 years ¹		12–17 years	
	n	%	n	%
Days absent in past month				
None	94	63.9	54	47.8
1–2 days	40	27.2	36	31.9
3–5 days	11	7.5	10	8.8
6–10 days	2	1.4	4	3.5
More than 10 days	0	0.0	9	8.0
Total	147		113	
Reasons for absence⁴				
Unwell	33	62.3	24	40.7
Appointments	9	17.0	17	28.8
Suspended or expelled	3	5.7	9	15.3
Other reasons for absence	10	18.9	19	32.2
Total	53		59	

1 Includes a small number of 5 year olds who were attending school and excludes 6 year olds who were not attending school.

2 Includes behavioural school and special needs school.

3 Includes special education, remedial services, special class or special school.

4 Percentages do not add up to 100%, as children may have been absent for multiple reasons.

A number of school-related differences were evident between children in foster care and relative/kinship care (Table 6.8). Those in foster care were more likely to have repeated a grade; to have changed schools when placed with the caregiving family and after being placed; to have an education plan in place; and to be receiving special services at school or out-of-home tutoring than those in relative/kinship care.

Children in residential care differed from children in other placement types in several aspects. They had more often changed schools since being placed in residential care, and they were more likely to be receiving special education or remedial services at school or attending a special school. The majority (63%) were reported to have an OOHC education plan in place by comparison with a minority of children in other placement types. Additionally, a higher proportion of those in residential care were not attending school (27% compared with 5–6%). However, as the sample size was frequently less than 20, other results for this sub-group are not discussed.

Table 6.8: Caregiver reports of schooling history, by placement type

	Foster care		Relative/ Kinship care		Residential care ¹	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Number of primary schools attended						
0	10	4.7	8	3.3	0	-
1	52	24.4	88	36.2	6	-
2	56	26.3	72	29.6	3	-
3	53	24.9	38	15.6	3	-
4	24	11.3	19	7.8	2	-
5 or more	18	8.5	18	7.4	4	-
Total	213		243		18	
Number of secondary schools attended						
0	5	13.2	4	7.8	1	-
1	15	39.5	27	52.9	7	-
2	12	31.6	13	25.5	7	-
3	3	7.9	4	7.8	6	-
4	2	5.3	2	3.9	0	-
5 or more	1	2.6	1	2.0	0	-
Total	38		51		21	-
Repeated a grade	26	13.5	20	9.3	2	-
Total	192		215		19	
Current grade in school						
Kindergarten	14	7.1	18	8.1	0	-
Year 1–3	86	43.4	93	42.1	0	-
Year 4–6	61	30.8	62	28.1	1	-
Year 7–9	28	14.1	41	18.6	9	-
Year 10–12	9	4.5	7	3.2	7	-
Total	198		221		17	
Child changed schools when placed with family/facility	139	62.9	131	53.7	13	65.0
Total	221		244		20	
Child changed schools since placed with family/facility	28	12.6	21	8.6	6	28.6
Total	223		245		21	
Reason for school change since placement						
School out of area	19	65.5	7	33.3	2	-
To change peer group	0	0.0	1	4.8	0	-
Other	10	34.5	13	61.9	4	-
Total	29		21		6	-
Current type of school						
Government school	196	83.4	218	83.8	14	53.9
Non-government or private school	21	8.9	23	8.8	1	3.9
Home schooled	0	0.0	2	0.8	0	0.0

	Foster care		Relative/ Kinship care		Residential care ¹	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Distance education	1	0.4	0	0.0	1	3.9
Other school ²	5	2.1	1	0.4	3	11.5
Not attending school	12	5.1	16	6.2	7	26.9
Total	235		260		26	
Services received						
Child has OOHC education plan	72	35.1	39	17.4	10	62.5
Total	205		224		16	
Child receives special services at school ³	84	39.8	59	26.3	14	53.8
Total	211		224		26	
Child has additional tutoring from outside the household	23	21.7	22	15.9	3	15.0
Total	106		138		20	
More than once a week	11	47.8	4	18.2	1	-
Once a week	12	52.2	15	68.2	1	-
Less than once a week	0	0.0	3	2.2	1	-
Total	23		22		3	
Days absent in past month						
None	61	58.1	78	57.4	9	-
1–2 days	29	27.6	45	33.1	2	-
3–5 days	12	11.4	8	5.9	1	-
6–10 days	2	1.9	4	2.9	0	-
More than 10 days	1	1.0	1	0.7	7	-
Total	105		136		19	
Reasons for absence⁴						
Unwell	23	52.3	27	46.6	3	-
Appointments	11	25.0	14	24.1	1	-
Suspended or expelled	4	9.1	5	8.6	3	-
Other (specify)	8	18.2	15	25.9	6	-
Total	44		58		10	

1 When the n is less than 20, percentages are not provided, and these trends are not discussed further.

2 Includes behavioural school and special needs school.

3 Includes special education, remedial services, special class or special school.

4 Percentages do not add up to 100%, as children may have been absent for multiple reasons.

Caregivers' involvement in and perceptions of children's school life

Table 6.9 suggests that most of the current caregivers or other adults in the household had a high degree of involvement in the child's schooling. For example, more than 90% reported that they (or another adult in the household) had talked with the child's teacher, year coordinator or school principal about the child since the child came to live with them. Most caregivers of 6–11 year olds had attended an event in which the child had participated (85%), although fewer caregivers of 12–17 year olds had done so (55%), perhaps because of more limited opportunities. The majority of caregivers (83% for 6–11 year olds; 76% for 12–17 year olds) had attended a parent-teacher meeting; however, fewer caregivers (47% for 6–11 year olds; 44% for 12–17 year olds) had attended an education planning meeting regarding the child. Close to one half of caregivers (42% for 6–11 year olds; 50% for 12–17 year olds) had contacted a school counsellor about the child or young person.

More caregivers of 6–11 year olds reported helping children with homework on a daily basis (55%) than caregivers of 12–17 year olds (24%). Approximately one third of caregivers of 6–11 year olds were concerned about how the child was learning preschool and school skills, with 23% reporting that they were definitely concerned, while another 14% reported that they were a little concerned (this question was not asked of caregivers of 12–17 year old children). Additionally, caregivers of 36% of 6–11 year olds and 56% of 12–17 year olds felt that the child was experiencing academic or other problems at school. A higher percentage of 12–17 year olds had found it difficult to settle into their new school (43%) by comparison with 6–11 year olds (30%).

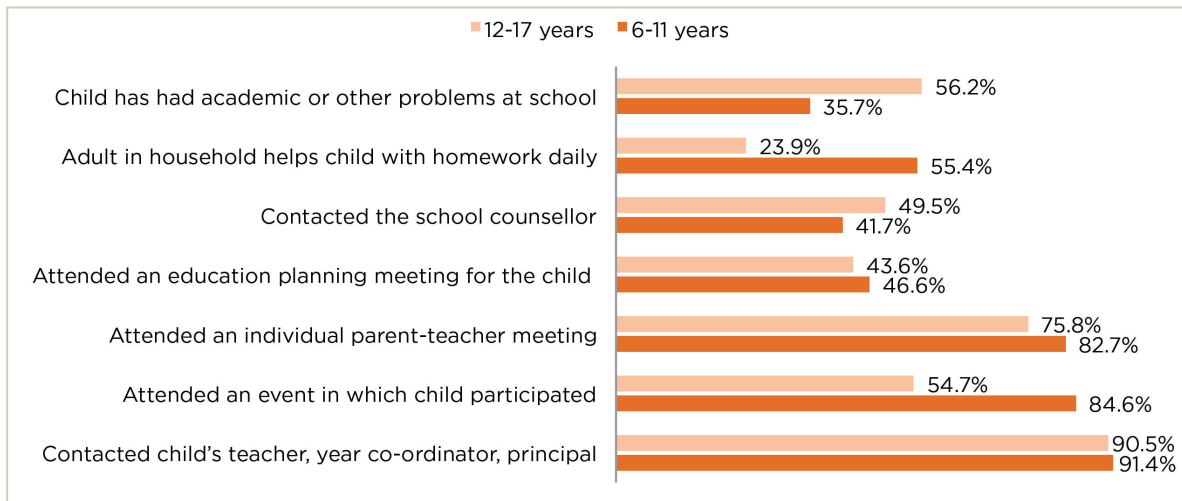
Table 6.9: Caregiver reports of their involvement in the child's learning, by child age

	6-11 years ¹		12-17 years	
	n	%	n	%
Carer school contact²				
Contacted the child's teacher, year coordinator, principal	338	91.4	86	90.5
Attended an event in which the child participated (e.g., sporting event, musical performance)	313	84.6	52	54.7
Attended an individual parent-teacher meeting	306	82.7	72	75.8
Attended an education planning meeting for the child	172	46.6	41	43.6
Contacted the school counsellor	154	41.7	47	49.5
Total	369–375		94–95	
Adult in household helps the child with homework				
Daily	82	55.4	22	23.9
A few times a week	34	23.0	15	16.3
Once a week	10	6.8	14	15.2
A few times a month	7	4.7	13	14.1
Less often	15	10.1	28	30.4
Total	148		92	
The child had difficulty settling into the new school	40	29.6	28	43.1
Total	135		65	
The carer has concerns about how the child is learning preschool or school skills				
Yes	85	23.0	-	-
A little	50	13.5	-	-
No	235	63.5	-	-
Total	370		-	
The child has had academic or other problems at school	117	35.7	68	56.2
Total	328		121	

1 Includes a small number of 5 year olds who were attending school and excludes 6 year olds who were not attending school.

2 Percentages do not add up to 100%, as caregivers may have had multiple types of contact.

Figure 6.7: Caregiver reports of their involvement in child's learning, by child age^{1,2}

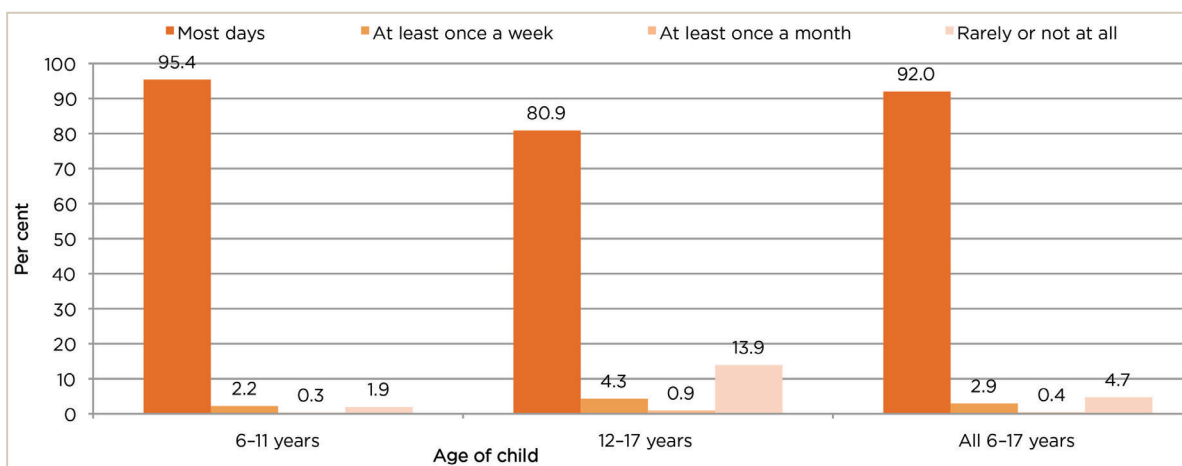


1 The 6–11 year age group includes a small number of 5 year olds who were attending school and excludes 6 year olds who were not attending school.

2 Percentages do not add up to 100%, as caregivers may have had multiple types of contact.

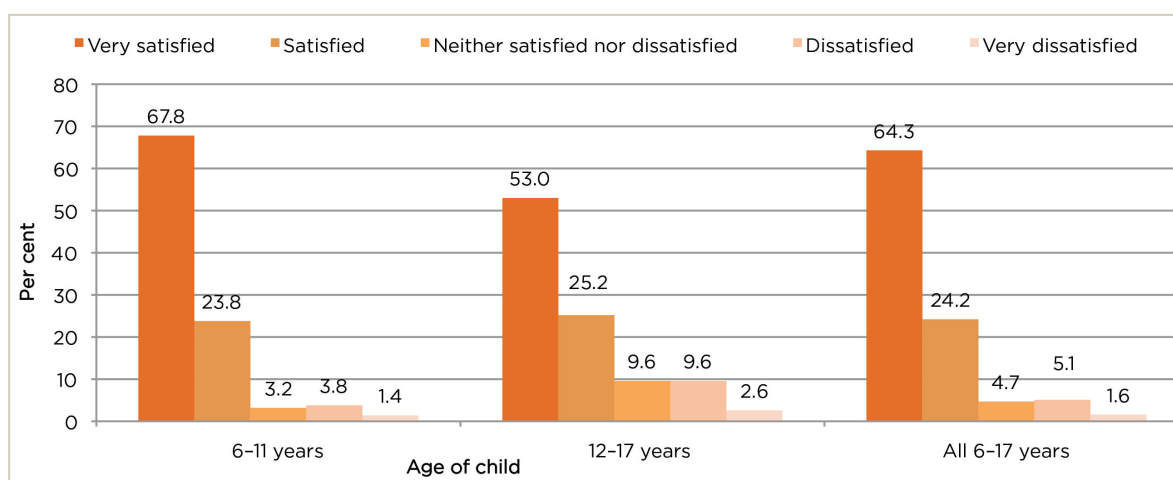
According to caregivers, almost all 6–11 year olds looked forward to going to school on most days, as did four fifths of 12–17 year olds (Figure 6.8). Only 2% of 6–11 year olds rarely or never looked forward to going to school, although 14% of 12–17 year olds did so. Approximately 90% of caregivers were 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' that the school was meeting the child or young person's needs (Figure 6.9).

Figure 6.8: Caregiver reports of the percentage of children who look forward to going to school, by child age¹



1 n=368 6–11 year olds; n=115 12–17 year olds; n=483 all children. The 6–11 year group includes a small proportion of 5 year olds for whom data was provided (see body of report for the explanation).

Figure 6.9: Caregiver reports of satisfaction with the current school meeting child's needs, by child age¹



¹ n=370 6-11 year olds; n=115 12-17 year olds; n=485 all children and young people. The 6-11 year group includes a small proportion of 5 year olds for whom data was provided (see body of report for the explanation).

Differences between children in foster or relative/kinship care are shown in Table 6.10, as well as residential care where applicable. Foster carers and residential care workers appear to be more likely than relative/kinship carers to have contacted the child's teacher, year coordinator or school principal (although overall, rates of contact were high). Similarly, more foster carers and fewer relative/kinship carers had attended an education planning meeting regarding the child. Most residential care workers had attended an education planning meeting. A higher percentage of relative/kinship carers were 'very satisfied' that the school was meeting the child's needs than foster carers, and fewer had concerns about the child's learning or felt that the child or young person was experiencing academic or other problems at school. Residential care workers less often reported that children looked forward to going to school most days or believed that schools were meeting children's needs.

Table 6.10: Caregiver reports of support for child's learning, and perceptions of the child's learning progress, by placement type

	Foster care		Relative/ Kinship care		Residential care	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Carer school contact						
Contacted the child's teacher, year coordinator or principal	209	93.7	216	88.2	19	95.0
Attended an individual parent-teacher meeting	186	83.4	193	78.8	15	75.0
Attended an event in which the child participated (e.g., sporting event, musical performance)	174	78.0	192	78.4	14	70.0
Attended an education planning meeting for the child	121	55.3	93	38.1	19	95.0
Contacted the school counsellor	89	40.1	113	46.1	9	45.0
Total	219– 223		235– 245		20	
Adult in household helps the child with homework						
Daily	45	42.9	59	43.7	4	-
A few times a week	19	18.1	30	22.2	8	-
Once a week	12	11.4	12	8.9	-	-
A few times a month	6	5.7	14	10.4	1	-
Less often	23	21.9	20	14.8	6	-
Total	105		135		19	
The child had difficulty settling into the new school	31	30.7	27	32.1	10	-
Total	101		84		15	
The child looks forward to school						
Most days	206	92.8	231	94.7	10	50.0
At least once a week	6	2.7	6	2.5	2	10.0
At least once a month	1	0.5	-	-	1	5.0
Rarely or not at all	9	4.1	7	2.9	7	35.0
Total	222		244		20	
School is meeting the child's needs						
Very satisfied	136	61.0	168	68.6	10	50.0
Satisfied	60	26.9	55	22.4	3	15.0
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	8	3.6	14	5.7	1	5.0
Dissatisfied	15	6.7	5	2.0	5	25.0
Very dissatisfied	4	1.8	3	1.2	1	5.0
Total	223		245		20	
Carer has concerns about how the child is learning preschool or school skills¹						
Yes	69	23.9	40	13.6	-	-
A little	34	11.8	36	12.2	-	-
No	186	64.4	218	74.1	-	-

	Foster care		Relative/ Kinship care		Residential care	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Total	289		294		-	
Child has had academic or other problems at school	94	47.0	70	31.3	21	84.0
Total	200		224		25	

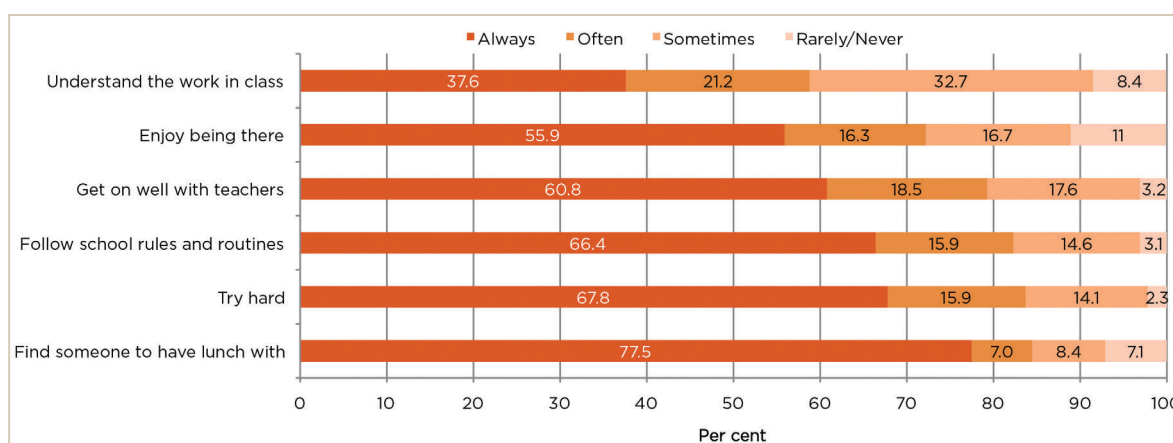
1 Question asked to caregivers of children aged 3–11 years only.

Children's perceptions of school life

Children aged 7–17 years who were currently attending school were asked their perceptions of school life, in relation to managing the work, following school rules/routines, and their social relationships⁷. The 12–17 year old group was asked several additional questions to capture issues that are more salient in secondary than primary school.

In all aspects of school life, children aged 7–11 years did not appear to be experiencing difficulties (i.e., most answered 'always' or 'often' on the various aspects). The exception was 'understanding the work in class' where 41% said they 'rarely/never' or only 'sometimes' did so. Regarding the social aspects of school life, 85% of children were 'always' or 'often' able to find someone to have lunch with, 79% of children were 'always' or 'often' getting on well with their teachers, and 72% reported that they 'always' or 'often' enjoyed being at school (see Figure 6.10).

Figure 6.10: Child reports on aspects of school life for children aged 7–11 years¹



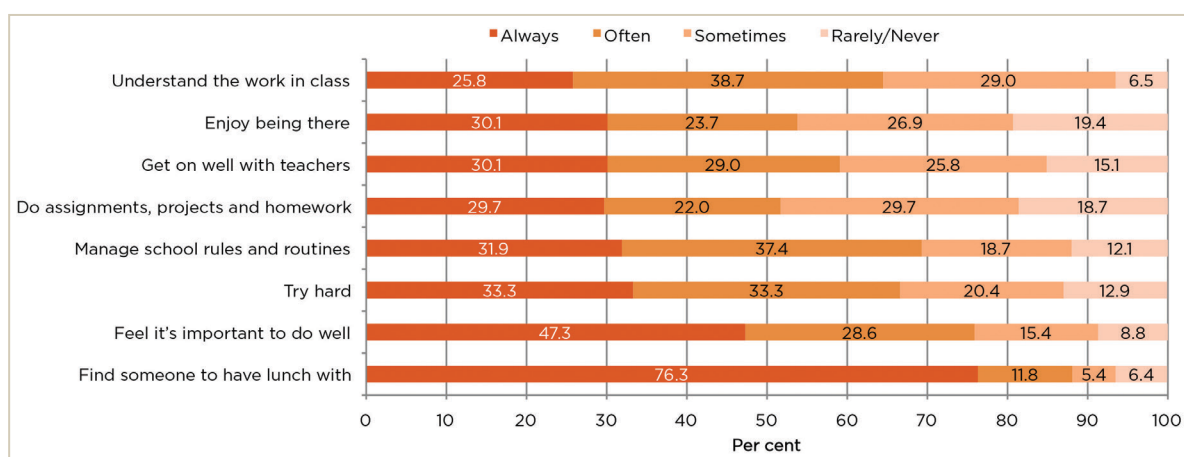
1 n=226–227 over the various aspects.

Looking next at 12–17 year olds, in relation to academic aspects of school life, 36% said they 'rarely/never' or only 'sometimes' understood the work in class and 48% said they 'rarely/never' or only 'sometimes' completed assignments, projects and homework on time. However, in relation to motivational aspects, 76% reported that

⁷ Interviews were offered to children aged 7 years and older. Thus, for this section, the age bands are 7–11 years and 12–17 years.

they ‘always’ or ‘often’ believed it was important to do well and 67% reported that they ‘always’ or ‘often’ felt they tried hard. Regarding social aspects of school life, while 88% of children aged 12–17 years felt they were ‘always’ or ‘often’ able to find someone to have lunch with, only 59% reported that they ‘always’ or ‘often’ got on well with teachers, and only 54% reported that they ‘always’ or ‘often’ enjoyed being at school (Figure 6.11). Thus, a substantial minority appeared to be experiencing difficulties at school.

Figure 6.11: Child reports on aspects of school life for children aged 12–17 years¹



¹ n=91–93 over the various aspects.

6.4 Children aged 14–17 years work experiences

As the study progresses, and children grow up, we will learn more about young people’s participation in paid work. However, in Wave 1, only 10 of 67 children aged 14–17 years were in paid work (e.g., at a supermarket, restaurant, shop) and one young person was earning an income from odd jobs (e.g., baby sitting, mowing lawns, delivering flyers), as reported by caregivers. Hours of work ranged from one hour per week to 38 hours, with roughly equal numbers working fewer than 10 hours, 11–20 hours or 21–38 hours. Caregivers were asked how these children were getting on at work, with 80% perceiving that the children were ‘always’ or ‘often’ getting on well with supervisors and workmates, working hard and doing well (however, as noted, numbers are very small and therefore are indicative only).

6.5 Summary of key findings

Childcare

- Approximately half of 9–35 month old children were attending some form of childcare, as were more than 90% of 3 year olds and 96% of 4–5 year olds. This was most often at a childcare centre, except at 4–5 years, when preschool was the most frequent type.

- The most common amount of time spent across all types of childcare was 2–3 days for 0–3 year olds (i.e., 11–20 hours per week) and 3–4 days for 4–5 year olds (i.e., 21–30 hours per week).
- Children in foster care were less likely to be attending any type of childcare, and when in childcare tended to spend fewer hours there.

Out-of-home and within-home learning and social activities

- Approximately three quarters of children aged 9 months to 5 years had very frequently (i.e., on most days per week) taken part in a range of within-home activities (including playing with toys or games indoors, playing music, singing songs and dancing) with their caregivers or other adults in the household.
- Almost all caregivers had read to the child on at least one day in the past week.
- Just under half of 9 month to 5 year old children had participated in activities outside of the home. About one quarter had attended playgroup, while fewer than 10% had attended the other activities listed (e.g., library story time/other reading program).
- Foster carers were slightly more likely to engage in out-of-home and within-home activities with children than relative/kinship carers.

School

- Most POCLS children had experienced some disruptions in schooling, with two thirds of 6–11 year olds⁸ and three quarters of 12–17 year olds reported by caregivers to have experienced one or more primary school changes during their school life. (As caregivers may not have full details of the child's change of schools prior to their placement, this may be an underestimate.)
- More than half (56%) of 6–11 year olds and two thirds of 12–17 year olds had changed schools upon being placed, and 8% and 22% respectively had changed schools since being placed.
- Approximately one fifth of all children had attended more than three primary schools in their lives and one fifth of 12–17 year olds had attended three or more secondary schools.
- Almost all 6–11 year olds were currently going to school, although 9% of 12–17 year olds were not.
- Just over a quarter of children were reported to have an OOHC education plan (26% of 6–11 year olds and 30% of 12–17 year olds), although around one in 10 caregivers did not know if an OOHC education plan had been developed. Children in foster care were more likely to have an education plan in place than those in relative/kinship care.
- The great majority of caregivers reported being involved in their child's schooling, including talking with school personnel about the child, attending a parent-teacher meeting or an event in which the child had participated, attending an education

⁸ The 6–11 year old group also includes a small number of 5 year olds who were attending school (they comprised 16% of the 5 year olds in the cohort).

planning meeting about the child or contacting a school counsellor. Residential care workers and foster carers had more often than relative/kinship carers been in contact with the school about the child.

- 11% of 6–11 year olds and 13% of 12–17 year olds had repeated a grade at some stage, and slightly more than one third were currently receiving special education or remedial services at school, or attended a special school.
- Approximately one third of caregivers of 6–11 year olds were concerned about the child's learning development, and caregivers of just over one third of 6–11 year olds and 56% of 12–17 year olds felt that the child was experiencing academic or other problems at school.
- Almost all caregivers of 6–11 year olds believed children looked forward to going to school, as did four fifths of caregivers of 12–17 year olds. Most caregivers were 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' that schools were meeting children's needs.
- While a large majority of 7–11 year olds had positive views about school regarding most of the aspects covered⁹, a sizeable minority of 12–17 year olds seemed to be experiencing difficulties (such as learning and motivational aspects, getting on with teachers, enjoying being at school) based on their own self reports.

Work experience

- 10 of 67 children age 14–17 years were in paid work, and one young person was earning an income from odd jobs, as reported by caregivers. Types of paid work included sales or hospitality. Caregivers reported that these children were getting on well with supervisors and workmates, working hard and doing well.

6.6 Conclusion

Many POCLS children who were not yet of school age attended some form of childcare, most commonly at a childcare centre (except at 4–5 years, when preschool was more common). School age children frequently had to change schools when they entered care. For many, this was an additional change to the school changes already experienced. Approximately one tenth had repeated a school grade at some stage, while approximately one third was receiving special services or remedial help at school. Just over one quarter of caregivers reported that the child had an OOHC education plan. School absenteeism was relatively common, most frequently due to health reasons. Most caregivers were monitoring and supporting their child's school progress. A sizable minority was concerned about the child's learning progress and felt that the child was experiencing problems at school. On the other hand, most caregivers believed that children looked forward to going to school and felt that schools were meeting children's needs. Most 7–11 year olds had positive perceptions of their school life, but a substantial minority of 12–17 year olds did not. There were several differences between children from key sub-groups (differing ethnic and cultural backgrounds, placement types). In particular, children in residential care, while a very small group overall, seemed to have multiple problems and were faring less well at school.

⁹ The age range for child reports was 7–11 years, not 6–11 years.