



# Children known to Social Services

Pupil Wellbeing  
Survey 2024

Gloucestershire County Council

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## Introduction

Local authority children's social services support children and families who have additional needs beyond what health, education or community services can help with. They also have a duty to safeguard children who may be at risk of harm, whether from family members or others.

Effective social services for children can literally change that individual's path and improve their social determinants of health for generations.

Formal interventions from child social care services may be time-limited or they may extend across a person's entire childhood. The first contact with these services may be at birth, or the child may be nearing adulthood when they are first referred.

However, inequalities in the provision of early interventions mean that some children and young people are more likely to require acute interventions such as entering care. This impacts greatly on the child's or young person's experiences, as formal involvement from child social care services may have protective effect on their life and environment. This is especially common where there is exposure at home or in the community to trauma or adverse experiences.

Despite this potential protective effect, research suggests that in general, children and young people who are care experienced or have a social worker have worse outcomes in childhood and across the life course than their peers.

## The Pupil Wellbeing Survey

The Pupil Wellbeing Survey (PWS) and Online Pupil Survey™(OPS) is a biennial survey that has been undertaken with Gloucestershire school children since 2006. Children and young people participate in years 4, 5 and 6 in Primary schools; years 8 and 10 in Secondary schools; and year 12 in Post 16 settings such as Sixth Forms and Colleges. A large proportion of mainstream, special and independent schools, colleges and educational establishments take part – representing 57.2% of pupils in participating year groups in 2024. The PWS asks a wide variety of questions about children's characteristics, behaviours

and lived experience that could have an impact on their overall wellbeing. The 2024 PWS was undertaken between January and April 2024.

## Limitations and caveats of the survey

Not all children and young people who are resident in Gloucestershire attend educational establishments in the county and similarly not all children and young people attending educational establishments in Gloucestershire are residents in the county. It is therefore important to remember this analysis is based on the pupil population not the resident population.

Gloucestershire is a grammar authority, has a number of notable independent schools and several mainstream schools very close to the county's boundary these all attract young people from out of county. This results in the school population (particularly at secondary phase) having slightly different characteristics, especially ethnicity, to the resident young people's population. 12.3% of Gloucestershire's resident population (2021 Census) were estimated to be from minority ethnic groups however 21.0% of Gloucestershire's school population were pupils from minority ethnic groups in January 2024 and 21.7% of the PWS cohort were pupils from minority ethnic groups in the 2024 survey.

Although a large proportion of the county's educational establishments took part in the survey some only had low numbers of students completing the survey in contrast others had high numbers. Although this doesn't impact the overall county analysis as demographics are represented as expected at this geography, analysis by district and education phase might only have certain demographic groups represented due to numbers of pupil take up (for example low numbers completing the survey in Tewkesbury at FE level), where FE provision is situated also impacts the survey as older students travel further to access FE provision.

## Analysis of deprivation

Schools can be categorised into statistical neighbour groups which cluster schools with pupils of a similar social profile within the same type of school (a similar

level of deprivation, affluence or personal/family characteristics).

We use Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) to determine the relative deprivation of pupils. The IMD is based on the home postcode of pupils (collected in the school census). This is aggregated to give an overall IMD score for the school, reflecting the deprivation levels experienced by pupils. The schools are then split into quintiles based on their scores: quintile 1 is the most deprived and quintile 5 is the least deprived in Gloucestershire.

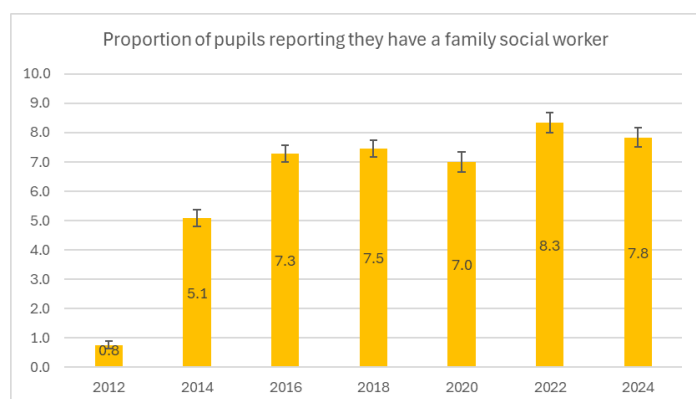
In addition:

- Grammar/selective schools are compared to other grammar/selective schools in their phase without reference to the IMD.
- Independent schools are compared to other independent schools in their phase without reference to the IMD.
- Post-16 only/Further Education (FE) colleges are compared to all other Post-16 only colleges without reference to the IMD.
- Special and alternative schools are compared to all other schools of this type in the same phase without reference to the IMD.



## Pupils known to Social Services/Family Support

Between 2016 and 2020 there was no significant increase in the proportion of pupils reporting they had a family social worker, in 2022 this rose significantly to 8.3%, which may be due to increased hardship during the pandemic. In 2024 whilst falling slightly to 7.8% the proportion of pupils reporting a family social worker was not significantly lower. Around 7.6% (6,401) of resident children and young people aged 7-17 were known to Children's Social Care in 2023/24, this includes all children and young people with an Open Referral in the academic year. A further 4,595 children and young people had an Early Help episode.



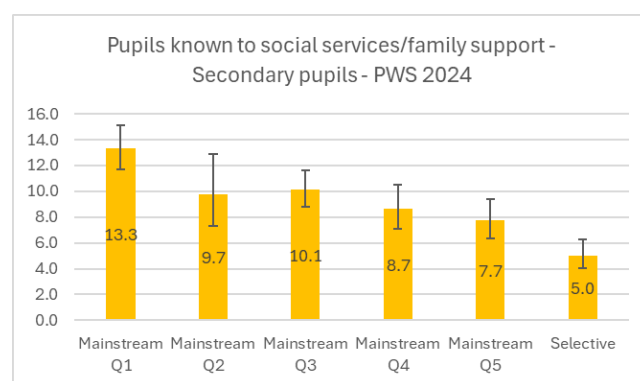
1.6% of pupils said they were a Child in Care<sup>1</sup> (CiC) and a further 1.0% said they used to be in care, this is higher than the known figure of 1.0% in 2023/24 although not significantly.

If a pupil reported being a CiC/used to be in care or having a social worker they have been grouped as 'Known to social services/Family support'. In 2024 9.2% of pupils were Known to social services/Family support. The analysis in this report uses this aggregation as well as specifying CiC and those who used to be in care.

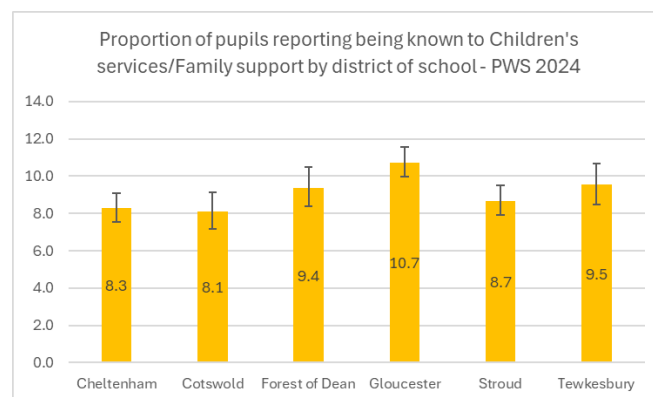
In terms of demographics, pupils reporting they were CiC were more likely to be biologically male than female. A higher proportion of pupils aged 11 or under (9.5%) reported being Known to social

services/Family support than those aged over 11 (8.9%) although not significantly.

Pupils in special schools and Independent special schools were significantly more likely to be Known to social services/Family support. (Of particular note was the high number at Cotswold Chine school in the secondary phase). Being Known to social services/Family support appears to be linked to deprivation, in the secondary phase pupils in quintile 1 schools were over twice as likely to be Known to social services/Family support than those at selective schools.

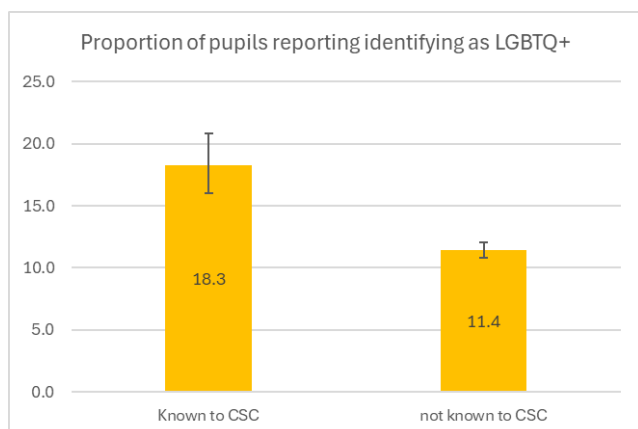


Pupils in schools in Gloucester district were the most likely to report they were Known to social services/Family support. This reflects known social care activity.



Pupils Known to social services/Family support were significantly more likely to report being LGBTQ+ than those not known to social care.

<sup>1</sup> A child who has been in the care of their local authority for more than 24 hours, also known as a looked after child (LAC).



## Healthy living

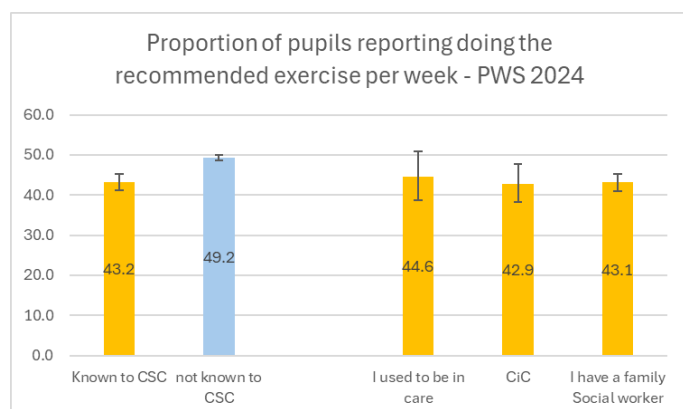
Pupils *Known to social services/Family support* were in line with their counterparts when reporting eating '5 a day' portions of fruit and veg.

Pupils known to social care were significantly more likely to drink *sugary drinks e.g. full sugar fizzy drinks, milkshakes, hot chocolate* daily than those not known to social care (28.3% vs. 18.6%).

1 in 8 care experienced pupils (12.5%) reported drinking energy drinks daily, higher than all pupils *Known to social services/Family support* (9.2%) and significantly higher than those not known to social care (3.6%).

Pupils *Known to social services/Family support* were significantly less likely to report eating *snacks such as sweets, chocolate, biscuits and crisps* daily, than those not known to care. This was influenced by those reporting they had a family social worker rather than those who said they were or had been a Child in Care.

Exercise participation levels in pupils *Known to social services/Family support* is significantly lower than those not known to social care, 43.2% vs. 49.2%.



## Health harming behaviours

Pupils *Known to social services/Family support* were significantly more likely to report direct health harming behaviours than those not known to social care:

- 2 times more likely to smoke cigarettes regularly (weekly/daily) (3.6% vs. 1.3%)
- 2 times more likely to have tried illegal drugs (20.6% vs. 11.2%)
- Almost 2 times more likely to regularly vape (17.4% vs. 10.4%)
- Whilst not significantly more likely to drink regularly they were more likely to be drunk regularly (8.6% vs. 6.2%)

Pupils *Known to social services/Family support* were over 4 times as likely to report being in a gang than those not known to social care.

Pupils *Known to social services/Family support* were more likely to say they had been in serious trouble with the Police.

Pupils *Known to social services/Family support* were twice as likely to report carrying a weapon (13.5%) and those who said they used to be in care were 3 times (16.5%) more likely than those not known to social care (5.5%).

1 in 3 (32.6%) CiC reported self-harm, significantly higher than those not known to social care (1 in 5). Pupils who reported they used to be in care were more likely to report self-harm than those who were currently CiC (43.0% vs. 32.6%).

Pupils *Known to social services/Family support* were more likely to report unhealthy sexual behaviour. They were significantly more likely to say they were



sexually active (15.7% vs. 10.3%) and had Early Sexual Debut (ESD) (11.5% vs. 6.9%).

Where pupils had had sex, pupils *Known to social services/Family support* were significantly more likely to report they had not used protection the last time they had sex, compared to those not known to social care (21.9% vs. 15.7%).

### Accessing Oral health services

Pupils in the primary phase are asked about their oral health. Pupils *Known to social services/Family support* were significantly less likely to brush their teeth daily (90.3% vs. 95.2%) than those not known to social care.

Those who used to be in care (89.1%) were the least likely to report doing their teeth at least daily. CiC were not significantly less likely to report doing their teeth daily than those not known to social care, an improvement since the previous survey.

Pupils *Known to social services/Family support* were significantly less likely to say they had been to the dentist in the last year than those not known to social care (56.1% vs. 66.1%). Pupils reporting they used to be in care were the least likely to have been to the dentist in the previous 12 months (52.6%).

### Mental wellbeing

Significantly fewer pupils *Known to social services/Family support* reported they were happy *Quite often/most days* (50.3%) compared to those not known to social care (62.9%).



Survey participants complete the Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Well-being scale (WEMWBS) an internationally used and respected measure of wellbeing. From this wellbeing can be categorised

into low, average and high. Low Mental Wellbeing (LMW) has been aligned to NHS probable clinical depression diagnosis. Pupils *Known to social services/Family support* were significantly more likely to report LMW than those not known to social care (32.7% vs. 22.1%). It is of note this is driven by those with a family social worker and those who used to be in care, CiC were in line with those not known to social care (25.6%).

Pupils *Known to social services/Family support* were significantly less likely to report they had a trusted adult to turn to if they were worried about something than those not known to social care (77.6% vs. 84.9%). Pupils who reported they used to be in care were the least likely to report they had someone to turn to if they were worried (72.1%).

### Accessing mental health support

Pupils *Known to social services/Family support* were three times as likely to be receiving support from a professional at the time of the survey than those not known to social care (18.0% vs. 6.0%), and twice as likely to say they had ever had mental health support (32.9% vs. 16.0%).

Where they hadn't had support a quarter (25.5%) of pupils *Known to social services/Family support* said they felt they needed support. Pupils *Known to social services/Family support* were more likely to say they didn't receive professional mental health support because; *Still on waiting list*.

### Sleep

Sleep is strongly correlated to mental wellbeing, the more sleep a person got the less likely they were to have LMW, plateauing around the recommended sleep mark. Less than half of pupils *Known to social services/Family support* had the recommended hours sleep (43.6%), significantly lower than those not known to social care (52.0%). Almost 1 in 3 pupils *Known to social services/Family support* reported they often woke up in the night because they were worried compared to 1 in 5 of those not known to social care.

## Screen-time

In the UK, the average media/screen usage of a teenager is estimated to be 6-7 hours per day<sup>2</sup>. The mean screentime in PWS 2024 was 4-6 hours for pupils at both secondary and Post 16 phases and between 0-3 hours for primary phase pupils. Excessive media/screen time has been classified in the survey for pupils who report having 7+ hours of media/screen time per day.

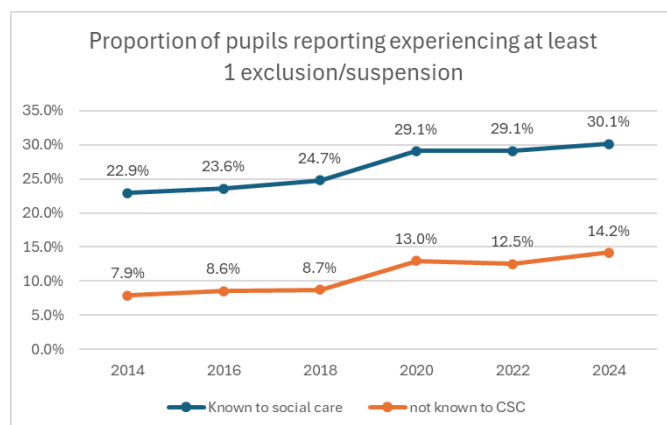
Excessive media/screen time is strongly correlated to sleep, wellbeing and self-harm behaviours. Pupils *Known to social services/Family support* were significantly more likely to report excessive screentime than their peers who were not known to social care (38.0% vs. 25.3%).

Pupils *Known to social services/Family support* were significantly more likely to report one of their top 3 online activities was *Posting my own social media* and *Gambling* than those not known to social care.

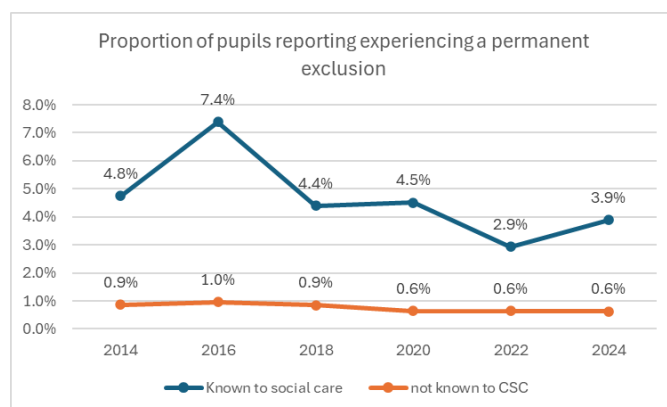
Research<sup>3</sup> suggests that heavy social media use and posting regret are associated with lower self-esteem among adolescents, and that younger students could be more vulnerable than their older counterparts.

## School life

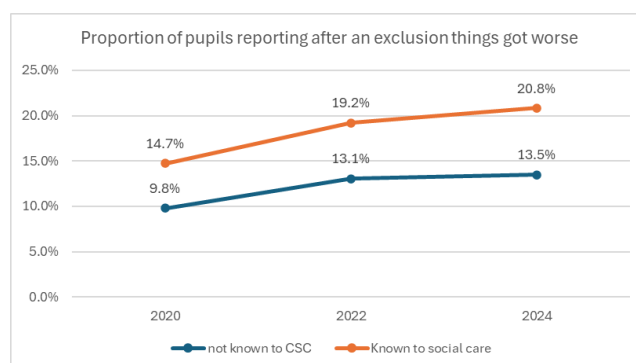
Twice as many pupils *Known to social services/Family support* said they had at least one isolation, suspension or exclusion than those not known to social care (30.1% vs. 14.2%). Reported isolation, suspension or exclusion rates rose for all pupils between 2018 and 2020 and have remained high.



A third of CiC and those who used to be in care reported at least one isolation, suspension or exclusion. Pupils *Known to social services/Family support* were 6 times more likely to have a permanent exclusion than those not known to social care (3.9% vs. 0.6%).



1 in 5 pupils *Known to social services/Family support* who had at least one isolation, suspension or exclusion reported *things got worse* after the isolation, suspension or exclusion; significantly higher than those not known to social care (13.5%).



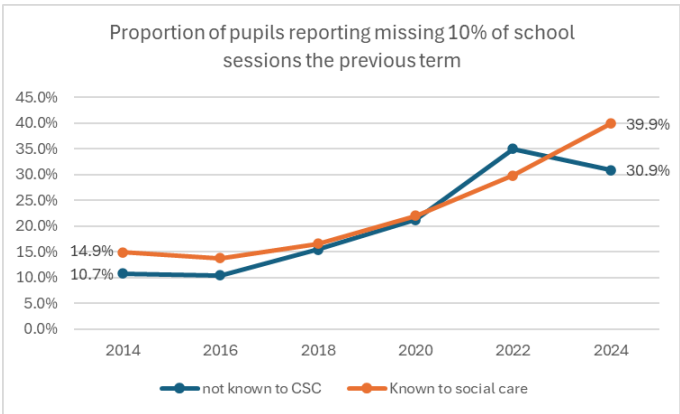
<sup>2</sup>[https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0025/217825/children-and-parents-media-use-and-attitudes-report-2020-21.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0025/217825/children-and-parents-media-use-and-attitudes-report-2020-21.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [Heavy social media use and posting regret are associated with lower self-esteem among middle and high school students - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)





Whilst overall pupils *Known to social services/Family support* were significantly more likely to report being absent from school for more than 10% of expected sessions than their peers not known to social care (39.9% vs. 30.9%), CiC were significantly less likely to report being absent from school for more than 10% of expected sessions (26.6%). There has been a continuous upwards trend in being absent from school for more than 10% of expected sessions in pupils *Known to social services/Family support*.



Primary pupils *Known to social services/Family support* were significantly less likely to say they got the help they needed from school than those not known to social care (77.5% vs. 84.4%). This was driven by those with a family social worker and those who used to be in care.

Pupils *Known to social services/Family support* were significantly less likely to say; they enjoyed school (47.9% vs. 57.8%), they achieved top grades (35.7% vs. 42.7%); twice as likely to report being aggressive at school (14.5% vs. 6.3%) and twice as likely to say they were often in trouble (18.9% vs. 9.0%) than those not known to social care.

## Relationships

Pupils *Known to social services/Family support* were significantly more likely to say they found it difficult/very difficult to make and keep friends than those not known to social care.

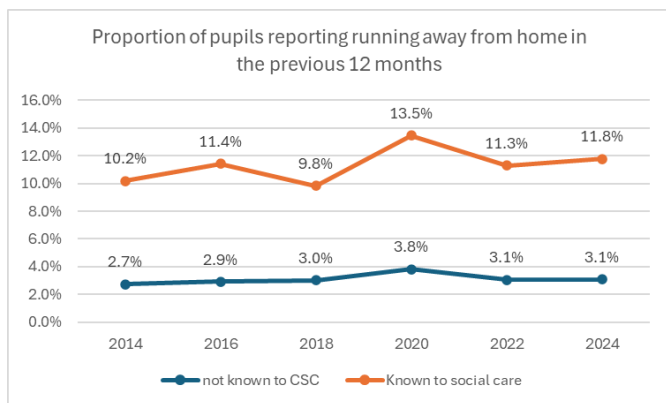
Half of pupils who were *Known to social services/Family support* said they lived with both parents (49.6%), significantly lower than those not known to social care. Research suggests living with a step-parent is a factor associated with a higher risk of child abuse. Twice as many pupils *Known to social services/Family support* reported they lived with one parent than those not known to social care (25.9% vs. 12.4%).

Pupils living in some residential settings were much more likely to report being *Known to social services/Family support*, these included living in a residential special school and living with a resident who was not their parent (kinship care).

Residential setting	% known to CSC
I live in a children's home	75.0
I live in a residential special school	90.0
I live on my own/independently	12.5
I live somewhere else	23.6
I live with a relative who is not my parent	49.1
I live with foster carers/in a foster home	94.4
I live with friends	43.8



Pupils *Known to social services/Family support* were 4 times more likely to say they had run away from home in the past 6 months than those not known to social care.



The proportion of pupils *Known to social services/Family support* reporting they feel unsafe/very unsafe at home or the place where they live had been reducing since 2014 but has risen between 2022 and 2024. Pupils who were in care at the time of the survey were the most likely to report they felt unsafe at home or the place where they live (5.7%).

Half of pupils *Known to social services/Family support* reported they had witnessed domestic abuse (51.3%) vs. 1 in 4 of those not known to social care. 1 in 3 pupils *Known to social services/Family support* reported ever being a victim of domestic abuse compared to 1 in 8 of those not known to social care.