

Research recommendation

What is the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of therapeutic interventions for improving learning outcomes and school attendance and reducing exclusion in educational settings?

Why this is important

Educational outcomes for looked-after children are in need of improvement. In 2017, at key stage 2, 32% of looked-after children and young people reached the expected standard in reading, writing and maths (compared with 61% of those who were not looked after). In 2016, 0.10% of looked-after children were permanently excluded from school, compared to 0.08% of all children. The education of looked after children can be complex as a result of the high prevalence of mental health disorders (45% in looked after children, 72% in residential care) and special educational needs (56.3%). Therapeutic strategies could be useful for improving school outcomes in such children, however there is little available evidence for therapeutic interventions reporting educational outcomes in looked after children and young people.

Rationale for research recommendation

| | |
|--|---|
| Importance to 'patients' or the population | Looked after children are known to have poorer educational outcomes compared to those who are not looked after. This is of some concern to looked-after children and their guardians since educational outcomes are likely to impact long-term success and wellbeing. |
| Relevance to NICE guidance | Therapeutic interventions to improve learning outcomes have been considered in this guideline. These may be effective for some outcomes (e.g. behaviour at school), however, no evidence has shown improvements in terms of UK-relevant educational outcomes. |
| Relevance to the NHS, public health, social care and voluntary sectors | Looked after children are currently eligible for the government funded pupil premium. However, evidence is needed to show the most effective ways to spend this resource in order to |

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| | improve educational outcomes for looked after children and young people. |
| National Priorities | High: this research question is relevant to national statutory policy documents such as Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked-after children from the Department of Education. |
| Current evidence base | Two non-UK, non-randomised controlled studies were identified looking at the use of animal-assisted psychotherapy vs residential care as usual for school outcomes in looked after children with mental health problems. |
| Equality considerations | Looked after children with mental health problems were identified by the guideline committee as being a group of special interest in need of additional support in order to achieve educational success. |

Modified PICO table

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Population | Looked after children and young people (wherever they are looked after). |
| Intervention | Therapeutic interventions for improving learning outcomes and school attendance and exclusion in educational settings? For example, art therapy, play therapy, occupational therapy, music therapy, psychotherapy, animal-assisted psychotherapy, DDP didactic developmental psychotherapy, or therapeutic foster carer training. |
| Comparator | Usual care, waiting list, or another commonly used intervention designed to support readiness for school. |
| Outcome | UK-recognised and age-specific academic outcomes (e.g. achieving appropriate Key Stage level) |

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| | Other UK-relevant educational outcomes such as homework completion and school attendance. Adverse events such as school absence, school exclusion, or suspension. |
| Study design | Randomised controlled trial or controlled prospective experimental study. |
| Timeframe | Results should include moderate-term outcomes (e.g. 6-month or middle of school term outcomes) and long-term outcomes (1-2 year follow up). |
| Additional information | None |