The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England: Linking Care and Educational Data

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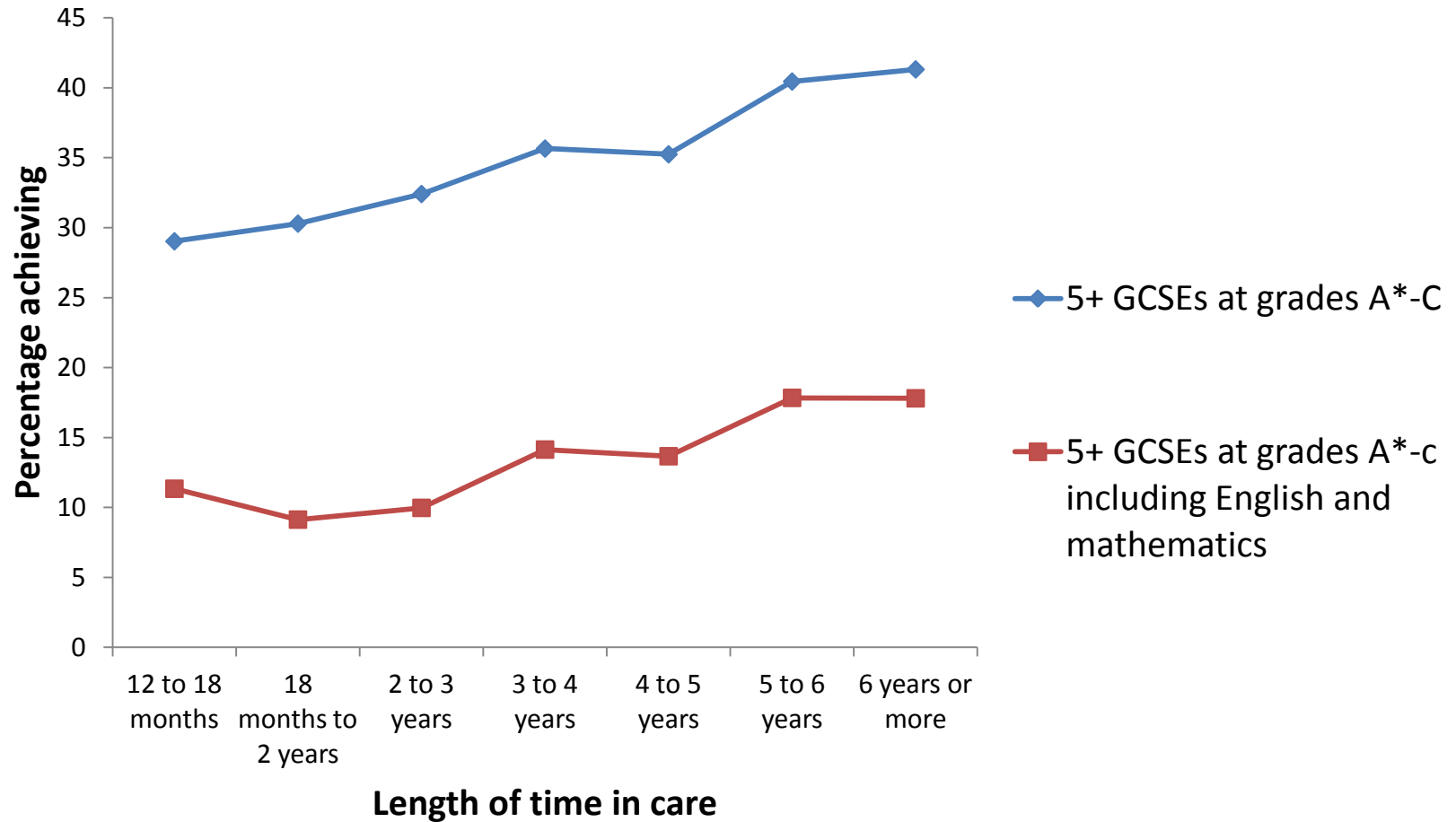
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#EducationInCare

Educational outcomes of looked after children in England
(Source: DfE, 2013[1])

Length of time in care (x-axis) vs Percentage achieving (y-axis)

Legend:
- 5+ GCSEs at grades A*-C
- 5+ GCSEs at grades A*-c including English and mathematics

[1]https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/264952/final_improving_permanence_data_pack_2013_sept.pdf

Project aim and purpose

Aim:

To identify key care and educational factors that are associated with the progress of children in care from the end of Key Stage 2 (KS2; end of primary school/Year 7) to the end of Key Stage 4 (KS4; end of secondary school/Year 11) and their attainment at KS4.

Purpose:

To inform the resource priorities of central and local government, the practice of professionals and the databases used to monitor outcomes.

Main research questions

- What are the key factors contributing to the low educational outcomes of children in care in secondary schools in England?

- How does linking care and educational data contribute to our understanding of how to improve their attainment and progress?

Research design

How did we do this?

- **Linking national data sets on the education (National Pupil Database) and care experiences of looked after children in England (SSDA903)**
  - to explore the relationship between educational outcomes, the children's care histories and individual characteristics, and practice and policy in different local authorities

- **Interviews with young people in six local authorities and with their carers, teachers, social workers and Virtual School staff**
  - to complement and expand on the statistical analyses, and to explore factors not recorded in the databases (e.g. foster carers' attitudes to education, role of the Virtual School)

Research design

- Linked NPD and CLA databases for 2013 KS4 Cohort

- Retrospective study

- 8 best outcomes (GCSE + equivalents)
  - 6 points = 1 grade on 1 exam

- Groups for analysis:
  - CLA-LT: A longer-stay group of Children Looked After (those in care for 12 months or more continuously at the end of KS4)
  - CLA-ST: A shorter-stay group of Children Looked After (those in care for less than 12 months at the end of KS4)
  - CIN: Children in Need at the end of KS4 but not in care
  - Comparison group: Children not in care and not in need at the end of KS4

Database analyses

- Descriptive statistics – how do CLA compare to peers on factors generally linked to educational outcomes?

- Regressions – which factors predict better or worse educational outcomes for CLA?

- Multilevel modelling – what is the relative contribution of factors at different levels?

Local authority

School

Individual child

Description of our cohort

- 7,852 looked after children eligible for GCSEs in 2013

- **4,847 had been in care for 12 months or more continuously**, of which:

  - Over half first entered care as teenagers

  - 29.0% had been in most recent placement for under a year

- Fewer KS4 placements were foster care than at KS2 (59.6% vs. 70.2%), use of (all) residential care increases (18.5% vs. 11.3%)

- 17.3% had only had one placement; 10.2% had had 10 or more placements since first entry to care

Comparing CLA and peers

	N	Mean KS4 points	Controlling for KS2
Comparison Group (Not on the 2012-13 CIN or CLA databases)	622,970	340.59	341.66
CIN (Children in the CIN database but not CLA)	13,599	185.14	249.77
CLA-ST (Looked after at 31 March 2013 but not 12 months continuously)	1,387	149.52	200.38
CLA-LT (Looked after at 31 March 2013 and for 12 months or more continuously)	4849	202.41	267.46

CLA vs. peer group (selected characteristics)

Table shows proportion of the sample and the mean GCSE points for this group

	In Care 12 months +	Not in care or in need
Girls	44.2% (228.60)	48.8% (353.54)
White British or Irish	73.4% (201.61)	70.5% (339.05)
Asian or Black African	6.5% (251.27)	10.5% (348.95)
FSM eligible in 2003-2004	55.0% (206.62)	18.0% (296.45)
FSM eligible in 2012-2013	13.1% (199.36)	14.6% (300.70)
SEN: School Action + or Statement	73.5% (179.09)	15.9% (259.24)
Behavioural, Emotional, Social Difficulty	38.6% of SEN (185.40)	4.8% of SEN (233.39)
Autism Spectrum Disorder	3.9% (82.90)	1.0% (260.71)
Severe or Multiple Learning Diffs	0.5% (24.71)	0.3% (101.74)
Mainstream School	58.8% (275.92)	88.8% (346.06)
Non-mainstream school	41.2% (86.03)	11.2% (297.32)

Description of our cohort

- Using age at first entry and reason for entry, we created career types:

Career type	Per cent of 4,847	KS4 score
Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker	3.4	232.7
Disabled	6.4	47.7
Entry aged 0 to 4	14.8	217.7
Entry aged 5 to 9	30.2	229.0
Adolescent abused/neglected	24.0	211.4
Other Adolescent entrant	21.3	185.5
Children in Need but Not in Care	N = 13,599	185.1
Children Not in Care or in Need	N = 622,970	340.6

Regression model predicting KS4 scores ($R^2 = .66$)

EARLY ENVIRONMENT

FSM at KS1

Home language at KS1

IDACI at KS1

Care career type

CARE PLACEMENTS

Placement changes since KS2

Length of time in care

Home language at KS4

Placed out of authority at KS4

Length of latest placement

FSM at KS4

In non-foster placement at KS4

IDACI at KS4

INDIVIDUAL

Gender

Mean SDQ score

Ethnicity

Primary SEN

KS2 scores

RELATED TO SCHOOLING

School changes in Year 10-11

In non-mainstream school at KS4

Unauthorised absences

Fixed & permanent exclusions

Size of association – unstandardised beta values

EARLY ENVIRONMENT

Disability
-18.19*

CARE PLACEMENTS

Changes since KS2
-2.31***

Length of latest placement
0.003*

Other language at KS4
-18.84*

Non-foster placement KS4
-37.30***

INDIVIDUAL

Male
-7.59**

Higher SDQ score
-1.74***

ASD -38.21***
MLD -10.40*
SMLD -87.56***

KS2 scores
39.61***

RELATED TO SCHOOLING

Change in Year 10-11
-33.93***

Non-mainstream
-60.25***
to -121.36***

Unauthorised absences
-255.46***

Fixed-term exclusions
-0.54***

Factors predicting poorer progress

Individual characteristics
- Being male
- SEN: ASD, Moderate Learning Disability or Severe/Multiple Learning Difficulties
- Entering care primarily due to a disability
- Having a higher mean score on the SDQ

Instability
- Having more changes of placement (compared to other children) after KS2
- Changing school in Year 10 or 11
- Having more unauthorised school absences
- Having missed more school days (compared to peers) due to fixed-term exclusions

Concurrent environment
- Having spent less time in the latest placement
- Living in residential or another form of care (compared to kinship or foster care) at KS4
- Having a home language other than English at KS4
- Being in a non-mainstream school at KS4 (all types)

Multi-level modelling

- Three-level model

  - Child: KS2 attainment; gender; ethnicity; SEN; SDQ; school and care difficulties

  - School: type; proportion eligible for free school meals; proportion SEN; mean KS2 scores; contextual value added scores

  - Local authority: proportion poor families; mean deprivation score; rate of CLA and CIN; proportion FSM and SEN; Ofsted rating; mean care cost per day; proportion in foster and residential care

- Variation in KS4 attainment of looked after children at local authority level was smaller than at other levels

  - suggests that **variability existed at the level of individual pupils and schools**, rather than the local authority level

Findings from quantitative analyses

- Controlling for pupil- and school-related factors, CLA make better educational progress than do CIN
  - Care system appears to act as a protective factor educationally
- Late adolescent entrants into care make poorer educational progress
  - May reflect reasons for entry into care & greater instability
- Both school and care factors are related to educational outcomes
- Instability (school or care) is an important factor particularly in KS4

Findings from quantitative analyses

- Emotional and behavioural issues as reflected by the SDQ scores may underlie difficulties
  - BUT response of school and care systems to young people's characteristics and circumstances are at least as important
- Overall, little variation between LAs nationally on CLA progress once other factors are controlled
  - Key factors are at the level of the individual and school
- Schools that perform better with all pupils also show good progress for CLA

Findings from qualitative interviews

- Working with six local authorities
  - 26 young people ('high-' and 'lower-progress' groups)
- Interviews with young people, carers, teachers and social workers

Findings from qualitative interviews

- Half higher-progress group described as "bright"
  - Most had birth family education support from young age

- Continuing birth family influence for nearly all

- Young people's *agency*
  - Choose to engage with education once certain preconditions met

Findings from qualitative interviews

- Overwhelming view that becoming looked after had positive effects educationally and overall

- Foster carers' level of educational support seemed more important than their educational qualifications *per se*

- Good integrated working important

- Teachers most important educational influence

- Young people welcomed the additional, individual support

Implications

- Greater focus on *progress* needed
- CIN more helpful comparison for CLA than whole school population (but need to remain aspirational)
- Interventions need to be tailored to the characteristics and experiences of the individual
- When placement moves are essential, school moves should be avoided especially in the final years of schooling
- School choice not a matter of 'academic OR nurturing'
- Better support earlier to reduce later difficulties
- Importance of involving young person in decisions
- Teacher development in social, emotional and mental health issues; social worker development in education system

Ways forward

- Databases
  - Continuing improvement of existing databases
    - 'missing' data (e.g. SDQ)
    - definitions (e.g. what does 'placement length' mean?)
  - Regular, more extensive analyses, supported interpretation and better use of existing data (including common definitions)
  - Need for more data on carers/residential staff

- Research
  - Longer term perspective on progress/outcomes – some young people take longer to make significant progress
  - Compare children who enter and leave the care system with those who stay
  - Examine key factors for Children in Need (but not in care)

Project team

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