Making sense of the research evidence
BAAF Aiming higher: improving educational outcomes for young people in care
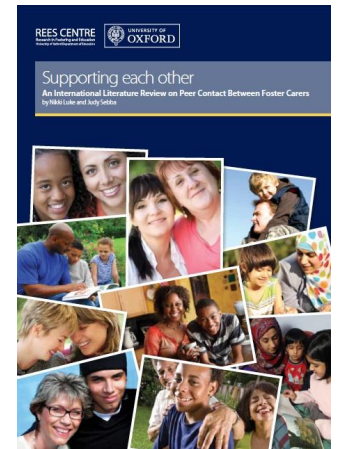# 21 January 2015

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# Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education

The Rees Centre aims to:

- identify what works to improve the outcomes and life chances of children and young people in foster care

We are doing this by:

- reviewing existing research in order to make better use of current evidence
- conducting new research to address gaps
- working with service users to identify research priorities and translate research messages into practice
- employing foster carers and care experienced young people as co-researchers

Centre is funded by the Core Assets Group but also has grants from a range of other funders
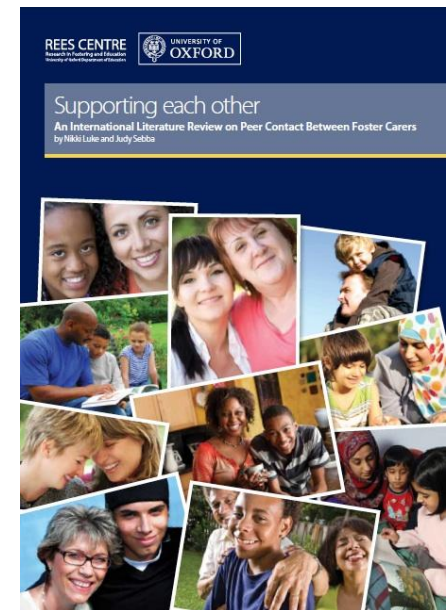
Some outcomes of children in care in England

- 12% achieve **expected grades (5 x A*- C incl Eng & maths)** at 16 years compared to 52% of all children – a gap of 40% (calculation method changed in 2014*;

- achievement **gap is lower at KS2** (31% gap in all 3 subjects, 28% for maths, 23% reading, 34% writing);

- Two times as likely to be **permanently excluded**;

- Five times as high (10% of LAC) have **fixed term exclusion**;

- Of 27,220 former care leavers aged 19-21, 38% were not in education, employment or training - **NEET**;

- Only 8% **access HE** compared to > 50% of general population;

- educational experiences and outcomes contribute to later **health, employment** (22% unemployment rate), **involvement in crime** (27% of those in prison).

DfE (2014) Statistical First Release Dec 2014, * restricted qualif, 1st entry only

Referral at 14 years old
Luke Rodgers http://www.lukespeaks.com/

- Luke is at high risk of absconding
- Known to deal and has been caught with drugs at school
- **Has stolen previous foster carers car in the night**
- **Low attendance at school and is disengaged with other pupils**
- Luke has issues with attachment
- He Isolates himself in his room, we are seeking psychological assessments as we think the links to early childhood trauma
- Luke struggles to follow simple house rules when living in a foster placement
- Hard to build a rapport with Luke as he can be guarded and 'closed'
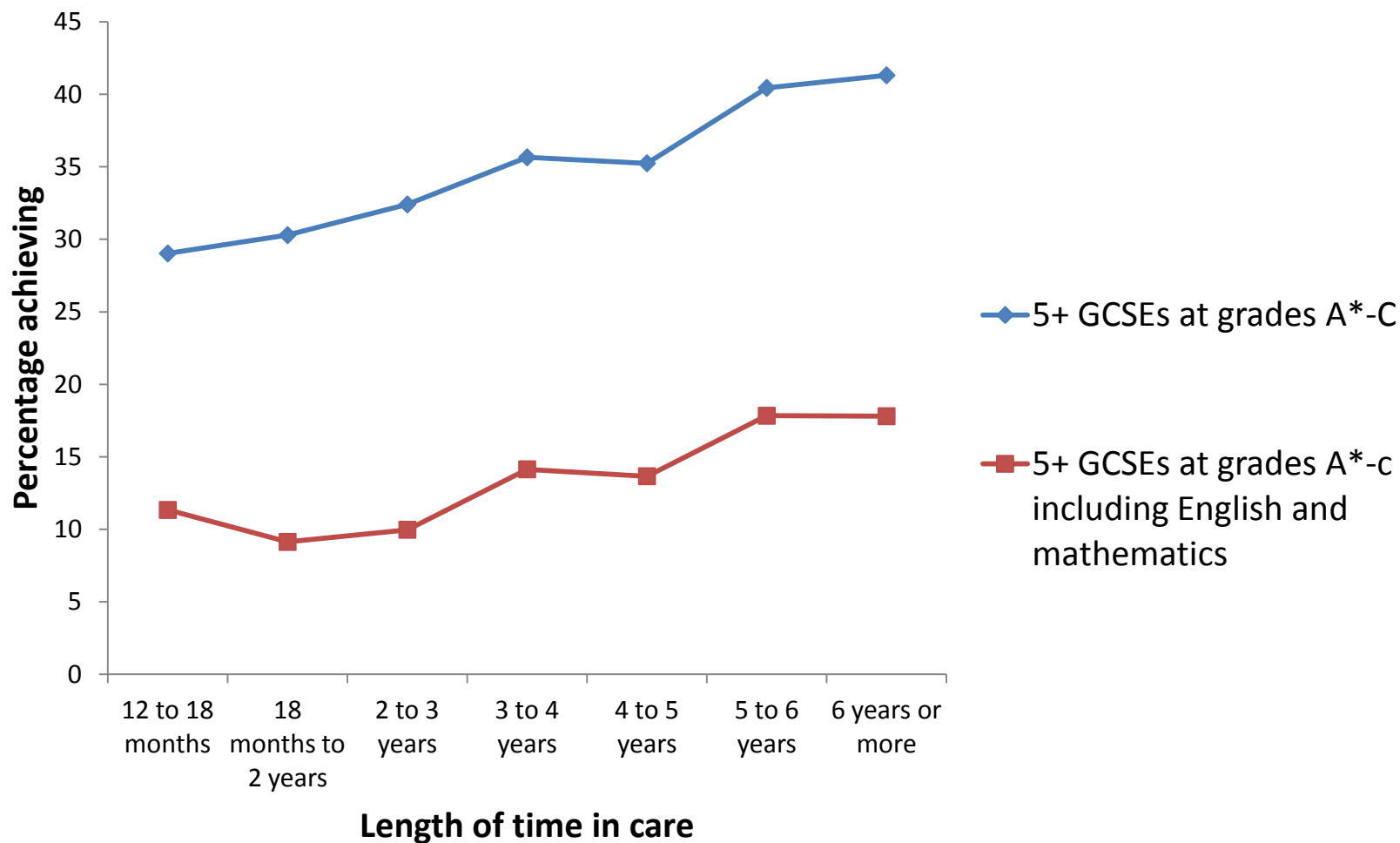
...Luke is an underachiever

Referral at 14 years old

- Luke was late home, his foster carers reported him missing
- Luke tried cannabis with friends at school, just experimenting
- **Luke felt frightened and alone while in foster care, took his foster carer's car to see his mum, he deeply regrets it**
- **Luke has been to 11 primary schools and and feels like he's always loosing friends**
- Luke parents rejected him at a young age and he found it hard to find a foster family
- Luke hides away because everyone keeps reminding him his step dad beat him
- Luke is always told where to live without being given a choice, it upsets him that he has to move from a settled foster family
- Luke doesn't feel like anyone will ever love him

Luke is an award winning social entrepreneur

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

Chart showing "Percentage achieving" (y-axis, 0 to 45) against "Length of time in care" (x-axis). Categories: 12 to 18 months, 18 months to 2 years, 2 to 3 years, 3 to 4 years, 4 to 5 years, 5 to 6 years, 6 years or more.

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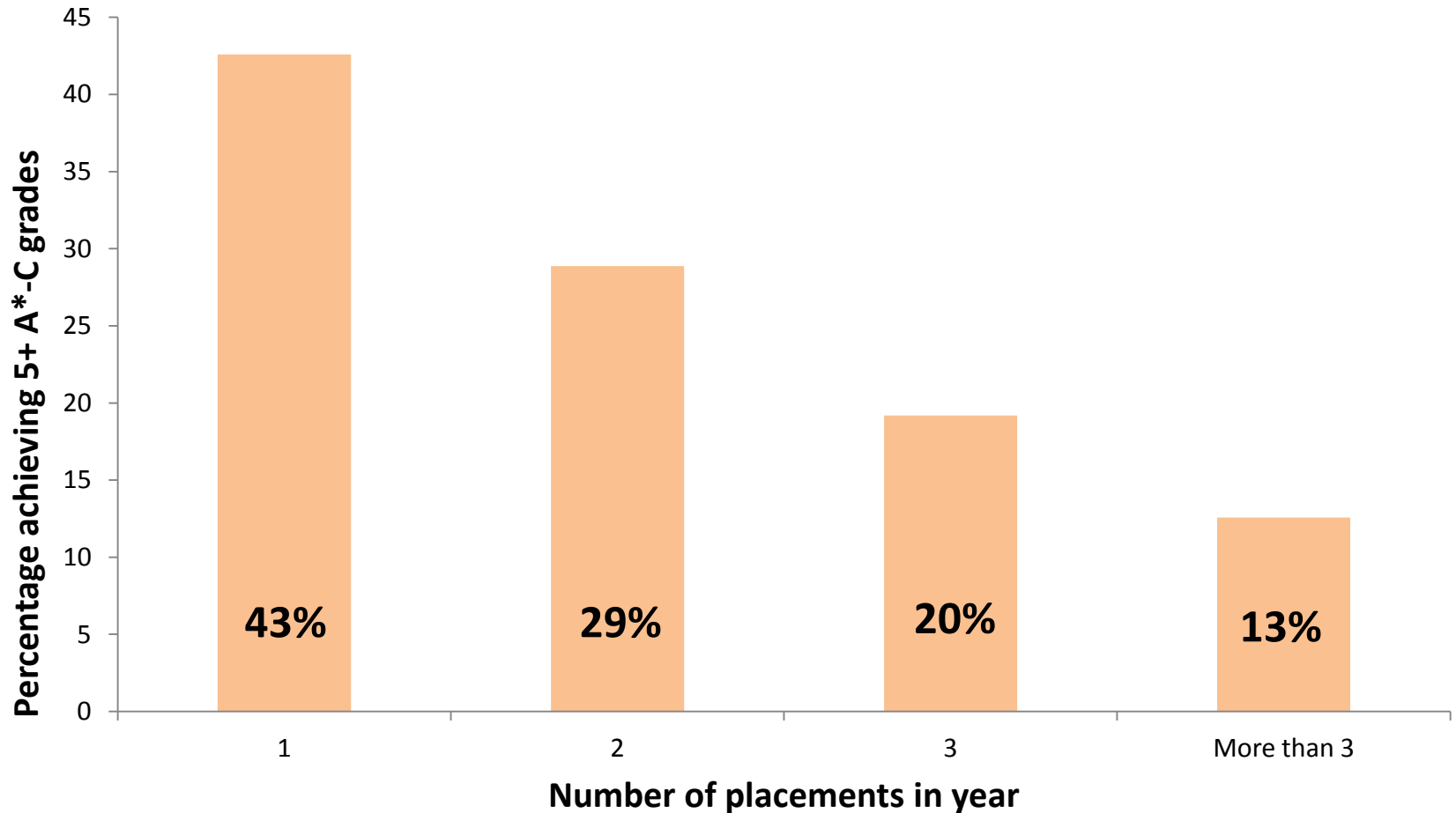- 5+ GCSEs at grades A*-c including English and mathematics

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

Key Stage 4 attainment for looked after children by stability in year

Bar chart showing Percentage achieving 5+ A*-C grades (y-axis) by Number of placements in year (x-axis):
- 1 placement: 43%
- 2 placements: 29%
- 3 placements: 20%
- More than 3 placements: 13%

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

Funded by The Nuffield Foundation

February 2014 – April 2015

Nuffield Foundation

Project aims and purpose

- 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?

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

Research design

How are we doing 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 36 children 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)

Description of our cohort:
All analyses provisional at this stage

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

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

  - 44.2% female

  - 78.8% White British

  - 51.3% first entered care aged 10 or over

- Looked after children are over-represented in indicators of difficulty:

	CLA (12 months or more)	Non-care
SEN Statement	30.3%	3.2%
Proportion of SEN children with BESD	50.4%	26.6%
Attends Pupil Referral Unit	12.3%	1.1%

Description of all children in Year 11

- This is how indicators of difficulty relate to KS4 scores (8 best, GCSE or equivalent, possible scores 0-464) **for the whole sample** (*N* = 609,204):

Indicator of difficulty	KS4 score	
SEN Statement	199.1	368.0
Identified BESD	247.5	356.8
Attends Pupil Referral Unit	105.3	342.4

- SEN statement vs. No special need
- BESD vs. No special need
- PRU vs. Average across all school types

Description of our cohort

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

Career type	Per cent	KS4 score
Entry aged 0 to 4	14.8	217.7
Entry aged 5 to 9	30.2	229.0
Adolescent entrant	21.3	185.5
Adolescent abused	24.0	211.4
Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker	3.4	232.7
Disabled	6.4	47.7
Not in care		343.52

Placement histories

- For the 4,847 who had been in care for at least the last 12 months:

    - 16.4% had been in care for under 2 years; 25.6% for 9 years or more

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

    - 36.4% had always been in foster care; 3.0% always in kin care; 3.5% always in residential care;

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

    - 17.3% had only had one placement; 10.2% had had 10 or more placements

Number of placements and KS4 scores
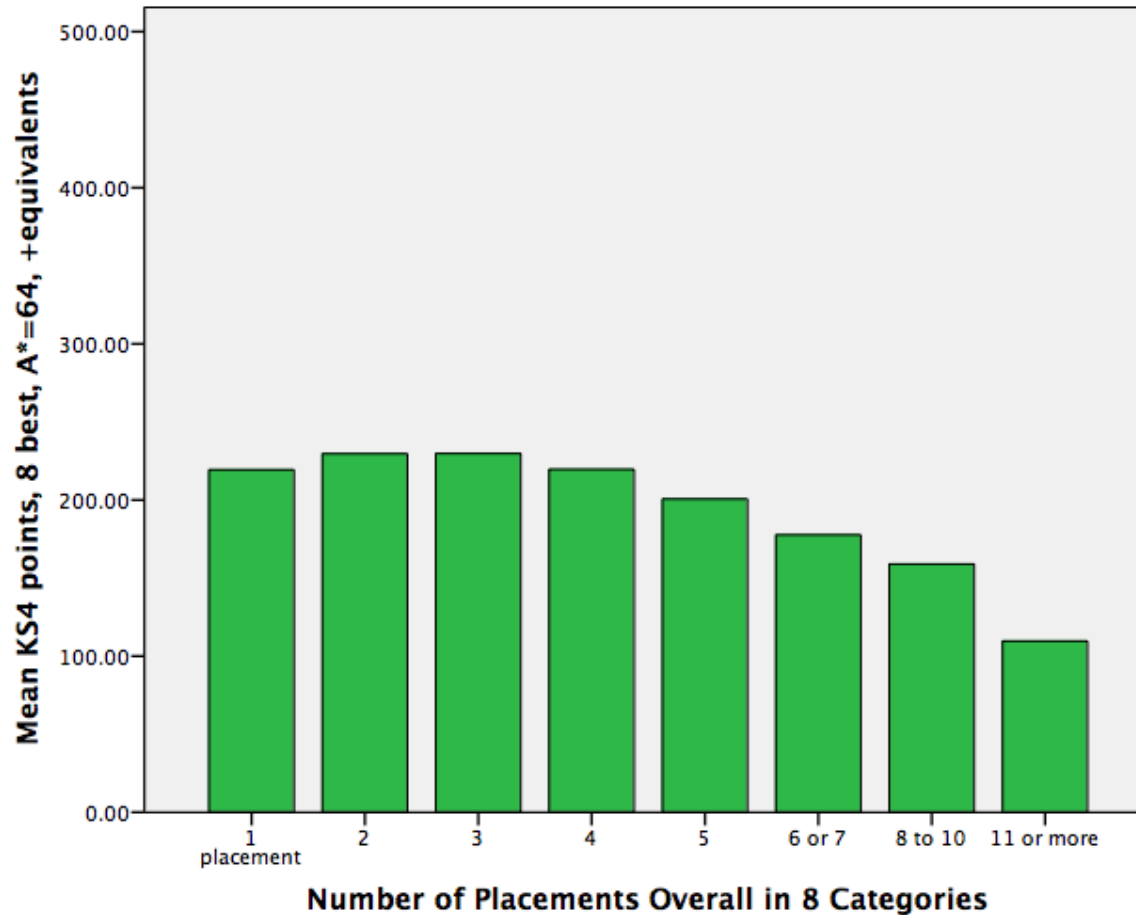
- BUT we are analysing this alongside other variables to get the full picture of what really counts

What does the international research evidence tell us about improving educational outcomes?

- Some foster carer training in behaviour (e.g. *Fostering Changes*, Briskman & Scott 2012) improves education outcomes;

- Flynn et al. (2012) reported enhanced sentence comprehension and reading outcomes when carers undertook 2.5 hours reading activities a week;

- Alfano (2010) demonstrated improvements in reading using paired reading with foster carers and primary school children;

- Mentors, maximizing placement and school stability, aggressively pursuing educational supports, and treating mental health problems that may act as barriers to classroom success (Pecora et al, 2012).

Systematic Review – Aoife O'Higgins

37 quantitative studies from US, England, Australia & Canada:

- Older children don't perform as well in every study looking at age, whatever the age range studied, e.g. 6 year olds weren't doing as well as 7 year-olds and 16 year olds weren't doing as well as 12 year olds.
- Minority ethnicity associated with poorer outcomes, overall.
- Boys do worse, overall.
- Children with SEN and behavioural issues have lower attainment (and the proportion of children with SEN and behavioural problems is much higher in the looked after cohort)
- Findings on age at entry into care, stability and placement type are mixed, but the different study designs place a question mark over these findings.
- Carer attitudes, aspirations and home-based involvement predicted better educational outcomes across several studies.

Challenging our own thinking – Knowledge Claims

- Reading at home with foster carers has a positive impact on outcomes;

- Reducing exclusions increases the educational outcomes for looked after children (and all others);

- A joined up consistent approach is essential in improving the educational outcomes for looked after children;

- 'Ordinary care' provides the basis for successful interventions;

- Children and young people with input into their care plan will achieve better outcomes.

Pupil Premium Plus

- From 2014, LAC were eligible if looked after on the date of the local authority census (March each year);

- The formula is £1900 per child aged 4 to 15 on August 31st;

- Schools have a responsibility to ensure that the money has a positive impact on the child's learning;

- Ofsted requirement that schools evidence how PPP was spent and how it has benefited LAC;

- Virtual School Head is responsible for allocation of Pupil Premium Plus in practice;

- If the child's education is at direct LA expense (e.g. permanently excluded to a PRU or in a 'private' education provision), LA deploys PPP as it sees fit.

What should we be doing?

- Avoid placement disruption – quality of school - carer understanding/relationship?

- Avoid key stage 4 moves - is the change REALLY necessary?

- How joined up is everyone, including the young person's involvement, around a consistent plan?

- How can school/virtual school support consistency?

What should we be doing continued?

- Improve social workers' understanding (and stability) of the factors driving educational outcomes and how their decisions will impact on them;

- Improve carers' understanding of the pivotal role they have in creating the stable home environment necessary for a child to learn;

- Improve school culture (see Bath/NE Somerset DVD);

- Bring social workers, carers and teachers together to increase mutual understanding.

What are the key learning points?

- The strategies with the strongest evidence base are tutoring (by carers in particular), mentoring and supporting carers to support education – quality of ordinary care matters - the Pupil Premium Plus enables all three to be done.

- Listen to young people in care – stereotyping, support and not identifying them in public as in care
  http://www.incareinschool.com/leaflet.php
  Richard Parker and Mike Gorman will say more about this.

Future reviews and studies

Reviews

Recruitment and support of LGBT carers   Feb 2015

School strategies that raise achievement   April 2015

Effective support for sibling placements   May 2015

Other Research studies

Evaluation Excellence in Schools: Children in Care - GLA funded

DfE Children's Social Care Innovation Fund - Evaluation

Supporting mental health of LAC in schools - Nikki Luke (Rees), Robin Bannerjee (Sussex), Mary John (Surrey)

Webinar on education of LAC 10 Feb 4.30 pm

joining instructions are on website

How you can be involved

- Express interest in being involved in future possible research projects;

- Come along to lectures & seminars and log into webinars;

- Join our mailing list and receive newsletters 5 times/year rees.centre@education.ox.ac.uk;

- Web - http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/;

- Comment on our blog – or write for us;

- Follow us on Twitter - @ReesCentre

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