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

Nuffield Foundation

Funded by
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Educational outcomes of looked after children in England

- Background to the study
- English national databases
- Preliminary findings:
  - Quantitative
  - Qualitative
- Key messages for policy and practice

Educational outcomes of looked after children in England

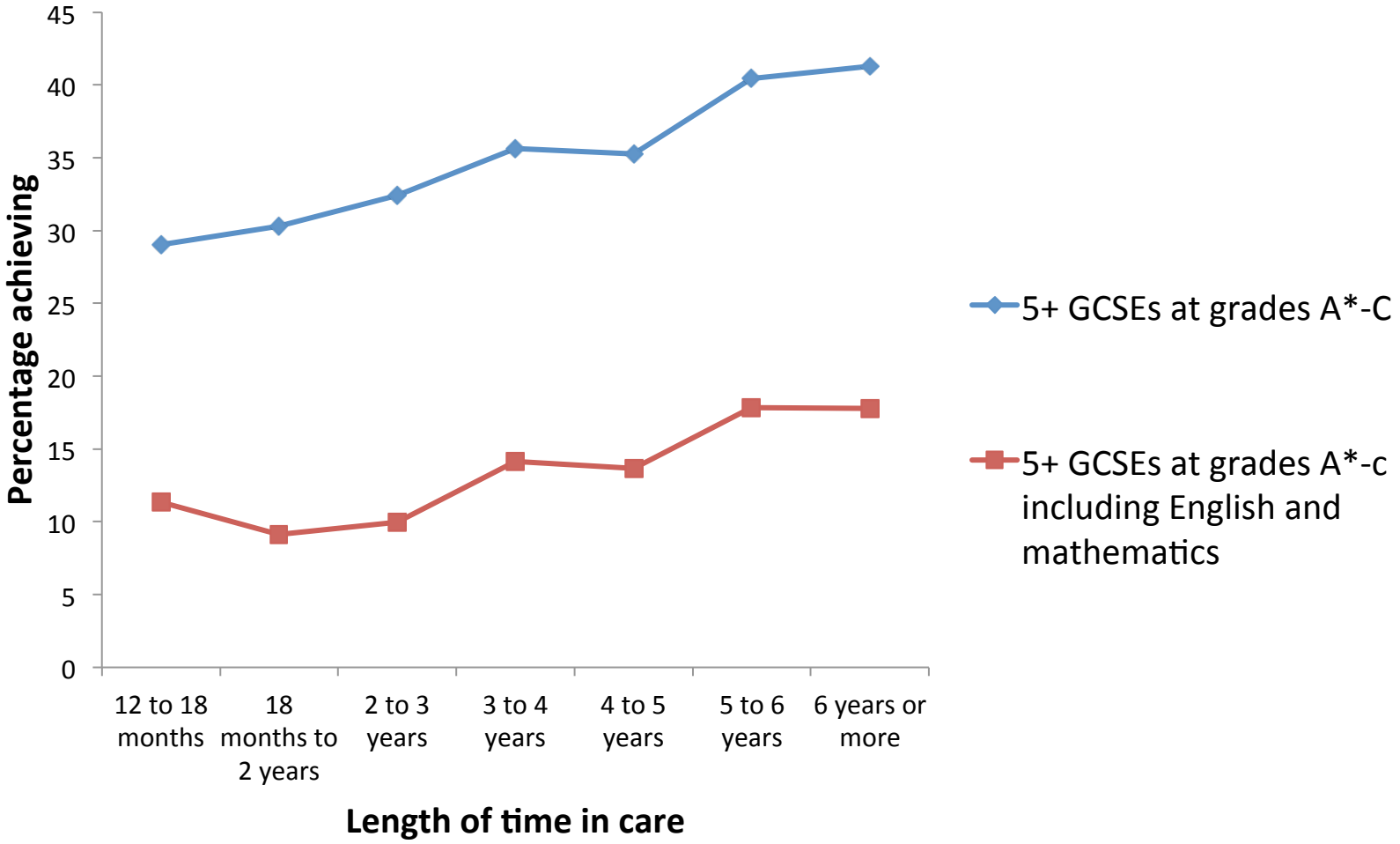
DfE (2013b) Statistical First Release 11 Dec 2013

- 15% achieve **expected grades** at 16 years (Key Stage 4) compared to 58% of all children – a gap of 43%
- Twice as likely to be **permanently excluded**
- Three times as likely to have a **fixed term exclusion**
- BUT **achievement gap is lower at Key Stage 2** (age 11) (26% for maths, 23% reading, 28% writing)

In addition

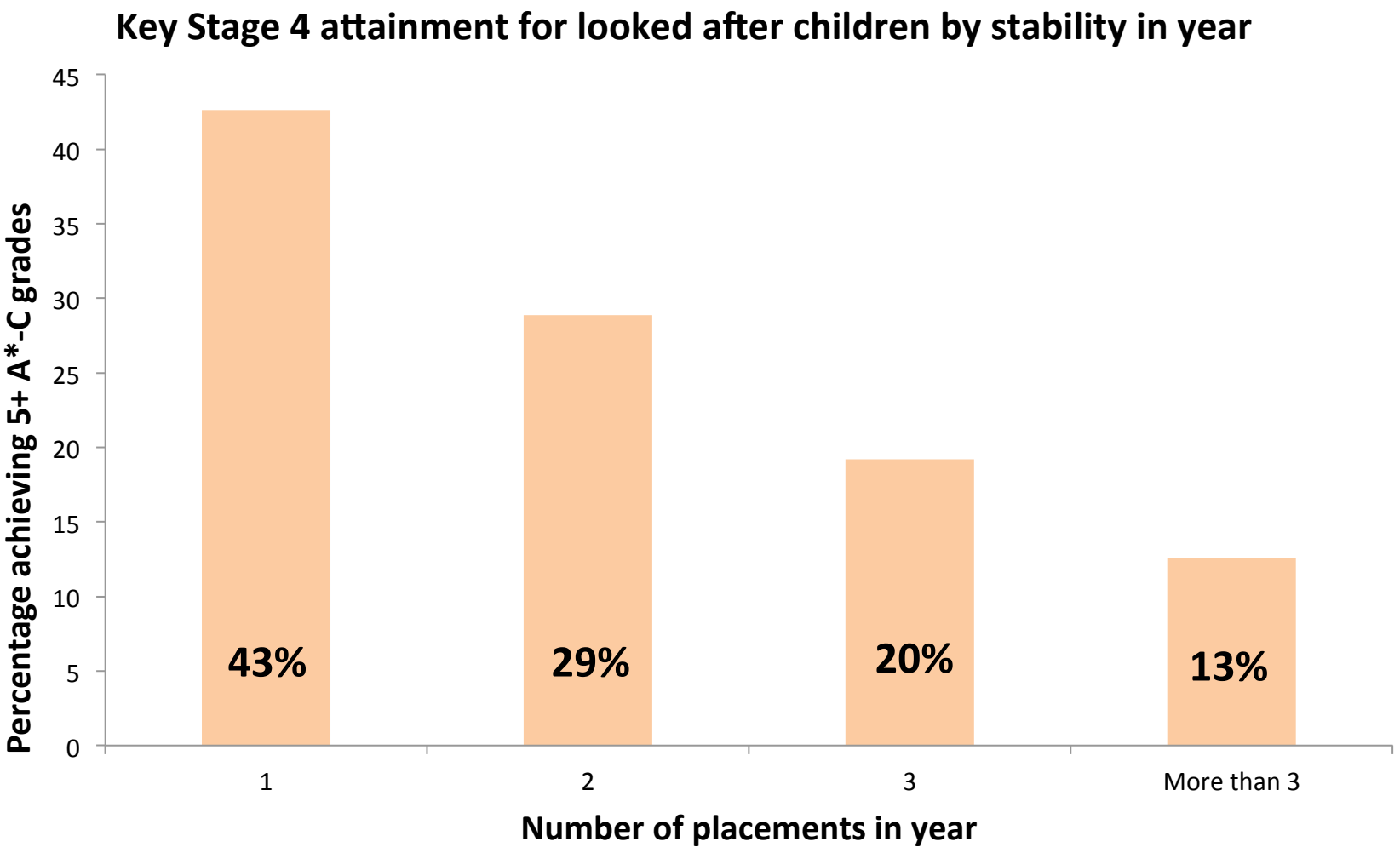
- Only 7% **access Higher Education** (DfE, 2013a) compared to around 50% of general population
- Educational experiences and outcomes contribute to later **health, employment** (22% unemployment rate), **involvement in crime** (27% of those in prison; Social Exclusion Unit, 2002)

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



Educational outcomes of looked after children in England

(Source: DfE, 2013b)



International research on educational outcomes

- Linking school and child welfare records is a promising approach (Stone, 2007)
  - but in England, little done beyond DfE analysis
- This type of research is more common in US & Canada (e.g. Conger & Rebeck, 2001; Flynn et al., 2013)
- Combining this with qualitative work allows for in-depth exploration of potential predictors (e.g. Pecora, 2012)
- BUT differences in systems may limit transferability of results
- Need to examine characteristics of child, carer, placement and educational experiences as predictors of educational achievement in England

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.

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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?

Additional questions

- How do foster carers' characteristics (e.g. aspirations) influence educational outcomes?

- What can local authorities, schools, Virtual Schools, social workers or foster carers do that appears to improve the attainment and progress of secondary school pupils in care and what difference can the relationship between these services make to outcomes?

- What difference can the relationship between services make to outcomes (fragmentation of services is a key issue for young people)?

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

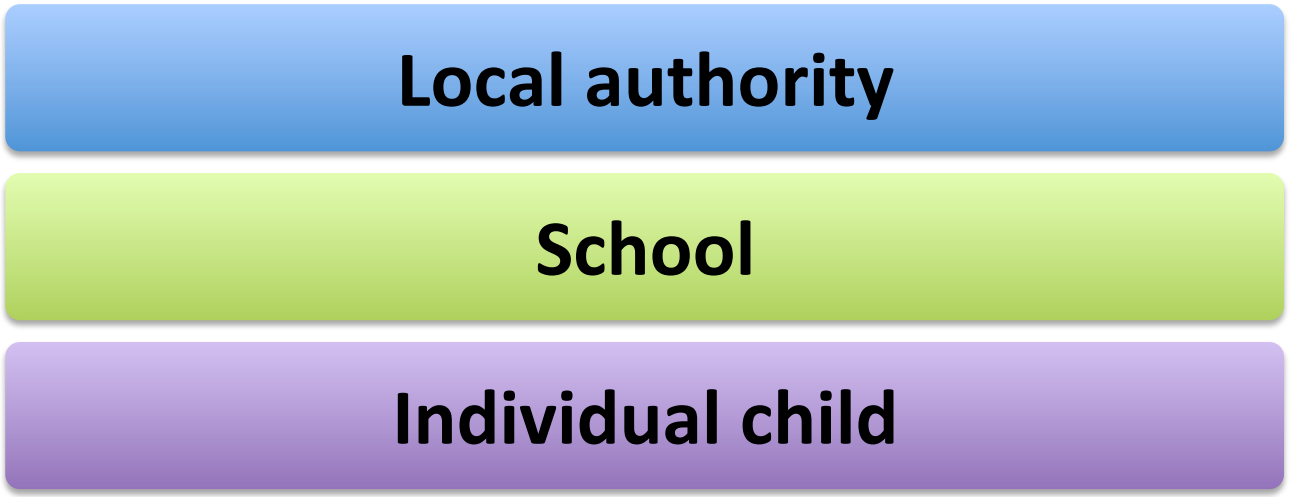
- **Interviews with young people in six local authorities and with their carers, teachers, social workers and Virtual School staff**
  - to complement and expand on the statistical analyses, and to explore factors not recorded in the databases (e.g. foster carers' attitudes to education, role of the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

English national databases

- Education (NPD) and care (SSDA903)
- Databases are constantly evolving
  - outdated codes
  - idiosyncrasies in data submissions
- Formatting data
  - provided with a mix of episode vs. annual vs. individual level data
  - 'missing' data (e.g. for Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire)
  - skewed data (e.g. children on a series of short-term respite breaks)
  - creating variables from raw data (e.g. what does 'placement length' mean?)
  - creating categories within variables (e.g. placements since KS2)

Database analyses

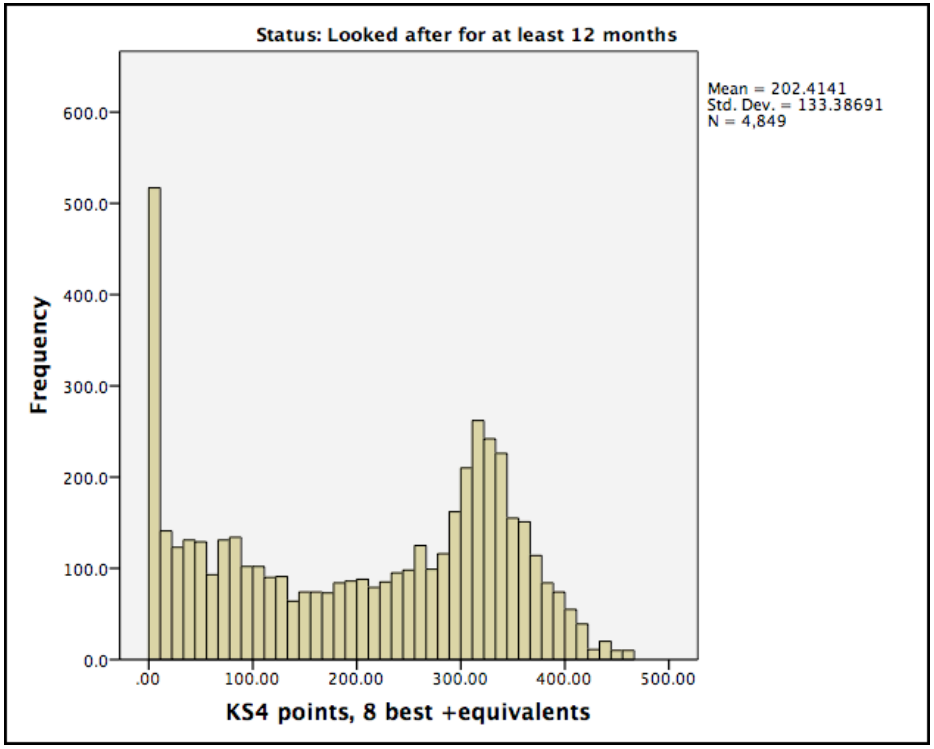
- Descriptive statistics – how do CLA compare to peers on factors generally linked to educational outcomes?
- Regressions – which factors predict better or worse educational outcomes for CLA?
- Multilevel modelling – what is the relative contribution of factors at different levels?

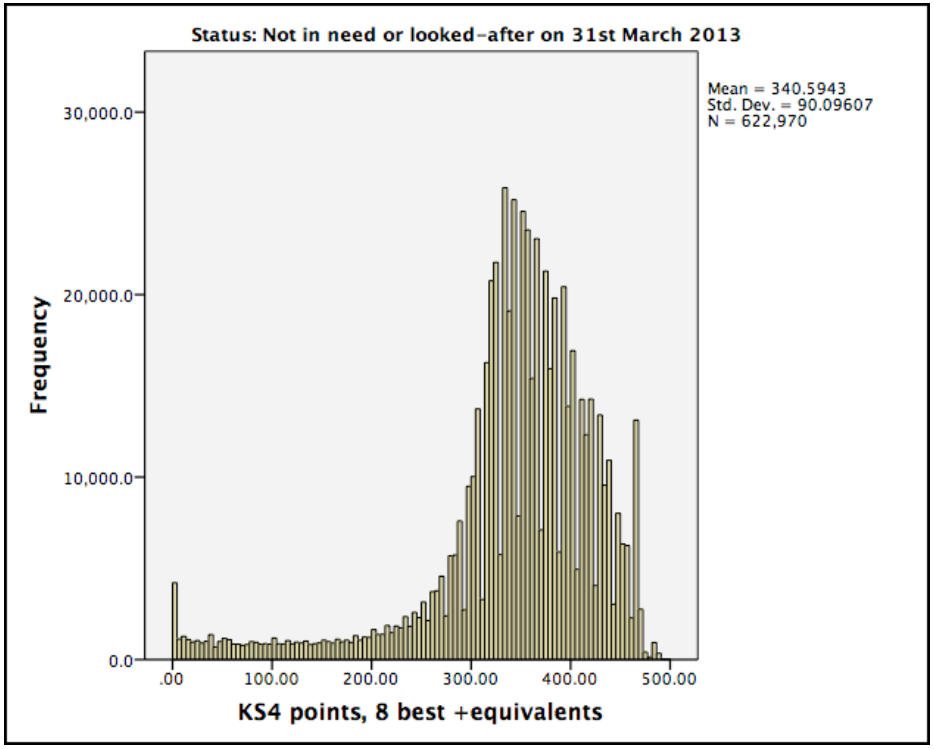


Description of our cohort

- 7,852 looked after children eligible for GCSEs in 2013
- **4,847 had been in care for 12 months or more continuously**, of which:
  - 51.3% first entered care aged 10 or over
  - 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

GCSE scores: CLA vs. Not in care/in need





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)
Boys	55.8% (181.66)	51.2% (328.27)
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% (201.57)	18.0% (296.45)
Not FSM eligible in 2003-2004	45.0% (199.36)	82.0% (351.25)
SEN: School Action + or Statement	73.5% (179.09)	15.9% (259.24)
Behavioural, Emotional Social Disorder	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

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

	B	*SE B*	*β*
Block 1			
Constant	151.933	16.670	
Gender (1 = Female, 2 = Male)	-7.589	2.846	-0.028**
Ethnicity (reference group: White)			
Asian or Black African	15.561	9.489	0.029
Black Caribbean or Mixed White/Black Caribbean	7.524	6.006	0.013
Other Mixed	12.884	7.564	0.017
Traveller	-43.153	27.653	-0.015
Other	3.823	7.953	0.006
Ethnicity Unknown	10.548	6.163	0.020
Primary Special Educational Need (reference group: none)			
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	-38.206	8.370	-0.055***
Behavioural, Emotional and Social	-3.566	3.752	-0.013
Moderate Learning Disability	-10.395	4.924	-0.027*
Physical, Sensory and Other Disabilities	-5.476	5.930	-0.010
Severe or Multiple Learning Difficulties	-87.563	8.421	-0.138***
Specific Learning Disability	-6.722	7.576	-0.009
Speech, Language and Communication	-6.259	8.742	-0.008
Eligible for FSM at 2004 census (KS1)	3.673	2.991	0.014
Local deprivation index 2004 (KS1 IDACI)	2.781	7.461	0.004
Home language other than English at 2004 census (KS1)	14.945	11.780	0.024
Care Career Type (reference groups: entry aged 0-4/5-9)			
Adolescent Entrant (Abuse/Neglect)	-0.313	4.797	-0.001
Adolescent Entrant (Other Reasons)	-5.861	5.101	-0.018
Entered Care as UASC	-20.278	11.777	-0.028
Entered Care due to Disability	-18.194	7.492	-0.033*

	B	*SE B*	*β*
Block 2			
KS2 3-test average	39.605	2.072	0.253***
Length of Time in Care (Excluding Respite)	-0.003	0.002	-0.035
Block 3			
Mean standardised SDQ scores	-1.743	0.218	-0.089***
Placement Changes Since KS2	-2.305	0.347	-0.076***
School Changes in Year 10-11	-33.926	5.012	-0.080***
Unauthorised absences (as a proportion of total possible sessions)	-255.458	21.850	-0.127***
Number of sessions of fixed-term exclusions	-0.543	0.067	-0.090***
Child has ever been permanently excluded	-9.947	7.734	-0.013
Block 4			
Length of latest placement	0.003	0.002	0.030*
Residential/other non-foster placement at KS4	-37.304	3.600	-0.131***
Placed out of authority at KS4	2.567	2.780	0.010
Eligible for FSM at KS4 (reference group: no)			
Yes: eligible for FSM in 2013/2013	-0.435	4.707	-0.001
FSM eligibility not known	-31.939	5.935	-0.103***
Local deprivation index 2013 (KS4 IDACI)	1.651	8.680	0.002
Home language other than English at 2013 census (KS4)	-18.836	9.324	-0.038*
School type at KS4 (reference group: mainstream)			
Special school	-87.622	4.680	-0.272***
Pupil Referral Unit	-88.234	8.149	-0.165***
Alternative Provision	-121.356	8.278	-0.209***
Other	-60.250	8.155	-0.094***

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

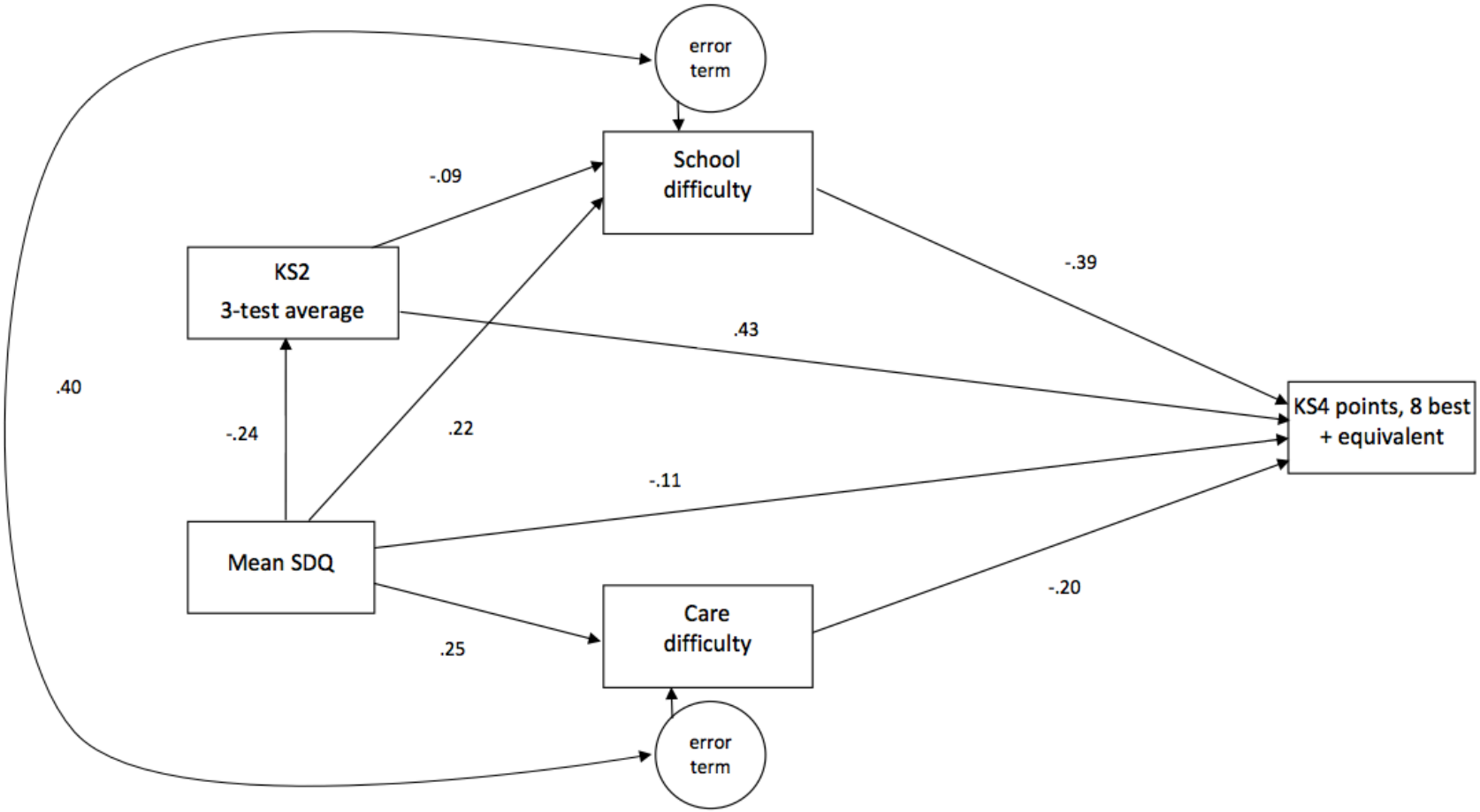
Concurrent environment

- 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 unknown FSM status at KS4
- Having a home language other than English at KS4
- Being in a non-mainstream school at KS4 (all types)

Path model

- Examining the **relationships between** variables and **potential pathways** to GCSE outcomes
- Model focuses on young people's experiences of (in)stability and features of their later environment
- Included KS2 scores and mean SDQ score
- School difficulty was created using the data from four variables:
  - unauthorised absences as a proportion of total possible school sessions
  - number of sessions missed due to fixed-term exclusions
  - whether ever permanently excluded
  - being in a non-mainstream school at the end of KS4
- Care difficulty was created using five variables:
  - placement changes after the end of KS2
  - mean placement length after the end of KS2
  - number of residential placements after the end of KS2
  - whether the final placement was in residential or other care (as opposed to foster or kinship care)
  - length of latest placement

Path model



$\chi^2(1) = 17.026$, $p < .001$, CFI = .997, RMSEA = .058.

Figures given are standardised coefficients. All paths are significant at $p < .001$.

Multi-level modelling

- Three-level model
  - child; school; local authority
- Taking account of:
  - KS2 attainment; gender; ethnicity; proportion eligible for free school meals (school and local authority levels)
- Variation in KS4 attainment of looked after children smaller at local authority level than at other levels
  - suggests that **variability existed at the level of individual pupils and schools**, rather than the local authority level
- Two-level model revealed differences between local authorities

Provisional 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

Provisional 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

Provisional findings from qualitative interviews

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

Provisional 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

Changing the narrative

- CIN more helpful comparison for CLA than whole school population (but need to remain aspirational)
- What accounts for variation within CLA?
- Greater focus on *progress* needed

Ways forward

- Databases
  - 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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