

Raising the aspirations and educational outcomes of looked after children: a data tool for local authorities

July 2011

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- In December 2010 the Department published figures from a new child level data source on the outcomes of looked after children. For the first time it is possible to begin to understand the interdependencies of a range of factors that have an impact on the outcomes of looked after children. This is the third in a series of data packs relating to looked after children. The others are on children's homes and adoption.
- This data pack is intended for use by Virtual School Heads (VSHs) and other local authority staff to:
 - help gain a deeper understanding of the factors that affect the attainment of looked after children and to train others
 - illustrate some key factors, like placement stability, that affect the educational attainment of looked after children, which should be central to care planning
 - inform the strategic and operational decisions taken by VSHs, commissioners, social workers and their managers, Independent Reviewing Officers, Directors of Children's Services and Lead Members

- Improving the educational outcomes of looked after children by narrowing the gap between their attainment compared to the rest is a priority for the Government. That is why:
 - looked after children are eligible for the Pupil Premium of £430 in 2011-12
 - looked after children and care leavers continuing in education or training post-16 are eligible for the new 16-19 Bursary (Education Maintenance Allowance replacement)
 - care leavers who begin a course of Higher Education are entitled to a Higher Education Bursary of £2,000
 - looked after children continue to have priority in being able to attend the school of their choice
- The Schools White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching*, gives a clear strategic role to local authorities in championing the needs of vulnerable children such as those who are looked after.
- Looked after children are one of the groups included in the Key Performance Indicators for the Department to narrow the educational attainment gap between vulnerable children and their peers.

- Local authorities have a statutory duty under the Children Act (1989) to promote the educational achievement of the children they look after, regardless of where they are placed.
- One way of fulfilling this duty, which most local authorities have embraced, is by adopting a ‘Virtual School Head’ (VSH) model where there is a single person who is a champion for the educational attainment of looked after children as if those children attended a single school.
- Evidence from Ofsted inspections of looked after children’s services suggests that this role has played a part in the work that local authorities have done in recent years to focus on the educational attainment of looked after children.
- Education is an integral part of the care planning process. This includes requirements for looked after children to have an effective Personal Education Plan (PEP) and for local authorities to avoid disrupting their education and training unless this is unavoidable.

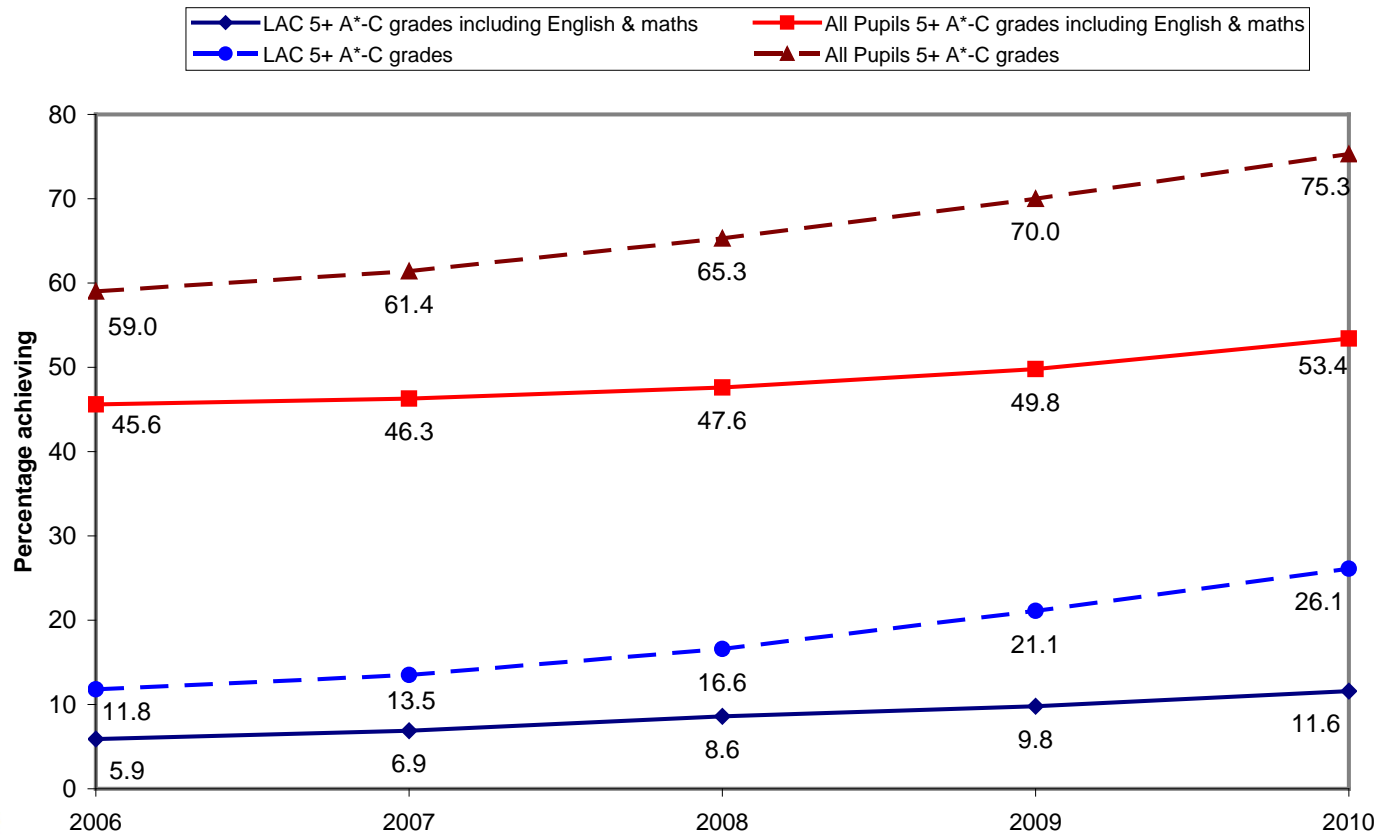
Improved data matching now tells us much more ...

- Outcomes information was previously derived from the aggregate Outcomes Indicators (OC2 return) data collection that was completed by local authorities until 2008/09.
- The Looked After Children – National Pupil Database (NPD) dataset has been created by matching the SSDA903 data collection on looked after children to the NPD, the Department's key data source on attainment, absence and pupil characteristics. A child's Unique Pupil Number (UPN) is the main identifier used in the matching process.
- In 2010, 98% of school-age children looked after continuously for 12 months or longer had a valid UPN and 95% were successfully matched to the NPD.
- This has enabled us to discontinue the aggregate OC2 return and derive key information on the outcomes of looked after children from the new child-level matched (CLA-NPD) dataset.
- We would like to thank local authorities for their recent efforts to improve the prevalence of UPNs. This has enabled us to provide the rich analysis in this data pack which can be used to inform and improve the outcomes of looked after children.

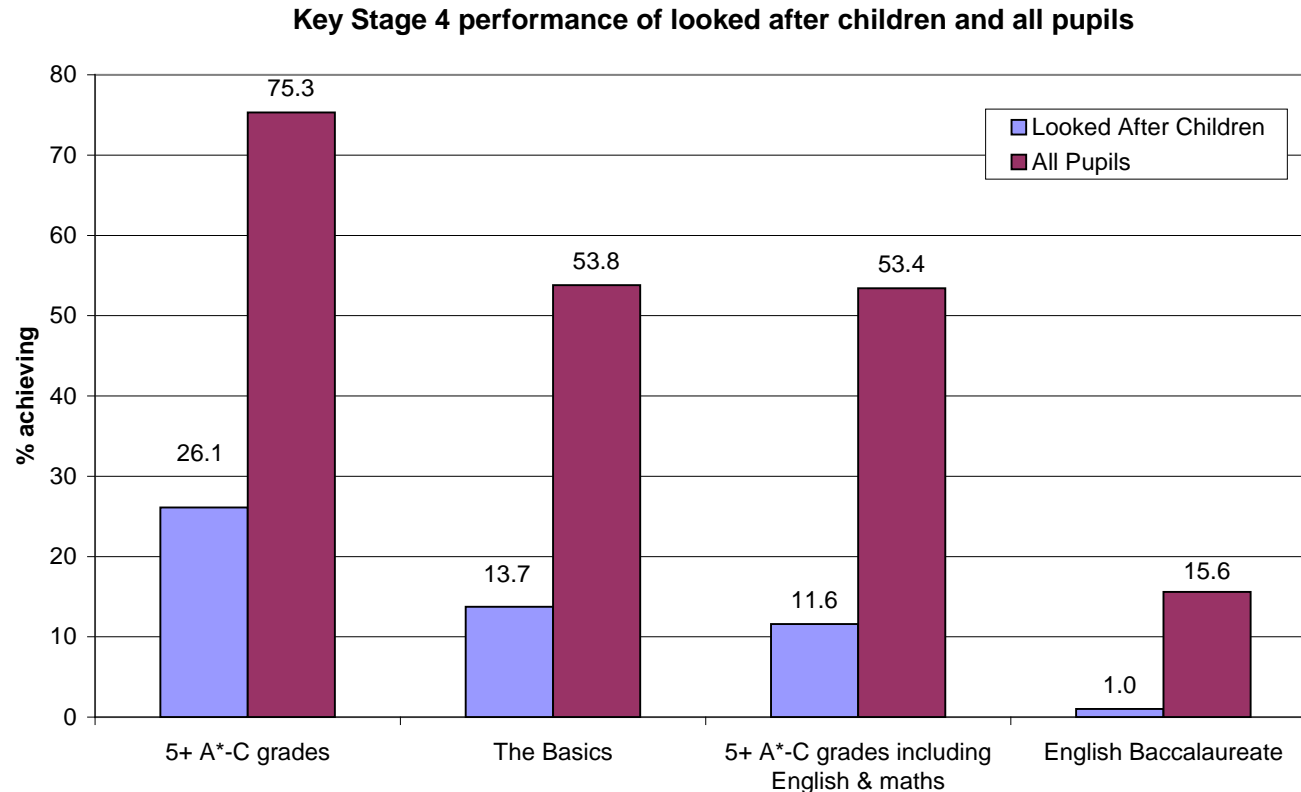
Unless otherwise stated, all figures in this data pack refer to children looked after in England for 12 months or longer at 31 March 2010. Pupil characteristics (e.g. SEN) are taken from the January 2010 School Census. All attainment data and absence rates refer to the 2009/10 academic year. However, exclusions rates are taken from 2008/09.

Attainment of LAC has been improving, but the attainment gap between all pupils and LAC has been gradually widening at Key Stage 4. Attainment and the gap between all pupils and LAC has been stable at Key Stage 2 over the same period.

Key Stage 4 performance of looked after children and all pupils: 2006 - 2010



Attainment gaps remain wide for the two new Key Stage 4 thresholds (the Basics and the English Baccalaureate). It is encouraging that, as with all pupils, most LAC who achieved the Basics also achieved three further GCSEs to reach the 5+ A*-C including English and maths threshold.



The Basics covers achievement (A*-C grades) in both English and mathematics GCSEs. The English Baccalaureate covers achievement (A*-C grades) in five separate GCSEs: English, mathematics, sciences, a language and a humanities subject.

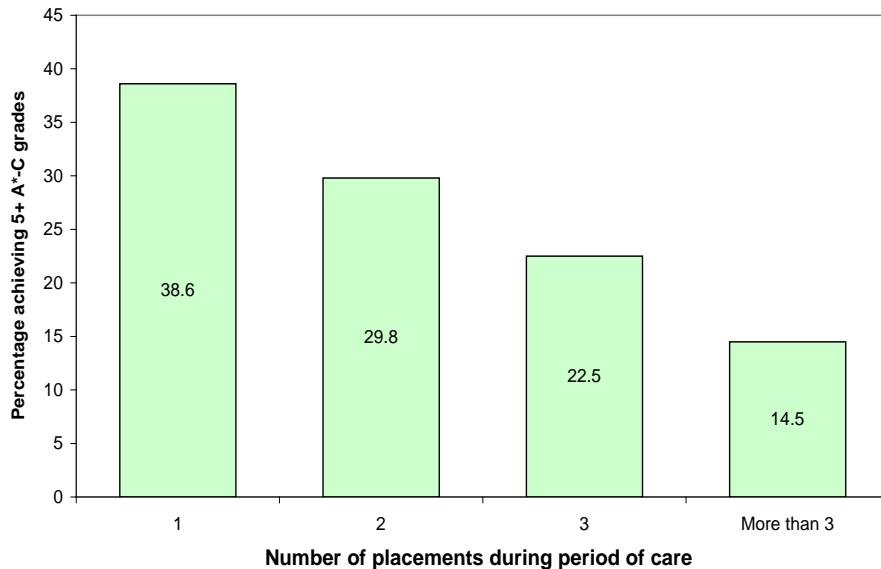
Slides 7 and 8 show that in spite of the improvements in the educational outcomes of looked after children made in recent years there is still a long way to go, especially in relation to achievement in the Basics (English and maths GCSEs).

But evidence from the evaluation of the impact of the Department's one-to-one tuition programme showed that:

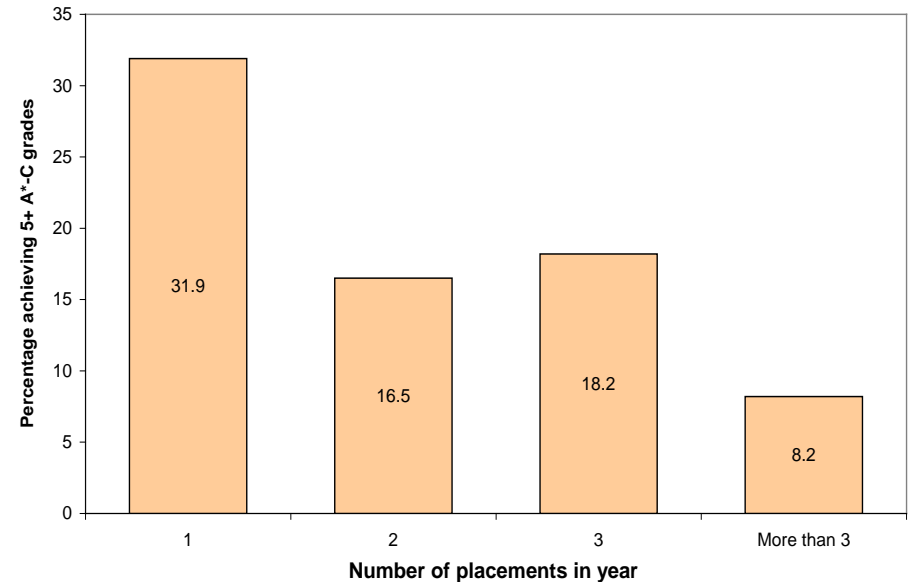
- At Key Stage 2, looked after children who received tuition outperformed other looked after children and all pupils who were below Level 2 at Key Stage 1
- For pupils who fell behind later on at Key Stage 2, tuition appears to have been more effective at helping looked after children keep up with their peers
- At Key Stage 4, looked after children who received tuition outperformed other looked after children and all pupils who were below Level 5 at Key Stage 3
- For pupils who fell behind later on at Key Stage 4, tuition appears to have been more effective at helping looked after children keep up with their peers and, in terms of progression, looked after children who received tuition outperformed their peers

Placement stability is closely correlated with attainment. LAC in a single placement during their period of care (left hand chart) or a single placement during the year (right hand chart) perform considerably better at 5+ A*-C grades at Key Stage 4 than those with two or more placements ...

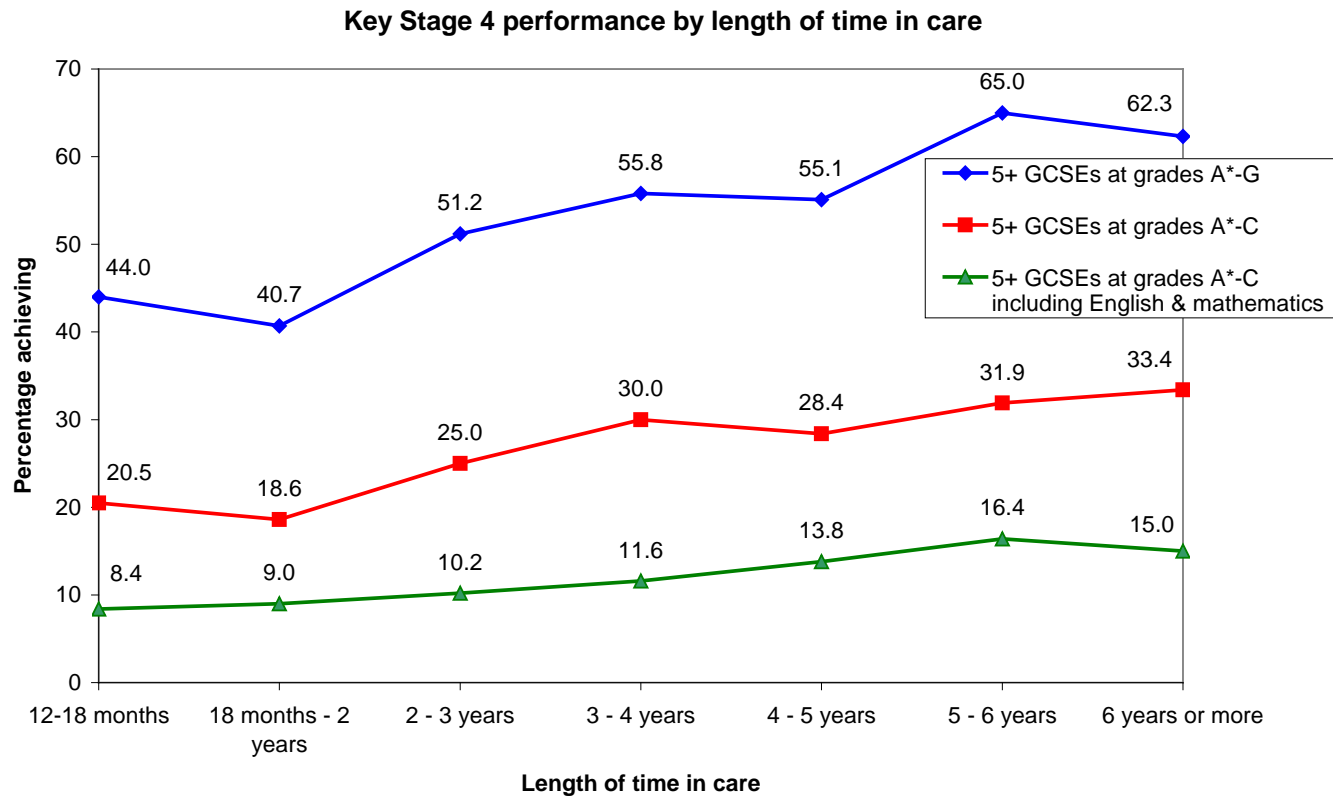
Key Stage 4 attainment for looked after children by stability in period of care



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



... and a similar relationship is evident when comparing Key Stage 4 attainment by the length of time in care. LAC in long-term care perform better than their peers.



Slide 10 tells a powerful story about the correlation between placement stability and attainment. Similarly, Slide 11 presents new evidence on the relationship between length of time in care and attainment.

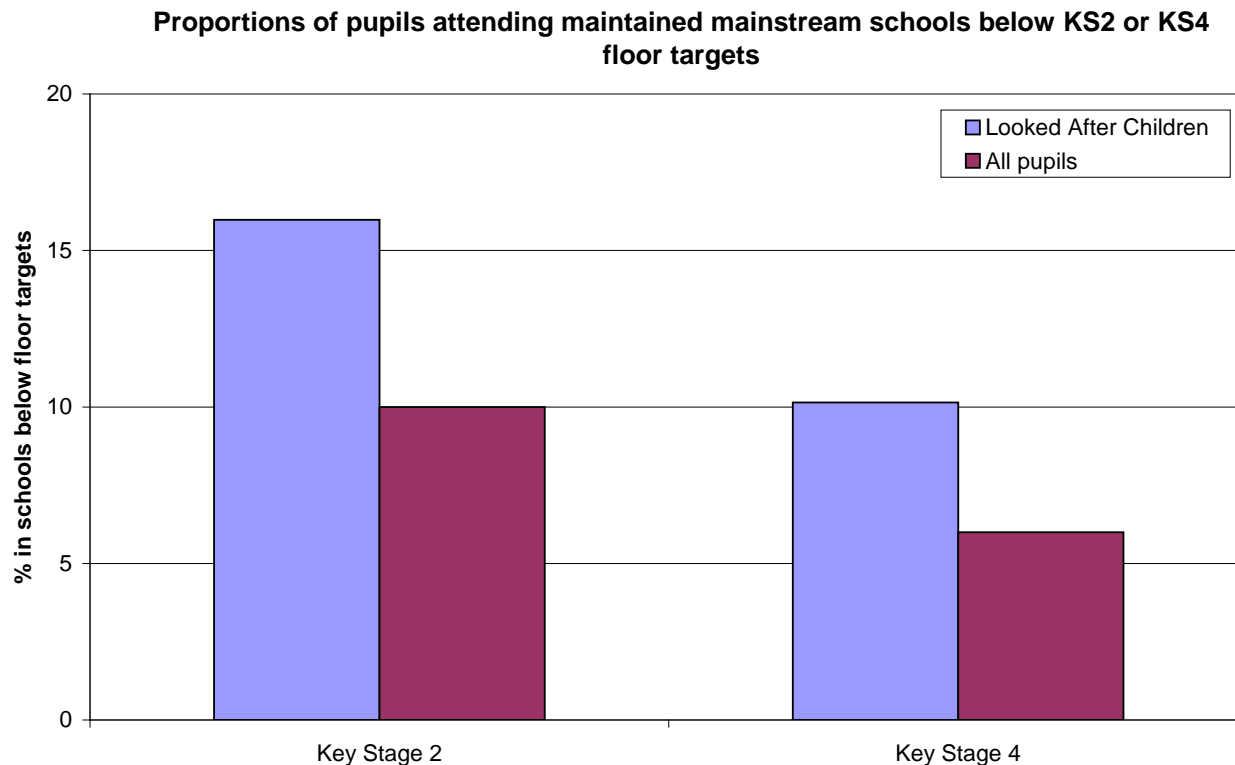
Children who have had more placement moves within the most recent care episode are less likely to achieve than those who have had a single placement.

This highlights important implications for the way in which placements are planned. Local authorities need to make the right placement initially based on the child's needs and avoid disrupting a child's educational placement unless there is a good reason. Placement moves should never be made purely to save money.

Key questions for local authorities:

- Is enough account taken of the impact of placement moves on educational attainment?
- In particular, what measures are you taking to avoid, unless absolutely necessary, placement moves when looked after children are studying for their GCSEs?
- What more could social workers, commissioners, Virtual School Heads, fostering services and others do to improve and support placement stability?

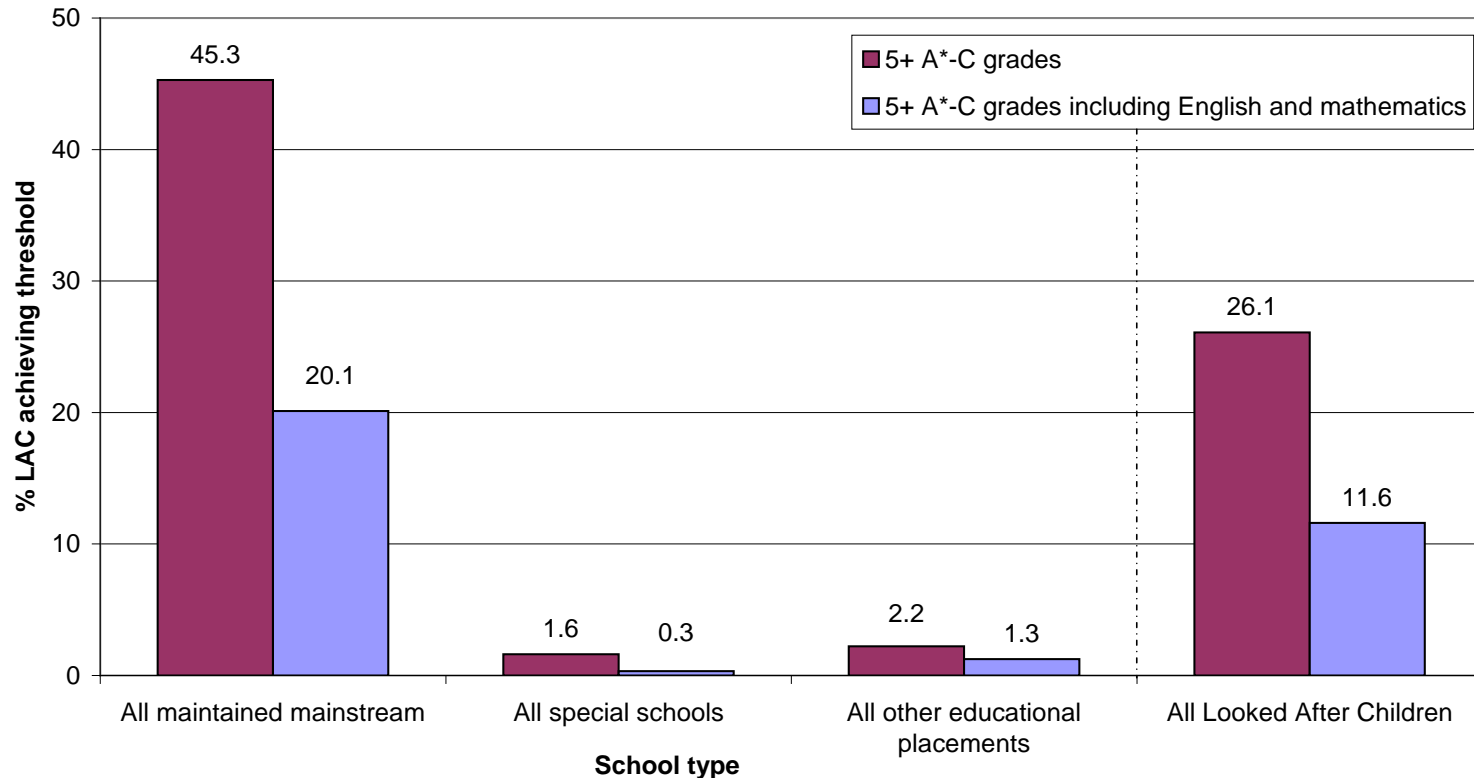
It is important that LAC go to a school that will meet their assessed needs. A greater proportion of LAC are in the lowest attaining schools, compared to all pupils, at both primary and secondary. Looked after children at both Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 are more likely to be in schools achieving below the KS2 and KS4 floor standards, thereby affecting their chances of success.



Maintained mainstream schools are assessed against a set of floor standards at Key Stages 2 and 4. The standards are based on overall attainment at the end of the Key Stage, and pupil progress in mathematics and English over the course of Key Stages 1 – 2 for primary schools, and Key Stages 2 – 4 for secondary schools.

Around one third of LAC are in special schools and other educational placements where attainment is much lower than average. Key Stage 4 attainment in maintained mainstream schools is much better than the average for all looked after children.

Key Stage 4 performance by school type



Slide 13 shows that looked after children are much more likely to be in the lowest attaining schools.

Social workers and VSHs should think carefully before moving a child from a settled school placement simply because their school is performing below the floor standard. Where an educational placement move is necessary (e.g. age 11) placing looked after children in schools below the floor standard should be avoided.

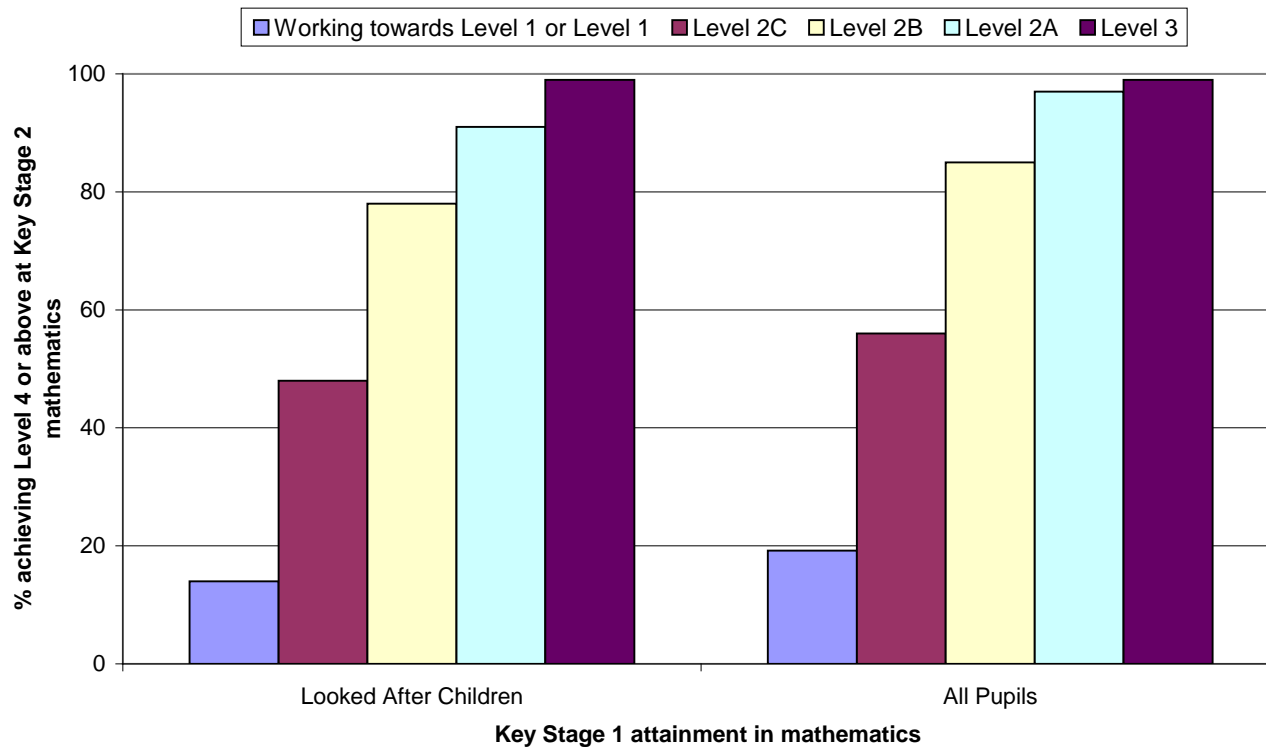
We would expect achievement in special schools to be considerably below the average for all looked after children (see Slide 14). However, the achievement of looked after children in 'other educational' placements is a cause of concern and underlines the need for them to be placed in good mainstream schools.

Key questions for local authorities:

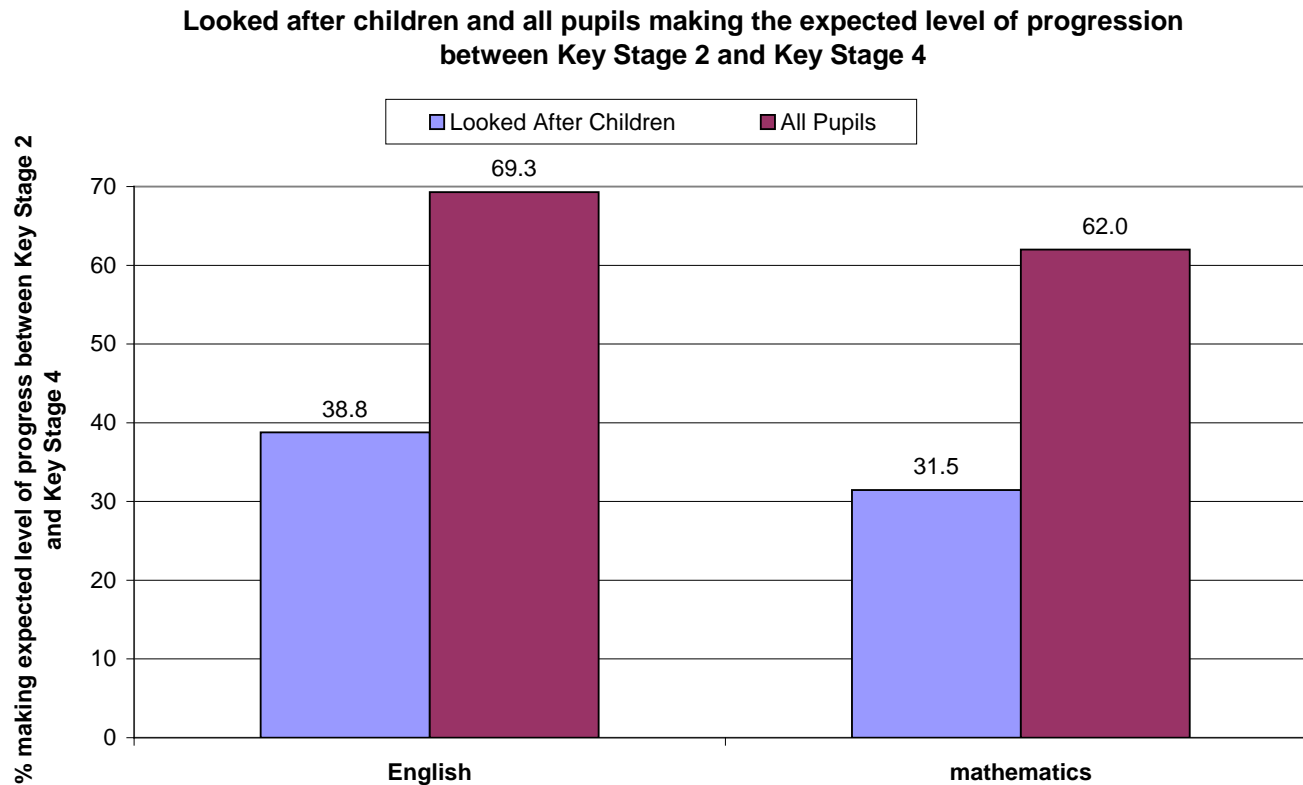
- Where a new educational placement is needed do you make sure you know the attainment levels of the schools where you are seeking to place?
- Would you send your own child to the school placement you are considering for a looked after child?
- Is placing a child in a 'non-mainstream' educational setting really meeting their assessed needs and, if not, are you getting value for money from the provider?

There is a very strong relationship between performance in English and mathematics at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 for both LAC and all pupils. These patterns are repeated for English. This demonstrates that achievement in the early stages of education is vital to succeeding in later life ...

Progression between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 in mathematics for looked after children and all pupils



... However, the proportion of looked after children making the expected level of progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 is much lower than for all pupils.



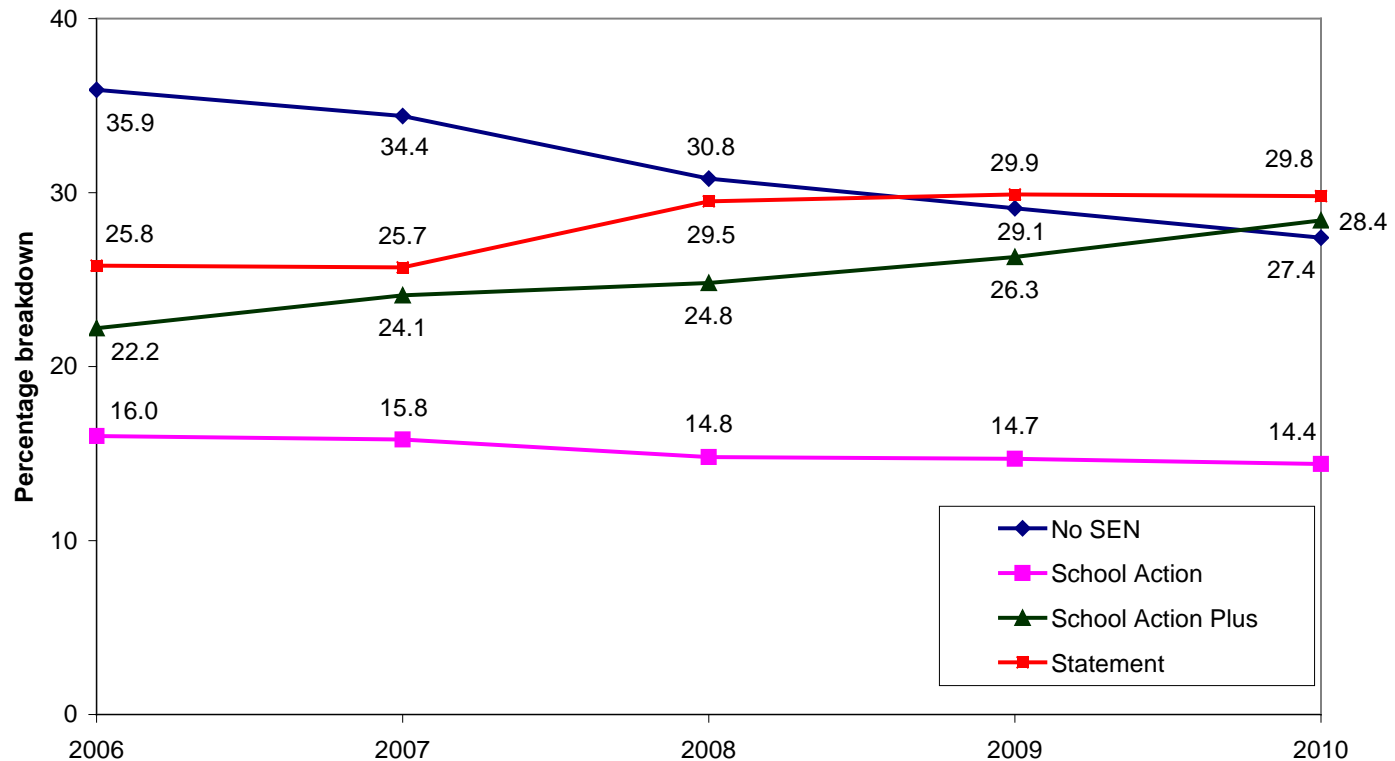
Slide 16 shows that, though looked after children progress from a lower baseline, the pattern of progression between Key Stages 1 and 2 is similar to that of other children. Slide 17 shows that looked after children are less likely than their peers to make the expected level of progress between Key Stages 2 and 4.

Key questions for local authorities:

- If achievement of the expected levels of attainment in earlier Key Stages lays the foundations for achievement later on, what more can local authorities do to:
 - support the work of Virtual School Heads and their equivalents so that they know the levels of attainment of all the children looked after by the authority and can deploy resource where it is most needed?
 - work with schools to meet the needs of individual looked after pupils in order to get the most out of the Government's new Pupil Premium?
 - make more use of one-to-one tuition?
 - give carers the training and confidence needed to support achievement in English and maths, for example, by using the Booktrust's Letterbox Club scheme?

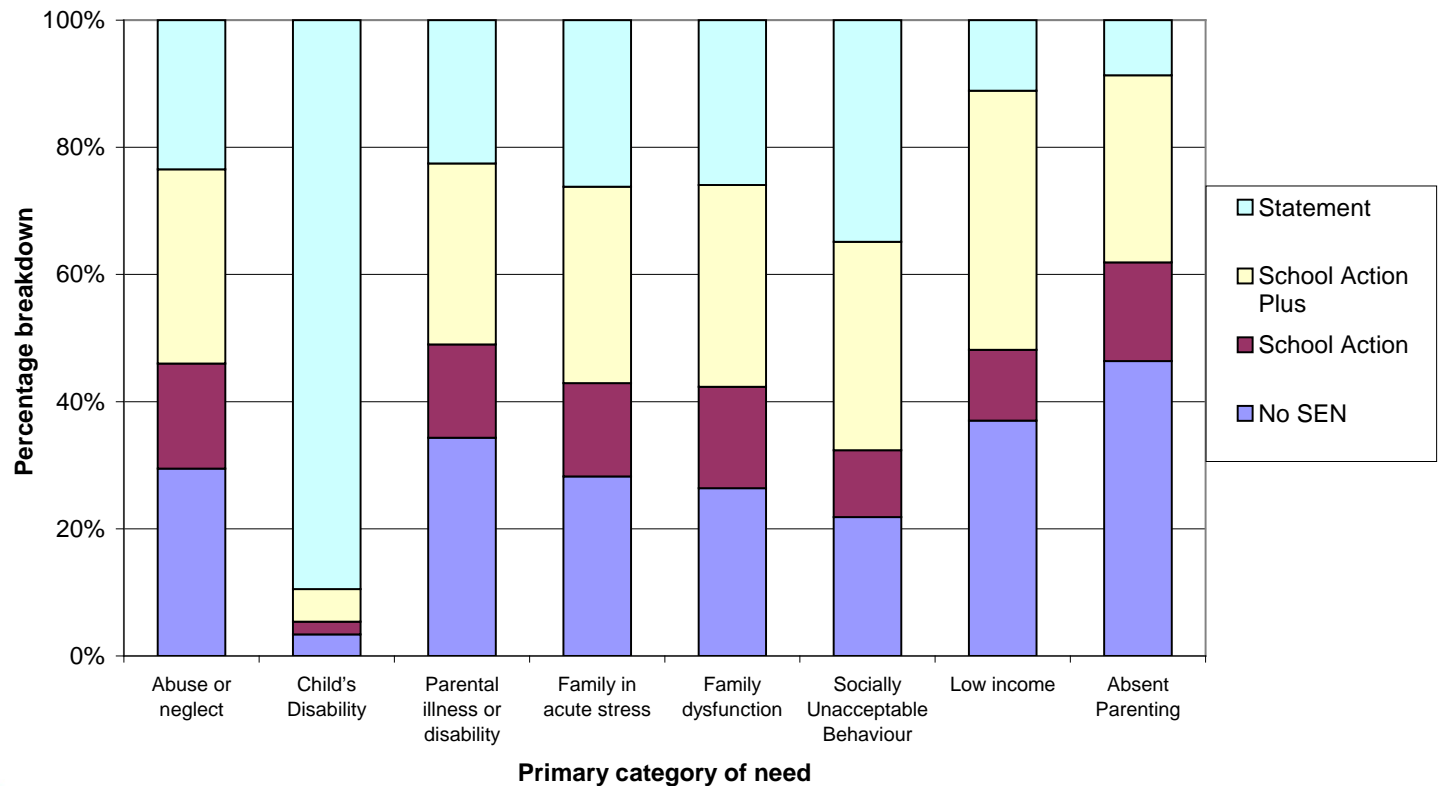
There are increasing proportions of LAC with identified Special Educational Needs (SEN), especially those with more severe needs (School Action Plus and statements). 73% of LAC were identified with SEN in 2010, compared to 64% in 2006.

Breakdown of provision of SEN for looked after children: 2006 - 2010

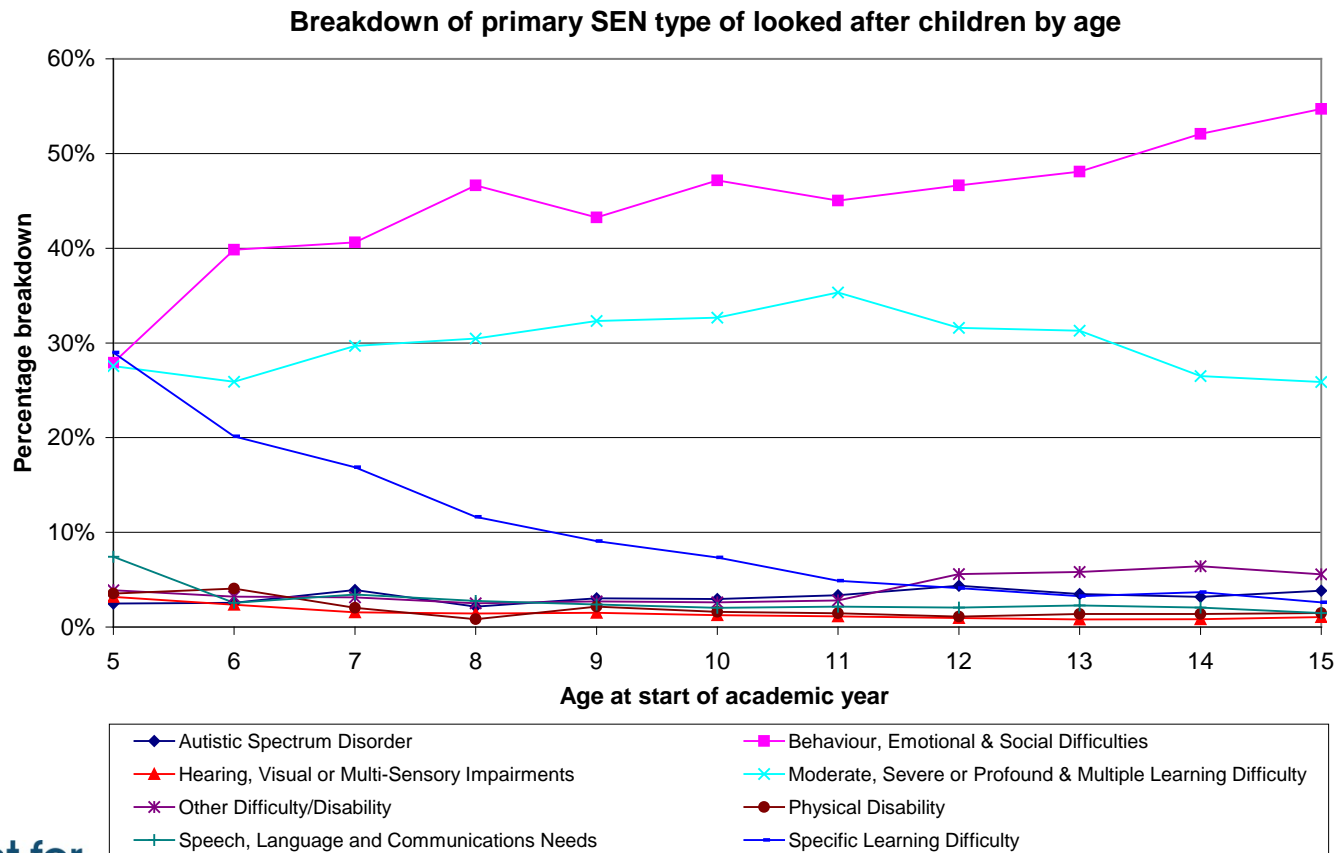


The proportion of LAC with statements of SEN varies by their primary need. Unsurprisingly, LAC with disability as their primary need are the most likely to have a statement. This highlights some of the complex needs that will affect the outcomes of many LAC.

SEN provision by primary category of need for looked after children

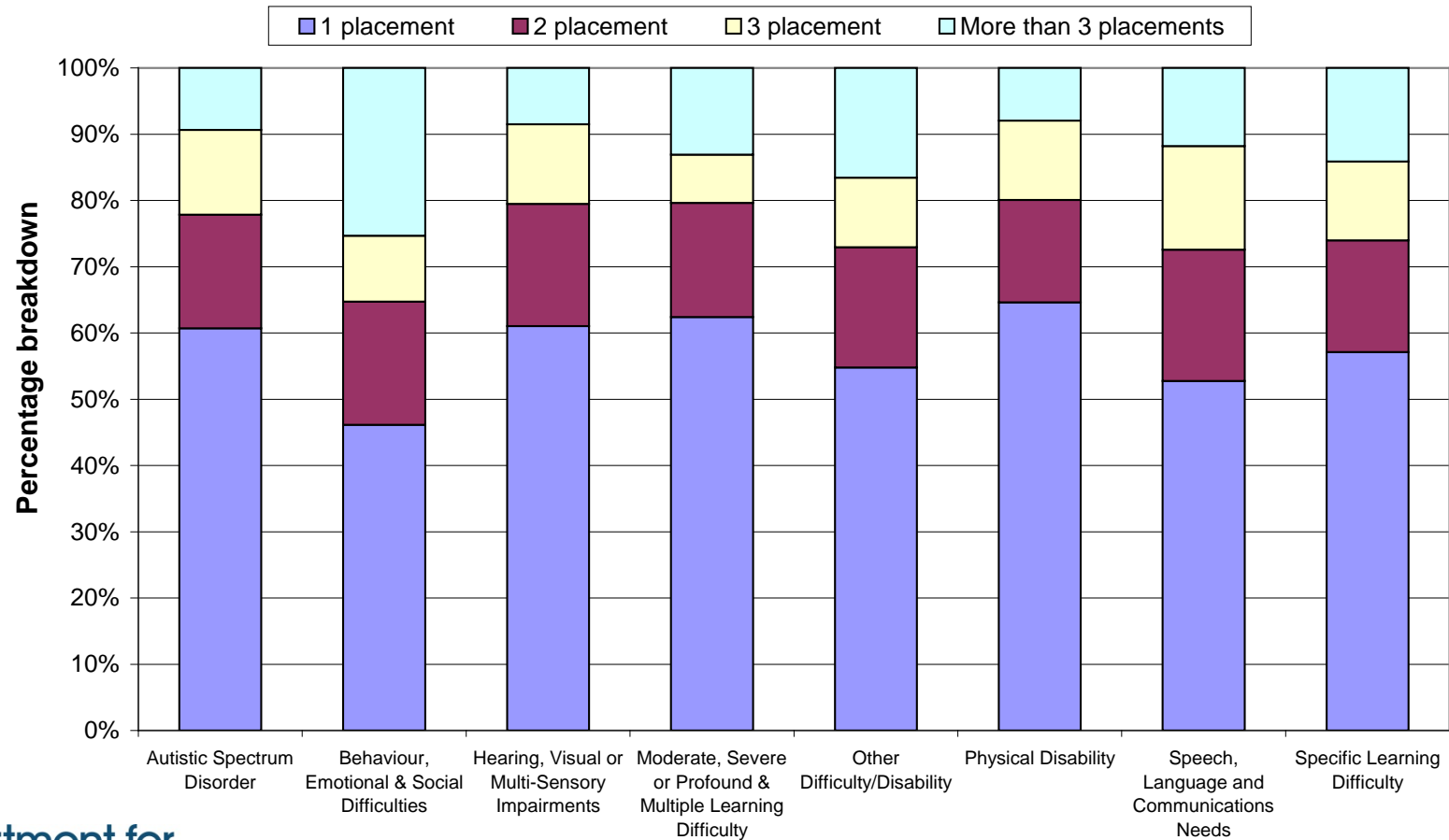


Primary SEN type varies by age for LAC along the same lines as all pupils. A higher proportion of older LAC have a primary SEN type of behaviour, emotional and social difficulties. In contrast, fewer older LAC have a specific learning difficulty as their primary SEN type.

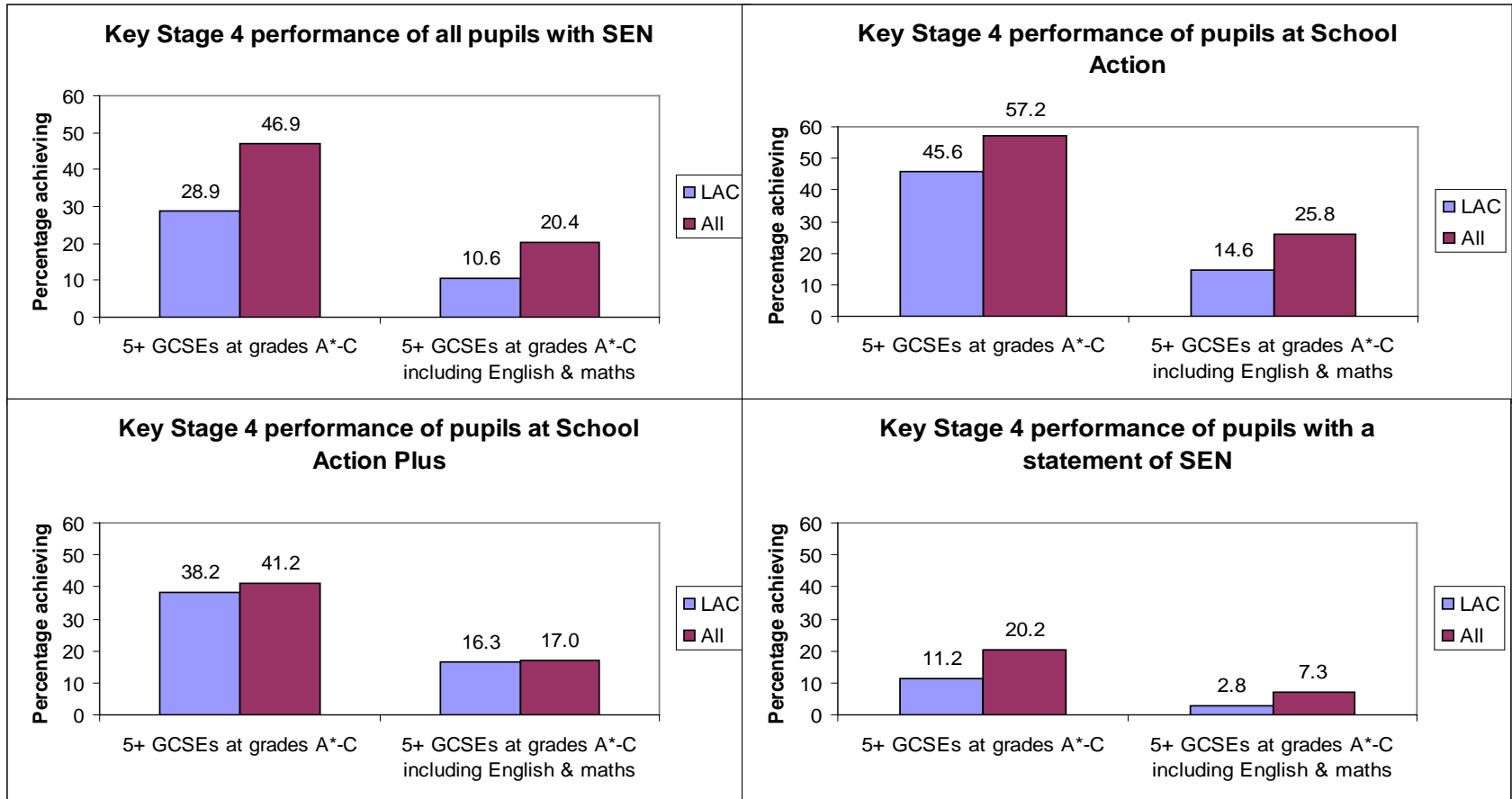


The number of placements during each period of care varies by primary SEN type. LAC with behavioural difficulties have more placements, whilst LAC with physical disabilities are more likely to have stable placements.

Breakdown of primary SEN type of looked after children by number of placements



Looked after children with SEN do not achieve as well as all children with SEN. However for children at School Action Plus there is very little difference in the achievement of LAC and all children.



Slide 19 shows that an increasing proportion of looked after children are being identified with more severe special educational needs (i.e. requiring a statement or at School Action Plus).

Slide 21 shows that behaviour, emotional and social difficulties (BESD) is by far the largest primary SEN type among looked after children and is also more prevalent in older looked after children. Younger looked after children show more specific learning difficulties.

Slide 22 presents the unsurprising link between BESD and looked after children who have had multiple placements in each period of care. But it is not so clear what is cause and what is effect.

Having SEN should never be seen as a barrier to progression. Good identification along with appropriate intervention is key to improving achievement levels.

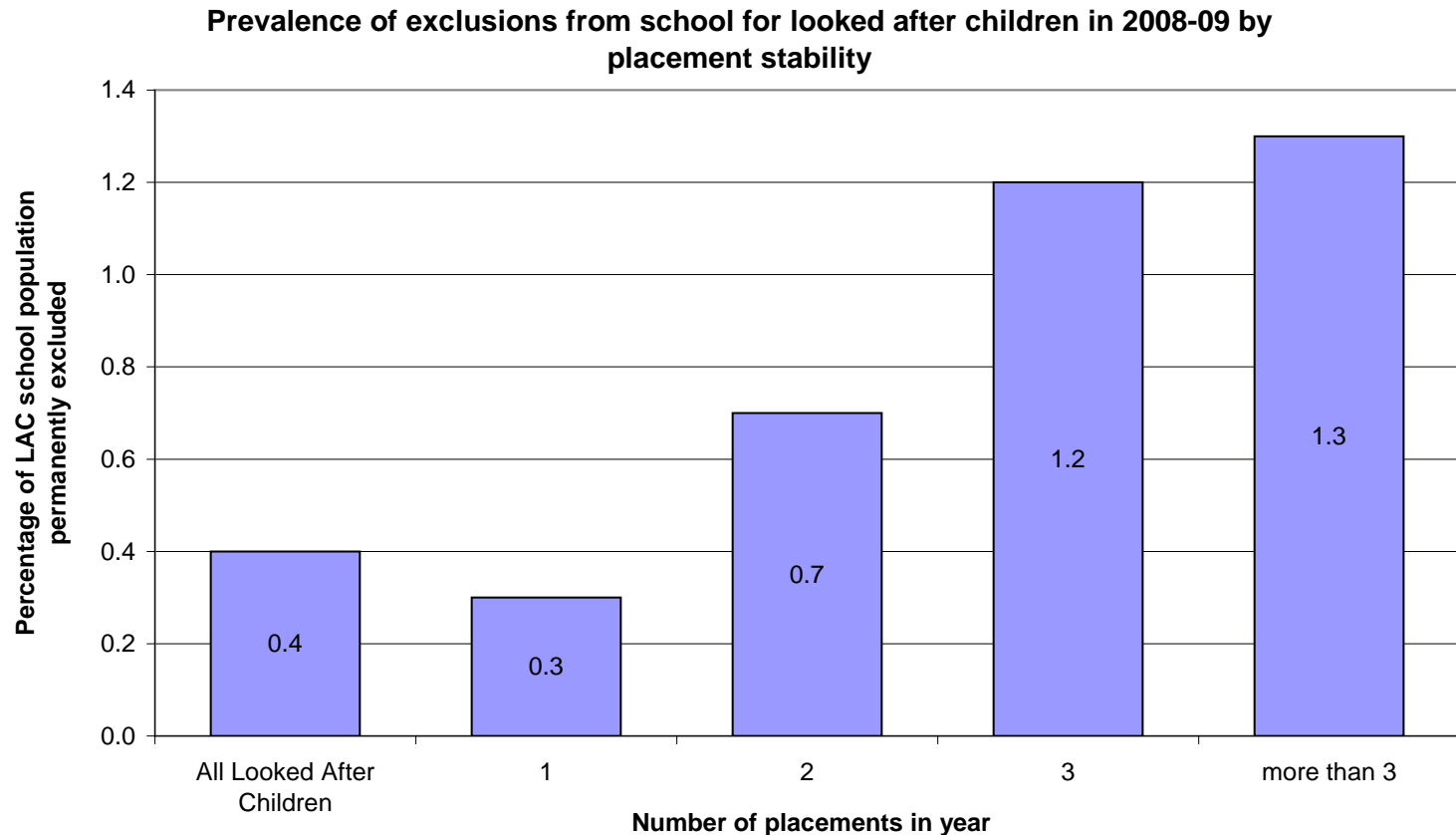
Key questions for local authorities:

- What mechanisms do you have in place to ensure that children who have/may have SEN are being appropriately assessed without delay?
- How can you best achieve placement stability for LAC with BESD?

Key questions for local authorities (continued):

- Are you using the Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) as a tool to support care and educational placement decisions?
- What are you doing to ensure that Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are being appropriately accessed?
- What more could you do to help carers and teachers support looked after children with SEN, especially those with BESD, and those accessing CAMHS?

Exclusion from school is also strongly linked to placement stability, with LAC having a higher incidence of exclusion where there has been more than one placement in the year.



Slide 26 provides valuable information about the relationship between being permanently excluded and placement stability.

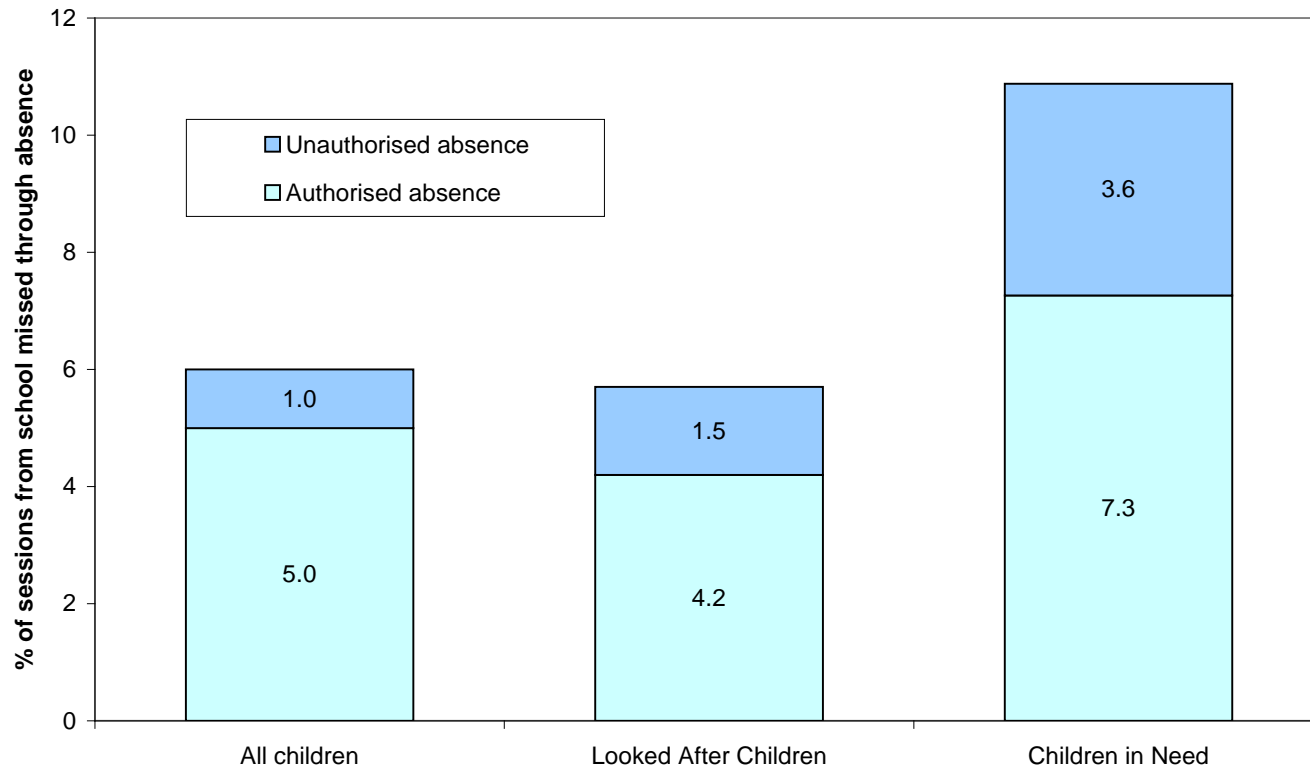
As with placement stability and attainment, there are important questions for social workers, fostering services and VSHs. In particular, how they work with and support carers and schools to understand the cause and effect in order to, where possible, reduce the level of permanent exclusions.

Questions for local authorities:

- Do you have mechanisms in place that identify at an early stage looked after children who may be at risk of being excluded?
- For those at risk, are you offering support to carers and schools to minimise the risks of school and placement breakdown?
- Where exclusion is unavoidable, what arrangements for education are you putting in place from the first day following the permanent exclusion?
- What support is given to carers to help them manage the period of exclusion?
- What support is given to the child to help them manage their behaviour?

Overall absence rates are actually lower for LAC than for all pupils (although unauthorised absence is noticeably higher). Children in Need, of whom around 20% are also LAC, show much higher absence rates. This suggests that good care has a relatively stabilising effect on a child's education.

Comparison of absence rates from school for different cohorts of children



Children in Need (CIN) figures are for all CIN at 31 March 2010 and are derived from the matched CIN-NPD dataset. CIN figures include all CLA at 31 March 2010.

Conclusions

- The new child level dataset provides a powerful source of hard evidence which local authorities can use to inform their planning of services for looked after children
- Key messages from this pack for local authorities to consider in fulfilling the duty placed on them to promote the educational achievement of the children they look after are that:
 - placement stability is a key factor in helping looked after children to succeed
 - looked after children with SEN have poorer outcomes than all children with SEN and more needs to be done to support them
 - looked after children make progress if given support such as one-to-one tuition. How can use of the Pupil Premium support this?
 - looked after children are disproportionately represented in schools that are below floor standards and when making school placements social workers, as corporate parents, should consider if such a school best meets the child's needs

Next steps and future publications

- This data pack emphasises some of the complex challenges that are faced by looked after children in England.
- Local partners can apply this national picture to their local populations to be clearer on some of the reasons why looked after children struggle to achieve the outcomes of their peers.
- This data pack only provides a flavour of some of the analysis that can be provided using the new matched dataset. We would be grateful for feedback on other areas that would be useful to explore.
- Please send any ideas for further analysis that we may be able to include in future publications to Matt.Walker@education.gsi.gov.uk
- For policy questions please contact Michael.Allured@education.gsi.gov.uk or Ian.Payne@education.gsi.gov.uk
- Outcomes data for looked after children in 2009-10 was published in a SFR at www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000978/index.shtml Outcomes data for 2010-11 will be published in December 2011.

Annex: data sources

- All outcomes information for **looked after children** is derived from the matched CLA-NPD dataset.
- Much of the comparative data for **all children** are included in the outcomes SFR at www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000978/index.shtml
- Key Stage 4 information (Slides 7 and 8) is derived from “GCSE and Equivalent Results in England, 2009/10 (Revised)” at www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000985/index.shtml
- Key Stage 1 – 2 progression (Slide 16) is derived from “National Curriculum Assessments at Key Stage 2 in England 2009/10 (Revised)” at www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000975/index.shtml
- Key Stage 2 – 4 progression (Slide 17) is derived from “Pupils Making Expected Progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 in England: 2007/08 – 2009/10” at www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001010/index.shtml
- Key Stage 4 attainment by SEN (Slide 23) is derived from “GCSE and Equivalent Attainment by Pupil Characteristics in England, 2009/10” at www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000977/index.shtml