Outcomes for children looked after by local authorities in England, 31 March 2016

Quality and methodology information document

May 2017

Contents

1. Introduction

The 'Outcomes for children looked after by local authorities in England, 31 March' statistical first release (SFR) provides national and local authority (LA) level information on the outcomes for children who have been looked after continuously for at least 12 months at 31 March by local authorities in England. For the purposes of this document the publication will be referred to as the Outcomes SFR. In the Outcomes SFR and this document, the definitions of a 'looked after child' and a 'non-looked after child' are:

• The definition of a 'looked after child' is a child who has been continuously looked after for at least 12 months up to and including 31 March. This definition has been used because 12 months is considered an appropriate length of time to gauge the possible association of being looked after on educational attainment. However, note that a child may not have been in the care of a local authority for the whole of a key stage period. It is also the cohort of children for whom information on outcomes such as health, wellbeing and offending are collected through the SSDA903.

• Where reference throughout this publication is made to a 'non-looked after child', we have defined this as a child who has not been looked after continuously for 12 months as at 31 March. This will include both children who have never been looked after and also those who have been looked after but who have not met the 12 months criteria.

All figures are based on data collected annually through the longitudinal children looked after return (also known as SSDA903) which is completed each spring by all local authorities in England. Further details on which children are included in the data collection can be found in the children looked after (CLA) return collection guide.

Data from the children looked after return is matched to attainment, school census and alternative provision census data in the national pupil database (NPD) to provide the information for the Outcomes SFR. Where possible, figures are presented for the last 5 years to allow comparisons over time.

The Outcomes SFR includes information for looked after children on:

- Educational attainment at key stage 1, key stage 2 and key stage 4
- Special educational needs (SEN)
- Absence from school
- Exclusions from school

The Outcomes SFR is the main source of information on the outcomes for looked after children in England. It is used to inform policy decisions to improve the life chances for this vulnerable group of children. It is also used extensively by other groups interested in this subject and by local authorities for benchmarking purposes.

From 2015, the Outcomes SFR includes information for previously looked after children who left care through an adoption, special guardianship order or child arrangements order on:

Educational attainment at key stage 2 and key stage 4

The Outcomes SFR is the main source of information on the attainment outcomes of previously looked after children who left care through an adoption, special guardianship order or child arrangements order. These are labelled as 'Experimental Statistics' to reflect that they are relatively new statistics with only partial coverage at this stage and do not yet meet the overall quality standards necessary to be designated National Statistics.

This document aims to provide information on the methodology involved in the production of the Outcomes SFR from collection through to publication. The Outcomes SFR follows on from the main CLA SFR: *'Children looked after in England including adoption'*.

2. Recent history

In 2016, changes were made to the Outcomes SFR to bring it in line with the new educational outcome measures, following the primary and secondary school reforms:

- Children at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2 were assessed under the new national curriculum using new tests and interim frameworks for teacher assessment where the expected standard has been raised. The headline measures were changed to reflect the new curriculum and the data is not comparable with that provided for previous years; therefore, no time series information was published in the 2016 Outcomes SFR.

- In October 2013, it was announced that a new secondary school accountability system would be implemented from 2016. It includes two new headline measures: Attainment 8 and Progress 8. In the 2016 Outcomes SFR, no time series was published for the two new key stage 4 measures, although a time series for those achieving 5+ GCSEs A*-C or equivalent including English and mathematics was published to allow some comparisons over time. The English Baccalaureate measure was also published for looked after children for the first time.

- In addition at key stage 4, the department has made changes to how English counts in two of the headline measures in 2016: achieving A*-C in both English and Mathematics and achievement of the English Baccalaureate, to align more closely with Attainment 8 and Progress 8.

In September 2015 the definition of a persistent absentee changed. Therefore, in the 2016 Outcomes SFR, figures based on the new methodology were calculated for previous years, in order to provide a time series. This is similar to what was done in the 2016 pupil absence in schools publication.

Prior to 2016, the percentage of children looked after continuously for twelve months at 31 March who had a valid unique pupil number (UPN) recorded in the SSDA903 return, was published in the local authority tables for relevant ages. This information was originally published in 2012. The percentage of children with a UPN for these tables is over 90% for the majority of local authorities and so these rates were not published in the 2016 Outcomes SFR.

The 2015 Outcomes SFR was released later (moved from December to March) to allow the use of revised key stage 2 and key stage 4 data, and to include more comparative and contextual data, and additional information on attainment of children who have been adopted from care or left care with a special guardianship order or child arrangements order.

In previous years health outcome indicators were included in the Outcomes SFR, for example information on health, offending and substance misuse. From 2015, this information was released in December as additional tables to the main CLA SFR: Children looked after in England including adoption.

3. Process

Data is collected from local authorities using the CLA return (SSDA903) before being matched to data in the NPD. The process begins with the creation of input files from the CLA return (SSDA903). Data matching on these files involves attainment, school census and alternative provision census data in the NPD. The matched data from the NPD is used in the production of the statistical release.

CLA-NPD: Overview of end to end process
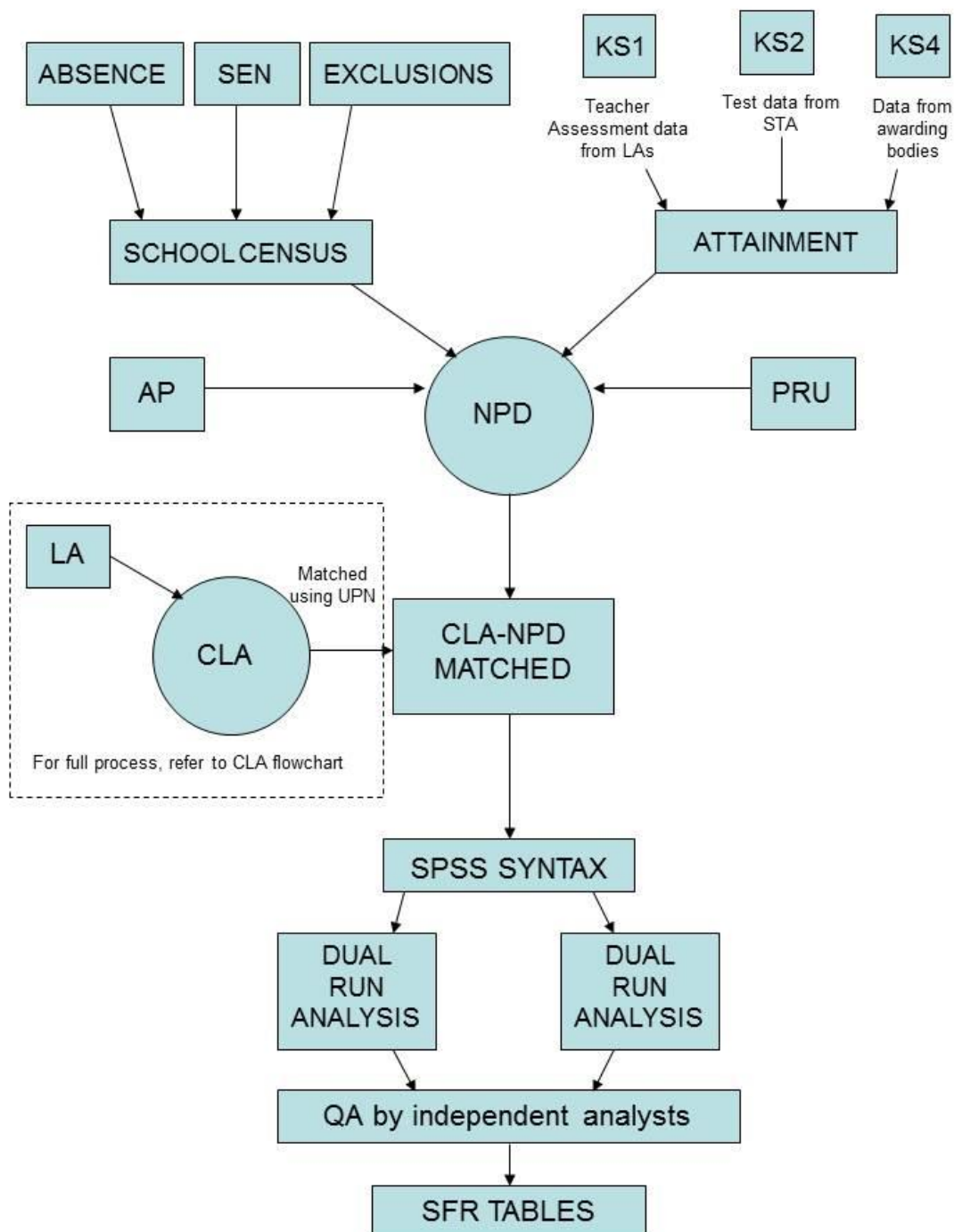
4. Creation of input files

Following the collection of data from local authorities through the SSDA903 return, a 'snapshot' of the database is taken in early August each year which contains data for the latest year as well as updated historic data for each looked after child. From the 'snapshot', a series of tables are produced including the 'Episodes' table, which presents a row for each separate episode of care during a child's period of care. This table is used to produce the input files which are sent for matching in the NPD. An input file is created for each year beginning 1 April and ending 31 March, including all children who have been looked after during the year. This is done for the most recent six years, in order to provide an updated five year time series in the Outcomes SFR where possible. Six years are required due to the timing of exclusions data.

For a looked after child's record to be eligible for matching, they must have a unique pupil number (UPN) and must not have been looked after in respite care only.

- UPN returns: This is the main field which is used to match data from the SSDA903 return in the NPD. Only children with a valid UPN are included for matching in the NPD. It is the responsibility of the local authority to submit valid UPNs for children on the SSDA903 return.
- Respite episodes: Some children are looked after in respite care, under a series of short term placements. This is to provide parents or full-time carers with a break. This pattern of respite care is unlikely to impact on the outcomes for a child, and therefore children who are looked after in respite care only are excluded from the analysis.

A number of indicators are created on the child level input files which are sent for matching in the NPD:

- Child is looked after on 31 March
- Child is looked after continuously for at least six months
- Child is looked after continuously for at least twelve months
- Child is eligible for Pupil Premium

Several other variables including child characteristics and placement information are also included.

Prior to finalising the input files, a number of quality assurance checks are completed. This includes the analysis being dual run independently by two members of the team, checks of summary figures against previous years for consistency and checks against relevant tables in the 'Children looked after in England (including adoption) year ending 31 March' SFR. Additional checks include assessing the volumes of UPNs by local authority and age.

The format of the files is set out in the input files specification document which is agreed between the looked after children and National Pupil Database teams each year.

5. Data matching

The UPN is the key field in the collection which allows the looked after children data to be matched in the NPD. Other information such as date of birth, gender, ethnicity and the local authority responsible for the care of the child may also be used to aid matching. It is the responsibility of local authorities to ensure that the UPN and child information provided on the SSDA903 return is accurate, as incorrect data could lead to a mismatch of data in the NPD.

A valid UPN should be returned for all looked after children aged 4 or over at 31 August within the collection year (with the exception of children looked after under an agreed series of short term placements). This criterion began in 2013. Previously UPNs were only required for looked after children aged 6 to 15 years old at 31 August. UPNs can be returned for younger children if they have been assigned one.

There are several reasons why a child may not have a UPN, for example:

- Child looked after is not of school age and has not yet been assigned a UPN (some children not of school age have a UPN depending on the type of setting they attend)
- Child looked after has never attended a school where UPNs are mandatory (e.g. some unaccompanied asylum seeking children or children that have only ever attended an independent school)
- Child looked after is educated outside of England
- Child is newly looked after (from one week before the end of the collection period) and the UPN was not yet known at the time of the SSDA903 annual statistical return
- Sources collating UPNs reflect discrepancies for the child's name and/or surname and/or date of birth thus preventing reliable matching

The CLA database is a longitudinal dataset and local authorities can amend UPNs for earlier years during each collection.

This publication does not use an age filter when presenting attainment information (i.e. we publish data for children at the end of the key stage so they can be of varying age), so the matching rates in the tables below use the following ages to ascertain the degree of matching for each key stage: age 6 for key stage 1, age 10 for key stage 2 and age 15 for key stage 4 (age at 31 August). This is not a precise measure of data quality, as some of these children may have repeated a year and therefore wouldn't be eligible for key stage exams. Conversely, there will be other children who are eligible for exams who are not aged 6, 10, or 15 years old but will not be included in the key stage percentages in the tables below.

Percentage of looked after children (children looked after continuously for at least 12 months as at 31 March) that have a UPN submitted in the SSDA903 return

	Children aged 4-15 at 31 August	Children eligible for Key Stage 1 teacher assessment	Children eligible for Key Stage 2 tests	Children eligible for Key Stage 4 tests
2016	98.6	99.0	99.9	98.7
2015	99.5	99.7	100.0	99.4
2014	99.6	99.9	99.9	99.3
2013	99.6	99.7	100.0	99.4
2012	99.5	99.5	99.9	99.4

Based on snapshot of SSDA903 as at 31 March 2016

The UPN allows the data to be matched to attainment information held in the NPD, which is collected from awarding bodies. The percentage of successful matches with attainment information is summarised in the table below. The matching process is re-run for historical data each year to ensure that as many records as possible are updated and matched.

Percentage of looked after children (children looked after continuously for at least 12 months as at 31 March) with a UPN that have successfully been matched to attainment data in the NPD

	Percentage of children looked after aged 6 with a UPN that were successfully matched to key stage 1 attainment data	Percentage of children looked after aged 10 with a UPN that were successfully matched to key stage 2 attainment	Percentage of children looked after aged 15 with a UPN that were successfully matched to key stage 4 attainment
2016	94.7	93.9	93.3
2015	94.9	94.2	94.0
2014	94.1	93.1	94.5
2013	94.5	93.4	93.9
2012	95.2	94.4	94.1

Based on snapshot of SSDA903 as at 31 March 2016

Information on attainment, special educational needs (SEN), absence and exclusions are based on CLA data that has been matched in the NPD to attainment, school census and alternative provision census data:

Attainment data: CLA data is matched to provisional key stage 1 data, revised key stage 2 data (from 2015) and revised key stage 4 data (from 2015).

School census data: CLA data is matched to the spring school census data which is a snapshot of pupil information in schools as at the third Thursday in January. Pupil level data has been collected via the school census since 2002 (annually). A termly school

census was introduced in 2006 for secondary school and since 2007 it has been returned for all other schools (nursery, primary, secondary and special); it has also been returned by pupil referral units since 2014 (the pupil referral unit census was introduced in 2010, but discontinued from 2014 onwards as these institutions now complete the school census). CLA data is also matched to the pupil referral unit census for January 2010 to January 2013. Absence and exclusions data is matched to the school census data in the NPD before the CLA-school census matching is done.

Alternative provision census data: CLA data is matched to the alternative provision census which is a snapshot of pupil information in alternative provision at the third Thursday in January. Pupil level information has been returned via the census since January 2008. The alternative provision census covers pupils attending a school not maintained by a local authority for whom the authority is paying full tuition fees, or educated otherwise than in schools and pupil referral units, under arrangements made (and funded) by the local authority.

6. Production of Statistical First Release

Coverage and duplicates

The numbers of pupils at the end of each key stage in the CLA Outcomes SFR can be different to that reported in the main attainment SFRs. Some of this difference is due to the coverage within the releases. Generally the coverage for looked after children is more than for the attainment SFRs as we aim to include as many looked after children as possible.

There can also be differences due to how duplicates have been identified in the two underlying data sources, however, this is only for a very small number of cases. The methodology for removing duplicates will be aligned in future so that these very small differences no longer occur (from 2017 onwards).

Duplicates within the looked after children matched attainment data have been removed by taking the best attainment result for that child. We intend to review the method for removing duplicates to identify any areas where improvements can be made in the selection process. For example, incorporating other variables in the selection criteria.

Denominators

In this publication, denominators for educational attainment, special educational needs (SEN), absence and exclusions only include those children for whom a UPN has been supplied and have been matched to the NPD. This methodology was introduced in 2012. Prior to this, percentages were given based on the total number of looked after children with and without UPNs.

Prior to 2016, the percentage of children looked after continuously for twelve months at 31 March who had a UPN recorded in the SSDA903 return, was published in the local authority tables for relevant ages. This information was originally published in 2012. The percentage of children with a UPN for these tables is over 90% for the majority of local authorities and so these rates were not published in the 2016 Outcomes SFR.

Attainment data

Attainment data is given for looked after children in any educational setting who are at the end of the key stage and have key stage data available.

Recent changes to attainment data that affect the Outcomes SFR are summarised in the recent history section of this document.

In 2015, SEN breakdowns were provided at national level for key stage 2 and key stage 4 for the first time in the Outcomes SFR. The SEN information was taken from matched school census data. In 2016 SEN information was also taken from both the school census and the alternative provision census matched data.

In 2016, the new progress measures at key stage 2 and key stage 4 are based on models that include children in state-funded mainstream schools. However, children in some settings outside of the model have progress scores.

In the revised 2016 key stage 2 assessments publication progress measures are published for state-funded mainstream schools only which are the schools included in the national model. However, within the Outcomes SFR we publish progress measures for all schools that have been included in the progress measure calculations which in addition to state-funded mainstream schools includes state-funded special schools and non-maintained special schools, as we want to cover as many looked after children as possible. We publish this by SEN. In addition, we've provided a total for state-funded mainstream schools for comparison.

Progress measure percentage coverage for looked after children and non-looked after children who are matched to key stage 2 attainment data

	Looked after children	Non-looked after children
Total	2,820	589,390
Percentage:		
Children in schools covered by the model	*88*	*98*
Children in schools covered by the model with Progress 8 scores	*85*	*93*
Percentage:		
Children in schools covered by the calculations	*99*	*99*
Children in schools covered by the calculations with Progress 8 scores	*94*	*94*

In the 2016 key stage 4 GCSE and equivalent results publication the Progress 8 measure breakdowns are published for state-funded schools which is state-funded mainstream schools (those schools in the national model) plus state-funded special schools. However, within the Outcomes SFR we publish progress measures for all schools that have been included in the progress measure calculations which in addition to state-funded mainstream schools includes state-funded special schools, non-maintained special schools and alternative provision, as we want to cover as many looked after children as possible. We publish this by SEN. In addition, we've provided a total for state-funded mainstream schools for comparison.

Progress measure percentage coverage for looked after children and non-looked after children who are matched to key stage 4 attainment data

	Looked after children	Non-looked after children
Total	4,890	604,480
Percentage:		
Children in schools covered by the model	65	89
Children in schools covered by the model with Progress 8 scores	56	83
Percentage:		
Children in schools covered by the calculations	90	92
Children in schools covered by the calculations with Progress 8 scores	77	86

At key stage 4, 2014 data onwards cannot be compared to earlier years due to two major reforms that took place previously – a full breakdown of the reforms and their impact is given in SFR41/2014.

Further information on attainment data can be found in the following publications: key stage 1, key stage 2 and key stage 4.

Special educational needs

The national and local authority SEN provision tables relate to looked after children who have been matched to the school census, the PRU census (from 2010 to 2013) and the alternative provision census. It is possible for a child to be matched to more than one of these census types if they attend more than one kind of setting. Such cases will be included in the figures but will only count once. In these cases, the highest level of SEN has been counted.

In September 2014 the special educational needs and disability (SEND) reforms came into effect as part of the Children and Families Act 2014. See the SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 for more detailed information on the reforms.

Further national and local authority figures on special educational needs can be found in: Special educational needs in England.

Absence data

The school census started to collect absence information on a termly basis in 2006 from maintained secondary schools, city technology colleges and academies. From 2007, this was extended to cover maintained primary schools and special schools.

Absence information is collected in arrears and the latest available data is for the 2015 to 2016 school year.

In September 2015 the definition of a persistent absentee changed. In the 2016 Outcomes SFR, figures based on the new methodology were calculated for previous

years, in order to provide a time series. This is similar to what was done in the [2016 pupil absence in schools publication](#).

More details on how pupil absence statistics are calculated can be found in: the [Pupil absence statistics: guide](#).

Exclusions data

Exclusions data was first collected for the school year 1994 to 1995. The school census started to collect exclusions data on a termly basis in 2006 from maintained secondary schools, city technology colleges and academies. From 2007, this was extended to cover maintained primary schools and special schools.

The school census collects exclusions information two terms in arrears. For example, the summer school census collects information on exclusions occurring during the autumn term. The latest available exclusions data is for the 2014 to 2015 school year.

More details on how pupil exclusion statistics are calculated can be found in: the [Pupil exclusion statistics: guide](#).

Adoptions, special guardianship orders and child arrangements orders

The figures on attainment for previously looked after children who left care through an adoption, special guardianship order (SGO) or child arrangements order (CAO) have been published as additional tables to the main SFR tables in 2016. This information was published for the first time in 2015. The figures are labelled as 'Experimental Statistics' as they are relatively new statistics with only partial coverage at this stage, and do not yet meet the overall quality standards necessary to be designated National Statistics.

The coverage is partial as the cohort information is taken from the school census and alternative provision census, where children are reported as having previously left care due to adoption, a SGO or a CAO only if their parents have declared this information to the school or alternative provision setting. Therefore, the data is reliant on self-declaration from parents and is partial rather than a full count. Users are advised to exercise caution when interpreting these statistics as there can be issues with low levels of coverage which may introduce bias and changes in coverage and attainment measures mean year on year comparisons should not be made. In the 2015 Outcomes SFR, only information from the school census was published.

We cannot match the children looked after data (from SSDA903) for those that have left care due to an adoption, a SGO or a CAO with attainment data as the Unique Pupil Number (UPN) for the majority of children is changed when a child leaves care under these circumstances and the UPN is the key matching data item.

Comparing figures reported on the school census and alternative provision census with those from the SSDA903, we calculate in 2016, around two thirds of these children are covered at key stage 2 and one third at key stage 4.

Calculated percentage coverage of children who left care through an adoption, SGO or CAO, 2015 to 2016

	Key stage 2		Key stage 4	
	2015	2016	2015	2016
Adoption	63	75	27	36
SGO	55	66	32	38
CAO	43	42	27	23
Total	58	68	28	35

Only children with a valid UPN that have been matched to attainment data are included in the coverage calculations above. Some children may have been counted more than once in the SSDA903 data if they have left care under these circumstances more than once.

Information on children that left care due to adoption, a SGO or CAO is reported via the school census and alternative provision census for previous years and may not represent the current situation for a child.

Rounding conventions

The National Statistics Code of Practice requires that reasonable steps should be taken to ensure that all published or disseminated statistics produced by the Department for Education protect confidentiality.

National and regional figures have been rounded to the nearest 10 and Local Authority figures have been rounded to the nearest 5. For confidentiality purposes, numbers from one to five inclusive have been replaced in the published tables by a cross (x). To ensure the suppressed number cannot be identified by simple arithmetic secondary suppression may be required. In this case the next smallest number is also suppressed.

Percentages have been rounded to whole numbers for key stage 1 and key stage 2 and rounded to one decimal place for key stage 4. Exclusions have been rounded to two decimal places. Averages have been rounded to one decimal place at key stage 2 and at key stage 4 for attainment and to two decimal places at key stage 4 for progress. This is in line with the department's rounding protocols for the main statistical releases in these subject areas. Where the numerator in a percentage was five or less or the denominator was 1 to 10, the percentages has been suppressed and replaced by a cross (x). Not all percentages will sum to 100 due to these rounding conventions. Averages that are based on 1 to 5 have been suppressed and replaced by a cross (x).

In addition, the following convention has been used:

'.' means not applicable

'..' means not available

'-' means negligible – used to represent a percentage that would appear as 0 when rounded but is not zero

7. Definitions

Below are some definitions relevant to this document. For more detailed information see the [CLA return guide](#).

Term	Definition
Child	A 'child' is anyone aged under 18. In the vast majority of cases, children cease to be looked after on their 18th birthday.
Looked After	The term 'looked after' has a specific, legal meaning, based on the Children Act 1989 and the SSDA903 collection follows this as closely as possible. A child is looked after by a local authority if they are provided with accommodation for a continuous period of more than 24 hours; are subject to a care order or are subject to a placement order.
An 'Episode' on the SSDA903	The period of time during which a child is looked after by the local authority is broken down into 'episodes' of care on the SSDA903. Each episode represents a period of being looked after under the same legal status and in the same placement. When either of these changes, a new episode begins.
Respite Care	Respite care is the term used to describe children who are subject to short-term break agreements. Special legal codes (V3 and V4) are used to identify this group of children.
Unique Pupil Number (UPN)	A UPN is a number that identifies each pupil in England uniquely. It is allocated to each pupil on first entry to school, following a national formula and is intended to remain with the child throughout their school career.
Child Arrangements Order (CAO)	A child arrangements order provides for a child to live with a person, discharges any existing care order. That person will also be awarded or be deemed to have parental responsibility if he/she does not already have it. The child arrangements order also provides for who a child should spend time with as well as who a child should live with.
Special Guardianship Order (SGO)	A special guardianship order is an order appointing one or more individuals to be a child's 'special guardian'. It is a private law order made under the Children Act 1989 and is intended for those children who cannot live with their birth parents and who would benefit from a legally secure placement.
Adoption Order	This is made after a placement order and transfers Parental Responsibility for the child from the birth parents and others who had Parental Responsibility, including the local authority, permanently and solely to the adopter(s). An Adoption Order can be made where the Court agrees that adoption is in the best interests of the child and Parental consent to adoption has been given or dispensed with by the Court.

8. Consultation process

Feedback on the methodology is welcomed. If you have any comments on the information collected, the timing or format of our outputs or whether these statistics are meeting users' requirements, please contact us via [email](). If you would like to register as part of our looked after children data user group, please also let us know.

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