Educational outcomes of children referred to social services

A report to Action for Children

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1 Introduction

The educational outcomes of children in need (CIN) and children looked after (CLA) tend to be worse than those of other children. Outcomes of this population of children are the subject of an annual data release from the Department for Education[1].

However, the outcomes of children who are referred to Children's Social Care Services (CSSS) but fail to meet the threshold for support, either after initial consideration or after a statutory assessment, are less well known.

In this report we will use CIN census data to track a cohort of children and examine their histories of involvement with CSSS. We will focus on the number and timing of referrals and support to the end of their school careers.

We will then group children by their histories of referral and support, and investigate how educational outcomes vary between these groups.

2 Data

2.1 Datasets and population

This study makes use of the following datasets:

- Children in Need (CIN) census 2008/09 to 2020/21
- National Pupil Database (NPD) Autumn, Spring and Summer census 2007/08 to 2021/22
- Alternative provision (AP) census 2008/09 to 2021/22
- Pupil referral unit (PRU) census 2009/10 to 2012/13
- NPD absence 2005/06 to 2020/21
- NPD suspensions and permanent exclusions 2005/06 to 2020/21
- Key Stage 2 (KS2) data 2009 - 2019
- Key Stage 4 (KS4) data 2019 - 2021
- Children Looked After (CLA) census 2005/06 to 2020/21

The population is defined as all children who appear at least once in any CIN census return. Children are grouped into cohorts according to the academic year of their birth. This report will focus on those born in the 2004/05 academic year, i.e. between 1st September 2004 and 31st August 2005. These children would have been expected to take their end of KS4 exams in 2021.

Every pupil in the state-funded education system in England is identified by a unique pupil number (UPN) recorded in the NPD. Local authorities (LAs) are required to record the UPNs of children covered by the CIN census. CIN census data is linked to NPD data primarily using these UPNs. However, not all CIN census records are able to be matched with a corresponding record in the NPD[2].

[1] Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities in England, 2021, Department for Education

[2] Outcomes for Children in Need: 31 March 2019 Methodology document, Department for Education, 2020

2.2 Referrals in CIN census data

Each year's CIN census contains data at referral-level. That is, each time a child was referred to children's social care services (CSSS) a new record was created. A referral which spanned multiple census years was recorded in each of the years in which it was open. Table 2-1 shows the number of referrals in the CIN census dataset broken down by census year.

*Table 2-1: Number of raw referrals and unique pupils contained in the children in need (CIN) census dataset broken down by CIN census year. CIN census years run from the beginning of April until the end of March. Referrals which are opened in one census year and closed in another are counted in each census year in which they are open. Numbers are shown separately for the full dataset and the dataset limited to those born in the 2004/05 academic year. *Data collection in 2008/09 began in October rather than March.*

	all pupils		2004/05 birth cohort	
census year	no. referrals	no. pupils	no. referrals	no. pupils
2008/09*	399,340	379,830	14,630	13,790
2009/10	708,670	581,440	44,590	35,390
2010/11	574,560	489,450	38,620	32,220
2011/12	551,860	476,100	39,740	33,580
2012/13	572,350	496,260	40,910	35,010
2013/14	632,390	545,160	44,470	38,060
2014/15	639,200	552,180	43,630	37,540
2015/16	635,760	554,850	43,090	37,620
2016/17	645,630	563,290	43,640	38,060
2017/18	659,970	576,790	45,680	39,800
2018/19	676,360	588,510	48,220	41,690
2019/20	676,560	588,150	50,720	43,570
2020/21	650,960	568,830	50,040	43,010
Total	**8,023,610**	**2,585,210**	**547,980**	**151,430**

2.3 Defining support

We make use of a range of data items to define whether a given referral resulted in support being provided. In most cases, the definition is derived from a referral's "NFA" (no further action) status or its reason for closure code.

When the census is submitted, referrals are marked as "NFA" if they did not meet the threshold for a statutory assessment. Reason for closure codes are recorded when a referral is closed, either after support was provided or if the child was judged not to require support.

Referrals marked as "NFA" and those with a reason for closure code of "RC8" (case closed after assessment) are assigned as not having resulted in support. Those with any other closure code are assigned as having resulted in support.

For referrals where these data items are not populated, we use the "cin_ended" field (a derived field provided with the CIN census dataset indicating the end of a period of need) and the presence of a child protection plan (CPP) to identify young people known to have received support.

Where none of these fields are populated, we judge the referral to not have resulted in support.

2.3.1 Missing data at Local Authority-level

One of the problems we face when judging whether a given referral resulted in support or not is inaccurate recording of closure codes and "NFA" statuses. Despite around a quarter of referrals each year having been marked as "NFA" or closed with a reason for closure code of "RC8", we observe census returns from a number of local authorities which contain no such records.

The situation is summarised in Table 2-2. We see that 78 out of 154 local authorities (LAs) submitted a census return containing no "NFA" or "RC8" records at least once between 2009/10 and 2020/21. While some of these returns may be the result of policy positions taken by specific LAs, and therefore represent genuine phenomena, it is likely that many result from missing data.

Table 2-2: Summary of possible missing data items in the children in need (CIN) census dataset. Numbers of pupils and referrals, the percentage of referrals recorded as "NFA" (no further action) or with a closure code of "RC8" (case closed after assessment), numbers of local authorities (LAs), and the number of LAs with no referrals recorded as "NFA" and/or "RC8" are shown for each census year. CIN census years run from the beginning of April until the end of March. Referrals which are opened in one census year and closed in another are counted in each census year in which they are open.

Census year	No. pupils	No. referrals	% referrals NFA or RC8	No. LAs	No. LAs w no NFA and/or RC8
2009/10	592,750	708,670	28.5%	151	27
2010/11	497,180	574,560	28.0%	150	26
2011/12	483,240	551,860	26.8%	150	29
2012/13	503,320	572,350	22.6%	152	23
2013/14	553,030	632,390	23.7%	152	17
2014/15	559,550	639,200	26.5%	152	16
2015/16	561,510	635,760	26.7%	152	17
2016/17	570,050	645,630	28.1%	152	16
2017/18	583,150	659,970	28.1%	152	19
2018/19	594,950	676,360	27.8%	152	21
2019/20	594,510	676,560	25.3%	151	19
2020/21	574,780	650,960	24.4%	150	26
Total	**6,668,000**	**7,624,270**	**26.4%**	**154**	**78**

2.3.2 Collating referrals at the pupil-level

For this study, we collate referrals at the pupil-level, which involves removing duplicate referral records. Multiple referrals are collapsed into one if they relate to the same child and have the same start date. We then remove any referrals which start and end while another referral was open[3].

Referrals with missing dates are assigned a representative date to enable us to use the referral. This is selected based on information from similar referrals, defined by whether the referral resulted in an assessment, support or an EHCP, and placing much greater weight on spells from the same Local Authority and similar reporting year.

[3] We retain any referral which starts while another referral was open but ends after it was closed

Table 2-3 shows the number of referrals after this process has been completed. In contrast to Table 2-1, each referral is counted only in the year it started.

When we collate referrals at the pupil-level, a referral is assigned as having resulted in support if any of its constituent referrals resulted in support. Similarly, if any of its constituent referrals resulted in a statutory assessment and/or a CPP then it is assigned as having resulted in a statutory assessment and/or a CPP.

Table 2-3 shows the numbers of referrals which are assigned as having resulted in support.

Table 2-3: Number of referrals and unique pupils contained in the CIN census dataset after processing. Processing collapses multiple referrals into one if they relate to the same child and have the same start date. Referrals are counted in the census year in which they began. CIN census years run from the beginning of April until the end of March. Numbers are shown separately for the full dataset and the dataset limited to those born in the 2004/05 academic year.

	all pupils			2004/05 birth cohort		
census year	no. referrals	% referrals w support	no.pupils	no. referrals	% referrals w support	no.pupils
pre-2008/09	233,130	54.4%	216,520	8,370	58.5%	7,930
2008/09	289,630	61.2%	259,520	14,980	61.8%	13,340
2009/10	418,000	46.5%	346,390	30,560	45.9%	25,130
2010/11	359,540	49.5%	298,950	26,660	49.2%	21,910
2011/12	344,440	53.6%	291,040	26,600	53.3%	22,250
2012/13	357,810	58.1%	303,500	26,870	57.3%	22,710
2013/14	405,730	55.4%	345,110	29,480	54.6%	25,020
2014/15	390,920	52.7%	334,870	27,320	52.7%	23,470
2015/16	386,070	52.0%	334,340	26,570	51.5%	23,110
2016/17	398,160	50.6%	344,720	27,080	49.4%	23,440
2017/18	406,590	50.8%	353,230	28,860	50.4%	24,970
2018/19	409,870	52.7%	355,710	29,970	52.7%	25,850
2019/20	403,880	53.0%	351,120	31,290	53.3%	26,920
2020/21	365,200	38.1%	318,020	28,950	37.3%	24,960
Total	**5,168,960**	**51.8%**	**2,584,520**	**363,550**	**51.2%**	**151,420**

A feature of the method we use to define support is that referrals which remained open at the end of the most recent census year are more likely than those which did not to be assigned as not resulting in support. This is evident in Table 2-3, which shows a below average percentage of referrals resulting in support for referrals made in the 2020/21 census year. The impact of this on the pupils in our cohort of interest, the 2004/05 birth cohort, is minimal.

2.4 Constructing outcome measures

Once we have established the referral histories of the pupils in our cohort of interest, we move on to look at their outcomes.

The outcomes we will examine are divided into three sections, each of which is formed of several measures. These sections and their measures are:

1. History of absence, suspension and permanent exclusion from Reception to Year 11:
    a. Ever persistent absentee: missed at least 10% of sessions due to absence in any academic year.
    b. Ever suspended: suspended from school (previously known as a "fixed term exclusion") in any academic year.
    c. Ever permanently excluded: permanently excluded from school in any academic year.
2. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4:
    a. Average Attainment 8 score: the average grade achieved across eight qualifications. The qualifications included are set by DfE rules[4].
    b. Achieved a grade 4/C or above in English and maths.
    c. Enrolled in a state-funded AP school or pupil referral unit (PRU) at the end of KS4.
3. Journeys into care:
    a. Ever looked after: ever featured in the children looked after (CLA) census

[4] Secondary accountability measures guidance, Department for Education

3 Descriptive statistics

3.1 Grouping children by their history of referral and support

We divide pupils into three groups based on whether and when they received support upon referral to CSSS. The groups are defined as follows:

1. Group 1: received support the first time they were referred
2. Group 2: did not receive support the first time they were referred, but did subsequently
3. Group 3: never received support

In constructing these groups, we ignore referrals which happened when pupils were older than compulsory school age.

Table 3-1 shows the numbers of pupils who belong to each of the groups.

Table 3-1: Numbers of pupils in the children in need (CIN) census by grouping. "Group 1" children received support the first time they were referred, "Group 2" did not receive support the first time they were referred but did subsequently, and "Group 3" never received support. Referrals which occurred when pupils were older than compulsory school age are ignored. Results are shown separately for all pupils and for pupils born in the 2004/05 academic year.

	no. pupils		% pupils	
Grouping	all pupils	2004/05 cohort	all pupils	2004/05 cohort
Group 1	1,247,840	76,650	52.5%	50.6%
Group 2	312,260	25,710	13.1%	17.0%
Group 3	816,850	49,060	34.4%	32.4%
Total	**2,376,950**	**151,420**	-	-

Around half of children referred to CSSS received support the first time they were referred. Of those who did not, around a third received support following a subsequent referral, and two thirds never received support (either because they were never referred again, or because they were referred again but never met the threshold for support).

3.2 Numbers of referrals

Table 3-2: Numbers of pupils in the 2004/05 birth cohort by the number of times they were referred to children's social care services and their grouping: "Group 1" children received support the first time they were referred, "Group 2" did not receive support the first time they were referred but did subsequently, and "Group 3" never received support.

		Total number of referrals				
	no. pupils	1	2 or fewer	3 or fewer	4 or fewer	5 or more
Group 1: Support on first referral	76,650	44%	66%	79%	87%	13%
Group 2: Support other than on first referral	25,710		26%	49%	66%	34%
Group 3: No support	49,060	73%	91%	97%	99%	1%
Total	**151,420**	**46%**	**67%**	**79%**	**87%**	**13%**

Table 3-2 summarises the total number of referrals experienced by pupils, overall and broken down by each of our groupings. Overall, it was rare for pupils to have been referred to CSSS a great number of times. 79% of pupils were referred three times or

fewer. Only 13% of pupils were referred five times or more. 46% of pupils were only referred once.

Referral numbers varied between pupils in each of our groupings. Pupils who did not receive support on their first referral but did subsequently (Group 2) tended to have been referred the most times: 26% were referred twice (the minimum possible number for this group, by definition) and 34% were referred five times or more. In contrast, those who never received support (Group 3) tended to have been referred the fewest times: 73% were referred once, and only 3% had experienced more than three referrals.

3.3 Patterns of support spells for Group 1 and Group 2 pupils

We see from Table 3-2 in the previous section that around 40% of those who received support were never referred again after that support (the 44% of Group 1 pupils who were referred once, plus the 26% of Group 2 pupils who were referred twice).

For the 60% of pupils who were referred again (61,870), Table 3-3 summarises how many of these subsequent referrals also resulted in support.

Table 3-3: Numbers of pupils in the 2004/05 birth cohort who ever received support when referred to children's social care services by the number of times they were referred after they first received support, and the number of those referrals which also resulted in support. "Group 1" children received support the first time they were referred and "Group 2" did not receive support the first time they were referred but did subsequently.

			No. referrals after first support which resulted in support				
No. referrals after first support	Grouping	No. pupils	1+	2+	3+	4+	5+
1	Group 1	16,540	54.7%				
	Group 2	5,970	33.9%				
2	Group 1	9,920	79.2%	34.7%			
	Group 2	4,380	54.8%	16.6%			
3	Group 1	6,090	89.4%	60.1%	23.8%		
	Group 2	3,160	70.8%	36.6%	9.4%		
4	Group 1	3,860	93.8%	75.5%	44.8%	15.1%	
	Group 2	2,080	79.8%	52.6%	24.5%	6.6%	
5	Group 1	6,400	98.0%	89.4%	72.5%	49.7%	27.5%
	Group 2	3,460	89.2%	70.9%	48.9%	28.2%	12.9%
Total	**Group 1**	**42,810**	**75.3%**	**36.8%**	**18.3%**	**8.8%**	**4.1%**
	Group 2	**19,060**	**59.9%**	**28.5%**	**13.1%**	**5.8%**	**2.3%**

We see that Group 1 pupils were more likely than Group 2 to have received support on subsequent referrals. For example, among those who were referred twice more after they first received support, 79% of Group 1 pupils received support again compared with 55% of Group 2 pupils.

Overall, of those who were referred again after their first spell of support, 29% received support on every subsequent referral (35% of Group 1 pupils and 17% of Group 2). 29% never received support again (25% of Group 1 pupils and 60% of Group 2).

Table 3-4 (overleaf) summarises the length of time between spells of support for those who received support more than once. Overall, around half (50.8%) of subsequent support

spells began within a year of a previous support spell ending. Large intervals of time between support spells were relatively rare, with 9% beginning five or more years after a previous spell ended. Intervals between support spells were slightly shorter for Group 2 pupils than Group 1.

Table 3-4: For pupils in the 2004/05 birth cohort who received support at least twice when referred to children's social care services, a summary of the intervals of time between one support spell ending and another beginning for a given pupil. "Group 1" children received support the first time they were referred and "Group 2" did not receive support the first time they were referred but did subsequently.

			% intervals by length							
Grouping	No. pupils	No. intervals	< 90 days	< 1 year	< 2 years	< 3 years	< 4 years	< 5 years	5+ years	Av length (days)
Group 1	32,240	62,700	21.3%	49.5%	67.4%	77.8%	84.8%	89.6%	10.4%	689
Group 2	11,410	21,220	24.0%	54.7%	73.2%	83.1%	89.4%	93.5%	6.5%	562
Total	**43,660**	**83,920**	**22.0%**	**50.8%**	**68.9%**	**79.1%**	**85.9%**	**90.6%**	**9.4%**	**657**

3.4 Time elapsed between first referral and first support for Group 2 pupils

Figure 3-1 shows the percentage of Group 2 pupils by the amount of time between their first referral and the first referral which resulted in support.

For around half of pupils, the gap was under two years, while for 22% of pupils it was five years or more.

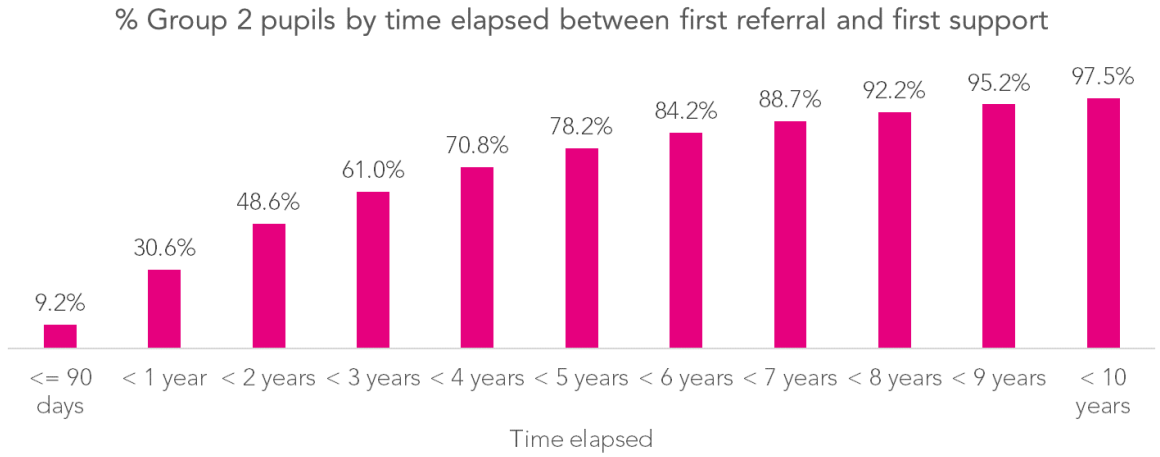

Figure 3-1: Percentage of pupils in the 2004/05 birth cohort by the time elapsed between the date of their first referral to children's social care services and the date of their first referral which resulted in support. The population covered by this figure are the 25,710 "Group 2" children. "Group 2" children are those who did not receive support the first time they were referred but did subsequently.

3.5 Timing of first and last referral

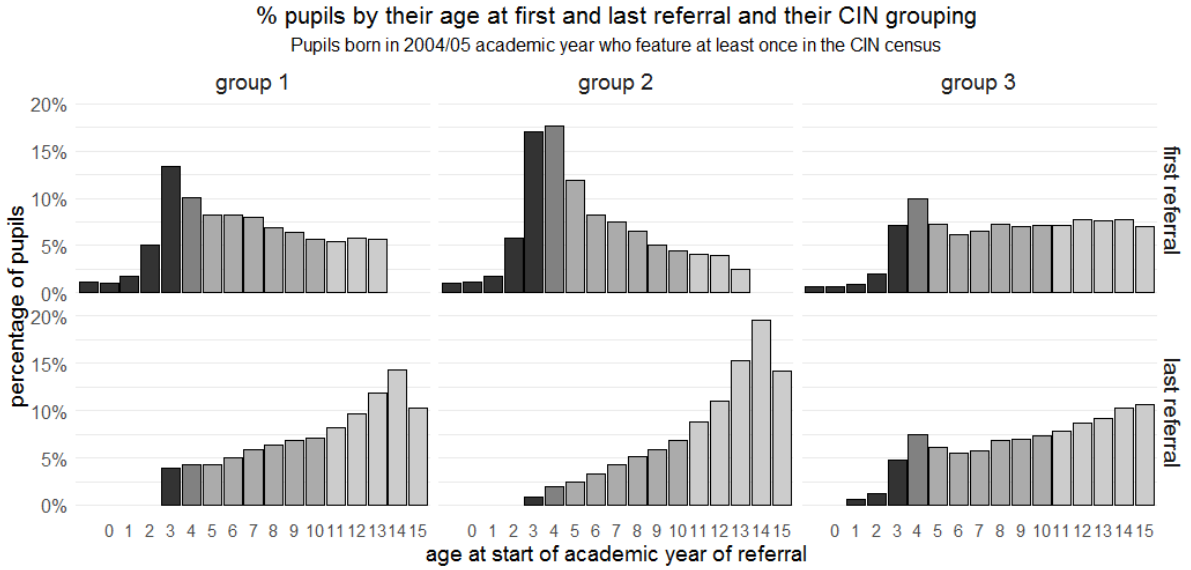

Figure 3-2: The percentage of pupils in the 2004/05 birth cohort by their age when they were first and last referred to children's social care services and their grouping: "Group 1" children received support the first time they were referred, "Group 2" did not receive support the first time they were referred but did subsequently, and "Group 3" never received support. "Age" = the age a pupil was at the start of the academic year in which their referral took place (so that, e.g. Reception-aged children are all 4 years-old). Referrals which happened before pupils were born are grouped in a single bar shown on the left-hand-side of the age axes. Referrals which happened after compulsory school age are ignored. Any bars which relate to fewer than 10 pupils or less than 0.05% of pupils are omitted to protect confidentiality.

Figure 3-3 (overleaf) shows the timing of pupils' earliest and most recent referrals, overall and split by the total number of times they were referred. Because the CIN census first occurred in 2008/09, i.e. the year before pupils in the 2004/05 birth cohort would typically have started Reception, referrals in the earliest years are likely to be undercounted.

Overall, the most common time for pupils' first recorded referral was in the year before they started Reception (12% of pupils) or the year in which they started Reception (11%). The most common time for their last referral was during Year 10 (14%).

Regardless of the total number referrals, the most common time for pupils' earliest recorded referral was either the year of or before they started Reception, and for their last referral was during Year 10. However, this pattern is much more pronounced among those with more referrals compared with those with fewer. For example, 46% of pupils with at least five referrals were referred for the first time either the year of or the year before they started Reception, compared with 22% of those with two referrals.

Among those with a single referral, that referral was slightly more likely to have occurred in the later school years than earlier. Only 11% of such pupils were referred before they reached school-age, compared with 27% of those with multiple referrals.

Figure 3-2 above shows the timing of pupils' earliest and most recent referrals, overall and separately for each of our groupings. Group 1 and 2 children tended to be referred for the first time earlier than Group 3 pupils, on average, and referred for the last time later.

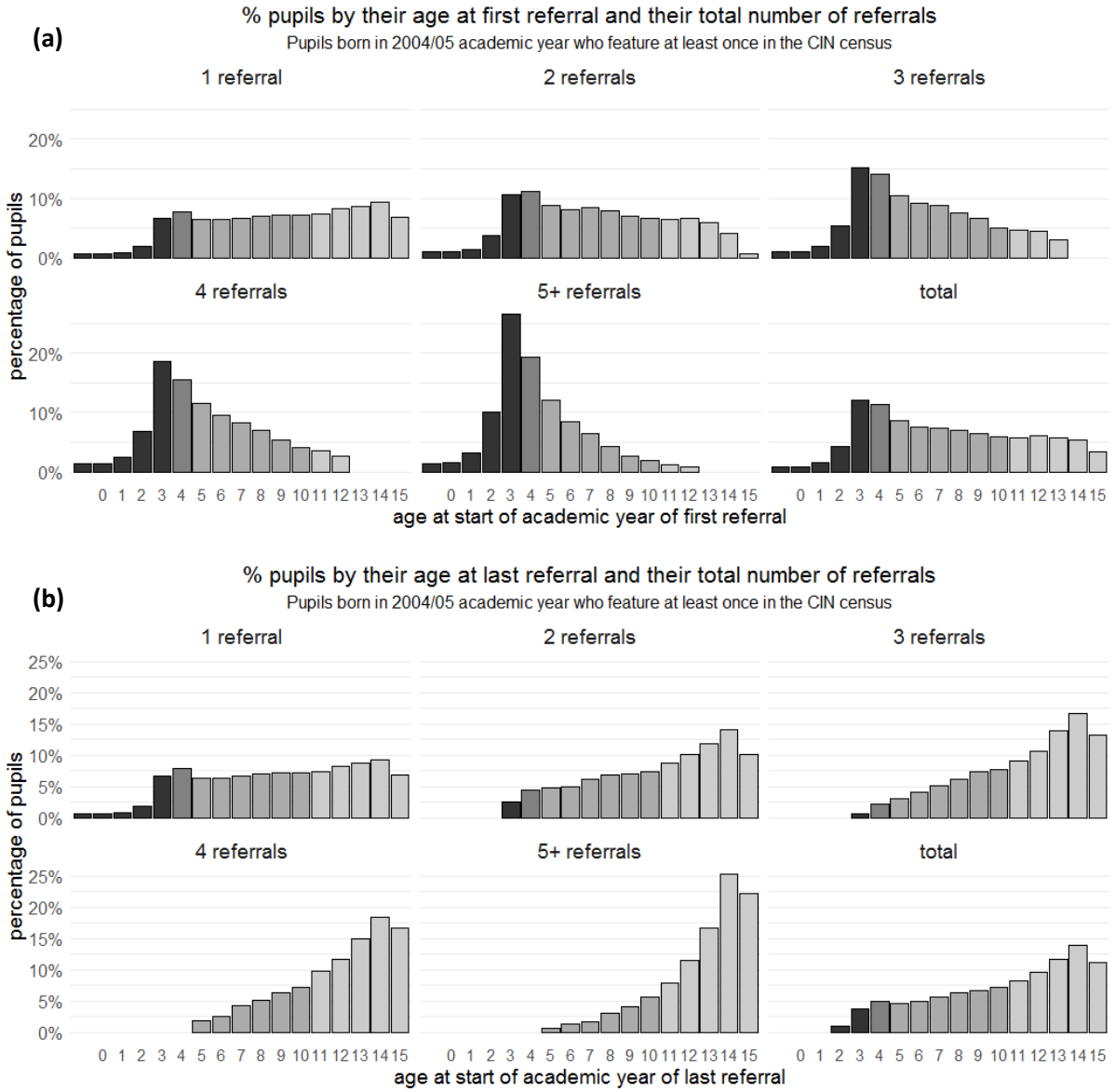

Figure 3-3: The percentage of pupils in the 2004/05 birth cohort by their age when they were first (a) and last (b) referred to children's social care services and the total number of times they were referred. "Age" = the age a pupil was at the start of the academic year in which their referral took place (so that, e.g. Reception-aged children are all 4 years-old). Referrals which happened before pupils reached school-age are grouped in a single bar shown on the left-hand-side of the NC year axes. This includes referrals made before pupils were born. Referrals which happened after compulsory school age are ignored. Any bars which relate to fewer than 10 pupils or less than 0.05% of pupils are omitted to protect confidentiality.

3.6 Pupil characteristics

Table 3-5 (overleaf) summarises a range of pupil characteristics shown separately for those in each of our CIN groupings, and by pupils' total number of referrals.

Overall, 48% of the cohort were female, 67% were eligible for free school meals (FSM) at some point in their school careers, 59% had been identified as having special education needs (SEN), and 22% had English as an additional language (EAL).

The proportion of pupils who were disadvantaged and with an identified SEN increased with increasing numbers of referrals. For example, 91.5% of those with five or more referrals had been eligible for FSM at some point compared with 54.2% of those with a single referral. The proportion of pupils with EAL decreased with increasing referral numbers, the proportion from a white British background increased, and average prior attainment at both Key Stage 1 and 2 decreased. The proportion of female pupils did not seem to be related to numbers of referrals.

These patterns are mirrored when we look at the characteristics of pupils by our groupings. Group 2 pupils, who tended to have been referred the most times, had the highest proportion of disadvantaged, SEN and white British pupils, and the lowest prior attainment and proportion of EAL pupils. The reverse was true for Group 3, whose pupils tended to have been referred the fewest times.

*Table 3-5: Characteristics of pupils in the 2004/05 birth cohort the total number of times they were referred to children's social care services and their grouping: "Group 1" children received support the first time they were referred, "Group 2" did not receive support the first time they were referred but did subsequently, and "Group 3" never received support. "FSM" = free school meals, "SEN" = special educational needs, "EHCP" =education health and care plan, "EAL" = English as an additional language, "Long-term FSM" = eligible for free school meals in 80% or more of terms on-roll, "KS" = Key Stage, EXS = met the expected standard (a scaled score of 100+) in KS2 reading and maths tests . "c" in this table indicates the figures have been suppressed to protect confidentiality. ~ indicates a percentage which is negligible. *The "not obtained" ethnicity grouping also includes those who refused to provide the information, usually grouped separately as "refused".*

		CIN grouping			Total no. referrals				
	total	1	2	3	1	2	3	4	5+
no. pupils	**151,420**	76,650	25,710	49,060	69,700	31,930	18,690	11,500	19,600
Gender									
% female	**47.5%**	47.7%	47.5%	47.3%	47.7%	47.2%	47.3%	47.9%	47.5%
Disadvantage									
% ever FSM	**67.4%**	69.3%	81.6%	57.0%	54.2%	69.1%	78.3%	84.3%	91.5%
% long-term FSM	**20.4%**	21.6%	29.6%	13.8%	12.6%	19.1%	25.5%	30.1%	40.2%
avg % terms FSM	**36.9%**	38.5%	49.0%	28.0%	26.1%	36.4%	44.5%	50.4%	60.6%
SEN									
% ever SEN	**59.2%**	60.7%	68.0%	52.4%	50.7%	60.3%	66.3%	69.8%	74.9%
% ever EHCP	**12.8%**	13.0%	15.6%	10.9%	9.3%	13.8%	16.0%	17.0%	17.8%
avg % terms SEN	**29.6%**	30.3%	34.7%	25.7%	24.1%	30.5%	34.4%	36.2%	39.0%
EAL									
% ever EAL	**21.6%**	21.6%	16.1%	24.4%	26.6%	21.7%	18.6%	14.8%	10.4%
Ethnicity									
% white British	**67.8%**	67.8%	72.6%	65.4%	63.3%	67.5%	70.5%	74.3%	78.1%
% black African	**5.1%**	5.0%	4.0%	6.0%	6.2%	5.5%	4.4%	3.5%	2.3%
% white other	**4.7%**	4.8%	3.5%	5.3%	5.8%	4.5%	4.0%	3.3%	2.4%
% Pakistani	**4.4%**	4.4%	3.3%	4.8%	5.3%	4.4%	3.7%	3.0%	2.3%
% mixed other	**2.5%**	2.5%	2.4%	2.5%	2.5%	2.4%	2.5%	2.4%	2.5%
% m. white/b. Car	**2.3%**	2.3%	2.8%	2.0%	1.8%	2.3%	2.6%	2.7%	3.4%
% black Carib	**2.1%**	2.2%	2.3%	2.0%	2.0%	2.3%	2.3%	2.3%	2.1%
% other Asian	**1.7%**	1.7%	1.1%	2.0%	2.2%	1.6%	1.4%	0.9%	0.6%
% Bangladeshi	**1.7%**	1.9%	1.3%	1.8%	2.1%	1.9%	1.5%	1.1%	0.7%
% Indian	**1.6%**	1.7%	1.1%	1.8%	2.1%	1.6%	1.5%	0.9%	0.6%
% m. white/Asian	**1.4%**	1.4%	1.5%	1.3%	1.4%	1.3%	1.5%	1.4%	1.5%
% not obtained*	**1.2%**	1.1%	0.7%	1.5%	1.7%	1.1%	0.8%	0.5%	0.3%
% black other	**1.1%**	1.1%	0.9%	1.2%	1.2%	1.2%	0.9%	1.2%	0.7%
% m. white/b. Afr	**1.0%**	1.1%	1.1%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	1.2%	1.0%	1.2%
% white Roma	**0.7%**	0.7%	0.8%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.8%
% Chinese	**~**	~	~	~	~	~	~	c	c
% white Irish	**~**	~	~	~	~	~	~	c	c
% white Irish trav	**~**	~	~	~	~	~	~	~	~
Prior *attainment*									
avg KS1 aps	**14.0**	13.9	13.5	14.3	14.5	13.9	13.5	13.3	13.0
avg KS2 score	**98**	98	97	99	100	98	97	97	96
%KS2 EXS R M	**41.0%**	40.4%	34.9%	45.3%	47.0%	40.2%	36.4%	33.5%	30.6%

4 Results

In this section we describe a range of outcomes of pupils who were referred to CSSS. We measure these outcomes at the age when pupils reached the end of compulsory schooling.

4.1 Absence, suspension and permanent exclusion

The first outcomes we examine are pupils' experiences with absence, suspension and permanent exclusion. Table 4-1 shows how these vary by each of our groupings.

Table 4-1: Selected absence and suspension and exclusion outcomes for pupils in the 2004/05 birth cohort by grouping: "Group 1" children received support the first time they were referred, "Group 2" did not receive support the first time they were referred but did subsequently, and "Group 3" never received support. Outcomes cover the period 2009/10 to 2020/21 – typically the beginning of reception to the end of Year 11. Absence for 2020/21 omits Spring and Summer Terms due to COVID-related absence and school closures.

	no. pupils	% ever persistent absentee	% ever suspended	% ever perm. excluded
Group 1: Support on first referral	76,650	59.4%	32.2%	3.3%
Group 2: Support other than on first referral	25,710	69.4%	41.3%	4.8%
Group 3: No support	49,060	50.5%	24.5%	1.6%
Total	**151,420**	**58.2%**	**31.2%**	**3.0%**

We see that outcomes for those who never received support (Group 3) were better than for those who did. Of those who did receive support, outcomes were better for those who received it on their first referral (Group 1) compared with those who received it on a subsequent referral (Group 2).

However, we saw from Table 3-2 that Group 3 pupils also tended to have been referred the fewest times, and Group 2 pupils tended to have been referred the most.

Table 4-2 shows how absence, suspension and permanent exclusion varied by the number of times a pupil was referred to CSSS.

Table 4-2: Selected absence and suspension and exclusion outcomes for pupils in the 2004/05 birth cohort by the number of times they were referred to children's social care services. Outcomes cover the period 2009/10 to 2020/21 – typically the beginning of Reception to the end of Year 11. Persistent absence is defined as missing at least 10% of sessions in an academic year. Absence for 2020/21 omits Spring and Summer Terms due to COVID-related absence and school closures.

Total referrals	no. pupils	% ever persistent absentee	% ever suspended	% ever perm. excluded
1	69,700	48.4%	22.6%	1.4%
2	31,930	58.7%	30.9%	2.8%
3	18,690	65.5%	36.9%	3.9%
4	11,500	70.2%	41.2%	4.5%
5+	19,600	78.2%	51.3%	6.9%
Total	**151,420**	**58.2%**	**31.2%**	**3.0%**

We see a strong relationship between number of referrals and outcomes, with poorer outcomes seen among those with more referrals. Some of the differences are large, for

example, pupils with five or more referrals were almost five times as likely to have been permanently excluded than those with just one referral (6.9% vs 1.4%).

In Table 4-3 we try to isolate the impact of grouping from number of referrals. We show how outcomes varied for each of our groups of pupils for a given number of referrals.

Table 4-3: Selected absence and suspension and exclusion outcomes for pupils in the 2004/05 birth cohort by the number of times they were referred to children's social care services and their grouping: "Group 1" children received support the first time they were referred, "Group 2" did not receive support the first time they were referred but did subsequently, and "Group 3" never received support. Outcomes cover the period 2009/10 to 2020/21 – typically the beginning of Reception to the end of Year 11. Persistent absence is defined as missing at least 10% of sessions in an academic year. Absence for 2020/21 omits Spring and Summer Terms due to COVID-related absence and school closures.

Total referrals	Group	no. pupils	% ever persistent absentee	% ever suspended	% ever perm. excluded
1	Group 1 (support on first ref)	33,840	49.4%	23.1%	1.6%
	Group 2				
	Group 3 (no support)	35,860	47.5%	22.2%	1.3%
2	Group 1 (support on first ref)	16,540	59.5%	31.5%	3.0%
	Group 2	6,650	59.7%	31.8%	3.2%
	Group 3 (no support)	8,750	56.3%	28.9%	2.3%
3	Group 1 (support on first ref)	9,920	66.1%	37.9%	4.3%
	Group 2	5,970	66.3%	37.3%	3.8%
	Group 3 (no support)	2,800	61.8%	32.4%	2.9%
4	Group 1 (support on first ref)	6,090	71.1%	42.8%	5.1%
	Group 2	4,380	70.7%	40.6%	4.2%
	Group 3 (no support)	1,030	62.9%	35.1%	3.0%
5+	Group 1 (support on first ref)	10,260	78.6%	51.5%	7.1%
	Group 2	8,700	78.4%	51.7%	6.9%
	Group 3 (no support)	630	66.6%	41.5%	3.6%

We see that almost all of the observed difference in outcomes between Group 1 and Group 2 pupils was related to differences in numbers of referrals.

We also see that, although the difference in outcomes between those who never received support and those who did is reduced, it is still present. For example, among pupils with three referrals, around 37% of Group 1 and 2 pupils were suspended during their time at school, while 32% of Group 3 pupils were.

4.1.1 Timing of referrals and absence

The measures used so far in this section are "ever" measures, counting whether a pupil who had been referred to CSSS experienced absence, suspension or permanent exclusion at any time during their school career. This covers those for whom absence, suspension or permanent exclusion happened after they were referred, and those for whom it happened before.

Figure 4-1 shows the distribution of pupils who were ever persistently absent by the number of national curriculum (NC) years between their first referral and the first time they were persistently absent.

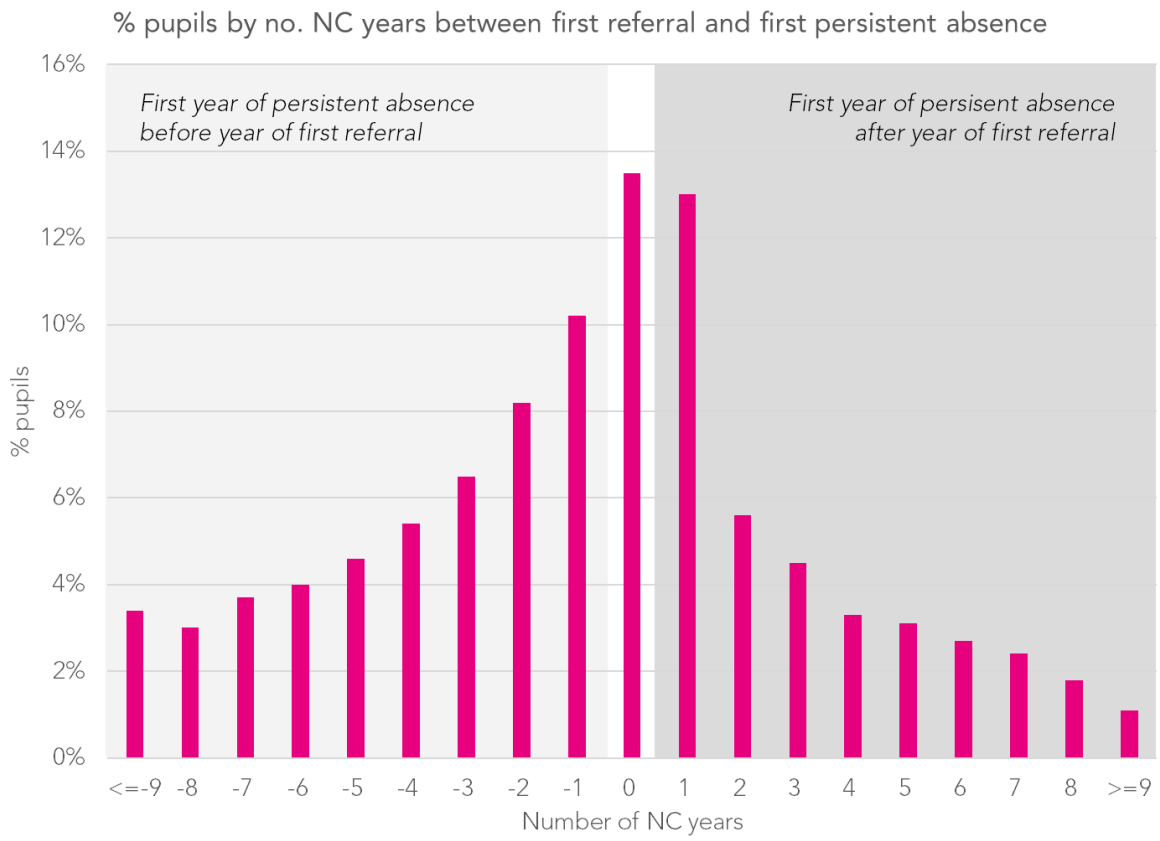

Figure 4-1: The percentage of pupils in the 2004/05 birth cohort by the number of national curriculum (NC) years between their first referral to children's social care services and the first year they were classed as a persistent absentee (missing at least 10% of sessions). Absence for 2020/21 omits Spring and Summer Terms due to COVID-related absence and school closures. The population covered by this Figure are the 69,520 pupils whose first referral occurred while they were of school-age and who were ever classed as a persistent absentee.

We see that the most common scenario was the first instance of persistent absence and the first referral happening in the same NC year (14% of pupils). The next most common was the first instance of persistent absence happening the year after the first referral (13% of pupils) and the next was the first instance of persistent absence happening the year before the first referral (10% of pupils).

Overall, persistent absence tended to precede pupils' first referral: this was the case for 49% of pupils, while first referral preceded persistent absence for 37% of pupils.

4.1.2 Timing of referrals and suspension

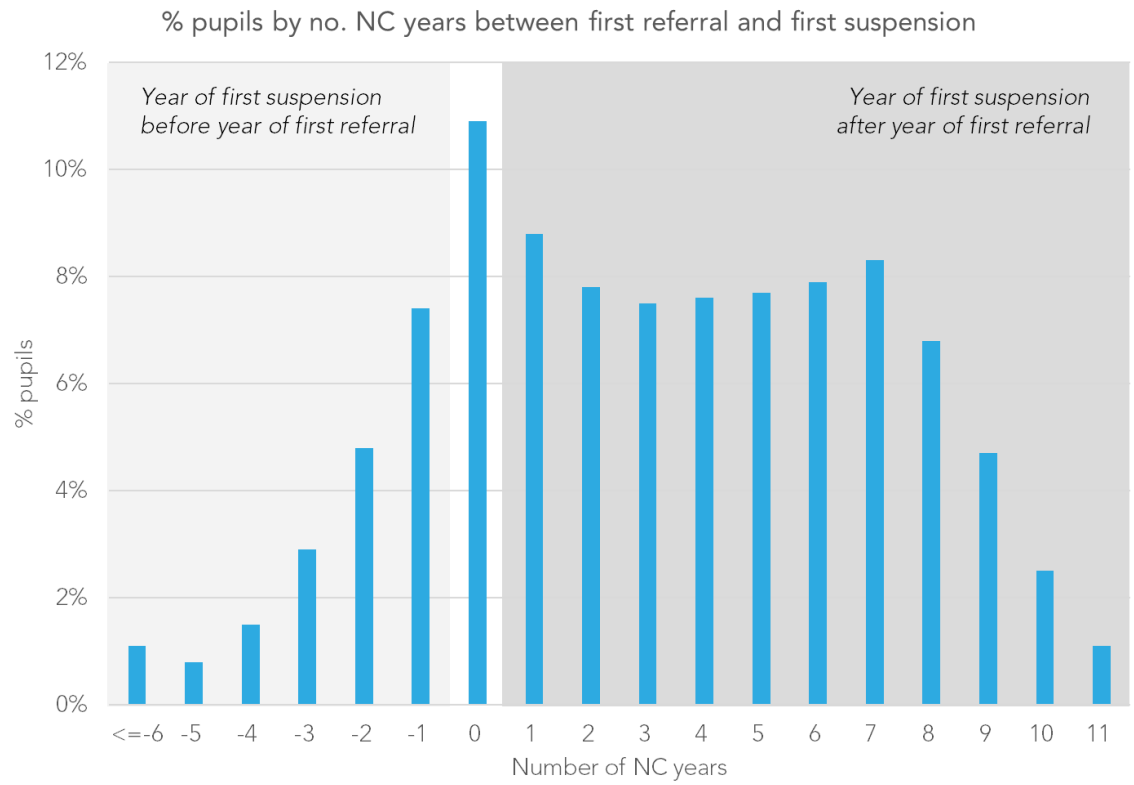

Figure 4-2: The percentage of pupils in the 2004/05 birth cohort by the number of national curriculum (NC) years between their first referral to children's social care services and the first year they were temporarily suspended from school (previously known as a "fixed term exclusion"). The population covered by this Figure are the 37,520 pupils whose first referral occurred while they were of school-age and who were ever suspended.

Figure 4-2 shows the distribution of pupils who were ever suspended by the number of NC years between their first referral and first suspension. The most common scenario was for pupils' first referral and first suspension to happen in the same NC year (11% of pupils).

Overall, first referral tended to precede suspension, often by a number of years. 71% of pupils were first suspended at least a year after their first referral, and 39% at least five years after. 19% of pupils were suspended before their first referral.

4.1.3 Timing of referrals and permanent exclusion

Figure 4-3 (overleaf) shows the distribution of pupils who were ever permanently excluded from school by the number of NC years between their first referral and first permanent exclusion. The two most common scenarios were for permanent exclusion and first referral to happen in the same year (13% of pupils) and for permanent exclusion to happen the year after first referral (11% of pupils).

Overall, the pattern is similar to that for suspensions. First referral tended to precede permanent exclusion by a number of years. 76% of pupils were first permanently excluded at least a year after their first referral, and 41% at least five years after. 11% of pupils were permanently excluded before their first referral.

It should be remembered that rates of persistent absence, suspension and permanent exclusion tend to increase with age. Suspension and particularly permanent exclusion rates among the general population of primary phase pupils are usually negligible[5].

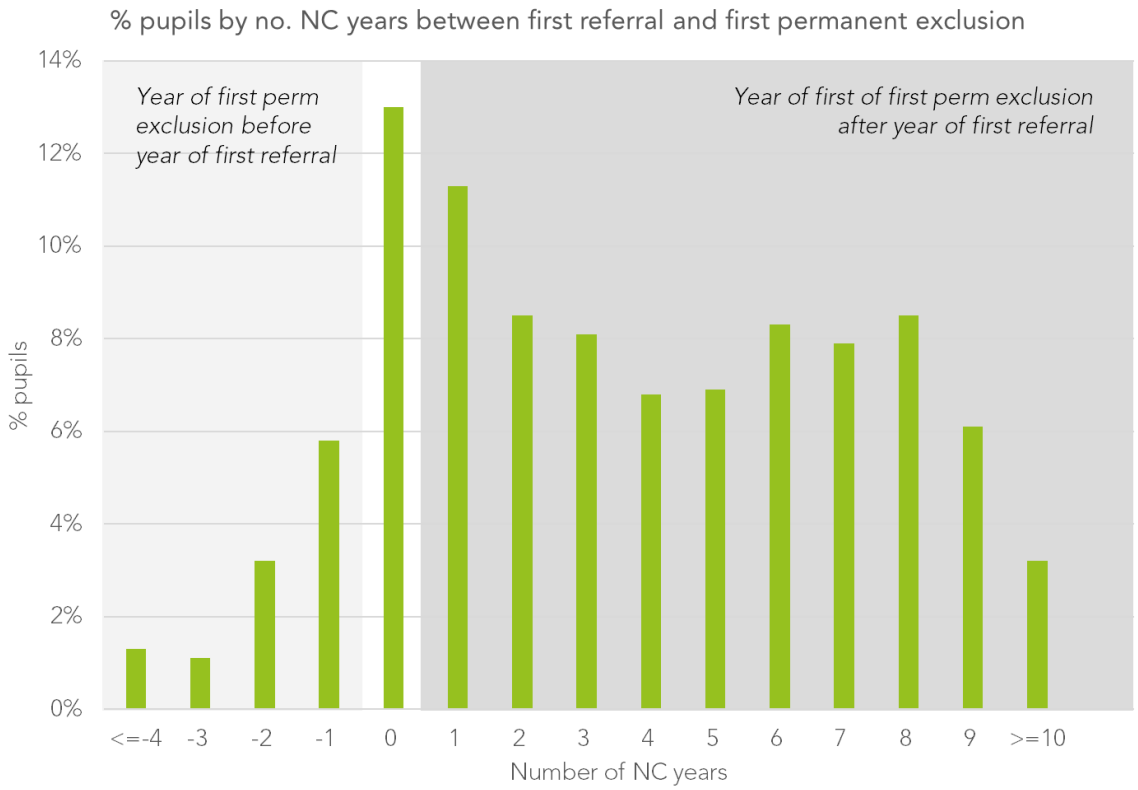

Figure 4-3: The percentage of pupils in the 2004/05 birth cohort by the number of national curriculum (NC) years between their first referral to children's social care services and the first year they were permanently excluded. The population covered by this Figure are the 3,550 pupils whose first referral occurred while they were of school-age and who were ever permanently excluded.

[5] Statistics: exclusions, Department for Education

4.2 End of Key Stage 4 attainment

We now move on to consider pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 4. Table 4-4 shows how selected outcomes varied for each of our groups of pupils, broken down by the total number of times they were referred.

Table 4-4: Selected end of Key Stage 4 (KS4) outcomes for pupils in the 2004/05 birth cohort. Average Attainment 8 (Att 8) score, the percentage of pupils achieving at least a grade 4/C in English and maths, and the percentage of pupils enrolled in a state-funded alternative provision (AP) school or pupil referral unit at the end of KS4 are shown (these measures ignore pupils who were not in the 2021 end of KS4 cohort). Data is broken down by the number of times pupils were referred to children's social care services and their grouping: "Group 1" children received support the first time they were referred, "Group 2" did not receive support the first time they were referred but did subsequently, and "Group 3" never received support.

Total referrals	Group	no. pupils	% in 2021 KS4 cohort	Average Att 8 score	% Eng & maths 4+	% in AP at end of KS4
Total	**Group 1 (support on first ref)**	**76,650**	**93.5%**	**36.1**	**44.0%**	**3.1%**
	Group 2	**25,710**	**93.4%**	**30.9**	**35.1%**	**4.4%**
	Group 3 (no support)	**49,060**	**94.0%**	**40.0**	**51.1%**	**1.5%**
	Total	**151,420**	**93.6%**	**36.5**	**44.8%**	**2.7%**
1	Group 1 (support on first ref)	33,840	92.9%	42.0	53.9%	1.4%
	Group 2					
	Group 3 (no support)	35,860	93.9%	41.8	54.1%	1.2%
	Total	**69,700**	**93.4%**	**41.9**	**54.0%**	**1.3%**
2	Group 1 (support on first ref)	16,540	93.7%	35.5	43.1%	2.9%
	Group 2	6,650	92.9%	36.4	44.7%	2.9%
	Group 3 (no support)	8,750	94.1%	36.7	45.3%	2.0%
	Total	**31,930**	**93.6%**	**36.0**	**44.1%**	**2.7%**
3	Group 1 (support on first ref)	9,920	94.0%	32.4	37.9%	3.7%
	Group 2	5,970	93.9%	32.2	37.2%	3.4%
	Group 3 (no support)	2,800	93.6%	33.7	40.6%	2.3%
	Total	**18,690**	**93.9%**	**32.5**	**38.1%**	**3.4%**
4	Group 1 (support on first ref)	6,090	93.9%	29.2	31.5%	4.7%
	Group 2	4,380	93.5%	30.0	34.3%	4.3%
	Group 3 (no support)	1,030	94.9%	31.9	36.1%	2.5%
	Total	**11,500**	**93.8%**	**29.8**	**33.0%**	**4.3%**
5+	Group 1 (support on first ref)	10,260	94.0%	25.6	26.0%	6.5%
	Group 2	8,700	93.5%	26.2	26.9%	6.1%
	Group 3 (no support)	630	94.3%	31.0	34.6%	2.7%
	Total	**19,600**	**93.8%**	**26.0**	**26.7%**	**6.2%**

Mirroring the results of the previous section, pupils with more referrals had worse outcomes than those with fewer. For example, 54% of those with a single referral achieved a grade 4/C in English and maths, compared with 27% of those with five or more referrals. Pupils with the greatest number of referrals were also almost five times as likely as those with the fewest to have completed KS4 in a state-funded AP school or PRU (6.2% of those with five or more referrals compared with 1.3% of those with a single referral).

We also see similar patterns to the previous section when we look at timing of support. Outcomes for those who received support on their first referral (Group 1) were better than for those who received support only after a subsequent referral (Group 2). However, most of this difference seems to be related to a greater number of referrals among the latter group. For example, among those with at least five referrals, Group 1 pupils had an average Attainment 8 score of 25.6 compared with 26.2 for Group 2 pupils, a difference of less than a tenth of a grade per qualification. This is much smaller than the difference in Attainment 8 score between Group 1 and Group 2 pupils overall; the score for Group 1 pupils (36.1) was around two thirds of a grade per qualification better than for Group 2 (30.9).

Outcomes were better for those who never received support (Group 3) compared with those who did receive support, regardless of the timing of that support or the number of times they were referred.

These results cover those in the 2004/05 birth cohort who were also in the 2021 end of KS4 cohort, around 94% of pupils. A small proportion of the "missing" 6% completed KS4 in a different year, but for the vast majority we were unable to match them to a record in the KS4 dataset. There are several possible reasons for this. For example, some pupils may have migrated to another country or moved to the independent sector before the end of KS4.

4.3 Journeys into care

The final outcome we consider is whether pupils were looked after at any point before the end of compulsory schooling. Table 4-5 shows how the proportion of looked after pupils varied by grouping and by pupils' total number of referrals.

Table 4-5: The percentage of pupils in the 2004/05 birth cohort who were looked after at any point before the end of compulsory schooling. Data is broken down by the number of times pupils were referred to children's social care services and their grouping: "Group 1" children received support the first time they were referred, "Group 2" did not receive support the first time they were referred but did subsequently, and "Group 3" never received support.

	no. pupils				% ever looked after			
Total referrals	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	**Total**	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	**Total**
1	33,840		35,860	**69,700**	5%		4%	**4%**
2	16,540	6,650	8,750	**31,930**	9%	8%	7%	**8%**
3	9,920	5,970	2,800	**18,690**	13%	11%	9%	**12%**
4	6,090	4,380	1,030	**11,500**	17%	14%	10%	**15%**
5	10,260	8,700	630	**19,600**	20%	18%	9%	**19%**
Total	**76,650**	**25,710**	**49,060**	**151,420**	**10%**	**13%**	**5%**	**9%**

We see that, overall, the likelihood of having been looked after increases with the total number of times pupils were referred. 4% of those with a single referral were looked after compared with 19% of those with five or more referrals.

For a given number of total referrals, Group 1 pupils were slightly more likely to have been looked after than Group 2. Those who never received support (Group 3) were less likely to have been looked after than those who did (Groups 1 and 2). This difference increased with increasing numbers of referrals.

We also look at the relationship between the proportion of pupils ever looked after and the age they were when they were first referred to CSSS. These results are summarised in Table 4-6.

Table 4-6: The percentage of pupils in the 2004/05 birth cohort who were looked after at any point before the end of compulsory schooling. Data is broken down by the age at which pupils were first referred to children's social care services and their grouping: "Group 1" children received support the first time they were referred, "Group 2" did not receive support the first time they were referred but did subsequently, and "Group 3" never received support.

	no. pupils				% ever looked after			
Age at first referral	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	**Total**	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	**Total**
before birth	810	270	350	**1,430**	46%	40%	56%	**47%**
0 - 1	780	300	340	**1,420**	41%	32%	41%	**39%**
1 - 2	1,410	440	460	**2,310**	36%	32%	42%	**36%**
2 - 3	3,870	1,500	970	**6,350**	26%	25%	27%	**26%**
3 - 4	10,300	4,370	3,530	**18,200**	14%	18%	9%	**14%**
4 - 5	7,740	4,550	4,860	**17,160**	11%	14%	4%	**10%**
5 - 6	6,300	3,060	3,600	**12,960**	9%	12%	3%	**8%**
6 - 7	6,300	2,150	3,070	**11,510**	7%	11%	2%	**7%**
7 - 8	6,140	1,920	3,180	**11,240**	7%	9%	2%	**6%**
8 - 9	5,310	1,670	3,570	**10,550**	6%	9%	2%	**5%**
9 - 10	4,890	1,310	3,420	**9,620**	6%	9%	2%	**5%**
10 - 11	4,350	1,120	3,510	**8,980**	6%	7%	2%	**4%**
11 - 12	4,180	1,060	3,500	**8,730**	6%	8%	2%	**4%**
12 - 13	4,410	990	3,760	**9,160**	5%	6%	2%	**4%**
13+	9,850	990	10,960	**21,790**	3%	3%	4%	**4%**
Total	**76,650**	**25,710**	**49,060**	**151,420**	**10%**	**13%**	**5%**	**9%**

We see a strong relationship between age at first referral and the likelihood of having been looked after. 47% of those referred before birth had been looked after compared with 4% of those referred for the first time when they were 13 or older.

However, it is likely that the strength of this relationship is overstated. Because the CIN census only began when pupils in the 2004/05 birth cohort were 3 - 4 years-old, referrals made before this time which feature in the dataset must have been recorded retrospectively, or have remained open until pupils were 3 - 4 years-old or older. A number of referrals which were open only for a short period (for example, because they were judged not to require an assessment) will be missing from the dataset. We would therefore expect referrals made before the age of 3 - 4 to have more serious underlying causes than those made after which would, in turn, increase the likelihood of those children being looked after.

There doesn't seem to be much of pattern when we look at differences between pupils in each of our groupings, other than that Group 3 pupils tended to be less likely to have been looked after than Group 1 or Group 2 pupils.

That any Group 3 pupils should have been looked after might be puzzling. However, it is an expression of the limitations of our method of assigning referrals as having resulted in support or not. In particular, if referrals' closure codes were recorded incorrectly (a known

issue, especially in the earliest census returns) or are missing (for example, for records which remained open in the most recent census return) we may have assigned a referral as not resulting in support when in fact it did, or vice versa. There also exist some records in the CLA census which do not link to a similarly timed referral in the CIN census.

5 Acknowledgement

This work was produced using statistical data accessed via the ONS Secure Research Service. The use of this data in this work does not imply the endorsement of the ONS in relation to the interpretation or analysis of the statistical data. This work uses research datasets which may not exactly reproduce National Statistics aggregates.