An independent evaluation of the outcomes for looked after and vulnerable children attending boarding schools

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Foreword

As the 2022 Independent Review into Children's Social Care exposed, too often children growing up in care are moved to different areas, different families and different schools, which leads them unable to secure the basics of a grade 5 in English and maths at GCSE. That review highlighted how access to excellent education is the essential foundation that care experienced children need. That education is vital to ensure that talent and potential, rather than a young person's background, determines their ability to progress. With the progression rate to high tariff universities for care experienced children remaining at 1% since 2009/10 (compared to 11% of all other pupils in recent years, Department for Education, 2021), the review called on the government to be far more ambitious for their futures.

The UK's state boarding and independent schools offer some of the highest quality education and pastoral support and could be made much more accessible for children in care. But establishing placements at a boarding or independent day school for a looked after child, or a child with significant social care experiences, is an extremely complex process. The best interests of the child are at the heart of every decision and such placements won't be right for all children. That is why we commissioned Prof. David Murphy and his team to undertake this study - to help us to understand the potential educational, as well as economic,

benefits and to inform our work as Royal National Children's SpringBoard Foundation (RNCSF), funded by the Department for Education, to establish the conditions necessary for the widespread offer of such school placements for many more children with care experience.

The research makes a compelling case that boarding school placements for care experienced children makes both educational and economic sense. The findings from the matched control group analysis – that care-experienced children could be four times more likely to achieve 'five good GCSEs including Mathematics and English at grade 9-4', and that the intervention also offers savings to government that equate to £2.75million for every 100 children supported – provides the government with the evidence to consider the routine use of such placements as part of care planning arrangements. The qualitative aspects of the research have furthered our understanding of the careful preparation and support that each child needs in order to thrive.

We are very grateful to the research team for the insights that their study offers, and in particular to the young people who took part in the interviews and those who participated in the life grid discussions.

Ali Henderson

Chief Executive Officer
Royal National Children's SpringBoard Foundation

Introduction

We are pleased to provide this report detailing the independent evaluation of outcomes for looked after and vulnerable children ("LAVC") attending a state or independent boarding school. The report was commissioned by Royal National Children's SpringBoard Foundation ("RNCSF") to inform the Department for Education's understanding of the effectiveness and impact of boarding school placements for LAVC. It forms a strand of the overall evaluation of the Department for Education's Broadening Educational Pathways for LAVC scheme ("BEP").

The Broadening Educational Pathways for LAVC scheme is a Department for Education funded programme, launched in 2020, that seeks to equip Local Authorities with the information to consider boarding or independent day school placements for LAVC, and to encourage more independent schools to provide the significant fee remission associated with accepting LAVC as a priority within their own bursary schemes. In doing so the BEP scheme seeks to strengthen the emotional wellbeing, educational attainment and outcomes for LAVC in transitioning to positive future destinations (Higher Education, employment and life chances).

To help evaluate the conditions for the BEP scheme's scaling prospects, RNCSF sought an independent research partner to assess the outcomes achieved by LAVC supported by RNCSF to attend boarding schools in the period 2013-2020; and use this to assess the relevance, effectiveness and value for money of boarding school placements for LAVC in the context of the children's social care commissioning landscape in England and Wales. Although the BEP scheme includes provision for LAVC to attend both boarding and independent day schools, this report details only the experiences of LAVC supported to attend a boarding school, since it was only this sub-set of programme participants that offered the sufficient sample size (>100 young people) to determine statistically significant findings.

The findings presented are based on a number of points of evaluation.

First, we consider the educational outcomes for LAVC who were supported to attend a boarding school through the work of RNCSF between 2013 and 2020 and compare these outcomes with a matched control group, created by accessing the Department for Education (DfE) National Pupil Database (NPD). It should be stated at the outset that the analysis of educational outcomes is limited by:

a) the criteria for inclusion within RNCSF's boarding school placements programme between 2013-2020 is broader than just those who are 'looked after'. What this means in the context of this evaluation, is that not all of the children that were included in the analysis were formally registered as LAC or with a current Child Protection or Child in Need Plan. The cohort group included those in care (LAC) as well as those for whom the intervention was intended to play a 'preventative' role (children previously looked-after (PLAC) given significant involvement of children's social services and children whose circumstances can be described as being on the 'edge of' care – those in Special Guardianship Order, informal foster or kinship care arrangements; with CIN or CPP plans; registered young carers; unaccompanied asylum seeking minors; and/or those accessing early help children's social care intervention at the time of referral. Given the broad set of eligibility criteria describing those in the cohort group, it is not possible to create a control group that can exactly match this heterogeneous treatment group. Consequently, our analysis uses a number of control group scenarios that aims to test a set of assumptions through a number of statistical models.

b) the use of KS4 (GCSE) as the main measure of educational outcomes. It was not possible to include analysis of A-level (or other KS5 equivalent) educational performance. This is because there is no official data on the number of children looked after who are enrolled on A-Level courses against which a comparator group can be created. Our analysis evaluates the correlation between KS4 outcomes and lifetime earnings but recognises the limitation that this ignores the potential effect of ongoing educational outcomes achieved at A-level (or other KS5 equivalent) which are the main route to a young person progressing to Higher Education (HEI). As such this analysis does not seek to evaluate the potential of the scheme in seeking to increase (from fewer than 6%) the number of care leavers progressing to Higher Education Institutions.

Second, based on the KS4 progression analysis, we have provided a tentative estimate of a costs-benefit analysis for the intervention to support further analysis of the economic value of a scaled scheme.

For the benefits side of that equation, we used the educational outcomes findings to create a model for our statistical analysis predicting the number of additional LAVC within the treatment group who obtained good GCSEs compared to the control group. In doing so, we made assumptions to ensure only the additional children were included in any cost benefit analysis, (i.e. to control for some of the LAVC who attended boarding school through RNCSF's work who likely would have achieved good GCSEs anyway, even without the intervention.

In terms of costs: we compare the estimated average costs of social care that the LAVC included in the analysis would have been likely to incur had they not attended a boarding school, with the costs of social care avoided for children who have attended a boarding school and would, therefore, not require a placement within a residential or foster home.

Third, we present findings from 12 interviews conducted with people central to the BEP programme. These include six LAVC who attended a boarding school for all, or part, of their secondary schooling, and six key stakeholders who are members of staff working in organisations involved in delivery of the BEP programme. These in-depth, qualitative, findings can be read alongside the descriptive presentation of the RNCSF longitudinal survey that a number of LAVC boarding pupils supported by RNCSF completed between the years 2019-2021.

In sum, the evaluation we have conducted is thorough, independent, and a well-rounded assessment of the experiences and outcomes achieved for LAVC supported to attend a boarding school.

The evaluation team consists of researchers from the School of Education and School of Economics at the University of Nottingham. The team is led by Professor David Murphy School of Education. In support and leading the quantitative analysis and also from the School of Education was Dr Michael Adkins and Professor Mary Oliver who led the qualitative study is also in the School of Education. Professor Gianni De Fraja is from the School of Economics and led on the economic analysis. In addition, Dr Shun Chen assisted in the literature searches and was from the School of Education at the University of Nottingham but is now with the School of Education at the University of Aberdeen.

The research team have been supported by Ali Henderson (Chief Executive, RNCSF) and Leah Morgan (Head of the LAVC Programme, RNCSF). Their help and support throughout have been highly appreciated. We would also like to thank the team at the Office for National Statistics and the Department for Education for their help and support in accessing the data required for this study.
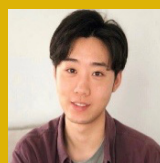
Biographies

David Murphy is Professor of Psychology and Education at the University of Nottingham, School of Education and Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society and also a member of the BPS Register of Psychologists Specialising in Psychotherapy. David's research interest are within the Centre for Research of Human Flourishing looking at the intersection of education and wellbeing, therapy as pedagogy and student-centred learning.

Mike Adkins is a Senior Research Fellow in Education at the University of Nottingham. His research interests focus on maths and science education, school effects, inequalities in educational participation and higher education transitions. His expertise lies in the application of advanced statistical methods to very large scale administrative social science datasets and the running of randomised controlled trials across primary, secondary and further education. He is an accredited ONS researcher and carried out the secondary data analysis of the National Pupil Database for this project.

Mary Oliver is Professor of Science Education at the University of Nottingham, School of Education. Mary has worked with teachers and students in science education. Her research interests are in their experiences in teaching and learning and includes conducting small-scale qualitative studies and analysing large quantitative data sets. Mary has recently been working on a project using PISA and TIMSS datasets to explore effects of instructional approaches, teacher self-efficacy and professional development on student achievement. She has worked previously with David Murphy on projects exploring the use of boarding schools for vulnerable children.

Gianni De Fraja is an applied microeconomist, whose work bridges applied theory and empirical analysis. His recent papers are in labour economics, health economics, and the economics of higher education. He is currently a Professor of Economics at the University of Nottingham, and Research Fellow at CEPR. He has previously held chairs in York and Leicester and visiting posts in Tokyo, Bonn, Barcelona, and Rome.
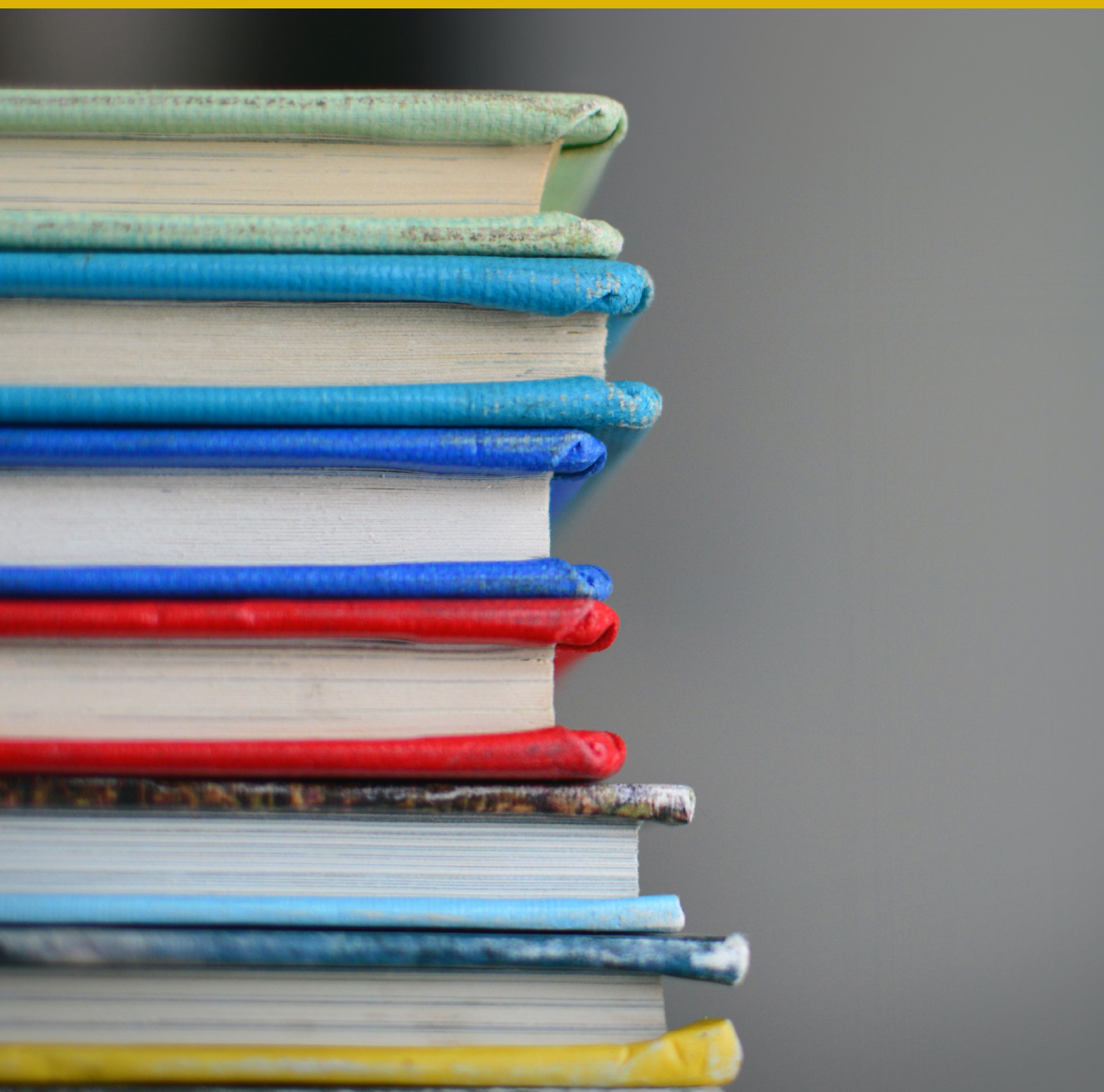

Shun Chen is a Lecturer of Person-centred Counselling and Psychotherapy in the School of Education at the University of Aberdeen. He holds the status of Chartered Psychologist with the British Psychological Society (BPS). In addition, Shun is an accredited psychotherapist with the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) and has received accreditation as a trainer in Gender, Sex, and Relationship Diversities. Shun's multifaceted career as a researcher, trainer, and practitioner is underpinned by his deep interest and extensive experience in LGBTQ+ psychology and psychotherapy. His work is characterised by a commitment to understanding and addressing the unique psychological needs of the LGBTQ+ community, and he continually seeks to contribute to the field through his teaching, research, and practice.

Why boarding for vulnerable children?

Whilst there is no monetary value to accurately reflect the subjective experience of living a whole, healthy and satisfying life, similarly, there is no cost that can accurately reflect the emotional, psychological and physical struggle in the life for a looked after or vulnerable child (LAVC). This evaluation has been conducted amidst a crisis in UK children's social care and with the backdrop of the independent review of children's social care report (accessible here, 2022). The problems associated with children's social care are substantial, not least in regards to their educational journeys.

The number of looked after children in England is rising, having reached an all-time high of 80,850 in 2021 (DfE, 2021). The estimated cost of statutory spending on children's social care is also increasing (The Case for Change, accessible here, 2022) even though the total cost has remained almost unchanged. One consequence from this is that cuts were made to non-statutory spending in areas supporting youth services and extra-curricular opportunities. The downstream costs for LAVC are also significant. Murray, Lacey, Maughen and Sacker (2020) suggested there is a 70% increase in likelihood of all-cause mortality for those who spend time in out-of-home care. LAVCs are also more likely to become involved in the criminal justice system than those who do not enter care (Ministry of Justice and DfE, 2016). The chances of becoming not employed in education or training as a care leaver, far outweigh those who are never in care as children (DfE, 2021) and, care leavers are disproportionately represented amongst the homeless community in adulthood (Reeve, 2011). Most importantly for evaluating the value of boarding school placements for LAVC, the educational outcomes for LAVC are significantly lower compared to children with no social care experience. In the 2021 reporting year, Department for Education reported the average KS4 attainment 8 scores for looked after children was 23.2, and for children identified as 'in need' (CIN) was 22.6, compared to 50.9 for non-looked after children. This is a considerable attainment gap and one that the Broadening Educational Pathways scheme aims to address.

Children's social care is both expensive, and often identified as leading to poor outcomes. Intervening early in a child's life could limit the chances of later experiencing poor health, lower academic attainment, involvement within criminal justice systems and homelessness. PWC (2021) recently estimated these outcomes alone might cost, at a minimum, £2.3b per annum for looked after children.

The concept of government support to improve the life chances of LAVC through supporting their attendance at boarding schools is not new - the

2005-08 "Pathfinder" programme , 2012-15 Assisted Boarding Network and Buttle UK's "Boarding Chances" programmes have each sought to place children on the edge of care in both independent and state boarding schools. Analysis of these three schemes showed very few children were offered places in schools for a variety of reasons across relationships between local government, central government and boarding schools; and difficulties in identifying and supporting children for whom boarding school was the right environment. In 2020 the Department for Education commissioned the BEP scheme with the aim of addressing the main weaknesses highlighted by the conclusions raised in previous initiatives. The initial scope of the BEP was to "create a blueprint for the routine referral of LAVC for the opportunity to secure a place at a boarding (state and independent) or independent day school". The aim of the scheme is to secure improvements to both the pastoral care and educational outcomes for participating LAVC.

Within the LAVC included within the treatment group covered by this report, we have observed three overarching principles. First, that LAVCs who attended a boarding school gained the opportunity to experience a rich educational opportunity with the view to enhancing educational attainment. Second, attending boarding school and improving educational outcomes can lead to net educationally derived economic advantages for society. Third, that attending boarding school can alter the life trajectory of LAVCs by gaining and building networks to facilitate improved life chances.

In the following sections of this report, we present the findings from three interrelated studies that considered the educational outcomes, the net educational benefits of the boarding scheme alongside the costs avoided of entering the care system and, in-depth testimony detailing the experiences of those receiving and administering the bursaries.

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[1]Included within the descriptor LAVC ("Looked After or Vulnerable Child") are children looked after, children previously looked after, children identified by their local authority as 'in need' or be subject to a child protection plan, children in kinship care, informal foster care or special guardianship orders (i.e. not being looked after by a birth parent – not including children who have been adopted or have other significant circumstances that have involved children's social care intervention, such as being a young carer.

Study 1
Educational outcomes

The literature we review here shows some evidence that LAVC and/or disadvantaged youth might benefit both through academic and other life outcomes from the opportunities provided through attending a boarding school.

Implementing a boarding intervention to improve

Implementing a boarding intervention to improve academic attainment for looked after and vulnerable children is motivated by an attempt to improve life chances. It is broadly accepted that by improving academic attainment, the potential for better life chances can be enhanced. This is achieved by increasing the ability to have choice and assumes that choices have a socially determining role in terms of improving longitudinal outcomes. For example, being able to continue in study beyond the compulsory age is considered to improve later life benefits. Post-16 educational outcomes for looked after children, however, are poor when compared to all individuals. Nelson and Anderson's (2021) Department for Education report showed that around thirty percent of all individuals from 2005/6 to 2008/8 KS4 cohorts became university graduates. Compare this to just eight percent of children who had been looked after for at least one year and only six percent for those looked after for a single day, and it is easy to see how life choices are limited by academic attainment.

Steel, Erhardt, Phelps and Upham (2015) looked at data from The Boarding School Association (TABS) in the US. Linking their dataset to an administrative dataset, the findings showed that boarding school attendees were more likely to complete their university studies than matched non-boarding controls, even after controlling for socio-economic advantages. That advantages for boarders continue later into their education journeys is not surprising, especially if we take the view that educational capital is accumulative. It is possible the transition to university is something being a boarder prepares you well for; living out of home when boarding might help prepare students for out of home living at university. This point is borne out in the evidence (Jack, 2019) that students from low socioeconomic

backgrounds who receive a bursary to attend an independent day/boarding school can do better if/when they move on to more elite universities, as they have had the opportunity to develop greater social and cultural capital compared to similarly disadvantaged youth who went to state schools but attend the same universities. Therefore, it is possible that boarding can provide a protective layer ensuring a young person from a disadvantaged background is more likely to achieve their potential in completing university, if they experience the benefits of an elite education earlier in their academic journey. Steel et al. (ibid) found that other life chances following boarding school were also improved, suggesting boarders were more likely to be employed, have excellent health, earn more per annum, and were more likely to volunteer than graduates who did not attend boarding school.

Improving academic outcomes for disadvantaged children through the use of boarding schools

There is a dearth of high quality evidence within the published academic literature that assesses improvement in academic outcomes for disadvantaged children who attend independent day/boarding schools. Some evidence, consistent with the principle, has been found. For example, a programme in the US looked at socially disadvantaged children attending SEED schools that offer a holistic education experience with curricula that addresses both the academic and non-academic development of children (Curto & Fryer, 2014). Findings suggested that for each year a child is in a SEED school, they achieve small to modest gains with effect sizes of around 0.211 in reading, 0.229 in math scores. However, when interpreting the findings, Curto and Fryer (2014) suggest caution as these effects might quite likely be driven by gender, with girls significantly outperforming boys in the study.

A more recent study by Behaghel, de Chaisemartin and Gurgand (2017), looked at the rate of change in academic and non-academic outcomes for disadvantaged children attending boarding school. The study included data gathered from children who had been randomly selected to attend boarding schools after entering a lottery in the US and in France. Behaghel, de Chaisemartin and Gurgand (2017) noted that improvements in academic performance for disadvantaged children attending boarding schools took two years to be observed and, once improvement was observed, it was more pronounced in higher ability students. Behaghel, de Chaisemartin and Gurgand (ibid) suggest that as the adjustment to boarding takes approximately two years for academic effects to be observed, the transition itself might be disruptive to academic development. The learning from this study suggests the need for careful management of transition to boarding if boarding school places for vulnerable children are to maximise academic benefit earlier in the educational journey.

A study by Foliano, Green and Sartarelli (2019) in the UK looked at the effect of boarding by comparing the effect of attending a selective and resource-rich English boarding school on the educational achievement of pupils with low socioeconomic status, against attending selective grammar day schools and independent day schools. Their findings suggest that pupils attending a selective boarding school achieved significantly better GCSE results. For boarders, the probability of obtaining at least five GCSEs at A-A* was about 32% and 29% higher relative to the values for matched pupils in selective non-boarding grammar schools and independent day schools, respectively.

A recent report by Pro-Bono Economics (Plaister & Thomson, 2021) measured the likelihood of achieving two or more A-Levels (or equivalent) and attainment at A-Level (or equivalent), of young people who had attended a boarding school and were from "disadvantaged" backgrounds (FSME and living in areas of the lowest 3 IMD quintiles). The study found that, when matched against children sharing similar characteristics using the NPD, this cohort of "disadvantaged" young people attending a boarding school achieved more and better A-Levels (or equivalents) than their matched controls. Whilst the results in this study provide a favourable first glance, some caution is advised when interpreting the results. Importantly, the authors note they did not use GCSE results as a matching variable, even though this would have provided the best proximal academic attainment matching variable and created a more plausible control group. The authors also note that prior academic attainment is the best predictor of later attainment. This clause is supported as the analysis shows the study's effects are 'considerably lower' across 'all outcomes' when KS4 results are used as a matching variable. However, this finding can be explained also in part by the point that a number of the "disadvantaged" pupils' in the treatment group had actually been supported to attend their boarding schools prior to entering 6th Form. Nevertheless, a key point is that controls that are well matched on academic criteria are likely to be the best match sample for testing the effects for educational rather than social outcomes.

[2]Boarding School Provision for Vulnerable Children: Pathfinder Evaluation - UCL Discovery
[3]Boarding for 'in need' children | EEF (educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk)

Improving academic outcomes for vulnerable children through the use of boarding schools

The evidence above provides some evidence for the benefits of boarding for disadvantaged young people. Vulnerable children are those that might be looked after, classed as a child in need, be subject to a child protection plan, a special guardianship order or have other circumstances requiring significant social care involvement, such as being a young carer. Looked after and vulnerable children (LAVC) have particularly poor educational outcomes and worse than those who are classified as "disadvantaged" (e.g. those eligible for free school meals).

There is a small but growing number of studies internationally within the literature researching the use of boarding schools for LAVC. Boarding interventions have been used in a wide range of circumstances including researching boarding effects on children's social and emotional development (Dillon et al., 2021), for improving the access for vulnerable children to town-based or city-based schools in China (Chen et al, 2014; Gao et al, 2021; Mo et al 2014), and for vulnerable children in England (Norfolk County Council, 2018) are some examples. In a soon to be published meta-analysis of the literature, Murphy, Chen and Liao have found a small positive effect for cognitive, psychological and behavioural outcomes for the benefits of boarding for vulnerable children. The results from the meta-analysis are to be interpreted with some caution as there was a high degree of heterogeneity within the data suggesting the need for further tests to check for the influence of for moderating variables.

Evidence sourced from Royal National Children's SpringBoard Foundation (RNCSF) data presented in their Impact Report published in 2019 reported that LAVC supported through the charity's work to attend a boarding school achieved on average, when compared to reports of national averages for similarly vulnerable children, two grades higher per GCSE subject taken. In addition, RNCSF-supported boarding school attendees from vulnerable and 'disadvantaged' backgrounds had a higher chance of securing places at university, in higher education or apprenticeships (89%) compared to the national average (67%) for young people who are disadvantaged. Furthermore the rate of entry specifically to university for LAVC supported to attend a boarding school by RNCSF in the period 2013-19 was 82%, compared to a national average of only 35% percent for disadvantaged young people in 2019.

The limitation of the data within these reports is that the perceived effects might be inflated due to the use of the national averages as the comparison group. Hence

RNCSF's interest in commissioning an independent evaluation that allowed for a more realistic comparison group constructed using a matched control group using administrative data, such as that contained and available within the National Pupil Database (NPD).

Creating a matched control group is not the perfect solution to the problem of not being able to randomise within an evaluation study. Matched controls are not able to account for a range of non-observable variables that randomisation could, theoretically, be able to do. For example, using matched controls means that we do not know enough about participants in a control group and cannot therefore match these to the same qualities within the treatment group. Factors such as self-regulation, motivation for study, problem solving, academic self-concept and other personal character traits capable of explaining differences in performance remain unknown.

Nevertheless, matched controls do offer the opportunity to conduct robust analyses of the treatment effectiveness where programmes are implemented on the basis of being a 'within the subjects' design. The use of large-scale administrative datasets available, such as the NPD, provide an excellent source for building a robust and trustworthy control group for analysis.

In summary, the evidence reviewed above suggests we might expect small to medium positive educational gain to be observed in the treatment group of LAVC who have attended a boarding school. Using matched controls where matching incorporates the latest possible educational attainment point as a matching criteria, can provide the best possible estimates. In the absence of randomized trials and with relatively small samples in most studies, interpretation of the findings should be done with caution. The rationale for boarding school places for LAVC to date has been premised on the grounds of educational attainment and improving life chances as the primary outcomes. Whilst the extent of the educational benefits to be gained might be small, the social and emotional benefits to LAVCs might have greater promise and are in need of further investigation. That is largely beyond the scope of this evaluation.

Within the treatment group analysed in this report, only some of the children were looked after at the time of going to boarding school. Others were considered to meet the LAVC status as they were either a child identified by their local authority as being "in need" (CIN), have a child protection plan (CPP), have a special guardianship order (SGO) in place, or be in kinship or other informal foster care arrangement. Others though may be not so far in to the care system and might have significant social worker involvement or face other challenges such as being a young carer. With such a

heterogeneous sample within the treatment group, we will make a number of comparisons with different control groups to represent the care status and also to account for missing data within the sample. This will allow for more nuanced understanding whilst remaining within the advice from DfE regarding the cautionary approach to interpretation of the results.

Method

We made a bespoke request to the Department for Education (DfE, 2022) in England to provide data on pupils who had been supported by RNCSF to attend a boarding school. The young people in the treatment group were supported to attend either a state funded or privately funded boarding school, which provided challenges to collect sufficient data as schools from the independent sector do not take part in compulsory data collection on a yearly basis. Data on pupil attainment at GCSE are returned by the examination boards, but census data and Key Stage data (depending on when the pupil entered the independent school) are often incomplete.

The data sharing agreement was signed in March 2022 and the extract was transferred to the Office for National Statistics for processing within their Secure Research Service environment. This data request drew on variables from Key Stage 4 to provide GCSE results, KS2 and KS1 as a baseline measure of attainment (as all eligible pupils entered at or after year 7), the final Spring Census prior to attending the boarding school placement (to draw on their free school meal status and their Index of Deprivation Affecting Children (IDACI) score), and status flags from the Children Looked After and Children in Need data tables. This allowed us to build a significant snapshot of the longitudinal educational histories of participating pupils.

In addition to this, we also requested broader pupil population data from all the tables above – KS4, KS2, KS1, CLA and CIN in order to create a matched sample of pupils with similar characteristics to those in the treatment group but who had not attended a boarding school placement.

To gain a sufficient sample size we drew from multiple years of placements – with those pupils completing GCSE exams between 2016/2017 and 2020/2021. This provided 110(rounded for statistical disclosure control) RNCSF-supported LAVC pupils for matching. We noted significant missingness on the part of KS2 and also blank records for the KS4 Attainment 8 English and Mathematics slots, despite a full range of data within the remaining 6 slots. All RNCSF pupils had an Attainment 8 score calculated by the DfE, yet 53% of students had a blank cell for GCSE Mathematics and English. Given the number of independent boarding schools, a possible explanation is that they may have taken iGCSE. However, from 2011 iGCSE has been incorporated into the NPD by the DfE. All students with missing Maths and/or English grades obtained lower Attainment 8 scores. We are unable to explain why this is the case.

Analytical scenarios

We created three analytical scenarios based on a discussion with the funder and to adjust for shortcomings in the data. Firstly, these discussions focused on pupil status within the administrative data regarding their Children Looked After status. All children considered by the charity for the scheme were selected due to being "vulnerable", with circumstances that can be described as being on the 'edge of' care, although some did not meet the threshold to be recorded as such in the administrative data extract. In two scenarios, we recoded the data to assume that these pupils were in fact classified as Children Looked After. Secondly, we took into account the uncertainty surrounding the missing data discussed above and addressed this via multiple imputation.

The scenarios were as follows:

— Scenario 1: RNCSF pupils were compared with a mixture of KS4 general population, Children Looked After (LAC) and Children in Need (CIN). It assumes any missing GCSE Mathematics and English grades were 0 scores at the first attempt.

— Scenario 2: RNCSF pupils were compared against LAC & CIN only. Assumes any missing GCSE Mathematics and English grades were 0 scores at the first attempt.

— Scenario 3: As part of a speculative analysis RNCSF pupils were compared against LAC & CIN and missing scores for GCSE Mathematics and/or GCSE English were imputed where appropriate using auxiliary variables to provide attainment data.

Missing data analysis

We ran three sets of imputations using the Multivariate Imputation Chained Equations "mice" package version 3.13.0 (van Buuren et al., 2021) in R on the national derived sample of 10% of England's student population; the LAC only sample; and a speculative imputation of the LAC only sample, but with a significant adjustment via setting the KS4 English and Maths Attainment 8 slots (and overall KS4 Attainment 8 Score) to missing where there was no value recorded.

The imputation model for the national derived sample of 10% of England's KS4 student population between 2017-2021 (246,390 students) and included the academic year, gender of the student, Attainment 8 score, GCSE Mathematics and English grade score, the major ethnic group of the student, the FSM6 status of the student, the IDACI score, KS1 and KS2 average point score, along with the student's LAC/CIN status, and finally a treatment indicator. All variables with missing values were imputed with the predictive mean matching method, with the exception of EverFSM6 which was imputed using logistic regression.

The imputation model on 37990 LAC students included KS4 academic year, gender of the student, Attainment 8 score, GCSE Mathematics and English numerical grade, Ethnic group major, EverFSM6, the IDACI score, KS1 average point score, KS2 average point score, whether the student had been classified as CIN at any point, and the Treatment indicator. All variables with missing values, were imputed with the predictive mean matching method, with the exception of EverFSM6 which was imputed using logistic regression.

Finally, the speculative imputation model on 37990 LAC students included KS4 academic year, gender of the student, Attainment 8 score, GCSE Mathematics and English numerical grade, Ethnic group major, EverFSM6, the IDACI score, KS1 average point score, KS2 average point score, whether the student had been classified as CIN at any point, the Treatment indicator, and all slots for the Attainment 8 measure. All variables with missing values, were imputed with the predictive mean matching method, with the exception of EverFSM6 which was imputed using logistic regression.

The Gibbs sampler was run for 1000 iterations for the first imputation model and 2000 iterations for the final two models, with three imputed datasets drawn from each of the resulting posterior distributions. The MCMC plots were checked visually for convergence, along with the Rhat values for all parameters.

Matching process

The R Package MatchThem (Pishgar, Greifer, Leyrat & Stuart, 2021) was used to provide non-parametric matching algorithms to match the RNCSF LAVC boarders (the "treatment" group) against a set of similarly distributed students forming a synthetic control. The first matching process used the following covariates: KS4 Academic Year, Ethnic Group Major, Ever FSM6, IDACIScore, KS2 average point score, gender as recorded at KS4, whether the student was CIN at any point and whether they were a LAC for at least 1 day. Nearest Neighbour matching was used with the propensity score distance calculated via GLM. 3 control students were drawn for every treatment student.

For the second and third matching models, a similar approach was used as above, but as all treatment students were assumed to be equivalent to LAC, and as the entire dataset consisted of only LAC, we dropped the LAC variable from the matching process. Again Nearest Neighbour matching was used with the propensity score distance calculated via GLM. 3 control students were drawn for every treatment student. Table 1 below presents the balance scores for all three matching processes.

Covariate balance achieved in the three scenarios is presented below in Table 1 as measured by a standardised maximum adjusted difference value.

Table 1: Matching covariate balance for scenario 1, 2 and 3.

	Maximum Adjusted Difference Treatment vs. Control		
	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3
Distance	0.0009	0.3231	0.2921
KS4_ACADYR_2016/2017	0.0159	0.0762	0.0762
KS4_ACADYR_2017/2018	0.0381	0.0254	0.0190
KS4_ACADYR_2017/2018	0.0222	0.0222	0.0095
KS4_ACADYR_2019/2020	0.0413	0.0476	0.0635
KS4_ACADYR_2020/2021	0.0317	0.0349	0.0413
Ethnic Group Major AOEG	0.0063	0.0095	0.0286
Ethnic Group Major ASIA	0.0063	0.0127	0.0381
Ethnic Group Major BLAC	0.019	0.0286	0.0317
Ethnic Group Major CHIN	0	0.0063	0
Ethnic Group Major MIXD	0.0413	0.0127	0.0190
Ethnic Group Major UNCL	0.0095	0.0095	0.0127
Ethnic Group Major WHIT	0.0381	0.0317	0.0413
EVERFSM_6	0.0159	0.0476	0.0413
IDACIScore	0.0587	0.0595	0.0961
KS2_APS	0.1261	0.0381	0.1101
CIN_AnyPoint	0.0444	0.0444	0.0508
CLA_CLA_PP_1_DAY	0.0095	-	-
KS4_GENDER_M	0.0476	0.0635	0.0635

Source: National Pupil Database.

Results

Four multiple linear regression models were then fitted to each of the three outcome measures - KS4 Attainment 8, GCSE Mathematics and GCSE English numerical grades. The first model was an empty model which estimates the average score on the outcome for the students. The second model added the treatment coefficient. The third model added the IDACIScore control and the KS2 average point score control which were mean centred, and the last model, provided an interaction between treatment and KS2 average point score. Some caution should be exercised with the p-values as no multiple comparisons correction has been applied. Table 2 to 10 are reported below and provide the findings for Scenario 1, 2 and 3.

For Scenario 1, RNCSF LAVC pupils scored 10.97 grade points (-15.32, -6.63) lower than comparable pupils in the matched control on Attainment 8 which suggests scoring over 1 grade point lower in each of the 8 GCSE subjects on average. On the GCSE Mathematics and GCSE English outcomes, RNCSF LAVC pupils scored approximately 2.29 and 2.01 grade points (with the intervals as follows: -2.92, -1.66 and -2.62, -1.41 respectively) lower than the control group.

For scenario 2, the Attainment 8 measure was 0.40 points higher for the RNCSF LAVC pupils than the control group, although the interval crossed 0 (-4.58, 5.38). For GCSE Mathematics and GCSE English, the scores were -1.44 and -1.20 lower, with intervals of (-1.95, -0.94, and -1.79, -0.61 respectively).

In scenario 3, Attainment 8 was positive for the RNCSF LAVCs pupils, with an average treatment score of 8.34 grade points higher than the control (1.91, 14.77). There were positive treatment effects on both GCSE Mathematics and English with an average treatment score of 0.37 (-0.46, 1.19) and 1.09 (0.38, 1.80) grade points higher than the control respectively, although only GCSE English was statistically significant.

In terms of effect size differences, we urge caution here as the sample sizes were very small and the impact of missing data. They ranged from -0.64, -1.17 and -0.94 for Attainment 8, GCSE Mathematics and GCSE English respectively in scenario 1; 0.02, -0.70, 0.49 in scenario 2; 0.44, 0.23, 0.54 in scenario 3. Table 11 can be used to make an estimate in months gained per effect sizes as proposed by the Education Endowment Foundation. Taking Scenario 3 as the most likely scenario, Attainment 8 scores suggest approximately +5 months, GCSE Maths is +3 months and GCSE English is +7 months.

Proportion of 5 GCSE 9-4

For the final two scenarios we carried out a descriptive analysis and calculated the proportion of students in the treatment arm that achieved 5 GCSEs 9-4 including English and Mathematics, and 5 GCSEs 9-4 including all possible subject combinations and for the control arm. Please note counts have been rounded and percentages are based on these rounded numerators and denominators for data protection statistical disclosure control purposes.

In Scenario 2, using the individual Attainment 8 slot data, we calculated that 20 of the 110 RNCSF LAVC in the treated group (18%) achieved 5 GCSEs 9-4 including English and Maths, and 70 (64%) achieved 5 GCSEs 9-4. The control saw 40 out of 320 students (13%) achieve 5 GCSEs 9-4 including English and Maths and 50 out of 320 students (16%) achieve 5 GCSEs 9-4. 60 out of the 110 RNCSF LAVC in the treated group had NPD records that suggested a 0 score in English, and 60 out of 110 had a 0 score in Mathematics. This is particularly surprising and raises questions about the qualifications sat and recorded in the NPD itself, particularly as the remaining Attainment 8 slots had non-zero values.

In Scenario 3, using the individual Attainment 8 slot data, we calculated that 60 out of the 110 RNCSF LAVC in the treated group (55%) achieved 5 GCSEs 9-4 including English and Maths, and 80 (73%) achieved 5 GCSEs 9-4. For the control condition, we calculated 40 out of 320 (13%) achieved 5 GCSEs 9-4, and 50 (16%) achieved 5 GCSEs 9-4.

Table 2: Scenario 1: KS4 Attainment 8 score as recorded in the NPD for the 110 RNCSF LAVC in the treated group compared to 320 students drawn from the national population using non-parametric nearest neighbour matching calculated through GLM distance.

Predictors	KS4 Attainment			KS4 Attainment			KS4 Attainment		
	Estimates	CI	p	Estimates	CI	p	Estimates	CI	p
(Intercept)	40.65	37.17 – 44.13	<0.001	43.18	38.61 – 47.76	<0.001	41.50	39.57 – 43.44	<0.001
Treatment				-10.14	-15.94 – -4.34	0.001	-10.97	-15.32 – -6.63	<0.001
IDACI Score							-20.46	-37.09 – -3.83	0.020
KS2 APS							2.99	2.56 – 3.42	<0.001
o2	497.29			477.86			295.84		
Observations	430			430			430		

Source: National Pupil Database.

Table 3: Scenario 1: GCSE Mathematics score as recorded in the NPD for the 110 RNCSF LAVC in the treated group compared to 320 students drawn from the national population using non-parametric nearest neighbour matching calculated through GLM distance.

Predictors	GCSE Mathematics			GCSE Mathematics			GCSE Mathematics		
	Estimates	CI	p	Estimates	CI	p	Estimates	CI	p
(Intercept)	3.73	3.17 – 4.28	<0.001	4.28	3.50 – 5.05	<0.001	4.09	3.70 – 4.49	<0.001
Treatment				-2.20	-2.98 – -1.42	<0.001	-2.29	-2.92 – -1.66	<0.001
IDACI Score							-2.83	-4.59 – -1.08	0.003
KS2 APS							0.31	0.26 – 0.35	<0.001
o2	6.68			5.78			3.79		
Observations	430			430			430		

Source: National Pupil Database.

Table 4: Scenario 1 - GCSE English score as recorded in the NPD for the 110 RNCSF LAVC in the treated group compared to 320 students drawn from the national population using non-parametric nearest neighbour matching calculated through GLM distance.

	GCSE English			GCSE English			GCSE English		
Predictors	*Estimates*	*CI*	*p*	*Estimates*	*CI*	*p*	*Estimates*	*CI*	*p*
(Intercept)	4.19	3.76 – 4.62	**<0.001**	4.34	3.66 – 5.02	**<0.001**	4.16	3.72 – 4.59	**<0.001**
Treatment	-2.01	-2.62 – -1.41	**<0.001**	-1.98	-2.71 – -1.25	**<0.001**	-2.01	-2.62 – -1.41	**<0.001**
KS2 APS	0.25	0.14 – 0.37	0.003				0.25	0.14 – 0.36	**0.002**
IDACI Score							-2.28	-4.21 – -0.36	**0.023**
o2	4.65			6.01			295.84	4.58	
Observations	430			430			430		

Source: National Pupil Database.

KS4 Attainment 8

Table 5: Scenario 2 - KS4 Attainment score as recorded in the NPD for the 110 RNCSF LAVC in the treated group compared to 320 students drawn from the CLA-CIN population only using non-parametric nearest neighbour matching calculated through GLM derived distance.

	KS4 Attainment 8			KS4 Attainment 8			KS4 Attainment 8			KS4 Attainment 8		
Predictors	*Estimates*	*CI*	*p*	*Estimates*	*CI*	*p*	*Estimates*	*CI*	*p*	*Estimates*	*CI*	*p*
(Intercept)	32.81	29.84 – 35.78	**<0.001**	32.73	28.94 – 36.51	**<0.001**	21.08	16.79 – 25.37	**<0.001**	18.92	13.94 – 23.90	**<0.001**
Treatment				0.32	-5.19 – 5.83	0.908	0.40	-4.58 – 5.38	0.873	9.93	2.53 – 17.34	**0.009**
IDACI Score							-10.97	-26.17 – 4.23	0.155	-11.26	-26.31 – 3.78	0.140
KS2 APS							2.59	1.95 – 3.24	**<0.001**	3.09	2.36 – 3.82	**<0.001**
o2	495.16			496.21			403.84			392.94		
Observations	430			430			430			430		

Source: National Pupil Database.

KS4 GCSE Mathematics

Table 6: Scenario 2 – GCSE Mathematics score as recorded in the NPD for the 110 RNCSF LAVC in the treated group compared to 320 students drawn from the CLA-CIN population only using non-parametric nearest neighbour matching calculated through GLM derived distance.

	KS4 GCSE Mathematics			KS4 GCSE Mathematics			KS4 GCSE Mathematics			KS4 GCSE Mathematics		
Predictors	*Estimates*	*CI*	*p*	*Estimates*	*CI*	*p*	*Estimates*	*CI*	*p*	*Estimates*	*CI*	*p*
(Intercept)	3.16	2.87 – 3.45	**<0.001**	3.52	3.18 – 3.87	**<0.001**	2.12	1.54 – 2.69	**0.001**	0.001	1.14 – 2.56	**0.001**
Treatment				-1.45	-2.01 – -0.88	**<0.001**	-1.44	-1.95 – -0.94	**<0.001**	-0.28	-1.11 – 0.55	0.496
KS2 APS							0.31	0.25 – 0.37	**<0.001**	0.37	0.30 – 0.44	**<0.001**
IDACI Score							-1.84	-3.43 – -0.24	**0.025**	-1.87	-3.39 – -0.35	**0.016**
o2				6.02			5.64			4.30			4.14
Observations	430			430			430			430		

Source: National Pupil Database.

KS4 GCSE English

Table 7: Scenario 2 - GCSE English score as recorded in the NPD for the 110 RNCSF LAVC in the treated group compared to 320 students drawn from the CLA-CIN population only using non-parametric nearest neighbour matching calculated through GLM derived distance.

	KS4 GCSE English			KS4 GCSE English			KS4 GCSE English			KS4 GCSE English		
Predictors	*Estimates*	*CI*	*p*	*Estimates*	*CI*	*p*	*Estimates*	*CI*	*p*	*Estimates*	*CI*	*p*
(Intercept)	3.24	2.91 – 3.56	**<0.001**	3.54	3.13 – 3.95	**<0.001**	2.41	1.97 – 2.86	**<0.001**	2.19	1.71 – 2.67	**<0.001**
Treatment				-1.21	-1.84 – -0.58	**0.001**	-1.20	-1.79 – -0.61	**0.001**	-0.17	-1.07 – 0.65	0.633
KS2 APS							0.25	0.15 – 0.34	**<0.001**	0.30	0.20 – 0.40	**<0.001**
IDACI Score							-1.33	-3.37 – 0.71	**0.194**	-1.36	-3.42 – 0.70	**0.187**
o2		7.14			6.88			6.02			5.91	
Observations	430			430			430			430		

Source: National Pupil Database.

Table 8: Scenario 3 - KS4 Attainment score as recorded in the NPD for the 110 RNCSF LAVC in the treated group compared to 320 students drawn from the CLA-CIN population only using non-parametric nearest neighbour matching calculated through GLM derived distance. Missing Mathematics and English Attainment 8 slots and GCSE Mathematics and English were imputed as part of a speculative analysis.

Predictors	KS4 Attainment 8			KS4 Attainment 8			KS4 Attainment 8			KS4 Attainment 8		
	Estimates	CI	p	Estimates	CI	p	Estimates	CI	p	Estimates	CI	p
(Intercept)	35.54	32.47 – 38.61	<0.001	33.29	29.36 – 37.21	<0.001	19.88	16.55 – 23.21	<0.001	17.90	14.49 – 21.30	<0.001
Treatment				9.02	3.56 – 14.48	0.002	8.34	1.91 – 14.77	0.016	16.56	9.87 – 23.25	<0.001
IDACI Score							2.92	2.19 – 3.64	<0.001	3.36	2.38 – 4.34	<0.001
KS2 APS							-13.98	-28.53 – 0.57	0.060	-14.53	-30.24 – 1.17	0.069
o2	483.2			468.9			358.3			351.0		
Observations	430			430			430			430		

Source: National Pupil Database.

Table 9: Scenario 3 – GCSE Mathematics score as recorded in the NPD for the 110 RNCSF LAVC in the treated group compared to 320 students drawn from the CLA-CIN population only using non-parametric nearest neighbour matching calculated through GLM derived propensity scores. Missing Mathematics and English Attainment 8 slots and GCSE Mathematics and English were imputed as part of a speculative analysis

Predictors	GCSE Mathematics			GCSE Mathematics			GCSE Mathematics			GCSE Mathematics		
	Estimates	CI	p	Estimates	CI	p	Estimates	CI	p	Estimates	CI	p
(Intercept)	3.96	3.61 – 4.31	<0.001	3.85	3.35 – 4.34	<0.001	2.33	1.81 – 2.84	<0.001	2.23	1.82 – 2.64	<0.001
Treatment [1]				0.44	-0.18 – 1.06	0.149	0.37	-0.46 – 1.19	0.296	0.76	0.16 – 1.36	0.014
KS2 APS							0.33	0.28 – 0.38	<0.001	0.35	0.29 – 0.42	0.140
IDACI Score							-1.50	-2.68 – -0.32	0.013	-1.53	-2.72 – -0.34	0.012
o2	4.12			4.09			2.64			2.63		
Observations	430			430			430			430		

Source: National Pupil Database.

Table 10: Scenario 3 – GCSE English score as recorded in the NPD for the 110 RNCSF LAVC in the treated group compared to 320 students drawn from the CLA-CIN population only using non-parametric nearest neighbour matching calculated through GLM derived propensity scores. Missing Mathematics and English Attainment 8 slots and GCSE Mathematics and English were imputed as part of a speculative analysis

Predictors	GCSE English			GCSE English			GCSE English			GCSE English		
	Estimates	CI	p	Estimates	CI	p	Estimates	CI	p	Estimates	CI	p
(Intercept)	4.00	3.67 – 4.33	<0.001	3.71	3.28 – 4.14	<0.001	2.43	2.08 – 2.78	<0.001	2.22	1.86 – 2.58	<0.001
Treatment				1.16	0.56 – 1.75	<0.001	1.09	0.38 – 1.80	0.007	1.96	1.22 – 2.70	<0.001
KS2 APS							0.28	0.21 – 0.35	<0.001	0.33	0.24 – 0.41	<0.001
IDACI Score							-1.25	-2.97 – 0.46	0.146	-1.30	-3.20 – 0.59	0.166
o2	5.30			5.06			4.05			3.97		
Observations	430			430			430			430		

Source: National Pupil Database.

Table 11 Months' progress to effect size

Months' progress	Effect size from…	to…	Description
0	-0.05	0.05	Very low or no impact
+1	0.06	0.09	Low impact
+2	0.10	0.18	Low impact
+3	0.19	0.26	Moderate impact
+4	0.27	0.35	Moderate impact
+5	0.36	0.44	High impact
+6	0.45	0.52	Very high impact
+7	0.53	0.61	Very high impact
+8	0.62	0.69	Very high impact
+9	0.70	0.78	Very high impact
+10	0.79	0.87	Very high impact
+11	0.88	0.95	Very high impact
+12	0.96	1.00	Very high impact

Source: Education Endowment Foundation

Study 2
The net benefits of boarding places for LAVC: A first approximation

In Study 1, we have provided what we believe to be the first evidence for the effectiveness of a scheme which supports LAVCs to attend boarding schools in the UK, using a matched control as the comparator. For the continuation of funding and/or further scaling-up of the scheme, evidence estimating the potential net educational benefit of the placement scheme per academic gain is also important. In this next part of our evaluation study, we introduce literature outlining the economic imperatives of improving educational outcomes for LAVC. This includes highlighting established links between academic attainment at GCSE level and earnings, higher tax revenues and lower universal credit claims. We consider the cost associated with poor educational outcomes for LAVC linked to their higher levels of involvement in the criminal justice system, the cost of needing access to statutory homelessness services and the potential physical and mental health outcomes of looked after children later in life. We then submit a first approximation of the net educational benefits of the scheme, providing an outline of our methodology and presenting our findings, whilst clearly acknowledging the limitations and cautious approach we have adopted to support interpreting the data.

Education, employment, earnings and health

The impact of the intervention outcomes of the use of boarding school places for LAVC are varied and include improving access to employment opportunities, higher earnings, long term health and wellbeing. It is envisaged that recipients will, as a result of attending a boarding school, have an increased access to and better opportunities for employment, leading to higher earning potential, and experience better health and wellbeing. Nelson and Anderson (2021) looked at the Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) for looked after children (LAC). The data for KS4 cohorts 2005/6 looked at rates

of employment, benefits claimed and, for those who were in work, earnings. These were compared with the national averages within the cohort. LAC were four times more likely to be receiving benefits compared to all individuals and, 11 years after leaving education, were earning around £6000 per annum less, compared with all individuals in the sample. This figure increased from £4000 less per annum 8 years after completing their GCSEs suggesting, the income gap between looked after children and those who are not classed as looked after widens over time.

The data also showed, 11-years after GCSEs, just 22% of children looked after for at least one day and 28% of children looked after for at least 12months, were in employment. This compared to 57% for all individuals in the cohort being in employment. With such low levels of looked after children reaching employment 11-years after GCSEs, it is clear that improving GCSEs is an essential first step for educational interventions.

Hodge, Little and Weldon (2021) have also analysed the LEO data and looked specifically at the link between GCSEs and earnings. Their analysis found that "the value of an additional grade in overall GCSE attainment in undiscounted (lifetime) earnings is £23,000" (Hodge et al., 2021, p. 7) meaning "[A] one-grade improvement in overall GCSE attainment is associated with average increase in the present value of lifetime earnings of £8,500" (p. 6). The report also states that the "largest marginal returns are associated with moving from grade D to grade C, and from grade C to grade B, in most subjects" (p. 7). The marginal returns ranged from £15,000 to £25,000 for moving from grade D to grade C and from £16,000 to £30,000 for moving from grade C to grade B. The marginal returns were greater for males than females and on average, a smaller return per grade for FSM eligible pupils (£7,763 to £8,186) than ineligible pupils (£8,593 to £8,779).

The report by Hodge and colleagues (2021) does not identify looked after children specifically. They do, however, provide data for those who are categorised as disadvantaged through their eligibility for FSM. Data are also provided for KS2 Tercile. The predicted undiscounted lifetime earnings were lowest for FSM eligible females from the bottom KS2 Tercile (£746,000) compared with non-FSM girls from the same bottom KS2 Tercile (£880,213). FSM eligible boys from the bottom Tercile were predicted to earn £1,207,000 which was lower than when compared with non-FSM boys from the same bottom Tercile (£1,350,119). The highest earnings were for non-FSM males in the top KS2 Tercile (£1,8849,77) and by non-FSM girls in the top KS2 Tercile (£1,348,779). These compared to FSM eligible boys from the top KS2 Tercile (£1,587,776) and FSM girls from the top KS2 Tercile (£1,120,795). KS2 performance and gender are clearly important factors producing different levels of returns on GCSE grades.

Being in care comes with risks that last well beyond the time a child is being looked after. Murray, Lacey, Maughan and Sacker (2020) conducted a longitudinal study and found children who were looked after in any

form of non-parental care had, on average, increased all-cause mortality hazard ratio of 1.62 (95% CI: 1.43, 1.86) times higher than adults who had never been in care, as children. This finding lasted up to 42-years later meaning that, on average, an adult who had been looked after as a child, was 70% more likely to have died. This excess mortality was reported to be most often recorded as 'unnatural' such as, deaths due to self-harm, accidents and mental health and behavioural causes. The study found no significant differences between males and females and suggests the chances of living a longer, healthier, adult life is far lower for looked after children.

In another study, The Health Foundation (2021) analysed data from the Office of National Statistics and found a significant relationship between average net annual income and healthy life expectancy. The assumption here is, improvement in income might be related to healthier life expectancy. Healthy life expectancy is defined as the number of years that an individual is expected to live in a good state of health. The bigger the number of years a person lives in a good state of health the greater the costs saved by the state due to reduced need for the provision of health services.

Findings

Given the lack of availability of fresh and more suitable data, it will be necessary to use existing sources in order to obtain calculations, which therefore should be considered at best tentative approximations.

The theoretical model is to classify the education level of LAVCs in three groups, according to their educational achievement. Using the classification in Nelson and Anderson (2021), the three groups are

a) Graduates – achieved a level 6 qualification (and/or above)

b) Non-graduates achieving at least a level 3 qualification - A full level 3 qualification is two A-level passes (or equivalents)

c) Achieving a level 2 or below qualification - a full level 2 qualification is five GCSE passes A* to C (or equivalents).

The overall outcomes for all children is such that the three groups are approximately equal in size. To be precise, 35% of all children achieve a level 6 or above qualification, 31% have at least a level 3, and the remaining 35% have at most a grade 2 qualification. The split is radically different for LAVC children. Only 8% of those looked after for 12 months achieve level 6, 16% level 3, and 76% level 2 or less. Similarly for LAVC looked after for at least one day: 6% achieve level 6, 13% level 3, and 81% level 2 or less.

The final aim of our analysis would be to estimate the long-term net benefit associated with an additional X places for LAVC able to access a boarding school place for all, or part, of their secondary school education. To this end, we compute the expected benefit for a single pupil, obtained adding the benefit in case of a successful outcome, that is of an outcome that changes the future of a child in the programme, multiplied by the probability of a successful outcome plus the benefit in case of an unsuccessful outcome, multiplied by the probability of an unsuccessful outcome. Once this "unit expected benefit" is obtained, it can be scaled up, multiplying it for the number of pupils in the programme.

The benefits of an outcome that results in an improvement of the child's success at KS4 education can be summarised under the following headings.

i. Increased Direct Tax Receipts

ii. Reduced Universal Credit Expenditure

iii. Reduced Expenditure on health services

iv. Reduced Expenditure on statutory homelessness services

v. Reduced Expenditure on the criminal justice system

In addition, by staying longer in education children will require an increase in the corresponding education expenditure.

vi. Increase in the education expenditure.

Some cost-benefit analyses include other, perhaps less quantifiable, benefits, such as increased political participation, increased charitable giving and volunteering and so on. This is less quantifiable and we do not account for it, in line with our conservative approach.

The matching analysis above shows that the overall effect of 110 LAVCs able to attend a boarding school is to increase from x0 to x1 - take one LAVC from group (c) (poor GCSEs) to groups (a) and (b). In other words, following the opportunity to attend a boarding school, $\Delta x = x_1 - x_0$ fewer LAVCs achieve level 2 qualification, and Δx more LAVCs will achieve level 3 qualification, or become graduates. The assignment to the two groups (a) and (b) will follow the following assumptions:

- *Best case scenario:* All LAVCs able to attend a boarding school go on to graduate in higher education.

- *Middle case scenario:* The proportion of those LAVCs able to attend a boarding school who go on to graduate in higher education is the same as the current proportion of "all children". In this case there will be $0.47\Delta x$ more children who achieve level 3 qualification, and $0.53\Delta x$ more children who graduate.

- *Worst case scenario:* None of the LAVC able to attend a boarding school go on to complete university. In this case there will simply be Δx more children who achieve level 3 qualification.

The most favourable outcome is one where all the children in the programme go on to higher education.

In the middle case scenario, the assumption is that the LAVCs who go beyond the "poor GCSE" threshold is the same as the national average. One could however even argue that it could exceed it and should be given by the proportion of pupils who attend boarding schools (or indeed the boarding schools attended by the LAVC in the treatment group), in which case the proportion of children who graduate would be higher.

In the worst case scenario, the assumption is that none of the LAVCs who go beyond the "poor GCSE" go on to pursue further education. In practice the number of LAVC who will attend university after obtaining good GCSE, will be an intermediate value between these best and worst case scenario. It is important to note that the number of LAVC who do attend further education is not a valid guide to predict how many will attend as a consequence of being able to attend a boarding school, as this number includes pupils who would have gone to further education even if they had not benefited from the boarding school place.

In practice of the original treatment group which comprised 210 pupils, 99 are yet to finish KS5. Of the remaining 111 who completed KS4, 56 are known to have progressed to university, and 32 did not continue as boarding school pupils in their 6th form years. That is, for those whose progression is known 71% (= 56/(111-32)) have progressed to higher education. Four scenarios can be envisaged for the outcome of the 32 pupils who did not continue in boarding school.

- *Best case scenario.* Their KS5/HE progression is the same as those who remained: 23 progressed to HE (= 0.71 × 32).

- *Middle case scenario.* Their KS5/HE progression is the same as the national average, 17 progressed to HE (= 35/(31+35) x 32).

- *Bad case scenario.* Their KS5/HE progression is the same as the LAVC average, 10 progressed to HE (the mid point between 8/(16+8) x 32 and 6/(13+6) x 32).

- *Worse case scenario.* None of these 32 LAVC in fact progressed to higher education, as the reason why they did not continue their residency in the boarding school is their inability to progress: they were unwilling, or deemed unsuitable to remain in education.

In these four cases, the percentage of the 111 children who completed KS5 is 71%, 65%, 60%, and 50% in the worst case scenario.

Access to the Longitudinal Education Outcomes data would allow a more up-to-date determination of the net present values. In the absence of this access, we are forced to use the Figures used by Franklin and Choudhury (2018), updating them to current prices according to the CPI (1.202 from tax year 2017/18 (index = 104.1) to last date available Feb 2023, 115.8)). They use the methodology used by Katan et al. (2016) and Godfrey et al. (2002) to assessing the net fiscal savings to determine the yearly gains from reductions in expenditure on public services and those from increased tax revenue. They approximate the gains by limiting the time horizon to 20 years, which seem a reasonable assumption, as gains beyond that horizon are heavily discounted, as well as being predictable with a large degree of uncertainty.

Regarding the difference in costs and benefits, we will take the approximation that the only difference between LAVCs who proceed to university and those who do not is in the higher earnings of the former. That is, the table is built with the costs and benefits ii-vii of the best- case and the worst-case scenarios are the same. The underlying assumption is that, for a child that completes a level 3 qualification, the expected costs of Universal credit, health services, homelessness, criminal justice system will be the same: that is, there is no difference in the extent of these costs for a person who has achieved A-levels only, and one that has, in addition, attended university. Regarding the additional education expenditure, is the cost of a student attending sixth form; with the assumption that LAVC who attend boarding school also go on to attend higher education or university will cause no additional costs to the treasury and will be financially liable for funding their higher education (an intermediate assumption would be to assume, in line with the student loan scheme prediction, they will cost the treasury approximately ½ of the tuition fee).

To assess the additional tax revenues for a graduate, we use the approximation that the figure obtained by Franklin and Choudhury (2018), is split - : the increase in tax revenues for a LAVC with good GCSEs who goes on to graduate is double that of the increase in tax revenues for a LAVC with good GCSEs who goes on to achieve level 3 qualification, but not to university.[4]

To sum up, we can summarise the above discussion in the following Table 12. It reports the net present values, namely today discounted value of the future benefits and costs, for the two possible outcomes for a pupil who obtains good GCSEs and can therefore progress to sixth form and higher education.

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[4]Let D be the overall increase of tax receipt in F&C. let d be the increase for A-level only, and let $2d$ be the increase for graduates. Then we have $= \frac{31}{31+35}\delta + \frac{70}{31+35}\delta = \frac{101}{66}\delta$, and so $\delta = \frac{66}{101}D$.

Table 12. Benefits and costs of one additional LAVC obtaining good GCSEs as a result of accessing a boarding school placement

Benefits and costs of one additional LAVC obtaining good GCSEs as a result of accessing a boarding school placement

	F&C2018	Update	University Graduate	Only KS5
i Increased Direct Tax Receipts	5000	6029	7879	3940
ii Reduced Universal Credit Expenditure	7500	9043	9043	9043
iii Reduced Expenditure: health services	850	1025	1025	1025
iv Reduced Expenditure: statutory homelessness	1100	1326	1326	1326
v Reduced Expenditure: criminal justice system	3300	3979	3979	3979
vi Increase in the education expenditure	-3750	-4522	-4522	-4522
Total net benefit	**14000**	16880	18731	14791

Table 12 can be used to assess the present net value of the educational benefit for one additional child obtaining good GCSE. This is £18731 if this child progresses to HE, and £14791 if they do not.

We commented above that the likely number of pupils who progress to HE is between 71% and 50% of those achieving good GCSE. Thus we can assess the unit net benefit of the programme as being between £17256 and £15451 per successful child. Given that as argued before, the percentage of children who did achieve a good set of GCSE because they attended the programme (that is, in addition to those who would have achieved good GCSE anyway) is 41% we can obtain the expected unit benefit per enrolled pupil as a figure between £7075 (=£17256 × 0.41) and £6334 (=£15451 × 0.41).

The above figures refer to the educational benefits for a single LAC. The overall benefit depends of its overall scale, which at least for a reasonably limited range can be assumed to increase proportionally to the number of children enrolled. Thus, for example, if 100 children were enrolled, a likely range for the overall educational benefit could be between £707,500 and £633,500.

The use of boarding school placements for LAVC by RNCSF thus far

In Study 1, we presented the findings from three possible scenarios that were constructed to address the issue of missing GCSE data within the intervention group. For the purpose of our economic analysis in this section, we will use the findings reported for Scenario 3, which includes imputation of missing data for English and Maths GCSE results, where these scores were recorded as 0 within the intervention sample in the NPD. As we are primarily focused on the attainment of GCSEs within our analysis of the KS4 attainment data, we looked at the distribution of scores for students who attained on average the equivalent of five good (9 to 4 and equivalents) GCSEs including English and Maths within the RNCSF sample.

The results showed that 54% of RNCSF's LAVC boarders achieved five good GCSEs including English and Maths compared to just 13% of controls. This means there was a difference of 41%. The total number of additional LAVCs who are thought to have achieved five good GCSEs, including Maths and English, as a result of the opportunities provided to them within their boarding school placements is 45. To calculate the net benefit of the intervention, we multiplied the number of additional children thought to have gained five good GCSEs including Mathematics and English by the midpoint of £16,880 and £14,791 which is £15,835.

Using Table 12 above to calculate an overall educational net benefit, the use of boarding school placements for LAVC, based on a sample of 110 LAVCs, is estimated to offer returns to HMT of approximately £712,600 (= £15,835 × 45 additional pupils).

The limitations associated with this finding omitting to consider any additional benefit to the LAVC going on to achieve KS5 and progress to higher-tariff Universities mean this model is built on conservative assumptions.

This approach to calculating the present net value of the educational benefit can be used to understand the potential benefit of scaling. E.g. for every 100 LAVCs that are able to attend a boarding school, a conservative assumption is that approximately 41 of them will gain 'good' GCSEs that might not otherwise have been expected to, and this value adds approximately £650,000 in savings to HMT from the link between GCSE performance and tax receipts, reduced welfare, health and homelessness services connected to lifetime earning potential.

This is a very tentative first approximation at estimating the potential net educational benefit of the use of boarding school places as a route to secure improved outcomes for LAVC and there are several factors not contained. For example, it does not contain any additional benefit for those students whose GCSE results were not changed. In practice some of them may have obtained excellent GCSEs instead of just good, and so for example proceeded to a more selective Higher Education Institution, some of which might have been in Russell Group institutions where it is understood that economic

benefits can be higher. Similarly, those who did not achieve five good GCSEs despite accessing a boarding school education may have improved their results, and entered a vocational course thus enhancing their life prospects leading to greater net benefits. Further research would, in future, be useful to shed light on these additional benefits. By the same token other less tangible benefits are not accounted for.

Costs avoided/costs saved: boarding places as a social care intervention

The second strand for analysis of economic implications of access to boarding school places for LAVC is to consider the potential costs avoided/costs saved in terms of government expenditure. In the earlier sections of this report we outlined the net educational benefits which accrue in the long term to the children whose future lifetime is affected by their participation in the programme, namely those children whose educational outcomes are affected by the ability to attend a boarding school. This, as shown refers to a fraction of the total of the children enrolled. But there are benefits and costs due to the attendance of all children who are in the programme during their educational years, and these financial costs and benefits should be accounted for a complete analysis.

In other words, as stated previously (Murphy et al, 2020), a boarding school programme of funding for LAVCs can be positioned as both an educational and a social care intervention. As a social care intervention, the boarding school programme could, arguably, be positioned as a preventive intervention. That is, by working with children who are lower down the social care levels of intervention, providing them with the opportunity to attend a boarding school can prevent the later need for services that are more time and cost intensive for social care services. Many LAVCs will progress up through the levels of risk/need within the social care pathways, requiring more intensive services as time passes. The question now, therefore, is to consider whether the use of boarding schools can bring an economic benefit to society by reducing the costs of children's social care, by reducing risk levels, whilst simultaneously providing enhanced educational opportunities. The analysis within this section is, in essence, hypothetical as no actual data for the full boarding school programme is available to test at present. What we are able to do, is use the existing treatment group of the 210 LAVC supported by RNCSF to attend a boarding school in the period 2013-2020, to speculate as to what might be possible if in the future the programme were to be delivered at scale and if the risk profiles were able to be changed as a result of encouraging more LAVCs to attend a boarding school.

The costs of children's social care are high and estimated to be between £8-9 billion per annum in England alone (IFS, 2018). A substantial proportion of children's social care budgets is, naturally, spent on supporting looked after and vulnerable children. For example, approximately 20% of spending goes on support for looked after children with a further 12% spent on children with either a Child Protection Plan, are a Child in Need

or those placed on a permanent placement (Stanford & Lennon, 2019). Care for LAVCs requires around a third of all spending in the children's social care budget.

In a study looking at the impact of boarding places for LAVCs in Norfolk (Boarding Schools Partnership, 2018), findings showed there were reductions in children's risk level whilst boarding. This is important, as lower levels of risk category also require lower levels of social care involvement and, consequently, lower costs are associated with such care provisions. For example, the Norfolk study looked at social care outcomes of boarding using changes in risk category as an outcome. The study showed that the vast majority of children (71% overall), decreased in their level of risk during their boarding placement. Those who were at the highest risk level, classed as looked after children, 41% were reduced to risk level one and required only universal services whilst approximately 4% were reduced to risk level two. Similarly, of those starting in risk level three and two, 69% and 79% respectively were reduced to risk level one and required only universal services during their boarding placement. In total, 60% of children from all risk levels from five to two, were reduced to level one risk whilst boarding and, as a result, required only universal services.

There were also some reports of risk level increases within the Norfolk study. For instance, two children moved from risk level 4 to 5 and two from 3 to 5 whilst one child moved from level 3 to 4.

It is necessary to specify the costs associated with care at the various levels of risk/need. In the next few paragraphs, we have identified the costs we have used in our calculations to estimate the costs avoided/costs saved by use of a boarding school place for a LAVC and the sources where these were extracted from. We understand that there may be other approaches that might have led to a different set of estimates and so we offer our proposal of the costs avoided/ costs saved with an open mind.

In addition to the costs avoided/saved associated with a reduction in risk, costs can also be avoided/saved by increasing the stability of living arrangements. This is the situation where permanency of care can be established through either adoption, kinship care or staying within the family wherein boarding provides a substantial period of respite for the wider family who are struggling. The average weekly cost of looking after a child in residential care was estimated to be as much as £200,000 per annum (Competitions and Markets Authority, 2022). The costs associated with foster care are lower than full-time residential care but can still cost up to £50,000 per annum (RNCSF, 2020).

Where neither residential nor foster care is required, there remains a cost for meeting the social care needs of vulnerable children. For example, the cost of ongoing significant social worker involvement is estimated to be about £3,710 per case per annum (PSSRU, 2018) whereas the costs to children's social care for a child requiring only universal services is estimated to be around £800 per annum (Stanford & Lennon, 2019).

The overall strategy we follow in this section is to compare the costs incurred by the government (central government or local authorities) in the absence of the use of boarding school placements for LAVC, with those that are incurred in the presence of the programme. Once we have defined the sample, we compute, as best possible, the costs that would be borne in the absence of the programme, with those that are incurred with the programme. In both cases, all costs need to be considered, irrespective of who bears them: the relevant concept is that of opportunity cost: thus, for example the entirety of the school annual tuition fees need to be added: the school contribution to the programme would be used for other ends, from the purchase of sports equipment to provision of scholarships for other talented children who are unable to fund attendance to boarding school.

Defining the sample

We first describe the sample of LAVCs who have access to a boarding school place. At the point of our analysis, the data provided to the researchers was of N=210 (rounded to nearest 10) children who had accessed a boarding place as a result of RNCSF's work in the period 2013-2020, and so are included in the treatment group for this strand of the analysis. Within this treatment group, we can separate the children into groups:

- those who were classed as being looked after children at the point of starting in their boarding school place (n=11). We shall refer to these as the LAC-group.

- those who met RNCSF criteria as being at the "edge of being placed into care" (n=199) cover a wide range of LAVC statuses, ranging from those requiring at minimum significant social worker input to those with a child protection plan in place. This group has been classed as the vulnerable child group (VC-group).

- A third group are the children who have been classed as requiring only universal services (US-group) in their time at boarding school. None of the children in the sample belonged to this category.

To sum up: there are three categories of children:

(A) Looked after children,

(B) Vulnerable children, and

(C) Children requiring universal service only.

The cost to government expenditure budgets of looking after the children in these three categories varies enormously.

For Group (A): the cost incurred by a Local Authority for each child in this category varies from an average £200,000 per child per annum for those in residential care, to an average of £50,000 per child per annum associated with foster care (Competitions and Markets Authority, 2022).

For Group (B): the annual costs as per LAVC status relevant to our VC-group were presented above (Stanford & Lennon, 2019). There are three possible care plans for these children:

(i) a child with a Child Protection Plan costs approximately £9,300 per annum;

(ii) a child with permanency £7,000 p/a;

(iii) a "Child in Need" £8,300 p/a

For Group (C) (those requiring only universal services only) to the cost to central government expenditure budgets is estimated to be around £800 per child p/a (Stanford & Lennon, 2019).

In order to estimate the cost and benefit to society, and separately, the cost added or saved by HMT, it is necessary to compare the cost that would have incurred had the boarding school programme not existed, with the actual costs incurred by running the programme. We do so by constructing a table divided into two parts: in the upper part we compute the cost of not using the boarding school sector as a route for LAVC, and in the lower part the cost of funding 210 LAVC to attend a boarding school. The key to understanding the consequences of the scheme is to understand that the children who are enrolled would have had a different life and the interactive table in Appendix 1 allows to consider different hypotheses regarding these changes. This is explained in detail below.

Table 13 is built based on the following assumptions, illustrated in the upper part of Table 13, in the yellow rows:

- 35% of the pupils would have gone into care in the absence of the boarding school programme.

- For 20% of the children who are "on the edge of becoming LAC" the home situation deteriorates so that they become LAC while they are in the boarding school. For the rest the home situation does not worsen sufficiently to require a change in status. During the holiday they live with their families and only require universal service.

- For 30% of the children who are "on the edge of becoming LAC" the home situation would deteriorate in the absence of the boarding school programme so that they become LAC. This percentage is higher, because removing a child from a dysfunctional home reduces their risk and so without the boarding school programme, they are more likely to require looking after. The rest remain in VC status.

- 10% of the pupils would have a statement of Special educational needs (SEN) if they attended state schools.

For Group A, the assumption we make is that 20% of the LAC accessing the boarding school programme would otherwise have required residential care, and for the remaining 80% a full (year round) cost of foster care would be required. This 80/20 split is based on the national average of children who enter care initially requiring residential, as opposed to foster, care (Department for Education analysis, 2022, "Why do children go into children's homes").

For those in Group B: some of the children are prevented from needing to become formally "looked after" by their access to the boarding school programme. It is very difficult to estimate the proportion and so various scenarios can be envisaged. The Appended Excel table can be used to vary the proportion and so assess the sensitivity of the conclusions. As a benchmark we used 35% of the pupils would have gone into care in the absence of the boarding school programme.

Costs of not offering LAVC the opportunity to attend a boarding school: Lower part of Table 13.

The first task is to create a counterfactual. That is, to estimate the cost to social care services of not offering LAVC the opportunity to access a boarding school place. We begin to recognise that some of them benefit from the programme as they move from a high vulnerability (and high cost) category to when where they require less protection. We know that 11 pupils in the programme were LAC on starting their boarding school place. If we assume that a fraction x of the children who would become looked after in the absence of the ability to attend a boarding school then therefore cease to become looked after as a direct consequence of this programme, then we know that, in the absence of a boarding school place, 11/x children would be looked after. The line of the block of yellow cells in Table 13 is this effect: taking the findings from the Norfolk study that indicated a reduction in risk for LAC attending boarding schools, it is posited that 60% of the children cease to be looked after, implying that there would have been 28 looked after children within the 110 in the analysis group who would have been likely to become LAC without the boarding intervention. The next line in the yellow part of Table 13, the one headed "Percentage LAC who are in residential care: the rest are in full time fostering", determines the cost of not having the programme, and varies from a maximum of almost £200K per child, to a still high, but 75% lower for full foster care, paid for by the LA. Obviously changes to the percentage of children who would be in foster care rather than in residential homes alter dramatically this component of the cost.

The next two lines of the yellow part of the table serve to compute the cost of the majority of the children in the programme sample analysed to date - those that are not yet looked after but face risks to escalating up the care pyramid. The annual costs as per LAVC status relevant to Group (B) - our VC-group - were presented above (Stanford & Lennon, 2019). There are three possible care plans for these children: (i) a child with a Child Protection Plan costs approximately £9,300 p/a; (ii) a child with permanency £7,000; and (iii) a "Child in Need" £8,300 p/a. The three type of social care needs have similar cost, therefore changing the respective percentages does not alter the overall cost substantially. The Table 13 in the text is built with the assumption of an even split.

This completes the description of how the upper part of Table 13 can be used to compute these costs. Of a programme sample of 210 young people, there might be:

- 28 LAC - of whom 20 require access to residential care and the remaining 8 to foster care, for a total annual cost of £3,983,200 and £400,000 respectively.

- the remaining 182 children would be considered vulnerable, and hence cost between £9,300 and £7,000 each per year, with a total associated cost of £235,284.

- none are assumed to be children in the Universal service only group, given the nature of the intervention's criteria for selection.

An additional cost is the cost per child of significant social worker involvement. This is estimated at £3,710 per child, however this cost is incurred for all 210 LAVC children, irrespective of whether or not they participate in the programme. Therefore it can be omitted from both the upper and the lower part of the table.

Finally, the calculations need to net off the cost that each of the participant LAVC would incur in attending their local state day school, but are no longer doing once they are a pupil registered as in attendance at a boarding school. The National Funding Formula for schools guarantees a minimum per pupil funding of at least £5,715 per pupil per year (Department for Education, 2022[5]). The average per pupil spend (the "Average Weighted Pupil Unit") can be higher according to a number of weighting variables (relating to location, SEN etc.). At a national level this is averaged at £6,700 (Department for Education, 2022[6]). For the purposes of this report we have used the most conservative figure - the minimum per pupil amount of £5,715 and this is included in the first row of the upper part of the Table.[7] In addition, pupils who are looked after (and those who were previously looked after, determine an additional payment of £2,350 (https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06700/SN06700.pdf, p 7).

Funding for the boarding schools programme: the upper part of Table 13.

The advertised costs associated with boarding school places varies widely. RNCSF's work focuses on those boarding schools who are members of the Independent Schools Council (ISC). With ISC registered boarding schools the average range for boarding school full boarding fees is between £25,000 p/a and £50,000 p/a. Using the mean of c.£32,500 p/a, RNCSF has posited a model of funding for the routine referral of LAVC that requires all boarding school programme participating schools to commit to meeting "at least 60% of the associated fee profile" in fee waiver schemes. Thus of the average £32,500 p/a fee profile, c.£13,000 p/a is funded by a combination of participating local authority contributions and, to date, a £5,000 p/a contribution from RNCSF whose BEP Challenge Fund has used fundraised income to act in lieu of the NFF/AWPU average state per-pupil education spend. Participating schools commit to meeting the residual (anything from £12,000 p/a to full fee remission place at £50,000 p/a depending on each school's own individual funding profile)

The boarding schools are not available during the school holiday, and accommodation and stable pastoral care for the 210 children needs to be provided for during this time. Some will return home and the only additional cost incurred in government expenditure might be the average of £800 per annum associated with a child who only receives the universal service. This is the last line in the Table 13.

But some children do not have a safe home to return to, and may require foster care during this period. One way to estimate the cost of holiday-time foster placement is to use the model of implementation of the boarding school programme that has been part of a pilot in East Sussex local authority, in which the authority supplements the boarding school placement costs with an additional budget for foster carer fees (£2,725) and maintenance (£3,105) for 18 weeks of school holidays and a retainer (£2,573) for 34 weeks of term time. This total of £8,403 is in addition to any local authority contribution towards school fees mentioned above.

[5] School funding statistics, Financial year 2022-23 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)
[6] School funding statistics, Financial year 2022-23 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)
[7] School funding statistics, Financial year 2022-23 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)

Table 13. Costs of not doing and costs of doing the LAVC boarding schools programme

Percentage of children who are prevented from becoming looked after as a consequence of being enrolled in the BEP programme	50
Percentage of children whose home situation deteriorates so that they become LAC while they are in the boarding school. The rest live with their family and only have universal service	20
Percentage of children whose home situation would deteriorate in the absence of the boarding school programme so that they become LAC. The rest remain in LAVC status	30
Percentage of Vulnerable Children in the Child Protection Plan	34
Percentage of Vulnerable Children in Permanency (the rest are in "Child in Need")	33
Percentage of LAC who are in residential care: the rest are in full time fostering	15
Percentage of LAC who would be considered to be SEN if they attended state schools	10

	Annual cost to HMT	Annual cost to schools	Number of pupils	Total cost borne by HMT	Total cost borne by schools
Cost of the BEP Programme				3,663,753	3,717,000
School attendance, fees, etc (a) Looked after children: actual number in the programme 11	14,800	17,700	210 51	3,108,000 428,5533	3,717,000 0
Foster carer fees for 18 weeks of school holidays	2,725		51	138,975	0
Maintenance for 18 weeks of the school holidays	3,105		51	158,355	0
Retainer for 34 weeks of term time	2,573		51	131,223	0
(b) Vulnerable children			0		
LAVC status costs (Stanford & Lennon, 2019)					
Child Protection Plan costs	9,300		0	0	0
Permanency	7,000				
Child in Need	8,302				
Universal service only				127,200	0
Other costs, in addition to school attendance	800		159	127,200	0
Cost in the absence of the BEP Programme					
School attendance at State school (a) Looked after children	8,595		210 71	1,804,950 5,109,760	0 0
Weekly cost of residential care is: 3,830	199,160		11	2,190,760	0
Yearly cost of full time foster care	500,000		60	3,000,000	0
(b) Vulnerable children			139	1,140,992	0
LAVC status costs (Stanford & Lennon, 2019)					
Child Protection Plan costs	9,300		47	437,100	0
Permanency	7,000		46	322,000	0
Child in Need	8,302		46	381,892	0
(c) Universal service only			0		
Other costs, in addition to school attendance	800		0	0	0
Difference (a negative number is a cost reduction)				-4,472,949	3,717,000
Society Net benefit					755,949

Summary

Our analysis has estimated both the net educational benefit of attending boarding school for LAVC and the potential costs saved/avoided for HMT budget for the social care of LAVC. In each case, our findings indicate there are potential benefits to the LAVC, HMT and society more broadly.

Our findings suggest a net educational benefit of attending a boarding school for each LAVC accessing the programme as approximately £6,500. Based on the sample of 110 LAVC for which we included in the educational outcome analysis in Study 1, for every 100 LAVC able to access a boarding placement, the programme can be considered to provide a total net benefit in the ensuing impact on potential for improved lifetime earnings of c.£650,000. This, if the programme were to be scaled to, for example, allow for 1000 LAVC supported to attend a boarding school for their KS4 studies, it is estimated a lifetime net educational benefit of more than £6m. It is worth noting that this is a conservative estimation and a more nuanced analysis that allows for the effects of those LAVC who secure 'good' GCSEs as a result of the intervention who then proceed to KS5 (A-level or equivalent) attainment and progression to Higher Education would allow for a more accurate analysis of the potential of attainment to affect earnings and later life chances.

There is also the potential for a benefit to the boarding school programme for HMT through costs saved/avoided resulting from changes in the expenditure associated with social care provisions for LAVC. Our analysis suggests, using the assumptions set out above, a cost saving/cost avoided to HMT of £4,472,949 per annum. This amount is based on what we know of the 210 LAVC for who we were provided data.

There must be caution in interpreting our findings. First, the data used in Scenario 3 and forms the basis to estimating the net educational benefit to society, was subject to a potentially problematic level of missing data meaning, we cannot be truly confident in the findings even though we have used a robust and recognised approach to imputation and missing data analysis. On the other hand, our data are plausible and reflect the RNCSF held data on GCSE attainment.

Second, the assumptions used to create the best and worst case scenarios for the net benefit analysis relies exclusively on data reported in other studies rather than being collected as primary data for the purpose of this study. As a result, there could be some inaccuracies and error in the assumptions made that we have not accounted for.

Third, we have used actual data that tracks attainment only as far as KS4. A more nuanced analysis of KS5 and degree attainment would allow for a more accurate analysis of the potential of attainment to affect earnings and later life chances.

Fourth, there are a number of further issues within the data that are not explored within the scope of this quantitative evaluation. For example, the findings are not based on an intention to treat sample but only those that have completed the intervention. Data for drop out cases of LAVC children awarded a boarding school place but who did not complete the programme have not been included in this analysis.

Finally, as the example in the above paragraph shows, the overall figures are highly sensitive to small changes in the assumptions that need to be made to compute them. Nevertheless, this is the first approximation of a potential cost-benefit analysis of the boarding programme and further research is now warranted as the figure very tentatively indicates there might be promise in scaling of the programme.

Study 3
"SpringBoarders"' perspectives

This aspect of our evaluation provides our account of a series of interviews with six SpringBoarders (this term is used throughout as it is the term used by RNCSF to refer to the LAVC who were supported through their programmes to attend boarding school). The interviews were conducted to gather in-depth, independently sourced accounts of the lived experiences of LAVC boarders. Each participant volunteered to take part and provided informed consent to be interviewed allowing their data to be used within this evaluation. Participating SpringBoarders had already left compulsory education and were either in their final year at boarding school or had already left boarding after year 13. All participants were aged 18-19 years at the time they were interviewed. First, we provide anonymised basic pen portraits of the participants, describe our methods and analytic approach and then present the themes that were identified.

Pen portraits

SpringBoarder A, was age 19 and currently studying in a UK university. Prior to the opportunity to attend a boarding school he lived in a large city in England and then moved to an independent boarding school setting in rural England that he attended from age 11-18. He attended the boarding school from year 7 to 13 and found boarding to provide many opportunities for his growth and development.

SpringBoarder B, was age 19 and was also currently studying in a UK university after attending a boarding school from year 9 to 13. Prior to the opportunity to attend a boarding school, she had been attending an independent day school with specialist learning support and then moved to an independent boarding school in rural England where another family member was also a student.

SpringBoarder C, was age 18 and was currently taking a gap year prior to going to university. He had attended an independent boarding school from age 11 to 18. The experience of boarding had been positive and transformative although he felt that improvements for others' experience were possible.

SpringBoarder D, was in Year 13 and in second year of attending a co-educational independent boarding school. From 4 months old until aged 5, SpringBoarder D had moved from the maternal home and through the care system living with different carers. Whilst boarding, they assumed leadership roles in school, developed confidence, articulated ambition and motivation, feeling these were all nurtured by their school.

SpringBoarder E was in Year 13 and had attended a specialist performing arts boarding school from year 9 onwards. They identified experiences and opportunities at school, stability and support of school staff as positive aspects to their experience.

SpringBoarder F was in Year 11, had been attending a boarding school for four years after disruptive early childhood experiences. They feel very well supported emotionally, socially, and academically to be ambitious and saw boarding as a wonderful opportunity.

Methods

The interviews were conducted over the internet using Microsoft Teams, were recorded and transcribed using an automated transcription facility integral to the Microsoft software. Interviews lasted between 40 and 65 minutes. The interviewers adopted a low-direction approach to the interviewer's questioning style, creating an atmosphere of safety and trust to enable participants to share openly about their experiences and to cover the most salient topics to the participants. Following the interviews, transcripts were checked for accuracy and sent to the participants to review and check whether they were satisfied with the content.

The transcripts were then analysed. The approach taken to analysis was called thematic analysis; based on the approach developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This requires that researchers engage with the data over a period of time, immersing themselves in the text, iteratively developing themes and revisiting the original transcript until a set of themes is settled upon. In line with Braun and Clarke (2006), an inductive process of coding was carried out. First, two researchers independently coded the transcripts, identifying the most prominent and salient themes. These were then shared between the two researchers before a second round of analysis was carried out. At this stage, the themes were refined and connected to examples of text from the interviews themselves. This led to the creation six themes: *Transitions to boarding; Do I belong here? Searching and striving for authenticity; Access and opportunity; Broadening horizons, Learning beyond subjects; and Feedback for RNCSF.* Each of these themes are set out below with a description of their meaning and quotes from the SpringBoarders own voices used to represent them.

Key themes

Table 13. Key themes: SpringBoarder perspectives

Theme	Subtheme
Transitions to boarding	Receiving the offer to attend a school, emotional process, homesickness
Do I belong here? Searching and striving for authenticity	Belonging, authenticity, family and independence, knowing myself, tension in realising family hopes and efforts and, being less influenced by family
Access and opportunity (Social Capital)	Meeting the needs for support, Getting involved with activities, accessing support from teachers
Broadening horizons (Cultural Capital)	Interacting with a wide range of people, money isn't everything, RNCSF connection/ network
Learning beyond the subject (Education Capital)	Social and communication skills, character strength, ambition, autonomy, leadership
Feeding back to RNCSF	Being with others in similar situations, schools need to be more understanding, more support in school for the challenges of being LAVC

Transitions to Boarding

Transition to a boarding school for LAVC can be a challenging process (Yao, Deane & Bullen, 2014). Being away from home, moving in to a new environment, surrounded with unfamiliar people and buildings, all potentially present an overwhelming degree of stimulation and new information for assimilation. For the SpringBoarders that we interviewed, these were important elements of the process of transition. Whilst these do, of course, all sound like common features of the transition for any child, there were some important differences too. We learned about the wide range of feelings SpringBoarders experience as they go through the process of securing their boarding school place. Whilst no two accounts were identical, there were some clearly significant experiences. For SpringBoarder C, the boarding school place was only confirmed at a very late stage and this had created significant stress and anxiety. This was followed by the shock for them in arriving in a new place after such uncertainty meant they had to adapt quickly,

❝

I think it's a shock for anyone coming into a completely new school, no matter what sort of school, [you] are coming to a new place where you don't know how things work, everything's a bit different, especially boarding…

❞

...And as well, I've never boarded before, so coming into a school where I was actually living there, that was a bit of a shock, but then, although it was a, that[living there] was a big shock that would also fundamentally be the reason I settled in so quickly...

I think getting used to the way things worked as well, that was always going to be a challenge. So, we had like a longer school day which I wasn't used to and things like that. And on the weekend I wasn't able to see my friends and stuff like that. So yeah, there were definitely some challenges."

For SpringBoarder A, the boarding school opportunity had been experienced in a different way as they were unclear as to why they were there on a fee-remission place, or even who had helped to arrange this. They seemed almost unaware of much of the organising and administrative processes taking place outside of their awareness and had little information about what they were getting in to. The resulting emotions were powerful, "It was a lot of guilt" ...and "fear", "fear of the unknown 'cause no one knew anything about boarding schools in my area." These two accounts were quite different to SpringBoarder B who had been asking their parent if they could go to their preferred school for several months following a visit; for them, the only issue was whether they would be successful in being awarded a boarding school place. For others, there was clearly much more by way of parental influence in driving the process and selection of schools. The role of parents, carers or professionals seeking the boarding opportunities is important; whilst some participants indicated they felt very agentic in the process, others seemed to be more passively engaged and almost felt they 'just ended up' in their school without really being aware of how they got there or why the school was chosen for them.

Each SpringBoarder we interviewed reported feeling homesick when they first arrived at their boarding school. They all said there was good support available if needed and none felt they were treated harshly for feeling homesick. However, there were some important yet subtle differences between SpringBoarder's experiences of homesickness. For many children whose parents decide that they will place their children in a boarding school, there is not really a choice for the child, whereas, for a SpringBoarder, the initiative is driven by a strong commitment to placing the child at the centre because of their circumstances and home life. The boarding schools, it is considered, might be a far more stable environment for them to live in. Consequently, their sense of homesickness was often related to the change in culture,

being in a new environment, possibly being surrounded by countryside and people who look and sound different; rather than a feeling of being given or sent away from home. SpringBoarder A said,

> **"**
> **I mean, I think the best way to describe it is a culture shock. Because it's like I was, I'd just gone to a different world…**

In the, in the inner city with people who look and sound completely different to people in the countryside. So, when, when, I went up to [name of school and location], and it was, there wasn't a shop in sight. There was no street lighting. There was just some fields on fields and not many buildings and everyone spoke differently. Everyone looked differently, dressed differently to, to the last detail. Everything is different, so apart from our language I guess, it was a real culture shock and it was difficult at first."

As the above quote shows, homesickness for some SpringBoarders can be more about missing a place than people. About missing a sense of 'where I am from' as much about missing a parent figure or specific people. The interviews showed that school transitions are important for multiple reasons. They can, and often do, provide the opportunity for learning about the process of change providing learning for future life transitions – such as going into higher/tertiary education, apprenticeships, work, partner/close relationships across the lifespan. Some early transitions will leave significant imprints on memory and shape behaviours, attitudes and motivation for and towards the remainder of life. SpringBoarders said that they had felt supported through their transitions to boarding but that they were, nonetheless, not easy to navigate.

Do I belong here? Searching and striving for authenticity

Having navigated and survived the transition to boarding school, SpringBoarders faced a further set of challenges. The different surroundings, environments and rule structures offered a significant contrast, often representing a place that can feel disorientating, confusing and yet, to some, was also liberating. We have labelled this theme Do I belong here? Searching and striving for authenticity because it captures the challenges but also represents the beginning of a process where SpringBoarders conveyed a sense of realising the opportunities available to them through the boarding school place.

Belonging is a key feature for wellbeing in vulnerable children (Zufferey & Tedmanson, 2022) and is also linked to successful educational transitions (Cuervo, Barakat & Turnbull, 2015). Settling in and feeling 'at home' in a boarding school can take time but once achieved students reported they were happy. SpringBoarder E said,

"*It was definitely a shock at first because I'd never been to boarding school before and it was just a very different environment. This is also my first private school, so it was like very different people to what I was used to. The boarding house took a lot of time getting used to, but now people in the house are my closest friends, so now it's like a lot. I didn't even know (laughs) it's really nice.*"

The feeling of being somewhere so different clearly highlights the issue of sense of belonging. Springboarder A commented on the internal struggle to feel like they belonged,

"*Psychologically, I was having these constant battles with myself. These feelings like gratitude, and as I say, like peace... a bit of freedom, but also kind of like I don't feel like I fully belong, although I have made some good friends and everything else. But there was, these are all internal battles. I wasn't. It was just like I wasn't bullied or anything like that. It was all very much internal, like an identity thing.*"

This quote demonstrates what we have termed the struggle for authenticity. Adolescence is a challenging time; one where young people are striving for a sense of their genuine and emerging identity. Going through a significant transition to boarding school at this time in life presents an environmental influence on the process of struggling and striving for authenticity. Finding a place to belong after transitioning to boarding and meeting people from very different backgrounds was tough for SpringBoarder A. They described how their feelings changed gradually over time,

"*The way I understood the world was more like this... There are almost like two types of people, those who are kind of meant to succeed or have been given the conditions where they can succeed and those who've had say um, you know, kind of a, with a lack of opportunity, or poor or with other things like. So, I think when I almost had this irrational, kind of image of people who were wealthier or of a higher class or whatever. I saw them as like, they're going to be smarter than me, or they just knew more things. Or they, you know, were just these like brainboxes, and they're at a stage that it was just unattainable to be. That was actually in the back of my mind when I was joining the school; but I learned that these are regular people. And I started to almost break down the way that I started to see the world in terms of class and wealth and all these other things.*

There were those that did not see this struggle in such successful terms. For example, SpringBoarder C recalled how he had seen peers also in the scheme struggle with not feeling they belonged and acting out their frustrations.

"I think I would say it was both slightly sad and frustrating, 'cause I mean there were these people sort of self-sabotaging one of the most important opportunities they would have had in their lives. But again, it wasn't necessarily 100% their fault because again, the staff who were dealing with them weren't perhaps aware or trained to deal with that level of instability, perhaps. You know they required perhaps delicacy, as opposed to just when they do something wrong. Tell them off and then give the detention, which is the normal approach. You break the rules. You get punished. Yes, and there was no looking past the depth. You know, why did they break the rules? I think there were about seven or eight of us who joined in the first year, and I was the only boarding one who made it to the final year."

Striving for authenticity also means becoming the self that one believes themselves to be, rather than not being what we believe others want us to be as if it is own valued choice. It is about self-discovery and following our inner valuing. Boarding, it seemed, might in some instances allow for an opportunity to reconnect with things that are more intrinsically valued rather than taking on values from others. Parents figure significantly as a source of external valuing for young people. Striving for authenticity means being less influenced, perhaps, by the demands of parents and instead being driven by internal values. SpringBoarder D described the struggle through this process whilst boarding where we can see they described wanting to please their parent and also striving toward becoming their own self. They said that boarding,

"made me like push myself as well as just like from my mum because like she worked hard to get me this opportunity, I just don't want to lose it. I don't want to disappoint her. And at the same time...I've just like become more comfortable in myself after joining this school because I'm less influenced by like my mum and my brother"

The process of joining a new boarding school and feeling that one belongs took time. Through this process, SpringBoarders described the struggle for authenticity as one of coming to know themselves better, finding out who they are, what their preferences and intrinsic aspirations were. In coming to learn more about the self, SpringBoarders also described their experiences of seeing others struggle.

Access and opportunity

The SpringBoarders all expressed they had benefitted personally from access to the opportunity through the wider benefits associated with attending a boarding school. The academic literature comments on the benefits of boarding school as an opportunity for increasing the life chances through enhanced social, cultural and educational (human) capital (Bass, 2014). Our analysis supports this and suggests that SpringBoarders learn how to use their acquired social capital, gained through the experience of boarding school.

It is helpful to understand that social capital was a concept introduce by Bourdieu (1983) and refers to the extent that a person has access to a network of resources often in the form of mutually recognised acquaintance and connection, from which a person has access to 'credit' in the form of drawing from the available resource. SpringBoarders were able, and learned how, to draw from the available resources within their well supplied school in the form of academic tutoring beyond the formal lesson, through smaller class sizes, from the facilities (such as for sports, music, craft, etc.), and wider opportunities. Below are some of the ways that SpringBoarders described their experiences at school that also highlight the process of learning how to identify and draw from available social capital.

As we have noted in our previous two themes SpringBoarders have a number of challenges to navigate. To help do this successfully, they are able to draw on the extensive network of support available to them within the school. For example, SpringBoarder D said,

"Mrs [teacher's name] was definitely a big help because she was always checking in. As well as my housemistress at the time [house mistresses' name]. She was very helpful because she'd say whenever you need a chat, just come to my office whatever you need and she was really sweet. That definitely helped because it was kind of like, knowing that you have an adult looking after you that wasn't a teacher made it feel more homely."

SpringBoarder C also had support from the adults around their boarding school that made it known that it's okay to ask for help,

"Well, I think I had my housemaster and house mistress so they were really helpful and within the first couple weeks they will always, you know, be speaking to new boarders, especially on Friday in the week and on the weekends and stuff like that. But then they also planned a lot of things on the weekends to help you interact with other boarders"

These examples support the idea that social capital can be acquired. Learning how to identify and access support is a life skill. Getting emotional needs met too was important and going beyond this, SpringBoarder B also shows how academic support was available unlike what they previously had at other less well-resourced schools,

"My chemistry teacher sat with me after lessons and he would just go through the maths with me over and over until it made sense and I knew it. At an Independent School, you know that the teachers would offer to do this."

The way that access and opportunity, in the form of social capital and learning how to use this to enhance life chances, is encapsulated in the quote below from SpringBoarder A who said,

"you're rubbing shoulders with people who are in, whose parents may be in influential positions or who have similar ambitions. And are going to do great things when they're older potentially and, everyone has got this kind of, everyone has got big goals so being around those people is infectious."

Broadening horizons

Another way in which SpringBoarders described their experiences was in terms of the advantages of being surrounded by a wide range of people, typically from much more privileged backgrounds. SpringBoarder A said they found it helpful and informative when they had spent time with other young people whose family environment provided opportunity for learning about things such as engaging in conversations about cultural things like sports, significant historical events, film or art. They also spoke of the importance about learning about managing money and knowledge about how managing personal finances was passed on through the generations within the family, *"Even like the way they spent money was completely different and I find out personal finance is kind of a family taught skill"*.

In a slightly longer extract, it is possible to see how, for one SpringBoarder, this process of learning about different forms of capital was challenging. They had to learn for themselves what is important to them in ways that differ from their prior expectations but also in ways that shows they did not have the intergenerational privilege of wealth to rely upon:

"People in poverty don't normally learn about it [managing personal finances] or the value of reading, or when people are talking about their interests. Often, when people have an interest in like more poverty-stricken areas, you almost have to justify it, in the sense of like is there a lucrative side to it? If I told my family outside about how you can make money from this, make money for that, whereas people will go off to study like Fine Arts and things; like that was like it's not an obvious career path...So I think I learned that there's real meaning outside the financial, because when you're when you've got, actually a Kanye West lyric, which says having money isn't everything but not having it is. So when you're poor, you're always thinking about where's my next meal, where's my next pay-check, so everything becomes dominated by money. So I think in my own outlook on life, I've realized that I really, I'm not materially minded, although I thought I was when I first joined the school, I was seeing all these fancy cars and fancy clothes and think, oh I want that. But in reality, I don't. I want things which bring me meaning, I want a family, I want to make social change. I wanna, you know, have purpose."

Other ways in which learning was enhanced and cultural capital is accumulated by SpringBoarders is through the opportunity to travel. SpringBoarder C explained how being able to travel was transformative for them, seeing the world beyond their school and home and how this opened their mind to an array of potential future opportunities they may have never known or considered,

"But the biggest one, which is my favourite, especially ones about year 10 or 11, is the trip or activities because after we come here from [country of birth], which I was too young to properly remember any of that, so I hadn't left the country before, but the school regularly did overseas trips which they partially could pay for if you're a bursary student and, RNCSF helped with quite a few others. I remember the first trip I went on was one to Rome in Italy. And that was so amazing to experience all the other cultures. Since, I mean that wasn't the last I ended up, I think of so many Berlin, a Belgian one. Skiing in the Alps, but it was truly amazing. Because these are the sort of things I never would have done, even if I was at home just because financially.

These two SpringBoarders demonstrate how the boarding school provided them with the opportunity to learn and see the world beyond what would otherwise have been possible. The learning opportunities can be understood as a means for accumulating social and cultural capital.

Learning beyond the subject

School can be a place where young people learn about subjects that interest them or are selected for them. However, school also provides the environment for learning about other human capabilities that provide the means for advancing life chances beyond their qualifications. The SpringBoarders we spoke to told us how they had learned more than their subjects including: learning about and developing better social and communication skills, developing character strengths and personal values, seeing their ambitions grow, they realised and connected with their autonomy and became leaders amongst other young people. These were some benefits attributed by SpringBoarders to their experience of boarding.

The ability to communicate well is important for becoming more autonomous in life and in the boarding school SpringBoarders could develop these abilities. SpringBoarder F said,

"When I was younger I had very little confidence. I had a stutter. Yeah, and I just couldn't do public speaking. I've started debate to help me with my public speaking. I'm not very good at it at the moment, (laughs) but it's helping me become more comfortable with talking in front of other people.

I'm on student council and talking, like learning how to properly talk with people older than me, like the headmaster, people in like positions of power and not being like really, really nervous.

Being socially skilled and able to relate to a wide range of people was also something developed through boarding. SpringBoarder C said,

"At my school, particularly, it was quite an International School. There were students from all over the world and effectively growing up with people from all different continents and stuff, I think is probably one of the most valuable things because it really teaches you perspective; and how that everyone has their own sort of cultural views. But you still have to live together. You can't argue or get annoyed at someone who's going to be sleeping in next door."

The SpringBoarders were often able to be autonomous and self-directing, taking responsibility for setting their own goals and learning about themselves. They described taking on opportunities such as drama and acting, the Duke of Edinburgh awards and other extracurricular opportunities were all reported as valued elements of boarding.

Feeding back to RNCSF

In our interviews, we asked each SpringBoarder for their views on what might have helped them when they were starting out or if they could have their time again what would have helped them more. The responses varied from 'nothing it was really excellent' to concerns for others who did not have the chance suggesting the 'bursary schemes needed to be more widely known about and advertised'. There were some other proposals suggested too. SpringBoarder A, for instance, suggested that whilst it is understandable that schools do not want to make vulnerable children stand out as being different, there are times when being connected to other bursary holders within the school would have been helpful. This quote captures the sentiment,

"I feel like when I first, so when I first started talking about it to people, like telling people where I was from and how I got here, because people really didn't know until lower sixth. Every time I spoke about it, I was this is the best thing in the world. This is like I was really selling it and because I was so happy at what happened and don't get me wrong. It was life changing and I'm still very, very, grateful for what happened, 100% but, I think as I've left and as I'm kind of learning more. I'm learning to critique it a bit as well, and I feel like. That's why I've been really thinking about recently, like what could have been done better and? I don't know like. The first thought that comes to mind is when I left school I was told that there were other SpringBoarders in the school and I had no idea. I was the first one at [name of school] but when I was in like lower sixth there were people in lower years who were there and I would have loved to meet them."

There is and was good support for these SpringBoarders in their boarding schools. Throughout the interviews, we picked up on some factors that might also be useful for RNCSF and schools to consider. For example, at times, the interviewees stated that there might have been more understanding and empathic approaches to helping SpringBoarders making the transitions to boarding, be more flexible when responding to minor rule breaking and doing more to connect bursary recipients to others like them studying within the school.

Interview Study: Part 2 – key informant perspectives

We also conducted a series of interviews with key informants (KIs) to develop an in-depth understanding and insight into the experiences of staff working within the BEP programme. The intention at this stage of our research was to gather information to inform the independent evaluation pertaining but not limited to experiences, perceptions and views of the benefits as well as drawbacks and, the project's relevance for the communities and schools in which they work; identifying expectations of any barriers and challenges associated with the recruitment, placement and support of children and recommendations for overcoming these.

The participants we recruited represented a range of staff working within independent boarding schools, charities working with both RNCSF and the independent boarding schools, virtual schools, and staff within RNCSF. In total, six KIs were interviewed. The analysis of interviews was once again carried out using Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis. On this occasion, we used two stages of analysis. First, we repeated the same process as for the SpringBoarder analysis by inductively generating themes. Second, we conducted a deductive analysis. The deductive approach is described in more detail below.

Having identified a set of themes through the inductive thematic analysis, one of the researchers used the Broadening Educational Pathway Programme Initiation Document to identify RNCSFs own 'success criteria' for operationalising the scheme and sets out its processes and stages for implementing the scheme. In addition to this, the RNCSF approach to addressing previously identified weaknesses in delivering a scheme to expand the number of boarding school places for vulnerable children was highlighted as informing the design of and programme delivery. These two features of the RNCSF approach were then used to conduct a deductive thematic analysis.

We found that the inductive analysis provided a wide range of thematic areas from which we generated 11 main themes. We then further analysed these to conduct the deductive thematic analysis; using the RNCSF success criteria provided three overarching themes within which we could nest those inductively generated findings. Thus providing a robust and trustworthy analysis of the interview data whilst building in a process analysis and evaluation of implementation of the scheme.

Presentation of key themes

We identified three main themes generated through first an inductive and then second a deductive approach that are mapped directly to 'success criteria' identified in the DfE/RNCSF BEP for LAVC Programme Initiation Document. These three main themes contain 11 nested themes that were generated through the inductive approach. Table 14 below shows both the main themes and nested themes.

Table 14. Interview Study Part 2: Main themes and sub-themes

Main Themes generated using deductive approach	Nested sub-themes generated through inductive approach
Inputs	Relationships and relational working
	Referrals
	Assessment
	RNCSF as a partner
Outputs	Fitting in and transitions
	Emotional labour
	Families
Outcomes	Learning for the whole person
	Academic success
	Human Capital
	Aspirations

Inputs

The first theme identified as 'Inputs' was generated from RNCSF's success criteria with four nested inductively generated sub-themes that were: 'Relationships and relational working', 'Referrals', 'Assessment' and, 'RNCSF as a partner'. Each of these is expanded upon below and we incorporate an evaluation in the analysis of the data rather than limiting this to a purely descriptive presentation of the interviews.

Relationships and relational working

This sub-theme was represented by three factors common across all interviews. These were, partnerships, processes and attitudes. Partnerships referred to building relationships between schools and local authorities including with the virtual school in the area, working with and building relationships with foster carers, families, social workers and other relevant professionals. Processes represented the aim of creating safety through the process of both identifying the future SpringBoarders and of the appropriate schools. This was achieved by being consistent and creating a sense of a caring stable environment. Attitudes referred to being caring, compassionate and showing acceptance of the child, their family and their circumstances by building and being in empathic relationships whatever role the professional occupied.

Referrals

This sub-theme showed how different schools and agencies working with RNCSF worked together to identify the right child for the scheme. This was clear evidence of implementing the learning from previous less successful schemes identified by Murphy et al (2020). Referrals were often facilitated through different routes including those directly from the family or through the virtual school and local authority. Whilst the relationships were clearly evolving and partnership working was evident, schools were able to be autonomous in how they engaged with their local community to identify looked after children and this was valued by schools as a form of good practice on the part of RNCSF. Previous research by Murphy et al. (2020) also highlighted the importance of finding the right school, for the right child at the right time and this finding suggests that RNCSF are implementing learning in the scheme.

Assessment

This sub-theme showed that, as part of the identification of appropriate LAVC, a rigorous range of tasks and processes are involved. First and foremost, participants reflected on their own individual approaches which were highly consistent across different institutions. Perhaps surprisingly, each interviewee reported they had relied on personal feelings, at the level of gut responses to inform decisions about making assessments of the suitability of a child for the programme. A combination of perception of what is required and experience in the role intersects with experiences from the personal past life of the professional, often grounded in their own family life or educational journey, to inform the decision making process. This linked closely to relationships as a theme; all the staff involved indicated their approach was deeply relational as a method of assessment and selection of children for the scheme. These personal and visceral processes were built upon by more explicit and concrete methods such as, current academic achievement. Academic ability was considered important but was clearly not the lone criterion. Entrance exams, interviews with staff in schools and with RNCSF were always conducted. Some common characteristics that appear to be looked for in the children were that the child was perceived as being 'willing to engage' and 'have a go at things' being able to 'adapt to the boarding environment'. There was a recognition that adjusting to boarding was not easy for the children, especially those from more unsettled backgrounds and the home visit would often be an important step for getting to understand the child more fully.

RNCSF as a partner

This final sub-theme was defined by statements referring to the connection between the schools, local authorities, children and families and RNCSF. In our interviews, when asked about partnership working with RNCSF, participants shared statements such as 'they just get it' and 'they're un-shockable, you can tell them anything'. Participants referred to the knowledge and experience that RNCSF brings to the process of finding the right child for the programme whilst others acknowledged that the schools feel they are permitted a high degree of autonomy in how they work with the child once the child is placed and settled. The support provided by RNCSF was also recognised at every stage saying 'they're always there if we need them'.

Outputs

RNCSF success criteria identified and specified 'outputs'. Outputs in the success criteria were related to the matching of looked after children to available places at independent day or boarding schools that best suited their needs and interests and also providing support and guidance to ensure the child thrives within their placement. This theme has three nested sub-themes; Fitting-in and transitions, Emotional labour and, Families.

Fitting in and transitions

All participants acknowledged how difficult the transition to boarding can be for LAVC and, all participants thought that RNCSF did an excellent job to help schools, children and their families to navigate this process delicately. Five of the six participants described instances and examples showing how they approached the task of changing negative perceptions of boarding schools that many people hold in order to support the family through the transition into boarding. Participants were aligned in agreement with the need to break down barriers between independent schools and the wider public and specifically within the local communities in which they are often situated.

When considering the offer of a boarding school place for a LAVC, there are many challenges to be faced and it is an emotional time. This was recognised as being hard for families especially when they first bring a child into the school. The culture of some independent schools is different as one participant said, 'we have oil paintings hanging on the walls here – that's intimidating for some visitors'. Similarly, the same participant said we use 'different language and have different terminology that some children will never have heard or understand. You know we have "prep" which basically is just homework'. The cultural differences, the physical buildings and atmosphere around the school were all important features to be discussed, explained and introduced to new families approaching the schools for the first time.

Emotional labour

The emotional labour involved for staff supporting looked after children who were new to boarding was evident across all interviews. Emotional labour was seen as part of an entire 'approach' to the work involved when matching a child and was captured partly in the

first theme of relationships. However, we are giving this theme further treatment, as some specific accounts of the emotional work were particularly notable. First, it is important to note that all of the staff we interviewed were emotionally dedicated to providing a caring, safe, stable and consistent environment for the LAVC participants. Interviewees expressed genuine emotion when reflecting on instances when the placement had not work out as planned.

The emotional labour was also recognised as being difficult for teachers in schools who feel out of their depth in supporting the young people who have often experienced very challenging personal events in their life prior to coming to a boarding school. The need to continue to support teachers to develop their skills was identified as an important learning edge for many participants (we pick this up again in the section below on human capital). It was noted that teachers need support to develop their emotional capacity for offering support to others. Having RNCSF to call upon helped the teachers and staff to grow in their confidence to contain and hold increasing levels of distress and empathically support children to process their distress without affecting behaviour negatively. Similarly, connections between the school, local authorities and social workers was important and valued in being able to ask questions and get information that alleviated emotional distress amongst school staff. One participant reported how sometimes issues relating to a child that can seem 'really big in the context of a boarding school can, easily, be put into perspective with a few minutes on the phone to a social worker.' Supportive and partnership working

enabled school staff to develop their capacity for supporting a vulnerable child. RNCSF's support added to this and the training to support schools was valued and could be developed further.

There were substantial evidence of a high level of ongoing year-round support provided to the children once they had started at the school. It was recognised that it is important for children to have exposure to a family environment; one school described the role of house parents and the extensive resources available through the pastoral support team that children can access at any time.

Families

The role of supporting families is integral; as it is often at times when families are in difficulty that children are drawn to access the opportunity. The scheme was reported as being able to provide support for families crucial to enabling the individual child to gain the most out of the opportunity. This additional social benefit is important and requires particular attention. One teacher said they actually help 'keep families together' by offering a bursary place.

Bringing the family alongside during the process of assessment and then in the transition into the school was very important. One participant in a pastoral role indicated about 90% of their working time is dedicated to supporting the SpringBoarders, was actually spent supporting the child through support for the wider family. The relationship with the main carer was considered very important. Sometimes, parents found their child leaving home so difficult they would try to hold the child back or want them to come home after they had gone to the boarding school. This would often be a stressful time for the child and pastoral staff would support the child. The schools that RNCSF have identified for their partnerships all have to meet specific accreditation standards including a requirement to provide excellent pastoral support for these vulnerable children.

Outcomes

A key success criteria for the BEP scheme is to evaluate the 'outcomes' that can be achieved through the use of boarding school places for LAVC. One of the central aims of this criteria is to deliver on 'life transforming outcomes' that can be evidenced by academic progress and attainment, raised aspirations and broadened horizons, enhanced employability prospects and improved social skills, resilience, self-confidence and wellbeing. Some of these elements of the criteria have been assessed through other sections of this evaluation. Others are mapped by our sub-themes of Learning for the whole person, Academic success, Human Capital and Aspirations.

Learning for the whole person

Where pastoral care was considered an emotional challenge for support staff and teachers involved, the quality of high standards of pastoral care provided meant that the looked after and vulnerable children were being cared for in emotional, psychological and physical ways. The care was holistic. The children were given access to pastoral staff and could be in contact with RNCSF staff if required whenever needed. This support was extended year-round ensuring the young person was not left to fend for themselves during the holidays when the usual structures of boarding life were removed. Whilst academic success was considered important, it was also set in context of the individual child's personal goals. Children had the chance to learn about and develop aspects of themselves that they otherwise would not. In one example, an LAVC was attending an independent day school. The interviewee, working in a virtual school, reported how the child was able to express himself in ways that were never going to be given opportunity in his state school; in the independent school he found other children with similar interests. Another example referred to having interests in science or literature where children realised that their subjects could also become their passions. Learning was understood more than merely the reception of information – it was provided in support to become part of who they are as a person not just what they know. The nature of education seemed to be perceived differently for those children attending a boarding school to a state school. It takes on a less instrumental role in the child's life.

The opportunities from enrichment were considered a significant benefit. This was highlighted through the wide range of sports, the facilities available, the scope of inclusivity by having teams wrap support around the child were all considered as uniquely available within the independent boarding school setting compared to what the child would otherwise have available through the regular state sector.

Academic success

Academic success was carefully presented by all participants interviewed as important but never as the only goal and often not as the most important outcome. For example, staff in schools were keen to point out that academic success would come from taking care of the children in a more holistic way.

Human Capital

Human capital represents those attributes and capabilities that a young person develops, acquires and through their experiences at their school, flourishing. Whilst academic success is important, developing a wide range of life and social skills was considered essential and opportunities for this learning were available to children through the scheme. For example, children learn how to take responsibility, work within the boundaries of a structured day, as they took up new hobbies they learnt the qualities of discipline in applying themselves to learning instruments, playing different sports. Staff believed that the children learn to be themselves and develop their potential.

The human capital acquired through attending a boarding school was considered to give the child a set of personal skills and characteristics they can transfer into a range of life circumstances including interviews, attending social events going to university or becoming an ambassador for the scheme or participating in the other events offered by RNCSF. One school reported on LAVC supporting events aimed at integration within the local community. Students from their schools were involved in community work, supporting local charities and supporting other local LAVC through activities provided at their school. The perceived social benefits of this were very evident to the staff involved.

Aspirations

Becoming a person with aspiration is a key success criterion for the scheme. School staff were clear that the opportunities for LAVC to board were able to 'make things happen' for the children that could give them the sense of achievement and, of being able to believe in themselves. At one school there was a message that 'our children are encouraged to look up' and this was considered to be something that looked after children had to learn as they often arrived with lower confidence and less self-belief than their peers. This theme has been expanded on significantly in the interviews with the young SpringBoarders themselves.

Summary

To summarise the evaluation to this point, it appears a growing body of evidence is emerging that supports the work undertaken by RNCSF in the implementation of the BEP scheme. This has been reflected in the interviews with SpringBoarders and the staff from a range of organisations who spoke in an overwhelmingly positive way about RNCSF. We heard how the high degree of autonomy given to schools, the close and deeply relational approach that RNCSF brings to this work, is significant in the success reported by participants in our interviews and triangulates well with the quantitative evaluation results.

Longitudinal survey conducted by RNCSF

In this section of the report we present a descriptive account of the longitudinal survey that was conduct by RNCSF over a three year period. As there are only a small number of respondents for each round of the survey, we believe the survey is best used as a source of triangulation with the interview study presented above. It is our view that the findings provide a valid source of corroboration of the interviews conducted and support our interpretation of the interview data.

The survey findings are collected over three years ranging from 2019 to 2021. In 2019 there were 11 respondents, in 2020 there were 9 and in 2021, 22 responses were obtained. In the section below we have provided an overview of the responses across the three years by question. Sections 1 and 2 we related to the partner organisation. Section 3 of the report refers to experiences of boarding school.

Q3a: I like boarding school. In 2019 and 2021 81% of respondents said they either Strongly Agree or Agree with this statement. In 2020 88% of respondents said they either Strongly Agree or Agree.

Q3b: There are people at school who care about me. In to 2019, 8 of the 11 respondents said they Strongly Agree or Agree and 1 respondents said Disagree and 1 Don't Know. In 2020, all of the respondents either Strongly Agree or Agree. In 2021, all but 1 respondent said they Strongly Agree or Agree and 1 said Don't Know.

Q3c: I know who to talk to at school if I have a problem. In 2019 all respondents Strongly Agree or Agree, in 2020 all but 1 respondent (who said Don't Know) Strongly Agree or Agree. In 2021, 20 respondents Strongly Agree or Agree and 20 Don't Know.

Q3d: I feel happy and comfortable at school. In 2019, 9 Strongly Agree or Agree and 1 Disagree with 2 saying Don't Know. In 2020, 8 out of the 9 respondents Strongly Agree or Agree and 1 said Disagree. Finally, in 2021, 19 out of 22 said Strongly Agree or Agree, 1 said Disagree and 20 said Don't Know.

Q3e: I am part of my school community. In 2019, 10 said Strongly Agree or Agree and only 1 said Don't know. In 2020, 100% of respondents said Strongly Agree or Agree and in 2021, 21 out of 22 either Strongly Agree or Agree.

Q3f: I would like more friends at school. Responses to this question were more varied. In 2019, 5 respondents said Agree, 2 said Disagree, 1 said Strongly Disagree and 3 said Don't Know. In 2020, only 1 said Agree, 2 Disagree, 0 said Strongly Disagree and 6 said Don't Know. Lastly, in 2021 5 said Strongly Agree, 3 said Agree, 7 said Disagree, said Strongly Disagree and 5 said Don't Know.

The survey also asks respondents to write down three words that best describes their experience at boarding school. We have combined the words used over the 3 years of the programme. The word cloud below represents the responses and as can be seen the responses suggest that boarding school if fun, challenging, exciting and provides a sense of home and community. The descriptions are largely all positive with perhaps the only exception being that of feeling homesick.

independence
overwhelming
tiring   hard
personal growth
challenging   exciting   opportunity

fun   home
community
enjoyable
everlasting happiness
teacher   joyful
competitive
happiness   friend

experience
school
year group
intense
house
love boarding school
interesting
positive
friendship
engaging
atmosphere
different
lesson
homesick
loving

The next question in the survey aims to understand how SpringBoarders think about boarding school. This section covers whether SpringBoarders were given the opportunity to meet more people, get better qualifications, were being helped to get a better job, engage in extracurricular activities, feel more likely to succeed in life and to excel at something. There were six parts to Q4 which has the stem "Boarding school is…" The questions were as follows.

Q4a: …giving me more opportunities to meet people from different backgrounds. In 2019, 10 respondents said they either Strongly Agree or Agree with this statement, 1 Strongly Disagree and 1 Don't know. In 2020, the same questions was answered by 100% saying they either Strongly Agree or Agree and in 2021, 19 said Strongly Agree or Agree, 2 said Disagree and 1 said Don't Know.

Q4b: …helping me to get better qualifications. In 2019, 2 said Strongly Agree and 8 said Agree, just 1 said Disagree and 1 said Don't Know. In 2020, 3 said Strongly Agree, 6 said Agree, 1 said Disagree and 1 Don't Know. In 2021, 13 said Strongly Agree, 6 Agree, 0 Disagree whilst 1 said Strongly Disagree with 1 Don't Know.

Q4c: …giving me a better chance of getting a good job. In 2019 100% of respondents said the either Strongly Agree or Agree with this statement. In 2020, there was a similar response with 8 out of 9 respondents either Strongly Agree or Agree with just 1 saying Don't Know. In 2021 there was a little more variation as 17 out of 22 were either Strongly Agree or Agree, 1 said Disagree and 4 said Don't Know.

Q4d: …giving me more extra-curricular activities. In 2019, 1 student said they Disagree and remaining 10 said either Strongly Agree or Agree. In 2020, similarly 1 said Disagree, 1 Don't Know and remaining 7 said either Strongly Agree or Agree. In 2021, 19 out of 22 said they either Strongly Agree or Agree and none Disagree with 3 saying Don't Know.

Q4e: …giving me more confidence that I will succeed in life. This statement saw a bit of variability in responses across the years and within the responses within a year. The most positive responses came in 2019 when 9 responses were Strongly Agree of Agree and just 2 Don't Know. In 2020, 7 said Strongly Agree or Agree with 1 saying Disagree and 1 saying Don't Know. However, in 2020 just 14 out of 22 said they Strongly Agree or Agree. 4 said they Disagree and 1 said the Strongly Disagree and 3 said Don't Know.

Q4f: …giving me more chance to excel in something I am good at. In 2019, 9 out of 11 said they either Strongly Agree or Agree and 2 said they Disagree. Similarly, in 2020, 8 out of 9 said they Strongly Agree or Agree and 1 said Disagree. In 2021, there were over half of respondents (13 out of 22) who said they Strongly Agree and a further 4 said they Agree. 4 said they Don't Know and 1 said they Disagree with the statement.

The next block of items asked questions about how SpringBoarders had found being away from home. They were asked about negative reactions from family or carers, about missing home, friends, and adjusting to home during holidays and adjusting back into school life after holidays. The questions were answered by saying either 'a lot', 'sometimes' or 'not at all' and the stem to this questions is, Have you experienced…

Q5a: …negative reactions from family/carers. In 2019, the finding are split with about half (6 out of 11) saying 'Not at all' and 4 saying 'Sometimes' and 1 'A lot'. In 2020, the picture was very similar with 5 out of 9 saying 'Not at all' and 3 said 'Sometimes' and 1 said 'A lot'. In 2021, the picture might be said to have improved as 0 said 'A lot', 5 said 'Sometimes' and 16 said 'Not at all'.

Q5b: …strong feeling of missing home/family. In keeping with the Word Cloud results above, there were consistent albeit relatively low numbers of reports of missing home. In 2019, 2 said 'A lot', 6 said 'Sometimes' and 3 said 'Not al all'. In 2020, 2 said 'A lot', 6 said 'Sometimes' and 1 said 'Not al all'. Then in 2021, half (11 out of 22) said they 'Sometimes' had strong feelings of missing home/family, 3 answered 'A lot' and 7 said 'Not at all'.

Q5c: …strong feelings of missing friends back home. In 2019, 3 said 'A lot' and 6 said 'Sometimes and 3 'Not at all' (one person answered twice). In 2020, 1 said 'A lot', 5 said 'Sometimes and 3 said 'Not at all'. In 2021, 3 said 'A lot' and again half (11 out of 22) said 'Sometimes' and 8 said 'Not at all'.

Q5d: …difficulties in readjusting to home life during school holidays. In 2019 readjusting to home life did present much difficulty as 8 out of 11 responses were 'Not al all' 2 said 'Sometimes' and just 1 said 'A lot'. In 2020, the responses were similar as 7 out of 9 said 'Not at all' and 2 said 'Sometimes'. In 2021, over half (13 out of 22) said 'Not at all' and 6 said 'Sometimes' and 3 said 'A lot'.

Q5e: …difficulties in readjusting to school life after the holidays. Transitions to boarding school presented a more mixed picture than transition to home. In 2019 7 out of 11 said they either had difficulties 'A lot' or 'Sometimes' and 4 said 'Not at all'. In 2020, just over half (5 out of 9) said 'Not at all' and just under half said 'Sometimes' or 'A lot'. In 2021, just over half (12 out of 22) said either 'A lot' or 'Sometimes' and 10 said 'Not at all'.

The next question asked about whether a SpringBoarder had experienced any kind of abuse or discrimination during the year at boarding school. This might have been on grounds of race, gender, religion, disability of sexual orientation. Notably social class was not listed and might have helpfully prompted a wider response as not all young people might understand the term 'protected characteristics'. The stem to this question was 'Within this we would include any behaviour or comments which made you feel uncomfortable, awkward or different in some way'. The answer was a binary Yes/No with a free text bow to expand if the answer was 'Yes'. The question was introduced in year 2021 and represents the views of 22 respondents.

In total 18 respondents said 'No' they had not experienced any abuse or discrimination whilst there were 4 who said 'Yes' they had experienced abuse or discrimination at boarding school. Three of the respondents provided explanations which showed that there was an incident of racism, of homophobia and one person reported they had been bullied both emotionally and physically.

In the next section of the survey questions turned to understand SpringBoarder's experiences of academic progress. The main question was, 'In terms of academic work, how well do you think that you are doing now compared to your previous school? There were four statements and respondents had to answer stating the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statement.

Q6a: I work harder now than I did at my previous school. In 2019, 1 respondent said 'Don't Know', 5 said 'Agree' and 5 said 'Strongly Agree'. In 2020, 4 said 'Strongly Agree', 3 'Agree' and 3 said 'Don't Know'. In 2021 the responses were spread more evenly across response options. 6 said 'Strongly Agree', 7 'Agree', 3 said they 'Disagree' and 5 said they 'Don't Know'.

Q6b: I feel like there are higher expectations of my than there were at my previous school. In this question for the 2019 cohort, 6 said they 'Strongly Agree' and 3 said 'Agree' and just 1 said 'Disagree'. In 2020, 8 out of 9 said either 'Strongly Agree or 'Agree' whilst 1 said they 'Disagree'. In 2021, 19 said they either 'Strongly Agree' or 'Agree', 3 said they 'Disagree' and 1 said 'Don't Know' (one respondent answered both Strongly Agree and Agree).

Q6c: I feel more challenged now than I did at my previous school. In 2019 10 out of 11 either 'Strongly Agree' or 'Agree' whilst 1 said 'Disagree'. In 2020, 4 said 'Strongly Agree'. 3 'Agree' and 2 'Don't Know'. In 2021, 8 said 'Strongly Agree' and 8 more said 'Agree', 3 'Disagree' whilst 1 responded 'Don't Know'.

Q6d: I am doing better now in terms of academic progress than I was at my previous school. Responses to this statement were quite mixed and varied. In 2019, 4 said 'Strongly Agree' and 3 'Agree'. However, 1 said 'Disagree' and another 1 said 'Strongly Disagree' and a further 2 said 'Don't Know. In 2020, responses were more positive as 3 said 'Strongly Agree' and 3 said 'Agree' whilst none 'Disagree' or 'Strongly Disagree' and 3 said 'Don't Know'. In 2021 things were a little less certain again as while 9 'Strongly Agree' and 5 'Agree' another 3 said 'Disagree' and 6 said 'Don't Know'.

To help understand these responses about academic progress it is helpful to look at some of the free text responses that respondents provided. For example, in 2019 one person said 'I don't know how I'm getting on' whilst another said 'I've had a lot of support from the learning support department'. In 2020 there were no free text responses given. In 2021 there were seven responses given. These indicated that there was good support from teachers, that being in a more academic environment provided motivation, and that boarding school had changed their work ethic. There were two responses that indicated that having poor mental health and low confidence could impact on learning and making academic progress.

The BEP programme intends to raise aspirations. To track this outcome the survey asks the following question, 'What impact do you think that boarding school has had on your future?' There were four statements that respondents were asked to say how much they agree or disagree with that are listed below. Then there are three charts that represent each of the three years 2019-2021.

Q7a: I feel more positive and ambitious about my future than I did before I started boarding school.
Q7b: Boarding school has opened up opportunities that I would not have had before.
Q7c: I am now more aware of the range of careers available to me than I was before I started boarding school.
Q7d: Boarding school has helped me to make connections with people who will help me succeed in life.

I feel more positive and ambitious about my future than I did before I started boarding school

Q7A

◼ 2019 ◼ 2020 ◼ 2021
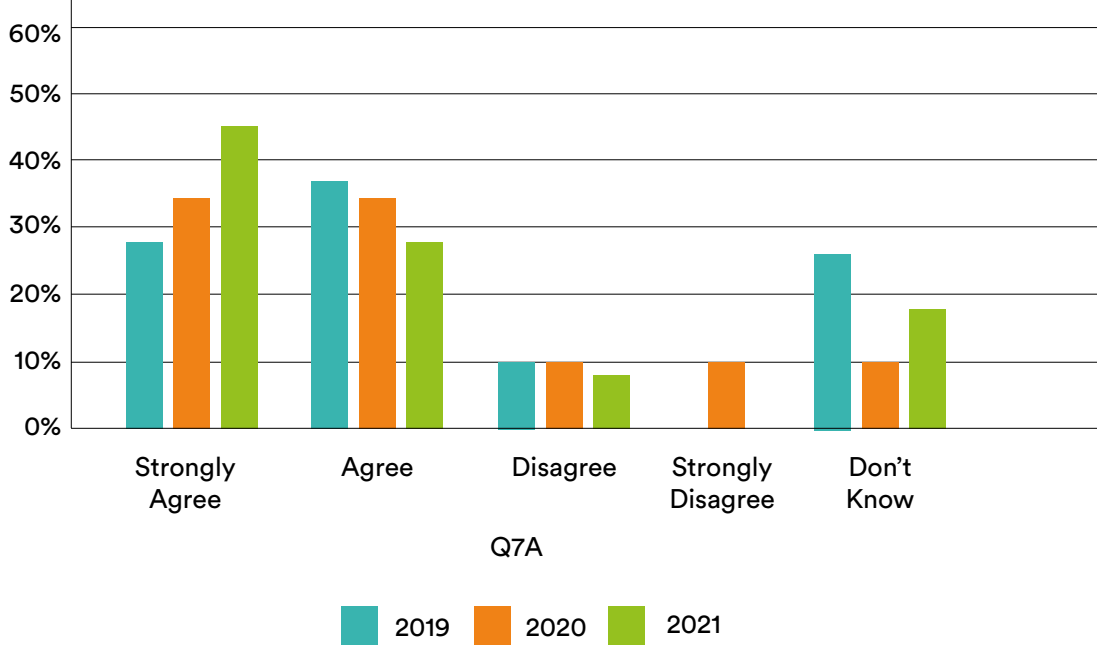
Boarding school has opened up opportunities that I would have not have before

Q7B

◼ 2019 ◼ 2020 ◼ 2021

I am now more aware of the range of careers aailable to me than I was before I started boarding school.

Q7C

■ 2019 ■ 2020 ■ 2021

Boarding school has helped me to make connections with people who will help me succeed in life

Q7D

■ 2019 ■ 2020 ■ 2021
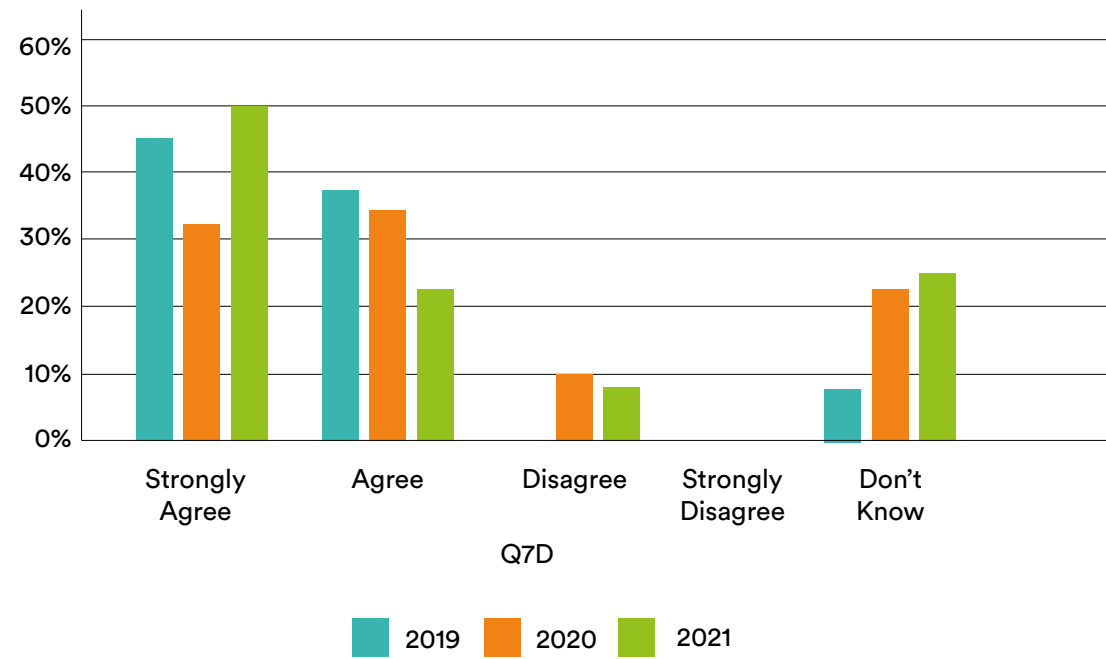
In the next section of the survey respondents were asked about their feelings about themselves including about their confidence, self-esteem, engagement in extra-curricular activities, whether they felt valued by teachers and their changes in outlook. There were five statements which were all to follow the stem 'I feel…' and the statements were:

Q8a: …positive about myself.

Q8b: …more confident in social situations than before I started boarding school.

Q8c: …that participating in extra-curricular activities is important.

Q8d: …that I am valued by my teachers.

Q8e: …that I am gaining a broader outlook on life with the opportunities at boarding school to develop friendships with people from different backgrounds.

The charts below show how the responses to this section look over the three years.

Positive about myself
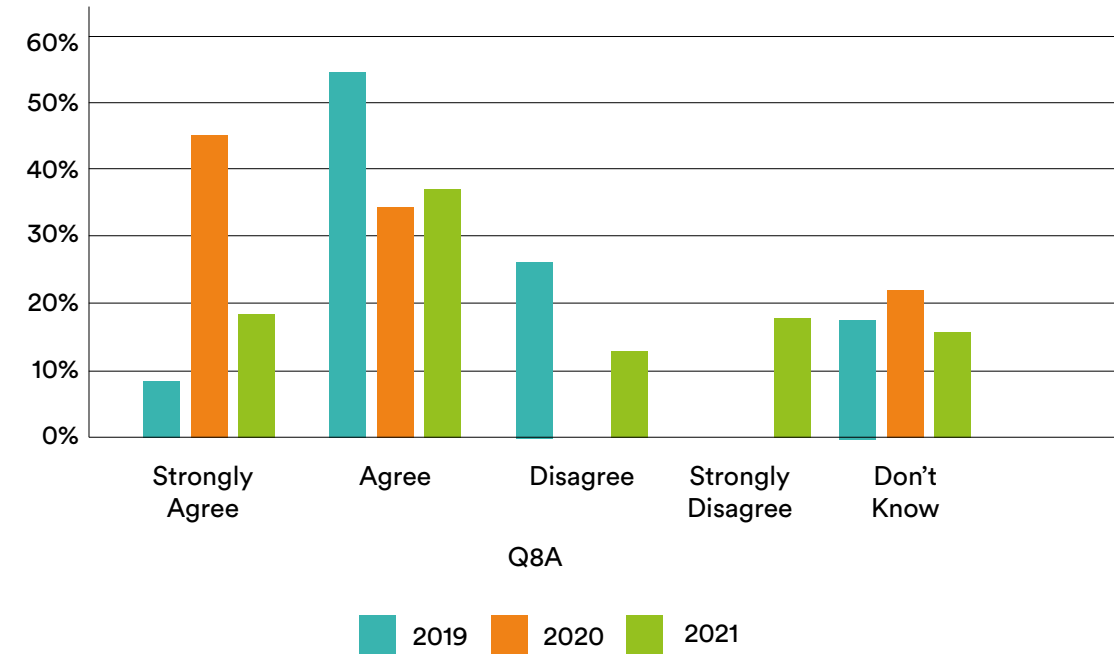
Q8A

2019   2020   2021

More confident in social situations than before i started boarding school

Q8B

2019   2020   2021

Participating in extra-curricular activities is important

Q8C

Legend: 2019, 2020, 2021

Participating in extra-curricular activities is important

Q8E

Legend: 2019, 2020, 2021

More confident in social situations than before I started boarding school

Q8D

Legend: 2019, 2020, 2021
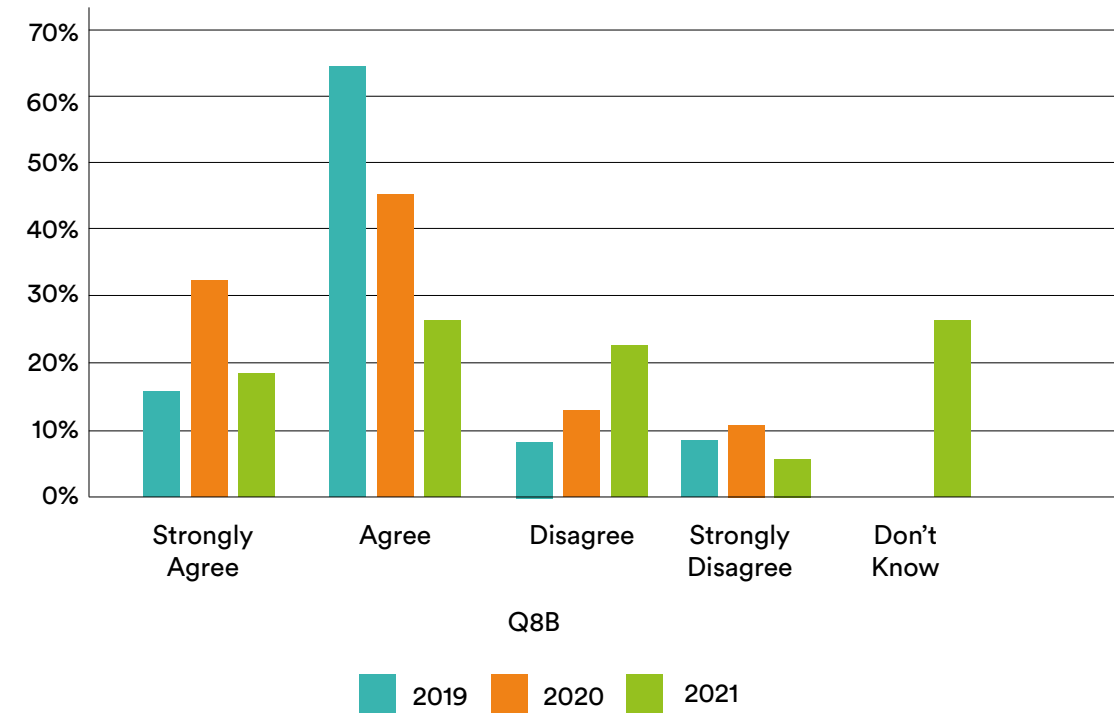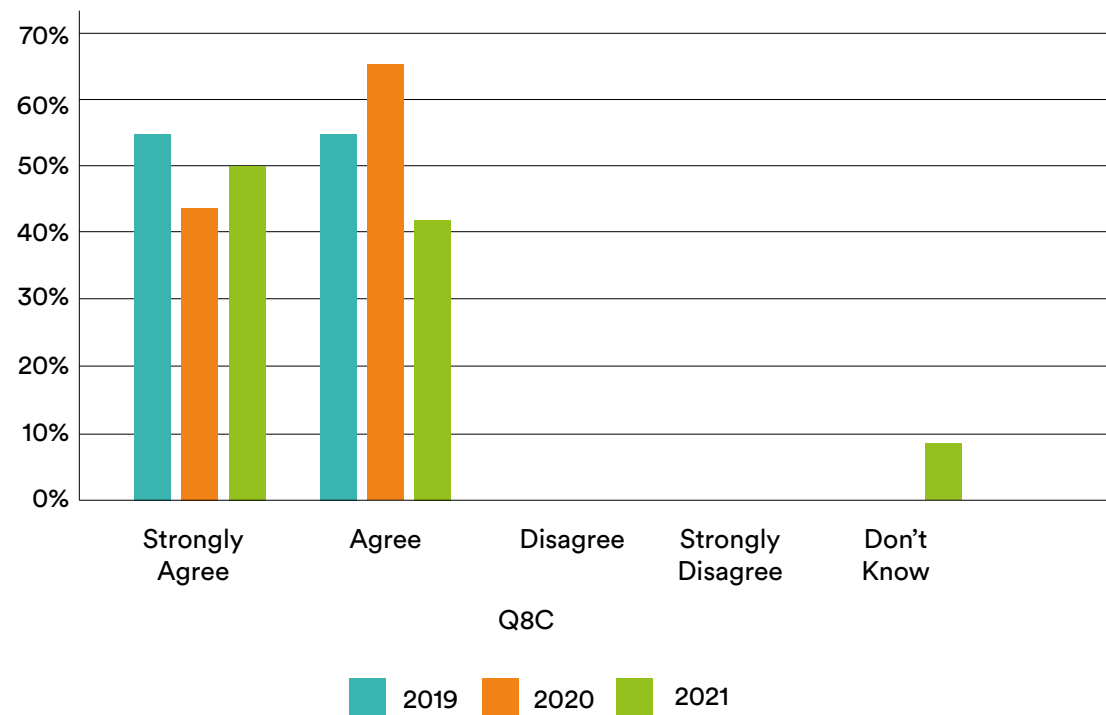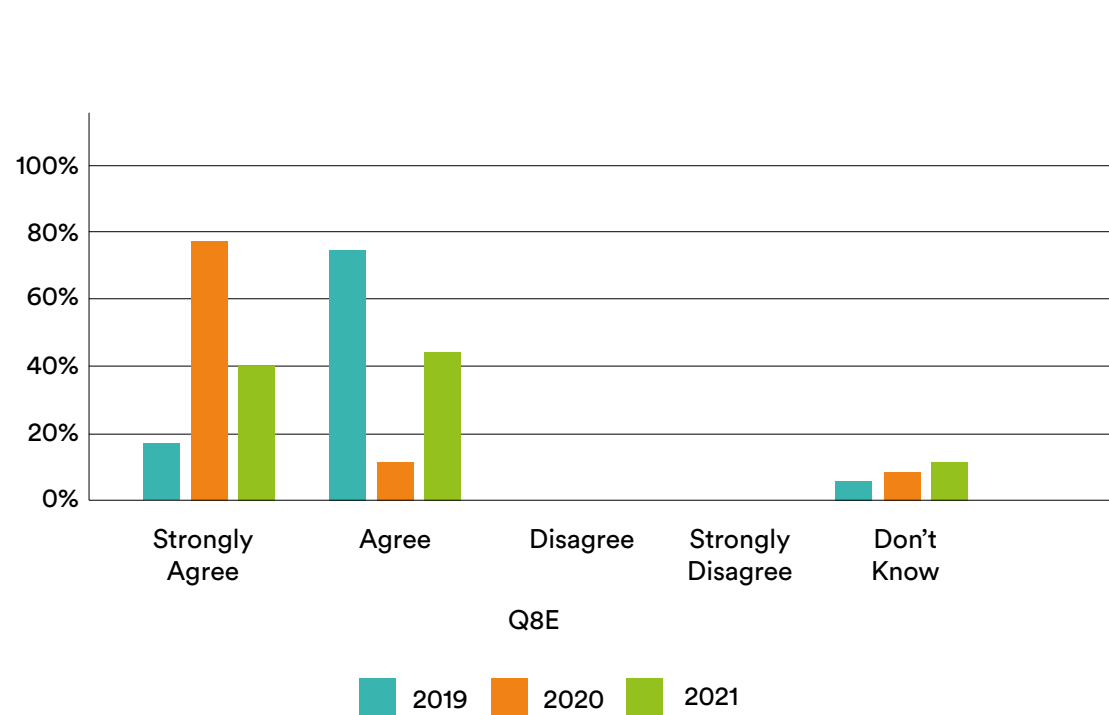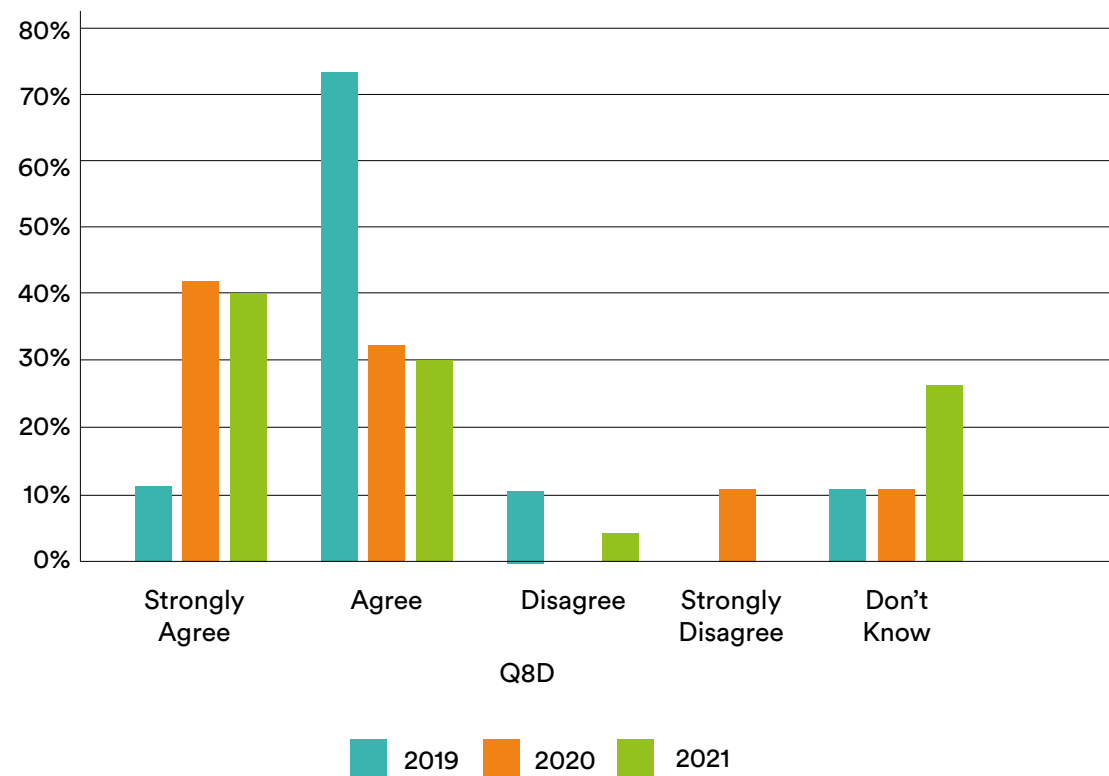
The final set of questions were free text boxes for SpringBoarders to share information about their experiences with others. As the data suggest that not the same questions were asked each year we cannot provide a year by year comparison. In 2019 it is worth noting that two respondents provided additional comments with one saying they had been bullied and one saying they had received great support. For another question they said that boarding had largely had a positive effect of their family including both positive effects on parents and siblings. In the final question about giving advice to future potential applicants to boarding school, 8 out of 11 responded and all but one of the 8 said they would encourage someone else to apply. In 2020, there were very few responses to the open ended questions and just 5 out of 9 responded and 3 said they would encourage others to try it. Finally, the 2021 responses were quite extensive. Respondents shared that they had spoken to others about their boarding experiences and that this seemed to have shifted perceptions within the family and local community. Parents had changed their views, the boarding schools provided more space and opportunities.

In the 2021 survey, respondents were asked to rate their relationship with RNCSF on a scale of 1 to 10. 21 respondents rated their relationship and the mean score was 5.71 with scores ranging from 0 to 10. When asked how the relationship might be improved, the overriding response was to request more contact from RCNSF.

Summary of conclusions

We have conducted a rigorous and extensive evaluation of the boarding school programme for LAVC delivered by the RNCSF. In sum, it is our overall view that the programme is working well and is serving to benefit LAVC who access boarding schools. We have been impressed with the close attention given by RNCSF staff to the careful and dedicated delivery of the programme, ensuring the wellbeing of all the LAVC involved in a boarding placement. This covers the entire boarding school journey from the point of selecting schools appropriate for the child's interests and needs, the pastoral and educational support during the boarding school placement in addition to ongoing engagement with the wider Springboarder community. Our findings suggest that the boarding school programme is effective educationally, efficient economically and contributes towards changing the futures and raising the aspirations of the LAVC involved.

We suggest several broad conclusions from this evaluation.

1. Our findings have shown that the opportunity to attend a boarding school for LAVC appears to have had a positive impact on GCSE attainment compared to controls when using the measurement of 'five good GCSEs including Mathematics and English at grade 9-4' (or A*-C equivalents). The data showed that the BEP programme leads to 54% of the treatment group achieving this level whilst only 13% of the matched control group. That is, a potential 41% improvement as a result of attending boarding school.

2. We have identified and tentatively proposed the net educational benefits of the boarding school programme using the data for Scenario 3 resulted in an additional 45 out of 110 LAVCs obtaining good GCSEs who wouldn't otherwise. This translates into is an estimated net educational benefit for society worth around £657,450 (= £14,610 × 45 additional pupils).

3. We developed a model for estimating the social care costs avoided/costs saved for the implementation and potential scaling of the boarding school programme. This is the first attempt to model the cost/benefits by any researchers within the field of LAVCs attending boarding school programmes in the UK. Our analysis of relevant data entered into the model showed the costs avoided/costs saved to His Majesty's Treasury to be circa £4,472,949 per annum and the net benefit to society of £755,949 per annum. However, this is based on a number of assumptions and estimates and might be subject to a significant error. It is also the case that small adjustments to the assumptions underpinning the model, such as the number of children requiring the highest level of costs for residential care, will have significant impact on the costs avoided.

4. Compelling evidence from the evaluation was taken from data from interviews with LAVC boarders. Springboarders' perspectives on their experience of the boarding programme showed that it provides a life changing opportunity in really difficult circumstances. All children reported struggling at some point, yet they all also reported positive effects the opportunity had on their life. Some LAVCs suggested the need for more and better pastoral support at boarding schools, the need for Springboarders to have more awareness and understanding about their status in the scheme and the opportunity to meet with other LAVC in similar circumstances. The positive aspects of attending a boarding school were the life changing experience of a better educational environment, widening perspective on life chances, and more hopes for their future success were important take away messages from the interviews.

5. In this evaluation of the boarding school programme we found that, at present, there is too much 'noise' in the dataset available for any firm conclusions to be drawn. As this is an interim evaluation for a programme that may potentially run for several more years, we strongly recommend that further delivery of the project benefit from an evaluation design that has 'built-in' to the delivery model. This can and should include standardised measures for both cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes.

6. Finally, we recommend the need to conduct further, more robust, research and evaluation of the programme and that this is strongly recommended where public money is used to support opportunities for LAVC to access a boarding place.

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Appendix 1

i Alternatively, the contribution of the local authority could be omitted from both parts of the table. This would correspondingly reduce the total on the top part, the cost of doing nothing.