



**narrowing  
the gap**  
in outcomes  
for vulnerable groups

**overview and analysis of available  
datasets on vulnerable groups and the  
five ECM outcomes: executive summary**

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## Executive Summary

This summary presents the main findings from a data mapping and analysis study commissioned by the Local Government Association (LGA) from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) as part of a two-year development and research programme, Narrowing the Gap.

This major programme, funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and the LGA, working in partnership with other agencies, seeks to make a significant difference in 'narrowing the gap' in Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes between 'vulnerable' children (aged 3 to 14) and other children. These outcomes, in summary, are to be healthy, to stay safe, to enjoy and achieve, to make a positive contribution and to achieve economic well-being.

The data study, carried out in September and October 2007, sought to identify what useful and comparable data was (and was not) readily available on each of the outcomes for vulnerable groups.

### What have we learnt about the data and about gaps in outcomes?

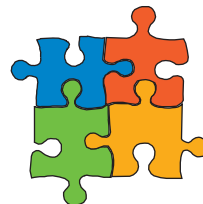
Where data was collected at individual child level, it was possible to identify significant gaps in a number of ECM outcomes for children and young people from lower socio-economic groups, for looked after children, for children with special educational needs, for children with poor attendance, for those who had been excluded from school and for children and young people from some minority ethnic groups.

More generally, however, it became apparent that even the best datasets were not comprehensive, that there was a lack of consistency in defining or identifying vulnerable groups between datasets and that the overall quality and nature of data on many of the outcomes was:

- insufficiently detailed to allow the extent of any gap to be identified for some of the groups
- not collected in a way that facilitated accurate comparisons over time
- insufficiently robust to enable judgements to be made as to whether gaps were widening or narrowing.

One further note of caution is necessary. Young people may be disadvantaged in more than one way. Any analysis that seeks to shed insight on gaps in outcomes for any one group – and whether or not those gaps are narrowing – ideally needs to take account of known background characteristics about that group (such as sex, ethnicity, socio-economic circumstances, special educational needs and so forth).

## What data sources were used in the study?



The data that was included in this study came from four major sources:



### Publicly accessible data

These include:

- DCSF Statistical First Releases and Statistical Volumes
- Data from the Office of National Statistics
- Data from other government offices, such as the Home Office and Department of Health



### Secondary analysis of large datasets

These include:

- PLASC (DCSF's Pupil Level Annual School Census) and the NPD (National Pupil Dataset) from 2001/02 to 2005/06
- TIMSS (The International Maths and Science Study for the IEA) for 2003
- PIRLS (the OECD's Progress in International Reading Literacy) for 2001
- PISA (the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment) for 2003



### Data from longitudinal research studies

Information and research findings from other national datasets:

- EPPE (Effective Pre-school and Primary Education)
- ALSPAC (Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children)
- LSYPE (Longitudinal Study of Young People in England)
- MCS (Millennium Cohort Study)



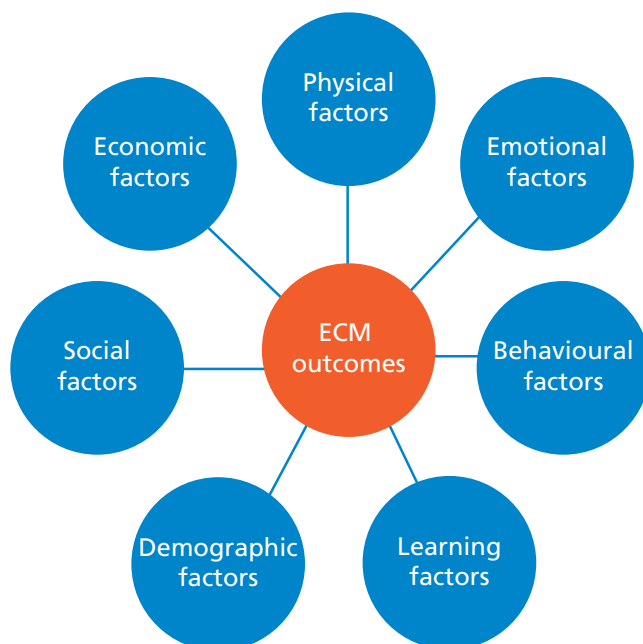
### Data from other surveys

Relevant information, where possible, from other datasets, including:

- Young People's Social Attitudes
- General Household Survey
- TellUs2

## Why might some children be more vulnerable than others?

The vulnerable groups of children and young people that are the central focus of the Narrowing the Gap research and development project include young people who may be disadvantaged in many different ways. These disadvantages may be as a result of the action (or interaction) of factors related to socio-economic circumstances or of issues to do with young people's physical or emotional well-being. They may be linked to difficulties in learning or to problem behaviours, or they may relate solely to situations that arise as a result of being part of poor communities.



## Who are the vulnerable children?

The first challenge in identifying the gaps in outcomes for vulnerable groups is identifying exactly how many children and young people there are in each category. Numerical information is available for some of the groups of children and young people that are central to Narrowing the Gap. For others, the numbers of individual children are not known, are available solely as an estimate, or are based only on aggregated data.

Vulnerable group	Data for 2005/06 (unless indicated)	
	Number	per cent of all young people in age group
Children from poorer socio-economic groups	67,094	12.3
Children in care (looked-after children or LAC) March 2007	60,000 (of whom 11,800 were aged 16+)	10.0 (rate per 10,000 under age 18)
Children with disabilities	Not known	
Children with statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) (all ages) data for 2006/07	229,100	2.8
Pupils with SEN without statements (all ages) data for 2006/07	1,333,430	16.2
Children excluded from school (permanent)	9170	0.12
Children excluded from school (fixed term) (one or more periods of exclusions (DfES, 2007a))	189,890	5.74
Children with poor records of attendance at school (primary) data for 2006/07 (DCSF, 2007a)	73,940	2.2
Children with poor records of attendance at school (secondary) data for 2006/07	204,810	6.9
Children from different ethnic minority backgrounds (includes Roma/Traveller children)	See Appendix B for details	
Young offenders (*note that this is the number of offences by 10–17 year olds, not the number of offenders)	(301,860*)	Not known
Young carers	Not known	
Children at risk from significant harm	26,400 (under 18)	4.8 (possible overestimate)
Children living with 'vulnerable' adults	Not known	
Mobile children	Not known	
Children of service families	Not known, but will be recorded from 2008	
Pupils not fluent in English	Not known	
Young mothers (under-16 conception rate 2003–05 aggregated) (ONS, 2007)	22,201	7.7
Asylum seekers/refugees	Not known	
Unaccompanied asylum seekers/refugees (March 2007)	3300	Not known
Asylum seekers/refugees in need receiving a service (March 2006)	5500	Not known
Children in unsatisfactory housing	Not known	

## What does the data tell us about the gaps in Every Child Matters outcomes?

The second challenge is identifying the specific outcomes for those groups. Meeting these challenges is highly dependent upon the data that might be available.

### Being Healthy?

Indicative data for some of the vulnerable groups was obtained against five main areas: mental health, child obesity, smoking, drinking and drug use. The young people for whom the health gaps were largest and who seemed at most risk of mental health problems or resulting problem behaviours were those:

- from low socio-economic groups or those eligible for free school meals (FSM)
- with SEN
- with poor attendance records
- who had been excluded from school on at least one occasion.

White pupils were linked to a higher incidence of smoking and drinking. Those from mixed-race and Black backgrounds were more associated with incidences of drug taking.

In terms of overall health, the data is not conclusive. Some argue that the relationship between higher household income and children's good health is a direct one, others argue that it is an indirect effect, linked to parental behaviour and to good parental health.

### Staying Safe?

From the available data (mostly aggregated at local authority level), the young people who seemed most at risk of not being (or not feeling) safe were those from:

- mixed-race and white backgrounds
- low-income families.

Little (if any) of the data in this area is comprehensive, however, and more needs to be known about outcomes at an individual pupil level.

### Enjoying and Achieving?

As far as enjoyment is concerned, comparative analyses of data from international studies (TIMMS, PIRLS and PISA) suggest that the children least likely to experience enjoyment in reading, mathematics or science, or to feel a positive enjoyment in school, are those from lower socio-economic groups. At present, it is not possible to examine any changes over time in these gaps, but this should be possible once the findings from the most recent round of international studies are published. Young people from white British, mixed-race and Black Caribbean backgrounds had the least positive attitudes to school (LSYPE).

The story for attainment is complex. Outcome data from the National Pupil Database (NPD) suggests that gaps in attainment, at key stages 1 to 4, have been evident for young people:

- eligible for FSM
- with SEN
- from Irish traveller or Gypsy/Roma backgrounds

*The term 'gap' is used here to mean the difference between the outcomes for a specific group and the expected outcome for a member of that group, given the identified outcomes for all other young people.*

*Given that obesity is rising across all socio-economic groups and within both low and high deprivation areas, there is a significant health issue for all young people and not just those in the most vulnerable groups.*



- from mixed-race ethnic heritage
- from Black minority ethnic groups
- Asian children (though not at key stage 4)
- looked after children.

DCSF analyses of aggregated data suggest that the attainment gap for LAC pupils appears to be narrowing, with more such children gaining qualifications. NFER's multilevel analyses of individual pupil-level data from the NPD suggest that the gaps for Black Caribbean pupils appear to be narrowing. The NFER analyses also suggest, however, that the biggest gaps at key stage 4 are for white boys with FSM. The data indicates that these gaps have not narrowed over the six year period between 2001/02 and 2006/07.

### **Making a Positive Contribution?**

Available data on making a positive contribution tends to focus on the negative (published data on crime, antisocial behaviour, and exclusions) rather than on providing information on, for example, active community involvement. Black/Black British children and those with a history of truancy or exclusion were over-represented amongst those young people with offending behaviour. Nonetheless, the type of data that is available makes it difficult to identify real gaps between groups or any changes over time.

### **Achieving Economic Well-Being?**

Children from some vulnerable groups appeared more likely to be in low-income households, to have made less use of formal childcare or to be eligible for FSM than other children. Young people from Bangladeshi and Pakistani households were more likely than their peers to live in low-income households and to have less experience of formal childcare or non-traditional early years' provision. Young people with special educational needs were more likely than other young people to be eligible for FSM.

Participation rates at 18 (as indicated by the Youth Cohort Survey) were lower amongst young people:

- from Bangladeshi and Pakistani backgrounds
- from households in which parents were occupied in routine or other occupations
- with a disability
- who reported that they had truanted in the past
- who said that they had been excluded at least once during compulsory education.

### **What do we know about the gaps for vulnerable groups?**

From current data, we can identify gaps in ECM outcomes for some vulnerable groups of young people, particularly for:

- children and young people from lower socio-economic groups
- looked after children
- children with special educational needs
- children with poor attendance

*Child poverty and the proportion of young people living in unsatisfactory housing both appear to have decreased between 1994/95 and 2004/05.*

- those who had been excluded from school
- children and young people from some minority ethnic groups.

These outcomes and gaps are enumerated in the full report. Existing data does not allow us, however, to make any detailed statements about the ECM outcomes for:

- young offenders
- mobile children
- young mothers
- asylum seekers/refugees
- children with disabilities.

## Are the gaps narrowing?

The collection of individual child-level data on PLASC and in some of the longitudinal large-scale surveys facilitated the identification of changes over time against some of the ECM outcomes. The ways in which data is currently collected and collated, however, and the different ways in which groups are defined mean that it is not possible, in most cases, to ascertain whether or not the gaps are narrowing, or widening or have stayed the same in recent years.

ECM outcome		Are the gaps narrowing?	
Be healthy		Higher incidence of obesity amongst lower socio-economic groups, but rate of growth in incidence of obesity now greater amongst higher socio-economic groups.  Provision for the physical health of children who are looked after has improved	
Stay safe		No comparable data available	
Enjoy and achieve	Enjoy	No comparable data available at present	
	Achieve	White boys on Free School Meals Free School Meals SEN Gypsy/Roma Black Caribbean pupils LAC	No change in gap No change in gap No change in gap Gap widening Gap narrowing Gap narrowing
Make a positive contribution		No comparable data available	
Achieve economic well-being		No comparable data available	



## What should we do now?

In order to monitor progress and to evaluate the impact of interventions to narrow the gap for vulnerable groups of young people, some clear steps need to be taken. In addition to agreeing the definitions for vulnerable groups, we need to improve the collection and collation of data on young people and to identify how datasets might best be linked, so that more informative investigations and tracking of outcomes can take place. At present the situation is as follows:

- Data may be collected for different purposes (such as for a census, for a survey or to provide information for funding arrangements). This means that information on different sets of young people may not be comparable.
- Those collecting data may also use different definitions for identifying groups. Researchers and others may use proxy measures such as eligibility for FSM, or the number of books in the home, instead of parental occupation or skill levels when identifying socio-economic circumstances, for instance.
- Data may be collected at the level of the individual child (as for PLASC) or aggregated at the level of the local authority (such as by placements for looked after children) or the group (as in the case of young offenders). Where data is available only at aggregate or group level, it is much more difficult to identify comparable outcomes or to measure progress.
- When data is aggregated it may also be collated for different age bands, so that it is not always possible to compare the outcomes for young people within a specific age group.

Physically, operationally and ethically, there are likely to be problems in constructing one single database for all young people. Comprehensive, child-level datasets (such as PLASC) provide the richest source of illuminative data, while representative surveys (such as LSYPE, MCS and EPPE) can be a source of enlightening insights. In using and matching these datasets there is clearly a need to consider the ways in which best to approach the use of sensitive data, particularly in relation to data protection and child protection issues. Yet, without a more strategic approach to the collection and analysis of data, preferably adopting a multivariate approach, we will continue to face significant difficulties in identifying gaps and monitoring progress towards ECM outcomes. This is a significant challenge for the wider project on Narrowing the Gap and one which deserves close consideration.

## How to get the full report

The data report will be published by NFER on behalf of the LGA and the Narrowing the Gap Programme in January 2008. For more details, please contact the NFER's Publication Unit on 01753 637002, at [book.sales@nfer.ac.uk](mailto:book.sales@nfer.ac.uk) or visit [www.nfer.ac.uk](http://www.nfer.ac.uk).

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