



The NCER Children Looked After Project

NCER is a long-standing mutually-owned Community Interest Company that provides education performance analyses and associated services to local authorities under the provisions of Education Act 1996 S.10. Every local authority is a member of NCER. NCER uses data from national sources, including the NPD, and from local authorities directly.

The central NCER products are **Nexus** and **Nova**. These enable local authorities and schools easily to compare and contrast performance at national, local authority, school and pupil level on a wide range of indicators and with a wide range of filters.

Three exemplar queries:

How is school A performing on Ebacc with girls on free school meals, compared with national and local authority norms?

How is school B performing on progress from Key Stage 2 to 4 with summer-born boys living in advantaged areas, compared with national and local authority norms?

How did pupil X, a boy on free school meals and with English as a second language, perform compared with boys with similar characteristics nationally and locally?

The purposes of these analyses are:

- to support schools and academies in identifying and working on areas for improvement;
- to identify areas of strength which could be used for cross-school learning;
- to provide schools with richer and better contextual analyses than available to Ofsted; and
- to hold schools and academies to account.

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Children Looked After by local authorities form a very varied and changing population. Ofsted assessed outcomes by looking at year-on-year headline data, which proved extremely unstable for reasons outside of local authority effectiveness.

ADCS and NCER, and the Virtual Heads Association, NAVSH, were seeking a better way of assessing educational progress and outcomes for children looked after by the local authorities. With the support of DfE and Ofsted, existing Nexus and Nova systems were extended to include the SSDA903 database.

The Rees Centre research on the factors that were strongly correlated with educational outcomes for children looked after was a vital element used to inform the system design.



In simple terms, the existing **Nexus** and **Nova** systems were extended by matching in SSDA903 social care data to build in extra filters accessible by Virtual Heads, the post-holders charged with the statutory duty of improving educational outcomes for children looked after.

The outcome is a system that has now been operating for three years, and that is being updated and extended annually, to enable:

- fair comparisons between children with different care characteristics, such as length of time in care or number of educational placements;
- Virtual Heads to work with schools to raise expectations and to set ambitious but realistic targets;
- Virtual Heads to consider where best to apply Pupil Premium Plus funding to secure improved outcomes; and
- local authorities (and Ofsted) to assess better the effectiveness of their virtual school.

A problem in explaining ...

Since NCER systems work at individual pupil level, the only access to the analyses is to properly authorised officers of the local authority concerned, with secure dual-factor authentication. The children looked after analyses are only available to Virtual Heads. Direct demonstration is therefore impossible – and we have never been able to afford the luxury of setting up dummy datasets – sorry!

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(and ADCS Associates Chair)

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