

Chances for Children: Support for Boarding

Executive Summary

Introduction

Buttle UK's Chances for Children grants support children and young people in crisis throughout the UK with a range of items and costs. These packages of support can be anything up to £2,000 and are tailored to the individual needs of the children and young people we support. Alongside this we have had a historic, complimentary commitment to towards meeting the cost of boarding fees for vulnerable children, for which we dedicate £1,000,000 per year. Dating back to the charity's foundation in 1953, these larger grants are typically used in serious cases, where remaining in the home is having a clear, detrimental impact on the child's development. In some cases, the intervention offers an alternative where there is a future risk of the child being taken into the care system.

Buttle UK has developed a 'Theory of Change' to help us target and measure the impact of our work. This outlines how our support aims to provide children with the best opportunities to achieve at school, gain employment and move out of poverty by ensuring that they are growing up in a safe, health, well-equipped home, and that they are not excluded from educational or personal development activities due to financial barriers. Our Theory of Change forms the basis of all grants that we provide to children and young people and our work funding boarding cases meets all of our Theory of Change outcomes as comprehensively as our other grant-giving activities.

The charity typically funds places for around 150 pupils a year through our Support for Boarding grants at a variety of state and independent schools. The academic year 2017-18 saw a particularly large cohort of 50 pupils take their GCSE exams, providing a unique opportunity to gain insight into the efficacy of the programme and draw conclusions for policy and practice elsewhere in the sector. The cohort consisted of an ethnically diverse range of children, who we placed in a range of schools across England, although rates of students and boarding schools were highest in London and the South East, respectively. These children started their boarding places with a range of developmental challenges, including poor mental health and behaviour problems.

This paper considers the impact of our boarding programme based on an assessment of the level of vulnerability/need of the children in this cohort and their outcomes after support. We assessed need by drawing out information about the Adverse Childhood Experiences to which the children have been exposed and children's presenting issues. We assessed child outcomes by looking at GCSE grades and conducting interviews with parents and carers to understand family circumstances and changes that parents and carers have observed with respect to levels of personal and educational development in their children.

Key Findings

“This experience has given her aspirations and the will to go to university. This was very crucial for her, especially because all the kids in the area she grew up in have no GCSEs...I think that the experience of boarding has made her a better human being, much more open to other cultures and different people...It has helped her to build self-esteem and the ability to take on new challenges and learn to work with other people too.”

“[Boarding support has been] Absolutely magnificent. It has changed our lives. When I approached Buttle, I had meningitis, which almost killed me, and I couldn’t cope with five kids on my own, and I was having domestic violence problems with my daughter’s father and I had a court injunction. I was really sick, was in and out of hospital, on medication, and couldn’t take proper care of my kids. Your help has given my children the opportunity of coming out of poverty.”

Vulnerability / needs of the children supported

- > We used Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) to demonstrate the backgrounds of the children we are supporting in a way that is recognised by a wide range of other bodies. Broadly, evidence around ACEs suggests that children who have experienced four or more ACEs are at increased risk of negative outcomes, including physical and mental health problems, higher engagement in risk behaviours, poor educational achievement and unemployment.¹
- > All children in our cohort experienced at least one ACE (e.g. domestic violence, neglect, abuse, parent alcohol/substance misuse), and 56% of children experienced four or more ACEs.
- > We also examined the presenting issues in children; all children experienced at least one of the following problems: poor mental health and wellbeing (e.g. behaviour problems, psychiatric illness, low self-esteem), school and neighbourhood problems (e.g., victimisation, antisocial friendship groups and gang involvement), neurodevelopmental disorder (ADHD, ASD, dyslexia), or physical disability or illness.

GCSE results

- > Of the total children supported over the 5-year period, 76% completed their GCSEs in the boarding school where the placement was funded.
- > Among the cases where we were able to obtain GCSE results (68% of the children who completed GCSEs; N = 23), 47% received five A* - C grades (including English and Maths), and 92% of children obtained five A* - Cs across all subjects.
- > The success rates of children in this cohort obtaining five A* - Cs including Maths and English are closer to the national average for all children (63%) than the average for Children in Need (19%). This demonstrates how boarding support can help improve the outcomes of vulnerable children.²
- > Overall, 66% of children with four or more ACEs completed their GCSEs, compared to 88% of children with three or fewer ACEs. For those who completed their GCSEs, the number of ACEs did not affect GCSE results, i.e. children with four or more ACEs achieved as well as children with fewer ACEs, indicating that boarding can be an effective intervention, even for very vulnerable children.

¹ [Public Health Wales \(2016\) Adverse Childhood Experiences in Wales \[multiple reports\]](#)

² DfE (2019) Children in need of help and protection: Data and analysis

- > While the numbers are too small to draw any definitive conclusions, these results suggest that offering the placements to those that are most vulnerable does not preclude the placement from being successful.
- > We therefore hope that, along with the recent evaluation from Norfolk County Council about the results of their use of boarding,³ the case is strengthened for local authorities to be considering boarding for some of the children identified as being very vulnerable and at high risk of entering care.

Theory of Change Outcomes

Child is growing up in a safe, healthy, well-equipped home

- > Parents felt that the children were safer in boarding than they had been at home.
- > Parents felt that their child being away helped as it meant that they were not witnessing the often very difficult issues the family /parents faced.
- > Several parents stated that boarding had provided stability for their child, and one parent highlighted the importance of the child having a male role model at the school, as this is something they did not have at home.
- > Instances of bullying were very few, and parents felt that schools were proactive in handling the situation if it did arise.
- > Family relationships were often noted to have improved, with less conflict in the home and more quality family time when the child was at home.

Child is not excluded from educational activities due to financial barriers

- > The percentage of children gaining GCSEs shows that boarding placements can produce far better levels of educational attainment than for other defined groups of vulnerable children (Children in Need or Looked after Children).
- > Parents outlined that their children now have aspirations for their future.
- > One parent noted that the transition to the new school was initially difficult due to the child being behind other children academically, but that the child soon caught up.
- > Parents were enthusiastic about the variety of activities and opportunities available to their children in the school.
- > Some did note that access to all activities within the school could be challenging due to the additional costs. This is something Buttle UK will address in the future by providing additional funding for a wider range of costs beyond boarding fees.

Child is not excluded from personal development activities due to financial barriers

The purpose of our funding is to remove this particular barrier and provide an opportunity to access an environment that offered a range of developmental opportunities. The value of this support was reflected in:

- > Parents reporting that their child's behaviour has improved.

³ Norfolk County Council (2018) Boarding School Placements for Vulnerable Children and Young People.

- > Most parents mentioning a notable improvement in levels of confidence/ resilience/ self-esteem.
- > In more than one case, parents noting that their child was able to interact with a more diverse group of friends and peers.
- > Several parents praising the mental health and wellbeing support provided by the schools for their children (e.g., councillors, school nurses etc.)
- > However:
- > Some parents stated that the child still experiences stress and difficulties when at home (e.g., during the holidays).
- > Both the parents and the children often found the physical distance between them difficult emotionally, particularly during the initial transition period to boarding.

Financial benefits to local authorities in engaging in boarding partnerships

- > Government focus is increasingly moving away from just Looked After Children to Children in Need.⁴
- > In the year of 2017-2018, local authorities spent £8.8 billion child social care, with an overspend of £872 million.⁵
- > The average school fee for our cohort was £28,118 per child per year.
- > The cost for children in care ranges between £33,592 (foster placement) and £212,004 (local authority own provision care homes) per child per year, prior to accounting for the costs of schooling and additional child-directed social care costs (e.g. therapeutic interventions),⁶ or factoring in the additional costs saved that are attributed to supporting care leavers⁷.
- > There is therefore the potential for the cost of placing vulnerable children in boarding to be substantially lower than placing a child in care, particularly when working in partnership with other funding organisations
- > By engaging in partnerships with Buttle UK and other organisations/schools, the cost of supporting vulnerable children is greatly reduced for local authorities, with the added knowledge (based on evidence from this evaluation and the Norfolk County Council Boarding School Partnerships evaluation)⁸ that children's life chances are being improved through academic achievement (and therefore future employment opportunities), personal development and enhanced wellbeing.

⁴ DfE (2019) Help, protection, education: concluding the Children in Need review.

⁵ House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts (2019) Transforming Children's Services.

⁶ Personal Social Services Research Unit (2017) Unit costs of health and social care 2017

⁷ Roberts, N., Jarrett, T., Powell, T., Kennedy, S., Gheera, M., Harker, R. & Wilson, W. (2019), Support for Care Leavers. House of Commons Briefing Paper.

⁸ Norfolk County Council (2018) Boarding School Placements for Vulnerable Children and Young People.

Areas of learning for the development of our Support for Boarding programme

- > We will work more closely with the family, school and potential referral partners so we can address potential problems with boarding places early to enhance success rates, particularly when engaging in more proactive approaches to recruiting children.
- > We will continue to build partnerships with more boarding schools to support children in all areas of the UK, and will continue to build relationships with local authorities to increase the number of vulnerable children we can support through boarding.
- > We will further develop our impact evaluation methodology to better capture how boarding support improves outcomes for children in each of our Theory of Change areas. This will be made possible through the development of partnerships with our boarding schools and the introduction of our Memorandum of Understanding with schools, a formal agreement with schools that will enable us to obtain updated information on educational and pastoral progress of each student enrolled on our Support for Boarding programme.

Chances for Children: Support for Boarding

Introduction

Buttle UK has a long history of supporting children through boarding places, dating back to the charity's foundation in 1953. We offer large grants to cover boarding tuition for children for whom remaining in the home is having a clear detrimental impact on their development. Disruptions in the home life mean that the parent is unable to care for the child (for example due to severe physical or mental health problems), and there is a high risk of family breakdown. All children supported through boarding programmes are also on a very low income/living in poverty, and their experiences mean that they have a future risk of being taken into the care system. Our boarding scheme provides an alternative to children entering care and becoming Looked After Children. We typically fund boarding education for around 150 children aged 11-18 per year across a variety of state and independent schools. We dedicate £1,000,000 per year to boarding grants.

Whilst the overarching aim of our boarding places remains consistent, over time we have developed how we provide this support to maximise the number of children that we can impact. As an organisation, we have also developed our Theory of Change (a framework from which we base and target all our support to maximise the impact of our grants for children), and consequently have developed and shaped our boarding programme to fit within the development of our charity aims and values. The Theory of Change (see figure 1) shows how the ultimate aim of Buttle UK is to help children have the best chances of good educational achievement and break the intergenerational cycle of poverty by providing children with the necessary resources to do so with our grants. We believe that when a child is growing up in a safe, healthy, well-equipped home, has access to the right educational and social resources and activities, they will have the best chance of achieving and laying the foundations for a positive path for their future.

The support provided through our boarding programme targets each of our Theory of Change areas, providing a safe living environment, access to educational resources and access to social activities that support children's personal development. Sixty-five years of experience have shown us that a boarding education provides the opportunities of greater stability, routine and levels of aspiration than is otherwise being experienced by the very vulnerable children we support. This helps these children by both addressing their social needs and raising their educational attainment. Despite excellent results, the practice is currently benefitting a relatively small number of children, and we are keen for this support to be available to help more than the 150 children we currently support per year. We believe that the approach is extremely cost effective in comparison with local authority care and should be more widely and systematically available. We would like to see a long-term solution that will provide children with stability, support and consistency throughout those all-important teenage years and we believe boarding school can be one option to achieve this. In the meantime, we are committed to finding ways to develop how we offer this support ourselves and demonstrate how it is effective, to widen boarding support and maximise the number of vulnerable children that it can benefit.

Whilst we can see the opportunities that our boarding programme provides individual children every year, we recognise that evidencing the benefits of funding boarding places more systematically is critical to being able to persuade others – including schools, funders, local authorities and others of its value – to help us create more opportunities for children to access this opportunity than our current resources allow.

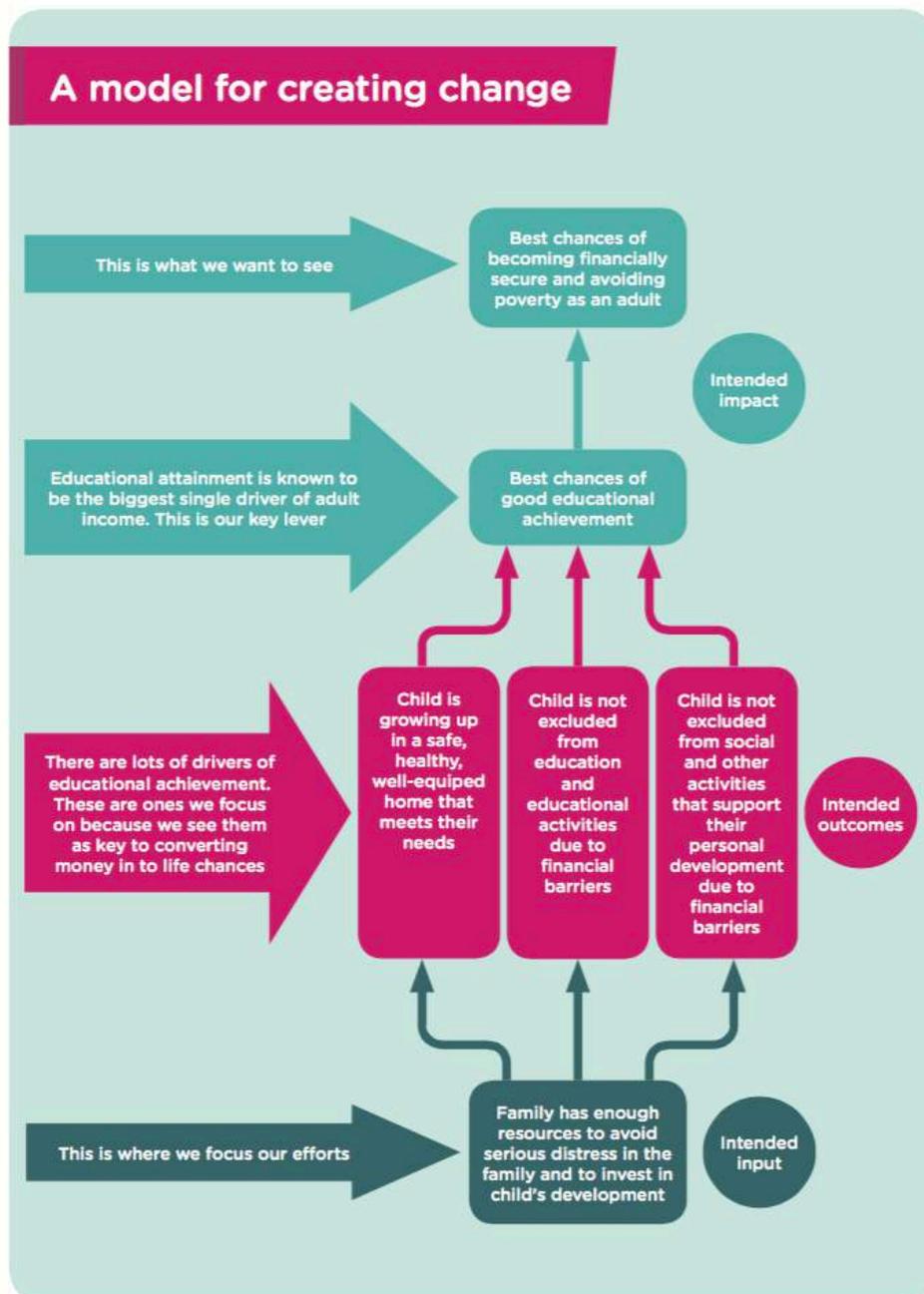


Figure 1. Buttle UK's Theory of Change

The 2017-2018 academic year saw a particularly large cohort of 50 pupils take their GCSE exams, giving a unique opportunity to gain insight into the efficacy of the programme and draw conclusions for policy and best practice elsewhere in the sector. This report provides a background on how our boarding programme is implemented, and how previous evaluations have helped develop the programme to what it is today. This report particularly focuses on the findings from our most recent evaluation of boarding support, highlighting the strengths and impact of the approach, and drawing conclusions for how we can use these findings to inform the development of our current Support for Boarding programme and best support our beneficiaries.

The Support for Boarding programme in practice

Eligibility

The Support for Boarding programme is aimed at children from low-income families who are at risk of family breakdown due to parents/carers being unable to provide adequate support for their child. Specifically, a child is eligible for the programme if they meet the criteria of facing severe family, social, emotional or health problems linked to their family situation. The Support for Boarding programme aims to intercept before the child is at the stage where they are at risk of being taken out of the home and into local authority care. Generally, children are only eligible for a boarding place if in a single parent family, with the following exceptions: one parent within a two-parent household is severely incapacitated, resulting in the second parent being unable to work; a child in kinship care where one of the carers is unable to look after the child (e.g., due to age), or; a two-parent adoptive family where the child is unable to continue living with the family due to experiencing severe adoption related distress. The eligibility criteria has remained consistent throughout our time offering boarding support.

Application Process

Although the support provided by Buttle UK (i.e., Chances for Children grants) typically requires that a referral organisation apply on behalf of a child/family needing support, the Support for Boarding programme is unique in that parents apply directly to Buttle UK on their child/ren's behalf. Parents must complete the online application form via the Buttle UK website, adequately evidencing why their child is in need of a boarding place and must supply two supporting letters from professionals (e.g., GP, school teacher). Once the Grant Development Officer (GDO) has reviewed the application, if they believe that the child is eligible for a boarding place, the GDO will complete a home-visit to interview the parent/carer to find out more about their circumstances and why the child needs a boarding place, before making the decision of whether to award the grant. Additionally, each year parents are required to complete a funding renewal form, where they indicate whether there have been any changes in their family circumstances or finances, how their child has been progressing at school, and provide a copy of their child's school report.

Funding Process

Currently, all boarding places are 50% funded by the endowment fund within Buttle UK, and 50% funded by the boarding school that is placing the child. Both Buttle UK and the partner school also each provide an additional 5% funding, which is available to the child and family to ensure that the child in boarding school has the same access to resources for development as their peers (e.g., music lessons, educational field trips, school uniform). This additional funding can also be used to ensure that the child and family are supported and there is a safe living environment for the child during the holidays (e.g., washing machine for the family, bed for a sibling, holiday camps/activities). Buttle UK and the school can also approach other organisations for funding, and if either is successful, they can split their share of the cost of funding between themselves and the additional organisation.

Relationships with / Expectations of Schools

Once a child is assessed as eligible for a boarding place, Buttle UK will identify a boarding school within one hour and a half from the child's home that is appropriate for the child to attend, and facilitate discussions and agreements between parents/carers and the school. In some cases, parents/carers will have already identified a boarding school, and in these instances, we facilitate conversations with the school to ensure they meet our criteria and are willing to work in partnership with Buttle UK. We will only place a child in a boarding school with a Good or Outstanding Ofsted status.

The Support for Boarding Programme involves an arrangement between Buttle UK and a participating boarding school. Both parties work together to agree on a funding package that will see the child through to the end of their secondary education, with the possibility of extending this to the sixth form. The participating schools are expected to provide spaces for the children, make a bursary award for these children where required and provide all required pastoral and educational support within their existing capacity. Schools are also expected to report on the child's progress to Buttle UK at regular pre-agreed intervals, working with Buttle UK to provide all information necessary to conduct evaluations and adequately monitor the progress and further needs of the child and their immediate families. There is an expectation that both parties shall maintain, at the minimum, the same level of financial support for the children for the entire duration of their secondary education, should the children choose to remain at the school.

Our previous boarding research projects

Buttle UK remains committed to the concept of using boarding as a way to support vulnerable children, ensuring that we are targeting children who benefit the most from this support, and identifying how we can increase the number of children that we support through boarding. Buttle UK has already engaged in a number of research projects to help reach these goals, and we have used findings from these research projects to develop our existing Support for Boarding programme. Findings and resulting developments from previous boarding research and evaluation projects are discussed below.

School Places Project

As outlined, parents/carers are required to self-refer for their child's boarding place. We recognise that this reactive approach limits the range of children that have access to the support, as Buttle UK does not actively seek children/families that may benefit from it. As an organisation, we have been working on ways to address this issue, thinking about how we can employ a more proactive approach to our boarding work.

In 2015, we conducted a year-long pilot project (the School Places Project) to explore whether a proactive approach could be taken to identifying children who may benefit from a boarding school placement. This project involved Buttle UK approaching a representative group of state primary schools, asking them to identify any children who may be eligible for a boarding place, then approaching the parents to inform them of the support that Buttle UK provides. This proactive outreach approach introduced the opportunity of boarding to parents who had not previously considered this as an option for their child.

Fifteen children were successfully placed in a boarding school through this initiative, eight of whom feature in the present evaluation. As part of our Support for Boarding programme, we are continuing to develop outreach and further explore how we can engage other

organisations to maximise the number of families that are aware of our boarding programme and ultimately the number of children we can support through boarding.

Boarding Chances for Children

Due to the success of the School Places Project pilot, Buttle UK attempted to further employ and evaluate a proactive approach to supporting children through boarding places, which involved engaging with local authorities to encourage them to consider boarding school as an alternative to placing children in care. The aim of the Boarding Chances for Children project was to evidence to local authorities that funding a boarding place for a child at risk of going into care would be beneficial in improving child outcomes and providing a more cost-effective method of support for local authorities. Our aim was to encourage local authorities to use Boarding support more systematically to help children at risk of going into care. However, this project was brought to a close due to difficulties in establishing sufficient local authority engagement with the project to generate the required levels of referrals. It became apparent that local authorities were not yet able or willing to consider boarding school as an option in a systemic way.⁹

Whilst this project was terminated, the Boarding School's Partnership¹⁰ was subsequently set up by the Department for Education. This is an information service for local authorities to identify and partner with boarding schools offering support for vulnerable children, which has led to successful partnerships between local authorities. For example, Norfolk County Council have found positive results using this partnership (discussed on page 28).¹¹ We still believe that local authority engagement in funding boarding as a means of supporting vulnerable children could be beneficial for local authorities by helping reduce the number of children going into care, resulting in substantial savings. We are currently in discussions with a range of local authorities to develop funding partnerships for our Support for Boarding Programme (see page 29 for further discussion).

Internal Review - "Scoping Options for the Future"

In order to take the learning from the School Places Project and the Boarding Chances for Children Project and develop our approach to supporting children through boarding, in 2017 we undertook an independent feasibility study, funded by KMPG Foundation. We used interviews (Buttle UK staff, partner agencies, parents, charities) and a review of 23 case files to explore both the benefits and issues with our pre-existing boarding models. The purpose of this study was to inform us how we may build on what we were already doing to develop a programme of excellence that could be promoted and replicated in the wider care sector.

This research found that our boarding support is reaching very vulnerable children, showing that our methods for assessing eligibility work well in identifying children most in need of boarding support. We also found that, whilst families reported that children experience initial difficulty in adapting to their new environment when first starting their boarding place, all children ultimately experienced positive outcomes (good academic achievement, well-being, confidence and behaviour).

One key finding from this evaluation was the difficulties families faced in finding further funding for their child's boarding fees. At this time, Buttle UK provided families with a maximum of £4,500 per year towards boarding, and it was the responsibility of the parents to

⁹ Education Endowment Foundation (2017) Boarding Chances for Children: A Report on Lessons Learned.

¹⁰ <https://www.boardingschoolpartnerships.org.uk/>

¹¹ Norfolk County Council (2018) Boarding School Placements for Vulnerable Children and Young People.

find additional funding from schools and other charitable organisations. This raised some serious issues for families in that they did not always know when the full funding was secure, creating considerable anxiety. As an organisation, we realised that by providing more funding and developing partnerships with schools and organisations to facilitate funding processes, we were able to take this onus away from the parent. Parents now have the option to apply with funding already agreed with a school or without pre-agreed funding, and we can provide options for schools that may have funding and places available and facilitate conversations with the school on the parent's behalf. As stated in the previous section, we now pay 50% funding plus an additional 5% for support beyond fees, and we ensure that we secure the remain funds necessary on behalf of the parents/carers.

At the time of this evaluation, parents were required to apply to Buttle UK for boarding funding with a pre-existing agreement with a boarding school, and we would provide the funding but would not have direct relationships with boarding schools. However, we recognised that by having a relationship with the school directly, we are better able to assure that the child is getting the support that they need and have better opportunity to assess the impact of support for boarding on the child's educational and social development. Therefore, the decision was made to build stronger relationships with schools. We now visit schools to gain an understanding of what they have to offer children and require that the school becomes a "partner" school, signs a memorandum of understanding (MoU) agreeing to provide all information and adhere to the expectations outlined above. Within each school we have a point of contact with whom we can regularly communicate to keep updated on the child's progress and circumstances. This also allows us to play a more active and impactful role in improving children's chances through boarding and provides the relationships to obtain more information for evaluation purposes

Another issue that arose from this scoping project was that families tended to struggle with completing forms, particularly in relation to providing all necessary financial information. Although the application form has remained the same (as this information is required to assess eligibility for funding), this form is now completed online, and the renewal form has been simplified to make this process easier for parents.

The Present Evaluation

The present evaluation aims to demonstrate the benefits of supporting vulnerable children through boarding places. It is worth bearing in mind that, as the changes and developments to Support for Boarding outlined in the previous section have only been implemented over the last year, the 50 children included in the present evaluation were enrolled in previous boarding schemes. Nonetheless, the basic model of support is the same for all schemes and meaning the evaluation serves to demonstrate how supporting vulnerable children through boarding can be a cost-effective method of improving children's life chances and mitigating the effects of early adversity.

Evaluation Methodology

Sample

The present evaluation examines a cohort of 50 children who were supported in a variety of schools over a 5-year period and sat their GCSEs in 2018. Due to the aim of our Theory of Change being to facilitate the best chances of good education and ultimately best chances of being financially secure and avoiding poverty as an adult, the key outcome of interest was educational achievement (specifically GCSE results). Therefore, the cohort was chosen based on 2018 having a particularly high number of children completing their GCSEs in this year.

Forty-two of the 50 children were placed in boarding through a collaboration between parents, schools and/or support agencies, and eight children (16% of the cohort) were placed in boarding through the School Places Project (the proactive approach discussed in the previous section). It is worth stating that not all children entered the boarding schools at the same time, so children within this cohort were supported for a varying number of years. Of the 50 children we supported from 2013-2018, children started across the following years; 25 in Year 7 (2013), two in Year 8 (2014), 11 in Year 9 (2015), eight in Year 10 (2016) and four in Year 11 (2017). The eight children supported through our School Places Project were included within the 25 pupils placed in Year 7.

Method

We used a mixed methods design, conducting interviews and using the information collected on our database. From this were able to obtain a range of information about the demographic backgrounds of the children we supported; their family circumstances / adverse experiences and their social, emotional and educational outcomes.

Demographics: We extracted demographic data from our database containing information provided in applications and renewals. Demographics include the ethnicity and family type of the 50 children included in the study, in addition to outlining the schools and regions in which we supported children in boarding and retention rates.

Needs of children: To help understand the particular needs of the children we support and identify the characteristics of children that may benefit from boarding support, we examined the number of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) that each child in the cohort has experienced, by conducting a content analysis on applications and Buttle UK grant officer

assessment and recommendation reports, We also assessed the needs and behaviours expressed as concerns by the parent/carer in the application for boarding support. As part of the evaluation, we examined whether child GCSE outcomes or withdrawal differed depending on the number of ACEs a child has experienced.

Child outcomes: We used a mixed-methods design to obtain outcome information about children to assess whether support for boarding had helped in each of our Theory of Change key areas. We obtained GCSE results from parents and boarding schools. We also conducted in-person and telephone interviews with 10 parents (20% of 2018 cohort) to assess whether a boarding place has benefited children in our Theory of Change areas (education, training and employment, wellbeing and personal development, and a safe, healthy and well-equipped home).

Cost-benefit considerations: We considered the potential cost effectiveness of boarding support by comparing the cost of funding the schools per child (average boarding fee across the schools supporting children in this cohort) with the cost to local authorities of supporting a child in care, to highlight the potential benefits of local authority engagement with Buttle UK to develop boarding partnerships as a means to supporting and improving outcomes for vulnerable children.

Demographics

Children

The majority of children supported were from single parent families. Typically, we have found that single parents make up around 63% of Buttle UK's grants activity,¹² however here it places much higher. These statistics reflect the eligibility criteria for our boarding programme, whereby two-parent/carer families are only considered if one parent is incapacitated and the other is unable to work, or adoption placements that are at risk of breaking down. The remainder of families were grandparents / kinship carers, or two parent families (including adoptive families; 2%). Table 1a provides a breakdown of the ethnicity of our boarding children, showing that we supported an ethnically diverse range of children.

Table 1b shows the percentage of children within each region. Whilst Buttle UK supports children across the UK with our *Chances for Children* grants, the children in this cohort were all residing in England. The majority of children in this cohort live in London and the South East. This is largely due to fewer families from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland applying for boarding places.



8%



86%



8%

¹² Buttle UK (2016) Crisis Points Report. <https://www.buttleuk.org/research/crisis-points-report>

Table 1a. Child ethnicity

Ethnicity	%	Ethnicity	%
White - English	42%	Mixed - White and Asian	2%
Black or Black British - African	12%	Mixed - White and Black African	2%
Black or Black British - Caribbean	6%	Mixed - other background	2%
Black or Black British - Other	4%	White - Welsh	2%
Mixed - White and Black Caribbean	4%	Unkown	24%

Table 1b. Child home region

Region	%	Region	%
London	36%	South West	8%
South East	26%	Yorkshire and Humberside	4%
East Anglia	14%	North West	2%
West Midlands	10%	-	-

Boarding School information

In total, a mixture of 34 state and independent schools took in at least one pupil, seven of which enrolled more than one child. The greatest number of children taken in by any one school in this cohort was seven (Royal Alexandra and Albert State Boarding School). State schools made up 26% of the boarding schools enrolling children from this cohort (74% were private boarding schools). State schools enrolled 36% of children in the cohort. The popularity of particular schools largely reflects that: a) state schools have processes and protocols that makes them equipped and willing to take the children that we support through boarding (i.e., a child at risk of going into care), and; b) certain schools have a longstanding relationship with Buttle UK, regularly placing vulnerable children, including those supported by our boarding programme, in their schools. See Appendix 1 for list of all schools taking children in the cohort.

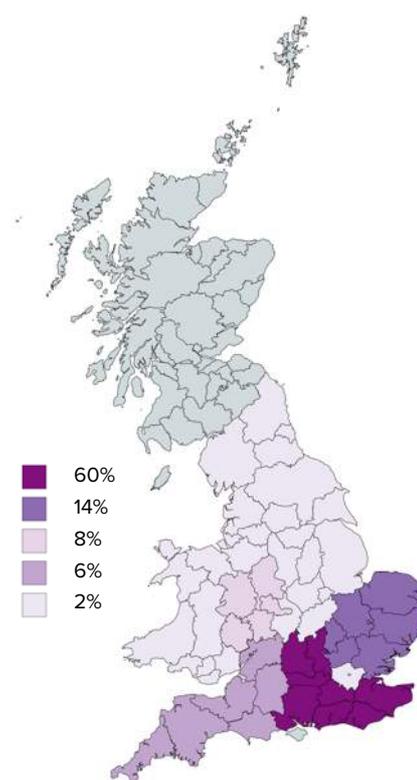


Figure 2. Breakdown of boarding placements by region.

Figure 2 shows the breakdown of schools by region. The locations of the schools in which the children were placed shows a heavy skew towards the South East. This is likely due to high population density in London and the South East,¹³ and the concentration of schools' locations themselves; boarding schools have historically been more highly concentrated in the South East of England than in other regions, and a high proportion of children on our programme who are from London attend boarding schools in this region, due to its close proximity to London. With this exception, children tended to go to a boarding school within their region.

¹³ [ONS \(2017\) Estimates of the population for the UK, England and Wales, and Scotland and Northern Ireland.](#)

The needs and the experiences of the children

Adverse Childhood Experiences in our boarding students

As outlined, the eligibility criteria for our boarding programme means that all children we support have disrupted home lives that are detrimental to their wellbeing and development and put them at risk of going into care. To gain a better understanding of the experiences that make these children vulnerable, we conducted a content analysis on applications for the Cohort to ascertain what Adverse Childhood Experiences the children we supported had been exposed to, and whether these experiences had an influence on the success of boarding support.

The term Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) refers to a number of traumatic or stressful events in childhood that can increase the risk of multiple negative outcomes. These traumatic experiences include child sexual, physical and emotional abuse, physical and emotional neglect, parental separation, drug or alcohol abuse in the household, parent incarceration, and domestic violence. ACEs have widely been shown to impact a range of outcomes into adulthood. Research shows that individuals who experience four or more ACEs are at greater risk of physical health problems (e.g., Cardiovascular disease, obesity and type II diabetes), mental health problems (depression, suicidality and anxiety); health harming behaviours such as early sexual activity, drug and alcohol misuse and smoking; criminality and violence perpetration and victimisation.¹⁴ Whilst ACEs research has predominantly been conducted in the US, there is evidence replicating these findings across the UK.^{15,16} Public Health Initiatives are now being developed across the UK to help support children who have experienced ACEs, and to help prevent the intergenerational cycle of ACEs, ultimately saving on costs to Public Health Services (for example, [Early Action Together](#)).

The increasing use of examining ACEs as a way to determine poorer outcomes for children offers a way to describe the backgrounds of the children we are supporting that is recognised by a range of other bodies. We therefore conducted content analysis on the data we obtained on the children and families through our application processes. Specifically, we examined the instances of the following ACEs:

- Domestic violence
- Parental separation or divorce
- Parent mental health problems
- Child abuse (physical, sexual and/or emotional)
- Child neglect (physical and/or emotional)
- Parent (or close family member) incarceration
- Family member drug and/or alcohol misuse

¹⁴ Hughes, K., Bellis, M. A., Hardcastle, K. A., Sethi, D., Butchart, A., Mikton, C., ... & Dunne, M. P. (2017). The effect of multiple adverse childhood experiences on health: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *The Lancet Public Health*, 2(8), e356-e366.

¹⁵ [Public Health Wales \(2016\) Adverse Childhood Experiences in Wales \[multiple reports\]](#)

¹⁶UCL Institute of Health Equity (2015) The impact of adverse experiences in the home on the health of children and young people, and inequalities in prevalence and effects.

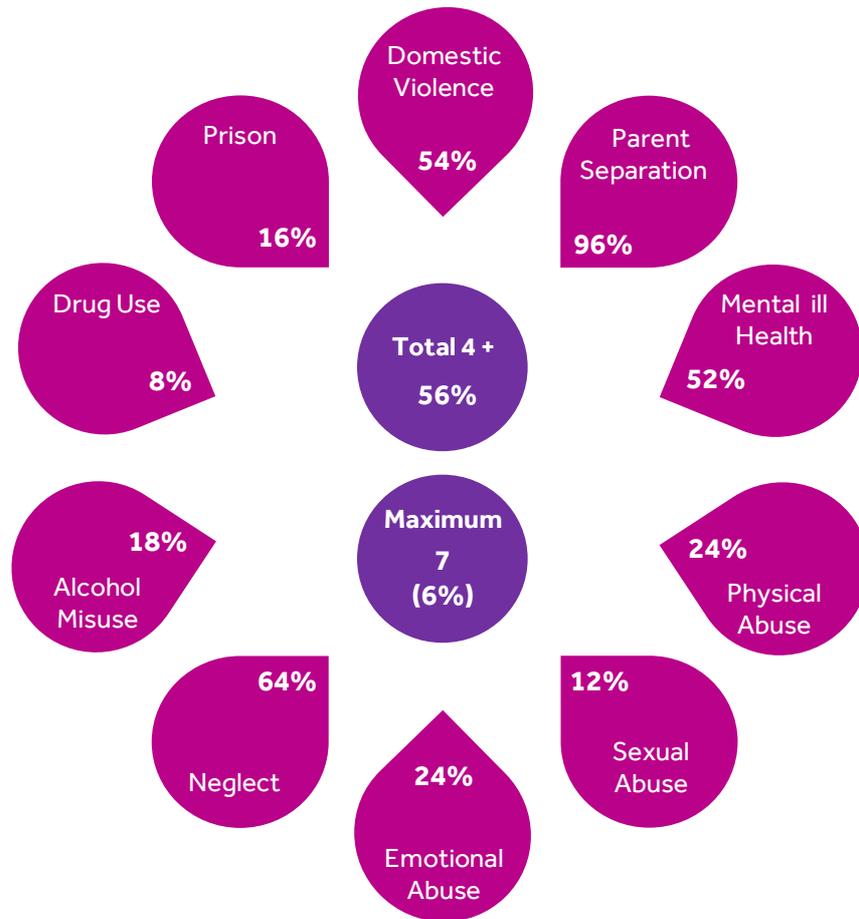


Figure 3. Percentage of pupils experiencing specific ACEs.

Figure 3 shows the percentage of children in the cohort who experienced specific ACEs. Every child had experienced at least one ACE prior to starting their boarding placement, 94% of children experienced more than one, and over half of the cohort (56%) experienced four or more ACEs.

Due to the purpose and eligibility criteria of our boarding programme, it is not surprising that the prevalence of ACEs was relatively high amongst the cohort. The most commonly occurring ACE was divorce/separation, reflecting how the majority of our boarding cases are single parent families. Over 50% of children have lived in a home in which the parent experiences mental health problems and/or domestic violence, and 42% have experienced some form of abuse (emotional, physical and/or sexual). Almost two thirds of children have experienced neglect, 16% have a parent in prison, and 20% have experienced a parent or family member within the home misusing drugs and/or alcohol. Together, these findings show that we are reaching very vulnerable children through our boarding support, with a substantial number of children in this cohort experiencing issues in the home such as mental health problems, abuse, neglect, parent incarceration, domestic violence and parent separation. Over half have experienced four or more ACEs, and are therefore individuals who are considered to be a high-risk group for poor outcomes.

One thing worth noting is that, by including ACEs commonly referred to in policy,¹⁷ we omitted one disruptive family experience that is prevalent for 50% the children we supported in this cohort: parent physical ill health. Research has identified parent/family physical ill health as an ACE,¹⁸ although it is much less commonly assessed than the categories outlined above. Nonetheless, as an organisation we recognise that physical ill health in the family can have a significant detrimental impact for the child. If we were to include family member severe physical ill health as an ACE, the number of children having experienced four or more ACEs would increase to 66%.

Reasons for support: Child Issues



Figure 4. Breakdown of children's presenting issues

Children within the cohort displayed a wide range of issues. The most commonly reported issue presented by children was mental health problems and poor wellbeing; this includes emotional and behaviour problems, psychiatric illness, psychological and behavioural effects of witnessing domestic abuse, and low self-esteem / self-confidence; 60% of children in this cohort had poor mental health and wellbeing when applications were submitted. Additionally, 56% of children were reported as having social and behavioural difficulties in school and in their neighbourhood; this includes issues such as being victims of bullying, having antisocial friends in the neighbourhood, harassment in the neighbourhood and gang involvement. Sixteen percent of children in this cohort also had neurodevelopmental disorders, a physical disability or physical illness. Most children experienced at least two of these issues, indicating that they do not occur in isolation. For a breakdown of the percentage of specific issues, see appendix 2.

Whilst we have not conducted the statistical analyses needed to draw definitive conclusions, it is worth noting that the high prevalence of mental health and behaviour problems and prevalence of bullying are often associated with the aforementioned ACEs.¹⁹ Irrespective, this demonstrates that our boarding programme reaches vulnerable children who are displaying issues that can be associated with their early experiences and linked to poorer academic attainment.²⁰

¹⁷ [Public Health Wales \(2016\) Adverse Childhood Experiences in Wales \[multiple reports\]](#)

¹⁸ Hughes, K., Bellis, M. A., Hardcastle, K. A., Sethi, D., Butchart, A., Mikton, C., ... & Dunne, M. P. (2017). The effect of multiple adverse childhood experiences on health: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *The Lancet Public Health*, 2(8), e356-e366.

¹⁹ [Public Health Wales \(2016\) Adverse Childhood Experiences in Wales \[multiple reports\]](#)

²⁰ [Department for Education \(2018\) Improving the educational outcomes of Children in Need of help and protection: Interim Findings.](#)

The Impact of Support through Boarding: Outcomes

To understand the impact of offering children support through boarding, we assessed the cohort's completion rates, academic attainment, social/emotional wellbeing and personal development, and their home circumstances. We used a mixture of GCSE results and interviews with parents.

Retention Rates

We examined the number of children within the Cohort who completed education to the end of their GCSEs to understand for how many children a boarding school place successfully provided a stable, continuous place for children to learn and complete their education.

Table 5 shows the rate of children who completed their boarding placement through to the end of their GCSEs. The overall retention rate for the 2018 cohort was 74%. Of the 26% of children who withdrew from the programme (N = 13), 10 started in Year 7, and withdrew from the programme after an average of 1.8 years. It is worth noting that, of the nine withdrawals that occurred among the children who started in Year 7, four were children who were placed as part of the School Places Project (i.e., proactive recruitment, see page 9). This means that 50% of the School Places Projects Students within this cohort withdrew before completing their GCSEs. If these children were discounted from the Cohort, the overall retention would rise to 81%. The other three children who withdrew were children who started in Year 10, and these three children withdrew after an average of 1.3 years.

Table 5. Entry year of students and retention rates

Entry year	Completed	Mean years in placement before withdrawal	Total N
2013 (Year 7)	15 60%	1.8	25
2014 (Year 8)	2 100%		2
2015 (Year 9)	11 100%		11
2016 (Year 10)	5 63%	1.3	8
2017 (Year 11)	4 100%		4
Total	37 74%	1.55	50

Reasons for withdrawal

In one case, the child withdrew from the support for boarding programme because they received funding from other sources and no longer needed financial support from Buttle UK. In eight cases, children withdrew due to behaviour problems. In most of these cases, withdrawal was either initiated by parents or mutually agreed between parents and schools. In two cases the child was expelled for their behaviour problems. One placement broke down due to the parent taking the child out of school. The two remaining withdrawals were due to health concerns.

The proactive referral method for the School Places Project may explain the higher withdrawal rates among this part of the cohort. In the majority of cases that we support

through boarding, the parent applies for the funding, meaning that a decision has already been made to place a child in boarding school prior to Buttle UK's involvement. Conversely, in the School Places Project, boarding was not an idea that parents were previously accustomed to or necessarily in favour of. There are number of reasons why this situation makes the placement more difficult to sustain, including negative perceptions around boarding and residual wariness or hesitancy on the part of the family to fully engage with the programme, or adapt to the new arrangement... Indeed, one of the cases in this cohort (as well as other children in the School Project due to finish their GCSEs at different years) had placement breakdown due to the parent no longer wanting the child to be in boarding, for no reason linked to the wants of the child or school. This may be something we need to consider as an organisation as we continue to develop our boarding programme and engage in a proactive approach to referrals.

The role of ACEs in withdrawal

Figure 5 shows completion rates for students based on their number of ACEs. Although withdrawal rate increased as the number of ACEs increased, this would be expected based on research evidence that the children with more ACEs would be at increased risk of displaying behaviour problems²¹ (the most common reason for boarding placement withdrawals). Nonetheless, the figures demonstrate that even among children with the highest number of ACEs, the proportion of children who completed their GCSEs was greater than the proportion of placement failures; 66% of children with four or more ACEs completed their GCSEs, demonstrating that supporting vulnerable children through boarding can be an effective way to see students through to the end of GCSEs.

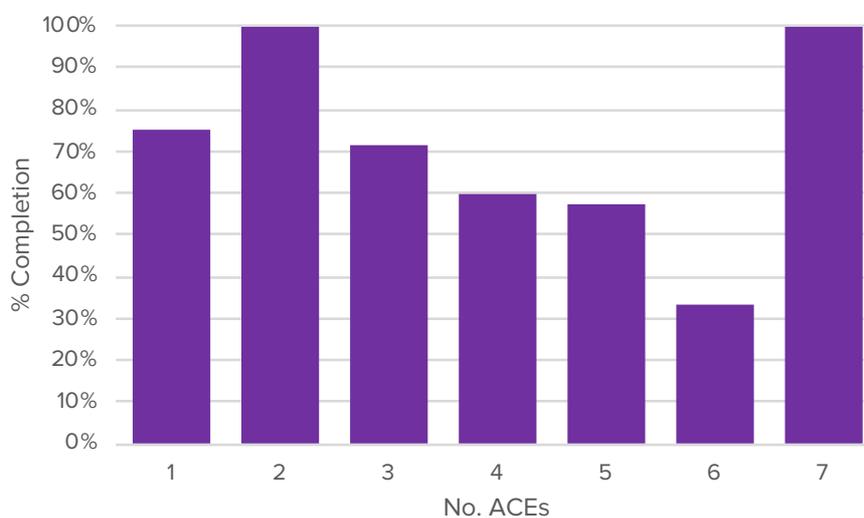


Figure 5. Retention rate; breakdown by number of ACEs.

²¹ Public Health Wales (2016) Adverse Childhood Experiences in Wales [multiple reports] <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/888/page/88517>

Educational Outcomes

As noted, 74% (N = 37) of the cohort remained in the boarding placement through to the end of their GCSEs. The core aim of the Boarding Programme (and Buttle UK activities as a whole) is to improve life chances for children by providing the opportunities and resources to achieve in education (Theory of Change, Figure 1). To assess whether our boarding support has had a positive impact on children’s educational development, we collected children’s GCSE results and information on progression to further education.



GCSE Results

We were able to gain the full GCSE results for 68%* of the children who completed their GCSEs with our support (N = 25; 50% of total cohort). Table 6 shows the breakdown of GCSEs for those children whom we successfully collected GCSE data, showing the number of children who achieved five or more A* - C grade GCSEs, and the number of children achieving A* - Cs including Maths and English. Of the children for whom we have GCSE data, 92% achieved five or more A* - C grade GCSEs. Forty-eight percent of children achieved five or more A* - Cs including Maths and English GCSEs.

Table 6. GCSE Results for children who completed their placement until the end of GCSEs.

Outcome	N	% total cohort	% of those who completed	% known results
5 A* - C	23	46%	62%	92%
Including Maths and English	12	24%	32%	48%
Passed some GCSEs	2	4%	5%	8%
Don't Know	12	24%	32%	-
Withdrawn	13	26%	-	-
Grand Total	50	100%	-	-

* From the academic year 2019-2020, we will be able to obtain GCSE results for 100% of students that complete placements within our partner schools, in line with our Memorandum of Understanding.

These findings are particularly noteworthy given the average grades of children in care. In the UK, only 19% of children in need (i.e. all children needing contact with a social worker) obtain A* - C in English and Maths, compared to 63% children who are not in need.²² As demonstrated in our analysis of the needs of the children we supported through boarding, all children have encountered the adverse/traumatic experiences that are recognised as factors determining whether a child is in need (e.g., domestic violence, drug and alcohol misuse, neglect and abuse).²³ The high attainment of GCSE grades among our children indicates that boarding support can be an effective means of helping very vulnerable children achieve good educational results. Indeed, despite our boarders being at risk of entering care, the percentage of children achieving A* - Cs in Maths and English is much closer to the national average than the population of Children in Need.

GCSE Results by Number of ACEs

To see whether the boarding support may be more or less beneficial for child educational achievement depending on their level of need, we examined whether GCSE results differed depending on the number of ACEs experienced by the child. Figure 6 shows percentage of children attaining 5 A* - Cs and 5 A* - Cs including Maths and English. Overall, 77% of the children that experienced four or more ACEs and completed their boarding placement achieved five A* - Cs, and 31% achieved five A* - Cs including Maths and English. Notably, this would increase to 38% if we were to include severe physical ill health in the family as an ACE.

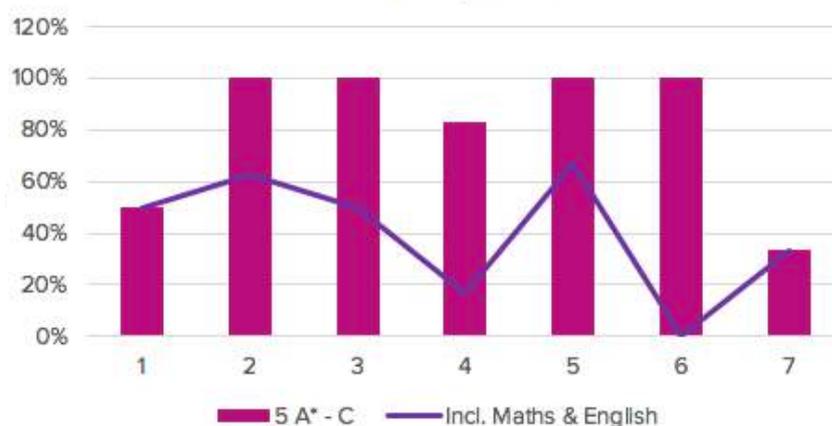


Figure 6. Breakdown of percentage of children achieving 5 A* - Cs by ACEs

Whilst findings indicate that success rates may be slightly greater for children who have experienced fewer ACEs, it also shows that over two thirds of children obtained 5 A* - C GCSEs when experiencing a large number of early traumatic experiences, and a third obtained these GCSEs including Maths and English; whilst the lowest percentage of successful Maths and English GCSEs came from those with four ACEs, this then increased for those with more than four ACEs. The percentage of children with five and seven ACEs achieving 5 A* - Cs including Maths and English is greater than that of the general population of children in need.²⁴

²² DfE (2019) Children in need of help and protection: Data and analysis

²³ DfE (2019) Children in need of help and protection: Data and analysis

²⁴ DfE (2019). Children in need of help and protection: Data and analysis

Although the sample for this cohort is too small to draw any definitive conclusions around the impact of ACEs on responsiveness to support, our current give initial indication that providing some of the most vulnerable children at risk of going into care with a place at a boarding school can help promote their resilience and provide the opportunity to achieve well in school.

It has been noted that defining risk by the number of ACEs should be done so with caution; different ACEs are not equally weighted; rather, they are likely to have differential impact on children's development. The impact of ACEs on child outcomes also varies between children, depending on resilience.²⁵ All children supported by us through boarding have very negative experiences in the home and are at risk of going into care, and some are experiencing other difficult circumstances that are not captured within the commonly defined ACEs categories, such as the aforementioned physical ill health, negative peer relationships, peer victimisation, and engagement with gangs. We believe that every successful GCSE result each child in our cohort demonstrates the benefits of supporting vulnerable children through boarding.



²⁵ Finkelhor, D. (2018). Screening for adverse childhood experiences (ACEs): cautions and suggestions. *Child abuse & neglect*, 85, 174-179.

Theory of Change Outcomes

As outlined, at Buttle UK we focus our operations around our Theory of Change, which highlights that we aim to improve children's life chances by improving their educational outcomes.

We provide the resources to ensure that the child is:

Growing up in a safe, healthy, well-equipped home

Not excluded from educational activities due to financial barriers

Not excluded from activities that promote personal development due to financial barriers

The purpose of providing holistic support for vulnerable children through our boarding programme is that it can provide support in each of these areas. We conducted interviews with 10 parents on their experiences of the boarding programme and the impact of boarding support for their children within each area of our Theory of Change. As a whole, parents indicated that boarding had a positive impact for their child and families.

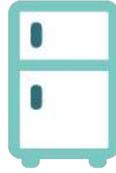
“My child attending boarding school has made a tremendous difference to my family as a whole. There were so many challenges before. My child needed friends, needed to be followed and supported. Knowing that my child was in a safe environment really put my heart at rest. Also knowing that he had access to so many activities in one place was life changing, as it opened up so many opportunities for my child.”

“He would be in a completely different place if it wasn't for boarding school. The support from the school has been tremendous.”

“[Boarding support has been] Absolutely magnificent. It has changed our lives. When I approached Buttle, I had meningitis, which almost killed me, and I couldn't cope with five kids on my own, and I was having domestic violence problems with my daughter's father and I had a court injunction. I was really sick, was in and out of hospital, on medication, and couldn't take proper care of my kids. Your help has given my children the opportunity of coming out of poverty.”

Child is growing up in a safe, healthy, well-equipped home

Parents generally felt that their child was safer than they had been at home. Even in cases where no specific change was noted within the home, parents felt that their child being away was an improvement, keeping them out of negative situations in the home and preventing the child from witnessing these problems. Parents noted that boarding school provided stability that the child would not have in the home and gave parents the opportunity to focus on improving their own circumstances.



“It has meant I could focus on other important stuff knowing that my daughter was in a safe environment and properly looked after.”

“Accessing boarding has meant a lot more stability equally for myself and my daughter.”

“It has taught him about being healthy, eating well and [has] given him a routine and structure that he doesn’t get at home.”

“...they are not experiencing any pressure or concern at home at the moment. They are now in an environment where they are learning, they are comfortable, they are really happy.”

“...the male environment at Boarding provided a good role model for my son when he needed it the most.”

As part of living in a safe home, it is important to also consider the neighbourhood and environment in which the children grow up. Some parents reported that prior to boarding, they had concerns about who their children were spending time with outside of school. Parents reported that going to boarding school had prevented their children from spending time with the “wrong crowd”, in some cases keeping them away from gangs, and reducing the risks they were exposed to in their own neighbourhoods.

“The area where we live was also having an impact on my son, particularly the other teenagers he was hanging out with. I used to be extremely worried every time he would go out, but now that he is at boarding school, I feel a lot less stress and anxiety, and his behaviour has changed too, as now he behaves a lot more like a responsible adult.”

One aspect of a healthy home is the quality of family relationships. Several parents highlighted that boarding has improved the quality of relationships, improved family communication and reduced family conflict, therefore creating a healthier, happier family dynamic in the home. However, a few parents noted that continuing issues in the home such as ongoing health problems, new family issues arising since the boarding placement, or the distance between the boarding school and the home limited the positive impact of boarding on family relationships.

“We spend more time together without arguing and doing things as a family.”

“You saved our lives, everything improved.”

“My children now get on pretty well. They used to argue quite a lot but now their relationship is a lot better... We spend quality time together, we socialize, we conversate.”

“The pressure was really high, particularly at the beginning due the restrictions around things we could do as a family given the distance between home and boarding school and subsequent financial implications.”

We asked parents about what happens during the holidays to gain more understanding of how boarding has impacted home life. We received a mixture of responses. Some parents reported that they spend their holidays engaging in good quality family time. They also reported that their children now engage better with peers outside of the home during the holidays. However, as noted above, some did state that things at home are still difficult during the holidays, particularly in homes with ongoing family physical illness.

“We spent time together. We couldn't go away due to financial constraints but we did have family days out.”

“Before, she used to hang with a small group of girls, but since attending boarding, she spends time with lots of new friends from different backgrounds and ages. But we also try to do as much as we can together at home or go out when we can, even with the little money we have.”

Child is not excluded from educational activities due to financial barriers

As an organisation, we aim to enable children to engage in education and training that can lead to employment in the future. Ensuring that a child has access to educational activities is key in achieving this.

Reports from parents indicated that, whilst the adjustment to boarding school may initially be difficult, boarding school provided the right educational setting for children to excel academically. Some parents reported that their child's school performance had improved, that the child had done well in their GCSEs, gone on to do A-Levels, and continued to progress in education. Parents saw this as having helped set their child up for their future. Several parents also reported on the positive impact that boarding had on their child's drive, motivation and aspirations to achieve.

“The school prepared him for life.”

“This experience has given her aspirations and the will to go to university. This was very crucial for her, especially because all the kids in the area she grew up in have no GCSEs. She has already made plans as to where and what she wants to study.”

“Boarding also helped her to set higher aspirations... She now wants to travel the world, she wants to be successful. She has broadened her horizons.”

“I now know that my child is independent, is more mature, is more understanding and goal-oriented, so I'm confident he will achieve the best in the future.”

Child is not excluded from personal development activities due to financial barriers

As well as educational development, we recognise the importance of children's personal development in their trajectory towards a positive future. One of the drivers behind offering boarding support is that it also provides the resources and opportunities for an individual child's personal development to flourish. Improvements in wellbeing and behaviour indicate that the boarding support has succeeded in helping the child with their personal development. Parents reported that the support provided improved children's personal development in multiple areas, including mental health and wellbeing, confidence, peer relationships, and the ability to recognise and develop their wider talents beyond the standard curriculum.

"It was tough at times, but overall it was an amazing experience and an opportunity for growth and personal development."

"He's good at managing his anger now. The school provided counselling with his father situation. My child has also managed to build relationships with other children, increase his confidence as well as his physical health"

Parents noted that their children's confidence and independence had improved throughout their time at boarding school. One common theme among parents was the benefit of boarding for positive peer relationships, particularly in relation to having children from a range of cultures and backgrounds, and this leading to greater acceptance and understanding.

"He is now a lot more confident, determined and self-aware than he used to be."

"I think boarding taught her how to appreciate diversity. She used to have friends from a working-class background only, whereas now she has a variety of friends from very wealthy backgrounds to those coming from extremely deprived neighbourhoods. But also, friends from a variety of ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds. Her experience at boarding has taught her that we are all equal."

"She has so many more friends than she used to. She has been several times head of house or deputy head of house, loves being in the small town where the school is and has enjoyed the overall experience."

Multiple parents indicated that boarding school helped improve their children's behaviour, mental and physical health and wellbeing, and several identified the pastoral support provided within the school as being of particular help to their child's wellbeing.

"[The child now has] Better performance and behaviour, which was quite significant considering he was expelled in Year 6. Boarding school did a great job to provide discipline and relieve pressure from me."

"Boarding school managed to get through him. They helped with his behaviour and diabetes as well. I would have had to give up my job to look after him, if it wasn't for boarding."

“He matured, he is positive, he can sleep at night, he doesn't suffer.”

“[The] First things I noticed were reduced anxiety and increased self-confidence. My daughter was finally thriving, and I thought it was great she was being followed so attentively by the teachers.”

“He felt supported and he was able to access help with his low mood when he needed it.”

“Boarding makes it easier for the family as there are other people to keep an eye on his wellbeing and to make sure that he is ok. He likes to stay at school and in boarding for as long as he can so he can access all additional sports and clubs.”

Challenges

Although parents were very enthusiastic in informing us of all the benefits of boarding for their children, most also noted that it was not without its challenges. One of the main challenges that parents reported was the distance between themselves and the child. Parents and children found the distance and only seeing each other at weekends and/or holidays difficult. However, parents reported that it was easy to maintain contact with their child at school, and that the schools were very good at keeping parents informed and involved with their child's progress. Nonetheless, we have taken this feedback on board, and as part of the development of the programme, we are aiming to build partnerships with a range of boarding schools across the country to try to ensure each child is placed no further than 1.5 hours from their home.

Some parents stated that financial pressures meant that their own home was still in a poor condition and they could not afford repairs, or that troubles remaining within the home (such as health problems in the family) continued to be a stressor for children when at home, and in some cases reversed some of the positive effects of boarding for the child. Some parents stated that the cost associated with ensuring their child had access to all activities within the school could also be challenging. It is with this in mind that we have amended our grant programme to include an additional 10% of funding (5% from Buttle UK, 5% from the school) to cover additional costs and prevent these difficulties in the future.

“I find myself borrowing to buy...equipment and clothing needed for sport and other after school activities. There is also additional financial pressure when my son is at home, as food and utility bills will inevitably increase, and I have to resolve to use credit cards to cover for that.”

There was a mixture of reports from parents with regards to the transition to boarding. Some parents reported that this was easy for the child, whereas some reported that the transition to boarding school was difficult for their child and themselves. However, they did recognise that this improved over time (for example, less home-sickness, better peer relationships and catching up academically with peers). A couple of parents reported that their child struggled sharing a room with other pupils, but also stated that the school had been very supportive with this.

Although most parents believed that boarding had been very beneficial in developing peer relationships, a few reported that their children had struggled with this. A couple of parents reported issues with bullying (both victimisation and perpetration), whilst a few reported that their child initially struggled to develop relationships with peers during the transition, but that this became easier over time. Several parents reported that their child did not face any challenges and loved boarding. Parents also noted that the school staff (for example school nurses) were effective in helping the children through the challenges they were facing.

There were two other notable negative experiences reported by parents: one involving poor communication from the school, and another where the parent felt the child was unfairly treated by staff. In the former, the parent felt that the school could have brought up problems with the pupil sooner and that circumstances were allowed to escalate unnecessarily. In the latter, the parent felt that their child was being incorrectly singled out as being the source of behavioural difficulties when they were in fact a victim. However, in both of these cases it is difficult to ascertain to what extent these were due to systemic issues with the schools/programme, or due to personal differences between parents and the school. Nonetheless, some parents did express a desire for better, or more timely communication. We hope that this issue will be resolved with our new programme involving more direct relationships between ourselves and the schools, and the written agreements with more explicit expectations on both sides.



Potential Cost Benefits of Supporting Children through Boarding



Up to **£212,004**

Social care costs per year

£28,118 (average)

Average boarding fees per year



In addition to the academic and personal benefits of supporting vulnerable children through boarding, we are very interested to consider how the approach might be able to provide financial benefits to local authorities, so that this may encourage them to take on the approach more systematically and therefore make it available to more children. The rationale for our previous Boarding Chances for Children Programme (page 9), was the understanding that a key factor in the current lack of engagement from local authorities in using boarding as an intervention to prevent a child entering the care system is because the cost of support comes at the point where children are already in care (i.e. they are Looked After Children), not at the point where they are at risk of going into care. Therefore, boarding appears an expensive early intervention.

However, government policy is increasingly focused on children in need (which includes all children requiring support through social services, including, but not limited to, Looked After Children), recognising both the need and financial costs of vulnerable children before they reach the point of entering care.²⁶ As stated, all children supported through our boarding programme have severe home difficulties that have a detrimental impact on their development, and put them at risk of going into care. Although not all children in this cohort met the criteria for being a child in need (i.e. having contact with a social worker), as demonstrated in the ACEs review above, all children have encountered experiences that put children at risk/categorise children as in need (e.g., abuse/neglect, domestic violence, parent drug/alcohol misuse).²⁷ It is likely that the lack of contact with social workers for some of the children in the cohort is more of a reflection of these children going “under the radar” and not receiving support, rather than a reflection of their level of need.

²⁶ DfE (2019) Help, protection, education: Concluding the Children in Need review.

²⁷ DfE (2019) Help, protection, education: concluding the Children in Need review.

Children's social care residential costs have dramatically risen, with a 22.5% increase in costs seen across the UK from 2014-18; providing residential care for children now costs £1.25 billion a year, and in the year 2017-18, local authorities spent a total of £8.8 billion on children's social care.²⁸ This value represents an £872 million overspend, with 91% of local authorities overspending on children's social care services.²⁹ In 2017, it was estimated that prior to considering school costs and additional service provision (e.g., therapeutic, directed social care support), the cost to local authorities for children's residential social care are as follows: £4,077 per child per week for placement in a local authority's own care homes; £3,298 per child per week for voluntary and private sector care homes; £646 per child per week in foster care, and; £8,648 per child for reunification with family.³⁰ This equates to £212,004 per year per child in a local authority care home, £171,080 per year per child in a charity/private care home, and £33,592 per year per child in foster care, prior to taking into account school, wider social support and reunification costs. Moreover, this does not account for the long-term financial costs to local authorities due to their statutory responsibility to continue supporting care leavers up to the age of 25.³¹ Although, to our knowledge, there has been no recent calculation of the cost of supporting care leavers, this was reported to cost £265million in 2013-14,³² and this is likely to have increased.

In contrast, the average boarding fee for the schools that supported the children in this cohort are £9,373 per term (£28,118 per year). Whilst we recognise that children in boarding school return home during school holidays, so are not cared for throughout the full 52 weeks per year, the cost of boarding is substantially smaller than the cost of providing care placements. Supporting a child through boarding not only has the potential to reduce long term societal and fiscal costs by promoting positive outcomes, education and future employment/life chances (thus reducing the need for future welfare provision), but also could save local authorities money in the short term through reduction of child and young adult care leaver social care costs. Engaging in partnerships with organisations such as Buttle UK and with the boarding school would further save local authority costs, and successful cases would result in long-term reductions in costs to local authorities in support for care leavers. Based on the evidence presented in this review, we firmly believe that there are vast benefits to local authorities, and the children they support, for local authority engagement in programmes that enable children to attend boarding school and reach their potential.

²⁸ House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts (2019) Transforming Children's Services.

²⁹ House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts (2019) Transforming Children's Services.

³⁰ Personal Social Services Research Unit (2017) Unit costs of health and social care 2017.

³¹ Roberts, N., Jarrett, T., Powell, T., Kennedy, S., Gheera, M., Harker, R. & Wilson, W. (2019), Support for Care Leavers. House of Commons Briefing Paper.

³² Department for Education (2015) Care leavers' transition to adulthood

Reflections: Comparisons with Norfolk County Council

In 2017, the Department for Education launched the Boarding Schools Partnerships,³³ a network of schools, charities and the Government aiming to provide the means for local authorities to evaluate boarding opportunities for vulnerable children. In a demonstration of the effectiveness of local authorities engaging in boarding school partnerships, Norfolk County Council conducted an evaluation of their support for vulnerable children through boarding over 2010-2018 (Norfolk Boarding Schools Partnerships).³⁴ They found that boarding support was a successful method of supporting vulnerable children to improve outcomes. Boarding support led to a reduction in the number of Looked after Children, estimating that boarding support is only 50-60% of the cost of a Looked after Child. There was also a reduction in the risk profile of 71% of children in boarding (e.g., children no longer being on a child protection plan). Moreover, boarding support led to positive academic outcomes; 64% of children obtained GCSEs, and the percentage of children gaining A*-C in English and Maths was greater than the number of looked after children receiving these grades (21% compared to 17.5% national average).

Notably, the children in our cohort had even higher success rates in terms of academic outcomes, which may be due to our boarding places serving as early intervention (i.e., before the child becomes Looked after), whereas many children in the Norfolk County Council Boarding Partnership had already been in care. This is a testament to the importance and benefit of supporting children before their circumstances necessitate them becoming looked after. Additionally, Norfolk County Council recognised that obtaining information on mental health and wellbeing outcomes is key for future evaluations, and although we can further develop the way that we collect this information, we were able to demonstrate improvements in these areas for the children in our cohort. Together, the findings from Norfolk County Council and our present evaluation indicate that engagement in boarding partnerships can both reduce costs for local authorities and improve outcomes and life chances for vulnerable children.

Therefore, our recommendations are as follows:

- > Local authorities should actively consider boarding as an alternative to care in cases where it may be appropriate.
- > Support networks should be made more aware of the option so that families may proactively consider boarding as an option in appropriate cases as an alternative to care.
- > Local Authorities should establish intake arrangements and funding models with boarding schools in their area in addition to appropriate support for the children's families in parallel.

³³ Boardingschoolpartnerships.org.uk

³⁴ Norfolk County Council (2018) Boarding School Placements for Vulnerable Children and Young People.

Areas of learning for Support for Boarding

Based on this evaluation, and in conjunction with our previous research, we are taking several steps to further improve our Support for Boarding Programme to maximise the benefits of the programme for children and families:

- > We will work more closely with families, schools and potential referral partners so we can address potential problems with boarding places early to enhance success rates, particularly when engaging in more proactive approaches to recruiting children.
- > As already noted, we and our partner schools now each offer an additional 5% funding for support beyond school fees, to cover costs such as school uniforms, educational trips, extracurricular activities and wider support for families.
- > We will continue to build partnerships with more boarding schools to support children in all areas of the UK, and will continue to build relationships with local authorities to build partnerships and increase the number of vulnerable children that we support through boarding. We will continue to take the responsibility of obtaining funding away from the parent through these partnerships.
- > We will further develop our impact and evaluation methodology to better capture how boarding support can improve outcomes for children in each of our Theory of Change areas. This will be made possible through the development of partnerships with our boarding schools and the introduction of a more formal agreement with schools to provide updated information on educational and pastoral progress of each student enrolled on our Support for Boarding programme. We will focus on:
 - > Obtaining GCSE results for every child.
 - > Developing relationships so that contact can be maintained after the child has finished school, to follow progress as these children transition into adulthood and understand the long-term impact of our boarding support.
 - > Developing and maintaining relationships even when placements are withdrawn, to gain a deeper understanding of why some placements are not successful and the outcomes for children after withdrawal.
 - > Better capturing personal development / mental health and wellbeing data beyond interviews with parents; using update reports on pastoral care from schools and a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods to measure these outcomes for a larger sample of children.
 - > Getting the voices of the children supported through boarding (our direct beneficiaries) heard, developing methods of evaluation to ensure that we don't just receive adults' perspective on the support we provide.

Conclusions

Overall, the present report serves to demonstrate the positive impact of supporting vulnerable children through boarding, and the cost benefits this could have for local authorities. Specifically, our evaluation demonstrates that:

- > **Our support is successfully reaching vulnerable children:**
- > All children experienced at least one Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE), with 30% experiencing four or more ACEs (e.g., domestic violence, neglect, abuse). Including family member physical health problems would further increase this percentage.
- > All children we supported had some form of emotional or behavioural problem, physical disability or learning difficulty.
- > Whilst the School Places Project cases suggest that taking a more proactive approach in recruiting vulnerable children to support through boarding may lead to a higher drop-out rate, this does not mean that these cases cannot be successful.
- > **Overall, children supported through our boarding schemes demonstrated positive outcomes in each of our ToC areas:**
- > There was a high GCSE success rate (46% achieving 5+ A* - Cs including Maths and English, 92% achieving 5+ A* - Cs), and parents reported that their children now have aspirations for their future.
- > Parents reported that boarding school provided children with a safe, stable living environment, and that family relationships improved (e.g., less family conflict).
- > Parents reported that children's wellbeing had improved, with many noting increases in confidence, better and more diverse peer relationships, and improved behaviour and mental health.
- > **There are multiple learnings to be taken to further improve and develop our Support for Boarding Programme:**
- > We will have greater engagement with families, boarding schools and other involved organisations to identify and help fix early issues and improve success rates.
- > We will have partnerships with schools, with more formal agreements in place to obtain more information about educational and personal development.
- > We will organise funding for places to take responsibility and stress away from the parent
- > We and the school will provide additional funding to pay for costs such as trips and uniform.
- > **We believe that there is great potential for local authorities to develop partnerships with us and place children in need of support in boarding schools, both to reduce costs to the local authority and improve outcomes for children in need.**

Appendices

Table A1. List of boarding schools enrolling children in this cohort

School	Sector	N	School	Sector	N
Royal Alexandra and Albert School	State	7	Harefield Academy	State	1
King Edward's School Witley	Independent	5	Hockerill Anglo-European College	State	1
Wymondham College	State	3	Kingham Hill School	Independent	1
Duke of York's Royal Military School	State	2	Milton Abbey School	Independent	1
Gresham's School	Independent	2	Monmouth School	Independent	1
Langley School	Independent	2	Moreton Hall School	Independent	1
St Lawrence College	Independent	2	Oakham School	Independent	1
Ackworth School	Independent	1	Old Swinford Hospital	State	1
Ashford School	Independent	1	Queen Anne's School	Independent	1
Barnard Castle School	Independent	1	Queen Elizabeth's School	State	1
Bedales School	Independent	1	Royal Wolverhampton School	Independent	1
Bethany School	Independent	1	Slindon College	Independent	1
Cheltenham College	Independent	1	St John's College	Independent	1
Cranleigh School	Independent	1	St. Swithuns	Independent	1
Farlington School	Independent	1	Stonyhurst College	Independent	1
Farringtons School	Independent	1	The Oratory School	Independent	1
Gordon's School	State	1	Wellington Academy	State	1
Total = 50					

Table A2. Presenting Issues of Children

Issue	N	%
Poor mental health and wellbeing	30	60%
Psychiatric Illness	3	
Other psychological problems	6	
Psychological / behavioural effects of witnessing domestic abuse	5	
Behaviour problems	16	
Low self esteem / self confidence	20	
School and neighbourhood problems	28	56%
Other school problems	10	
Victim of bullying	8	
Antisocial friends in neighbourhood	5	
Harrassment in neighbourhood	4	
Neurodevelopmental disorders	5	10%
ADHD/ADD	3	
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	1	
Dyslexia/learning difficulties	1	
Physical disability / illness	3	6%
Other	8	16%