



Department
for Education

Looked after children aged under 16 in unregulated placements

February 2021

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Introduction

National figures on children looked after (CLA) in England living independently or in semi-independent living accommodation are published in the [children looked after statistics release](#). Further analysis looking at the characteristics of these children and their placements was published in the [Looked After Children in independent or semi-independent placements report](#).

We launched a consultation: [Reforms to unregulated provision for children in care and care leavers](#) in February 2020, in which the Department sought views from the sector and care experienced young people on a series of reforms relating to placement practice and the quality of provision in independent and semi-independent provision, usually referred to as unregulated placements. This publication sets out additional data to provide insights into the use of these settings. It focuses on CLA in independent or semi-independent living accommodation under the age of 16 (Sections 1 and 2), and contains some headline figures on children in other residential settings or residential schools (Section 3).

Summary

Headline messages

- Across the year 2018-19 there were 660 CLA placed in independent or in semi-independent living accommodation who were under the age of 16 when their placement started. This has more than doubled from 290 during 2014-15. The majority of these children were aged 14 or 15 (94%).
- Around a quarter of CLA under the age of 16 in these placements (27%) were unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) compared to 1% of all CLA under the age 16.
- The majority of these placements for CLA under the age of 16 were less than 3 months in duration (71%), and the average placement duration was 35 days.
- Around a quarter of these children under the age of 16 who moved into independent or semi-independent accommodation came from a children's home (26%), 21% from a foster placement and 17% from other placement types. For 36% of these children it was their first placement in their period of care.
- Following their first placement in independent or semi-independent accommodation during the year, 23% of children moved into a different placement in independent or semi-independent accommodation, 18% into a children's home and 13% to a foster placement. Around a quarter of children were still looked after in the same independent or semi-independent placement at 31 March 2019 (26%).
- Around a third of placements prior to the independent or semi-independent accommodation placement ceased because the carer requested the placement to end due to the child's behaviour (32%), and a quarter due to a change to or implementation of the care plan (25%).

This is an ad-hoc release and will not be produced annually.

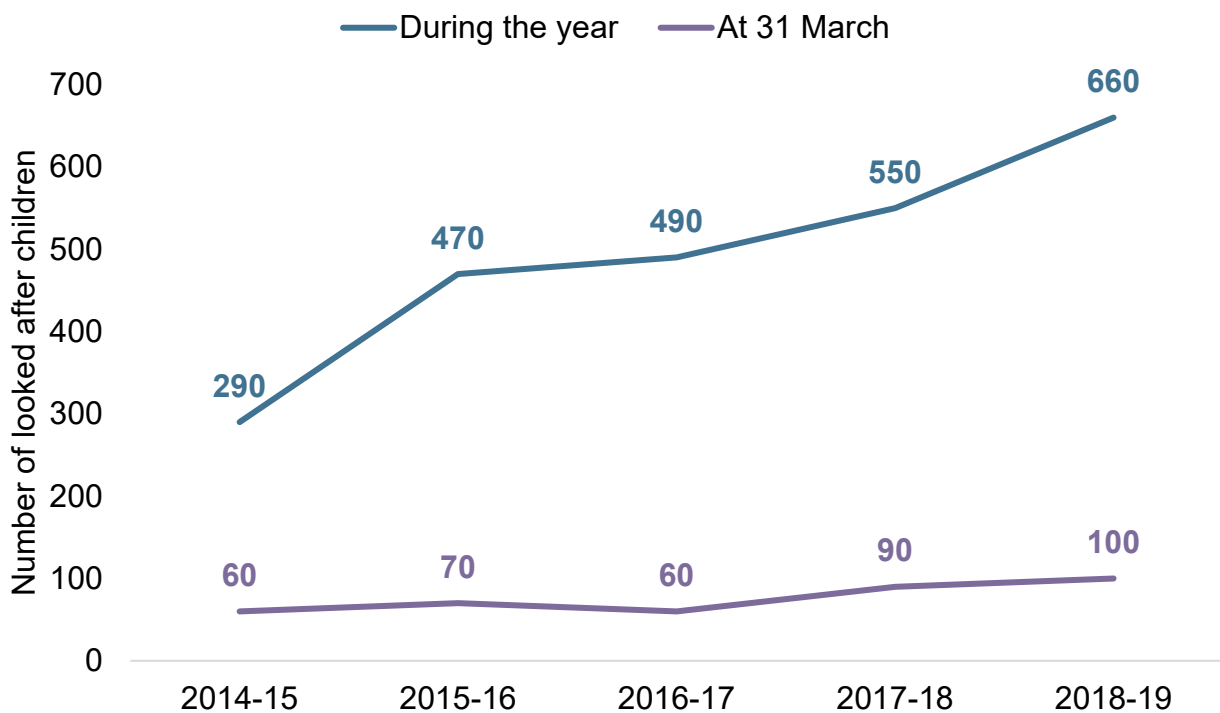
1. Number of children and characteristics

1.1 Number of children over time

There were 660 CLA placed in independent or semi-independent living accommodation during 2018-19 who were under the age of 16 when their placement started¹. These 660 children had 840 placements during 2018-19. The number of CLA in these placements under the age of 16 has more than doubled from 290 during 2014-15.

There were 100 CLA under the age of 16 in independent or semi-independent living accommodation at 31 March 2019, which is an increase of 76% from 60 CLA at the same time in 2015.

Figure 1: CLA aged under 16 in independent or semi-independent accommodation



Source: SSDA903

¹ The placement could have started before the start of 2018-19.

1.2. Age at the start of placement

The majority of CLA under the age of 16 at the start of their first placement in independent or semi-independent accommodation during 2018-19 were aged 14 or 15 (94%).

Table 1: CLA aged under 16 in independent or semi-independent accommodation by age, during 2018-19

2018-19		
Age at the start of placement (years)	Number of children	Percentage
Total	660	100
Under 12	10	2
12	10	2
13	20	3
14	150	22
15	480	72

Source: SSDA903

Note: Where a small number of very young children are reported as being in these placements, this is likely to be when they're with their mother who is also looked after and in this placement setting.

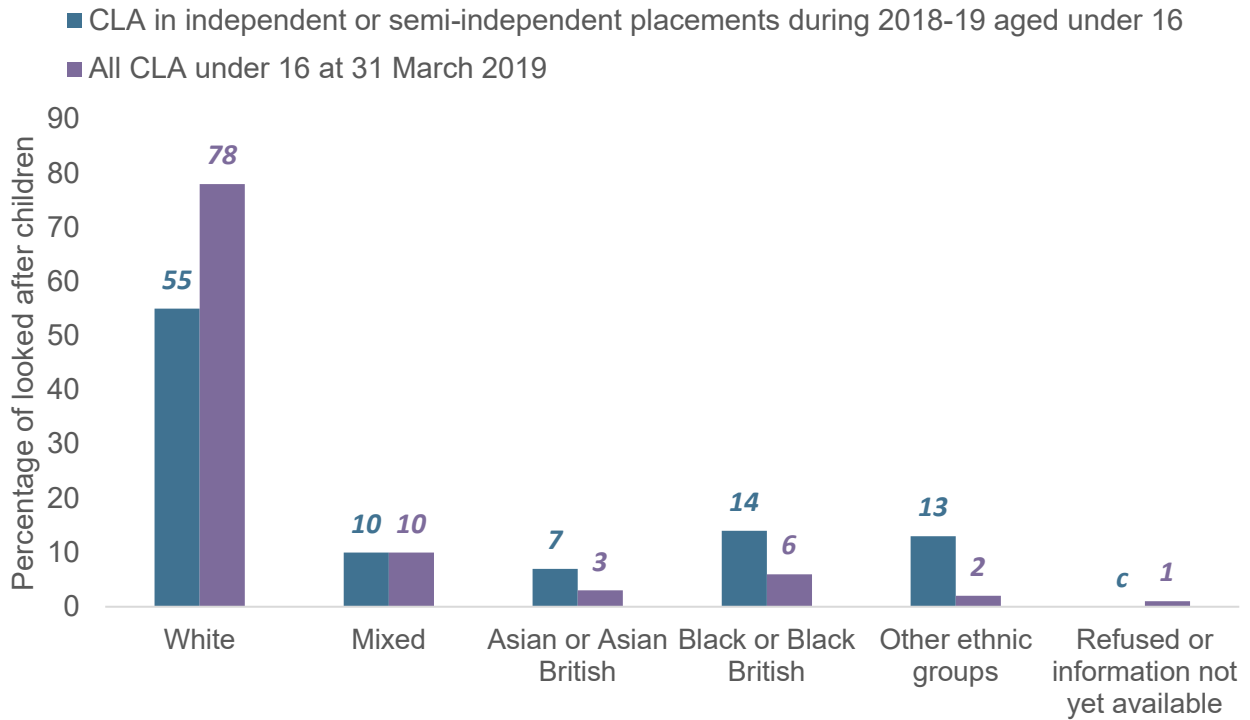
1.3. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC)

A higher proportion of children under the age of 16 living independently or in semi-independent accommodation during 2018-19 were UASC (180 CLA, 27%) compared to all CLA aged under 16 (1% at 31 March 2019).

1.4. Ethnic origin

There was a higher proportion of Asian or Asian British, black or black British, and other ethnic groups under the age of 16 living independently or in semi-independent accommodation during 2018-19 than all CLA aged under 16 at 31 March 2019. This is being driven by the higher proportion of UASC in these settings.

Figure 2: CLA in independent or semi-independent accommodation and all CLA, aged under 16 by ethnicity



Source: SSDA903

1.5 Local level use of these placements

When looking at the number of CLA aged 14 or 15 in independent or in semi-independent accommodation during 2018-19 as a proportion of all CLA aged 14 or 15 at the start of the year, nearly two thirds of local authorities reported between 0 and 5% of all CLA aged 14 or 15 in these placement types.

Table 2: CLA aged 14 or 15 at the start of their placement in independent or semi-independent accommodation as a percentage of all CLA aged 14 or 15², during 2018-19

	2018-19	
Proportion of CLA aged 14 or 15 in independent or semi-independent accommodation	Number of local authorities ³	Percentage of local authorities
Total	151	100
0%	21	14
Greater than 0% and less than or equal to 5%	93	62
Greater than 5% and less than or equal 10%	33	22
Greater than 10%	4	3

Source: SSDA903

² All children looked after during the year who were aged 14 or 15 at 1 April 2018.

³ Excludes Isles of Scilly where there were no looked after children during the year.

2. Placement information

2.1. Number of placements

The majority of CLA under the age of 16 had one placement living independently or in semi-independent accommodation during 2018-19, and 16% had two or more of these placements during the year when they were still under the age of 16 at the start of their placement.

Table 3: Number of placements during the year for CLA aged under 16 in independent or semi-independent accommodation, during 2018-19

2018-19		
Number of placements	Number of children	Percentage
Total	660	100
1	550	84
2	70	11
3	30	4
More than 3	10	2

Source: SSDA903

2.2. Placement duration

Looking at all placements in independent or semi-independent accommodation during 2018-19 for CLA under the age of 16 that had ceased during the year, the majority were less than 3 months in duration (71%). The average duration of these placements was 35 days, indicating that they are predominately short term placements.

Table 4: CLA aged under 16 in independent or semi-independent accommodation by duration of placement, during 2018-19

2018-19		
Placement duration	Number of placements	Percentage
Total	630	100
1 to 7 days	130	20
8 days to 1 month	170	26
1 month to 3 months	160	24
3 months to 6 months	80	12
6 months to 1 year	50	8
1 year to 2 years	30	5
2 year to 3 years	30	5
3 year to 4 years	c	c

Source: SSDA903

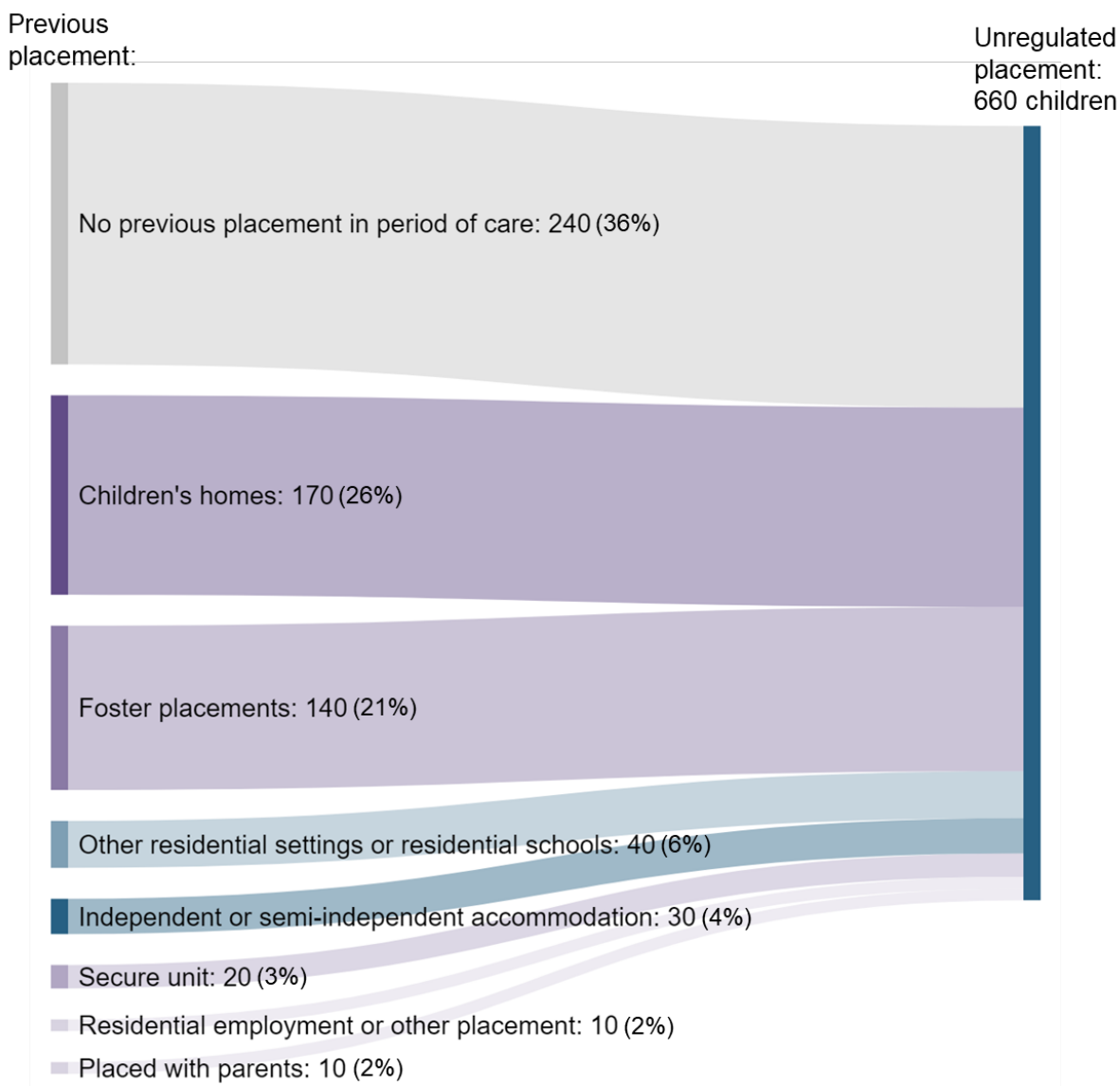
Note that children could have turned 16 whilst in these placements.

2.3. Journeys analysis

The following analysis takes the first placement in independent or semi-independent accommodation for the 660 CLA during 2018-19 in these settings, and looks at the previous and following placements to give some insight into the journeys for these children.

For just over one third of these children, their placement in independent or semi-independent accommodation was their first placement in their period of care. Around a quarter of children moved into independent or semi-independent accommodation from a children's home (26%), and 21% from a foster placement. For 4% of these children they had moved from a different placement in independent or semi-independent accommodation and 3% from a secure unit.

Figure 3: Placement prior to first placement in independent or semi-independent accommodation for CLA aged under 16 during 2018-19



Source: SSSA903

Just over half of the children who had no previous placement in their period of care were UASC (54%). For the small number of children who had previously been in a different placement in independent or semi-independent accommodation, 41% were UASC, and for those previously in a foster placement, 20% were UASC.

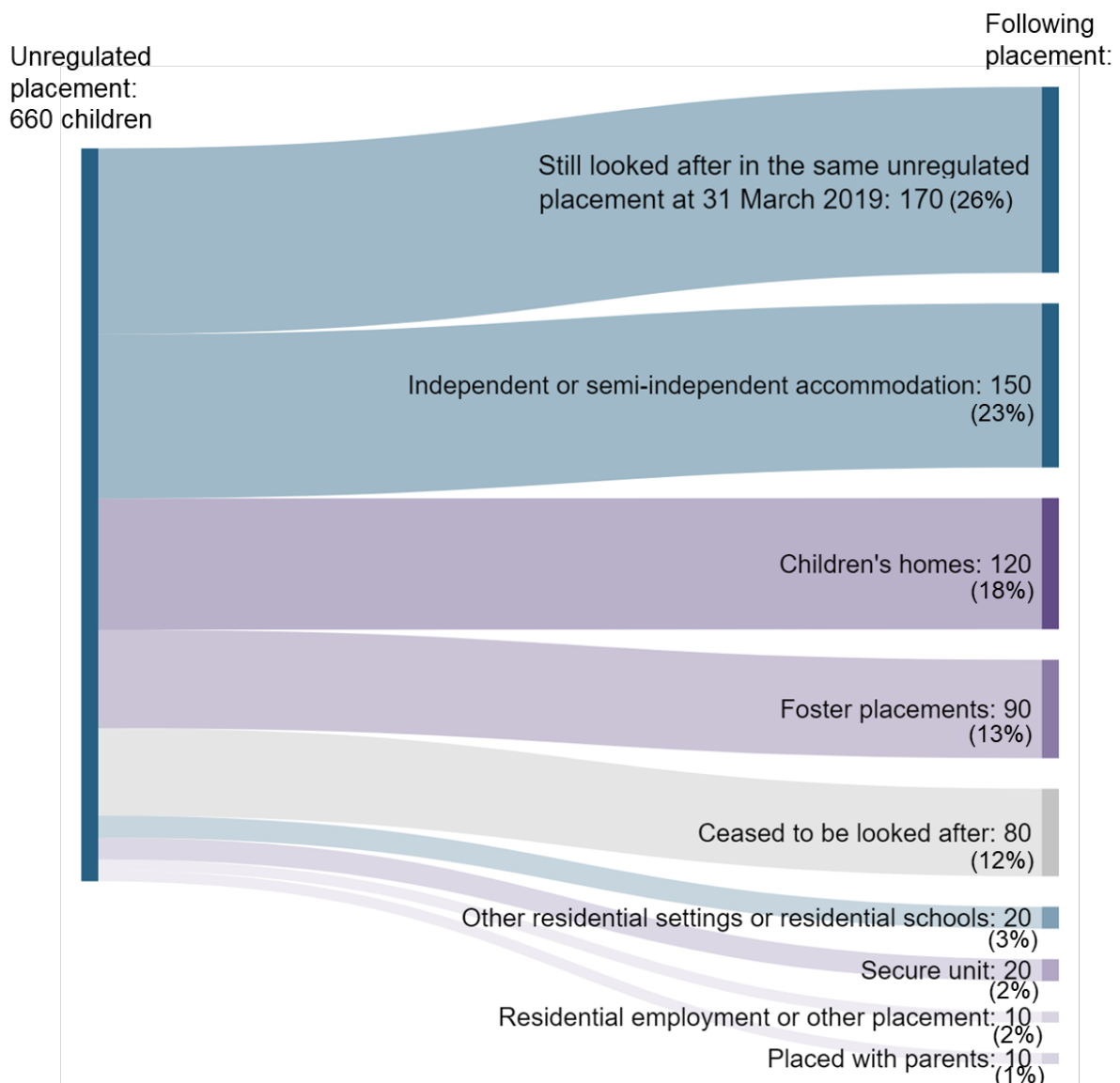
Table 5: Placement prior to first placement in independent or semi-independent accommodation for CLA aged under 16 during 2018-19 by UASC status

	2018-19		
Previous placement	Total number of children	Number of children who were UASC	Percentage of children who were UASC
Total	660	180	27
Children's homes subject to Children's Homes regulations	170	10	4
Foster placements	140	30	20
Independent living or Semi-independent living accommodation not subject to Children's Homes regulations	30	10	41
No previous placement in period of care	240	130	54
Other residential settings or residential schools	40	c	c
Placed with parents	10	0	0
Residential employment or other placement	10	0	0
Secure unit	20	0	0

Source: SSDA903

For approximately a quarter of the 660 children in the analysis they were still looked after in the same independent or semi-independent placement at 31 March 2019 (26%). Around a quarter of children moved into a different placement in independent or semi-independent accommodation (23%), 18% into a children’s home, 13% to a foster placement and 2% to a secure unit.

Figure 4: Following placement for CLA aged under 16 in independent or semi-independent accommodation during 2018-19



Source: SSSA903

Note that children could have turned 16 by the start of their following placement.

2.4. Reason for placement change

For the 420 CLA aged under 16 in independent or semi-independent accommodation during 2018-19 who had a previous placement in any setting, nearly one third of the previous placements ceased because the carer requested the placement to end due to child's behaviour (32%). This could indicate that independent or semi-independent accommodation is being used as an emergency placement in these situations. A quarter of the previous placements ceased due to a change to or implementation of the care plan (25%).

Table 6: CLA aged under 16 in independent or semi-independent accommodation and all CLA by reason for placement change, during 2018-19

2018-19		
Reason for placement change	Number of children	Percentage
Total	420	100
Change to/implementation of care plan	110	25
Resignation/closure of provision	10	1
Allegation (s47)	c	c
Standards of care concern	c	c
Approval removed ⁴	c	c
Carer requests placement end due to child's behaviour	140	32
Carer requests placement end other than due to child's behaviour	20	5
Child requests placement end	20	5
Responsible area/local authority requests placement end	10	3
Change in the status of a placement only ⁵	20	6
Other ⁶	90	22

Source: SSSA903

Note: Use these figures with caution due to the number of children in the 'other' group.

When looking at the reason for placement change along with the previous placement for these children, for children who moved from a children's home into independent or semi-independent accommodation, almost half of them (47%) were due to the carer requesting the placement to end due to the child's behaviour. For children moving from a foster

⁴ Where a setting is no longer approved/registered with the appropriate statutory body (eg Ofsted).

⁵ Where there is a change of status for the placement but the child remains with the same carer and there is no change to the care plan, for example if a foster carer moves house, or a foster carer working for a local authority becomes managed by an independent fostering agency.

⁶ Includes custody.

placement the main reasons were the carer requesting the placement to end due to the child's behaviour (28%) and change to or implementation of the care plan (26%).

3. Children in other residential settings

CLA are also placed in other types of settings that are not regulated children's homes or foster care providers but are regulated under other frameworks. These settings are not semi-independent or independent arrangements. There were 3,430 CLA in residential care homes; NHS/Health Trust or other establishment providing medical or nursing care; family centres or mother and baby units or residential schools during 2018-19. These children could have been looked after in more than one of these placements.

2,960 CLA in other residential settings were aged under 16 when their placement started, and 470 were aged 16 and over.

Table 7: CLA in other residential⁷ settings by age, during 2018-19

2018-19		
Age at the start of placement (years)	Number of children	Percentage
Total	3,430	100
Under 1	1,700	50
1-4 years	200	6
5-9 years	110	3
10-15 years	950	28
16 and over	470	14

Source: SSDA903

⁷ Residential care homes, NHS/Health Trust or other establishment providing medical or nursing care, family centres or mother and baby units or residential schools.

Technical information

Methodology

This analysis focuses on children living independently or in semi-independent living accommodation. For further information on these placement types can be found in the [children looked after in England guidance](#).

The figures are based on data from the SSSDA903 return which is collected each spring from all local authorities in England. This publication is the main source of information on the numbers of CLA in England.

Quality and methodology information can be found on the CLA statistics collection page. These provide further information on the data sources, their coverage and quality and explains the methodology used in producing the data, including how it is validated and processed.

Further information can be found on the [children looked after in England including adoption collection](#) page.

Rounding conventions

1. Rounding and suppression is applied to the data.
2. Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10. Note that figures may not sum to the total due to rounding.
3. For confidentiality purposes, numbers from one to five inclusive have been replaced by a 'c'. To ensure the suppressed number cannot be identified by simple arithmetic secondary suppression may be required. Where any number is shown as zero (0), the original figure submitted was zero (0). The following convention has been used:

“.” means not applicable

“-” means negligible – used to represent a percentage below 0.5%

Percentages have been rounded to whole numbers but where the numerator was five or less or the denominator was 10 or less, they have been suppressed and replaced by a 'c'. Note that percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.



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