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What did Sure Start do for youth offending, children's social care, and school behaviour?

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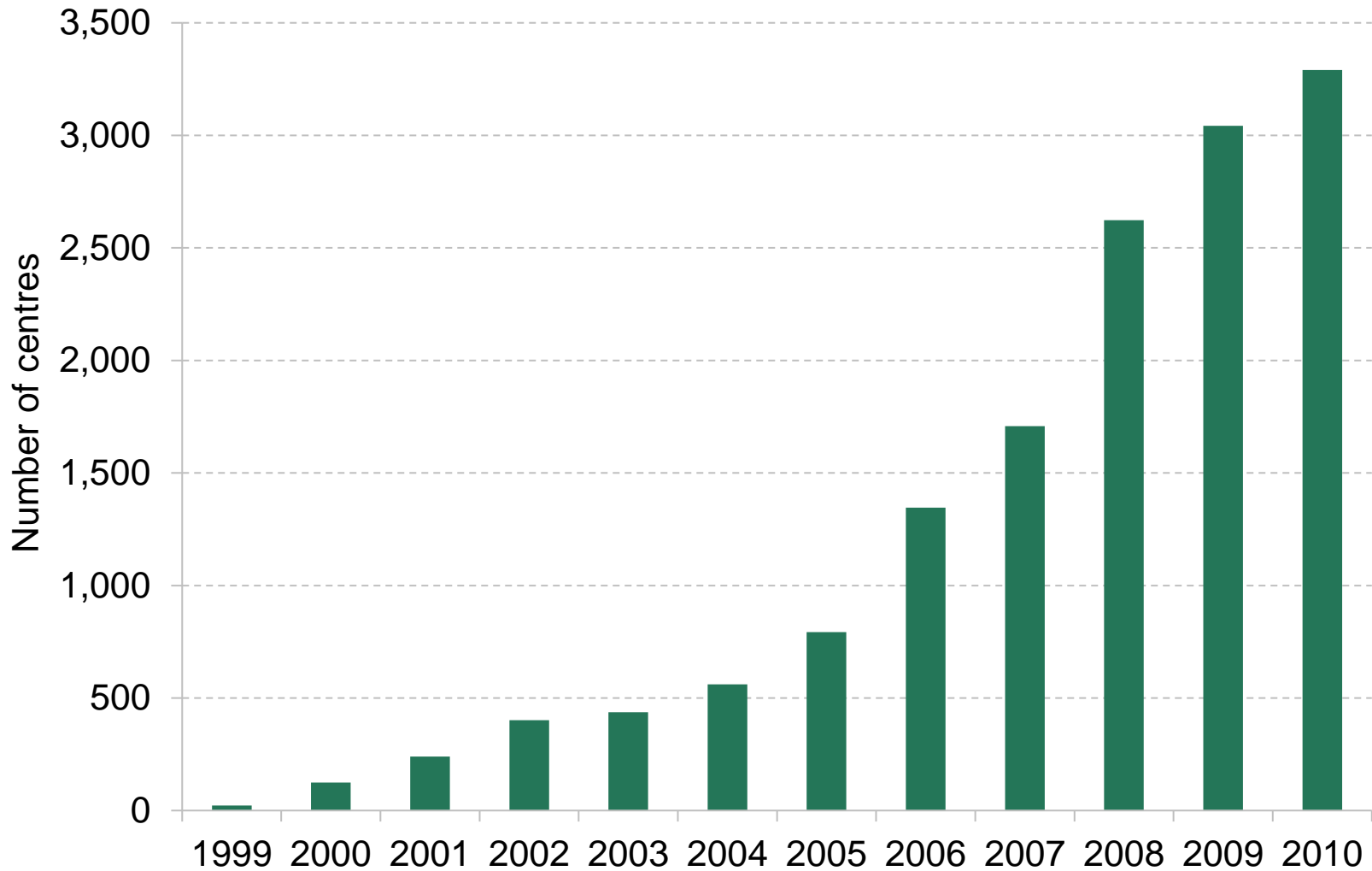
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- Sure Start was a cornerstone of UK early years policy throughout the 2000s.
- It introduced a ‘joined-up’ approach in early years nationally through a network of ‘one-stop shops’.
- Past IFS work has found improvements in health and education as a result.
- In this work, we focus on rare and costly outcomes:
 - Youth offending
 - Behaviour in school
 - Contacts with children’s social care

Sure Start's rollout



Data sources and outcomes

National Pupil Database (NPD) linked to a range of datasets.

- Police National Computer (PNC) data on all guilty verdicts.
- Data on absences and exclusions from school at ages 11 and 16.
- Data on Children in Need (CIN) and Children Looked After (CLA) social care contacts.

Evaluation method

- Estimate the impact of having *greater access* to Sure Start on children's outcomes, measured by living within 2.5km of a Sure Start centre
 - Quasi-experimental evaluation method exploiting roll-out of new centres
- Use the difference between changes in outcomes for children when a new centre opened, compared to changes in outcomes for children in comparable areas without a new centre.

Sure Start services and possible mechanisms

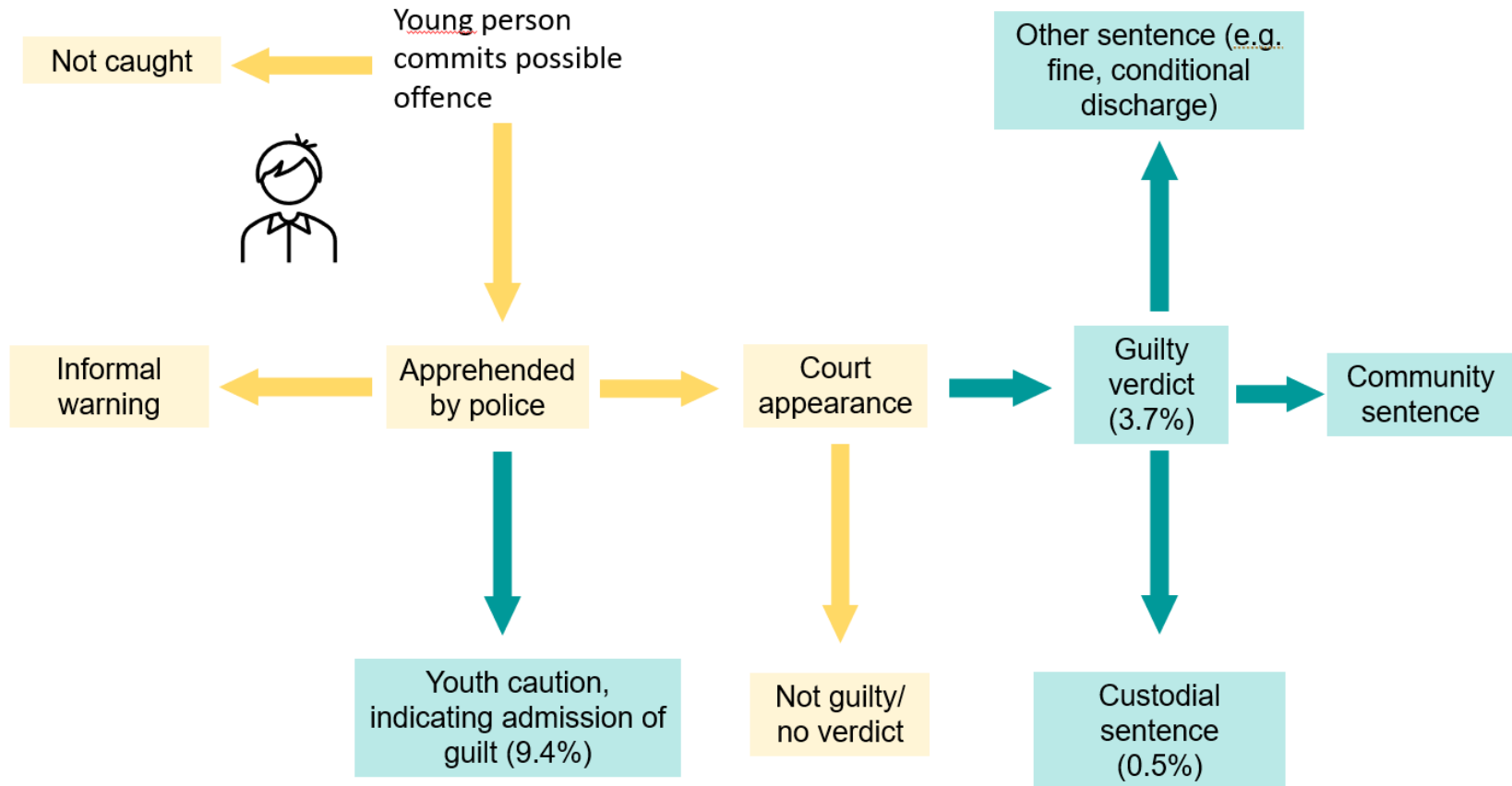
Mechanisms	Absences and suspensions	Offending	Social care contacts
Early learning and childcare			
Changes in children's socio-emotional skills	↓ or ↑	↓ or ↑	↓ or ↑
Health services			
Early identification and support for children with high health need and disabilities	↓	↓	↓
Parenting support			
Improvements in parenting and home environments	↓	↓	↓
Outreach and changed peer relationships			
Engaging hard-to-reach families and changing social links within communities	↓ or ↑	↓ or ↑	↓ or ↑



Youth offending

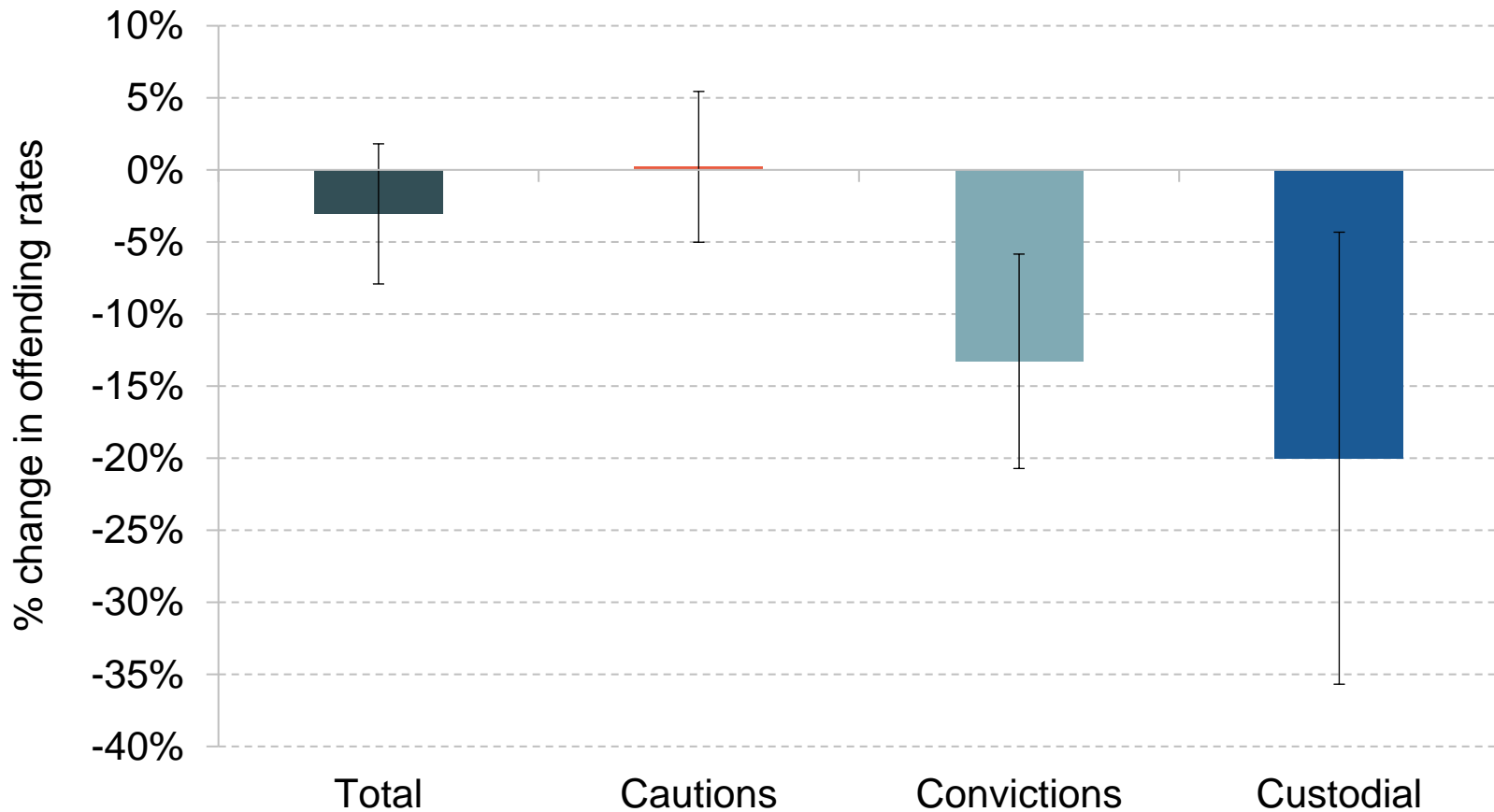
Youth justice and Sure Start

Youth justice pathways in England (percentage of young people experiencing each outcome before age 16 in brackets)



Youth offending outcomes

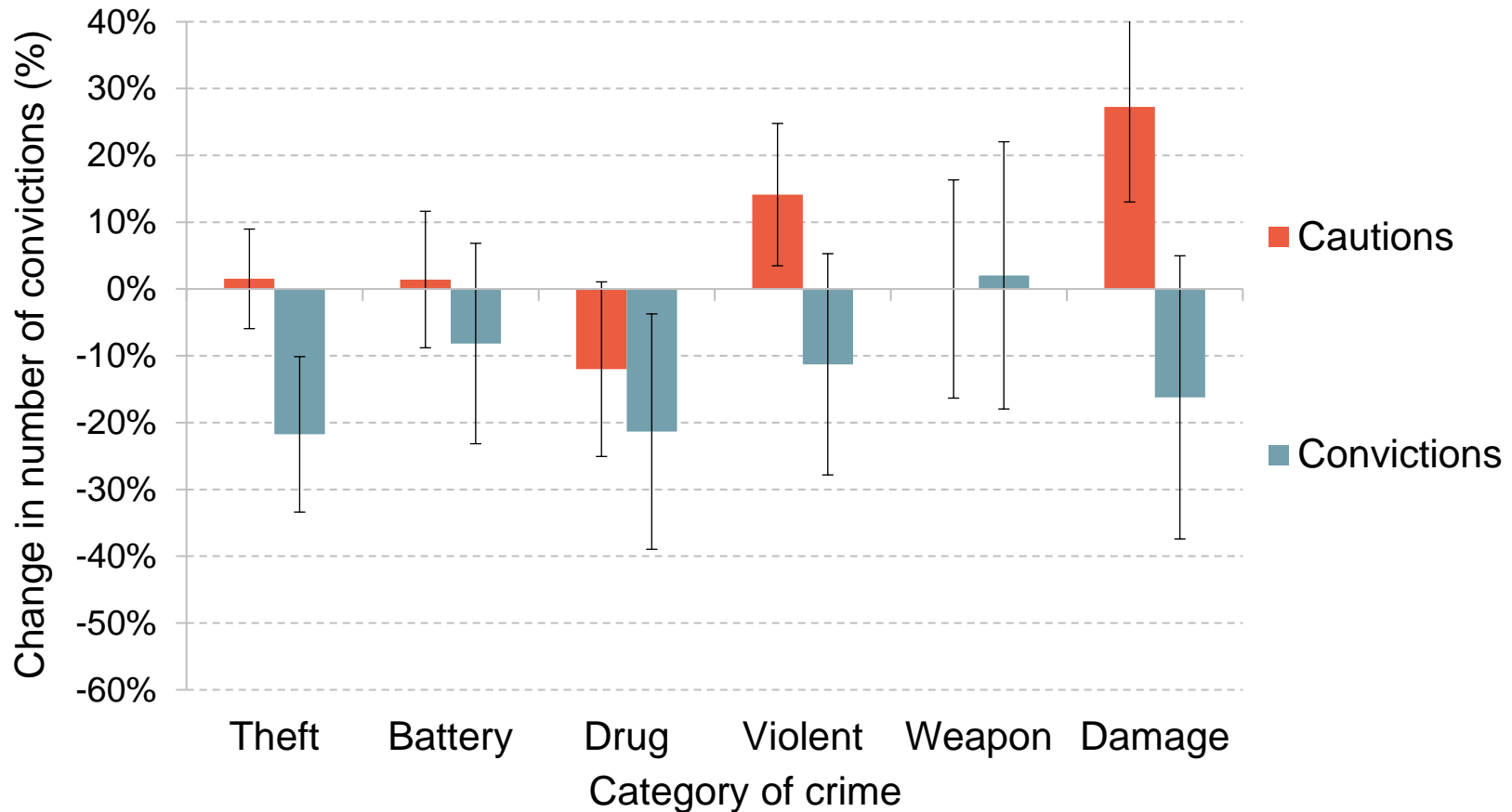
Effect of living within 2.5km of a Sure Start centre



Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Source: authors' calculations using the National Pupil Database – Ministry of Justice linked data

Types of youth offending

Effect of living within 2.5km of a Sure Start centre



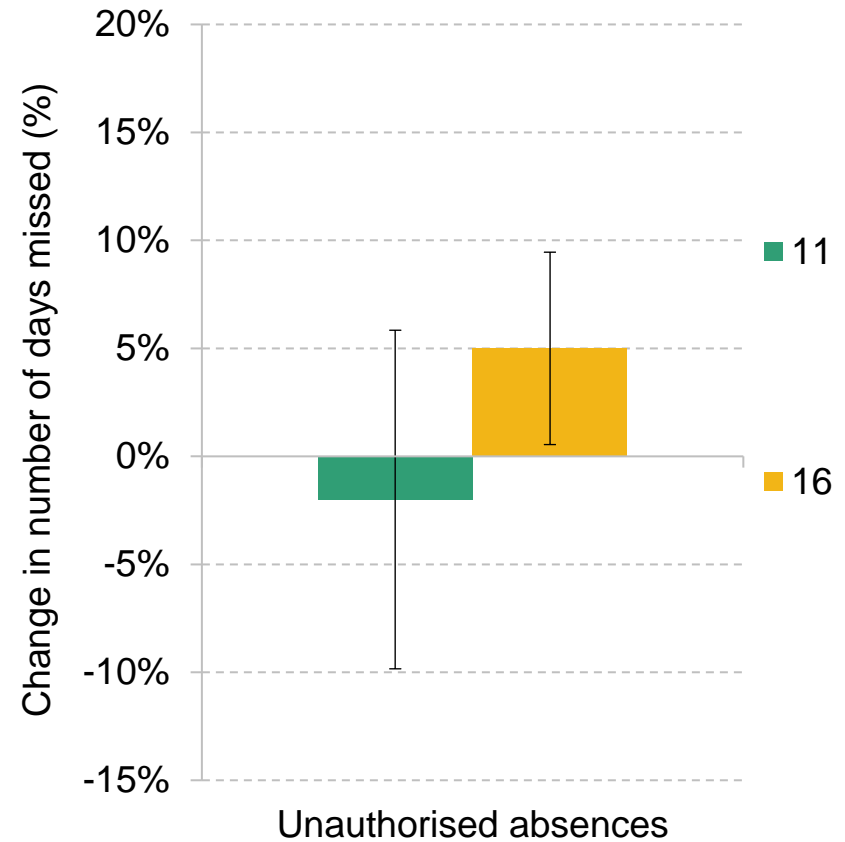
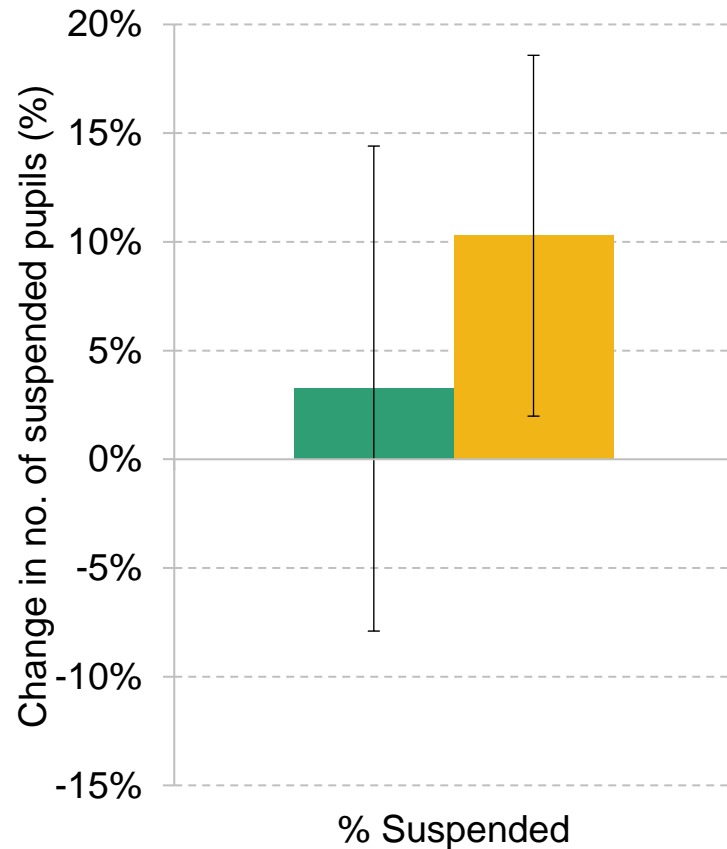
Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Types of offence listed left to right according to their frequency at baseline. Source: authors' calculations using the National Pupil Database – Ministry of Justice linked data



School absences and suspensions

Suspensions and unauthorised absences

Effect of living within 2.5km of a Sure Start centre

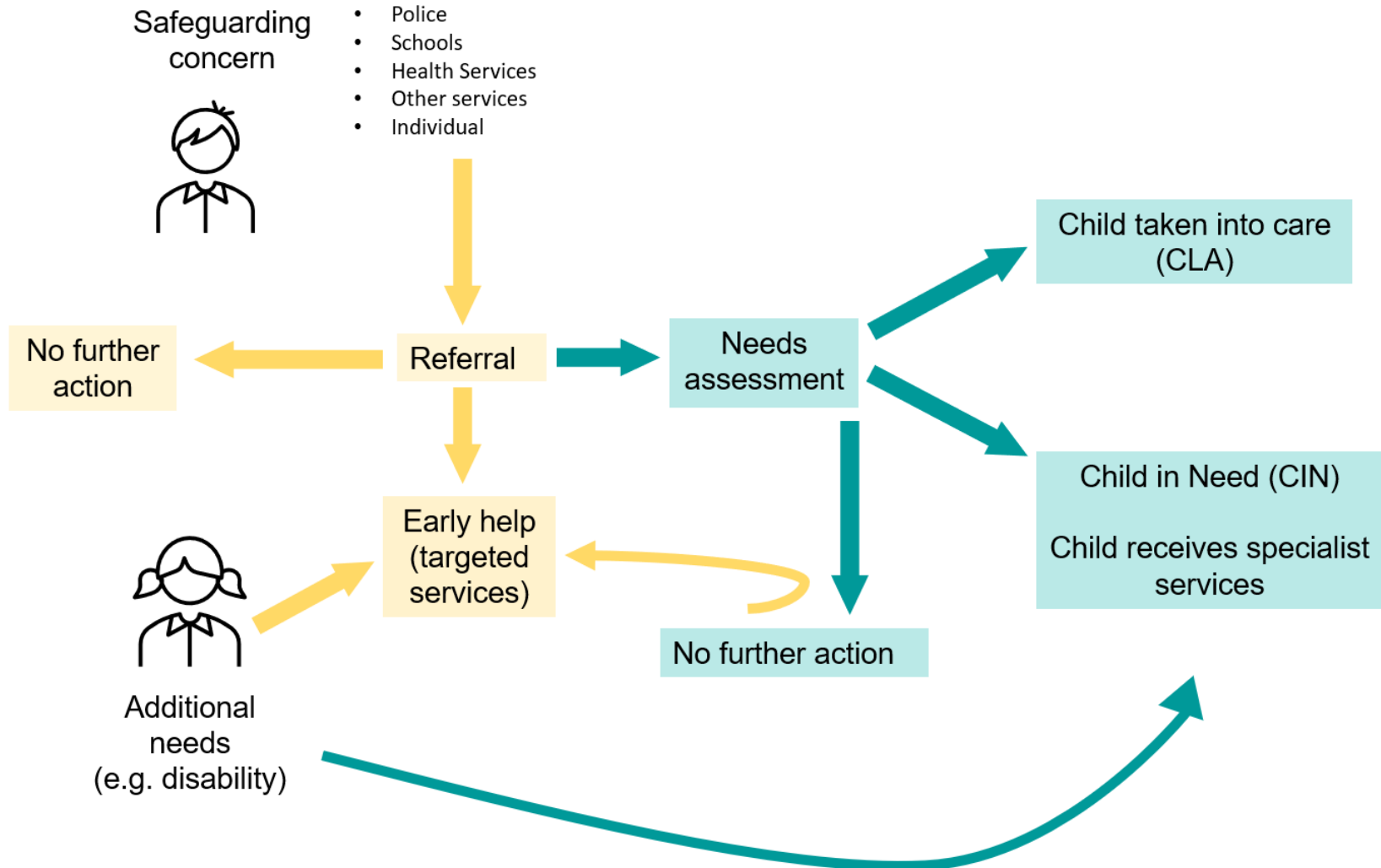


Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Source: authors' calculations using the National Pupil Database – Ministry of Justice linked data

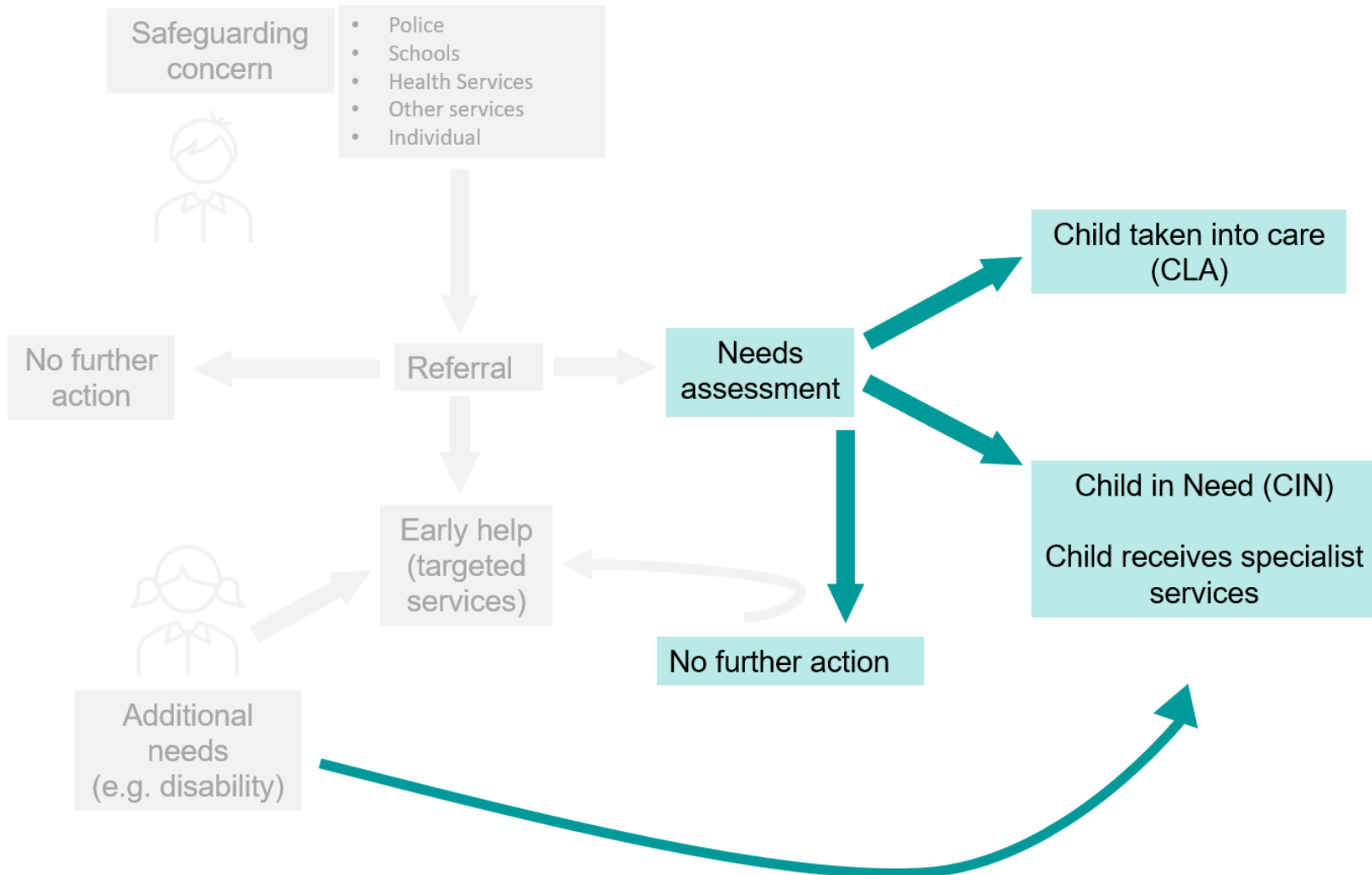


Children's social care

Children's social care in England



CIN and CLA data



Impact of Sure Start on children's social care contacts



- Referrals 2 in 5 children by age 16*
- Children in Need (CIN) 1 in 29 children
- Children Looked After (CLA) 1 in 175 children

* Model estimates from Jay et al. (2020)

Impact of Sure Start on children's social care contacts



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Two additional considerations:

1. Incomplete data on social care activity under age 5
 - Focus on ages 7 to 11 (KS2) and 12 to 16 (secondary school)

* Model estimates from Jay et al. (2020)

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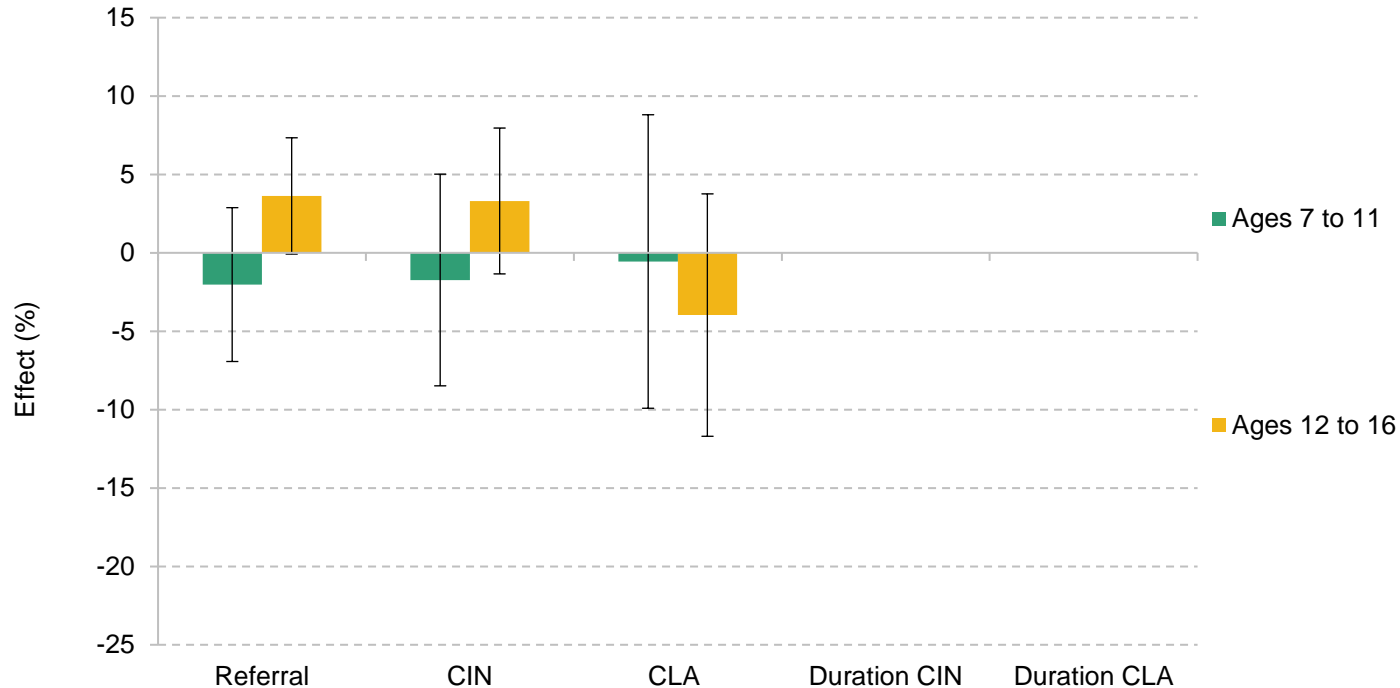
Two additional considerations:

1. Incomplete data on social care activity under age 5
 - Focus on ages 7 to 11 (KS2) and 12 to 16 (secondary school)
2. Sure Start may have increased identification of unmet need
 - Overall impact is therefore ambiguous

* Model estimates from Jay et al. (2020)

No significant impact on social care contacts....

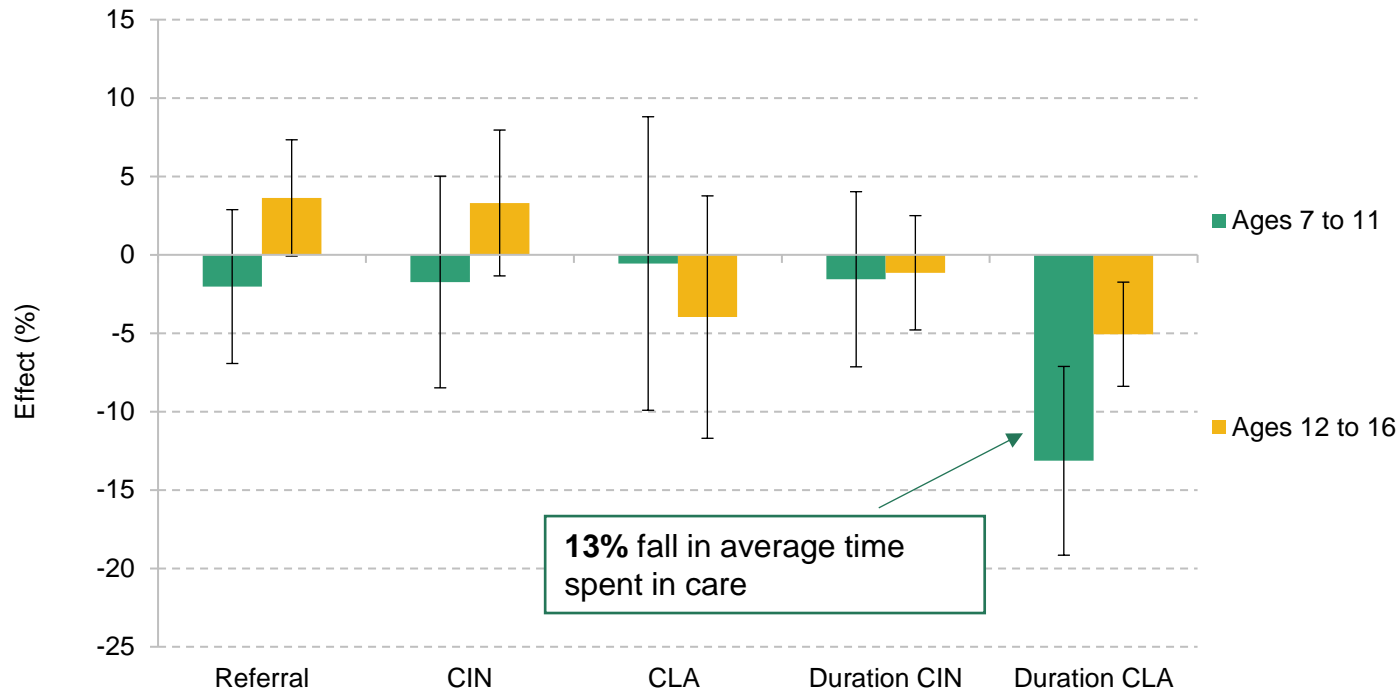
Effect of living within 2.5km of a Sure Start centre on referrals, CIN, CLA and duration



Note: Outcomes between ages 7 and 11 use sample of cohorts of children born between 2002 and 2009 for referrals and CIN, and between 1999 and 2009 for CLA. Outcomes between ages 12 and 16 use sample of cohorts of children born between 1997 and 2005 for referrals and CIN, and between 1994 and 2005 for CLA. Black error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Duration as CIN and CLA is among CIN and CLA, respectively. Duration CLA refers to average duration of most recent period of care.

... but fall in average duration in care

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Implications for Sure Start's cost effectiveness

Calculating the costs and benefits

Costs

- Upfront spending on Sure Start in 2010: **£2,520 million**
- Long-run savings to government from:
 - Reduced criminal offending: **£257 million**
 - Reduced social care usage: **£234 million**
 - Reduced hospitalisations and SEN (previous work).

Savings represent **19%** of upfront cost

Benefits

- Benefits to would-be victims of crime: **£20 million**
- Earnings benefits from education (previous work).
 - Missing school, as well as changes to offending and social care use might also impact long-run earnings (via education) – exclude to avoid double-counting.

Takeaways



Access to Sure Start delivered **unequal benefits across children**

- Falls in serious convictions and custodial sentences during adolescence
- Less time spent in care for CLA children during late primary and secondary school
- But rises in suspensions and absences during secondary school

No clear pattern of differential impacts

- By gender, disadvantage and ethnicity or Sure Start Local Programmes vs Children's Centres
- Differs to previous evidence on educational and health benefits

These translate into **cost savings to government**

- For every pound spent at its peak, Sure Start saved around 19 pence in public spending on youth justice and children's social care
- On top of savings identified in previous work through education and health benefits

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