

# Academic performance of children and young people in care: how do they compare?

Nicole Hunter

Child Welfare and Prisoner Health Unit, AIHW

Child Aware Approaches Conference, Brisbane, 15–16 May 2017



Australian Government  
Australian Institute of  
Health and Welfare

**Educational Outcomes for children in care**  
Linking 2013 child protection and NAPLAN data

# Background

- Around 30,000 children in care in Australia
- Lack of national evidence regarding outcomes
- Education is a gateway to future employment and life opportunities
- Lost educational opportunities have a cumulative effect

# This project

- Examined literacy/numeracy results of children in care
- Data linkage — child protection and NAPLAN
- Cross sectional — 2013 data
- 6 states/territories participated
- Built on previous pre-NAPLAN linkage work

# NAPLAN

- National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)
- Testing conducting annually
- 4 student year levels (Years 3, 5, 7, 9)
- 5 assessment domains (reading, writing, spelling, grammar, numeracy)

# Study population

- Included children who:
  - Participated in NAPLAN testing for Years 3,5,7 or 9 (including those recorded as exempt, absent or withdrawn), and
  - Were ‘in care’ at the time of testing (14-16 May 2013).
    - ‘In care’ = care arrangements ordered through the Children’s Court and parental responsibility has been transferred to the Minister/Chief Executive.
- 6 states/territories provided data for this study: NSW, Vic, WA, Tas, ACT and NT.

# Size of study population

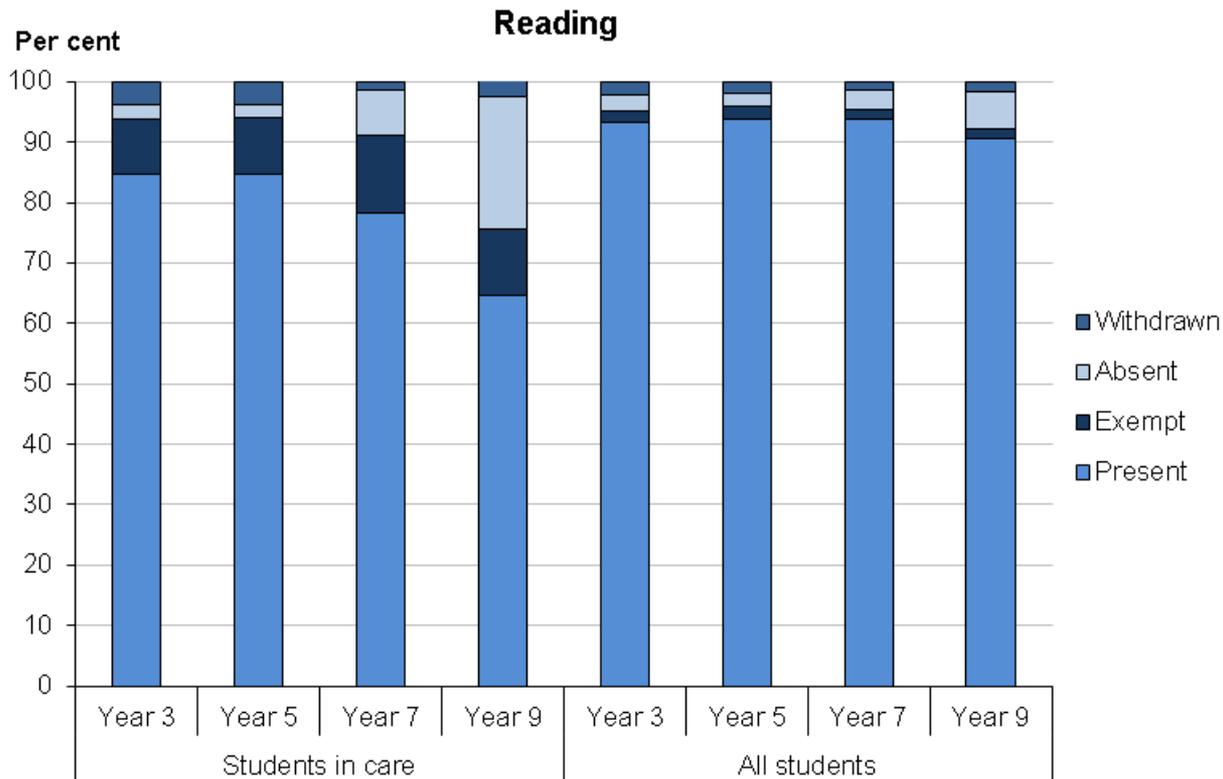
- Linked data were available for around 3,500 children
- Similar proportions of children across Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 (23-27%)

	Year 3	Year 5	Year 7	Year 9	Total
Number	957	967	849	810	3,583
Per cent	26.7	27.0	23.7	22.6	100.0

# Characteristics of study population

- 7-17 age range, most (66%) were aged 10-14
- 1 in 3 were Indigenous (33%)
- 1 in 12 had a language background other than English (LBOTE) (8%)
- Half were on their first order (53%)
- 4 in 5 lived with foster carers (45%) or relatives/kin (34%)
- 1 in 3 had been in their current living arrangement for <1 year (34%)

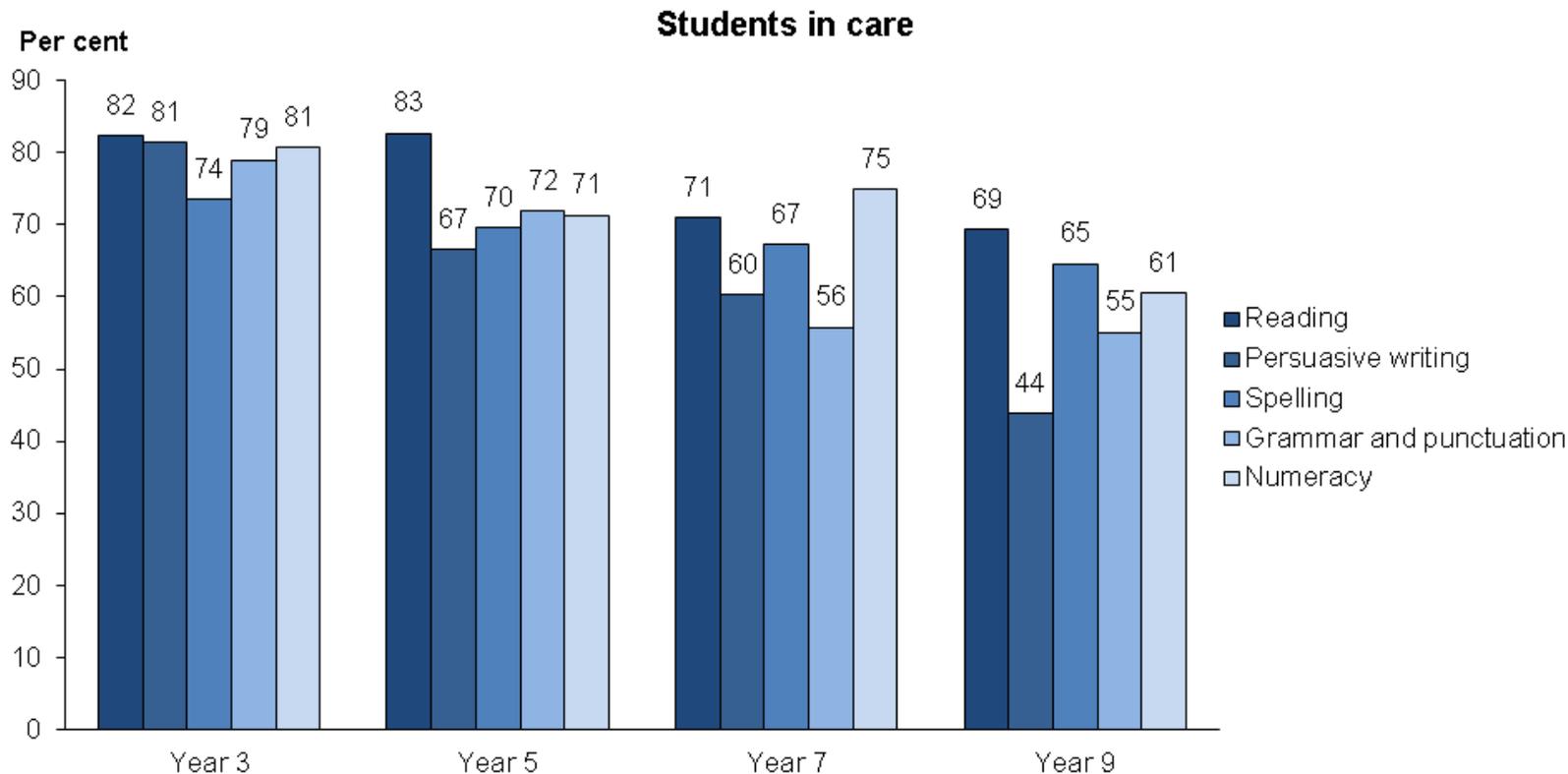
# Participation in assessment



# National minimum standards

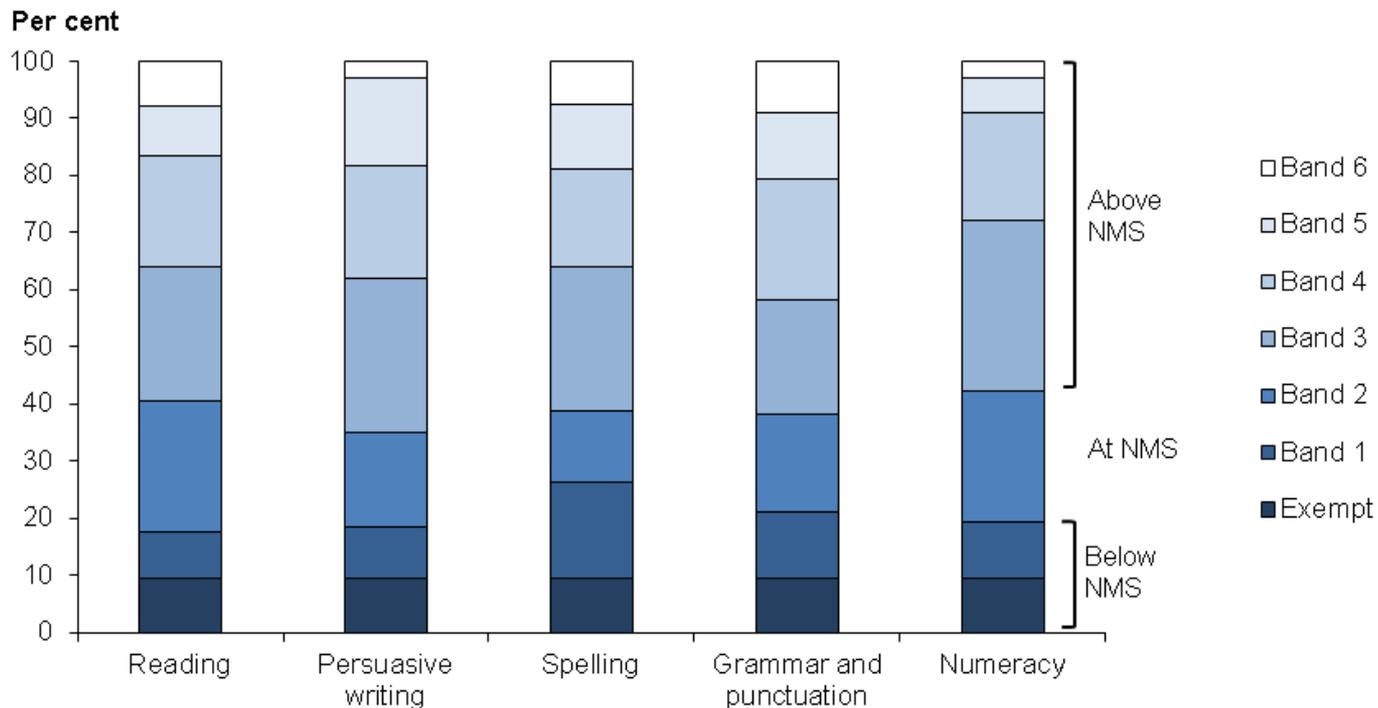
- Each NAPLAN assessment domain has a defined NMS
- The NMS is ‘the agreed minimum acceptable standard of knowledge and skills without which a student will have difficulty making sufficient progress at school’

# NMS achievement rates



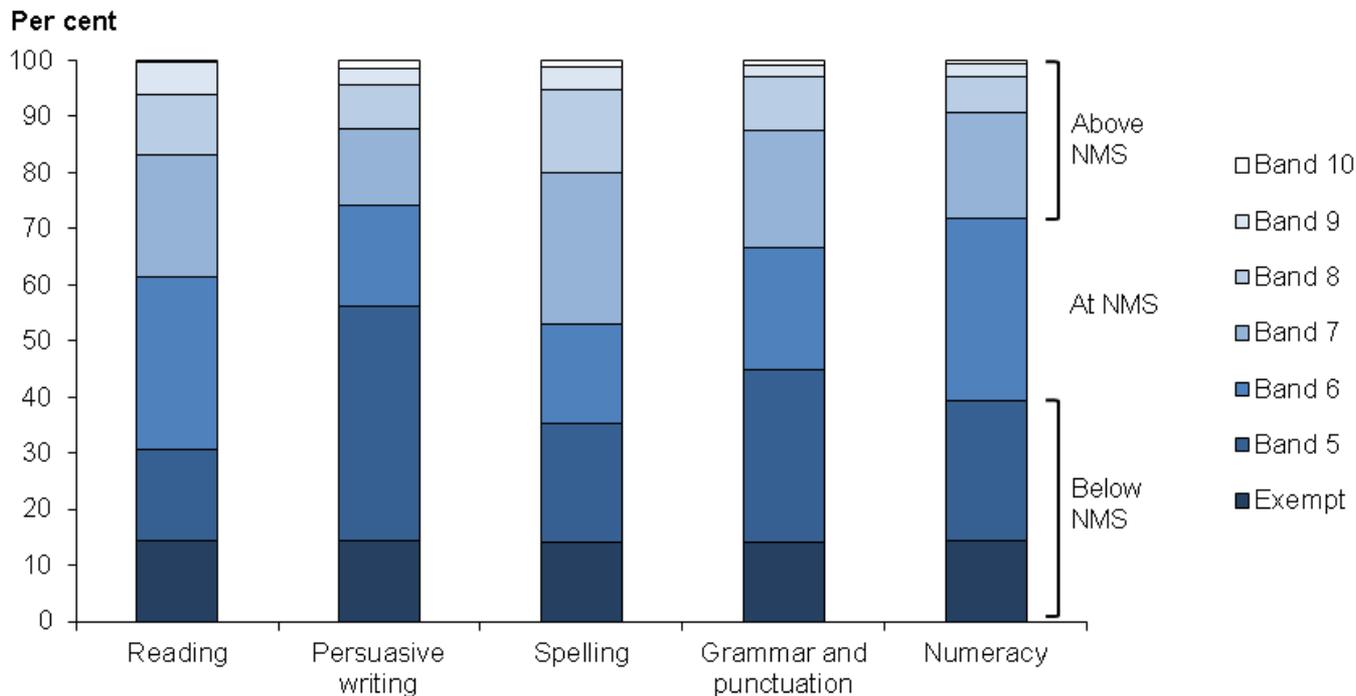
# NMS achievement bands

## Students in care, Year 3



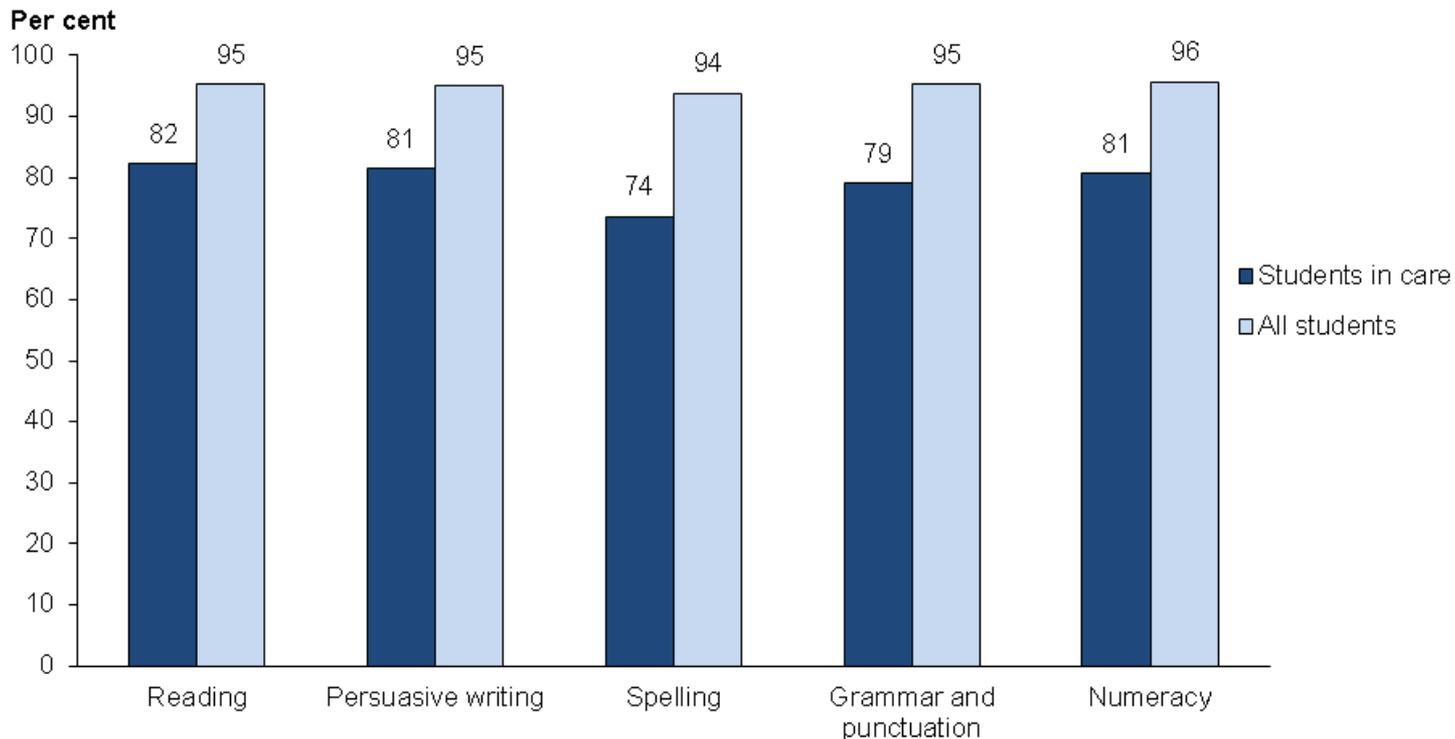
# NMS achievement bands (cont'd)

Students in care, Year 9

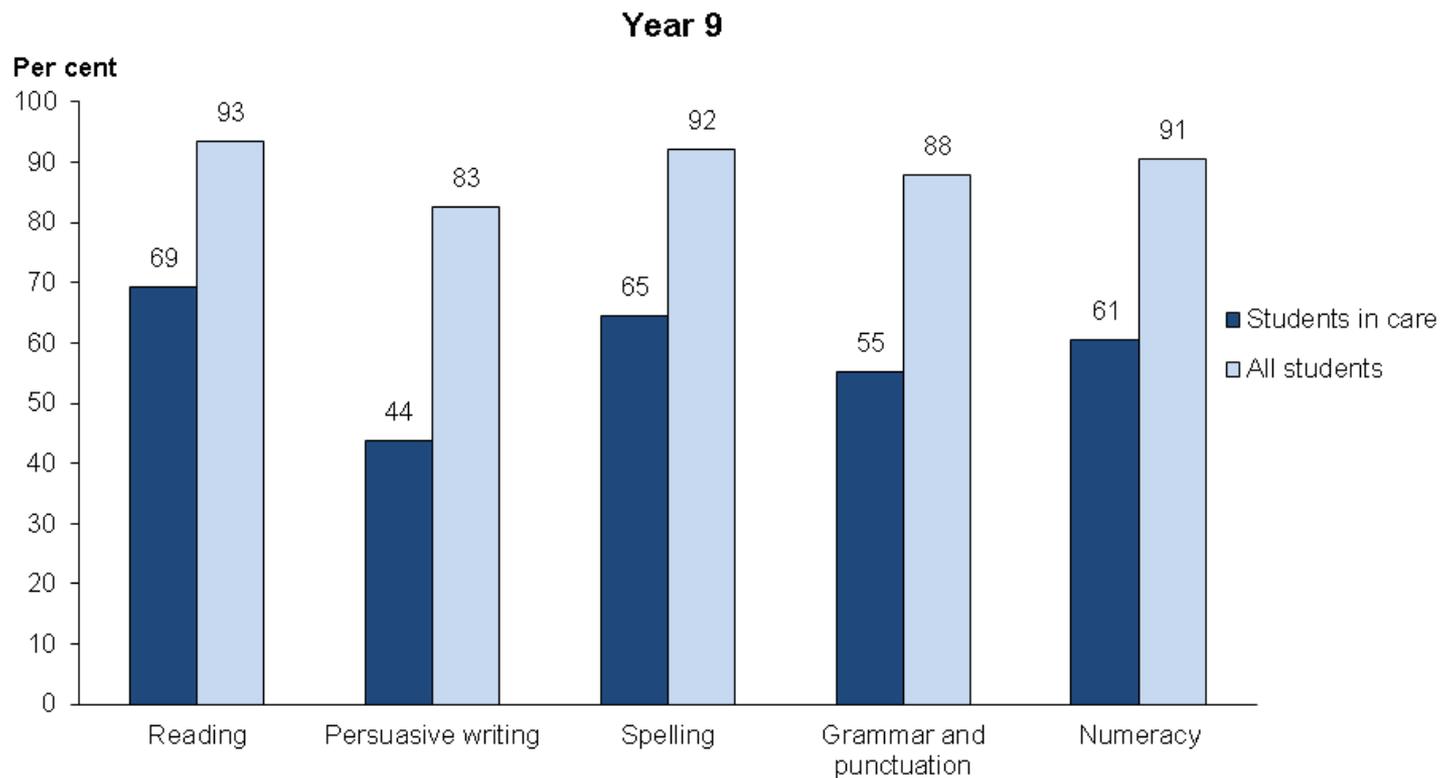


# NMS comparisons

Year 3



# NMS comparisons (cont'd)



# Characteristics associated with NMS achievement

- Exploratory regression analysis of reading and numeracy NMS achievement for students in care
- Year level
  - Reading: Compared to Year 3 students, Year 7 & 9 less likely to achieve NMS, and Year 5 more likely.
  - Numeracy: Compared to Year 3 students, Year 9 less likely to achieve NMS.
- Living arrangement type
  - Reading & numeracy: Compared to children in foster care, those living with relatives/kin were more likely to achieve the NMS, and those in residential care were less likely.
- However, the predictive power of the models was low – explaining only 7-9% of the variance in NMS achievement.

# Next steps

- The findings provide further evidence that children in care are an academically disadvantaged group
- Reinforces the need for ongoing national monitoring and indicator reporting
- Regular data linkage required
  - Consider future opportunities for longitudinal analysis and linkage with other datasets