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9 April 2024

Webinar

@TheIFS

What did Sure Start do for performance in school?



Economic
and Social
Research Council

Background



- Cornerstone of UK government's policy to tackle child poverty and social exclusion in late 1990s
- Aim to improve the health and well-being of families and children from pregnancy onwards
- Holistic view of child development and importance of early years in the life cycle
- Pioneer of 'joined-up' approach in early years through a network of 'one-stop shops' serving local communities

Timeline and rollout

Jan 99: trailblazer identified, invited to apply
Nov 99: Full approval of first 15 SSLPs

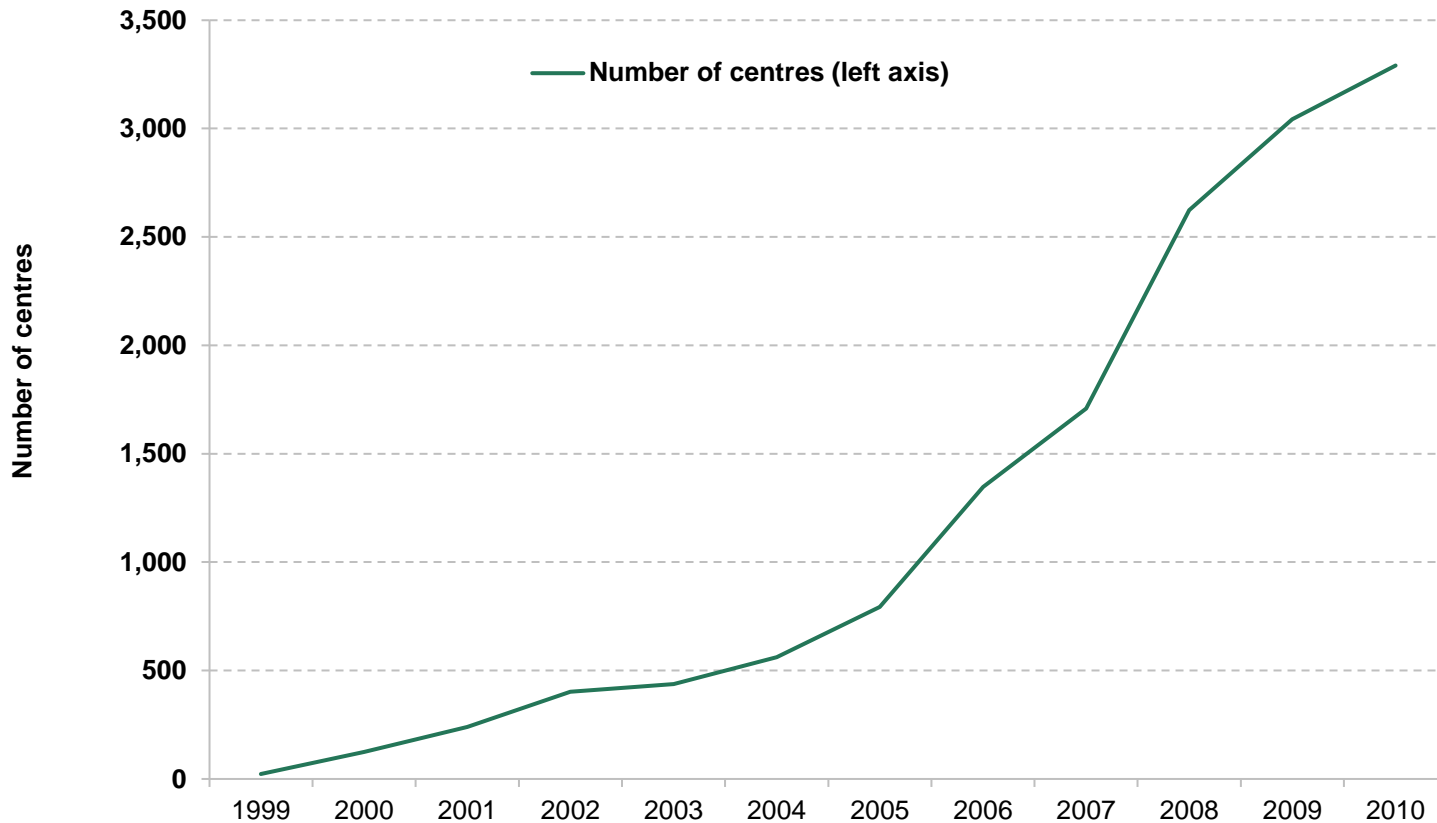
2000: Government target rises from 250 to 530 SSLPs. Funding more than doubles

2003-04: Pledge to expand SS. 10-Year Strategy 'A SSCC in every community'

2004-06 Phase 1 (20% most deprived)

2006-08 Phase 2 (30% most deprived)

2008-10 Phase 3 (70% most deprived)



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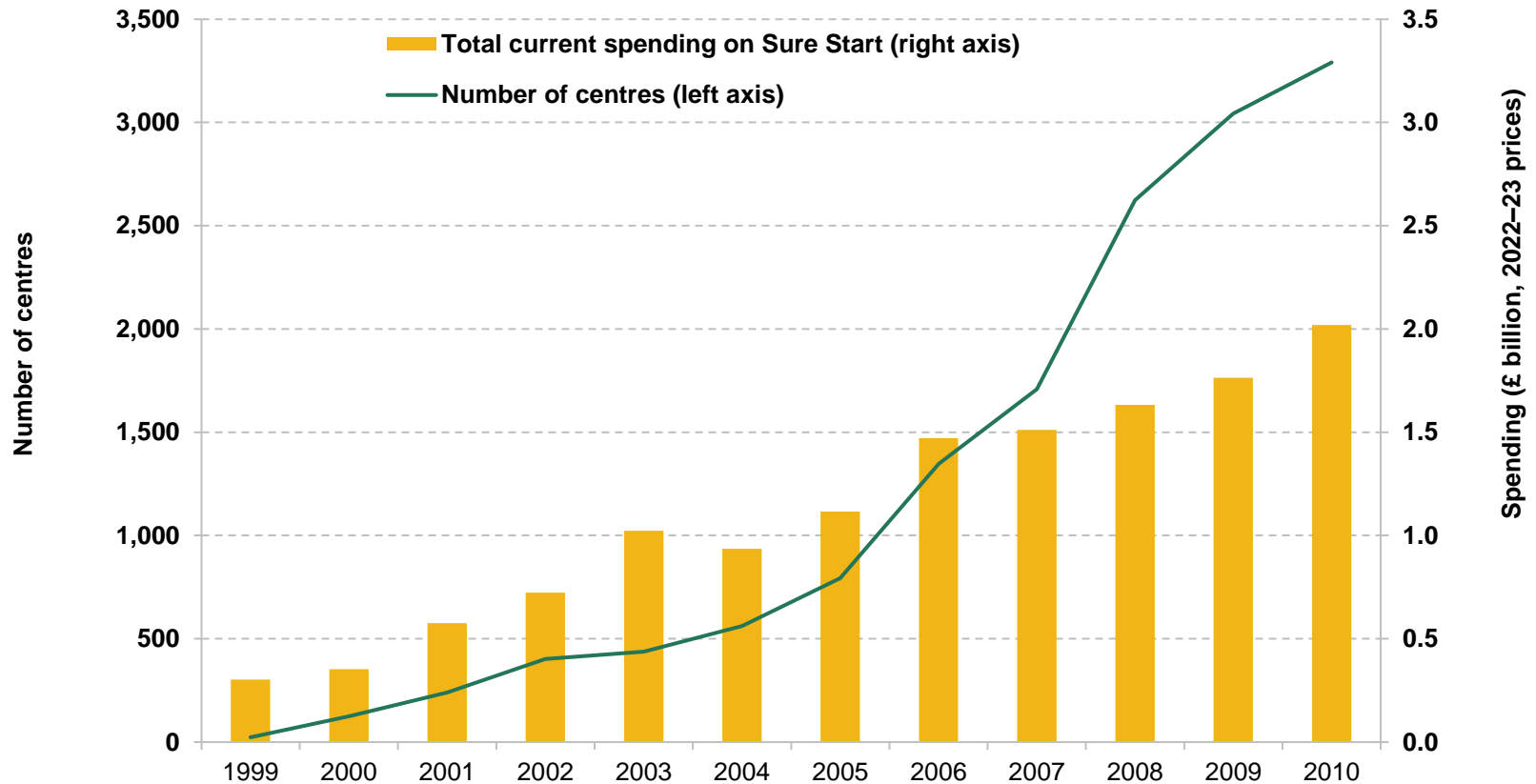
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What do we know so far about the impacts of Sure Start?

Government-commissioned evaluations

- [National Evaluation of Sure Start \(NESS\)](#)
- [Evaluation of Children's Centres in England \(ECCE\)](#)

IFS (Nuffield-funded) evaluations

- [Impacts of SSLPs and SSCCs on children's hospitalisations](#)
- **[Impacts of SSLPs and SSCCs on children's educational outcomes](#)**
- Impacts of SSLPs and SSCCs on referrals to children's social care and youth offending [Summer 2024]

(Some) other research on Sure Start

- [Sure Start Children's Centres \(National Audit Office, 2006\)](#)
- [Sure Start Children's Centres, Memorandum for the children, schools and families committee, National Audit Office \(2009\)](#)
- [Implementing Sure Start Children's Centres \(JRF, Institute for Government\)](#)
- [IFS Education Spending report](#)
- [Stop Start \(Sutton Trust-funded\)](#)

How could have Sure Start affected school outcomes?

- Sure Start aimed to promote life chances of children, including educational outcomes and employment

- Services to promote the intellectual, emotional and physical development of children
 - Parent/child activities and parenting support
 - Health services
 - High-quality childcare and employment advice

- Support for children and parents with special needs

Data sources and outcomes

National Pupil Database (NPD)

- Foundation Stage Profile, KS1, KS2 and KS4 scores
- Prevalence of Special Education Needs at 5, 7, 11 and 16

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 SSLPs & SSCCs
- Back of the envelope calculation for the impact of *using* Sure Start, using survey data
- Draw from previous mixed method evaluations to interpret results

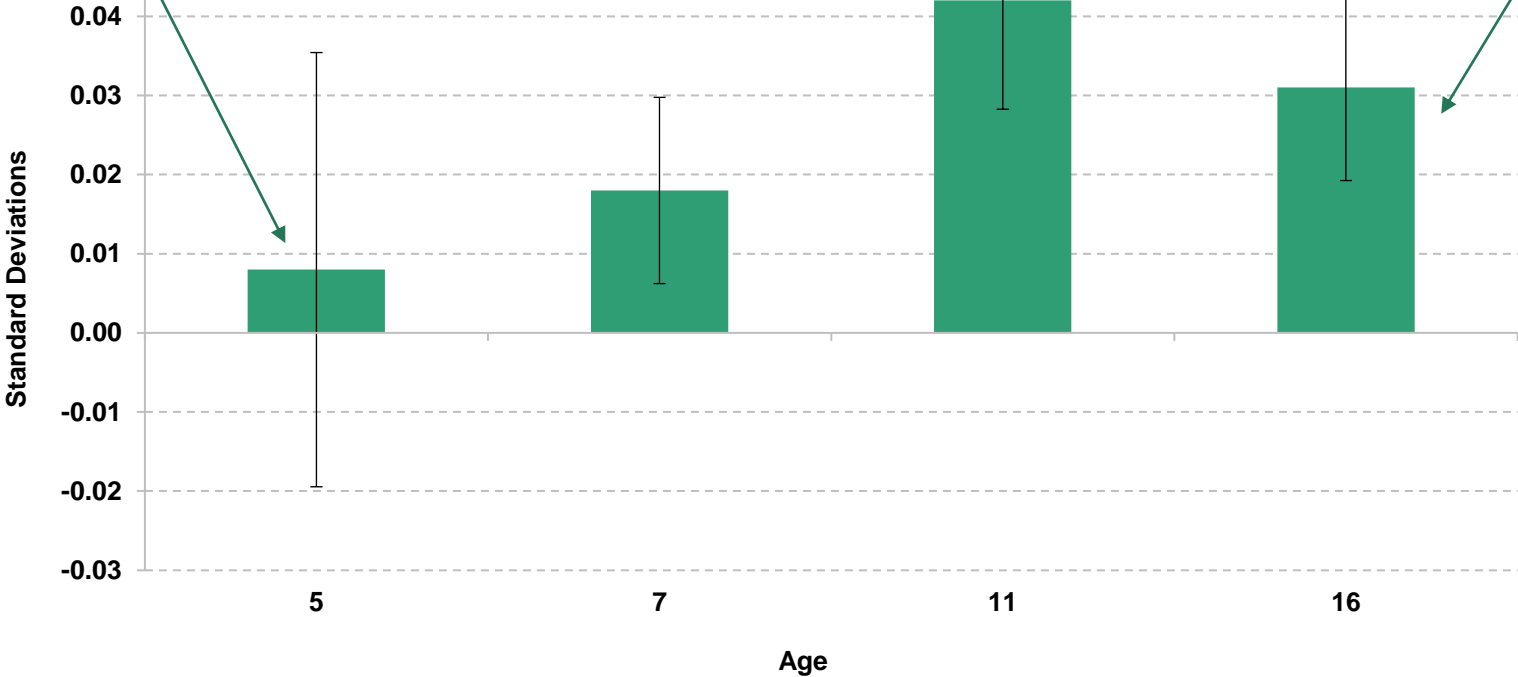
Children with greater exposure to Sure Start had higher educational attainment in primary and secondary school



Impact of living near a Sure Start centre at age 0-5 on educational outcomes

Across all children at age 5, there is no significant impact on overall FSP, but a significant impact on communication and language

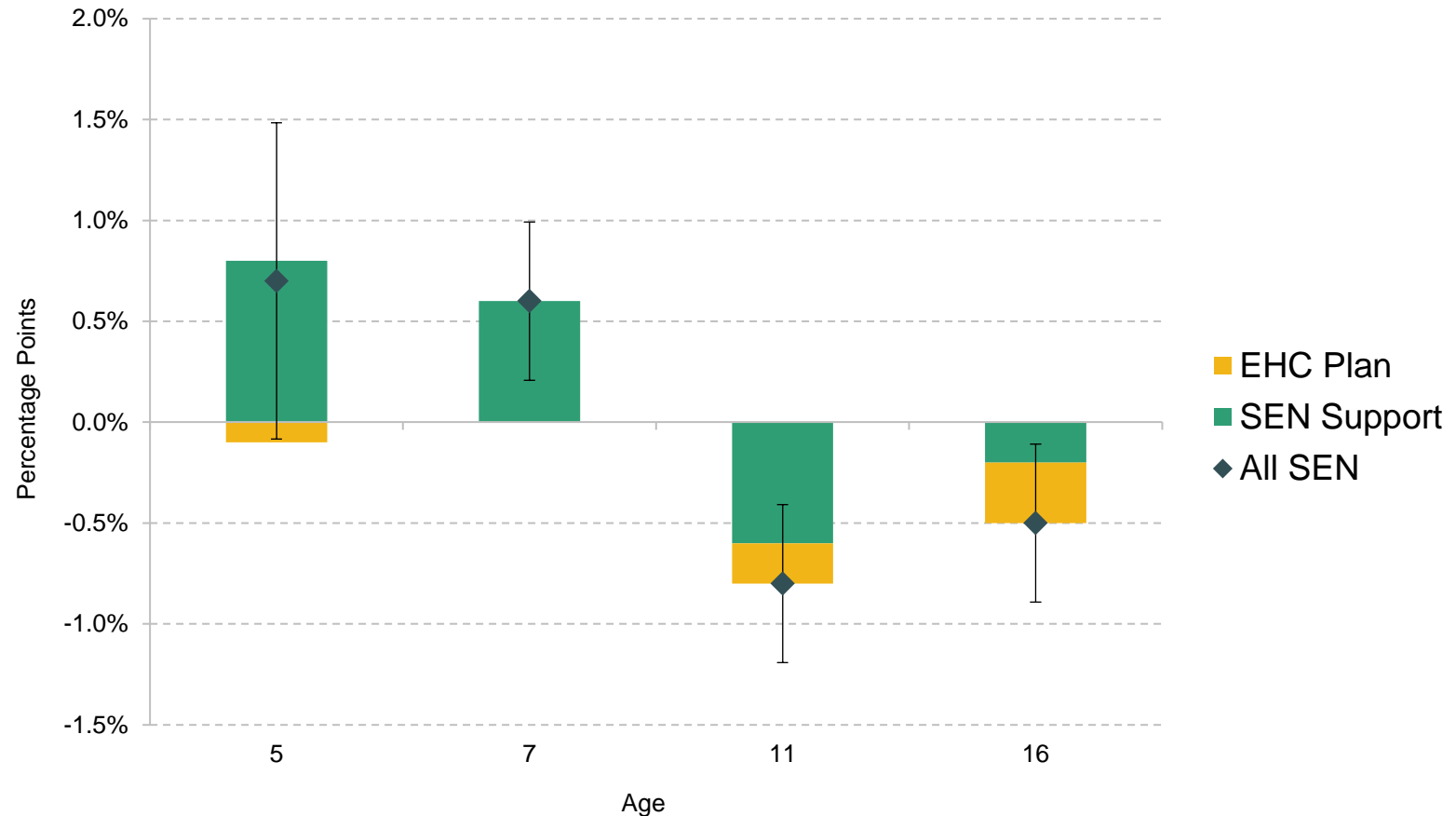
An increase in 0.03 sd = 0.8 GCSE grade higher



Note: 0.01 Standard Deviations is equal to one quarter of a GCSE grade. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Source: authors' calculations using the National Pupil Database

Access to Sure Start increased the prevalence of SEN in primary school but reduced it in secondary school

Impact of living near a Sure Start centre at age 0-5 on the prevalence of SEN



Note: Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.
Source: authors' calculations using the National Pupil Database



Who benefitted, and what were the mechanisms?

What did Sure Start do for performance in school?

How did effects vary with income?

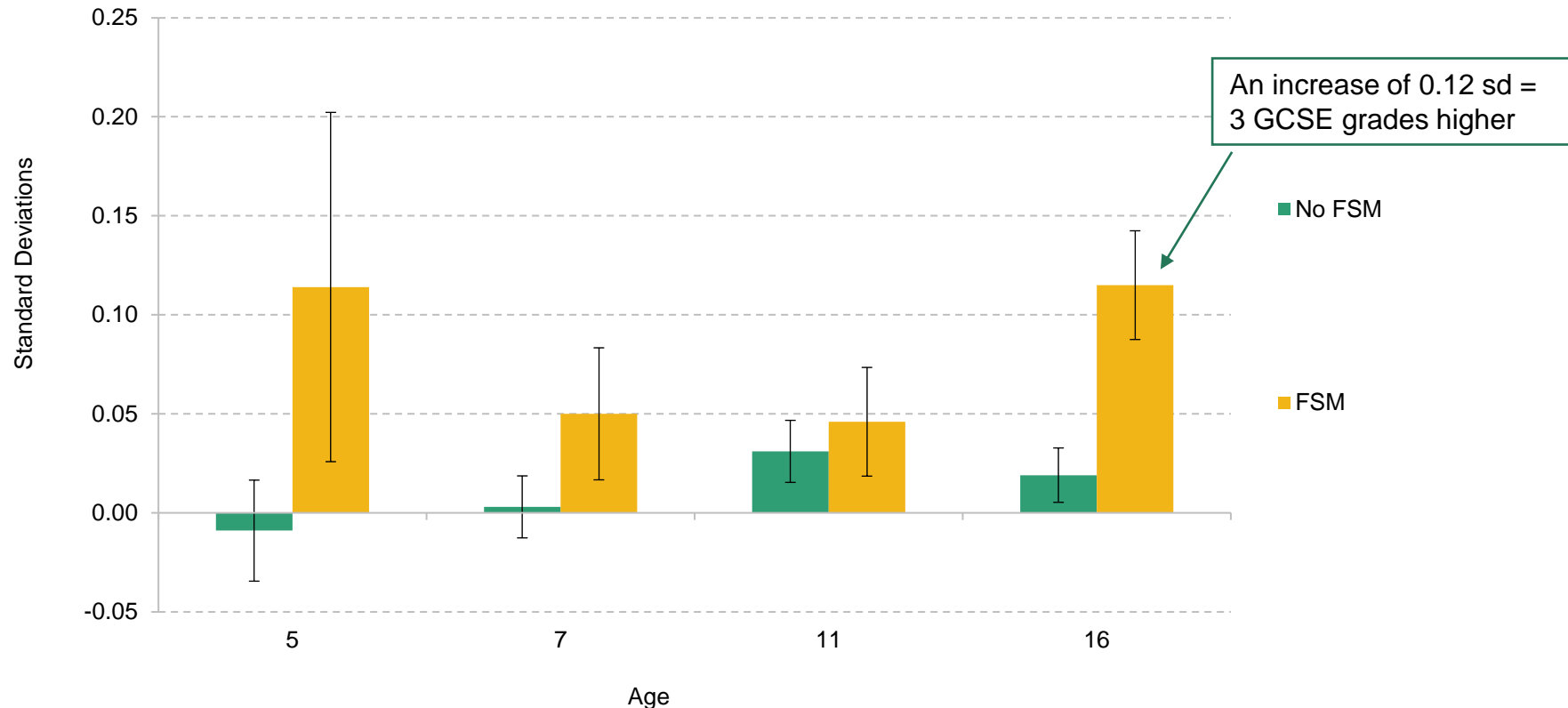
- Sure Start was designed to ameliorate impact of child poverty.
 - Children from low-income backgrounds face a disadvantage gap in academic achievement.

- Until 2006, all centres targeted the 20% most deprived areas.
 - Some services specifically targeted at low-income families.

- We calculate the effect separately for those eligible for Free School Meals.

Academic outcomes by income

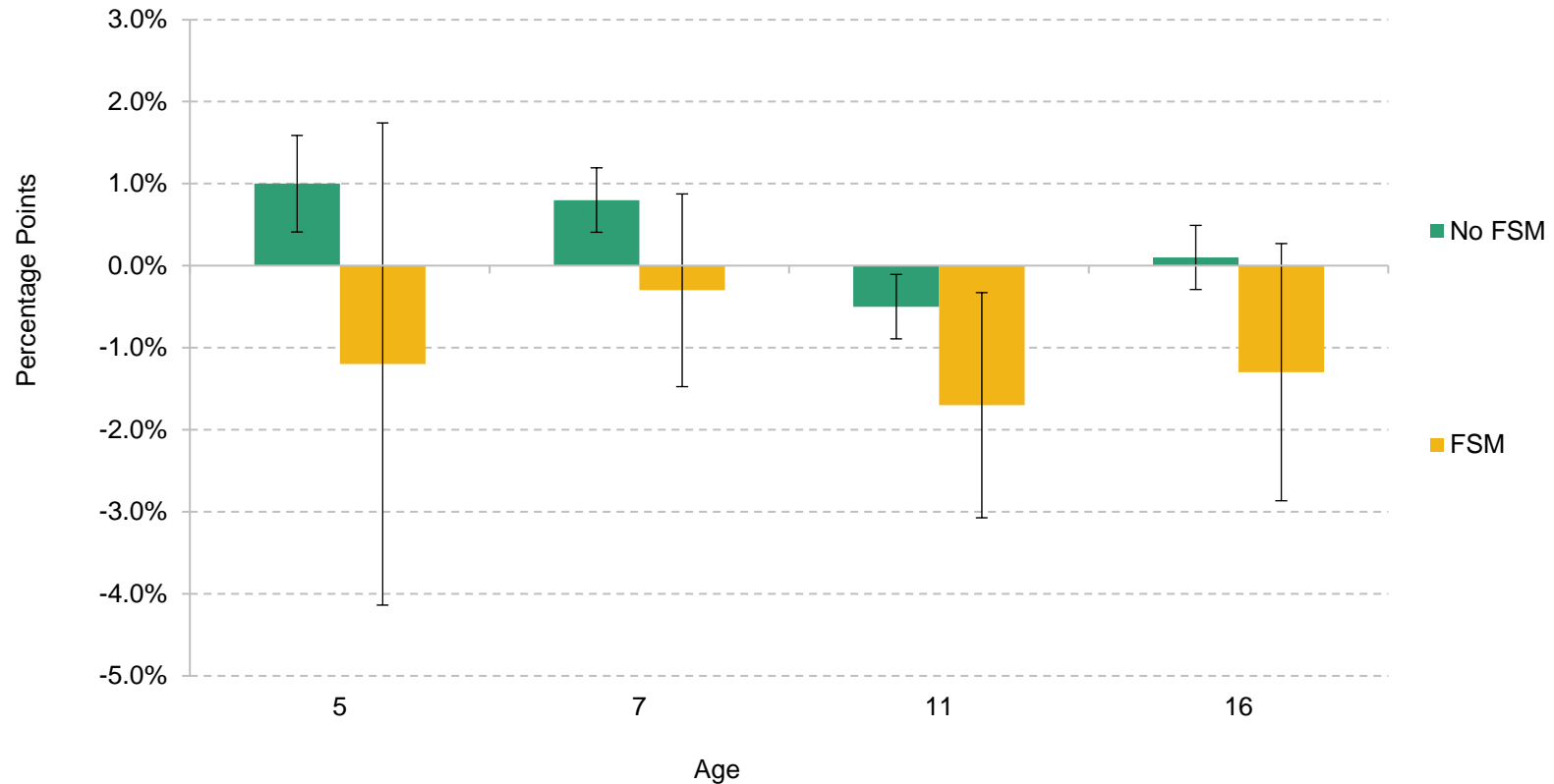
Effect of living within 2.5km of a Sure Start centre



Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Free School Meal eligibility measured at age 5. Source: authors' calculations using the National Pupil Database

SEN outcomes by income

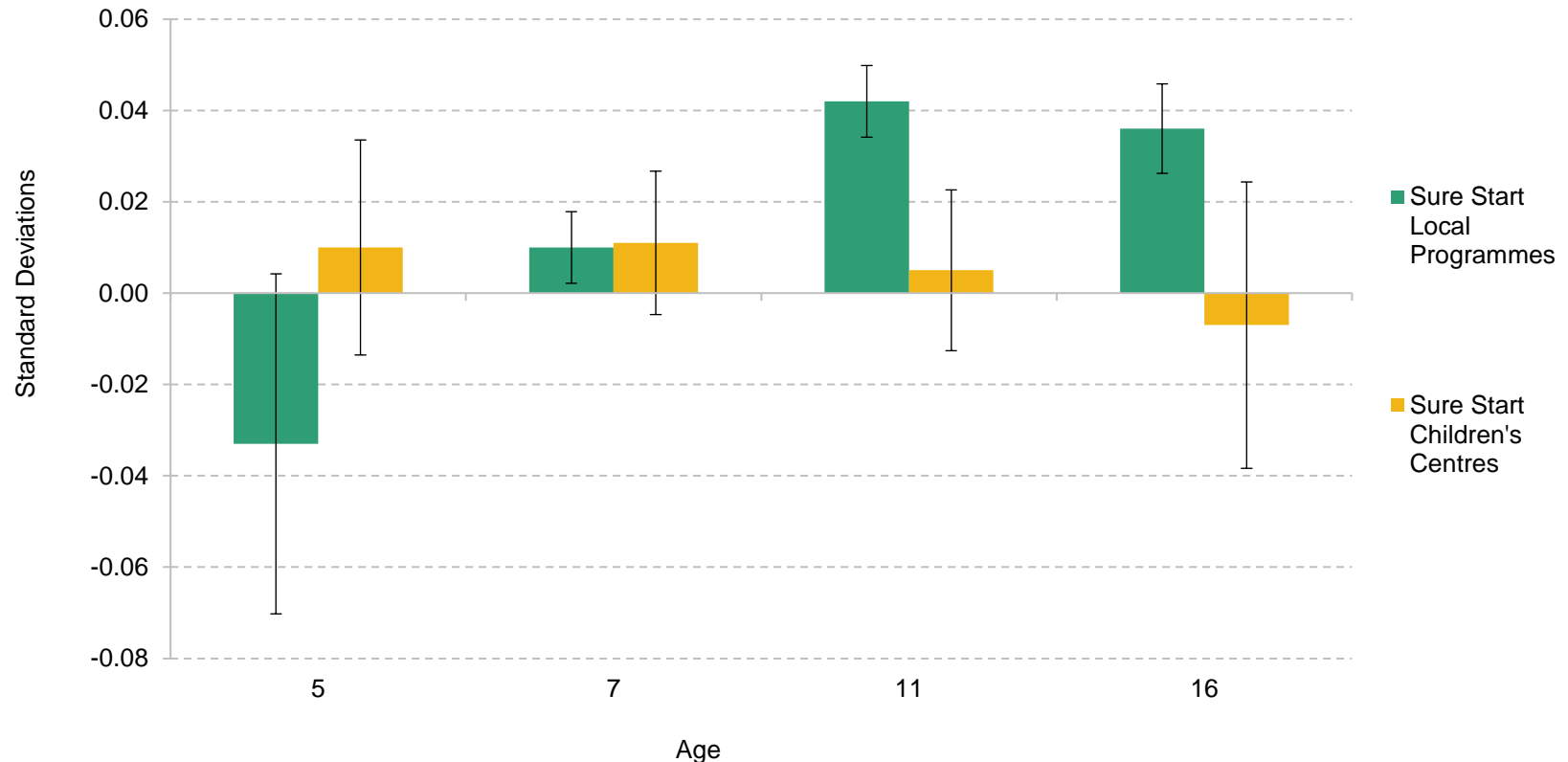
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Academic outcomes by centre

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

What was behind the difference between centres?

- Local Programmes (SSLPs) spent a lot more than Children's Centres (SSCCs).

Total expenditures, 2008-09 (NAO, 2009)

Former SSLPs	Other phase 1 centres	Phase 2 centres
£510,000	£290,000	£120,000

- More money on parental outreach.
- Reached out to greater numbers of parents.
- More money on teacher input to learning development
- Greater engagement of the local community.

Calculating the costs and benefits

Costs

- Total spending on Sure Start in 2010: **£2.520 billion**
- Over the long-run, total cost affected by:
 - Savings from changes to SEN need: **£192 million**
 - Reduced hospitalisations (previous work).
 - Youth offending and children's social care (forthcoming).

Benefits

- Improved GCSEs associated with higher earnings: **£2.533 billion**
 - We use DfE results to estimate effect on earnings.
- Benefit for every £1 spent: **£1.09**

Key Takeaways



- Sure Start had a significant positive effect on grades and SEN.
 - For children from low-income backgrounds, these effects were very large.
- Sure Start Local Programmes were disproportionately effective.
 - Higher budgets.
 - More spending on parental outreach.
 - More spending on teacher input.
 - Greater local input.
- From academic outcomes, a modest but positive benefit/cost ratio.
 - Other effects of Sure Start need consideration.

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