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Summary findings of the Intervention Level Evaluations

Opportunity Areas Intervention Level
Evaluations research brief

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Executive summary

The Opportunity Areas (OAs) programme was launched by the Department for Education (DfE) in 2017. Each OA was able to implement different projects (interventions) based on local need. As part of the DfE wider evaluation programme York Consulting completed 5 evaluations focused on single interventions within the OA programme. These are the OA intervention-level evaluations (ILE) and took place between January 2019 and July 2021.

It should be noted that this report summarises and brings out key insights from these five projects, it does not constitute an evaluation of the OA programme or place-based working. A separate evaluation of the overall OA programme is underway. It is hoped that this report will have value to those designing similar interventions in the future, either within or separately to a place-based programme.

The projects were:

- **Norwich Inclusion Charter (NIC)** project included a variety of interventions to reduce suspensions and permanent exclusions in schools.
- **Team Around the School (TAS)** pupil inclusion project in Blackpool designed to reduce absence, disengagement with education, permanent exclusions and elective home education.
- **Inspire by Teaching Recruitment (IBTR)** project designed to support recruitment in North Yorkshire Coast schools.
- **Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing (MHEW)** project designed to support the mental health and emotional wellbeing of young people in Hastings.
- **School-to-School Support (S2SS)** project provided peer support between Bradford schools to improve underperforming schools.

The methodology involved 3 waves of fieldwork between January 2019 and July 2021. Across the 5 projects fieldwork involved in-depth qualitative telephone and virtual interviews with many stakeholders including: project management staff, delivery agencies and practitioners, headteachers, teachers, other school staff, young people and parents. Some projects included quantitative surveys and triangulated qualitative case studies based around pupils or schools. All projects provided management information for analysis of their operational performance.

Qualitative assessment indicated that these interventions were successful in addressing some of the challenges identified in these 5 OAs.

Key insights which may inform future delivery are as follows:

- **Place-based working.** People working together in the location in response to locally identified needs engendered a commitment to project delivery. These projects helped generate commitment across different organisations to work together. Respondents perceived that the projects were embedded in the locality which enabled effective strategic and operational decision-making. A sense of independence from DfE enabled prompt solutions to overcome problems encountered, while oversight was retained by the OA Board supported by DfE Heads of Delivery.
- **Project set-up.** All projects had aspects that took longer than initially anticipated to become established and gain momentum. Where projects were enhancing existing provision, there were fewer delays to implementation. The challenge of embedding projects was addressed in different ways, using: pilots and soft launches; effective use of subcontracted services; and establishment of networks.
- **Adaptation of projects.** The ILE projects were adaptable and flexible throughout their delivery. This enabled projects to be responsive to local needs and to develop place-specific solutions. The period of coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions was a challenge, with all involved compelled to adapt to new ways of working. According to almost all stakeholders (headteachers, families, practitioners), the projects adapted and dealt with the impact of COVID-19 restrictions very well. Projects assisted schools undertaking urgent support to: engage vulnerable young people in schoolwork; support families by delivering food parcels; maintain dialogue with families experiencing crises; and extend project timeframes. All projects utilised virtual communication, typically substituting face-to-face meetings with Zoom calls.
- **Collaboration.** There were strong examples of enhanced collaboration and joint working between different stakeholders across all projects. These collaborations supported successful implementation and delivery through the development of mutual trust, working together to solve common challenges, and sharing of data. Collaboration ranged from informal arrangements, between schools, through to formal arrangements, involving delivery practitioners working with local authority (LA) social services teams or schools formally working together jointly to deliver a project. Early evidence of culture change was identified in some projects (for example, schools exploring inclusive approaches before excluding pupils), with confidence among research participants that these changes would continue.
- **Engagement of schools.** Initial engagement with schools was a challenge across many of the projects. Some schools were resistant to approaches from practitioners. This resistance was driven by uncertainty about how successful this unknown or new intervention would be. Senior project staff continued dialogue with headteachers to explain the benefits of engaging with practitioner led

interventions. After further dialogue headteachers recognised the benefits of projects that were part of wider OA programmes of activity to improve social mobility. Early adopting schools often set a pathway for others.

- **Engagement of young people and families.** Engaging parents was initially challenging for most projects. This had a big impact on project resources and timescales where parental consent was required for interventions to support their children. Reasons included: concerns about statutory services; insufficient information; and embedded norms of historically poor parental engagement. In addition, parents declined parenting programmes due to perceptions of stigma and value of support, and lack of childcare. These challenges were generally overcome by practitioners patiently explaining the benefits for parents and their children.
- **Sustainability.** Different levels of sustainability were planned to be achieved, across the projects; although some were dependent on additional funding to continue. There was qualitative evidence of the value of these interventions, which may lead to further local funding. Existing partnerships were enhanced through the delivery of the ILE projects. The work of OAs, through ILE projects, increased the commitment by schools and other partners to a common endeavour at a LA level.

There was qualitative evidence that these projects have improved the outcomes (such as avoiding exclusion) of those who were participants or service users (including young people, parents and recruited teachers). The ILE projects were also reported to have generated positive results for practitioners, headteachers and teachers.

Introduction

The Opportunity Areas (OAs) programme was launched by the Department for Education (DfE) in 2017. The OA programme covers 12 local authority (LA) districts and was designed to increase social mobility through education related interventions. OAs were initially established as a 3-year programme, which was extended into a fourth and then a fifth year covering 2021 to 2022.

Each OA is supported by a Partnership Board, which is an advisory body whose members offer expertise and knowledge relevant to the local OA. These OA Boards have no legal status or statutory authority. The Board's role is to provide advice, recommendations, support and challenge to the DfE Head of Delivery. The OA Heads of Delivery were accountable to the DfE for their respective areas.

This summary research report explores the findings of 5 OA intervention-level evaluations (ILE) conducted between January 2019 and July 2021. All projects operated, in adapted ways, during the period of coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions between March 2020 and April 2021.

The projects were:

- **Norwich Inclusion Charter (NIC)** project included a variety of interventions to reduce suspensions and permanent exclusions in schools.
- **Team Around the School (TAS)** pupil inclusion project in Blackpool designed to reduce absence, disengagement with education, permanent exclusions and elective home education.
- **Inspire by Teaching Recruitment (IBTR)** project designed to support recruitment in North Yorkshire Coast schools.
- **Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing (MHEW)** project designed to support the mental health and emotional wellbeing of young people in Hastings.
- **School-to-School Support (S2SS)** project provided peer support between Bradford schools to improve underperforming schools.

Method overview

Three waves of fieldwork took place:

- **Wave 1 (January 2019 to December 2019):** This wave focused on the process aspects of project delivery.

- **Wave 2 (May 2020 to July 2020):** This wave explored how schools supported vulnerable pupils during the first COVID-19 lockdown (March 2020 to July 2020) and considered the implications of the interruptions on project delivery. The Bradford project was not part of this wave of fieldwork as activity was paused during this period.
- **Wave 3 (November 2020 to July 2021):** This wave assessed medium-term outcomes and perceived impacts arising from ILE projects.

Across the 5 projects fieldwork involved in-depth qualitative face-to-face, telephone and virtual interviews. These interviews were with many stakeholders including: project management staff, delivery agencies and practitioners, headteachers, teachers, other school staff, young people and parents (see Annex A). Some projects included quantitative surveys and triangulated qualitative case studies based around pupils or schools. All projects provided management information for analysis of their operational performance. Unit cost analysis was undertaken in the final wave.

Report structure

This report consists of:

- Part 1: Key overarching insights for future delivery from across the 5 projects.
- Part 2: Individual ILE research summaries for each of the 5 projects.

Part 1: Key insights for future delivery

There was qualitative evidence that the 5 ILE projects have improved the outcomes of participants (including young people, parents and recruited teachers). The ILE projects were also reported to have generated positive results for those delivering interventions (practitioners, headteachers and teachers).

Insights and learning for delivery of future projects emerged from the analysis of the 5 ILE projects. These were across the following areas:

- Place-based working
- Timescales
- Adaptation of projects
- Collaboration
- Engagement
- Sustainability.

Findings related to the individual reports, in particular what the perceived outcomes were, are outlined in the summaries section (Part 2 of this report). Detailed findings and background to all 5 ILE projects are available in the individual reports.

Place-based working

Key Findings Box 1: Place-based working:

- The tailored and bespoke design and delivery of the ILE projects were felt by respondents as key to tackling entrenched social mobility problems in their area.
- Respondents highlighted that a locally driven approach meant that strategic operational decision-making was more effective and tailored to the needs of their locality. As such this place-based approach encouraged buy-in among senior local stakeholders.

A place-based approach engendered a commitment to project delivery. This was demonstrated across all of the ILE projects, where individuals worked together in the location in response to locally identified needs. Those interviewed said projects had been tailored and adapted to the needs of their locality. Local stakeholders felt that projects were designed ‘in the area for the area’ and that they directly involved local organisations

in planning and delivery; for example, the focus on mental health in Hastings and reducing school exclusion in Blackpool. For both of these projects, the interventions were tailored to the local need through collaborative partnership working with local agencies. In Bradford too, headteachers felt the support was more tailored and relevant than other national school support programmes they had participated in. Box A provides an example where the design was locally developed.

Box A: Place-based influence on identification of schools (S2SS project)

Bradford OA worked with the LA, Regional Schools Commissioner and the teaching school to review data to identify schools requiring support. This locally driven approach used insight across a range of stakeholders to identify both the schools requiring support and the system leader schools that could support them.

The role of the OA Board, through selection, funding and oversight of the projects, also helped generate commitment across different organisations to work together. Stakeholders said the existence of the OA supported quicker agreement between organisations than would have been the case without those arrangements. For example, commitment to a common local initiative, overcame previous resistance to joint working, as evidenced by strengthened relationships between schools in Norwich through the NIC. These changes occurred because the OA created a focus for local decision-making to enable the expenditure of allocated funding.

Respondents perceived that the projects were embedded in the locality which enabled effective strategic and operational decision-making. A sense of independence from DfE, while simultaneously having Head of Delivery oversight and accountability helped to enable prompt solutions to overcome problems encountered. The following 3 boxes (B to D) give examples where the ILEs used their knowledge of the local area to make decisions about the running of the project.

Box B: Local insight influencing decision-making (MHEW project)

The MHEW working group, including LA, OA and NHS representatives, made key decisions on aspects of the project. The working group reported to the OA Board. Collating local stakeholders' views allowed evidence-informed decision making. Examples included: extending the Short-term Keywork service and including additional sessions of managing anxiety and school transition on the Parenting Support strand.

Box C: Local knowledge enhancing a tailored solution (IBTR project)

The project recruitment consultant drew on their existing knowledge of the area and was able to develop relationships with responsive schools. This enabled a demand-driven approach to address recruitment challenges. Recruitment strategies were adapted to the needs of each school rather than being driven by a structured programme formula.

Box D: Locally developed solutions (TAS project)

School Home Support (SHS), the TAS project delivery partner, is an example of an external provider contracted to provide complex case-based support to pupils and their families. They utilised workers from the locality, who brought a range of skills and expertise to the team. Beneficiaries felt confident working with people who knew the local area and were familiar with the challenges faced by families. Authority to act on situations as they emerged enabled these services to provide real-time support and avoid escalation of situations into bigger problems.

Project set-up

Key Findings Box 2: Project set-up

- Delays to set-up and implementation were experienced by all 5 of the ILEs. These were particularly prevalent where new approaches and partnerships needed to be established. Fewer delays resulted when existing provision was being enhanced.
- Pilots and soft launches were used effectively to overcome challenges of implementation. These helped encourage interest, iteratively improve the intervention as well as helping to spread the word of the intervention among other local stakeholders.

Timescales

All projects had aspects that took longer than initially anticipated to become established and gain momentum. Some of the projects faced challenges during the first few months of implementation which had knock on effects to overall timetables for delivery. More time than expected by project leads was generally needed for setting-up and establishing projects. Where projects were enhancing existing provision, there were fewer delays to implementation.

Reasons for delays included:

- Gaining agreement from schools to participate.
- Completing paperwork such as action plans and formal commitments or agreements.

For some projects, and schools, unplanned events, such as changes in senior leaders or Ofsted inspections, had a direct effect on school participation.

Headteachers and practitioners also reported that an extended period of intervention contributed to improved outcomes. This was because the extended period enabled more sustained relationships and effective support.

Embedding projects

The challenge of embedding projects was addressed in different ways across the ILE projects. Key elements that worked well in embedding the projects included:

- **Pilots and soft launches.**¹ Pilots and soft launches supported three projects in establishing their activities and to get individual schools involved. This was because the pilot or soft launch allowed the projects: to gain interest, demonstrate their value and learn the best approaches before full implementation. In some project strands pilots and soft launches were used because the delivery team had initial difficulties in convincing schools to participate, which these approaches helped manage. An example where a soft launch was beneficial is in the following box E.

Box E: Soft launch (IBTR Project)

IBTR completed initial engagement with a small number of schools that had strong interest in recruitment. This worked well to spread awareness of the project because it showed how the service worked and its value to local schools; a demonstration effect. Other schools then subsequently engaged with the project as they saw the benefits of the support.

- **Effective use of contracted services.** All projects involved some contracts with providers of services supporting project delivery. These covered: pupil and family support, recruitment consultancy and parenting programmes. When used effectively contracted services allowed for the focused delivery of the specific project elements without being distracted by wider parts of the project. This is unlike project staff who

¹ Pilots are where a small cohort is initially identified to participate in a project whereas soft launches are less defined using pragmatism to engage participants that agree first.

will have multiple focuses.

- **Establishment of networks or groups of schools.** The creation of cluster groups or networks of schools helped with dialogue and gaining agreement to engage with project activities. Co-ordination of these groups by a well-connected facilitator was an important attribute. Although these activities took time, and were resource intensive, they benefitted project stakeholders over the longer-term by supporting regular dialogue through their continued operation. The NIC project is an example where networks were used to embed the project, described in box F.

Box F: Network of schools (NIC project)

Project and school stakeholders pointed to improved networking as one of the most notable changes and achievements from the NIC project. They described a focus on inclusion with everyone pulling in the same direction – something which had not been achieved on this scale before. Respondents interviewed said getting secondary headteachers to engage with each other was a considerable achievement. Previously there was a culture of mistrust, and leadership not working together across schools. All secondary heads agreed that a sense of trust and transparency had been achieved through the collaboration of leaders. One secondary headteacher pointed out that they all shared their Improvement Plans in a way that would not have happened previously.

Adaptation of projects

Key Findings Box 3: Adaption of projects:

- Local ownership of the ILE projects enabled them to be flexible and adaptable throughout their delivery. As a result, this enabled the projects to be responsive to changes in local needs.
- There are examples from all 5 projects where adaptations occurred to better meet changing local requirements and iteratively improve service delivery. According to almost all stakeholders (headteachers, families, practitioners), the projects successfully adapted and dealt with the impact of COVID-19 restrictions.

The ILE projects were adaptable and flexible throughout their delivery. This was a result of their local ownership. Projects were locally driven and planned through the OA Boards rather than being centrally directed by DfE or using a one-size fits all approach. This enabled effective local decision-making mechanisms and greater flexibility in budgets to support adaptations. OA Boards received project updates and made informed decisions to adjust delivery, and focus, as required. This was evident across all 5 ILE projects.

This adaptable approach enabled projects to make changes quickly to meet the local needs. Within the projects this could be seen through funding, adding or changing specific elements. Two specific examples of projects that adapted to increase uptake and quality were the NIC and IBTR, the following boxes (G and H) explain this.

Box G: Project adaptation to enhance quality of delivery (IBTR project)

When the IBTR project struggled to stimulate interest from applicants outside of the North Yorkshire Coast they adapted the project by introducing new elements. For example, in the second phase of the project the OA approved a financial incentive package for out-of-area recruits. This enabled large candidate pools for hard-to-fill roles, ensuring the best match to the vacancy.

Box H: Adapting to the needs of primary schools (NIC project)

Norwich primary schools struggled to implement the inclusion champion role due to pressures on staff time and other priorities. Therefore, funding was used to support Enhanced Primary Inclusion Champions (EPIC) in 13 schools, which enabled more capacity for implementation of the inclusion champion role.

Adaptations in response to COVID-19

The period of COVID-19 restrictions was a challenge for schools as well as wider society. Schools, local communities, young people, and parents were compelled to adapt to new ways of working for which there was largely no blueprint. According to stakeholders (headteachers, families, practitioners) the 5 ILE projects adapted and dealt with the impact of the period of COVID-19 restrictions very well. For example, adaptations made changes to enable continued participation (Box I) or were to accommodate increased service demand (Box J).

Box I: Extending project timescales (S2SS project)

Bradford schools were unable to implement some aspects of action plans during COVID-19 interruptions. E.g., staff training or morning reading programmes. Schools were given additional support to help them revise their action plans and the period of support for the project was extended to allow greater time for action plan interventions to take place.

Box J: Adapted project support (MHEW project)

The need for mental health support increased due to pressures on families and young people as a result of COVID-19 interruptions. The Short-term Keywork service continued to receive referrals from schools, expanded its offer to include year 4 and moved to remote delivery. An additional keywork offer was introduced to offer emotional wellbeing and practical support for vulnerable families, while the i-Rock service ran Instagram Live sessions on a range of wellbeing issues.

Social distancing had a direct effect on normal operation, in 4 out of 5 projects, as they were generally predicated on face-to-face delivery. All projects utilised aspects of virtual communication in response to COVID-19 restrictions, typically substituting face-to-face meetings with video calls. Examples of this are given in boxes K and L.

Some of these adjustments may have led to lasting changes. At the time of research, schools and practitioners thought that some use of technology might become more prevalent. This was particularly the case in some parts of the IBTR teacher recruitment activity where online methods, such as not using paper copies of applications, were seen to make the recruitment process easier.

Box K: Adaptation to online modes of delivery (NIC project)

Primary to secondary transition programmes in Norwich adapted their approaches, using virtual school tours, Google Classroom demonstration lessons and a virtual day-long session. This helped achieve most of the objectives of the transition work; building confidence and familiarity for those due to start secondary school.

Another adaptation that was found in some ILEs in response to COVID-19 was that they refocused their activities to support the response to restrictions. Projects assisted schools by flexing delivery to temporarily undertake urgent support, to:

- Engage vulnerable young people in schoolwork and provide learning resources (an example is given in box M).
- Support families by delivering food parcels.
- Maintain dialogue with families experiencing crises.
- Extend project timeframes to accommodate delays.

These activities were not part of the original project design, but this highlights the teams' adaptation to the COVID-19 situation. Some of the adaptations involved working with other agencies that were under pressure. For example, the providers of TAS adapted

their support by working alongside local authority statutory services to manage the increased demand and lower levels of staff.

Box M: Improving access to technology (TAS project)

Schools that had existing spare hardware, such as computers and tablets, utilised it to assist young people who did not have sufficient access to technology. In Blackpool, practitioners arranged for IT hardware and broadband to be provided to families with vulnerable young people.

Collaboration

Key Findings Box 4: Collaboration

- Effective joint working between different organisations created the conditions for better communication and decision-making across the ILE projects.
- This collaboration helped to foster a culture for better communication and decision-making across multiple organisations. Some examples of this include mutual trust to solve common challenges, sharing of data and what works encouraging best practice.

Effective joint working between different organisations was a characteristic of ILE projects. This collaboration, which occurred because of the ILE projects, created the conditions for better communication and decision-making.

Across all 5 projects there were strong examples of enhanced collaboration and joint working in support of successful implementation and delivery. For example, through a development of mutual trust and working together to solve common challenges, or through sharing data and identifying what works to help share learning and encourage best practice.

Collaborative arrangements varied, including:

- Pairs of schools, typically in the same local authority, such as in the case of Bradford. Where peer support stimulated a collaborative culture between schools.
- Groups of schools within the local authority, such as in Blackpool and Norwich. This resulted in stronger bonds and communication between schools, particularly about pupil inclusion.
- Schools and the local authority, such as in North Yorkshire Coast. Arrangements involving schools and local authorities led to increased trust and willingness to co-operate. For example, some schools had been reluctant to use the local authority

recruitment service, but valued the support given by the consultant, who was employed by the local authority.

One example from the TAS project involved collaboration between the OA project and the local authority social services team. It is further described in box N.

Box N: Effective collaboration with social services (TAS project)

The TAS service worked with the local authority on the eligibility criteria to access TAS support. This was to prevent escalation of the individual cases to the local authority in the face of increased demand during the first COVID-19 lockdown (March 2020 to July 2020). As a result, SHS increased their caseload and supported statutory social services provision. This was largely through regular contact with families, delivery of food parcels and schoolwork materials and sharing of information and referral to relevant services. Delivery was adapted accordingly to overcome constraints of social distancing. Overall, this led to improved dialogue between TAS and statutory council services, and to quicker support to families.

Early evidence of culture change was identified in some projects. This was demonstrated through professional dialogue between stakeholders and attitudes to continuous improvement. There was confidence among research participants that these changes would continue. An example of where collaboration through participation in an ILE project showed benefits in the school culture is outlined in box O.

Box O: Recognising the benefits of school-to-school support (S2SS project)

Headteachers evidenced the benefits to their school from receiving support from a trusted system leader. The professional peer-to-peer dialogue influenced improvement in areas such as literacy learning through demonstration effects and through agreeing different teaching strategies. This perception of school improvement extended to school staff who started to recognise their schools had strengths as well as development areas. Staff talked about the positive experiences to learning from other schools through visits, through direct support and through professional relationships. System leaders also noted benefits to their school from these relationships.

Joint working between North Yorkshire Coast schools resulted in a service tailored to their own area. This overcame issues of trust while recognising they still competed in the teacher labour market. More detail is provided in box P.

Box P: Joint working between schools (IBTR project)

Having competed on recruitment for many years, 48 schools started to work together in a variety of ways:

- They committed to working with a recruitment consultant who operated a talent pool to support their recruitment.
- They operated joint recruitments when 2 schools were targeting similar roles.
- They reduced the level of direct poaching of staff.

Prior to the project similar support available from the local council was only used on a limited basis. The design of the project, with a dedicated recruitment consultant providing different levels of service, as agreed with each school, directly addressed their needs. The project shows evidence of culture change, with increased trust demonstrated by an agreement between the participating schools to collaboratively fund and continue the IBTR project after the OA funding period.

Another way in which collaboration was observed was through information-sharing between schools, the local authority and contracted providers. This was generally successful in supporting service delivery and led to positive outcomes for young people and their families. In some specific cases, sensitive information could not be shared, such as safeguarding concerns from schools to the ILE projects in Blackpool and Norwich. Box Q describes the collaboration and information sharing seen in the TAS project.

Box Q: Information sharing (TAS project)

Carefully designed consent arrangements existed in Blackpool to ensure families that signed up to the TAS project understood how their data would be used. Data was shared between Blackpool Council and the School Home Support (SHS) staff, who were delivering the TAS. This enabled SHS practitioners to gain full informed consent from families and to set out expectations for their engagement with support. However, there were some limitations to the data sharing. Some schools shared limited details of safeguarding concerns. This created a difficulty for SHS staff who had to operate a risk-based approach to family and pupil support. As a result, in some cases, support may have been limited, in others, staff may have been at risk to unknown situations.

Engagement

Key Findings Box 5: Engagement of schools, young people, and families

Schools

- Initial engagement with schools was challenging as a result of resistance to the ILE approaches. This was largely because of uncertainty about an unknown new intervention.

- Continued dialogue with headteachers explaining the benefits of engaging helped to overcome this resistance. OA Boards helped galvanise this, promoting these ILEs as flagship projects. This helped generate confidence that there was real commitment to the anticipated improvement.

Young people and Families

- Engagement of parents was also initially challenging for most projects; a precursor to involving their children. This had a big impact on resources and timescales.
- A variety of different strategies to engage parents helped overcome this. Examples included; adapting delivery to fit around parents' schedules, direct contact with parents as well as helping to address wider challenges first such as claiming benefits and debt management.

This section covers project engagement with schools and with pupils and parents.

Engagement of schools

Schools' participation in all 5 projects was voluntary. Initial engagement with schools was a challenge across many of the projects and some schools were resistant to initial approaches from ILE project staff. This resistance was driven by uncertainty about how successful an unknown or new intervention would be.

Senior project staff continued dialogue with headteachers to explain the benefits of engaging with practitioner led interventions. After further dialogue headteachers recognised the benefits of projects that were part of wider OA programmes of activity to improve social mobility. The communication from OA Boards that these were flagship projects, which had the support of senior stakeholders in the area, helped generate confidence that there was real commitment to the anticipated improvement.

In addition to the role of the OA Partnership Boards, early adopting schools could set a pathway for others to follow. This demonstrated to others that the intervention could also support their school in a similar way. The IBTR project made use of this form of engagement, as highlighted in box R. By increasing this engagement with schools, it also helped to embed the projects, as described in section on project set up.

Box R: Strategies to engage headteachers (IBTR project)

Word-of-mouth referral between headteachers of the IBTR recruitment consultant helped to establish the service. The recruitment consultant believed that traditional ways of promoting a new service using fliers and emails would not be effective. Instead, they identified needs and solved problems in early recruitments in early adopting schools.

They then relied on referrals, linked to successful appointments, to drive future demand. This was coupled with personal relationship-building and tailoring of services to each school's preferences.

Likewise, the role of trusted project staff, who drew on established relationships with schools, was important. Again, this reduced concerns that headteachers may have had about the project. An example of a project using trusted relationships is described in box S.

Box S: Drawing on established personal relationships (TAS project)

Appointment of a project manager with recent established relationships with headteachers helped to engage all secondary schools. Initially there was concern among some schools about how effective the TAS support would be. The project manager, a former headteacher, was able to explain how the project would work. In addition, a proactive approach from SHS staff, who established a regular presence at each school, also helped increase confidence in the service.

Engagement of young people and families

Engaging parents was initially challenging for most projects. This had a big impact on resources and timescales for interventions where parental consent was required for the child's participation. Some parents declined to participate initially for a number of reasons:

- **Concerns about statutory services.** Some parents were fearful or distrusted statutory services. They were concerned that projects explicitly or implicitly involved statutory services. This particularly applied to services that worked directly with their child.
- **Insufficient information.** Some parents wanted more information about an intervention before agreeing for their child to participate.
- **Embedded norms.** Parenting practitioners and school staff both reported that certain schools have historically suffered with poor parental engagement. This was said to be influenced by negative parental attitudes towards education and the transient local population in some parts of OAs.

In terms of parenting programmes, parents declined to participate for the following reasons:

- **Stigma.** Parenting support practitioners across 3 projects identified parental

stigma to formal parenting programmes. This necessitated careful explanation of such support to generate parental engagement.

- **Value.** The parenting practitioners interviewed for 2 projects shared the view that structured parenting programmes tended not to be held in especially high regard by parents. This was mainly because parents did not have a particularly well-informed view on the potential benefits for themselves and their children.
- **Childcare.** For parents without ready access to childcare support, it was often difficult to find the time for, and/or commit to, structured parenting activities.

In response to these challenges engaging parents in parenting programmes, the parenting practitioners made varied and concerted efforts to engage parents. Some practitioners explained that one approach to overcoming stigma was to avoid a direct focus on parenting improvement. Box T describes how the MHEW project took this approach to parental engagement.

Box T: Parental engagement (MHEW project)

It became apparent early in the delivery of the Parenting Support strand that parents were more likely to engage in activities that were not overtly focused on 'improving parenting'. In particular, parents tended to be more willing to attend sessions on online safety and bullying, prompting the practitioners to use such sessions as a 'hook' for subsequent participation in Positive Parenting Programme (Triple P) activities. This had some success, but was still challenging to meet project targets, in terms of numbers of parents signed up. The Parenting Support team said they had observed parents attaching a stigma to formal parenting programmes, with some assuming that such programmes are only for 'bad parents'. They also saw it as an admission of guilt or failure if they took part. The significance of this challenge is echoed in much of the existing research evidence (e.g. Butt, 2009 and Mansell, 2013).

More generally, projects used a variety of the following activities to engage with parents:

- Distributing printed leaflets via a range of community and educational settings.
- Attending community-based events and local food banks.
- Attending parents' evenings and other school-based events.
- Direct contact by phone or knocking on doors.
- Addressing wider challenges first (where project resources allowed), for example, claiming benefits and debt management.

Service providers explained that the best approaches to parental engagement involved building up trust over time through honesty, openness, patience and tenacity. They all explained that informed parental consent was necessary as parental involvement was often important to the solution for their child. Box U provides an example from the NIC on the importance of parental consent.

Box U: Importance of parental consent (NIC project)

Parental consent and commitment was particularly important for interventions that involved parents re-enforcing new types of communication or changing routines at home. For example, the Benjamin Foundation offered Norwich families a bespoke 'Pathway to Inclusion' plan, which incorporated parent coaching, one-to-one sessions with pupils (6 sessions), home visits, multi-agency meetings and signposting to other support.

Sustainability

Key Findings Box 6: Sustainability

- Different levels of sustainability were planned to be achieved, across the projects. Some were dependent on additional funding to continue.
- The work of OAs, through ILE projects, increased the commitment by schools and other partners to a common endeavour at a LA level.

Sustainability of the ILE projects was a key area of focus for the OA delivery teams and Partnership Boards. Sustainability, as a term, meant different things to the individual projects. It was described as:

- The continuation of the whole project. This could be without OA funding or through other funding streams.
- Maintaining parts of the project.
- Sustaining the improvements or networks that they had introduced as part of the project.

Qualitative research identified differing levels of sustainability across each of the ILE projects. These were either achieved at the time of research or planned to be achieved. Some of the projects were dependent on additional funding for this to continue. To overcome this and achieve sustainable continuation, projects adapted services, sought match funding from their local authority, and, in the case of IBTR, an alternative model of having participating schools contribute to a shared pot of funding were considered.

In addition to this, existing partnerships were enhanced through the delivery of the ILE projects. The strength of the relationships between local authorities and schools (especially academy trusts) were reported by respondents to have declined in recent years. The work of OAs, through ILE projects, has increased the commitment by schools and other partners to a common endeavour at a local authority level. There is evidence that sustainability of the project was also witnessed through a changing of school practices and attitudes. In Norwich, the co-ordinator role helped to improve headteacher dialogue, leading to better arrangements for pupils, these are further described in box V. Such new networks and ways of working were hoped to be sustained beyond the lifetime of the projects.

Box V: School networking (NIC project)

Headteachers gave evidence of how they now engage in more regular and solution-focused dialogue with each other. This was reported to result in better arrangements for pupils and to help reduce suspensions and exclusions. All fieldwork respondents agreed that the co-ordinator role across schools demonstrated the value of facilitated communication within and between schools. It was hoped that this could be continued.

In Hastings, additional funding for the project was sustained through the LA and the Hastings and Rother CCG. As a result, the MHEW project continued to operate beyond OA funding. This is outlined in box W.

Box W: MHEW support (MHEW project)

The four main strands of the MHEW project within the scope of the evaluation have all continued beyond the end of their OA funding period. Of particular note is the introduction of a successor service to Short-term Keywork, provided through local NHS-funded Mental Health Support Teams and offered to 11 schools in Hastings.

Part 2: Summaries of ILE projects

The following section contains a slightly amended executive summary for each of the full ILE reports. For full findings and details please see the relevant full reports.

Team Around the School (Blackpool OA)

The Team Around the School (TAS) project was an initiative developed by the Blackpool Opportunity Area (OA). It aimed to address the issue of permanent exclusion and poor attendance in the town's 8 secondary schools. TAS is part of a wider portfolio of inclusion projects which collectively sought to address the needs of disadvantaged young people and for wider social mobility in Blackpool.

The TAS project delivered the planned activity, despite some delays and disruptions due to coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions. All 8 secondary schools in Blackpool referred young people at risk of disengagement with school to School Home Support (SHS), a charity contracted through the project, to support young people and their families. SHS practitioners checked eligibility, assessed individuals' needs through the development of an action plan, communicated with school staff, delivered a range of support to young people and their families and reviewed the support and supported progression from the project. Support lasted an average of 8 months and included coaching, listening, advice, resolution of problems and referral to other organisations. COVID-19 disruptions extended the length of support and compounded some of the challenges faced by young people and their families.

Evaluation Aims and Methodology

A mixed methods evaluation aimed to explore the delivery of the project, including whether it was implemented as planned and what worked well and not so well across the different elements of the project. It also planned to assess the impact of the project on reducing permanent exclusion as well as conducting a cost benefit analysis. Challenges with the selected target measures, lack of a comparator group and the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on data availability, meant that the impact component of this evaluation and the cost benefit analysis was scaled back from the original design.

Three waves of data collection fieldwork took place between May 2019 and June 2021. This involved qualitative interviews with headteachers, TAS leaders, school teams, the SHS team, young people, parents, alongside in-depth case studies of young people. The SHS dataset and other data from schools and Blackpool Council demonstrated the characteristics of the TAS cohort, support provided, and distance travelled in relation to 10 Outcomes Ladder (OL) areas.

Key Findings

Implementation and Delivery

Delivery. A total of 422 cases (each case included the young person and other members of their family who were being supported by the project) were referred to SHS. Of these, 327 were supported by the TAS project. This exceeded the project target of 200. Those supported by SHS were predominantly at risk of suspension or permanent exclusion. Just under two-fifths (38% or 163 of 422) of all young people referred to TAS graduated from the project by August 2021. A further 70 participants (17%) were active cases continuing to receive support. Just over a fifth (22% or 94) of young people did not progress onto support and the same number (22% or 94) commenced support but left the project without graduating.

Time investment for set-up. Working with schools took longer than anticipated with regards to setting up and engagement. TAS leaders hoped that schools would have engaged as soon as the project started but some did not engage for a few months after the start.

Initial engagement. Practitioners overcame the challenge of engaging with an often transient population in Blackpool (due to seasonal work and families moving into and out of the area) and parents' suspicions of statutory services. Practitioner persistence and reassurance did, over time, engage some of these families who were resistant to support, although there remained a small hardcore group who would not engage.

Independence of support. The SHS team and schools placed an emphasis on the independence of the service from school and local authority statutory services. This was important in successfully securing the initial consent and engagement of families (who valued having someone neutral to speak to).

Communication and relationships building. Through liaison and proactive communication, the TAS project provided a bridge between home and school. Practitioners highlighted that relationship building was key to successful engagement, investing time and being persistent were important. Over-dependence on the SHS practitioners was an issue in a few cases, which took up time that might have been spent on other cases. Overall, once a trusting relationship between pupils or families and the practitioner was in place, engagement with the support offered was successful. This typically involved reiteration of the support delivery process and multiple one-to-one contacts. The views of evaluation participants demonstrated a consensus that working in partnership and to support the work of other services or agencies was a central element to the success of the TAS project.

Range of support. SHS staff provided a range of support and advice to young people and families. This included: emotional support; parenting skills; communication skills;

financial skills; educational support; housing advice; and health and wellbeing support. The most prevalent areas of need were emotional and mental health issues for parents and relationship issues (with parents/family and peers) for young people. The support provided was wide-ranging with flexibility to adapt provision to the needs of young people and their families. Support was provided in a variety of settings (at school, home or in the community). Parents or young people would call SHS when in crisis which helped to stop escalation. Planned group working was less successful with parents; this was attributed by practitioners to poor emotional or mental health, an unwillingness or inability to travel, and responsibilities at home.

Signposting and referral to other local services were key elements of the support. This relied on SHS's good local knowledge and understanding of service provision, alongside a willingness to accompany parents and/or young people to attend.

Responding to COVID-19: The project's flexible delivery model adapted during COVID-19 interruptions; working well to engage and support hard to reach families. The COVID-19 crisis forced a change in the approach to delivery. The reduced opportunities to have face-to-face communication and to meet with pupils and parents in their home were adapted, alongside the provision of additional elements such as school materials, IT equipment, food and wider support to families.

Benefits, Outcomes and Impacts

Assessment of outcomes and impacts was limited due to lack of comparison data and challenges with data as a result of COVID 19. Findings are based on the Outcomes Ladder (OL) and qualitative assessments of the impact of the programme by stakeholders and young people and their families.

Benefits for schools

Schools and families reported better communication and a higher awareness of the situation at home. Participating schools noted that information, such as insights into pupils' home circumstances, provided by TAS were invaluable in better managing and responding to the needs of the young people. Most schools considered TAS to be offering a valuable service and were keen for it to continue.

TAS was recognised by school staff as a valuable extension to the limited capacity in schools for undertaking intensive one-to-one work with this group of young people, and to engage with families. Furthermore, TAS support contributed to the identification and assessment of learning difficulties (e.g., dyslexia) and mental health problems in some pupils.

Outcomes for young people and families

The TAS project benefited young people and families in Blackpool who were on the verge of permanent exclusion. This has been demonstrated through the Outcomes Ladder tool and the qualitative evidence illustrated in this report.

The SHS team used an OL tool to measure the 'distance travelled' by families further to the support.² The 10 outcomes addressed health and wellbeing (child and parent), safety, school attendance and behaviour, learning and behaviour at home, and parental support needs. All but one family made progress on at least one of the 10 outcomes. Just over three-fifths (62% or 53 out of 87) families made positive progress in five or more outcomes.

Based on the perceptions of young people, families, school teams, and practitioners, it was stated that positive outcomes were achieved because of TAS support. While quantitative evidence is limited, qualitative evidence suggested progress towards the targets initially identified in the project.

Young people reported that they had a greater motivation to learn, improved resilience, confidence and self-esteem, alongside greater aspiration, and engagement with career planning. Many young people outlined improved mental and emotional health (e.g., through learning anger management strategies).

Parents reported gaining new skills through participation in TAS. This included being better able to manage their child's behaviour at home. Parents valued having a 'listening ear'. Their living and work circumstances were reported by parents and SHS staff, to have improved due practical help received.

For schools and TAS leaders who were interviewed, there was a perception that improvements in young people's attendance and attitudes to school, and behaviour in class were associated with the support provided by TAS. While absence rates on average increased in Blackpool secondary schools, the view among TAS leaders, the school and SHS teams was that attendance at school had improved for some young people because of the TAS project.

There was a consensus among interviewees that TAS had resulted in fewer permanent exclusions and TAS data indicated that, of the pupils who graduated from the project, subsequently none were permanently excluded. Over the lifetime of TAS, the rate of permanent exclusions among Blackpool's secondary schools has fallen. However, due to COVID-19 disruptions, a lack of a comparator group, and multiple exclusion projects

² This involved rating 10 different outcomes on a 5-point Likert scale (scores: 1=not coping, 2=some concerns, 3=just managing, 4=feel stronger, and 5=needs met). Further details are included in Appendix B

operating in Blackpool at the same time, the reduction in permanent exclusions cannot be attributed to the TAS project.

Project leaders, school teams and practitioners interviewed felt that TAS had, despite the overall increasing trend across Blackpool, helped to prevent young people moving to Elective Home Education. This was noted particularly among families seen as least able to cope with delivering education at home. The effects of COVID-19 disruption have been cited as reasons for increase in EHE following sustained periods of home schooling.

Conclusion

The TAS project has benefitted the educational development of young people at risk of permanent exclusion in Blackpool. The benefits of a holistic and tailored support package that incorporates a young person's family and home situation was recognised by all evaluation participants as important elements in achieving these outcomes. Addressing the identified needs required a multi-component response that tackled social issues alongside the provision of specialist expertise. The project, provided by a third sector organisation (SHS) that was independent from statutory provision, was seen by evaluation participants as important in gaining the trust and confidence of families. Many participants considered that the TAS project prevented the need for referral to statutory services by intervening at an earlier stage and avoiding progression to a crisis situation.

School-to-School Support project (Bradford OA)

School-to-School Support (S2SS) was an initiative developed by the Bradford Opportunity Area (OA) in 2018 to improve schools serving children from disadvantaged backgrounds, with the wider aim of supporting social mobility.

The S2SS project delivered the planned activity, despite some delays and disruptions due to Covid-19 restrictions. Initially, 26 Bradford OA schools were supported, with a further 6 schools added at a later stage. Schools with high proportions of disadvantaged pupils that would benefit from extra support were paired with experienced system leaders, they attended 'Implementation Matters (IM)' workshops designed to guide the development and implementation of action plans, together developed an action plan, and delivered actions to address school improvement. Schools received support from the system leader including assisting in the development and implementation of action plans and wider tailored support on school improvement. The S2SS project was originally designed to take place over four school terms, but due to Covid-19 disruptions, took place over almost 2 years for the initial cohort.

Evaluation Aims and Methodology

The evaluation aimed to explore the delivery of the project, including whether it was implemented as planned and what worked well and not so well in the different elements of the project. It also planned to assess the impact of the project on school improvement as well as conducting a cost benefit analysis. Challenges with the selected target measures (including an aim of improving Ofsted grades), lack of a comparator group and the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on data availability, meant that the impact component of this evaluation and the cost benefit analysis was scaled back from the original design.

Evaluation fieldwork took place between May 2019 and April 2021 and involved qualitative interviews with headteachers, teachers, system leaders and strategic stakeholders, 8 in-depth school case studies, a survey of teachers and review of action plans. Quantitative data analysis included school management information, school performance data, and Ofsted inspection data.

Key Findings

Implementation and Delivery

Evidence based practice: IM workshops covered a range of areas related to implementation science including logic modelling, 'active ingredients', outcomes definition, monitoring fidelity, measuring progress, and building sustainability. Headteachers recognised the value of these workshops, helping them to gain a stronger understanding of why and how an intervention was intended to work. This helped with effective implementation and was believed to help achieve real improvement. Some headteachers reported they already had this knowledge and questioned why the workshops were compulsory. The timing of the workshops could have been better synchronised as some participants attended workshops after submitting action plans, meaning they were less able to feed learnings into action plans.

Bespoke school action plans: The review of action plans found that the development process typically resulted in a set of well-researched, clearly defined actions. Planned activities were tailored to the needs of individual schools, with headteachers and system leaders collaborating to design bespoke action plans. The most common areas of focus were pupil attainment, leadership and governance, teaching quality and curriculum and learning. Strategies were rooted in evidence, underpinned by EEF 'active ingredients' and other elements covered in the IM workshops. Action plans were adapted over time, as the headteacher and system leader developed their understanding of a particular issue and in response to COVID-19 challenges. There were some challenges in monitoring progress, for example because targets were not always clear, or progress reports not completed in sufficient detail.

Matching: Matching was based on school demographics and an overview of the needs of the school. Headteachers and system leaders were generally positive about the schools they were matched with. Relationships went beyond the direct relationship between the headteacher and system leader; other staff in supported schools were involved in joint working with experts from system leader schools. Having similar cohorts of pupils, being located within relatively close proximity to the other school and having a similar vision and ethos were important factors to facilitating successful relationships, according to headteachers.

Flexibility of Support: There was no 'one size fits all' approach to system leaders' support. Some were more hands on and provided a formal 'inspectoral' type role, while others took on a more passive 'listening' role. Having the right mix of being supportive without being overbearing was valued. The support provided by system leaders covered: coaching and support for decision making with headteachers; establishing new or develop existing systems; and modelling good practice in many areas of school operation from preparation, teaching, monitoring and assessment. Interviewees believed that there was the need for flexibility and adapting strategies when initial approaches were unsuccessful and communication (particularly between the system leader and the headteacher) was identified as critical throughout.

Length of Support: The importance of the long-sustained period of support over at least four terms was emphasised by research participants as enabling relationships to grow and adapt and for change to embed. Many participants also expected to remain in contact once the formal project support period had ended.

Benefits, Outcomes and Impacts

Benefits: Headteachers described a range of benefits of the S2SS project:

- Access to independent expert advice and knowledge. In particular, the objective perspective of a system leader was important to help assess priorities.
- Having a strategic ally external to the school to provide support and challenge them and their team.
- Developing a collaborative approach to improving the school.
- Personal development for headteachers, by recognising development areas and challenging themselves to address these.
- Networking through relationships linked to their system leader's school, contact with other S2SS schools (via IM workshops) and through the Bradford teaching school hub.

- System leaders also noted a variety of benefits for themselves and their school, including developing their own professional skills and knowledge, and giving their staff opportunities for development. Headteachers and system leaders reported benefits to pupils of improved teaching quality and better-focused programmes of learning.

School outcomes and impacts: An original aim of the project was for schools to improve by one Ofsted grade. There were challenges to using this measure to assess the project's impact due to differing timescales and inspection frameworks which were exacerbated by COVID-19 as inspections did not take place for a period. In addition, there was no feasible comparator group to enable assessment of impact.

During interviews for the 8 case study schools, headteachers and system leaders estimated their Ofsted grades before and after support, where actual grades did not exist. Through this method, 5 schools were graded as good after support, having progressed from a lower prior Ofsted grade, 2 others remained as 'requires improvement' and one was felt to have become inadequate. Headteacher and system leader views regarding the contribution of the S2SS project to Ofsted grade improvement were generally positive, although greater attribution was made by some than others. This finding should be treated with caution as it is on subjective judgement of their own schools.

Evaluation findings related to project level outcomes were limited due to lack of data and changes to plans as a result of Covid-19 disruption, which limited pre/post measurement. Headteachers, system leaders and teachers reported that improvements had been made as a result of the S2SS. There were also examples across the 8 case study schools where they documented improvement in areas targeted by the S2SS action plans. Attributes of the project that enabled these improvements were: implementation planning and preparation; effective joint working with a systems leader; use of evidence-based interventions which were monitored to ensure they were delivered with fidelity.

There were encouraging signs in some schools that changes and improvements would be sustained and embedded for the longer-term.

Conclusion

S2SS gave headteachers of schools with high proportions of disadvantaged pupils an opportunity to deliver a bespoke evidence-based action plan implemented in collaboration with an external system leader. The S2SS project was generally well received amongst participants, with all case study schools reporting that improvements had been achieved in most areas targeted by action plans. IM workshops, while not always best sequenced, helped to construct a robust evidence-based action plan. Working relationships between system leaders and headteachers varied according to the schools' need. This tailored and flexible approach helped build strong partnerships

between system leaders and headteachers and their wider schools, which many aimed to continue once the formal period of support was completed.

Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Project (Hastings OA)

The Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing (MHEW) Project was an initiative developed by the Hastings Opportunity Area (OA) in 2018. The project aimed to provide early intervention support to promote children's and young people's resilience, social and emotional skills and self-regulation.

The MHEW Project delivered the planned activity, despite some delays and disruptions due to coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions. There have been six different strands to the MHEW Project, together receiving total funding of £1.4m between September 2018 and July/August 2021. Four of these six strands were the main focus of this evaluation:

- **Short-term Keywork** provided support to pupils with low-level emotional wellbeing concerns. It was delivered primarily via a 12-week programme of one-to-one support sessions by trained keywork practitioners in schools. This switched to telephone/video calls when COVID-19 restrictions applied.
- **Parenting Support** offered the Positive Parenting Programme (Triple P) to parents. Triple P sought to equip parents with practical strategies to build strong relationships with their children, manage behaviours and prevent problems from escalating.³
- **i-Rock** is a drop-in service for 14–25-year-olds, offering advice and support on emotional and mental wellbeing, employment, education and housing. Funding through the OA enabled i-Rock to open five days a week (previously it was open three days a week) and provide in-house wellbeing interventions for young people.
- The **Whole School Approach** strand offered a bespoke package of mental health-related support and consultancy to schools in Hastings.

Evaluation Aims and Methodology

The evaluation aimed to assess the efficacy of the MHEW Project approach, namely early intervention and support, joint commissioning and a delivery model that involves schools, the local authority, the voluntary sector and the NHS.

³ There are five different levels to Triple P, discussed in more detail in the main report. These are: Level 1 - communication strategy; Level 2 - one-time assistance via one-off seminars or 'Brief Primary Care' sessions (a one-off conversation with a practitioner); Level 3 - one-to-one interventions of between three and six sessions, plus discussion groups on specific parenting topics; Level 4 - known as 'Standard Triple P', this involves more intensive one-to-one support and is delivered over ten one-hour sessions; Level 5 - intensive support for families with complex needs.

The evaluation was structured into three waves. Wave 1 explored the implementation, delivery and early outcomes of the MHEW Project. Wave 2 reviewed the adaptations introduced to address COVID-19 restrictions. Wave 3 focused on levels of need and demand for mental health and emotional wellbeing support (particularly following the re-opening of schools in March 2021) and the outcomes and impacts generated by the MHEW Project. Unfortunately, due to quantitative data constraints as a result of COVID-19, and ethical concerns prohibiting the adoption of a control group, a robust impact assessment on the outcomes and impacts was not possible and therefore a qualitative approach was taken instead. Research participants included Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs), teachers, senior managers in schools, strand leads, practitioners, young people and parents/carers.

Key Findings

Implementation and delivery

Need and demand. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, SENCOs and other school staff agreed that demand for mental health and emotional wellbeing support amongst pupils in Hastings was increasing. They attributed this to a range of factors including worsening levels of parental mental health, local economic and social deprivation and increasing use/prevalence of social media. Anxiety, low self-esteem, eating disorders, self-harm and problems relating to resilience and emotional intelligence were reported most frequently.

Following the re-opening of schools in March 2021, interviewees consistently spoke of large increases in the number of pupils presenting with mental health and emotional wellbeing issues and of those issues becoming more serious. They included social anxiety, attachment issues and self-harm.

Short-term Keywork. Participating schools engaged well with the Short-term Keywork service when it was introduced, welcoming the Keyworkers into the schools and providing appropriate facilities for the support sessions. Ineligible referrals (for example, pupils with more severe mental health problems) were an issue in the early stages of delivery, but as the service became more established and better understood within schools, the number of ineligible referrals reduced considerably.

Parenting Support. From the outset of the MHEW Project, it proved challenging to engage parents in structured parenting programmes. As a consequence, the Parenting Support strand did not achieve its original targets. For example, 205 parents took part in Primary Care interventions against a target of 300 (69% of target), while 401 parents took part in discussion groups against a target of 660 (61% of target). The parenting practitioners attributed this to a combination of factors for parents including: a stigma around formal parenting programmes; limited awareness of the benefits that such programmes can offer; and having childcare issues that prevented attendance.

i-Rock expansion. The i-Rock service moved from being open three days a week to five days a week as planned. By the end of December 2019, it had exceeded its target for young people supported by 64% (787 young people compared with a target of 480 young people). i-Rock staff developed effective relationships with statutory and voluntary services in Hastings and became recognised as an important part of the mental health and emotional wellbeing landscape in the town. However, the recruitment of psychology specialists to the i-Rock team took several months longer than expected, delaying the full implementation of the i-Rock expansion and meaning that young people could not be offered in-house wellbeing interventions until early 2020.

Whole School Approach⁴. This strand has involved mental health training for school staff, consultancy for schools on organisation-wide approaches to mental health, and support for schools to develop Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) resources, lessons and learning. It was arguably the most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic as it became very difficult for school staff to commit time to training or developmental activities, especially when schools were closed to all but keyworkers' children and vulnerable pupils.

Responding to COVID-19 restrictions. Each of the strands responded quickly and flexibly to the first national COVID-19 lockdown (March to July 2020). The Short-term Keywork service continued to receive referrals from schools, expanded its offer to include year 4 pupils and moved to remote delivery. On the Parenting Support strand, group sessions were delivered via Microsoft Teams and covered the full range of Triple P. Additional sessions were run on managing anxiety and school transitions. i-Rock moved to a virtual offer via phone, email, text and video calls, and also introduced Instagram Live sessions. The Whole School Approach strand adapted by offering online training courses originally intended for face-to-face delivery, along with 'top tips' documents and a mental health guide for schools.

Benefits Outcomes and Impacts

Short-term Keywork. Between September 2018 and April 2021, the service supported 377 young people via one-to-one sessions (94% of target). More than four-fifths (85%) of the young people reported an improvement in their anxiety and depression following those sessions. Qualitative feedback on the service was overwhelmingly positive throughout the evaluation. Pupils enjoyed the sessions and consistently spoke of the

⁴ The original design of the Whole School Approach strand was in keeping with the principles promoted by Public Health England and the Department for Education in the following guidance document: [Promoting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/424242/Promoting_children_and_young_people_s_mental_health_and_wellbeing_-_GOV.UK.pdf). However, the challenges and constraints subsequently faced by the Whole School Approach strand, mainly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, made it difficult to embody all of those principles to the extent that was originally intended. The findings of this report pre-date the DfE offer to state schools and colleges of training grants to access quality assured senior mental health lead training [Senior mental health lead training - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/424242/Promoting_children_and_young_people_s_mental_health_and_wellbeing_-_GOV.UK.pdf).

support having had positive effects on their levels of anxiety, calmness, happiness and self-belief. For some pupils, this had led to them feeling more comfortable attending school and being better able to concentrate in lessons. Parents agreed and had observed changes in their child's behaviour, demeanour and/or wellbeing. School staff believe that the Short-term Keywork support has helped to prevent mental health and emotional wellbeing issues from escalating.

Parenting Support. Between September 2018 and August 2020, 2,445 parents took part in Triple P activities at Levels 2 to 5. Qualitative feedback gathered for the evaluation suggests that parents have typically gained a (better) range of tools and strategies to help manage the issues they faced and that their self-confidence improved. They described the parenting practitioners as well-informed, non-judgemental and helpful, and said that the support had helped to improve relationships with their children.

i-Rock expansion. Between April 2019 and August 2020, 1,229 young people received an initial triage by i-Rock staff, and 666 received a wellbeing intervention, in both cases exceeding target. More than 90% of young people reported feeling less distressed following their triage, and 99% said they would recommend i-Rock to a friend. Qualitative feedback was more limited but suggested that i-Rock provided an environment in which young people felt comfortable and safe asking for support. The qualitative feedback also indicated that it was helpful for young people to be able to access advice and support on a range of topics (e.g., housing, alcohol, drugs and wellbeing) in one place.

Whole School Approach. Quantitative survey feedback collected by the Whole School Approach practitioners, whilst limited, was very positive: 63 of 64 school staff (from across three different schools) said that they felt better able to contribute to a whole school approach to mental health and emotional wellbeing, and 12 school senior leaders all reported improvements in the promotion of mental health and resilience in their schools. The associated qualitative feedback suggests that where school staff engaged with the Whole School Approach strand, they generally found it very beneficial.

Sustainability. The four main strands of the MHEW Project have continued beyond the end of their OA funding period. From January 2022, a successor to the Short-term Keywork service will be introduced, provided through local NHS-funded Mental Health Support Teams⁵. Funding has been secured for the Parenting Strand up to March 2022 and i-Rock remains open five days a week. Numerous outputs from the Whole School Approach strand (e.g., short films hosted on YouTube) will remain available after the OA funding comes to an end.

⁵ In 2018 NHS England and DfE began rolling out Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) in schools and colleges to offer early intervention for pupils and students with mild to moderate mental health needs. No MHSTs were operational in Hastings until 2022. <https://www.england.nhs.uk/mental-health/cyp/trailblazers/>

Conclusion

The multifocal nature of the MHEW project has been both a key feature and a key strength of its design and delivery. It provided new services, or expanded existing ones, at various points on a continuum of need, from lower-level mental health and emotional wellbeing issues (Short-term Keywork) to crisis intervention (i-Rock). It recognised the influence of parenting styles and parental stress on young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing (Parenting Support) and sought to instil organisation-wide good practice (Whole School Approach). The model adopted by the MHEW Project benefited the young people in Hastings by impacting positively on different, and very influential, areas of their day-to-day lives. While each strand has had its own priorities, targets and staff teams, the evidence gathered through this evaluation suggests the project as a whole has increased the awareness of, and has augmented the response to, mental health and emotional wellbeing challenges in Hastings.

Inspire by Teaching Recruitment (North Yorkshire Coast OA)

The Inspire by Teaching Recruitment (IBTR) project was an initiative developed by the North Yorkshire Coast Opportunity Area (OA). It was launched in 2018 to address teacher recruitment difficulties in Scarborough, Whitby and Filey.

The IBTR project developed a centralised model offering recruitment support to all schools in the North Yorkshire Coast area. It involved the use of a recruitment consultant to support schools in attracting additional teaching talent into the area and fill their school vacancies. The project also offered financial incentives, linked to recruitment and retention, to support particularly hard to fill vacancies. The IBTR project was a different approach to the traditional model of schools, in the North Yorkshire Coast area, each managing their own individual recruitment.

Evaluation Aims and Methodology

The evaluation aimed to explore the delivery of the project, including whether it was implemented as planned and what worked well and not so well in the different elements of the project. It also planned to assess the impact of the project through a cost benefit analysis. Challenges of coronavirus (COVID -19) affected data availability, meaning that the cost benefit analysis was scaled back from the original design. An analysis of unit cost savings was conducted instead.

Evaluation fieldwork took place between May 2019 and May 2021 and involved qualitative interviews with headteachers of participating schools and recruited teachers covering 3 waves of fieldwork. Quantitative analysis of project management information was undertaken covering all recruitments and associated advertising. However, the

quantitative analysis was limited due to lack of data about vacancy trends prior to the introduction of IBTR.

Key findings

Implementation and delivery

Effective recruitment. The recruitment consultant developed a personalised approach to both headteachers recruiting and to teachers being recruited. The knowledge, enthusiasm and personalised approach of the recruitment consultant was key to the project's success as it ensured better matching of staff to recruited roles. Headteachers and recruited teachers were satisfied with the personalised support and centralised delivery model provided by IBTR. Headteachers felt that IBTR addressed their recruitment barriers through tailored support (e.g., sifting). Secondary schools tended to retain greater control of the process than primary schools. In some cases, secondary headteachers preferred to undertake certain elements themselves such as leading interviews. There was a dependency of this personalised approach on the individual recruitment consultant, so it may have been challenging in the short-term to replace them.

Talent pool. The establishment of a 'talent pool' of teachers interested in working in the North Yorkshire Coast area facilitated a forward pipeline of potential teacher recruits. The teacher recruitment web portal promoted interest in teaching in the area and helped to reduce advertising costs. Headteachers indicated in interviews that the pool of talent available through the project gave them better choices and improved the quality of teachers moving into the area.

Flexibility of support. The reputation of IBTR was enhanced by how it responded to COVID-19 interruptions. This was achieved by the successful introduction of virtual recruitment practices and the continuation of the high-quality personalised service by the recruitment consultant.

Take-up of financial incentives to fill shortage vacancies. IBTR filled 32 hard to fill vacancies using financial incentives. Headteachers thought that it was unlikely that these vacancies would have been filled with the same quality of candidates had the incentives not been available. All financial incentive vacancies were in secondary schools (apart from 3 primary senior leadership positions). Nearly three-fifths (19 or 59%) of financial incentive vacancies were in either STEM subjects or senior leadership positions. All posts attracting at least one of the financial incentives were filled by candidates from outside the North Yorkshire Coast area.

Benefits, outcomes and impacts

Vacancies filled. Over 3 years of operation the project successfully filled 247 school vacancies in the North Yorkshire Coast area across participating schools (12 secondaries⁶ and 34 primaries). Most vacancies filled (73% or 181) were teaching positions although some non-teaching vacancies were also filled (teaching assistants, administrators, senior leaders). Some schools had a higher concentration of vacancies filled than the average. For example, 2 schools accounted for over half (64 or 54%) of secondary vacancies.

Increased recruitment from outside the North Yorkshire Coast area. IBTR attracted new talent into the North Yorkshire Coast area with a fifth (20% or 49) of vacancies filled from outside the area. Headteachers consulted as part of this evaluation confirmed that prior to IBTR it was rare for them to recruit teachers from outside the North Yorkshire Coast area.

Benefits to headteachers included a tailored service giving them as much or as little involvement as they preferred. They recognised that the role of the recruitment consultant saved them time and felt that this enabled a better field of applicants than they would otherwise have achieved.

Benefits to recruited teachers included support and advice from the recruitment consultant, visiting their school before term started and learning about systems used with in their school. Recruited teachers also felt they received a personalised approach that helped them secure their position.

Retention of quality teaching staff. Headteachers consulted, felt that IBTR had improved teacher retention. Specifically, they thought there were fewer teachers leaving in the first twelve months after appointment. There is tentative evidence to suggest that IBTR has achieved high levels of teacher retention; with 85% of teachers recruited onto permanent contracts through IBTR still in post as of March 2021.

Reduction in school recruitment costs. Savings in recruitment costs were associated with a reduction in expenditure on administration, advertising, and supply cover, plus increased speed of vacancy filling. IBTR generated potential savings greater than the cost of delivering teacher recruitment on the North Yorkshire Coast. As a result of IBTR support it was estimated that over three-quarters (46 out of 60) of schools saved a total of £612,702 on recruitment costs, or a saving of £13,319 per school supported. This exceeded the cost of delivering the project by £122,952 (cost of delivery was £489,750). Caution needs to be taken with these figures given they are based on the informed assumptions of headteachers and the recruitment consultant.

⁶ One of these was an FE college

Conclusion

The IBTR recruitment project was successful at engaging with North Yorkshire Coast schools. By the end of the third year (March 2021), IBTR had supported all mainstream secondary schools and three-quarters of primary schools to fill vacancies; with all schools fully staffed at this point in time. Headteachers felt the personalised and customised service from the recruitment consultant worked exceptionally well. Similarly, newly recruited teachers also believed that the IBTR project was beneficial for them, many teachers highlighted the personal touch that came through using the recruitment consultant. This was particularly true for NQTs and those with less experience. A feature contributing to the success of IBTR was the relationship established between the schools and the recruitment consultant. The knowledge, enthusiasm and personalised approach of the recruitment consultant was key to the project's successful engagement with headteachers and recruited teachers.

Norwich Inclusion Charter (Norwich OA)

The Norwich Opportunity Area (OA) Norwich Inclusion Charter (NIC) project aimed to support schools in Norwich to reduce suspensions and permanent exclusions.⁷⁸

The NIC project established a multi-agency approach to working with children and families to maintain engagement in education, reduce school exclusions and be an exemplar of how a coordinated approach can work. It involved:

- **The development of, and commitment by schools to, an agreed Inclusion Charter.** Principles included the nomination of an inclusion champion within schools; inclusion featured in school development plans; timely sharing of transition information; and full engagement with the Norfolk Fair Access Protocol.⁹
- **Management, coordination and school collaboration.** This involved a dedicated Norwich-wide NIC project manager and various cross-school networks.
- **NIC funding to support interventions within and across schools.** The funding was used to: improve school inclusion practices; support families and pupils at risk of exclusion; and provide transition activities for pupils between primary and secondary school.

⁷ The Department for Education recognises that school exclusions are essential behaviour management tools for headteachers and can be used to establish high standards of behaviour in schools and maintain the safety of school communities. It supports schools to improve pupils' behaviour and reduce the likelihood of exclusion being necessary but recommends that schools and local authorities should not adopt a 'no exclusions' policy as an end in itself.

⁸ Suspensions are also sometimes referred to as Fixed Term Exclusions (FEX).

⁹ A Fair Access Protocol is a mechanism to ensure that vulnerable children, and those who are having difficulty in securing a school place in-year, are allocated a place as quickly as possible. Norfolk's managed move scheme requires schools to set up managed moves with advice from a Fair Access Team.

Evaluation aims and methodology

The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of the NIC project in achieving its intended outcomes within Norwich. Intended outcomes (outlined within the NIC project logic model in Appendix B) were for:

- **Schools** to embed the Charter, improve management of pupil behaviour, and develop multi-agency working.
- **Families** to be more positive and confident.
- **Pupils** to improve engagement and educational performance, with reduced levels of permanent exclusions and suspensions.

However, this research has not been able to quantifiably attribute changes in suspensions and permanent exclusions to the NIC project. This is due to challenges in identifying a robust comparator group and the disruption caused by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Evaluation activities were conducted over 3 waves between January 2019 and May 2021. The research included: a document and data review, focus groups, online surveys, interviews, and case studies. The stakeholders interviewed included local authority (LA) representatives, school leaders, school inclusion leads and staff, teachers, intervention leads, pupils and families.

Key Findings

Implementation and Delivery

NIC project core features

Most primary and secondary schools in Norwich signed up to the Charter by November 2020. This framework was seen by school leaders and inclusion staff as pivotal in providing a focus on inclusion within and across schools in Norwich. School stakeholders also identified NIC project coordination structures, the independence of the NIC project team from schools, and dedicated funding as important to the NIC project's success.

Within this, the Inclusion Champion role was seen as important. This meant that there was an individual with responsibility for the individual schools in meeting the aims of the NIC project. Some primary schools did not have the resources to release staff from teaching in order to become an Inclusion Champion. When the NIC started funding the Enhanced Primary Inclusion Champion (EPIC) role this enabled more primary schools to engage.

The NIC funding pot enabled schools to access a range of interventions and training. Some flexibility in funding allocation allowed schools to tailor interventions to meet their specific needs and refocus easily, for example during COVID-19 interruptions. Lessons learnt from the early NIC project funding rounds included the need to ensure that interventions fit with individual school contexts; and that they incorporate requirements for sustaining activities within schools.

NIC project collaboration and networking

Greater collaboration between schools was one of the most notable achievements of the NIC project. This was achieved through the NIC developing: a Charter to support inclusion best practice; setting up networks and providing a neutral coordination role.

The different elements together were seen as enabling genuine connections and communications within and across schools. These networks provided forums for knowledge sharing, a collective approach to managed moves and the introduction of internal/ external exclusions¹⁰. Additionally, collaboration was fostered through the focus on a single issue (inclusion) and the individual pupils' needs. These collaborative relationships were also valued when schools were dealing with the immediate responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. These changes were reported as making a real difference for pupils' engagement and attendance at school.

NIC project intervention funding

The NIC funding pot enabled schools to access a range of support to improve: their school inclusion practices; family and pupil interventions, including alternative provision; and transition activities.

School inclusion practices

School inclusion practice support aimed to reinforce positive behaviours and early targeted support for pupils at risk of exclusion. This was through a whole-school approach underpinned by NIC funded staff training and development. The staff members reported that this had a positive impact with them feeling more confident in managing behaviour and using more restorative and self-reflective ways of managing behaviour.

In the 4th year there was a greater focus on emotional and mental health support. This was a response to the increased amount of social, emotional and mental health issues that arose for pupils during the period of COVID-19 restrictions.

Family and pupil interventions

NIC project funding supported personalised planning and alternative provision (AP) for individual pupils at risk of exclusion. Stakeholders said these interventions resulted in

¹⁰ Senior leaders referred to short-term managed moves as internal/external exclusions. This is not DfE policy and further consideration is needed before it is implemented elsewhere.

improved self-confidence, reduced behaviour problems, and improved school attendance. In the fourth year, funding was re-focused to support more in-school (rather than out-of-school) AP. This was because the short periods of AP were seen as insufficient for many pupils and that on-site AP could lead to a smoother transition back to mainstream education.

Family and pupil coaching offered a joined-up approach to supporting pupils at risk of exclusion. Evidence demonstrated that for pupils this resulted in lower levels of anxiety, less disruptive behaviour, and improved attendance and engagement in class.

Pupil transition

The NIC project funded a transition project manager to enable effective transitions for pupils at risk of disengaging with education during the move from primary to secondary school. Information sharing and coordination between schools was an important aspect with activities focusing on this. School stakeholders said the transition activities led to more coordinated and positive experiences for pupils and parents.

There was positive engagement from schools with the transition activities, with commitment shown to continue to develop and embed transition activities. However, inconsistent communication within some schools regarding transition limited their opportunities to fully engage with these activities.

Benefits, outcomes and impacts

It is not possible to quantitatively attribute outcomes of the programme to the intervention. However qualitative evidence suggests that there were some positive benefits to schools, families and pupils because of engagement in the project.

School benefits, outcomes and impacts

Senior school leaders said improved school inclusion practices and coordinated approaches to managed moves and their alternatives (introduced through the NIC project) had resulted in fewer suspensions and permanent exclusions. These inclusive practices also supported schools in their preparations and response to the COVID-19 restrictions.

Inclusion staff and senior leaders said whole-school changes and staff development led to a considerable change in school culture and ethos. They felt this was evident in calmer environments and lower levels of disruption. Whilst considerable progress was made across many schools, others were at an earlier stage in their journey towards an inclusive ethos.

Family benefits, outcomes and impacts

Parents and school stakeholders identified some improvement in parenting approaches after NIC intervention. Likewise, school stakeholders reported that they had a better relationship between the school and parents.

Pupil benefits, outcomes and impacts

The combination of interventions funded through the NIC project have enabled pupils to develop confidence, improve behaviour and well-being, and re-engage with learning. Several individual pupil stories demonstrate the link between these positive outcomes and the avoidance of suspensions or permanent exclusions.

Conclusion

There is qualitative evidence that the NIC style of support across schools in a locality can influence improved inclusion practices within schools. The key ingredients were greater partnership and collaboration, backed up by targeted interventions. Teachers and practitioners felt that levels of exclusion were lower than might have been the case, particularly linked to: school Inclusion Champion role; collective school approaches to pupil exclusions; staff training in restorative and trauma-informed approaches (Thrive practitioners and Emotional Literacy Support Assistants); and family and pupil coaching support. There were encouraging signs in some schools that changes and improvements would be sustained and embedded for the longer-term.

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Annex A: Total interviews across ILE projects

Table 1: Number of interviews split by ILE location and participant type.

Participant type	Norwich	Blackpool	North Yorkshire Coast	Hastings	Bradford
Project management/ strategic stakeholders	6	16	7	11	10
Delivery agencies/ practitioners	18	40	10	31	31
School staff	71	40	61	52	41
Young people	19	18	0	46	0
Parents	8	19	0	5	0
Total	122	133	78	146	82

Source: York Consulting interview tracking, 2021.

Note: e-survey responses have not been included in these figures.



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