



Leading Learning through
Action-led Research and Innovation

Celebrating Research that gets Results

A collection of evidence-based research

2023

Volume 2

Contents



4 Welcome by Bill Goddard



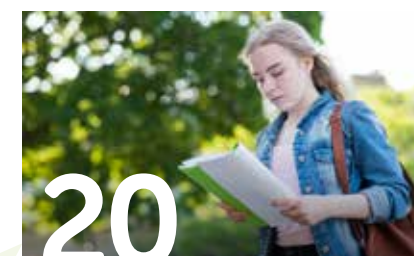
6 Wellbeing matters



10 Narrowing the gap



14 Creative play



20 Small steps matter



24 Adding value



28 Talking together



32 Harnessing the power of observation for inclusion



38 A helping hand



44 Swimming with dolphins

50 Thank you

52 Project locations map

The Laurel Trust is an exciting educational charity founded to support research and innovation in schools and academies in areas of multiple deprivation through the creation of partnerships with them to secure improvement.

© 2023 The Laurel Trust. All rights reserved.



Leading Learning through
Action-led Research and Innovation

Welcome

BILL GODDARD | CHAIR OF TRUSTEES

I would like to welcome you the second collection of summaries of recent school research and development projects which have been achieved with some grant funding support from The Laurel Trust.



These have been carried out through one of the most challenging periods that any of us can remember in our professional lives. Schools have faced serious challenges in terms of COVID and the many

associated consequences. The projects have been continued through some significantly difficult times but have nevertheless been seen through to successful conclusions. This has been done through the amazing fortitude of school leaders and staff who have managed to maintain the project activity whilst keeping their schools functioning.

In this volume David Bateson, OBE, has beautifully captured each of the research projects in his summaries. At the end of the collection David has given an engaging, authoritative and personal history of special educational needs' provision over the fifty years of his career.

A number of the projects feature the support of children with additional needs. However, The Laurel Trust also gives grant funding to a wide range of research across schools in all phases, many with educational or health partners. These partners have included parents/carers and

local communities, the National Health Service, Universities/Higher Education Institutions, the caring and specialist agencies, Local Authorities/Multi-Academy Trusts and family support workers. The geographical spread of the research projects that we have been and are supporting is shown in a map on our website.

All projects came about through an anonymised application process and a rigorous application of a research and development process which was all documented by each of the projects. Throughout the process each project was constantly supported by an assigned Trustee and our Consultant Director. Dissemination of the projects was and is a key requirement so that as much as possible project ideas and processes are transferable to other schools in other parts of the country.

Information and contact details about each project which may serve to inspire readers to follow up with their own enquiries is available from the Trust. We continue to offer grants to future projects and information can be seen on the Trust's website.

I hope that you enjoy reading about the commitment of so many teachers, education and health professionals and parents/carers which is evidenced in this publication.



Leading Learning through
Action-led Research and Innovation

Celebrating Research that gets Results

A collection of evidence-based research

2023

Volume 2

Wellbeing matters

Using research-informed practice to improve the wellbeing and outcomes of children with social, emotional and mental health difficulties

School 21: part of The Big Education Trust

CONTEXT

This project was led by School 21, part of the Big Education Trust, which worked with 11 mainstream schools, primary and secondary, across three London boroughs - Newham, Tower Hamlets and Southwark.

22% of pupils in Newham schools come from low income families, over 38% receiving Free School Meals (London average 28%, England average 19.2%). Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs are one of the Local Authority's High Need categories and these pupils represent over 17% of those receiving SEND support (national average 20%, DfE 2022). Poverty increases the likelihood of SEMH and COVID is likely to have exacerbated needs.

The numbers of pupils with a diagnosis of SEMH has increased over recent years (15.0% of those

with an EHCP - Education Health and Care Plan, 20% of those receiving support, (DfE, 2022). As the value of school budgets has diminished, schools' access to external expertise and the number of staff they can deploy to support these pupils has decreased. This project was therefore keen to encourage teachers to engage with recent evidence about supporting children with SEMH within mainstream. At the same time, special schools have faced the same budgetary pressures but also a chronic lack of space (more than a 50% increase in placements in the last 13 years (DfE 2022).

22%

percentage of pupils in Newham schools from low income families



“As the value of school budgets has diminished, schools’ access to external expertise and the number of support staff they can deploy to support these pupils has decreased.”



“Of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), those with SEMH have some of the highest risk of under-achievement and low attainment.”

STUDY AND RESEARCH FOCUS

The main research question was:

What is the impact on learning outcomes of children with SEMH, if we support teachers to undertake research into their learning and wellbeing needs?

The main aims were to:

- **Improve learning and wellbeing for pupils with SEMH in Newham schools so that they can live happier and more successful lives**
- **Improve Newham teachers’ knowledge and understanding of what works for pupils with SEMH**
- **Positively affect whole school SEMH policy and practice in relation to pupils with SEMH**
- **Develop research skills of teachers so that they can engage more effectively with research evidence**

and carry out their own research projects

- **Develop a bank of effective strategies for teaching SEMH pupils that could be shared across the Big Education MAT and beyond through the Teaching School Hub.**

WHY IT IS SIGNIFICANT

Of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), those with SEMH have some of the highest risk of under-achievement and low attainment. They are quite distinct as learners from those with cognitive disability who may achieve highly but lowly in relation to standardised attainment. Their SEMH needs can inhibit their learning and interactions, and this can mean lower language and reading skills

and difficulties gaining successful employment. Without support, they are more likely to end up in the justice system and less likely to have happy relationships.

In England, 25.1% of those receiving SEND support and 17.4% of those with an EHCP have a Speech Language and Communication Need (DfE 2022). Children with SEND are three times as likely to be unemployed and 49% of those who do work don't retain that job for long (Department for Work and Pensions) and 30% of the prison population has special needs (Ministry of Justice). Only 5.1% of those aged 18-64% with learning difficulties are in paid employment (Department for Work and Pensions).

METHODS AND PARTICIPANTS

This project focused specifically on 'research-informed practice', since it supports teachers to use research evidence within practitioner research to make a difference in their own context. The work centred largely on Zones of Regulation (the greatest focus was on children with difficulties in regulating their emotions and negotiating conflict with peers). Data was gathered from 453 pupils, 124 of whom were also analysed for the pre and post survey.

Across the 11 schools there were:

• Case studies showing:

- the context of the projects (e.g., target pupils and specific concerns for this group)
- how research on the needs of SEMH pupils influenced their approach
- changes made to learning experiences for these pupils because of the project
- changes made to the pastoral care for these pupils because of the project
- observed impacts of the project, including learning behaviours and progress and attainment of pupils, impacts on parents, and wider school impacts
- lessons for other schools
- personal learning for the participating teacher and leader as well as attitudes to employing research informed practice.

• Leuven pre and post data analysis

- Schools collected data from teacher observations (Leuven) and baseline and endpoint survey data to measure change over time in respect to a range of wellbeing measures.

- Leuven data scored individuals over two time points for involvement, wellbeing, social and emotional strengths and difficulties and whole class impact of their behaviour.
- The data was cleaned to ensure we only included young people who had both a score at baseline and a score at endpoint and created 4 different samples for each of the measures – so some pupils appear in, say the wellbeing data but not the class impact data.

- School wellbeing survey analysis; some schools also asked their focus pupils to respond to a baseline and endpoint survey so that their responses could be compared at baseline and endpoint. The survey was designed by an external researcher, John Ivens, who used three established and evidenced based measures to examine:

- Subjective wellbeing using the School Children's Happiness Inventory
- Life Satisfaction using Cantril's Ladder
- Whether or not they were bullied or acted as a bully

Alongside this, there were questions relating to what pupils thought would make the school better or safer.

The responses to the baseline and endpoint survey were matched to produce a longitudinal sample, providing 124 for the analysis. Responses were received to both the baseline and endpoint survey from four of the schools, so not all schools in the project are represented in this data.

- Post programme evaluation analysis of a questionnaire from 20 staff members across the 11 schools
- Headteacher survey analysis



“This project focused specifically on ‘research-informed practice’..”



“Data was gathered from 453 pupils, 124 of whom were also analysed for the pre and post survey.”

IMPACT

- There was incredibly positive feedback on the impact of the intervention, with the biggest difference being made in behaviour and understanding emotions

- There was a positive, yet small, direction of change, in the children's involvement, wellbeing, social and emotional strengths and difficulties and whole class impact of their behaviour shown by the Leuven data

- Participants highlighted the following areas as important to consider when implementing similar projects within their contexts:
 - The importance of teaching emotional literacy
 - Research focused interventions will be most impactful
 - Enable a whole school approach for ultimate impact

- In the course evaluation, 100% fed back that:
 - The content was useful and relevant
 - The facilitators were skilful and effective
 - I know how to use what I learned on this programme to improve my own practice
 - Applying what I have learned on this programme should improve pupil outcomes
 - The programme has or will help improve practice in my school

- In the headteacher survey we found:
 - All rated the programme 'good' or 'excellent'.
 - 8/11 said that the programme had significant impact on children
 - 10/11 of the eleven headteachers felt it had had a significant impact on the knowledge, skills and understanding of teachers and on the school leader.



The programme leaders learnt a lot to benefit them in their roles. The practices shared by the schools at the Celebration Day, attended by the headteachers of Schools 21 and 360, were all informative and there will be a lot more ideas that can feed into the Big Education Trust's strategic planning. Also in attendance were members of the Newham Local Authority, who were excited to hear the findings and wanted teachers to present at a headteacher online briefing, so that all Newham schools benefit.

Next steps and sustainability

We conclude that research-informed practices designed for pupils with specific SEMH needs can have a broader impact on the wellbeing and mental health of all pupils. Although our quantitative data has not yet shown a measurable impact, qualitative data has, and this would suggest that a longer time frame may well show a demonstrable quantitative impact. The Zones of Regulation tool was one approach that worked well in multiple contexts and with various cohorts of pupils, so we would recommend this highly for

“We also conclude that teachers enjoy and benefit from engaging in structured research projects...”

schools seeking to improve SEMH for specific pupils or across the school.

We also conclude that teachers enjoy and benefit from engaging in structured research projects, seeing them as a general school improvement tool, which allows them to identify and analyse an issue, design baseline-impact data collection tools, successfully implement an intervention at class and whole school level, and review its impact. We would recommend all teachers being offered the opportunity to engage in a structured research programme like this, as part of their standard professional development offer.

We have held an open access celebration event, which was extremely well received.

- 90% of attendees gave a score of 8, 9 or 10 that they found the event 'useful'.
- 71% of attendees gave a score of 8, 9 or 10 that the event would result in a change in their practices

We hope to disseminate further at a Newham Headteachers' Briefing.

The practices explored by the schools as part of the project are now embedded within school policy and practice so should have longevity. Several schools mentioned plans in their final presentations to widen the scope of their projects so that they cover the whole school. ●

Note: all of the images used in this summary are stock images

Narrowing the gap



A short-term guided reading intervention

Grafton Primary School

CONTEXT

Grafton Primary School is an outstanding Barking and Dagenham Local Authority (LA) School for pupils aged 3 to 11. It is larger than average and serves pupils from a range of ethnic backgrounds, although the majority are white British.

The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is well above that found nationally and 81% of the children involved in this project (22.5% nationally, DfE) were in receipt of free school meals (FSM). 62% of participants had English as an Additional Language (EAL), six times the national average.

After the first Covid lockdown, Grafton identified children most at risk of making limited progress in reading and falling behind their peers due to their weakened confidence,

skills and engagement. They needed intensive small group intervention to close the gap with their peers. Grafton worked with 8 other partnership schools to this end.

81%
percentage of the children involved in this project who were in receipt of free school meals

62%
of participants had English as an Additional Language



“The project aimed to both raise reading levels and to equip children to become happy and willing life-long readers with all the benefits that reading habits bring.”

to equal opportunities. Those with poor reading skills, often below the functional age of 9 years old, make up high proportions of the unemployed, those in poverty and the prison population (Departments of Work and Pension and Justice).

Schools are doubly important for those children from homes that cannot afford books or do not have the skills to support reading. They play a vital role in engagement, motivation and promoting choice.

The project was underpinned by extensive reading research knowledge about successful readers who read both for pleasure and purpose and the importance of variety and choice in motivation. It was based on the essential role of connectivity in establishing a reading identity i.e. emotions, the affective domain, underlie enjoyment and attainment.

The Matthew Effect of accumulated advantages and disadvantages is seen in reading identity and reading ability. In reading, the ‘rich get richer and the poor get poorer’. A child that feels it is a good reader is more likely to increase their reading skills and vice versa (Stanovich, 1986). Morgan and Fuchs (2007) support this view and argue how early experiences of failure in reading constrain poor readers who wish to only read what is required of them. This means they don’t acquire the skills they need to succeed. This is why raising children’s levels and confidence is so critical.



STUDY AND RESEARCH FOCUS

The project aimed to both raise reading levels and to equip children to become happy and willing life-long readers with all the benefits that reading habits bring. The hypothesis was that if the group of children were correctly identified and supported by carefully structured small group interventions they would make significant progress.

The overarching question was:

Can a short, small group intervention carried out by trained Teaching Assistants (TAs) close the gap in reading caused by lost learning?

Emerging questions during interventions were:

- **What are class teachers and parents’ perceptions of children at the start and at the end of the intervention?**
- **How have reading habits at home been influenced?**
- **How does the intervention influence children to read for pleasure?**
- **Has children’s confidence grown by the end of the intervention?**
- **Do they see themselves as a reader?**

WHY IT IS SIGNIFICANT

Reading is a key to pleasure, personal development, the wider curriculum and a successful life. It is central

METHODS AND PARTICIPANTS

Small group intervention was chosen to increase children’s attainment and enjoyment. It was intended to motivate by increasing pleasure, reducing stress, maintaining high levels of interest and be moderately challenging. The intervention was planned by the Reading Recovery Teachers and their Lead based in Grafton.

The process:

- A designated researcher was identified in each of the 9 partnership schools.
- The starting levels of children recorded and timetable for implementation established
- Books and equipment purchased
- 18 Experienced TAs were identified in each of the schools
- TAs in the group further reading/ intervention trained. Intervention daily for 20 minutes with groups no larger than 4 children
- Year groups assessed using the PM benchmark kits and vulnerable children identified.

Target the most at need and the least likely to catch up naturally. (Children were all at least 6 levels behind).

- Parents informed of their child’s participation and invited to school to learn ways to support their children reading at home
- Starting levels from the PM benchmarking kits recorded on Excel Spreadsheet
- Intervention started in October/ November with new cohort February/March and May/June
- The designated lead in each school required to give 4 weekly sessions with TAs to help with the monitoring of children, groups and support
- After 12 weeks children benchmarked using the PM benchmark kits and data recorded and sent for collation

The project also used discussions to find out the views, attitudes and behaviours of children, staff and parents. TAs maintained close contact with parents, mindful that they are the most influential educators (BMJ, 2008).

“Often children were said to be reading more for pleasure and to parents at home.”

Access to books

- Children were more likely to read enjoyably at home if actively engaged in choosing them from a library or shop
- Children need good quality, interesting books and not just decodable books
- The quality of school reading books is vital to engagement.

Views of the children

Reading identities and reading ability
At the beginning children often said they didn’t like reading or that they were not good at it. At the end most were happy to read out loud and saw themselves as confident readers, reinforced by TAs and parents and by now reading at age-related or above levels.

Reading motivation

The children demonstrated intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in reading thus increasing the likelihood of them carrying on reading in the future.

Views of TAs

TAs enjoyed the training and work on the interventions, liking the resources and finding small groups very beneficial. They noted children were all feeling like good readers after 4 weeks. They enjoyed praise from TAs and liked TAs to talk to their parents after school encouraging reading at home.

TAs recognised that a worried or stressed child whilst reading is less likely to want to read in the future. They were therefore determined to ensure that reading was pleasurable. They thought carefully about books that were chosen so that the children would continue reading high interest and moderately challenging books.



NEXT STEPS AND SUSTAINABILITY

This small group short-term intervention, enacted by trained and enthusiastic TAs enabled all children, who were behind, other than those with SEND, to catch up whilst enjoying reading often supported by parents. Notwithstanding the small scale of the study, replication at local level is planned and at scale could be possible using these principles:

- 1 Children have access to good quality books and have time to read and discuss their reading.
- 2 Reading at home, if it is pleasurable and involves parents, is vital as this positive involvement defines home reading culture, access to interesting books and reading habits.
- 3 It is critical to label positively i.e. children were constantly told they were ‘good readers’. Labels influence the development of children’s identities and self-esteem: how they see and define themselves

and how they interact with others.

This can affect their attitudes towards school, their behaviour and ultimately their achievement.

4 Providing an enjoyable shared reading experience helps children read for pleasure and foster life-long reading.

At the least, the relationship between proactive, motivated TAs and the success of reading interventions in school and at home warrants further study. This study is a good practical example of school-based action research with clearly identified needs. Partnership working, parental support and home reading were key features. The TAs provided exemplars for children and of the schools’ learning communities.

It is recommended that the report be shared with school leaders, teachers and TAs interested in improving

children’s confidence and enjoyment through short term interventions and used to encourage parental engagement. The partnership wants to talk to Borough schools about the importance of having a variety of books and not just decodable texts and to encourage schools to run regular small reading workshops, open to all parents to talk about how they might encourage reading for pleasure.

Overall, this research was successful because it was specific, limited and time-bonded. There was shared ownership and support from school leadership teams. Professional development was an integral part. The project had very explicit and clear objectives combined with external sponsorship and support. This gave the project status and enabled it to meet clear success criteria. ●

Note: all of the images used in this summary are stock images

IMPACT

Main outcomes:

- Of the 130 children who took part, 117 (90%) caught up with their peers. The exceptions were those with SEND. There is a key relationship between positive attitudes to reading and reading assessment scores
- All children who completed the programme and finishing on book level 14 or higher passed the phonics screening test in Year 1 and the retest in year 2.
- Children’s reading Identities and ability changed. Once they caught up with their peers the perceptions of themselves as readers changed. They thought of themselves as good readers and felt proud.

- The small groups and TA support helped children to raise levels and self-esteem. They were more likely to read at home and were reading for pleasure
- Professional Development for TAs, in this case IoE accredited, has a big impact on children. Their confidence, skills, positive attitudes and teaching style can influence a child for many years and they can actively encourage parental engagement
- The research cycle repeated to further develop work with additional cohorts with identified needs.

Parents

- Often children were said to be reading more for pleasure and to parents at home.



Creative play...

...with a pinch of SaLT

Discovery Schools Trust Lead School: Parklands Community School

CONTEXT

Discovery Schools Trust has been established for 7 years and consists of 13 primary schools. Wellbeing services are driven by an educational psychology service (EPIC), established for 4 years, and a speech and language therapy (SaLT) service, established for 3 years. EPIC had produced a creative play intervention over the previous 2 years.

The content included a blend of Solihull Approach principles and the work from Margot Sunderland (Centre for Children's Mental Health). Its aim was to improve parent-child interactions highlighted by class teachers as needing some support in this area. Creative Play was successfully delivered in 4 MAT schools. Now the intention was to integrate the work of the SaLT team. Funding by Laurel Trust enabled this to take place.

Both services, working with schools, parents and children aimed to uncover what impact both a targeted and a universal creative play provision could have on the development of cognitive, social, imaginative, language and communication skills.

The lead project school indices of deprivation are 71.1% (County average 39.4%) with FSM at 19.1% (National 19.2%, DfE 2022) whilst

"Its work is underpinned by its core tenets of Improvement, Connectivity, Altruism and Democracy."

the other partner school is 98.5%. The intervention was the first joint venture for the EPIC and SaLT teams, combining the expertise of both services to address wellbeing, speech and language skills and learning outcomes for some of our most deprived children within the Trust. Our MAT has a strong focus on research and innovation, having associations with a teaching school alliance, teacher training and inspiring leaders' programmes. Its work is underpinned by its core tenets of Improvement, Connectivity, Altruism and Democracy.

The planned work was necessarily adapted in the light of the disruption to schools caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

STUDY AND RESEARCH FOCUS

The key drivers for the project were the links between the importance of play for language and cognitive development and the importance of play for developing positive relationships through reciprocity, fun, warmth and joint attention.

The overarching intention was to study the impact that both a targeted and a universal creative play provision in school, supported by informed parents, could have on the wellbeing and development of cognitive, social, imaginative, language and communication skills of disadvantaged pupils aged 4-5 in two comparable schools.

The study wanted to review the following in the light of an extensive literature review of the importance and range of play and language for a child's social, intellectual, emotional and mental development:

- What is the impact on parent-child relationships in terms of quality & changed perceptions of the parent/s?
- What is the likelihood that play will happen more in the home environment?
- Does the involvement of a SLC focus change the language that parents use when engaged in play with their child/ren?
- How does the child's language change as the intervention goes on?
- What impact has there been on the language level used by adults in the classroom?
- Has there been a change in the types of play children choose to engage in?
- Is there any change in the children's confidence and quality of social skills in play and confident use of language?
- Is there an impact on the number of utterances used &/or vocabulary development in children?

- What impact have the interventions had on a child's SLC screening assessment and on their EYFS tracker since baseline on entry?
- Has there been any impact on the child-teacher/TA relationship as a result of the interventions?
- What added value does the targeted after school intervention provide for the focus children?

WHY IT IS SIGNIFICANT

The role and impact of language in development is well-documented e.g. low language levels at age 5 are still evident at age 35 (Centre for Longitudinal Studies, 2020). Previous research has shown a link between deprivation and low language levels on entering primary school and the link between deprivation and attainment as well as the link between deprivation and general relationship skills/prosocial behaviours (CLS, 2020).

Language and interaction problems are often indicative of special educational needs and disability (SEND). 25.1% of children requiring SEND support in primary schools have speech, language and communication needs and 20.0% have social, emotional and mental health needs (DfE, 2022). Children from poor socio-economic backgrounds can have a gap of 30 million fewer words heard by age 3 (Hart, B., & T.R. Risley, 2003.)

Children with SEND generally have poorer life chances. They are, for example, three times as likely to be unemployed and 49% of those who do work don't retain that job for long (Department for Work and Pensions). 30% of the prison population has special needs (Ministry of Justice) and more than 60% of young offenders have literacy and/or speech, language and communication difficulties. (Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists).

METHODS AND PARTICIPANTS

This project set out to: Adapt the Creative Play Programme to include a speech, language and communication (SLC) focus in addition to boosting child:parent relationships, love and friendship.

Use Multidisciplinary collaboration to map creative play ideas onto the classroom curriculum to implement at a whole class level.

Select a group of Foundation 2 children with their parent/s and siblings where appropriate for after school intervention run by a SaLT and Assistant Psychologist modelling language use and play interaction.

Design a training and coaching programme on the principles of creative play and language use for classroom staff, to be delivered as a 1 session training input with 3 coaching sessions in situ to model language use and monitor language load.

Develop and disseminate a Creative Play and Language pack for parents and Foundation teachers to use after the project.

Share the project findings with the rest of the MAT





Project team

Head Teacher of the lead school, Senior Educational Psychologist, Senior Speech and Language Therapist, Assistant Psychologist, a Psychological Services Assistant and an undergraduate psychology student on work experience with EPIC.

Targeted Intervention

Participants were 9 parent-child dyads split across 2 schools. Class teachers selected participants through purposive sampling, selecting EYFS children from their knowledge that they felt would benefit from the aims of the project. Guidance was given to select children that showed difficulty in the sub-category areas of assessment: Prosocial scale (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire), Personal, social and emotional development (PSED) and Creativity

(EYFS Trackers), play, attention and listening and expressive language (SaLT Screening Assessment).

Class Intervention

Both schools had 2-Form entry for EYFS children. The class intervention group were the classes of the EYFS lead teachers that were on the project team. The second class were the control class group. These children and adults did not know any information about the project. The aim was that the control group would receive the intervention after both target and class interventions had been delivered in the project classes.

School Participant Profiles

A questionnaire in schools A and B measuring child psychological adjustment showed the EYFS children in both schools had an above

“The aim was that the control group would receive the intervention after both target and class interventions had been delivered in the project classes.”

average level of difficulty. School B had a higher level of difficulty than school A in their control, experimental and target groups.

The Speech, Language and Communication screening assessment indicated that 66.7% of school A's target group had significant speech and language difficulty and 14.3% some difficulty. In school B, the figures were 85.7% and 14.3% respectively.

The project would:

- have SaLTs model appropriate language to use in play with parents
- have the psychology team and SaLTs look at aligning the play activities with curriculum topics from the classroom
- train class staff in the approach so that it can be reinforced for focus children and delivered to the rest of the children at a whole class level
- expand a child's variety and enjoyment of play, contributing to language development, wellbeing and learning outcomes
- monitor staff's use of language
- be supported by Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) and ELKAN trained staff

Operations

- Time and budget monitoring
- Keeping in touch meetings
- External evaluators secured
- Launch events for schools and parents
- Project evaluation and measures were constantly revisited
- Assistant psychologists ran the targeted interventions with coaching from SaLT
- SaLT carried out initial and ending observations to look at changes in aspects of these key speech and language areas between parents and children
- Teachers were consulted about how best to adapt the targeted programme for the full class and a resource pack written fit for purpose
- Teachers and their LSAs were then invited to training ahead of the coaching sessions

- Data, pre and post project, from the parent-child group, class intervention group and control groups
- Reflective journals were kept.

The Covid pandemic and lockdown had a significant impact on the second half of the project, cutting short plans to complete the intervention and gather final data and information. The school could not deliver coaching sessions after the 2nd one due to school closures. Because the bulk of the project was so close to completion, the team was still able to gather meaningful data against the evaluation structure, thanks to the dedication of the teachers.



IMPACT

Although the project was curtailed by Covid, the targeted interventions were completed, and two thirds of both the class sessions and the coaching support were delivered. Data was gathered from teachers, SaLT and Assistant Psychologist observations, the Parent Child Relationship Scale, parent focus groups and EYFS trackers. The study notes the small numbers

of children involved and differences between how progress can be reported in EYFS trackers. The SaLT observations noted that the 3 parents involved in School A had adapted positioning and used more open questions. Positioning in School B was less changed although there were some encouraging linguistic signs. Praise, however, was not noted in either setting. In both schools, all children seemed more engaged and

confident in finishing their activities. The SaLT noted in one school, amongst other things, how rarely adults get down to the level of children, how frequently closed questions are used and how little praise is offered. In the other school, better positioning was used and children encouraged to face each other, take turns and share ideas. Signing, gestures and praise was also in evidence.

Targeted children School A

- More improvement than the control group in communication and language, PSED and expressive arts and design with PSED being the most noticeable difference
- Parents average enjoyment was 4.6/5 and children 4/5.

School B

- Parent-child questionnaires showed an increase in conflict, closeness and dependency
- Improvements in all EYFS areas with the greatest in arts and design
- PSED showed a slight but narrowing negative compared to the control group
- Parents average enjoyment was 5/5 and children 4.4/5.

Class children School A

- The experimental group showed no change in communication and language and the control group a slight decline
- Both groups showed a small increase in PSED skills
- The experimental group showed improvements in literacy but the control group a decline
- Both groups showed a minimal decline in arts and design.

School B

- Both groups showed a positive shift in communication and language, PSED and expressive arts and design with a slightly greater gain in the control group
- Both groups showed literacy gains with a slightly higher shift in the experimental group.

Target children vs experimental class group

School A Target Group

- A maintained level of communication and language whilst the experimental group saw a decline
- An increase in PSED notably in confidence and self-awareness
- A decrease in literacy but the experimental group an increase
- An increase in expressive arts and design but a decrease in the experimental group.

School B Target Group

- Higher increase in communication and language than the experimental group
- Higher increase in PSED
- an increase in literacy but less so than the experimental group
- Similar increase to the experimental group in expressive arts and design but more gains in imagination whereas the experimental group gained more in media.

NEXT STEPS AND SUSTAINABILITY

A process evaluation was written with close reference to the Education Endowment Foundation's school improvement 'Guidance to Implementation', focusing specifically on the aspects of PREPARE and SUSTAIN, given the aim of the project to produce a sustainable approach for future use by schools in the MAT.

The external evaluator recognized the project's ambitious number of intended outcomes and a narrower focus would have provided greater clarity and evaluation. The plans, however, were logical and well-specified. The team agreed that involving participants in the planning stage would have helped in assessing readiness and anticipating specific needs, and this would also have supported clarity around the complex timeline and layers of intervention.

Participants would have benefited from more thorough assessment before this stage. Although the team and the schools knew each other well before the project began, clarity for the school-based participants about the project itself came at the launch event and the different needs of schools and practitioners had an impact on the project, with one school withdrawing at an early stage and differing levels of experience shaping the coaching focus for those teachers delivering the intervention. Ideally, the assessment of readiness would have an impact on practical preparation for implementation of the intervention. Once ready to implement an intervention, practically prepare for its use. Everyone involved praised the planning, preparation and quality of supporting materials, and there was a clear readiness to adapt to different needs from all sides. Attendance at the launch and at training events –for staff and parents –was given high priority and worked well. Workload was carefully considered, with release time



offered to make each element of the intervention more likely to succeed, and the timeline was adjusted around school calendars and practical issues, which was greatly appreciated.

The project team is proud of what has been achieved and is pleased with a number of the outcomes. The targeted intervention was complete and so firmer conclusions can be drawn.

The project has provided a summary and poster and materials for downloading. There is to be a recorded form of training to accompany the targeted and classroom intervention booklets so that school staff can implement the programmes themselves. A live Q&A session via Teams could be offered

for any schools who have queries following the receipt of the materials. Resources on the website are freely available to schools and a research paper could be written. It would be good to think that we will be able to attend a celebration conference with The Laurel Trust too.

This work offers much in terms of practical approaches to improving play, language and communication for children, parents and schools. The focus is undeniably important, educationally, emotionally and morally. It underlines how much more needs to be done both universally and specifically in the training and informing of teachers, parents and the harnessing of other disciplines. ●

Note: all of the images used in this summary are stock images

Small steps matter

How can we demonstrate good learner progress without (quantitative) data?

The Learn to Live Federation Ellen Tinkham School & College | Bidwell Brook School

CONTEXT

The Learn to Live Federation consists of two Special Schools across three sites in South Devon: Ellen Tinkham School, Ellen Tinkham College and Bidwell Brook School. The schools serve the needs of approximately 350 learners from age 3-19 some of whom come from increasingly deprived areas. These are pupils with an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) who have significant cognition and learning needs.

Some of the learners have severe, profound and multiple disabilities and complex medical needs. Most have sensory and communication needs. In special schools nationally, 3.1% of EHCPs are for children with profound and multiple difficulties (PMLD), 9.5% for those with severe learning difficulties (SLD) and 38.1% regarded as having cognition and learning difficulties (Department for Education -DfE SEND data 2022). There has been an increase of more than 50% in special school places in the last 13 years, a reflection of the growing population, identification, severity, complexity, longevity and enduring nature of needs.

Several other schools, both mainstream and special, were involved in the project as outreach partners of the Federation. (More

“Some of the learners have severe, profound and multiple disabilities and complex medical needs. Most have sensory and communication needs.”

than 52.40% of those with EHCPs are in mainstream, DfE 2022)

The research took place over the course of the pandemic and is now set within the context of the SEND Review (DfE 2022) which asserts that too often outcomes are poor for those with SEND.

STUDY AND RESEARCH FOCUS

This 3 year project aimed to evidence whether pupils were making good or better progress by establishing an objective, consistent and rigorous approach to judging pupil progress without ‘P levels’. (The Rochford Review declared P levels not fit for purpose, introducing the Engagement model in 2022. Although statutory for pupils not engaged in subject-specific study at KS1 and KS2, it is intended to sit alongside a school’s own assessment.)

The new system would recognise small steps in progress so that learners, teachers and parents had a clearer view of the progress learners were making. These steps would be aligned with EHCP outcomes and designed to enable more learners to achieve targets and feel successful in their learning. The key would be in curriculum personalisation focusing on functional skills.

Initial research questions were:

- How do we ensure outcomes delivered through EHCPs are fit for purpose and what does fit for purpose mean in this context?
- How can we improve co-construction of outcomes and provision with families so that it is meaningful and effective?
- How do we minimise in-school or school-to-school variation?
- How do we know next steps are ambitious enough to lead to positive outcomes for a child’s learning future and how can the curriculum improve this?
- What does a progression model in English, Maths, PSHE look like and how does this align to the 4 areas of the EHCP?
- How can we revise processes linked to EHCP whilst fully complying with statutory procedures as set out in the code of practice?
- How do we do these things whilst seeking to reduce teacher workload?

WHY IT IS SIGNIFICANT

Special schools have always evaluated how far forward pupils move rather than how high they jump i.e. a concern for achievement from an initial starting point rather than a norm-referenced standard of attainment. This research examines the purpose of learning and the formative and summative use of assessment mindful of the individual, their EHCP and the statutory National Curriculum aims.

A personalised approach, as developed by the Federation, is the most effective and logical strategy given the distinctive nature of both the learners and special schools and the absence of national

benchmarking norms of attainment. Our approach has had enthusiastic support from other special and mainstream schools. The Local Authority (LA) was also keen and provided a link officer. This was an ambitious project, and we have made huge advances in achieving our aims and plan to take the work further.

This work is also significant in the wider context of SEND outcomes where it is recognised how those with SEND have poorer life chances (DfE, Department for Work and Pensions, Ministry of Justice, Department of Health).

METHODS AND PARTICIPANTS

The work was framed within a wide range of expertise and experience and significant background reading. From the outset, the project endeavoured to involve all the pupils and those concerned with them, to give a rounded picture of progress.. Qualitative data was gathered from pupils, teachers, parents, governors, and the LA who were then worked with to develop an online hub.

Much of the development of the assessment descriptors and personalisation of the curriculum was carried out by members of the SLT due to pandemic restrictions on larger groups. They used existing resources and information e.g. the National Curriculum, P levels, Attention Autism before developing their own criteria. Much of the continuing development work has now moved to Middle Leaders whose work is informed by other staff. Given this is at the core of what the schools do, this work will be ongoing. .

Working with the LA, the Federation has developed an online Hub for EHCPs. The intention is to make the EHCP a much more ‘live’ and useful document than is currently the case. The Hub will enable more people to contribute and add to the EHCP making it a richer and more useful document, although the benefits will take time to be realised. interaction.

The very detailed new assessment descriptors are grouped into 5 colour-coded levels. These are used across the Federation and teachers have begun to build these into their planning. As with all change, initially this increased workload but as teachers have become more familiar with the system this impact has been reduced. The assessment method and personalised planning is an important focus of the induction programme for all new staff.

One of the few benefits of the pandemic was the way in which schools have worked more closely with parents, an essential aspect of our work. The Federation was keen to build on this by involving parents in co-constructing targets. This has been achieved by setting up parental focus groups in which parents can become familiar with the assessment descriptors and target setting.

IMPACT

In measuring the impact of the new assessment and personalised curriculum, the schools relied on qualitative data and individual case studies. They surveyed teachers and parents before and after developments, talked to learners and undertook individual case studies to get a deeper understanding of the impact of the changes.



Impact on Teachers and other practitioners
Surveys provided evidence of increased levels of staff confidence in terms of planning, especially for sensory/complex learners, and increased confidence in setting targets. This greater clarity about planning and increased opportunity for learners to achieve targets has led to greater accountability of teaching staff and learning assistants as well as more effective and focussed progress meetings. Teacher expectations of what learners can achieve have also been raised and their planning and assessment skills developed. Use of the online Hub has thrown up some problems in terms of the time needed to interact with the software which the Federation will work to reduce.

Impact on Learners
Some early evidence shows that the more frequent achievement of targets by learners, albeit in smaller steps, is building their self-esteem and motivation which, in turn, will impact on confidence and achievements. There is also the opportunity to increase learners' levels of meta-cognition in the long term. There is already evidence of this from some of the mainstream schools which have adapted the new assessment system for their SEND pupils.

Impact on Parents
The work done by staff with parents in the focus groups has meant parents have become better equipped to support their child's learning. The Federation plan to expand this work. Research by Desforges shows parents play an important role in learners' achievements especially for Special Needs learners. A small survey of parents involved in these groups has shown a positive response to this development, although sometimes teaching staff have found an unforeseen increase in the level of challenge from parents as they become more familiar with target setting and personalisation of the curriculum.

The overall impact of the work is well summarised by this statement from the Federation:

"At The Learn To Live Federation we use the EHCP as a basis for designing a person centred learning journey. The learning journey is broken down into small achievable but aspirational targets that are measurable by teachers through our home school agreement targets and curricula. These targets are written in conjunction with parents/carers so they can be worked on in all settings."

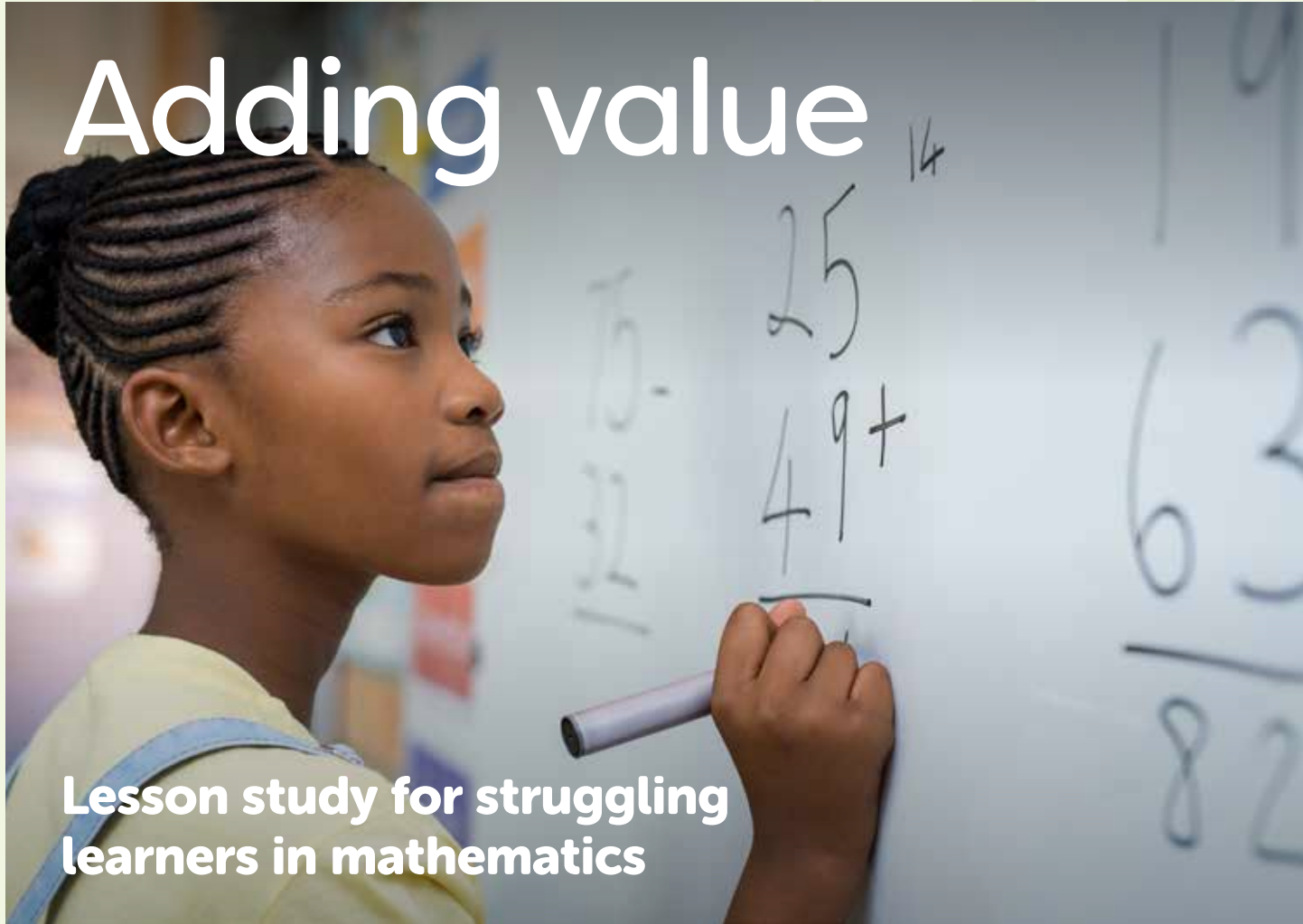
"The Federation intends to move on to develop assessment criteria for Foundation subjects in the near future."

NEXT STEPS AND SUSTAINABILITY
The new assessment system and personalised curriculum is both sustainable and transferable. The task, however, of helping all staff to utilise and internalise the new way of working is ongoing. Working and involving parents in co-construction of targets needs to be expanded with a particular focus on the harder to reach parents. Costs involved in developing and maintaining the Hub will be factor in terms of sustainability, but the costs can potentially be shared among a number of schools. The current assessment system covers key areas in English, Maths and PSHE.

The Federation intends to move on to develop assessment criteria for Foundation subjects in the near future. In terms of the initial research questions, the school has made progress in all areas without claiming to have fully explored them and will continue to refine their work in order to build towards this. The summary chart of questions, conclusions and recommendations provides an excellent basis for an action plan. ●

Note: all of the images used in this summary are stock images





Adding value

Lesson study for struggling learners in mathematics

The Communitas Education Trust in collaboration with the London South Teaching School Alliance

CONTEXT
The Lesson Study for Struggling Learners programme was an action-led research project led by John Donne Primary School, part of the Communitas Education Trust in collaboration with the London South Teaching School Alliance (LSTSA). This Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) works within an area of urban deprivation (43% Pupil Premium) and has observed increasing numbers of pupils with a diagnosis of SEND over recent years (now 16.5% of the school population which had been rising for 5 years, DfE June 2022).

This is in a context of reducing real-term school budgets that have limited schools' access to external expertise and capacity to deploy SEND support staff. The project therefore aimed to better support teachers to engage with recent evidence about supporting children with SEND and reducing the developing gap between mainstream and special schools.

Within the borough, there was a 31% gap in maths attainment for SEND pupils at the end of Key Stage 1, widening to 49% by the end of Key Stage 2. (Nationally the gaps are 51% and 52% respectively and 14.4% of children on SEND support have a specific learning difficulty which may include dyscalculia, DfE June 2022). This pattern was reflected across the Trust and this project sought to tackle it by supporting a group of

“Within the borough, there was a 31% gap in maths attainment for SEND pupils...”

mainstream and special schools to improve learning for SEND pupils through a research approach to professional development: Japanese lesson study. In this process, teachers collaboratively plan and teach a series of lessons, discussing the learning they will then take into their own classrooms and the changes to practice they plan to implement.

The project commenced in September 2019 and was designed to take place over one academic year but was interrupted in March 2020 by school closures due to COVID.

STUDY AND RESEARCH FOCUS
The overarching question was whether or not enabling special and mainstream teachers to conduct joint lesson study would make a difference to:

- The confidence, knowledge, skills and practice of mainstream teachers in relation to teaching SEND pupils mathematics
- The enjoyment, engagement and learning of SEND pupils in mathematics lessons mainstream classrooms
- Whole school approaches to teaching and learning for SEND pupils in mathematics in participating schools

In addition to the implied aims above, the project wanted to develop understanding of lesson study as a research tool so that participating schools use the approach to carry out their own research in the future and wanted to further relationships with local special schools to support the development of future provision.

WHY IT IS SIGNIFICANT
Children with SEND generally have poorer life chances; they are three times as likely to be unemployed and 49% of those who do work don't retain that job for long (Department for Work and Pensions) and 30% of the prison population has special needs (Ministry of Justice). Only 5.1% of those aged 18-64% with learning difficulties are in paid employment (Department for Work and Pensions).

“Children with SEND generally have poorer life chances; they are three times as likely to be unemployed...”

METHODS AND PARTICIPANTS
The project explored whether joint special-mainstream lesson study groups could improve the mathematics learning experience and outcomes for SEND children in mainstream. Lesson Study would support teachers to identify a range of research-informed strategies to facilitate personalized interventions. They would design, implement and measure the impact of changes to practice that met the very specific needs of individual SEND pupils in their classrooms.

Following a briefing with headteachers, Memorandums of Understanding were signed and schools allocated to special/mainstream partnerships. Five groups of four teachers took part. Each group had a special school teacher and a Lead Teacher for Lesson Study. The LSTSA provided project management and administrative support with gathering research data. Funding was provided for supply cover.

Participants were briefed on the nature, research background and timeline of the project led by Lead Teachers and Lesson Study experts. After observations in the special school, teachers identified their focus SEND pupils in mainstream and decided the desired learning and strategies to achieve this. Each group received a range of research literature about better meeting the needs of SEND pupils in mathematics and were given practical advice from the special school teacher in their group. Baseline data for the focus pupils was reviewed.

- The study originally planned to collect the following data:
- A teacher baseline-impact audit to measure understanding of and confidence in strategies to meet the needs of SEND pupils in mathematics lessons (quantitative)
 - A pupil case study from each participating teacher, capturing evidence of the impact of the project on engagement and enjoyment (Leuven Scale observation) and learning (work samples and assessment data) (qualitative and quantitative). Whilst baseline data was gathered, it was not possible to gather impact data, due to COVID school closures.
 - Teacher evaluations of the impact of the project on their knowledge, understanding and skills in relation to better meeting the needs of SEND pupils in maths lessons (qualitative)
 - A senior leader survey to explore the degree of whole school impact on teaching and learning (qualitative). This did not take place as plans to disseminate findings to colleagues were cancelled due to school closures.

The audit and evaluation data were returned to Gill Featherstone, Research Assistant, UCL Institute of Education, who aggregated and analysed it in order to examine projects and their perceived impact on pupils, professional development and whole-school approaches to meeting the needs of SEND pupils.



IMPACT

At the end of the project, 16 (of 17 responses) teachers reported being very or somewhat confident in planning sequences of learning that will enable good progression in maths for SEND pupils. This contrasts with 6 at the start.

Prior to the project teachers wanted also to learn about a range of resources and teaching approaches that ‘work’ with SEND pupils, making them into more independent learners and ways to improve SEND communication and socialisation. After the project, 16 (of 17) reported being very or somewhat confident in knowing about a range of approaches known to work well to support SEND pupils in maths. Specific ideas that resonated included multi-sensory approaches, ensuring resources are accessible, and splitting learning into manageable chunks. Some reflected that they expected to see more confident pupils and SEND pupils

“One participant identified how using different visual and practical ways benefited all pupils with abstract concepts and the application of learning.”

that make more progress as a result. One participant identified how using different visual and practical ways benefited all pupils with abstract concepts and the application of learning. Additionally, participants cited the benefits of academic reading, the mastery approach, planning for the resources, watching peers structure lessons and giving children time and resources to figure out how to solve a problem themselves.

There were 18 responses to the evaluation of the project itself, the majority found each element to be very or quite useful. Comments included:

“This course has really helped to understand that thorough lesson planning is essential in order to be able to cater for SEND children. Lesson objectives, resources and adults must be planned for carefully...”

“I loved the whole project and it will help me to really tune in to my SEND pupils as individuals and not as group.”

16 of the 18 participants who took part said they would be quite or very likely to carry on using lesson study and 13 said it would have a strong or some effect on other teachers. Of those that hadn’t been able to influence colleagues, lockdown was cited as the main reason.

NEXT STEPS AND SUSTAINABILITY

Despite the limitations imposed by Covid, positive and sustainable effects are evident. The lead school facilitator increased knowledge and understanding of the Lesson Study process and, through collaboration, ensured sessions were accessible for participants from a diverse range of settings. The support of The Laurel Trust aided managing a project budget and producing written reports. COVID-19 demanded flexibility and this increased confidence as a training facilitator has led to the taking on of new challenges.

Despite school closures, participants have implemented their learning and are supporting other teachers, influencing practice including the use of language, the ‘chunking’ of learning and personalisation.

New guidance has been shared across the MAT and on its website. It enables struggling learners to

participate more fully in whole class teaching by creating a consistent, whole school lesson structure that incorporates the learning from the programme to reduce the demands on SEND pupils’ working memory. This is having a positive impact on pupils of all abilities and making maths teaching a more enjoyable experience.

The school is committed to Lesson Study as a means of enacting real, research-informed changes that improve its educational offer. Similarly, there is a commitment

“The school is committed to Lesson Study as a means of enacting real, research-informed changes that improve its educational offer.”

to developing the working relationships between schools in the trust as well as with colleagues from special schools that were facilitated through the project.

Increasing the number of cycles and planning time would be beneficial. There are many themes to develop further, not all of them in maths. The importance of planning and range of approaches has been well identified and disseminated but issues of good practice for those with SEND being good practice for all; how much better teaching would be if all teacher received more SEND input in their initial training; the importance of language in maths; the transfer and application of skills; and the lack of homogeneity in SEND have necessarily only been touched upon and offer rich seams to explore further for the benefit of children with SEND and their peers. ●

Note: all of the images used in this summary are stock images





Talking together

LEAP: supporting spoken language skills in early Primary School through collaborative practice.

Owler Brook Partnership

CONTEXT
This project was a new collaboration between eight schools, Sheffield Children’s NHS Foundation Trust and the Human Communication Sciences division of the Heath Sciences School, University of Sheffield. The project leads were Owler Brook Primary and a Senior Lecturer in Speech and Language Therapy.

The schools have an average of 45.4% free school meals (*FSM - England average 19.2%, 2022, Department for Education -DfE*) and 74.7% of pupils having English as an Additional Language (*EAL -19.3% EAL, DfE 2021*). 23.4% of pupils across the schools are on the SEND register (*national average 16.5%, DfE 2022*), with an average 0.7% having an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) (*national average 4%, DfE 2022*). The schools also serve increasing numbers of pupils of Roma Slovak origin and have local expertise in supporting Romani speakers to access the primary curriculum.

“The project was a response to schools reported increasing concerns about children’s spoken language skills...”

The project was a response to schools reported increasing concerns about children’s spoken language skills and having the capacity to deliver support, especially following the pandemic.

STUDY AND RESEARCH FOCUS

The main aims of the project were to:

- Investigate ways of increasing capacity to support spoken language skills in early primary school through creating new partnerships.
- Evaluate the impact of small group language interventions delivered by student speech and language therapists (SLTs).
- Increase expertise in supporting children’s spoken language skills across Sheffield.

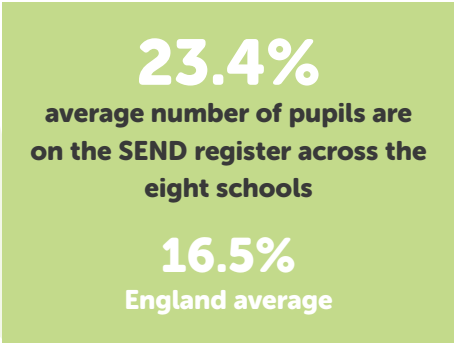
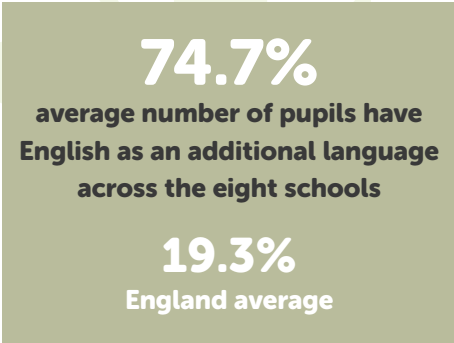
The specific research questions were:

1. What is the nature of any Speech Language Communication Needs (SLCN) in our group of children?
2. What is the impact of the Language Enrichment Activity Programme (LEAP) small group interventions for children aged between 5 and 7, in terms of their expressive and receptive language skills?
3. Is delivering LEAP a suitable learning opportunity for student SLTs?
4. What are the language needs of Roma Slovak children and how do we best support them?
5. What are teacher and parent perceptions of how to support children’s spoken language skills, particularly in relation to bilingual children?



WHY IT IS SIGNIFICANT
In England, 25.1% of those receiving SEND support and 17.4% of those with an EHCP have SLCN (*DfE 2022*). Therefore a quarter of 5 year olds do not meet the expected level of language development, and possibly one in three (35%) for children living in poverty (*Finnegan*

et al 2015). The types of skills are an important foundation for much learning in the classroom, for early literacy development, for social communication and for living a successful life (*Department of Work and Pensions, Department of Justice et al*).



METHODS AND PARTICIPANTS

The project was underpinned by extensive reading, knowledge and expertise across the schools, university and health partnership. The Sheffield-produced programme, LEAP, has evidence-based principles of communication-supporting interactions. It focuses too on Information Carrying Words (ICW). LEAP encourages small group instruction and the use of multiple non-directive strategies to aid expressive and receptive language development. LEAP was to be evaluated using a quantitative study with robust and non-biased evaluation such as waiting control pre and post-test design, outcome assessment blind to intervention status and recruitment from eight schools.

Teachers identified those who had spoken language abilities behind their peers; had some spoken English language skills; were in F2 or Year 1 and Year 2 groups; and with or without EAL or SEND. Parents were then provided with information sheets, opportunities to discuss the project, and consent forms. Student SLTs then assessed the children, using the LEAP assessment and the Renfrew Action Picture Test (RAPT).

206 children were assessed and 145 included initially in the study. The results of 112 children were able to be analysed, 67 of whom were assigned to the LEAP intervention, and 45 to the waiting control. They were all aged 4-7. A baseline of standardised and non-standardised assessments was done followed by outcome measures after 6 weeks. A cohort of 80 were followed up approximately 8 weeks after the first rollout of LEAP (38 children who had completed LEAP and 43 who had not completed LEAP).

31 children who spoke Roma at home were assessed using the British Picture Vocabulary Scale (BPVS); RAPT; Non-standardised information carrying words (ICW); Dynamic Assessment; and Language history via parent verbal questionnaire. Interviews were conducted with 15 school staff members with experience of supporting Roma Slovak children and 5 Roma Slovak parents. These interviews asked questions about how to best support children's language skills at home and in school.

IMPACT

1. What is the nature of any SLCN in our group of children?

There is a high level of SLCN across the schools. 138 children were identified as having potential SLCN of whom 45 had EAL and 29 were already known to the SLT service. There was a wide range of abilities within the group but with a heavy weighting towards the lower percentiles.

2. What is the impact of the LEAP small group interventions for children aged between 5 and 7, in terms of their expressive and receptive language skills?

Initial analysis suggests that LEAP had

a positive, specific, significant impact on children's spoken language skills delivered in 12 sessions. Those who completed LEAP increased their scores on 8/9 measures during the half term. Using a series of paired t-tests, results show that this progress is significant. Children in the control group improved on 2/9 measures.

The smaller cohort of 80 were followed up approximately 8 weeks after the first rollout of LEAP (38 children of whom had completed LEAP). Neither those who had completed LEAP nor the control group changed any of their language scores during this follow up period. This suggests that increases to

“206 children were assessed and 145 included initially in the study.”



“Teachers identified those who had spoken language abilities behind their peers...”

language scores due to LEAP were maintained but did not continue once LEAP stopped.

3. Is delivering LEAP a suitable learning opportunity for student SLTs?

45 student SLTs trained in LEAP, and delivered 12 LEAP groups for at least 6 children. Student surveys and feedback suggested that the learning opportunity was very positive from first year undergraduates to second year masters students. Given the success of incorporating LEAP into the SLT training during the project, this model will continue.

4. What are the language needs of Roma Slovak children and how do we best support them?

Schools reported additional concerns for children from Roma Slovak backgrounds following the pandemic school closures. They seemed to have SLCN in both Romani and English. The assessment of 31 of these children at Owl Brook showed a wide variation in language skills, both in English and Romani.

5. What are teacher and parent perceptions of how to support children's spoken language skills, particularly in relation to Roma Slovak children?

Many children identified by teachers as having potential SLCN speak a language other than English at home. Bilingualism is a strength for the child and should be built on at school. Where work with interpreters is not possible other strategies should be considered. Dynamic assessment activities led by an SLT are effective in differentiating types of language needs.

Owl Brook is keen to share its experience and practice, underlining the importance and cultural sensitivities of the work in relation to Roma Slovak children and families e.g. that Romani is an oral rather than written language. The work

illustrates many positive processes and outcomes, not least the need for Romani-speakers to be available and wider support for families.

The planned project evolved as the result of the pandemic, and, though this meant some children could not receive LEAP, the partnership deepened mutual understanding, was more flexible and lasted longer. Some children with EAL regressed, some children were harder to engage upon return and it was difficult to have sufficient translators or bilingual support staff.

NEXT STEPS AND SUSTAINABILITY

Significant steps have been taken to make this work sustainable. The following have been done and are required to continue:

- a collaborative approach to increasing support for spoken language skills in F2, Year 1, and Year 2.
- collaboration to increase schools' capacity to deliver small group interventions.
- the incorporation of LEAP groups into the BMedSci and MMedSci at the University of Sheffield, both as a placement and volunteering opportunity for student SLTs.
- other ways of increasing capacity to deliver LEAP groups e.g. training volunteers.

- new opportunities for sharing knowledge about how to best support children, particularly in relation to children who speak a language other than English at home.
- the sharing of the interview data as the basis of an accessible guide to supporting the spoken language skills of Roma children.
- the increased use of dynamic assessment as a means to understand bilingual children's spoken language strengths and difficulties.
- the continued use of LEAP as a practical approach to teacher concerns about children's language skills.
- that schools continue to develop and build upon their close working partnership with school SLT to improve language outcomes for children who have both SEND and EAL.
- that SLT Students have the opportunity to work in schools where SEND and EAL experience can be developed to broaden their knowledge and understanding.
- that the research is shared across the city, within the NHS and the University and within the Family of Schools and Locality so that other schools and develop their approaches and provision to ensure better outcomes for children who have SEND and/or EAL.

This Sheffield project has created new pathways for supporting spoken language skills for children aged 5 to 7 years in eight schools. It has developed new partnerships across schools, the University and the NHS in Sheffield; created better understanding of children's language skills; shown the importance of language intervention groups; and supported bilingual children and, in particular, those who do not speak English at home. ●

Note: all of the images used in this summary are stock images





Harnessing the power of observation for inclusion

Improving vulnerable pupils' engagement and outcomes and teacher confidence in meeting the needs of all learners in mainstream settings

Gipsy Hill Federation

CONTEXT
There are six mainstream primary schools in the Gipsy Hill Federation and this research was led by two of the schools from Lambeth and Southwark. The overall proportions of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), eligible for pupil premium and who experience disadvantage, are significantly above national average.

Nationally, the proportion of pupils with SEND has risen to 16.5%. 24% of these pupils have an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP). 15% of those with EHCPs have social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs as do 20% of those requiring support in mainstream. More than 90% of those with SEND and more than half of those with EHCPs are in mainstream (DfE, 2022). This research is set within a context of increasing identification, novelty, frequency, severity, complexity and longevity of SEND and how the vast majority need to be included successfully in mainstream schools.

“Nationally, the proportion of pupils with SEND has risen to 16.5%”



STUDY AND RESEARCH FOCUS

The intention of this research was to develop the structures and professional learning to meet the needs of all pupils whilst also ensuring their inclusion, access to the curriculum and educational experiences.

Overarching question

How can structured observations of vulnerable learners informing collaborative reflective planning teams of mainstream teachers together with SEND specialist leaders of education (SLEs) improve the engagement and outcomes for vulnerable learners and increase teacher confidence in inclusive pedagogies to meet the needs of all learners?

The observed pupils needed individualised curriculum pathways and the research looked at enhancing these whilst building independence and improving experiences of inclusion. It intended to do this by developing ‘adaptive expertise’ (Mulholland, 2019), moving away from differentiation or something ‘other’. Expertise and capacity was developed by working with SEND SLEs, focusing on the strategic use of learning. The research set out to raise teacher and learner expectations of what could be achieved by developing a more inclusive pedagogy as pupils with SEND in mainstream might have very separate experiences from their peers (Lamb, 2009).

WHY IT IS SIGNIFICANT

The rise in SEND generally and the complexity of needs in mainstream in particular is significant now and for the future of these children and society. How schools respond affects the quality of inclusion, and the process and outcomes for those children with SEND and their peers. Also, if adaptive teaching is more effective than differentiation, it might be favourable to teacher workload and enable those with SEND to have their share of teacher time.



England has the longest tail of educational under-achievement in the world (McKinsey). Many of those under achievers have SEND or an SEMH nature. That failure to thrive, educationally and socially, is reflected not only in attainment and achievement at school but in the likelihood of unemployment



(Department of Work and Pensions), the justice system (Ministry of Justice) and health outcomes (Department of Health). If one allies this with what is known about brain development and the importance of early intervention, then all work that improves provision for children at the earliest stages is potentially vital.

METHODS AND PARTICIPANTS

Two teachers at varying career stages from each school took part. They were from Key Stage 1 in one setting and from Key Stage 2 in the other. They collaborated with SLEs and focused on children working significantly below age related expectations and who were experiencing significant barriers to their education and inclusion.

Before engaging in child observations, teachers were trained in a graduated approach and in curriculum development for those with complex learning difficulties.

The research had pre- and post pandemic phases. This unavoidable pause was used as a time of reflection and actively contributed to the modification of the second phase, as did the implementation of a new federation-wide behaviour policy, providing greater support and structures for pupils at risk of exclusion. The research, whilst maintaining its aims, shifted emphasis towards curriculum development, planning and implementation for vulnerable learners with complex needs working significantly below age related expectations.

The second phase had collaborative planning cycles to support the embedding of adaptive expertise and genuine inclusion:

- Observation of child by teacher (using filming equipment)
- Coaching session between class teacher and SEND SLE using the filmed observation (identification of barriers to learning and establishing priority aims)
- Focused team planning session (outside of teacher's usual PPA session) for the teacher alongside the SEND SLE and school SLE (additional time using expert's knowledge to plan)
- Observation of child in class with adjustments in place from coaching and planning sessions (using filming equipment)
- Coaching session post observation between SEND SLE and teacher (refinement and adjustments to provision as needed)
- SEND SLE & school SLE join teacher for PPA (focus on dissemination across the whole year team)

This cycle was repeated during the next term with a different teacher but from the same year group, so the collaborative element was sustained and there was support from the teacher from the first cycle as well as the SLEs.

Qualitative and quantitative evaluation data was collected before and after the cycles through teacher questionnaires, pupil engagement profiles, pupil outcomes against individualised targets, case studies, reflections of staff and progress data using the school's assessment management system captured individual and whole class impact.



“Two teachers at varying career stages from each school took part. They were from Key Stage 1 in one setting and from Key Stage 2 in the other.”



“Before engaging in child observations, teachers were trained in a graduated approach and in curriculum development for those with complex learning difficulties.”

IMPACT

Qualitative results demonstrated a positive impact on teacher confidence in removing barriers, meeting individual need, and progress against identified areas of concern, leading to improvements in access, engagement, independence and learning behaviour. Teachers reported pupils making very good progress but this was not reflected in the summative data but did indicate, in the case of writing, a flaw in the initial assessment of basic skills.

Teachers also provided insight into areas to further refine e.g. although more confident in accurately assessing pupils and planning for them accordingly, teachers identified that they needed to build skills further in these areas.

An increase in the progress of the whole class in writing, reading and maths was seen during the project. Through focusing on the pupils working below age related expectation, it allowed for a shift in progress for pupils working at expected and above levels.

Case studies showed the benefits, not in doing more, but in achieving success for their learners by nurturing inclusive habits and responding to individual difference through adaptive teaching. Teachers enhanced practice and provision to ensure progress for the children in their classes that found learning the most challenging by approaching planning through the eyes of the pupil and using the graduated approach, underpinned by robust formative assessment. This accurate initial assessment followed by continual formative assessment is essential.

Clear evidence-based targets for those with the most barriers to learning meant that the role of all adults in the class became more specific and targeted. These targets facilitated communication, structure and freedom.



“Case studies showed the benefits not in doing more but in [...] nurturing inclusive habits [...] through adaptive teaching.”

The cross-sector 'collaborative professionalism' helped liberate teachers to approach challenges within their classrooms more creatively and positively affected strategic development of the school in how to view and approach learners with SEND.

Through embedding structured child centred observations and

collaborative partnership working between teachers and specialists, sustainable systems, techniques and tools to improve engagement of learners working significantly below their peers were developed.





NEXT STEPS AND SUSTAINABILITY

This observational and adaptive approach would benefit a range of learners with differing needs. The changes required are in how schools use systems and processes, partnered with teacher knowledge of the individual as well as collaboration to flexibly approach planning. This is about being smarter, developing a culture of reflective practice and collaborative professionalism that nurtures inclusive habits and

pedagogies, vital for some but beneficial for all.

There needs to be an inclusive ethos and culture of the school, where adaptive expertise is promoted and nurtured by all staff. It is imperative that the school systems, structures, and processes allow for, and support, this flexibility. This responsibility lies with school leaders including SENCOs. They need to work collaboratively and strategically to

“The changes required are in how schools use systems and processes, partnered with teacher knowledge of the individual as well as collaboration to flexibly approach planning.”

ensure that the systems in place complement and support each other, especially in the integration of assessment and inclusion.

Teachers must be reflective learners and use adaptive problem solving.

Observation as a tool for collaborative professionalism is key to being able to use adaptive expertise and apply it with knowledge for a young person. Leaders must see themselves in the same way, as constant learners, able to adapt structures, systems, and practices for teachers to adopt this ethos and way of working. Leaders need to create protected opportunities for them and their staff to collaborate and reflect critically with mentors, and others. Teachers and leaders need to be knowledgeable about learning objectives and skills across all year groups for the core subjects. Without these, accurate assessments will not be made, gaps not identified and progression impossible to plan.

Teachers need assessment knowledge of when a pupil is

“Teachers and leaders need to be knowledgeable about learning objectives and skills across all year groups for the core subjects.”

working independently, not only when supported. Then they can effectively plan for that pupil’s inclusion and progress. This does not mean that they may never use adult support. Judging when learning needs to be facilitated by an adult, what scaffolds to use and when to promote independence is important for the learner to grow.

Accurate assessment needs to be followed by knowledgeable formative use, especially for pupils who are working significantly below age related expectations, set within a framework of what skills it is important for the pupil to acquire in the short, medium and long term. These targets and the methods for their achievement need to be clearly communicated to staff and pupils and regularly reviewed.

Ultimately, it should be asked if our systems incentivise teachers and leaders to engage in habits that promote inclusivity; whether these systems enable an inclusive mind-set; the development and application of adaptive expertise; and an approach to professional development that equips teachers to be responsive. ●

Note: all of the images used in this summary are stock images



A helping hand

Closing the attainment gap in schools with cooperative working between health and educational services to introduce assistive technology

St Catherine's Catholic School

CONTEXT

This research is the result of a collaboration of 8 primary schools in North Sheffield's 'Locality B' working with the services of the Local Authority (LA), Occupational Therapy (OT) and Educational Psychology (EP). Locality B is an area of multiple disadvantage and social deprivation with higher than the Sheffield average of poverty, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) register and with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) (Sheffield LA Dec 22).

The project was initiated after the Project Lead (PL) observed a pupil struggling to access, enjoy, complete and accomplish a written literacy task despite support. His physical and associated learning needs resulted in his attainment being at odds with his verbal and creative abilities. This prompted thinking about how assistive technology (AT) might remove barriers to reveal some pupils' true achievement. It was also evident upon initial enquiry that schools and staff were mostly unaware of AT in

terms of its availability and use. It was decided that, to be effective, the project would need to harness the knowledge of educationalists, OTs and EPs.

"...the Project Lead observed a pupil struggling to access, enjoy, complete and accomplish a written literacy task..."

STUDY AND RESEARCH FOCUS

The overarching question was how AT could be used to support pupils with SEND to learn with more ease, motivation and ultimately success.

The intention was for:

1. Schools and health services to collaborate so that schools are better equipped to recognise children's needs and have a more informed understanding of their barriers to learning.
2. Schools become able to select and provide assistive technology matched to a learner's profile, feel confident to support children to use technology effectively so that children are able to learn with more ease, confidence and independence.

The project aimed to gauge:

1. Improvements in learner's access to the curriculum, levels of motivation, confidence and engagement with learning.
2. School staff confidence to select appropriate AT to support learners.
3. Positive and challenging aspects of using AT.
4. The successes and challenges in delivering interventions.

And to provide:

5. Findings and recommendations to support decision-making for the use of AT in schools.

First, the project needed to train practitioners and to identify the support schools and staff required so that an effective AT strategy could be developed across Sheffield. A multi-disciplinary team (MDT) was created to harness their expertise whilst also aiming for them to adjust their practice and give more specific advice around the use of AT to schools. The project intended to capture case studies of children that other schools, teachers and professionals could identify with.



WHY IT IS SIGNIFICANT

Children with SEND generally have poorer life chances. They are, e.g., three times as likely to be unemployed and 49% of those who do work don't retain that job for long (Department for Work and Pensions). 30% of the prison population has special needs (Ministry of Justice) and more than 60% of young offenders have literacy and/or speech, language and communication difficulties. (Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists).

For children with SEND, repetitive presentation of those things that are overly challenging, is demoralising. It may feel worse if the learning demands something that you find physically impossible. AT can help, from the humble e.g. adaptive grips for pencils, adaptive seating and adaptive keyboards to the sophisticated e.g. software, computers and augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices. AT can promote learning, independence and self-worth.

There is a digital divide in England with the poorest children (and who are more likely to have SEND) being most severely affected and the attainment gap widening during the pandemic's reliance on online learning. AT, a 'reasonable adjustment' under the law,

"For children with SEND, repetitive presentation of those things that are overly challenging, is demoralising."

30%
percentage of prison population that has special needs

>60%
percentage of young offenders that have literacy and/or speech, language and communication difficulties

is important at both the individual and macro levels of equal opportunity.

Professional reports detailing strategies and resources required for pupils to access learning often recommend AT. It is often detailed within EHCPs but without knowledge, training, resource and multi-disciplinary support this recommendation cannot be implemented.

METHODS AND PARTICIPANTS

The 8 schools responded to the PL's initial enquiry. Special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) in each school identified two learners and their families to participate. Selection was on the basis of having some physical difficulties that affect access to literacy-based tasks. All of them had comorbid learning needs.

Initial questionnaires were distributed to 8 SENCOs and 17 teachers. The responses largely indicated little training on motor skills and none on AT. Confidence overall was low.

The OT service provided interactive online training, using Sway, [SA1] accessible at a time and in amounts convenient to users. A Q and A by Zoom followed. OTs created a menu detailing the different technology options currently on the market from low, mid to high tech and the needs these serve.

Schools referred case studies to the MDT who recommended Clicker 8 software for all of them. The PL, SLS and EP and a Clicker 8 consultant filmed a training session that was sent to schools.

“The responses largely indicated little training on motor skills and none on AT. Confidence overall was low.”

Termly review meetings were held. Training materials were provided for new class teachers and there was a Q and A session with the Clicker 8 consultant. Schools that struggled with AT were seen individually. A training session for parents was planned and is to become an online Sway resource.

The study was, therefore, a mixture of the qualitative and quantitative and gathered through:

- **Pre- and post- questionnaires about staff views and confidence in using AT to support learners.**
- **Pre-and post- questionnaires for family, children's and staff views on the identified children's access to learning, including levels of motivation, independence and ease of learning.**
- **Data on the identified children's attainment and progress made compared to progress made in a similar time period prior to using technology.**
- **Case studies of the impact of using technology to support a child's access to learning.**

The results have been used to infer the effect AT has on children's potential to access learning and how it affects motivation and self-worth. Feedback from SENCOs and teachers has led us to infer the level of support schools need to implement technology successfully.



IMPACT

Initial:

- **Training received positively.**
- **Relationships, trust and commitment grew.**
- **The potential of AT to improve performance, success motivation, self-worth and independence was recognised.**
- **Q and A increased impact through deeper staff learning.**
- **Clicker 8 training built SENCOs' and teachers' confidence and knowledge in using AT and this specific software.**

Midpoint - responses showed:

- **SENCOs' more confident in matching AT to needs.**
- **Staff's greater confidence using AT.**
- **EP learned from OTs, especially in the level of specificity required when recommending AT.**
- **OTs learned about school perspectives**



“The potential of AT to improve performance, success motivation, self-worth and independence was recognised.”

- **Purchasing AT and installing software on hardware was lengthier than anticipated. The OT and EP advised and schools shared solutions.**
- **Once installed, there were improvements [SA2] in access, self-esteem and quality. Success stories were captured in newsletters and the summer termly meeting. Some evidence is both powerful and moving. It shows AT enabling pupils to have a voice and share thoughts, feelings and likes and dislikes in the written form.**

Some actions were:

- **There were fewer completed questionnaires than expected. Therefore the study moved to a percentage response basis. This limitation means, although data is reported, the basis of the conclusions is qualitative rather than quantitative.**
- **Teachers wanted reassurance from supporting professionals about the benefits of AT and when one should move away from pen and paper recording.**
- **One school saw AT could result in greater and equitable access. It nominated a teacher to lead on its use. All SENCOs saw this as valuable, not just for their workload but also in effective learning and professional development for teachers. The lead teacher also saw that what is good practice for those most in need may also be good practice for many more and received support**

from senior leaders in widening Clicker 8 usage.

- **A link was made with a special school which changed to one with the Strategic Lead of Sheffield's SEND Hub. This employs specialist teachers who complete learning support assessments across Sheffield.**

Some reflections made:

- **Various difficulties became apparent, including delays due to hardware and software issues, changes of staff and case study children leaving. Again, not just technical knowledge but the training in the use of AT prior to implementation was highlighted**
- **This varied ability of schools to engage is a significant issue for leaders in the successful embedding of new practice. Exemplar schools can be used to foster effective change and keeping the focus on outcomes for children.**

Final findings

- Results from 10 pupils showed positive gains in using AT to support access to literacy-based sessions. They reported: greater enjoyment recording their ideas and pride in their work; improved quality and quantity of work; and technology being easier to record ideas than pen and paper.

- Teachers reported children showing greater motivation in completing literacy-based work when using AT, although this may be most apparent initially.

- Results for the quality and quantity of work were mixed, perhaps because teachers are comparing different benchmarks. [SA3] Nevertheless, there was a positive trend.

- Teachers reported that children needed time and more adult support when first learning how to use AT.

- The school with the whole site licence spoke about successes and the training they gave to the whole school. They noted the reduced input needed from TAs when children are confident and able to navigate AT independently and how as a teaching team they are better able to assess a child’s knowledge and understanding when using AT. They reported increased levels of motivation and engagement of children who had previously found recording their work difficult. As a result, one of the other schools has organised a senior leadership team visit and they and other schools are investigating whole-site Clicker 8 licences. All parties at the final review meeting have agreed to continue to meet on a termly basis.



- Two parents were able to attend the live session and their feedback was positive. Overall, feedback from parents has been hard to gather.

- The OT service drew up thorough advice to help children access AT and overcome some implementation barriers.

NEXT STEPS AND SUSTAINABILITY

The project concludes:

- When teachers access OT motor needs training and the appropriateness of AT, knowledge, confidence and desire grows to embrace it. Q&A sessions deepen knowledge and impact on the will to embrace change.
- Schools need funding for technology and software and consistent advice, training and support for AT. This support could allow OT to concentrate on those with the most complex needs.

“Schools need funding for technology and software and consistent advice, training and support for AT.”

- IT professionals in school are central to the implementation of AT
- Schools with a named teacher to lead on AT have a more coordinated and strategic approach to implementing AT, reduce the burden on SENCOs and allow professional development.
- Short relatable written case studies give impetus to implementation.
- SENCOs and teachers benefit from meetings with the Project Lead. Engagement enables effectiveness. Disruption and inconsistency hinder it.



- Thought needs to be given to greater access to training for all parents in means and ways convenient for them.
- AT has a positive effect on motivation and outcomes.
- Where AT is embedded across the school, Teaching Assistants are freed up to work with other learners i.e. AT can be cost effective for many, not only the few.

Recommendations are to:

- Encourage a wider ongoing take up of training and live Q&A sessions with the OT team.

“...the Project Lead (PL) observed a pupil struggling to access, enjoy, complete and accomplish a written literacy task...”

- Work with key stakeholders to consider and plan for wider implementation of the use of AT.

This could be achieved by:

- Sharing the project training along with the menu of technology across schools and supporting professionals.
- Planning regular Q&A sessions with supporting professionals to learn, talk through concerns and give advice for particular cases, acting as review meetings for schools who have installed technology.
- Approach Clicker 8 for a deal if purchasing licences on a large scale.
- Approach commissioning to secure a budget to support schools in purchasing AT and software.
- Make use of links with the SEND hub to support schools in implementing AT.

- Involve secondary colleagues in promoting the use of AT.

The findings from this project need to be shared more widely with leaders within Sheffield to devise a strategy for the successful implementation of technology across Sheffield schools, using the resources and materials created as part of this project to aid this. ●

Note: all of the images used in this summary are stock images



Swimming with dolphins...

...a lifetime in special needs

At the risk of being self-indulgent, this overview of the research funded by the Laurel Trust is set within the context of the writer's 50 years in the world of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND); the SEND Review, *Right Time, Right Place, Right Time*, (DfE, 2022); and The SEND and AP Improvement Plan (DfE, 2023).

David Bateson OBE, Chair of the National SEND Forum

Although I don't intend to reiterate the covering piece for Laurel research in 2020, that did make the point about inclusion being the flexible process on a continuum of provision that brings about the right provision at the right time in the right place with the right people. The SEND Review itself, although it does not refer to it, is set within a context of a growing population within which there is an increasing identification, novelty, frequency, severity, complexity and longevity of SEND. There are now 4.0% children with an education, health and care plan (EHCP) and a more than 50.0% increase in special school placements over the last 13 years (DfE, 2022).

The water's for everyone

As I write, it seems hard for me to believe that it is was 1973 when a callow youth took up a role as a 'welfare assistant' in a school for

the 'mentally handicapped' prior to training for mainstream and special education. How things have changed and, in some profound and practical ways, it is for the better. This is not to deny the many significant issues and problems that remain. It is a relatively recent phenomenon that all children in this country have been granted the dignity of being deemed worthy of education. The 1944 Education Act categorized children with special educational needs by their disabilities defined in medical terms. Many children were considered to be "uneducable". It was only in 1971, following the Education (Handicapped Children) Act 1970, that 'special care' children came into the expectations and considerations of education.

The terms of the 1944 Act such as 'educationally subnormal' and 'maladjusted' were still in regular use for those we now think of as having

moderate learning difficulties (MLD) or social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH). Even the job title 'welfare assistant' indicated the attitudes that are now better reflected in 'teaching assistant' or 'learning support assistant'. Care was not enough. If we didn't care we'd be monsters and if we really care we want children to learn.

Testing the water

The Warnock Report in 1978, enacted in the 1981 Act, brought with it much of the shaping of our thinking about SEND since and coined the term 'special educational needs'. Its ideas of SEN statements of special educational need gave us the ideas of meeting needs in ways that were adequate, an efficient use of resources and not detrimental to others' education when placing children and the notion of 'integrative' education and mainstream where possible – the precursor to



'inclusion'. It saw common educational goals for all: independence, enjoyment and understanding.

The 1981 Act brought no additional funding for statementing nor teacher training despite the closure of many special schools. This Cinderella aspect of SEND has had long-lasting effects and the 1988 Act and the introduction of the league tables associated with the National Curriculum was seen by Warnock as a negative for SEND and later she called for a major review, particularly of the premise of inclusion.

All into the deep

The 1997 Green Paper *Excellence For All Children Meeting Special Educational Needs*, following the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act, saw the new Labour Government affirm the notion of inclusion, giving public support to the UN statement on Special Needs Education 1994 which "calls on governments to adopt the principle of inclusive education" and "implies a progressive extension of the capacity of mainstream schools to provide for children with a wide range of needs". By doing so, it aligned the English education system for the first

time with the international movement towards inclusive education.

The tension increased between political and social desire and the reality of meeting needs in a system not designed to be all things to all people. The British system with its atomized pluralist school system and its 150 local authorities of varying political persuasion, funding and educational capacity was never going to be conducive to a national entitlement provision that was equitable and functional. The result was huge variation in the pro rata placements in special schools, the level of statementing and EHCPs and, most importantly, the quality of provision and outcomes for children.

More flotation aids please

After falling rolls in special schools between 1980 and 1999, there was a plateauing followed by an increase in excess of 50% of special school places from 2010 to now. At the same time the changing SEND demographic (as in the first paragraph) saw the percentage of those with statements and their successors education and health care plans rise from 2.7% to 4.0%. It is also

no surprise that the system, based on Warnock, was not prepared for the numbers identified as having some sort of autism and those with SEMH.

Keeping heads above water

The field of SEND has not been short of policy, legislation and suggestion since 1997 including the: 1999 Health Act; 2001 Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA); 2002 Audit Commission demanding a review of statementing; 2004 SEN Strategy *Removing Barriers to Achievement*; 2005 Mental Capacity Act; 2010 Equality Act; 2011 *Support and Aspiration: a new approach to SEND*; 2014 Children and Families Act and the Code of Practice; SEND Review, *Right Time, Right Place*, Right Time; 2023 SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan. This policy framework, for all its

"It is a relatively recent phenomenon that all children in this country have been deemed worthy of education."



limitations of disputable notions of value-for-money; occasional one-size-fits-all; and the lack of enactment, such as the possibility of pooling education and health budgets; has hugely sensitized us to the possibilities and human value of those with SEND. It is, however, regrettable that the policy repeatedly homogenises SEND despite it being the broadest of spectrums and consistently fails to paint the big picture. It is, however, well-meant and indicative of a maturing society and policy has become more nuanced since bodies such as Ofsted recognized the importance of, in my words, how far forward children move rather than how high they jump i.e. achievement from individual starting points, not against normative standards. The failures have been around the piecemeal implementation of intentions together with attendant funding and training issues. It is these that the SEND and AP Improvement Plan seeks to redress.

Learning to swim

There are, of course, many things we didn't know 50 years ago and many that we do not know now. We will never know enough, nor have enough, but it is no impediment to our attempts to try. Much of our work in the early days was occupational and by that I mean used to occupy rather than planned and sequenced leading to a vocation. It was very much a 'skills and frills' curriculum with much of the planned learning firmly rooted in Skinner's behavioural psychology. Whilst much of the necessary 'small steps' approach remains, the ideas of holistic and lateral development would come later.

Some schools were very short, if not completely without, many things we now assume should be in place. Buildings may have been temporary, or adapted old houses or of clasp construction. Quiet rooms, soft play and sensory rooms were yet to exist and there was inadequate toileting, eating and equipment such as hoists.

“We will never know enough, nor have enough, but it is no impediment to our attempts to try.”

Few were qualified or trained and staffing ratios were very different. My probationary year with a class of 13 'maladjusted' boys aged 11-14, all of whom were excluded from



mainstream and most with a criminal record, was in an old building many years past its supposed expiry date. There were few curriculum resources other than those that had to be made and no support assistant. Those pupils, already disadvantaged, were ill-served by a probationary teacher and an overly stressed one at that.

Swimming with and against the currents

Pupils and the staff who serve them now have mostly vastly improved buildings, equipment, training and staffing levels. They also have vastly increased demands of numbers, range and expectation of provision and outcomes, health and safety and medical and family support. In the last 13 years there has been more than a 50% rise in the special school population and, since 2016 the average number of pupils in these schools has risen from 108 to 139. Schools are mostly overcrowded, often sacrificing some of their specialist rooms and catering for a broader range of ability and disability than once was the case, despite their capacity or ability to deal with the needs presented. The pressure on the number and quality of places is part of our nation's failure to adequately look into the future and use data and trends to plan for the aforementioned increasing identification, novelty, frequency, severity, complexity and longevity of SEND. We resolutely refuse to relate birth and early years medical data to educational planning and persevere with short-term single parliament approaches. As with an ageing population, we are uncomfortable too with the equation between the prodigious rising costs and the apparent 'value' of the outcomes.

Climate change

As the sensitivity, assessment and diagnosis of needs developed over 50 years we have seen a refinement of terminology, a greater understanding of coterminous needs or co-



morbidities and a rise in previously unknown or under-recognised needs. The Code of Practice, of course, uses the four pillars of Communication and Interaction; Cognition and Learning; Social, Emotional and Mental Health Difficulties; and Sensory and/or Physical Needs. Within this the exponential growth of the recognition of autism (ASD) and the prevalence of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) and the rise in mental health issues all stand out as markedly different to our understandings in the 1970s. Few of us would have believed then that 4.0% of the school population would have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and that, of those, 31.3% would have ASD, 17.4% SLCN and 15.0% SEMH. Whilst we may have known in the 1970s that 20% of children might at any one time have SEND (16.5% now), we may well have been surprised that half of those with EHCPs would be in mainstream and that only just over 10% of those with SEND would be in special schools. We would have been

“Schools are mostly overcrowded, often sacrificing some of their specialist rooms and catering for a broader range of ability and disability..”

surprised too at the work reflected in The Laurel Trust research being conducted by schools in partnership with each other and other agencies. (All statistics, DfE 2022).

Inevitably, these changes in diagnosis, prognosis, provision and expectation have demanded greater resource. With greater resource has come a greater demand for justification, especially in respect of outcomes. Outcomes have too often been couched in normative terms. The greater number of complex needs of a more enduring nature suggest that we must show how we are improving as providers whilst our



'standards', not our achievements, decline. This nuance has been lost in some quarters.

All at sea

Sometimes, things got lost or were misunderstood. Remediation and SEND were often conflated and equal opportunities mistaken for equal outcomes. A lack of clarity and homogenizing of the many strands of SEND led to misunderstandings e.g. inclusion being synonymous with place, and mainstream at that; community being locality; achievement being attainment; specialism confused with segregation; national building schemes initially ignoring special schools. Thankfully, when Ofsted started to look at progress from an individual's starting point and the pragmatism of finding the right placements for pupils' needs rather than the right place from a political viewpoint, things improved. Yes, there really were people calling

“Few of us would have believed then that 4.0% of the school population would have an Education, Health and Care Plan...”

special schools 'evil'.

There was a fundamental flaw in the politicising of SEND by some. All the pupils in my headships came from mainstream schools. The pupils performed from what was the old P level to A level and many experts thought some, if not all, should be in mainstream. Their assumption was that the pupils had been failed by poor mainstream provision, in the belief that schools could be all things to all people. This view always did a profound disservice to mainstream schools. It was not that the pupils had necessarily poor curriculum nor

teaching (although too many rarely had input from qualified teachers because of capacity issues) and rarely access or physical needs (although space and specialist equipment again could be an issue). It was that the pupils felt disconnected, different in a negative way rather than a distinctive one. This attention to the cognitive and physical domains was insufficient without the affective domain and this could be beyond a mainstream environment, not for want of trying. One can't be made to relate: we find our own groups. It is an irony of the teenage years in particular (many of our admissions were from secondary schools, where differences became more apparent) that pupils fight fiercely to assert their independence but desperately want to fit in with their peers too.

Piloting the courses

It is no wonder then that SEND has been buffeted in so many ways and that core concerns of pedagogy,

care, relationships, resource, funding, training, partnerships and leadership were developed despite, rather than because, of policy. In many ways, it was the by-product of ideas such as Estelle Morris' time as Secretary of State when school's could earn autonomy, the subsequent specialist school movement and the advent of Teaching Schools that led to outward-looking partnership working.

All of which, in a roundabout way, brings us to this year's Laurel Research. Each of the eight projects exemplify not only the breadth that is SEND but the best of intention, identification, individualization, care and respect for children and their families, assiduous adaptation of pedagogy and outward-looking partnership working. This is a world away from where we were 50 years ago.

In this research is the broad church of SEND: mainstream and special schools; universities; teachers, therapists and assistants; and families and their children. We see the effects of deprivation on language and social development. The need for opportunities to play, to develop our senses, to regulate emotions, to develop communication, to learn to read, to become facile with numbers, the profound liberation of their untapped learning using assistive technology and so much more.

We see teams of diligent and dedicated professionals enhancing and creating learning relationships to better help pupils learn and develop. We see the sacrifice of the individual practitioner to a greater good, one that is based on practice informed by knowledge born of concern for the present and the future. We see, and recognize, the importance of leadership without which SEND remains a secondary concern. This is good work, conducted in the most trying of times of a pandemic, and political

and economic upheaval. The SEND Review and the *SEND and AP Improvement Plan* will not of course magically remedy the issues raised in these research papers. If implemented well there will be better informed training for students and practising teachers; a better experience for parents negotiating the system; good practice guides; more consistent processes and equitable practice around the country; a restatement of aspiration for those with SEND; improved transition; and more specialist provision. The plan intends to improve the integration of education, health and social care (but naturally does not address issues in primary legislation for education and health that might inhibit enforcement). There are to be national, regional and local partnerships to oversee the effectiveness of reform but, again, one needs to be reserved about the measure of these if SEND is viewed homogeneously.

For the people on the ground, their salvation and job satisfaction lies within the things they control. This Laurel Trust funded research allows that control and sense of professional value and validation to flourish. I like to think that these fellow professionals are engaged in noble and civilizing work and have the kinds of aspirations that intend to:

- **Guarantee and improve the achievement and wellbeing of the most vulnerable children with SEND**
- **Make the most of the moment and the future, researching the most effective and enjoyable practice for the best outcomes**
- **Create a legacy for sustained quality and improvement that recognises the rights, joys and dignity of the young people we serve.**

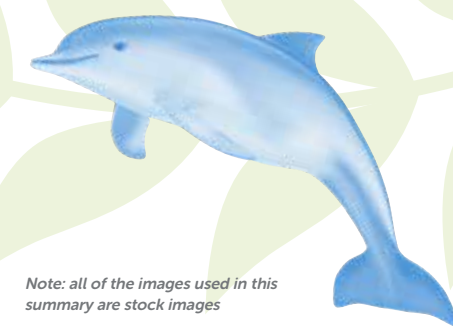
They exemplify the duties and values that aim to:

- **inspire and create confidence**
- **make the most of everyone and every moment**

- **have fun: enjoy learning for its own sake within a climate of support, encouragement and recognition**
- **treat young people and their families with dignity and professional integrity**
- **use evidence to neither artificially limit nor inflate outcomes and hope**
- **not conflate under-achievement with SEND**

They have a belief in the best in and for people, and not just in children. (I don't know if I would ever have become a headteacher if my great tutor at College, Freda Cliff, hadn't told me as a student that she believed I would be one day). They use a productive partnership approach to improve process and outcomes. They recognise that we need academic, vocational, and quality of life measures i.e. they know it's about the quality of the moment for students as well as the quality of outcomes. They know fun is essential. They know it's about how far forward we move, not how high we jump. That the future will only be as good as the partnerships we create. That it's about legacy, not ego. Most of all they know that inclusion is a state of being, not place.

The last word should go to a past pupil. When told by a colleague that I was out of school doing something important, the pupil asked if I was swimming with dolphins. What could be more important? The children are marvellous: a lifetime swimming with dolphins. ●



Note: all of the images used in this summary are stock images

Thank you

The Laurel Trust wishes to thank
the following Lead Schools and all their Partners:

**Ellen Tinkham School/
Learn to Live Foundation**

Gipsy Hill Federation
South London

Grafton Primary School
Barking and Dagenham

**John Donne Primary School/
Communitas Education Trust**
Peckham, South London

Owler Brook Primary School
Sheffield

Parklands Primary School
Wigston, Leicestershire

School 21
Newham

St Catherine's Catholic School

Sheffield

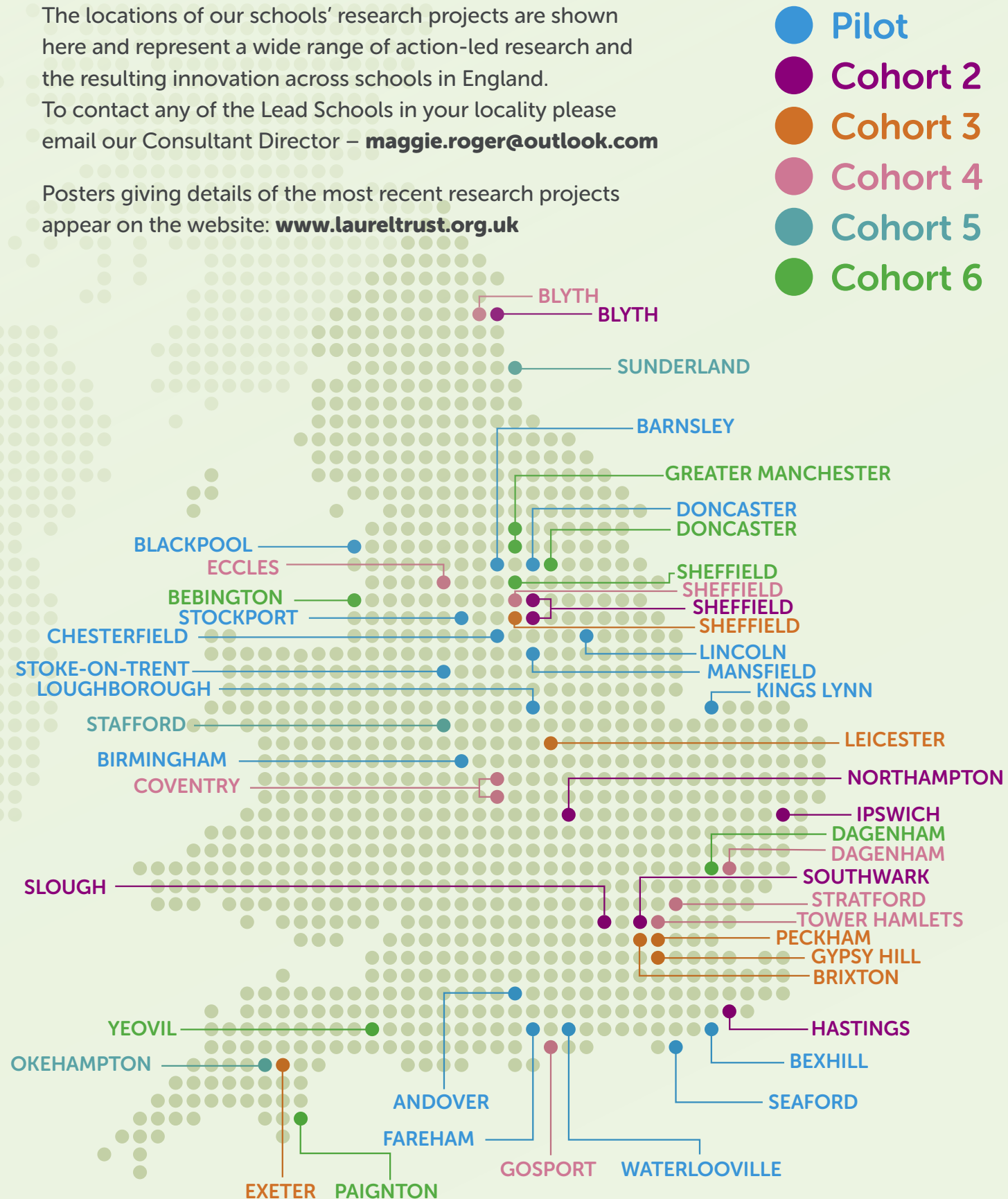
Notes

Project locations

The locations of our schools' research projects are shown here and represent a wide range of action-led research and the resulting innovation across schools in England.

To contact any of the Lead Schools in your locality please email our Consultant Director – **maggie.roger@outlook.com**

Posters giving details of the most recent research projects appear on the website: **www.laureltrust.org.uk**



Notes

[illegible]

The Laurel Trust wishes to thank David Bateson OBE for his thoughtful and incisive article and for writing the research summaries with such skill.



Leading Learning through
Action-led Research and Innovation

Registered Office: c/o Stone King LLP Boundary House 91 Charterhouse Street London EC1M 6HR

Telephone 07960 684014 | email info@laureltrust.org.uk

The Laurel Trust is a charity registered in England number 1117330 and a company limited by guarantee and registered in England number 5774260.