



Evaluation of the Impact of 'Unlocking Potential' Pilot on Children, Young People and Families

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Contents

1	Executive summary	3
1.1	Background	3
1.2	Aims and objectives of the research	3
1.3	Methodology	3
1.4	Findings	4
1.5	Conclusions	7
2	Background	8
2.1	Local Authority, school and funder involvement	9
3	Objectives of the research.....	11
4	Methodology	11
5	Longitudinal analysis across the three year pilot.....	13
5.1	Children and their development.....	13
5.2	Attendance and punctuality	14
5.3	Parent/carer perceptions	16
5.4	Academic attainment in ECC and ECaR	17
5.5	Financial value.....	20
6	Wider themes arising from the interview data.....	22
6.1	Leadership and management	22
6.2	Sustainability	23
6.3	Establishing trust and engagement with parents.....	24
6.4	Wider benefits: Transforming lives	25
7	Conclusions	30
8	References	34

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Background

Unlocking Potential: the 'National Pilot Programme Children, Young People and Families' offered an added dimension to Every Child Counts (ECC) and Every Child a Reader (ECaR) programmes in participating schools by underpinning the work with School-Home Support Practitioners (SHSPs) to increase the impact of the interventions. Unlocking Potential was specifically targeted at those children who were not achieving maximum benefit from the ECC and ECaR literacy and numeracy recovery programmes due to poor attendance and/or limited parental support. Over the three year pilot, SHSPs worked with children and their families in twenty schools in the pilot areas of Bradford, Bristol, Hackney, Islington and Tower Hamlets. SHSPs put in place a range of interventions to address parenting skills and children's social development to support and reinforce the specialist numeracy and literacy provision the children were receiving at school.

1.2 Aims and objectives of the research

This research aimed to identify effective models and interventions to increase the impact of programmes that tackle literacy and numeracy difficulties by involving parents/carers in their child's education.

The overriding research questions were:

- Did the alignment of School-Home Support with early literacy and numeracy interventions improve the percentage of children who fully caught up with their peers?
- Did the alignment of School-Home Support with early literacy and numeracy interventions impact on the speed with which children went through the programme?
- Did the alignment of School-Home Support with early literacy and numeracy interventions improve the maintenance of gains made on the programmes?
- What was the impact on parents and families' support of children's learning and parental engagement with education as a result of School-Home Support's intervention?
- What were the key features of success?
- What were the barriers to success?
- What was the cost effectiveness of the programme?
- Was there added value in terms of sustainable change for children, parents and families?
- What could be learned from the three year pilot to further support the development of the programme?

1.3 Methodology

Focus group interviews and individual semi-structured interviews were undertaken with SHSPs, school staff, parents, pupils, Reading Recovery and Numbers Count staff throughout the three year evaluation.

In Year 1 of the project, all schools involved in the project were visited. These initial visits enabled questions to be explored about the implementation of the project, what had worked

well, and what had been difficult. SHSPs were asked about the nature of the interventions put in place, the perceived effectiveness of the interventions and any difficulties that had arisen in contacting parents.

In Year 2 of the project, 10 schools were selected for further visits to explore examples of good practice and to consider the impact of the programme for pupils and parents who completed the programme in the first year of the project.

In Year 3 of the project, the remaining ten schools in the pilot received a final visit to further explore examples of good practice and to develop case studies of pupils and parents involved in the project. Where possible, pupils who had completed the programme in the first year of the project were interviewed for a final time to identify the longer term impact of the programme.

Pro formas to collect data on attendance, behaviour and parental involvement were provided to the research team from School-Home Support. In total, over the three years of the pilot, parent and carer feedback forms were received from 300 individuals. In total teacher feedback forms were received for 628 pupils.

The two universities responsible for ECC and ECaR, Edge Hill University and the Institute of Education, University of London, shared data to track progress including gains in numeracy and literacy with the research team.

1.4 Findings

Attendance

There was clear evidence of improvements in attendance for children participating in Unlocking Potential: this from teachers, parents and individual attendance data. In each year of the pilot, data were analysed where children had a full set of attendance data for that academic year. In each of the three years of the pilot the increase in attendance from the baseline measure to the summer term was statistically significant. For those involved in Year 3 of the project their attendance increased from a baseline of 92.3% to 95.2% during the summer term.

Pupils involved in Year 1 of the pilot were tracked for the three years of the pilot in relation to attendance. Of these, forty-two children had full attendance data for all three academic years. The gains made in attendance in Year 1 of the pilot were maintained throughout the following two years. At the end of Year 3 their attendance had risen from a baseline of 90.9% to 95.6%: this improvement was statistically significant and shows clear evidence of sustained improvement in attendance as a result of the Unlocking Potential pilot.

There was also evidence of improvements in punctuality for children participating in Unlocking Potential. Across all three cohorts of pupils in schools involved throughout the pilot there were statistically significant reported changes in punctuality whereby teachers perceived that the children were more punctual for lessons.

Impact on pupils

Across all pupils involved in the Unlocking Potential pilot there was a marked improvement in learning behaviours. There were statistically significant changes reported in behaviour in class in relation to completing homework, staying on task, having the right equipment for lessons, being able to follow routines, working through a problem and completing work.

Teachers also perceived that the children had made positive progress in developing their emotional well-being. Statistically significant improvements were found in all three cohorts in relation to how confident the children felt, how well they controlled their anger, their willingness to interact with peers and to participate in class and how well they responded to rewards and sanctions.

Teachers, parents and the children themselves spoke of the increase in confidence levels for the majority of children. This enabled children to make more progress with their work and to help other children.

Attainment

In every school Head Teachers were pleased with improved attainment at the end of Key Stage 1. The impact on academic attainment was very good in all schools.

In some schools the majority of children met national expectation levels and when children did not, the specialist teachers were able to refer the children on for further assessment in terms of identifying Special Educational Needs. In other schools, the progress that the majority of children had made was also very good. However, due to their entry levels to ECC and ECaR being extremely low, although they had made significant improvements, they had not yet caught up with their peers.

In the following example, a Head Teacher describes the impact of the project on attainment of the children in his school.

It's really gone from strength to strength as I've said before. The progress the children are making in reading and maths is absolutely phenomenal really. The children are coming up who never in the past would have got a Level 2.

Although there were no statistically significant differences between the Unlocking Potential schools and the comparator schools for numeracy or literacy gains, the gains made were maintained over time and were often higher than national outcomes. It is important to recognise that the nature of the project meant that the sample size was small. Poor results from one or two children had a large impact on the overall results.

Given that the children participating in Unlocking Potential had been identified for support due to a range of complex difficulties, these findings can be regarded as positive. That the children in the pilot progressed and maintained their progress following the ECC and/or ECaR interventions suggests that the additional work of SHSPs within Unlocking Potential had an impact in enabling these children to make progress during the programme and that the progress could be expected to continue after the programme.

Financial value

Many Head Teachers commented on the value for money of the Unlocking Potential pilot. In some instances Head Teachers had reworked the SHSP remit and refined their strategic vision to include accelerated learning across the school. Head Teachers emphasised the significant impact of the SHSP's role in the school and their desire to continue to embed the work of the Pilot longer term.

It was clear that the financial value of Unlocking Potential was far beyond that of the work undertaken with the targeted children. There were wider benefits for all pupils and teachers in the schools. Parents/carers of targeted children and other parents became more engaged with schools and developed trusting relationships, they attended classes to enhance their employment prospects and benefitted from practical financial assistance from SHSPs. Evident too was the impact of Unlocking Potential on the wider school community. Although difficult to quantify it was apparent that Unlocking Potential had transformed the lives of some families, who previously may have been perceived as too hard to reach.

Wider benefits: Transforming lives

There was evidence to support the role of the SHSPs in encouraging greater levels of parental involvement in children's learning and school. This included some marginalised families who had engaged with the school community for the first time as a result of the programme. SHSPs were positive about the support they received from the parents. In all years of the pilot teachers perceived parental/carer engagement to be higher after the programme as was the extent to which they supported their child's learning: the differences were statistically significant.

Across the three years of the programme high levels of one-to-one advice and support were taken up by parents/carers from SHSPs. Relevant is that across the pilot there was a reduction in parents/carers seeking referrals from the SHSPs to an agency/organisation from 9.1% in Year 1 to 1.7% and 2.5% in Years 2 and 3 respectively. This would indicate that there could be wider cost benefits from employing an SHSP in terms of the reduced use of external agencies/organisations. There was clear evidence of the practical positive impact on family life where financial support had been provided for families in crisis by SHS.

Community cohesion was an important theme throughout the pilot in terms of SHSP's contribution to the agency of the school in the community. Community learning in schools was seen by many Head Teachers as key to empowering parents to develop new skills and to increase their confidence in relation to learning. In some schools SHSPs had supported parents to enrol on ESOL courses, parenting courses and teaching assistant courses, which were organised for them in school by the SHSPs. To further improve parents' employability, SHSPs worked with parents to enrol them onto vocational courses, and addressed pressing social and housing issues with them.

Features of success

Important to the success of Unlocking Potential were the SHSPs' focus on: delivering workshops to engage parents; one-to-one casework with families with complex lives; providing high levels of support to parents/carers; and the high level of face to face regular contact. Also important was the clear understanding of the role and remit of the SHSPs by

the school, Head Teacher, teachers and the practitioners. Many schools had enabled SHSPs, ECC and ECaR teachers to work regularly with parents by providing a dedicated space with easy access for parents with prams. SHSPs had devised strategies for overcoming language barriers and successfully tackled tough social issues thereby reversing poor attendance and punctuality patterns.

Barriers to success

Where Head Teachers adopted a leadership style based on tight control and a lack of flexibility, SHSPs were constrained in the nature of the work they could undertake. In some instances, the lack of physical resources in schools limited the scope of the work that SHSPs could do.

1.5 Conclusions

By underpinning ECC and ECaR with SHSPs, Unlocking Potential was effective in engaging children and their parents/carers with reading and literacy recovery programmes. Evidence from parents/carers, teachers and SHSPs showed that Unlocking Potential had an impact in promoting positive behaviour and improved attendance among the pupils. It enabled pupils to develop their self-confidence, their self-esteem and their emotional well-being. Pupils involved in Unlocking Potential made positive gains in numeracy and literacy. The gains made were often above national outcomes, and although overall the gains made did not exceed those in the comparator schools, the gains made were maintained over time for a cohort of pupils who had been selected as being at risk of under-achievement.

Parents/carers became more engaged with the children's learning. Among the case studies, there were examples of Unlocking Potential having had a dramatic positive impact on whole families and enabling parents and carers to be visibly more integrated within the school community. The wider benefits of Unlocking Potential extended to siblings, the whole school and the wider community.

2 BACKGROUND

In England one in six children (16 per cent) leaves primary school having failed to master the basic skills in reading (DfE, 2012). Generally, day to day ordinary teaching does not enable children with literacy difficulties to catch up with their peers and in the cases where poor literacy continues into adolescence and adulthood there are serious implications for and costs to society beyond those associated directly with education (Every Child a Chance Trust, 2009a).

Where children have difficulties with numeracy similar patterns emerge relating to longer term life consequences. There are links between poor attainment in mathematics and truancy. The DfES analysis in 2006 showed that Year 9 pupils entering secondary schools with poor maths skills were over twice as likely to truant as were those who entered with age-appropriate skills. Pupils with poor numeracy skills are much more likely to be excluded from school than their peers. Since 1998, there has been an improvement in mathematics in the primary school, although the picture for low achieving pupils continues to be of concern with 6% of children failing to reach level 3 (the level expected for a seven year old) at Key Stage 2 (Gross, 2007; Burr, 2008; Williams, 2008).

Those who are not in school regularly for whatever reason have limited lifetime opportunities, socially, professionally and economically. They are more likely to experience unemployment, underemployment, and long-term dependency on social services (Coley, 1995; National Center for Educational Statistics, 1995) and homelessness (Berridge et al., 2001; Parsons et al., 2001; Flood-Page et al., 2000; Mori, 2004; SEU, 1998). Excluded pupils are two and a half times as likely to be unemployed at age 19 than their non-excluded peers (Office of National Statistics, 2004) and there are links between truancy, exclusion and crime (DFEE and Home Office 2001). The financial costs to health and social services of children with a range of conduct disorders are up to ten times higher than for children without difficulties (Scott et al., 2001) and Boyle and Goodall (2005) suggest that over their lifetime each truant costs society at least £250,000. Costs to the public purse arising from failure to master basic numeracy skills in the primary school years, and related to all individuals with numeracy difficulties, are estimated at up to £2.4 billion every year (Every Child a Chance Trust, 2009b). For literacy the costs are estimated at a total of up to £2.5 billion every year (Every Child a Chance Trust, 2009a).

There is a clear relationship between literacy and employment. The relationship between numeracy and employment is even stronger. Nearly four out of ten economically inactive women have very poor numeracy skills; the same pattern is seen among men (Grinyer, 2005).

Research into literacy interventions by Brooks (2007) indicates that early intervention is critical in enabling children to catch up with their peers since in responding to literacy difficulties at an early stage means that the achievement gap is less and the potential for bridging it increased. Research into interventions for pupils with mathematical difficulties has also highlighted the need for early intervention. This in order to reduce the risk of children developing negative attitudes and anxiety about mathematics and also since mathematical difficulties can affect performance in other areas of the curriculum (Dowker 2004; 2009).

In 2008 in England the national roll-out of Every Child a Reader (ECaR) began under the management of National Strategies. A comprehensive evaluation of the intervention

demonstrated that it was possible to tackle the literacy difficulties which may blight children’s lives (Tanner, et al., 2011). The Every Child Counts (ECC) project was a parallel programme to ECaR but with a focus on tackling the difficulties that children have with numeracy. Although less long standing than ECaR, reports have been positive with children moving from an average initial Number Age of 5 years 8 months on entry to 7 years on exit (Edge Hill University, 2012).

This project offered an added dimension to ECC and ECaR in schools that ran both programmes specifically targeted at those children who were not achieving maximum benefit from the programmes due to poor attendance and/or limited parental support. Over the three year project SHSPs worked in twenty schools in the pilot areas of Bradford, Bristol, Hackney, Islington and Tower Hamlets. They put in place a range of interventions to address parenting skills and children’s social development to support and reinforce the specialist numeracy and literacy provision the children are receiving at school.

School-Home Support’s practitioner service works in partnership with schools to support children and their families to improve attendance and raise achievement. They successfully engage parents, building trusting relationships and giving emotional and practical support to families, helping them overcome the barriers that are affecting learning.

SHSP practitioners are experts in parental and family engagement and work on a variety of issues, including but not limited to: Improving attendance; increasing parental engagement and involvement with the school; improving behaviour; supporting effective transition; addressing issues surrounding poverty, and supporting attainment. For the Unlocking Potential project, SHSPs extended their expertise in parental engagement through specific training on delivering ‘Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities’ parenting courses.

2.1 Local Authority, school and funder involvement

At the beginning of the evaluation Unlocking Potential involved 20 schools in three geographical areas (Inner London, Bristol, and Bradford).The different areas received varying levels of input (see Table 1).

Table 1: Varying inputs to the schools at the beginning of the pilot

Area	Number of Schools	Inputs	Funder
Inner London: Shoreditch (Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Islington)	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0.5FTE SHS Practitioner • Additional ECC/ECaR provision (4 children per year per school) • Literacy/Numeracy kitbags for ECaR/ECC supported children • Talking Partners programme • Funding for SEAL audit and whole school development • Business volunteer support for ECC/ECaR ‘graduates’ 	Mayor’s Fund for London

Inner London: Hackney	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 0.5FTE SHS Practitioner 	KPMG Foundation
Bradford	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 0.5FTE SHS Practitioner 	Sofronie
Bristol	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 0.5FTE SHS Practitioner (working across the school in a different role to that in the other areas of the Unlocking Potential project) 	DfE

The three year pilot of Unlocking Potential took place at a particularly challenging time in education in England this especially in relation to changes in Government funding arrangements. During the three year period of the evaluation Bristol dropped out of the programme as did some of the London schools and one school from Bradford. Table 2 sets out the schools involved in the final year of the pilot.

Table 2: Participants schools in Year 3 of the pilot

Area	Number of Schools	Inputs	Funder support
Inner London: Shoreditch (Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Islington)	6 Reduced to 5 from January 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 0.5FTE SHS Practitioner Additional ECC/ECaR provision (4 children per year per school) Literacy/Numeracy kitbags for ECaR/ECC supported children Talking Partners programme Funding for SEAL audit and whole school development Business volunteer support for ECC/ECaR 'graduates' (No funding for the last three elements above during the third year of the project) 	Mayor's Fund for London Nomura Charitable Trust
Inner London: Hackney	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 0.5FTE SHS Practitioner 	KPMG Foundation
Bradford	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 0.5FTE SHS Practitioner 	Sofronie
Bristol	Withdrawn from project		DfE

3 OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The overriding research questions were:

- Did the alignment of School-Home Support with early literacy and numeracy interventions improve the percentage of children who fully caught up with their peers?
- Did the alignment of School-Home Support with early literacy and numeracy interventions impact on the speed with which children went through the programme?
- Did the alignment of School-Home Support with early literacy and numeracy interventions improve the maintenance of gains made on the programmes?
- What were the key features of success?
- What were the barriers to success?
- What was the cost effectiveness of the programme?
- What was learned from the three year pilot to further support the development of the programme?

4 METHODOLOGY

Focus group interviews and individual semi-structured interviews were undertaken with SHSPs, school staff, parents, pupils, Reading Recovery and Numbers Count staff throughout the project.

In Year 1 of the project all schools involved in the project were visited. One school began the pilot late in the academic year and was not included in the visits. Interviews were undertaken with parents, pupils, school teachers and SHSPs. These initial visits enabled questions to be explored about the implementation of the project, what had worked well, what had been difficult. SHSPs were asked about the nature of the interventions put in place, the perceived effectiveness of the interventions and any difficulties that had arisen in contacting parents. SHSPs also provided a detailed breakdown of their activity with pupils and parents using the EDRS (Electronic Daily Record Sheet) monitoring tool which all School-Home Support practitioners complete.

In Year 2 of the project 10 schools were selected for further visits to explore examples of good practice and to consider the impact of the programme for pupils and parents who completed the programme in the first year of the project

In Year 3 of the project the remaining ten schools in the pilot received a final visit to further explore examples of good practice and to develop case studies of pupils and parents involved in the project. Where possible, pupils who had completed their intervention programme in Year 1 of the project were interviewed a final time in the last year of the pilot to identify the longer term impact of the programme.

Table 3 sets out the total number of interviews and focus groups undertaken as part of the evaluation.

Table 3 Total number of interviews and focus groups undertaken

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Head Teachers	16	9	9
SMT	4	1	3
SHS Service Delivery Managers	2	3	1
Class teachers	34	11	10
ECC/ECaR teachers	29	5	14
SHSPs	19	10	11
Pupils	106	11	11
Parents/Carers	48	8	9

Pro formas to collect data on attendance, behaviour and parental involvement were provided to the research team from School-Home Support. In total, over the three years of the pilot, parent and carer feedback forms were received from 300 individuals. In total teacher assessment forms were received for 628 pupils. Table 4 sets out the number of forms received for each year of the pilot.

Table 4 Total responses received from parents/carers and teachers during the pilot

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Parents/Carers	99	120	81
Teachers	266	180	182

The two universities responsible for ECC and ECaR, Edge Hill University and the Institute of Education, University of London, shared data to track progress including gains in numeracy and literacy with the research team.

A comparison group of schools, involved with Reading Recovery and Numbers Count and similar to the project schools, was identified in Year 1. Schools were matched on their involvement with ECC and/or ECaR, school size, gender of pupils, School Action and School Action Plus, authorised absence and persistent absence. There were no statistically significant differences between the comparator schools and the Unlocking Potential Pilot schools on these measures.

The sample

The three year pilot of Unlocking Potential took place at a particularly challenging time in education in England. At the beginning of the evaluation 20 pilot schools and 20 comparator schools were engaged. At the end of year 3 of the project the number of pilot schools who were fully engaged in the project had reduced to ten and the number of comparator schools had reduced to seven.

At a national level the number of schools participating in ECaR reduced by around 40% in the final year of the project, mainly due to recent changes in Government funding arrangements across England (ECaR Annual Report, 2012). With regard to ECC, during 2011-12 ECC launched a new programme 1stClass@Number which was a lighter touch, small-group intervention delivered by teaching assistants. During 2011-12 the number of

pupils participating in ECC, as opposed to the lighter touch provision, dropped by around 50% (ECC Annual Report, 2012).

Overall 808 children were engaged in the three year pilot of Unlocking Potential. In year 1 of the pilot 266 children were involved. In year 2 this increased to 316. In the final third year of the pilot 226 children were involved.

5 LONGITUDINAL ANALYSIS ACROSS THE THREE YEAR PILOT

5.1 Children and their development

Teacher questionnaires were returned for 410 pupils across the nine pilot schools that engaged fully in all years of the pilot of Unlocking Potential.

Across all three cohorts of pupils in the pilot there were statistically significant reported changes in behaviour. Teachers' perceived that following the pilot children were more likely to complete their homework, to stay on task during the lesson, to have the equipment for the lesson, to be able to follow routines, to work through a problem and to complete their work (see Table 5).

Table 5 Teacher's perceptions of changes in behaviour in class across all pupils involved in the three year pilot of Unlocking Potential

	Pre-pilot mean	Standard Deviation	Post-pilot mean	Standard Deviation	Significance level
Homework - how often is their homework completed? (N=393)	2.91	.944	3.3	.78	<.001
Focus - to what extent do they stay on task during your lesson? (N=408)	2.62	.712	3.15	.641	<.001
Organisation - how often do they have their equipment for your lesson? (N=359)	3.06	.835	3.38	.677	<.001
Following routines - how willing are they to follow class and school rules/routines? (N=407)	3.19	.747	3.55	.576	<.001
Problem solving - how often will they work through a problem? (N=407)	2.39	.721	3.06	.719	<.001
Completion of work - how often do they complete their class work? (N=407)	2.81	.742	3.38	.596	<.001

Number of teachers responding pre and post is indicated in brackets after the statement

In relation to the well-being of the children, across all three cohorts of pupils involved in the pilot, comparison of the pre and post responses indicated highly statistically significant changes in the extent to which the children felt confident, how well they controlled their anger, their willingness to interact with peers, their willingness to participate in class and how well they responded to rewards and sanctions (see Table 6).

Table 6 Teachers' perceptions of changes in the emotional well-being of all the pupils involved in the three year pilot of Unlocking Potential

	Pre-pilot mean	Standard Deviation	Post-pilot mean	Standard Deviation	Significance level
Self-esteem - how confident to they seem? (N=407)	2.57	.806	3.23	.672	<.001
Anger management - how well does the pupil control their anger? (N=404)	3.42	.772	3.67	.557	<.001
Interaction with peers - how willing are they to interact positively with their peers? (N=409)	3	.791	3.46	.618	<.001
Participation - how willing are they to participate in class activities? (N=409)	2.79	.871	3.39	.666	<.001
How well do they respond to rewards and sanctions? (N=407)	3.34	.774	3.65	.554	<.001

Number of teachers responding pre and post is indicated in brackets after the statement

5.2 Attendance and punctuality

Across all three cohorts of pupils in schools involved throughout the pilot there were statistically significant reported changes in punctuality and attendance whereby teachers' perceived that the children were more punctual for lessons and that their attendance had improved (see Table 7).

Table 7 Teacher's perceptions of attendance and punctuality throughout the pilot

	Pre-pilot mean	Standard Deviation	Post-pilot mean	Standard Deviation	Significance level
Attendance - how often do they attend your class? (N=410)	3.66	.56	3.8	.439	<.001
Punctuality - how punctual are they to your class? (N=410)	3.53	.723	3.7	.572	<.001

Number of teachers responding pre and post is indicated in brackets after the statement

In each year of the pilot data were analysed where children had a full set of attendance data for that academic year. In each of the three years of the pilot the increase in attendance from the baseline measure to the summer term was statistically significant (see Table 8).

Table 8 Improvements in attendance throughout the pilot

	Number of children	Baseline Mean	Summer Term Mean
Year 1 2009-10	76	91.2	94.3
Year 2 2010-11	183	93	94.6
Year 3 2011-12	133	92.3	95.2

Forty-two children from the schools involved in all stages of the pilot had full attendance data across all three years of the pilot. There were children who were involved in the first year of the pilot and whose attendance was tracked for a further two years after their engagement with Unlocking Potential. The gains made in attendance in Year 1 of the pilot were maintained throughout the following two years. Indeed attendance at the end of the third year in which these pupils were tracked had increased from a baseline of 90.9% to 95.6% (see Table 9): this was statistically significant.

Table 9 Tracking attendance over three years (N=42)

	Mean	SD
Baseline	90.9	8.27
Year 1 Autumn 2009-10	92	9.14
Year 1 Spring 2009-10	91.2	11.14
Year 1 Summer 2009-10	94	8.42
Year 2 Autumn 2010-11	90.3	9.72
Year 2 Spring 2010-11	95.6	5.45
Year 2 Summer 2010-11	94.8	6.65
Year 3 Autumn 2011-12	95	7.42
Year 3 Spring 2011-12	95.5	4.86
Year 3 Summer 2011-12	95.5	6.02

Throughout the pilot there was a strong focus on improving school attendance due to the links between poor attendance and under-achievement. Evident from the interview data throughout all years of the pilot was the important role that SHSPs played in supporting families to improve the attendance of the children.

Her role in supporting attendance is really important. We did a piece of research last year and looked at all those children with low attainment and then linked that to attendance. It's not rocket science! Low attendance equals low attainment; it's as simple as that. So having someone working on low attendance is ultimately going to lead to higher attainment and that's what we've been seeing as well. (Head Teacher)

During the initial phase of the pilot, it became clear that for some children, improved school attendance depended on whether the practitioner reminded the parent to bring them to school. Where appropriate, when SHSPs were unable to contact the parent/carer by telephone, practitioners would go to the home in person and bring the child to school. This approach enabled the relationship between the most vulnerable parents and the SHSP to develop and provided a foundation for further parental engagement work.

One child, the one that she has worked with most – yes he has improved but it's slow progress and if the mother has any upsets in her own life then his attendance goes as well. She has literally gone and picked him up and brought him to school and

*that's the only way to do it. On the whole attendance in this school is very good.
(Head Teacher)*

Most SHSPs worked in each school for 2½ days per week which meant that their ability to support school attendance fluctuated across the week. When a particular practitioner's hours increased she noticed the difference that this made in terms of improving attendance.

Parents see me every day. They are happy because their questions and queries can be dealt with straight away. Attendance has improved because if a child wasn't here on a Thursday I couldn't get in touch in the past. Now, if they're not here, I can straight away ring so that they send them in tomorrow. They do understand when I speak to the parent and it does have that impact. (SHSP)

By collaborating successfully with full-time school attendance officers and parent liaison workers, the majority of practitioners were able to address fluctuating patterns of attendance.

5.3 Parent/carer perceptions

Parents were asked to give a rating to the service across the three years of the pilot. Table 10 indicates a major increase in perceptions of improvement in Year 2, levelling off, as might be expected in Year 3, as the service stabilised with a high quality offering.

Table 10 Parental rating of the service throughout the pilot

Year of pilot	Rating	No Improvement		Significant Improvement		
		1	2	3	4	5
1	% (N)	1.1% (1)	2.2% (2)	27.2% (25)	32.6% (30)	37% (34)
2	% (N)	.9% (1)	0	9% (10)	32.4% (36)	57.7% (64)
3	% (N)	0	1.2% (1)	14.8% (12)	38.3% (31)	45.7% (37)

Over the duration of the pilot the highest SHS service use identified by parents and carers was for support to underpin ECC and ECaR and for one-to-one support (see Table 11), although a sizeable minority engaged with the information evening/event.

Table 11 Use of SHS services by parents/carers

Service	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Welfare Fund	4%	2.5%	3.7%
Support on ECaR/ECC	40.4%	90.8%	90.1%
Referred to an agency/organisation	9.1%	1.7%	2.5%
Parenting course	21.2%	13.3%	6.2%
Information evening/event	13.1%	27.5%	17.3%
One-to-one advice/support	42.4%	50%	56.8%
Other	11.1%	22.5%	4.9%

Across the three year pilot there was a reduction in referrals to an agency/organisation from 9.1% in Year 1 to 1.7% and 2.5% in Years 2 and 3 respectively. There was also a reduction in parents and carers attending a parenting course. Both of these could be regarded as

positives with parents feeling more able to cope with and manage their children with the support given by the SHSPs. This may mean that there are wider cost benefits in terms of the reduced use of external agencies/organisations.

Across the three years there were high levels of one-to-one advice and support being taken up by parents/carers from SHSPs. This is echoed in the qualitative data where the strong links that the SHSPs developed with parents/carers were of real importance to the overall success of the pilot.

5.4 Academic attainment in ECC and ECaR

The impact on academic attainment was very good in all schools. In some schools the majority of children met national expectation levels and when children did not, the specialist teachers were able to refer the children on to be statemented for SEN. In other schools the progress that the majority of children had made was, again, very good. However, due to their entry levels being extremely low, although they had made significant improvements, they had not yet caught up with their peers.

In the following example, the Head Teacher described the impact of the project on attainment of the children in his school.

It's really gone from strength to strength as I've said before. The progress the children are making in reading and maths is absolutely phenomenal really. The children are coming up who never in the past would have got a Level 2.

They did very well, especially last year in writing which was where we had the biggest improvement. The standards achieved in writing were very good and often reading will be very good but writing will be sluggish. Writing was particularly good last year and early indications for the children that did ECaR last year that are now in Year 2, show that that group has done very well as well. (Head Teacher)

In every school, Head Teachers were pleased with improved attainment at the end of Key Stage 1.

We had a very good year last year in terms of children getting Level 2s. For instance in maths, we got 93% of children getting Level 2, only 3 or 4 children didn't get a Level 2 which is phenomenal really... So what's happening is that the vast majority in terms of our data – whereas we were in the 70s with 70% of our children getting Level 2 we suddenly find ourselves in the high 80s and 90s. It's that 10% who have come up from the bottom who at one time would never have done. It's not quite as impressive with the reading but it's kind of similar – we were in the 80s for that I think last year. It puts a lot of pressure on us higher up the school because it means we're going to have to get 93% at Level 4. It's not beyond the realms of possibility because they have had a good start. (Head Teacher)

Commenting on the impact of the pilot on particularly vulnerable children, several Head Teachers remarked that their expectations of these children were much higher because of the project. This Head Teacher realised the value of multifaceted support.

The children are making good progress and they're closing the gap. They're making better than the national expectation of progress, but there's still a big gap (One Level)

in national expectation of attainment. We're also finding that the children are still making progress after the programme's finished and that's been important. Progress in Year 3 is good by our standards, but it's outstanding by national requirements. (Head Teacher)

5.4.1 ECC

Throughout the pilot the number age gain at 6 month follow up increased across the Unlocking Potential schools to exceed the national average in 2011-12 (see Table 12).

Table 12 Number age 6 month follow up gain since exit

	Unlocking Potential Mean (SD)	Comparator schools Mean (SD)	National
Year 1 (2009-10)	5.8 (3.78)	9.57 (6.18)	7.6
Year 2 (2010-11)	5.89 (3.62)	6.97 (2.72)	8.6
Year 3 (2011-12)	6.39 (2.53)	11.25 (4.47)	6

Key Stage 1 national assessments for mathematics for Unlocking Potential were higher than nationally for Year 1 and Year 2 of the pilot. In Year 3 this dropped to below the national average, due to the poor performance at one school (see Table 13), as is apparent from the large standard deviation of 34.38.

Table 13 Key Stage 1 national assessments for mathematics for children who completed the programme during the time of the pilot: Percentage of children attainment L2+

	Unlocking Potential Mean (SD)	Comparator schools Mean (SD)	National
Year 1 (2009-10)	77 (9.71)	62 (16.77)	70
Year 2 (2010-11)	77 (10.74)	72 (25.02)	72
Year 3 (2011-12)	68 (34.38)	77 (23.64)	73

5.4.2 ECaR

The length of the ECaR programmes for those making accelerated progress decreased over time for Unlocking Potential schools, the comparator schools and at a national level (see Table 14). In the final year of the pilot those participating in Unlocking Potential completed the programme in the shortest amount of time.

Table 14 Length of programmes for those making accelerated progress (weeks)

	Unlocking Potential Mean (SD)	Comparator schools Mean (SD)	National
Year 1 (2009-10)	21.36 (1.93)	23.3 (8.25)	18.8 (4.8)
Year 2 (2010-11)	19.81 (3.66)	22.96 (5.19)	18.2 (4.6)
Year 3 (2011-12)	17.52 (1.84)	18.1 (1.65)	17.9 (46)

The six month follow up gains for Book level average, writing vocabulary and the BAS reading scale show a varied pattern which is heavily influenced by the small sample size. Apparent from the large standard deviations is that there was wide variation across and within the schools (see Table 15).

Table 15 Follow up gains at six months

Book level average	Unlocking Potential Mean (SD)	Comparator schools Mean (SD)	National
Year 1 (2009-10)	21.63 (3.2)	21.25 (.354)	20.8 (3.3)
Year 2 (2010-11)	18.62 (1.31)	20.45 (2.4)	20.5 (3.4)
Year 3 (2011-12)	18.97 (3.49)	19.23 (1.86)	20 (3.5)

Writing vocabulary	Unlocking Potential Mean (SD)	Comparator schools Mean (SD)	National
Year 1 (2009-10)	57.13 (14.57)	51.5 (20.51)	54.1 (20.1)
Year 2 (2010-11)	49.63 (8.39)	45.58 (12.51)	51.8 (18.9)
Year 3 (2011-12)	56.18 (11.61)	48.3 (31.11)	49.2 (18.4)

BAS reading scale	Unlocking Potential Mean (SD)	Comparator schools Mean (SD)	National
Year 1 (2009-10)	93.75 (4.5)	92 (9.9)	7:4 (88 months)
Year 2 (2010-11)	85.5 (3.51)	90.75 (6.95)	7:4 (88 months)
Year 3 (2011-12)	88.33 (6.62)	91 (3)	7:4 (88 months)

While there were no statistically significant differences between the pilot and comparator schools in the Key Stage 1 assessment for Reading, those in the Unlocking Potential pilot

exceeded the national average quite considerably in Year 1 and Year 3 and were similar to the national average in Year 2 (see Table 16).

Table 16 Key Stage 1 national assessments for reading for children who completed the programme during the time of the pilot: Percentage of children attaining L2+

Reading	Unlocking Potential Mean (SD)	Comparator schools Mean (SD)	National
Year 1 (2009-10)	80 (27.39)	81 (4.01)	70
Year 2 (2010-11)	73 (39.26)	86 (9.44)	74
Year 3 (2011-12)	96 (6.63)	95 (10)	77

Similarly, while there were no statistically significant differences between the pilot and comparator schools in the Key Stage 1 national assessments for writing, apart from in Year 1, those in the Unlocking Potential pilot exceeded the national average quite considerably in all years of the pilot (see Table 17).

Table 17 Key Stage 1 national assessments for writing for children who completed the programme during the time of the pilot: Percentage of children attaining L2+

Writing	Unlocking Potential Mean (SD)	Comparator schools Mean (SD)	National
Year 1 (2009-10)	79 (30.35)	56 (9.41)	56
Year 2 (2010-11)	68 (37.01)	66 (35.1)	58
Year 3 (2011-12)	78 (25.22)	88 (14.45)	63

Overall the children involved in Unlocking Potential throughout the pilot made positive gains in reading and writing and caught up with their peers. These gains were maintained over time.

5.5 Financial value

In broad terms where young children fail to gain effective numeracy and/or literacy skills the longer-term financial impact relates to four areas: increased educational costs in secondary school and into adulthood; employment-related costs plus additional costs associated with not being in education, employment or training (NEET); health costs, and costs to the criminal justice system (Every Child a Chance Trust, 2009a, b).

Work undertaken by KPMG estimated that with a 79% success rate and a unit cost of £2,600 per person, annual savings of £1.6 billion would be made as a result of providing effective numeracy intervention at age seven to the 35,843 pupils who currently leave primary school each year with very low numeracy skills. In terms of the return on investment it was estimated that for every pound spent on the programme, this was between £12 and £19

(Every Child a Chance Trust, 2009b). The corresponding figure for ECaR was between £11 and £17 (Every Child a Chance Trust, 2009a).

A more recent independent evaluation of ECC concluded that it was expensive and that it might be too expensive for many schools (Torgerson, et al., 2011). With regard to ECaR a separate independent evaluation concluded that if the progress the children made was sustained throughout school then the long-term benefits of ECaR would be expected to exceed costs. However; a caveat was added given the expense and the intensive nature of the programme. It was not clear whether the funding and resources necessary to maintain it would be available in the future (Tanner et al., 2011). As both evaluations commented there is no information about the actual longer term impact of either ECC or ECaR.

Given that the long term impact and efficacy of ECC and ECaR is unproven, it is difficult to comment on the cost effectiveness of Unlocking Potential, especially given the small number of schools and pupils involved in the pilot. It is clear from the qualitative data that while Head Teachers were very positive about the effectiveness of Unlocking Potential in their school, they varied in their view as to the cost effectiveness.

For the most part, it was felt that SHSPs had proved themselves invaluable to the school throughout the pilot, having provided an outstanding service to school communities in addition to individual children and their families:

I have decided with my governors that the project technically ends in July and we should lose our SHSP in July, but we have decided we can't afford to lose her because she is a vital part, so we are going to fund her ourselves for the 2½ days. (Head Teacher)

As one Head Teacher pointed out the SHSP was relentless in pursuing parents. Indeed this was a common theme shared by all the practitioners:

With the governing body, they've heard about the project. They know what's happening. They've heard from the maths coordinator, from the literacy coordinator how the work that's being done is impacting on the learning. And they are in agreement that we keep this woman – we make sure that it continues. The decision ultimately was based on the empirical evidence. (Head Teacher)

In some schools, Unlocking Potential was viewed as a good programme and in turn a good investment:

Initially, I thought there's an awful lot of money here – two fully qualified teachers working with individual children and is it going to work, etc. Well it's definitely worked. It's worth investing money in something that's clearly a good programme. The impact that the programmes have had on the quality of teaching in the classes where the ECC teacher's been working with number has come up hugely. (Head Teacher)

One Head Teacher of a small school had assessed the value of SHS to her fluctuating staffing needs and had decided that the organisation did offer value for money to schools through maintaining a consistently high level of training and service delivery.

I think it does offer value for money. Like absolutely everything, it depends on the individual. My experience of SHS has been very good. I think the support given and

the training given by SHS is very good. They very closely monitor what their practitioners are doing... Of course they're a middle man but the quality of the people and the training they've received have been very good. (Head Teacher)

Some Head Teachers widened the remit of the project to include a wider range of children, this on the basis of cost:

We've started to develop it in our own way if you like. We started at the beginning of this year to make it not just specific to the two year groups where it was within KS1 before, with ECC and ECaR just relating directly to Year 1 and Year 2. What we felt was that it wasn't cost effective and it wasn't the best use of resources to support the children if we just kept it focussed down tightly on those two year groups. So we decided that we would span out to working across targeted groups further up the school. We also decided that some one-to-one would continue but that we would also look to have small groups as well, because again that was cost effective. (Head Teacher)

Some Head Teachers placed value on what had been learned from the project and aimed to replicate the approach using their own staff.

Aspects of the role can be embedded in the future work of the school. We aren't going to be able to fund that role but some of the aspects will be picked up by our own staff. They will take over the meetings with parents going onto those programmes as they will for all intervention programmes next year – so they will have that sort of contact with parents and I think some of that can be sustained along with what we've got in place already. (Head Teacher)

In addition, a number of Head Teachers expressed concern about the cost of hiring the SHSPs in their school. While they recognised the expertise of the SHSP, they felt that the financial costs were not the best use of their budgets. At the time of this report, six of the eight London schools involved at the end of the Unlocking Potential project still employed SHSPs.

6 WIDER THEMES ARISING FROM THE INTERVIEW DATA

6.1 Leadership and management

Every Head Teacher appreciated the positive impact of the project on the academic attainment of the individual children, parental involvement at both individual and community level and in terms of developing new ways of working across the school.

As with other interventions in schools the role of the Head Teacher was pivotal to the success of the pilot. The majority of Head Teachers were highly committed to Unlocking Potential. In broad terms the leadership and management by Head Teachers influenced the pilot in two key areas: the level of creativity and flexibility with which the SHSPs were able to work and the space and resources allocated to the SHSPs.

There were some differences in leadership style among the Head Teachers of the participating schools. Some Head Teachers adopted a leadership style that was less tightly

controlled and provided scope for initiative, creativity and variation. By contrast other Head Teachers adopted a more controlled approach to management with little room for flexibility.

When there was scope for creativity, SHSPs were able to be more flexible:

She's embedded herself in terms of the parent engagement and she's kind of really confident in the way she does that. We've just kind of acknowledged that the SHSP does a range of activities. We've seen more of the creative side of her and we've given her the space to do it. (Head Teacher)

In particular the majority of Head Teachers gave the SHSPs scope to develop their role in the school. The project was constrained in schools where this did not happen.

I don't really arrange things here. I just do what they want me to do – make phone calls – get people to come to things...The staff are really nice. I have friends here, but in terms of the work I do it's not a lot. It's because of the structure that's been put in place. Here, it's a happy school but it's very difficult for someone that comes in. Here you can plan and then it will be a 'No'. It's usually that everything's a 'No'. (SHSP)

Many school buildings had been newly developed during the course of the pilot. The fact that Head Teachers had allocated these new facilities to the SHSPs' work was testimony to the value that the pilot brought to each school. In a minority of schools Head Teachers acknowledged that development of the role of the SHSP had been impaired by a lack of resources; in particular they noted that facilities for parental engagement were inadequate in the school.

In one school the work of the project was limited by a building project. This had an impact on delivering the programme. Parents did not observe lessons because these took place in a cloakroom. Coffee mornings took place in a local church.

In terms of the involvement of our Parent Involvement workers, they've had a bit of a difficult year because first of all they've had very little space to work in. They've still been able to engage with parents and to work with them in terms of supporting them to help with the children's education, but they've had to do it within a very constricted sort of environment. Just getting to meet with parents on a very casual basis in what we call the 'Chill and Chat' sessions –it's been off-site until very, very recently. A lot of events, workshops, that sort of thing that they would have liked to have developed we just haven't had the space for. (Head Teacher)

This indicates the importance of the Head Teacher and other Senior Managers in the school being aware of the needs of the programme and taking them into account in short-, medium- and long-term planning.

6.2 Sustainability

Having widened the reach of the project, many Head Teachers were convinced that the work of the project should be continued but that a teaching assistant could be trained to perform the practitioner parental engagement role.

I could employ somebody and train them up to do the work that she's doing on a fulltime basis for the same amount of money. If it goes up anymore I can. I'm not saying that they'd be as good as her or as effective as her but the money would become a concern next year if it continues to go up on a two day week. (Head Teacher)

Another consequence of having widened the reach of the project was that the impact of the practitioner's role became less powerful in the school and some Head Teachers questioned whether schools should become involved in supporting parents to this extent.

Sometimes the practitioners get drawn into things that are not the school's remit really and it's difficult because how wide is a school's remit? A lot of time can be spent supporting an individual family, going to banks and meetings and things but actually it's about costs at the end of the day, on the one hand we might support that one family, but in the same amount of time we might have supported three other families. (Head Teacher)

However, in schools where there had been very little modification of the project remit by the leadership team, the Head Teacher recognised the sustainability of the project and the importance of the role of the SHSP in supporting parents.

The parents trust her and I think that's the key to it. It's got to be somebody that they see regularly. It's no good us swapping and changing. Somebody they see regularly, can build a relationship with, they feel they can go back and talk to her. She's always on the playground. She's also running a Strengthening Families course. When she's not doing a course with them, she's out there talking to them. (Head Teacher)

Over the duration of the pilot the parents became less dependent on SHSPs for emotional support and this process led to the development of self-sustaining autonomous parent networks. Parents started to approach SLT or other members of staff directly, mirroring to some extent the behaviour of middle class parent networks.

Before they asked, 'Should I speak to the teacher? Should I speak to the home liaison officer? Should I speak to the Head Teacher? Now they can do that. They can go directly to the office. All the coffee morning parents are really good friends. They don't speak English together but they communicate and they've all become very good friends. (SHSP)

6.3 Establishing trust and engagement with parents

Many practitioners found that establishing relationships with parents was difficult initially. In schools where Head Teachers supported a flexible approach to the work of SHSPs, the SHSPs developed creative ways of breaking down barriers:

I built my relationships with parents informally. Parents didn't know me. If I had tried to put a formal course on it would have been 'Well who do you think you are? Why do you think you know more than I do?' The first thing I remember doing was the Simple Relaxation event. The parents would come for a free massage and we'd get talking. Parents started to realise that I'm actually in the school to support them. I built my relationships that way and then I brought the structured courses in. (SHSP)

In the second and third years of the pilot, SHSPs delivered formal parenting courses based on specific training they had received to deliver the 'Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities' course. These were very well attended and helped parents to consolidate their parenting skills and to build a supportive parent network.

Strengthening families was absolutely fantastic. I did the very first course and my husband did the second course. Now we know how to work together. I recommended the course to my best friend. The best and hardest section was when we had to talk about our past. We had such a good bond in that group. It took all the weight from my shoulders and I've felt so much more confident in myself. I've even applied to go to College with young students. I'm going to be a nail technician and start my own travelling business, going from home to home. As a group we were very close and we all sort of keep in touch because we see each other. (Mother)

Many of the practitioners were bilingual and could speak with parents in their home language. Before the involvement of SHSP, language had been a real barrier between some parents and the school their child attended:

Finding language interpreters for parents for whom we didn't know which languages were spoken was difficult for the school. The SHSP got straight in there and said she speaks Hoki. It's a dialect form of Mandarin but it's not Mandarin. I was thinking, 'Wow you've built up a great relationship with this woman!' She can communicate with her. She is communicating which is amazing because it's taken us a long time to get a smile out of that parent. Now she says 'Hello' and comes in. If there's a problem she won't back off. (Head Teacher)

6.4 Wider benefits: Transforming lives

During the pilot parents discussed their experiences and the impact of the ECaR and ECC programmes on their child. In every case the parents spoke very warmly of the work of the specialist teachers and their relationship with the practitioner. In some cases, the impact was particularly transformational.

In every participating school, SHSPs had supported the well-being of vulnerable families. Many families struggled with financial hardship and the SHSPs were able to put in place new furniture, food and clothing in order to support the families through a time of crisis. In this example, the SHSP describes intervening to help a homeless family, new to the UK. Their five year old daughter had joined the school in a traumatised state.

Case study: Transforming the lives of families

The Slovakian family have taken up a huge amount of time. It's almost daily. It's something every day from housing to benefits to filling out a welfare form for a cooker. We've had a washer donated to a member of staff by an elderly person. So she's had a washer, a cooker and a bed. So it's transporting all that and the practicalities. We had to get bedding – oh everything last October because they were homeless. There's been some family friction. I've had to deal with disputes. I managed to get a school place for the five year old in Year 1 – not a word of English, quite wild in the sense that she has no boundaries, no social skills. She's caused havoc in the sense that she screamed on the first day of school because she was so scared. (SHSP)

Case study: Taking time to build trusting relationships to facilitate change

At the start of the project, one mother would not bring her son to school. He had been sexually abused when he was aged five so his mother was very protective. The SHSP befriended the mother and worked intensively with her, making several home visits every week. His school attendance became more regular and in the third year of the project improved from 68% to 98%. He gained two sublevels in maths and reading. Initially, his mother resisted contact with school staff but by the third year, she had developed a good relationship with the child's class teacher and was pleased that her son had developed friendships, was well-liked and popular in the class. The class teacher said:

I get on really well with his mum. She's bringing him and will wait with him in the line and after school I'll talk to her about how he's done that day, making sure she gets positive feedback. I speak to her most days. She's always very polite...and wants him to do well. She's been working with him at home as well. She comes to the parents evening. She's always the first one and I always make sure I give her the first slot and she's always attended them. (Year 4 teacher)

The majority of targeted children needed further support as they moved into Key Stage 2. However, this did not apply to a small number of children who had not only closed the attainment gap but were exceeding expectations.

Case study: Exceeding expectations

Liam's home had flooded during the first year of the project and the SHSP had put practical financial assistance in place. One year later, Liam had made rapid progress in all areas and was a member of the school football team. In the third year of the project he began Year 3 at Level 3C in reading, two sublevels above expectation. By the spring term he had moved up to Level 3A, making a year's progress in two terms.

Liam is a very confident reader and is very good at reading. He uses the text to analyse what's going on and to justify characters' actions. He can read with expression. He can say why something's happened. He's got good recall. He can summarise the important parts. He's good at analysing characters which is quite a high level thing. Liam's attendance is consistently good. He responds well to targets. He's onto complex sentences. In maths he always wants to get onto the next club. He wants to start multiplying decimals. He's very motivated. Whenever we do Philosophy for Children or Accelerated Learning in Maths he can explain his thinking and explain his learning. He's a clever boy and he can talk well. (Year 3 teacher)

Case study: Ongoing support following ECC

Zara completed ECC in the first year of the pilot. However, two years later she was shy, withdrawn at home and had been bullied at school. Her youngest brother had a complex developmental disorder and his care demanded most of her mother's time and energy. Her older brother tended to pick on her at home and the mother was very concerned. The SHSP stepped in to offer support and the mother reported positive change.

I think it's really good that she's here because if she weren't here I don't think I would have a child that's doing so well with maths now. She gave me these charts – to give your children a smile or a sad face when they've done well, or they've not done well. Back in them days I was always upset. My eldest had a really bad behaviour problem. He was getting detentions every week. Zara was falling behind with her school work, but she wouldn't say anything or tell me how she was feeling and she was really quiet. They're both doing quite well now. My son's shown a big change and he's even got a certificate for his behaviour. Zara's shown a big change too. She talks more. She's not shy at all. She tells me how she's feeling now. Her maths has really improved and her teacher's really happy. So am I. The credit for all this goes to her. (Zara's mother)

The SHSP organised teaching assistant training courses for parents at the school in the second and third year of the project. This led to long-term improvements in the families' economic well-being.

We've run the teaching assistant course three times and all in all I would say that about 40 parents have completed their Level 2 Teaching Assistant course. A couple of them have now got jobs working as TAs. We had about six different ethnicities and different languages within the group. It was great to see everyone coming together. I see them in the playground, parents that weren't necessarily friends before. (SHSP)

During the pilot, school staff and parents began to anticipate the impact of the pilot on younger siblings. The example below demonstrates the importance of parent networks in this process.

Just by being in school and soaking up the atmosphere, parents learned what we were all about and reading's a part of that. A lot of these mums haven't had much education themselves, but some are very highly educated. Those mums could influence the other mums. It's all for the benefit of the child and not just the child but siblings, especially the younger ones. There was a noticeable difference in the level of abilities that the children came into in nursery. (ECaR teacher)

A Head Teacher commented on the impact of a collective cultural shift among parents and her expectation that entry levels of younger siblings will reflect this shift:

She's having some real impact with some of those families. I think that the impact in years to come as younger children come up through the school as well – the siblings of the children that she's currently working with and I think parents will have more awareness of preparing children for school and of their role in children's learning. (Head Teacher)

Two mothers provided insight into this process.

When she can't pronounce a word, we go back to the whole way that her ECaR teacher done it. You know, break it down, sound it out then put the word together. We've got phonics games that rhyme that we do at home. It's like a little circle. I do stuff with her then she'll help her brother out. She sounds it out to help her brother and things like that. (Mother)

She helps out with her younger brother and the homework. She's got a number chart from one to one hundred and they both do read it out loud in the bedroom. So her brother's already starting to recognise numbers because he sees his sister Zara. They do a lot of drawing in books as well. She helps him with reading, writing and numbers. She reads him a bedtime story before bed. (Mother)

According to one Head Teacher, a rippling out effect had occurred within the classrooms of his school. As the levels of emotional well-being, child safety and pastoral care for the most vulnerable children had improved, all of children in the school became happier.

It's the fact that the children, not just the children that are around the programme it's the others as well. There are children who are achieving slightly higher than them who think, 'Well actually you know the school is taking a real care of these kids here and really helping them'. I think that that creates a sort of ethos and a feel in the school as a really caring place to be. It has changed. We're now a very happy school. We don't have a lot of issues. It's partly because we've channelled the care in at that very early age really. (Head Teacher)

Every SHSP empowered many parents during the pilot. Parents were often particularly vulnerable due to health, mobility or housing issues. A number of the parents were isolated and quite a number of them had a young child with a disability. However, the following example represents one element of a practitioner's work in two neighbouring schools. The practitioner recognised that housing and unemployment issues were wider barriers to children's learning and tackled the problem.

Case study: Transcending wider barriers to children's learning

She hasn't just remained within her role of working with these ECaR children. She's really got involved in a project called Stand-up Citizens. It's a project that's helping parents to get jobs for a living wage, improvements to their housing through work with the local council. The parents are really appreciative. There are a few blocks around here and the council have agreed that because of Stand-up Citizens, they will do all the damp-proofing and all the work that needs to be done to improve those properties and quite a few of our parents are benefiting from that. (Head Teacher)

Stand-up Citizens is going really well. Many families between the two schools have benefited. In a meeting they (Happy Homes) agreed to spend £500,000 on eradicating damp in four blocks. We said, 'Okay, but we've still got many families that are suffering from damp' and they've just released £1,000,000 in order to do some more flats. The families – Gosh they're like new people! It's really made such a huge difference. When I see them now they're full of smiles and they're so happy that the work's been done on their houses. They feel that their children's health is not in jeopardy. It's been so empowering for parents. (SHSP)

In addition to the wider benefits for pupils, siblings, parents/carers and schools, many of the Head Teachers spoke about community cohesion and how this had developed during the pilot.

The SHSP has been very good in terms of community cohesion. We've had a number of workshops where a range of things have been discussed. We've had the Citizens'

Advice Bureau and someone from London Citizens came in talking to parents about their local concerns in their locality. We've had dietary sessions – a lot on and that does help to bring different members of the community together. We did well in our Community Cohesion in our Ofsted just before Christmas and she contributed a lot to that. She's been a real source of strength, serving the community. (Head Teacher)

7 CONCLUSIONS

Attendance

There was clear evidence of improvements in attendance for children participating in Unlocking Potential: this from teachers, parents and individual attendance data. In each year of the pilot, data were analysed where children had a full set of attendance data for that academic year. In each of the three years of the pilot the increase in attendance from the baseline measure to the summer term was statistically significant. For those involved in Year 3 of the project their attendance increased from a baseline of 92.3% to 95.2% during the summer term.

Pupils involved in Year 1 of the pilot were tracked for the three years of the pilot in relation to attendance. Of these, forty-two children had full attendance data for all three academic years. The gains made in attendance in Year 1 of the pilot were maintained throughout the following two years. At the end of Year 3 their attendance had risen from a baseline of 90.9% to 95.6%: this improvement was statistically significant and shows clear evidence of sustained improvement in attendance as a result of the Unlocking Potential pilot.

There was also evidence of improvements in punctuality for children participating in Unlocking Potential. Across all three cohorts of pupils in schools involved throughout the pilot there were statistically significant reported changes in punctuality whereby teachers perceived that the children were more punctual for lessons.

Impact on pupils

Across all pupils involved in the Unlocking Potential pilot there was a marked improvement in learning behaviours. There were statistically significant changes reported in behaviour in class in relation to completing homework, staying on task, having the right equipment for lessons, being able to follow routines, working through a problem and completing work.

Teachers also perceived that the children had made positive progress in developing their emotional well-being. Statistically significant improvements were found in all three cohorts in relation to how confident the children felt, how well they controlled their anger, their willingness to interact with peers and to participate in class and how well they responded to rewards and sanctions.

Teachers, parents and the children themselves spoke of the increase in confidence levels for the majority of children. This enabled children to make more progress with their work and to help other children.

Attainment

In every school Head Teachers were pleased with improved attainment at the end of Key Stage 1. The impact on academic attainment was very good in all schools.

In some schools the majority of children met national expectation levels and when children did not, the specialist teachers were able to refer the children on for further assessment in terms of identifying Special Educational Needs. In other schools, the progress that the majority of children had made was also very good. However, due to their entry levels to ECC

and ECaR being extremely low, although they had made significant improvements, they had not yet caught up with their peers.

In the following example, a Head Teacher describes the impact of the project on attainment of the children in his school.

It's really gone from strength to strength as I've said before. The progress the children are making in reading and maths is absolutely phenomenal really. The children are coming up who never in the past would have got a Level 2.

Although there were no statistically significant differences between the Unlocking Potential schools and the comparator schools for numeracy or literacy gains, the gains made were maintained over time and were often higher than national outcomes. It is important to recognise that the nature of the project meant that the sample size was small. Poor results from one or two children had a large impact on the overall results.

Given that the children participating in Unlocking Potential had been identified for support due to a range of complex difficulties, these findings can be regarded as positive. That the children in the pilot progressed and maintained their progress following the ECC and/or ECaR interventions suggests that the additional work of SHSPs within Unlocking Potential had an impact in enabling these children to make progress during the programme and that the progress could be expected to continue after the programme.

Financial value

Many Head Teachers commented on the value for money of the Unlocking Potential pilot. In some instances Head Teachers had reworked the SHSP remit and refined their strategic vision to include accelerated learning across the school. Head Teachers emphasised the significant impact of the SHSP's role in the school and their desire to continue to embed the work of the Pilot longer term.

It was clear that the financial value of Unlocking Potential was far beyond that of the work undertaken with the targeted children. There were wider benefits for all pupils and teachers in the schools. Parents/carers of targeted children and other parents became more engaged with schools and developed trusting relationships, they attended classes to enhance their employment prospects and benefitted from practical financial assistance from SHSPs. Evident too was the impact of Unlocking Potential on the wider school community. Although difficult to quantify it was apparent that Unlocking Potential had transformed the lives of some families, who previously may have been perceived as too hard to reach.

Wider benefits: Transforming lives

There was evidence to support the role of the SHSPs in encouraging greater levels of parental involvement in children's learning and school. This included some marginalised families who had engaged with the school community for the first time as a result of the programme. SHSPs were positive about the support they received from the parents. In all years of the pilot teachers perceived parental/carer engagement to be higher after the programme as was the extent to which they supported their child's learning: the differences were statistically significant.

Across the three years of the programme high levels of one-to-one advice and support were taken up by parents/carers from SHSPs. Relevant is that across the pilot there was a reduction in parents/carers seeking referrals from the SHSPs to an agency/organisation from 9.1% in Year 1 to 1.7% and 2.5% in Years 2 and 3 respectively. This would indicate that there could be wider cost benefits from employing an SHSP in terms of the reduced use of external agencies/organisations. There was clear evidence of the practical positive impact on family life where financial support had been provided for families in crisis by SHS.

Community cohesion was an important theme throughout the pilot in terms of SHSP's contribution to the agency of the school in the community. Community learning in schools was seen by many Head Teachers as key to empowering parents to develop new skills and to increase their confidence in relation to learning. In some schools SHSPs had supported parents to enrol on ESOL courses, parenting courses and teaching assistant courses, which were organised for them in school by the SHSPs. To further improve parents' employability, SHSPs worked with parents to enrol them onto vocational courses, and addressed pressing social and housing issues with them.

Features of success

Important to the success of Unlocking Potential were the SHSPs' focus on: delivering workshops to engage parents; one-to-one casework with families with complex lives; providing high levels of support to parents/carers; and the high level of face to face regular contact. Also important was the clear understanding of the role and remit of the SHSPs by the school, Head Teacher, teachers and the practitioners. Many schools had enabled SHSPs, ECC and ECaR teachers to work regularly with parents by providing a dedicated space with easy access for parents with prams. SHSPs had devised strategies for overcoming language barriers and successfully tackled tough social issues thereby reversing poor attendance and punctuality patterns.

Barriers to success

Where Head Teachers adopted a leadership style based on tight control and a lack of flexibility, SHSPs were constrained in the nature of the work they could undertake. In some instances, the lack of physical resources in schools limited the scope of the work that SHSPs could do.

Summary

By underpinning ECC and ECaR with SHSPs, Unlocking Potential was effective in engaging children and their parents/carers with reading and literacy recovery programmes. Evidence from parents/carers, teachers and SHSPs showed that Unlocking Potential had an impact in promoting positive behaviour and improved attendance among the pupils. It enabled pupils to develop their self-confidence, their self-esteem and their emotional well-being. Pupils involved in Unlocking Potential made positive gains in numeracy and literacy. The gains made were often above national outcomes, and although overall the gains made did not exceed those in the comparator schools, the gains made were maintained over time for a cohort of pupils who had been selected as being at risk of under-achievement.

Parents/carers became more engaged with the children's learning. Among the case studies, there were examples of Unlocking Potential having had a dramatic positive impact on whole

families and enabling parents and carers to be visibly more integrated within the school community. The wider benefits of Unlocking Potential extended to siblings, the whole school and the wider community.

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