



An economic analysis of School-Home
Support

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1.0 Introduction

Matrix was commissioned to provide an evidence-based assessment of the economic case for School-Home Support, focusing on their main service, the provision of School-Home Support Workers. The aim of the research was to collect the evidence needed to outline the economic arguments for School-Home Support workers. In summary this approach was guided by the research question:

What is the economic value of the School-Home Support?

School-Home Support (SHS) is a national charity working with vulnerable and excluded children and families. SHS provides trained and experienced workers who become professional and paid members of the school's pastoral care team, enabling teachers and school management teams to focus on managing core school business and delivering the curriculum.

Across SHS, specialist support is provided in the following areas:

- school attendance and punctuality;
- transition;
- curriculum support, through learning mentors; and
- supporting families.

SHS provides a range of different types of support for children and families. This study relates to School-Home Support Workers.

2.0 School-Home Support workers

School-Home Support workers (SHSWs) are recruited, inducted, supervised and line managed by School-Home Support, and supported by a member of senior school management. They work in primary and secondary schools, commissioned by LEAs and/or headteachers. Supervision is provided on a case work supervision model. SHS provides supervisors who can discuss individual cases and offer support on reflective practice.

2.1 Why do School-Home Support Workers work with children and families?

SHSWs work with children and families to address problems that may be affecting a child's school life, but are not covered in the curriculum focused activities of the teaching staff. They do that either by providing direct support themselves or by helping a child and/or a family to access support from other agencies. SHS works in deprived areas, and the families they work with tend to be the most excluded and vulnerable. In primary schools, there is a strong emphasis on working directly with families (i.e. parents and carers). A SHSW may get involved with a family because the parents/carers are having problems:

- some families have **difficulties engaging with authorities** – this may manifest itself as not being able to access appropriate services for themselves and their children, or not being able to liaise effectively with the school to resolve issues;
- **relationship breakdown** is a common problem that SHSWs encounter, with its knock on effects on children;
- **financial problems** are common and SHSWs may support families if they are experiencing problems accessing benefits, or are in severe debt. SHSWs also encounter many **housing problems**;
- SHSWs also encounter families where **children are neglected, or are in danger**, often in households where **domestic violence** is occurring;
- SHSWs work with families where carers have **poor mental or emotional health**. Parents/carers may have experienced bereavement, or be suffering from depression, or other acute mental health problems; and
- **substance misuse** is a common problem in households that SHSWs work with, including both drugs and alcohol.

SHSWs encounter these problems if they are causing problems for children in school. This may manifest itself as non-attendance, lack of concentration, poor behaviour or performance.

SHSWs also work with children directly to resolve problems. This approach is often useful in secondary schools. Children may be experiencing many difficulties:

- **poor behaviour** may have become a problem and the SHSW is asked to help try and improve the situation;
- **friendship breakdowns** are common, and can be traumatic experiences for children, affecting their attendance;

- **bullying** can be serious, and SHSWs can offer and facilitate support;
- **bereavement** – if a child suffers bereavement and does not have the necessary support, it can harm their school performance;
- many children have **caring responsibilities** which hinder their school life;
- poor relationship with family and school; and
- risk of exclusion from school.

2.2 What do School-Home Support Workers do?

School-Home Support workers conduct **targeted case-work** i.e. they identify children and/or families that need support and ensure that they receive the support they need, giving information and direct support where it is within the capacity of the individual worker to do so. Children with difficulties may be identified by other staff and then referred to SHSWs, or cases are assigned as part of an organised approach within the school. SHS is a prevention and early intervention service, aiming to avoid problems before they escalate and avoid more costly interventions.

When supporting families, SHSWs primarily:

- **Explore options and discuss strategies** with parents on actions they could take to address issues, and
- **Signpost, refer or support/accompany** parents to other support services

SHSWs can provide practical ideas, information and support to families. The type of support and guidance they provide can be one-off or longer term, depending on the case. If necessary, SHSWs will refer for statutory intervention, or for other appropriate interventions. These could include referrals to primary care, social services, mental health services, parenting support or welfare rights centres. SHSWs may act as advocates for families in order to resolve problems that are affecting the children. This might include ensuring that social landlords provide safe accommodation.

When supporting children directly, SHSWs provide:

- **Behavioural and emotional support** (e.g. anger management, dealing with loss)
- **Monitoring and liaising** with other school staff or external agencies
- **Transition** support

A key feature of SHSWs is their versatility. They are specifically tasked to resolve problems, not to apply a particular intervention. Combined with their **dedicated capacity for pastoral care** they are distinctive in the school setting.

SHSWs mainly work individually with children and/or families, and they conduct home visits if they think it is required. Some SHSWs organise groups for parents or children to get people with similar challenges together. For example, a SHSW might facilitate the setting up of a parenting support group.

Building trusting relationships in schools is necessary if SHSWs are to identify and be able to work with vulnerable children and families. SHSWs work within the school team, getting referrals from staff if problems have been identified. SHSWs might also regularly conduct activities within a school to become a known face, and to be able to interact with children and families. For example in a primary school a SHSW might check the school attendance register, or be in the playground at play-time; be involved in school clubs such as breakfast clubs; meet and greet parents and children in the morning. In a secondary school an SHSW might have a key role in parental involvement activities, or have an open surgery.

A key feature of SHS is that it is perceived as **independent** by children and families from the mainstream statutory agencies. Stakeholders we spoke to believed this allowed for better more trusting relationships. Sometimes parents have had bad experiences of mainstream agencies but can work well with SHSWs.

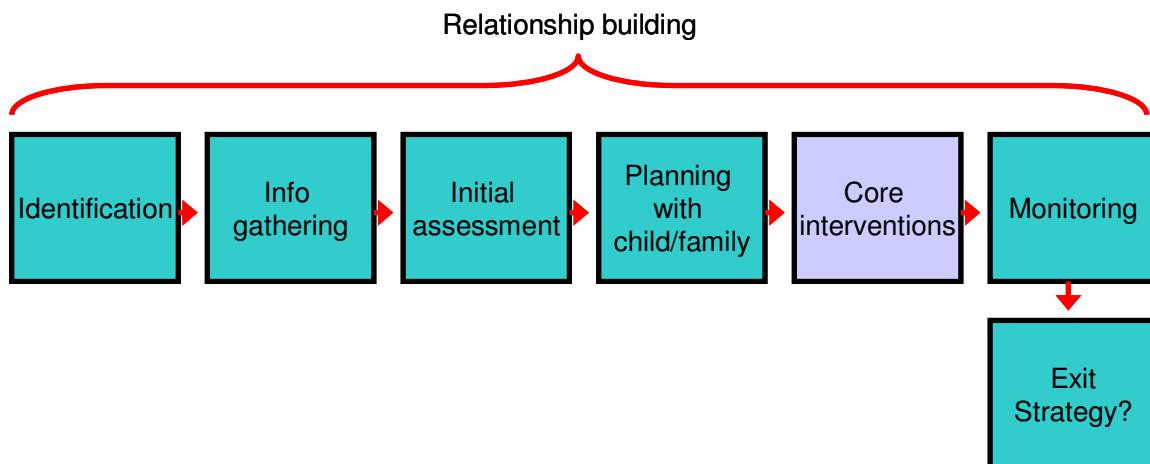


Figure 1: an overview of the process of working with children and/or families

Figure 1 shows the overall process of working with children and families. This is a generalised version of a process map that SHSWs use as a decision making tool in their everyday work. Once a problem has been identified, in the ways described above, a SHSW will ensure they talk to relevant staff or access records to gather information. That might include checking attendance, or talking to form tutors.

A SHSW will then meet with the child and/or their family. In formal terms, this will be to make an assessment of their needs. A key issue at this point is whether a SHSW can support the child or family themselves, or whether the case should be referred for specialist or statutory intervention, or both.

If a child or family wants the support of a SHSW, they will plan their support together. At this stage the SHSWs will conduct the interventions described above i.e. targeted case work. SHSWs will then monitor what happens. If appropriate, the plan will include an ‘exit strategy’ i.e. a plan to ensure that the child and/or family can support themselves in the future.

SHS has a **welfare fund** that SHSWs can draw upon if lack of money is a serious issue. An example may be that a child is not attending school because the family's washing machine is broken and their clothes are dirty so they are being bullied. If appropriate, a SHSW could use the welfare fund to get the washing machine fixed. SHS believe this kind of pragmatic approach can address problems quickly by focusing on what is best for the children and avoiding unnecessary bureaucracy.

2.3 What do School-Home Support Workers aim to achieve?

SHS exists to ensure that every child has the support they need to thrive and achieve. SHSWs work towards this vision in a school environment, commissioned by the schools themselves. Attendance and Achievement are therefore important, although the introduction of the Every Child Matters agenda has meant that schools should not solely focus on academic issues. SHS aim to ensure that children are able and ready to learn, and understand that the empowerment of parents is an important way to ensure this. SHSWs give parents the support they need to support their own children and make important decisions.

The versatility of SHSWs means that while the overall objectives of SHS remains constant, the immediate objectives vary. They may include objectives relating to finance, health, personal and social skills, safety and accommodation. SHS makes a conscious decision to work through schools and as such the goals stated by SHSWs interviewed by Matrix included:

- improve school attendance and punctuality;
- avoid school exclusions;
- improve achievement;
- improve parental engagement with school;
- guide parents through an issue so that they are able to make informed choices and decisions for themselves;
- help children to think for themselves: problem solving, conflict resolution – empower children, enable to become independent;
- improve resilience and aspirations;
- better relationships; and
- improved parenting skills.

Each SHSW will have specific priorities set as part of the school framework, agreed through negotiation at the beginning of the school year. These will relate to the School Improvement Plan and its self evaluation framework. For example some schools SHSWs may focus on a few very problematic children, while in other schools, SHSWs might focus on attendance more widely.

3.0 Approach

3.1 Methodology

Primary data on the impact of School-Home Support has not been collected for long enough to provide a strong enough evidence base for this study. The short timescales of the project excluded the possibility of prolonged collection of primary impact data. Therefore Matrix combined existing research about similar interventions and qualitative research about SHS to provide evidence based assumptions for an economic model.

Our approach had the following key stages:

1. **field work** to describe SHS and determine search criteria;
2. a **rapid evidence assessment** to find evidence of the link between SHS and outcomes;
3. collection of **epidemiological data** to understand the link between different types of shorter and longer-term outcomes; and
4. development of an **economic model** that compares the cost of SHS with the monetary value of its outcomes.

Initial field work was crucial to get a clear understanding of the 'logic model' of SHS. This was important because the research team needs to select studies of similar interventions. Matrix interviewed the following types of staff:

- School-Home Support Workers;
- Service Delivery Managers;
- Supervisors;
- SHS Field work support manager;
- members of SHS senior management team; and
- school Management (Headteachers and deputies).

The second stage was the **rapid evidence assessment** (REA). An REA is a tool for identifying and summarising available research evidence on a policy issue, as comprehensively as possible, within time constraints. The advantages of the REA approach is that it provides a balanced assessment of what is already known about a policy or practice issue, by using systematic review methods to search and critically appraise the academic research literature and other sources of information.

The focus of this REA was on collecting the evidence required to build an economic model. Therefore we were looking for interventions that were similar to at least one core aspect of SHS.

After conducting searches of relevant academic databases in the English-speaking world, we found 653 articles that met our search criteria. We reviewed their abstracts and narrowed the number of relevant articles down to 87. We obtained the full versions of the articles and

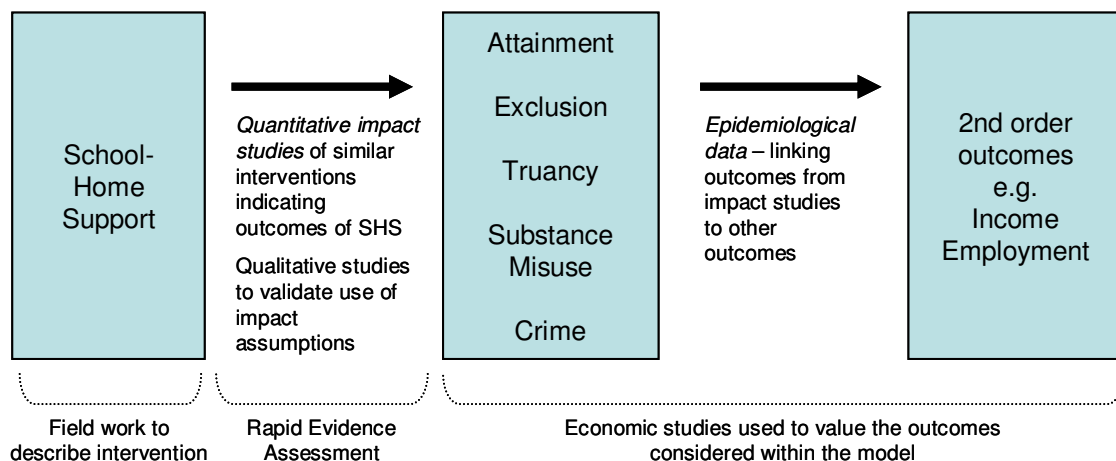
assessed them according to the relevance of the intervention and the type of research. At the end of the process we had two types of data:

- **Quantitative and rigorous impact evaluations** with control samples – quantitative data from these studies was extracted for use in the economic model; and
- **Qualitative studies** – these studies were used to inform and validate the use of data from the quantitative studies in the economic model.

The studies we found led us to focus on a set of outcomes i.e. the outcomes measured in the impact studies. For the purposes of the model, these were known as ‘first order outcomes’.

We then collected data from two other kinds of studies:

- **epidemiological studies** were used to show the links between first order outcomes and other outcomes e.g. if SHS had an effect on attendance, epidemiological studies can be found to show the subsequent effect on employment; and
- **economic studies** were used to find the values of the different outcomes considered within the model. These values form the basis of the economic impact of SHS.



Drawing on the sources of existing data described above, we constructed an economic model to predict the economic value of the impacts of SHS. This was then compared to the unit cost of SHS, calculated from SHS monitoring data.

Figure 2: Methodological overview

3.2 Limitations

Reliance on small number of studies

A large number of existing evaluation studies were reviewed in the course of this project. However, although a number of relevant qualitative studies were identified, very few relevant quantitative studies were identified. Therefore, some elements of the model we developed are based on one quantitative evaluation report of a very similar but not identical intervention.

In particular the study team relied heavily on one major Home Office funded study for quantitative impact data for use in the economic model: *A family-teacher-social work alliance to reduce truancy and delinquency – the Dorset Healthy Alliance project* (Pritchard, 2001 – hereafter referred to as the Pritchard study). However, after assessment of the key characteristics of this study we believe that it provides the strongest existing evidence base for the impact of SHS. The basis for this judgment is as follows:

Similarity of the intervention - The Pritchard study focuses on a project with the following aims and activities:

The aims were to:

- provide a preventive service for difficult children in order to reduce problems before they became unmanageable, thus reducing truancy, delinquency and exclusions
- enhance partnership between home and school, giving early help to families who were experiencing difficulties
- support the teachers' professional task by an easily accessible crisis team to deal with problematic pupils, and through these interventions, raise the schools' morale.

There were three broad types of activity:

- counselling and group work for children and families
- accessible consultation and support for teachers dealing with problematic children and families
- the development of community and school networks to facilitate mutual family support and inter-agency collaboration.

The study considers the issues associated with replication of this intervention. It identifies the social work training of the project workers as a key factor. Given the core competencies of SHSWs this is a good match. SHSWs are carefully supervised and can offer a high level of support. SHS have designed a person specification that matches the needs of children and families. Also, the fact that children and families perceive SHS as independent from social services has been shown in qualitative research to be beneficial.

The study also highlights the importance of the project worker's 'sympathy for education'. Our experience during field work, the evidence set out in the NCB study, and the fact that SHSWs are line managed by school management suggests that SHS meets these criteria too.

Both SHS and the intervention in the Pritchard study spent varying amounts of time with individual children and families. However, we found that the unit costs per child were close

enough to support the judgment that the interventions were similar (Pritchard - £134 per child¹ compared to £178.10 per child in SHS).

Similarity of target population – The Pritchard study focused on a project in both a primary and secondary school, both in seriously disadvantaged areas. SHS works in disadvantaged areas too. No information was given on the racial diversity of the Pritchard study schools, although it is likely that SHS schools are more diverse.

Quality of the study – The Pritchard study is a comparative longitudinal study of the project and a comparator service. It used administrative data from education, social services, employment, police and probation. It is the only robust impact study of a similar intervention to SHS.

The lack of robust quantitative evaluations is probably due to the difficulty in carrying out such research on such interventions. The versatility of SHS makes it a powerful model but also means that it is hard to design an evaluation sophisticated enough to disaggregate the impact of SHS from other factors.

Limited number of impacts modelled

The other key limitation of the study is the limited number of impacts modelled in the study. It was not feasible to quantify and model all the impacts of SHS within the timescales of this project. It is likely therefore that this model gives a very conservative estimate of the economic benefit of SHS, not least because the model focuses only on the savings due to the impacts on children, not their families.

3.3 Mitigating factors

Our approach has been transparent and the key underlying assumptions in the model are set out in the findings section of this report. As far as possible within the timescales we have followed Treasury Green Book guidance on economic evaluation. As such the findings are open to peer-review. A full technical specification of the model is available.

Our estimate of the benefits of SHS is likely to be conservative. We have avoided over-complicating the model to eliminate the possibility of double-counting impacts. Also, one of the key limitations – the limited number of impacts modelled – means that further research is likely to add to the modelled savings due to SHS.

¹ The unit cost of the intervention in the Pritchard study only includes salary costs. Therefore the unit costs of SHS are likely to be very similar.

4.0 Key findings

4.1 Impact of School-Home Support

Using the studies identified during the REA and epidemiological data we developed a model of the impact of SHS. This model is guided by the scope of the Pritchard study (see above). This means that we necessarily missed out outcomes that were not measured by that study. We also avoided adding links between different outcomes (e.g. the link between hard drug use and crime) to ensure that the model did not double-count impacts.

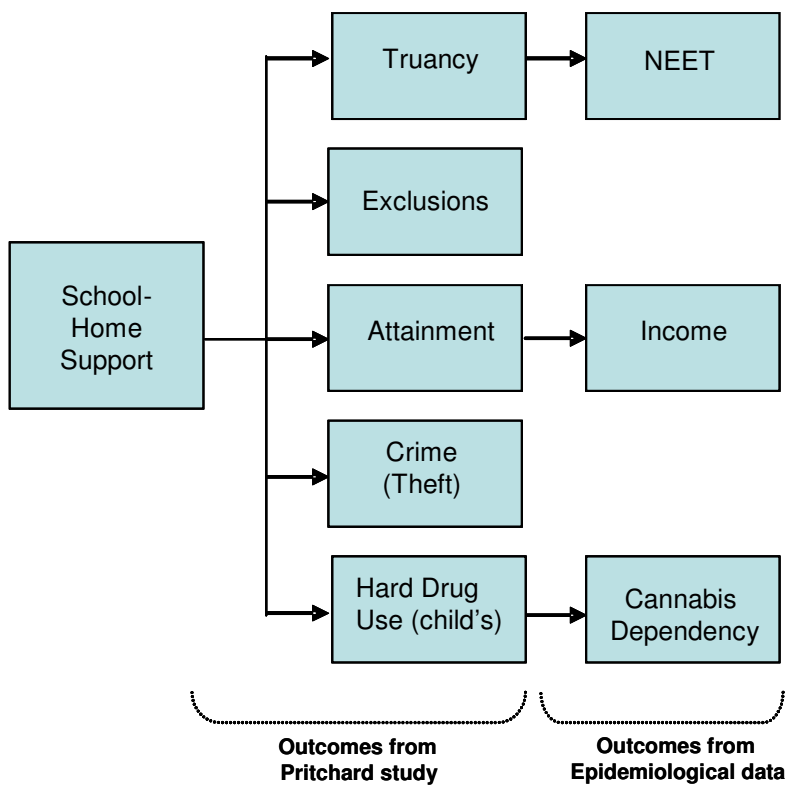


Figure 3: The outcomes of SHS modelled in this study

The REA allowed us to make the following evidence based assumptions about the impact of SHS:

Impact	Assumption for economic model
<i>These assumptions apply only to those receiving SHS (not the whole school)</i>	
Truancy / Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)	Decrease in truancy of 9.9 percentage points Decrease in those becoming NEET of 0.05 percentage points
Exclusions	Decrease in permanent exclusions of 1.79 percentage points

Impact	Assumption for economic model
Attainment / future income	Increase in the number of children attaining 5 GCSEs at A* to C of 3 percentage points
Offending (Theft)	Decrease in thefts of 2.1 percentage points
Hard drug use / Cannabis dependency (by the children, not parents)	Decrease in frequent hard drug use of 5.3 percentage points Decrease in cannabis dependency of 0.29 percentage points

Figure 4: Key evidence based impact assumptions

4.2 The economic value of School-Home Support

4.2.1 The cost of School-Home Support

Based on monitoring data and financial information given by SHS, we calculated that the **average cost per child in contact with an SHSW is £178.10²**.

4.2.2 The value of School-Home Support

The model includes the following costs:

Impact	Costs
Attainment / future income	Decreased tax receipts across lifetime due to decreased income as result of lower attainment until age 65
Offending (Theft)	Direct costs to the criminal justice system across an average 'life time of crime'
Truancy / Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)	Job Seeker's Allowance for one year
Exclusions	Direct costs (exclusion process, replacement education) + indirect costs (other services: social services, health, police and criminal justice) for one year's permanent exclusion
Hard drug use / Cannabis dependency	Health services, drug treatment, unemployment and criminal justice costs across average expected life time of drug use

Figure 5: Exchequer costs included in the model

Impact	Costs
Attainment / future income	Difference in net income due to gaining 5 A*s-C at GCSE until age 65

² This figure is not an economic value because it does not include in-kind contributions (e.g. support time by school staff).

Impact	Costs
Offending (Theft)	Value of property stolen or damaged, emotional impact, lost output and victim services due to expected number of crimes over a life time

Figure 6: (Non-exchequer) Societal costs included in the model

4.3 Conclusions

Exchequer cost/benefit

On the basis of the impacts and costs considered in this model, for every pound spent on School-Home Support, the Exchequer saves £3.35.

Costs incurred per pupil	
SHS unit cost	£178.10
Cost savings per pupil	
Exclusion	£41.27
Truancy	£0.89
Offending	£341.96
Drugs	£16.04
Attainment / Income	£196.25
Total	£596.42
Resultant benefit	£418.32

Figure 7: Costs and exchequer savings per pupil.

Non-exchequer cost/benefit

On the basis of the impacts and costs considered in this model, for every pound spent on School-Home Support, non-exchequer savings amount to £17.79.

Costs incurred per pupil	
SHS unit cost	£178.10
Cost savings per pupil	
Offending	£1,331.58
Attainment / Income	£1,836.84
Total	£3,168.42
Resultant benefit	£2,990.32

Figure 8: Costs and non-exchequer savings per pupil.

4.3.1 Total cost/benefit

The total savings considered in this model due to School-Home Support across (including exchequer and non-exchequer costs) are £3,764.83. This means that **for every pound spent on School-Home Support, £21.14 is saved across the whole of society.**³

³ These costs are calculated at Net Present Value i.e. we have discounted savings in the future at the rate recommended in the Treasury Green Book.