

EDUCATIONAL DIVERSITY

Right to Succeed & Educational Diversity Research Project 2016 / 17

Title : Exclusion Prevention Programme - are we missing the point?

Getting back to basics when assessing students' behaviour - can we prevent risk of exclusion by having a deeper understanding of learning needs?

Introduction

The introduction sets out the particular challenges of the context in which the research has been undertaken.

Educational Diversity is a diverse Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) in Blackpool, a town facing major social and economic challenges, which according to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation, is the most disadvantaged local authority in the Country. The PRU comprising of five centres, supports young people unable to access mainstream education for either behavioural, medical, social or emotional needs. In an Ofsted Inspection conducted in May 2017, it has retained a judgement of "Good".

Educational Diversity is *"passionate in [their] drive to help some of Blackpool's most vulnerable pupils to succeed. [They] go the extra mile every day to make sure that these pupils get the help they need, whether on ... roll, in mainstream schools or new to Blackpool."*

(Ofsted, May 2017)

During the last few years, the DfE have placed increased pressure for Blackpool schools to raise educational standards for a greater number of young people following a steady decline in the academic outcomes achieved at the end of Key Stage 4. Recent Ofsted Inspections of Blackpool's secondary schools rated only one mainstream school as 'Good', whilst others still require improvement. In response to this, the local authority established a strategic improvement board "The Blackpool Challenge", led and chaired by Professor Sonia Blandford who had previously been instrumental in the educational improvements across London. The formation of the Blackpool Challenge enabled leaders in collaboration with key partners including Achievement for All and Right to Succeed, to drive the improvement agenda. The main three foci of the partnership were Inclusion, Curriculum and Data and Assessment with a vision to ensure "100% of children achieve 100% of the time".

The main agenda of the Inclusion subgroup of the Blackpool Challenge, chaired by the Headteacher of Educational Diversity, was to try and identify any causal factors impacting on low achievement of vulnerable groups and an increased number of young people being excluded from mainstream provision. Historically, it could be argued that within the town more generally, there has been a culture of "zero tolerance" behaviour policies, focusing on the symptoms and not the causal factors. Therefore, a lack of understanding around primary needs leads to a reactive response to 'presenting behaviours', resulting in exclusion.

The increase in permanent exclusions, coupled with schools struggling to meet the needs of all its' learners, has impacted on the numbers accessing alternative provision in the PRU, which has resulted in Educational Diversity being the largest PRU in Europe with up to 330 students. Alongside the excluded students, a significant number access support for their social, emotional and medical needs through the Home and Hospital Education Service (HHES) arm of the PRU.

Prior to the introduction of the Blackpool Challenge, in June 2014, in response to a request from Secondary Headteachers to provide a graduated response to managing the increased concerns around challenging behaviours, Educational Diversity developed a short term intervention model 'The Chrysalis Project'. This project targeted young people who, professionals believe, could make positive behaviour change but more importantly, demonstrated a willingness to do so.

A focus of the project was to explore factors which could influence positive behaviour change amongst Blackpool's most vulnerable young people. It was felt that this could raise aspirations, identify and remove barriers to learning and subsequently prevent permanent exclusion. Due to the huge success and learning gained, the initial six-week intervention programme, involving two cohorts of seven pupils, quickly evolved from September 2015 to encompass an additional 12-week model.

During the full academic year 2015-16, the Chrysalis Project successfully supported in excess of 100 pupils, with only 3% unable to maintain the progress made, thereby resulting in a permanent exclusion.

Due to the deprivation factors across the town and the lack of aspiration both in young people and their families, it has also been recognised by Local authority leaders that much needs to be done to develop a more resilient community which will help further raise standards across Blackpool. This resulted in Blackpool securing National Lottery funding through HeadStart, which is promoting improved resilience in Blackpool's young people.

In order to try and gain a better understanding of the level of need across the town, Right to Succeed introduced a Mental Toughness Questionnaire to measure individual resilience and then offer support to identify ways to assess, teach and build resilience within the young people. Educational Diversity quickly recognised the potential of this piece of work, not only to support the resilience of the young people accessing the PRU but also to the staff and wider school community; thus incorporating it into the projects detailed above.

As a direct result of the work completed, Right to Succeed and Educational Diversity, secured funding for a research project with The Laurel Trust to explore if the Chrysalis model, the work around HeadStart, along with further development around mental toughness can be adapted and further disseminated, targeting primary schools and a large secondary school in Blackpool.

The impact of early intervention has been the central focus of our research, exploring the use of diagnostic assessments and how they are used to identify and develop specific interventions to enable student needs to be met effectively.

Our research partners are:

**School names redacted*

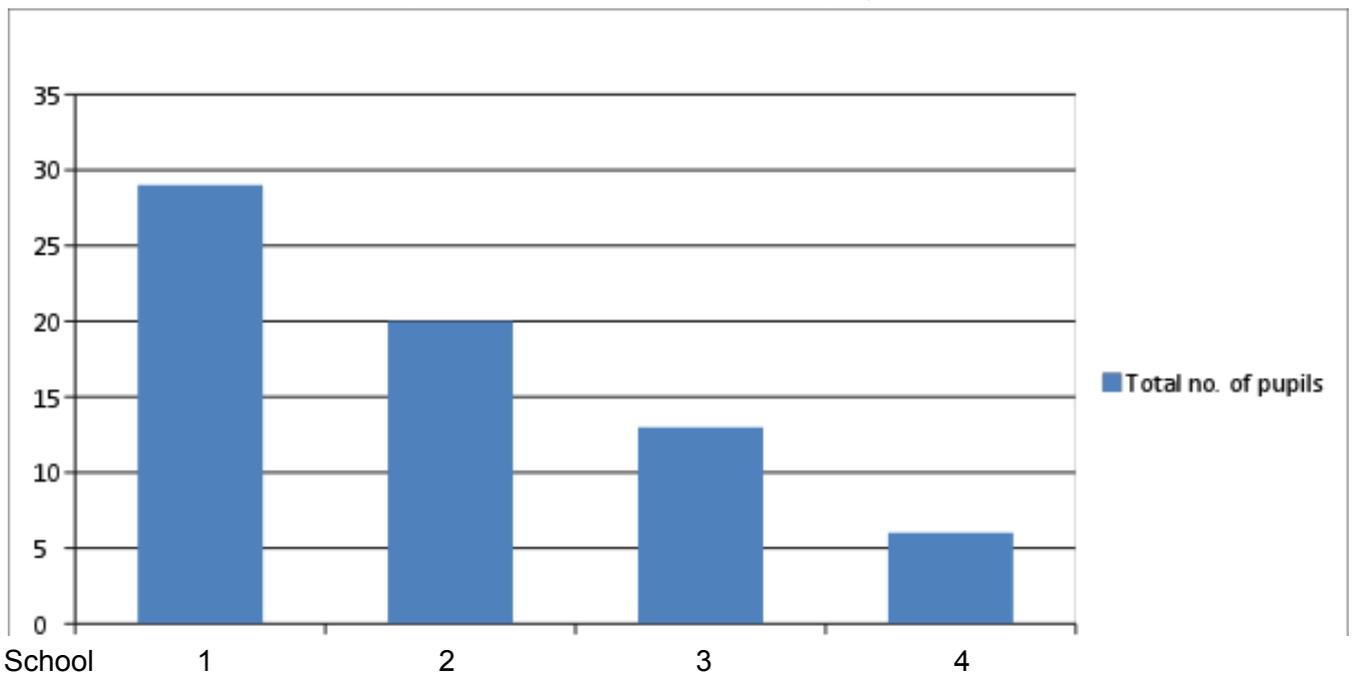
Phase	School	No of pupils
Primary	[REDACTED]	13
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	7

[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	
Primary	[REDACTED]	13
Secondary	[REDACTED]	29
Secondary PRU	[REDACTED]	6

Each setting has focused on a different aspect, depending upon their developmental journey and the specific needs of the school.

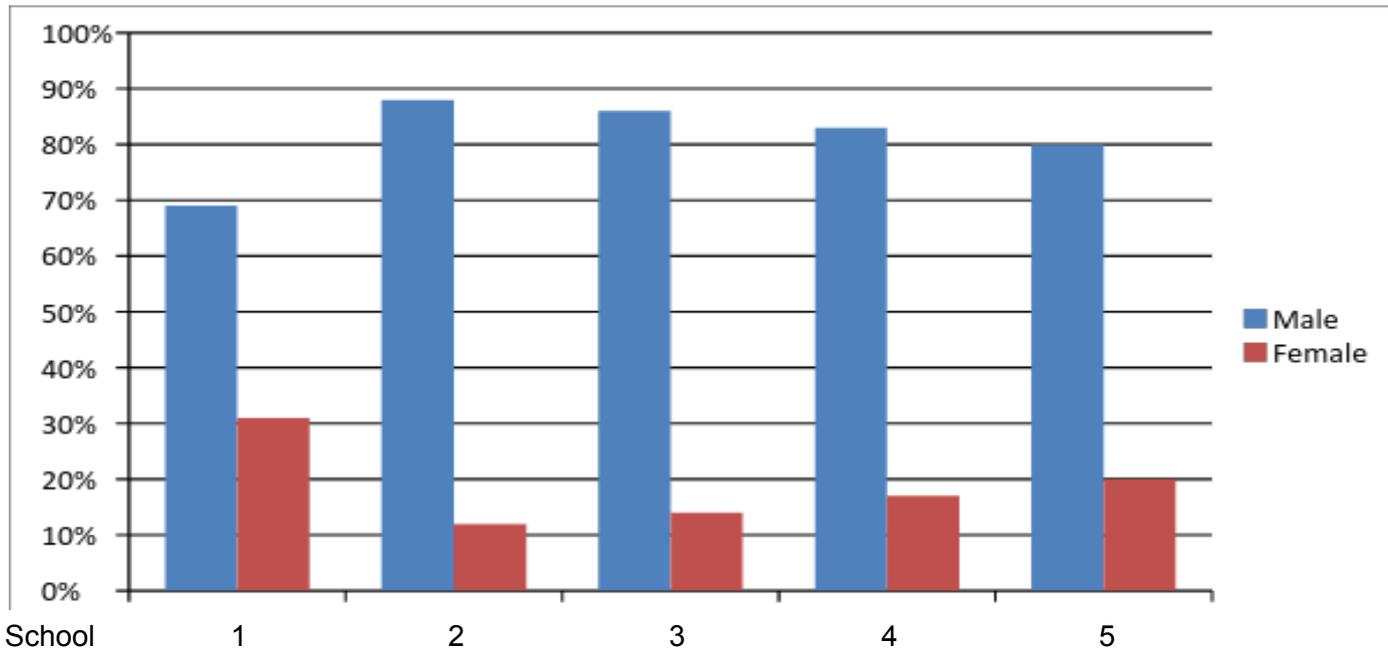
Context of the research population:

A total of 68 students across 4 provisions, were involved in the project:

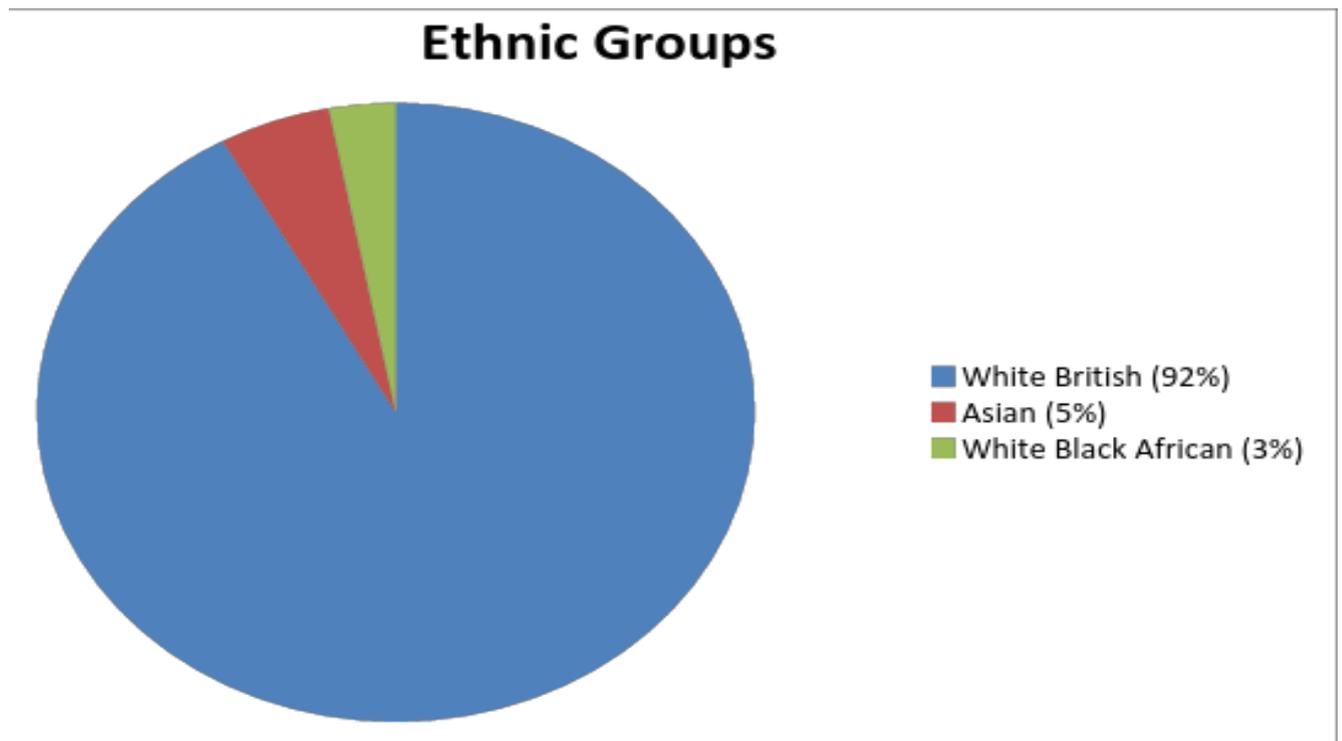


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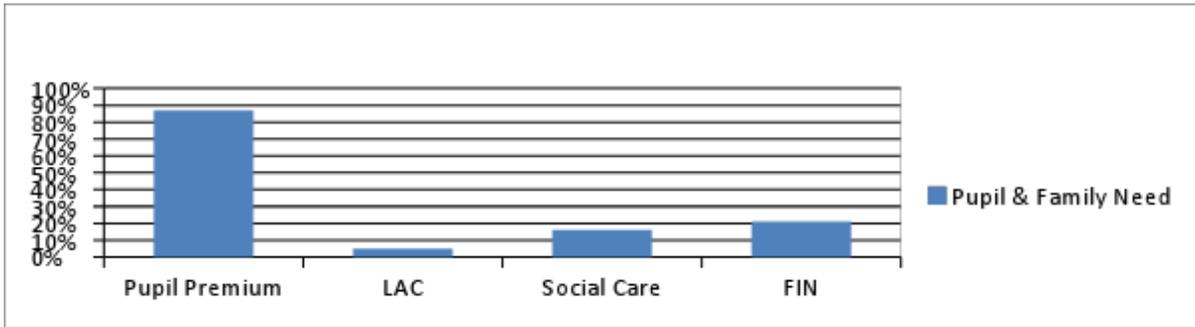
Experience of working with young people, who may present with some challenging behaviour, shows a high ratio of males to females, usually either 3 or 4:1. This was replicated in this project:



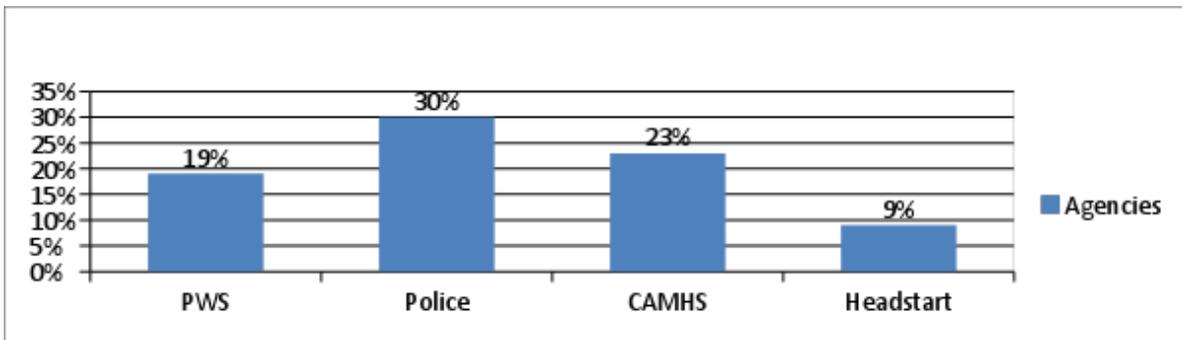
The population of Blackpool remains a high proportion of White British, a further statistic that has been replicated within this sample group:



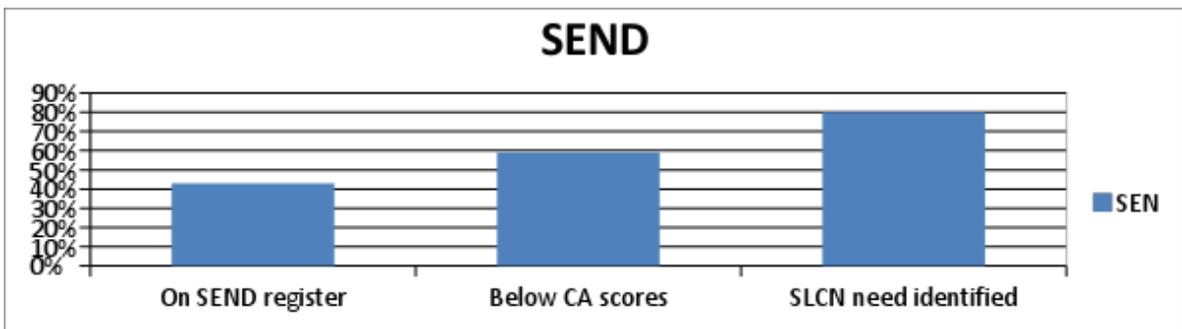
Blackpool has high levels of social mobility and deprivation. The town is an importer of need which includes high numbers of children who are looked after, eligible for pupil premium, open to Families in Need (FIN) and Social Care (SC). Not surprisingly, these elements related to the cohort group:



To support the challenges across the town, along with FIN and SC, there are a number of agencies who work with the young people, their families and the wider community. The other main agencies working with the young people from this project included: the Police, Pupil Welfare Service (PWS), Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and HeadStart.



In line with national and local trends relating to SLCN (Speech, Language and Communication Needs) and behaviour, the assessments of the young people involved in the project demonstrated a high percentage of need. Prior to diagnostic assessments, 43% were recorded on their special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) registers. Results from the academic testing showed 59% with scores at least two years below chronological age, and 80% with at least one area of SLCN. This indicates the possibility of previously unidentified needs:



Rationale

Educational Diversity & Right to Succeed have been particularly interested in the national research relating to SLCN and the correlation with behaviour. The DfE Bercow Report

(2008) identified a gap of provision in both identifying and meeting SLCN of young people in schools, recognising that if these are unmet they can have a direct impact on behaviour in schools.

A commissioned audit carried out in 2012 in the PRU, demonstrated that 100% of the KS2 cohort, 97% of KS3 and 86% of KS4 students were found to have SLCN which had previously been unmet. More interestingly, the early intervention programme Chrysalis Project, identified 100% of the young people to have some form of unmet SLCN. This evidence reinforces the widely acknowledged viewpoint that “children and young people with undetected SLCN may also be at greater risk of exclusion from school” (www.talkinpoint.org.uk 2016) as well as affirming “that children excluded from school are likely to have special educational needs, including a high incidence of SLCN” (Ripley and Yuill, 2005, *School British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 75:37-50).

Through this understanding staff within the PRU have been upskilled in identifying and implementing strategies for SLCN to provide universal support and have employed an SLCN therapist to provide targeted intervention. The PRU’s outreach support for mainstream schools now considers SLCN as a causal factor around challenging behaviour. Some parents and carers are being supported to take part in the ‘Bercow: Ten Years On’ review.

In addition, learning from the Chrysalis project has demonstrated that supporting students with behavioural needs using NLP (neuro-linguistic programming) models has a positive impact on their behaviour, resilience and fundamentally their ability to remain within mainstream education (85% remained in mainstream education between 2015-16).

Moving forward, the challenge remains to embed the development of robust support systems available within mainstream, to enable sustained pupil progress around behaviour which is long lasting, beyond the current post Chrysalis average of 0.5 – 1.5 terms.

The main justification for the research project has come from increasing knowledge and experiences, which in essence comprises of two main areas:

- Identification of need enabling support mechanisms within mainstream schools
- Transition (primary to secondary)

It has been acknowledged during the collaborative working of these projects that there is a need to further upskill staff in the implementation of appropriate interventions and that a number of colleagues could further benefit from a greater understanding between the proven link between SLCN, SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) and behaviour. This is supported by Dockrell, Lindsay, Palikara, and Cullen, (2007) who stated that secondary “teachers are not always able to recognise or accommodate the needs of those with SLCN” (in Cross 2009: 12).

As a result of this learning, schools are committed to working in partnership to develop these skills which has resulted in Educational Diversity exploring a number of professional learning opportunities in identified areas.

Methodology & Methods

The overall approach in conducting this study has been one of action research. The focus

has been to reflect on current working practices within Educational Diversity and within the wider context with mainstream colleagues. Any assumptions leading to tentative hypotheses have been based upon observations and experiences, thus making this research inductive.

The methodologies that have been used are outlined below:

- data collection
- analysis of school improvement plans, self-evaluation documents and professional development opportunities
- structured conversations with pupils and staff
- need-led targeted interventions

Earlier projects such as Chrysalis and Targeted Transition led by Educational Diversity, have guided the research. Analysis of both objective and subjective data has been undertaken; the objective data is more readily available, thus providing a good starting point. However, as with any action research, there has been constant reflection and reviewing of practice which amended the direction of travel. It was initially intended, following the collection of baseline data, to spend quality time with each of the research partners to plan next steps, as a way of determining the individual nature each strand of the study would take. This was especially relevant due to the project taking place in several different settings. However, due to the limited time available since the beginning of the project (Oct 2016) alongside time constraints of schools and the project lead, the data available, is not as extensive and therefore as valid as hoped for at this point.

With this in mind, the following data was collected by each of our research partners to measure impact:

Data type	What	Details
Objective data	Attendance	Baseline before interventions followed by termly measures
	Exclusions	
	Academic assessments	Used to determine any previously unidentified learning need to inform interventions
	SLCN screening	Used to determine any specific difficulties in this area
	Pupil Profile	To provide individual context
Subjective Data	Behaviour Checklist	Baseline before interventions, followed by regular updates. Used to determine specific areas of need and to direct interventions. Primaries / SERFs (Special Enhanced Resources Facility)- completed by class teacher Secondaries - completed by the staff member of the

		main subject identified as causing most concern
	Mental Toughness Questionnaire	Used only in the secondary school, to provide a baseline regarding skills of resilience and to direct interventions

The schools involved chose their target groups for inclusion in the project based upon their identified needs, tying in with each school's School Improvement Plan (SIP). Teams of staff were identified, also linking in with their SIPs, enabling carefully planned professional development and training opportunities. Courses have been delivered focusing on NLP, SLCN and Structured Conversations.

When planning interventions for each setting, consideration was given to the context of each individual school, their school improvement plans, self-evaluations, audit of professional learning needs and the capacity of the school to move forward with the project. Structured conversations with staff and pupils helped to tailor the interventions. Examples of the interventions include:

**School names redacted*

<p>██████████ School name</p>	<p>Assessments for SLCN led to closer working with commissioned SALT to spread the universal use of strategies to promote SLC skills.</p> <p>Development of an NLP-focused transition plan to support the targeted Y6s in small group sessions.</p>
<p>██████████</p>	<p>Explored ways to adapt NLP principles and models to support younger KS1 and KS2 children during targeted group sessions. Each SERF developed ideas based on knowledge about individual needs. Practises starting to be shared between settings.</p>
<p>██████████ School name</p>	<p>Working towards thoroughly embedding academic and SLCN assessments when supporting pupils with presenting behaviours. A small team of staff worked together with the common aim and began to bridge working practices between the behaviour and SEND teams within school.</p>
<p>██████████ School name</p>	<p>Using an NLP-based curriculum and behaviour checklists as a starting point for structured conversations with pupils and their potential mainstream schools to support carefully planned reintegration programmes, enabling a second chance in mainstream school.</p>

Alongside this, there has been a local authority drive to complete a review of SERF (Special Education Resource Facility) provision within the primary schools with a view to aligning practice that would lead to improved outcomes and retention within mainstream.

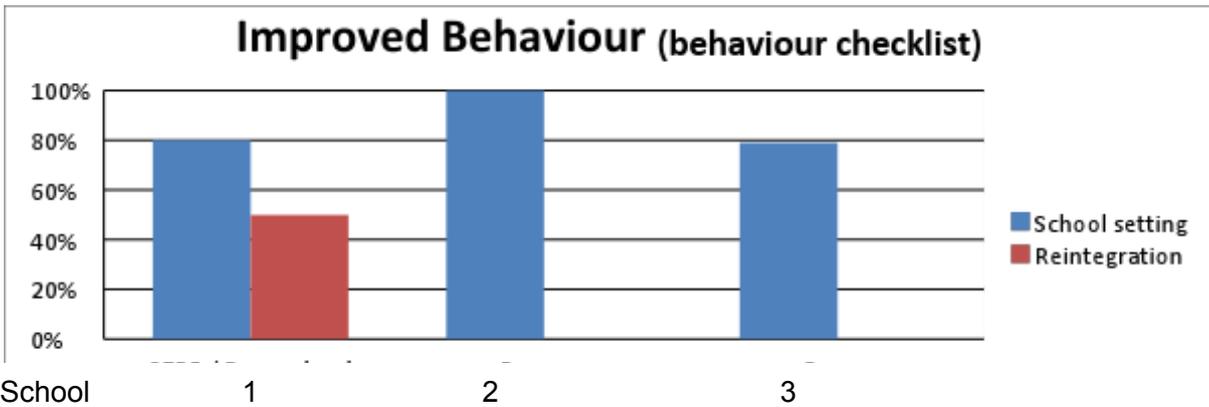
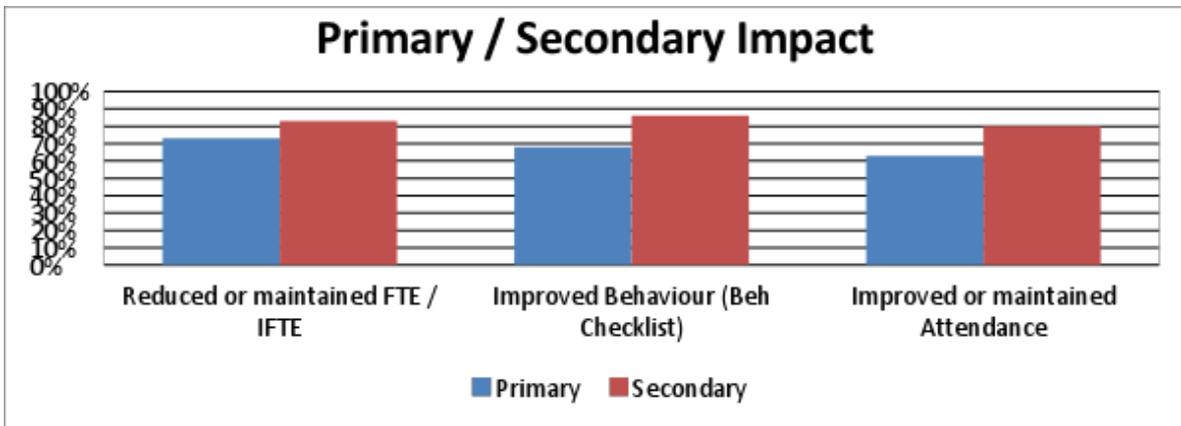
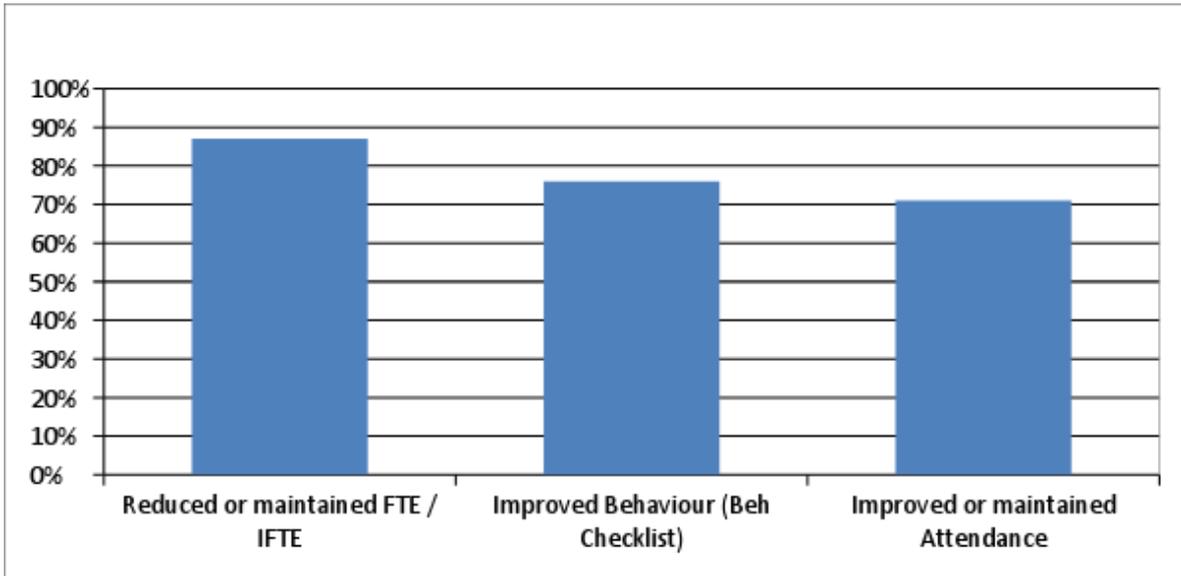
The ability to influence systemic change is very much dependent upon a number of factors, including the capacity within the organisation to embrace and then implement new ways of working; co-dependent on the availability of resources and operational working. In addition, each has their own set of priorities and pace of working, further influencing and, in some situations, restricting the pace of the research and opportunities to deliver interventions.

It was always the intention to allow this project to run over a full academic year, providing a greater depth for outcome measures, but due to external variables, these have been limited.

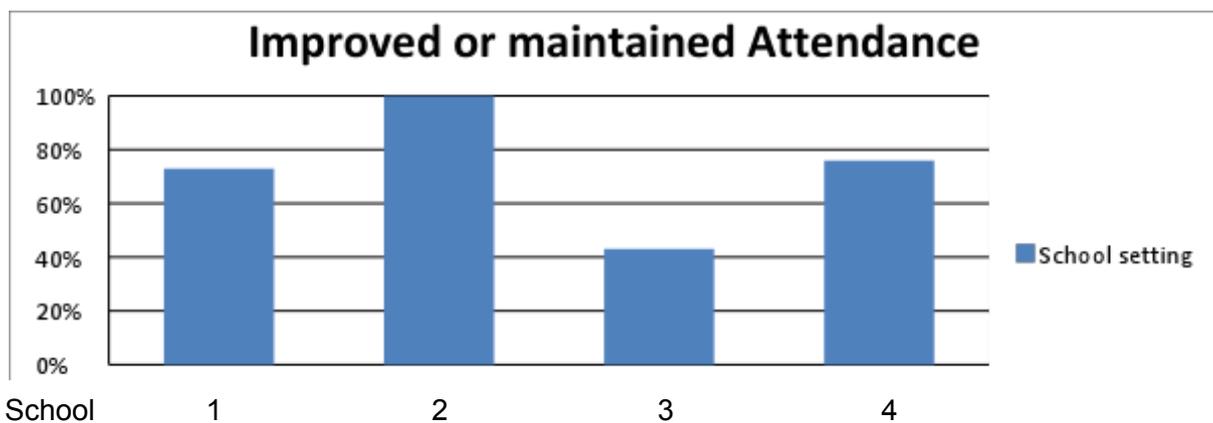
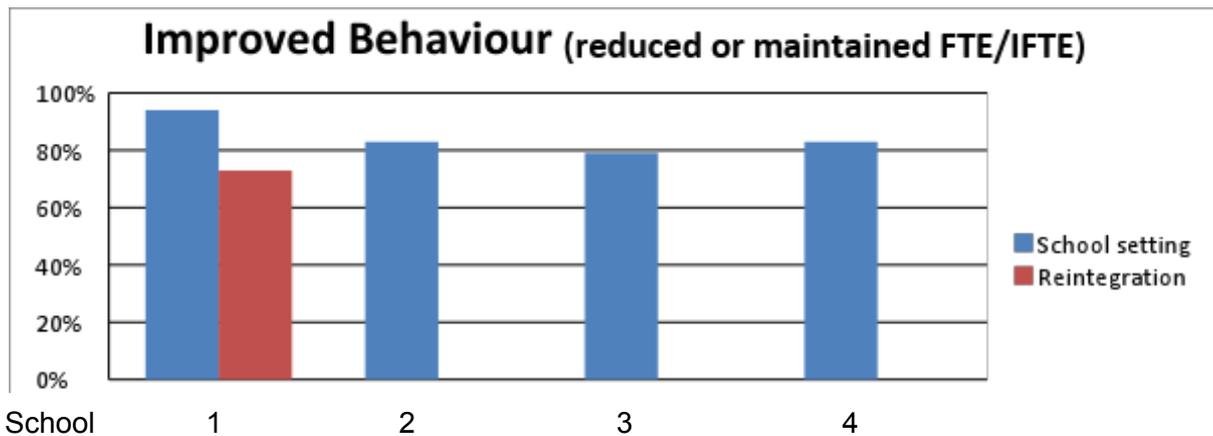
Findings / Results

The main areas focused upon for impact measures are attendance and behaviour. The behaviour measures have been split into statistical reductions of Fixed Term (FTE) and Internal Fixed Term Exclusions (IFTE), alongside subjective measures based on a reduction of 'serious concerns' highlighted on the behaviour checklist. Some settings are further ahead in their use of the behaviour checklist and thus have more thorough data available as a result. Equally, due to the limited timescale of this project, not all interventions have been running long enough to justify the collection of this data. [REDACTED] (*School name redacted) in particular have not had time to implement specific interventions based upon their thorough assessments, thus the comparative behaviour checklists are yet to be implemented. Their overall impact data may therefore be capturing a change in staff attitudes and responses to the chosen individuals, following their more in-depth assessments, rather than from any targeted interventions.

The data has been organised to demonstrate overall impact as well as exploring findings pertinent to each setting. Considering the short term nature for measuring impact for this project, the charts below should, however, be read with caution. More time is needed to truly measure the outcome and impact of the interventions. In addition, it should be noted that some of our research partners already use some holistic approaches for supporting their pupils (particularly the specialist SERFs), thus the data will be capturing some impact of these too.



**School names redacted*



Conclusions

The statistical data detailed above demonstrates that when staff have taken the time to “step out of the frame” (Salman Rushdie, 1999) and assess pupils with challenging behaviour from a different viewpoint i.e. learning and SLCN, they sometimes identified previously unmet needs. With the careful planning and delivery of personalised interventions to support these needs the majority of the very vulnerable pupils, involved in this project, have made improvements with their behaviour and attendance.

The pupils chosen were typically those who were struggling to maintain behaviour acceptable for mainstream education. Staff were also struggling to find ways to meet their needs. It is not suggested that the improvements made have been such to prevent future exclusions in the long term, however it is recognised that this approach to both identifying root causes behind presenting behaviours and then subsequently delivering appropriate support interventions, clearly has promise. With thorough and fully embedded processes, the long term potential impact is significant.

Training for key staff in schools has been provided. This has raised awareness and challenged practices used to promote positive behaviour in schools. However, as expected, the impact of this has been limited due to the numbers of staff we have been able to support. Within larger schools or where cross-working between settings (e.g. School 2/ PRU and mainstream schools) this can still be a challenge as staff are not always aware of the links

between learning and behaviour; often continuing to label and stereotype the young people.

Adequate resources are a further challenge to schools. The research has led to form the opinion that prioritising a higher level of resource to the most vulnerable young people will increase their chances of success in more ways than simply improving their behaviour. For example, improvements in resilience will bring increased confidence to learn and improvements in forming and maintaining relationships. These in turn will impact upon attendance, which in turn will increase opportunities for academic achievement. "Rocket Science", it is not, however, it does require Senior Leadership Teams to have the belief, passion, commitment and strength to do something different to meet the needs of their most vulnerable young people.

While each provision developed along different paths, it was possible to maintain the common goal of improving assessments and interventions to support students and understand what may lie behind their presenting behaviour. To this end, it has been successful. However, to truly understand the impact of the overall project; to find out if this approach to supporting vulnerable young people can reduce or even prevent permanent exclusions, more time is needed to embed the learning and practices.

To look at some details pertaining to the research partners, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Some settings have developed further than others which can be explained by differences in SLT priorities; differences in the skills and motivation of staff leading each project as well as challenges presented from some external partners.
- Pupils in all settings demonstrated high levels of SLCN, following screening of targeted students. As a result of the project, key staff, have developed an increased awareness around the link between this and behaviour which has started to result in improvements of interventions and support available. However, this is not yet a common approach in all schools.
- While this project focused around shared aims, each setting achieved slightly differing outcomes, some of which were not anticipated. For example:

**School names redacted*

██████████: Fully embraced the diagnostic assessment process and has started to improve working links between the behaviour and SEND teams.

██████████: A number of interventions were already in place to support vulnerable pupils prior to this project. Staff, now have an increased bank of resources for supporting resilience, have invested time in developing a plan to support transition of some of their most vulnerable students into Y7. The SENCO has started to use the SLCN screening tool to assess pupils, although this needs extending further.

██████████: Successfully working towards a robust and consistent process to assess the needs of their students, across all settings. All are exploring alternative interventions

to those already in place as a result but are, as yet to develop parity across the SERFs. Impact data has been more positive during time in the SERF compared to time in mainstream schools during reintegration days.

██████████: Fully embedded SLCN screening with recommended classroom strategies for all students within the targeted group and used consistently within one centre. NLP-focused curriculum already well-established and has been adapted to support students to prepare for a second chance in a mainstream school, following permanent exclusion. Beginning to use structured conversations with students and staff to plan and support this.

Next Steps

**School names redacted*

██████████:

- Embed SLCN screening and diagnostic assessments as a routine process for early responses to behaviour needs
- Commit resources to enable the diagnostics and interventions to be delivered consistently into next academic year.
- Complete SLCN training

██████████:

- Embed the use of diagnostic assessments as a routine process for early responses to behaviour needs
- Embed the use of diagnostic assessments
- Develop resilience-focused curriculum to support transition.
- Extend the use of targeted transition programmes to reach more vulnerable Y5/6 pupils.
- Complete SLCN training

██████████:

- Develop and share practice of resilience curriculums to ensure all pupils accessing a SERF have the same positive experience and preparation for returning to mainstream schools.
- Complete SLCN training
- Explore and develop ways to support mainstream colleagues in meeting the needs of their students upon reintegration and give consideration to training and coaching opportunities.
- Explore how outcomes from this project could lead into the SERF review currently taking place.

██████████:

- Cascade consistent SLCN screening across all centres in Educational Diversity.
- Cascade learning to support Y6 students in the PRU to have a more successful transition into mainstream secondary schools, to include joint working with SERF colleagues.

Recommendations - for all schools supporting pupils with challenging behaviour

- Avoid making assumptions
- Conduct thorough assessments and analysis of pupil needs, as many of the behaviours are often simply avoidance tactics.
- Address the primary need and not the presenting behaviours.
- Screen all pupils for SLCN
- Invest in whole school training around SLCN and strategies to support in the classroom
- Ensure all assessments are purposeful – plan interventions (SEND, SLCN, behaviour, resilience, etc) that are genuinely needed.
- Act on clear evidence – use data collected to demonstrate reason for support plan
- Ensure behaviour and SEND teams work collaboratively

Looking forward into the medium and longer term future, Right to Succeed are supporting Educational Diversity in extending their work in schools both locally and within a national context, to embed some of the learning from this research project. Locally, some of the secondary schools / academies have approached the team for guidance on developing their own internal behaviour support programmes, based upon the successes of the short term intervention initiatives; the Mental Toughness assessment tool is also being integrated into monitoring student placements through the In Year Fair Access systems within the local authority. Nationally, Right to Succeed have approached Educational Diversity to lead on some school improvement work with colleagues from other local authorities in extending this research into other regions across the country for which collaborative working will be imperative. Additionally, the links already forged with the Regional PRU Network will provide further opportunities to share learning.

The findings of this research project should enable more staff within schools and PRUs, to be encouraged to step outside the frame and “**see the whole picture**” (Rushdie, 1999). Through improved understanding of the impact of unmet needs, the evidence clearly demonstrates that more vulnerable young people will be able to realise their potential and have the opportunity to achieve high academic outcomes, whilst “**remaining**” within the changing landscape of mainstream provision.

References

Ofsted (May 2017)

DfE Bercow Report (2008)

www.talkingpoint.org.uk (2016)

Ripley, K. and Yuill, N. (2005) Patterns of Language Impairment and Behaviour in Boys Excluded from School British Journal of Educational Psychology 75(1):37-50

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(Cross, M, 2009, Language and Social Exclusion, I CAN Talk series, issue 4:5)

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September 2017