LAMBETH CHANGE PROJECT: SOCIAL WORKERS IN SCHOOLS

INTERIM REPORT AUGUST 2019
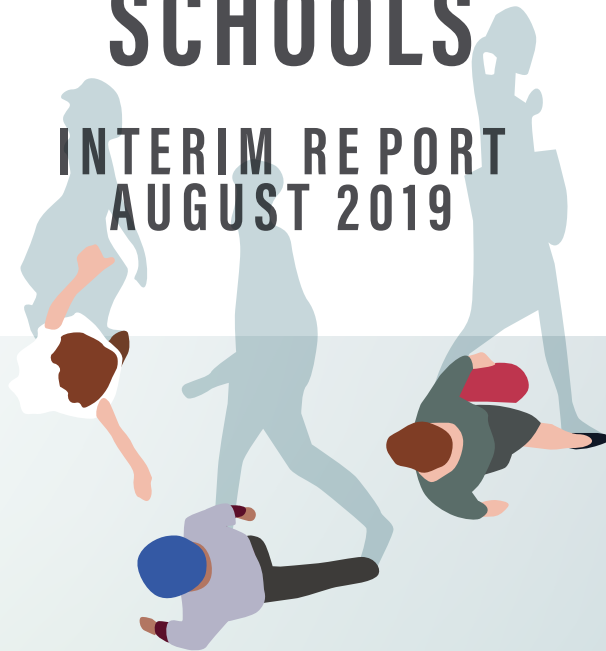
Authors

Cindy Corliss, Jillian Grey, Erin Doherty and David Westlake

Acknowledgements

About What Works for Children's Social Care

What Works for Children's Social Care seeks better outcomes for children, young people and families by bringing the best available evidence to practitioners and other decision makers across the children's social care sector. We generate, collate and make accessible the best evidence for practitioners, policy makers and practice leaders to improve children's social care and the outcomes it generates for children and families.

About CASCADE

The Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre (CASCADE) at Cardiff University is concerned with all aspects of community responses to social need in children and families, including family support services, children in need services, child protection, looked after children and adoption. It is the only centre of its kind in Wales and has strong links with policy and practice.

To find out more visit the Centre at: **whatworks-csc.org.uk**, or CASCADE at: **sites.cardiff.ac.uk/cascade**

If you'd like this publication in an alternative format such as Braille, large print or audio, please contact us at: **wwccsc@nesta.org.uk**

Executive Summary

Introduction

In Lambeth, social workers are being placed in schools to support children and young people, families and schools with safeguarding. Their aim is to reduce social care involvement and keep children living safely at home. A team of five workers are embedded in five secondary and three primary schools and are working with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and pastoral staff. The social workers are doing the full range of statutory work, as well as offering support on safeguarding issues and concerns to teachers, parents and pupils. Social workers have been placed in the schools since 1st March 2019.

This interim report is part of an evaluation by Cardiff University for What Works for Children's Social Care. In it we explore the progress of the pilot to date, focussing on its feasibility and evidence of promise during the set up and initial implementation period. A final report, in March 2020, will examine the remainder of the pilot and consider its short to medium term impact.

Methodology

We are taking a realist approach to understanding the nature and feasibility of the intervention. This will help us understand the mechanisms and moderators of the intervention, so we can describe the impact it is having. This report includes formal and informal interviews, observations and focus groups with professionals from social care and education. The interim findings are based on a thematic analysis of qualitative data.

Key findings to date

Implementation

The project got underway in line with the project plan, and social workers were embedded within schools swiftly. The five workers were recruited internally, which avoided recruitment delays but meant that they had existing casework to complete or hand over.

Diverse nature of school contexts

The varied nature of the schools has shaped how the intervention is implemented, including the kinds of activities the social workers do and the balance of work with children and families. Whether a school was a primary or secondary had perhaps the biggest influence on the work social workers did. The work undertaken in primary schools was more likely to involve parents and carers, whereas the work undertaken in secondary schools was more likely to involve the young person.

Activities undertaken by social workers in schools

Social workers have been involved in a range of activities while embedded in the schools. They have had formal and informal discussions with school staff - often with the aim of alleviating their anxieties. Overall, it is felt these discussions were leading to a reduction in referrals and a better conversion rate (with more referrals progressing to assessments). Other activities include 'drop in' sessions for parents and children covering a range of issues including offering advice around homelessness and liaising with Early Help. Navigating the process of working within the school setting has proved challenging in some cases, and workers have noted the need to exercise caution and avoid giving the impression of "telling people how to do their jobs."

Function and boundaries of the social worker role

As the pilot progresses, we expect the role of social workers in schools to become clearer. Some schools absorbed the social work role smoothly, but others have found it more difficult to adapt to the new way of working. One worker questioned the focus for the work, explaining that the role was too diverse and that "trying to be everything, means that I think that we're missing, almost the real crux of why we should be there." This worker felt the focus should be on earlier intervention more than statutory work – as they had identified several families who would not meet the threshold for Children's Social Care but still need help.

Developing a shared understanding of safeguarding

There were differences between social care and school staff in the interpretation and management of children's behaviour, and surprise among social workers at the way behaviour issues were dealt with, and the 'zero-tolerance' approach some secondary schools applied to issues such as uniform. The different approaches of the two agencies were acknowledged, with one worker noting that social care and education "come from such a different place when dealing with children. It's trying to meet in the middle."

Impact on referrals and speed of intervention

There are promising signs that the pilot is having an impact on referrals and other outcomes, which we will explore quantitatively in the next stage of the pilot. In many cases this has meant that families receive help faster than they otherwise would. The presence of social workers in the schools helped to speed up action, whether that was a referral to another service, a conversation with a parent or child, or the provision of advice to the DSL or pastoral team. Both school and social care staff told us that parents had been positive about the role and had approached social workers for help and advice, which led social workers to feel that trust is being built.

Acceptability to families and school staff

Overall, there has been a positive reception from school staff, children and families. All except one school has written to families informing them of the pilot. Some families initially expressed concern about having a social worker present, but these have been resolved through the collaborative efforts of school and social care staff. Despite various teething problems, schools seem broadly positive about the intervention and its potential for improving safeguarding in schools.

Discussion

Our interim findings illustrate some of the complexities of implementing the pilot. Much of this arises from the number and diversity of schools involved, which provides an important context for the pilot and shapes the work social workers do. More broadly, it highlights the differences in how safeguarding issues are conceived and managed between education and social care.

There is encouraging evidence of mutual benefits to social care and education in terms of improving their understanding and management of safeguarding issues. This is likely to enhance interagency working. Lambeth are taking a critical approach and applying a problem-solving attitude to working in a new way, and those involved feel able to make mistakes and to be supported in learning from them.

The scope and activities of the social worker in schools role are still being worked out. There is evidence of statutory and non-statutory work being done, and the impact it has is likely to become clearer as the pilot progresses. Some of the activities social workers have undertaken would normally be done by school staff, and this raises questions about the scope of the role and the impact it might have on outcomes. We will continue to explore the nature of the role in the remainder of the pilot, in

order to provide a detailed description and so that our logic model accurately incorporates the various mechanisms through which social workers provide help and support change.

Conclusions and next steps

The project has started very positively, and embedding social workers within schools, in a relatively short space of time, is a real achievement. That they are evidently doing meaningful social work with children and families, and simultaneously working closely with school staff too, is especially impressive. Further work is needed to build a coherent sense of the social worker in schools role, and to refine the understanding of the mechanisms through which the activities they undertake might affect the outcomes that we are interested in.

In Phase 2 of the pilot evaluation we will explore these issues in more detail, and involve children and families in our data collection. In our final report we will compare outcomes across the intervention schools with a set of similar schools.

Table of contents

Introduction

Rationale for social workers in schools project

The intervention being evaluated is part of a programme of three projects in which social workers are placed in schools to support children and young people, families and staff. The overall aim is to keep children living at home safely and reduce the need for children to be in care. Similar approaches have been used elsewhere (Rose et al, 2006; Wilkin et al, 2008) but these have largely focused on early intervention. In this project social workers are doing the full range of statutory social work.

Background to the project in Lambeth

Lambeth designed an intervention based on situating social workers within schools and were successful in their bid to receive funding from What Works for Children's Social Care. Lambeth's intervention aims to reduce referrals from schools by working with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) at each school as well as offering immediate support for safeguarding issues and concerns to teachers, parents and pupils. Social workers are also expected to have a wider role delivering training and support for the schools, and in supporting parents and families in schools and the community.

Lambeth are working with eight schools, across primary and secondary provision, identified as part of their original bid. The eight schools involved were selected by Lambeth because they had high levels of need and social care involvement and wanted to be involved. Table 1 gives a summary of the schools involved.

Table 1: Schools involved in Lambeth pilot
*(Size (pupils) figures are based on publicly available data published by **gov.uk**)*

School	Primary/ Secondary	Size (pupils)	Type
1	Secondary	515	TBC
2	Secondary	744	Academy
3	Secondary	848	Academy
4	Primary	535	Federation
5	Primary	371	TBC
6	Primary	429	TBC
7	Secondary	896	Academy
8	Secondary	700	TBC

The pilot evaluation

The project is a pilot of a new intervention and a feasibility study to explore data collection and the potential for evaluating social workers in schools at scale. Details of the design are available in the evaluation protocol, which was published prior to the start of the project in March 2019 (Westlake, Corliss and Forrester, 2019). The pilot evaluation will focus primarily on the process of implementation, but it will also explore evidence of promise and indicators of success.

This report focusses on emerging evidence around implementation and feasibility during the early stages of the project. The final report, due for publication in March 2020, will build on these interim findings. It will provide a more detailed exploration of how and why the project was implemented as it was, including an analysis of any barriers and opportunities. It will also consider evidence of the impact

of the pilot, through a quasi-experimental comparison of intervention schools and a group of similar schools in Lambeth.

Methods

Summary of pilot evaluation design

We are taking a realist approach to understanding the nature and feasibility of the intervention. We aim to have a clear description of it, in the form of a detailed logic model that will be developed from the initial logic model included as Appendix 1 in the evaluation protocol (Westlake, Corliss and Forrester, 2019). We will also use qualitative and quantitative data to describe the ways the intervention has been applied, and the indications of its impact that are available. The evaluation is structured as three phases; initial theory development, implementation, and progress in relation to short term outcomes.

The focus of this interim report is on implementation during the early stages of the pilot (described as Phase 2 in the evaluation protocol). This is an important aspect of our evaluation for three reasons. Firstly, it will be a key point of comparison between this project and two similar projects underway in other local authorities, as each one has designed a different intervention based on local circumstances. Secondly, implementation has clear implications for policymakers and other local authorities who might be interested in commissioning similar interventions, because seemingly minor details of implementation can have significant impacts on overall effectiveness. And, finally, implementation issues are at the heart of the realist approach we are adopting in order to understand what works, for whom, and under what circumstances (Pawson, 2013). The final report will further examine implementation and progress in terms of outcomes, in order to develop the logic model and consolidate the programme theory.

Data used in this report

This report is based on qualitative data collected between March and June 2019. It includes formal and informal interviews and observations with professionals, children and families involved with the intervention, and focus groups involving social workers, service managers, and school personnel involved in delivering the intervention. The details of data collected to date can be found in Table 2.

Table 2: Data collection March 2019 – June 2019

Data	Number
Focus groups involving social workers (n=19)	2
Interview with project leads (social care)	4
Interview with education service leads	4
Interview with social workers based in schools	5
Observations with social workers (two visits to schools to observe young people, one visit with a young person in an inclusion unit, one home visit with a family)	4

In this report we draw on the data above, as well as our learning from meetings and ongoing communication with service leaders in Lambeth.

Research questions addressed in this report

At this stage in the project our focus is on early evidence of feasibility and promise, as set out in the evaluation protocol (p. 3-4). In relation to feasibility, we consider the following aspects of initial set up and implementation:

- Was the scheme implemented as intended (according to the logic model)?
- To what extent were social workers embedded within schools?
- What types of activities do the school social workers undertake?
- How acceptable is the intervention to social workers, school staff and families?
- What are the barriers and facilitators for delivery?
- How does the project delivery vary between schools?

In terms of early evidence of promise, we explore the following questions:

- What potential benefits do stakeholders (e.g. social workers, school staff) identify?
- Do there appear to be any unintended consequences or negative effects?
- Is there evidence to support the intervention logic model?

Analysis underpinning in this report

Interim findings to date were generated through thematic analysis which incorporated the data outlined above. Audio recordings of interviews and focus groups were reviewed by a second researcher (i.e. not the researcher who conducted the interview). They completed a basic thematic coding framework, noting down key themes and transcribing direct quotes that were deemed illustrative of these themes. The framework was then shared with the researcher who conducted the interview, and the analysis was discussed and refined in light of their input.

Overarching themes were brought together by the lead author and, in a final stage of analysis, these were discussed and agreed by the whole research team. The discussion incorporated our learning from wider data collection activities, including observations and other informal discussions. The resulting themes give an early indication of how the social workers in schools project is progressing. We will revisit these themes in the second phase of data collection in order to refine and develop.

Interim findings

Project launch and initial implementation

The project was launched on 27 February 2019 at Lambeth Town Hall at a meeting that included representatives from the participating schools, Children's Social Care, the research team, and colleagues from the Department for Education and What Works for Children's Social Care.

There was a productive atmosphere during the meeting, with social care and education staff expressing enthusiasm and positive anticipation. A question and answer session highlighted some of the expectations for the pilot, particularly the hope that it could help schools and social care work more effectively together. Social workers began working in the schools from 1st March 2019, and implementation has taken place on time and according to the project plan.

Recruitment, training and set up

In their original bid, Lambeth identified recruitment as a key risk to the project, as lengthy recruitment processes could waste valuable time and delay launching the pilot. However, their strategy to mitigate this by recruiting internally has proved successful. A job description was circulated, and five internal candidates were successfully appointed to senior social work roles within the team, all of whom have at least two years' experience in social work. A team manager was also internally seconded, meaning the team was established with no delay to the planned implementation timetable.

The five social workers joining the team had existing caseloads, which they began to reduce once seconded to the project and assigned to the schools. The handover period seems to have caused some frustration among school staff, who would have preferred workers not to have to complete existing work alongside their induction into the schools. Some of these challenges included learning to acknowledge that social workers needed to leave school grounds for meetings and family visits, which differs from the practice of school staff who remain on site all day. However, this has not been a major issue.

Training was offered by the local authority and was run by the internal schools improvement advisor as part of the induction and allowed the social workers to become familiar with the school setting and its policies and procedures. The social workers have generally been working closely with the school pastoral team and are seen as part of this team by staff, students and parents. Around this time, they also met the school Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and other safeguarding staff. An early task for some workers was to work closely with the DSL to familiarise themselves with a list of children they were concerned about. Some staff were granted access to school email and calendars, though this logistical aspect varied between schools. At the time of our fieldwork (May 2019), social workers in schools were embedded in all eight schools; three secondary with their associated primary schools served by one social worker per pair and the remaining two secondary schools served by one social worker each. Social workers have been engaged in direct work with young people, children and families.

Implementation

Implementing the pilot across eight schools is a complex task, and the inevitable differences between schools has shaped how the pilot has developed in each one. Lambeth have adopted a flexible approach to meet the needs of each school and adapt to the existing infrastructure already in place. One senior manager in social care commented on the process of becoming embedded;

> "It really depends on how well the school run their own sort of pastoral team, or inclusion team. If they're very well run and they've got good designated safeguarding leads, then actually they just fit in really easily. The ones that don't have that sort of infrastructure then that's much harder." (Senior manager, interview)

We discuss some of the challenges associated with this in more detail below, but a variety of logistical and practical challenges have arisen as a result of inter-agency working. Minor problems encountered to date include differences in Information Technology (IT) systems, including calendar sharing and email access, and challenges associated with mobile working across schools. However, there is evidence that these are being addressed proactively.

Themes identified to date

In this section we discuss key themes identified through our analysis, and explore the challenges and opportunities associated with the pilot to date. In the following sections we consider some overall messages for the initial roll out of the pilot.

1. Diverse nature of school contexts

It is difficult to overstate how far the differences between schools influence the way the pilot operates in practice. The schools vary in myriad ways, including in their culture, management, infrastructure, staffing, safeguarding practices, workload, and levels of need. One interviewee explained;

> "One of the biggest challenges is embedding us in schools, and…the contrast in how schools operate as to the impact of the project. Some of the schools, their safeguarding pastoral care is more organised or better resourced than other schools, in a couple of the schools, the designated safeguard lead is teaching as well so they've got very little capacity to actually deal with cases on a case-by-case basis." (Social worker, interview)

The schools also varied in terms of their size, the relative affluence or poverty in their area, and the funding structure. For example, some were under local authority control and others were academized. Whether a school was a primary or secondary had perhaps the biggest influence on the work social workers did. The work undertaken in primary schools was more likely to involve parents and carers, whereas the work undertaken in secondary schools was more likely to involve the young person. Primary schools tended to be more community based, which resulted in more engagement with families. Consequently, when working in primary schools, social workers reported greater opportunities to provide advice services such as parental drop-ins and to signpost to other services.

In contrast, two aspects of work in secondary schools were notable. Firstly, in some cases, the more hectic atmosphere where staff were often doing multiple jobs, and as a result, communication was poor at times between staff members and between staff and pupils. And secondly, the enforcement of a strict, often 'zero-tolerance' approach to behaviour management. We return to this issue in our discussion of different approaches to safeguarding below (Theme 4).

2. Activities undertaken by social workers in schools

Social workers have been involved in a range of activities while embedded in the schools, in keeping with the flexible approach to implementation set out by project leads, and the diverse context described above. As anticipated, in all the schools there have been formal and informal discussions between social workers on-site and school staff, in particular DSLs and other pastoral staff. The focus of these has been largely on potential safeguarding issues, often with the aim of alleviating anxieties among school staff. Overall, social workers and school staff felt these discussions were helpful and leading to a reduction in referrals, as we discuss below.

Social workers have also been working directly with parents and children. At the time of the data collection, all but one school had notified families about the social worker being placed in the school. Some families initially expressed concern about having a social worker present, though the exact nature of their concerns is difficult to ascertain at this stage, but may be related to the negative reputation surrounding social services. Nonetheless, these concerns seem to have been resolved through the collaborative efforts of school and social care staff.

One worker described how they had set up 'drop in' sessions for parents once a week and had already given advice to a parent via this forum. This took place in a school where a relatively large number of children have child in need or child protection plans, and the sessions can be viewed as an example of social workers devising additional ways of engaging these families. Other school social workers told us that they had plans to expand this area of their work, including running workshops on topics such as parenting and anger management, and focussing on the transition between primary and secondary school (which has been raised numerous times as being a crucial and potentially difficult period for children).

In secondary schools, as noted above, more direct work with young people has taken place than in primary schools. One social worker has had drop-in sessions to discuss relationship issues with some of the young people, and another has been able to spend time in the exclusion unit to develop a

rapport and an understanding of how young people experience the unit. Reflecting on this work, the social worker noted;

> "The young people feel really lonely, isolated, that it felt like prison, they just liked to sleep. That's what they did, they just slept all day. And I said 'yeah but what about your work? You've got work duties.' They said, 'Yeah, no one cares, we can just sleep.' So that was really sad. It was this place where nothing happened. It's just nothing, it's almost a barren land, that's how they sort of, that's the imagery I get from it and this young person goes there almost every week without fail, for a good solid amount of hours. And I think that is really what I am trying to touch in with, with the inclusion and that boy in particular." (Social worker, interview)

In some schools the existing pastoral provision is more developed than in others, which shapes how they fit into the school in practice. As one interviewee noted, discussing an issue regarding a young person who had been bullied and as a result had not attended school in months due to the school not evidencing the issue;

> "That feels like a real big shame, and it's unfortunate about the recording [of evidence] and I explained this in the meeting that you've really let him down here, because even if you were going to do nothing with it, it's that it was there, so you could always refer to 'yes he did come to us and say he was worried about the situation and we dealt with it by doing this.'" (Social Worker, interview)

Navigating this process sensitively has proved challenging in some cases, and workers have noted the need to exercise caution and avoid giving the impression of "telling people how to do their jobs." They explained the ongoing challenges they faced regarding the prominence safeguarding was given in some schools – which could be deciphered through the extent to which formal meetings took place and the reliance on informal discussions.

3. Impact on referrals and speed of intervention

There are promising signs that the pilot may be having an impact on referrals and other outcomes, which we will explore quantitatively in the next stage of the pilot. In many cases this has meant that families receive help faster than they otherwise would. The presence of social workers in the schools helped to speed up action, whether that was a referral to another service, a conversation with a parent or child, or the provision of advice to the DSL or pastoral team. With these things in mind, one social care interviewee made a persuasive case for social workers maintaining a remit that includes early help;

> "Early identification is the main thing, we've also seen a drop in referrals which is great, and we've seen a growth in conversion rates, so when we decide it's an assessment, it is an assessment. So, we're already seeing the benefits of that, which means less state intervention for families at our level so we're picking up families much earlier, going out and meeting them, and a lot of the activity we are doing is below the threshold of a referral. So, we're getting in there earlier which means families are getting a quicker response, and we can be much more informative about additional support out there in the community. We are linking a lot in with early-help, so we're doing quite a lot of early-help assessments which is really positive, so we're mobilising that early intervention." (Senior manager, interview)

4. Function and boundaries of the social worker role

As the pilot progresses, we expect the role of social workers in schools to become clearer. In the early stages of any new way of working – and especially so when this involves co-locating professionals for the first time – the function and boundaries of the new role will take time to establish. Some schools absorbed the social work role smoothly, but grasping the purpose of the pilot has proved challenging elsewhere;

"There have been some schools that have struggled a bit more, and, as in, not really understanding what the role is, other schools that have put really high demand on the social worker, and actually the social worker's job has been a lot of pushing back." (Social worker, interview)

It is clear from our interviews that social workers are active in this process. One worker questioned the focus for the work, explaining that the role was too diverse and that "trying to be everything, means that I think that we're missing, almost the real crux of why we should be there." This worker felt the focus should be on earlier intervention more than statutory work – as they had identified several families who would not meet the threshold for Children's Social Care but still need help. Activities such as group work, which were mentioned as part of the early intervention role, may not be surprising, but others – such as organising an Easter egg hunt for children and families – raises questions about the potential for 'mission creep' when social workers are embedded in schools. The Easter egg hunt was well received, but it is not clear why the social worker was involved. We consider the implications of this in more detail in our Discussion below.

Notwithstanding the challenges associated with implementing such a pilot, there was a general sense that progress was being made, and that, given time, the role would bring about an improvement in safeguarding practice. There are signs that the intervention is feasible and acceptable to stakeholders involved.

5. Developing a shared understanding of safeguarding

Managing inter-agency differences is often described as a challenging aspect of the social work role, and this project brings the differences between education and social care into sharp focus. In the words of one social worker, the two agencies "come from such a different place when dealing with children. It's trying to meet in the middle."

One area of sought-after middle ground is in the interpretation and management of children's behaviour. Social workers felt they had a wider lens on children's circumstances, and therefore saw behaviour or presentation issues in this context. They have been surprised at the way behaviour issues were dealt with, and the 'zero-tolerance' approach some schools applied to issues such as school uniforms. Some noted being uncomfortable about schools use of exclusions and had started to challenge the way these issues were managed. One worker noted their expectation that this was part of a journey they were just beginning, and that building effective relationships with school staff would take time;

> "It's been important to be strategic about how we challenge the school, the longer the social worker is there, the easier it'll get about giving feedback about how they're responding." (Social worker, interview)

Nonetheless, there were examples of changes taking place already, as the following fieldnote shows;

> *One of the positive aspects for this worker in a school is that she has been able to shape and change some of the schools expectations, in one case a young person (YP) hadn't come to school for 6 weeks, and when that YP turned up to school following this absence she was sent home because she was wearing trainers. The worker then met up with the YP and the safeguarding lead to make some adjustments to their policy.* (Researcher fieldnotes)

The worker in this example felt happy with the way this intervention went, noting;

> "The approach is then more measured, for the way the children are being treated, cause they're not treated badly, but I suppose it's being a bit more compassionate, and giving them a few more chances before you might say 'that's it you need to go straight to detention' or something like that. So that part has been nice and [the school] have been really open to kind of learning, and having advice." (Social worker, interview)

Similarly, there were different views about how 'managed moves' should be used. Managed moves are agreements that are made between a school and a parent/carer to allocate the young person to a different school or education placement and are frequently used to avoid permanent exclusions. There was a general concern among social care staff about what they perceived to be an over-reliance on managed moves to deal with relatively minor behaviour issues.

Conversely, there was debate about the ethical issues of the social worker being seen to speak to children informally, and the extent to which parents know this 'light touch' work is taking place. There was also an incident where a child disclosed to a teacher, and the presence of the worker in the school led to a variation to normal procedure. In this example, a Section 47 Investigation was instigated;

> "… and actually the social worker should've done a strategy meeting before speaking to the child, but because they were on site they spoke to the child, the police weren't happy with that, but the welfare of the child was not impacted, these are things that we are going to learn." (Senior manager, interview)

6. Acceptability to families and school staff

Without buy-in from families and school staff, it is hard to imagine the programme being successful. There are also many reasons to expect challenges in this area – the perception of social services among parents can be very negative, and professionals can sometimes express frustration about other services. It is therefore very encouraging that the evidence to date suggests broad acceptance of the social workers in schools.

Both school and social care staff told us that parents had been positive about the role, and had approached social workers for help and advice in some cases, which led social workers to feel that trust is being built. Children and young people will be involved in our next phase of fieldwork, so their views will be incorporated directly, but school staff feel they are benefiting;

> "The young people like having the social worker available to them in school, so if they have, you know, a problem or a worry, that they know where to find them. Yeah and I think that kind of fluid availability is really helpful for children. You know, the statutory procedure of go and do a home visit, I've never that comfortable with that, because if a child has a problem at home, seeing them at home is probably, you know, not always the most appropriate." (School staff, interview)

One member of school staff noted that when they started teaching, they had a social worker in the school, and she felt the pilot was a positive development. There was also a sense that social workers were on a "learning curve" and, as one school staff member put it, they "don't know how schools really run." School staff also noted that in a larger roll out it would be worth starting at the beginning of the school year, rather than part way through a term.

Discussion

Our interim findings illustrate some of the complexities of implementing the pilot. Much of this arises from the number and diversity of schools involved, which provides an important context for the pilot and shapes the work social workers do. More broadly, it highlights the differences in how safeguarding issues are conceived and managed between education and social care. The two agencies share the policy domain of the Department for Education, but some of the examples above suggest these are two rather different worlds. Bringing them closer together is a key aim of the pilot, and the process of doing so is already generating valuable insights.

Several findings present broadly positive pictures including the implementation and the embedding of social workers within the schools. While there were challenges encountered such as facilitating access

to emails and calendars, both schools and social workers were feeling positive and looking forward towards the autumn term. Moreover, schools have begun to understand and recognise that social workers need to be flexible with their work hours and not all of their time will be within the schools themselves given the nature of their jobs.

One of the main advantages set out in the logic model is the potential for each agency to enhance their understanding of safeguarding roles. There is some encouraging evidence that this is beginning to happen, and a great deal of ambition among all participants that this will become more apparent as the pilot continues. There is also a clear enthusiasm and commitment to problem solving among school and social care staff. The senior manager who gave the example of Section 47 procedures not being followed framed this as a learning opportunity, and this reflects the more general atmosphere that Lambeth have created. In any new way of working it is important that those involved feel able to make mistakes and to be supported in learning from them.

This ongoing development is likely to consolidate the nature of the work the social workers do and clarify the boundaries of their role. At this stage these are still being formed. The balance of work they end up doing across the schools remains to be seen, in terms of statutory and non-statutory activities. How this balance manifests will be crucial for our understanding of the intervention and what outcomes it seeks to improve. Group work and drop-in sessions for young people and families have been met with enthusiasm, as was the Easter Egg hunt mentioned above.

This can be correlated with how acceptable social workers and schools found the intervention. As stated previously, social workers are enjoying the varied work that is being undertaken. However, this is often connected to the availability of the DSL and the amount of time they have to spend addressing issues related to safeguarding. This is an area, including addressing how acceptable families find the intervention, which will be explored further in the final report.

Nonetheless, these activities differ from those which workers in this service would normally undertake, and raises questions about the potential for social workers to drift into doing tasks that other professionals might normally do. Overall, this was considered a positive thing, as it was thought that doing a wider spectrum of work would help to establish the role and links with the local community. However, it is unclear whether this kind of input, however effective, will provide evidence of promise in relation to social care outcomes in the limited timescales available.

We will continue to explore the nature of the role in the remainder of the pilot, in order to provide a detailed description and so that our logic model accurately incorporates the various mechanisms through which social workers provide help and support change.

Conclusions and next steps

The momentum evident at the launch event and the enthusiasm of social care and school staff has clearly helped ensure the project starts positively. Getting a team of social workers embedded within the schools, in a relatively short space of time, is a real achievement. That they are evidently doing meaningful social work with children and families, and simultaneously working closely with school staff too, is especially impressive.

The good relationships Lambeth appear to have built across the school system seem to be crucial enablers of the pilot. Further work is needed to build a coherent sense of the social worker in schools role, and to refine the understanding of the mechanisms through which the activities they undertake might affect the numbers of referrals to social care, social care involvement and other outcomes.

It is important to emphasise that this report comes at an early stage in the pilot, and we expect it to develop further as it becomes more established. In Phase 2 of the pilot evaluation we will explore these

issues in more detail, and involve children and families in our data collection. Our aim here is to understand their perspective of the pilot and learn from their experiences of it. In our final report we will compare outcomes across the intervention schools with a set of similar schools. We will also refine and develop the logic model based on these findings and present a realist programme theory based on it.

References

Children Act (1989) The Stationary Office. London.

Pawson, R., 2013. The science of evaluation: a realist manifesto. Sage.

Rose, R., Smith, A., Ali, S. and Gray, T. 2006. Extended services in and around schools in Derbyshire. Northampton: University of Northampton School of Education, Centre for Special Needs Education and Research.

Westlake, D., Corliss, C., & Forrester, D, 2019. Lambeth Change Project: Social Workers in Schools. What Works for Children's Social Care. London.

Wilkin, A., Murfield, J., Lamont, E., Kinder, K. and Dyson, P. 2008. T he value of social care professionals working in extended schools. [Online]. Slough: National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER). Available at https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/SCX01/SCX01.pdf [Accessed: 18 February 2019].

wwccsc@nesta.org.uk

@whatworksCSC

whatworks-csc.org.uk