What Works for Children's Social Care

EARLY INTERVENTION FOUNDATION

Coming together as What Works for Early Intervention & Children's Social Care

Research learning communities

A qualitative evaluation

May 2023

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Coming together as What Works for Early Intervention & Children's Social Care

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About What Works for Early Intervention and Children's Social Care

What Works for Children's Social Care (WWCSC) and the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) are merging. The new organisation is operating initially under the working name of What Works for Early Intervention and Children's Social Care.

Our new single What Works centre will cover the full range of support for children and families from preventative approaches, early intervention and targeted support for those at risk of poor outcomes, through to support for children with a social worker, children in care and care leavers.

To find out more visit our website at: **www.whatworks-csc.org.uk**

About Ipsos

Ipsos UK's Policy and Evaluation Unit was commissioned by What Works for Children's Social Care to undertake an evaluation of the Research Learning Communities (RLC) Programme in 2021.
The Ipsos Policy and Evaluation Unit is a multidisciplinary team of more than 50 evaluation specialists and economists who offer considerable expertise in the evaluation of public policies and programmes. This includes experience across all major areas of public policy, and the completion of more than 500 evaluations for UK central government departments, DGs of the European Commission and International Agencies.
For further information about this evaluation, please contact Karl Ashworth (Evaluation Director) at Karl.Ashworth@ipsos.com or Nadia Badaoui (Evaluation Manager) at Nadia.Badaoui@ipsos.com.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

CIN	Children in Need
GPS	Grammar, Punctuation, and Spelling
LAC	Looked After Children
LSA	Learning Support Assistant
NfER	National Foundation for Educational Research
RCT	Randomised Controlled Trial
RLC	Research Learning Communities
VSH	Virtual School Heads
WWCSC	What Works for Children's Social Care

Executive summary

Introduction

The Research Learning Communities (RLC) Programme is a professional development programme that aims to improve the Literacy and Mathematics outcomes of children by supporting school leaders and teachers in primary schools to develop and implement research-informed teaching strategies. The programme was previously delivered to schools and evaluated with funding from the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF). The RLC programme was then adapted by the School of Education in Durham University specifically for Children in Need (CIN) and Looked After Children (LAC) with support from WWCSC and delivered between November 2021 to May 2022. This marked the first time that the RLC was tailored to focus on supporting teachers to develop evidence-based teaching strategies specifically for CIN/LAC. A total of six primary schools were recruited to partake in the programme. The programme was accordingly delivered to Subject Leads and Designated Teachers via several online workshops, with each session lasting approximately two and a half hours. The workshop participants were then responsible for cascading research evidence, learnings and teaching strategies to other Year 5 and 6 teachers in their schools. With a new focus on CIN/LAC, WWCSC commissioned Ipsos UK to conduct a new evaluation of the RLC programme from November 2021 to February 2023 that primarily examined the benefits and potential impacts of the RLC programme on:

- CIN/LAC attainment, assessed through Year 6 CIN/LAC KS2 scores in Literacy and Mathematics, supplied by the National Pupil Database (NPD) as well as anecdotal reports from teachers
- Designated Teachers' and Subject Leads' knowledge of academic/action research and use of academic/action research in practice
- Designated Teachers, Subject Leads, and Year 5 and 6 teachers' attitudes towards academic/action research and implementation of improved teaching practices for CIN/LAC.

Methods

The evaluation was originally intended to be delivered as a randomised controlled trial (RCT). However, due to challenges with recruitment, the study was amended to a qualitative evaluation with a view to generating learnings to expand the RLC programme and inform future evaluations. Workshop observations of all seven RLC workshops were conducted to explore engagement and participation in the delivery of the workshops and the quality of the workshop sessions. Semi-structured in-depth interviews with participants and delivery staff were conducted to understand experiences and impacts of the RLC workshops on teacher outcomes.

Research questions

This evaluation sought to answer the following questions grouped by the evaluation domains of evidence of feasibility, evidence of promise and readiness for trial:

1. **Evidence of feasibility:** What evidence is there of the RLC programme's feasibility (including in relation to fidelity, differentiation, reach, acceptability, and enablers and barriers to implementation)?
2. **Evidence of promise:** What evidence is there of the RLC programme's promise (including evidence to support the programme's causal mechanisms, potential impacts and unintended consequences)?
3. **Readiness for trial:** What is the RLC programme's readiness for trial (including the extent to which the programme can be applied as anticipated and be sufficiently codified to operate up to a pilot or full-scale trial in future)?

Key findings

Evidence of feasibility

- Despite issues with recruitment and participant retention, there is strong evidence of the intervention's feasibility. The core components that made the RLC programme effective in the previous EEF trial were maintained in this adaptation of the programme to CIN/LAC. These included adherence to the original programme plan and RLC "cycle of inquiry" throughout the workshops (where participants were supported to access, evaluate and apply academic research findings to apply to their own teaching). In turn, teachers appeared to adhere to plans developed through the workshops to adapt their teaching practices, especially regarding providing targeted support to CIN/LAC.
- However, the timing of this adapted programme in the context of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic affected programme recruitment and retention and prevented the programme from achieving its intended reach and impact. Delivery staff and workshop participants pointed to time pressures imposed by recovery strategies from the COVID-19 pandemic which led to higher than anticipated dropout rates from the programme. This also reduced opportunities for collaboration among remaining participants. The scope for collaboration was also found to be partly reduced by the delivery of the workshops via an online rather than face-to-face environment (in which the previous EEF trial was delivered).

Evidence of promise

- This study found evidence of promise supporting the causal mechanisms and potential impacts outlined in the RLC logic model. Participants reported that the RLC programme was effective in providing an opportunity for participants and teachers to reflect and carefully design an intervention for CIN/LAC. There was some evidence the programme had a positive impact on professional development among teachers. There was a consensus among participants that it promoted the benefit of research-led learning, and some participants began to share these learnings with other members of staff. Some participants also intend to continue efforts to implement research-informed teaching interventions in future academic years for CIN/LAC.
- However, the high attrition rate from the RLC programme (with teachers from four out of six schools withdrawing early) showed that professional development opportunities for teachers can contribute to an unmanageable burden on teachers' time.
- There was some evidence that the RLC programme had a positive impact on CIN/LAC through improved concentration in lessons and better personal skills with peers and teachers. For example, there was evidence that changes to teaching

strategies as a result of the RLC programme prompted CIN/LAC to build confidence due to the introduction of pre-teaching and reflective learning exercises (e.g. green pen marking). However, this evidence was based on the subjective interpretations of Subject Leads and teachers who took part in this research.

- There did not appear to be any unintended consequences or negative effects of the RLC programme for teachers or CIN/LAC.

Readiness for trial

- There is still a high level of uncertainty about the feasibility of a trial because the intervention did not recruit and retain enough participants to enable a pilot evaluation. The impact of high participant attrition to the RLC programme, combined with low response rates to the teacher survey and limited participation in teacher interviews, limited the scope of this evaluation.
- Any future experimental impact trial ought to determine strategies and incentives to encourage greater uptake and commitment from schools to take part, for example by using organisations with a track record of recruiting schools, or offering incentives.
- The timing of the programme also impacted the feasibility of the programme with schools facing considerable time pressures and staff shortages as they were coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic. Future research could be conducted once schools have had more time to recover from the impact of the pandemic.
- Future research could additionally undertake the data collection and evaluation methods that were originally proposed in this evaluation, when designed as an RCT/IPE. These include pre- and post- teacher questionnaires, collecting administrative data on pupil outcomes, collecting school-level data for case studies and a cost evaluation.

1. Introduction

Description of the intervention

Why?

In the past decade, there has been increased interest in using evidence to inform teaching practice. Such interest was generated following research findings which pointed to teaching practice not being systematically evidence informed, teachers relying on their own experience as evidence of what works, and the challenges of changing teachers' attitudes towards research evidence (Rickinson et al., 2021; Speight et al., 2016; Judkins et al., 2014; Goldacre, 2013).

Recent research examining barriers that inhibit the uptake of research evidence among teachers cite a lack of skills to interpret and appraise research evidence, limited resources and time, limited access to evidence, and few incentives to use research evidence in practice (Brown & Flood, 2020; Speight et al., 2016; Nelson & O'Beirne, 2014; Sharples, 2013). In addition, there is often a lack of clarity regarding what "evidence" looks like, how to apply evidence to teaching practice, and the need for better systems and structures to support the dissemination of evidence in easily digestible and accessible formats for teachers (Coldwell et al., 2017; Goldacre, 2013, McAleavy & Bennett, 2016).

What?

The Research Learning Communities (RLC) Programme is a professional development programme that aims to support teachers in primary schools to implement research-based teaching strategies that have the potential to improve the Literacy and Mathematics outcome of CIN and LAC.

The RLC programme brings together primary Subject Leads and Designated Teachers[2] in a series of workshops focusing on raising their understanding and use of educational research in order to develop and implement new teaching strategies or adjust existing teaching strategies for CIN/LAC in their schools. Subject Leads and Designated Teachers are to champion evidence-informed teaching strategies and work with Year 5 and 6 teachers to facilitate working together to develop and implement these new/adjusted strategies.

The RLC programme is based on teacher action research, described in simple terms including planning a new teaching strategy, acting on it, observing its effects, reflecting on its effectiveness, revising plans, and repeating the cycle again (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). Thus, during the workshops, conceptual research needs to be translated into instrumental action in the classroom. In the workshops, teachers collaborate to review research evidence and share personal experiences to collectively make sense of its implications and applications to teaching practice.

[2] A Designated Teacher is a teacher or a headteacher/acting headteacher in a school, who is responsible for "promoting the educational achievement" of looked after and previously looked after children in their schools and ensuring that both policy and practice is attuned to the needs of these pupils. Designated Teachers are mandated to "take lead responsibility for ensuring school staff understand the things which can affect how looked after and previously looked after children learn and achieve and how the whole school supports the educational achievement of these pupils." (Department for Education, 2018, p. 12)

In this way, RLC aims to facilitate what the programme developers have previously called a "cycle of inquiry" (Brown & Flood, 2020; Brown, 2017), whereby Subject Leads and Designated Teachers are supported to access, evaluate and apply academic research findings to inform their own teaching and apply them. In addition, RLC aims to support Subject Leads and Designated Teachers attending the workshops to cascade their learning to Year 5 and Year 6 teachers in their schools who support with the roll-out of new practices.

For these reasons, the programme provides participants with training on effective change leadership. It does so by building their understanding of their role in the change leadership process and offering specific strategies and techniques that they can employ in their own school contexts to ensure new practices are adopted/existing practices are adjusted. To enhance the potential positive impact of the programme, at the outset, RLC also intends to gain the support of Head Teachers/Assistant Head Teachers, whose teachers are participants in the programme.

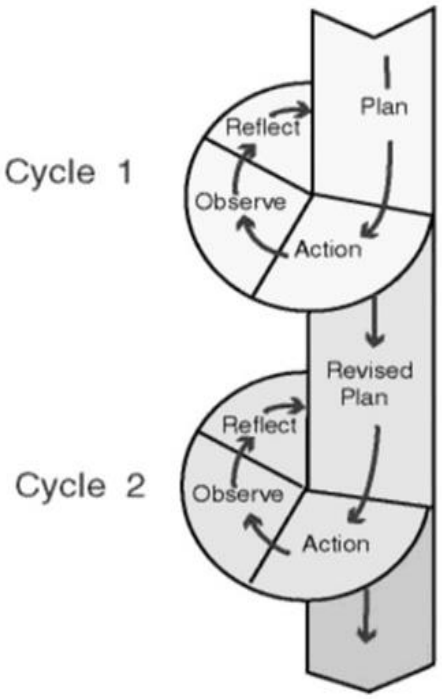


Figure 1.1: Action research cycle
Source: Kemmis & McTaggart (1988)

RLC involved six workshops during which Subject Leads and Designated Teachers engaged with the programme's materials and planned activities. Before and after the workshops, teachers also attended an introductory session where they were introduced to the programme and a "moving forward"/wrap-up session in which they reflected on their learning and consider next steps. RLC ran between November 2021 and May 2022.

Who? (recipients)

The RLC programme involved six primary schools. Within each school, the intended recipients of the programme included specific cohorts of pupils and teachers.

Pupils

The programme intended to improve the Mathematics and Literacy outcomes of Year 5 and 6 pupils who have been classified as Children in Need (CIN) in the CIN 2020 census or Looked After Children (LAC) in the LAC 2020 census in the past six years.[3] This cohort aligned with the target population which was to be analysed through an experimental impact evaluation approach. CIN are a group supported by children's social care, who also have safeguarding and welfare requirements which are identified through a children's social care assessment or because of their disability (Department for Education, 2019). LAC refer to

[3] CIN and LAC classifications are aligned with the Children Act of 1989. As per the Act, CIN/CLA encompasses "all those children receiving statutory support from local authority social care, including those on a Children in Need Plan, on a Child Protection Plan, and Looked After Children."

children living in the care of their local authority for more than 24 hours, who are placed with foster carers, either in residential homes or with parents/any other relatives (NSPCC, 2022).

Teachers

The RLC programme intended to engage each school's Literacy or Mathematics Subject Lead and its Designated Teacher. Both Subject Leads and Designated Teachers were invited to attend the RLC sessions and workshops on behalf of each school. Additionally, the programme intended to engage Year 5 and 6 teachers, who were expected to support Subject Leads and Designated Teachers with the implementation of new (or adjustment of existing) teaching strategies in their schools. Year 5 and 6 teachers were not invited to attend any of the programme's sessions/workshops.
Virtual schools, led by Virtual School Heads (VSH) were also involved in the recruitment of schools for the programme. VSH were also invited to attend the programme to support their own professional development. However, VSH were not part of the intended beneficiaries for the programme and were not expected to be developing or implementing new/adjusting existing research-informed teaching practices in the participating schools. Given their strategic role in the education of CIN/LAC, VSH were consulted on their views on the programme, as part of the development of the evaluation protocol. However, no VSH subsequently attended any RLC sessions or took part in the programme thereafter.

Who? (providers)

Two programme facilitators were trained by the development/delivery team at the School of Education, Durham University to deliver the RLC programme. The facilitators brought prior experience delivering the RLC programme to teachers and schools in the UK. They were also supported to develop/deliver all intervention materials for the workshops. These included easy-to-read, practical syntheses of academic research and templates for teachers to develop interventions using a Theory of Action, drawing on materials from previous RLC programmes and prior research. Finally, the development/delivery team (in collaboration with VSH) identified/suggested **educational themes most relevant to CIN/LAC** to focus on in the workshops.

Where? (location)

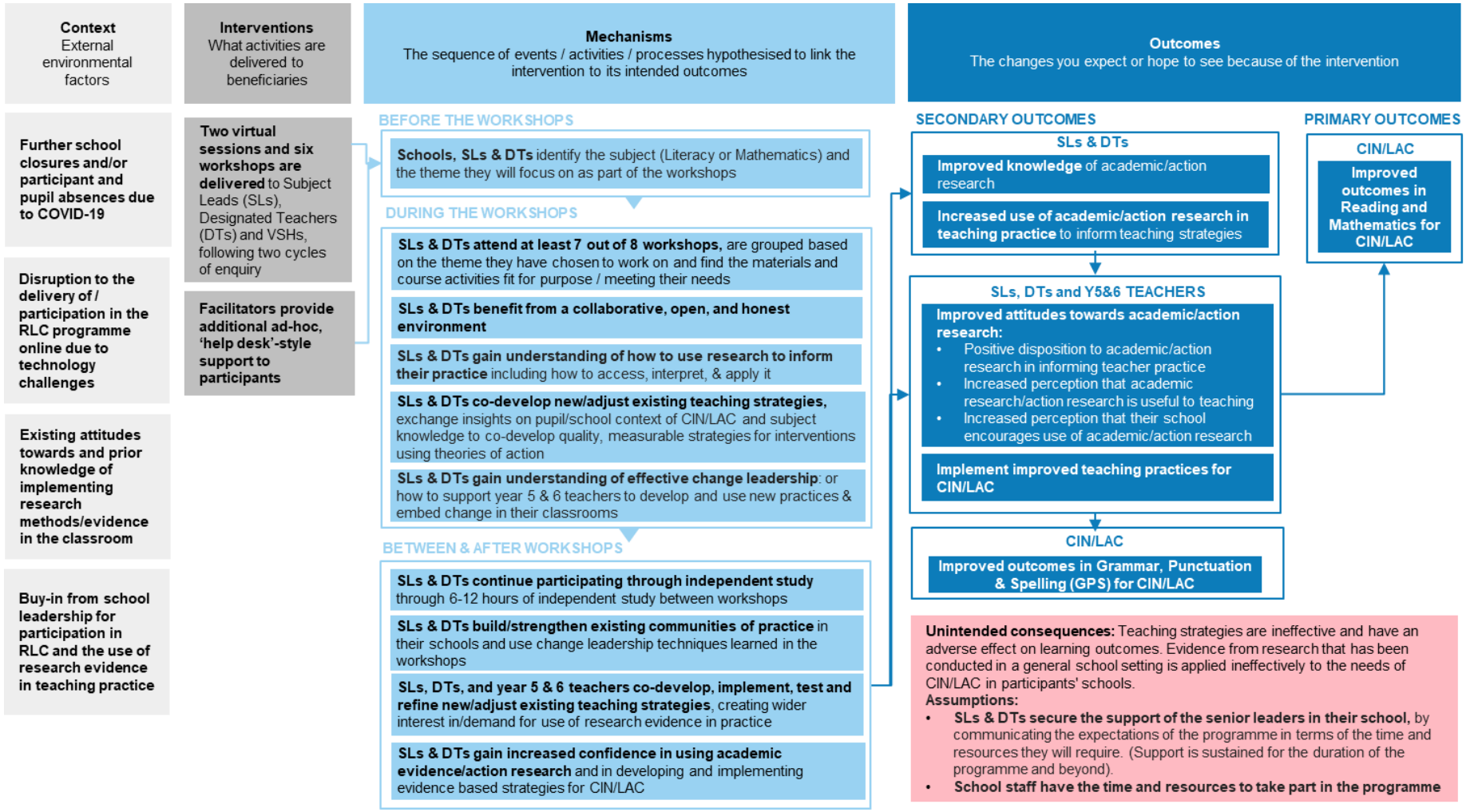
Workshops were hosted online, with each lasting for approximately two and a half hours. Workshops were held after the end of the school day, thus after about 3:30pm, to minimise disruption for teachers and pupils.

Theory of change/Logic model

A theory of change for the programme was developed during the protocol development stage using the WWCSC logic model template. It is illustrated in Figure 1.2 and described in detail in the remainder of this section.

Logic model

Figure 1.2: RLC logic model



Interventions

As described in the logic model, the activities that were intended to take place as part of the intervention involved:

- **A total of two sessions and six workshops were to be delivered virtually** to Subject Leads, Designated Teachers and VSH, following two cycles of enquiry. The first cycle of inquiry was to take place between Workshop 1 and 3, and the same process was to be repeated during Workshops 4 to 6. Each workshop group aimed to consist of 10–15 participants. Further detail on the sessions and workshops delivered can be found in Appendix A.
- **Facilitators provide additional ad hoc, "help desk"-style support to participants**, if required, between the workshops, for example, should a teacher require one-to-one advice on developing and implementing a particular strategy, or understanding a piece of research.

Mechanisms

Before the workshops and introductory session, it was intended that the following mechanisms (or sequence of events, activities or processes) would occur:

- **Schools, Subject Leads and Designated Teachers identify the subject (Literacy or Mathematics) and the theme (out of the themes previously identified by VSH) they will focus on as part of the workshops.** As discussed above, both subject and theme will be chosen based on the needs of CIN/LAC in their school. (Teachers may choose to focus on one theme throughout the RLC programme, or switch themes during the second cycle of inquiry).

During the workshops, it was intended that:

- **Subject Leads and Designated Teachers attend at least seven out of eight workshops/sessions and are grouped based on the theme they have chosen to work on:** For an impact on pupil outcomes to occur, it is assumed that either the Subject Lead or Designated Teacher from each school attend at least seven out of eight of the workshops in order to ensure they are part of each key step of the intervention.
- **Subject Leads and Designated Teachers benefit from a collaborative, open, and honest environment:** For the workshops to be effective, Subject Leads and Designated Teachers must be able to collaborate and share learning with each other in an open, honest environment so that they are able to challenge each other and themselves as well as reflect on and question their practice. As such, the RLC programme is intended to create a positive and supportive workshop environment which helps foster reflective and constructive discussions. In the workshops, participants are expected to benefit from sharing the challenges they face and the strategies they develop with participants from other schools. In this way, the RLC may create cross-school repositories of knowledge which participants can tap into, learn from, and/or use.
- **Subject Leads and Designated Teachers gain improved understanding of how to use research to inform their practice:** By consulting research evidence in a synthesised format in the workshop and through links and sources provided by

facilitators, Subject Leads and Designated Teachers are expected to gain an understanding of the practical applications of research evidence to their teaching and to that of their colleagues, and how to access, interpret and apply it.

- **Subject Leads and Designated Teachers co-develop new/adjust existing teaching strategies:** Subject Leads and Designated Teachers from each of the schools are to work closely together to interpret research evidence and contextualise it. Subject Leads are to bring their specific subject knowledge on Literacy or Mathematics, while Designated Teachers their insights on the background and challenges of CIN/LAC in the school. Bringing together subject specialisms with a deep understanding of the CIN/LAC in the school and their needs has the potential to further support personalised learning. New/adjusted existing strategies will be underpinned by a clear Theory of Action which will guide the development process and also support evidence gathering and impact assessment in the classroom.
- **Subject Leads and Designated Teachers gain understanding of effective change leadership:** This is intended to enable the workshop participants to effectively generate interest in and engagement of Year 5 and 6 teachers with the new/adjusted existing teaching strategies they are introducing, as well as in the concept of evidence-informed action research as a source of information for developing new teaching practices.

Finally, between and after the workshops, it was intended that:

- **Subject Leads and Designated Teachers spend eight to 12 hours of independent study** between workshops reading additional literature to that discussed in the workshops to further inform and refine their strategies.
- **Subject Leads and Designated Teachers build/strengthen existing communities of practice in their schools and use change leadership techniques learned in the workshops:** Initially, it is expected that this could be through staff meetings, emails, or workshops organised by the Subject Leads and Designated Teachers. Efforts to create communities of practice will require effective information sharing, collaboration and relationship-building driven by workshop participants.
- **Subject Leads, Designated Teachers and Year 5 and 6 teachers co-develop, implement, test and refine new/adjust existing teaching strategies for CIN/LAC in their school, creating wider interest in/demand for use of research evidence in practice:** Working collaboratively, workshop participants and their Year 5 and 6 colleagues develop evidence-based teaching strategies and relevant classroom material that allow personalised learning for CIN/LAC in their school. Part of implementation also involves the collection of relevant pupil data and reflection upon the implementation of strategies in action to assess the effectiveness of the strategies and improve them. As positive outcomes start materialising, this process is also expected to help generate interest in and enthusiasm for the new strategies and more generally for the use of evidence in teaching practice among teachers in the school.
- Subject Leads, Designated Teachers, and Year 5 and 6 teachers will **gain increased confidence (or self-efficacy)** developing and trialling new practices for CIN/LAC based on evidence and the Theory of Action learned in the workshops (developing self-efficacy, a key mechanism that mediates the effect of RLC on the proximal outcome).

Outcomes

This qualitative evaluation originally intended to assess the potential for an impact analysis required for a large-scale impact study of both pupil and teacher outcomes and their "readiness for trial" which (as described in the logic model) include:

- **Teacher outcomes:** It is expected in the short-term (proximal outcome) that both workshop participants as well as Year 5 and 6 teachers will co-develop and implement improved teaching practices for CIN/LAC, demonstrating improved attitudes towards adopting and using evidence-based practices in the classroom. Measuring the adoption or use of evidence-based practices can be challenging and a future study may follow the EEF approach of using attitudes towards research as a proxy for change in behaviour. Regardless, it is assumed that the more sustained the application of new/adjustment of existing teaching strategies for CIN/LAC, and of the Theory of Action within teacher communities, the greater the impacts on pupil attainment over time.
- **Pupil outcomes:** It is expected in the longer-term (distal outcome) that the programme will improve pupils' attainment in Reading and Mathematics, as measured by the relevant national curriculum tests at KS2 for Year 6 CIN/LAC. In addition, it is expected that there will be an improvement in Grammar, Punctuation, and Spelling (GPS) outcomes, also measured by the relevant national curriculum tests at KS2 for Year 6 CIN/LAC.

Teacher outcomes described in the logic model centre on improvements in workshop participants':

- **Knowledge** of academic/action research specifically relating to CIN/LAC
- **Attitudes** towards the usefulness of academic/action research to enhance teaching strategies for CIN/LAC
- **Behaviours** relating to the use of academic/action research in the development of new teaching strategies, and the implementation of improved teaching practices tailored to the needs of CIN/LAC in their school.

As part of this evaluation, pupil and teacher outcomes were discussed and analysed descriptively through qualitative interviews with participants and delivery staff. This analysis has served to confirm the intervention logic set out in the logic model. However, since the quantitative elements of the study were not conducted, this evaluation has not sought to be strongly prescriptive over the operational definitions of the outcome measures which could be applied in an RCT setting.

Assumptions

- **Support from the schools' senior leaders is secured:** Subject Leads and Designated Teachers secure the support of the senior leaders in their school, by communicating the expectations of the programme in terms of the time and resources they will require. Support is sustained for the duration of the programme and beyond. Ideally, the RLC programme would be tied into teachers' regular work assignments and even performance management targets (e.g. through CPD plans) so that it does not add too much of a burden to teacher workload. In addition, improving research Literacy and learning practices among teachers should also be part of school leaders' longer-term strategic plans. Finally, it is important to ensure

that RLC is included as part of continuity planning for school leadership, to ensure that changes in school leadership do not derail the success of the programme.
- **School staff have the time and resources to take part in the programme.**

Previous evaluation

RLC has previously been delivered in the UK to schools which agreed to take part in the programme and their teachers and pupils across various year groups (Sanders et al., 2020). The programme was robustly evaluated by the Education Endowment Foundation and Bristol University between 2014–16 using a RCT with 119 primary schools (of which 60 were in the intervention group) and a process evaluation (Rose et al., 2017). The evaluation assessed RLC's impact on reading outcomes for children in Key Stage 2 (KS2) and teacher outcomes, and concluded that:

- The programme had a positive impact on teachers' disposition towards research, with some evidence that this impact may have been influenced by factors such as the level of postgraduate qualifications or seniority of teachers that took part in the intervention.
- There was some evidence of a small positive relationship between teachers' disposition towards research and pupil outcomes, irrespective of involvement in an RLC.
- There was no evidence that RLC improved reading outcomes for children at KS2, with some teachers suggesting that it may take a number of years for participation in an RLC to change teaching practice and improve pupil outcomes (Rose et al., 2017). Using pupil data collected as part of the RCT, sub-group analysis was conducted, focusing on children with a social worker and their KS2 results. Although the small sample sizes of children in the sub-group analysis meant the re-analysis was underpowered by conventional levels, analysis indicated that the programme did show "signs of promise". Analysis showed that children from this cohort who received the programme demonstrated two months' additional progress in reading attainment compared to children with a social worker in control schools (Sanders et al., 2020).

These "signs of promise", identified by WWCSC, provided the opportunity to adapt and deliver the RLC programme so that it supported teachers with the use of evidence focusing on CIN/LAC, who generally have lower educational attainment than their classmates and may have an even greater need for tailored and innovative teaching (Berridge et al., 2020). In turn, the evaluation of the adapted programme was seen as key in order to support the evidence base in this field, which is scarce, by using a robust evaluation design and thus, providing solid evidence on the programme's impact.
The EEF-funded evaluation also concluded that there were key factors which affected the uptake and outcomes of the RLC programme, such as:

- **Being part of a wider community of practice:** Participants placed value not just in the content of the workshops, but also in the opportunity to meet teachers from other schools and create a wider community, where they could collaboratively reflect on their teaching practice and share ideas.
- **Quality of facilitation and support:** During the interviews, participants felt that the facilitation team were key drivers behind the success of the workshops due to their delivery and ongoing contact with schools throughout the duration of the project via telephone and email channels.

- **Existing school culture and practices:** The cultures and practices of participating schools were seen as another factor that shaped the outcome of the RLC programme. For instance, “research friendly” schools that had already trialled new approaches based on research evidence, had open communication among teachers and leadership teams (e.g. regular staff meetings), a “participatory” approach, and support from te Institute of Education at University College London. The size of the school also played a role as smaller schools were found to more effectively facilitate communication and the adoption of a whole-school approach to integrate the findings from the programme into everyday teaching practices.
- **Time constraints and workload:** Time constraints imposed by teachers’ day-to-day workloads were another factor. For instance, interviewees reported that Year 6 teachers were particularly busy with preparing SATs and end-of KS2 activities which resulted in them having a lack of time to engage with research (also prominent across year groups). Schools with existing communication between teachers and leadership figures (e.g. staff meetings) and practices (e.g. revision of pupil data, collaboration, class interventions) tended to have a smoother implementation of the programme because such initiatives reduced the number of extra demands placed on teachers.
- **Compliance with government policy:** Ofsted inspections and changing educational policies meant that schools prioritised accountability activities over pedagogical development such as implementing the RLC programme. Interviewees particularly felt that changing government policies resulted in teachers shifting their attention to short-term initiatives at the expense of developing a professional culture throughout their schools.
- **Staff turnover:** High levels of staff turnover constituted a barrier to schools’ ability to remain engaged for the duration of the programme. Some reasons for high turnover include maternity, sick leave or increased in-school responsibilities.
- **Familiarity with research:** Previous rates of engagement with research also led to variation in teachers’ uptake of the programme. For example, some teachers lacked skills or experience and subsequently required additional support from colleagues which, in turn, slowed down the implementation of the project. The evaluation also found that the lack of open access to up-to-date research also hindered the implementation of the programme.

Evaluation context

Table 1.1 provides an overview of the schools that took part in the RLC programme. It provides an overview of the number of teachers initially involved in the programme from each of the six schools that took part. There is also a breakdown of the free school meal (FSM) rates across each school to provide additional context. During the 2021/22 academic year when this study took place, two of the participating schools had FSM rates above the 2021/22 national average of 22.5% (United Kingdom Statistics Authority, 2022), while four schools had rates below this average. The two schools that did not drop out of the RLC programme had FSM rates below the national average.

Table 1.1: Schools that took part in the RLC programme

School	Number of	Number of RLC	Deprivation (%

	workshops attended per school*	participants/teachers involved	free school meals)
1	7	3	16% FSM
2	6	1	18.1% FSM
3	1	1	8% FSM
4	1	2	39.8% FSM
5	3	2	22.8% FSM
6	0	2	10.3% FSM

* This table records the number of times at least one participant from each school attended each workshop. Please note that the delivery team also sent recordings of the workshops to schools that could not attend online for them to watch afterwards, which may mean that schools viewed more workshops than indicated here (although this has not been confirmed).

2. Methods

Research aims

This evaluation initially aimed to examine the benefits and potential impacts of the RLC programme on:

- CIN/LAC attainment, assessed through Year 6 CIN/LAC KS2 scores in Literacy and Mathematics, supplied by the National Pupil Database (NPD) as well as anecdotal reports from teachers
- Designated Teachers' and Subject Leads' knowledge of academic/action research and use of academic/action research in practice
- Designated Teachers, Subject Leads, and Year 5 and 6 teachers' attitudes towards academic/action research and implementation of improved teaching practices for CIN/LAC.

Research questions

In light of the above aims, the research questions that this evaluation sought to answer were:

1. Evidence of feasibility:
    a. Fidelity
        i. What is teachers' attendance at the RLC workshops?
        ii. Is the implementation of the RLC programme perceived as consistent with its original design? If not, are adaptations perceived as beneficial or detrimental?
        iii. How relevant/well adapted is the content of the RLC programme perceived as meeting the needs of teaching and learning for CIN/LAC?
        iv. How well do Subject Leads and Designated Teachers leverage their leadership and support roles to cascade teaching strategies to other teachers and deliver the RLC programme in their schools?
        v. How well do teachers adapt their teaching practices to incorporate learnings from the programme?
    b. Differentiation and service orientation:
        i. To what extent is the RLC programme perceived as genuinely new and innovative compared with similar initiatives that have been previously/are currently implemented at the school for CIN/LAC?
        ii. Does the RLC programme offer support in ways not previously offered?
    c. Barriers and facilitators to delivery:
        i. What are Subject Leads and Designated Teachers' views of the frequency, timing and duration of the workshops?
        ii. What adaptations could be made to the RLC intervention to improve future roll-outs?
        iii. How did Subject Leads and Designated Teachers view the process of getting buy-in from leadership at their schools?
    d. Reach and acceptability:

i. How attractive is the idea of the RLC to teachers and school leaders?
ii. To what extent are teachers able to develop, implement and target new/adjust teaching strategies to pupils who have been CIN/LAC at any point in the last six years in their classrooms?
iii. To what extent do Designated Teachers and Subject Leads (participating in the workshops), Year 5 and 6 teachers, and teachers in the wider school engage with the programme and use the resources provided in the workshops?

2. Evidence of promise:
    a. Mechanisms:
        i. How does the RLC and the role of Subject Leads and/or Designated Teachers work in practice? And how does this enactment differ based on different school contexts?
        ii. To what extent do Subject Leads and Designated Teachers effectively collaborate with Year 5 and 6 teachers to co-develop and implement Theories of Action in their schools?
        iii. To what extent do Subject Leads and Designated Teachers effectively collaborate with each other to facilitate programme success? (e.g. in exchanging relevant subject matter expertise, in change leaderships/supporting other Year 5 and 6 teachers)
        iv. What are the views of Subject Leads and Designated Teachers on the quality of workshop content, structure, support and environment (or the space created for collaboration and open and honest conversations)?
        v. Do different stakeholders believe that the programme is addressing their requirements and the outcomes needed to be achieved?
        vi. What supports and what inhibits effective implementation at a school level and why?
        vii. What are the necessary prerequisites for the use of research to change teachers' practice and how are they manifested at a school level?
        viii. What are the characteristics and practices employed by schools where the RLC programme and the role of Subject Leads and/or Designated Teachers is perceived to be effective?
    b. Potential impacts:
        i. How do teachers expect the RLC programme to impact on both their practices and school practices and on CIN/LAC outcomes?
        ii. Do there appear to be any unintended consequences or negative effects for teachers, pupils or both?
        iii. What evidence of promise is there that the intervention positively impacts teacher outcomes?
        iv. What evidence of promise is there that the intervention positively impacts pupil attainment?
        v. To what extent are the topics chosen in the workshop transferrable to improvements in attainment across different subject areas?
3. Readiness for trial:
        i. Do the teacher questionnaires achieve the desired response rate?
        ii. What are the key considerations for a future experimental impact trial?

Protocol registration and ethical review

We obtained research ethics approval through Ipsos' research ethics process in September 2021. This process included completing an ethics review form with detailed information on the project as well as submitting relevant information sheets and consent forms for review. The ethics reviewers were independent and not otherwise involved in any evaluation activities. The evaluation team submitted the relevant materials to the Ipsos Ethics Group on Monday, 23 August 2021, and received feedback and approval from the reviewers.
In conversation with Durham University and What Works for Children's Social Care, we have considered ethical risks and trade-offs of conducting a pilot study for a future experimental evaluation and are satisfied that these are reasonable. We also believe that the evaluation has merit in providing evidence on the effectiveness of the RLC programme for improving learning outcomes for CIN/LAC.

Consent

Ipsos sought schools' consent for participation in the evaluation via school Head Teachers. Consent was sought in line with the MRS Code of Conduct (Market Research Society, 2019). During programme recruitment, Head Teachers were contacted jointly by WWCSC, Durham University and Ipsos to provide initial consent for their school to take part in the programme and evaluation. Consent was later obtained on an individual basis prior to and during each research activity. Prior to all research activities (including the teacher questionnaire, workshop observations and interviews) an information sheet was sent in advance to Subject Leads, Designated Teachers and Head Teachers who took part in the programme. The information sheet included details on the evaluation, the data to be collected, how it would be collected, stored and secured, and how they could withdraw their consent if they chose not to participate. It stated that teachers' participation was voluntary and that they did not have to complete the questionnaire or participate in case studies if they did not want to.
Ipsos researchers reobtained consent at the start of each research activity. In workshops and interviews, this involved asking participants and interviewees for their verbal consent, including for the online calls to be recorded for research purposes. For the online questionnaire, a copy of the information sheet was provided in the survey platform and participants were asked to record their written consent to take part prior to completing any questions. At the end of the survey, they were also asked to note whether they consented to being recontacted for the second wave of the questionnaire (although this was not administered). For all research activities, researchers reiterated that participants could withdraw their consent at any time during the activity or withdraw their information from being used in the study by contacting the evaluation team.

Ethical considerations

In terms of content, the interviews did not ask teachers to discuss personal details of CIN/LAC or any potentially sensitive information and instead focused on the experience of participating in the RLC programme. These expectations were clearly explained to the interviewee before the interview took place. Despite our focus on the RLC intervention (not personal histories) there was a risk that some teachers may have been prompted to reflect on things that have happened with CIN/LAC in their pasts. Asking about new teaching strategies to engage CIN/LAC in a research interview may also have made teachers recall traumatic events experienced by CIN/LAC. We subsequently developed plans for what to do

if an interviewee became upset, e.g. assuring them that they did not have to answer any question or say anything that caused them distress. We went through this plan with moderators in a briefing session before fieldwork and included it as a separate guidance sheet along with the topic guides. We included techniques for supporting participants who became upset, such as:

- Making sure moderators were aware of any topics that could potentially be upsetting
- Alternating between "light" and "heavy" topics in the discussion guide, or having a light topic fully immediately after a heavy topic
- Giving participants enough space to talk about something difficult/upsetting, but also
- Knowing when to sensitively move on the conversation
- Where possible, making sure to end the interview on a positive note.

During interviews we were flexible, used open questions, and took a friendly and encouraging approach. We were willing to take breaks and explore topics of interest to the teacher rather than being bound by the topic guide. To build rapport, we used questions to check understanding, combined verbal and non-verbal communication to facilitate understanding) and allowed plenty of time and tailored support for teachers to decide about participation or answering individual questions. The interviewer made it clear to teachers, both in writing and verbally, that while the information they provided was confidential, researchers were legally bound to report anything that suggests children or someone else is at risk of serious harm.
The original trial protocol is registered online on the Open Science Framework, available at: https://osf.io/c98wu/?view_only=510f3aaeae5b409c954bdd7a98caa1a7.

Changes to research methods

A mixed-methods evaluation was originally devised to achieve the research aims discussed above. The mixed-methods evaluation was to include pre- and post- teacher questionnaires, the collection of administrative data on pupil outcomes, collection of school-level data, workshop observations, cost evaluation, case studies, and interviews with the RLC delivery team and VSH. In the pilot evaluation trial protocol, CIN and LAC census data were to be matched to the National Pupil Database (NPD), data which would be used to analyse Year 6 CIN/LAC pupil Key Stage 2 (KS2) Literacy and Mathematics results in 2021/2022. However, this evaluation protocol was revised due to a range of limitations faced by the research team (see below, page 36), primarily relating to low intervention recruitment (with just six schools recruited to take part from an original target of 240). The evaluation was subsequently changed from a randomised control trial (RCT) to a pilot evaluation, with qualitative data from teachers gathered to understand the perceived impacts of the programme on pupils. These revisions to the design led to the omission of:

- The cost evaluation component
- Evaluation questions regarding readiness for trial (including the feasibility of using outcome measures developed by NfER and applied in the previous EEF trial)
- Evaluation questions regarding the feasibility of using national curriculum tests at KS2 for Year 6 CIN/LAC over the last six years for measuring pupil outcomes, and the appropriateness of Rasch model scoring for analysis of outcome data.

Data collection

Teacher questionnaire

The first round of the teacher questionnaire was launched online from October–November 2021. A total of eight teachers completed the questionnaire (one senior leader, five middle leaders, three classroom teachers and one other) from four schools. This fell short of the target of 24 completes by teachers which meant that the low response rate prompted Ipsos and WWCSC to drop the teacher questionnaire from the evaluation, due to the limited data available for analysis. Efforts were made to boost response rates, including email reminders sent to teachers as well as verbal reminders from the Ipsos researcher who observed the RLC workshops.

Workshop observations

Workshop observations of all RLC workshops were conducted online by a member of the Ipsos team. A semi-structured observation guide was designed to ensure that data collection was consistent, and all relevant data was collected. The guide was framed around the key research questions for this evaluation. The purpose of the workshop observations was to ensure that the evaluation answered key research questions relating to engagement and participation in and quality of the workshop sessions. Workshop observations took place between November 2021 and June 2022.

In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted by an Ipsos interviewer with schools that participated in the RLC programme workshops. These consisted of 60-minute virtual semi-structured interviews with Head Teachers, Subject Leads, Designated Teachers and those who facilitated the workshops. The content of the discussion guides used for the interviews was guided by the evaluation framework and tailored depending on the interviewee. For workshop participants, the interviews explored their involvement with the RLC programme, experience of the workshops, reasons for dropping out or remaining for the entirety of the workshops, and perceived impacts of their participation in the programme. For delivery staff who facilitated the workshops, the interviews explored their role in the programme, experiences of recruiting and setting up the workshops, experience during the workshops, accounts of what they did between the workshops, reasons for why schools dropped out, and perceived impacts of the programme on schools. A total of three semi-structured interviews with workshop participants from three schools and two interviews with delivery staff were conducted, taking place between May and October 2023.
Table 2.1 provides a breakdown of the completed and decline interviews with Subject Leads, Designated Teachers, Year 5 and 6 Teachers and Headteachers.

Table 2.1: Completed and declined case study interviews

Interviews	Completed	Declined	No show/unable to book
RLC participants	3	1	2
Head teachers	1	1	4

Class teachers/other staff	0	2	4

Sample recruitment and selection criteria

The first round of school recruitment for the programme began in September 2021. This took place six months after the reopening of primary and secondary schools in England on 8 March 2021, following the national lockdown periods that took place March–June 2020 and November–December 2020. The recent impacts of school closures due to these lockdowns may have impacted primary schools' availability to engage in the RLC programme, as they prioritised recovery strategies to make up for lost learning time.

Participants were recruited by WWCSC with support from VSH who were responsible for identifying eligible primary schools to take part in the evaluation and connecting them to the WWCSC and/or Durham delivery team through school briefings or via email. Both WWCSC and the Durham University delivery team additionally advertised the RLC programme online and through professional networks to invite primary schools to take part in the evaluation. A total of six primary schools were recruited.

For the in-depth interviews, Ipsos sent an email to contacts within all six schools that had participated in the RLC workshops. The email contained an explanation of the nature of the semi-structured interviews, an information sheet to explain the project, and a privacy notice, while also inviting recipients to take part in the semi-structured interviews at a time and day that best suited them. The first round of these emails was sent in May 2022, with a further three reminder emails sent to schools after to invite them to take part. The delivery staff on the RLC programme also forwarded Ipsos emails to schools and telephone contact was made with schools that did not respond back to the emails.

Data management and processing

Data protection

We ensured compliance with all data protection regulations (GDPR) and Ipsos' strict information security policy. For the teacher sample, Ipsos did not provide any identifiable information to WWCSC from teachers and were thereby the data controller. For the case study interviews, Ipsos relied on the legal basis of consent for processing interviewee data. All Ipsos' research operations were governed by the Market Research Society Code of Conduct. Ipsos also held the following international quality standards covering quality management systems, interviewer quality and information security: ISO 20252:2006, ISO 9001:2008 and ISO 27001:2005.

Data security

Our data security processes meet the standards outlined in the Data Protection Act 2018. Ipsos has the Cyber Essentials standard. Any personal data was held securely on our UK servers and will be securely destroyed three months after the end of the project in May 2023. Ipsos uses a purpose-built and dedicated file services solution and carries a full set of ISO certifications. Any enhanced sample data was encrypted and sent over our secure file transfer system. All projects that involve personal data processing are required to complete a data flow and post a privacy policy online for respondents, using standardised templates.

Analysis

A qualitative thematic analysis was utilised to explore patterns and meanings of emerging data routed in the depth interviews and workshop observations. Notes were made during the depth interviews and observations, while the research team also drew on recordings (which received approval from participants) of each for analysis. The data was then transferred to analysis grids which mapped data to the key evaluation questions. For the workshop observations, data was accordingly coded and analysed thematically, while looking at specific context, mechanism and outcome relationships as outlined in the programme's logic model. For the interviews, a thematic coding framework was developed both deductively based on the logic model and research questions, and inductively, including unexpected issues emerging in the data.

3. Findings

Evidence of feasibility

Fidelity

Is the implementation of the RLC programme perceived as consistent with its original design? If no, are adaptations perceived as beneficial or detrimental?

In line with the intervention description outlined in the RLC logic model and original trial protocol, we found that the approaches and agendas for the workshops closely adhered to the original programme plan and the RLC "cycle of inquiry" (where participants are supported to access, evaluate and apply academic research findings to apply to their own teaching). The cycle of inquiry acted as a guide for tracking progress across the workshops. In turn, teachers appeared to adhere to plans developed through the workshops to adapt their teaching practices, especially in regard to providing targeted support to CIN/LAC.

How relevant/well adapted is the content of the RLC programme perceived as meeting the needs of teaching and learning for CIN/LAC?

We found that RLC delivery staff made adaptations to the design and delivery of RLC workshop content and materials to tailor the programme specifically to CIN/LAC, as expected, although discussion in the workshops sometimes focused on students more generally. Delivery staff felt the original RLC programme was flexible enough to be well suited to being tailored to different learning contexts, including the contexts of CIN/LAC. Examples of adaptations made by the delivery team included a review of the literature on LAC, as well as literature on Literacy and Maths in primary education specifically tailored to the context of CIN/LAC and the RLC programme more widely, including pieces on Maths Mastery, reading comprehension, oral language interventions and Literacy focus. These adaptations were perceived by workshop participants to have been highly appropriate to the context of CIN/LAC.

Workshop participants also agreed that literature shared by the delivery team was helpful for enabling them to form links to cognitive and emotional learning strategies that could improve attainment scores of CIN/LAC in these subjects. However, it was also noted that CIN/LAC sometimes felt like an additionality to the workshops: for instance, it was reported in the depth interviews that workshop participants would discuss an interesting piece of research but forget to relate this to CIN/LAC. On the other hand, the content of the workshops, such as the slides and literature used, was seen to provide an effective blend of research and teaching strategies. The content also provided a useful opportunity for workshop participants to discuss ideas with delivery staff and learn more about how learnings could be tailored to CIN/LAC in practice, particularly in relation to Maths and Literacy outcomes.

What is teachers' attendance at the RLC workshops?

We expected that teachers from all participating schools would attend at least seven out of the eight workshops. However, out of the six schools initially recruited, one school withdrew prior to the first workshop. While teachers from all five schools took part in the first workshop, participant attendance rapidly declined since with most schools deciding to entirely drop out by Workshop 5 of the programme in March 2022. Only two schools attended the final three workshops (although one of these schools listened to a recorded version of one of the final three workshops they could not attend). The schools who withdrew from the programme mainly cited time and resourcing pressures which made it impossible to continue taking part. Time constraints and workload were also cited as challenges in the previous EEF evaluation, which took place prior to the COVID-19 lockdown. The

unanticipated dropout rates of schools, coupled with only two schools remaining for the duration of the workshops, resulted in delivery staff feeling that opportunities for cross-school collaboration became increasingly limited.

How well do teachers adapt their teaching practices to incorporate learnings from the programme?

There was some evidence that teachers were able to adapt teaching practices to incorporate learnings from the RLC programme in line with the programme's intended objectives, despite challenges. For instance, a teacher reported incorporating learnings from the RLC into their teaching strategies for a Year 5 CIN pupil by introducing a pre-teach at the start of the lesson, which was effective in enabling the pupil to feel confident to raise their hand and share their reflections in the lesson. Teachers also reported being able to smoothly incorporate self-reflection within their teaching off the back of the RLC programme by adopting green pen marking exercises with pupils (e.g. CIN/LAC pupils marking their own work) to provide insightful, honest and critical comments to reflect on the learning experience.

Despite these successes, participants in interviews also reported time constraints as a barrier to enabling teachers first to digest the learning from the RLC programme, and then devise strategies to incorporate these into their teaching practice. In addition, staff changes were also noted as a barrier to incorporating learnings into teaching practices. Another difficulty raised within the workshops was that other teachers (not directly participating in the programme) tended to be less likely to support the integration of research findings to inform their teaching strategies due to time constraints and a general unwillingness to engage with research. Nonetheless, teachers who directly participated in the RLC programme and attended the workshops appeared to grow increasingly confident in harnessing academic research to co-design their new teaching practices, in line with the theory of change for the programme.

How well do Subject Leads and Designated Teachers leverage their leadership and support roles to cascade teaching strategies to other teachers and deliver the RLC programme in their schools?

As outlined in the intervention logic model, we expected that the RLC programme would involve participants building or strengthening existing communities of practice in their schools and using change leadership techniques learned in the workshops to cascade teaching strategies across their schools. This expectation was partly matched by evidence from the workshop observations that Subject Leads and Designated Teachers leveraged their leadership and support roles to circulate teaching strategies and deliver the RLC programme within their schools. This involved creating more distributed and shared leadership structures among teachers (for example, through sharing workload and regularly meeting to reflect on research-led learning and teaching styles within the wider team of teaching and leadership colleagues) which was perceived to help ensure the effective circulation of teaching strategies and facilitate the delivery of the RLC programme within schools. Participants also reported that the extent to which teaching strategies were effectively cascaded to other teachers depended on interpersonal relationships between teaching staff. Subject Leads felt an important enabler was the time they spent developing relationships between teachers both prior to and during the RLC workshops to accelerate the circulation of new teaching strategies or prompt changes in teaching across multiple classes throughout the school.

Differentiation and service orientation

To what extent is the RLC programme perceived as genuinely new and innovative compared with similar initiatives that have been previously/are currently implemented at the school for CIN/LAC? / Does the RLC programme offer support in ways not previously offered?

The RLC programme was expected to add unique value to previous/existing professional development initiatives through its focus on CIN/LAC, improving teacher understanding of and confidence in using research to inform their teaching strategies, and strengthening communities of practice. We found that while research-based learning was not a new concept for the workshop participants who took part in interviews, generally the RLC workshops were viewed to have provided added value through the way that the research and materials were carefully adapted and targeted towards CIN/LAC specifically during the workshops. In addition, workshop participants who remained for the entirety of the workshops felt that the RLC programme provided additional value to previous initiatives because they were able to draw on the support and expertise of the delivery staff who had backgrounds in both research-informed teaching strategies and working with CIN/LAC. Workshop participants appreciated how the delivery team facilitated a relaxed discussion and platform for sharing ideas, which helped to differentiate the programme from others they had participated in. Workshop participants also recalled being able to discuss their ideas with delivery staff outside of the workshops as a form of support which helped the programme to stand out from others.

Barriers and facilitators to delivery

What are Subject Leads' and Designated Teachers' views of the frequency, timing and duration of the workshops?

Overall, the frequency of the workshops (delivered monthly over an eight-month period from November 2021 to June 2022) was viewed to be appropriate, particularly by schools that remained for the entirety of the workshops. However, school staff felt that the timing and duration of the workshops (running for two hours at the end of the school day) were challenging to accommodate, particularly at the end of the school day when there would more likely be staff meetings. Participants suggested the workshops be divided into shorter time spans, e.g. 30-minute slots to help schools invite other members of staff to participate more regularly. In the interview with a school that dropped out, time constraints and staff shortages (because of increased pressures and ongoing demands of COVID-19) were cited as the main reasons for withdrawing from the programme.

What adaptations could be made to the RLC intervention to improve outcomes and/or experiences?

Delivery staff and participants suggested several adaptations to improve outcomes and/or experiences of the RLC programme. First, delivery staff suggested directly involving participating schools in the programme set-up to provide information about their current projects and approach to research-informed teaching which could have been used as a point of discussion and reflection in the workshops by the delivery team. Another adaptation put forward in terms of set-up included ensuring delivery staff had more technical knowledge of the online platform used for workshops to ensure that everything worked (e.g. to help resolve cases of microphones, cameras and interactive boards not working, which happened occasionally during the workshops). Additionally, participants who took part in the interviews felt that the workshop materials (e.g. slides) ought to have been provided in advance of the next workshop so they could attend with questions and ideas in mind.

How did Subject Leads and Designated Teachers view the process of getting buy-in from leadership at their schools?

It was expected that the RLC programme would equip participants with effective change leadership strategies to gain buy-in from leaders, and that participants would secure the support of senior leaders in their school for the duration of the programme and beyond. However, participants reflected on various challenges securing buy-in for the RLC programme from leadership at their schools. They recalled instances when they had to convince their school leaders that the research used to inform teaching practices posed genuine opportunities to improve outcomes, while also reminding them that the use of research was not a quick fix but rather a gradual process that developed over time. In the workshops, participants also flagged that there were concerns among school leadership over the applicability of the research for specific teaching contexts, complexity over the language in research reports, and lack of time for teachers to implement research strategies into their everyday teaching practice. To resolve these issues, workshop participants emphasised the importance of school leadership structures being adaptive and collaborative for securing buy-in, while also stressing that leadership teams could be brought on board if they saw evidence of the impact of research-informed practices on teaching and learning outcomes.

Reach and acceptability

How attractive is the idea of the RLC to teachers and school leaders?

Efforts to recruit schools to take part in RLC were unsuccessful at attracting the intended target number of schools (originally 240). WWCSC was responsible for recruitment, working closely with VHS who reached out to schools through local authority headteacher meetings and were intended to help build awareness of the programme among a large number of schools in an efficient way. However, there was limited turnout at events hosted by VSH and this approach garnered limited results. There were also delays which resulted in recruitment being initiated in August for a programme start in September. The short timeframe meant that VSH could only conduct a few briefings in a few local authorities, and many schools were likely unable to attend the briefings and gain school leadership approval for the programme in the time provided, particularly amid their recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The recruitment also coincided with national changes to the remit of VSH, which in September 2021 was expanded to include promoting the educational outcomes of children with a social worker, creating additional constraints on VSH ability to participate in the recruitment and the programme.

However, despite issues with recruitment, the RLC programme was attractive to teachers and school leaders who volunteered to take part because it addressed key challenges in tailoring educational provision to CIN/LAC. Participants discussed how prior to RLC, they had attempted to develop new initiatives to adapt their teaching strategies to CIN/LAC, for instance by applying learnings from Attachment and Trauma Awareness training to help vulnerable pupils in their school, drawing from Education Endowment Foundation resources, and identifying specific CIN/LAC in their schools who required further support. However, despite these initiatives, there was a sense that teaching strategies needed to be adapted further for CIN/LAC who were among those most vulnerable and at risk of falling behind their peers in terms of attainment. It was for these reasons that school teachers and leaders said they became interested in taking part in the RLC programme.

On the other hand, RLC was not perceived to be as attractive as expected among the wider body of teachers and school leaders in participants' schools. Participants reported that while other teachers and school leaders appreciated the quality of the research, there was mixed feedback about the feasibility of integrating the research findings into their school practices.

This was largely due to the different leadership structures in their schools and more sceptical attitudes of school staff outside the workshops towards utilising research to inform their teaching practices (buy-in). In this context, workshop participants faced additional challenges devising a clear strategy to ensure that the research evidence could work in practice in their schools.

To what extent are teachers able to develop, implement and target new/adjusted teaching strategies to pupils who have been CIN/LAC at any point in the last six years in their classrooms?

In line with the programme logic model, participants said they were able to successfully identify and apply baseline evidence to develop new/adjust existing teaching strategies for CIN/LAC in their schools. Participants agreed that the RLC programme provided an opportunity to take a more measured approach to developing an intervention compared to during the pandemic when Designated Teachers described how their support often took the form of "firefighting" rather than planning proactive support to improve educational achievement among CIN/LAC. See the section "Evidence of promise" below for examples of the teaching strategies developed and implemented in schools and their impacts.

To what extent do Designated Teachers and Subject Leads (participating in the workshops), Year 5 and 6 teachers, and teachers in the wider school engage with the programme and use the resources provided in the workshops?

It was expected that participants would conduct independent study between the workshops and that they would support Year 5 and 6 teachers in their schools to develop and use new practices. In line with these expectations, workshop participants and their wider school colleagues generally engaged well with the RLC programme and were able to effectively draw on resources and learnings from the workshops, although this varied depending on staff time and willingness to engage in the programme. For instance, a school was able to use reading materials relating to pre-teaching, reflective learning and critical thinking from the workshops to change the way that Maths was taught in Year 5, which resulted in children in class becoming more focused. This school also reported that they planned to use the reading materials from the programme to inform their teaching of English. Workshop participants were also able to circulate the reading materials received between workshops across their school to teachers and leadership. However, in some instances, the level of engagement with these materials also depended on staff time, leadership structures, and teachers' pre-conceptions towards research-informed teaching practice, which meant some workshop participants were unable to circulate RLC workshop learnings across their school as effectively as expected.

Evidence of promise

Mechanisms

How does the RLC and the role of Subject Leads and/or Designated Teachers work in practice? And how does this enactment differ based on different school contexts?

Due to the limited number of participants that attended all the workshops and took part in interviews, it is not possible to definitively conclude how the role of Subject Leads and Designated Teachers enacted RLC in different contexts. However, different leadership structures were considered a key factor for how Subject Leads and/or Designated Teachers worked together in schools. In some participant schools, leadership roles are distributed among several people and there are different learning hubs collaborating on different concerns. Participants noted that this can delay the culture change required for implementing RLC. Ensuring other members of school staff understand the factors that

affect CIN/LAC's school journey can take time as Designated Teachers often need to change mindsets and convince staff of the reasons behind children's behaviour and that research evidence is genuine and robust.

To what extent do Subject Leads and Designated Teachers effectively collaborate with Year 5 and 6 teachers to co-develop and implement Theories of Action in their schools?

Based on workshop observations and interviews with participants, there was evidence that Subject Leads and Designated Teachers effectively collaborated with Year 5 and 6 teachers to co-develop and implement Theories of Action in their schools, in line with intervention aims.

For example, in one school, the Subject Lead was able to collaborate with Year 5 and 6 teachers to discuss which factors led to students underachieving. The hypothesis was that this underachievement could potentially be due to low self-esteem and the Lead collaborated with teachers to identify causes for lack of confidence among CIN/LAC. Evidence provided through the RLC programme allowed them to unpick and identify different learning behaviours that were barriers to learning for CIN/LAC, and successfully co-develop a Theory of Action to address them.

Another participant collaborated on a lesson study with Year 5 and 6 teachers. They discussed the most appropriate lesson in which to conduct the study and conducted the observation together. Participants were also able to successfully hold meetings with Year 5 and 6 teachers to disseminate information and learning from RLC workshops. In these meetings, Designated Teachers also discussed experiences with Year 5 and 6 teachers regarding children of concern. This aligned with the RLC programme's intention to improve participants' confidence in applying evidence to inform teaching strategy development and encouraging others in their schools to engage in the use of academic/action research.

To what extent do Subject Leads and Designated Teachers effectively collaborate with each other to facilitate programme success? / What are the views of Subject Leads and Designated Teachers on the quality of workshop content, structure, support and environment (or the space created for collaboration and open and honest conversations)?

It was anticipated that the RLC programme would facilitate effective collaboration between participants and that Subject Leads and Designated Teachers from each school would attend the workshops and collaborate effectively with one another. However, we found that collaboration among schools was not as effective as expected and likely did not create the open, discursive environment originally intended. Facilitators invited schools verbally to collaborate with one another; but the extent of collaboration varied between schools, and participants only contributed when asked to do so. There was some evidence of schools exchanging ideas, but all participants and facilitators agreed that collaboration within the workshops could be improved by implementing more breakout groups. Participants collaborated more with teachers from their own school, but for two schools only one teacher attended the workshops, limiting their participation and collaboration.

However, participants found the content, structure and support provided by facilitators to be effective, in line with the intervention's expected quality. As described in the "Reach and acceptability" discussion above, school staff felt that the workshop content was useful and broadly relevant for the CIN/LACs in their school, particularly the information shared on Maths and English mastery and how, for example, this could be linked to cognitive learning and emotional wellbeing. Accordingly, a drop out school emphasised that nothing about the content caused them to withdraw. The two schools that remained found the support provided by the delivery team helpful, were engaged with their independent study, and would seek out additional support from the delivery staff when needed. A school also noted that the delivery staff signposted them to additional research they felt was useful while the other school was

able to have a long conversation on the phone with a delivery staff member between workshops to troubleshoot the planned intervention.

Do different stakeholders believe that the programme is addressing their requirements and the outcomes needed to be achieved?

Participants agreed that the programme addressed their requirements for developing and implementing focused interventions for CIN/LAC in their schools, and that by examining what worked well and what was particularly useful for individual children in detail, they could also apply best practice to the learning environment more generally. These individual successes could also be used as examples to gain buy-in from other members of staff into research-informed teaching strategies. This buy-in to research-informed teaching strategies enabled Subject Leads and Designated Teachers to have a more collaborative approach to interventions, which they found preferable as it distributed the responsibility of improving outcomes for CIN/LAC. The RLC programme gave participants learning that they felt comfortable using to upskill their colleagues. Delivery staff felt the programme could help with training members of staff who deal with CIN/LAC daily. They also felt that the programme enabled teachers to take a novel and critical look at what is happening in the classroom to make improvements.

What supports and what inhibits effective implementation at a school level and why?

A whole-school approach was considered important for supporting effective implementation at a school level. Embedding practices into lessons requires buy-in from senior members of staff and class teachers. Interpersonal relationships between teachers can support or inhibit this process. Participants in the workshops highlighted that positive interpersonal relationships can help snowball these embedded practices from one classroom to the next. However, the ability to do this is impacted by the leadership structure of the school, and there need to be open channels of communication so that teachers can understand the reasons for certain leadership decisions. A teacher could influence another teacher into embedded a teaching practice but not have the responsibility or information relevant for that kind of decision-making. Effective implementation is also hampered whenever a CIN/LAC's teacher changes. This can create an inconsistent approach to supporting the CIN/LAC. If schools can facilitate a culture change around supporting CIN/LAC in class, then the impact of staff turnover may be lessened.

What are the necessary prerequisites for the use of research to change teachers' practice and how are they manifested at a school level?

Based on workshop observations, gathering robust baseline data was a key prerequisite for effectively developing strategies to change teaching practice. This involved identifying the needs or the current situation of CIN/LAC and helped to identify if there has been a positive (or negative) impact from a change to teachers' practice. This helped demonstrate initial evidence of impact/success stories of research-informed teaching to get buy-in at the school level. Delivery staff also emphasised the importance of self-reflection by teachers on their own learning. A school leader mentioned that they did group reflection in staff meetings to give teachers the opportunity to share what they had been working on in order to filter learnings throughout the school. However, they also said they are often too short on time in staff meetings to cover this sufficiently. Participants also said that taking part in training or workshops such as RLC can also help secure buy-in by educating teachers on the uses of research for informing teaching practice.

What are the characteristics and practices employed by schools where the RLC programme and the role of Subject Leads and/or Designated Teachers is perceived to be effective?

Due to the limited turnout in workshops by the end of the programme, it is difficult to identify definitive characteristics for successful schools. However, the remaining participants cited that their progress benefited from having secured buy-in from several members of staff for a

collaborative approach. Participants and delivery staff also highlighted the importance of the schools prioritising professional development to successfully engage with the RLC programme.

Potential impacts

How do teachers expect the RLC programme to impact on both their practices and school practices and on CIN/LAC outcomes?

There was a consensus that the RLC programme highlighted the importance of research-based learning to help school staff make a more informed choice about their teaching strategies. It also enabled participants to work on helping individual children develop rather than merely firefight concerns around CIN/LAC. It allowed participants to reflect and make carefully considered decisions on how to improve attainment for CIN/LAC. The RLC programme was also effective in helping teachers to advocate for research-informed teaching strategies. For example, a school ran a lesson study as part of their RLC intervention and the teacher who was teaching the class during the lesson study had never done anything research-led before. They engaged with the research despite not being a participant of the programme and asked to be involved in the school's next intervention.

Do there appear to be any unintended consequences or negative effects for teachers, pupils or both?

The programme logic model hypothesised that a potential negative unintended consequence of the RLC programme could be that teaching strategies are ineffective and have an adverse effect on learning outcomes for CIN/LAC. In our interviews and workshop observations, we did not find any evidence of this or any other negative effects associated with the programme or the evidence-based interventions delivered in schools.

However, the drop-off rate of the RLC programme showed that avenues for professional development such as RLC can contribute to an increased burden on a teacher's time. Especially for teachers who also have safeguarding responsibilities, extended professional development programmes can stretch them beyond their capacity. One of the schools that dropped out explained that they might have been able to continue their commitment to the programme if their school had the resources to spare their staff members for the time required to participate. Without sufficient school resource, participating in RLC could have knock-on effects such as burnout of school staff.

What evidence of promise is there that the intervention positively impacts teacher outcomes?

The programme logic model hypothesised that RLC would lead to improved teacher knowledge, use and attitudes towards academic/action research in informing teaching practice. We found that the RLC programme gave multiple members of teaching staff in participating schools the unique opportunity to work collaboratively to design an intervention. Participants felt they and CIN/LAC benefited from RLC, providing anecdotal evidence that intended outcomes were achieved. For example, after the programme had finished, one school had already started to use the research provided as well as key learnings from teaching practices suggested in the workshops to think ahead towards interventions next year. They have created a research folder on the school system to collate all the research to feed it to other teachers.

What evidence of promise is there that the intervention positively impacts pupil attainment?

It was expected that RLC would improve teaching practices, and thus CIN/LAC attainment. The RLC programme was perceived by workshop participants to have had some positive impacts on pupil attainment, in line with the primary outcome specified in the RLC logic model. The two schools who completed the programme designed and implemented tailored

support for individual students. From these examples there is the potential to demonstrate anecdotal evidence of positive impacts for pupil attainment. For one school the individual in question (Year 5 CIN) was highly intelligent but was finding the school process highly challenging. After the intervention they started coming into lessons more focused and able to engage with the learning immediately due to the introduction of pre-teach and reflective learning. This engagement was demonstrated through his confidence at the beginning of the lesson to raise his hand and share, as well as showing more insightful and honest critical reflection in Maths classes.

Another school focused on the social mental health of in-care children. For instance, it was reported that a child in care had difficulty forming social relations with peers and teachers due to “annoying” behaviour. The RLC programme subsequently helped the school follow the cycle of inquiry from unpicking this behaviour to exploring how best to support the student. A learning support assistant (LSA) was trained to become a coach, supporting a few focus children by giving them targets and reviewing their progress. The intervention addressed social and emotional skills of the target group and highlighted some children who were not in care that needed additional support as well. While this evaluation was unable to evidence change in pupil attainment, there is evidence that addressing social and emotional skills may provide some children in schools that took part in RLC long-term learning benefits.

To what extent are the topics chosen in the workshop transferrable to improvements in attainment across different subject areas?

There is anecdotal evidence that some workshop topics were transferrable to improvements in attainment across different subject areas for CIN/LAC as well as other students. The school that tailored an intervention around a Year 5 CIN observed that the introduction of pre-teach, reflective learning and critical thinking has been beneficial for the whole Maths class, with students being more focused as they start class and their critical green pen insights have improved. The school began looking to implement these teaching strategies into English as a result. None of the schools spoken to had begun transferring the workshop topics across subject areas but they believed that it was feasible, indicating that the topics chosen could lead to improvements in attainment across subject areas.

Readiness for trial

Do the teacher questionnaires achieve the desired response rate?

The teacher questionnaires fell short of the desired response rate despite multiple reminders, with only eight teachers from four schools completing (out of the initial target of 24 teacher responses). In addition, two out of the six schools that participated in the RLC programme failed to complete the questionnaire. During this first round of the teacher questionnaires, it was particularly difficult to increase the response rate within the timeframes for this evaluation. This minimal response rate subsequently meant that there was a lack of sufficient data from the teacher questionnaires that could be used for this evaluation.

To what extent could the evaluation approach be applied for a future experimental impact trial?

High participant attrition to the programme, combined with low response rates to the teacher survey and to requests to teachers for an interview, must be taken into consideration for future trials. However, feedback from the delivery team and participants indicates that the timing of the evaluation has impacted its feasibility, with pressures on schools (e.g. time and staff shortages) coming out of the pandemic leading to low commitment despite a positive outlook on research-based learning.

With regards to school recruitment, delivery staff noted in interviews and in a Theory of

Change workshop facilitated by WWCSC that while recruitment was done in conjunction with Virtual Schools, it was not a system that many schools understood and was unsuccessful in generating interest from schools or teachers in the programme. Further work is needed to determine strategies and incentives to encourage greater uptake and commitment from schools to partake, for example by using organisations with a track record of recruiting schools.

The translation of the original design of the RLC programme to a CIN/LAC context appears to have been effective, due to the considerable time and collaboration among the delivery team to tailor RLC programme materials and research content specifically to CIN/LAC. However, issues with the virtual format of the programme and timings for participants to take part in workshops should be considered alongside a well-developed risk management strategy.

4. Discussion

Discussion of findings

Despite challenges with school recruitment and the lingering effects of the pandemic, the RLC programme was able to achieve some examples of success. These examples illustrate how effective action-research, combining teachers' deep pastoral knowledge of the individual problems of CIN/LAC in their schools, with academic evidence on effective strategies to resolve them, discussed in a collaborative setting, may lead to positive outcomes for pupils and teachers.

The programme's clear and consistent workshop plan (structured along the "cycle of inquiry") and accompanying focus on effective change leadership and communities of practice provides a replicable delivery model for improving teaching practice for vulnerable children. However, issues with participant retention point to the difficulties maintaining engagement in professional development programmes in the context of wider issues with staff and school resources and competing demands on teacher time.

Under-recruitment and high attrition rates impacted the implementation of the RLC programme such that participation in the workshops declined throughout the sessions, with only two schools participating in the final three workshops. This meant that four of the original six schools that took part did not complete the full RLC programme. Consequently, it remains unclear as to how much all six schools benefited from the programme. A key consideration for a future impact trial is the need to identify other channels for recruitment which could increase the reach of the RLC programme to enough schools to effectively power the analysis of CIN/LAC outcomes.

The high dropout rates can partly be accounted for by the timing and duration of the workshops which were reported to be particularly challenging for participants amid their pre-existing workloads and that schools felt that they were still in the midst of recovery strategies to mitigate the impact of school closures and staff and pupil absences due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While recovery from the pandemic placed a particularly high burden on teachers, it is unclear whether the RLC programme was able to strike the right balance between the demands it placed on participants and maintaining engagement.

It is also significant that this programme was the first of its kind delivered specifically for improving teaching practice for CIN/LAC. While the use of action research/research-informed teaching has wider applicability and relevance to all students, the fact that the focus on CIN/LAC was a particular draw for participation and viewed as the primary added value of the RLC programme, demonstrates that teachers perceive the programme to be fulfilling a real need in improving teaching for the most vulnerable students. However, as with any professional development programme, challenges securing buy-in from other school leadership and teaching staff noted by some participants means there is some uncertainty around whether new teaching strategies are sustainable after RLC ends.

There are several similarities between the findings of the 2016 EEF evaluation of the RLC programme (which aimed to improve attainment outcomes of all students) and the findings of this evaluation of RLC (specifically for teaching CIN/LAC). In both cases, RLC was found to enable teachers to successfully implement research-informed teaching strategies and improve teachers' disposition or attitudes towards the use of research, including by disseminating the research among other members of staff. However, findings from both studies suggest that more work may be needed to constructively engage teachers who are not already familiar with research-informed teaching. The participants that remained for the

duration of this RLC programme already had some familiarity with action research and research-based learning, in line with EEF's finding that teachers who benefited most from the RLC programme already had a positive disposition towards the analysis and discussion of evidence.

Similarly, a key enabler noted across both evaluations was having a "research-friendly" culture, or leadership structures that were initially open towards the integration of research evidence to inform teaching approaches. This study found that distributed and shared leadership structures in schools enabled participants to effectively circulate teaching strategies and deliver the RLC programme within their schools by sharing the workload with non-participant teachers and regularly meeting to reflect on research-led learning and teaching styles within the wider team of teaching and leadership colleagues. This is consistent with findings from the 2016 EEF evaluation, which noted the importance of existing school culture and practices in supporting the adoption of new teaching strategies. Nevertheless, securing the buy-in of school leadership was cited as a challenge in both programmes. The two RLC programmes also faced similar challenges with staff turnover, time constraints, and workload all affecting the take-up of the programme and its effectiveness.

Both evaluations also found that it may take several years for participation in RLC to change teaching practice and improve child outcomes. This was confirmed in the EEF evaluation's results for child outcomes as they found no evidence linking RLC and improved child attainment, two years after implementation. This iteration of the RLC programme for CIN/LAC aimed to deliver and measure impact in an even shorter timeframe (one year). Longer-term longitudinal research is likely required to assess the full impacts of programmes like RLC, which focus on the enablers of student performance (and are often one small part alongside many other factors in a child's journey through education).

A key distinction between this intervention and the previous EEF-funded intervention was the role of the community of practice. Participants in the 2016 RLC programme stressed that the value of the workshops largely lay in the opportunities they provided to share and reflect on teaching practices with teachers from other schools. However, this iteration of RLC struggled to foster the same level of collaboration among participants. Previous RLC workshops were delivered in person, and delivery staff and RLC participants in this evaluation noted that while conducting the workshops online and after school was helpful for managing workloads and teaching commitments, the online format limited the scope for collaboration and networking across schools. This iteration of RLC may have been more effective at retaining participants and improving outcomes had there been more effective practices for online collaboration.

Limitations

- **Limited participation in the teacher survey:** There was limited participation in the online teacher survey sent to school staff, with only eight responses out of an intended sample of 24 participants. To encourage uptake, Ipsos provided verbal reminders to participants during the first and second RLC workshop. However, despite best efforts, the survey was subsequently removed from this study due to low responsiveness. The removal of the survey reduced the scope of this evaluation and limited the findings to qualitative data collection methods, which (while providing in-depth insight into experiences) are not representative.
- **Dropouts from RLC workshops:** A total of four out of the six schools initially recruited withdrew from the RLC workshops. To mitigate attrition, the RLC delivery

team made regular contact with schools and sent out frequent invitations for them to take part in each workshop session. With schools dropping out midway through the workshops and only two remaining for the entirety, the findings from the workshop observations cannot provide a consistent reflection of all schools that initially took part in the programme.

- **Limited participation in case study interviews:** Ipsos was only able to recruit a limited number of school staff for end of programme interviews (three interviews with three out of six schools in total). Steps taken to resolve this issue included sending out four rounds of email invitations and phone calls to schools. Ipsos also extended fieldwork dates from June 2022 to September 2022. While qualitative research is not designed to be representative of a population, the fact that only three interviews were conducted with workshop participants from three out of the six schools subsequently reduced the depth and scope of the findings.

Conclusions and recommendations

Broadly, the content and facilitation of the workshops were seen as relevant and adding additional value. The research was also deemed applicable for CIN/LAC and it was perceived to have the potential to be applied to other areas. Skills such as pre-teach and coaching support were beneficial to CIN/LAC and were also observed by participants to be beneficial to non-CIN/LAC and there were instances of participants who were taking the steps to implement them in different subject areas. Participants felt the facilitation team were key enablers for the success of the programme due to their workshop delivery and support between sessions. Participants also valued the opportunity to share ideas and collaboratively reflect on their teaching practices, although these were partly limited due to dropout rates of schools and the workshops being conducted in an online environment.
While the content of the workshops was viewed broadly favourably, delivery staff and workshop participants made several practical recommendations for adaptations to the RLC programme which would enhance implementation in the future. Sharing workshop slides, activities, and all readings with participants ahead of each workshop would increase the ability of participants to share ideas. Providing hard copies of reading materials would support the engagement among schools of non-participant staff. Having participating schools directly involved in the initial set-up of the workshops would increase the investment of participating schools. Ways of further encouraging collaboration in an online environment should be considered in future iterations of the programme.
Finally, if the intervention and the evaluation were to be replicated, particular attention should be made to effectively recruiting a sufficient number of schools to generate sufficient sample sizes for measuring outcomes and reducing participant attrition. Considering that CIN/LAC make up a small proportion of the total school population, school recruitment is a key challenge and a prerequisite for enabling a more robust evaluation. Exploring higher levels of incentives for participating schools may also help to reduce attrition.
It is also difficult to separate the challenges of this programme from the wider environment schools were operating in at the time of its inception. Schools were under considerable time constraints and pressure imposed by their necessary recovery strategies in response to COVID-19, which could mean that future programmes may be more successful in recruitment once schools have had more time to recover.

Directions for future research

Future research could undertake the data collection and evaluation methods that were proposed in this evaluation but could not be conducted. These include pre- and post-teacher questionnaires, collecting administrative data on pupil outcomes, collecting school-level data, and interviews with VSH. The incorporation of these data collection and evaluation methods would provide a more robust evaluation of the RLC programme in the context of CIN/LACs, while further addressing the original aims of this evaluation (see "Methods" section, page 18). A cost evaluation could also be conducted to gain further insight into comparing the costs of the RLC to the costs of any existing programme or activity already carried out from the point of view of the stakeholders bearing the costs. The trial protocol that was previously developed provides a ready blueprint for this study. Furthermore, a future evaluation of the RLC programme could explore strategies and incentives that could potentially encourage greater uptake of the RLC programme from schools throughout the duration of the programme. Such research could expand upon the limitations of this evaluation considering limited rates of participation, despite multiple reminders sent to schools. The use of recruitment agencies experienced in working with schools is likely to prove beneficial rather than relying upon VSH.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Description of RLC workshops

Session/workshop titles	Description of sessions/workshops
Introduction session	Participants: • Are introduced to the purpose and workings of the RLC programme • Gain an understanding of their role and what is expected of them • Are informed on how their school's senior leaders, e.g. the Head Teacher and Assistant Head Teacher, need to support them and Year 5 and 6 teachers in order for them to be successful in the programme.
Workshop One: Developing new research-informed teaching approaches	Participants: • Examine and reflect on current teaching practices for CIN/LAC in their school • Define their vision and related aims and objectives for what is to be achieved in relation to teaching and learning of CIN/LAC in their school • Assess the gap between current practice and their vision, by discussing what research evidence shows about effective practice in this area and their own practical experiences • Derive an initial idea of what strategy could be employed and how.
Workshop Two: Testing and refining new initiatives	Participants: • Implement the new/adjusted strategy in their school and when in the workshop, review pupil data and other relevant information/evidence to assess its effectiveness • Refine their strategy/improve it • May be asked to trial their ideas with other colleagues, using approaches like lesson study • Are supported to develop Theories of Action which will provide a documented record of the new/adjustment of existing strategy and assessment approaches for measuring its success.
Workshop Three + impact: Leading the implementation of	Participants:

new initiatives and change, and how to know whether they made a difference	• Discuss the evidence from the trial and lesson studies and whether their strategies need refining • Discuss ways of embedding change effectively in their schools and different change leadership strategies.
Workshop Four: Developing second round of research-informed teaching approaches	Participants: • Are able to change the theme they will be focusing on as part of round two • Repeat the processes and procedures in Workshops One to Three to create a new /adjust a different strategy used in the school with CIN/LAC.
Workshop Five: Other ways to test and refine	Participants: • Enrich their understanding and repertoire of testing and refining their teaching strategies aimed at CIN/LAC.
Workshop Six: Additional material on leading change	Participants: • Enrich their understanding and repertoire of strategies for leading change in their school to support Year 5 and 6 teachers to implement effective teaching strategies for CIN/LAC.
Moving forward	Participants: • Reflect upon what has been achieved so far and how • Working in self-organising research learning communities, are able to continue implementing the strategies as well as use the Theory of Action process learned to create and test new strategies for CIN/LAC.

Appendix B: Workshop observation guide

RLC Project Observation Guide: Phase 1

Introduction

As part of the evaluation of the RLC programme, a total of eight observations will be conducted, covering the RLC programme's two introductory sessions and its six workshops. This semi-structured guide is not exhaustive and does not cover everything that you might expect to see during the delivery of the workshops. You should therefore consider recording anything else you observe that you feel may be useful to the evaluation during the session. The purpose of the observations is to explore:

- The level of engagement and interaction between participants
- How each workshop and session is run in practice
- Feedback from participants and potentially initial impact against outcomes.

In advance of your observation, please ensure that:

- Project participants understand the purpose of the observation and how it will feed into the evaluation/data collection process
- Project participants understand your role as an observer and how this forms part of our evaluative approach
- You follow the usual GDPR protocol, including for consent. This is your responsibility. This includes providing reassurances to participants that it will not be possible to identify them individually from the results, and that they can decline to participate at any point.

Observation notes
The key overarching questions that you should be aiming to help answer from the observations are: • Is the implementation of the RLC programme consistent with its design? • What are Subject Leads' and Designated Teachers' views of the frequency, timing and duration of the workshops? • To what extent are Subject Leads and Designated Teachers able to study independently? • To what extent do Subject Leads and Designated Teachers collaborate with Year 5 and 6 teachers to co-develop and implement Theories of Action in their schools? • What are the views of Subject Leads and Designated Teachers on the quality of workshop content, structure, support and environment (or the space created for collaboration and open and honest conversations)? • Do different stakeholders believe that the programme is addressing their requirements and the outcomes needed to be achieved? • How does the RLC and the role of Subject Leads and/or Designated Teachers work in practice? Do teachers note any differences in implementation in their schools? What reasons do they cite for this? • What supports and what inhibits effective implementation at a programme and school levels and why? • What can be improved? **Attendance:** • How many participants are there? What is their profile – age/gender/ethnicity? • How many delivery staff are there?

- Who else is there and what is their role?

Online environment:

- Are participants clearly informed for how they can input into the discussion?
- How formally/informally is the discussion run?
- Are people using cameras?
- Were participants able to join the online workshop smoothly?
- What are the initial dynamics between participants? (Do they seem relaxed, energetic, chatty, awkward, quiet?)

Introduction and overview:

- Are the aims and objectives of the session clearly explained?
- Are participants clear on what is expected of them? Are they given the opportunity to ask clarification questions?
- Are the ground rules clear for how people are to participate?
- How engaged are participants?
- Are they paying attention/listening?

Main activities:

- Is the workshop being delivered as planned, according to a clearly specified agenda?
- Does the agenda provided in the workshop match our pre-existing understanding of the structure and content of the workshops?
- Is the workshop content structured in a way that is easy for participants to follow?
- What work and/or independent study have Subject Leads and Designated Teachers completed prior to the workshops? Do they mention any examples of academic papers that they have read?
- Were breakout rooms used? If so, did the breakout rooms run smoothly?
- Did participants use the chat function? If so, was the chat function regularly used?

Quality of facilitation: *(Please note general feedback on how the workshop is facilitated, with reference to the three facilitation modes: directive, collaborative or hands-off)*

- Does the facilitator support participants when required?
- Does the facilitator actively encourage and facilitate collaboration among participants during the workshops?
- Is the facilitator or a small number of participants doing most of the talking during the session, or is the discussion more dispersed?
- Do participants seem aware that they are learning or is the session more fluid?

Engagement and reaction: *(Please note any differences in engagement for the workshop overall and for across different activities in the workshop)*

- How engaged are participants in the workshops? Do participants regularly contribute their reflections and ideas? Are participants actively encouraged to interact with the workshop?
- Are they paying attention/listening to each other?
- Are they participating at the appropriate points?
- Are they all contributing equally to discussions?
- Are they willing to express their opinions? Do they listen to each other? Have a willingness to change opinion?
- What are the group/power dynamics at play?
- Are they interacting with delivery staff/other participants?
- Are they positive/respectful towards one another's ideas?
- Which stages of the session are getting the best reaction?

- Are there any elements that seem to be less well received?
- Are there any differences in the profile of those that seem to be more/less engaged – e.g. by age/gender/ethnicity?

Barriers and enablers:

- What feedback (if any) do participants provide on whether the RLC programme addresses their needs/the needs of their school/the needs of CIN/LAC?
- Do participants reflect on any barriers or enablers to implementing the programme in their schools/cascading teaching strategies to Year 5 and 6 teachers? Please provide examples.
- Are Subject Leads and Designated Teachers able to collaborate with each other to co-develop and implement Theories of Action in their schools?
- Do participants reflect on any barriers or enablers to the RLC workshops or teaching strategies leading to better reading and Mathematics outcomes for CIN/LAC? Please provide examples.

Feedback from teachers/participants:

- What feedback (if any) do participants provide on the timing, frequency, and duration of the workshops? Why? Please provide examples.
- What feedback (if any) do participants provide on the time and costs required for their participation in the workshops? Does this impact the implementation of the RLC programme?
- Do participants find the workshops useful?
- What do participants (if at all) perceive as significant about the RLC programme?

Specific workshop activities:

Workshop 1:

- Are participants able to derive an initial idea of what strategy they could employ in schools and how they can implement such a strategy?
- How do participants perceive Research-Informed Teaching Practice?
- Do participants/their schools already use research in their teaching practice? Why/why not? What barriers or enablers do they discuss to using research evidence?
- What other benefits, difficulties and perceptions associated with teachers' use of research do participants discuss? Please provide examples if possible
- Are participants able to discuss the differences they want to make in schools and their vision for future success? Please provide examples.
- Do participants reflect on the current situation in their school? Please provide examples.
- Do participants understand the types of data provided in the handout materials?
- What are participants' reflections on the type of baseline data that they would collect and use?
- Do participants understand the homework task for the next workshop?

Workshop 2:

- How do participants reflect on their current strategy? Do they come up with ways to refine and improve it?
- What are participants' reflections on their homework activity from workshop 1?
- Are participants able to interpret and analyse the baseline data that they have? Please provide examples if possible
- What do participants reflect on as good quality research? What sources do participants discuss for good quality research?

- What are participants' reflections on practice-based knowledge and how to ensure it is evidence based?
- Do facilitators support participants to develop Theories of Action for the new or adjusted strategy?
- Do participants understand the homework task for the next workshop?

Workshop 3:

- How do participants reflect on the trial and lesson studies' evidence?
- What amendments are discussed to participants' existing strategies?
- Are participants encouraged to discuss ways of embedding change effectively in their schools?
- Are participants able to discuss different changes in their leadership strategies?
- Are Subject Leads and Designated Teachers able to collaborate with Year 5 and 6 teachers to co-develop and implement Theories of Action in their schools?
- What do participants (if at all) perceive as significant about the new/adapted strategies for CIN/LAC compared to previous approaches/strategies?

Workshop 4:

- How did participants go about repeating the process and procedures in workshops 1 to 3 in order to create a new/adjust a different strategy?
- Are participants able to derive an initial idea of what strategy they could employ in schools and how they can implement such a strategy?

Workshop 5:

- Are participants able to confidently test and refine their teaching strategies aimed at CIN/LAC?
- How do participants to reflect on their current strategy to come up with ways to refine and improve it?
- Do facilitators support participants to develop Theories of Action for the new or adjusted strategy?

Workshop 6:

- Are participants able to confidently lead change in their school to support Year 5 and 6 teachers to implement effective teaching strategies for CIN/LAC?
- How do participants reflect on the trial and lesson studies' evidence?
- What amendments are discussed for participants' existing strategies?
- Are participants encouraged to discuss ways of embedding change effectively in their schools?
- Are participants able to discuss different changes in their leadership strategies?
- Are Subject Leads and Designated Teachers able to collaborate with Year 5 and 6 teachers to co-develop and implement Theories of Action in their schools?
- What do participants (if at all) perceive as significant about the new/adapted strategies for CIN/LAC compared to previous approaches/strategies?

Moving forward:

- How do participants reflect upon what has been achieved in the workshops so far?
- What supports effective implementation at a programme and school levels? Why?
- What inhibits effective implementation at programme and school levels? Why?
- Are participants able to continue implementing the strategies learned in the workshops?
- Are participants able to use the Theory of Action process to create and test new strategies for CIN/LAC?

- What feedback (if any) do participants provide on the quality of workshop content, structure, support, and environment? Why? Please provide examples.
- What do participants feel can be improved about the RLC programme? Why? Please also consider improvements to the implementation of the RLC programme at school level. Please provide any examples that participants mention.
- What do participants (if at all) perceive as significant about the RLC programme compared with other similar activities or initiatives in the past?

Anything else:

Appendix C: Interview discussion guide for RLC workshop participants

Research Learning Communities:
DISCUSSION GUIDE – Depth interviews with RLC workshop participants (Subject Leads and Designated Teachers)

This interview guide is for teachers that have participated in the RLC workshops (Subject Leads and Designated Teachers). The objectives of this interview are to:

1. Understand how the RLC programme has worked in practice for teachers and schools
2. Understand what features of the RLC programme and/or external factors helped or hindered success, and what could be improved or adapted for future programmes
3. Understand the reasons behind why schools dropped out of the RLC programme (if relevant)
4. Understand perceived outcomes of the programme for teachers, schools and children in need/children looked after.

Introduction and background (5 mins)

Introduce self, Ipsos UK, purpose of discussion:

- Ipsos UK, an independent research organisation, have been commissioned by What Works for Children's Social Care to evaluate the Research Learning Communities programme, or RLC.
- We're doing a number of interviews like this with schools that have participated in the RLC programme.
- The focus of our discussion today is to understand (1) your experience of taking part in the RLC programme, (2) (*If relevant)* your reasons for dropping out, (3) what worked well and what could be improved, and (4) your perceptions of the impact the programme has had for you, your school, and for children looked after and children in need.

Explain tone and nature of discussion:

- It is relaxed and informal.
- There are no right or wrong answers.
- There is plenty to get through, so I may have to move the conversation on from time to time – it's not that we're not interested in what you have to say.
- The length of the interview will be around 60 minutes.
- As we mentioned in our email, you'll also be receiving a £30 Amazon voucher for participating in the interview. We will send this over after the interview.

Explain confidentiality and anonymity:

- Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you are free to pause or end the interview at any time.
- Please do not feel obliged to say anything that may be difficult for you. You are free to refuse to answer any question.

- All of your answers will be confidential. Neither you, nor your school, will be individually identified in our report. The report may contain anonymised quotes from these interviews, but it will not be possible to trace these back to you.
- **Have you read the privacy notice?** *(If not, read through with participant)*
- **Do you have any questions before we begin? Are you happy to proceed with the interview?**

Seek permission for recording:

- We would like to record the discussion for analysis purposes.
- The recording will be used to ensure that we transcribe details correctly. It will not be provided to anyone outside of the evaluation team and will be destroyed after we have completed the evaluation.
- The recordings will be securely stored up until the point at which they are destroyed in September 2022.
- You can withdraw your data after the interview before it is included in the analysis, by June 2022.
- **Do I have your permission to record?**

Teacher role (2–3 mins)

Just to begin, please tell me a bit about your role in your school?

- *Probe on:* Are you a Subject Lead or Designated Teacher? Other senior leadership role? Role in relation to looked after children/children in social care?
- What are your responsibilities?
- *(If a classroom teacher):* How many looked after children/children in social care do you currently teach?
- How long have you worked at your school?
- What year groups are you responsible for?

Involvement with the RLC programme (10 mins)

Please tell me about your role in the RLC programme?

- How many RLC workshops have you personally attended to date?
- Which workshops did you attend? e.g. name and/or date of the workshop(s)
- Have other teachers in your school attended the workshops? Which ones did they attend?
- What role did you play in delivering the RLC programme in your school?

What made you/your school decide to get involved with the RLC programme?

- What did you hope the project might achieve in your school/for pupils who are in need or looked after?
- Do you know how many children there are who are looked after at your school? Did this influence your decision to participate?
- To what extent was there support among your school's leadership and other teachers for participating in the programme?

Can you tell me a bit about the process of signing up to the programme?

- How did you or your school find out about the RLC programme?

- *(If respondent heard about the programme through Virtual School Heads)* What was this process like?
- Had you heard about RLC before? If yes, how?
- How clear were the communications about RLC in general?
- *Probe*: Was the purpose of the RLC programme clear?
- Was it clear what the programme would involve and what would be expected of you to sign up? (e.g. attending the workshops; co-developing, testing, and implementing new teaching strategies with other teachers)
- Were there any challenges/issues you had to address in order to take part?
- Did you identify the subject (Literacy or Mathematics) for your school to focus on? *(If yes)* Why was this subject chosen?
- Did you involve any other teaching colleagues in the programme at the start? In what ways?

Prior to RLC, to what extent did you use research and evidence to inform your teaching practice?

- Did you use published "evidence" (e.g. research reports) or school-based evidence (e.g. school or pupil data) to inform your teaching practice?
- Does your school leadership promote the use of published or school evidence in the classroom?
- What about in your school (e.g. on school policy, staff development, etc.)?
- How much did you collaborate with other colleagues within your school or with other schools in doing, using and discussing research? Why?

Experience of the RLC Workshops (25 mins)

Now I'd like to talk more about the RLC workshops that you took part in. *(if relevant to participant)*

Which aspects of the workshops, if any, do you think worked particularly well? Why? **And which aspects, if any, do you think worked less well?** Why?

- *Probe on:*
  - Timings of the workshops
  - Duration/length of the workshops
  - Frequency of workshops
  - Logistics and online set-up
  - Facilitation and maintaining engagement
  - Workshop activities.

(If not already discussed) **What are your thoughts on the content of the workshops that you took part in?**

- Was the content discussed accessible/understandable?
- Did you feel it was relevant and appropriate for your school?
- Was the content relevant for children in need/looked after children in your classes specifically (i.e. did you have CIN/LAC pupils for whom this would be useful)?
- How engaging was this content for you?
- What, if anything, did you like most about the workshop content?
- What, if anything, could be done to improve the workshop content?

(If not already discussed) **How did you find the facilitation of the workshops, in your opinion?**

- What makes you say that?
- To what extent, if at all, did the facilitators encourage you to participate during the workshops?
- To what extent, if at all, did the facilitators provide support between and after each workshop?

(If not already discussed) **Were you able to collaborate and share ideas with other participating schools in the workshops? In what ways?**

- What impact (if any) did this collaboration have? e.g. did it influence your experience of the workshop, or the teaching strategies you co-developed with other teachers in your school?
- Did you learn anything new from speaking to teachers in other schools participating in the workshops?

Were you able to engage with or complete the activities assigned before/ between each of the workshops (e.g. in relation to reading materials, data collection, teaching strategy development)?

- How helpful or unhelpful were the handouts provided for the activities?
- Was it clear what you were expected to do?
- Were these activities helpful?
- Were there any challenges to delivering these activities? (*Probe*: time required, burden to complete)
- Did you share the materials provided with other teachers in your school?
- Who did you involve in your school to help with these activities? (Were they Year 5 & 6 teachers?)
- How many hours, roughly, did you spend on these activities between workshops?
- Were you able to conduct your own independent research in addition to what was provided? What research did you do?
- How many hours, roughly, did you spend on independent study between workshops?

To what extent have you been able to effectively involve or circulate learnings from the RLC workshops with other teachers in your school?

- What makes you say that?
- What were the difficulties? What were the enablers?
- *Probe on:* other teachers' attitudes? logistics? Time/workload?

What teaching strategies, if any, were you able to trial and develop following the workshops?

- What teaching strategies were you able to trial and develop?
- How have you implemented these teaching strategies in your school?
- Were there any costs associated with participation or with the implementation of new teaching strategies? (e.g. facilities, materials, equipment)

- What barriers or challenges were there to implementing these new strategies? (*Probe*: capacity, workload)
- To what extent, if at all, would you consider adopting these teaching strategies for the long term?

What, if anything, did you find most useful about the workshops? Why? **And what did you find least useful about the workshops?** Why?

- What makes you say that?

In what ways, if any, could the workshops have been improved?

- In your opinion, was there anything missing from the workshops/any follow-up activities that would have been appropriate or useful?

Reasons for dropping out of the RLC programme (15 mins)

(If relevant) **Can you tell me about your decision to drop out of the RLC programme?**

- What makes you say that?
- *Probe on*:
  - COVID-19
  - Teacher absences
  - Staff turnover
  - Workload
  - Online format of workshops
  - Frequency, timing or length of the workshops
  - Content or focus of the workshops
  - Costs associated with participation or with the implementation of new teaching strategies (financial and time related)
  - Feasibility of implementing the new teaching strategies in your school.

What, if any, were the main difficulties that you faced during your participation in the RLC programme?

- What makes you say that?
- How could such difficulties be overcome?

What, if anything, could have been done differently to have encouraged you to remain on the RLC programme? Why?

Impact of the RLC programme (10 mins)

We'd now like to talk about what you think the outcomes of the workshops have been. *(If relevant – ask dropout schools if they are able to discuss any potential impacts of the programme, depending on the extent to which they engaged before dropping out)*

From your experiences of the RLC workshops, what have you taken away from the sessions?

To what extent, if at all, do you believe RLC has or will have an impact on your teaching practice?

- *Probe on*:
  - Approach to children in need and children looked after
  - Change leadership skills
  - Confidence in developing and trailing new teaching strategies

- Knowledge of relevant research
- Knowledge of the action research process
- Use of academic and/or action research to inform teaching strategies.

What impacts, if any, do you think RLC has or will have on your school or on other teachers?

- What makes you say that? Can you give some examples?
- *Probe on:*
  - Encouraging the use of academic/action research to inform teaching strategies
  - Strengthening existing communities of practice
  - Instilling more "change leadership" or appetite for change.
- Were there any unintended or unexpected outcomes of RLC in your school?

What impacts, if any, do you think RLC has or will have on children that are in need or looked after in your school/classrooms?

- What makes you say that? Can you give some examples of how your students or parents have responded to these new teaching strategies?
- *Probe on*:
  - Behavioural outcomes (internalised or externalised behaviours)
  - Learning outcomes in specific subjects (Reading, Mathematics)
- Were there any unintended or unexpected outcomes?
- Did the new teaching strategies also have any impact on other students/the wider student body?

Are there any teachers or members of school staff that have particularly benefited from the programme?

What, if any, additional value do you think this programme adds compared to other sessions you have had in the past? What makes you say that?

- Have any other programmes or training sessions on using action research or on supporting children in need and looked after children been delivered in your school?

What do you think have been the key barriers to the success of RLC in your school? Why?

- *Probe on:*
  - Research skills among school/teaching staff
  - Duration of the programme (only one year)
  - Time/workload or other commitments (e.g. Ofsted school inspections)
  - COVID-19
  - Relevance of the programme to wider student body
  - Leadership buy-in/the influence of the "senior leader" attending the workshops
  - Staff turnover
  - Existing research culture.

In terms of enablers of success, what characteristics of your school have helped to promote the success of RLC? Why?
In terms of recruiting additional schools onto the programme in the future, who in your network do you think would be best suited to engage/teachers schools in this intervention, or in a similar intervention? Why?

Reflections and wrap up (5 mins)

Thank you very much for taking the time to speak with me so far. You have shared some valuable insights today which will be very helpful for our research.
Before we finish, I have two final questions to ask.
Would you recommend this programme to other schools or teachers? Would you like the project to be conducted in your school again or with other pupils? Why/why not?
We were hoping to also speak to Head Teachers and other class teachers in your school who have engaged with RLC.

- Which specific staff or teachers would it be most useful to speak to?
- *(If we do not already have Head Teacher or class teacher contact details)* Could you please forward them our contact information and ask them to reach out to us, so that we may arrange an interview?

Do you have any final reflections that you would like to add which we may not have covered today?
Do you have any questions for me?
Thank and close.

Appendix D: Interview discussion guide for delivery staff

Research Learning Communities:
DISCUSSION GUIDE – Depth interviews with RLC workshop delivery staff

This interview guide is for teachers that delivered the RLC workshops. The objectives of this interview are to:

1. Understand how the RLC programme has worked in practice for teachers and schools
2. Understand what features of the RLC programme and/or external factors helped or hindered success, and what could be improved or adapted for future programmes
3. Understand the reasons behind why schools dropped out of the RLC programme (if relevant)
4. Understand perceived outcomes of the programme for teachers, schools, and children in need/children looked after.

Introduction and background (5 mins)

Introduce self, Ipsos UK, purpose of discussion:

- Ipsos UK, an independent research organisation, have been commissioned by What Works for Children's Social Care to evaluate the Research Learning Communities programme, or RLC.
- The focus of our discussion today is to understand (1) your role in the RLC programme, (2) the set-up of the workshops, (3) your experience of delivering the workshops, (4) what happened between the workshops, (5) your perspectives of why schools either remained or dropped out of the RLC programme, and (6) your perceptions of the potential impacts, if any, that the programme has had for schools that participated in the workshops.

Explain tone and nature of discussion:

- It is relaxed and informal.
- There are no right or wrong answers.
- There is plenty to get through, so I may have to move the conversation on from time to time – it's not that we're not interested in what you have to say.
- The length of the interview will be around 60 minutes.

Explain confidentiality and anonymity:

- Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you are free to pause or end the interview at any time.
- Please do not feel obliged to say anything that may be difficult for you. You are free to refuse to answer any question.
- All of your answers will be confidential. You will not be individually identified in our report. The report may contain anonymised quotes from these interviews, but it will not be possible to trace these back to you.
- **Have you read the privacy notice?** *(If not, read through with participant)*
- **Do you have any questions before we begin? Are you happy to proceed with the interview?**

Seek permission for recording:

- We would like to record the discussion for analysis purposes.
- The recording will be used to ensure that we transcribe details correctly. It will not be provided to anyone outside of the evaluation team and will be destroyed after we have completed the evaluation.
- The recordings will be securely stored up until the point at which they are destroyed in January 2023.
- You can withdraw your data after the interview before it is included in the analysis, by January 2023.
- **Do I have your permission to record?**

Role of delivery staff (3 mins)

Just to begin, please tell me a little bit about your background.

- Previous background in relation to looked after children/children in social care?
- Have you worked on and/or partook in any programmes similar to the RLC?

Please tell me a bit about your role in the delivery of the RLC programme?

- *Probe on:* How did you initially get involved with the RLC programme? What made you decide to get involved with the RLC programme?
- How many RLC workshops have you personally delivered in total?

Recruitment and set-up of the workshops for the RLC programme (10 mins)

I would now like to talk about the process for recruitment and setting up the workshops for the RLC programme.

What was the process for recruiting schools to take part in the workshops like?

- What methods/channels were used to recruit schools? How effective were these?
- Did the delivery team prioritise the recruitment of any particular schools? If so, what types of schools were targeted?
- How did schools respond to being initially contacted to take part in the RLC programme? To what extent, if at all, were schools interested/did they find the RLC programme relevant to their needs?
- How does the recruitment process for the RLC programme compare to alternative programmes that you may be familiar with?
- What, if anything, could have been done to improve the recruitment process?

Can you tell me a bit about the process of setting up the RLC programme for an online environment?

- What were your key considerations?
- To what extent did the set-up of the RLC programme for an online environment differ from setting up another programme for face-to-face?
- How easy or difficult was the set-up? What difficulties, if any, did you face?
- Were there any shortcomings for setting up the RLC programme for an online environment?

What was the process like for setting up the content related to the workshops?

- *Probe on*: Activities, materials provided between workshops, readings referenced in the slides, slide content

Can you tell me about how you and the delivery team went about tailoring the RLC programme to looked after children and children in need?

- What were the delivery team's key considerations for tailoring the RLC programme to CIN/LAC?
- To what extent, overall, do you feel that you were able to tailor the RLC programme to CIN/LAC?
- What difficulties, if any, did the team face with tailoring the RLC programme to CIN/LAC?
- Did the delivery teamwork with anyone else to tailor the RLC? If so, who?
- What, if anything, could have been done better to tailor the RLC programme to CIN/LAC?

Thinking back, what, if anything, could have been done to improve the set-up of the workshops, overall?

- What makes you say that?

Experience during the RLC Workshops (10 mins)

Now I'd like to talk more about the RLC workshops that you delivered. Overall, what was your experience of facilitating the workshops like?

- What makes you say that?
- Were any particular workshops that were easier or more difficult to facilitate than others? Which ones? What makes you say that?
- How easy or difficult was it to encourage schools to actively participate during the workshops?

(if not already discussed) **Which aspects of the workshops, if any, do you think worked particularly well?** Why? **And which aspects, if any, do you think worked less well?** Why?

- *Probe on:*
  - Timings of the workshops
  - Duration/length of the workshops
  - Frequency of workshops
  - Activities between workshops
  - Logistics and online set-up
  - Maintaining engagement with schools
  - Workshop activities.

(If not already discussed) **To what extent, if at all, were participants able to collaborate and share ideas with other participating schools during the workshops? In what ways?**

- What impact (if any) did this collaboration have? e.g. did it influence participants' experience of the workshop, or the teaching strategies they co-developed with other teachers in their school?
- Did participants learn anything new from speaking to teachers in other schools participating in the workshops?

What, if anything, do you think participants found most useful about the workshops? And what do you think participants found least useful about the workshops?

- What makes you say that?

If you delivered the programme over again, what changes would you make to the workshops, if any?

- In your opinion, was there anything missing from the workshops/any follow-up activities that would have been more appropriate or useful?
- Timing, frequency, etc.

Between the workshops (7 mins)

Please now have a think about what happened between the different RLC workshops.
What was your experience of engaging with participants between the workshops like?

- Any examples of particular schools that you remained in contact with?
- What did you discuss with participants outside of the workshops?
- How helpful or unhelpful was your contact for participants, in your opinion?

In your opinion, to what extent, if at all, were schools engaged with the homework activities and reading materials provided between the workshops?

- To what extent, if at all, were participants able to engage with or complete the activities assigned before/between each of the workshops (e.g. in relation to reading materials, data collection, teaching strategy development)?
- What feedback, if any, did schools provide on the activities and reading materials that were provided between the workshops?
- Were some schools more engaged than others?

In your opinion, how far, if at all, were teachers able to draw on the activities and materials provided between the workshops to inform their participation in the workshops?

- What makes you say that?

Reasons for schools' remaining or dropping out of the RLC programme (5 mins)

I would now like to reflect on the potential reasons for why schools chose to either remain or drop out of the RLC programme.
Can you tell me anything about schools' reasons for remaining for the entirety of the workshops?

- What makes you say that?
- What reasons, if any, did schools provide?

Can you tell me about schools' decisions to drop out of the RLC programme?

- What makes you say that?
- *Probe on*:
  - COVID-19
  - Teacher absences
  - Staff turnover
  - Workload
  - Online format of workshops
  - Frequency, timing or length of the workshops
  - Content or focus of the workshops
  - Costs associated with participation or with the implementation of new teaching strategies (financial and time related)
  - Feasibility of implementing the new teaching strategies in your school.

(if not already discussed) **What, if any, were the main difficulties that schools faced during their participation in the RLC programme?**

- What makes you say that?
- How could such difficulties be overcome?

(if not already discussed) **What, in your opinion, if anything, could have been done differently to have encouraged schools to remain in the RLC programme?**

- What makes you say that?

Impact of the RLC programme (15 mins)

We'd now like to talk about what you think the outcomes of the workshops have been, if any.

From your experience of the RLC workshops, what do you think that teachers have taken away from the session?

- What makes you say that? Can you share any examples?
- To what extent do you feel that these takeaways will be helpful for CIN/LACs?

What impacts, if any, do you think RLC has or will have on schools more widely?

- What makes you say that? Can you give some examples?
- Did you receive any feedback on how the teaching strategies developed from the RLC workshops work in practice?
- *Probe on:*
  - Encouraging the use of academic/action research to inform teaching strategies
  - Strengthening existing communities of practice
  - Instilling more "change leadership" or appetite for change

- Were there any unintended or unexpected outcomes of RLC that teachers had reported to you?

To what extent, if at all, do you believe that the RLC has or will have an impact on participants' teaching strategies?

- *Probe on*:
  - Approach to children in need and looked after children
  - Change leadership skills
  - Confidence in developing and trailing new teaching strategies
  - Knowledge of relevant research
  - Knowledge of the action research process
  - Use of academic and/or action research to inform teaching strategies.

(if not already covered) **What impacts, if any, do you think the RLC programme has or will have on children that are in need and/or looked after in your schools/classrooms?**

- What makes you say that? Can you give some examples of what you have heard from teachers about how students and/or parents have responded to new teaching strategies derived from the RLC programme?
- *Probe on*:
  - Behavioural outcomes (internalised or externalised behaviours)
  - Learning outcomes in specific subjects (Reading, Mathematics).
- Were there any unintended or unexpected outcomes that you are aware of?
- Did the new teaching strategies also have any impact on other students/the wider student body?

What, if any, additional value do you think this RLC programme adds compared to other alternative programmes that you may have previously delivered or been involved in?

- What makes you say that?

What, if any, are the key factors that enable the RLC programme to be more successful than alternative programmes for CIN/LAC?

- Do you feel that there are any particular contexts or school settings that the RLC programme would be more successful in? Can you please give examples?

What, if any, do you think have been the key barriers to the success of RLC in schools? Why?

- *Probe on:*
  - Research skills among school/teaching staff
  - Duration of the programme (only one year)
  - Time/workload or other commitments (e.g. Ofsted school inspections)
  - COVID-19
  - Relevance of the programme to wider student body

- Leadership buy-in/the influence of the ‘senior leader’ attending the workshops
- Staff turnover
- Existing research culture.

Reflections and wrap up (5 mins)

Thank you very much for taking the time to speak with me so far. You have shared some really valuable insights today which will be very helpful for our research.

Before we finish, I have one final question to ask.

To what extent, would you recommend the RLC programme to other schools or teachers with CIN/LAC? Why/why not?

- Would you recommend any alternative programmes over the RLC? If so, which ones?
- What types of teachers?
- Any particular types of schools?

Do you have any final reflections that you would like to add which we may not have covered today?

Do you have any questions for me?

Thank and close.

Appendix E: Privacy notice shared with interview participants

Ipsos UK

Privacy notice for the "Research Learning Communities" evaluation

1. Introduction

Ipsos UK and its affiliates, subsidiaries and related entities ("Ipsos", "we", "our") is committed to protecting the privacy and security of the personal data we collect about end customers and users of our services ("you/your"). This project is funded by What Works for Children's Social Care ("WWCSC"). The project will incorporate evaluating information captured in workshops which are delivered by Durham University

The purpose of this privacy notice is to explain what personal data we collect about you when we conduct research for the Research Learning Communities evaluation project. When we do this, we are the data controller.

Please read this privacy notice carefully as it provides important information about how we handle your personal information and your rights. If you have any questions about any aspect of this privacy notice you can contact us using the information provided below or by emailing us at compliance@ipsos.com quoting *Research Learning Communities* in the subject or body of the email.

2. Personal data we collect

- Your name
- Your email address
- Your place of work
- Your occupation and level
- Subject specialism
- Length of service
- Highest level of qualification
- Recontact permission where consent is provided.

3. How we collect information about you

- Basic contact information (name, occupation, email address and place of work) will be collected voluntarily from yourself via a consent form sent to you by your employer or by WWCSC
- WWCSC will pass the basic contact information to Ipsos UK
- From yourself within an online/telephone interview with Ipsos UK
- From yourself via an online survey Ipsos UK have sent you.

4. Purposes for which we use personal data and the legal basis

When conducting the research study, we may use your personal data for the following purposes and on the following lawful bases. The table below is relevant to all data subjects involved in the research study:

4.1 Purpose	4.2 Lawful Basis for Processing
To conduct the research based on the data you have provided.	Based on consent you have provided in the consent form
For us to contact you to participate in an interview as part of the evaluation where you have clearly indicated to us that you wish to be a participant in this research.	Based on consent you have provided in the consent form. The lawful basis we shall be relying on is consent.
To transcribe the audio captured from any recorded interviews we have with you.	Based on consent you have provided at the start of the interview. The lawful basis we shall be relying on is consent.
For us to send you surveys as part of the evaluation where you have clearly indicated to us that you wish to be a participant in this research.	Based on consent you have provided in the consent form. The lawful basis we shall be relying on is consent.
To be able to check the eligibility to take part in the study based upon the research criteria requirements.	Based on consent you have provided in the consent form. The lawful basis we shall be relying on is consent.
For Durham University to be able to invite you to participate in the workshops.	Based on consent you have provided in the consent form. The lawful basis we shall be relying on is consent.

5. Sharing your data

We will not share your data outside the United Kingdom.
Any data shared with the below categories of recipients is the minimum necessary for the task they have been instructed to carry out on our behalf or in conjunction with us. Each category of recipient is subject to pre-approved review to ensure comparative technical and organisational measure for keeping the data secure.

- TakeNote, pre-approved transcription supplier.

There may be scenarios where we are subject to a legal obligation to disclose or share your personal data, such as with law enforcement agencies, regulatory bodies or public authorities in order to prevent or detect crime. We will only ever disclose your personal data to these third parties to the extent we are required to do so by law.

6. How long we keep your data

Ipsos UK will only retain your data in a way that can identify you for as long as is necessary to support the research project and findings. In practice, this means that once we have satisfactorily reported the research findings (which does not contain any information that could be used to identify you) to the project funder (WWCSC), we will securely remove your personal, identifying data from our systems by May 2023.
Any teacher contact data WWCSC has provided to Ipsos UK will be deleted by Ipsos UK by September 2022. WWCSC will delete any teacher contact data it holds within three months of the workshop session coming to an end.

7. How we protect your data

All participants are free to withdraw from the study prior to analysis taking place. If you wish to withdraw from the study please use the details found in section 10 to make contact with Ipsos UK.
Ipsos UK takes its information security responsibilities seriously and applies various precautions to ensure your information is protected from loss, theft, or misuse. Security precautions include appropriate physical security of offices and controlled and limited access to computer systems.
Ipsos UK has regular internal and external audits of its information security controls and working practices and is accredited to the International Standard for Information Security, ISO 27001.
Contact information will be shared via secure encrypted transfer by WWCSC with Ipsos UK and Durham University. WWCSC stores your information securely on a dedicated drive, and access is controlled by WWCSC's secure access policy for the duration of the research study period.
Any personal data is not subject to any automated decision-making.

8. Your rights and options

You have the following rights in respect of your personal data:

- You have the right to access your personal data within the limited period that Ipsos UK holds it.
- You also have the right to rectify any incorrect or out-of-date personal data about you which we may hold.
- Participating in this study is entirely voluntary and is done with your consent. You have the right to withdraw your consent.
- You can ask us to restrict the use of your personal data if: It is not accurate, It has been used unlawfully but you do not want us to delete it, We do not need it anymore, but you want us to keep it for use in legal claims, or if you have already asked us to stop using your data but you are waiting to receive confirmation from us as to whether we can comply with your request.
- In some circumstances you can compel us to erase your personal data and request a machine-readable copy of your personal data to transfer to another service provider. You have the right not to be subject to a decision based solely on automated processing (including profiling) that produces legal effects concerning you or similarly significantly affects you.
- You will not have to pay a fee to access your personal data (or to exercise any of the other rights). However, we may charge a reasonable fee if your request for access is clearly unfounded or excessive. Alternatively, we may refuse to comply with the request in such circumstances.

9. How to Complain

You can also lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office. They can be contacted using the information provided at:
Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow

Cheshire
SK9 5AF
Helpline number: 0303 123 1113
ICO website: https://ico.org.uk/concerns/.

10. Contact us

If you have any questions, or wish to exercise any of your rights, then you can contact:
Contact Name: Nadia Badaoui
Project: Research Learning Communities (RLC)
Organisation: Ipsos UK
Address: 3 Thomas More Square, London E1W 1YW, United Kingdom
Alternatively, you can email us at RLCevaluation@Ipsos-MORI.com

11. Changes to this privacy notice

We may update this notice (and any supplemental privacy notice), from time to time as shown below. We will notify you of the changes where required by applicable law to do so.
Last modified: 19 April 2022.

Appendix F: Information sheet shared with interview participants

Research Learning Communities: Information for schools

The intervention

What is Research Learning Communities (RLC)?

Research Learning Communities (RLCs) involve small groups of teachers coming together from a number of schools to focus on tackling key issues related to teaching and learning. Evidence indicates that RLCs are successful in:

1) Increasing teachers' confidence to use research to develop new approaches to teaching and learning
2) Building the capacity of teachers to lead research-informed change
3) Enhancing teaching practice
4) Improving student outcomes (Brown, 2017; Rose et al., 2017).

Originally trialled in some 55 primary schools by the EEF examining outcomes for all pupils, when the data was analysed by What Works for Children's Social Care it was identified as showing "signs of potential" for positive outcomes for children who have had a social worker. The RLC approach has now been adopted by a range of school communities across England, as well as in Boise, Idaho, Barcelona and in Malmo, Sweden.

What will this programme involve?

The overall aim of this RLC programme is to improve teaching practices for, and the educational outcomes of, looked after children (LAC), children in need (CIN) and children who have a social worker. The programme is designed for **Subject Leads and Designated Teachers** and its focus will be on **Maths & English** lessons for **year 5 & 6 pupils**; with specific areas (e.g. metacognition in English) to be determined in collaboration with schools. The programme will be led by Professor Chris Brown from the Durham University School of Education along with a team of facilitators.

What is required?

Subject Leads and Designated Teachers from each school will be required to attend eight workshops between October 2021 and March 2022. These workshops will take participating teachers through two rapid cycles of understanding:

1) How to engage with research evidence.
2) How to design new, research-informed, approaches to teaching and learning.
3) How to lead change within schools so that these teaching practices are widely adopted.

Workshops will be online, and each will last for approximately two and a half hours. Workshops will be held towards the end of the school day to minimise disruption to the teaching day. Given that we aim to host them after the school day, teacher cover time won't be paid for. We will, however, offer participating schools a thankyou of £250 to help schools with the cost/issues of releasing staff for schools within the treatment group.

Who do I contact if I have any questions or would like more information about the RLC programme?

If you have any questions, queries, or concerns, please contact the intervention team at Durham University or the WWCSC:

- Professor Chris Brown, Professor in Education: chris.brown@durham.ac.uk
- Clare Clancy, Programmes Manager: clare.clancy@whatworks-csc.org.uk
- Eleanor Stringer, Head of Education Programmes: eleanor.stringer@whatworks-csc.org.uk

The evaluation

The **What Works for Children's Social Care (WWCSC)** has funded **Ipsos UK** to carry out an evaluation of the Research Learning Communities (RLC) programme. Ipsos UK are an independent research and evaluation organisation. You can find more about us by visiting https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk.

What is the aim of the evaluation?

The aim of this evaluation is to assess the feasibility of the RLC programme in improving teachers' use of research-informed teaching practices, and ultimately, the learning outcomes of children in need (CIN) and looked after children (LAC). The evaluation seeks to answer several questions about the programme, for example, what the RLC intervention looks like in practice, how well it was received by participating staff, and gauge whether the intervention is ready to be scaled up.

Why should I take part in the evaluation?

By participating in the evaluation, you will contribute to important research about how best to support teachers to improve their teaching practices for CIN and LAC. The evaluation findings will be used by the WWCSC, the Department for Education (DfE), and other relevant academic and educational institutions to inform the development of future strategies to improve research access and teaching practices among teachers, and ultimately, learning outcomes for CIN and LAC.

What does taking part in the evaluation involve for my school?

Schools who agree to take part in the evaluation will participate in RLC programme activities delivered by the School of Education at Durham University and the evaluation. By participating, you will ensure that your experiences of the programme are represented in its evaluation, and that we build as comprehensive an understanding of the impact of the programme as possible.

How will evaluation information be used and shared?

All data and information collected for the evaluation will be stored securely and treated with the strictest confidence. Only Ipsos UK evaluators will be able to access this information, and all information will be held securely in compliance with GDPR. The information collected will be analysed and used to write an evaluation report for the WWCSC which will be published and available online. This report will not include any names of pupils, staff, schools, or any other identifiable information. We may use quotes, but these will be anonymised. No individual school, teacher, or pupil will be identified in any report arising

from the research. Following the end of the evaluation, and by May 2023 at the latest, all personal information held by Ipsos UK will be securely and permanently deleted.

Are schools and teachers obliged to participate in the evaluation?

Participation in the evaluation data collection is **voluntary**. Head Teachers must first consent to their school participating in the RLC programme and evaluation in order for their teachers to be contacted by the evaluation team. Teachers will have the option not to take part in the study, and we will not share the names of those who decline to take part with their schools. Teachers will then be asked to provide their consent to participate at the start of each evaluation activity. Teachers can choose to withdraw at any point in the study for example when asked to take part in the second round of the teacher questionnaire, or if asked to take part in a case study interview. If teachers complete a questionnaire and then change their mind about participation, they do not have to submit their responses. If teachers complete an interview and then change their mind about participation, we will ask that they let us know by the end of May 2022.

What data will be collected from schools and teachers?

The evaluation data collection will comprise of:

- **Teacher questionnaires:** Subject Leads, Designated Teachers, and Year 5 and 6 teachers will be asked to complete a questionnaire at the start of the intervention, in October 2021. The questionnaire will be up to 20 minutes in length. Questionnaires will ask teachers about their awareness, understanding, and use of research as well as how they develop and implement new teaching practices. The questionnaires will be administered online and disseminated via email to schools and teachers. Teachers will be asked to provide their consent to participate at the start of the questionnaire. While questionnaires will request that teachers provide their names and schools, this information will solely be used for the purposes of the evaluation and will not be shared with WWCSC, their schools, or anyone else.
- **Workshop observations:** Ipsos UK evaluators will conduct observations of RLC workshops. The School of Education at Durham University will let participants know in advance and request the consent of all participants to observe the workshop at the start of each workshop. Evaluators would take notes during the workshop, observing how the session is delivered and how it is received by the participants. These notes will not include any identifiable information about participants.
- **Case study interviews:** In order to develop a deeper understanding of the effects of the RLC programme, we intend to conduct case studies. We will use purposive sampling to select a mix of schools based on key contextual factors, including their location, student population, improvement stage and progress scores. If selected, we will conduct a series of interviews (approx. 45 minutes to 1 hour in duration) with senior leaders, Subject Leads, Designated Teachers, and Year 5 and 6 teachers from May–June 2022. We will liaise with schools in order to arrange interviews with teachers at a time convenient to them. Interviewers will check and record whether interviewees consent before starting each interview. Interviews will take place over the phone and/or video conference (per the preference of the interviewee).
- **RLC workshop attendance data:** We will ask the School of Education at Durham University to share monitoring information they have collected on teacher attendance to RLC workshops during the project via a secure link. This will help to account for

workshop attendance and attrition in our analysis of the efficacy of the RLC programme.

Who do I contact if I have any questions or would like more information about the evaluation?

If you have any questions, queries or concerns, please contact the evaluation team at Ipsos UK using the contact details below:

- Adam Behailu, Evaluation Coordinator, at adam.behailu@ipsos.

What Works *for* Children's Social Care

EARLY INTERVENTION FOUNDATION

Coming together as What Works for Early Intervention & Children's Social Care

CONTACT

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