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# **Supervision of Designated Safeguarding Leads Scale-up**

# **Evaluation: Call for Local Authority Delivery Partners**

What Works for Children’s Social Care (WWCSC) is seeking proposals from local authorities in England to participate in a large-scale evaluation of a programme providing supervision to Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) within mainstream primary schools in 10 local authorities.

This programme is a scale-up of the previous [Supervision of Designated Safeguarding Leads](https://whatworks-csc.org.uk/research-project/supervision-of-designated-safeguarding-leads-in-primary-schools/) project that ran in primary schools in Bolton Council between September 2019 and March 2020, to test an innovative approach to collaboration between Children’s Social Care (CSC) services and schools. This trial found indicative evidence of positive impacts but was unable to draw conclusive findings due to the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic.

## **What Works for Children’s Social Care**

WWCSC seeks better outcomes for children, young people and families by bringing the best available evidence to practitioners and other decision makers across the Children’s Social Care sector.

Our research looks at the point of referral through to permanence, including adoption, care-leaver support and targeted early help. We focus on Children’s Social Care practice in England and draw on and share learning at the international level.

Engagement and co-design are central to our approach and we are working in close consultation with leaders, practitioners, children and young people, families and researchers across the sector to:

* Identify gaps in the evidence, and create new evidence through trials and evaluations
* Collate, synthesise and review existing evidence
* Develop, test and publish tools and services that support the greater use of evidence and inform the design of the future Centre
* Champion the application of robust standards of evidence in Children’s Social Care research.

What Works for Children’s Social Care (WWCSC) is seeking proposals from Local Authorities to deliver a programme providing monthly supervision to Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) within primary schools in England; the Programme will be delivered across 10 Local Authorities.

This primary school scale-up is also a direct scale up of the original [Supervision of Designated Safeguarding Leads](https://whatworks-csc.org.uk/research-project/supervision-of-designated-safeguarding-leads-in-primary-schools/) trial that ran in primary schools in Bolton Council between September 2019 and March 2020, to test an innovative approach to collaboration between Children’s Social Care (CSC) services and schools. The report of their delivery and findings can be found [here](https://whatworks-csc.org.uk/research-report/supervision-of-designated-safeguarding-leads-in-primary-schools-in-bolton/). This research found indicatively positive evidence but was unable to draw firm conclusions due to the onset of the Coronavirus Pandemic.

## **Background / Designated Safeguarding Leads Supervision**

DSLs are the members of staff in a school who have the lead responsibility for safeguarding and child protection, including responsibility for referring cases that meet threshold levels of concern to CSC.

More specifically, Designated Safeguarding Leads are expected to:

* Manage referrals to CSC
* Act as a liaison with safeguarding partners including local authority case managers, headteachers and other school staff
* Undergo specialist training
* Raise awareness
* Maintain child protection files[[1]](#footnote-0)

The role involves having to make difficult decisions about complex situations and vulnerable children, however DSLs tend not to receive adequate formal supervision.

The initial evaluation aimed to test the impact of providing formal, individual supervision to DSLs in primary schools, with the aim of reducing inappropriate contacts to CSC. 94 primary schools in Bolton Council were eligible to participate in the programme, and were randomly assigned to either receiving the intervention, or support as usual. The DSLs allocated to the intervention group were offered monthly supervision sessions over the course of 6 months. These were provided by an experienced social work manager hired specifically into this role. The primary

outcome measure was the proportion of contacts made to CSC resulting in no further action.

**Implementation**

Due to the success of engagement with our previous RCTs in this area, we would like to revisit the programme with primary schools. We now intend to implement it across approximately ten local authorities’ within England, and appoint an independent evaluator to conduct an RCT to evaluate the impact of the intervention.

We hope to commence implementation in September 2021, and to evaluate the impact of this intervention throughout the 2021/22 academic school year. We envisage that all mainstream primary schools in these areas will participate in the trial.

The intervention aims to improve knowledge and understanding of Children’s Social Care processes and issues, resulting in **reductions in inappropriate contacts to Children’s Social Care**, and a reduction of DSL stress and anxiety.

Core elements of the intervention include:

* Recruiting one experienced social work manager per local authority to provide supervision to the DSLs
* For the experienced social work manager and DSL to have monthly individual reflective supervision sessions for the duration of the academic year
* To use agreements and record keeping documents to ensure that supervisors and supervisees have an understanding of the processes, and of expectations of roles and responsibilities.

Bolton CSC developed a series of supporting materials and documents when developing the project to ensure it was consistently implemented. The [trial protocol](https://whatworks-csc.org.uk/research-project/supervision-of-designated-safeguarding-leads-in-primary-schools/) provides more detail on the intervention and approach to the trial, and includes the Memorandum of Understanding, Supervision agreement and Record of supervision for the original evaluation. Additional training and induction materials will also be provided prior to the start of delivery.

### **Initial project steps**

Once awarded, we expect local authorities to complete the following steps in preparation of delivery starting in September.

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| --- | --- |
| Actions | Dates |
| Welcome meeting with WWCSC with individual local authorities  | 11/05/21 or 18/05/21 |
| Introduction meeting for all local authorities  | w/c 24/05/21 |
| Planning recruitment with schools | w/c 31/05/21 (half term) |
| Engagement with schools and establishing key contacts | From 07/06/21 |
| Recruitment of social workers | Start-August |
| Meeting with evaluators  | End of August  |

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## **Evaluation**

This project will be evaluated using a Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT), to identify the impacts of supervision for DSLs on a range of outcomes. These will be determined during the evaluation set up phase, but are likely to include;

* Number of contacts from schools to children’s services
* Number of referrals that lead to an assessment or no further action being taken
* Number of Child in Need Plans started
* Number of Child Protection Plans started
* Number of days in care

What Works for Children’s Social Care will appoint an independent evaluator to undertake the evaluation. As a part of the Randomised Controlled Trial, the schools to be provided with supervision will be selected at random from a pool of eligible schools within each local authority, with the remaining schools serving as a comparison group for the evaluation.

For this evaluation approach, we will require local authorities participating to;

* Provide information on eligible schools to the evaluator
* Work with the schools within their local authority which are randomly chosen by the evaluator
* Support the qualitative impact and process evaluation by facilitating interviews and focus groups as appropriate
* Provide data at the end of the trial.

The trial protocol and final report will be published by What Works for Children’s Social Care, and we would anticipate that local authorities would be given a chance to comment prior to publication.

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### **Indicative Budget**

Under this programme WWCSC is able to support the salary of **one senior social worker, per Local Authority, up to a maximum of £50,000**.

We would expect other associated costs (administration, travel etc.) to be provided by the LA.

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### **Indicative timetable for application process**

Set out below is the proposed timeline for selection of the evaluator(s). This is intended as a guide only.

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| --- | --- |
| Decision timetable | Dates |
| Opportunity published | 26/03/21 |
| Deadline to submit a proposal by emailing programmes@whatworks-csc.org.uk | 30/04/21 |
| Internal review, and any clarification conversations, if necessary | w/c 03/05/21 |
| Successful local authorities appointed and notified | w/c 10/05/21 |

## **How to apply**

Please answer all the questions in Annex 1 below, and submit your completed application to programmes@whatworks-csc.org.uk by no later than **9am on Friday 30th April 2021.**

**Your application should be no more than 3 A4 pages in total.**

## If you have any questions that have not been answered above, please email programmes@whatworks-csc.org.uk or anum.farid@whatworks-csc.org.uk

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## **Application form**

*Please complete all sections below.*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Local Authority Name** |  |
| **Address** |  |
| **Lead Contact** |  |
| **Phone number** |  |
| **Email address** |  |

*We will store and use this information to contact you about your application.*

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| **Motivation**Please explain your reasons for applying to be a part of the DSL Primary Supervision programme. (250 words) |
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| **Working with schools**Is there any formal support for designated safeguarding leads in primary schools? How will this project integrate with or complement your existing school safeguarding. (250 words) |
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| **Implementation**Please explain how you will:a) fill the senior social worker role to provide the supervision including how you will manage this social worker’s existing caseloads as they move into the supervisory rolec) work with schools to implement the model according to the principles outlined in the ‘how will it work’ section above(600 words) |
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| **Project support and senior leadership**Describe the roles and experience of each of the key individuals who will support implementation. How will senior leadership support the project? (250 words) |
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| **Evaluation**This programme involves a randomised controlled trial evaluation design. Participation is a condition of funding, it will involve:* Providing details of all the mainstream primary schools in the local authority.
* facilitating the arranging of interviews, focus groups and/or surveys as required by the evaluator

a commitment to providing individual administrative data to the evaluator on children’s social care outcomes in each school involved (providing that suitable data sharing and protection measures are in place) |
| *Please confirm that you have understood what is entailed in the independent evaluation and your commitment to supporting it.* |

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| **Budget**Under this programme WWCSC is able to support the cost of **one senior social worker, up to a maximum of £50,000**. Please complete the table below. We would expect other associated costs (administration, travel etc.) to be provided by the LA.  |
| **Staff costs**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Basic salary** | **On costs** | **Number of staff** | **Cost to WWCSC** |
| **Senior Social Worker** |  |  |  |  |
| **Grand total** |  |

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1. Annex B: Role of the Designated Safeguarding Lead, Keeping Children Safe at School. Department for Education, September 2018. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\_data/file/741314/Keeping\_Children\_Safe\_in\_Education\_\_3\_September\_2018\_14.09.18.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-0)