

Evaluation of Worcestershire Back to School

Intervention Developer	Worcestershire Children First
Delivery Organisations	Worcestershire Children First
Evaluator	What Works for Children's Social Care
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Type of Trial	Difference-in-differences (DiD) Implementation and Process Evaluation
Age or Status of Participants	Children and Families: Children aged 4-18 who are referred to and / or supported by the 'Back to School' intervention, as well as their parents. Professionals: School staff, 'Back to School' workers.
Number of Participating Local Authorities	2
Number of Children and Families	DiD: up to 400 children and young people (200 in the treatment group, 200 in the comparator group) IPE Admin data and survey: All families participating in 'Back to School' Qualitative data collection: 12 intervention families as well as four families who have withdrawn engagement and four families who have been triaged to other support. 12 school staff, six direct workers, and six professionals from the comparison authority.
Primary Outcome(s)	DiD: School attendance

Summary

This protocol sets out an evaluation of Worcestershire's Back to School Intervention. Back to School, developed by Worcestershire Children First, is an intensive programme to identify and support the children most likely to struggle with the return to school following national school closures in 2020. The intervention offer includes a dedicated worker providing support to each child and parent via regular contact, and using a bespoke Signs of Safety tool to help access tailored support including an online programme of Emotional Health and Wellbeing sessions.

The evaluation presented is a difference-in-differences evaluation of the impact of Back to School on school attendance. This is accompanied by an implementation and process evaluation as well as a study of the cost of delivering Back to School. We specify in this protocol a set of conditions needed to go ahead with the difference-in-differences analysis. As these conditions have not been met, only the implementation and process evaluation and the cost evaluation will be possible.

The implementation and process evaluation aims to provide a more detailed understanding of the implementation of Back to School and inform future rollout and evaluation. This will comprise interviews with staff and families to understand what has been delivered, barriers and facilitators to delivery and the experience of those delivering and receiving the intervention including how acceptable the intervention is and perceived outcomes. It will also include families who have not taken part in Back to School, to understand how Back to School differs from other services, and families who have withdrawn from Back to School to understand barriers to engagement with the programme.

The cost study will collect data from schools and the Local Authority to assess the cost per pupil of delivering Back to School.

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Background and Problem Statement

Schools play an essential role in protecting children, and missing school can amplify existing vulnerabilities. For those “vulnerable” children and young people on social work plans, attending school is a key source of support and a protective factor in their plans.

During the period of lockdown in the Covid-19 Pandemic in Spring 2020, schools were closed to a large proportion of pupils. Those open with a social work plan were able to attend school if the parent or carer wanted them to. However, during lockdown the community message was 'stay at home if you can', and the Department for Education (DfE) removed all consequences for parents or carers associated with sending their children to school to coincide with the Covid-19 government guidance.

Despite availability of school places for vulnerable children, in many areas only the minority attended¹. A rapid evidence assessment from the EEF concludes that school closures are likely to reverse progress made to narrow the gap in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and their peers in the last decade, and that support is needed to help disadvantaged pupils to catch back up². In September 2020, children were expected to return to school following this unprecedented period of absence. It was expected that some children would find the transition back to school too difficult, and some may not return. The reinstatement of consequences for parents and carers if their child does not attend school, may not be enough for some to make this happen. Evidence from Bristol University suggests that young people who have a less strong relationship with school have found reduced anxiety during the lockdown³. This is one among a range of factors that may reduce likelihood of certain children to return to school when required. Other factors anticipated to affect attendance post school closures may include concern about Covid-19, or loss of routine.

Non-attendance at school is not, on its own, enough to meet the threshold for a social work assessment. To ensure there is support in place, Worcestershire Children First (WCF) are introducing the ‘Back to School’ project to identify and support the children most likely to struggle with the return to school in September 2020.

This protocol presents an evaluation of this new intervention, to understand how it has been delivered and received, and its impact on school attendance. Understanding whether it is effective, and how it might be replicated or improved upon in future will benefit any future delivery or expansion of the programme.

Intervention and Theory of Change

‘**Back to school**’, developed by Worcestershire Children First, is an intensive programme to identify and support the children most likely to struggle with the return to school. It aims for professionals to work together to ensure a timely and proportionate approach to identify any risks and to minimise further delay and impact of non-school attendance. The project will

¹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/892528/Attendance_during_the_coronavirus_COVID-19_outbreak___summary_of_returns_to_11_June.pdf

²<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/covid-19-resources/best-evidence-on-impact-of-school-closures-on-the-attainment-gap/>

³ Widnall, E., Winstone, L., Mars, B., Haworth, C.M.A., & Kidger, J. Young People's Mental Health during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Initial findings from a secondary school survey study in South West England, 24th August 2020, NIHR School for Public Health Research

include having a process in place to share information and to fast track engagement with families. A logic model providing an overview of the intervention is available in Appendix 1.

The project is being led by Worcestershire Children First social care and safeguarding, working in partnership with WCF Education and Early Help, Schools, Worcestershire Health and Care Trust, (providers of our PH/CCG commissioned early help services) and Worcester University. A project management group, established July 2020 has representatives of each agency / service contributing to the project (i.e. children's services, education, early help, schools, health, university).

The project initially set out to work with children and young people who meet the following criteria⁴:

- Less than 70% attendance pre Covid (i.e. there is a school attendance issue)
- None or very little meaningful contact with school or education provider during Covid period
- Have not returned or not returned with any consistency as of September 20

To increase recruitment, this was later expanded to:

- Have not returned or have had less than 70% attendance since the return to school in September 2020

The target cohort includes children from primary and secondary schools of all ages. The programme will accept children who are, or have been in the past, subject to a child protection plan (CP) or child in need plan (CIN) as well as children who have never had a social worker previously.

To avoid duplication with existing services, out of scope will be children who are looked after (who are overseen by the virtual head and have a bespoke child care plan with an educational element already in place), those who have an allocated Education Welfare Officer (EWO) and those subject of early help plans as all these children will already have school attendance as part of their plans and lead professional will be supported to access Worcestershire's "back to school" tool and Emotional Health and Wellbeing (EHWB) programme as part of their wider work with the child and family.

Referrals will be received directly from schools (via an electronic system). This is reliant on communication to stakeholders in a timely and coordinated way to ensure they are in a strong position to identify and work with families (for example the schools' newsletter, DSL network, social work leadership meetings). Referrals go into a spreadsheet to be triaged to determine the appropriate and proportionate pathway of support based on the inclusion criteria and simultaneously risk assessing each individual's circumstances including what (if any) support is already being provided. Triage meetings take place twice weekly and are attended by Early Intervention Family Support, Targeted Family Support and Education Welfare Officer staff.

For children and young people referred but who do not meet the criteria for this project, the LA will refer to and work in collaboration with appropriate services providing targeted support. This will be either by schools directly, who are still expected to fulfil their statutory responsibilities around attendance, or for example the Barnardo's "See Hear Respond" programme which includes a back to school element. For support provided by schools, there

⁴ These criteria are provisional and may be widened if recruitment to the programme is insufficient

will be Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) who will support the school to work with children and families, and address any whole school barriers re-engagement from its pupils.

The intervention offer will aim to address areas that may be impacting on children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing including isolation from peers, loss of routine, increased stress and worry, increased incidence of adverse events such as domestic violence, child abuse or bereavement, loss of support or protective and coping factors, later identification of emerging needs, parental stress, mental health of conflict, economic impacts. It will also look to address anxiety in relation to rebuilding relationships, missed learning, exams or grading affected by time away from school, health concerns and fear of contracting Covid.

Funding will be used to increase staffing levels to be able to provide a service to the anticipated number of children/families who do not return in September 2020. The intervention offer will use the Signs of Safety model of intervention, a strength-based approach already used in Worcestershire's safeguarding work. The intervention offer will include a dedicated worker providing support to each child and parent via regular contact, supporting them to access support including:

- Direct work using a **bespoke return to school Signs of Safety tool** to identify barriers and drivers to enabling the child to attend school. This will include initial assessment of four areas (what works well and what doesn't about being at home and at school) and a danger statement setting out the worst outcome of not attending school. This will help parents who are focused on short term anxieties about the virus or returning to a school routine to consider medium and longer term impacts that not going back to school may have for children's educational or longer term outcomes. This uses the family's language and records the young person's narrative. The tool is used to inform a plan for the family. [This tool will also be available for other professionals in Worcestershire, including early help and social workers]
- Dedicated workers closely supporting children, young people and parents/carers to access a **universally available programme of EHWP and health-based sessions**, provided online (put together by Worcestershire Health & Care Trust). Dedicated workers will support children, young people and parents/carers to identify and access specific sessions relevant to the child's particular plan, and use these as a prompt for discussion with the family. These will cover a range of aspects associated with school return, including:
 - Healthy eating and diet
 - Importance of Sleep
 - Importance of Routine & how to introduce this
 - Beating worries
 - Relaxation techniques - square / bubble breathing
 - Building relationships
 - Coping with change
 - Emotional regulation
 - Anxiety
 - Bereavement
 - ASC - Managing Change
 - Mental Health Impacted by Financial Situation
 - Importance of Exercise
 - Sensory Needs Interactive Session

A key feature underpinning delivery of this intervention is that Signs of Safety is already licensed by the authority and embedded in practice via training to children's social care, including early help, and familiar to partners such as schools.

This enables staff to be able to appropriately use the bespoke Signs of Safety tool to guide children's plans as part of this intervention.

From point of allocation, a focussed piece of work is carried out to identify needs quickly and produce a plan on a page. Case notes are added to this, including a six week review and closure summary.

Staff delivering the intervention will be Early Intervention Family Support Workers (for children up to age 13) and Targeted Family Support workers (for secondary school children). These staff receive monthly supervision as usual from their line managers, as well as peer group supervision / workshop sessions in small groups and a weekly catch up with the team leader. Training for direct workers involves a workshop on the bespoke Signs of Safety tool.

The initial intervention plan also included peer and parent mentors, offering advice and assistance on navigating the education system and understanding the importance of it. However due to wider factors, these elements were not possible to deliver at this time.

Delivery in Worcestershire

Children's services in Worcestershire strongly encouraged families to take up available school places during lockdown. Prior to the Summer holidays in 2020, 37% of children on plans were attending school (Child Protection 48%, Child in Need 33%, Children Looked After 32%).

WCF identified 16 staff for the project across Early Intervention Family Support (n = 10) and Targeted Family Support (n = 6) (from level 2 and 3 services, i.e. early help or complex needs) as dedicated workers to the project. Training on the use of the bespoke Signs of Safety tool began in August 2020.

The project would open up 'Back to school' support to all schools, with focus on the target cohort of children, without charge. In July 2020, 17 schools identified as likely to have children who would meet the project criteria (i.e. those with the highest number of children with either a CiN or CP plan and with the poorest levels of attendance) were contacted. 23 pupils were referred by these initial schools form an initial cohort, enabling support to commence for them prior to the return to school. Following the start of term, all schools in the area were eligible and were provided information on how to refer to the project.

This referral process for schools was open from September 2020 along with communication on the scope of the project. The service will only accept referrals that meet the criteria.

The project was initially expected to run from September 2020 to December 2020, with pre-programme work being undertaken prior to 1st September, so the project will be ready to go live as soon as children are due to return to school. Project delivery was subsequently extended to March 2021, with referrals to be accepted up until 15th January 2021. EHWP sessions were due to start from mid-September and be provided live initially and then available as recorded sessions. Cases will remain open until March 2021 to monitor whether children return to school after the Christmas break.

A referral tracking system has been created to measure the outcomes of the project. The system used by children's services is Liquid Logic. The tracking system includes a dashboard which monitors attendance and whether it continues. This is updated automatically for most schools through directly linking via the child's unique pupil number to the One System.

In the event of further school closures, pupils who are working with the Back to School programme will still have access to school places, and will continue to be supported to access these places or to access virtual education from home.

Impact Evaluation

02/02/2021

Please note that the analysis plan has changed given the current circumstances. As set out in the section 'Requirements to conduct the impact evaluation', we determined a set of conditions that needed to be met to go ahead with the difference-in-differences analysis. In light of the new information and developments, we do not believe these requirements are met and we will thus refrain from conducting the impact evaluation that was originally envisaged.

As we do not consider the parallel trends assumption to hold, we will refrain from conducting the impact evaluation. In light of the third national lockdown it is unlikely that any comparator local authority would continue a trend in school attendance rates similar to Worcestershire in absence of the programme. The lockdown can affect different local authorities differentially, ranging from the quality of online schooling to the exception rules determining which vulnerable children can still attend school in person. All of these factors threaten the validity of our assumptions and make it unlikely that we would be able to obtain a causal estimate of the programme's effect through the difference-in-differences analysis. In addition, schools' recording of attendance might differ significantly during the lockdown due to issues associated with monitoring online attendance.

Research questions

Since the program was designed to support children most likely to struggle with the return to school, the impact evaluation will focus on analysing the effect of the programme on its key aim - school attendance.

- Does 'Back to school' affect the school attendance rates of children and young people involved with the programme compared with children that are not participating in any programme aimed to increase school attendance?

The evaluation will measure both short-term attendance i.e. during the first term after the Summer holidays as well as sustained attendance in the Spring 2021 term.

Design

The design of the analysis is a difference-in-differences (DiD) design. Children within Worcestershire that are not taking part in the programme do not constitute a suitable control group, since their school attendance and the degree to which the schools are worried about their attendance are different. The DiD design allows to identify a suitable control group

outside of Worcestershire, by choosing a local authority with similar trends in school attendance rates and then matching children in that local authority to children in the Back to School programme based on a set of characteristics thought to correlate with attendance. The unit of analysis is at the individual level to optimise the power to detect an effect within the constraints of the project.

Children taking part in the programme in Worcestershire will be matched to children with similar characteristics in another local authority not implementing the 'Back to school' programme. More details on the matching can be found under 'Matching' below.

We will measure the effect of the programme on school attendance rates for children in the Autumn and Spring term of the 2020/2021 school year. Our primary analysis will focus on the immediate effect of 'Back to school' on school attendance rates during the Autumn term. This will be followed by a follow-up analysis in May 2021 to explore whether there are any longer-term effects of the programme on school attendance that have not been discovered in the primary analysis.

Identification strategy		Difference-in-differences
Unit of analysis		Individual (child/young person)
Primary outcome	variable	School attendance
	measure (instrument, scale)	Percentage of sessions attended out of all the school sessions the child was expected to attend during the term (continuous variable). ⁵

Matching

A DiD analysis compares the change over time in school attendance rates for children participating in the programme ('treatment group'), with those of children not part of the programme in another local authority ('comparator group'). The identifying assumption in a DiD analysis is parallel trends in outcome variables prior to the intervention. This requires the trends in school attendance rates for children in the treatment and comparator groups to be as similar as possible in the terms before the implementation of the "Back to School" programme.

We will choose the comparator local authority according to the following criteria:

- is using Signs of Safety,
- is not introducing a programme similar to 'Back to School'⁶,
- is in the same Covid-19 tier at the beginning of the school year,
- and have similar trends in aggregate absence statistics (matching on unauthorised absences) as Worcestershire over the 2019/2020 school year.

The identifying assumption in a DiD analysis is parallel trends in outcome variables prior to the intervention. We match on local authority level trends in the percentage of unauthorised sessions missed in state-funded primary, secondary and special schools (from the Local

⁵ This excludes prolonged absences due to e.g. sickness or self-isolation.

⁶ We will confirm this directly with the local authority.

Authority Interactive Tool⁷) over the school years of 2015/16 to 2018/19. We match on the shortest Euclidean distance between the data for each potential comparator local authority and Worcestershire. The data is the change in the outcome variable between one year and the next. The lowest scoring local authority whose trend is also convincing when inspected visually will be the first preference for matching.

Once data from Worcestershire and the chosen comparator local authority is obtained, we match each individual child in the 'Back to school' programme with other school-aged children in another local authority. We will choose matches out of the group of children in the comparator local authority that would meet the eligibility criteria of the back to school programme. This means we will only consider children that

- have had less than 70% attendance in the spring term of the 2019/20 year.
- are not looked after, have an allocated EWO or are subject to an early help plan. These are the same out of scope restrictions that apply to children in Worcestershire to be eligible for the programme
- The child is not participating in any similar programmes if data on this is available.

Once we have established this cohort, we will match children within the treatment and comparator group via coarsened exact matching⁸ (CEM). We do so in order to decrease the imbalance in covariates between the treated and control individuals, allowing the identification of a better causal estimate. We chose CEM to match at an individual level because it allows analysts to specify ex ante the maximum acceptable imbalance. CEM works by first temporarily coarsening the control variables so that the continuous variables are cut into categories (e.g. age as an integer coarsened to 0-5, 5-10, 10-15, 15-18 years) and categorical variables are combined (e.g. school year coarsened to primary school, senior school). All individuals are then assigned to strata with the same coarsened control variables. Strata which do not have at least one treatment and control individual are dropped. We specify the coarseness of the variables as:

- Gender (included as a binary indicators: 0=Not recorded/unborn, 1= male, 2=female, 3=indeterminate, 4=Missing)
- Age (0-4, 5-12, 13+ years)
- Free school meal eligibility (included as a binary indicator: 0=No, 1=Yes)
- Disabled (included as a binary indicator: 0=No, 1=Yes)

The coarseness is only used for matching purposes and we describe our operationalisation of covariates for inclusion in the regression below. We report the proportion matched and the multivariate imbalance score which measures imbalance with respect to the joint distribution, including all interactions, of the covariates (Iacus, King and Porro, 2011).⁹ We then estimate the difference-in-differences regression weighted by the weights that equalise the number of treated and control individuals within each CEM stratum We refrain from matching on previous trends or levels in school attendance rates beyond the eligibility criteria detailed above, as this would risk introducing bias due to regression to the mean.¹⁰

⁷ Department for Education: Local authority interactive tool (LAIT)

⁸ Iacus, S., M., King, G. & Porro, G. (2018, April 12). CEM: Software for Coarsened Exact Matching. CRAN. <https://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/cem/vignettes/cem.pdf>

⁹ Iacus, Stefano M., Gary King and Giuseppe Porro. 2011. "Multivariate Matching Methods that are Monotonic Imbalance Bounding." *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 106:345–361. <http://gking.harvard.edu/files/abs/cem-math-abs.shtml>.

¹⁰ See e.g. Chabé-Ferret (2017), available under:

https://www.tse-fr.eu/sites/default/files/TSE/documents/doc/wp/2017/wp_tse_824.pdf

Sample size / MDES calculations

We refrain from including power calculations for this analysis because sample size is constrained ex ante by the project modalities and we would need to make too many assumptions for power calculations to be useful.

Outcome measures

To answer the research question, the outcome measure is: school attendance (percentage of sessions attended out of all school sessions the child was expected to attend in the term). We do not consider any authorised absences in the denominator of the calculation.

Data on school attendance will be provided by WCF and the comparator local authority. This will include data on school attendance in the 2019/20 school year as well as the first term of the 2020/2021 school year. If children do not attend school due to Covid-19, i.e. self-isolation measures or sickness, we will exclude these days from the analysis and the denominator of all school sessions the child was expected to attend. If schools are shut during the term and children will have to attend virtual lessons, we will exclude these days from the analysis as well as Worcestershire is unable to track attendance during online lessons.

Analysis plan

Primary Analysis:

Prior to analysis, each individual participating in the programme will be matched with another individual not participating in the programme, based on trends in school attendance rates. This matching having been completed, we will estimate the effect of the intervention, DiD, on school attendance rates, Y_{igt} :

$$Y_{igt} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 B2S_g + \beta_2 Term_t + \beta_3 DiD_{igt} + \beta_4 X_{it} + \beta_5 Y_{it-1} + \epsilon_{ist} \quad (1)$$

Where

- β_0 is a regression constant
- $B2S_g$ is a binary indicator of whether the child participates in the 'Back to school' programme
- $Term_t$ are dummy variables to capture time trends in school attendance rates common to all children
- DiD_{gt} is a dummy variable indicating whether a child in local authority g was participating in the 'Back to school' programme in term t
- X_{it} is a vector of child-level characteristics
- Y_{it-1} is the school attendance rate of the previous term
- ϵ_{ist} is an error term, denoting standard errors

The main analysis will apply a linear regression model to obtain an estimate of the impact of 'Back to School' on school attendance rates. The results will be evaluated against the conventional 5 percent significance level.

Secondary Analysis

Delayed and sustained effects of 'Back to School'

Once data for the Spring term 2021 becomes available, we will investigate whether 'Back to school' has medium-term effects that go beyond the first school term. It is also possible that the work with the social worker will only have a noticeable effect towards the end of the school term, and would thus be masked by the lower school attendance in the first part of the term. The study of the delayed effect of 'Back to School' should reveal any effect that is stronger in the medium-term.

Sensitivity Analysis

DiD involves multiple observations of the control and treatment groups over time. This can create serial correlation where errors in one period transfer to another. Serial correlation can be a particularly important issue in the DiD context because of the inclusion of fairly long time series, and dependent variables which are commonly used are typically highly positively serially correlated. Three pre-intervention periods are available but previous attendance is likely to be highly correlated. Serial correlation underestimates the standard errors, meaning that we have too much confidence in the result, and we get a higher rate of false positives. We check for serial correlation using the Breusch-Godfrey test.¹¹ If the test reveals that there is serial correlation, we will run multilevel models with standard errors clustered at the individual level to counteract individual-level serial correlation. We will consider whether the multilevel model produces a statistically different and practically different estimate of the treatment effect to the treatment effect estimated from equation (1) (where we take practically different to be 20% above or below).

Covariates

In order to increase the precision of our estimates, we include the following individual-level covariates (where they are available).

- Gender
- Age at beginning of term
- Free school meal eligibility (included as a binary indicator: 0=No, 1=Yes)
- Disabled (included as a binary indicator: 0=No, 1=Yes)
- Individual-level fixed effects

Gender and disability will be included as covariates if an ordinary least squares regression (OLS) is run instead of a fixed effects model.¹²

Handling missing data

In the case of missing data, we will consider the possible reasons for its missingness and undertake statistical analyses to determine whether there are any patterns relating to other recorded covariates or the intervention variable. We will consider dropping a variable which has >30% of the data missing. We conduct null imputation where data is missing experimentally at random.

¹¹ We consider there to be serial correlation if the p-value of the Breusch-Godfrey test is below 0.05.

¹² In a fixed effects model any time invariant covariates will drop out.

Requirements to conduct the impact evaluation

If we fail to find a suitable comparator local authority that is able to provide us with school attendance data, we do not expect parallel trends in Worcestershire and the selected comparator local authority to continue in the absence of the program, or the number of children that are accepted into the Back to School programme is below 100, we will not conduct any impact evaluation but will focus on the IPE instead since we cannot provide a robust impact evaluation in that case.

Implementation and Process Evaluation

Aims

Drawing on the implementation framework outlined by Durlak and DuPre¹³, the implementation and process evaluation will provide a more detailed understanding of the implementation of this intervention, including characteristics of those referred to and receiving the intervention (reach and participant responsiveness), and the support they received (fidelity, dosage). It will also consider how the intervention differs from other services and support (differentiation). In addition it will aim to understand the mechanisms, including facilitators and barriers to engagement and delivery, as well perceived positive or negative outcomes and helpfulness of the different elements. Finally it will look at the cost of delivery of the intervention. This will inform refinement of the logic model, future delivery and wider rollout, and components to measure in future evaluation.

The research questions this implementation and process evaluation will address are as follows.

1. Implementation

- a. What is the number, characteristics and engagement of children and families referred to and supported by the 'Back to School' intervention?
- b. What support was received by children and families supported by the 'Back to School' intervention?

2. Mechanisms

- a. What are the perceived facilitators and barriers to engagement and delivery of the 'Back to School' intervention?
- b. What are the perceived outcomes of the 'Back to School' intervention (including any perceived unintended or negative consequences)?
- c. How helpful were the different elements of the 'Back to School' intervention perceived to be?

3. Differentiation

- a. What was the experience and support received by children and families who did not receive the 'Back to School' intervention?

4. Cost

- a. What is the cost per pupil of delivering the 'Back to School' intervention?

Research question 1 will be addressed using referral logs and support logs. Research question 2 will be addressed through a survey of families as well as interviews with school staff, direct workers, parents and pupils, including families who withdrew engagement from the service. Research question 3 will be addressed through interviews with school staff in

¹³ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10464-008-9165-0>

Worcestershire, families in Worcestershire who were referred but triaged to other support, as well as professionals in the comparison local authority. Research question 4 will be addressed through a survey of an identified lead in all participating schools, and the programme lead at the local authority.

If the impact evaluation does not meet the required criteria to proceed, then interviews with professionals in the comparison local authority will not go ahead.

Design and Methods

Sample

We will collect anonymous delivery data from referral and support logs in relation to all referrals and children participating in the intervention. A short, anonymous online survey will also be shared with all parents and all secondary age young people participating in the intervention. The number of expected respondents will depend on recruitment to the intervention. Based on estimated total capacity of the service, this could be up to 200 families.

We will also recruit **two** primary schools and **two** secondary schools which have children participating in the intervention for more in-depth data collection. We aim to include schools which have sufficient numbers of pupils on the programme (i.e. three pupils per school on the programme as a minimum, but ideally more than this assuming not all families will take part in the research), and to include both schools targeted early in the initial programme recruitment as well as those who referred children to the programme later on. These school selection criteria will be reviewed and refined once we have information about how many pupils on the programme there are per school and what the characteristics of these schools are.

In each school, we will undertake phone interviews with up to **three** school staff (e.g. heads, designated safeguarding leads, teachers). We will also undertake phone or in-person interviews with up to **three** parents from families receiving support through the intervention from each school. For each of the secondary schools we would also look to speak with up to **three** pupils. We would ensure this sample of families includes a range of ages, families who are and are not already open to statutory services, and those who have been re-engaged with school as well as those who haven't. This would be a total of up to **12** school staff, **12** parents and **six** young people. If we are unable to recruit sufficient families from the four schools selected, we will broaden our criteria to recruit families from other schools.

In addition, we would seek to undertake phone interviews with up to **six** 'Back to School' direct workers.

We would also seek to speak to families who are not receiving the Back to School intervention. This will include up to **four** parents and **four** (secondary age) pupils who were referred but triaged to other types of support (Barnardos or school support as usual). It will also include up to **four** parents and **four** (secondary age) pupils who were accepted to the programme but withdrew their engagement.

If the impact evaluation is able to proceed, to understand practice in the comparison local authority, we would seek to speak with up to **four** professionals across school and local authority staff within that local authority.

	Primary School 1	Primary School 2	Secondary School 1	Secondary School 2	Total
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School Staff	3	3	3	3	12
Parents	3	3	3	3	12
Pupils	-	-	3	3	6
Direct workers					6
Differentiation					
Parents referred but triaged to other types of support					4
Pupils referred but triaged to other types of support					4
Parents accepted to the programme but withdrew engagement					4
Pupils accepted to the programme but withdrew engagement					4
Professionals in the comparison local authority					4
Total					56 Interviews

Identification and recruitment of schools will begin in **December 2020**. Data collection will be undertaken in **February 2021** to allow time for the intervention to embed.

Recruitment

Recruitment of schools

Four schools participating in the programme (two primary and two secondary) will be selected by the research team based on their characteristics (i.e. primary or secondary, early or late targeted schools), and approached by a researcher to discuss participation.

Recruitment of professionals

Staff across a range of roles within schools (e.g. head, designated safeguarding lead, teachers) will be invited to participate in interviews via a gatekeeper at each school. Intervention professionals will be identified and approached via the intervention coordinator. Professionals in the comparison local authority will be approached via a gatekeeper identified at the local authority. Gatekeepers will share the information sheet with staff. Should they agree to participate, staff contact details will be provided to the research team via secure transfer (e.g. egress). Professionals will be provided with written and verbal information about the study, and the opportunity to ask questions. These will inform participants about what the study is about, what it will involve for them, how the information they provide will be used, that taking part is voluntary and the point up until which they can withdraw. Those agreeing to participate will be asked to provide audio recorded consent at the beginning of their interview, confirming they have been provided information and asked questions, and they are aware participation is voluntary.

Recruitment of families

Families will be notified about the research by the 'Back to School' coordinator. A letter from the 'Back to School' coordinator advising families whether or not they have been accepted onto the project will notify them that they may be contacted by a researcher, and directing families to inform the 'Back to School' coordinator if they don't want to be. The researcher

will work with the 'Back to School' coordinator to identify families who have not opted out of being contacted. This will include 'Back to School' families from case study schools as well as families who have been triaged to other support and those who have been referred to 'Back to School' but subsequently withdrawn their engagement. Contact details of selected families will be provided to the researchers by the gatekeeper via secure transfer (e.g. egress), and where applicable the family's direct worker will be asked to discuss with the family about hearing from a researcher in order to answer any initial questions they might have about what the research would involve. The researcher will speak with the parent, and for secondary pupils ask parents to ask for the young person's agreement to speak with them.

Researchers will provide written and verbal information about the study to all family members invited to participate in interviews, and the opportunity to ask questions. Information sheets will be tailored to ensure information is accessible and understandable to different ages. These will inform participants about what the study is about, what it will involve for them, how the information they provide will be used, that taking part is voluntary and the point up until which they can withdraw. The researcher will ensure that family individual needs, such as learning disabilities, are taken into account through discussing with the direct worker in advance of any interview. For families where literacy or language may affect understanding of the written research materials, the researcher or where applicable the direct worker will be available to explain the materials verbally in plain English, and check for understanding. Those agreeing to participate will be asked to provide audio recorded consent at the beginning of the interview, confirming they have been provided information and asked questions, and they are aware participation is voluntary. For under-16s parents will also be asked to provide a recorded statement of consent in advance of the young person's interview. If families initially identified choose not to take part when contacted, further potential families will be identified via the gatekeeper.

The survey will be shared with one parent per family, as well as secondary age young people via the direct workers. If families do not have access to the internet or a suitable device, the direct worker will be able to support the family to access a device for the family to use, allowing the family members privacy to complete the survey. The survey introduction will include information about the research and participants' rights as discussed above, as well as contact details to ask questions. The direct worker will also be able to answer questions or signpost support from the research team. Participants will be asked to indicate their consent to participate as part of the survey.

Data Collection

Admin Data

Admin Data will be collected at the aggregate level from referral and support logs held by the Local Authority. This data is already collected as part of the routine monitoring of the intervention and is therefore readily available. The items we will request include:

- Number of referrals
- Proportion of referrals accepted to the programme
- What other support offered to cases not accepted to the programme (e.g. school or Barnardos)
- Characteristics of referrals and children accepted to the programme (attendance, age, gender, ethnicity, statutory involvement)
- Number of families accessing each type of support through the programme
- Other types of support referred to outside of the programme

- Engagement with the programme (i.e. how many families have withdrawn engagement)

Interviews

Interviews lasting 30-60 minutes each will be conducted with up to six intervention staff, up to 12 school staff, up to 12 intervention parents and up to six intervention young people in February. Interviews will also be carried out with up to four parents and four young people who have been triaged to other support, and four parents and four young people from families who have withdrawn engagement from the service. Interviews will also be carried out with up to four professionals in the comparison local authority. Interviews will use a semi-structured topic guide developed based on the research questions and tailored according to the respondent. Interviews will take place by telephone or video link and recorded using a password protected recording device or GDPR-compliant recording software (zoom recordings saved locally rather than on the cloud). Interviews will ask about the different elements of the intervention, including the bespoke Signs of Safety tool, recorded or live online sessions, and the task-centred approach (as opposed to whole system thinking). They will also ask about perceived facilitators and barriers to engagement and delivery (including reasons families withdrew engagement), as well as perceived outcomes. Interviews will also ask school staff and families triaged to other support within Worcestershire, as well as professionals in the comparison authority, about what support is offered to those not receiving the intervention. For those in Worcestershire, this will include whether families not part of the intervention programme accessed the universally available online sessions and their experience of receiving that support without a direct worker.

Survey

A short online **survey** will be developed using Qualtrics software. The survey will last 5 minutes and will ask for parent and secondary pupils to report on different elements of the intervention and how helpful they were, as well as attitudes and perceived helpfulness in relation to the intervention. This will be shared by the direct worker in February 2021, with a reminder sent out three weeks later. The survey will provide a wider breadth of views on the different elements on the programme, to be triangulated with the in-depth individual accounts provided by the interviews carried out with a smaller number of individuals.

Cost

Cost will be measured in terms of all time and resources necessary to implement the programme¹⁴. Costs to the local authority, schools and the families will be considered.

We will share an online survey with a designated lead in all participating schools and the programme lead at the local authority. We will measure the categories below, and where possible identify whether these are prerequisites, start-up (one-off) costs or recurring costs. Where possible we will also identify whether there is overlapping use or prolonged life use of any goods.

We will seek to establish actual rather than intended costs, by collecting this data from people involved in the study. However, where this data is not forthcoming, we will need to rely on the forecast or anticipated costs. This will be based on total cost to local authorities if they were to implement the intervention independently of funding and evaluation. Cost data will be requested in February 2021.

¹⁴https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Evaluation/Setting_up_an_Evaluation/Cost_Evaluation_Guidance_2019.12.11.pdf

Survey data on costs will be supplemented and triangulated with cost data submitted to WWCS's programme team by Worcestershire.

Local authority and School

i) Personnel for the implementation of the programme, i.e. how much local authority staff time is used for delivery of the programme, and for which staff roles, including any supervision, cover or admin time, and whether any school staff time is used e.g. for making referrals or corresponding with direct workers. ii) Personnel during training for the implementation of the programme i.e. how much local authority staff time is allocated for delivering or receiving training, and for which staff roles, and whether any school staff time is used? iii) Programme costs e.g. fees and costs for programme components such as training packages.

iv) Facilities, equipment and materials e.g. resources, printed materials, office supplies, computers, software, premises costs.

v) Other programme inputs or hidden costs.

vi) We will also seek to collect the cost (in terms of time and money) of a child missing school and needing follow-up, which can be regarded as the cost averted if the programme has an impact. This will be based on a triangulation of available literature on the cost of missing school.

Families

We will measure cost to family based on cash costs incurred which are not reimbursed (e.g. travel to appointments if these are in person), and time to engage with the intervention.

Data Collection Schedule

Method	Sample Size	Timeline
Admin Data	All cases	March 2021
Survey	All intervention parents and secondary pupils - one each per family (up to 200) Cost survey	February 2021 February 2021
Interviews	Direct workers (6) School staff (12) Intervention parents (12) Intervention pupils (6) Parents triaged to other support (4) Pupils triaged to other support (4) Parents who withdrew engagement (4) Pupils who withdrew engagement (4) Professionals in comparison authority (4)	February 2021 February 2021

Analysis

Preparation and analysis of qualitative data

Interviews will be recorded, transcribed and pseudonymised prior to analysis.

Qualitative analysis of interview data will use NVivo software and follow a thematic analysis approach. This will involve data familiarisation, checking accuracy of transcription, labelling the data with descriptive codes and developing themes which describe patterns across the data to answer the pre-specified research questions. Analysis will look for patterns, consistencies and inconsistencies across different informants, sites and time points that might be informative for the research questions.

The following steps will be taken to ensure rigor in the analysis and reporting of qualitative data:

- Confidence that the findings are an accurate reflection of participant experience will be ensured through presentation of examples of participant responses using quotes, and triangulation between different informants and data collection methods.
- The degree to which findings are transferable to other contexts will be considered through detailed description of contextual factors, and collection of data from a range of informants to gather a range of perspectives.
- Transparent reporting of the research and analysis process will ensure the study methods are clear and repeatable.
- When interpreting findings, consideration will be given to contrasting and inconsistent accounts, as well as findings from previous research using the intervention model.

Analysis and triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data

Admin data will be presented descriptively to illustrate implementation and answer Research Question 1. Survey data will be presented descriptively to illustrate perceptions of the intervention. Survey findings will be triangulated with qualitative findings to answer Research Question 2 in relation to perceptions of the different elements of the intervention, facilitators, barriers and perceived outcomes.

Qualitative analysis of interviews from professionals in the comparison authority, as well as school staff and families triaged to other support in Worcestershire will be used to answer Research Question 3.

Analysis of cost data

We will seek to establish an overall cost of the programme and put the overall cost in context to the provided funding. We will seek to establish actual rather than intended costs, by collecting data directly from people involved in the study. However, where this data is not forthcoming, we will need to rely on the forecast or anticipated costs. This will be based on total cost to local authorities if they were to implement the intervention independently of funding and evaluation.

Personnel costs will be estimated by multiplying the number of hours by a typical hourly wage for an employee at Worcestershire in that role. We will aim to report both the

Worcestershire hourly wage and the average UK hourly wage of the role that these positions correspond to in national statistics, to allow for a comparison of costs with other programmes and across multiple settings.

Family time will be valued as half of the average wage of working adults in the UK (reporting both national average and Worcestershire wages) and set at the average wage of working adults in the UK in sensitivity analysis¹⁵.

All other costs will be collected as detailed in the data collection section. The resulting overall costs will be broken down as follows:

- costs to the LA, costs to the schools and costs to the families involved
- monetary
- fixed and variable costs

In addition to calculating the overall programme costs, we will look to establish a unit cost per school and per participant, i.e. per pupil per year estimate, based on the number of pupils involved in the programme. This will provide a cost measure that will be more easily comparable to the costs of similar programmes. The estimated cost of the programme will also be compared to the allocated funding for implementing the programme.

Finally, we will try to report on the minimum cost effective effect size (MCEES). The MCEES will give an indication of how large the effect on school attendance of pupils involved in the programme must be to make the intervention cost effective. To calculate the MCEES, we will calculate the quantified benefits of the programme required to reach the level of the costs calculated as described above. To quantify the programme’s benefits we will use a human capital approach and consider the lifetime impact of increased school attendance and the potential additional beneficial impact if the programme prevented exclusions from school. We will consider reduced costs to the local authority (e.g. reduced need of support for formerly excluded children), the young person’s well-being and future income as benefits of the programme.

Ethics

Ethical review has been provided by the What Works for Children’s Social Care Research Ethics Committee in November 2020.

The project lead(s) will take ownership of ongoing monitoring of ethical issues throughout the research lifecycle. This will include regular contact with the local authority during fieldwork periods, to allow ethical concerns to be raised and discussed, as well as regular review points within the research team, following the completion of each data collection phase for each wave. Should any unexpected ethical issues arise during the project, the research team will take advice from the WWCS Research Ethics Committee.

Ethical Issue	IPE Mitigation	Impact Evaluation Mitigation
Confidentiality	Confidentiality will be ensured through removal of identifying information	All data will be pseudonymised prior to being

¹⁵ Including the opportunity cost follows HM Treasury guidance. Fujiwara, D. & Campbell, R. (2011). Valuation Techniques for Social Cost-Benefit Analysis: Stated Preference, Revealed Preference and Subjective Well-Being Approaches. A Discussion of the Current Issues. HM Treasury & Department for Work and Pensions, p.62.

	<p>before analysis and ensuring no individual, family or team can be identified in the reporting of results. Participants will be notified of this, and that their answers will in no way affect their treatment, either by their employer in the case of staff, or children's services or education in the case of families. Given numbers are quite small, care will be taken in reporting to ensure participants cannot be individually identified.</p>	<p>sent to WWCS, and therefore very unlikely to be able to be identified by researchers at WWCS. The outputs will be aggregate statistics and will be checked for statistical disclosure (e.g. mask cells with smaller than 10 observations). This will be explained on the privacy notice that will be available on WWCS's website.</p>
<p>Risk of harm or distress</p>	<p>Families and professionals will be made aware prior to participating that their responses will be pseudonymised and remain confidential with the exception that any disclosure of harm or risk of harm will need to be reported to the family's social worker, direct worker, or school for safeguarding purposes. All researchers collecting direct data will be subject to DBS checks, and trained in safeguarding procedures.</p> <p>Framing of sensitive topics will be taken into consideration in the development of the topic guide, working in collaboration with social workers within WWCS as well as our Young Advisors Group to ensure framing is appropriate. If the sensitive nature of any content of the evaluation does lead to any participant becoming distressed the evaluator will assist them in seeking support through their direct worker, or by signposting any other local support services as agreed with the LA, and remind them of the option to pause, discontinue or withdraw. In the event that the data collected suggest that the intervention is causing harm, this will be reported to those responsible for programme delivery.</p> <p>Directly collected data will be collected via phone or video interviews, and online survey, so no risk to researcher safety is anticipated. There are no anticipated emotional effects for</p>	<p>The data used is administrative data which is collected/created in the course of day do day children's social work or school work, and no further collection of data is required. The data is being used for statistical research to understand whether a practice model is contributing towards improved school attendance. We believe that "the reasonable person" would find the use of data in this way acceptable, and would not cause them any harm or distress.</p> <p>The low risk of harm mostly comes from the possibility of harm if the individual were identified (very unlikely) following a data breach (also very unlikely). We will mitigate the risk of a data breach through following detailed data handling procedures. What Works for Children's Social Care is in the process of updating its data handling policies and procedures - these will be detailed in this protocol before publication.</p>

	<p>researchers but they will be able to receive support from their manager and employer if any concerns arise.</p>	
Informed Consent	<p>All participants will have the opportunity to ask questions, will be asked to give consent to participate and will be made aware that participation is optional. For young people under 16 a parent or carer will provide consent in addition to the young person's own assent to participate.</p> <p>Procedures for families affected by learning disability or difficulty understanding study information and written materials are set out in the sample recruitment section above.</p>	<p>Due to the nature and scale of the data collection, it is not possible for us to gain informed consent from research participants. However, we will publish a privacy notice providing details of the study.</p>
Right to withdraw	<p>All participants will be made aware they have the right to discontinue participation or withdraw at any time, including withdrawing their data at any point before aggregated analysis has been commenced (i.e. end of Feb 2021). Contact details will be provided so that participants can directly request this.</p>	<p>In our privacy notice we will provide mechanisms for individuals to withdraw their data from the study, should they wish.</p>
Burden on staff	<p>Burden on gatekeepers and staff providing administrative data will be minimised wherever possible by ensuring only essential information and tasks are requested of them. We are working closely with the project leads at the Local Authority who will be the primary gatekeepers for contacting participants and have time for evaluation factored in as part of their roles. Sharing the survey link will be a low-burden task for direct workers given the small number of cases they will each hold. Support will be provided for direct workers and gatekeepers should families have questions about the research they are unable to answer. The administrative data we will be requesting is data already collected as part of the project.</p> <p>Researchers will be flexible on the scheduling of interviews, to minimise burden on participants.</p>	
Feedback for participants	<p>A short accessible summary of the final research report will be publically available for participants to access.</p>	

Registration

We will register the study with the Open Science Framework (OSF) before any outcome data is obtained.

Data protection

For the Implementation and Process evaluation, qualitative and survey data will be collected and processed on the basis of informed consent. Recordings will be made using a password protected recording device or GDPR-compliant recording software (zoom recordings saved locally rather than on the cloud) and stored in an encrypted hard drive in a secure location. Recordings will be transferred via Egress to a GDPR compliant provider with whom we have a data privacy agreement in place for transcription. Transcripts will be pseudonymised and stored separately from any personally identifying information such as participant contact details. Data will be stored for two years after the final report, and then securely deleted.

Individual level admin data will be pseudonymised before transfer to WWCS. We will not request any 'instant identifiers' (that would allow us to point to an individual in the dataset) or 'meaningful identifiers' (which would allow identifying someone through linking the data to another dataset, beyond the local authorities administrative datasets). We will require 'meaningless identifiers' (data variables used within the local authorities dataset or datasets, but have no meaning beyond these datasets' boundaries) to track individuals over time. The data will be processed on the basis of legitimate interest. Individuals that form part of the treatment or comparison group will be contacted by the local authority and provided with information on the evaluation as well as guidance on how to withdraw their data from the research.

Contact information for staff will be shared by a gatekeeper to WWCS via secure transfer (e.g. egress) on the basis of informed verbal consent, obtained via a gatekeeper in the school or local authority. Following a letter from the local authority notifying them about the research at the point of entry to the programme, contact information for families who have not opted out of being contacted and who have been identified to be invited to participate in the research will be shared by the local authority gatekeeper with WWCS via secure transfer (e.g. egress).

The section below refers to the impact evaluation and is structured according to the guidance given by the Information Commissioner's Office, which "covers the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) as it applies in the UK, tailored by the Data Protection Act 2018".¹⁶

Principles of the GDPR

Principle (a): Lawfulness, fairness and transparency

1. Lawfulness:

The legal basis for What Works for Children's Social Care processing the data is legitimate interest.

¹⁶ Information Commissioner's Office, Guide to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-data-protection/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/>

Legitimate interest is a three-part test:

1. Purpose test: are you pursuing a legitimate interest?

We are a charity, whose purpose is to improve the evidence base in children's social care. We consider the processing of the data to be in our legitimate interests because it will enable us to produce research in this area and in particular in relation to the Covid-19 response, which will benefit local authorities, in particular senior leaders who make decisions about introducing new programmes to address the effects of Covid-19, as well as the Department for Education in future funding decisions.

1. Necessity test: is the processing necessary for that purpose?

The processing is necessary for the purpose because processing individual-level data allows us to conduct analysis which is better powered to detect the impact of Back to School, and which allows us to better control for the circumstances of the individual which may affect the outcome. Both of these factors mean that we are more likely to be able to provide meaningful research which can be used to inform practice, with downstream effects for children involved in statutory social care.

1. Balancing test: do the individual's interests override the legitimate interest

We will publish a privacy notice on our website to give general notice of this processing. While the data is quite sensitive and on a population which includes vulnerable children, we will not be using identifiable IDs and the data will be stored securely. We believe this processing falls within generally socially acceptable uses of this kind of data - it is scientific research in the public interest by a charity and for the benefit of a vulnerable group. Alongside the privacy notice, we include a form which individuals can fill in to uphold their individual data rights.

We therefore believe that the individuals' interests do not override our legitimate interest in this processing.

The legal basis for processing special category data is that it is necessary for archiving, scientific, historical research or statistical purposes (point (e) of section 10 of the DPA which refers to (j) (archiving, research and statistics) of Article 9(2) of the GDPR). The project meets condition (4) in Part 1 of Schedule 1:

(a) is necessary for archiving purposes, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes,

This processing constitutes scientific research as it will be used to create evidence on pre-defined, specific hypotheses around what works to improve outcomes for children affected by Covid-19 school closures and who have already had low attendance rates prior to Covid-19.

(b) is carried out in accordance with Article 89(1) of the GDPR (as supplemented by section 19)

Organisational and Technical Arrangements

"Those safeguards shall ensure that technical and organisational measures are in place in particular in order to ensure respect for the principle of data minimisation. Those measures may include pseudonymisation provided that those purposes can be fulfilled in that manner."

The data will be pseudo-anonymised i.e. it can no longer be attributed to a specific data subject without the use of additional information. We are not requesting any 'instant

identifiers' (e.g. name or address) or 'meaningful identifiers' (identifiers that allow linking to other datasets).

See "Organisational and technical arrangements".

Safeguards (DPA 2018 Section 19)

In the UK, the requirements of Article 89(1) GDPR will not be met unless the provisions of Section 19 DPA 2018 are also complied with. We have no reason to believe that the research will cause damage or distress (and certainly not substantial damage or distress) to the children or young people - the analysis requires no extra involvement of the children or young people. The data has already been collected in the course of day-to-day work with the child / young person and their family. The processing and presentation of evidence is unlikely to have distressing effects because we protect against identification of the individual and also against statistical disclosure (following the ONS standard rules outlined in the Approved Researcher training). The research is not being carried out for the purposes of measures or decisions with respect to a particular data subject but looks at the effect of SofS on the cohort as a whole.

(c)is in the public interest.

The work is intended to support work towards high standards of quality of social work practice which affects a substantial section of the public.

2. Fairness:

ICO's guidance says fairness means "you should only handle personal data in ways that people would reasonably expect and not use it in ways that have unjustified adverse effects on them". This data is being used for statistical research to understand whether a practice model is working and contribute towards improvements in public services. We believe that "the reasonable person" would find the use of data in this way acceptable.

3. Transparency:

This will be covered below in the section on the right to be informed. We will ensure that privacy notices are written in clear and plain language. We will also ensure that notices have a Flesch-Kincaid grade level of 7 to ensure that either older children who are able to object by themselves can do so and that the notices are accessible to all parents.

Principle b): Purpose Limitation

This data will only be used to answer the research questions in this document, as part of a general purpose to increase the evidence base about how SofS affects the outcomes of children / young people and their families involved in social care. They will not be used for any other purpose, other than usual statistical checks to ensure the accuracy of the data.

This data will only be used to increase the evidence base about how Back to School affects the outcomes of children / young people and their families with previously low attendance rates. They will not be used for any other purpose, other than usual statistical checks to ensure the accuracy of the data.

Principle c): Data Minimisation

We have only requested data that is adequate, relevant and limited to what is necessary to fulfil the purpose of this project i.e. to build the evidence base on the programme and responding to Covid-19 school closures. Broadly speaking, we can classify the data requested into two groups, broadly individual-level and local authority level variables. The individual-level variables are sourced from local authority administrative datasets, and local

authority level variables are sourced from public data e.g. the Local Authority Interactive Tool (LAIT).

Individual-level variables

- Outcome measures which are necessary to measure whether Back to School was successful;
- Other individual-level variables which we expect to influence the outcomes. Not being able to include these variables limits the scientific value of this research because they are likely moderators of social care outcomes.

Local authority level variables

- Local authority level variables which we expect to influence the outcomes.

Principle d): Accuracy

The local authorities spend considerable time cleaning the administrative data so that it is suitable for data returns to the Department, and we are requesting only data that is in such returns (for example, the LAIT, CIN Census, school census). We will conduct usual checks on all 23 24 variables used to validate data quality. Please see the “Handling missing data” for our approach to missing data in the administrative datasets.

Principle e): Storage limitation

WWCSC will transfer its data to an externally managed data archive (details are being finalised and this protocol will be updated accordingly) and keep this data indefinitely. This is permitted under GDPR, provided it is for: archiving purposes in the public interest; scientific or historical research purposes; or statistical purposes. WWCSC will delete any copies of 25 the data it holds outside of the archive once the data has been successfully transferred to the archive, and it has been two years after publication of the final analysis, to allow for follow up robustness checks

Principle f): Integrity and confidentiality (Security)

See “Data security arrangements”.

Principle g): Accountability principle

The Executive Director of What Works for Children’s Social Care and Principal Investigator for this research (Dr. Michael Sanders) will be ultimately responsible for the conduct of the research. Other details are below in the accountability and governance section.

Individuals’ rights under the GDPR

The right to be informed

WWCSC will publish a privacy notice on its website detailing how the processing will be done. As this data is indirectly collected and for “scientific or historical research purposes” as well as “statistical purposes”, WWCSC is relying on an exemption to the requirement to individually inform participants as it would “prevent or seriously impair the achievement of the purposes for processing”

This is the case because:

- It would require WWCSC, which is part of a not-for-profit organisation to expend considerable resources to mail a large number of individuals thus leaving less resources to undertake the processing;

- It would require re-identifying the individuals via their addresses, which is data WWCSA does not have access to.

The right to access, rectification, erasure, restriction of processing and to object

Individuals have the right to access their individual data and supplementary information. The right of access allows individuals to be aware of and verify the lawfulness of the processing. Individuals are entitled to obtain:

- confirmation that their data is being processed;
- access to their individual data; and
- other supplementary information

If an individual wishes to access this information, we cannot comply directly because we do not have identifiers in the dataset. We would point the individual towards the privacy notice and trial protocols to indicate the type of information that we hold on them for the purpose of this analysis. We would then collect the information necessary for their local authority to be able to identify them via the online form, and refer the case to the appropriate local authority where the request can be handled using the local authorities own subject access request procedures. For individuals invoking their rights to rectification, erasure, restriction of processing and to object, we would then require the local authority to inform us of which rows of data to rectify or delete.

The right to data portability

The right to data portability allows individuals to obtain and reuse their individual data for their own purposes across different services. It allows them to move, copy or transfer individual data easily from one IT environment to another in a safe and secure way, without hindrance to usability. This is not particularly relevant in the context of statistical analysis as the value of processing the data is to the public and comes from the aggregation of the data, rather than from the processing of the individual's data, and so it is difficult to imagine the purpose of porting the data to an alternative system.

Individual's rights in relation to automated decision-making and profiling

Nothing in this analysis is related to either automated decision-making or profiling of any individuals.

Accountability and Governance

WWCSA takes and documents the appropriate technical and organisational measures in place to comply with GDPR. Data Protection is overseen by WWCSA's Operations Director with support from a designated member of the Senior Research Team. The approach of WWCSA to information security will be outlined in its IT Usage and Data Protection policies.

Checks on staff

The data will only be accessed by WWCSA research team members. Research staff at WWCSA have undergone data protection training and have substantial experience in handling data, as well as be subject to Disclosure and Barring Service checks. The research team continues to review the training needs of the team to ensure WWCSA's approach remains up-to-date.

Data security arrangements

Data will be transferred securely using a secure platform such as Egress. Egress meets the FIPS 140-2 standard: <https://www.egress.com/certifications>. Data will be stored on encrypted hard drives and processed on a non-networked laptop. When not in use, both these encrypted hard drive and non-networked laptop should be stored in the safe. For the

impact evaluation, data will also be transferred to an external data-archive. Precise details on what archiving service will be used is in the process of being determined, these details will be published once confirmed. Note that this arrangement only applies to the impact evaluation and that we do not intend to archive any data used for descriptive statistics.

Risks

Risk (Likelihood, Impact)	Mitigation
<p>Low engagement of staff and families in evaluation (IPE) (Medium, Medium)</p>	<p>The study is designed to collect only data that is necessary for the evaluation, and to minimise burden on staff and participants by ensuring that interview times and locations are flexible and convenient to participants, and that any survey proforma or data template is clear and brief. The information we provide to participants will include a rationale for why the research is being undertaken and its potential benefits, to help encourage engagement from those invited to participate.</p> <p>Although there may be challenges engaging busy practitioners and families with complex circumstances, we will build relationships with school and local authority gatekeepers and work closely with them to facilitate recruitment. Involvement of only a small proportion of the overall number involved with the intervention is needed to reach recruitment targets. If schools experience unexpected events such as Ofsted inspections or localised closure due to Covid-19, we should be able to quickly identify replacement schools. Therefore reaching targets is expected to be achievable.</p> <p>The evaluation aims to triangulate between a range of informant sources, therefore a lower response rate among one informant group can be compensated for in other areas to ensure the evaluation is still able to achieve its aims.</p> <p>Families who have not engaged with the intervention, or those who are not accepted onto the intervention, may be the hardest to engage in research either due to personal circumstances that have affected their engagement with the intervention or because they do not have any ties to the intervention that might motivate them to take part. We will work closely with gatekeepers in the local authority and schools to identify and approach these families, using clear and accessible information sheets and researchers experienced at engaging people in research.</p>
<p>National closure of schools due to Covid-19 (Medium, Medium)</p>	<p>National guidance currently requires schools to be open to all pupils. If any national closure of schools is implemented, the process evaluation will seek to understand any adaptation made to the intervention. The impact evaluation will also try to account for this in the analysis but may not be able to proceed in this instance. If individual schools or classes close rather than all</p>

	<p>schools at the local authority level, this will be harder to factor into the analysis and would rely on the local authorities providing us with accurate data on school closure dates and school attendance rates for the children affected..</p>
<p>Unable to access admin data in the required format (Low, High)</p>	<p>Administrative data is a key component of the evaluation and important for answering a number of the research questions. WWCSO will work closely with the authorities from the outset to establish a data sharing protocol and timeline that is acceptable to both organisations.</p> <p>We will send a draft data-collection template to the local authorities in advance, and consult with the data team to ensure they understand and are able to provide the data we need. If they are not able to do at initial consultation, we will support them to ensure that they can by the time outcome data is available.</p> <p>In the case that we are unable to find a comparator local authority that agrees to providing us with access to their admin data, no impact evaluation will be undertaken.</p>
<p>Absence of diverse views in qualitative sampling and reporting from participants (IPE) (Medium, Medium)</p>	<p>It is possible that the families and staff who agree to participate are going to be biased towards being more positive (or negative) about the intervention. In order to ensure we get a diverse picture of the strengths and weaknesses of the intervention, we attempt to address this through our sampling methods, for example aiming to include families who have withdrawn engagement as well as those who haven't been a part of the programme. We will also acknowledge this potential limitation and its implications for our interpretation of our findings in our reporting. In addition, a combination of social desirability bias, and concerns about what they say getting back to children's services and schools may lead to respondents being more positive in the views they share. Steps will be taken in interviews to build rapport with participants, reassure them of the researchers' independence, and explain clearly the confidential nature of the research to minimise this bias.</p>
<p>Unanticipated changes in local authorities (DiD) (Medium, Medium)</p>	<p>Such as changes within schools/additional programmes to improve school attendance rates. Our IPE should help us know whether this is the case in Worcestershire. In the comparator local authority we will remain in contact with our contact person to remain alert to any changes during the term.</p>

Personnel

The evaluation is funded by and will be undertaken by What Works for Children's Social Care (WWCSO).

The Principal Investigator is Michael Sanders (Executive Director, WWCSO). The impact evaluation data collection, analysis and reporting will be led by Eva Schoenwald (Researcher, WWCSO). IPE data collection, analysis and reporting will be led by Hannah

Collyer (Senior Researcher, WWCS). Both strands will be supported by Ella Whelan (Research Assistant, WWCS), and Janae Goodridge-Downer (Research Assistant, WWCS), and overseen by Aoife O’Higgins (Research Director, WWCS). There will be frequent communication and collaboration between the staff working on each component.

Timeline

Dates	Activity	Staff responsible/ leading
July 2020	Early target schools identified	WCF
Sept 2020	Term starts	WCF
Oct-Nov 2020	Research Ethics	WWCS
Feb 2021	Publish protocol	WWCS
Feb 2021	IPE data collection	WWCS
Nov 2020, Jan 2021, Apr 2021	Impact strand data collection	WWCS
May 2021	Reporting (main report)	WWCS
July 2021	Reporting - follow-up data update	WWCS

Appendix 1 Draft Logic Model

