



**SW learning context case studies:
Improving the performance of
disadvantaged pupils**

Team South West Partnership

Introduction by Chrysta Garnett

I have been amazed by the determination of South West (SW) schools to overcome the difficulties of the last year for all our pupils. Schools have been supporting students to succeed academically but also to adjust socially and emotionally to the considerable upheaval we have faced. With that in mind, on behalf of Team SW stakeholders, I wanted to share with you some case studies of schools that have achieved good outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and have done this in part by providing strong support for pupils' social and emotional development. The Education Endowment Foundation's (EEF) School Planning Guide shows the importance of high-quality teaching for disadvantaged pupils¹. However, that guide also shows that wider strategies, for example around non-academic barriers, can be important to help close the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their non-disadvantaged peers. These case studies are strong examples of support in this area. The government also provides support for mental health and wellbeing in schools and colleges: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/mental-health-and-wellbeing-support-in-schools-and-colleges#MHST>

Covid-19 has presented significant challenges to us all, and I know you will share my determination to support our most vulnerable pupils to succeed; and commit to continuing to work collectively and collaboratively in the region, to eliminate the disadvantage gap.

Chrysta Garnett, Team SW Strategy Lead

August 2021

¹ <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/eef-support-for-schools/covid-19-resources/guide-to-supporting-schools-planning/>

Foreword by Moira Marder

I have been incredibly impressed about how schools in the SW have faced the challenges of the last year. School leaders have had to remain relentlessly positive about our ability to make up for lost time, particularly for our most disadvantaged pupils.

While the priority has been to ensure that all pupils have access to high quality teaching, schools in the SW have also developed a range of strategies to support our most disadvantaged pupils. There has not been a 'one size fits all' approach and different contexts in some instances have needed different support. And as we emerge from the pandemic, schools and trusts across the region are continuing to work incredibly hard to develop effective relationships with families and focus on those pupils who need us the most.

I am feeling enthusiastic and optimistic about the next year, and the impact our improving practices will have on all our pupils but with a particular focus on the disadvantaged. This compendium of case studies from a range of trusts across the SW shares some helpful examples on how schools are supporting our disadvantaged pupils to be in the best possible place to access learning. With schools and trusts continuing to learn from one another, we can together, move even faster to closing the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their classmates.

Moira Marder, Chief Executive Officer of The Ted Wragg Multi-Academy Trust

July 2021

Glenmoor and Winton Academies, United Learning Trust

Glenmoor and Winton Academies are secondary schools (11-16), based in Bournemouth. Led by one Principal, both are rated *Outstanding* by Ofsted. Approximately 20% of both schools' cohort are disadvantaged pupils and the performance of this group is above the average of their EEF Family of Schools. The 2019 disadvantaged pupil Progress 8 score at Glenmoor Academy was 1.15.

1. How and what challenges did you identify for improving disadvantaged pupil outcomes?

From analysing attendance, progress and performance data, school leaders identified that a small group of Year 11 disadvantaged pupils at both schools, were underperforming and were persistently absent, with attendance below 90%.

Leaders also identified that some of these pupils were struggling with their social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH), for example with anxiety around school attendance and agoraphobia.

2. How did you explore appropriate, feasible and evidence-informed practices or programmes as 'best bets' for addressing the problem? And what was the intended impact?

In reviewing the needs of these pupils, it became clear to the leadership teams at Glenmoor and Winton that a 'one size fits all' approach was not appropriate for the target group and a more bespoke solution was required. Given that a key challenge was around attendance, the schools saw that its overarching requirement was to reduce persistent absence. The schools therefore employed an additional attendance officer to undertake home visits, supporting travel to school where necessary.

School leaders then considered how they might support those pupils with their social and emotional needs. In particular, the schools considered the EEF's Toolkit which showed that, on average, social and emotional learning interventions impact on attitudes to learning and social relationships in schools, with an average overall improvement of four months of progress - if implemented in line with the evidence². School leaders felt this was especially relevant in the context of limited external Child Adolescence and Mental Health Support (CAMHS).

Using pupil premium funding, the school took the decision to provide its own SEMH counselling support and establish an Alternative Curriculum Centre (ACC) to focus on supporting students with their mental health, for example relating to trauma, attachment disorder and severe anxiety. An anger-management programme was

² See: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/social-and-emotional-learning/>

also established. Where needed the school provided bespoke, one-to-one support with core subjects for those pupils who were eligible for the SEMH support.

3. How did you implement, monitor and evaluate if the intervention was working? What adaptations if any did you make?

The school took a range of actions to implement this approach, including providing counselling and anger management training for staff to support the identified group of Year 11 pupils.

Staff were also identified as caseworkers for specific pupils and given overall responsibility for their attendance, counselling and mental health. This ensured all pupils were visible and support was well-matched to their needs, and improvement could be closely monitored.

Given improvements in attendance, and the success of the ACC, it was decided to prioritise early intervention, widening support to disadvantaged (and non-disadvantaged) pupils in Years 9 and 10 with poor attendance and/or wider SEMH needs.

4. What was the impact/outcome?

The initial group of Year 11 pupils have improved attendance, and all left school with the required grade 4+ subjects in core subjects, with onward education/training in place.

Similar attendance progress was seen with pupils when the approach was rolled out to younger year groups, with full engagement in the Year 9 cohort recorded last year.

This approach, providing a bridge between school and formal CAMHS, has also helped to increase parental involvement with the outcome of supporting increased pupil attendance and engagement.

5. How did school leaders ensure teacher workload is manageable and how did you aim to motivate and sustain good practice?

The schools' decision to allocate a significant proportion of its pupil premium funding to attendance and SEMH resource ensured teacher workload was not increased. The approach has now been widened in both schools. A 'Student Additional Support' panel has been established, which considers the needs of pupils with attendance, SEMH and anger issues and providing access to support including mentoring, cognitive behaviour workshops or counselling. The overall effect continues to be a more joined-up approach, supporting parental engagement, akin to 'Team Around the Family'.

Fairfield High School, Excalibur Academies Trust

Fairfield High School is an 11-16 academy, based in Bristol. It is rated Ofsted *Good*. Of the school's current 1027 pupils on roll, approximately 34% of the cohort is eligible for pupil premium funding, and 17% require SEN support compared to the national average of 11%. The school takes in pupils from approximately 30 primary schools, and over 45 languages are spoken. In 2019, the school's Progress 8 score for its disadvantaged pupils was 0.28.

1. How, and what challenges did you identify for improving disadvantaged pupil outcomes?

Seeking to focus on Year 6 transition, Fairfield High School's leadership team considered data from a range of sources including from the Fischer Family Trust³, Cognitive Abilities Tests (CATs) scores as well as wider qualitative information from feeder primaries and partner agencies. The school also made use of the Pupil Attitudes to Self and School (PASS⁴) self-evaluation survey which seeks to gain insight into attitudes that could be hindering achievement.

The school's leadership prioritised building strong relationships as essential to the success of all its pupils. As part of the planned transition, additional one-to-one discussions were held with disadvantaged pupils so tailored support could be provided from the start, reducing any loss of learning when moving from one phase to another.

This identified several pupils, disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged – and some with SEMH challenges - who needed additional support with transition.

2. How did you explore appropriate, feasible and evidence-informed practices or programmes as 'best bets' for addressing the problem? What was the intended impact?

Informed by its own experience, the school recognised the real risk of dips in literacy and numeracy around the time of transition. EEF guidance identifies several issues at the point of transition including adapting to academic challenges and curriculum discontinuity; familiarising with formal school systems, expectations and routines; developing healthy peer networks and dealing with issues around bullying⁵.

The school established a team to help Year 6 pupils with SEMH needs so that they felt fully supported in transition and were able to be both happy and successful in school. The team's focus was to provide pastoral support to vulnerable pupils by establishing strong relationships. A range of transition activities were introduced including *Magic Mornings*, where disadvantaged pupils were invited to join Year 7

³ See: *Education analysis & research - FFT* www.fft.org.uk

⁴ For further info on PASS, as promoted by the Child Outcomes Research Consortium see: <https://www.corc.uk.net/outcome-experience-measures/pupil-attitudes-to-self-and-school/>

⁵ <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/the-tiered-model/3-wider-strategies/>

classes on a regular basis in the term before transition. This had the benefit of introducing vulnerable pupils to the school routines and expected patterns of behaviour. School staff also worked with local primary schools within the trust to review the curriculum and ensure adequate challenge for all disadvantaged pupils and their non-disadvantaged peers.

3. How did you implement, monitor and evaluate if the intervention was working?

School leaders established a culture of high expectations and aspirations through formation of strong relationships with disadvantaged pupils. Staff were given the opportunity to support transition activities which also contributed to career development. Given EEF evidence around the importance of dealing with bullying around transition⁶, the school's *Restorative Justice* system ensured that any bullying/friendship incidents were resolved promptly in an independent, compassionate yet robust manner.

Over time, the school made changes to its *Magic Mornings*, so pupils felt fully supported and experienced school systems and expectations, but also now benefit from additional maths and English.

When monitoring the Academy Improvement Plan, Year 7 middle leaders reviewed all aspects of pupil performance, including academic outcomes, attendance and results from PASS surveys.

4. What was the impact/outcome?

Monitoring showed that Year 7 attendance was improving: the school's Restorative Justice system also reported a lower number of incidents for Year 7 pupils.

The priority placed on transition by the leadership team and resulting activities have ensured that pupils needing additional pastoral support start school with confidence, already familiar with routines, the environment and excited about attending a new school.

5. How did school leaders ensure teacher workload is manageable and how did you motivate and sustain good practice?

The school's approach of having a well-resourced transition team ensures teacher workload is managed, with responsibility for transition activities being shared rather than allocated to an individual. School leaders also provide administrative support for the team from a marketing assistant.

⁶ <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/the-tiered-model/3-wider-strategies/>

The school takes a leading role for the trust in prioritising improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. The school also shares its good practice more widely through the teaching school system, through the Bristol Education Partnership, which involves both state and independent schools⁷. School leaders have also undertaken pupil premium reviews.

While recognising the role of individuals in securing strong disadvantaged performance, school leaders also very much understand, and celebrate, that it is the whole school approach which results in disadvantaged pupils achieving such good outcomes.

⁷ The Bristol Education Partnership seeks to broaden young people's experience of education, opening up new opportunities and overcoming disadvantage. <https://www.bristollearningcity.com/education/bristol-education-partnership/>

Somervale School Specialist Media Arts College, Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership

Somervale School Specialist Media Arts College is a small secondary school (11-18) in Radstock, formerly a mining town, near Bath. Ofsted rated the Academy *Good* in 2016. The school has approximately 24% of children who are disadvantaged. The school's 2019 disadvantaged Progress 8 score at 0.29, was among the highest of all secondaries in the local authority.

1. How, and what challenges did you identify for improving disadvantaged pupil outcomes?

In addition to reviewing a wide range of data sets, school leaders also interviewed disadvantaged pupils to identify what they saw as barriers to their progress and what support they needed. The school was clear that a one size fits all approach was not appropriate, and that a bespoke individual system was necessary. It became evident that some disadvantaged pupils were disengaged with learning and, as such, needed assistance to improve resilience, confidence and especially attendance.

2. How did you explore appropriate, feasible and evidence-informed practices or programmes as 'best bets' for addressing the problem? What was the intended impact?

The school leadership primarily focused on increasing the attendance of pupils for whom it was likely to make an impact through increased activity of an Education Welfare Office. The school also encouraged peer support in attendance. Additionally, leaders sought to identify attendance issues at an earlier point for disadvantaged children before poor patterns of attendance became established.

For persistently absent pupils, the school considered different approaches, some of which were discounted as not being appropriate for the school's cohort.

Informed of the potential for improving attendance from sporting clubs, leaders decided to engage with Bath Rugby through its programme *Raising the Game*⁸, which can evidence the successful impact of its approach. The EEF Toolkit refers to an overall impact of sports participation on academic achievement of around two additional months' progress, but the guidance also states that it may increase attendance and retention.

To decrease disengagement and grow confidence, the school also introduced regular tutor academic progress mentoring which provided not only pastoral support but also embedded an understanding of the school's zero-tolerance approach to learning, such as meeting homework requirements.

⁸ <https://www.bathrugbyfoundation.com/raising-the-game->

3. How did you implement, monitor and evaluate if the intervention was working?

Through Raising the Game, the school worked closely with partners to ensure information about pupils' social and emotional health, but also academic progress was shared.

The school provided training for mentors, and moderated and monitored their work to ensure the approach was of high quality, added value and that staff maintained their high expectations for all disadvantaged children. The school's mentoring was initially focused on pastoral support, but having reviewed the approach, leaders took steps to ensure these sessions gave more consideration to what was needed to ensure pupils' academic progress, for example in terms of homework, and support with engagement in lessons.

4. What was the impact/outcome?

Across the whole school disadvantaged cohort, leaders saw an improvement in attendance, with the gap of disadvantage children compared to their non-disadvantaged peers reducing by 2.5%. Years 7 and 9 saw particularly strong improvement in attendance: in Year 7 the gap was reduced to just under 1% and in Year 9 the gap decreased to 0.3%.

For those pupils participating in Raising the Game, attendance increased dramatically. The school is clear that the programme has contributed to wider school approaches to improved attendance, better physical health and resilience, and ultimately improved pupil outcomes.

The progress mentoring has made sure that pupils understand what is expected of them in their learning and that staff expectations are always high.

5. How did school leaders ensure teacher workload is manageable and how did you motivate and sustain good practice?

To support teachers in their mentoring, especially where this took place in lunch breaks, school leaders provided time through cancelling or reducing meetings.

The school uses increased on-line teaching to enable good practice and modelling to be shared more easily.

Where staff have demonstrated strong practice, this has been recognised through post-cards in pigeonholes, *Bright Spot* recognition, as well as through the staff room *Thank you* box.

To sustain progress, improved pupil attendance is celebrated through letters home and in-school rewards such as hot chocolate with the headteacher.

The Mendip School, The Partnership Trust

The Mendip School in Shepton Mallet, Somerset, is a Special school (4-19) predominantly for pupils with a diagnosis of autism (ASD) and speech language and communication needs. The school opened in 2015 and was rated *Good* by Ofsted at its first inspection in 2018. Approximately 40% of the cohort is disadvantaged.

1. How, and what challenges did you identify for improving disadvantaged pupil outcomes?

The school undertook '*intelligent analysis*' of both 'soft' and 'hard' data to identify attainment gaps and barriers to achievement. The barriers to achievement identified in the analysis related to pupils' special educational needs, early trauma, parental separation, social care involvement and adverse childhood experiences, including negative school experiences. This analysis revealed a need for increased social and emotional support in secondary, especially in key stage 3 (KS3), where there was reduced attainment.

2. How did you explore appropriate, feasible and evidence-informed practices or programmes as 'best bets' for addressing the problem? What was the intended impact?

School leaders were already informed about the recognised system of *The Thrive Approach*⁹ which promotes children's and young people's positive mental health by helping adults know how to behave and what to do in response to pupils' differing and sometimes distressed behaviour. The approach is founded on established neuroscience, attachment theory and child development. Leaders in the school had already seen the positive contribution of The Thrive Approach to pupil performance across the academy. School leaders investigated other trauma-informed interventions but considered that these were not relevant to improving the SEMH needs of the school's disadvantaged pupils.

The school therefore decided to allocate a significant part of its pupil premium funding to increase the number of Thrive-trained practitioners and thus pupil access to Thrive. The intended aim was to improve scores on the Thrive Wellbeing score to help improve attendance and ultimately academic outcomes, across the wider cohort but in particular at KS3.

3. How did you implement, monitor and evaluate if the intervention was working?

With regard to implementation, school leaders undertook a range of actions including provision of full Thrive training for identified school staff at practitioner level as well

⁹ <https://www.thriveapproach.com/>

as training for more informal, wider use and understanding across the school. As such, leaders ensured The Thrive Approach was central to the whole school ethos with its application understood across the entire school community, including all teaching assistants, the school office and site team staff. Relevant staff were then delegated specific individual responsibilities.

Disadvantaged pupils who received targeted interventions/activities based on the results of their analysis were tracked and monitored and the access of the intervention/activity was reviewed for each individual pupil. Non-academic skills were monitored through Thrive assessments as well as pupil and engagement trackers. The application of the approach was thoroughly reviewed through a formal review cycle comprising formal data drops three times a year against identified Thrive steps of progress, as well as through regular learning walks, observations, and staffing appraisals.

4. What was the impact/outcome?

Monitoring and evaluation showed pupils' SEMH improving, with serious behaviour incidents decreasing, and ultimately academic progress improving. Half of the pupils moved up one full progress level (relates to over a year of progress) and a quarter moved up one or two substages of a level (relates to between 3-9 months of progress). Based on Leuven Scales¹⁰, 93% of pupils made one or more levels progress in engagement. Fewer pupils made below expected secondary academic progress compared to previous years: 22% fewer in maths, 18% in writing, 25% in speaking and listening and 8% in science. The school therefore felt confident that supporting social, emotional, and mental health needs, along with quality first teaching, contributed to improved pupil attainment.

5. How did school leaders ensure teacher workload is manageable and how did you to motivate and sustain good practice?

Time allocations were granted to ensure teachers responsible for Thrive application had a manageable workload. The school's Thrive team also met regularly to provide peer support and identify priorities. Leaders have been clear to include The Thrive Approach in staff objectives and create a clear succession plan for qualified practitioners. Positive outcomes arising from The Thrive Approach are shared with all staff in regular 'HT highlights' communications. School leaders also model the approach, for example in language consistency, and when operating in classrooms.

¹⁰ <https://emotionallyhealthyschools.org/primary/the-leuven-scale/>

Marine Academy Primary, The Ted Wragg Multi-Academy Trust

Marine Academy Primary is a free school which opened in September 2013 in Plymouth and was subsequently graded *Outstanding* by Ofsted in June 2015. The school, where 35% pupils are eligible for the pupil premium, is in quintile four (more deprived) of all schools in the school location deprivation indicator. In 2019, 70% of the school's Year 6 disadvantaged pupils achieved the expected standard for reading, writing and maths.

1. How, and what challenges did you identify for improving disadvantaged pupil outcomes?

To identify barriers relating to disadvantaged pupil progress, school leaders surveyed 71 pupils from Years 2 to 6, and analysed a wide range of data sources including: behaviour and attendance, in-school assessment, such as speech and language assessments, and *Target Tracker* analysis of the KPIs for each of the National Curriculum subjects. The school also reviewed levels of parental engagement.

This data identified weak language and communication skills, with several children in Reception, KS1 and KS2 unable to use speech to connect ideas and explain what is happening coherently. While disadvantaged pupil attendance was strong, a high number had poor punctuality.

2. How did you explore appropriate, feasible and evidence-informed practices or programmes as 'best bets' for addressing the problem? What was the intended impact?

The school considered a range of evidenced-based approaches to improve language and communication. Based on evidence from the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, the school employed a speech and language therapist (SaLT) using their pupil premium funding. The aim of this was to support pupils develop a breadth of vocabulary that reflects their experiences, enabling children to connect ideas orally and explain what is happening coherently.

On the basis of EEF evidence around *Magic Breakfast*, which showed an average of two months' additional progress for pupils in KS1¹¹, the school also offered free breakfasts for all children, and increased Education Welfare Officer time to improve punctuality, and in turn pupil outcomes.

3. How did you implement, monitor and evaluate if the intervention was working?

The SaLT initially spent time completing screening on the Reception cohort to identify need. Depending on their level of need, children were then offered 1:1 support, small group support or referral to specialised NHS service. The school's

¹¹ https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/magic-breakfast/?utm_source=site&utm_medium=search&utm_campaign=site_search&search_term=magic%20breakfast

Inclusion Leader managed the SaLT who delivered academy-wide training and a range of other activities to ensure the approach was fully understood and embedded. Bespoke training was provided to EYFS leaders across a range of areas, including on *Colourful Semantics* and *Cued Articulation*. Each child engaged for a term before pupil conferencing was carried out to analyse impact. All children, both disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged, were provided with a free breakfast on arrival at school.

4. What was the impact/outcome? How do you know?

As of March, disadvantaged pupils in EYFS had made more than the expected two steps of progress in Communication and Language. Punctuality and attendance improved for all groups of children with overall attendance at 95.6%.

5. How did school leaders ensure teacher workload is manageable and how did you nurture motivation, sustain and support good practice?

School leaders have planned and resourced all subjects for class teachers, allowing them to use their time to personalise the learning for the children in their classes. This has reduced workload. In weekly staff meetings, teaching staff are encouraged to share good practice with each other.

Ernesettle Community School, The Inspire Multi Academy Trust (South West)

Ernesettle Community School (2-11) in Plymouth was graded *Outstanding* by Ofsted in November 2019. The school has 36% of children who are disadvantaged and is in the highest Department for Education quintile for deprivation with the Index of Multiple Deprivation placing the area in the most deprived 15% nationally. Using data aggregated over the previous three years (2017-19), Ernesettle is the most successful school for disadvantaged pupil outcomes in its EEF family of schools. In 2019, 82% of Year 6 pupils (22) met the expected standard for reading, writing and maths.

1. How, and what challenges did you identify for improving disadvantaged pupil outcomes?

To identify the challenges relating to improving disadvantaged pupil outcomes, the school investigated behaviour and attendance data and a range of school assessments.

These included:

- EYFS on entry baselines
- Speech and Language assessments
- Tier 2 vocabulary
- Target Tracker analysis of the KPIs for each of the National Curriculum subjects

School leaders also reviewed levels of parental engagement, including attendance at Parents'/Carers' Meetings, and analysis of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) experienced by children attending the school.

In relation to social and emotional learning, school leaders found that some families were facing complex family situations, running the risk of pupils encountering adverse childhood experiences; and that some behaviour issues existed in EYFS - evidenced through the number of red/time out cards given out.

2. How did you explore appropriate, feasible and evidence-informed practices or programmes as 'best bets' for addressing the problem? What was the intended impact?

In respect of the EEF Social and Emotional Learning Evidence Reviews¹², the school found that expanding children's emotional vocabulary is especially important for those from disadvantaged backgrounds and other vulnerable groups, who on average, have weaker social and emotional learning skills at all ages than their less-disadvantaged classmates.

The aim of focusing on expanding children's emotional vocabulary was to help class teachers understand how to support those learners with weaker social and emotional

¹² Social_and_Emotional_Learning_Evidence_Review.pdf (educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk)

learning skills. The school also sought increased engagement with the Multi Agency Support Team, to provide staff with enhanced guidance to support children who have experienced ACEs.

3. How did you implement and monitor/evaluate the intervention was working?

To help expand children's emotional vocabulary, the school sought to ensure language and text was kept short and that communications were simple and accessible for all parents.

The school also completed Multi-Agency Support Team referrals for Art Therapists and Counsellors where Child Protection records showed an increase in children having experienced ACE.

Class Dojo¹³ (education technology) is also used to connect teachers with students (and parent/carers) and build classroom communities that encourage pupils to build strong cooperative relationships.

4. What was the impact/outcome? How do you know?

School staff have now developed the skills which enable them to assess the wellbeing of learners, so they are able to provide effective and timely support. Staff can support children to make sense of unpleasant emotions and harness that emotional energy to face life's challenges, build emotional resilience and embrace change.

The school is able to demonstrate that children have become able to talk about their emotions and feelings, which has resulted in reduced behavioural incidents.

5. How did school leaders ensure teacher workload is manageable and how did to motivate and sustain good practice?

Teachers are encouraged to share good practice in staff meetings, weekly briefings and unit meetings. These discussions have in turn supported teachers to share ideas and strategies and make workloads more manageable.

¹³ <https://www.classdojo.com/>

The Quay School, The Delta Education Trust

The Quay School¹⁴ is an alternative provision academy for pupils aged 5-16. It is based on the south coast in Poole, within Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Local Authority.

Currently just over half of the school's pupils are disadvantaged. The school was rated *Outstanding* at its last full Ofsted inspection in 2015, and the school's short inspection in 2019 confirmed that the school continues to be outstanding stating that: *Many pupils at the school have found engaging with learning challenging in the past, due to their special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) or anxieties. Staff work particularly well together to understand challenges to pupils and to support them to develop trust, confidence and self-belief.*

1. How, and what challenges did you identify for improving disadvantaged pupil outcomes?

School leaders identified that a number of pupils were not fully benefitting from the teaching available to them as they were struggling to build trusting relationships with staff. As such, some pupils did not feel they were in a safe learning environment and thus able to make progress in their learning. Without trust in relationships, pupils were not allowing school staff to have influence over them, and without feeling safe in relationships, pupils were not able to learn.

2. How did you explore appropriate, feasible and evidence-informed practices or programmes as 'best bets' for addressing the problem? What was the intended impact?

Delta Education Trust has been making use of the *PACE+ Approach*, which is a proven, trauma-informed approach to support children and young people to build trusting relationships which increase their feelings of safety and, as a result, increase their ability to learn. The PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) Approach was originally developed by Psychologist Dan Hughes for use by foster and adoptive parents to overcome blocked trust and was adapted to be used by staff in trust schools. The PACE+ Approach has been reviewed by a number of neuroscientists and psychologists¹⁵. The Education Endowment Foundation also has a guidance report on improving behaviour in schools¹⁶.

Blocked trust results in children and young people resisting the influence of adults. Instead of engaging in reciprocal relationships, which are necessary for learning, they try to control adults to attempt to get their needs met and to feel safe. The

¹⁵ Including Dan Hughes, Stephen Porges, Bruce Perry, Kim Golding, Dan Siegel, Jon Baylin, Karen Treisman and Daniel Goleman.

¹⁶ Improving behaviour in schools (educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk)

evidence from neuroscience and psychology has shown that it is necessary to focus on relationships as well as learning. Without a secure base built upon trust and safety, the school understood that pupils will simply not be able to learn. Research has shown that children and young people need the school to focus on building trusting relationships which provide cues of safety in addition to focusing on learning.

The MAT, therefore, employed a PACE+ Approach to build trusting relationships. Using PACE in interactions with children and young people, in helping overcome blocked trust, rebuilds supportive reciprocal relationships and readiness to learn. The additional “+” of the PACE+ Approach is then assessing and teaching the social and emotional skills not yet learned.

3. How did you implement and monitor/evaluate the intervention was working?

At Delta Education Trust, staff are supported to embed the PACE+ Approach into their practice through training over time, supported by reflective practice and coaching. Evaluation of the impact includes tracking pupils’ engagement, academic progress, development of social and emotional skills, pupil wellbeing and staff wellbeing.

4. What was the impact/outcome?

The PACE+ Approach has contributed to closing the gaps in progress and attainment for disadvantaged pupils; in some trust schools, the gap has closed completely. Alongside academic gains there has been improvements in pupils’ social and emotional development and in both pupil and staff wellbeing.

The PACE+ Approach at trust schools has also been recognised as outstanding practice by Ofsted, Challenge Partners and trauma-informed and attachment aware experts.

5. How did school leaders ensure teacher workload is manageable and how did you motivate and sustain good practice?

At Delta Education Trust, work to accompany embedding the PACE+ Approach has also focused on taking evidence-based actions for staff wellbeing and to develop a culture of organisational care.

The trust has also supported many other schools to make effective use of the PACE+ Approach through its Sigma Teaching School with all staff trained reporting that it has changed their practice and had a positive impact on the children and young people in their care¹⁷.

¹⁷ Further information regarding the PACE+ Approach, including free online staff CPD resources, is available through the Sigma Teaching School at <https://www.sigmateachingschool.org.uk/online-training/>