What Works for Children's Social Care

Cardiff University
Prifysgol Caerdydd

SOCIAL WORKERS IN SCHOOLS: AN EVALUATION OF PILOTS IN THREE LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN ENGLAND

May 2020

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About What Works for Children's Social Care

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

About CASCADE

CASCADE is concerned with all aspects of community responses to social need in children and families, including family support services, children in need services, child protection, looked after children and adoption. It is the only centre of its kind in Wales and has strong links with policy and practice.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Schools play an important role in supporting the wellbeing of children and keeping them safe, and school age children typically spend a large proportion of their time under the supervision of people who work in schools. As schools are one of the major sources of referrals to Children's Social Care (CSC), the potential for improved ways of working has been highlighted historically (Morse, 2019), and there is statutory guidance that encourages better interagency working (HM Government, 2018). But the variation between schools and the complex interface between them and social care underlines the need to find solutions that work locally. This report presents findings from three pilot evaluations, where social workers worked differently with schools.

The aim was to embed social workers within schools (SWIS) in Lambeth, Southampton and Stockport, and for social workers to work more closely with schools to address safeguarding concerns and do statutory work. We have evaluated each pilot with a focus on how feasible it is to deliver the intervention, whether it shows promise after it has been running for around 10 months, and whether there is any indicative evidence of impact.

Table 1: Summary of pilots

Pilot Area	Types of schools	Number of schools involved	Number of social workers in team
Lambeth	Mainstream secondary and primary	8	5
Southampton	Mainstream secondary and primary, and specialist education and mental health (SEMH) schools	18	6
Stockport	Mainstream secondary and primary	11	10

Methodology

The evaluations were organised into three phases. In Phase one we developed an initial logic model to articulate theory and implementation; Phase two involved refinement of the logic model and assessment of early implementation; and Phase three aimed to understand how devolved SWIS pilots worked once they had become established and explore early evidence of their impact. Our research questions explore:

a. **feasibility:** can the intervention be delivered practically and are there systems and processes to enable the intervention to be easily scaled?

b. **promise:** what evidence is there that the intervention can have a positive impact on outcomes? and

c. **scalability:** To what extent is the intervention used as anticipated and is the programme sufficiently codified to operate at scale?

To address these questions, we undertook interviews with practitioners, managers, children and families, focus groups with professionals, and observations of practice. We also reviewed

activity logs and collected quantitative data about social care outcomes.

Key Findings

1. All the pilots were successful in embedding social workers within schools, and their base was moved from CSC offices to one or more schools in the borough.

2. How the intervention looked in practice varied across the schools. It ranged from workers being fully embedded and integrated into schools, to a more remote approach where they visited schools regularly. This pattern was found in all three pilots and suggests that a flexible approach is needed to account for the variation in schools. Factors that influenced implementation included the level of social care need within a school, its culture and management style, whether it was a mainstream or specialist school, and whether it was a primary or secondary school.

3. Social workers undertook a wide range of activities, working with children who were involved with children who were on child in need and child protection plans, and those who were not known to children's social care (CSC). They did statutory work, including Public Law Outline and care proceedings work to remove children from families where risks were high. They also provided early intervention, advice and a more universal service.

4. The pilots were perceived to be broadly successful by professionals across education and CSC, children and young people, families, and other professionals. Being on site and accessible to staff and students was thought to be a particular benefit, and there was evidence of work being undertaken that would not have happened if the social workers were not embedded. For example, young people could approach the social worker for advice and guidance on a wide range of topics.

5. Challenges associated with interagency working were highlighted by the pilot, but there is also evidence that the process of working more closely together helped to overcome these issues. For example, social workers found some schools' approaches to behaviour management unacceptable, so they used a social care lens to challenge this. They viewed lateness and poor behaviour in the context of a child's family circumstances, and helped reduce what they felt were punitive responses from schools (such as the use of internal exclusions).

6. There is some evidence that the pilot had a positive impact on reducing some of the social care outcome indicators we studied. Indeed, we found promising evidence of a reduction in one of the measures we studied in all three pilots, which is encouraging. The intervention appeared to reduce Section 47 (Child Protection) enquiries in Southampton and Lambeth, and reduce Section 17 (Child in need) starts in Stockport. Several issues mean that we must be tentative about these findings, and acknowledge the relatively small scale of this analysis. In some of our tests, for example, there was a 'floor' effect, which meant that room for improvement (and for statistically significant differences to be found between intervention and control schools) was limited. Moreover, we found no evidence of an impact on days in care in either of the two pilots where this analysis was possible. Nonetheless, the balance of our quantitative and qualitative analysis suggests the intervention is worth trialling further, and that scaling up such a trial would help us generate more robust conclusions about its effectiveness.

Discussion

We present a logic model that describes the intervention, with three key pathways:

- **Pathway A:** Enhanced school response to safeguarding issues

- **Pathway B:** Increased collaboration between social worker and school staff, and parents
- **Pathway C:** Improved relationships between social worker and young people

In Pathway A it is important that there is regular communication between the social worker and school staff, and that the social worker's expertise and contribution is acknowledged and welcomed by the school. The social worker can give advice and support to school staff, which increases their confidence in safeguarding issues, and improves the quality of school referrals. The social worker can also identify common issues in the school and challenge current ways of working. This increases the likelihood that school staff will take a young person's wider circumstances into account, improving the service they receive.

Pathway B may be more relevant for social workers in primary school due to greater interaction with parents in these schools. If the social worker gets to know and understand the family, and parents perceive them as independent of the school, then relationships between the school and parents can be improved. As a result, parents are more likely to feel supported and have confidence in joint support offered by the social worker and the school, and parents have a better awareness and understanding of a referral if one is made.

Pathway C may be more relevant for social workers in secondary school due to the greater opportunities for direct work with young people. Frequent interactions with the social worker enable the young person to trust the social worker and to feel understood and supported. This can lead to improved school attendance and participation , better management of a young person's risks and improved outcomes.

In all three pathways, improved child and family outcomes are theorised to lead to a reduction of the number of children in care.

Conclusions and recommendations

This study aimed to describe and understand how SWIS pilots were implemented and how they might be theorised to improve interagency working, help families and reduce the need for care. We offer the following recommendations:

1. **Test the intervention on a larger scale.** Our evaluation suggests SWIS may have a positive impact on reducing referrals for children thought to be in need and in need of protection from schools to CSC. Alongside this, this way of working has received a broadly positive response from those involved, including school staff, social care staff and children and families. Despite various challenges, some clear benefits of embedding social workers in schools have been highlighted. The intervention has good potential as a way of working and is worth exploring further.

2. **Clarify the focus of the intervention.** For the scale-up we recommend in 1), the nature of the intervention needs some clarification. For future implementers, it should be developed to have a clearer focus, and different approaches could be refined for different groups. Much of the work seemed to be centred around mainstream secondary schools, although there were several examples of creative work in primaries, and examples of more contact with parents in these schools. The work with the SEMH provision in Southampton was also very promising. It is worth exploring what the focus of SWIS should be and how social work input can be most effectively distributed across different types of schools.

3. **Focus on the nature and boundaries of the SWIS role.** The expansive nature of the SWIS role is one of the most informative aspects of the intervention, as workers demonstrated a wide spectrum of activities with professionals and children and families. However, there is a risk that the scope of the role is too wide, and that social workers begin to encroach on the duties of other professionals. Further development around the boundaries of the role and the expectations of workers may therefore be worthwhile.

4. **Work on further integrating social workers into schools.** The potential for a positive impact seemed greatest where social workers were more integrated in the school they worked with. Efforts to promote integration and enable workers to spend large amounts of time in schools will help generate a clearer picture of the intervention.

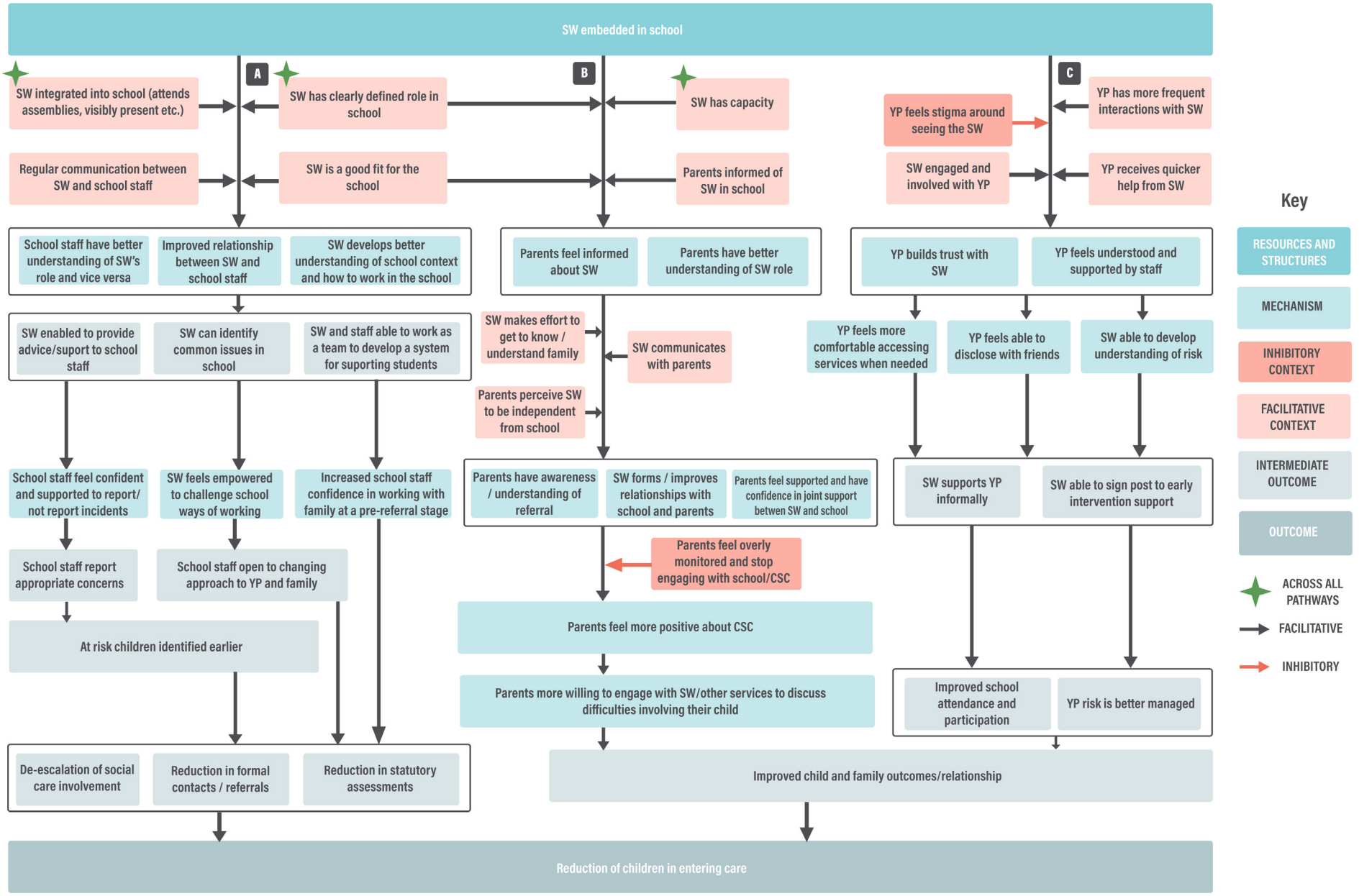

Figure 1: Overarching logic model

PART ONE

Overarching report

INTRODUCTION

Schools play an important role in supporting the wellbeing of children and keeping them safe, and school age children typically spend a large proportion of their time under the supervision of people who work in schools. In their pastoral capacity, teachers and other school staff regularly deal with safeguarding issues and raise concerns with Children's Social Care (CSC). Schools are among the major sources of referrals to CSC, contributing the second highest proportion (18%) of all referrals in 2018/19, behind the police (29%) (Department for Education, 2019). That being so, the potential for improved ways of working has been highlighted historically (Morse, 2019), and there is statutory guidance that encourages better interagency working (HM Government, 2018). But the heterogeneity of schools and the complex interface between them and social care underlines the need to find solutions that work locally.

In recent years two forces have created a renewed drive to make progress. The first is a significant increase in numbers of children receiving interventions from social workers and being removed from their birth families into care (DfE, 2019, Biehal et al., 2014), and the second is the wide-ranging reform of the English school system (Blair et al., 2000; Morries et al., 2001). This was characterised over the last decade by sweeping changes to the structure, management and governance of schools (Thomas et al., 2004; Gunter et al., 2005). As we enter the 2020's the ongoing nature of these changes, and the upward trajectory of care numbers, make it ever more important to find better ways to improve how schools and CSC work together. In this report we explore how embedding social workers within schools might offer a way of achieving this.

This is the final report from the "Social workers in schools" (SWIS) pilot evaluations, which were commissioned by What Works for Children's Social Care. It brings together findings from three evaluations of pilot programmes being implemented in three different areas of England. The aim was to embed social workers within schools in Lambeth, Southampton and Stockport, and for social workers to work more closely with schools to address safeguarding concerns and do statutory work. We have evaluated each pilot with a focus on how feasible it is to deliver the intervention, whether it shows promise after it has been running for around 10 months, and whether there is any indicative evidence of impact.

Background and rationale

The current study builds on other work which has explored the potential for placing social workers in schools. The idea of placing social workers in schools is often suggested and has been tried in some places. There are pockets of innovative practice across the UK where social workers are working closely with schools in ways that are similar to those used in these pilots. During the time we have worked on the evaluation, several practitioners have approached us in local authorities, at meetings and conferences to say that they used to work as a school social worker, are currently doing social work in a school setting, or know another practitioner who has or is doing something similar. One social worker told us that they worked for several years as a school based

social worker, employed directly by the school they worked in.

Yet there is relatively little UK research on the topic. Bagley and Pritchard (1998), evaluated a 3-year programme where social workers were placed in a primary school in a socio-economically deprived area. This had some positive impacts including a statistically significant decrease in truancy, bullying and exclusions. The authors also suggested that this could lead to a reduction in rates of children entering care.

An unpublished study Wigfall and colleagues (2008) also offers some valuable insights into this way of working. It evaluated a 6-month pilot which placed a social worker in each of four schools (three primary schools and one secondary school) for six months. Its findings have a great deal of relevance to the current study. The finding that the social workers were generally well received by the schools is encouraging, and while schools' experiences varied there was consensus that the posts should be continued beyond the pilot. Wigfall and colleagues (2008) also highlight the need to account for practical and cultural aspects of implementation, and to consider the complexities of bringing the two agencies closer together.

Other studies have focussed on the experiences of student social workers placed in schools. These suggest it can be difficult to integrate into a school as a student social worker (Hafford-Letchfield and Spatcher, 2007) but such placements can aid social workers' understanding of the education system (Gregson and Fielding, 2008) and increase opportunities for direct work with children and families (Parker, Hillison and Wilson, 2003).

More recently, Sharley's (2018) doctoral research examined the role schools play in addressing neglect in Wales, and as part of this she explored the nature of the relationship between schools and CSC, and the experiences of education colleagues. One of the key contributions of this work is in demonstrating differences between agency responses, and the factors that shape these differences. For example, different approaches to safeguarding, the learning and training environment created for staff to develop expertise, professional confidence in identifying and reporting concerns, and the schools' relationships with families. Sharley concluded that the creation of a 'school social worker' role might improve the interface between schools and CSC. She argues such a role could enhance multi-agency cooperation; preventative work; and facilitate training around decision-making, neglect, and the promotion of children's well-being in school. The current study can therefore be viewed as an attempt to build on this work and expand the research evidence we have on the topic.

Commissioning and design of the pilot projects

Local authorities were selected via a competitive tender process managed by CASCADE at Cardiff University, the research partner for WWCSC. A strong field of 30 applications were received for consideration in November 2018, and Lambeth, Southampton and Stockport were chosen. Meetings between project leads, evaluators and funders took place between December 2018 and March 2019 to develop and refine the plans, and projects launched in April 2019.

Being an intervention led by CSC, each pilot was designed by a leadership team based in Children's Services department of the local authority. However, education colleagues – primarily head teachers and their deputies from partner schools – were involved from an early stage (from when the bid was being prepared in many cases).

Brief summary of each pilot (January 2019 - March 2020)

Further details for each project can be found in the respective protocol and interim report (Westlake et al, 2019; Corliss et al, 2019; Silverwood et al, 2019). In summary:

1. **Lambeth** is an inner London borough which is in the South of the capital. It is the fifth most densely populated authority in England and Wales with a population of approximately 326,000. In this pilot Lambeth embedded a

team of five social workers in five secondary and three primary schools. Their aim was to work closely with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and pastoral staff in each school, undertaking the full range of statutory work, as well as offering support on safeguarding issues and concerns to teachers, parents and pupils. They intended to deliver training and support for the schools and provide additional services for vulnerable children and young people where needed.

2. **Southampton** is a major port city in Hampshire, on the South coast of England. It is a unitary authority with a population of just over 250,000. The pilot placed social workers in the Secondary 1 cluster of schools, which is in the central and north parts of the city, and the Secondary 2 cluster, to the west of the city. Within this group is a trio of Specialist Educational and Mental Health (SEMH) schools. Both clusters have historically high levels of social care need. The pilot aimed to reduce the number of referrals coming from schools by having social workers physically present in the schools and working with the DSL at each school.

3. **Stockport** is a large town in Greater Manchester. It is situated about 7 miles from Manchester city centre and has a population of around 290,000. The pilot placed social workers in a cluster of schools in the East of the borough. The cluster has been using a Team Around the School (TAS) model since September 2016, which places early help practitioners alongside school nurses, teachers, and other school professionals. In this pilot Stockport have placed social workers within the TAS model to enhance it. The pilot aimed to reduce the number of referrals coming from schools by working with the DSL and other staff at each school. In addition, due to their location within the school they aimed to improve working relationships with the senior management team, teachers, parents and pupils, offering them support on safeguarding issues and concerns.

Table 1: Summary of pilots

Pilot Area	Types of schools	Number of schools involved	Number of social workers in team
Lambeth	Mainstream secondary and primary	8	5
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Stockport	Mainstream secondary and primary	11	10

Summary of interim findings

In August 2019 we published three interim reports which focussed on the initial launch of the projects (Westlake et al, 2019; Corliss et al, 2019; Silverwood et al, 2019). In Lambeth, social workers were embedded in five secondary schools and three primary feeder schools and in Southampton they were based in three school clusters, which included two mainstream schools and three specialist provision schools. In Stockport social workers were placed into two secondary and eight primary schools. There were positive signs that the pilots were starting to become established and that aspects of this way of working had the potential to improve interagency working and safeguarding within schools. Nevertheless, there were challenges in setting up such an approach in all three authorities,

and Southampton had experienced particular difficulties in transitioning to the SWIS model. All pilots experienced some initial problems related to caseloads, as some embedded social workers worked to reduce their existing caseloads while simultaneously working within schools. There were also practical challenges, around providing social workers spaces to work and access to IT systems. As this was a new way of working it took time for both social workers and school staff to adapt to a model which met the needs of both social care and education.

Structure of this report

The aim of this report is to draw together key findings across all three pilots and present an overarching programme theory for social workers in schools. We distil the key messages across the pilots and what we have learnt about implementation. This is designed to inform decisions about rolling out further projects based around social workers in schools. Further detail about what happened in each individual pilot can be found in Part 2 of this report, where we focus on the journey of each local authority in turn.

METHODS

Research questions

We aimed to understand how and why the project was implemented as it was and gather indicative evidence about the outcomes it may lead to. We were also interested in barriers and facilitators of implementation. Specific research questions fall into three areas:

1. **Feasibility:** can the intervention be delivered practically and are there systems and processes to enable the intervention to be easily scaled?

- How is the intervention implemented?
- What types of work are undertaken by social workers, how is this similar or different from the work they do anyway?
- What are the characteristics of the families involved?
- What training and support is provided for social workers?
- How acceptable is the intervention to parents/ carers, children and young people, professionals?
- What are the barriers and facilitators for delivery?

2. **Promise:** what evidence is there that the intervention can have a positive impact on outcomes?

- What potential benefits do stakeholders (e.g. social workers, children, and families) identify?
- Do there appear to be any unintended consequences or negative effects?
- Are there quantitative indications that the pilots effect the outcomes they set out to target?
- What other evidence is there that they are having a positive impact?

3. **Scalability:** To what extent is the intervention used as anticipated and is the programme sufficiently codified to operate at scale?

- Is there a clear description of the service that would allow it to be implemented and evaluated in other places?

Research design

The evaluation had three phases. The first two phases, Initial theory development [January - February 2019] and Implementation [April - June 2019], were detailed in the interim reports. They focussed on how the pilots were designed and implemented in their early stages. The third phase [November 2019 – January 2020] is the focus of this report. This explores the ongoing implementation of the pilots as they became more established and identifies indications of the impact they might be having.

Methods

Between December 2019 and January 2020, we undertook a series of interviews with social care practitioners and managers, interviews with school staff and senior managers, young people and parents, focus groups with professionals, and observations of practice. Further details of how these activities took place in each local authority can be found in Part 2 of this report. A key output of this phase is the updated logic model (p. 22), which brings together what we have learnt about how the interventions works. The logic model was refined through meetings involving the research

team, where we worked through our thematic analysis and deliberated how the findings could feed into the theory contained in the model.

Summary of data collection in Phase 3

Table 2: Data collected in Phase 3

DATA COLLECTION TYPE	LAMBETH	SOUTHAMPTON	STOCKPORT	TOTAL
Interviews with managers	2	4	6	12
Interviews with social workers	5	7	5	17
Interviews with designated safeguarding lead/ assistant designated safeguarding lead	6	-	1	7
Interviews with other school staff (including headteachers and senior managers)	7	2	3	12
Interviews with local authority staff	8	-	-	8
Interviews with Children/Young People	3	-	1	4
Observations of social work practice	10	1	3	14
Observations of meetings or panels	3	3	4	10
Administrative data for matching, re Autumn terms 2016 – 18 (n = schools)	86	75	107	268
Administrative records from schools, re Autumn term 2019 (n = schools)	17	9	27	53
Activity logs (individual events recorded)	842	132	481	1455

Analysis

We analysed interviews, focus groups and observations using a qualitative thematic approach. Transcripts were coded by researchers using NVivo 12 to explore key themes that could be identified. The framework was then shared with the lead author and the research team, and the analysis was discussed and refined with their input. Overarching themes were brought together by the lead author and, in a final stage of analysis, these were discussed and agreed by the whole research team. The discussion incorporated our learning from wider data collection activities, including observations and other informal discussions. Activity logs were categorised in various ways based on an inductive approach.

For our impact analysis, we compared what happened in schools with social workers compared to schools without social workers in relation to Section 17 referrals, Section 47 enquiries and children spending time in care. We used statistical tests to match schools together based on existing similarities in relation to historical trends for these outcomes for the autumn term periods over years prior to the pilot, and then measured whether and how they

differed once the pilot started. To estimate the impact of social workers in schools, we used a difference-in-differences model with cluster-robust standard errors by school. More detail on the way this analysis was undertaken can be found in Part 2 of this report where we describe the analysis done for each pilot. This details the nature of our statistical analysis, including the data we used, what assumptions we made, and what the main limitations are.

To calculate how much the intervention cost to set up and deliver, we collected information on the financial claims reported by each of the local authorities over the study period. From these, we extracted data on the staff costs directly involved in the intervention and the costs incurred in the setup and implementation of the project. Staff costs included the costs of team managers and the social workers implementing the intervention.

FINDINGS

Our findings are presented in two sections. The first section summarises key findings from each local authority pilot, more details on which can be found in Part 2 of this report. The second section draws these findings together into a logic model that attempts to describe the core features of social workers in schools. This is an important part of developing a coherent profile for the intervention and will be informative for commissioners looking to trial it further. Alongside this, there are considerations for implementation which will aid organisations who are interested in delivering such a service elsewhere.

Section 1: Key messages from the three pilots

Summary of what happened in Lambeth

Lambeth embedded social workers within five secondary and three primary schools, and although some changes in the team meant schools had more than one link social worker, they have made progress in building good working relationships within the schools. Social workers have worked closely with DSL's and other school staff, providing advice around safeguarding concerns and reducing professional anxieties. They have also done a wide range of direct work with pupils across the schools, not just those known to CSC. Their input included one-to-one advice and support, as well as group work, along with their statutory duties.

The comparative analysis, which included schools involved in the pilot and a set of matched schools, showed a promising impact on the numbers of Section 47 enquiries, which were significantly lower in pilot schools. We found no impact on Section 17 starts, and we were unable to compare care outcomes due to issues of data availability. However, this is a tentative finding because across the data set an unexpectedly low rate of events meant that regression coefficients were imprecisely estimated. As we found in all three pilots, those involved felt the approach had great potential and our qualitative findings therefore suggest the intervention should be explored further.

Summary of what happened in Southampton

Southampton re-launched the pilot in the summer of 2019, after they had encountered initial difficulties in implementing their plans. This seems to have been a success, and since then the SWIS team have maintained a presence in all the schools involved. This varied in format, from a more embedded model whereby social workers were based within schools and worked closely with the DSL and other school staff, to a more remote approach where scheduled twice-weekly drop in sessions were held by workers. Social workers undertook a range of work, including giving advice and support to staff and students, helping students maintain attendance, doing activities with young people and undertaking statutory work.

Qualitative analysis consistently indicated that for both education and social care staff, the pilot was a promising way of working. This was supported by our quantitative comparisons, which suggested the pilot has some potential in terms of reducing Section 47 enquiries, which decreased in rate by

35%. There was no statistically significant impact on Section 17 starts or the number of days children spend in care, but there was a non-significant increase in the number of Section 17 starts (of 24%). This may indicate that social workers were becoming concerned about children not currently involved in CSC as a result of being in schools and working with children who are not currently known to CSC.

Summary of what happened in Stockport

Stockport also took a flexible approach to working with schools, and the SWIS team was embedded within the school cluster. Social workers were centrally located in a large secondary school, which they used as a base for visits to the schools they are allocated to. They also had access to desks and office space in other schools. The amount of time spent in the other schools depended on the size of the school, the levels of need identified and the type of involvement they require.

The perspectives of social care and school staff suggest that a lot of good work was being done as part of the pilot, and that the addition of a social worker to the existing TAS model helped improve the service. Social workers appeared to have more time to do direct work, were more accessible for young people to talk to in school, and developed a better understanding of the ways the schools work. In contrast to the other pilots, we found no evidence of a reduction in Section 47 enquiries in Stockport, but instead we identified a significant reduction in Section 17 starts. This may reflect the contribution social workers made within schools to intervene informally and help prevent the escalation of concerns.

Key findings

1. **Degrees of integration: different approaches to working with schools**

Each pilot had its own unique features, but in some respects, they set out with similar aspirations. They all aimed to embed social workers within schools – physically locating them inside the school building with the expectation that this would be their base for much of the working week. Yet, in practice, how far this materialised varied between schools in all three authorities.

There were examples where what happened on the ground measured up well to this vision of the pilot; where social workers became, as one manager put it, "part of the furniture" of the school. They occupied office space in the schools, either dedicated spaces or shared with school pastoral and safeguarding staff. In Lambeth, workers had office bases in several schools and moved around the schools freely, enabling them to be visible and accessible to staff and students during breaks and between lessons. In Southampton, two workers were embedded in one of the secondary schools, where they had their own office in the heart of the school, a short distance down the corridor from the DSL's office. In contrast, in Stockport, the whole SWIS team were based in a small but well-located office in one of the secondary schools, for where they were accessible to staff and students.

However, there are also examples in each pilot where it looked very different. In many schools, social workers remained visitors, though often they could come and go as they needed and schools welcomed them. Some schools lacked the physical space to accommodate workers more fully, and some were deemed to need less input than other schools which were larger or had greater social care need. Some schools were more reluctant to adopt an embedded model and opted instead for scheduled drop-in sessions or ad hoc input that fitted better with their routines and ways of working.

Even when workers were embedded, the extent to which they were integrated into school varied. Some were absorbed into the school's pastoral team, with constant contact with staff and students and portrait images of them featuring on safeguarding posters. Others were more isolated, in back offices where their computers did not work. Considering all the iterations of the model, it seemed to work most effectively when workers spent more time located within the schools, and where they appeared to be more

integrated in other ways. While it is clear that some of the schools involved would prefer a more remote service from the social workers, the most compelling evidence of promise emerged from where workers were fully embedded.

2. Types of activities and scope of the role

The role and remit of social workers in the pilots was expansive. They undertook a wide range of activities and types of work – from statutory work dealing with serious safeguarding concerns where children were taken into care, to preventative activities with a wide range of children, many of whom were not involved with CSC.

They clearly adapted to the school setting and provided a service that was, in most part, positively received. Some of the most promising examples were clearly enabled by their position within schools; such as informal discussions with students about issues that concerned them, or things that were happening that they wanted to know more about. One example of this was a child who wanted to know more about the private law proceedings their parents were engaged in; another is where a young person was given support around the process involved in disclosing sexual abuse. Being on hand was also described as a benefit by education staff, as social workers could respond to a crisis by supporting them immediately and in person, rather than via email or phone contact.

There were some examples where workers were doing tasks that might otherwise be done by other professionals, such as education welfare officers or school attendance workers. While this was noted as a positive, and there may be advantages to a social worker collecting a child from home and taking them into school, there is a risk that the SWIS role becomes unmanageably broad and merges into that of other agencies. Similarly, workers provided some informal and formal services at a more universal level, such as one-to one advice to children who were not known to CSC, and group work sessions open to all children in a school.

3. Challenging cultural and organisational differences

Differences between organisational cultures and approaches to safeguarding issues are central to the literature on inter-agency working, but often the challenges are discussed in general terms (Darlington, Feeney and Rixton, 2005). This can obscure the specific issues and make them more difficult to address. The experiences of Lambeth, Southampton and Stockport make the challenges more transparent.

For example, the pilots all illustrated differences between how schools and social care interpret issues such as lateness and behavioural problems. Often, schools would take what social workers felt was an inflexible approach to these matters, whereas the social care approach was more curious about why children were late, or what was going on at home to cause them to misbehave. Similarly, when children arrived wearing attire that deviated from the school uniform, social workers felt they were more likely to consider issues of neglect.

The differences between the working patterns of the two agencies, and how this influences their collaboration, also became clearer. Social workers developed a better understanding of how the regimented timetabling of school days leaves school staff small pockets of time to attend to safeguarding issues. Likewise, school staff seemed to have a better grasp of the unpredictable and crisis led nature of social work, and how this shapes their whereabouts and routine.

4. The impact of SWIS on social care outcomes

We found some evidence of a positive impact on the key outcomes we studied in each pilot, which is encouraging and suggests the approach is worth exploring further. Interestingly, we found a reduction in Section 47 enquiries in two of the pilots (Lambeth and Southampton), but no evidence of an effect on numbers of days children spent in care in the two pilots (Stockport and Southampton) where we examined this. In Southampton and Lambeth there was significantly fewer Section 47

enquiries in the schools that were doing SWIS. However, interpreting the data from Lambeth is difficult because the regression coefficients were imprecisely estimated because of limited sample size and low incidence rates. Although this suggests a significant and substantial benefit of the pilot, it should be replicated at a larger scale before we can draw firm conclusions. Findings in relation to Section 17 starts were also mixed. In Stockport there was a significantly lower rate of Section 17 starts in intervention schools. Conversely, Southampton exhibited an increase in Section 17 starts among intervention schools, though this was not statistically significant.

Our qualitative impressions can aid the interpretation of the effects that we have identified on Section 17 and Section 47 starts, though further work is needed to draw more reliable conclusions. Certainly, social workers within the schools seemed to have a better understanding of the issues children faced through being immersed within the school and in regular informal contact with staff and students. This may help them reduce the risks to children directly, and consequently the need for Section 47 work, as well as offering reassurance to school staff who may otherwise refer to CSC. It is also logical – and supported by what social workers told us - that some families, who were not on the CSC radar, will enter the system through Section 17 because of the social worker's presence in the school. The worker may become concerned about such children, or endorse the existing concerns of school staff who were – until that point – hesitant about making a referral.

Using the autumn term as our frame of analysis maximised the time for a measurable impact to emerge, but there is no doubt that a longer follow up period would give us a better picture of the potential impact of SWIS. Being a short period, our analysis is limited by low incidence rates for some of our outcome variables. In addition, the relatively short timescale between implementation and impact measurement limits what magnitude of change in these variables that we can expect. It is perhaps unsurprising, given these constraints, that we found no evidence that the pilots had an impact on days in care. It may be more likely that a change to how social workers work with schools would, relatively soon after it is established, have more of an impact at the earlier stages of their involvement than it would on care outcomes.

5. The costs of setting up and implementing SWIS

The cost of having social workers based in schools ranged from £84,387 to £155,274 over the autumn term, the majority of which was staffing costs. Lambeth did not report any ancillary costs in their financial claims. Southampton purchased six phones, six laptops and carried out a refurbishment of a room at one of the schools where social workers were based. For Stockport, ancillary costs were made up of setting up a base for the social workers and training.

Table 3: Total costs of Social works in schools over an Autumn term

Resource inputs	Total cost (£,2019)		
	Lambeth	Southampton	Stockport
Staffing: Team manager and social workers[1]	£100,681	£83,788	£154,091.42
Ancillary costs[2]	£0	£599.91	£1,182.88
Total	£100,681	£84,387.91	£155,274.30

1 The currency used in this estimation was pound sterling (£), with 2019 as the reference financial year. No discounting was applied to staffing costs as all costs occurred within the study period, which did not exceed one year.

2 We annuitized all ancillary costs based on the replacement cost and the useful life of the item. A 4-year life span was assumed and a discount rate of 3.5% was applied to estimate the annuitization factor and thus the value of ancillary costs over the Autumn term. We estimated the cost of the intervention over the four-month Autumn period (September to December).

Section 2: Towards a theory of social workers in schools

Overarching logic model

We have synthesised insights from each pilot to develop a theory of social workers in schools. This details how social workers in schools might work to safely reduce the number of children in care, mapping the key features of the intervention and setting out the way it might be theorised to operate. It is intended to serve as a basis for further theoretical and empirical development.

We propose three main pathways through which SWIS may work to reduce the number of children in care:

- **Pathway A:** Enhanced school response to safeguarding issues
- **Pathway B:** Increased collaboration between social worker and school staff, and parents
- **Pathway C:** Improved relationships between social worker and young people

Assumptions

In each pilot authority the schools involved were chosen because of their levels of social care need. Variations in levels of need within a school reflect variations in the communities they serve, and the scale of the theorised impact is likely to be greater in schools with highest social care need. However, aspects of the logic model are also based on other assumptions. For example, that there are practices within schools, including some in the pilots, that social workers feel are detrimental to vulnerable children. The use of internal exclusions for long periods, punitive behaviour management approaches and over-zealous school uniform policies were all noted as having a potentially negative impact. Similarly, there is an assumption that in many schools, referrals are made to CSC that would be more appropriately directed to early help services. Pathways in the logic model below incorporate some of the ways SWIS can challenge these issues.

Prerequisites

For any of the pathways to occur, the social worker must have capacity to spend a significant amount of time within the school engaging with staff and pupils. This seemed to work well when workers started the role without existing cases, as having a high caseload could reduce the amount of time they could spend at the schools they were linked to. The intervention worked better when social workers were more integrated and visibly present in the schools. They may need to do some work elsewhere, as aspects of the role such as visiting family homes and court work cannot be done within the school, but the intervention tended to be perceived most positively where social workers balanced this with spending substantial time within the school and using it as their main base. A further pre-requisite is that the social worker has a clearly defined role that is understood by all in the school.

Pathway A: Enhanced school response to safeguarding issues

In Pathway A it is important that there is regular communication between the social worker and school staff, and that the social worker's expertise and contribution is acknowledged and welcomed by the school. Together with the other prerequisites, these contexts facilitate school staff to have a better understanding of the social workers role (and vice versa), improves the relationship between the social worker and school staff and enables the social worker to develop a better understanding of the school's context and how to work effectively within it.

This enables three sub-pathways. First, the social worker is able to give advice and support to school staff. This increases their confidence in safeguarding issues and makes them better equipped to either report their concerns to CSC via a referral or decide they are less serious and can be addressed in other ways – such as through advice, signposting to other services, or ongoing monitoring. This improves the quality of school referrals and leads to appropriate concerns being reported and at-risk children being focussed on

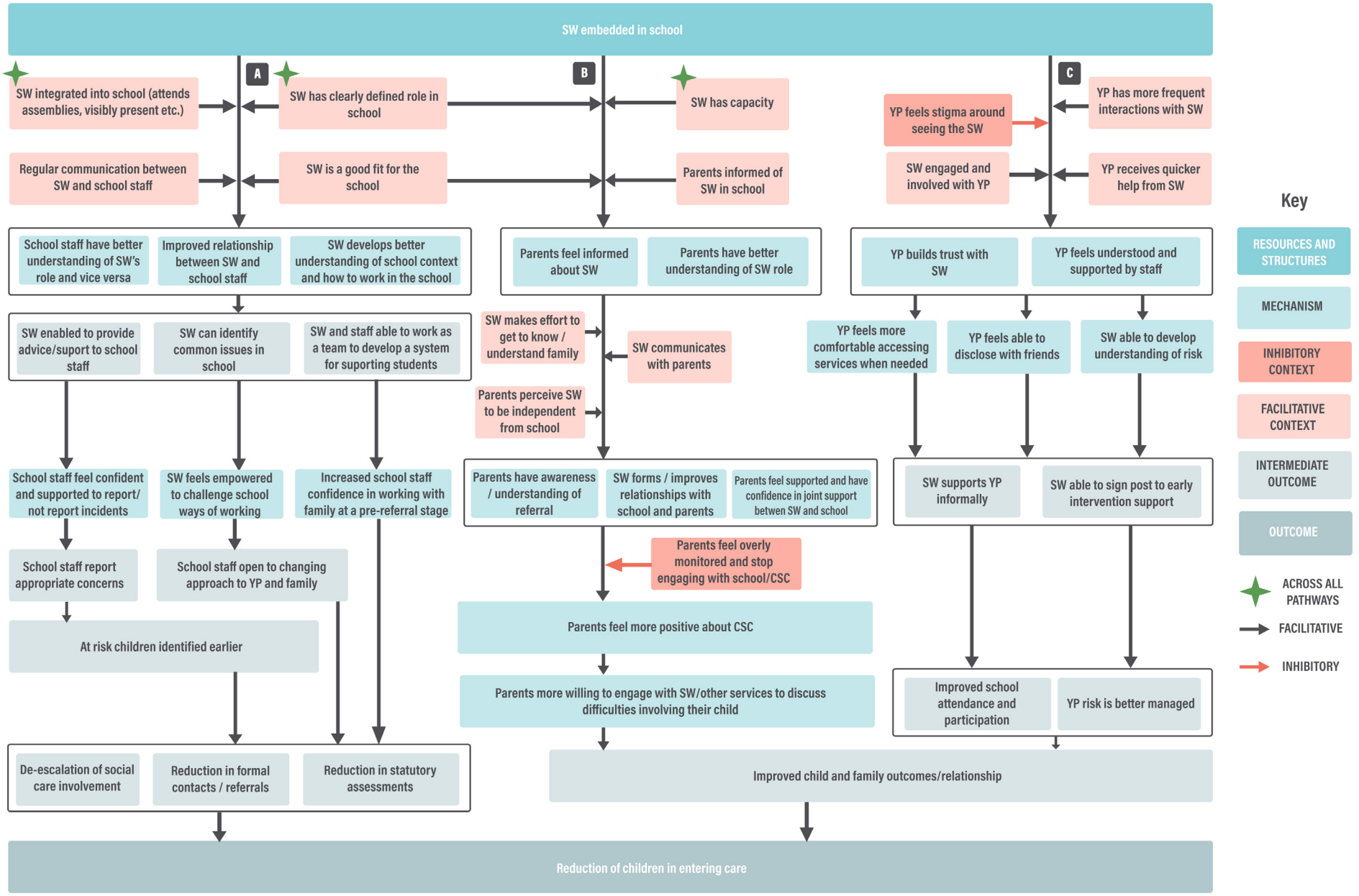

Figure 1: Overarching logic model

earlier. This can lead to the de-escalation of social care involvement, a reduction in formal contacts, a reduction in statutory assessments and improved child and family outcomes/relationships.

Second, the social worker can identify common issues in the school and challenge current ways of working. This increases the likelihood that school staff will take a young person's wider circumstances into account, improving the service they receive. Third, the social worker and school staff can work together to develop new systems to support young people and equip them to work with families at a pre-referral stage.

Pathway B: Increased collaboration between social worker and school staff, and parents

Pathway B may be more relevant for social workers in primary school due to greater interaction with parents in these schools. In this pathway it is also important that the social worker is a good fit for the school, and that parents are informed of the social worker's presence in the school. Together with the other prerequisites, these contexts facilitate parents to feel informed about the social worker, and they can build a better understanding of the social worker's role.

If the social worker gets to know and understand the family, and parents perceive them as independent of the school, then relationships between the school and parents can be improved. As a result, parents are more likely to feel supported and have confidence in joint support offered by the social worker and the school, and parents have a better awareness and understanding of a referral if one is made.

Ultimately this can lead to improved child and family outcomes/relationships because parents feel more positive about CSC which then increases their willingness to engage with the social worker/other services to discuss difficulties involving their child. Notably, this is unlikely to occur if parents feel closely monitored by the social worker's presence in schools, in which case they are more likely to stop engaging with CSC and the school.

Pathway C: Improved relationships between social worker and young people

Pathway C may be more relevant for social workers in secondary school due to the greater opportunities for direct work with young people. It is important that the young person has frequent interactions with the social worker, the social worker is engaged and involved with the young person and responds quickly to their needs. This pathway is unlikely to work if the young person feels stigma around seeing the social worker. This enables the young person to trust the social worker and to feel understood and supported. They are then more likely to feel comfortable accessing services when needed and feel able to disclose, and the social worker can develop a better understanding of potential risks to the young person. This allows the social worker to support the young person informally and to signpost to early intervention services. This can lead to improved school attendance and participation, better management of a young person's risks and improved outcomes.

In all three pathways, improved child and family outcomes are theorised to lead to a reduction of the number of children in care. More research would help inform several aspects of this model, as some of the assumed links are not well understood. For example, links between better child and family outcomes and care entry are complex, and the association between better relationships and other outcomes has a much stronger theoretical basis than it does empirical support (Forrester et al, 2019; Platt, 2012; Forrester, Westlake and Glynn, 2012).

DISCUSSION

In all the local authority pilots, the SWIS intervention was shaped by the schools that were involved. To some extent, each social worker – with the support of their manager and wider team – had to develop their own version of the intervention that was tailored to the particular school/s they were working with.

Nonetheless, there appears to be a few components of the model that were thought to be particularly important;

- Social workers need to be available and accessible.
- The intervention is open to the whole school not just those who are known to social care.
- There needs to be space to provide constructive challenge to school practices.

For some schools this was best achieved by a drop in approach, where workers would regularly spend time in the school and interact with staff and students. This itself varied, from scheduled time slots to more regular, longer periods of time spent in schools. In others, being based full time on the school premises seemed to be more in keeping with the aims of the pilot. If the more embedded and integrated approach is thought to be more effective – as it was by many social workers and school staff – then this is a systemic challenge of delivering the intervention, as the same pattern was evident in all three pilots. The approach seemed to work better when workers were more integrated, because they were visible, accessible and available to staff and students. However, some schools seemed to prefer a more remote interaction with social workers, so equally it could be interpreted as a sign that the approach needs a degree of flexibility built in.

Social workers in all three pilots came into contact with young people who were not known to CSC and who did not become subject to child in need or child protection plans. Some creative work was observed with young people who would not otherwise encounter a social worker. There were clear benefits of a social worker talking to young people about healthy relationships, for example, or group sessions where specific risks are discussed. However, implementers will need to consider how this might fit alongside statutory social work for practitioners who have limited capacity.

Finally, an important feature of the SWIS role was thought to be the ability for social workers to act as a critical friend within schools, challenging practices where they feel they could be improved. There was a consensus that this worked better when social workers were experienced, assertive, confident, and comfortable in working in isolation from their own colleagues among a team of professionals who worked in a different way.

Strengths and limitations of the evaluation

The chance to explore SWIS in three contexts generated a nuanced picture of how such an approach can be done across a range of schools. The common themes we observed across the three pilots suggest that the challenges and opportunities that were faced are - to some extent - generalisable. Being a set of feasibility studies, it was more important to understand how social workers interacted and engaged with schools than it was to examine the impact they might have on care outcomes. Nonetheless, our comparative analysis does give some useful indications of impact and, alongside the promising qualitative

evidence, this suggests they should be examined further. The timescale available for the evaluation precluded the inclusion of medium or long-term outcomes, and longitudinal work may help to address this in future. The amount of data we collected varied between pilots, due to practical and logistical issues such as the availability of workers and families during our fieldwork visits. These constraints unfortunately also limited the number of interviews we were able to conduct with children and young people.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This feasibility study aimed to describe and understand how SWIS was implemented across three local authorities. Embedding social workers into schools required boldness from both education and social care professionals, and particularly from the social workers who took up positions within schools. They were asked to work in a different way and in different places, which sometimes created challenges and dilemmas. As one senior practitioner noted, mimicking a well-known adage attributed to various historical figures[3], "if you're always going to do what you've always done, you're going to get the same results". We have explored how this new approach can be theorised to help families and reduce the need for children to enter care and explored the evidence that it may improve outcomes for children and young people.

Our findings are encouraging, and we offer the following recommendations:

1. **Test the intervention on a larger scale.** Our evaluation suggests SWIS may have a positive impact on reducing referrals for children thought to be in need and in need of protection from schools to CSC. Alongside this, this way of working has received a broadly positive response from those involved, including school staff, social care staff and children and families. Despite various challenges, some clear benefits of embedding social workers in schools have been highlighted. The intervention has good potential as a way of working and is worth exploring further.

2. **Clarify the focus of the intervention.** For the scale-up we recommend in 1), the nature of the intervention needs some clarification. For future implementers, it should be developed to have a clearer focus, and different approaches could be refined for different groups. Much of the work seemed to be centred around mainstream secondary schools, although there were several examples of creative work in primaries, and examples of more contact with parents in these schools. The work with the SEMH provision in Southampton was also very promising , and gives an indication of the potential of the model for children with specialist needs. It is worth exploring what the focus of SWIS should be and how social work input can be most effectively distributed across different types of schools.

3. **Focus on the nature and boundaries of the SWIS role.** The expansive nature of the SWIS role is one of the most informative aspects of the intervention, as workers demonstrated a wide spectrum of activities with professionals and children and families. However, there is a risk that the scope of the role is too wide, and that social workers begin to encroach on the duties of other professionals. Further development around the boundaries of the role and the expectations of workers may therefore be worthwhile.

4. **Work on further integrating social workers into schools.** The potential for a positive impact seemed greatest where social workers were more integrated in the school they worked with. Efforts to promote integration and enable workers to spend large amounts of time in schools will help generate a clearer picture of the intervention.

3 The adage is "If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got".

PART TWO

Pilot Local Authority Reports

OVERVIEW

This part of the report is designed to be read alongside Part 1, which draws together findings from all three pilot authorities. Here, we examine how the project was implemented in each local authority and draw out specific conclusions and recommendations for practitioners and managers in those places. The key themes we identify feed into our overall analysis and the programme theory we develop in Part 1 above. However, we pay more attention in this report to the nuances that the pilot evaluation reveals about implementing devolved budgets in each local authority.

There are several similarities and differences between the three pilots, and each context adds its own implications for how SWIS works in practice. Analysing these elements of the pilot aids our understanding of how SWIS might be targeted and delivered, and what outcomes we might expect associate with the intervention.

Social Workers in Schools in Southampton

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Southampton is a major port city in Hampshire, on the South coast of England. It is a unitary authority with a population of just over 250,000. The pilot placed social workers in the Secondary 1 cluster of schools, which is in the central and north parts of the city, and the Secondary 2 cluster, to the west of the city. Within this group is a trio of Specialist Educational and Mental Health (SEMH) schools; SEMH 2, SEMH 3, and SEMH 1. Both clusters have historically high levels of social care need.

The pilot aimed to reduce the number of referrals coming from schools by having social workers physically present in the schools and working with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) at each school. Social workers also sought to use their location within schools to improve working relationships with the senior management team of the school, teachers, parents and pupils, and to offer support on safeguarding issues and concerns. They intended to deliver training and support for the schools and provide additional services for vulnerable children and young people where needed. The clusters of schools in Southampton included 18 in total, and workers were based mainly within the two mainstream secondary and three specialist schools with visits to feeder primaries.

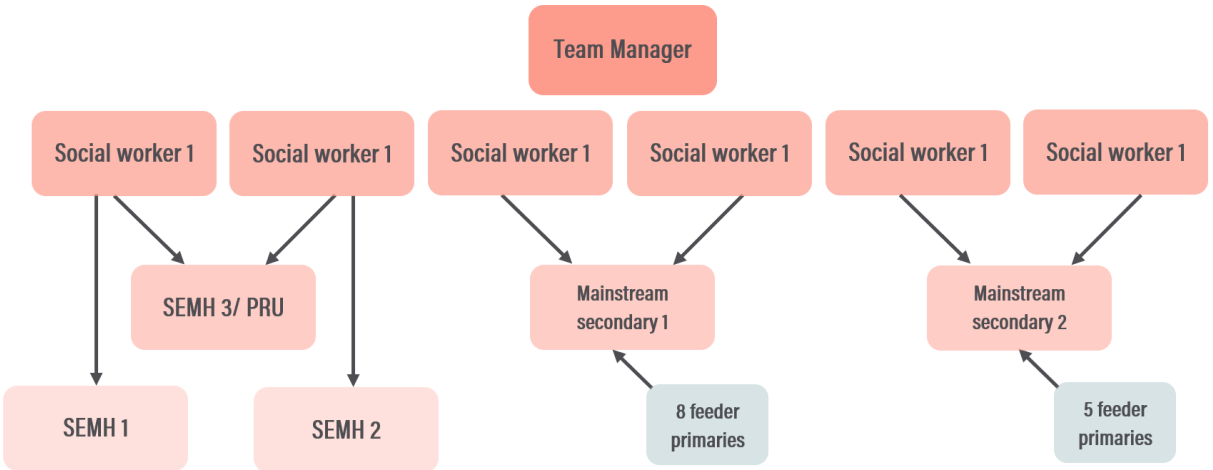

Figure 1: Team structure

Summary of interim findings

At the time of our first round of fieldwork (May 2019), several challenges had hampered the early stages of the pilot and limited its scope. There was a strong commitment from individual workers and managers, and evidence of some good work taking place, but this was overshadowed by systemic issues. Most notably, existing caseloads that were not linked to the schools continued to demand a lot of social workers' time, and their capacity was being taken up by court work not related to the schools they were assigned to. As a result, social workers had been unable to dedicate as much time as anticipated to working with children and families involved with the schools at this point in the pilot.

Focus of this report

This stage of the evaluation looks at SWIS following a re-launch of the pilot that occurred during summer 2019. We will examine how the pilot was implemented, and what social workers do when they are working within schools. We will identify the key characteristics of the intervention and look at indications of the impact it might have.

METHODOLOGY

Study design

The evaluation was organised into three phases. Phase 1 (January - February 2019) involved

developing an initial logic model which was used as a basis for the programme theory and data collection. Phase 2 (May - June 2019) involved fieldwork that helped us develop the logic model and assess progress in the early stages of the pilot. Phase 3 (November 2019 – February 2020) enabled us to understand how SWIS worked once they had become established in Southampton and explore early evidence of their impact.

Research questions

The evaluation of the pilot study requires us to understand how and why the project was implemented as it was, including the types of work done within schools and how this was perceived, as well as any barriers or facilitators to delivery. It also requires us to explore any evidence that the pilot shows promise and indicators of success. Our research questions fall into three main areas, evidence of feasibility, evidence of promise, and readiness for wider scale evaluation:

1. **Feasibility:** Can the intervention be delivered practically and are there systems and processes to enable the intervention to be easily scaled?
2. **Promise:** What evidence is there that the intervention can have a positive impact on outcomes?
3. **Scalability:** To what extent is the intervention used as anticipated and is the programme sufficiently codified to operate at scale?

Summary of data collection activities during Phase 3

We visited Southampton in November 2019 to do the bulk of the data collection and undertake interviews and observations. During this time, we recruited interview participants through liaison with the leadership team in Southampton, and spent periods shadowing social workers in each school setting (half days or full days) where opportunities for observing activities arose. The data we collected is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Data collection November 2019

Data collection type	Number
Interview with senior managers	3
Interview with team managers	1
Interview with social workers	7
Interview with school staff	2
Observations of social work practice	1
Observation of meetings or panels	3
Administrative data for matching, re Autumn terms 2016 – 18 (n = schools)	75
Administrative records from schools, re Autumn term 2019 (n = schools)	9
Activity logs (individual events recorded)	132

Analysis

We undertook three main forms of analysis. One to explore how the pilot worked using qualitative data, one to examine the impact of the pilot on quantitative outcomes, and the other to explore the economic impact of the pilot.

1. Qualitative theory building analysis

We analysed interviews, focus groups and observations using a qualitative thematic approach. Transcripts were coded by a researcher using NVivo 12 to explore key themes that could be identified. The framework was then shared with the lead author and the research team, and the analysis was discussed and refined with their input. Overarching themes were brought together by the lead author. In a final stage of analysis, these were discussed and agreed by the whole research team and used to refine the logic model. The discussion incorporated our learning from wider data collection activities, including observations and other informal discussions.

2. Quantitative comparative analysis

To estimate the impact of social workers in schools, we used a difference-in-differences model with cluster-robust standard errors by school. This compares schools with similar historical trends in certain outcomes, to assess whether the intervention has made a difference in these trends during the study period. We measured three outcomes: Section 17 starts, Section 47 enquiries and number of days children spent in care. For each outcome, we compared intervention schools against up to two matched control schools. This analysis relies on the assumption that outcome variables between the pilot and control schools exhibit parallel trends prior to the start of the intervention.

We matched schools based on three individual outcome trends. This meant that each intervention school could have up to six different comparator schools, two for each outcome. For the most recent change in outcomes in the two years prior to the intervention (2017-2018), we computed the difference in trends between treatment and comparator schools for each academic year group. These were averaged across the standardised absolute differences in trends for each academic year group to arrive at a single score for each treatment-comparator school pair. For each pilot school cluster, the two lowest scoring pairs were the first preference for matching.

The robustness of the match was tested using a Mann-Whitney U test comparing the ranking of the school matches identified by using 2017-18 data with the ranking of the school matches identified by using 2016-17 data. If the test yielded a p-value of below 0.05, then we rejected the match on the basis that the trend did not persist over time. We also checked for a parallel trend by inspecting the outcomes plotted over time for the treatment schools and the potential comparator schools. We include fixed effects for school and term and an interaction for intervention by term. The interaction estimates the degree to which change over time in the outcome differed in the intervention schools as compared to the control schools. Analysis was undertaken using school-level counts and numbers of pupils, rather than disaggregated by age group, given the small numbers of events.

Because all outcomes could be measured as counts, we used a Poisson link with number of students in each school in each term as the exposure scaling variable. The resultant coefficients were expressed as incidence rate ratios. These are best understood as the multiplicative change in the count of the outcome against a reference group, standardised by the number of students in the school for that term. So, for example, a rate ratio of 1.5 is interpreted as a 50% increase in the rate of an outcome, and a rate ratio of 0.5 is interpreted as a 50% decrease in the rate of an outcome, compared to a reference time point. Because the test of the intervention's effectiveness is based on an interaction term of intervention by time, the total impact in intervention schools is estimated by multiplying the time fixed effect by the intervention by time interaction. A characteristic of incidence rate

ratios is that confidence intervals are asymmetric, as the lower bound is 0 and the upper bound is infinity, with a point of no difference of 1.

3. Economic analysis

We collected information on the financial claims made and reported by each of the local authorities over the study period. From these, we extracted data on the staff costs directly involved in the intervention and the costs incurred in the setup and implementation of the project. Staff costs included the costs of team managers and the social workers implementing the intervention.

We annuitized all ancillary costs based on the replacement cost and the useful life of the item. A 4-year life span was assumed and a discount rate of 3.5% was applied to estimate the annuitization factor and thus the value of ancillary costs over the Autumn term.

We estimated the cost of the intervention over the four-month Autumn period (September to December). The currency used was pound sterling (£), with 2019 as the reference financial year. No discounting was applied to staffing costs as all costs occurred within the study period, which did not exceed one year.

Ethics

The School of Social Sciences' Research Ethics Committee at Cardiff University gave approval for the study. Social workers, staff working in participating schools, children and families were provided with information about the study and asked to sign a consent form, as part of which they were informed that taking part was voluntary and they could withdraw.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Our analysis is designed to show how the pilot was delivered and point to any early signs of the impact it was having. Considering what the interim findings revealed about the challenges faced early on, we start by looking at how much progress was made in implementing the pilot in the period since we last visited. To illustrate the nature of the project we describe the types of work social workers do, and their activities and routines when in the schools. Then we present our comparative analysis, which examines key outcome indicators between the intervention schools and matched comparators. In the following section we explore multiple perspectives on how the intervention worked, including the views of social care and education professionals and of children and families.

1. How was the pilot implemented?

In this section we consider the way the pilot was implemented in the various schools, as this provides a context for the following section, where we go into more detail about what types of work social workers undertook when they were there.

Project re-launch

Southampton were successful in maintaining a presence in all the school clusters involved, following the 're-launch' that took place during the summer. The additional time to build relationships with schools and a renewed focus and enthusiasm that the incoming team manager brought to the project seemed to help overcome many of the issues experienced initially. A Headteacher contrasted these two periods in this positive appraisal;

> *"I think we've made far more progress in September-October-November than we did in April-May-June-July. It wasn't working, I don't think it worked at all sort of pre the summer, just because we were trying to battle against it with the IT issues and trying to base them here [in the school] as much as we possibly could.* **(Headteacher, interview)**

Tailored format

Part of the reason for this change seems to be the adoption of a flexible approach whereby the way social workers engaged with schools varied. There was a strong sense that the social work team adapted according to what schools wanted from their assigned social workers. For example, some schools provided office space for workers to spend time in the school on a daily basis, while others welcomed workers visiting as and when they needed to. One school formalised the drop in approach with scheduled periods, twice a week where social workers visited and were available for staff and students to meet them.

Reflecting on the difficult start, one social care manager noted how the differences between schools made a tailored approach particularly valuable. They felt it would be important to ask:

> *"How do you operate? Talk to us about your core values, tell us about the*

presenting challenges that you think a social worker could assist with. And then talk to us about your pastoral support framework and how does that operate and how does that engage with young people, what outcomes does it achieve, how do you share information? **(Social care manager, interview)**

Presence within schools

As the project developed these issues shaped the format of the intervention and how much time workers spent in schools, as Table 2 shows.

Table 2: Configuration of pilot across schools

	Secondary 1	Secondary 2	SEMH 1	SEMH 2	SEMH 3	Feeder primaries (n=13)
Type of school	Mainstream secondary	Mainstream secondary	SEMH	SEMH	SEMH	Mainstream primary
Presence within school	Office based within school	Scheduled bi-weekly drop ins	Office based within school	Office based within school	Office based within school	Visiting regularly
Number of social workers	2	2	1	1	2	N/A

In Secondary 1 two social workers were based on site full time. They occupied an office along the corridor from the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and had regular contact with the DSL and other staff and students in the school. In Secondary 2 the format evolved during the project to become rather different. Social workers were embedded initially but, as we noted in our interim report, were situated in "in the back of the school in a soundproofed room" and found it difficult to interact with school staff and pupils. By Phase 3 a different configuration had been negotiated: social workers were based elsewhere but visited the school to hold twice weekly drop-in sessions.

This arrangement was not what social care staff had envisaged, and some questioned whether being based in the school full time – as they were in other schools - might lead to a better working relationship. Nonetheless, their new location was viewed to be more appropriate by a social care manager who noted "they've now moved to front of house, in a meeting room, and they're much more visible. And so that I think is helping". Moreover, this format also seemed to work better from the school's point of view, because they knew that the workers would be available at the allotted time;

> *"On a Monday and a Thursday I at least know [the social worker will be available] ...two of the heads of year want to go and speak to [the social workers] this afternoon and they know they can do that because she's definitely going to be there.* **(Headteacher, interview)**

To some extent the approach taken in each school was dictated by practicalities such as what space was available, and in this example the arrangement seems to emerge from a combination of this and the preferences and

working style of the school itself. In any case, the physical location of the social workers within the school does seem important. In another example, from a different school, a headteacher commented that having the social worker "right next to the school hall and the reception where people are coming and going all the time ... works quite nicely". Finding room for social workers could be difficult in buildings where, as one headteacher put it, "space is at an absolute premium".

The involvement of primary schools varied, and some headteachers were very positive about the pilot. Some workers felt that the intervention should be focussed more at secondary level, partly because the inclusion of feeder primaries added significantly to the number of schools they had to cover.

Management and support

Although the social workers were dispersed across the city in different schools, they met regularly and seemed to operate as a coherent team. This was helped by the way the team manager oversaw the work and supported the relationships between social worker and school staff in each institution. One manifestation of this, which we observed during our fieldwork, was a series of half termly meetings in each school. These were chaired by the team manager and involved the social worker/s and DSL/s or senior school staff. These meetings seemed to serve multiple functions. Ostensibly they were designed to help both agencies keep abreast of the children at risk and in need within that school, share information and do joint planning. There were detailed discussions about the children and their needs, and – notably - a wider range of children than just those who were involved with CSC were spoken about. As the manager outlined at the start of one of these meetings;

> *"This is an opportunity for me and [headteacher] and [deputy headteacher] as the Head and the Deputy with [DSL] to just review where the project is, review any children that are currently open to the project as well as looking at cherry picking any children that might be coming forward as well in the future, and also planning for the next sort of term.* **(Observation recording)**

However, they seemed just as valuable in maintaining good relationships between staff and ironing out any interagency working issues or implementation problems that may be arising.

The attributes and skills required for the role

When professionals were asked what attributes workers needed to be effective, several noted the importance of experience. Experience was thought to prepare workers for some of the challenges noted above around remote working, as they were considered more autonomous and able to cope with periods of working alone;

> *"I don't think these positions suit the newly qualified social workers because currently in this project there's an element of isolation.* **(Manager, interview)**

The same sentiment was echoed in the focus group with social workers, where there was a consensus that Southampton's stipulation of at least 2 years post-qualifying experience was a sensible requirement;

> *"I think that because it's a little bit more isolated than a role in the office, that actually you're making your decisions and you have to be strong in your decision making, to the extent that we can make [some decisions] without our managers, and strong in your analysis of the situation.* **(Social worker, focus group)**

Experienced workers were also thought to be more equipped to challenge school staff when necessary. For the same reason, words such as

'resilient' and 'thick-skinned' were also mentioned as important qualities for SWIS workers to have;

> *"...If you are in a very strong network that disagrees with you quite a lot and you've got several children who they disagree with you about, or you're not going quick enough... Actually you do have to not be pulled apart by that* **(Social worker, focus group)**

Other skills were also thought to be important. For example, being able to engage well with young people, and the ability to persist when the work is difficult. These were thought to be particularly important when working with teenage young people, and especially in the SEMH schools. One of the workers placed in one such school added "Humour works all day long for me".

2. What types of activities do social workers do?

It is important to understand the nature of the SWIS role and how it differs from the locality work that others in the department do. Southampton kept an activity log to record issues[1] raised and document work that took place as a result. A record was kept for each secondary school which noted the year group the child was in, the staff member who shared the issue, and a brief account of the advice given or action taken by the social worker. This type of record has strengths and limitations, and certain types of work are more likely to be recorded than others. As one worker noted, it can be difficult to remember and note down the informal contact they have with young people, for example;

> *"Because they're the everyday things, they're just things that you do for human beings and then you move on and you do your work. They don't feel like work. Like a conversation with a young person doesn't feel like work, it just feels human ...So mine are very much under recorded because I haven't been good at it but I have recorded what I can recall.* **(Social worker, interview)**

Moreover, other research has found that record keeping in social work is subject to a range of factors that influence what is and isn't recorded (Wilkins et al, 2018). Nonetheless, these logs can give an insight into some of the day-to-day activities workers undertook, and the interviews help to further flesh out some of this work. Broad categories are information and advice giving, both to other professionals and to children and families, and direct work with young people.

In total, 132 issues were logged across all the secondary schools, though some data was missing. These show that issues raised tended to relate to children at the key transition years, at either end of the school age spectrum – with higher numbers in years 7 (35% of issues) and 11 (32% of issues). In terms of who raised issues with workers, headteachers and year heads accounted for nearly half (47%) of issues recorded.

1 The database described these as "concerns" raised, but it is clear from the data that this was a wider set of issues as we discuss in the text.

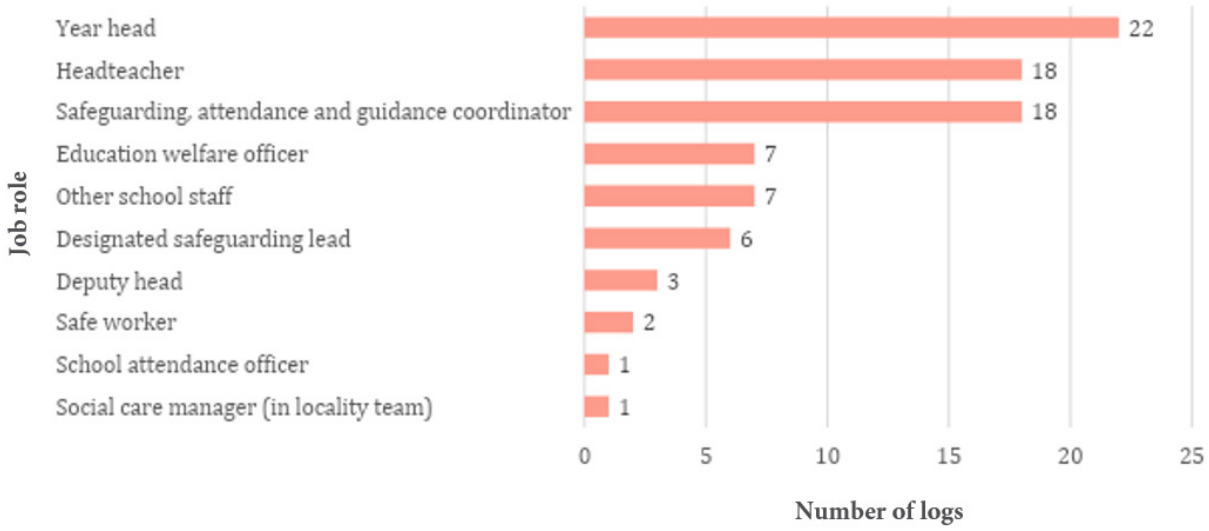

Figure 2: Person who raised issue

Contact with parents and professionals

Most of the contact with parents and professionals seemed to be around advice giving and consultation. Some of the issues were relatively simple requests for information, for example where the name and contact details of a new social worker allocated to a child, or an update from a meeting is requested. Other common issues included attendance problems and requests for advice about concerns they have around child welfare. In one example, where a headteacher asked for a father to be given support around private law matters, the social worker carried out a series of tasks;

> *Telephone call to dad. Review of social care file. Family are open to assessment with Social Care. Email sent to assessing SW and email sent to school to provide details of SW involved.* **(Activity log; "Advice/ Action")**

One of the social workers described advising the school DSL about whether they should make a referral to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), noting that the main benefit was often reassurance;

> *"Sometimes [the DSL will] ask questions, [such as] 'do you think this is a MASH referral?', sometimes [the DSL is] being really polite because [they] know the answer... but that's fine, it's a helpful conversation anyway.* **(Social worker, interview)**

Contact with young people

The physical co-location of social workers and education staff also seemed to have various benefits for young people. Being available was thought to alter the power balance between social workers and the young people, as it became their choice to visit the worker and not the other way around. For one worker this was more important than the actual interaction, "I think the chat for me is almost secondary to the choice to have the chat... because the power balance is just so different."

Our observations and interviews characterise the role as a balancing act where workers move between very different kinds of activities. This was particularly true in the SEMH schools, where workers appeared to spend more recreational time with children and young people;

> *"I'm trying to balance the role of being informative and being able to advise the school itself and the teachers within it. And then with the young people, trying to allow them to have the benefit of understanding the social work role but within the school setting. And then also building a social side to that as well which is like the having lunch with them and playing football. So I am trying to build of all of that into the time that I spend here.* **(Social worker, interview)**

As we noted above, a key benefit of being integrated within the school seemed to be the opportunity to give advice to a wider range of children than social workers would normally come into contact with. There was evidence of good work being done with children who were not currently known to CSC. One worker explains this kind of work in the following example;

> *"So the other day I had a conversation with a young woman that [the DSL] believes wishes to disclose, and I believe she does too. [But] she's not ready. And so actually I said 'well what about if we sit down and we just talk through the process?' and so I talked her through it as a social worker. Because if she's a bit, if she's cautious and she doesn't know what's going to happen next, [I thought] 'let's give her the tools, let me talk her through what happens next'. So [I told her] what my considerations would be as a social worker and then who I would discuss that with, what would happen next, what questions would be asked. If she wants a copy of a blank single assessment I can give her a copy of a blank single assessment so she knows what questions might be coming. And then she can make an informed decision about whether she wants to talk or whether she doesn't, and what she wants to share and what she doesn't. So, I couldn't do that if I weren't a court and protection social worker with the same amount of ease.* **(Social worker, interview)**

This is one of several examples where social workers had informal contact with young people. Where social workers provided a day to day presence in schools their informal contact with children and school staff seemed to increase over time. This was less apparent in the school where the drop in arrangement was in place, and workers reported that this was used primarily by staff members rather than young people. Another benefit for workers who were able to maintain a more constant presence in the school was being on hand during a crisis;

> *"If I'm here in school then if something was to happen and escalate really quickly, I can be here to help that. Whereas if I'm at the Civic office they've got to phone me and then I've got to do this, I've got to do that.* **(Social worker, interview)**

Mission creep?

The availability of social workers seemed to lead them to do roles and tasks that they might not ordinarily do, or roles that other professionals might be expected to undertake. For example, a social worker in a secondary school intervened directly with a child who was not attending regularly;

> *"When [child's name] was not coming in, I would detour in the mornings where I could, pick him up from [home] and bring him in because now I get that every single day makes some difference, every single day. It stops a habit developing where he doesn't come in at all. It means it's one more day in which he has social relationships and opportunities."*

The worker felt this was beneficial, but it raises the question of whether being embedded within

schools might encourage 'mission creep'. The following excerpt from one of the termly reviews we observed illustrates this dilemma. It is from a discussion about a child who the school was concerned about due to poor attendance. It shows a social worker taking on tasks an Education Welfare Officer (EWO) might ordinarily do in getting children who had poor attendance into school;

> **Social worker:** *"So is [the EWO] in today for example?"*
>
> **Deputy Head:** *"No. He hasn't been in since half term."*
>
> **Socal Worker:** *"Literally hasn't been in since half term?"*
>
> **Deputy Head:** *"No."*
>
> *...*
>
> **Social Worker:** *"And so if I were that young person's social worker I would be almost saying 'right [its] 8:30am, hello, what are we doing today, are we coming to school? Get your coat, get your bag, I'm going to take you in'. And actually that's what, with some of the attendance problems at [other school], that's what one of the social workers has done, she's done her journey, picked the little lad up and brought him into school..."*
>
> **(Observation recording, termly review)**

3. What are the opportunities and challenges?

The pilot highlights several opportunities and challenges associated with this way of working. An overarching issue here is the way differences in agency culture and routines shape the work.

Inter-agency working

Where social workers maintained a regular presence in schools one of the key advantages seemed to be in improving inter-agency working. Social workers noted that their working relationships with the schools were improved, because in person conversations "...with a cup of tea in your hand rather than on the phone, [are] completely different interactions." School staff also noted the benefits, and one headteacher described how it enabled the social worker to gain a better understanding of the school's safeguarding practices;

> *"[The social worker] has attended our whole staff meetings as well so she's got a feel of the sort of thing that consumes us on a daily basis and what we do about it. I mean we have for example, weekly staff meetings and there is a standing agenda item for children of concern...And [the social worker] gets sight of the minutes so she can check out whether there is anybody in our concern book that is part of her casework and things like that as well.* **(Headteacher, interview)**

The geography of the pilot also enabled this, as workers tended to focus on a smaller area and could build better relationships with fewer professionals they got to know well;

> *"One really good thing about this project is all of my cases are in the same geographical area so it makes it much easier to visit... I'm working with the same visitor, I'm not working with six health visitors... if I'm working with GPs then I'm only working with a small amount of GPs. So actually ... that kind of professional working has worked really well because ... the group of professionals is much smaller.* **(Social worker, interview)**

There were examples where the two agencies seemed to work well together, and this seemed to be particularly true in the SEMH provision. This was thought to be because the young people in those schools had higher levels of more complex needs that social workers were well placed to support;

> *"I think they accept that essentially we're the experts in safeguarding and they kind of assist, but they're the experts in the young people because they see them every day and they've known them for long periods of time.* **(Social worker, interview)**

Cultural differences

The pilot also showed that priorities and ways of doing things could differ between social care and education. In terms of what this meant for the those involved, one manager framed the task as "managing cultural partnerships as well as practical ones". Much of the work done by project leads aimed to reconcile organisational differences between education and social care and bring their respective priorities further into line. This seems to have had mixed success. Managers were optimistic, noting that the pilot had given social care more "credibility" within schools and furthered their efforts towards a more community-based approach. Yet there was a sense that social care staff were having to adapt their ways of working more to schools than the other way around.

Schools are judged primarily by the educational attainment of the children who are on their roll, rather than the safety and wellbeing of those children and their siblings and families. One headteacher remarked, "when OFSTED walk in there they aren't going to be asking me how is my social worker getting on, they're wanting to know the academic attainment of the pupils". As a result, their focus tended be narrower than that of social workers. Sometimes this created a tension around the role that schools wanted social workers to play, and how far they adapted their activities to focus specifically on the school or more broadly on the wellbeing of children and families associated with it;

> *"...That bit's about social workers working with the whole family...[Schools need to] accept that [sometimes] the social worker isn't on site or isn't available to them at that given moment but they're still adding value to the child that attends their school even though they might be in the feeder school down the road.* **(Manager, interview)**

A social care manager noted that overcoming these challenges can be more difficult than expected;

> *"I think if you buy into this optimism of partnership working you actually presume that the cultural clashes will be easy to overcome. But actually, they're not always and I think we should have spent more time focusing on that probably before we kicked off.* **(Manager, social care, interview)**

Over time workers from each agency reported gaining a better understanding of the other's roles. This involved frustration for both, and remains a work in progress, but seems a positive aspect of the pilot;

> *"You know it's an uncertain profession and so things are less prescribed and so I think that - that reactionary sort of activity that takes place - sometimes schools struggle with that. But on the whole I think that they're coming around to understanding it more.* **(Manager, social care, interview)**

There were also examples during the pilot where they seemed, in the words of the manager quoted at the start of this subsection, to manage practical partnerships effectively. Often the physical co-location seemed to facilitate this. When considering attendance issues, which were a high priority for schools, one worker explained how being in the school helped them grasp the school's concerns in a way that they otherwise would not;

> *"Now I wouldn't get that if I wasn't just lurking in school because that's not someone telling me, I've heard that before. I've heard lots of people telling me about the importance of attendance. And the importance of attendance when you've got six Section 47s and something else, it's way down your list of what you can hear.* **(Social worker, interview)**

Routines and working patterns

The routines and working patterns of education and social care professionals largely set the scene for practical partnerships. Challenges arose from this because routines are dictated by the nature of the work and those typical of school staff and social workers contrasted sharply. The structure imposed by teaching timetables and the emphasis on discipline found in schools put the working day of teachers and their pupils into a rigid and predictable format. Conversely, social workers' patterns of activity are shaped by the responsive, unpredictable and sometimes crisis led nature of the work;

> *"You know the teaching role is very clear isn't it? You turn up at school at 9am in the morning, you do your lessons, you do extra work at home, I'm not saying they have six weeks off. But you don't have that run-around, you don't have [as social workers do] that 'right, you need to go there now'. [As a social worker] you've got your planned day, but actually [the social work role is more responsive]. And I don't think that's recognised [by school staff].* **(Social worker, interview)**

It was important for some schools to fit the social workers into their routine. For example, the school that moved to the drop-in model found it difficult to know when workers would be available at the start of the project;

> *"It just didn't work in terms of having them based here full-time just because of the pressures and strains of their own job and having to do the home visits and being out a lot. It wasn't working, we weren't seeing them, they weren't seeing us.* **(Headteacher, interview)**

This school was open to more social work input but maintained the view that expanding the drop-in approach would be preferable to them being fully based in the school.

> *"I'd love there to be more school-based time... if we could go from two afternoons a week to four afternoons a week then obviously that would be fantastic. But I am also quite pleased that I've got something that is working for us at the moment. Yeah if it could be scaled up a little bit more, not back to where we were initially trying to do it as a whole day every day thing, but certainly if we could do a couple of afternoons and a couple of mornings that would be probably more beneficial.* **(Headteacher, interview)**

Balancing workload

The extent to which workers spent time in the schools and time elsewhere is a pertinent issue because not all aspects of their role could be done in the school. Some tasks were easier to do outside the school, and some activities had to take place at council offices. For example, one worker explained;

> *"I can't do court work from [the school], I need to be able to print, I need my managers, I need legal, I need fostering, I need family placement, I need those conversations and email doesn't work for that. I need to tap someone on the shoulder and go 'oi, where are we at?' And they need to tap me on the shoulder*

and say 'have you done...?'. **(Social worker, interview)**

The work social workers do to prepare for and attend court hearings is something we discussed with several workers, as this had been identified in our interim findings as a reason for the pilot having a difficult start. As we noted in our summary above, problems were caused by workers being too busy with court work relating to existing non-school cases to focus on being in the schools. Fortunately, this challenge had been largely overcome by the current phase of the evaluation as workers stopped taking on cases from the wider Protection and Court Team (PACT). However, SWIS workers still undertook the full range of child protection work for children within the schools – and sometimes this involved court work.

The balance of work remained a consideration throughout. While court work often created large volumes of work away from schools, it was thought to be an important aspect of the role that workers needed to do. This was partly because they felt responsible for the children and families they worked with, but also because it was important to maintain their professional expertise. One worker noted "I am in a frontline team in part because, [statutory expertise] that's the skill base I've got, I want to use that. I don't want to do [court work] day in day out but I want to use it."

4. What impact does it appear to have?

The difference in differences analysis suggests that the pilot has some potential in terms of reducing section 47 enquiries, though we found no evidence of any impact on section 17 starts or the number of days children spent in care.

Section 17 starts

This analysis considered five schools: two intervention and three matched control schools. Estimates of Section 17 starts per school term, the number of pupils registered in the school in each term (and thus 'at risk' for a Section 17 start), and the average count of Section 17 starts per 100 students are presented in Table 3. A visual trend, depicted in Figure 3, suggests that schools generally experienced a decrease and then an uptick of Section 17 starts. Note that comparator schools were chosen by trends in each age group, which means that aggregate trends are not as directly parallel as trends used for matching. In the intervention term, there did not appear to be a consistent change in trends across intervention schools.

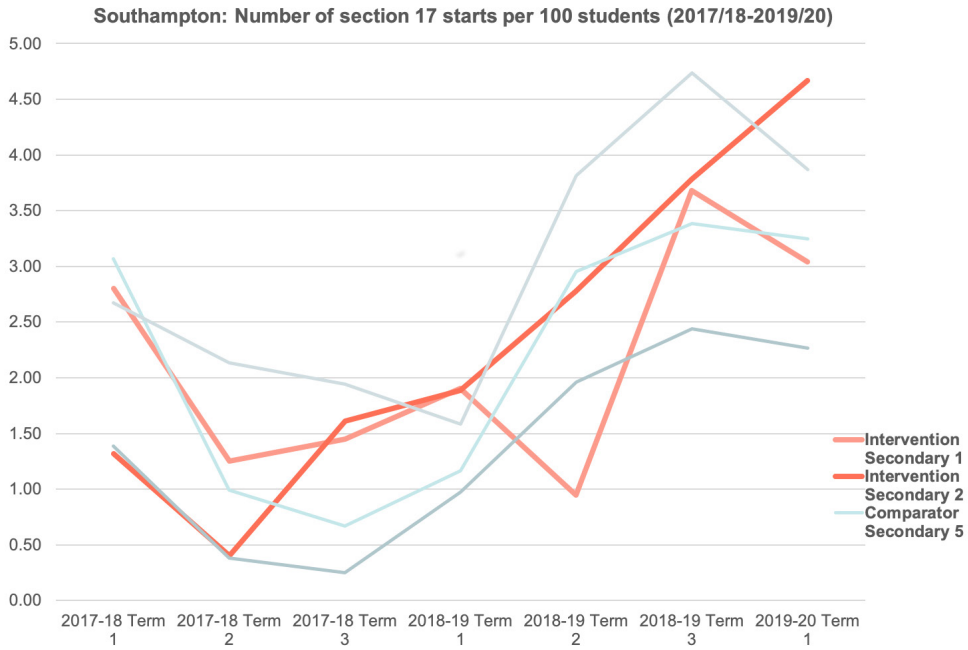

Figure 3. Average count per 100 students: Section 17 starts

Table 3. Section 17 starts by term and school

	Intervention						Control								
	SOU_Secondary1_INT			Sou_Secondary2_INT			SOU_Secondary5_COMP			SOU_Secondary6_COMP			SOU_Secondary7_COMP		
Term	Number	Pupils	Average count*	Number	Pupils	Average count*	Number	Pupils	Average count*	Number	Pupils	Average count*	Number	Pupils	Average count*
2017-18 Term 1	27	963	2.80	13	985	1.32	19	619	3.07	11	793	1.39	15	561	2.67
2017-18 Term 2	12	958	1.25	4	992	0.40	6	604	0.99	3	790	0.38	12	562	2.14
2017-18 Term 3	14	967	1.45	16	994	1.61	4	596	0.67	2	791	0.25	11	566	1.94
2018-19 Term 1	20	1050	1.90	19	1006	1.89	7	600	1.17	8	823	0.97	9	569	1.58
2018-19 Term 2	10	1056	0.95	28	1008	2.78	18	609	2.96	16	815	1.96	22	577	3.81
2018-19 Term 3	39	1060	3.68	38	1004	3.78	21	620	3.39	20	820	2.44	27	570	4.74
2019-20 Term 1	34	1119	3.04	48	1028	4.67	22	677	3.25	20	882	2.27	25	646	3.87

*Count is per 100 students

Regression estimates, presented in Table 4, suggested a difference of 24% in the change over time in rate of Section 17 starts between intervention and control schools. In control schools, the rate of Section 17 starts decreased by 14% (incidence rate ratio [IRR] 0.86, 95% CI [0.76, 0.97]) between the term before implementation and in the term of implementation. However, the rate of change was of lesser magnitude in intervention schools (intervention by time IRR 1.24, [0.85, 1.80]), suggesting that in intervention schools, Section 17 starts actually increased by 6%. This difference in trends between intervention and control groups was not statistically significant.

Table 4. Regression estimates of change over time in Section 17 starts

Term fixed effects		
2017-18 Term 2	0.27	0.16, 0.44
2018-19 Term 1	0.44	0.37, 0.52
2018-19 Term 3	Reference	
Intervention by time	1.24	0.85, 1.8

IRR, incidence rate ratio; CI, confidence interval

Figure 4. Difference in difference estimates of treatment effects on section 17 starts in Southampton

Section 47 starts

This analysis considered three schools: one intervention and two control. Estimates of Section 47 starts per school term, the number of pupils registered in the school in each term (and thus 'at risk' for a section 47 start), and the average count of Section 47 starts per 100 students are presented in Table 5.

Table 3. Section 17 starts by term and school

	Intervention			Control					
	SOU_Secondary1_INT			SOU_Secondary8_COMP			SOU_Secondary6_COMP		
Term	Number	Pupils	Average count*	Number	Pupils	Average count*	Number	Pupils	Average count*
2017-18 Term 1	25	963	2.60	10	1657	0.60	6	793	0.76
2017-18 Term 2	4	958	0.42	8	1670	0.48	3	790	0.38
2017-18 Term 3	13	967	1.34	14	1667	0.84	1	791	0.13
2018-19 Term 1	15	1050	1.43	8	1757	0.46	4	823	0.49
2018-19 Term 2	4	1056	0.38	9	1752	0.51	12	815	1.47
2018-19 Term 3	36	1060	3.40	8	1747	0.46	12	820	1.46
2019-20 Term 1	16	1119	1.43	17	1885	0.90	7	882	0.79

*Count is per 100 students

Inspection of the visual trend of average count per 100 students (see Figure 5) suggested that the intervention school experienced significantly more volatility per term as compared to control schools. Indeed, in the term immediately preceding the term of implementation, the intervention school reached its highest count of Section 47 starts per 100 students.

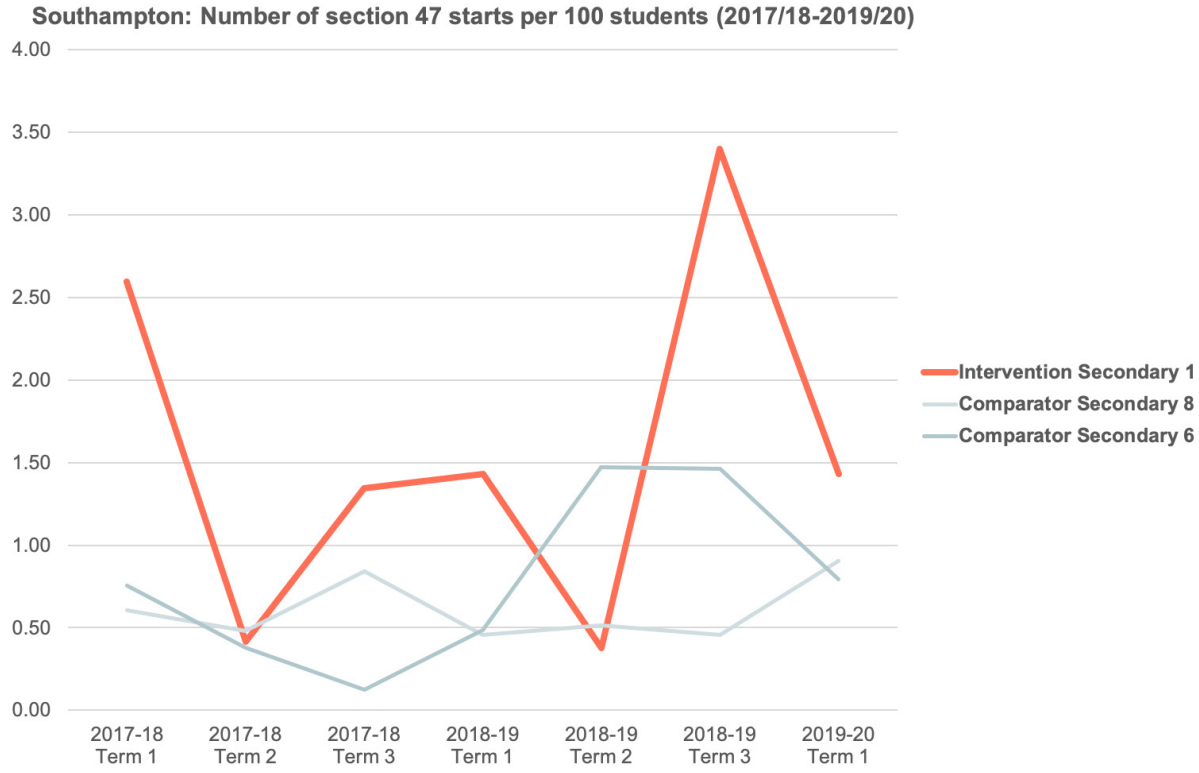

Figure 5. Average count per 100 students: Section 47 starts

Regression estimates, presented in Table 6, suggested a significant difference between intervention and control schools in the number of Section 47 starts between the term before implementation and the term following implementation. In control schools, the rate of Section 47 starts decreased by 19% (IRR 0.81, 95% CI [0.38, 1.74]), though this decrease was not statistically significant. However, the intervention school rate of Section 47 starts decreased even more by 35% (IRR 0.65, [0.45, 0.94]), suggesting a significant difference between intervention and control schools in the rate of change in Section 47 starts. This translated to a 47% decrease in intervention schools in Section 47 starts after implementation.

Table 6. Regression estimates of change over time in Section 47 starts

Coefficient	IRR	95% CI
Term fixed effects		
2017-18 Term 1	0.79	0.58, 1.06
2017-18 Term 2	0.29	0.08, 1.02
2017-18 Term 3	0.53	0.19, 1.5
2018-19 Term 1	0.48	0.31, 0.75
2018-19 Term 2	0.45	0.11, 1.85
2018-19 Term 3	Reference	
2019-20 Term 1	0.81	0.38, 1.74
Intervention by time	0.65	0.45, 0.94
Constant	0.01	0.01, 0.02

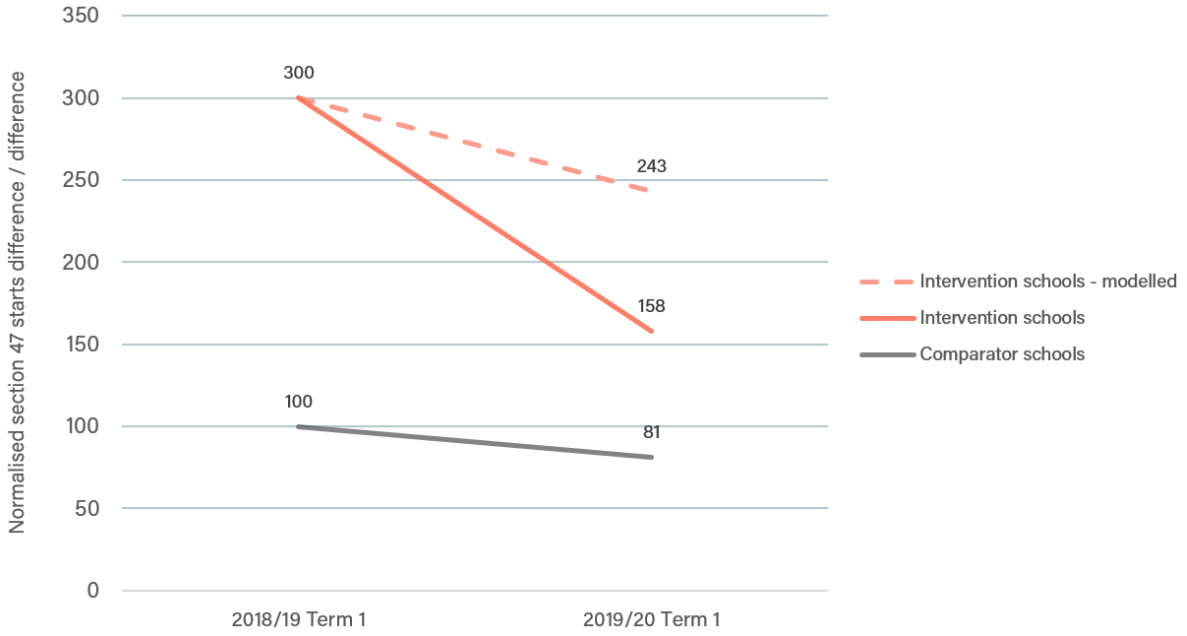

Figure 6. Difference in difference estimates of treatment effects on section 47 starts in Southampton

Days in care

This analysis drew on three schools: one intervention and two control. Estimates of days in care per school term, the number of pupils registered in the school in each term (and thus 'at risk' for accruing days in care), and the average count of days in care per student are presented in Table 7.

Inspection of the visual trends in days in care does not reveal an obvious conclusion (see Figure 7). Neither control school had a pre-intervention trend similar to the intervention school. In addition, while the intervention seems associated with an increase in days in care, one of the control schools had a similar increase.

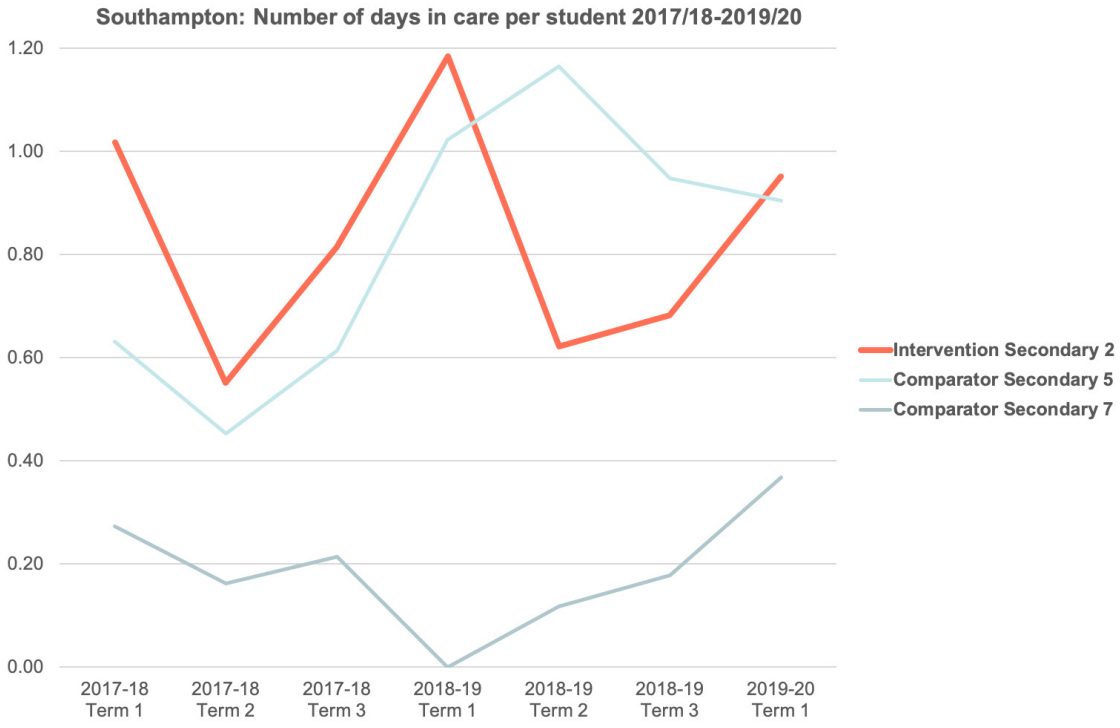

Figure 7. Average count: days in care

Table 7. Days in care by term and school

	Intervention			Control					
	SOU_Secondary2_INT			SOU_Secondary5_COMP			SOU_Secondary7_COMP		
Term	Number	Pupils	Average count	Number	Pupils	Average count	Number	Pupils	Average count
2017-18 Term 1	1002	985	1.017	390	619	0.630	153	561	0.273
2017-18 Term 2	546	992	0.550	273	604	0.452	91	562	0.162
2017-18 Term 3	809	994	0.814	366	596	0.614	121	566	0.214
2018-19 Term 1	1191	1006	1.184	613	600	1.022	0	569	0.000
2018-19 Term 2	627	1008	0.622	709	609	1.164	68	577	0.118
2018-19 Term 3	684	1004	0.681	587	620	0.947	101	570	0.177
2019-20 Term 1	978	1028	0.951	612	677	0.904	237	646	0.367

Regression estimates of the intervention's impact (see Table 8) did not suggest any meaningful relationship between the intervention and change in days in care. In control schools, days in care increased in standardised count by 34% (IRR=1.34, 95% CI [0.76, 2.38]) between the term before implementation and the term of implementation. This difference was not significant. In contrast, intervention schools increased by 20% (intervention by time IRR=0.89, [0.59, 1.35]), but the difference in trends between schools was not significant.

Table 8. Regression estimates in change over time in days in care

Term fixed effects		
2017-18 Term 2	0.67	0.46, 0.99
2018-19 Term 1	1.33	0.84, 2.09
2018-19 Term 3	Reference	
Intervention by time	0.89	0.59, 1.35

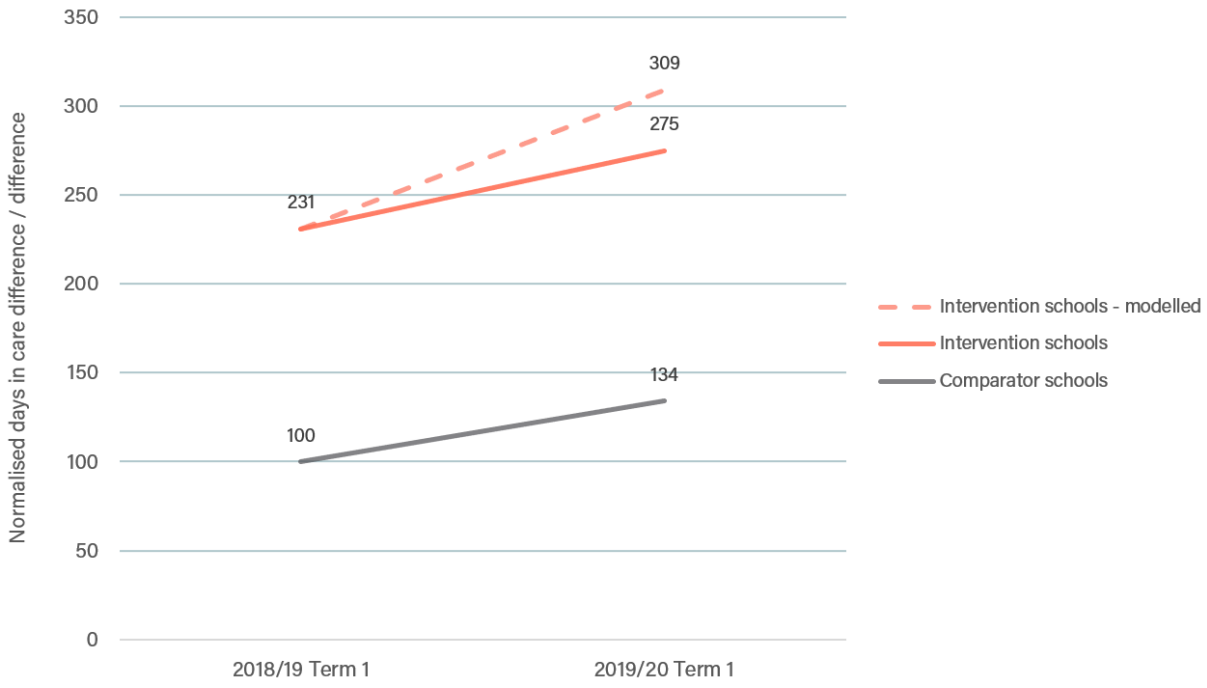

Figure 8. Difference in difference estimates of treatment effects on days in care in Southampton

The evaluation is primarily a feasibility study, and therefore our analysis of impact is designed to highlight early indications that the pilot may have an impact on certain measurable outcomes. In all three pilots the limited timescale for measuring impact limits what magnitude of change in these variables that we can expect. This is an even greater constraint in Southampton than it is elsewhere, because the pilot did not begin to operate as planned until several months into the evaluation period.

Using the autumn term as our frame of analysis maximised the time for measurable indications of impact to materialise, but arguably implementing a complex intervention such as this is better served by a longer follow-up period. As one manager commented, "I think we needed to give it a term of bedding in... where you're transitioning, and then the full academic year" before measuring impact. In that context, it is particularly encouraging that the pilot schools showed a significant reduction in child protection investigations as compared to the matched comparator schools.

The analysis also hints at other possibilities that may be worth exploring further. For example, although not statistically significant, there was an increase in the number of Section 17 starts (of 24%). If further evidence of this were to be found in future research, we might interpret it as a consequence of social workers becoming concerned about more children through being exposed to children who are not currently involved with CSC. It could be argued that spending time with these children, some of whom school staff are concerned about, and discussing these concerns with the schools, may cause them to instigate CSC involvement with more children overall.

5. How much does the intervention cost to deliver?

The cost of having social workers based in schools was lower in Southampton than in the other two pilots, at a total of £84,387 over the autumn term. Ancillary costs, which are part of this figure, included the purchase of six phones, six laptops and a refurbishment of a room at one of the schools where social workers were based.

Table 9: Total costs of Social works in schools over an Autumn term

Resource inputs	Total cost (£, 2019)
Staffing: Team manager and social workers	£83,788
Ancillary costs	£599.91
Total	£84,387.91

CONCLUSIONS

In order to make sense of the broad range of themes we have identified we return to our research questions to consider the feasibility, promise and scalability of SWIS in Southampton.

1. **Feasibility: Can the intervention be delivered practically and are there systems and processes to enable the intervention to be easily scaled?**

The pilot has demonstrated some of the opportunities and challenges of working with schools in a way that differs from usual practice. The intervention varied between schools in the format it took and the extent to which social workers were integrated into the school environment, and this variation helps us understand how such a project might bring about more effective interagency collaboration. In some schools, the approach outlined in the original project plan proved feasible. This was most apparent in secondary schools where social workers were given an office in the heart of the school where they were based most of the time, and in the SEMH schools where workers did more activities with young people. Elsewhere, the project team adapted to the circumstances and applied an approach that meant schools had more direct contact with social workers than they otherwise would but were not integrated into the school environment as planned. This partial implementation seemed to have benefits and drawbacks, with a clearer schedule of availability for school work but less overall time spent in schools. Nonetheless, the schools were generally positive about it.

More broadly, the pilot helps us understand the practicalities of working together across agencies by demonstrating how social workers fit into schools, both in terms of arranging their physical presence but also the contribution they make through the roles and responsibilities they take on. It highlighted some of the practical and organisational issues associated with working across agency boundaries, and illustrated how changing where social workers are based can influence the service children and families receive. Alongside the benefits that we identified, there were also challenges around roles and responsibilities and the way physical spaces were shared.

2. **Promise: What evidence is there that the intervention can have a positive impact on outcomes?**

There was consistent qualitative evidence that the pilot was a promising way of working, from both education and social care staff. By bringing social workers closer to school staff and pupils, the approach increased opportunities for direct work and made collaboration easier. However, there was also a consensus that a longer period is needed for the scale of its impact to be shown in measurable outcomes. Evidence that the rate of S.47 investigations decreased by 35% is encouraging. This may indicate that the work social workers do within the schools is helping reduce the levels of concern, such that children are less likely to experience significant harm. Similarly, the possibility that embedding social workers within schools – and bringing them into contact with large numbers of children not known to CSC – may increase Section 17 work is worth pursuing further.

However, we need to be tentative in our interpretation of this. The time frame is

particularly short, given that the intervention did not really begin until relatively shortly before the frame of analysis began. Moreover, and perhaps an even more important consideration, the varied implementation is another reason to be cautious about these findings. There are clear differences between the schools that had a more constant social work presence and those where workers visited, and there is good reason to expect the impact of these formats to vary.

3. **Scalability: To what extent is the intervention used as anticipated and is the programme sufficiently codified to operate at scale?**

The tailored approach that we have described has several benefits and may be necessary to accommodate the vast differences between schools. The culture, size, management, and physical environment of schools has been shown to have a real impact on how better working together arrangements are introduced.

However, the variation in the way the pilot was delivered creates a significant challenge for scaling the project because it makes it more difficult to identify key components of the intervention that can be replicated elsewhere. The schools involved shaped implementation, but whether their experiences apply to other schools needs further exploration. The pilot has generated useful learning about different approaches that can help refine what SWIS might look like in different types of schools, and further work in this area could show the impact of different configurations.

Looking at the different configurations of the pilot that developed, the drop in model may be easier to scale for a few reasons. The remit in that school was more narrowly confined to advice and consultation, primarily to staff in the school rather than young people. It also avoids the resource and space intensive aspects of the more integrated approaches. However, the greatest benefits according to the social care staff we interviewed seemed to be a product of being embedded and spending more time within schools.

Recommendations for Southampton

Finally, we offer some recommendations to Southampton, based on our findings.

1. The pilot in Southampton demonstrates a range of benefits associated with working more closely with schools, and it seems particularly promising where social workers are embedded in the school environment and integrated with its safeguarding efforts. It should be continued in the existing schools to monitor its impact in the longer term, and those involved should be applauded for overcoming early challenges.

2. Now that the pilot is more established, its core objectives should be reviewed alongside the key aspects of the role we have identified. As part of this, the benefits and drawbacks of the different configurations of the pilot should be considered with a view to develop and refine the SWIS role across different settings.

3. The level of input into feeder primary schools varied, and there was evidence that those which had direct experience of it were positive about the pilot. However, the number of schools is challenging for the team, and there is a risk that staff are spread too thinly. Consideration should be given to re-focussing the pilot in secondary schools.

Social Workers in Schools in Stockport

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Stockport is a large town in Greater Manchester. It is situated about 7 miles from Manchester city centre and has a population of around 290,000. The pilot placed social workers in a cluster of schools in the East of the borough. The cluster has been using a Team Around the School (TAS) model since September 2016, which places early help practitioners alongside school nurses, teachers, and other school professionals. The aim of TAS is to improve information sharing and responses to safeguarding issues. Central to this is the role of School Age Plus (SAP) workers, who are responsible for early help referrals and family engagement, and often lead TAS meetings. For the SWIS pilot Stockport have placed social workers within the TAS model to enhance it. The SWIS team includes six social workers, three senior practitioners, one project manager, a business support officer and a team manager.

The pilot aimed to reduce the number of referrals coming from schools by working with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and other staff at each school. In addition, due to the social workers' location within the school they aimed to improve working relationships with the senior management team, teachers, parents and pupils, offering them support on safeguarding issues and concerns. Social workers also delivered training and support for the schools and engaged with the community to provide additional services for vulnerable children and young people where needed.

Summary of interim findings

At the time of our first round of fieldwork (March - June 2019), the pilot had been implemented differently across schools, due to variations in physical space available, the culture of the schools, and the lines of communication between education and social care staff. The pilot was showing positive signs during its early stages. It was positively received by a range of stakeholders, including education staff, children and families. It was also felt that the addition of social workers to the TAS model helped to enhance the existing provision.

Social workers faced issues with mobile working, including difficulties with internet access which had recently been resolved. There had been challenges for some social workers when negotiating the role of the school and the role of the social worker, for example social workers ensuring they maintained boundaries and not taking on too many school pastoral duties. The social workers interviewed reported a high workload, and a minority continued to work with families who were part of their previous caseload. However, as the pilot became more established, workers focussed more on school-based work.

Focus of this report

This stage of the evaluation looks at SWIS after it had become more established. We examine how the pilot developed and explore what characterises the intervention, in terms of what social workers do when they are working within schools and the work they do with families. We also look at indications of the impact it might have.

METHODOLOGY

Study design

The evaluation was organised into three phases. Phase 1 (January - February 2019) involved developing an initial logic model which was used as a basis for programme theory and data collection. Phase 2 (May - June 2019) involved fieldwork that helped us develop the logic model and assess progress in the early stages of the pilot. Phase 3 (November 2019 – February 2020) enabled us to understand how SWIS worked once they had become established in Stockport and explore early evidence of their impact.

Research questions

The evaluation of the pilot study requires us to understand how and why the project was implemented as it was, including the types of work done by social workers in schools, how this was perceived, and any barriers or facilitators to delivery. It also requires us to explore any evidence that the pilot shows promise and the indicators of success. Our research questions fall into three main areas- evidence of feasibility, evidence of promise, and readiness for wider scale evaluation:

1. **Feasibility:** Can the intervention be delivered practically and are there systems and processes to enable the intervention to be easily scaled?

2. **Promise:** What evidence is there that the intervention can have a positive impact on outcomes?

3. **Scalability:** To what extent is the intervention used as anticipated and is the programme sufficiently codified to operate at scale?

Analysis

We undertook two main forms of analysis; one to qualitatively explore the way the pilot worked, and the other to examine the impact of the pilot on quantitative outcomes.

1. Qualitative theory building analysis

We analysed interviews, focus groups and observations using a qualitative thematic approach. Transcripts were coded by a researcher using NVivo 12 to explore key themes that could be identified. The framework was then shared with the lead author and the research team, and the analysis was discussed and refined with their input. Overarching themes were brought together by the lead author. In a final stage of analysis, these were discussed and agreed by the whole research team and used to refine the logic model. The discussion incorporated our learning from wider data collection activities, including observations and other informal discussions.

2. Quantitative comparative analysis

To estimate the impact of social workers in schools, we used a difference-in-differences model with cluster-robust standard errors by school. This compares schools with similar historical trends in certain outcomes, to assess whether the intervention has made a difference in these trends during the study period. We measured three outcomes: Section17 starts, Section 47 enquiries and number of days children spent in care. For each outcome, we compared intervention schools against matched control schools. This analysis relies on the assumption that outcome variables between the pilot and control schools exhibit parallel trends prior to the start of the intervention.

We matched schools based on three individual outcome trends. This meant that each intervention school could have up to six different comparator schools, two for each outcome. For the most recent change in outcomes in the two years prior to the intervention (2017-2018), we computed the difference in trends between treatment and comparator schools. These were averaged across the standardised absolute differences in trends for each academic year group. For each pilot school cluster, the lowest scoring pair was the first preference for matching.

The robustness of the match was tested using a Mann-Whitney U test comparing the ranking of the school matches identified by using 2017-18 data with the ranking of the school matches identified by using 2016-17 data. If the test yielded a p-value of below 0.05, then we rejected the match on the basis that the trend did not persist over time. We also checked for a parallel trend by inspecting the outcomes plotted over time for the treatment schools and the potential comparator schools. We include fixed effects for school and term and an interaction for intervention by term. The interaction estimates the degree to which change over time in the outcome differed in the intervention schools as compared to the control schools. Analysis was undertaken using school-level counts and numbers of pupils, rather than disaggregated by age group, given the small numbers of events.

Because all outcomes could be measured as counts, we used a Poisson link with number of students in each school in each term as the exposure scaling variable. The resultant coefficients were expressed as incidence rate ratios. These are best understood as the multiplicative change in the count of the outcome against a reference group, standardised by the number of students in the school for that term. So, for example, a rate ratio of 1.5 is interpreted as a 50% increase in the rate of an outcome, and a rate ratio of 0.5 is interpreted as a 50% decrease in the rate of an outcome, compared to a reference time point. Because the test of the intervention's effectiveness is based on an interaction term of intervention by time, the total impact in intervention schools is estimated by multiplying the time fixed effect by the intervention by time interaction. A characteristic of incidence rate ratios is that confidence intervals are asymmetric, as the lower bound is 0 and the upper bound is infinity, with a point of no difference of 1.

Ethics

The School of Social Sciences' Research Ethics Committee at Cardiff University gave approval for the study. Social workers in the child welfare units, staff working in participating schools, children and families were provided with information about the study and asked to sign a consent form, as part of which they were informed that taking part was voluntary and they could withdraw.

Summary of data collection activities during Phase 3

The data we collected is outlined in Table 1 (p60).

Table 1: Data collection November 2019

Data collection type	Number
Interview with managers[1]	6
Interview with social workers and senior practitioners[2]	4
Interviews with School Age Plus (early intervention) workers/managers	2
Interview with school staff (head teacher x2, school nurse, deputy DSL)	4
Interview with young person	1
Focus group with senior social work practitioners	1
Observations of social work practice	4
Observation of meetings or panels	4
Administrative data for matching, re Autumn terms 2016 – 18 (n = schools)	107
Administrative records from schools, re Autumn term 2019 (n = schools)	27
Activity logs (individual events recorded)	481

1 This group includes team managers and senior managers, for the purposes of anonymity we use the general label of 'manager' when quoting

2 We refer to these as 'social workers' when quoting, to aid anonymity

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Our analysis is designed to show how the pilot was delivered and point to any early signs of the impact it was having. Considering what the interim findings revealed about the challenges faced early on, we start by looking at how much progress was made in implementing the pilot in the period since we last visited. To illustrate the nature of the project, we describe the types of work social workers do, and their activities and routines when inside the schools. Then we explore multiple perspectives on how the intervention worked, including the views of social care and education professionals and of children and families. In the final subsection we present our comparative analysis, which examines key outcome indicators between the intervention schools and matched comparators.

1. How was the pilot implemented?

Configuration of the SWIS team

Stockport had the largest social work team of all the SWIS pilots. It included seven social workers[3], all but one of whom worked with two schools. Each was either assigned one secondary and one primary school, or two primary schools (except a part time worker who worked with one primary school. In addition, there were three senior practitioners overseeing up to four schools each, along with the designated social worker. There were two secondary schools and nine primary schools in total involved in the project. The larger schools in Stockport (two secondary schools and one large high need primary school) were assigned two social workers each, whereas the other primary schools each had one designated social worker. This team was led by a team manager and had one full time business support worker.

Building on the Team Around the School model

Stockport differs from the other pilots in that the SWIS was an addition to an existing way of working with schools; the TAS model. Project leads felt the addition of a social worker was a natural extension of the TAS model and, adding to the early help focus that TAS had previously had, it became known as the 'Enhanced Integrated Programme' when SWIS was implemented. This pre-existing way of working seemed to ease implementation somewhat. The TAS model had been in place since 2016 and one manager who was involved in this process described how setting it up was difficult, and that schools took time to adapt to a more flexible way of working. However, this seemed an advantage for the SWIS pilot as those issues had already been overcome, allowing the social worker to integrate more easily; "I think we're over that hurdle now, and I think, you know, the schools know what works for them".

Another advantage of delivering the pilot this way was that families were thought to be familiar with the TAS approach and more open to engaging with it than they might be with a social worker not associated with this wider team. As one worker explained;

> *"I think another key element is breaking down the barriers for families of how they*

3 Two of these worked part time so the team comprised six full time equivalent posts

view social workers so that they see us working together [with the wider group of professionals in TAS]. We're based in a universal setting which is not threatening, it's not specialist, so it's not as scary as going to our safeguarding building, which can be very, very oppressive, to be honest. **(Social worker, interview)**

Tailored format

As we found elsewhere, the way social workers interacted with schools varied across the group of schools they were assigned to. In this sense the intervention was tailored to the needs and circumstances of individual schools. This was brought about, partly, by the availability of physical space, as the extent to which schools were able or willing to accommodate social workers for large amounts of time varied. At the time of the fieldwork all social workers involved in the pilot had an office base in one secondary school. Social workers allocated to other schools in the pilot are based there and spend varying amounts of time in the schools they are allocated to. Other factors that seemed to determine how social workers interacted with schools included the size of the school, whether it was primary or secondary, the level of need identified within the school, and what the school felt they needed.

One social worker who works with two primary schools compared the different approaches used with the two schools. In the smaller school that has lower needs, their role is to liaise with the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) when they need support and help answer their questions. This is often done by phone and the social worker is in the school building less often. A manager described why this approach seemed to work for that school:

> *"They're an affluent school, they're a [faith] school, and have very little to do with us, but they're inviting us in all the time. So, things like the social worker that goes there goes to nativities, goes to award days and goes to the nice things and has a drop-in, but very rarely sees anybody other than chats with staff, but that, again, it's that relationship-building [that is important].* **(Manager, social care, interview)**

In the larger, higher need school they are usually on site about three times a week to offer support and advice to the large safeguarding team. This demonstrates that there is more than one way of working with a school, and that productive working relationships can be built through both approaches. Adapting to each school and tailoring the intervention seems necessary, but workers noted that this needs to be done carefully in order to ensure fairness across the group of schools they worked with:

> *"We're very conscious, as a team, to check in with each other and have regular meetings to make sure that the offer that we're giving to our individual schools is, to some extent, standardised... so that, that no school is feeling like they're either not getting what they signed up for, or they're looking at another school and thinking, well, why are you getting that and we're not.* **(Social worker, interview)**

Presence within schools

Where social workers were able to spend more time on the school premises they tended to integrate more easily. For example, in the school where they had an office base, the research team observed the good relationships social workers had with various members of school staff who came into the office. One pointed out that the social workers even join in with school social events along with the rest of the staff; "We had a Christmas staff do, and the social workers were all invited, and the majority of them came to that."

Some workers managed to achieve a similar level of integration in other schools away from this base. For example, one social worker was observed

arriving unannounced to a different school and chatting with school staff while setting up their laptop at a desk to work. They described how both the practicalities of getting through security and the interpersonal relationships they had built made them feel well integrated:

> *"I can use my finger to get in, I don't have to book in. I'll pop in later on today on the way in. I'll probably pop in and just say, "How are you doing?" I turn up not knowing whether they're in a meeting or not and if they are, I'll just go and sit in the Head's office ... do a bit of work, pop back into them. So I feel comfortable enough to be in and out in the office asking office staff is [particular child] in on time today?* **(Social worker, interview)**

There was a sense among other professionals that having the whole SWIS team based at one school made the pilot "top heavy":

> *"I don't think there is a designated space in every school like the, there is that office at [secondary school]. I think the schools would like to, and they are, you know, they are so welcoming of my, of my staff and I'm sure it's the same for the social workers but, I don't think we've established empty rooms like they did at [secondary school]. But I do think it's important that that is done* **(TAS professional, interview)**

Building relationships with schools that were thought to have lower social care needs took longer because workers spent less time there and had more limited interactions. However, over time workers did feel their contribution to these schools were worthwhile. One social worker described the experience of working with a lower need school and how he had worked to build up a relationship with them:

> *"It's a more thoughtful, paced plan step-ups, plan, step downs, a bit of phone assistance and being there and running the round the school meetings with the School Age Plus worker. I did a workshop as well, built some capital with them because I can't be there all the time. You know, it could be two weeks before I see them again .... And I think that's appropriate and I hope they feel the same. I do feel a bit worried that I'm not in there as much I could but there's finite resources, aren't there?* **(Social worker, interview)**

2. What types of activities do social workers do?

It is important to understand the nature of the SWIS role and how it differs from the locality work that others in the department do. Stockport kept an activity log (n=481) to record enquiries made and the work that took place as a result. Activities included in this log range from brief queries that took under 5 minutes to resolve through to more substantive pieces of work. Such a data source has various limitations, including the likelihood of biases relating to selective recording. Nonetheless, it gives an insight into the activities that workers felt were worth documenting.

This suggests that the main source of enquiries were staff within the school – primarily the pastoral staff and senior management. We heard qualitative accounts of direct work with children, as we discuss below, though very few (1%) of the logs list a child or young person as the enquirer. Informal contact with children and young people may be less likely to be recorded, and it may be more memorable or meaningful for workers asked to give examples of their work in research interviews.

Figure 1: Person making enquiry

Where logs did document queries raised by young people, they provided an enlightening account of the work that was done. In this example, a child approached the worker (via his teacher) for advice:

> *The young person is the centre of private court proceedings. He is very confused as to what is going on so wanted to know what a CAFCASS officer was, how a judge can make these decisions. He wanted me to read his letter he had written to the judge...he wanted to know why he couldn't see his dad.* **(Excerpt from activity log: "what was the query?")**

The social worker went on to record how they responded, working alongside the teacher and keeping the child's mother informed:

> *Before I went to see him at his teacher's request, I tried to get hold of his mother to get permission. However, I know this case of old and had spoken to mum previously who I was sure would be happy for me to reassure her son. I was very clear with [child] about ringing his mum and I would be telling her what we had spoken about. He said the first hearing was last week and he still wasn't allowed to see his dad. I explained with the aid of his teacher that these things take a lot of time and give the reasons why. I explained what a CAFCASS worker does in simple terms. I read his letter to the judge and said it was very clear what he wanted and that he was very articulate. I allowed him to talk about his frustrations without comment. Later I rang his mum, and she was happy that I had cleared some things up for him.* **(Excerpt from activity log: "Social worker response and advice given")**

Other contact with parents and family members was for several reasons. In one example, which led to a referral to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), a grandparent wanted to discuss an incident and raise concerns about aggressive

behaviour by a parent towards a child. In other instances, parents sought advice about matters relating to education, such as attendance and exclusions, and other issues such as dealings with the police and applications to housing.

Around half of all contact listed could be classed as 'discussion and advice', and either about a potential referral (23%) or other issues. Half of all enquiries resulted in between 5 minutes and 30 minutes of work, and only a minority took more than an hour of workers' time.

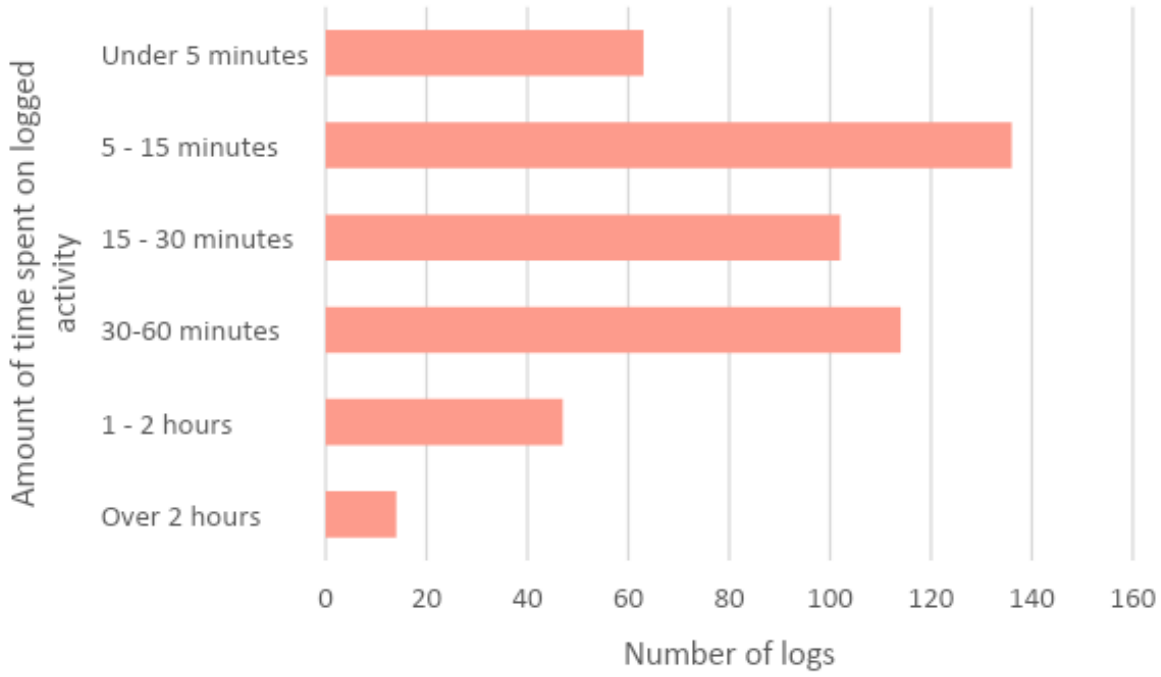

Figure 2: Time spent on logged activity

Supporting school staff

Social workers felt an important function of their role was to be "available as a team for each of the schools to be able to come to ... so that [school staff are] not going home on a Friday with all of [the concerns] in their head, not being able to offload".

The research team observed children and young people approaching social workers informally, by visiting the office when they have something they wanted to discuss. Some social workers had also set up drop-in sessions for parents to offer help and advice for a range of issues. One of the school nurses within the TAS who we interviewed noted:

> *"We had offered a drop in as part of the secondary school twice a week. That's one of the core offers [of the TAS model]. But we've never been able to do it in primary schools, because they've not had capacity until this ... pilot. Because we've [now] got a little bit more time, so, the school nurses in the primary schools have been going in with the social workers, the link social workers, and they've been doing parent drop ins, and they've been really well attended* **(School nurse, interview)**

Roles and boundaries

In Stockport, professionals interviewed felt that being part of an existing multi-agency approach seemed to help clarify the role. There was already capacity for early help work within TAS, so social workers were able to focus on statutory work and

supporting other professionals with safeguarding, as one manager noted:

> *"Well, I suppose in our model, we're very clear that the social workers are not delivering the interventions at an early help level. It's still very much an advice and consultation role, and a supportive function.* **(Manager, social care, interview)**

Nonetheless, the role does seem somewhat broader than other social work roles in terms of the activities workers did. Examples of this included visiting family homes where children were not attending school in order to help them attend and doing informal work with a wider range of families than those known to Children's Social Care (CSC). For example, one family required extensive support to get the children into school that would not have normally been possible:

> *"So, what we did, because we had the time and because we were in school, we were able to put loads of support in there, and ... our social worker...was there virtually every day for a long time, got the three younger children into school.* **(Manager, social care, interview)**

Because of their visibility in the schools, a wider group of parents than those known to CSC approached the social workers to ask questions or access information about other services or support networks. In some schools this was done through drop-in sessions designed to give parents a chance to seek advice and support:

> *"We've had a half a dozen parents each time - some of the same ones and some of the new ones – coming in or [wanting] advice and support and have been given professional advice right at that early stage of anxiety, which has brought the parents' anxiety down, given them a plan without actually needing any further intervention. And they've then felt safe coming back to us and checking in saying, 'Oh, by the way, everything's much better.'* **(Social worker, focus group)**

As the quotation above implies, the extra time workers had seemed to enable this work, and it was generally felt to be a productive use of time. More broadly, input at a lower level – before child protection plans had been put in place - was often thought to be effective. The work done with a family where there were serious concerns around neglect is one example. There were concerns about low school attendance and home conditions. As a result of some intensive work by the social work team in the school, there was a noticeable increase in school attendance and home conditions:

> *"...we've managed to put something in and keep them away from child protection. They may end up there, they may end up on a child protection plan, but the past eight months, we've managed to keep those children at home with dad, properly fed, all the neglect issues...they've all gone.* **(Manager, social care, interview)**

Direct work with young people

There were several examples of direct work being done with children and young people, and the greater opportunities the pilot gave for this was thought to be a key benefit. One social worker described how young people would come and talk to them when they were concerned about their mum, "The kids have come and knocked on [the door] and said, 'I can hear my mum crying at night, I think she's struggling again'". Another went on to explain how this could sometimes lead to immediate action:

> *"The kids will often come and talk to their social worker. If they've had a bad night, or if mum's said something about dad,*

> *or dad's said something about mum, or, vice versa, they will come and have that conversation direct with the social worker. There's been occasions where then the social worker said 'right, we need a meeting', and they brought the parents in there and then and we've all had the meeting, there and then.* **(Social worker, interview)**

It is difficult to envisage such a rapid response if the social worker was based elsewhere, and a young person we interviewed explained how having access to a social worker at their school was beneficial:

> *"Yeah, I think it's better having them in school because...if you're in like an emergency, like, something's going on, if you can just to their office there. I suppose you can speak to them and you can tell them about what's happened, or what's going to, so I think it's really helpful that they're there anyway.* **(Young person, interview)**

3. What are the other opportunities and challenges?

Cultural differences between social work and education settings

The fact that the cultures of education and social care differed so much was challenging, but the opportunity to reconcile some of these differences and improve working relationships was thought to be a key advantage of the pilot. As we found across all the pilots, the experience of bringing together the contrasting cultures of education and social care shaped how the pilot progressed. For social care staff, the way some schools were thought to operate was felt to differ from the culture of social work. In a focus group discussion, Senior Practitioners agreed that there were clear cultural differences between social work and the schools, particularly in relation to how they communicate with children. Examples given included how school staff respond to children's lateness or if children arrive in incorrect uniform. Social care practitioners felt this was sometimes unhelpful and came at the expense of opening a dialogue with the young person to find out what may be happening outside of school that is affecting their attendance and presentation. For example, one worker explained:

> *"One of the main issues for me was about staff at school and their approach to children. Sometimes they speak to children in a way that is not helpful to them to start their school day when they may have already had a whole host of difficulties before they've arrived at school.* **(Senior practitioner, focus group)**

The nature of such difficulties was brought to life by an example we were given, where siblings in a secondary school were often late and not wearing the correct uniform. It transpired that their parent was not taking their younger siblings to primary school, and the older children were doing this themselves before catching two buses to their own school.

However, by Phase 3 there was evidence that by working through these issues some progress was being made in terms of bridging cultural differences. As one worker explained:

> *"So as we're starting to get to know how schools work on a deeper level, some of that is kind of starting to become apparent now. But I think over time, we're starting to see seeds to changing the way they think of their most vulnerable children.* **(Social worker, interview)**

Practicalities and their impact on the emotional aspects of the role

The limited physical space within schools had implications for the work of social workers and school staff. Although the team was appreciative of the small office given to them by the school they were based in, they were used to a more versatile environment in council offices. The lack of available breakout space was thought to cause difficulties:

> *"I think, as you've noticed from this morning, the room that we've got is not viable, it's too small for us. We haven't got breakout space that we can use on a flexible basis, which really impedes our practice. So, if someone – coming back from an emotional visit – needs some private space to have some supervision, we don't always have that and that's quite challenging.* **(Social worker, interview)**

The same issue was also challenging from the perspective of school staff:

> *"They then moved into [the dedicated office], but we still have that issue where because they will call parents in, or they have other agencies coming in, or they see the children, they also need a meeting room, and we still haven't got enough space to do that. So, sometimes it can be quite, they'll come in and say, oh, can I just borrow your office for a minute while I speak to this child, or, which then means you've got to leave your office, and go and do something else for half an hour, whilst they're having that conversation.* **(School staff, interview)**

More broadly, the school could be "quite a lonely place to be sometimes" for social workers and managers used to being surrounded by more of their own colleagues. On the other hand, there were clear benefits to being based in the heart of the secondary school. It allowed children a place to talk and offload to someone who is independent from the school and knows them. This was noted through researcher observations and links explicitly to social worker visibility. The School Nurse highlighted how useful it is having social workers based on the same floor as it saves waiting for an email response from a social worker.

Project leads are planning to move the SWIS team to a more appropriate base soon, to a new location still within the community but not in a school. One manager recognised the challenges that the existing situation brings, noting that "definitely one of the things we need to do is find a better space, not just for wi-fi and printers, but for headspace and confidentiality".

The benefits of space will need to be weighed up against any drawbacks associated with being based outside the school premises, although this will be more akin to what other schools not involved in the pilot currently receive. Workers still felt welcomed and accommodated in the other schools within the cluster:

> *"If, if I'm based myself with them, their pastoral team will make space, so we might not have a designated desk, but they absolutely are more than accommodating to us and, and as the programme has progressed, I can confidently say that I feel part of their staff team.* **(Social Worker, interview)**

Balancing workload

The issue of workload is one which social workers often raise as a challenging aspect of their role, wherever they are based. During the early stages of the pilot, once existing cases had been closed or transferred, social workers in the SWIS pilot had relatively light caseloads. This enabled them to build relationships with the schools they were attached to. There were concerns that, as time went on, caseloads were increasing, and some

were worried about how they would manage to balance this with spending time within schools:

> *"It's a time investment and I think the challenge is: how are we going to keep giving that level of time and investment when our caseloads are really increasing? But so far... I think we've proven that [the SWIS approach] does in many ways make a lot of sense for families for us being out here [in schools].* **(Social worker, interview)**

> *"I just am concerned in terms of the challenge moving forward with the number of families that are coming through where we're keeping hold of families because we need to because of the complexity, that we're not going to have the capacity within the size of the team that we have right now...* **(Social worker, focus group)**

Workers reported having more time to work with families during much of the pilot, and the advantages of this became apparent during our observations. On one visit observed, a parent explained that she was used to changing social workers throughout the process and this was difficult for her. She appreciated having the consistency of the SWIS worker and appeared to have built up a good relationship with them. On the journey to/ from the visit, the social worker described how; "I have the time to do a sort of bespoke parenting course with her. Sending her off to a children's centre to do a course – [is] never ever going to happen, never going to work; [she is] too anxious, too worried". In this case the social worker used parenting resources from the School Age Plus team. As a result of this the parent was engaging in meetings and making positive changes to her parenting.

4. What impact does it appear to have?

The difference in differences analysis suggested there was a significant reduction in Section 17 starts in the intervention schools, compared to the matched control schools. We found no statistical effect of the pilot on the other two key outcomes (Section 47 starts and days in care), though it appeared that there was a strong 'floor' effect at play in many of the matched schools and thus there was limited room for improvement.

Section 17 starts

This analysis considered four schools: two intervention and two matched control schools. Estimates of Section 17 starts per school term, the number of pupils registered in the school in each term (and thus 'at risk' for a Section 17 start), and the average count of Section 17 starts per 100 students are presented in Table 2. A visual trend, depicted in Figure 3, suggests that except for one school, included schools peaked in the rate of Section 17 starts in the term before the intervention. However, one school experienced a consistent decline over the study period in the rate of Section 17 starts.

Table 2: Section 17 starts by term and school

	Intervention						Control					
	STO_Primary4_INT			STO_Primary2_INT			STO_Primary10_COMP			STO_Primary11_COMP		
Term	Number	Pupils	Average count*	Number	Pupils	Average count*	Number	Pupils	Average count*	Number	Pupils	Average count*
Autumn 2017	0	200	2.50	5	198	2.53	3	187	1.60	3	160	1.88
Autumn 2018	12	190	6.32	4	204	1.96	6	188	3.19	4	143	2.80
Autumn 2019	5	204	2.45	1	209	0.48	5	185	2.70	2	128	1.56

*Count is per 100 students

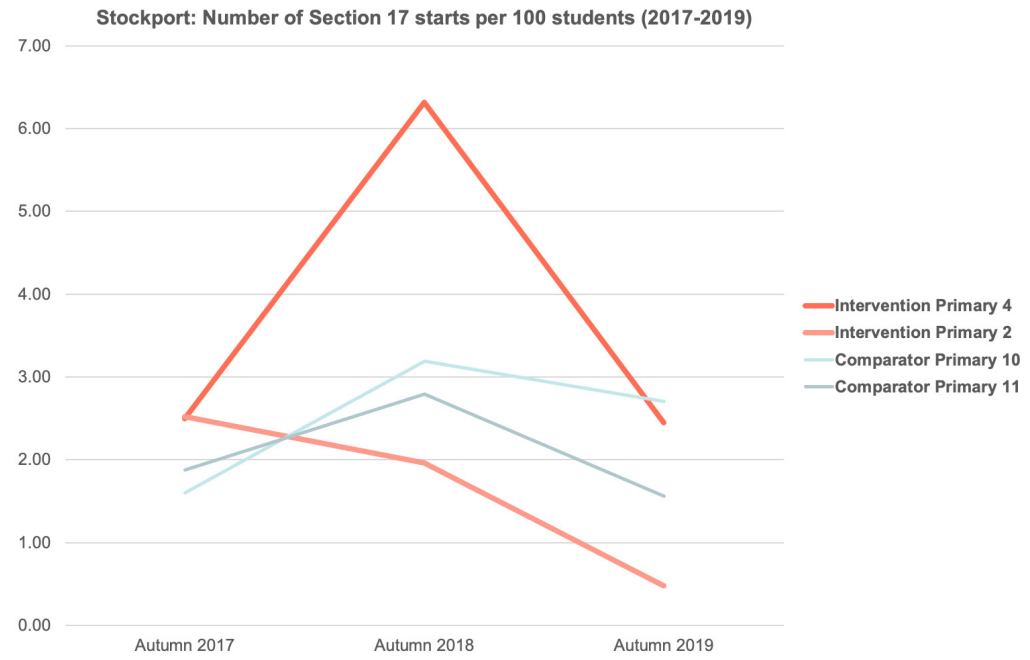

Figure 3: Average count per 100 students: Section 17 starts

Regression estimates, presented in Table 3, reflect these trends. Between the reference term (Autumn 2018) and the intervention term (Autumn 2019), the rate of Section 17 starts in control schools decreased by 25% (IRR=0.75, 95% CI [0.50, 1.12]), though with a limited sample this estimate was not significant. The intervention schools' decrease in rate of Section 17 starts was even greater, with a reduction of 53% beyond the control school decrease; this was statistically significant (intervention by time IRR 0.47, 95% CI [0.24, 0.93]). This is also equal to a 65% decrease in intervention schools from the term pre-intervention (0.75*0.47=0.35).

Table 3: Regression estimates of change over time in Section 17 starts

Term fixed effects		
Autumn 2018	Reference	
Intervention by time	0.47	0.24, 0.93

IRR, incidence rate ratio; CI, confidence interval

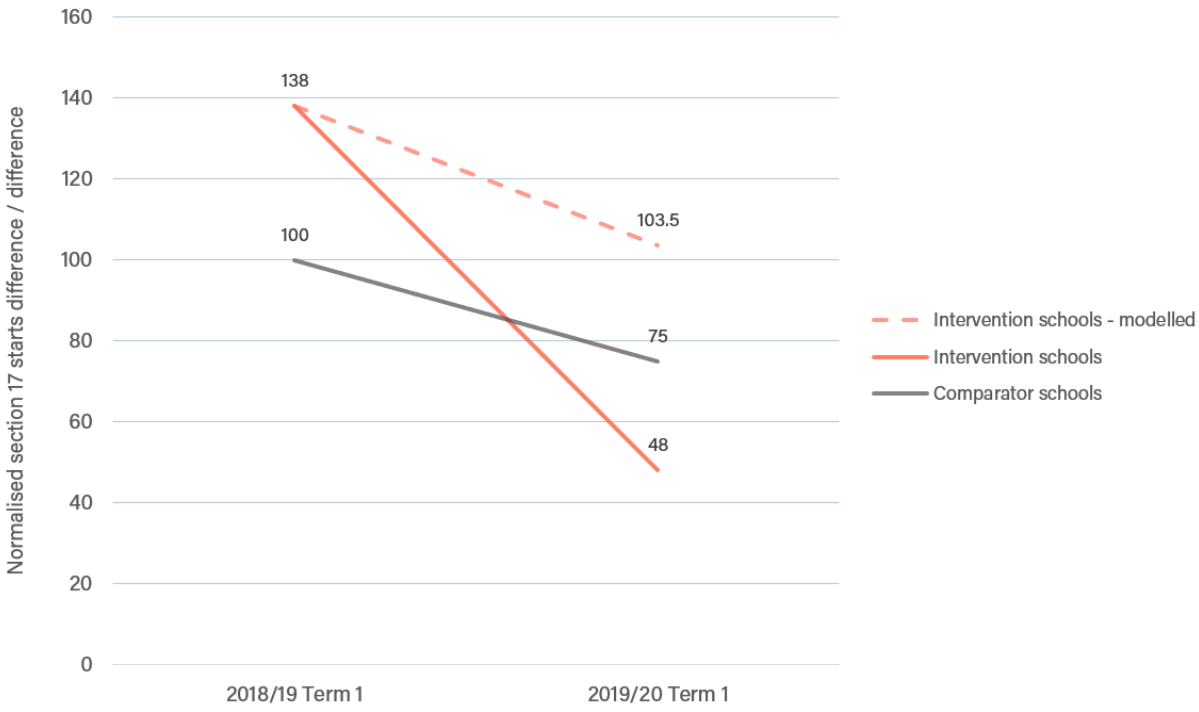

Figure 4. Difference in difference estimates of treatment effects on section 17 starts in Stockport

Section 47 starts

This analysis considered 12 schools: four intervention schools and eight matched control schools. Estimates of Section 47 starts per school term, the number of pupils registered in the school in each term (and thus 'at risk' for a Section 47 start), and the average count of Section 47 starts per 100 students are presented in Table 4. As noted in the introduction to this section, there was strong evidence of a floor effect, with one intervention school and three control schools each registering no Section 47 starts in any of the three terms for which data were collected, and further control schools reporting no Section 47 starts in the last term of data collection. Visual inspection of these trends (see Figure 5) suggested that there was no clear pattern in the remaining schools.

Table 4: Section 47 starts by term and school

Intervention												
	STO_Primary9_INT			STO_Primary2_INT			STO_Secondary2_INT			STO_Primary8_INT		
Term	Number	Pupils	Average count*	Number	Pupils	Average count*	Number	Pupils	Average count*	Number	Pupils	Average count*
Autumn 2017	5	309	1.62	0	198	0.00	13	960	1.35	7	411	1.70
Autumn 2018	1	272	0.37	0	204	0.00	10	990	1.01	11	412	2.67
Autumn 2019	6	309	1.94	0	209	0.00	10	1040	0.96	8	428	1.87
Control												
	STO_Primary12_COMP			STO_Primary13_COMP			STO_Primary14_COMP			STO_Primary15_COMP		
Term	Number	Pupils	Average count*	Number	Pupils	Average count*	Number	Pupils	Average count*	Number	Pupils	Average count*
Autumn 2017	2	279	0.72	0	208	0.00	1	406	0.25	0	427	0.00
Autumn 2018	2	291	0.69	0	205	0.00	3	412	0.73	0	410	0.00
Autumn 2019	3	282	1.06	0	205	0.00	0	419	0.00	0	407	0.00
	STO_Primary11_COMP			STO_Secondary3_COMP			STO_Secondary4_COMP			STO_Primary16_COMP		
Term	Number	Pupils	Average count*	Number	Pupils	Average count*	Number	Pupils	Average count*	Number	Pupils	Average count*
Autumn 2017	0	160	0.00	5	1142	0.44	3	1227	0.24	4	423	0.95
Autumn 2018	0	143	0.00	4	1180	0.34	0	1220	0.00	4	422	0.95
Autumn 2019	0	128	0.00	1	1220	0.08	2	1233	0.16	4	400	1.00

*Count is per 100 students

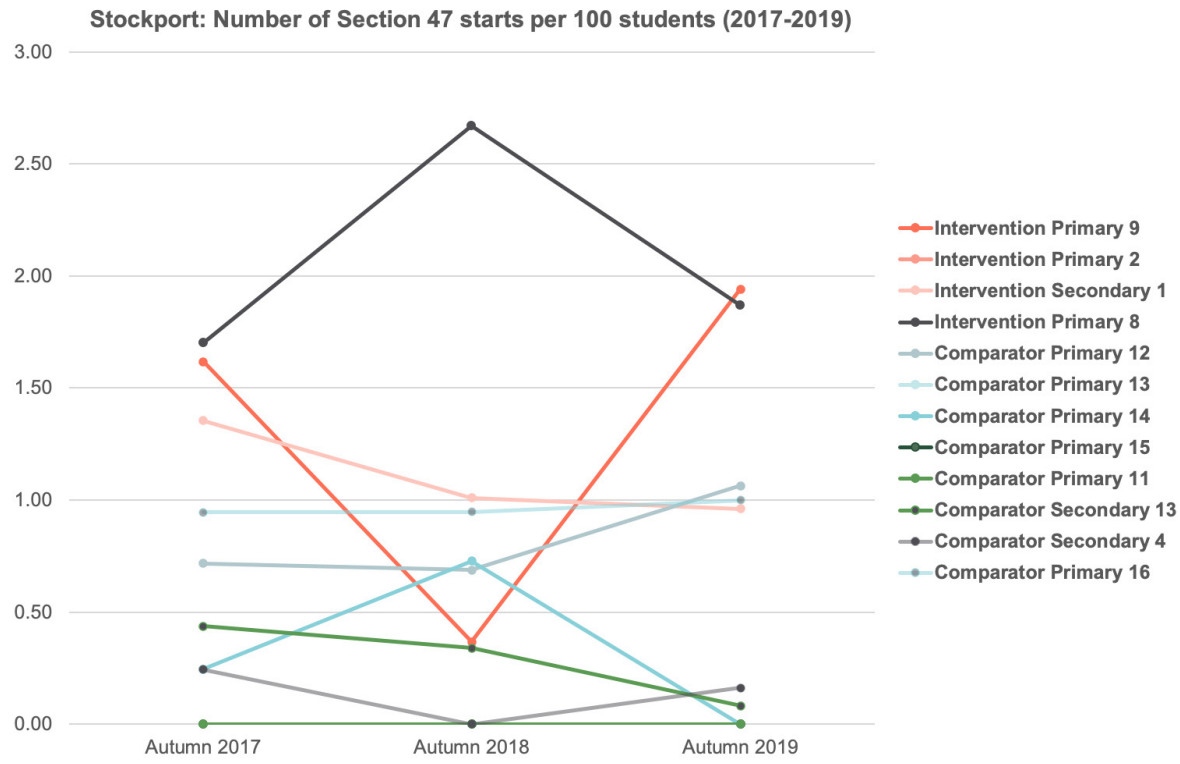

Figure 5: Average count per 100 students: Section 47 starts

Regression estimates, presented in Table 5, did not suggest a statistical impact of the intervention on the rate of Section 47 starts. While the rate of Section 47 starts in control schools decreased by 23% from the term before implementation to the term of implementation (IRR=0.77, 95% CI [0.35, 1.69]), this was not a significant difference. In contrast, the change in the rate of Section 47 starts in intervention schools was 35% greater than in control schools, but this estimate was also associated with considerable uncertainty (intervention by time IRR 1.35, 95% CI [0.61, 2.99]); this translated to an increase in intervention schools of 4% (0.77*1.35=1.04). Again, it is likely that the floor effect precluded a clear estimate of the impact of the intervention.

Table 5: Regression estimates of change over time in Section 47 starts

Coefficient	IRR	95% CI
Term fixed effects		
Autumn 2017	1.15	0.77, 1.71
Autumn 2018	Reference	
Autumn 2019	0.77	0.35, 1.69
Intervention by time	1.35	0.61, 2.99
Constant	0.01	0.01, 0.01

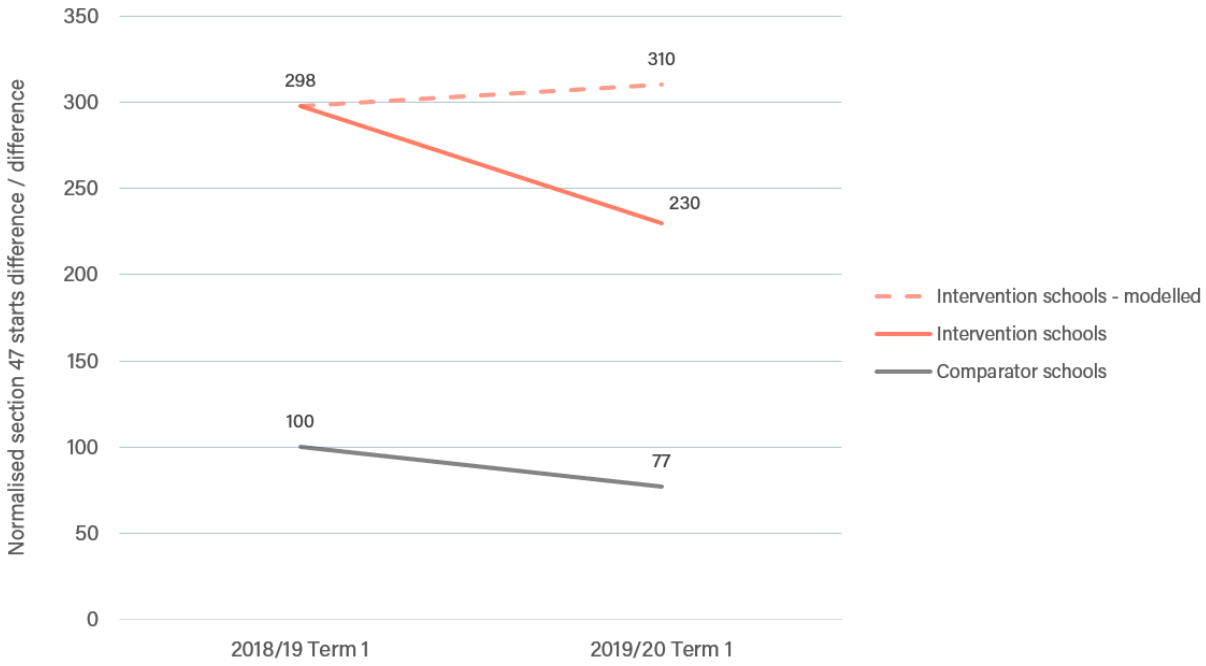

Figure 6. Difference in difference estimates of treatment effects on section 47 starts in Stockport

Days in care

This analysis drew on 15 schools: five intervention schools and 10 matched control schools. Estimates of days in care in intervention schools were highly variable; one intervention school reported no days in care in any of the terms of data collection whereas another intervention school reported no days in care in the autumn term immediately preceding intervention. Similarly, in control schools, two schools reported no days in care in any of the terms of data collection and a further six schools reported no days in care in two of three terms of data collection. Descriptive sample statistics are presented in Table 6 and are reflected in Figure 7.

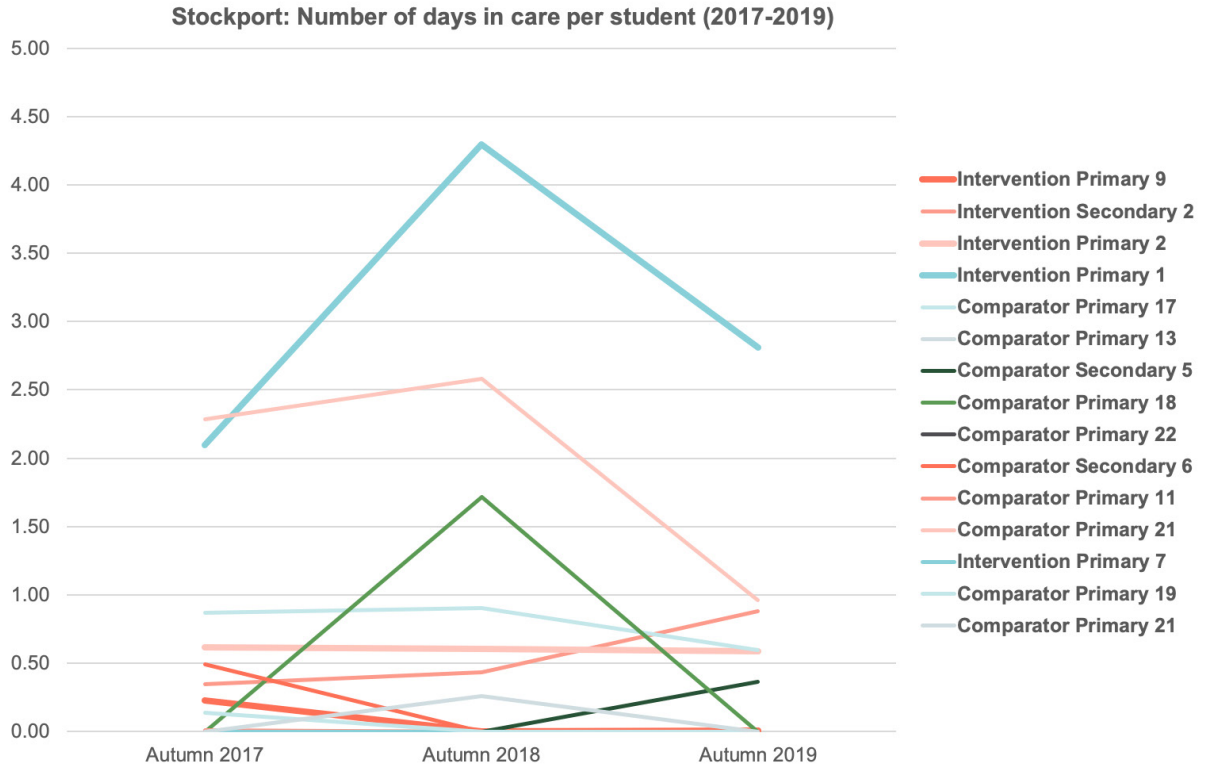

Figure 7. Average count: days in care

Table 6: Days in care by term and school

Intervention															
	STO_Primary9_INT			STO_Secondary2_INT			STO_Primary2_INT			STO_Primary1_INT			STO_Primary7_INT		
Term	Number	Pupils	Average count	Number	Pupils	Average count	Number	Pupils	Average count	Number	Pupils	Average count	Number	Pupils	Average count
Autumn 2017	70	309	0.23	244	700	0.35	122	198	0.62	488	233	2.09	0	373	0.00
Autumn 2018	0	272	0.00	307	712	0.43	123	204	0.60	825	192	4.30	0	369	0.00
Autumn 2019	2	309	0.01	615	699	0.88	123	209	0.59	492	175	2.81	0	369	0.00
Control															
	STO_Primary17_COMP			STO_Primary13_COMP			STO_Secondary5_COMP			STO_Primary18_COMP			STO_Primary19_COMP		
Term	Number	Pupils	Average count	Number	Pupils	Average count	Number	Pupils	Average count	Number	Pupils	Average count	Number	Pupils	Average count
Autumn 2017	355	409	0.87	0	208	0.00	0	990	0.00	0	275	0.00	45	331	0.14
Autumn 2018	369	408	0.90	0	205	0.00	0	972	0.00	492	287	1.71	0	340	0.00
Autumn 2019	246	411	0.60	0	205	0.00	369	1010	0.37	0	296	0.00	0	329	0.00
	STO_Primary20_COMP			STO_Primary22_COMP			STO_Secondary6_COMP			STO_Primary11_COMP			STO_Primary21_COMP		
Term	Number	Pupils	Average count	Number	Pupils	Average count	Number	Pupils	Average count	Number	Pupils	Average count	Number	Pupils	Average count
Autumn 2017	0	404	0.00	122	248	0.49	7	728	0.01	366	160	2.29	0	417	0.00
Autumn 2018	0	400	0.00	0	257	0.00	0	717	0.00	369	143	2.58	123	469	0.26
Autumn 2019	0	400	0.00	0	265	0.00	0	719	0.00	123	128	0.96	0	517	0.00

*Count is per 100 students

Regression estimates are presented in Table 7 below. These suggest that between the autumn term preceding implementation and the term of implementation, the rate of days in care in control schools dropped by 44%, but this estimate was not significant (IRR=0.56, 95% CI [0.17, 1.86]). The change in rate of days in care was 84% greater in intervention schools (IRR=1.84, 95% CI [0.51, 6.60]), meaning that intervention schools' rate of days in care increased by 3% (1.84*0.56=1.03).

Table 7: Regression estimates

Term fixed effects		
Autumn 2018	Reference	
Intervention by time	1.84	0.51, 6.60

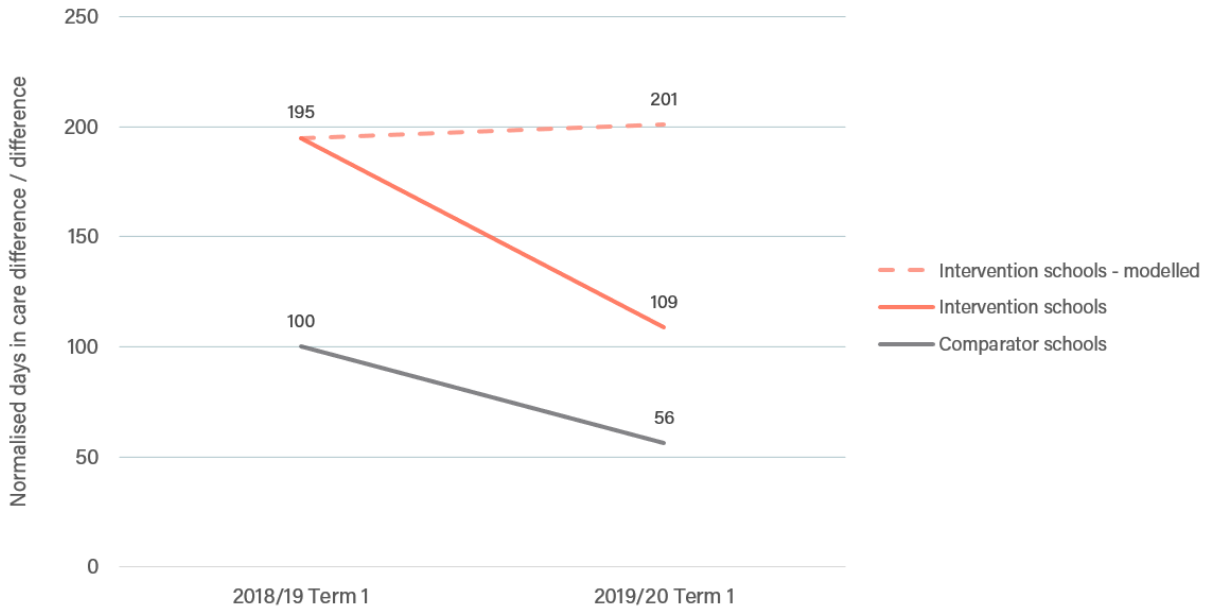

Figure 8. Difference in difference estimates of treatment effects on days in care in Stockport

Enhancing the TAS approach

There was also thought to be a positive impact on the TAS approach, as the SWIS pilot seemed to make the TAS model more efficient and effective. Having a social worker on site at schools meant safeguarding concerns could be addressed more quickly, and some issues could be attended to immediately. The chance to talk to other professionals in person, rather than relying on emails or phone calls, was also appreciated as a key benefit. One social worker described how being physically present in a school can calm situations down and prevent them escalating;

> *"The Head has rang us saying, 'Are you able to come for a minute?' And I had one just the other day where they'd got a parent in who was quite angry and frustrated [because] what the parent perceived needed to happen, hadn't happened. And I was able to come in and actually just mediate ... and we came up with a really positive child-focussed solution there that actually, if I'd not been there, we would've then had to have further meetings after that.* **(Social worker, interview)**

Social workers in the SWIS pilot are allocated to specific schools and often have an office base there, whereas in contrast, the social workers in locality teams are based in a central office. Although locality social workers are "linked" to schools through the TAS model, in a practical day-to-day sense this is very different to the SWIS model, as this brings the social worker into the school on a regular basis. When comparing the social workers in this pilot with those in the locality teams across the rest of Stockport, one of the School Age Plus team highlighted the benefits for their team and families they worked with. In particular, they appreciated being able to rely on more consistent input from social workers embedded in schools:

> *"...within those 11 schools in the programme, we are guaranteed to have a social worker, and quite often a senior practitioner from the programme, at every single team around the school meeting. Whereas in the rest of the locality, and before the programme...sometimes the social worker linked to that school would say at the team around the school meeting, 'I'm sorry I can't attend, I've got a court report to write, I've got a case conference, I've got a core group, and statutory work, you know, they were having to prioritise that', whereas in the programme, um, the, the social workers are prioritising the team around the school meetings, so, the relationships with the School Age Plus workers are sort of really embedded. They're really strong.* **(School Age Plus team)**

The benefits of the SWIS approach over the locality model were also noted by a manager, who identified the relational aspects of the model specifically:

> *"because [social worker] was the link worker to this school, so he's able to just literally walk across the corridor to speak to whoever he needs to. The school nurse comes in here, so he gets to speak to them. It's relationships, it's actually being able to talk to people and not waiting while they pick up a phone or answering an email.* **(Manager, social care, interview)**

More direct work and less bureaucracy

Similarly, social workers felt that the pilot had given them more opportunities to do meaningful direct work with children and families, and for their practice to become more "child-focussed", as one worker put it. Another went on to add;

> *"Working closer to the children and families in that community, in the school and the community, means that I do feel as though I'm on the go, out on the estate, out in the school, out in the families' homes, out seeing the children a lot more than it was. So it's increased my contact time with families [and] children in schools – just informally, popping into them, 'Hello, how you doing? I'll be around, I'll see you in a couple of days.'* **(Social worker, interview)**

School staff agreed with this perspective, and one headteacher described the direct work that social workers did in the school as "much more direct and less wrapped up in bureaucracy and red tape than it was previously". There was also evidence of other changes as a result of introducing the SWIS into the TAS model. One social worker highlighted how they felt more able to challenge school policies and now "other staff members are working on those issues, ...being – I suppose – less oppressive and more inclusive". More broadly, they were reportedly taking a leadership role. One social worker described how they adapted meetings to make them a more positive experience for everyone involved:

> *"Another thing that I did is I changed the whole way we did a team around the child meeting where I got a big piece of flipchart and I made us talk about the strengths, and the weakness, and the worries and the opportunities, and we did it together and it completely changed the focus and the staff were able to actually verbalise strengths with the mum there. And facilitating that was building that relationship again, which had been quite broken over the years. So, that was a real positive.* **(Social worker, interview)**

CONCLUSIONS

In order to make sense of the broad range of themes we have identified we return to our research questions to consider the feasibility, promise and scalability of SWIS in Stockport.

1. **Feasibility: Can the intervention be delivered practically and are there systems and processes to enable the intervention to be easily scaled?**

To an extent, the existing TAS approach had already shown signs of feasibility in Stockport. Adding social workers to this model and increasing the provision from early intervention to statutory social work was seen by many as the next logical step. Throughout the project social workers have integrated into this model well and worked successfully with various school staff, as well as the School Age Plus team. As we might expect, the impact of this was felt to be more apparent in schools with higher needs, where social workers spent more of their time.

There were benefits and drawbacks to the central base the SWIS team had at one of the secondary schools, and they are considering relocating the main hub elsewhere in the locality alongside maintaining the bases in schools. Practical issues such as having sufficient office space in schools and having ample break out space for private meetings are issues that should receive ongoing consideration.

2. **Promise: What evidence is there that the intervention can have a positive impact on outcomes?**

We compared the schools involved in the pilot with a matched group of other schools in Stockport which were not involved, to explore differences in key outcomes. This suggested that the pilot had a positive impact on reducing Section 17 starts, but no statistically significant effect on Section 47 starts or days in care. However, a strong 'floor' effect, where rates reduced to very low numbers across many of the matched schools, hampers this analysis somewhat because it limits room for improvement. A range of qualitative evidence suggests the SWIS pilot had a broadly positive impact. Having social workers physically present enabled emerging issues to be dealt with quickly, and it enabled young people to have access to a social worker.

Taken together, two important points arise from this. First, this suggests the intervention is worth exploring further to see whether the promising effects on Section 17 starts is sustained over the longer term. It would also be worthwhile to see whether we can identify any indications of effects on other outcomes, such as those relating to child protection or care outcomes. Second, it underlines the need to test the intervention on a larger scale, in order to produce more robust estimates and use a larger sample to overcome some of the issues we report here.

3. **Scalability: To what extent is the intervention used as anticipated and is the programme sufficiently codified to operate at scale?**

Situating the SWIS pilot within the TAS approach may make it easier to define and scale it to other areas within Stockport. As the TAS is used across the whole of Stockport, we might expect the SWIS model to work well across the borough. It is, however, important to be aware of the differences between schools and ensure that scaling includes careful consideration of

the needs of the individual schools and school clusters. These needs and characteristics are likely to shape how SWIS works in practice. Different versions of the model may emerge to suit different types of schools, and further work in other areas could help to delineate how each format works. The boundaries of the SWIS role in terms of activities they undertake, and the level to which they are physically embedded are likely to be key points of variation.

Conversely, the centrality of the TAS infrastructure to the current pilot may prove a challenge for expanding the model beyond Stockport. The pilot demonstrated how SWIS can be a valuable asset to the TAS model and how staff feel that having the social workers within the school rather than in the locality team office is beneficial to school staff, children and families. But as SWIS became integral to the TAS approach during the pilot, disentangling the two makes it more difficult to judge how easily this approach could be scaled elsewhere.

Recommendations for Stockport

Finally, we offer some recommendations to practitioners and managers in Stockport, based on our findings.

1. The pilot has revealed several benefits to integrating social workers in schools as part of the TAS model. The overwhelmingly positive response suggests that social workers should continue working in this way in the schools and as part of the TAS.

2. Visibility within the school was considered an important element of this pilot to ensure school staff, parents and young people were able to approach social workers. Ensuring social workers have an adequate space to work within the school, with enough desk space and private areas for confidential discussions is essential and should be given further consideration going forward.

3. Keeping social workers' workloads manageable has made it possible for them to build relationships with schools and spend more time undertaking direct work with families and young people. Local authorities often find it difficult to keep caseloads in social work manageable, so attention needs to be paid to this as the pilot matures in order for this work to continue.

4. Building relationships with schools who have lower social care needs may take longer, and the model delivered to these schools may differ as they require less social work support. Stockport should continue to keep these schools engaged while addressing the demand in higher need schools, and ways of doing this are already proving promising.

SOCIAL WORKERS IN SCHOOLS: AN EVALUATION OF PILOTS IN THREE LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN ENGLAND / MAY 2020

Social Workers in Schools in Lambeth

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Lambeth is an inner London borough which is in the South of the capital. It is the fifth most densely populated authority in England and Wales with a population of approximately 326,000. Lambeth decided which schools to place social workers in based on an analysis of internal data. This identified which secondary schools contributed the most referrals to social services and which schools had high numbers of exclusions related to youth violence and persistent absence. The pilot based social workers at six of the highest need schools; four secondary and two primary schools. The remaining two primary schools were covered by social workers based at a secondary school.

The pilot aimed to reduce the number of referrals coming from schools by being physically present in the schools and working with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) at each school. Those involved also sought to use their location within schools to improve working relationships with the senior management team, teachers, parents and pupils, offering them support on safeguarding issues and concerns. They intended to deliver training and support for the schools and provide additional services for vulnerable children and young people where needed.

Summary of interim findings

At the time of our first round of fieldwork (May 2019) the pilot had launched successfully, and social workers had been placed in the schools. Differences had been noted between the work in primary and secondary schools, with activities in primary schools more likely to involve parents and carers, whereas the work undertaken in secondary schools more likely to involve young people. Workers had been engaged in a variety of activities within schools, and they had begun to navigate working in a new setting and building relationships with school staff. Some schools absorbed the social work role more smoothly than others, and workers found they had to balance challenging school practices with a range of other tasks and activities. There were signs that the pilot was having an impact on referrals and other outcomes, and that social workers in the schools helped to speed up safeguarding responses. Overall, there were positive signs at the interim stage, and signs that the challenges of implementing a new approach were being gradually overcome.

Focus of this report

This stage of the evaluation looks at the SWIS project as it became more established. We will examine how the pilot was implemented and explore what characterises the intervention, in terms of what social workers do when they are working within schools and the work they do with families. We will also look at indications of the impact it might have.

METHODOLOGY

Study design

The evaluation was organised into three phases. Phase 1 (January - February 2019) involved developing an initial logic model which was used as a basis for programme theory and data collection. Phase 2 (May - June 2019) involved fieldwork that helped us develop the logic model and assess progress in the early stages of the pilot. Phase 3 (November 2019 – February 2020) enabled us to understand how SWIS worked once they had become established in Lambeth and explore early evidence of their impact.

Research questions

The evaluation of the pilot study requires us to understand how and why the project was implemented as it was, including the types of work done using budgets and how this was perceived, any barriers or facilitators to delivery. It also requires us to explore any evidence that the pilot shows promise and indicators of success. Our research questions fall into three main areas, evidence of feasibility, evidence of promise, and readiness for wider scale evaluation:

1. **Feasibility:** Can the intervention be delivered practically and are there systems and processes to enable the intervention to be easily scaled?
2. **Promise:** What evidence is there that the intervention can have a positive impact on outcomes?
3. **Scalability:** To what extent is the intervention used as anticipated and is the programme sufficiently codified to operate at scale?

Analysis

We undertook two main forms of analysis. One to examine the impact of the pilot on quantitative outcomes, and the other to explore the way the pilot worked.

1. Quantitative comparative analysis

To estimate the impact of social workers in schools, we used a difference-in-differences model with cluster-robust standard errors by school. This compares schools with similar historical trends in certain outcomes, to assess whether the intervention has made a difference in these trends during the study period. We measured three outcomes: Section 17 starts, Section 47 enquiries and number of days children spent in care. For each outcome, we compared intervention schools against matched control schools. This analysis relies on the assumption that outcome variables between the pilot and control schools exhibit parallel trends prior to the start of the intervention.

We matched schools based on individual outcome trends. This meant that each intervention school could have up to 6 different comparator schools, 2 for each outcome. For the most recent change in outcomes in the two years prior to the intervention (2017-2018), we computed the difference in trends between treatment and comparator schools for each academic year group. These were averaged across the standardised absolute differences in trends for each academic year group. For each pilot school cluster, the two lowest scoring pairs were the first preference for matching.

The robustness of the match was tested using a Mann-Whitney U test comparing the ranking of the school matches identified by using 2017-18 data with the ranking of the school matches identified by using 2016-17 data. If the test yielded

a p-value of below 0.05, then we rejected the match on the basis that the trend did not persist over time. We also checked for a parallel trend by inspecting the outcomes plotted over time for the treatment schools and the potential comparator schools. We include fixed effects for school and term and an interaction for intervention by term. The interaction estimates the degree to which change over time in the outcome differed in the intervention schools as compared to the control schools. Analysis was undertaken using school-level counts and numbers of pupils, rather than disaggregated by age group, given the small numbers of events.

Because all outcomes could be measured as counts, we used a Poisson link with number of students in each school in each term as the exposure scaling variable. The resultant coefficients were expressed as incidence rate ratios. These are best understood as the multiplicative change in the count of the outcome against a reference group, standardised by the number of students in the school for that term. So, for example, a rate ratio of 1.5 is interpreted as a 50% increase in the rate of an outcome, and a rate ratio of 0.5 is interpreted as a 50% decrease in the rate of an outcome, compared to a reference time point. Because the test of the intervention's effectiveness is based on an interaction term of intervention by time, the total impact in intervention schools is estimated by multiplying the time fixed effect by the intervention by time interaction. A characteristic of incidence rate ratios is that confidence intervals are asymmetric, as the lower bound is 0 and the upper bound is infinity, with a point of no difference of 1.

2. Qualitative thematic analysis

We analysed interviews, focus groups and observations using a qualitative thematic approach. Transcripts were coded by a researcher using NVivo 12 to explore key themes that could be identified. The framework was then shared with the lead author and the research team, and the analysis was discussed and refined with their input. Overarching themes were brought together by the lead author and, in a final stage of analysis, these were discussed and agreed by the whole research team. The discussion incorporated our learning from wider data collection activities, including observations and other informal discussions.

Ethics

The School of Social Sciences' Research Ethics Committee at Cardiff University gave approval for the study. Social workers in the child welfare units, staff working in participating schools, children and families were provided with information about the study and asked to sign a consent form, as part of which they were informed that taking part was voluntary and they could withdraw.

Summary of data collection activities during Phase 3

The data we collected is outlined in Table 1 (p85).

Table 1. Data collection November 2019

Data collection type	Number
Interview with senior managers	1
Interview with team managers	1
Interview with social workers	5
Interview with school staff	7
Interview with LA staff	8
Interview with Head teacher	2
Interview with DSL/ADSL	6
Observations of social work practice (including informal interviews with young people)	10
Observation of meetings or panels	3
Administrative data for matching, re Autumn terms 2016 – 18 (schools)	86
Administrative records from schools, re Autumn term 2019 (schools)	17
Activity logs (individual events recorded)	842

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Our analysis is designed to show how the pilot was delivered and point to any early signs of the impact it was having. We start by looking at how much progress was made in implementing the pilot in the period since we last visited. To illustrate the nature of the project we describe the types of work social workers do, and their activities and routines when inside the schools. Then we present our comparative analysis, which examines key outcome indicators between the intervention schools and matched comparators. In the following section we explore multiple perspectives on how the intervention worked, including the views of social care and education professionals and of children and families.

3. How was the pilot implemented?

Variations in levels of embeddedness across the schools

As we have found in all the pilots, the way social workers integrated into schools and worked together varied widely between different schools. However, broadly speaking, Lambeth seemed to be relatively successful in embedding the social workers in the schools, as they all had office space in the schools they were assigned to and spent a large proportion of their time based there. The team were distributed across the school group as follows.

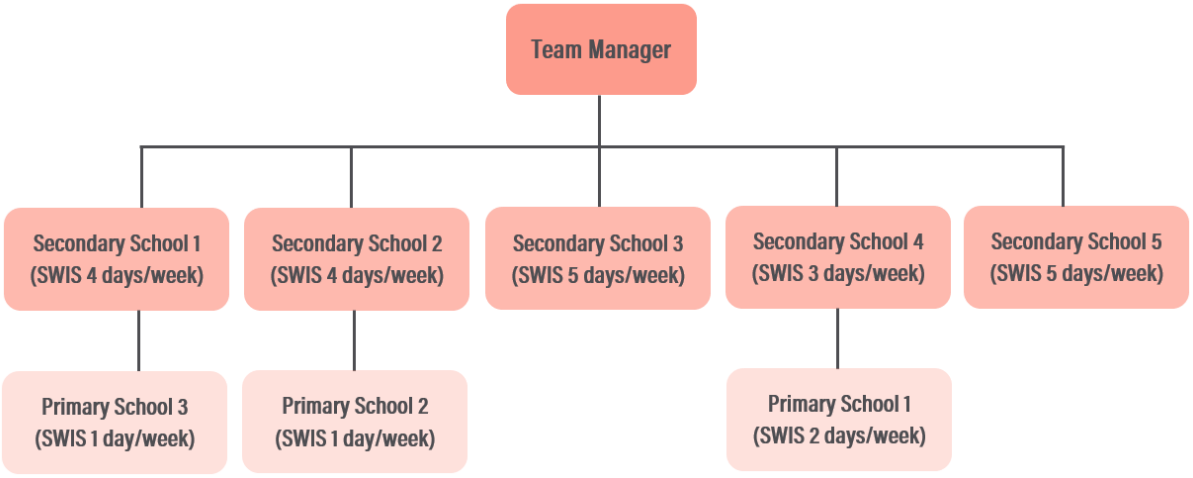

Figure 1. Configuration of SWIS team

Table 2. Summary of pilot implementation across schools

LAM_Secondary1_INT	4	Shares office with pastoral staff	1
LAM_Secondary3_INT	5	Shares office with DSL	2
LAM_Secondary5_INT	5	Shares office with SENCO, DSL	2
LAM_Primary2_INT	1	Shares office with DSL, also offered headteachers office when vacant	1

While they were well embedded within most of the schools, the extent to which they could be observed to be integrated varied. Indeed, this seemed to contribute to a consensus that the pilot was working particularly well in these schools. Two schools in particular, who retained the same social worker throughout the project, felt the project was largely successful in improving how they worked with social care. These social workers were observed to be more integrated in the schools – "part of the furniture" as one manager put it. One was sharing an office with the school attendance officer and the safer schools officer, which brought them into contact with a lot of young people who visited. The social worker ran multiple group sessions for vulnerable pupils, mentored pupils and coordinated drop-ins for parents. This social worker is a member of one of the houses within the school and attends house and school events and has been on residential excursions with the school. The situation in the other school where the worker was constant throughout was similar. They shared an office with other members of the pastoral team and students know they can come and speak to them at break, which we observed during our fieldwork. This worker is also supervising a student social worker, who also spent time in the school. One of these workers noted;

> *"I think they regard me as a member of staff, as part of the safeguarding team, and that's really nice. And they treat me as such. They don't treat me like I'm an alien, which is nice. And that's it, all really welcoming, to be honest.* **(Social worker, secondary school)**

There were even examples of social workers attending residential trips with students. Similarly, school staff noted the small and subtle, but nonetheless important markers can aid this integration;

> *"I think it's small things as well. But the fact that she's got a staff lanyard, the fact that her face is on the safeguarding posters, the fact we're building a nice community here where students can trust staff, they see her as a member of staff here, and I think that's really important.* **(School staff, secondary school)**

These workers spent less time at the linked primary schools, due to the workload at secondaries, but this meant they felt less integrated with the primary schools;

> *"I know a lot of the teachers really well here, I know a lot of the students, and I've attended their sports day and stuff like that. I've sat with them at lunch. So, I'm much more well known in this school compared with [other school]. Also [in current school] I have got ID passes.* **(Social worker, secondary school)**

However, this was not the case for all the workers and schools. One worker – the second to occupy the post that is linked to a primary and a secondary – found they spent most of their time at the primary school. As well as being a bigger school than the secondary, the environment seemed more amenable there. They share an office with the DSL and another member of the pastoral team, and the worker attends safeguarding meetings weekly and works relatively closely with the DSL. Although the worker has a whole office in the building that houses the internal exclusion room in the secondary, this did not have a working computer or phone during our visit.

In another secondary school the social worker shared a room with the DSL, SENCO, and several other members of the SENCO and pastoral team, but there are sometimes difficulties finding space to meet with students as this room is busy and not suitable for confidential conversations. The worker had been in post since December 2019 after the original worker left Lambeth, and although they had a good working relationship with the social worker, senior managers in this school were more critical of the pilot. They took the view that the original worker was not a good fit with the school, and subsequently they had a period with no SWIS input. However, their experience seemed to be improving.

One worker maintained a visible presence in the school they were assigned to, by walking around the school before classes started, in between classes and at break times. This is another school where the social worker changed during the pilot, and the school felt the original worker was not the right 'fit' for them.

Staffing

As we noted above, two of the schools who were most positive about the pilot had the same worker linked to them throughout. Lambeth did experience some turnover within their team, and this meant that some schools had a change of worker. This was thought to be one of the main challenges of implementation;

> *"Some things have been more difficult than I would have expected. I kind of came into the project thinking they were like, okay, we've identified people, we have got these set social workers that are going into their set schools, and, you know, now we just need to test it. But actually, there are all these other things that you need to think about, like if social workers leave, if your team manager goes off, those kinds of things.* **(Manager, interview)**

From the school perspective, this meant additional barriers to overcome. When there was turnover, schools who had come to expect the social workers presence were frustrated, especially if relationships had already been built between school staff, pupils and the social worker. One DSL said it was challenging as she and the original social worker had worked out a "routine and understood the expectations of each other."

Schools were more concerned about making sure the social worker was someone who represented a good fit for them, meaning they exhibited the skills and attributes that the school felt matched their own ethos and ways of working. A manager explained what had been learnt about this aspect of implementation, describing it as a "matching process" that takes account of the needs of the school;

> *"I guess [thinking about] the recruitment process of the social workers, now I'd be a lot clearer about what sort of social worker is needed, because they need to be really strong about what they do and what they don't do, they need to be confident, they need to be flexible, and... really, they need to be really enthusiastic because they've really got to infiltrate that culture and, you know, that takes someone who's really quite insistent.* **(Senior manager, interview)**

Where this was not perceived to happen, problems arose. The social worker reported that she had carried out certain numbers of contacts with pupils and parents and a set number of hours, whereas the school had a different impression. The school would have liked more transparency about the work that was being conducted, as it did not measure up to what they were seeing or what they had envisioned. One head teacher noted:

> *"And, you know, I think... I do come back to our first placement because I think there's lessons to be learnt there. You know, we were given the least experienced person in social work because it was felt the school had a strong support system, but schools are busy places.* **(School staff, interview)**

A social care manager felt there was a need to listen to schools, but at the same time it was sometimes necessary to remind schools that social workers were accountable to their own managers and not those of the school; "I think that some of the boundaries needed to be clear, but there was a bit of inflexibility [on the part of social care] as well."

It was clear that workers sometimes had a difficult task in this regard. There were clear benefits to being more integrated and becoming part of the school's safeguarding team, but at the same time they needed to maintain a sense of independence and be able to challenge the school where they felt necessary. This proved to be a difficult balance to strike, as we discuss further below.

The key learning from this seems to be that the relational aspects of linking social workers with schools are critical, and they need careful consideration alongside the practicalities. Lambeth focussed more on the latter at the outset, but as the pilot progressed, they developed a good understanding of this aspect of implementation. They involved schools in deciding how social workers are allocated to them and providing guidance around what the role of social worker entailed. For example, a 'menu' was developed for the schools which illustrated the types of work that could be undertaken.

4. What types of activities do social workers do?

It is important to understand the nature of the SWIS role and how it differs from the locality work that others in the department do. Lambeth kept an activity log (n=842) to record enquiries made and the work that took place as a result. We categorised this into types of activity, as shown in Figure 2.

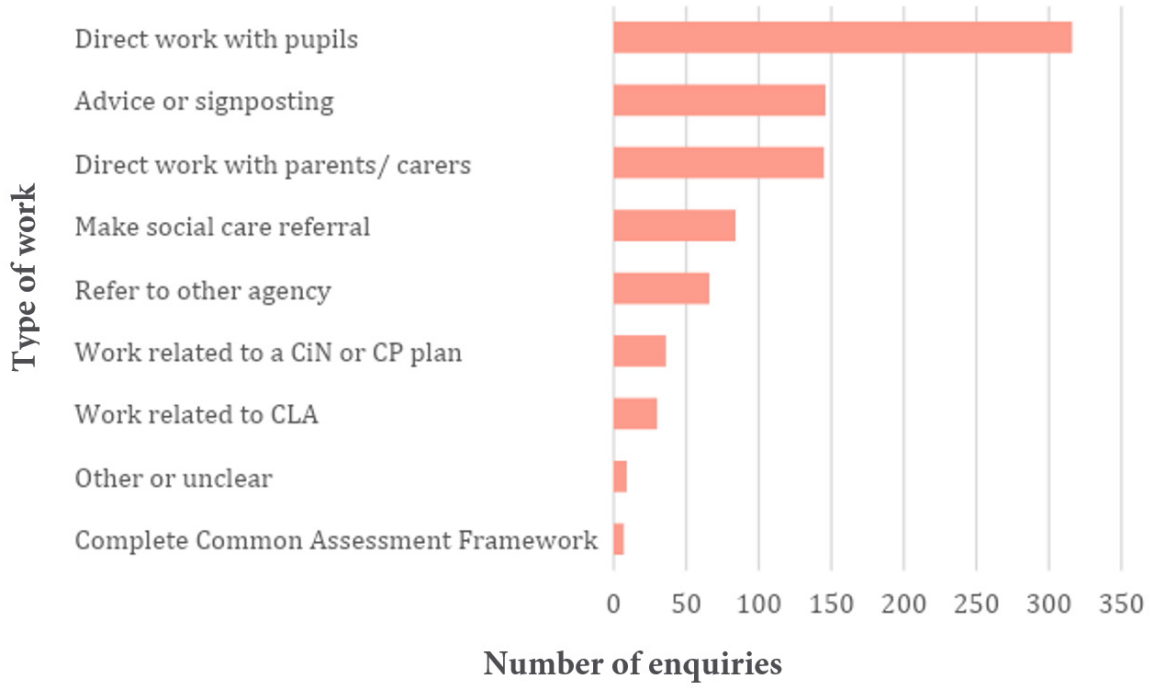

Figure 2. Breakdown of the type of work undertaken within schools

Direct work with children and young people

More than a quarter (28%) of the logged activities involved doing direct work with a child or young person. As we found in the other pilots, the social work input was not confined to young people who were already known to CSC, but a much wider group. This is clearly an aspect of the intervention that differs significantly from usual practice.

The nature of this work was wide ranging, but it can be grouped into two broad areas; concerns around behaviour, and issues around mental health and wellbeing. Behavioural concerns tended to be related to persistent absence or truancy, disruptive behaviour in school, and criminal behaviour and youth violence. Some examples, as they were recorded by social workers, include;

> *"Listened to students concerns, offered regular sessions to work around behavioural issues identified- to reduce the number of admissions to isolation.* **(Activity log, social worker secondary school, direct work with pupil)**

> *"Head teacher brought in pupil who had punched class teacher. Case recently opened to [Family Support and Child Protection] FSCP for assessment. Spoke with pupil around chain of events that led to pupil punching teacher. Supported pupil to start writing apology to teacher. Contacted allocated social worker to share information and discussed strategies.* **(Activity log, social worker primary school, direct work with pupil)**

> *"Student returned to school today follow a 3 day fixed term exclusion. Student is on final warning and at significant risk of permanent exclusion. Student has been in reflection unit approx. 28 times since sept 2018. Usually gets into trouble for arguing with peers and teachers, fighting, and disrespectful behaviour towards members of public. Pupil open to EH. Spoke with YP and liaised with EH who spoke with mum. YP wanted to go home, mother agreed for him to go home.* **(Activity log, social worker secondary school, direct work with pupil)**

Mental health and wellbeing concerns were focused on a variety of issues. These included mental health conditions, both diagnosed and undiagnosed, self-esteem, self-harm, and issues around relationships.

> *"Was informed by [internal exclusion unit] Green House that pupil said she was going to overdose. DSL said normally they would either call 999 or speak to parents. I offered to speak to student first. Met with student and then phoned parents. Assessed that while student was no longer seeking to actively die by suicide, this was still highly concerning. I informed the parents and urged them to take her to either urgent care or her GP.* **(Activity log, social worker secondary school, direct work with pupil)**

> *"Student reported to school nurse she is often spoken to in an unkind manner by her stepfather and sometimes mother. Student has self-harm because of this and has had suicidal thoughts. Student was spoken to further to explore and assess levels of risk. Support plan formulated which included inviting parents in for meeting; referral to CAMHS; interim emotional support from KOOT and ChildLine.* **(Activity log, social worker secondary school, direct work with pupil)**

Group work with young people

Social workers also ran sessions with groups of vulnerable pupils, mostly at secondary schools. These focussed on different topics, including managing difficult feelings, emotional regulation and dealing with stress and anxiety. For example, at one of the secondary schools a production of "Breaking the Chain" occurred which was centred on criminal exploitation and knife crime. Other groups focussed on healthy relationships because "that seems to be a common theme throughout", and was thought appropriate for some preventative work;

> *"Now we have ... four girls' groups, which deal with issues like respect, that individual's dignity, the age of consent, understanding the rights of saying "yes" and "no" and empowering them to have the "no" and understand what their space is. ... that for us is a key safeguarding area, where some of our students have agreed to situations which ... turned to being out of their control and had – I'm just going to be honest here – in some cases, devastating consequences that you can't rollback, so we wanted to prepare them. So, the work of [social worker] with the girls' group is prevention and empowerment in a positive way and enabling us to not let things escalate.* **(DSL, secondary school)**

Again, although some group work was tailored for specific groups of vulnerable children, much of this was provided as more of a universal service for children not necessarily involved with CSC;

> *"We had a group of girls last week sit- after their mock exams, sit, and we spoke about the exam stress and anxiety. We spoke about what their future looks like and what they wanna do and what they go on to do. And that was quite nice 'cause then you're getting a different type of student, who is- I mean, this group of girls are really academic and, you know, they go home on time, ... I don't really see those kids.* **(Social worker, secondary school)**

There were sometimes challenges to running such activities in the school, for instance because "Sometimes the children are actually in trouble, and so [school staff say], 'No, they can't go to a group because they are not allowed to'"

5. Relationships and relationship building

One theme that ran across pilot and was cited as important by all groups of participants was relationships. Indeed, this is a component of what we described above about the delicate process of linking social workers to schools; a factor in whether schools feel their social worker is a good 'match' for their school and its way of operating. Social workers worked closely with DSL and pastoral team staff, as well as senior managers within schools including year heads, deputy headteachers and headteachers. The channels of communication and methods of liaising with these professionals differed, but it was felt that building effective working relationships took time once workers were physically embedded. This was thought to be an ongoing process, where each agency gained a better understanding of the other gradually;

> *"I feel like this project has brought us together. So that was easy. I haven't necessarily worked with education as much prior to this project, and this pilot has helped build some of those relationships for us. You start seeing the kind of nuances between... and the similarities between education and working for the whole, I guess.* **(Local authority staff, interview)**

Relationships between social workers and pupils

The opportunity to build positive relationships with pupils was perceived a key benefit of the pilot and noted in all the schools involved. The small sample of young people we interviewed in schools felt that social workers worked well with pupils and that pupils held them in high regard. One of the young people we spoke to said the social worker and another member of pastoral staff "are the first people I go to when I need to speak to someone, so that's helpful." She went on to explain how the social worker in question supported her while she was at school.

> *"Yesterday I got into a situation where I stormed- nearly stormed out the school, and [social worker] came to the gate, and she's the one that calmed me down and took me to the office and spoke to me about the situation, yeah.* **(Young person, interview)**

During one of our observations of social work practice, we observed how - as recorded in our fieldnotes, "Young people have someone who they can talk about things with. The young person says that it is "nice to know there's someone else there." In a different school, the researcher noted:

> *"The young person reports she can talk with the social worker about anything and this includes bullying, family issues, relationships, arguments, friends, anger issues, paranoia, and school stuff.* **(Observation fieldnotes, school visit, researcher)**

School staff also noted this as a positive of the pilot, who viewed them as reliable, helpful professionals that young people can turn to when needed. The following quotations are from classroom teachers;

> *"My experience of [social worker] is that she's very hands-on with the kids, so she's ready and available when they need her, ...I also think it's given the children a comfort just knowing that she's here and that they have someone to support them, yeah, that they have someone to turn to.* **(Classroom teacher, secondary school, interview)**

> *"Yeah, they do trust her. And we have a high calibre of students who are dealing with a lot of different issues. And for them to trust [the social worker] like they do*

says a lot 'cause they don't do that with everyone here. So, yeah, and they're committed to her. They know when she's here. If [the social worker] says something to them Tuesday, they know on Wednesday it's gonna be dealt with or it's gonna be followed up. And even if it's not, even if she's not mentioned anything to them, if she sees them in the corridor, so and so, "You all right? How's the..." it's still that connection. **(Classroom teacher, secondary school)**

More generally, young people appeared to enjoy the activities they were engaged in with social workers and were enthusiastic about having another person that they could go to for support. Many of the pupils that were observed said that they had become unofficial ambassadors for the pilot and encouraged their friends and peers to seek out the social worker in their school if they were having a difficult time or needed someone to talk to. This word of mouth occurred in at least three of the schools that were observed and highlighted the high regard that the social workers were held in by pupils.

Relationships between social workers and families

Most of the work undertaken with families was in the primary schools. This was mainly because parents tended to visit primary schools to take and collect their children, whereas most secondary school aged children tended to make their own way to and from school. Although we did not involve parents in formal research interviews, several of our observations had family members present. Most of the parents who were present appeared to be pleased with the interactions and the work undertaken by the social workers (though it is worth noting that these families may be more likely to have had a positive experience)[1]. In one case, the parent was overwhelmed with the support she had received by both the social worker and the safer schools officer. She had been reluctant to come forward initially, but the social worker and safer schools officer were able to help resolve the situation and help support the parent and son effectively by encouraging the parent to consent to having an investigation opened and ensuring that they were both supported while this was being undertaken.

Another example involved concerns around a mother who was experiencing a lot of day to day stress but wanted to return to university. The social worker provided some counselling to the parent along with getting her children into the school's breakfast and after school club to help manage anxieties around where the children would be before and after school. The social worker explained;

> *"Initially at the beginning, she was reluctant because she was quite defensive, but I was able to break in the circle but being quite patient with mum and engaging with mum, working at her pace in a way that was still safeguarded.* **(Social worker, interview)**

6. What are the opportunities and challenges?

Role clarity

The pilot gave workers the opportunity to do a lot of activities and types of work that they would not normally do, with groups of children and young people who were not known to CSC. Much of this seemed beneficial, for example developing a safer understanding of what behaviours might be acceptable and unacceptable in relationships appeared to help young people who might be subject to risks they might encounter as they enter adolescence. Moreover, a wider group of children than those deemed to be legally 'in need' could access this support.

1 The method we used to recruit families for observations raises the likelihood of selection bias. As we relied on social workers to approach families and invite them to take part, those who were selected by the workers and agreed may be more likely to have had a positive experience and less likely to be critical.

Nonetheless, and as we noted in other pilots, this also raises some challenges. It could be argued that this preventative work is important in order for issues to remain below the threshold for CSC involvement, and to promote the wellbeing of young people more generally. However, social workers must balance this with statutory work, which will always take priority over these other activities. If the volume of statutory work increased it would be more difficult to provide this aspect of the role, so the balance of statutory work and providing preventative services needs careful attention. One worker, for example, noted that the higher caseload they had during the summer meant that the group work and parent drop-ins became more difficult to fit in.

Where schools felt they had a good relationship with their social worker, they seemed very positive about the pilot. Nonetheless, some staff were more critical of aspects of it. For example, one DSL was unhappy about the social worker taking on what they perceived to be part of their own role at the school. Speaking about the pilot more generally, a social care manager observed;

> *"I've found that the schools that had a much more established pastoral team were harder to kind of put the social worker in, [and once the pilot was underway they] gave [the social worker] a harder time and their expectations were much higher.* **(DSL, interview)**

Differences in organisational culture

As in Stockport and Southampton, Lambeth's experience highlighted some differences between the culture and practices of education and social care. Social workers found themselves adapting to fit into the strict timetables school staff work to, which contrasted with the unpredictability inherent in their own role;

> *"Our role isn't structured, yeah? Anything can happen, from it being a Section 47 to just doing a home visit because you need to do a welfare check. But I think what people in this role should be mindful of at the point of application is that actually, you're going into an organisation that, you know, has a daily structure and you have to be able to adapt because part of your adaption is learning how the school culture is like.* **(Social worker, secondary school, interview)**

The fact social workers had to travel around and work more flexibly than school staff caused some tension in some cases, as schools were not used to staff coming and going throughout the day. One school reportedly kept an 'attendance record' for the social worker and called a senior social work manager in for a meeting to discuss what they viewed to be 'poor attendance'.

There were also tensions around the way some schools dealt with behavioural issues and other matters of discipline. This often centred around the way that internal exclusions were handled. One social worker spoke about her willingness to challenge the systems in place;

> *"It's a room that has its purpose, but actually, when I arrived, there were children in there that were in there for far too long. I didn't go in guns blazing because I think it's an obvious situation. It's quite clear, having 12 children in an IE... they know a child's been in there seven months, three months, two months. They know. It's happening on their floor, so I'm not going to have conversations about the obvious. I'm just trying to understand why that is and what is the delay. Where's the movement? What's happening? Something is preventing these children from coming out, and when you're seven months in, three months in, it's not their behaviour because they're out of the mainstream, yeah? So what is it? What I started to learn was is that children that were in there were either being managed moves but there wasn't enough schools*

to accommodate them. There were children being in there that what was deemed as misbehaviour, actually, in my eyes, and being a previous teacher, it's not a behaviour problem; it's about your behaviour management within the classroom. **(Social worker, secondary school, interview)**

The social worker began to have meetings about these pupils and worked to move them out of internal exclusion and back into the classroom. She stated later in the interview;

> *"It's not even in use anymore. Like, I look at the IE register, there's three children in there for a day, so something shifted. What's happened is those children who is meant to get the managed move have had it. Children who are meant to be back in class are back in class.* **(Social worker, secondary school, interview)**

Not all social workers were able to enable such a fundamental change, but they continued to challenge the use of internal exclusions where they felt they were being used punitively or inappropriately.

> *"But also trying to, I suppose, navigate between what one professional might think needs to happen and what I think needs to happen. In this case, I heard yesterday that they wanted to put her in IE almost as a... not a punishment but as a way to kind of figure out what had happened. Actually, I think that's pretty unfair, given she was followed up the road to be attacked. So that might happen.* **(Social worker, secondary school, interview)**

This is one of several examples where schools seemed receptive to a different perspective and more information about a child's circumstances. One of the headteachers, for example, noted that this could enable them to take a different approach to children who were facing difficulties at home;

> *"I'm very pleased with the work that [the social worker has] been doing and know that she's made some real connections with lots of students, and that's meant that we've got information that we wouldn't otherwise have, and that's enabled us to treat children perhaps much more sensitively than we might have done otherwise because we know where they're coming from and what the circumstances they're in.* **(Head Teacher, secondary school, interview)**

7. What impact does it appear to have?

The difference in differences analysis suggests that the intervention reduced Section 47 starts, but not Section 17 starts. We were unable to include days in care as part of our analysis given challenges with data quality, and we used publicly available data (DfE, 2017, 2018, 2019) on total pupil numbers instead of local data on numbers of pupils who reside within Lambeth, as this was not available[2]. In all analyses, an unexpectedly low rate of events meant that regression coefficients were imprecisely estimated.

Section 17 starts

This analysis considered seven schools: four intervention and three matched control schools. Estimates of Section 17 starts per school term, the number of pupils registered in the school in each term (and thus 'at risk' for a Section 17 start), and the average count of Section 17 starts per 100 students are presented in Table 3. A visual

2 Ideally, as we have for this analysis in the other two pilots, we would use as our denominator the number of pupils in each group who reside within Lambeth, rather than the total number (which would include some children who reside elsewhere). This is because pupils from neighbouring boroughs would be ineligible for contact with Lambeth. However, this data was not available, so we used total pupil numbers instead.

trend, depicted in Figure 3, suggests that schools generally experienced a decrease and then an uptick of Section 17 starts. Because comparator schools were chosen by trends in each age group, aggregate trends are not as directly parallel as trends used for matching. In the intervention term, there did not appear to be a consistent change in trends across intervention schools.

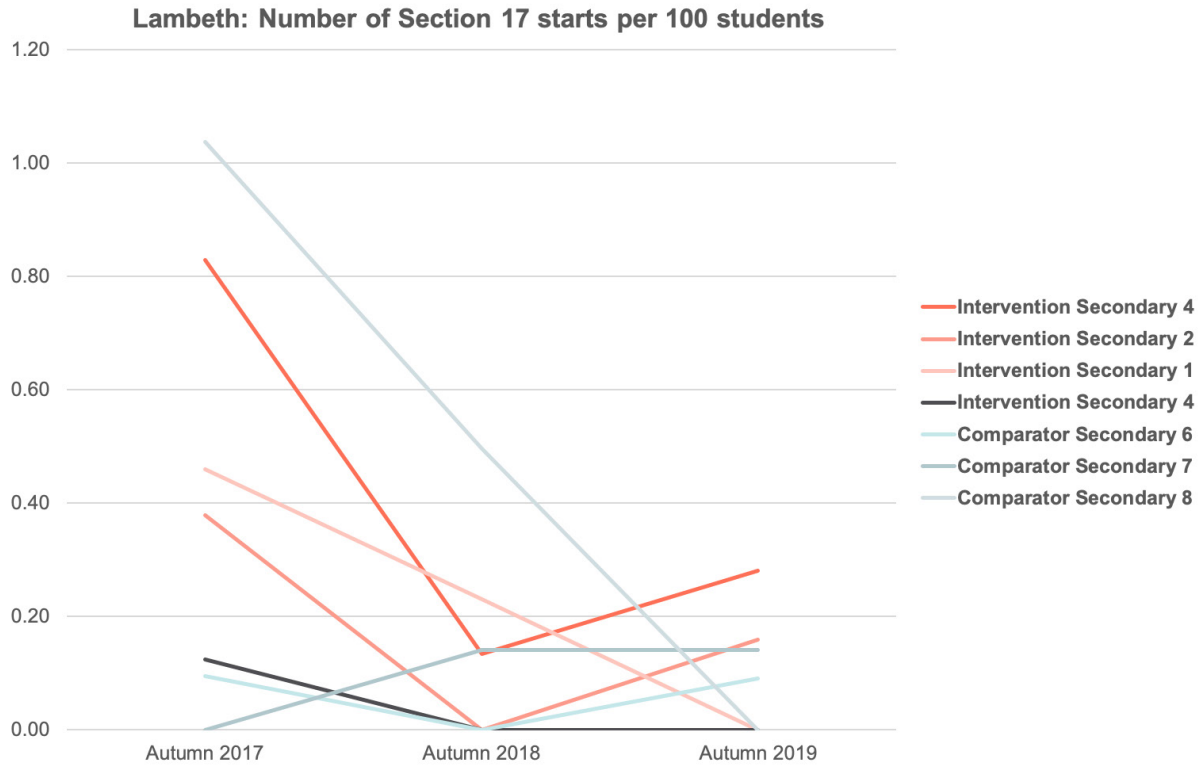

Figure 3. Average count per 100 students: Section 17 starts

Table 3. Section 17 starts by term and school

Intervention												
	LAM_Secondary4_INT			LAM_Secondary2_INT			LAM_Secondary1_INT			LAM_Secondary5_INT		
Term	Number	Pupils	Average count*	Number	Pupils	Average count*	Number	Pupils	Average count*	Number	Pupils	Average count*
Autumn 2017	4	482	0.83	3	793	0.38	4	869	0.46	1	807	0.12
Autumn 2018	1	744	0.13	0	771	0.00	2	869	0.23	0	819	0.00
Autumn 2019	1	356	0.28	1	628	0.16	0	825	0.00	0	861	0.00
Control												
	LAM_Secondary6_COMP			LAM_Secondary7_COMP			LAM_Secondary8_COMP					
Term	Number	Pupils	Average count*	Number	Pupils	Average count*	Number	Pupils	Average count*			
Autumn 2017	1	1048	0.10	0	713	0.00	5	482	1.04			
Autumn 2018	0	1043	0.00	1	712	0.14	3	605	0.50			
Autumn 2019	1	1097	0.09	1	707	0.14	0	670	0.00			

*Count is per 100 students

Regression estimates, presented in Table 4, suggested that the change over time in the rate of Section 17 starts was greater in intervention schools, but this difference was not statistically significant. In control schools, the rate of Section 17 starts decreased by 17% between the autumn term preceding implementation and the term of implementation (incidence rate ratio 0.83, 95% CI [0.09, 7.40]). This decrease was even greater in intervention schools, estimated at 26%; that is, the decrease in intervention schools was 11% greater than in control schools (intervention by time IRR 0.89, 95% CI [0.07, 11.04]; 0.83*0.89=0.74), but this difference was imprecisely estimated.

Table 4: Regression estimates of change over time in Section 17 starts

Coefficient	IRR	95% CI
Term fixed effects		
Autumn 2017	3.50	1.82, 6.72
Autumn 2018	Reference	
Autumn 2019	0.83	0.09, 7.40
Intervention by time	0.89	0.07, 11.04
Constant	0.00	0.001, 0.004

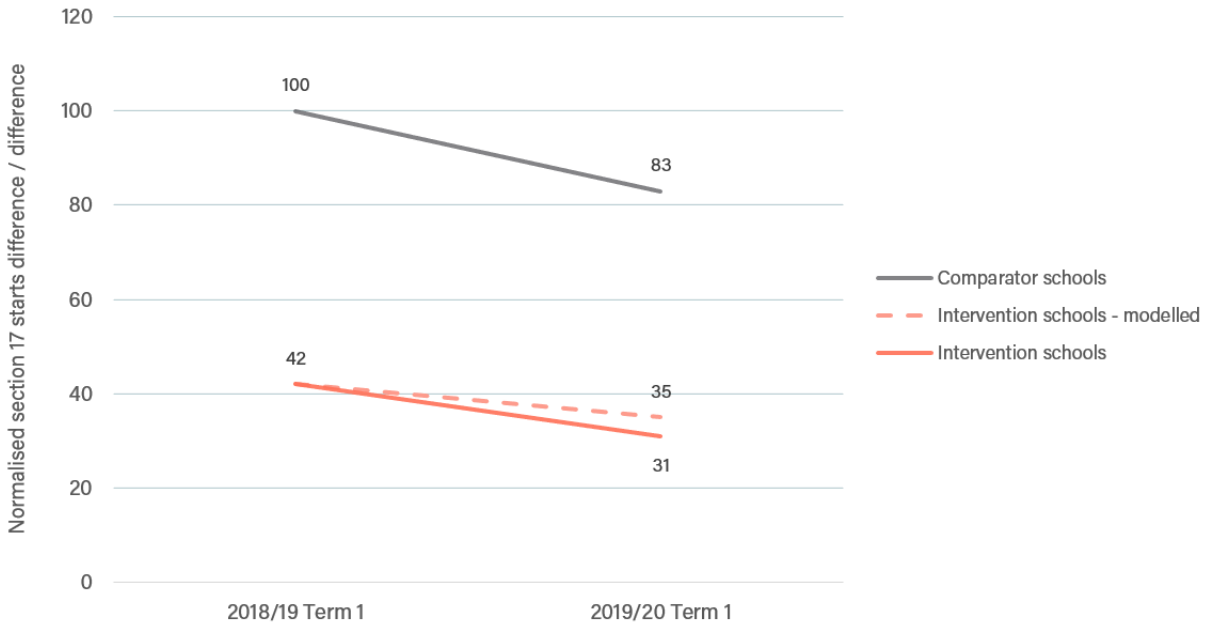

Figure 4: Difference in difference estimates of treatment effects on section 17 starts in Lambeth

Section 47 starts

This analysis considered eight schools: three intervention and five matched control schools. Estimates of Section 47 starts per school term, the number of pupils registered in the school in each term (and thus 'at risk' for a Section 47 start), and the average count of Section 47 starts per 100 students are presented in Table 5. Inspection of the visual trend of average count per 100 students (see Figure 5) suggests that the three intervention schools reduced their average termly count of Section 47 starts over time. This was less clear for control schools, with two control schools experiencing increases in the final term of observation. It is notable that six schools had no Section 47 starts in the autumn term before intervention implementation and five schools, including the three intervention schools, had no Section 47 starts in the final term of observation.

Table 5: Section 47 starts by term and school

Intervention									
	LAM_Primary3_COMP			LAM_Secondary1_COMP			LAM_Secondary5_INT		
Term	Number	Pupils	Average count*	Number	Pupils	Average count*	Number	Pupils	Average count*
Autumn 2017	10	563	1.78	2	869	0.23	1	807	0.12
Autumn 2018	1	542	0.18	0	869	0.00	0	819	0.00
Autumn 2019	0	504	0.00	0	825	0.00	0	861	0.00
Control									
	LAM_Secondary6_COMP			LAM_Primary4_COMP			LAM_Primary5_COMP		
Term	Number	Pupils	Average count*	Number	Pupils	Average count*	Number	Pupils	Average count*
Autumn 2017	1	1048	0.10	5	609	0.82	2	403	0.50
Autumn 2018	0	1043	0.00	2	602	0.33	0	371	0.00
Autumn 2019	0	1097	0.00	2	615	0.33	0	366	0.00
	LAM_Secondary9_COMP			LAM_Secondary10_COMP					
Term	Number	Pupils	Average count*	Number	Pupils	Average count*			
Autumn 2017	0	579	0.00	1	961	0.10			
Autumn 2018	0	489	0.00	0	980	0.00			
Autumn 2019	4	464	0.86	3	1002	0.30			

*Count is per 100 students

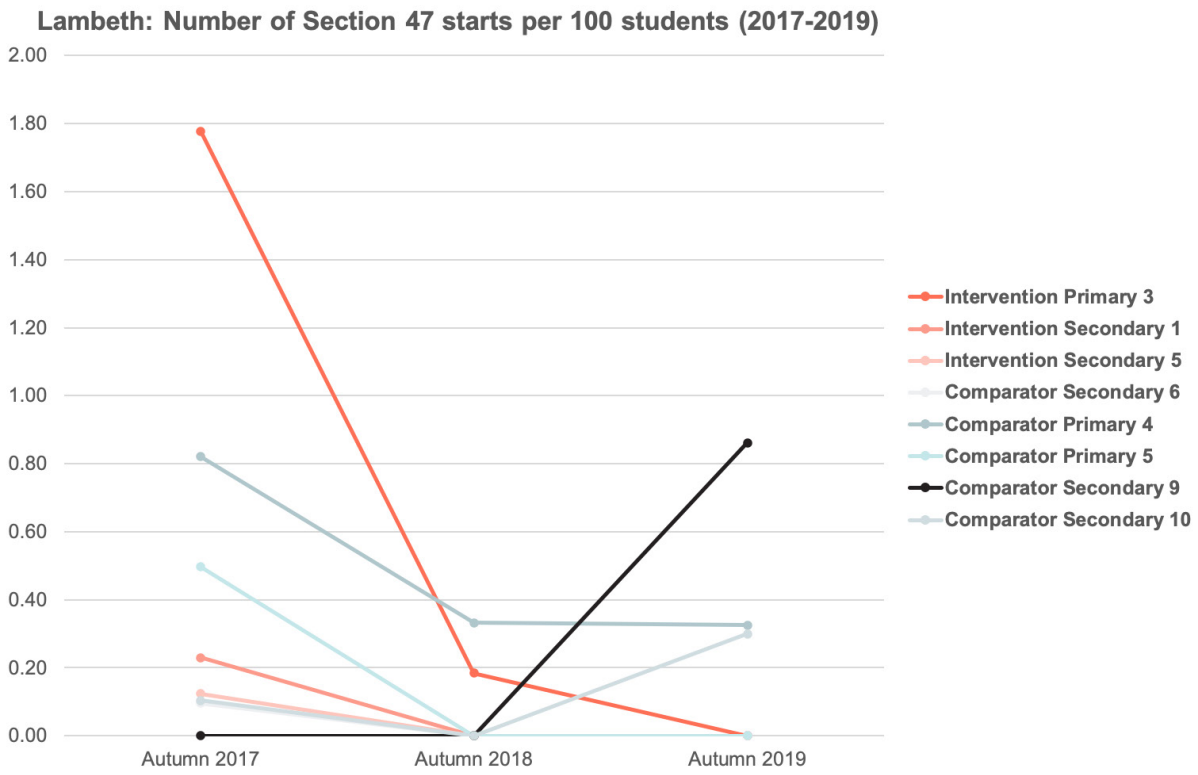

Figure 5: Average count per 100 students: Section 47 starts

Regression estimates (see Table 6) suggested a substantial and significant, but nearly inestimable, impact of the intervention on Section 47 starts. Specifically, control schools experienced an increase in Section 47 starts between the autumn term preceding implementation and the term of implementation, corresponding with an estimated 583% increase in the rate of Section 47 starts (IRR 6.83, 95% CI [0.84, 55.32]), though this was imprecisely estimated. In contrast, and reflecting the visual trend described above, intervention schools experienced a different trend, the number of Section 47 starts in intervention schools reduced to 0 in the period covered by our data. Although this produces statistical estimates, shown in the table below and figure 6, these estimates are not meaningfully interpretable. Although we might take reassurance that the figures are so positive for the intervention, the magnitude of this effect, including the change in trends for the control group, is implausible. This suggests that future research in this area should be conducted over a longer time period, and should involve a larger number of schools.

Table 6. Regression estimates of change over time in Section 47 starts

Coefficient	IRR	95% CI
Term fixed effects		
Autumn 2017	7.08	2.60, 19.23
Autumn 2018	Reference	
Autumn 2019	6.83	0.84, 55.32
Intervention by time	1.43E-08	1.54E-9, 1.33E-7
Constant	6.27E-05	1.58E-5, 2.49E-4

IRR, incidence rate ratio; CI, confidence interval

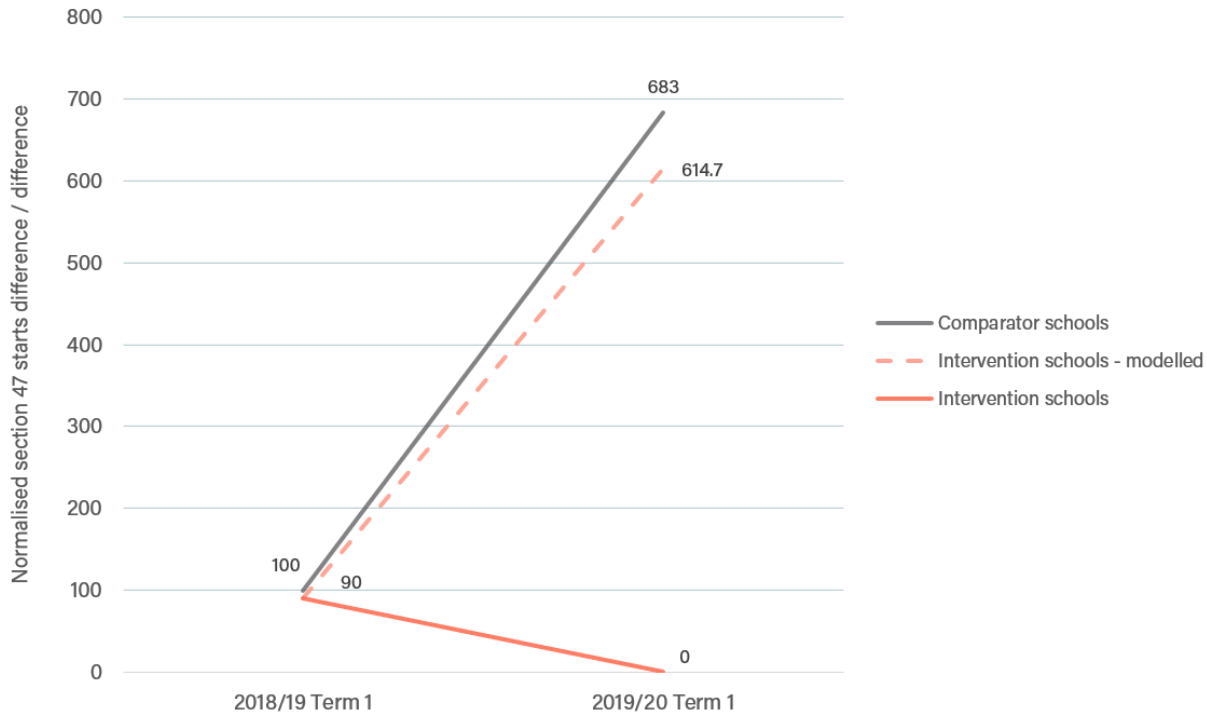

Figure 6: Difference in difference estimates of treatment effects on section 47 starts in Lambeth

Perspectives on the effectiveness of the pilot

Social workers were overwhelmingly positive about the impact that they were having, and Lambeth reported that their local data suggested the pilot had led to fewer social care referrals. There was thought to be a particular benefit in terms of reducing the referrals that required no further action (NFA). This is a generalisation to some extent, but local authorities aim to reduce referrals which require NFA because they create work at their 'front door' assessment teams but are ultimately deemed not to need CSC involvement;

> *"And initially, that data, we've seen it kind of fluctuate a little bit now as we have gone into the later stages of the pilot, but initially, you know, the indication is that it's making a difference. Just by having a social worker there and managing their anxieties and seeing those NFA's drop-down, it's making a real positive impact.* **(Manager, interview)**

As we have noted above, school staff had mixed views on the project – and these seemed to depend largely on whether they felt the individual social worker fitted into the school or not. As one of the social care managers noted, "it is about personality and it's about fit. But I didn't envisage it would be as tricky as it has been. But in the schools where it's worked well, it's worked amazingly well" School staff tended to agree with this view. One headteacher described being "so impressed by it, [I] have just been bowled over by how effective it's been in assisting us to safeguard our students. Another felt the social worker in a particular school had made,

> *"An amazing impact. Genuinely, every single staff member in this school would agree with that. Her impact on staff and making their job considerably easier, in particularly the safeguarding lead, where a lot comes through the safeguarding lead at this school.* **(Headteacher, interview)**

As well as assisting schools in their efforts, the pilot seems to have had real value in providing young people an outlet for them to discuss a range of issues. An important element of this seems to be that the worker is in the school and part of the team, but also independent from it and with specific expertise. An example which illustrates this well is where – as one manager explained - a girl made "a really serious disclosure of sexual abuse to the social worker because she knew him and she - and I'm not sure she would ever have told anyone that". It seems likely that being embedded within the school and getting to know students over time enabled this in a way that other ways of working would not.

CONCLUSIONS

The WWCSC research programme is underpinned by a realist approach which seeks to understand what works, for whom, under what circumstances. In order to make sense of the broad range of themes we have identified we return to our research questions to consider the feasibility, promise and scalability of SWIS in Lambeth.

1. **Feasibility: Can the intervention be delivered practically and are there systems and processes to enable the intervention to be easily scaled?**

Lambeth have successfully embedded social workers across a number of schools, and during the course of the pilot they have refined their understanding of what is needed to do this. For example, the project has shown how important it is to match social workers to schools, so that the personalities, working styles, skills, attributes and experience of social workers can be harnessed effectively. For some schools, it has taken more than one attempt to get this right, but our general impression is that progress has been made. By the latter stages of the pilot, the social workers had strengthened their working relationships with school staff and students and integrated the service they offered into the schools. Workers themselves have employed a range of approaches to integrate themselves within schools, from walking the corridors and classrooms when children are moving around, to attending meetings with professionals and becoming 'part of the furniture' in the safeguarding teams. They have also done a wide range of direct work with young people, individually and in groups, and this has clearly built solid relationships to which various benefits have been attributed.

2. **Promise: What evidence is there that the intervention can have a positive impact on outcomes?**

Our analysis generated some promising results, suggesting the pilot helped to reduce the number of Section 47 starts in the schools where social workers were based. This finding should be treated with caution, as there were some limitations in this analysis, due to low incidence rates across the sample, and data quality issues. Nonetheless, it suggests social workers being in schools as part of the pilot may have reduced the number of children thought to be suffering or likely to suffer significant harm. This is supported by our qualitative findings, which illustrate how social workers in some schools made a difference to individual children and young people. Taken together, this provides a clear rationale for more rigorous evaluation of the intervention in due course.

3. **Scalability: To what extent is the intervention used as anticipated and is the programme sufficiently codified to operate at scale?**

The intervention needs to be tailored to each school, and there is further work to be done to understand what the core aspects of the role are and how different elements are prioritised as caseloads fluctuate. However, Lambeth have shown that there are key features of SWIS that can be implemented across a diverse group of schools; being physically present, being visible and available to staff and students, and integrated into school life. In the two secondary schools where these core features seemed most apparent, both social workers and education professionals were positive about the pilot.

Recommendations for Lambeth

Finally, we offer some recommendations to managers and practitioners in Lambeth, based on our findings.

1. The pilot in Lambeth has been largely successful, especially where the social workers have been embedded since the start. It should be continued in the existing schools and trialled over a longer period to explore what medium and long-term outcomes it might lead to.

2. Further work should be done around the expectations of schools and the boundaries of the role. The 'menu' of what SWIS can offer, developed by CSC should be reviewed to ensure that what is listed meets the current work which is ongoing in schools.

3. As the role evolves, Lambeth should consider the balance of early intervention work and statutory work social workers do in schools – in order to ensure that their skills and expertise are used to the best effect.

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