

Merlin Housing Society School Attendance project

A summary of information from interviews with school staff in schools in South Gloucestershire about the causes that lie behind broken-week patterns of attendance

A survey of community-based interventions that can impact on those causes

Brief reviews of literature on the causes behind school absence and on the evidence base for relevant community-based interventions

A guide to the resources that can help organisations design good quality evaluations for the interventions that they use

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1 Introduction

In late 2016, Merlin Housing Society and South Gloucestershire Education discussed a proposal for Merlin to support a high-profile issue for schools via a research project and subsequently to direct funding into the community to support the research findings. The issue agreed on was Pupil Attendance, and specifically a pattern of attendance known as Broken Week Attendance. School Secondary Heads were advised about the new project during a regular meeting, and subsequently, emails were sent to those schools whose catchment areas were aligned with one of Merlin Housing Society's Community Hubs, inviting them to participate in the first part of the project.

Early in 2017, the author of this report interviewed staff at five secondary schools and three primary schools in South Gloucestershire.

In these interviews, school staff described their perceptions of underlying reasons for Broken Week patterns of attendance at their school, in relation to the demographics of the local area. Staff were also invited to describe interventions that they knew of and believed might be useful. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, and the information carefully analysed into themes, enabling an overview of school staff's perceptions of causes for broken week attendance in South Gloucestershire.

1.1 The structure of the report

In this report, the information given by school staff is organised into the three geographic areas that Merlin has identified as localities in which to provide housing and community based services, as outlined on the map in figure 1. The areas are:

- Patchway/Filton (shaded yellow)
- Staple Hill/Yate (shaded blue)
- Kingswood/Oldland Common (shaded green)

For each geographic area, the top three causes of Broken Week Attendance are identified, as articulated by school staff.

Following this is a description of community-based interventions that have been used to alleviate or overcome the issues identified by staff. (page 19) together with links to websites for further information, where appropriate. This list includes the suggestions put forward by the schools themselves (page 28).

Appendix 1 (page 31) provides a national and international context for the discussion about causes. It describes what is known about causes of student absence, from national and international research, and shows that a long-established tradition of trying to identify causes of absence with the *attitudes or personalities* of young people is slowly being challenged. New directions in research are shifting to a concern with understanding school attendance and aspiration in relation to *the demands of childhood and adolescence in contemporary society* and with this approach, what has become clear is that young people's motivation to maintain their self-esteem underpins some of their choices and actions.



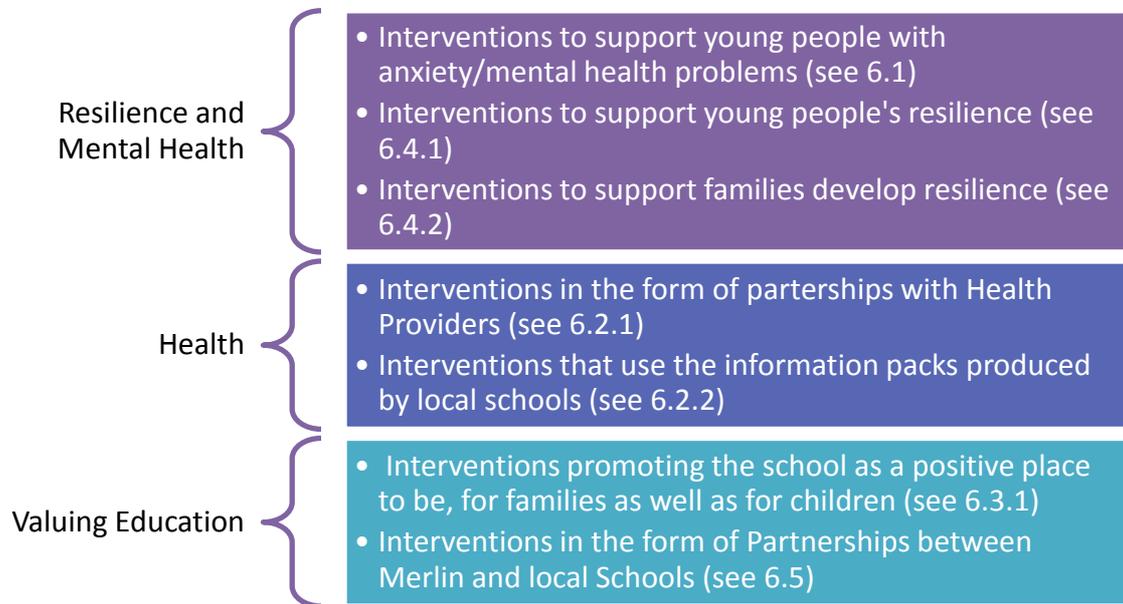
Figure 1 Merlin HS's three geographic areas

Appendix 2 (page 37) is a review of national and international research literature on interventions that have been designed to support families, young people and school, looking specifically for those that that have solid proof behind them.

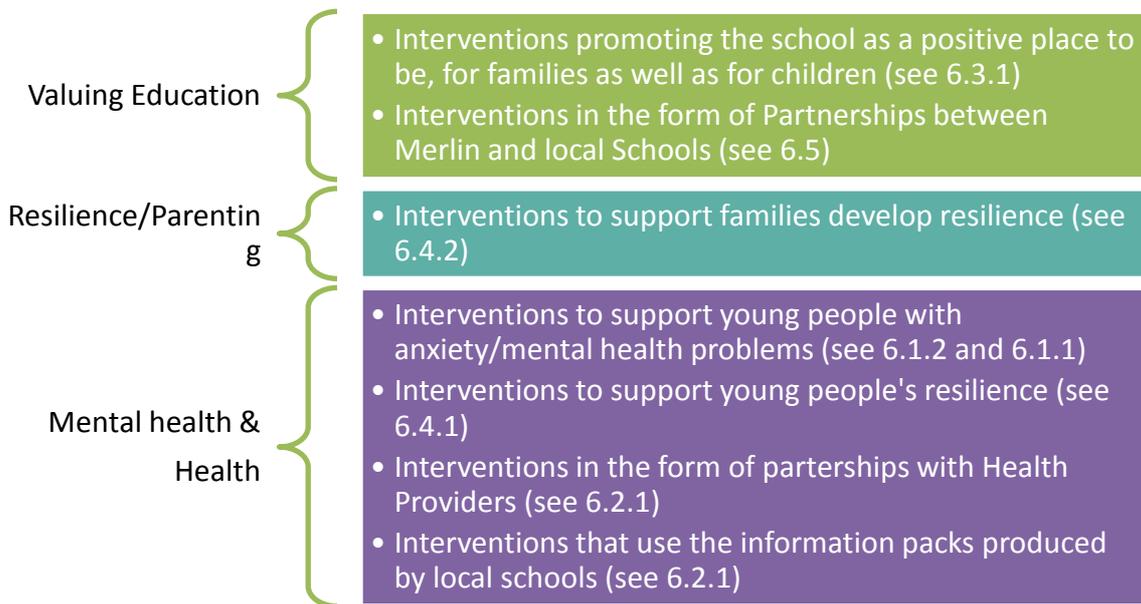
Appendix 3 (page 41) discusses the contemporary demands for providing robust evidence for interventions and gives a list of resources that can help organisations design good quality evaluations for the interventions that they use.

2 Summary

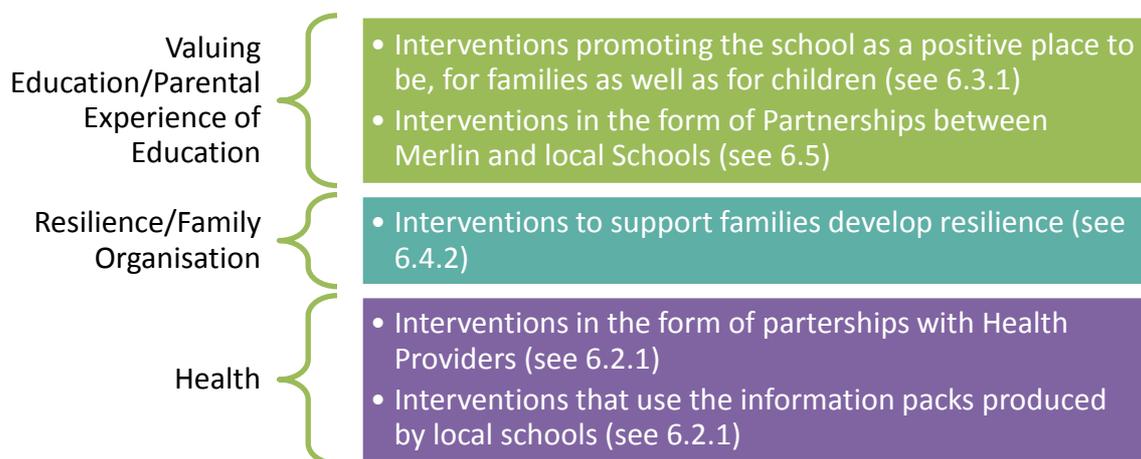
2.1 Top three Reasons for Broken Week Attendance given by school staff in the Patchway and Filton area & list of appropriate Community Based Interventions



2.2 Top three Reasons for Broken Week Attendance given by school staff in the Kingswood and Cadbury Heath area & list of appropriate Community Based Interventions



2.3 Top three Reasons for Broken Week Attendance given by school staff in the Yate and Staple Hill area & list of appropriate Community Based Interventions



3 Information from schools in Patchway/Filton area

3.1 School Staff's description of local demographics and their relation to attendance

Just managing (Community College)

"We've got a large number of families who, in every way they display and in a lot of their traits and their characteristics, their needs, the young people are... you would stereotype them as Pupil Premium, but they're not, because they've not qualified for benefits etc. So, we've got a lot of two-income families, where the incomes are both from low-skilled, minimum wage type jobs. Families in which for example mum works from seven in the morning till five in the evening and dad then works a 12-hour night shift, both at ASDA, with very little quality family time, and they are not Pupil Premium, but in terms of their quality of life and their family time and the ability for the parents to parent as parents, things get stretched. In a family like this, the kids get home, and the dad would just be getting up because he was getting ready for work, while the mother would not be back yet. As the mother gets back, the father would be on his way out, and then vice versa in the morning. In the morning, the father would just come in from the late shift, say hello to the kids, go to bed because he needs to sleep during the day when the kids are at school. And at this point, the mother would come in, perhaps join the kids for breakfast, or the kids would have to get food for themselves in the morning or the afternoon. So as you can see, some of these issues have an impact on the way children come to school, nourished, fed, uniformed, equipped, etc. You can see that it's not through bad parenting, as such, it's just that the parents have made the decision to both work, but that work, to be able to work and bring the income in and things. So here in Patchway that very often is reliant on a parent working shifts and things.

The pupils are mainly White British. I think we've got less than 5% that are not white British. In terms of gender, boys' and girls' attendance is very much the same. In terms of achievement, girls generally outperform boys. A couple of years ago we had an anomaly where it flipped, but girls generally outperform boys. Having said that, the gap is not significant. Last year our biggest group of underachievers were middle-ability Pupil Premium, of which a lot were also coming under concern for attendance. There is a correlation between attendance and achievement.

Over 90% of our kids come in either bike, on foot or on scooter. The ones that come in on car are very often because their parents drive them in, but they're local. we haven't got a school bus, for example."

Pupil Premium (Community School)

"Overall school attendance sits normally around 94 to 94.5%, but that's an improvement from three or four years ago when it was around the 92, 93s. However, Pupil Premium attendance levels sit at around about 90%. Although the numbers are never fixed, as a school, our Pupil Premium level is always between 30 and 35%, but year seven is over 40, higher than the other years. A lot of Pupil Premium students have broken weeks, and/or exclusions – of course, exclusions show up on our figures as lower attendance too."

Non-Pupil Premium (Community School)

"It's not necessarily the Pupil Premium students it's a bit of a mixture. I do think there's families out there that need help that aren't Pupil Premium or you might have a single parent that just earns really good money so they wouldn't claim any benefits but that doesn't mean that child or the parent needs some support in some way."

3.2 Reasons put forward by schools in Patchway

3.2.1 Resilience and Mental Health

Resilience and Mental Health (secondary, community school)

"Definitely **resilience and mental health** I find are the two big things that we struggle with in this catchment area especially because we've got quite a lot of families on the estates next door and they

are quite disadvantaged, needy families that need a lot of time. I haven't worked in another secondary school but because of the cohort of the kids we've got and the families we have we have to make sure we work closely with them otherwise we'll lose them.

Anxiety is another huge one, lots of **mental health**. If we've got a child who suddenly refuses to come to school because they're **anxious** the Family Liaison Officer will be that link where she'll go to the home, talk to the child, talk to the parents, encourage them to go to the GP and get a diagnosis of some kind and that's what we do. If they're at home just saying they feel **stressed out and anxious** and can't come in then obviously we're a bit more tougher oh no you need to be in but it depends on that child really and that family because sometimes it might not be even a family that gets Pupil Premium. Lots of parents that work full-time that gap nobody seems to look at because like we've got working parents so therefore you've got aspirations. But sometimes when you think of a family package, you know yourself when you're both going out to work and you've got children and you're running around and everything else and then that child suddenly goes, no, I'm not going to school that's a huge impact on everything else.

If you've got a student with **mental health** issues that are perhaps under CAMs that's a lot for the parents as well as the child and so their attendance does tend to dip because they could be having a good week or a bad week. And mental health is a huge thing and it just seems to be more and more students, young people are getting ill or we've got some students with chronic fatigue and things like that so you can't always say because their attendance is bad it's because they're truanting or just not coming in sometimes there's lots of medical reasons for them not to come in.

A lot of it is **resilience** around both the parents and the children so it could be especially in Year 11 their broken weeks seem to become more even though you think they should be less because they've got exams but because of the **stress** they're crashing, they're not coping very well. When you get up to my Year 11 it's a bit more of a bigger package so it could be daily contact with parents, lots of penalty warnings because in Year 11 you can just fine.

And sometimes it's just parental support where they've just hit a barrier and they don't know what to do with their child in terms of... if you've got a 15, 16 year old lad refusing to move, you can't move a big lad. But sometimes it takes that person outside of the family to go in and say, well, this is what's going to happen and support the parents as well.

And especially exam time as well we go out and pick them up if they're really **anxious and worried** about coming in to do an exam. I know not many schools do that but I think with the cohort of needy families that we have got, vulnerable families, we need to put that extra support in."

Vulnerable / Child Protection / Complex Needs / Mental Health (primary)

"I would say overwhelmingly the children who have broken weeks and poor attendance have come from backgrounds where there is vulnerability. We have a large number of vulnerable children in the school. Some of these children are on the child protection register. There's a story behind all these families, for example, there's a domestic incident or on the Child Protection Register, or they've got brothers and sisters with special needs, autism, split families, problems at home. For some of these families a whole range of things are going on, for example, large families, and maybe mum goes, dad lives somewhere else and the children go there at the weekend and someone else picks them up. Maybe they don't get up that early because no-one goes to work in the morning, or they struggle with getting their kids up and kids refuse to go to school. I think, it's a bigger issue than attendance, isn't it. Attendance is very much linked to all the other stuff that goes on. Psychological things, looking at mental illness in children, children who suffer and are depressed, those sort of things you see more of these days. If you've got a story behind that that explains all the complications in their life and all the things, actually you might be quite surprised that their attendance is as good as it is."

3.2.2 Health

Poor health (secondary, community college)

"There is a lot of old housing in the area, which has... and I've got no empirical evidence, but there's a lot of old housing in the area which has inherent problems around health and damp and

things like that, and there is a couple of families in the last few years that have stated that their housing conditions are the reason that their child is frequently ill, which is supported, that they'd been to the doctors and they get prescriptions for respiratory conditions and things caused by things like damp."

Coughs, colds and flu (secondary, community school)

"The younger ones, the Year 7s, coming from primary it's, 'I've got a cold, I just want to stay at home at my mum's.' It's that transitional period between being in primary to secondary school it's not the same, you can't just stay at home because you've got a cold, you know, you're learning. It's what you learn now is going to be what you take your GCSEs at the end. Broken weeks I find are just down to they've got a cold and they'll have a couple of days off. You've got to try to encourage them that, say you've got a cold but is it a cold you could have come in and managed, you know, if you'd have had some paracetamols? But again it depends on the child, the family and the year group really. Definitely through the winter I'd say probably the lateness is the worst, the dark nights and again the cold and flu-y stuff that goes around with the Christmas period. So our attendance is quite low at the moment but it normally starts to rise again now because the weather..."

Illness (secondary, community college)

"There is a lot of single-day illness, where a kid might not be feeling much like coming to school. Single-day illness is a big impact on pupil... on broken weeks. But single days, not the broken weeks, because sometimes a broken week might be they were off for four days because they were seriously ill over the weekend and had missed four days."

3.2.3 Valuing education / Parental experience of school, self confidence and expectations (secondary, community college)

"There's also a low aspiration, I would say, in the area from a lot of families around the value of education. An awful lot of kids have got parents who went to this school or other local schools and have done alright. "I've got a job; I didn't do very well at school," so they don't place a value on education that maybe students in some even more aspirational areas and schools do."

3.2.4 A norm or everyday culture of complex needs (primary)

"There's like a little circle of people who I suppose in one way is positive because they are supporting each other but the other thing, the cultures they are moving in, the group they are moving in is we've all had boyfriends and got domestic violence ... it's quite complex. They look after each other's children and things. You have incidents where you – one mum gets attacked by a boyfriend while she is homing another victim of domestic violence in the house at the same time. It's just... you couldn't write fiction like this. It's quite shocking."

3.2.5 New Arrivals (primary)

"Some of these children who have poor attendance are new arrivals, EAL, and obviously there are complications there in terms of relationships and getting the parents to come in, particularly if the parents don't speak any English at all. We've had two families quite recently who know no English, nothing at all, and some of them may have issues which are SEN as well which are unexplored. I'm not sure whether they necessarily are refugees but some possibly are."

3.2.6 Holidays (secondary, community college)

"I think one of the other things we've got now is parents are... because of the Isle of Wight, parents are more aware of that and we've had more holidays this year than last, so I think that's had an impact. I did some figures for that for the governors, and it was almost double. It's still only about point something of a percent of our attendance, but it has had an impact."

3.2.7 Big issues that are difficult to get to the bottom of (primary)

"There's also things we just don't know. I suppose we'd have to know – if they are genuinely not ill and they're off or they're off for a sniffle, you kind of need to get in the mind-set of the parent about what's the benefit of them being off. Is it because they are looking after siblings? Is it because it's...? There are always big issues that are difficult to get to the bottom of. Some of them are

coming with lots and lots of reasons and giving their reasons and having – starting to bring in medical forms. So there may actually be a case but they are genuinely more ill. Illnesses are given as a reason and you wonder whether it is an illness or whether it's a social circumstance, something has happened. Some of those it's pretty obvious they are sick and throwing up but then there are other ones who have got the headache, keeps having the headache, and you think I don't know – there doesn't seem to be anything wrong with you but then you think is mum ill, is there some reason why you want to be off, are you worried about mum?"

No obvious pattern (primary)

"You have what I call the hard core which is very difficult and then you have the ones you think, well, what's the problem here? They are happy in school, the parents are polite, friendly, nice, quite often young, young with lots of kids, and it is like you think they need a bit of help, a bit of TLC some of these ones, three dogs and four kids. And you have families with really complex problems and they're in school all the time. How come? That's bizarre. You've got more problems than anyone else and they're 100%. It's not entirely that. Child Protection funding for this one, for example... there's no obvious pattern. "

3.3 Summary: Top Three Reasons given by school staff in Patchway/Filton

- Resilience
- Mental Health
- Valuing Education

4 Information from schools in Kingswood/Cadbury Heath area

4.1 School Staff's description of local demographics and their relation to attendance

The school staff in the Kingswood/Cadbury Heath area explained the complexity of the picture for their demographics. Some schools serve a very mixed population; many of the children have rarely been out of the local area; and there are 'hotspots' in the geographical in which more of the families who are Just Managing or for whom the school receives Pupil Premium are living.

Just Managing (primary)

"I think one thing that needs to be noticed about attendance is you've got families that have got quite a bit of money and will take their children out for holidays and those families will have two weeks/three weeks a year off. So we've got the families the other end of the scale whose children will not – they won't even leave Warmley in a whole year, that have got the attendance problems, but for other reasons. You've got that real broad gap. We have our disadvantaged families as labelled by the government, free school meals, but then we also have a lot of Theresa May's 'just about managing'. So those families equally have quite poor attendance sometimes but they are working really hard. The challenge is those families can't afford a holiday in school holidays but they could maybe just about afford a holiday at other times. It's hard to say to them that that's unauthorised but we do because that's part of our policy and we don't want to send a wrong message to anybody, but equally when you think about it actually that holiday family time does go a long way to support them being good parents and lessening the self-esteem and all the rest of it. It's a real catch 22 actually; it's challenging. We do pull those up on attendance as well. I would love to do a little bit of research on all of our families 'Well I know we've got 23% at pupil premium but I reckon we've got another 23% at this JAMs,' and they are all –fairly low paid labouring type work. I think some of the single mums, a lot of them are trying to work in schools so they might even be reading assistants or dinner ladies and things like that so they are all quite manual – a lot of them work in kitchens and things. There's a bit of – shops, retail. As well, a lot of the jobs that they get and what they do depend on the support they can have for the children. When I was brought up as a child, I always had my mum and my aunties and all that sort of thing, extended family makes a big difference. I think there's a lot of people nowadays that haven't got that extension of families because people are working later into their 60s. And the whole support network depends on what sort of job they're getting as well. School deprivation indicator, so actually we're below national. Free school meals, we're in line with national. And one interesting dynamic in the area is that we have quite a few children with ASD autism, and we wonder whether that's to do with all the – we've got a lot of engineering, the MOD, BAE, all of Rolls Royce, have quite a lot of children here who have those tendencies. If you look at our stability compared with national, our children don't move and in fact when we went on a coach to Bristol, lots of my children said, 'Oh look there's a subway, we have that in Kingswood'. And they hadn't been to Bristol before. Our biggest most vulnerable group of white British disadvantaged boys and they are boys largely. That's our – and it's largely boys. The girls seem to achieve more. And that's why we're doing some things on outside learning because I think lots of – all our staff are female apart from one, so we've got to be very mindful that actually we're not taking it from our experiences, we're listening to our children, what do they like"

Pupil Premium (Secondary 1)

"We've certainly got an issue with pupil premium and broken weeks. There's a high pupil premium number for Kingswood. It's very white British I would say. If one was to put a class structure on it I'd say it's quite a working class area more or, well, lower middle class I guess. Perhaps low aspiration - there aren't proportionately the children that go off to university, it's a big challenge for us is accessing university generally. Quite a high proportion I would say of broken families, broken homes, that type of thing. We've got asylum seekers coming in which is a new thing for us in this area, If you go over the border Bristol would be more used to supporting asylum seekers unaccompanied children. We've had two start within the last month. And I think pupil premium numbers are growing locally. It does shift from year on year. I think Year 11 would be 38% and now

Year 7 is about 44%. It's a 6% shift really. In terms of employment, there's a lot of tradesmen and so on in the area and that's good and they're doing well for themselves, lots of small businesses and so on. Money is drying up a bit though. We've got more pupil premium students in our lower years than we do in our upper years which is another interesting context. For some of our highest needs children we are really struggling to access the high level of support that perhaps was available years ago, a few years ago, and that's affecting our pupil premium families more than their non-disadvantaged peers, as it were. I can tell you now where our issues are. It's the estate over in Mangotsfield, the new one, there, the plot on the new Cheltenham Road by the sorting centre - I know where we got to pick the children up and stuff like that. So if someone was saying they've got an issue in that area what can we do about the families in that area – there are some things already happening- we got a lot of kids that go to the youth club, for example, from that estate they go to the youth club - the Made for Ever youth centre in Fisher Road and they trek over to the Hanham Youth Club in Hanham High Street, I think kids from all schools go there at the moment.”

Mixture (Secondary 2)

“We've got some families that see the value of education and push education and are really on the ball, and then we've got a real mixture who see school as almost like a babysitting service, not an education service”

Just Managing (Secondary 3)

“Our figures are 23% People Premium and we've got 9% SEND, and we have 7% ethnicity. The one good thing we have got in the area is high employment actually, we've got very high employment in the area.....so children leave, tend to leave and get jobs so we don't have unemployed teenagers everywhere. What we did do...or an issue which again I think we need a bit more research, it was something I found when I was trying to dig for information and it was about people who fell between the gap of they were employed but they weren't earning enough to live on, so it was the Living Wage. And we were within the top three in the country of living wage hotspots around this school so things like Siston Common is one of the highest areas. So you think of the Welsh Valleys as being really socially...but actually here it's almost the worst of both worlds because they haven't got the parents at home when they get home because the parents are working but they're not actually earning the living wage. Our significant group by far is PP. Staple Hill is a key issue for us, actually Pucklechurch is a key thing. What I can say is a lot of our social issues come from Pucklechurch in terms of child protection, domestic violence, safeguarding issues. We also have a large amount of domestic violence actually reported in school and we have a large amount of safeguarding issues, so I probably deal with 170 a year on average. And not all of them will go to police and social services but a high percentage do, so I think I made 40 referrals to social service. We have more boys than girls in every year group. There's a girls school within travelling distance and a lot of parents used to choose to send them there. Now and it is getting less, so our Year 7 was the first year group we've ever had with more girls than boys so it's starting to equal out.”

4.2 Reasons put forward by schools in Kingswood/Cadbury Heath

4.2.1 Valuing education / Parental experience of school, self confidence and expectations

Valuing Education (Secondary 1)

“A lot of our families used to come here – there isn't a lot of movement out of Kingswood. A lot of parents and even grandparents were educated on this site, and if they've had a bad experience of school and then they still send their children there because it's the local school, fine, but they don't want to come here themselves. We find some of the engagement with other local community events is less well-attended with our people, premium cohort, than non less disadvantaged. For example we've got parents evening tonight and we'll have about 80% of our Year 9 cohort in and then the ones that we don't get are the ones who you really, really want to come through the door and that's the group I think we are targeting and those are the ones that suffer with poor attendance and all the

rest of it as well. More disadvantaged people will, if they've had a bad experience at school themselves they won't want to set foot anywhere near the place.

Actually a lot of our kids are disaffected I guess. There is a fair bit of, 'Why do I have to work...? Not lots but a fair bit of, 'Why do I have to work in school? I'll just work with my dad or my uncle or my brother,' or whatever. You then have to say to the kids, 'But you've got to stay in education. If you want to do it, you've got to get your Cs in English and maths.' You need to get your literacy, your numeracy, your C grades in your English and your maths. I don't know whether the relatives are persuading children that that's the case. I'm seeing it from the children's point of view that you still have to talk to them to say, look, it's different from years ago."

Valuing Education (Secondary 2)

"We have a lot who don't value education. In this area there is an element of, 'Well I didn't go and I've done alright. I've got my business. I got a job. And it's working with parents around that as well, that the value of education is something that we – Another common thing of course is, 'Well I've gone to work, they text me to say they're ill so I trust them, it's your job to deal with behaviour and to deal with the non-attendance, not mine' In attendance meetings you hear the phrase, 'Well I've gone to work, you need to deal with it,' a lot. They're not coming to school, that's your fault, not mine, what do you want me to do about it? They are big, I can't get them out. Some parents I would say don't realise – I don't know whether it's they don't realise that it's actually law that their children are in education or I don't know whether it's they think that nothing will happen, which is tough. I've had one parent phone me up and say, 'Can you send me a fixed penalty notice warning letter where it clearly states on there that if you have any more absences you will be fined £60?' And I said, 'But you don't actually reach the criteria for that but of course I can'. And he said, 'Yeah because I want to put it in front of my son and say if I get this you are paying it'. And it's about a child having a little bit – but it's the parents' responsibility by law to get children in."

Valuing Education (Secondary 3)

"I would suggest that if you look at the parents own school attendance record you would definitely find the same thing - it's that thing about valuing education, and it's also being able to say to children we all feel a bit rubbish sometimes, I don't like going to work all the time but actually you have to take some paracetamols and you get in and that's life. So, we will get parents coming in and saying oh she had period pains so I let her off a week every month. Well, that's not acceptable, take her to the doctors. If it's really bad you need to take her to the doctors. We had one saying he passes out all the time. Have you taken him to the doctors? 'No'. It's like, okay so that is an issue. Also we have SEND children especially parents saying but they've got autism. Then they should be in even more is the answer, it's even more important for disabled and special needs children to be in, they find learning difficult and they need to be in 100% of the time. And that's what we find is the almost unconscious allowing of children to stay home and that is very difficult to work with."

Valuing Education (Primary)

"In this area, people aren't moving in or moving out very much, it's very stable, therefore it can be quite dangerous because it all stays the same, all the expectations and then it's just repeated. A lot of parents bring it back on themselves quite a lot 'Well I was always rubbish at school.' So all this mindfulness and mental wellbeing sort of thing, isn't it? And how they inflict their emotions onto their children. 'It's okay to be rubbish at spelling because I was, so that's like a gene thing.' No, no, its NOT a gene thing."

4.2.2 Resilience

Resilience (Secondary 3)

"I would say it's lack of resilience, lack of resilience on parents and lack of resilience students, so students feel that they've got a headache and they can stay at home and parents will allow them and that's very complicated, it's a deep social issue and you will find that parents it is patterns all the way along, so you very rarely have one child in a family that has got good attendance and the others haven't. If you look at a parent's work attendance you would probably find exactly the same thing."

Resilience (Secondary 2)

“If there’s a single parent family, that parent is working and is working long hours the children are left to get themselves to school, effectively get themselves up, get themselves dressed, get themselves... so we find that to be a contributing factor. Often we’ll have meetings with parents where they say, ‘Look I go, I get them up but what can I do?’ So that’s certainly I would say something that we are combatting, I suppose, by often going to get the children.”

Resilience/Mental Health and Demands of Parenting (Primary)

“Often these mums are mums of several children, two or three, and they’re on their own. We’ve had – somebody came in pyjamas once because they wouldn’t get dressed for school, mum and I had the agreement, okay, bring them in, we’ll decide. It didn’t take long for them to get dressed. We had some training recently, and they were basically saying maybe a couple of hundred years ago you would have four adults to one child. The ratios – now we’ve got four children to one adult. And that has impacted significantly on children’s **mental health**, maybe even more so with our working families because they are not there as much, or they have a swap over. ‘Oh you’re going to dads because mum is working.’ Or, and this happens a lot, older sisters/brothers, 15/16, looking after younger ones. For example I phoned up to find out where one of our children was during the exam week in May last year and mum wasn’t at home and she hadn’t been home for two nights. Now we didn’t know that child wasn’t at home with parents but his 16 year old sibling was looking after home. I rang up: Where are you? It’s your exam this morning. He was probably up until 12 o’clock at night. So all of those boundaries and expectations, it’s all changed.”

“**Routines and Technology** I spoke to people about putting routines into place. I had a conversation the other week about a child, ‘Oh, he’s looking really tired,’ pupil premium as well, so I noticed it even more. Really tired. ‘What’s going on?’ ‘Oh well I think he is taking his phone to bed.’ ‘Well that needs to stop then.’ It’s all those, ‘Since he’s had his phone and he’s been taking it to his bedroom at night he has not been reading’. ‘Well take the phone away and then...’ so it’s Sunday night, bed early, let’s have a story, off to bed, clothes out ready, that sort of lifestyle. There’s a lot of peer pressure I think on our parents for their children to have all the latest technologies and all the rest of it. We had a huge amount of our children in Year 3 and 4 so they are at age 7/8/9 having mobile phones for Christmas this year. And then they take them to their rooms at night. We are having an e-safety night because we’re trying to support our parents to say it’s perfectly fine to challenge your children on that. If you don’t think it’s right... I think it’s just really hard because they make very good babysitters, an iPad and all the rest of it. I’ve actually had a child tell me that he’ll go to bed at night and when his mum thinks he is asleep he’ll put his Xbox on or whatever it is. And then he’s tired in the morning and then it’s the whole, ‘Oh I don’t feel very well, I’ll stay at home then’”

“**Spending time indoors** One thing I’ve found out since I’ve been doing my family link worker role is the whole housing issue, how chaotic some of these houses are, a) because they’re **overcrowded**, b) they might have three/four children living in a flat. They’ve got no garden. A lot of the parents are frightened to let their children out and play. They hear all sorts of horror stories. They are so frightened to let their children go out and play even if – sometimes they’ve got a maisonette and so they own the end part of the garden and they won’t let them go down there because there’s a big tree in the way. There’s little things like that. They’re very risk-averse, very risk-averse. Although there are some families in which children will just go out and be almost feral, they don’t know where they are and they’ll run round here, there and everywhere round the streets, and you’ve got others that don’t even go out. I’ll ask ‘Do you have any friends round for tea?’ No, don’t have anyone. It all depends again on who is picking them up from school or if they go to somebody else’s for tea, like nans for tea because mum is at work. All those little things like my children will have done when they were growing up like going out into the street and playing and having friends round for tea, a lot of that doesn’t exist.”

And the amount of times I get parents come up to me and say, ‘Oh I’m sure they’ve got ADHD’. It’s almost like they want their children to have a label nowadays. Your child hasn’t got ADHD, they’re just stuck in a flat and they need to go out.”

“They’re not classed as being over-populated or whatever because they’ve perhaps got two boys or two girls, however they’re in a maisonette or they’ve got people above them, people below them, **lots of noise**. A lot of these families the fact that what they’re actually living in from day-to-day has a big impact on the children’s **health, wellbeing, mental health**. They might be sleeping on a mattress in the corner of a lounge some of these children ‘It’s too noisy. I can’t concentrate. I can’t think. It’s easier to put your headphones on and do your gaming because that’s what I want to do and it’s home and I can get to cut off.’ But that still is noisy. That puts them off coming because they haven’t done their homework. We provide a homework club here and mostly our disadvantaged families come. Because it’s quiet. It’s too **noisy at home**. They can’t concentrate at home. It’s too noisy. So they either choose to come to homework club or they don’t do it. Homework becomes a really big thing when they transition into secondary schools, and to enable those children to do it you’ve got to give them the environment. They can’t cope with the **independence** of taking your learning on yourself. It’s really difficult for them. It’s the whole culture of what’s going on at home, ‘Mum will leave my shoes and socks out,’ put my shoes on and... It’s all this whole impact of what’s going on at home. Some of the things that we know from our Self-Organised Learning Environment room has been interesting - children go in there and they have to learn to work together as a group and find out the answer to their question and independently, and the whole **independence** is tricky. They have to learn to collaborate or work independently, they research everything and they put a presentation together at the end of the six weeks.”

Resilience/Demands of Parenting (Secondary 2)

“**Getting to school** I think there’s a problem with those parents that are trying, that often will lose the battle with their teenager because they’re having to do lots of other things. Some, families have got lots of children including younger children, therefore the priority of course is to walk the primary children to school and not drive the secondary children to school. I guess lots of them don’t drive. And so there’s that as well. So that – I suppose that affects punctuality more than it does attendance but it’s still a problem.

And then you get yourself in a bit of a vicious circle because the kids are missing learning time, they get downbeat, and so they struggle, they fall behind, they underperform in examinations or tests or what have you, and all of a sudden that makes them not want to come to school.”

4.2.3 Mental Health/Health

Anxiety (Primary)

“Separation anxiety is big. The child says: ‘I feel really ill, I’ve got a tummy ache’. For the child that’s really believable. It’s **anxiety**, it is a tummy ache, it is a bubble in your tummy and all the rest of it. Also they often – so it goes in a pattern like that. When a child misses a lesson, when you miss school or we miss work, you feel a bit funny about going back the next day anyway, everybody does. Now for a child that’s bigger, especially a child who is already a bit anxious and that **anxiety** is often fed. So it’s an ever decreasing circle. It’s just cultural circles go round and round and round, so then they return to school and maybe they don’t have such a positive day because they missed something yesterday or – and it won’t be work, it will be they all set up a really lovely game yesterday at lunchtime and so they all played that and I wasn’t a part of it. For a child that’s really important that they feel totally – that’s my home as well. I do find there are a number of things that I’ve noticed a pattern in especially with certain children is the whole the child says, ‘I’m poorly’ and mum is quite happy to keep them home. So we came to the agreement with quite a few children bring them in, we’ll make the decision whether or not they are poorly. I think parenting capacity has a huge impact. It’s really difficult. Parents they all love their children and children are smart. That emotional connection, that separation **anxiety**, it works both ways. I don’t think any of our families ever keep their children off school with the intention of disadvantaging – of making that gap bigger by giving them a bigger disadvantage against other children.”

Anxiety (Secondary 2)

“Our attendance is very low for pupil premium. We’ve got a gap of about 5% and that ranges for different reasons. We’ve got a fair few with fairly significant **anxiety issues**. We very rarely suffer

with low self-esteem, can't do it, don't want to come in, it's more true anxiety in the sense of fear of groups, that side to it really."

Health (Secondary 3)

"Most of the parents that we work with would have those types of excuses rather than it be keeping children off school I would think, although I guess we have a lot of illness. We've got a lot of authorised absence particularly within our pupil premium cohort a lot of low level illness, something we've done recently is educating parents by putting out leaflets around what illness would constitute a day off school, combating some myths

A lot of children through I guess term two, so running up to the Christmas period, you can see 6% of our Year 10 cohort, that's 6 children on average across the term and that's a lot that are having illness across – lots of those will be genuine, there was a bit of flu about, but there is also the head cold and that type of thing, and one of the things that we've moved to is asking for something from the doctor straight away on day one which is slightly contentious, in fact it's very contentious. However it allows us to have those conversations with people. We're saying if it's an appointment, if it's bad enough to be off school and then it's bad enough to see a doctor is our kind of philosophy on that one. What we can do of course is just say, look, if they are okay for school send them in and we'll keep an eye on them."

Health/Nutrition (Secondary 2)

"I'm amazed at how many students come to school and we have our central area where they go and they'll say, 'Oh...' We start at 8.45am and they're in at 8.50am, 'Oh I feel ill, I need to go home'. 'What's the matter?' 'Oh I just feel...' 'No, go and have some water, make sure you have break,' because a lot of them actually it's also missing breakfast and not eating breakfast so of course they feel sick because they've got no fuel."

Health (Primary)

"For one little boy, it turned out, started talking, and there were lots of issues around the younger sister and everything started to be put into place then. A lot of the time I think he's been having off isn't necessarily because of him, it's because of the younger sibling, and her health, and the impact on the family. Up all night. Or I've had conversations, mum has had trouble getting so and so to school this because, oh, mum has been having an asthma attack. Well is there somebody else you can get to bring him to school?"

4.2.4 Young Carers

Young Carers (Secondary 1)

"Young carers and things like that, struggling with school, and attendance, there's that element to it as well. I would have to do a bit more analysis probably around that but what – we haven't got that many young carers but we have got quite a few I suppose and it certainly does cover kids that we allow to come in late because of caring at home and that type of thing. We have a young carer's support group in school. Some of our parents do acknowledge they've got their needs at home and that they have to ask the children to do stuff."

Young Carers (Secondary 2)

"We've got some who don't come in because they are looking after parents or they're looking after siblings. We do have some students who are registered as carers and we run a young carers group but some of them – we've got one young girl who often doesn't get in because mum struggles with alcoholism and so she doesn't want to leave mum in the state that she's often in. So they're the types of things that sometimes students stay at home for. We've got one prolific non-attender who we're struggling to get in because mum and gran have been subject to domestic violence and so she is worried about leaving them. So those are the sorts of things that sometimes students don't come in for because it's the worry of leaving someone at home."

4.2.5 Gender Differences

Girls/Boys (Secondary 1)

“We have got significantly more girl illness for Pupil Premiums, significantly, compared to the boys. We’ve got, however, the boys being affected by more lateness, so because lates count as not in they’re being affected. Girls are very affected by lateness in Year 9 and you could say that that’s probably a pattern from there, they were quite bad last year they’ve got even worse this year. Then girl illness here in year 9 still very, very high compared to the boys.”

Boys (Secondary 2)

“Boys are sliding. I think many of the schools in Kingswood would show the same thing which is academically, so outcomes wise, there is a boy/girl gap and certainly a pupil premium boy gap, which you can attribute not obviously not just to attendance but the attendance again is a contributing factor. I think it’s true that a lot of these boys are probably from broken homes, perhaps without a male role model, again I don’t want to generalise because actually we’ve got some who are pupil premium boys who are brilliant male role models. There is a pattern of some of our children with let’s say the highest behaviour needs - that do come from perhaps families without a father figure.

We’re trying to improve our exclusion rates but we are occasionally having to exclude children. There is a boy/girl gap - we see more boys than we do girls, unfortunately exclude more pupil premium children than disadvantaged. We’ve also got an issue with punctuality from that group so if we’re thinking wider than the broken weeks. I think there are lots of contributing factors perhaps and from children being generally rushed and I suppose generally ill I suppose through not eating probably, so I’ve seen that, I’m just trying to think of some case studies.”

4.2.6 Other reasons put forward by school staff

Timetabling (Secondary 2)

“Often when you break attendance down and they don’t like a Tuesday because on Tuesdays three periods are maths and two are science. I’m not sure I’d come in on that day. So there sometimes can be timetabling issues which can be resolved but unfortunately sometimes it takes you a bit of time to see the pattern.”

Technology (Social Media) (Secondary 2)

“We also, a lot of – not a lot, I couldn’t breakdown the percentage but absenteeism is due to, ‘I’m keeping Billy off because she got a text message from so and so last night and it was horrible and unless you deal with it she’s not coming back to school’. And that side to it is quite hard because it’s trying to educate about the inappropriate use of social media and trying to understand and get the balance about the child feeling happy and safe, but also understanding that actually staying off school is not the answer.”

4.3 Top Three Reasons Kingswood/Cadbury Heath

- Valuing Education
- Resilience/Parenting
- Mental health/Health

5 Information from schools in Yate/Staple Hill area

Note: only two schools in this area participated in the interviews; thus, the information is less rich than for the other two MERLIN areas.

5.1.1 Valuing education / Parental experience of school, self confidence and expectations

“Parental experience of school, self confidence and expectations (Secondary)

Sometimes the parents will come to the attendance meetings and they’ll just go, “Well you’ve just got to tick a box for OFSTED haven’t you, to say that you’ve had this meeting? You’re not interested in my child” and as much as you can say to them, “But attendance goes with attainment and we are interested in your child, we want your child to do their best”, “But you want our child to do the best for you because it’s your statistics at the end of the day”. “No really we are interested in your child” and that’s the kind of conversations you have when you get to the attendance meetings. And even if that was true that – the outcome for the child is still a really good set of GCSE results- it doesn’t matter what our motivation for doing it is really. It’s these deep ingrained ones who probably hated school themselves and it’s just perpetuating isn’t it, all down the generations”

Valuing Education (primary)

“Many of the families here are Pupil Premium but we don’t see that as an excuse for coming in late or for broken weeks. We work hard to set up trust which also means what you say, you mean, and you carry out. So we work closely with the EWO who are the ‘bad cop’ to our ‘good cop’, if you know what I mean. We often find that there is a history of not valuing education and low expectations of school.”

5.1.2 Resilience /Family Organisation

Resilience (Secondary)

“There are a few families where if one child has a poor attendance then it’s likely that the other one will as well; so it is a family approach. There are some cases where there’s one child who’s got really poor attendance and the other one is better; there’s almost always a reason for that, like there’s been an illness or... but usually it’s a familial attitude and I suppose the reason that we look at PP students so well is that if nobody is getting up for work then who’s getting you up?

We have an example of a mum on her own, she’s got seven children, from baby to teenagers and she’s got to be in three different places at 8.45am dropping them all off at school. She did her best. You imagine one teenager going, “I don’t feel very well today” so she’s gone, “Well just stay there”.

The really practical things that you talk to parents about, like a night-before routine, just packing your bag and putting it by the front door, then that’s a very difficult thing for us to do because that’s time specific isn’t it? Someone needs to be in their house at 8pm reminding them to do it. If the worst comes to the worst and they’ve got a Family and Young People Support Services worker who’ll go around in the morning and help parents do that who are not capable of doing it. In the worst case scenarios when the whole family is just chaos, they’ll go and observe and then help the parent to put better boundaries in place to get the kids out of the door in time to get to school. In one family we have been trying to work with, they employed a social work assistant to go and do that job. That’s a big spend, a very expensive intervention.”

Resilience /Family Organisation (Primary)

“Families don’t see taking a day off as a problem – they are deciding on the basis of their own needs rather than the needs of the children. Sometimes children rule the roost in these homes. There is **overcrowding and squabbling** and that feeds into schools. We know from the EWO who tells us that they have worked with more than one generation of the same family, that there is a ‘blame culture’ amongst these families: they want an excuse for their children behaving in a poor way. It’s their parental skills, not being able to provide their children with boundaries – they let the children behave badly, but they want to blame something else, for example, by getting a diagnosis of ADHD.

We have a Nurture Group for Reception and year 1 where the children learn communication and language and it's a form of helping them transition between Reception and Year 1, because these children haven't had the nurturing at home that helps them to do it themselves. So it promotes the skills of parenting."

5.1.3 Health

Health (Secondary)

"If the broken week attendance is happening for a child where the family does engage we will often find that the child has had appendicitis or a broken leg or something. We do find that we have to have the meetings and make sure they're on board. Doing this work does ensure that if somebody has got a sniffly nose they'll come in to school. I think lots of it is – lots of those absences are when someone is feeling a little bit rough and stay at home because they have a sniffle or if they feel a little bit unwell. Actually the kids who have got great attendance have got great resilience and come in when they've got a cold, just like we all do when we're not feeling so well. But I think some of them know when their attendance gets to a certain point that they just won't be sent home; we'll keep them in school to try and keep that attendance up. So then they think, "I feel a bit rough this morning and I know that Mrs C won't let me go home so I'm not going in in case I get much worse and then she'll make me just sit in school" We've had some students in the medical room haven't we with the sick bag and said, "If you're sick, be sick in the bag and we'll send you home" but they're actually not going and they can't be sick and they've tried and tried and –it's terrible really, you just don't believe that they're ill all the time do you? Especially with the broken weeks, where you've got a day off here, a day there..."

5.1.4 Technology/Social Media

Social Media (Secondary)

"Sometimes social media does affect their attendance because they're all falling out on Facebook or whatever overnight and then some don't come in do they because they say they're being bullied, so then you go down that route that they refuse to come in to school for a while until it's all sorted out. So social media does affect attendance in that way.

We do some work with – we talk to Year Seven parents about sleep hygiene, but I'm not sure how well those things are implemented. Occasionally students have had a bad night and parents – but you don't really know what that means, whether they've had – they've been on their computers all night or – but sometimes when they come in for meetings, they do admit that they're – they don't know what the children do once they've gone to bed and their phones aren't taken away and their laptops aren't taken away."

5.2 Top Three Reasons Yate/Staple Hill area

- Valuing Education/Parental Experience of Education
- Resilience/Family Organisation
- Health

6 Interventions

The following interventions have been selected for inclusion on the basis of recommendations by authoritative bodies or as examples of good practice; the majority have not been subject to rigorous evaluation, and therefore there is little or no rigorous evidence that can show the extent to which they work and why. Section 8 of this report (Appendix 2) is a review of interventions that have been evaluated and for which there is some evidence of effectiveness. Section 9 (Appendix 3) discusses evaluation and lists some resources that have recently been developed to enable organisations to evaluate their projects, so that they can demonstrate *what works* and *why*. Given the interest and availability of funding for evaluation it is likely that the proportion of evidence-based interventions will increase in future.

6.1 Interventions to support Mental Health

Factors that have been identified as important in keeping children and young people mentally well

The Mental Health Foundation www.mentalhealth.org.uk gives a list of the important factors that help children and young people to keep mentally well. They state: Most children grow up mentally healthy, but surveys suggest that more children and young people have problems with their mental health today than 30 years ago. That's probably because of changes in the way we live now and how that affects the experience of growing up.

Things that can help keep children and young people mentally well include:

- being in good physical health, eating a balanced diet and getting regular exercise
- having time and the freedom to play, indoors and outdoors
- being part of a family that gets along well most of the time
- going to a school that looks after the wellbeing of all its pupils
- taking part in local activities for young people.

Other factors are also important, including:

- feeling loved, trusted, understood, valued and safe
- being interested in life and having opportunities to enjoy themselves
- being hopeful and optimistic
- being able to learn and having opportunities to succeed
- accepting who they are and recognising what they are good at
- having a sense of belonging in their family, school and community
- feeling they have some control over their own life
- having the strength to cope when something is wrong (resilience) and the ability to solve problems.

6.1.1 Community-based preventative programmes to support young people's mental wellbeing

The following lists interventions that are designed to support each of the main aspects to good mental health as described by the Mental Health Foundation above.

Being in good physical health, eating a balanced diet and getting regular exercise

Community-based Healthy Diet interventions

- [Incredible Edibles](#) (Community orchards; Community growing enterprises; growing produce and working together, providing training from field to classroom to kitchen, and supporting local commerce)
- [Edible Estates Good Practice Guide](#) Neighbourhoods Green, a partnership initiative which highlights the importance of open space for residents of social housing and works with

social landlords to raise the quality of their design, management and safe use, has published a comprehensive guide for Housing Associations about community growing on their land. The guide covers resident led projects, housing association led projects and third party led projects. An example of a Housing Association project is [Blooming Stockwell](#)

- [Community Food Initiatives](#) Community cooking sessions, Community retailing, Community cafes and catering Community growing, and Community food supplies
- [Eat Club](#) - making a positive change to the lives of young people through the joint preparation and consumption of delicious food
- [Food Dudes](#) for children, based on the principles of behaviour analysis, developmental psychology, behaviour change, and cognitive psychology, also taking into account recent advances in neurosciences and economics.

Community-based Exercise interventions

- [The Daily Mile](#) Requirements are: Mark out a 340m track: Organise a timetable so that participating young people can do the miles at least three times per week: Identify a way for young people to measure baseline physical fitness, self-esteem and behaviour at monthly intervals.
- [Sportivate](#) A successful programme giving 11-25 year-olds who are not particularly sporty access to range of sports. Favourite sports for young women and girls were gym, fitness and dance exercise or Zumba; for young men and boys the most popular sports were football, multi-sport & basketball. More information at <https://www.sportengland.org/media/11596/sportivate-lessons-learnt.pdf>

Having time and the freedom to play, indoors and outdoors

Community-based play interventions

- [A Charter for Children's Play](#) Play England's Charter for Children's Play provides a guide and framework to all those involved in developing, revising and implementing play strategies, community plans and children and young people's plans.

Support for families to enable their children to play outside

- [Street Play](#) Sometimes known as 'playing out sessions' or 'play streets' Street Play is a simple, effective and low-cost way for children to be able to play out in the streets where they live. Local authorities can use their existing powers under road traffic legislation to allow temporary street closures at regular weekly or monthly intervals, typically for three hours at a time. Local parents and other residents act as marshals, allowing their neighbours to drive to and from their homes at walking pace, while through traffic is re-directed. The result is usually a significant increase in children playing out and making friends on their street. In turn, adult neighbours get to know each other and community spirit grows.
- [Playing Out](#) Playing Out provides information and advice to local authorities, play organisations and other bodies so that they can support street play.

Examples of Good Practice in outdoor and indoor play from Play England

- [Gainsborough Adventure Playground:](#)
- [Wythenshawe Family Initiative](#)
- [People Make Play](#)

Being part of a family that gets along well most of the time

Community-based family wellbeing interventions

[Building resilience for families \(Newport\)](#)

Table 1 on page Table 1 Resilience intervention for families used in Newport, Wales²⁷ gives a summary of an intervention used in Newport, South Wales, for building resilience for families.

Going to a school that looks after the wellbeing of all its pupils

Community-based interventions that support schools

Examples of schemes used by housing associations to support schools

- [Reidvale Housing Association](#) offers a series of incentives and awards
- [Sanctuary](#) structured partnerships with schools and colleges include delivering talks on business, getting involved with careers events and providing CV and interview training
- [Westward](#) provided local schools with books produced by the national education charity the CEF to teach pupils about well-being and safety

Schools in South Gloucestershire have made specific suggestions about ways in which Merlin HS could partner with them in order to support their work (see section 6.5 beginning on page 28).

Taking part in local activities for young people.

Community-based support for young people's activities

Support for young people to become regular users of local Youth Centres, Community Centres, Sports and Leisure Centres, or to be involved in local volunteering

- [The Young Lives Foundation](#) A number of interventions to support young people through times of difficulty and distress, to enable their voices to be heard and to assist them to achieve their potential
- [ReachOut](#) is a mentoring charity working with young people in disadvantaged communities to raise aspirations and help them grow in character and attainment. This is done through Mentoring & Befriending, Advocacy & Children's Rights and Positive Activities (regular weekly groups, regular half-term activities, occasional day trips and seasonal trips, overnight experiences and camping weekends)
- [ChanceUK](#) is an early intervention organisation that supports children experiencing emotional and behavioural difficulties. The children that we work with are at risk of educational exclusion, anti-social and/or criminal behaviour in adolescence and early adult life. We empower children to develop their skills, confidence and life aspirations through a year-long mentoring programme.
- **Community mentoring** involves volunteers within a given community (this may be a local neighbourhood or a community of interest or identity) providing mentor support to people from the same community. This may be regarded as a form of 'peer support' as it involves volunteer mentors from backgrounds or community settings that are similar to those of participating mentees. Mentor sessions (one-to-one or group meetings between mentors and mentees) may happen in community settings, mentees' homes or via the internet or phone. The aim is to facilitate mentees' self-development, contribute to improving their social networks and motivate them to achieve their goals. Comprehensive guidance on how to set up community mentoring is available in the booklet [A Community Mentoring Toolkit](#) which was produced by a group of organisations in the North West of England as a result of their experience of establishing such a project.

6.1.2 Community-based support for young people who suffer from anxiety and depression

Skills and strategies for young people to manage their anxiety

The organisation [Anxiety UK](#) recommendation for anxiety in young people is a programme named 'Cool Kids'. This is family based program designed for children and teenagers from 7-17 which

provides children with skills and strategies to help them manage their anxiety in a variety of settings. Resources for running Cool Kids programmes are available from the Anxiety UK website.

Regulating mood and relieving depression

Dr. Michael Craig Miller, assistant professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School states: *Research shows that for some people exercise works as well as medication, and the real value is in low-intensity exercise sustained over time, because it spurs the release of proteins called neurotrophic or growth factors, which cause nerve cells to grow and make new connections, and the improvement in brain function makes you feel better. In people who are depressed, neuroscientists have noticed that the hippocampus in the brain—the region that helps regulate mood—is smaller. Exercise supports nerve cell growth in the hippocampus, improving nerve cell connections, which helps relieve depression* <https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/exercise-is-an-all-natural-treatment-to-fight-depression>. Community-based Exercise interventions are listed in section 6.1.1 above.

6.2 Interventions to support Health

6.2.1 Community-based support/education that can support minor health problems

- [Partnerships between Housing Organisations and health providers](#)
- [Partnering with Health Services to support Social Prescribing](#) Organisations in Bristol have been working together to support the development of Social Prescribing. One example is the Wellspring Healthy Living Centre whose aim is to support local people to improve their health and wellbeing and to build the confidence to achieve their goals and transform not only their lives but those of others in their community.

6.2.2 Local initiatives in Schools in South Gloucestershire

School staff in South Gloucestershire have collaborated to produce an information sheet for families listing common health problems (minor ailments) with an explanation for each one as to appropriate treatment and whether a child with this problem should go to school or stay at home. This has been distributed via the network known as SPIF (Secondary Partnership Inclusion Forum).

6.3 Interventions to promote Valuing Education

6.3.1 Community-based support for educational aspiration

Partnerships between Housing Societies and local schools

Examples of schemes used by housing associations to support schools

- [Reidvale Housing Association](#) offers a series of incentives and awards
- [Sanctuary](#) structured partnerships with schools and colleges include delivering talks on business, getting involved with careers events and providing CV and interview training
- [Westward](#) provided local schools with books produced by the national education charity the CEF to teach pupils about well-being and safety

Schools in South Gloucestershire have made specific suggestions about ways in which Merlin HS could partner with them in order to support their work (see section 6.5 beginning on page 28).

Individual support for young people that can help to engage and motivate them in schools

- [ReachOut](#) works in disadvantaged communities to support young people aged 9 to 16 referred for low confidence, behaviour issues, or because their teachers believe they would benefit from the support of a role model
- [The Big Brothers Big Sisters organisation](#) Big Brothers and Sisters are matched with young people between the ages of 7 and 12 and will usually spend some time with them once a week, for example helping them with homework, playing football in the park, going swimming or to the cinema. Mentors support young people to achieve their goals; they can introduce them to new interests and experiences e.g. learning guitar, perfecting their front crawl, planning a day trip to London or learning how to cook.

Parental engagement in schooling

Janet Goodall, of the University of Bath, has researched and written extensively on the subject of parental engagement in education, and recommends parental engagement in schooling through family literacy, language and numeracy programmes. As she writes: *‘The evidence of the impact of family literacy, language and numeracy programmes on children’s academic and learning related outcomes is extensive and robust, particularly in the case of literacy, but also numeracy and alongside other learning related outcomes including motivation and achievement. Furthermore, family literacy and numeracy programmes can have a positive impact on the most disadvantaged families, including the academic outcomes of the children. The benefits have been shown to last beyond the duration of the intervention.’*

Family learning is learning as, or within, a family, although the notion of ‘family’ encompasses the myriad of forms chosen in contemporary society. Family learning is often used very broadly to describe many different activities, from informal, one off drop-in sessions to more formal learning opportunities. Many programmes take place in schools and children’s centres and provision is tailored around the families who attend as well as wider community needs. Family learning is more than establishing a family friendly approach or facilitating a family engagement session, it needs to have clear learning outcomes for adults and children. Family learning refers to learning approaches that engage mothers, fathers and carers, and children, in learning or that support intergenerational learning. Family learning programmes aim to encourage family members to learn together.

The family learning pedagogical approach is one that:

- promotes the family as a learning environment;
- builds on home culture and experience;
- encourages participatory learning;
- promotes learning as a change in or affirmation of skills, attitude and knowledge;
- promotes family relationships as supporting well-being and readiness to learn;
- promotes a culture of aspiration in adults and children; gives opportunities and builds confidence to try out new skills and ideas

Key characteristics of the most effectively designed family learning programmes are listed on page 35 of the document [Family Learning Works](#)

A checklist for good practice in family learning is given on page 7 of the [NIACE guide to Family Learning](#). In this guide, an example of good practice in community-based family learning provision is available: this is Suffolk Community Learning and Skills Development which has since become part of [Realise Futures CIC](#), a specialist provider of employment support services, learning and development in the East of England.

6.4 Interventions to support Resilience

The following list has been compiled as a result of evidence based work by the Barnardos charity. The background to the list is described in more detail in the document [What Works in Building Resilience](#) for 13-19 year olds

- Strong social support networks.
- The presence of a least one unconditionally supportive parent or parent substitute.
- A committed mentor or other person from outside the family.
- Positive school experiences.
- A sense of mastery and a belief and one's own efforts can make a difference.
- Participation in a range of extra-curricular activities.
- The capacity to re-frame adversities so that the beneficial as well as the damaging effects are recognised.
- The ability – or opportunity – to ‘make a difference’ by helping others or through part-time work.
- Not to be excessively sheltered from challenging situations that provide opportunities to develop coping skills.

6.4.1 Community-based interventions to support the development of Resilience in young people

- The [Young Lives Foundation](#). Trained mentors meet with young people each week over agreed periods of 6-9 months at the young person's school, home or in the local community, building their self-esteem and encouraging and rewarding positive behaviour. The mentors motivate, guide and assist young people considered to be in need of support. Young Lives lists a number of reasons why a young person and their family may benefit from having a mentor, including: *Troubled home life, Peer group pressure, Poor attainment at school, truancy or exclusion. Personal issues – such as drug misuse, alcohol or mental illness, Poverty and deprivation.* A mentor can help to combat these risk factors by: *Building a relationship of trust and mutual respect, Being a positive role model, Offering encouragement, guidance and support Helping the young person identify and achieve positive goals.*
- [ReachOut](#) works in disadvantaged communities to support young people aged 9 to 16 referred for low confidence, behaviour issues, or because their teachers believe they would benefit from the support of a role model
- [The Big Brothers Big Sisters organisation](#) Big Brothers and Sisters are matched with young people between the ages of 7 and 12 and will usually spend some time with them once a week, for example helping them with homework, playing football in the park, going swimming or to the cinema. Mentors support young people to achieve their goals; they can introduce them to new interests and experiences e.g. learning guitar, perfecting their front crawl, planning a day trip to London or learning how to cook.

6.4.2 Community-based interventions to support the development of Resilience in families

Table 1 on page 27 gives a summary of an intervention used in Newport, South Wales, for building resilience for families. More information can be found at [Building resilience for families \(Newport\)](#)

The service in Newport also uses a principle named [Five Ways to Wellbeing](#).

Table 1 Resilience intervention for families used in Newport, Wales

		Family Resilience Framework (Nov 2016) www.boingboing.org.uk adapted from Hart, Blincow & Thomas 2007				
		BASICS	BELONGING	LEARNING	COPING	CORE SELF
SPECIFIC APPROACHES	We have somewhere safe and clean to live	We feel that we have a place where we belong	We try our best to achieve as much as possible when completing obligations (work/ school/ volunteering etc)	We have rules for in and outside of the home and keep to them	We understand how other people feel	
	We have enough money for our family to live	We all have good friends that support us when needed		We are brave when we need to be	We understand how we work as a family	
	We can keep ourselves safe in our home and outside	We all have friendships that have lasted a long time	We can ask for help and advice in order to learn	We can recognise problems and deal with them before they get worse	We understand each other	
	We can use transport to get to different places	We can speak to each other and friends when we need to		We solve problems as a family without blame	We know each other's interests and talents	
	We are free from prejudice and discrimination	We all help each other	We know what we want to do in our lives	We focus on good things in a bad situation	We each know our responsibilities within the family	
	We have a healthy diet	We meet up with friends and family that we can rely on	We have a plan as a family for our future	We start and continue activities that we enjoy doing	We create opportunities to do things that we enjoy	
	We get enough exercise and fresh air	We all have our own responsibilities	We are organised as a family	We calm ourselves down and relax when we need to		
	We get enough sleep/ have a good 'bed time'	We focus on and remember good times and places together	We highlight each other's achievements as a family	We look on the 'bright side' and remember that 'tomorrow is another day'	We know there are services around us that can help and support us	
	We spend time together as a family	We all know our family history and where we come from		We are open to learning new things	We give each other support when needed	
	We keep ourselves clean and tidy	We all think positively about a new situation or person	We teach each other new skills	We give others support as a family	We use specialist support when needed	
		We make friends with people and mix/ go out with them		We all have a laugh together		
	NOBLE TRUTHS					
ACCEPTING		CONSERVING	COMMITMENT		ENLISTING	

Family Resilience Framework developed by: Rhian Adams, Tiffany Bales, Laura Brown and Sarah Henderson with the support of the participants of the Newport Mind Community of Practice.

6.5 Ideas for interventions put forward by the schools themselves

During the interviews, school staff came up with ideas about ways in which Merlin could collaborate with South Gloucestershire schools to increase school attendance amongst children from families in the neighbourhoods that both organisations served. These ideas are presented in the school staff's own words.

6.5.1 Secondary 1, Patchway

I think that moving forward Merlin and our school could form a partnership; what it could do could be to run things in community. We've got a building here that's not used in the evenings; I know another school, Wydean School over in Chepstow is open pretty much every night till ten o'clock doing something, giving an income for the school, but not run by the school's teachers; people from the community use it as a hub; it's a community facility. Maybe some parents of the parents, especially the families that we want to get move involved in our school, might worry about coming into school actually to do school-type learning, but we've got food and cookery rooms. Working with parents to get them some qualifications, but even things outside of that, just give them something to do, to come into school, to have contact with the building, things around, I don't know, Indian head massage. If there was somebody locally that said, "Right, actually, I do that. I need somewhere to do it. I could do it at Patchway on a Tuesday and Wednesday night". And also there's a business centre where you can do maths and IT and things like that.

We could work closely with Merlin to look at which families that they've got in the area. Since Merlin Housing officers are some of people that work regularly with these families and sometimes have the trust of these families, the families that the school is trying hard to build a relationship with. There has already been Families in Focus work that's happened previously. Ideally we can come together to shift their mindset about attendance. I can imagine Merlin officers being trained by Integra, they could set up days during the course of the year where the Merlin staff would come in and have training from and updates from the Education Welfare Officer, we could supply a spare classroom, and they could learn about our side of the work with families: why attendance is important, the processes, the language we use, the acronyms we use. And also there can almost be some myth-busting type sessions with the Merlin officers to say actually, when you hear this about school and this about school and this about school, it's not true. After that there could be an email dialogue, and we would be able to answer questions. But ideally the Merlin officers could be like the conduit then between some of those families who find it hard to talk to the school because they're worried about what the school might say and they won't maybe speak to us as honestly as they would to... it would mean the Merlin Housing officer could become a real partner to the school. And I think that would be good value for money for everybody. We'd get the extra time in school as well to work with not just those families, but a range of families. And we would then have somebody that could work with those families in the community. They would improve their professional development by being fully aware of the importance of attendance.

So for both of us it would be time and capacity. We've always had a decent relationship with our community and some of our hard-to-reach families, there are a group of us in school who can reach them, but we need to broaden that and break down a few more barriers.

6.5.2 Primary, Kingswood/Cadbury Heath

It would be great an intervention by MERLIN was to happen in our school buildings because this is where we want them to be. We want families to see this as a fantastic centre to be where we're really happy and we do really exciting things and I learn stuff. We have topics that the families can join in – in this example, the spring term is a term long project about exploring all about space and the planets and the earth that we live on and the stars and all the rest of it. We had the Explorer Dome in here for two days and all children went in – the people that come along and run it are inspirational and they tell you about the stars and the earth and how we've got to keep it safe, and things like that. The families can see that we don't learn in the same ways that maybe some of the parents experienced and associated with negative things. Things like that would be great for them. Another example is an

outside learning day, all about outside education, outside learning, so the skills you can get from all the different areas, because there are loads of different areas: there's the environmental, sustainable stuff, and then there's just the team building things. We did a day like this, had a fantastic day as staff to inspire my staff to inspire my children to learn outside because you can take all learning outside, and we made story sticks and all the rest of it. but what we also did which was fab, she could do this, she brought a great big fire pit, we stayed outside on the 3rd January so it was really cold and we all cooked dinner and we talked together and we were outside and we felt much healthier. Because that's another issue, our children don't leave the house. We've got our lovely outside classroom now which can be used for parents too.

6.5.3 Secondary 1, Kingswood/Cadbury Heath

I remember talking with one academy just outside London, I think, and they had done a programme to engage families. They had got a chef in and they'd cooked with some of the – they'd got some of the dads from the school and some of the boys and done cooking. Thinking outside the box and trying to engage the community – it's amazing the number of boys that are engaged by cooking. Some of our most disadvantaged or most vulnerable children are really, really engaged by cooking which is fantastic. An activity like this will engage the community that we find it difficult to engage as school leaders... Only this week I had a conversation with a young lad who loved his day because he was doing cooking which is great, isn't it?

6.5.4 Secondary 2, Kingswood/Cadbury Heath

Could Merlin talk to families about attendance of children? Even if it's on when they do do visits is it on a checklist that says you've got – I notice you've got two children, what's their attendance? Oh their attendance is 95. Oh well done, that's really positive. And then on the other side to it, okay, if your attendance is that well why is that? Is there anything we can support you with that i.e. contacting the school, working with the school or provide some support for parents to get children into school? Attendance as part of their package. And that's about – I guess that's about them understanding themselves why the attendance is so poor, and that information is quite easily available to be given to them. I'm sure the education welfare service although we all buy into different packages now I'm sure they would support something to do that. If Merlin staff talk to them then maybe it would make the parent think "Actually I need to get them in to school a bit more".

And also maybe talking to parents about actually they can support their children in life – because I think some of the parents that we're talking about as well may not have had a good experience at school themselves, and so to actually come in to school and ask for support is actually quite a challenge or maybe quite a threatening environment for them. It's how another organisation can kind of be the voice of the school without the people having to come to – if they were to run an evening at one of their centres so it wasn't in the school environment, I'm sure people around the local school would be happy to – if, for instance, we knew that the vast majority there came to this school, be more than happy to pop along for 10/15 minutes of an evening and just talk about – and be there as a sound board for anybody who has got an issue that they're worried to come into school or maybe even, do you know what, they can't come in to school because of the hours etc. I'm very open to that kind of – couldn't be a regular thing but it certainly could be something that if it was calendared and organised I'd be more than happy to do something like that.

6.5.5 Secondary, Yate/Staple Hill

I wonder whether MERLIN are able to do some community work with those families. Doing things in the school building could break down the apprehension about school: as we have said, some of the parents that we're dealing with have poor experiences of school themselves and they feel they don't want to be here. MERLIN has community resources, but they probably haven't got two big teaching kitchens, and we could offer the use of those. Similarly we have and AstroTurf so that might be a way of showing those families that school is not necessarily such a scary place. If Merlin did it just before parents' evening and then say, "While you're here, come and meet their teachers" then the ones who can't engage or hate school for whatever reason because they can't access the Curriculum because

they can't read or whatever, to actually come back and have a game of football with the staff. Merlin could run different clubs after school. We could offer some really good woodwork stuff. We've got an amazing study centre and a really well-equipped library. Reading projects would be – they'd be absolutely right up our street, because there are family issues about literacy. Teally, what is important, and what they could offer that would help is working with families. For us, for working on Broken Weeks Attendance, if we had cash to do it, we'd employ another home school officer for Pupil Premium students; if our existing officer had more capacity she'd be able to be in families, in homes more. Dealing with Broken Week Attendance for Pupil Premium Students is about improving the relationship between school and home. Where mentoring might improve students' motivation to come to school and improve their aspiration, it's still the case that if you get up in the morning and your uniform is not clean or someone has moved your shoes and there's no breakfast in the house and actually you slept in because nobody was getting up for work, then it doesn't really matter what your motivation was, because it's just difficult isn't it to get out of the door.

7 Appendix 1: What does research tell us about reasons for poor school attendance?

7.1 Absence and Attainment

The relationship between GCSE results, prior attainment and attendance was investigated in the early 2000s by the UK's National Audit Office, who analysed official data from 17,000 schools in England, and found that there are extremely strong links between levels of absence at a school and levels of attainment, which is true both for primary and secondary schools. A strong association between attendance and attainment justifies government agencies such as Ofsted taking considerable interest in attendance.

While analysis of official education data has been able to show the association between attendance and attainment, different methods are needed to allow schools and other organisations to understand patterns of school attendance from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, or from school to school, and from family to family. What the government data had been able to show was that attendance patterns were closely related to the percentage of students at a school who were receiving free school meals, but it was also clear that it was closely related to other unmeasured aspects of school context; economic and social factors, the way in which a school is run (Schagen et al 2004).

The next few pages of this report show what research has been able to show about the causes of absenteeism from school. It also illustrates the shift in approaches to thinking about and researching the problem. Methods for studying patterns of absence and their causes have included longitudinal studies, in which young people and adults complete surveys at specific points over a long period, and more direct methods with smaller numbers of people such as interviews with young people and their families directly or by telephone.

7.2 What are the causes of absenteeism from school?

7.2.1 A tradition of identifying the problem with the young person

In the past, explanations have been put forward in terms of young people's decision-making patterns and personality types. For example, the following descriptions of young people who skip school: *Typical truants* who have low self-esteem and are introvert, whose absenteeism is linked to feelings of uncertainty about their personal life, their social life and to their educational prospects: *Psychological truants* who remain absent from school because of anxiety, or phobia, perhaps connected with poor experience of the institution or people in it: *Institutional truants* who have a positive self-image and a wide circle of friends, but a disregard for school. (see e.g. Reid, 1985). Although the behaviour patterns do occur and it appear to be plausible explanations, they tend to lead to ideas about interventions in terms of correcting young people's attitudes. These explanations may very easily lead us to forget that change in a person's behaviour can happen when there are changes in the context in which they live (the family, the school, the community) and that interventions could usefully concentrate on these areas of the young person's life and the interconnections between them.

7.2.2 The factors that impact on absenteeism

In 2008, an American professor named Christopher Kearney sifted through all the research that had been carried out up to that date, and was able to show that as many of sixty factors had been shown to be related to absenteeism. The author was careful to point out that the factors were all associated with each other, meaning, as he put it, that truancy can be *both a cause and a consequence* of a reciprocal relationship among *a large number of obstacles* in a young person's life.

Factors related to Problematic School Absenteeism (Kearney (2008) p.206)

Key child factors	Extensive work hours outside of school
	Externalizing symptoms/psychopathology
	Grade retention
	History of absenteeism
	Internalizing symptoms/psychopathology
	Learning-based reinforcers of absenteeism/functions
	Low self-esteem and school commitment
	Personality traits and attributional styles
	Poor health or academic proficiency
	Pregnancy
	Problematic relationships with authority figures
	Race and age
	Trauma
	Underdeveloped social and academic skills
Key parent factors	Inadequate parenting skills
	Low expectations of school performance/attendance
	Maltreatment
	Problematic parenting styles (permissive, authoritarian)
	Poor communication with school officials
	Poor involvement and supervision
	Psychopathology
	School dropout in parents and among relatives
	School withdrawal
	Single parent
Key family factors	Enmeshment
	Ethnic differences from school personnel
	Homelessness
	Intense conflict and chaos
	Large family size
	Poor access to educational aids
	Poor cohesion and expressiveness
	Poverty
	Resistance to acculturation
	Stressful family transitions (divorce, illness, unemployment, moving)
Transportation problems	
Key peer factors	Participation in gangs and gang-related activity
	Poor participation in extracurricular activities
	Pressure to conform to group demands for absenteeism or other delinquent acts
	Proximity to deviant peers
	Support for alluring activities outside of school such as drug use
	Victimization from bullies or otherwise
Key school factors	Dangerousness/poor school climate
	Frequent teacher absences
	Highly punitive or legal means to address all cases of problematic absenteeism
	Inadequate, irrelevant, or tedious curricula
	Inadequate praise for student achievement and attendance
	Inadequate responsiveness to diversity issues
	Inconsistent or minimal consequences for absenteeism
	Poor monitoring of attendance
	Poor student-teacher relationships
	School-based racism and discrimination
Key community factors	Disorganized/unsafe neighbourhood
	Economic pull factors (e.g., plentiful, well-paying jobs requiring little formal education)
	Geographical cultural and subcultural values
	High gang-related activity
	Intense interracial tension
	Lack of social and educational support services
	School district policies and legal statutes regarding absenteeism

7.2.3 Absenteeism and family life

Policymakers have supported the use of fines and court action as appropriate ways of tackling the problem of absenteeism, with an underlying idea that the root cause of children's failure to attend school can be attributed to irresponsible parents. There is evidence to suggest that this is a blunt and even an ineffective instrument. An analysis the association between authorities' readiness to issue penalty notices and reduction in student absence, drew the conclusion that fines and court action are not effective. Instead, it was clear that parenting itself is very often a symptom of the circle of poverty and disadvantage that proves difficult to break (Zhang, 2007).

Further studies have shown a more detailed picture of the attitude and behavior of parents. In the early 2000s, a group of researchers interviewed parents of children who were identified as poor attenders (Dalziel & Henthorne, 2005) and on the basis of the 22 parents they spoke to they identified four distinct groups: parents/carers who try hard to tackle poor attendance: those who describe themselves as feeling powerless to tackle poor attendance: parents or carers who appear to be over-protective or dependent on their child: and parents or carers who are either apathetic about tackling poor attendance or who appear not to engage with the school or other support professionals.

Studies like this cannot explain why the families have such difficulties, but does point to the likelihood that they are related to wider social changes. A study of young Belgians' absence from school helps to show how change in society could impact on patterns of school attendance. The Belgian researchers asked 700 young people about their absences from school, how long, whether parents knew about it, where the young people spent the time when they weren't at school, whether they were on their own or in a group, what time they decided not to come to school, and whether they had planned it in advance.

The researchers were surprised to find that around half the absences were *with* parental knowledge, and that for a high proportion of the absences, the time out of school had been spent with parents or other family members. Parental permission to miss school was associated with a slightly *higher* level of affluence and education amongst family members. (Keppens & Spruyt 2016)

Such a pattern of change would also appear to be true for the UK where a social change appears to be taking place in relation to attitudes to school attendance: this is the practice of taking children out of school in order to take advantage of lower cost: discussion about this has been widespread in the light of publicity about the case between an Isle of Wight businessman whose case against the local authority over a fine for taking his child out of school for a holiday reached the Supreme Court. [Isle of Wight Council v Platt \[2016\]](#).

7.3 New directions; understanding engagement with school

So far, the research that has been discussed has been of a particular kind – research that tries to understand the causes of absence through examining decision-making by young people or their families. Neil Southwell, an academic who, when at school, was identified as a 'persistent truanter', has argued that seeing people or parents as 'bad' could be replaced by thinking of schools as problematic in not being able to include the children in question. He writes:

What were once thought to be causes of a badness called truancy become understood as symptoms of unmet needs. The truant is no longer a defective child; the school is a defective includer. The emphasis focuses on discovering the ways in which schools are failing to meet the educational needs of truants – needs that must be met to ensure inclusion. It is easy for educationalists, especially those involved with special educational needs, to envisage such needs as being along the lines of needing help with numeracy or literacy due to having fallen behind, being dyslexic and therefore needing appropriate professional assistance or equipment, or needing counselling to help deal with problems at home. The needs of truants can include all of these, and other such factors, but their special educational needs can also go far beyond such matters. (Southwell 2006, page 94)

Newer approaches are in line with the observation made by Kearney, as described above, that absenteeism is *both a cause and a consequence* of a reciprocal relationship among *a large number of*

obstacles in a young person's life. Amongst these are studies of the development of young people's engagement with school, based on the understanding that there is dynamic interplay between young people and their environment (e.g. Upadyaya & Salmela-Aro 2013). An example of a model that has been developed is the stage-environment fit (see Eccles & Roeser, 2011) whose concern is the changes in the developmental needs of adolescents alongside the changes in the social contexts in which they live.

The Figure 2 below indicates the contexts or environments that Upadyaya & Salmela-Aro identified as significant for the young person's experience and engagement at school:

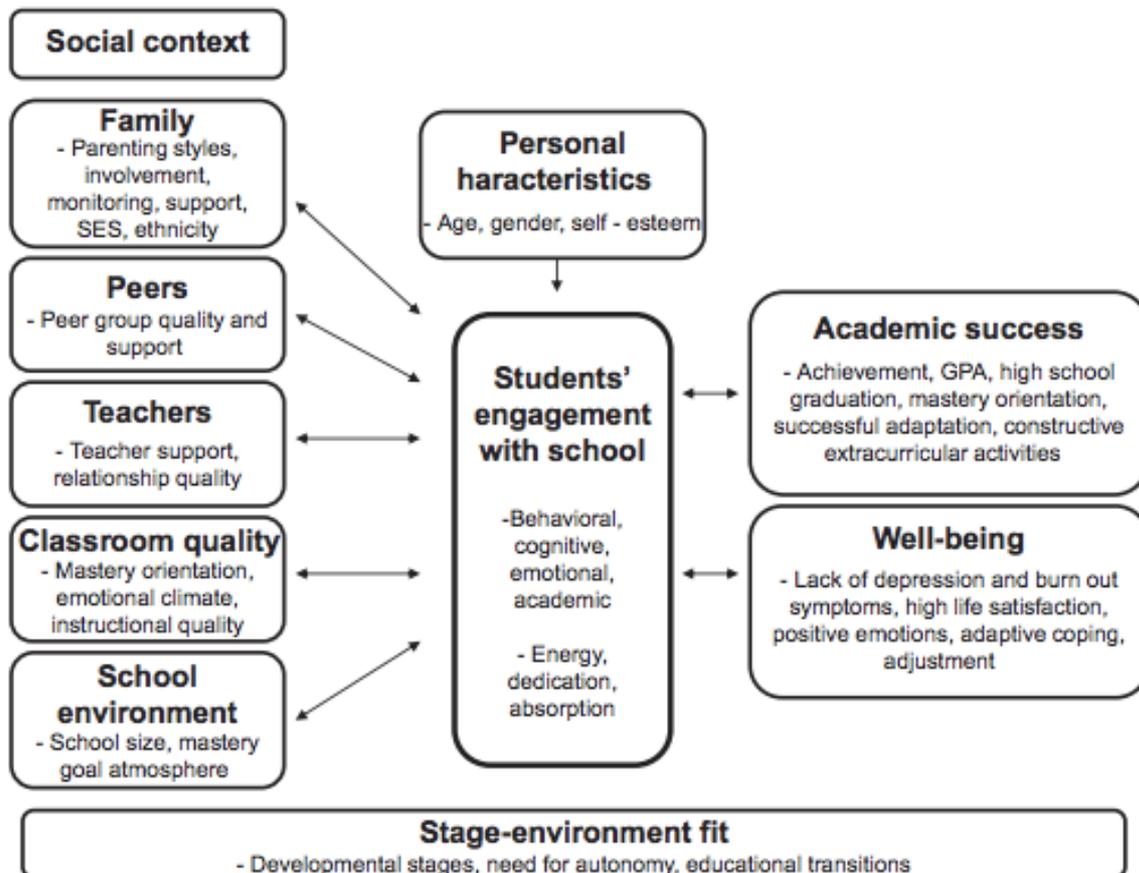


Figure 2 Associations between a young person's social context, engagement with school, and their well-being and academic success as identified by Upadyaya & Salmela-Aro, 2013 (p 137)

In the figure above, a young person's engagement with school, whether it is emotional, behavioural or related to the way they deploy and use their interest, is shown alongside the social context to which it is related as well as the personal characteristics, experience at school, and the psychological and social elements of day to day existence that constitute their wellbeing.

Recent research based on these dynamic, person-centred approaches has been able to tell us more about shifting patterns of engagement with school, to identify distinct trajectories for young people who become disengaged with school, and therefore to relate disengagement to wellbeing (Symonds et al, 2016) and wellbeing to absence from school (e.g. Attwood and Croll, 2015). It is possible to look at this across the whole country because there is a wealth of data about young people in the UK including the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England or LSYPE, a survey of young people's experiences, activities and plans. The LSYPE surveys some 16,000 young people who were born in 1989/90, and is linked to the National Pupil Database which provides data on attainment at school. Questions on emotional attitudes regarding schoolwork and lessons are included, for example *I am*

bored in lessons and the work I do in lessons is interesting to me, as are questions about general well-being, relationships with family, whether they had played truant (miss school without permission), whether they had tried drugs or alcohol, and whether they expected to apply to university. Because these questions are included, the LSYPE gives researchers the opportunity to study the relationship between educational attainment and young people's experiences and their ideas.

Using boredom and interest as the basis of a measure of engagement, Symonds and her colleagues were able to show trajectories of young people's disengagement in school over time. They identified eight distinct groups that ranged from those who had already been disengaged at the end of primary school and remained disengaged, to those who had achieved highly at primary school and whose engagement declined over time they were in secondary school. They found that the end of compulsory school, students in all of the eight disengaging trajectories had worse achievement on average than their counterparts. They attended school less frequently, tried less hard, and had lower aspirations for academic success. (Symonds et al 2016, *ibid*).

Looking at the information across the whole country enabled the researchers to bust some myths about disengagement. The widely-accepted concept of disengaged students is that they are male, have greater social disadvantage, and are white. The measure of engagement with school didn't correlate with gender; neither did engagement with school correlate with social disadvantage.

Something that the researchers found even more surprising was that disengagement from school didn't predict poor wellbeing as a young adult. Although they did find that that young people who had been disengaged at school continued to have high levels of anxiety and subjective ill-being the year after they left school, this evened out. Two years after they left school, those who had been consistently disengaged since Year 9 evaluated themselves as having a level of life satisfaction that was as good as those who had been fully engaged at school. A similar pattern was seen in the patterns of smoking, drinking and use of drugs amongst these young people; it dropped off by the time they were in their early twenties.

This led the researchers to suggest that some of the behaviours that are seen amongst disengaged students are part of a broader pattern that they called *dynamic disengagement* and that the increase in wellbeing and reduction in substance misuse once they are young adults, comes about *when they have the freedom to select their main activity*.

According to this way of looking at disengagement, the beginnings of the pattern could have been when as children they were continually finding that school work wasn't producing positive emotions for them – emotions, for example, associated with interest - and that this, over time, built into negative attitudes to schoolwork. Choosing a path of disengagement at secondary school may then have been a way of enabling them to reduce negative emotions, and one that enabled them to protect their self-identity. At the same time, of course, choosing this path meant that they reduced their own opportunities to make good academic progress, which was a way in which they might have been able to boost their self-esteem.

This relatively new, dynamic way of approaching the experience and behaviour of people who are disengaged at school seems to have the capacity to show where *emotions, self-esteem, and the development of identity* come into play in young people's trajectories through school. It offers the potential of showing the subtle interrelations of different factors on young people, in ways that come to shape their behaviour. At the same time it makes it clear that none of the factors themselves could necessarily be identified as causing disengagement or patterns from absence from school.

7.4 Conclusion

Studies that analyse statistical returns from schools, in an endeavour to pin down the underlying causes for non-attendance are able to point to factors such as the economic status of families; more detailed examinations of what makes young people skip school have looked at decision-making by individual students and their parents. There are approaches that begin to tease apart the complex interplay of factors and to look for chains of events and decisions, and to relate them to the demands of being a young person in contemporary society. When young people have been consulted (see e.g. Dahl (2016) Gregory & Purcell (2014) How (2015) Malcolm et al (2003) Spryt et al (2016)) their

stories can show how one thing builds on another to result in them missing school (*note: in order to keep the report to a manageable size, these studies have not been summarised*). The accounts of teachers and school staff in South Gloucestershire (seen in Section 2) and the reasons and causes that they have put forward, show that they too are well aware of the complexity and of the different situations and stories for the individuals at their schools. The latest research, summarised above, offers an even more subtle way of looking at the problem and suggests that interventions that work on self-esteem and positive emotions about school and schoolwork, would be of particular value.

8 Appendix 2: The evidence base for interventions

8.1 Community-based interventions

This section of the report considers studies that have examined the value of out-of-school activities for young people. A search of academic literature was carried out in order to find research that has assessed the effectiveness of interventions outside school premises.

Currently only limited number of studies that have produced robust research evidence¹, and this is particularly the case for interventions that aim to increase parental engagement or involvement in schools. There is, however, evidence in two main areas: there is evidence for the value of out-of-school activities for primary schools, and there is evidence on the value of for mentoring schemes.

8.1.1 The evidence for activities outside school

What evidence is there for the value of sport and other activities, offered to young people outside school, on outcomes and attainment?

A group of researchers (Tanner et al 2016) analysed data from the Millennium Cohort Study which is following several thousand individuals born between 2001-2002 through the course of their lives, charting the effects of events and circumstances in early life on outcomes and achievements later on (see Johnson et al, 2013).

In studying this data, these researchers were looking for the impact of out-of-school activity on social, emotional and behavioural outcomes for academic attainment at school. The data from the Millennium Cohort Study is released in waves, and in 2016 the availability of the first few waves enables researchers to study the effects for primary school children, that is to say, children aged 5-11.

Tanner and colleagues also conducted interviews with parents, children and the provider organisations for out-of-school activities, to get a better understanding of the factors that influence how children spend their time, and how activities might affect children's learning and development.

The analysis of data from the Millennium Cohort Study provided clear evidence that some kinds of out-of-school activity has an impact on school. Physical activities were associated with higher attainment and better social, emotional and behavioural outcomes at the end of primary school. School staff, parents and pupils identified a wide range of perceived benefits from taking part in after school clubs, covering academic as well as social and emotional outcomes.

The research also showed that economically disadvantaged pupils were more likely to access clubs provided at school after school hours (afterschool clubs) whereas activities organised at non-school locations were taken up by more affluent pupils. **Afterschool club attendance, provided on school premises, was associated with positive academic and social outcomes for disadvantaged children in particular.**

The authors of the report found that reasons for take-up of after school clubs included the low cost, convenience associated with them taking place at school and the reassuring familiarity of staff and location.

As mentioned, the Millennium Cohort study made it possible to study the value of out-of-school clubs for primary school children. Sport and other learning provision, provided by *secondary schools* on school premises outside the school day, has been shown to have an effect on attainment and attendance: this is covered in section 8.2.1 below.

8.1.2 The evidence for mentoring schemes

Mentoring can be defined as the process of pairing children with an older volunteer to build positive relationships enhancing their confidence or providing general academic support.

¹ See section 9 page 12 for a discussion of research evidence and standards of proof.

The National Foundation for Education Research surveyed mentoring as one of the types of interventions that were being used by schools to target students at risk of temporary disconnection from learning, beginning by identifying schools where an intervention was taking place which was thought to have a positive impact on students, then visiting the schools to find out about the scheme from staff and from participating students. (Kettlewell et al, 2012). Some of the schools had set up mentoring relationships between learners and employers in workplaces which also provided work-related skills, and these were identified as being particularly useful for raising students' aspirations, developing their skills and increasing confidence. Although some of these schools reported an increased attendance level for the students involved, the evidence was not clear-cut because three of the six schools had selected students for lower achievement and disengagement rather than behavioural aspects and one of these had required students to have good attendance in order to be selected for mentoring.

Similarly, a wide-ranging evaluation of school-based mentoring (Wood & Mayo-Wilson, 2012) was unable to show a clear effect on attendance, but here again, the schemes that were included in the evaluation varied widely and it cannot be claimed that all school-based mentoring is without value.

Since the study by Wood and Mayo-Wilson, an ongoing evaluation of the Princes Trust Mosaic Mentoring programme for Secondary School students has reported a positive influence in *Attitudes towards School* (Anderson et al, 2016) confirming the outcomes reported in an earlier report (Bartlett, 2012)

It comes as no surprise that schemes for disadvantaged young people are typically organised through schools, although mentoring schemes that are independent of schools also exist for specific groups or purposes: for example, Mentoring Plus is offered to young people who are referred primarily by Youth Offending Teams (Newburn et al 2003, Shiner et al 2004) and Independent Visitor schemes, introduced by The Children Act 1989, offer community-based mentoring for looked after children. The role of these mentors is 'visiting, advising and befriending the child' and there is some evidence of an impact on attendance (Hurst & Peel, 2013).

Robbie Gilligan, a professor of Social Work at Trinity College Dublin, has pointed out that mentoring can be done by adults, relatives, and friends and that mentoring relationships may emerge organically within the young person's social network and relationships. Gilligan stresses that legitimate anxieties about, for instance, child protection, can stifle opportunities for young people to have contact with willing mentors in the community, but if ways can be found to establish and support such nurturing and supporting relationships, they may be as or more fruitful and profound than those that come about through formally organised schemes (Gilligan 1999).

The UK's [Education Endowment Fund, which has published an evaluation of mentoring schemes](#), states that *school-based mentoring programs have on average been less effective than community-based approaches, possibly because school-based mentoring can result in fewer opportunities for young people to develop more lasting and trusting relationships with adult role models*. Against this, the evaluation warns that unsuccessful mentor pairings can have a detrimental effect on the young person.

8.1.3 The evidence for Parental Involvement and Parental Engagement

A report entitled *What do rigorous evaluations tell us about the most promising parental involvement interventions?* published in 2013 is one of a series of evaluations of carried out by a team at the Centre for Assessment, Evaluation and Effectiveness at the University of Durham. The work of two members in particular, Professor Stephen Gorard and Dr Beng Huat See, concerns the robust evaluation of interventions to support young people's engagement and attainment in the education system.

It is of particular significance for this report that Gorard and See pointed out that they had been unable to find robust evidence that home-based interventions were effective, and they commented:

There is an instinctive tendency to assume that initiatives aimed at increasing parents' engagement with their children's education must be a good thing. It seems logical that children whose parents are involved in their schooling will be better supported and therefore perform well. Indeed, previous studies have shown that children whose parents are engaged with their education score higher in attainment tests than those without such parents. But what we do not know is whether there is a causal link between the two, and therefore whether increasing parental involvement has the potential to raise children's attainment.

See and Gorard recorded their overall findings from the review as indicating that out-of-school interventions were not as effective as interventions carried out by or in close association with a school: *interventions were most likely to succeed when they were aimed at young children, and involved parents and staff meeting regularly in an institution, with parental training, on-going support, and co-operative working with teachers.* (Gorard and See, 2013, p.4).

The most effective programme they found was not solely concerned with parental engagement but combined it with other interventions and meant that it was not possible to isolate the effectiveness of parental involvement. It is worth describing the most effective intervention in a little detail, in order to gain a sense of what it involved. The Chicago Child-Parent Center (CPC) Program is a complex intervention with multiple parts that was intense and long-lasting: it ran every working day for three hours, with a six-week summer programme. It included parental training, with a focus on developing reading and language skills. However, it also provided young people with teacher-directed whole class instruction, small group activities, field trips and play; and funding was provided to enable low child to staff ratios in kindergartens, outreach activities including home visits, staff development activities, and health and nutrition services.

The investigation of parental programmes that have an impact on the academic outcomes of children from disadvantaged backgrounds frustrated the researchers because the evaluations weren't sufficiently rigorous for them to be able to show that there was good evidence for any of the interventions that community organisations are offering. There was evidence that interventions targeted at children at Early Years stage was effective, but, as they explained: *there was little evidence that intervening at a later primary or secondary school phase held much promise*².

8.1.4 Evidence for Out-of-School interventions - a conclusion

In summary, the research evidence that is available to date shows clearly that mentoring, provided out of school, is of value.

It also shows that out-of-school activities, particularly sport, have an impact on pupil outcomes. The research shows that participation of young people in out-of-school activity is facilitated if it is provided on their school premises. Children from disadvantaged families are more readily able to join school-based activities than activities provided an external settings.

Parent engagement programs may be very effective, but the evidence has not yet been accumulated to show that this is the case.

Existing research on parental involvement and engagement does indicate that at primary and secondary school level, the most effective programmes are those that are provided in close association

² Amongst the descriptions of interventions that they reviewed, See and Gorard described a school-based programme for which there was some evidence of effectiveness on attendance in addition to attainment and other outcomes. This was the Parent Education Teaching System (PETS), which took place in a middle school in the US. This aimed to build close collaboration with a school, began with teachers to give parents a document that 69 details the course requirements, method of assessments, and attendance and discipline policies. Parents had to meet with the teachers at least three times to discuss their children's performance and other behavioural issues, and had had to agree to monitor, provide assistance and communicate with the school. This kind of intervention seems unlikely to sit well in the culture and ethos of schools in South Gloucestershire.

with schools. This observation is consistent with the suggestions made by school staff in South Gloucestershire, whose ideas are put forward and discussed in the next section of this report.

8.2 Community activity in partnership with school – organised within the school

8.2.1 Providing sport and study skills on school premises

Section 8.1.1 of this report discussed the value of organised activities provided by non-school organisations and described a study that showed the value for disadvantaged families of activities being offered by schools on their premises, rather than at less familiar or more distant locations. The research that showed this was a study of primary school children.

There is some evidence from the UK that organised, out-of-school activities on school premises can have a positive impact on school attendance amongst secondary school students (Macbeath et al, 2003). The study that showed this was a large-scale one of over 8000 pupils, following outcomes over three years from 1997. The aim was to study impact of participation in out of school hours learning on the academic attainment, attitudes and school attendance of secondary school pupils. One of the questions the team was concerned with when analysing the data was: *Do students who participate in study support appear to show higher levels of school attendance relative to where they were at an earlier stage in their school career?* They found that when schools provided opportunities for study skills support, this had an effect on increasing attendance, particularly for year 11. Since this is the year that young people take exams, it is probably unsurprising that there was a greater effect for young people in this year group. Around forty schools offered sport (for example, PE club, football, hockey, swimming club, fitness training, trampoline) and involvement in this, which was greater amongst boys, had a beneficial effect on attitudes and achievement as well as attendance.

8.2.2 The research evidence for school-based parental support programmes

The strongest evidence was for interventions that were run by schools which took parents through a long-lasting, structured programme. This was the conclusion of the rigorous review produced by See and Gorard for the Nuffield Foundation (See & Gorard, 2013) which sought to find good, evidence-based methods for increasing young people's attainment through parental involvement.

8.2.3 Evidence for community activity in partnership with school - a conclusion

There is evidence that providing activities on the school premises that are not compulsory and are not part of the curriculum, can increase attendance. Sport is potentially more valuable than other activities, especially for boys.

School-based interventions whose focus is on parental support have been shown to be effective when parents participate in a long-lasting, structured programme

8.3 Conclusion

There are two specific areas for which robust evidence does exist:

- mentoring relationships are effective, especially so if long-lasting, and these are more readily established by out-of-school agencies
- activities outside school are less effective than activities provided by schools or on school premises, and sports are effective, particularly for boys.

The evidence also suggests that support for *school-based* activities are justified. Where the area of interest is parental engagement and involvement, the evidence points to the particular value of school-based interventions over community-based interventions.

9 Appendix 3: How to produce Evidence: What counts as a good Good Quality Evaluation of an Intervention?

Given the demand that decision making about public spending should be well justified, an increasing proportion of public money is being spent on evaluations of interventions.

The past decade has seen a significant increase in interest in robust evaluations of initiatives designed to support education, and also for evaluations of initiatives to support the wellbeing of young people and families.

9.1 Evaluations of Interventions in the Education Sector

In 2011, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) was created with a £125 million grant from the UK government to fund educational innovation to raise the attainment of disadvantaged children in England, and to evaluate these innovations using Randomised Controlled Trials (RCT)s. RCT evaluations explore issues such as:

- how consistently the intervention is implemented across different schools
- how much of the intervention the participants actually receive ('dosage')
- participant/teacher/school engagement with the intervention under evaluation.³

Evaluations have also been funded by the Nuffield Foundation, by the government department that is now the Department for Education, the Joseph Rowntree Trust, and the National Audit office.

In addition, reports have been commissioned to search for evaluations of innovations that have been carried out across the world in order to find robust evidence for interventions that can be taken up in the UK. As was explained earlier in this report, these reviews have altogether too frequently stated that research evidence for an intervention is insufficiently robust, giving further emphasis to the importance of increasing the quantity and quality of evidence for interventions that are currently running or being planned.

All those who design and implement interventions should therefore endeavour to produce robust evidence, and this is especially the case when external funding may be sought in the future. This is because, as has been stated, funders and policymakers are more and more likely to rely on good quality evidence in making decisions about public spending. Section 9.2 shows that the UK government has put funding into sources of guidance that will help organisations achieve good quality evidence.

9.2 Validating Interventions in the Children and Young People's Sector

[Project Oracle](#) was created to address a gap in understanding about which projects work and why. Originating in 2012 as a partnership between London Metropolitan University and the Social Innovation Partnership, a trusted advisor to public, private and social sector organisations, it is now a registered charity, funded by organisations that distribute government funding and have a responsibility for ensuring that public funds are well spent.

Project Oracle provides a variety of tools to empower the children and young people's sector (CYP) to achieve the best possible outcomes. Training and accreditation is available for organisations enabling them to collect and understand evidence about what they are doing well and what could be improved, which in turn allows them to develop and refine their projects. The existence of a good quality evidence base enables funders to make decisions about whether to fund interventions.

³ <https://www4.shu.ac.uk/research/ceir/randomised-controlled-trials-1>

9.2.1 The Five Standards of Evidence

Five Standards of Evidence describe what constitutes good evidence, reflecting how an organisation is currently gathering and using evidence, and identifying how they might improve over time. Organisations are encouraged to aim for the highest feasible standard and after validation⁴, their projects can be included in an Evidence Hub which currently holds information on over 300 organisations.

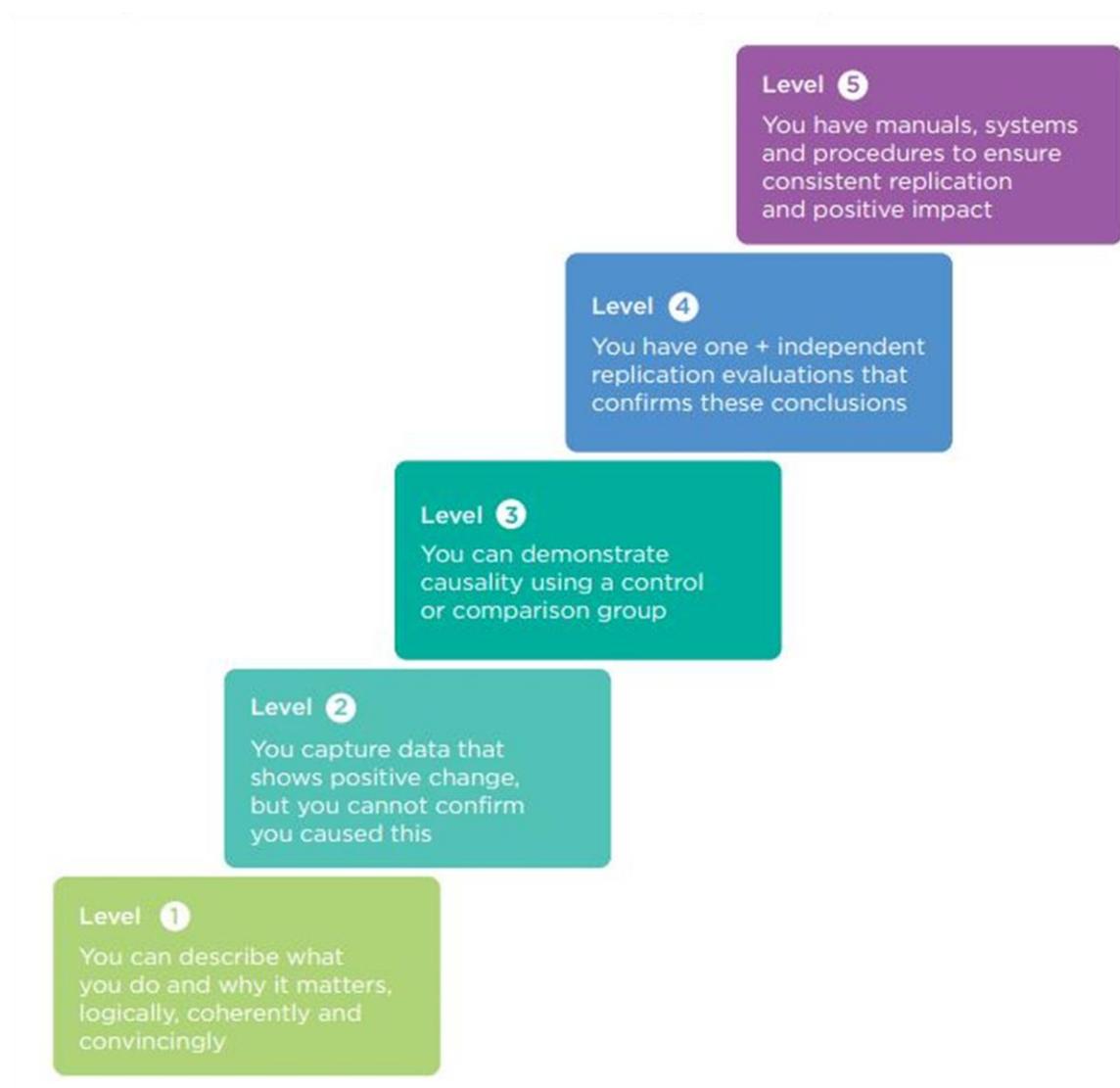


Figure 3 The Five Standards of Evidence. From Puttick, R. and Ludlow, J. (2012) 'Standards of Evidence for Impact Investing.' London: Nesta

Within the Evidence Hub: interventions that aim to increase attendance at school

In relation to attendance at school, currently the London organisation Catch22 provides a specialist service to increase the attendance and attainment of pupils most at risk of fixed-term or permanent exclusion. This organisation been validated at the first standard. More information can be found at <https://www.catch-22.org.uk/>

⁴ <https://project-oracle.com/projects/standards-of-evidence/>

Another organisation, [School-Home Support](#) works in partnership with schools and families to get children with poor attendance back into school, and ready to learn, has been validated at the second standard.

9.2.2 Resources to support evaluation and opportunities for Accreditation for interventions

Useful resources can be found on the Project Oracle website at <https://project-oracle.com/> at the EEF website at <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/> and at the innovation foundation NESTA who have produced a helpful document <http://www.nesta.org.uk/publications/nesta-standards-evidence> from which Figure 4 below is taken:

Nesta Standards of Evidence

Level	Our expectation	How the evidence can be generated
At Level 1	You can give an account of impact. By this we mean providing a logical reason, or set of reasons, for why your intervention could have an impact and why that would be an improvement on the current situation.	You should be able to do this yourself, and draw upon existing data and research from other sources.
At Level 2	You are gathering data that shows some change amongst those receiving or using your intervention.	At this stage, data can begin to show effect but it will not evidence direct causality. You could consider such methods as: pre and post-survey evaluation; cohort/panel study, regular interval surveying.
At Level 3	You can demonstrate that your intervention is causing the impact, by showing less impact amongst those who don't receive the product/service.	We will consider robust methods using a control group (or another well justified method) that begin to isolate the impact of the product/service. Random selection of participants strengthens your evidence at this Level, you need to have a sufficiently large sample at hand (scale is important in this case).
At Level 4	You are able to explain why and how your intervention is having the impact you have observed and evidenced so far. An independent evaluation validates the impact. In addition, the intervention can deliver impact at a reasonable cost, suggesting that it could be replicated and purchased in multiple locations.	At this stage, we are looking for a robust independent evaluation that investigates and validates the nature of the impact. This might include endorsement via commercial standards, industry Kitemarks etc. You will need documented standardisation of delivery and processes. You will need data on costs of production and acceptable price points for your (potential) customers.
At Level 5	You can show that your intervention could be operated up by someone else, somewhere else and scaled up, whilst continuing to have positive and direct impact on the outcome, and whilst remaining a financially viable proposition.	We expect to see use of methods like multiple replication evaluations; future scenario analysis; fidelity evaluation.

Figure 4 The Five Standards of Evidence: detailed description

10 Appendix 4: References

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