



research summary

The value of social care professionals working in extended schools

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The Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda has called for closer, more integrated working between education and other service providers. Extended schools and children's centres have been referred to as key sites for this kind of integrated service delivery (DfES, 2004). Recent legislative changes, including the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and the role of the lead professional will lead to a closer working relationship between social care and education professionals. As this collaboration develops, the question of what role social care professionals can take in school, as well as what should be expected of them, is becoming increasingly pertinent.

Key findings

How social care professionals and extended schools integrate

Four models of integration between social care professionals and extended schools emerged from the research:

- family/pupil support workers (largely unqualified social care professionals) based in or linked to extended schools and/or children's centres. (this was the most common model)
- experienced/qualified social care professionals working in these settings
- social work trainee placements undertaken in extended schools
- training opportunities/events for school staff provided by social care staff.

Local authorities were often involved in more than one type of social care practice.

Roles of social care professionals

Work in extended schools or children's centres was largely targeted at children, young people and families below the threshold for specialist intervention. Social care staff worked with the young person and family unit as a whole, and largely undertook activities relating to advice, guidance, support and signposting to other services. The majority of the work was focused on proactive, preventative initiatives.

Examples of activities undertaken by social care professionals

Where family/pupil support workers are based in or linked to extended schools:

- anger awareness and management courses
- counselling and mentoring
- parent/carer and family support such as parent drop-ins, child development classes, stress management, parenting adolescents courses

Where family/pupil support workers are based in or linked to Children's Centres:

- support for families on issues such as housing, employment and respite childcare
- signposting to specialist services regarding drugs and alcohol, domestic violence and welfare rights
- support during the transition from nursery to primary school

Experienced/qualified social care professionals working with extended schools and Children's Centres:

- higher tier casework including Child Protection and crisis intervention work
- development and use of the CAF
- attendance at multi-agency meetings

Social work trainee placements in extended schools:

- group work including friendship groups and work with groups of disaffected young people
- work and support around bereavement, self-esteem, behaviour and attendance
- family work and support

Training opportunities/events for school staff provided by social care staff:

- child protection and safeguarding training
- CAF training for schools
- training for school staff on how to engage children and young people with disabilities

Levels of qualification of social care staff

The models of practice for integrating social care professionals into extended schools or children's centres varied according to the level of social work qualification. It was largely felt that social care staff working in extended schools did not need to be qualified social workers, mainly because the majority of the interventions were concerned with low-level needs or early identification of difficulties. Instead, pupil or family support workers, care officers and social workers in training were typically linked with or based in the schools. It was felt that there was less stigma attached to these groups of professionals than qualified social workers, and that this increased the uptake of services in schools.

extended schools and children's centres have been referred to as key sites for this kind of integrated service delivery

The appropriateness of the extended school environment

The majority of interviewees from both social care and education felt that extended schools and children's centres provided a suitable environment in which to base social care professionals.

The main advantage was the accessibility of the school site for pupils and their families. Pupils were able to access support, when needed, in a familiar and convenient location. In primary settings, where parents tend to come to the school at the start and end of the day, access to parents was particularly easily achieved. Where extended schools were already set up for multi-agency service provision, with secure entrance points and welcoming areas for families, the environment was particularly favourable. Children's centres were also reported to provide excellent bases for social care professionals as they are purpose built to accommodate service providers and are appealing to parents.

Where disadvantages of the school site were reported, these largely concerned providing social care services for parents, as opposed to services for pupils. Difficulties were reported in finding appropriate areas of the school in which to locate social care professionals, particularly in smaller primary schools, and in encouraging some parents to come into a school setting, for example where they may have had negative experiences of schooling. Parents expressed concern that school sites were less confidential, and that they might be recognised when coming in to access a service.

Issues for consideration

The research looked at the challenges, key factors for success, and benefits of this type of service integration.



Challenges and key factors for success

As might be expected, introducing such a major service development is not without its challenges, although these were not considered to be insurmountable. Four main challenges and the key factors in successfully overcoming each of them were consistently highlighted.

1. Cultural changes were required for both education and social care professionals. Integration challenged established ways of working, procedures and the use of technical language.

Key factors: a commitment and 'buy-in' at strategic levels to integrated working and achieving the five ECM outcomes for children and young people.

2. Understanding the roles and responsibilities of social care or education colleagues was problematic. Entrenched views and institutional barriers made it initially difficult for some professionals to work together effectively.

Key factors: developing a common terminology, and marketing and publicising services across the professional community in order to inform and update people about what is happening.

3. Capacity issues presented difficulties for schools and social care. Funding, resourcing, staffing and logistical issues, such as a lack of appropriate space, had to be overcome.

Key factors: a genuine multi-agency approach to reshaping budgets and creating or adapting existing bases in schools to accommodate social care professionals.

4. Issues over threshold levels for intervention were found, as education colleagues perceived social care thresholds to be too high.

Key factors: ensuring clarity over the issue of social care thresholds and the involvement of partner agencies in any consultation and review of thresholds

Some challenges were specific to **social care professionals**:

- partnership working – difficulties over co-location and changes in working practices were identified
- managing expectations – social care staff felt that teachers had unrealistic expectations of what social care professionals in schools could achieve and how long it would take to impact
- establishing the work in schools and children's centres as part of social care professionals' 'core' business and not as an 'add on' activity
- engaging and embedding services within the local community was difficult given negative perceptions of social care
- for social workers in training:
 - ensuring that the core competences were met
 - having trained school staff to manage the trainees on site
 - trainees valuing the placements as 'real social work'.

Challenges specific to **school professionals** were:

- resistance: some initial resistance to having social care professionals in schools was noted
- school priorities: it was difficult to shift school priorities from being solely education-focused to being more social care-orientated
- cluster working: there was evidence of tension between a school that was hosting a social care service and its cluster schools (the challenge for the school is recognising that the social care professionals need to serve other schools, and will not be available to the host school at certain times)
- governance: governors experienced issues relating to site security and access, headteachers experienced difficulties with accountability for social care professionals working in the school
- communication: a lack of communication with social care professionals was noted, especially concerning the exchange of information about pupils in the school.

Challenges specific to **young people, families and the local community** included:

- school site location: some of the young people were unhappy about leaving lessons to see the social worker, and others were concerned that their classmates would know they were seeing a social worker
- stigma: some parents were reluctant to engage in services delivered from the school site due to the stigma attached or to negative perceptions of schools
- needs not being met: there was a concern that interventions could not be sustained, or that the services did not focus adequately on early identification and prevention
- lack of knowledge and awareness: for local communities, a lack of community awareness about what services were available to them was identified as problematic.

extended schools and children's centres provided a suitable environment in which to base social care professionals

In order to overcome the specific challenges for social care professionals, school professionals, young people, their families and the local community, the following **key factors** for success were reported:

- streamlined communication and information exchange
- clear partnership arrangements and remit
- appropriate management structures to support trainees and professionals in schools
- consultation with the local community and evaluation of services
- adoption of a more child- and family-centred approach to service delivery
- awareness raising of services available in school and to the community.



Benefits

A wealth of benefits of this type of service provision was identified. The three main benefits were:

- earlier identification of needs and quicker access to services
- a better understanding and knowledge of roles and responsibilities between social care and education colleagues (it was reported that barriers were broken down and relationships strengthened)
- a more coherent, holistic, package of support for children, young people and their families as a result of greater joint working.

Benefits specific to **social care professionals** included:

- an increase in professional support for staff, as agencies had greater shared responsibilities (particularly in the case of qualified social workers who saw fewer referrals as a result of earlier intervention work)
- less duplication of services through better multi-agency working.

The benefits specific to **school professionals** were:

- an enhanced capacity to meet national and local targets, including ECM outcomes
- improved communication with families, particularly where the social care professional could act as a conduit or 'middle person' between the two
- improvements in pupil attendance and behaviour as children and young people were more engaged and 'ready' for learning (teachers were reported to be less pressured and more able to focus on teaching as a result).

Benefits for **children and young people** included:

- improvements in learning and wellbeing, particularly regarding self-esteem and confidence
- reduced stigma and tensions associated with social care (locating social care professionals on the school site meant that they were regarded as part of the general school community)
- reduced numbers of assessments that young people had to undergo with different agencies (thus reducing the time young people spent out of the classroom).

Benefits for **families and the wider community** centred on:

- greater and more appropriate support for their child (that is, receiving the right service at the right time)
- enhanced knowledge and awareness of local services within localities and of where to go for help.

Concluding comments

This research has shown that integrating social care professionals into extended schools represents a significant shift in working practices for both agencies. It involves a period of change across children's services which,

certainly in the early stages, is likely to result in certain challenges, particularly those associated with understanding and adapting to different working practices and cultures.

However, the benefits of this type of service integration are seen as significant, and any challenges encountered were not insurmountable. As such, this provides encouragement for other local authorities or schools considering the development of this type of service. The findings also suggest that the extended school environment can provide an appropriate arena in which to strengthen multi-agency relationships and break down barriers to effective working.

Besides resulting in significant benefits for children, young people and their families, linking social care professionals and extended schools has emerged as a successful way of integrating services, of providing a holistic and effective response to ECM, of shifting entrenched working practices, and of enhancing willingness for joint initiatives.

To conclude, at the early stage of integrated service development during which the research took place, the main finding from the study was that non-qualified staff (for example, family/pupil support workers or care officers) could successfully take on the social care role and remit within the extended school environment. This tended to be largely focused on prevention and early identification of lower-level needs.

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About the study

There were four phases to the research, which took place between September 2006 and August 2007.

- **An audit of local authority practice**

Proformas were sent to heads of children's social services in all 150 local authorities in England to identify examples of effective collaborative working practices between social care professionals and extended schools. Fifty-seven proformas were returned.

- **Telephone interviews**

Short telephone interviews were carried out in 38 of the local authorities that returned a proforma.

- **Case-study work**

Case-study work was carried out in six local authorities to identify good practice. Sixty-six face-to-face interviews were conducted with children and young people in receipt of the services/provision, their parents, strategic- and operational-level personnel, headteachers and social care managers.

- **A literature review**

Key sources of literature were reviewed that focused on social care professionals working with extended schools and children's centres.

Reference

Department for Education and Skills (2004). *Every Child Matters: Next Steps*. London: DfES.

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