



# **Fenland and East Cambridgeshire**

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## Opportunity Area Celebration Booklet





Welcome to the Fenland & East Cambridgeshire Opportunity Area Celebration Booklet. We are delighted to share with you a selection of case studies and feedback which provide an insight into some of the learning and success of the Opportunity Area Programme. We are extremely grateful for all of our partners for diligently working to improve social mobility for children and young people in these communities.

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# Message from the Chair of the Partnership Board



It is almost five years since we first convened stakeholder meetings to address the following key question: *"How can the Opportunity Area initiative transform the life chances of the young people of Fenland and East Cambridgeshire and overcome the barriers which prevent them from acquiring the skills, knowledge and experience they need to access a wide range of career choices and career routes?"*

This celebration booklet incorporates examples of a concerted drive to support pupils, leaders, teaching and non-teaching staff, parents, governors, schools and a wide range of educational settings to close the attainment gap between different groups young people, build upon and share good practice, draw upon research evidence, raise expectations and above all support every child to become a successful learner.

At an early Partnership Board meeting, I shared two quotes. The first is anonymous: *"We are continually faced by great opportunities brilliantly disguised as insoluble problems."* The second is a quote by Richard Branson: *"Opportunity favours the bold."* On reflection, nearly five years on, I believe that they sum up the approach that we and all our partners have taken together. Adopting a place-based approach and promoting a coherent support system where the strategy has been and continues to be owned and shaped by those who are delivering it have been the hallmarks of the programme. We have been bold.

A successful strategy requires involving the right people, being clear on vision and values, setting appropriate strategic priorities to achieve goals and devising a strong implementation plan to enact change. None of this would have been possible without the support, experience and goodwill of so many partners. We have all been in this together and I want to thank everyone for their commitment to the programme and to ensuring that the legacy is preserved and built upon. I am confident that it will be because we have built strong networks not only of expertise but of trust, which will provide a firm platform for becoming a Priority Education Investment Area.

Together we have managed to keep many of our projects going despite the challenges of Covid. Measuring impact takes time. We have learned lessons as we have gone along; key ones being doing less in a more focused way pays off and how important it is to capture the youth voice. Thank you to those young people who are members of the two Youth Advisory Boards and provide such helpful and insightful views alongside influencing other improvements across the area, including the development of a wellbeing journal, supporting food poverty initiatives and more.

So...thank you to the DfE team, the local programme team, the Partnership Board and to everyone we have worked with for their wisdom, high level of professional debate and most importantly for sharing the same vision to provide the very best opportunities for the young people of Fenland and East Cambridgeshire. Without a vision there is no strategy, but we all bought into the same vision early on and that has determined our direction of travel.

I end with the African proverb which I quoted in my message at the beginning of our original delivery plan in January 2018: *"If you want to travel fast, go alone; if you want to travel far, go together."*

Tricia Pritchard

Chair of the Fenland and East Cambridgeshire Partnership Board





## **Project:** Targeted Early Years Setting Improvement Programme.

**Project Description:** A model of targeted quality improvement support to early years settings using self-evaluation and reflective practice, especially around CLL.

**Setting:** Busy Bees, Littleport

### **Impact:**

We found the project aims were well achieved...The most positive feedback we gain is from our children. As their play engagement increased, we were able to extend on children's vocabulary, risk taking, confidence, general body awareness, wellbeing and self-confidence. The most rewarding thing was to observe children being so enthusiastic about their play because of the new equipment, happy faces and positive attitude especially towards trying new things, challenging themselves. We were able to observe a positive impact on children's behaviour. Better engagement in play led to improved interactions between staff and children, we were able to model language as well as provide extended vocabulary to children. Children were able to independently use new equipment as well as build their resilience, this also positively impacted decision making and critical thinking skills. Children were also extending their learning about self-safety through risk taking, building on social skills through turn taking, sharing and working as a part of a team, helping and supporting each other. Older and more capable children were acting as guides for less capable children on a climbing and balancing frame, developing their emotional intelligence and social skills of becoming good citizens in the future. The Music Wall is supporting children's imagination growth as well as language development... Children who we barely hear using their language were making more sounds and using words while playing with the Music Wall. We hope this will help to build their confidence in verbal communication in general.

We have planned for the daily exercises... to support their daily exercise as well as build on their confidence, listening ears, following instructions, keeping safe (especially when crossing roads) as well as developing new vocabulary and social skills when playing as a part of the team. We believe this part is going really well, children are very enthusiastic about tennis and yoga as well as they enjoy making decisions on the destination of our outings...The most successful part of the project we found around building emotional resilience and self-confidence. Staff undergo well-being and mental health training as well as training around autism and special educational needs... Children benefit from being exposed to extended and rich vocabulary and all learning opportunities are enhanced...We found children are more open about the way they feel as well as it is easier for them to talk about their emotions. We are also more capable of supporting children to deal with unwanted emotions.

We are very impressed with some of the outcomes of the project. We are also very surprised with some areas we have discovered about our children and their family backgrounds we found about during the implementation of the grant. In many ways this was eye opening, and we are very thankful for this opportunity as now we gain a better understanding of some of our families and will be able to target their needs effectively. As a small charity run setting our funds are very limited, yet we do provide care for vulnerable families from disadvantaged backgrounds. Additional funds are used towards enhancing and enabling our provision as well as staff training and have already had a positive impact on our children's learning and development, we predict this is going to impact their life long skills. The changes we observe among children are incredible and really are happening rapidly. We are so proud of our children extending their learning. What we found especially useful about the project is that it involved all of us, staff, committee, children, parents, professionals. We can clearly observe changes being made for children as more learning opportunities are provided. Also I strongly believe the training staff members were receiving helped them to look at the families from different perspectives and to understand some of them more. I believe this will help to connect with children, build stronger parent partnership and richer interactions between practitioners and children. One of the biggest barriers we have encounter during the implementation of the project were the backlashes from Covid; we were experiencing challenges around communications with suppliers, delivery delays, missing or faulty parts, staff needed to self-isolate, training not being available or staff not being able to attend due to unforeseen circumstances...Working towards the project, receiving training and resources, observing children being more engaged in play and positive comments from parents also boosted staff's morals and benefited the setting as a whole. From the staff's perspective we found that there is something positive happening despite the Coronavirus pandemic being at its peak. From a child's point of view, new equipment is exciting and supports learning and development on different levels, boosting self-confidence and enriching language use. Improved child-practitioner interactions also positively impact on children's learning and developmental outcomes.





## **Project:** Targeted Early Years Setting Improvement Programme.

**Project Description:** A model of targeted quality improvement support to early years settings using self-evaluation and reflective practice, especially around CLL.

**Setting:** Gorefield

### **Impact:**

Our construction is a firm favourite with the children, one of my children said the best thing is the wheelbarrow and logs, another said she likes the wooden planks as she is building a pirate ship and she is going to make K.... Walk the plank. The children have been busy building with the rubber bricks and have told me they are making a house that Mr Wolf can't Knock down (that was our story time book this week). They went into a lot of detail of how strong it was and worked together to build it. We have large salt bins as storage boxes, one of my younger children said, these are my digger boxes, I will put my digger in there to keep it safe. A walkway was built using the bricks and planks as the floor was 'larva'. (a game on children's tv), there was some singing 'going to build a house' when they were making a house. This is an area that I am observing and adding to as the children use.



The sensory room was finished on Tuesday different children are invited to use it throughout the sessions. One child with autism stood watching the bubble saying 'pretty', after a few minutes he held his hand out to touch the bubble tube. Another of our children who is developing his emotional regulation skills went out there to 'relax', he calmed down and enjoyed pressing the buttons on the light sensory panel to make different patterns, he also has a fascination for numbers and as the buttons speak when you touch them, he spent a long time doing this.

The sensory garden has been the last part of the project, the children's input has made this one of the most enjoyable. The children have taken charge of the garden, when our school dog dug up the flowers, I asked the children if they could think of something that would stop Buddy digging, if not he wasn't allowed in the garden, they decided to bury his balls in an area he could dig, then 'he wouldn't have to leave the garden', they helped plant the different flowers, herbs and insect attracting flowers, the children are in charge of keeping the plants watered using the water butt. The children spent several days digging up worms for the wormery, being careful not to hurt them. The children will use the binoculars to look for birds in the school field and then look at the bug and bird board to see if they can find them on there, they will also find snails and bugs in the garden to match them to the bug board.

Our campfire and cooking pot is always full of mud pies, which the children are happy to share with you, I was told there was 'no spiders in my pie so I could eat it'.

We parent share each week what the children have been doing and have shown an interest in, we have had many comments on how they have all heard about the great worm dig. We have some events such as sports day and a sponsored walk this term, we feel this will give us a great opportunity to show our new sensory room, sensory garden, and construction area.



All the staff have been onboard with this project, in team meetings we have talked about key children and their individual needs, one of the areas we needed to plan for was language and literacy, sharing resources and turn taking. We also looked at how we could get the children to problem solve, to plan what they wanted to do and how to keep persisting even when things didn't go to plan.

Staff feel it has opened conversations between them and the children as well as between the children, including exploring new words and their meanings. The new areas we have developed on this project provides has provided learning opportunities to all our children in our group, inclusive to all ages and levels of development.

### **If you had this opportunity again what would you do differently?**

I feel the last two years have had an impact on both staff and children in our group, our main concern and focus had been on keeping the children and staff in our group as safe as possible, providing continuous care for both key workers and vulnerable children. I feel the project has given the staff a focus and an end result to look forward to. The sensory room, for our children who may feel overwhelmed after spending a long time in lockdown and not mixing in large groups. the sensory garden and the construction area has been a joint project between staff and children, the children were included in the decisions on what equipment we needed and what the area should have in it, e.g., the bug hotel a wormery, hard hats and a cement mixer. I think the project has given us a boost financially and the desire to reassess the provisions we have and the opportunities we provide.



## **Project: Targeted Early Years Setting Improvement Programme.**

**Project Description:** A model of targeted quality improvement support to early years settings using self-evaluation and reflective practice, especially around CLL.

**Setting:** Sally Daycare

### **Impact:**

We have noticed a big change in some of the children at the setting, they are becoming more settled in their play, and we have seen some good communication and imagination skills being developed. We have a child with potential additional needs, he has struggled to interact with his peers. He has shown an interest in the new equipment and role play areas we have been able to encourage him to interact more. We have noticed him going into the areas independently and beginning to play shops, talk on phones and seek out others by taking things to them. The other children are including him in their play more as he is now beginning to understand the concept of role play.

Children are staying longer at activities and are exploring new ways to use the equipment.

Staff have been interacting more with the children, teaching them how to use some of the equipment, asking questions and joining in with the children's play, modelling the play and extending it. There has been lots of new language being used in the areas and staff have been introducing new words and concepts.



We have used the iPads for links with home, being able to send and receive photographs from home. This has given the children the opportunity to show their friends what they have been doing, special events and achievements. Other children have noticed similarities and differences which has sparked new conversations and new friendships in the group. During our recent Ofsted inspection, we used the iPads to talk about home events. The inspector was pleased with how we were using them to bring home life into the setting. She was especially happy to see we had included a nonverbal child and how we had supported him with showing his photographs and communicated with him, for the other children to see and understand what he had been doing at home. This again sparked conversations about similarities and helped to connect children. We have also used the iPads to play educational games on relating to our topics and books we read. We have provided links to these games for the parents and some parents have used these at home and have been pleased that they can use these on their own tablets at home.

We purchased some resources to add to our story sacks which have impacted on children's language. The children have enjoyed these so much and are learning key phrases and beginning to have favourite stories. We are currently using stories as our main topics and have woven these into the provision, which is sparking the children's interest and creativity.

We also purchased some books which children have been taking home to share with parents. Children look forward to choosing a book to take home and will often tell us about the story when returning the book.

### **If you had this opportunity again what would you do differently?**

We have enjoyed taking part in this project and have learnt lots about our setting and the way things work for different children. We have observed the children closely to see how they interact and how their play preferences have influenced the provision. If we had the opportunity to take part again, I would take more time initially to observe the children and see how they are using the current provision. We would look at how we could develop things further and would hopefully implement things faster so the current cohort would benefit immediately. This time we have had a more gradual development and have been hindered by waiting for tradesmen and equipment arriving.





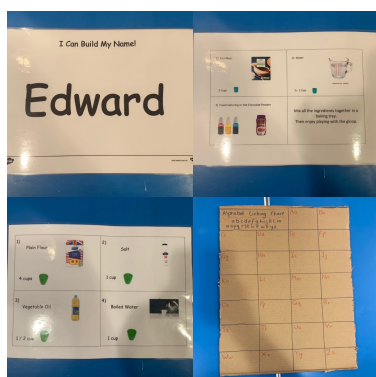
## Project: Raising Early Achievement in Literacy (REAL)

**Project Description:** A range of training opportunities and bursary to support successful implementation in settings.

Contents of boxes provided to each child / family working within the REAL Project. Contents include a variety of marking making resources, junk modelling resources, cutting and sticking resources, a shower curtain messy mat, a story sack pack, a nursery rhyme sack and ingredients and recipes to make play-dough and gloop!

A Close up of the play-dough mats we provided for each child (we included mats for Mummy's, Daddy's and siblings) and the play-dough and gloop recipes.

At each home-visit we left the families with some homework! Our first challenge was to complete this alphabet board, filling it with environmental print.



These are photos of one of our first home-visits with a child. After having a good look through his boxes contents this child wanted to mark make, we used paints and pens and created on this brown paper we saved from our Amazon deliveries, using all the new mark making tools from his box. We also enjoyed some time looking through his story sack pack.

On our second round of visits, we completed an activity alongside the children where we created envelopes for each member of the family which the children then stuck up around the house. We then used scraps of paper to write notes on or draw pictures on to post to a family member. These envelopes then stayed up so the mark making could continue after the home-visit.



This family also shared with us there on-going project we left with them after our first visit, with lots of environmental print found already!

For Parents and Families: The REAL project has had a huge impact on parents and families, through the project we have been able to reach out and share more intimate teaching and learning moments, guiding parents with how they can support their children's learning in the home environment and getting families involved in the children's learning and development. This has had an impact on the parents' confidence in supporting their children's learning and development. The project has also had a huge impact on repairing any strains put on relationships between parents / families and the setting that the pandemic restrictions caused by stopping these more intimate communications between all of us.



## **Project: Targeted School Improvement Programme (one aspect of their programme of support) THRIVE**

**Schools:** The four schools funded through the OA School Improvement Programme to train Thrive® practitioners and/or have the annual subscription fee paid included in this case study are; Orchards CofE Primary School in Wisbech (DEMAT), St. Peter's CofE Junior School in Wisbech (DEMAT), Elm CofE Primary School in Wisbech (DEMAT) and a Primary School in March. These schools have been assigned letters A to D in a randomised order.

- To promote and improve children's positive mental health by training staff member to know how to think and what to do in response to differing and sometimes distressed behaviour.
- To equip members of staff with the knowledge, insights and resources needed to develop the relationships that help their pupils to flourish and learn.

**Project aim:** To reduce exclusions (internal and fixed-term) and absenteeism.

### **Activity:**

Schools have reported that the Thrive® training was fit for purpose. The number of Thrive® practitioners in each school has increased and all schools are undertaking whole-school training to ensure that all staff have an understanding of the Thrive Approach and are able to demonstrate the general principles in their interactions with pupils.

### **Impact:**

School A has no quantitative data. Anecdotally reports that staff are positive and fully engaged. Children have benefitted from THRIVE® and are more settled as school is using the approach to address SEMH needs.

School B has reported that there is an excellent diagnostic element which enables the correct strategies to be put in place for those children in the nurture group. So that the approach can become an integral part of the school, SLT have undertaken four mornings of strategic thinking about whole-school approach. The Head stated that there is good information on behaviour skills but that it is lacking in identifying where a child might be missing 'something'. The school will combine its current nurture unit with a THRIVE® unit. *"Children with high needs are being impacted positively by participating in THRIVE®. There are fewer fixed-term and internal exclusions and reflections. We need to now use the approach for all other children in the school (less high need) as part of PSHE."*

School C has two fully qualified THRIVE® practitioners and are now accredited as a school. The Thrive Approach has really helped. Example given of pupil T, who was a school refuser only accessing 1 hour a day. Pupil T had 1:1 THRIVE® session 1.5 hours every morning, which set him up for the school day and enabled him to access classroom. He had English in a THRIVE® environment to help him write. Pupil T is now accessing the classroom daily and is in school full time. Overall, in conjunction with Steps and Mind Up, persistent absence reduced from 45 children to 32 children in a 5-month period. Attendance was at 93.88% before the three interventions were introduced and rose to 96.47% in 2019-20 (excluding COVID isolation cases), which is the highest experienced by the school.

### **Impact:**

School D reports that all staff, including new starters, have been trained in the Thrive Approach, which has had a significant impact on the learning of those pupils participating in the programme. Results from autumn term 2020 (comparing those who have had 1:1 THRIVE® and those that haven't) show that those who have had THRIVE® in Years 5 and 6 have made more progress. There is less of a difference in Year 3 and 4, but The Head attributes this to the fact that those children have had less exposure to the programme. The SEMH progress is visible in terms of moving up the THRIVE® programme and better behaviour. THRIVE® has supported the children to be ready to learn.

### **Please provide a summary of your views on this project**

Anecdotally, THRIVE® has benefited staff who now understand how to therapeutically approach children with SEMH needs in school. It has therefore significantly improved the lives of those pupils who have participated in the programme, in terms of their engagement and therefore outcomes. For those schools who have collected data, the evidence is strong that THRIVE® positively impacts attendance and academic achievement. School C also reported through pupil voice that they feel much calmer and know how to calm themselves down since therapeutic strategies have been in place.

### **What worked best and why?**

Systematic, whole-school embedding of the Thrive Approach alongside targeted 1:1 intervention of those pupils most in need.





**Project:** Targeted School Improvement Programme (one aspect of their programme of support)

**School:** Thomas Clarkson

**Project aim:** Vocabulary expansion intervention programme — embedding Bedrock Vocabulary and Accelerated Reader.

**Activity:**

Students set Bedrock Vocabulary for homework via English departments — this uses a pre-quiz to set appropriately challenging vocabulary tasks. Accelerated Reader is delivered through school's library service and English lessons, used to monitor and improve reading ages. Covid has changed the way we deliver literacy lessons — students have had to access these programmes at home with a greater focus on independent work. Covid has also prevented students accessing library lessons, which has impacted on reading ages. We also trained staff on writing well to speak well, but this needs further implementation. We also had a reading budding system for our weakest readers, but again this was not possible due to Covid.

**Impact:**

Covid caused lack of access to reading books — this has seen significant decrease in number of students who have a reading age matching their chronological age. Currently, only 3rd of each KS3 year group can read according to their chronological age. However, for the final term of 2020-21 we have reintroduced reading with a trolley service and have dedicated one English lesson a week to independent reading.

To counteract lack of access to library books, we purchased a class reader for each tutor group and trained tutors on reciprocal reading strategies.

**Please provide a summary of your views on this project:**

Mix of strategies is crucial. For significant impact, we needed a mix of online and face-to-face intervention programmes, including a mix of independent and supported vocabulary / reading work.

**What worked best and why?**

Online programmes as they automatically tailor to the child's ability with a suitable level of challenge for progress. They also gave us immediate data that we could use to inform other intervention strategies.





## **Project: Targeted School Improvement Programme (one aspect of their programme of support) Nussy**

**School:** St Peters Junior School

### **Project aim:**

We wanted to use Nussy to do some catch up support that could be delivered via Chromebooks with the children working through the programme independently, whilst also receiving supported phonics programmes from staff — at this point the staff were trained in RWI so this is what was used.

The school hadn't used technology in this way before and the laptops were in a state of disrepair. One or two TAs had used Nussy before and were keen advocates, especially as it was something engaging for children who weren't really keen on learning and weren't supported much at home.

### **Activity:**

We purchased some new Chromebook's and subscribed to Nussy. All the children did baseline testing on the programme which then automatically placed them on the programme at the appropriate lesson. We focused on children whose reading was lowest and those who hadn't passed phonics at KS1, for the case study we followed children in Y4, who are now in Y6.

What we have seen is that the children in Y6 who have been doing Nussy for 18 months have made quantifiable progress when tested both in Nussy and using the DIBELS test. All 10 of the children who have been specifically followed for this case study made progress, one up to 49% increase from their Nussy baseline assessment, the lowest being 5% (we know this child didn't engage in online learning during any of the lockdowns). All the children have made expected or above expected progress in the DIBELS tests.

The effect of the COVID lockdowns is that the children were not consistently completing the 15 minutes sessions 4 - 5 times a week so we have not seen the impact we were predicting that previous case studies of using Nussy have shown. One of the key factors of implementing it is the regularity of use.

The learners enjoyed it, however, we do believe the lack of regularity and as a result, slowness of progress, has stunted their enjoyment somewhat. The short, sharpness of the programme hasn't happened as it should have.

### **Please provide a summary of your views on this project**

The children who we have case studied have not had the same phonics teaching that children further down the school have had, who we hope will benefit from that and not need the technological intervention. However, as a short sharp intervention I believe it still has a positive impact.

### **What worked best and why?**

When we have been in school and directing children to get online, the progress has been more rapid. This is because we have been able to timetable their intervention time.





## **Project: Targeted School Improvement Programme (one aspect of their programme of support)**

**School:** The Weatheralls

### **Activity:**

With a strong management team in place, the school required further support to embed some of the earlier school improvement strategies to impact on the quality of teaching and learning as well as routes to develop the next layer of leadership.

The funding that came enabled the school to achieve the following:

- Train all staff consistently in the school's chosen approach to phonics
- Purchase resources specific to the development of phonics
- Access bespoke training to further embed the Talk 4 Writing model across school, including training new staff and purchasing improved reading material to ensure high quality texts were used in the delivery of writing lessons
- Take part in a high quality maths programme with the Maths Hub, that in turn has developed the leadership skills of our middle leaders

### **Impact:**

Phonics Project: In 2019 66% of children in Year 1 passed the phonics screening check at the end of the summer term, this was an improvement on the 2018 data (59%). In June 2020 children in Year 1 didn't take the national phonics screening test due to COVID but when the cohort were screened in autumn term of Year 2 the cohort achieved a pass rate of 73%.

This year Pre-lockdown (January-March) the Year 1 phonics data was continuing to show the upward trend of attainment. The autumn phonics practice screening highlighting that 66% of the Year 1 cohort were on track for passing with another 15% of children expected to pass following targeted support. This would have taken our pass rate in 2021 to 81% (1% off the national average in 2019).

Talk for Writing EYFS: The practitioner reported that 'After a few sessions we were no longer needing to prompt the children with the story telling language as they were already confident to use it within the group, which was so lovely to see'. This will continue to help the children in our nursery build up that bank of known stories and storytelling vocabulary, as they continue into Reception and beyond.

Early Talk Boost: This programme has had a direct impact on our Communication and Language Results at the end of Reception. In 2020 although COVID meant we didn't submit our data nationally, in house data shows that 67.6% of the cohort reached the EYFS standard in communication and language which was above our GLD score of 55.4%. This training also enabled us to gain a level of expertise, which in turn supported the other primary school in the Trust who were also using the programme. This has supported a more positive view of the Weatheralls staff and the reputation of the school as a whole.

### **Mental Health Awareness:**

The legacy has been the commitment to therapeutic approaches and early intervention. Intervention data shows impact through the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires. However, the school feel that this early work on mental health enabled them better support families and staff through the pandemic. We were able to identify, pinpoint support required and evaluate successfully.

### **Please provide a summary of your views on this project:**

In terms of school improvement over a four-year period, the Opportunity Area support had significant impact because the timing was right for The Weatheralls and the support well matched to the needs of the school.

In delivery of the Opportunity Area School Improvement Support projects, lessons learned were that you need:

- The right leader to drive the project and be an advocate for improvement.
- Monitoring and accountability both of the project leader and colleagues as they implement changes to their practice and pupils respond.
- The implementation of improvement work needs to be staged. There is a risk of overload if too many CPD initiatives land in one term. Teachers need time to embed change into their planning and practice. Leaders need to manage this.
- Good physical resources well-used are important, particularly in an under resourced school with disadvantaged pupils.
- Communication with parents and engagement where practicable strengthens the success of any initiative, supporting progress.



## Pinpoint's Tii Hubs

These are information, signposting to services and peer support session by parent carers for parent carers funding by the Opportunities Area. The sessions are informal online drop in's which offer a safe space to share concerns and to be helped towards the right service first time. Experienced parent carer staff from the Forum are there to facilitate and support. It's a place where parent carers find the reassurance that they are not on their own — for many it's a place to unburden and share their experience without feeling judged.

We also have a programme for parent carers to become trained Pinpoint Champions helping people towards services where they are in their own communities — on the playground, down the shops, at the park.



The OA kindly fund Pinpoint to provide a wide-ranging workshop offer — since the Pandemic these are all offered online. Parent Carers can drop in from wherever they are — at home on their sofa, parked in the car or from work. This has enabled people to join us without the need to travel or find childcare. Working parents tell us it's great as many can get permission from employers to join a session in their lunch time or in a work break. And a virtual offer means you can see others but its also ok to join with the camera off and just listen — for some this is the first step towards feeling comfortable as many parent carers are initially reticent to share their personal stories until they feel comfortable and safe to do so.

The Forum makes use of information they hear to help improve services provided for SEND children and to better reflect the needs and aspirations of families. The feedback parent carers agree to share feeds into education health and social care policy development and commissioning

so that those making decision have a wide range of intelligence and views at their disposal when making decisions. Feedback is anonymous and those participating are aware that this is helping the Forum to help more children and young people, as well as their parent carers.

But don't take our word for it! On the next page is what some of our parent carers wanted to tell you about Tii Hubs and our wider offer.





## Pinpoint's Tii Hubs - Feedback

*"Pinpoint has been there when I have needed someone that will also understand with no judgement. Pinpoint has made me feel I can push for something that is needed and the confidence to do so. Help, advice, and support. Groups are always welcoming, friendly and helpful."*

Rachel

*"I was thrilled to come across Pinpoint last year. Finally, someone listened to me, and my concerns regarding my son, and understood exactly where I was coming from with what I was saying! I had been battling with professionals for a year until I found Pinpoint. Up until that point thought I was alone in the journey, but soon come to realise I wasn't alone at all, and lots of these lovely ladies were there for me also! I don't know where I'd be at this point if I hadn't found Pinpoint. Great advice at the TII hub, lovely ladies who run the TII hub, and everyone else who joins too! Pinpoint is amazing, from the TII hub to the workshops, giving us a great understanding of everything we need to know! I can't thank everyone at Pinpoint enough!"*

Siobhan

*"Pinpoint has been very important to me. The team is fabulous and very helpful. I was in a very tough situation with my child in 2020-21 — my child sadly had to go into a residential setting. Pinpoint guided me and supported me in a time I needed it. They offer lots of useful workshops and their parent Tii hubs are amazing — a place where you can shed a tear, laugh, and know you're not judged. Every parent has been where you are or in a similar situation. They do a parent quiz which provides a smile on all parents faces. Pinpoint is very important and is needed for SEN families."*

Kelly

*"I first heard about Pinpoint from my school's family worker. She told me that they had a guest speaker who was giving a talk on dyslexia, which was a very insightful talk! However, what my family worker didn't tell me was, the actual Pinpoint team are an amazing group of parents and carers!"*

*From the first parent hub session I attended I felt welcome and supported!! Everyone is so helpful in giving advice to one another, making sure everyone knows they aren't alone in their struggles and that they are fighting a good fight for their children!*

*As parents and carers when we are fighting so hard to get the help and support our children need, it can be very overwhelming at times-you question yourself, can I do more, should I have noticed that earlier, am I overreacting? So, to have a group of people that understand what you are going through is such a necessity!*

*After one session I was feeling a bit overwhelmed from a stressful week and Linda made a point as she always does to tell us all to look after ourselves, she told us to "do something for yourself". Feeling fed up, I decided to do just that. I made myself a tea and put a film on and for an hour and a half while the film was on, I didn't look at my phone once. I took that time to just relax and watch the film and zone out from everything that was troubling me!*

*I wish I had found out about Pinpoint earlier and due to the great support, I have received from Pinpoint I want to help spread their name so other parents and carers can benefit from this amazing community!"*

Helen

*"I'm am a fairly recent member of Pinpoint and wish that I had found it years ago. From the first meeting all the other members were so friendly and welcoming. I now don't feel like I'm on my own. Everyone has a different situation with their children and family but are so willing to help each other. The workshops are so informative and the speakers so inspiring, I have pages of notes and tips I have gained from them. I am going to become a Pinpoint Champion to help try to spread the word to other families that haven't heard of the organisation and feel like they need help and support."*

Mary





## **Project: Steps**

**Project Description:** Implementation of Steps across a Secondary School, Steps is a therapeutic approach to behaviour.

**Date written:** December 2020

### **Activity:**

The school has high expectations for all students to succeed to the best of their abilities, regardless of their learning barriers and challenges. The precursor to adopting the Steps approach, was a period of very challenging behaviour in 2017/2018, particularly with a core group of children who were clearly unable to cope with the demands of day to day school life. There were some centralised behaviour systems, but faculties were largely responsible for their own behaviour systems in lessons. This led to inconsistency from faculty to faculty, and from classroom to classroom. There were high numbers of serious behaviour incidents leading to internal isolations and external exclusions. These sanctions were purely punitive, and not geared towards understanding nor improving the behaviour displayed. In 2017/2018 there were 85 exclusions, which equated to 288 classroom sessions.

It was clear that the school needed to review its understanding of behaviour and make changes to accommodate the changing needs of the school cohort.

### **Implementation and Impact:**

Rather than launching straight into delivering training to the whole school body, the Deputy and Assistant Principal worked with the senior leadership team and the governors initially, changing the culture and understanding of behaviour. It was essential to change the culture of the school as part of the implementation cycle of the Steps approach.

Pastoral staff then received additional training around attachment and trauma and mental health. This was done, without any sense of changing the behaviour system at this stage. This training was so well received that it was then delivered to the whole staff body on the first training day of the new academic year.

From this point on, changes were gradually made to the behaviour system, with staff receiving the Steps training, but broken down into some separate training sessions. Anxiety mapping and the Roots and Fruits work was embedded into the pastoral, and behavioural systems and informed learning plans and risk reduction plans for a few key students. The behaviour system was changed to follow a model of restorative justice and natural consequences.

As part of the later OA offer, the school received a day of Steps training, this was attended by all of the behaviour team, the pastoral team and the Inclusion team. This was a valuable refresher, and it was powerful to have an external trainer deliver the programme. The behaviour policy has been rewritten to reflect the therapeutic approach to behaviour, and the understanding of behaviour underpins the school's commitment to authentic care.

The exclusion figures since implementing the Steps approach reflect its impact:

- 2017/2018: 85 exclusions
- 2018/2019: 27 exclusions
- 2019/2020: 15 exclusions

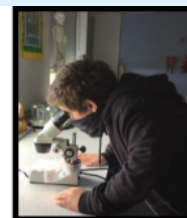
The school continues to develop its behaviour policy and its approach to understanding behaviour, with the majority of the work now being able to focus on preventative and early intervention, rather than fire fighting.

### **Additional Feedback:**

For the school, it was important to take time to introduce such a mind-shift in the staff. It didn't happen overnight, and there was some resistance and fear around it initially. There are elements that haven't worked so well, such as the writing of such in depth risk management plans. Staff found them unwieldy, and so simpler formats are used. The school has kept their 'isolation' room, but it has been relaunched as a reflection room. If students spend time in there — which is rarely — then the work is focused purely around reflecting on what they have done, and researching the impact and consequences of their actions. Students do not spend time in there working on something unrelated.



## Project: Virtual Experience of the Workplace (Special Schools)



**Project Description:** Four cornerstone employers and four special school careers leaders came together to deliver a SEND Virtual Week. Resourced by the employers, the learning objectives each day included interactive activities, guest speakers, career pathways, employability skills and lots of opportunities for questions and answers.

- The week focused on developing experience of the workplace based on the 10 STEM Learning employability skills.
- The students worked with a different employer each day and then on the Friday each school produced a presentation for the cornerstone employers and the other schools. The four local employers were Cambridge Commodities, Morgan Sindall Construction, G'S Fresh and Anglian Water. The students produced a presentation that described what was most memorable, what was the worst thing, what made them laugh and the things they had learnt to help them in the world of work.

Day one involved presentations from staff from Cambridge Commodities that explained what the company did and the various jobs that are available. The group then had several different powders from Cambridge Commodities to mix to produce different drinks.

Day two was spent with Morgan Sindall Construction. The day involved presentations from staff as well as virtual tours around some construction sites. The group were then given the task of building a chair from balloons and cello tape. The challenge was which group could build the chair lasted the longest with someone sitting on it.

Day three was spent with G'S Fresh. After the initial presentations from G'S staff the group completed a task where they had to think of all the jobs that they could list from the videos they had watched and from their previous knowledge. They then planted a lettuce seed.

Day four was spent with Anglian Water. The students were shown the process that our water from are drains goes through to be cleaned. They are listened to some interesting stories about unusual items that have been found in the drains. The students then had the opportunity to do some investigations on things that go down the toilet, toilet paper and different wipes.

*"We are extremely grateful to the CPCA and Cornerstone Employers for organising an engaging week of virtual work experience for our students at Highfield Ely and Highfield Littleport Academies. It has been challenging to find different ways for our students to access real experiences of the workplace over the last 15 months but, by bringing the world of work into the classrooms over their computer screens, our students were able to interact with employers from their own local communities. The presentations and activities were fun and engaging and focussed on essential skills used in everyday life. All of our students loved getting involved and getting their hands dirty, making their own drinks, planting seeds, building balloon chairs and carrying out investigations on baby wipes! They have definitely been inspired to keep working hard and to find out about different jobs on offer to them when they leave school or college."*

Simon Bainbridge-Executive Headteacher of Highfield Ely & Highfield Littleport

# Case Studies

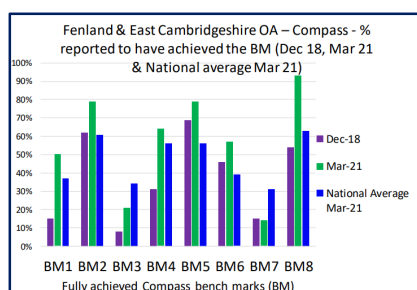


**Project:** A range of projects delivered in partnership with the Combined Authority, Careers Enterprise Company, Form the Future and Growth Works with an aim to raise aspirations & increase access for young people to a wide range of careers choices & post 16 routes across Fenland and East Cambridgeshire Opportunity Area.

**Business Context:** Although both areas are primarily rural, only 25 companies employ more than 250 people, the area is very rich in small & small to medium size businesses, engineering, agriculture, advanced manufacturing, professional services, who have supported and continue to support many careers activities within the schools.

**Support has led to:**

## DATA PERFORMANCE



- **Compass** - Achieve 6 out of 8 benchmarks against the national average
- **Employer Encounters** – 3yr Target was 49,936
- Funded employer encounters = 49,447
- Non Funded employer encounters = 67,186
- Total to date 115,633
- 234%
- **Cornerstone Employers** – 6
- **Enterprise Advisers** – 100%

**Level 6 & Level 7 Careers Leaders Qualifications:** 50% of the schools in our area undertook L6/L7 the Careers Leaders qualification with a further 14% undertaking the L4 Diploma.

*“The OA funding over the 4 years has been pivotal to the success of the careers programme at SVC, in both its delivery and its development. As a qualified Careers Leader (and Adviser), I now have the tools, knowledge and confidence to continually strive to move the programme forwards to provide first class careers guidance and education to all students.”*

Nick Oakhill, Soham Village College

*“Undertaking the Level 6 Careers Leaders qualification together with the Level 6 Personal Guidance and Quality in Careers Award, really cemented what was happening in SEND. It gave me the ability to network with other careers leaders, build on my knowledge and reinforce what I had been doing. This led to me being able to support other SEND provisions, sharing my best practice with newly appointed careers leaders across the Opportunity Area.”*

Emma Bird, Meadowgate Academy

## STEM Learning Enthuse Partnerships

*“The STEM funding has provided more opportunities for students to explore STEM careers and visits to Universities with a STEM focus. It has funded high quality bespoke CPD for the cluster and that offered by STEM Learning. It has provided additional enrichment opportunities such as entrance to the First Lego League competition and a STEM Festival. This project has strengthened links with other local secondary schools involved too.”*

Neale Wade Academy

Additionally, a successful partnership has been developed with Cornerstone Employers (Anglian Water, Cambridge Commodities, G's Fresh, KPMG, Morgan Sindall Construction & Stainless Metalcraft) and an Enterprise Adviser Network along with the Virtual Experience of the Workplace for Special Schools pilot (case study below) and development of virtual wallets also forms part of this programme of work.

**Legacy:** Careers leaders and employers feel our legacy is the collaborative working and networks both physical and virtual which have developed over the last four years and we have been successful in our application for a 30 place Careers Hub for 2021/22.

*“The Opportunity Area was a catalyst for bringing together schools, employers & other stakeholders to improve the opportunities and outcomes for all young people.”*

Alvina Morey, Senior Enterprise Co-ordinator





## CLL Pathway – session modules

The development of a modular pathway with four CPD sessions that offers practitioners the choice of completing CACHE Level 3 Award in Speech, Language and Communication.

*"Wow just wow the best course I had done this year. Lots of brilliant ideas and knowledge sharing. Ben was able to draw me in and to really understand why I do things. Diana shared so much information and I loved that she caused me to question my practice and how I can move forward for all the children. It was a lot of information and a long session but well worth it."*

Early Years Practitioner

## Targeted settings Yr 4

A model of targeted quality improvement support to early years settings using self-evaluation and reflective practice, especially around CLL.

*"The funding has allowed us to have the knowledge and resources to support the children to the best of our ability and to help support the children to reach their own individual potential and provide a happy nurturing environment for them."*

Carole Tuck, Manager, Witchford Rackham Preschool

*"I just wanted to thank you for giving us the great opportunity around the project. As a Playgroup (children and staff) we have enjoyed the experience, and also I must not forget the parents and the general public that have given the most amazing feedback."*

Angie Clark, Manager, Soham Preschool

## Five to Thrive

Five to Thrive is a unique approach taking key messages from neuroscience for early intervention and lifelong learning. The Project piloted a new training delivery model with Webinars, E-Learning Modules and Practice sessions.

*"The Thrive to Five training brought everything together for me to enable me to understand what a huge impact those 5 important fundamentals really are in a child's life."*

*The knowledge of brain development gained during the course was a huge insight into exactly how important communication and interaction is for babies.*

*One of the best courses I have done in my long career in childcare and one every practitioner should do."*

Wendy Hopkin, Manager, Murrow Preschool

*"I have some families with toddlers and new babies. You can understand at times life is very stressful. The course has given me information to explain to them in a clear way as to why their babies and child sometime act the way they do."*

Childminder, East Cambridgeshire





## Five to Thrive

*"Five to Thrive training has definitely impacted policy and procedure around behaviour and well-being. In general the training makes us and keeps us mindful of how we support children, staff and families through a variety of situations such as family break downs, bereavement, mental health, SEND and trauma relating too safeguarding."*

*"I use the one page profile for new starters. It engages parents with various aspects of their child's development that they may not otherwise share, this is a new concept for me as a practitioner and my first families to introduce this to will be new children starting in September 2022."*

*"It has given staff the knowledge of understanding attachment and how it affects children's emotional state, behaviour as well as mental health and well-being. Staff are ensuring all children's basic needs are met so that they can focus and engage in learning. Staff have also used examples from Five to thrive in parents meetings to support parents with understanding how children's mental and physical health have an impact on their development."*

Early years practitioners

*"We have noticed a significant difference in the length of time our new children — especially babies, are taking to settle in. Using some of the strategies learnt from the training has helped us support the process, parents and children. Our new baby room reminder motto is 'calm parent = calm children'."*

*We have also welcome four new children at various stages of social care support — fostered, SGO and adopted. We have been able to transfer some of the strategies and understanding of brain development to relate to what the children are experiencing and try to identify best ways to support them."*

Early years practitioners

## EY Steps

**This project developed an accessible training delivery model of the Early Years Steps, therapeutic approach to behaviour with webinars and EY Steps Tutor support application of approach in the settings.**

*"It's been really good to identify how staff are all saying slightly different things to the children and how this might be confusing for them. It feels like we're changing the narrative about behaviour into a positive. It's definitely making a difference."*

Preschool, Cambridgeshire





## OA Webinar Series

**An online resource with recorded and live CPD sessions commissioned by the OA**

*"I now am more confident with planning meetings. Having an increased awareness of how to manage my own impact on others as a leader."*

*FEC School Leader after accessing live coaching sessions.*

*"I love the resources on Knowledge Hub and recommend them to all our ECT's."*

Anonymous LA Rep

*"I will be better equipped to choose the correct management style. This will help with the management of staff."*

Senior Leader Fenland School after Coaching Webinar

*"Every session with Karin is an opportunity to reflect on my leadership. However, the opportunity to do this as a leadership team has been invaluable. We have had the chance to reflect on each other's strengths and how we can use these to form an even stronger SLT."*

Fenland School Headteacher



*"After Karin's session on the 6 leadership styles, it has helped me to understand which styles are effective and ineffective in leadership. I was able to reflect on which styles I personally am more drawn to within my own practise as well as how I can incorporate a more authoritative style into my leadership of my phase. It was also a good opportunity to discuss this within our leadership team and to explore how we as a whole can complement each other to move the school forward."*

Fenland SLT





This targeted programme of support focuses on accelerating and developing opportunities to re-engage disadvantaged children with learning through bespoke, school-led activities. Schools will have autonomy over the use of this funding and support alongside the OA Ready to Learn Lead with a focus on identifying barriers (due to the pandemic) and a focus on engagement, enrichment and wellbeing.

*"They both said how positive and 'can do' your attitude was with RTL and how it really helped to talk ideas through to clarify their planned purpose and ensure it was what they thought they needed so to speak!"*

Regional Director, Multi-Academy Trust of several 'Ready to Learn' schools.

*"It was a fantastic opportunity for X seeing her happy and relaxed during the play was an amazing experience for me as a mum of a child who has ASD and is usually afraid of going to the theatre. X was buzzing for days after that panto trip."*

Kate Kendal, HeadTeacher, Peckover Primary



*"My two said that they loved it, because it was X first trip with school and first trip after covid. X said it was really nice to get out of school with her friends. I watched X face for some of the panto and he was sat on the edge of his seat beaming the whole time."*

Parent

*"Qualitative data from student voice, student and parent surveys and teacher observations show that the enrichment opportunities are being thoroughly enjoyed by children. Engagement has been incredibly high. Staff and pupils report this has been very successful."*

Manea PP Lead Fenland School

*"As a parent, I would say it's been greatly beneficial to my children to have the experience of attending such an amazing performance with their class friends and as a whole school. It's something they still talk about now which is so lovely to hear."*

Parent

*"My two said that they loved it, because it was Child's Name first trip with school and first trip after covid. Child's name said it was really nice to get out of school with her friends. I watched Ellis' face for some of the panto and he was sat on the edge of his seat beaming the whole time."*

Parent

*"X had a great time! He said he loved it all, he still brings it up randomly now."*

Parent

*"The extra funding and focus on 'Reading for Pleasure' led to our English Lead being asked to speak about her improvements at the national conference."*

Fenland Headteacher

*"Now all have had access to watching a professional show and enriched our reading canon for LKS2. 100% children reported enjoying the performance. Approx 1/3 had seen a performance at a theatre previously now 100%."*

St Peters School, Headteacher

# Virtual Experience of the Workplace



*"Water is a precious resource, and we want to help nurture and inspire the next generation of employees or customers by giving students a peek behind the scenes we can get them thinking about their future careers and how they can help us to protect the environment. We had a fantastic day and were very impressed with all the different ideas the students suggest to stop people flushing wipes — there were songs, raps, drama, product designs and campaign poster. As well as great listening, and research, we saw great teamwork and collaboration."*

Marcia Davies, Community Education Manager, Anglian Water

*"G's were proud to be part of such a great initiative taking the workplace to the school environment with virtual work experience. We took time to make sure our day was as interactive, fun and educational as possible, the enthusiasm from the students and teachers really made the event so enjoyable to be part of. It was lovely to see how students had related their learnings to the 10 key employability skills and many seemed to have a genuine interest in the career opportunities in a business like ours."*

Charlotte Downing, Lead Resourcing & Talent Manager, G's Fresh

*"We are really pleased with how our SEND Virtual Experience of the Workplace day with the students went. Giving back to the local community is really important to us and we are really happy that we could take part in this, along with other businesses from the area. We are so glad the students enjoyed it and were able to take something away from the day."*

Marie Lee, Head of Human Resources, Cambridge Commodities

*"Helen Clements, Morgan Sindall Construction's Social Value Manager, said: "The team at Morgan Sindall Construction were delighted to take part in the Virtual Work Experience (VWEx) week for SEND/SEM schools in the East Cambs/Fens opportunity area. We were really proud to support this important programme by providing our insights and experiences in order to showcase the many career opportunities that exist within the construction industry."*

*During the week, students from across the region's four schools demonstrated some great skills and really engaged in every activity. The presentations they gave on the Friday really demonstrated how much they had learnt during the course of the programme from all four of the participating employers. We were particularly touched to hear that young people that may normally struggle to engage were going home and talking about the week to their parents."*

Helen Clements, Social Value Manager, Morgan Sindall Construction

*"The Key Stage 4 students have been lucky to have had the opportunity to take part with three other special schools in four days of virtual work experience. The students worked with a different employer each day and then on the Friday each school producing a presentation for the cornerstone employers and the other schools. The four local employers were Cambridge Commodities, Morgan Sindall Construction, G'S Fresh and Anglian Water. The students produced a presentation that described what was most memorable, what was the worst thing, what made them laugh and the things they had learnt to help them in the world of work. Careers Leader at The Harbour School Ms P. Knibbs said that this was an amazing experience, students were going home and talking to their parents about what they had been doing and learnt."*

Paula Knibbs, Head of KS4, The Harbour School, Wilburton



**Is a project where parents and carers lead the way! They decide the activities that benefit their family and community, such as guidance on further and higher education, tailored visits to universities, training on homework support, student finance or lifelong learning. Working together to create change for your children in Fenland.**

*"My son was proud to do a presentation, lovely staff what took us, found out a lot about uni fees, help and other resources... make choice going so much easier, being from Traveller community it was nice to see everyone make us welcome and fit in and not feel so excluded from stuff or that my child/children would miss out... thank you Parent Power."*

Parent

*"We've really enjoyed the trip today. It's helped give us an insight to what uni is all about. We feel inspired and reassured that it's the right pathway. It's motivated my son to work even harder at school to achieve this as a goal. Our guide Megan was very informative and took the fear of uni away."*

Parent

*"Very inspirational for my choices I'll make later on. And it's inspired me to think about my choices in more depth so that I can be successful in what I'd like to do later on."*

Young person, Fenland

*"None of our family have been to university. So basically university's never really entered my head because it doesn't 'exist' in my world. So being invited to be a part of Parent Power Fenland has opened up this subject area and now I feel I have a 'partner' in which to confidently explore this with support. I am not very proactive and usually need to be led so this has been an invaluable experience for us more than most, I would say, incoming from such an isolated position. I feel there is a path for us to follow now and we have been included in this 'conversation' now."*

Parent

*"As parents, we have a duty to provide the best support to our children that we can. Not all children want to go to university, and that's fine, but for those that do, we need to be able to provide them with the tools and information to make that happen. I was delighted to hear that the University of Cambridge is working towards being more inclusive and diverse, and am grateful for the extra support and guidance we are being given."*

Parent





## SENDIASS

Offering impartial and confidential information, advice and support to parents/carers, young people and children with special educational needs (SEN) or a disability or who have concerns they may have special educational needs. The project increased levels of support to Fenland and East Cambs.

*"Donna had, had impartial advice and are very knowledgeable about the law and what should be being done, they have given me the confidence and support to Pursue What was right for my son. Without their help I wouldn't be where I am."*

Parent/Carer Fenland

*"It is very difficult for parents to understand the processes and procedures for seeking help for their child. . . The support that it provides helps parents when they are terribly concerned for their children and can feel very emotional. Often with on one else to turn to for guidance as relationships may have broken down with school. I felt very supported and was given some practical and very useful advice. This helped me emotionally cope with what next and how to go about it. It ultimate meant my son was given the best chance for his next steps. Not all parents are able to undertake what is needed alone and need this guidance, at a time when they are worried for their child. The service helps the family stand a fair chance for equal access to educational support. A vital service."*

Parent/Carer Fenland

*"The service that you provide is amazing and I wouldn't of been able to get where I am without this service."*

Parent/Carer Fenland

## Mental Health Forums

Were offered as part of the inclusion offer and provided a forum for mental health leads/champions to learn about local services, evidence based interventions and resources.

*"I attended the recent forum and found it invaluable in getting me to see that we are doing well, but so much more is needed and as the Head I can drive things forward with the support of the champions."*

Head teacher/MHC East Cambs





## Steps

**Cambridgeshire Steps is a therapeutic and trauma-informed approach to behaviour management for all educational settings, grounded in evidence-based research. Schools and settings were offered training in the form of train the trainer and support with whole school training delivery and embedding.**

*“Step On training has made staff more knowledgeable about the communication behind children's behaviour, which has changed the way staff respond to children. This has strengthened relationships and reduced conflict. We have been able to support a child who was at risk of exclusion to stay in school through using the Steps approach.”*

Headteacher, Primary School, Wisbech

*“Training in Steps has supported staff to have a deeper understanding of therapeutic approaches to managing behaviour and within a whole school approach. The tools within Steps such as anxiety mapping has supported staff to meet the needs of children more effectively.”*

Headteacher, Primary School, East Cambs

*“We have rewritten our behaviour policy to reflect the therapeutic approach to behaviour, and the understanding of behaviour underpins the school's commitment to authentic care.. We continue to develop our behaviour policy and approach to understanding behaviour, with the majority of the work now being able to focus on preventative and early intervention, rather than fire-fighting.”*

Secondary School, East Cambs

## SEND Review

**SEND Review is a tool to develop professional dialogue between school leaders (and on occasion LA reviewers) about the effectiveness of SEND provision in school — for self-assessment, peer review and to develop school led improvement conversations leading to better outcomes for children and young people with SEND. The OA provided fully funded training led by Mary Abeyasekera to support Heads, SENDCOs and Governors to complete the SEND Review documents in addition to funding to respond to areas for development identified throughout the process.**

*“I would like to take this opportunity to thank you (the OA) and Mary for delivering some incredibly thought-provoking and inspiring training last week, it certainly gave us pause for thought and dig dip into the strengths of our school, as well as, the areas for improvement.”*

Inclusion Lead/Class teacher, Fenland

*“Thank you very much for the conference last Thursday, which I found really helpful in reflecting on our practice at school. I wanted to capitalise on the learning straightaway and write my action plan whilst everything was fresh in my mind.”*

SENDCO , East Cambs

### The SEND Review process

*“Significant impact. It has enabled clear identification of what MUST happen next. It is an excellent process enabling real honesty about what we have that is good and what is just not yet there.”*

A respondent to the SEND Review questionnaire FEC

*“It's been a really useful process, and come at a good time as it has helped us to consider beyond the current, very different, circumstances in which we all find ourselves.”*

Primary SENCO FEC

# General OA Feedback



In 2020, we asked Headteachers and School Leaders 'What impact has the OA had on your school?'  
This was some of the feedback...

*"The funding from the OA programme has supported the development of the school and helped to raise standards across the school as well as supported the wellbeing of all of the children."*

*"Ability to support school improvement priorities with practical recourses (e.g., Read Write Inc) books, training for staff, opportunity to buy otherwise unaffordable resources."*

*"Given us the opportunity to buy resources to support the development of our curriculum. Developed the knowledge of all of our staff."*

*"Additional SENCO, STEPS Training, RWI, SEND Review, NPQEL, NPQML - combined impact has helped X to be in a position where it expects to be judged as Good by Ofsted next academic year."*

*"I can only speak for last year but a huge impact on improving communication as a target area in the school, through T4W support and curriculum support through resourcing nearly all the foundation subjects."*

*"I can only speak for last year but a huge impact on improving communication as a target area in the school, through Phonics CPD and resourcing and T4W support. Huge amount of training and resourcing into the EYFS setting."*

*"The impact of the projects the school was involved in are still having an impact — many of our requests below are about maintaining the work that was carried out through them such as applying the skills from the vocabulary project to Mrs Wordsmith through the reading of quality books."*

*"We have appreciated the DFE focussing on this area for support. As a head, I have tried to be proactive and ensure that we have benefited in as many ways as possible. We have been a part of a bid as a part of our Trust hub and also a part of cluster bids. The OA has also raised my awareness of initiatives that I might otherwise have missed. Staff have been able to access some relevant and useful CPD and school have received external support and resources to improve teaching and learning. It has been beneficial to be part of the work of the area. All staff and children gain when the Head has and can act upon timely information."*

*"Access to CPD that we would not have had the budget to provide, specialist training for staff resulting in the school being able to offer a wider range of targeted support."*

*"We have accessed several OA programmes and all have had a positive impact within our school. The impact has been especially strong in Language and vocabulary development."*

# General OA Feedback



Continued: In 2020, we asked Headteachers and School Leaders 'What impact has the OA had on your school?'  
This was some of the feedback...

*"The OA programme has been a wonderful opportunity our school to explore innovative approaches to improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and work alongside professional peers in the area to collaborate. We have worked directly with PVI's, with schools across a wider geographical area than our close cluster, and with school leaders beyond school. As a whole school, professionals here have embraced new opportunities by conducting action research, led the support of others by training other providers, have felt we could significantly shape the work required locally by participating in stakeholder meeting and conferences. The Golden Thread Conference was an example of this, which as well as presenting informed us by boosting our understanding of metacognitive approaches to learning. This has been a huge boost to professional esteem and confidence — we have seen schools looking outwards and forwards and for individual schools being part of this wider initiative has been a powerful driver for tackling systemic local difficulties. I consider our school has been proud to have participated and have been energised by the focus it has given our work for communication, aspiration and wellbeing, which underpins our curriculum. For staff within school there are now more robust, rigorous innovative approaches making a real difference to how staff in East Cambridgeshire and Fenland can articulate their pedagogy. Staff are trained with better skills as Mental Well-being champions, a focus on common issues and enjoy a wide professional discourse."*

*"Improved understanding of the barriers to learning and raised expectations, more collaborative learning with other partners, specific improvements through involvement in projects."*

*"Language development. This has been realised through improving the range of experiences that our children don't usually receive, with increased support in phonics and vocabulary. Substantial support through the Cambridgeshire maths hub."*

*"We have seen huge improvements in staff effectiveness and retention. We have up-skilled teachers and TAs in teaching, metacognition and targeted interventions. We have started a systematic phonics scheme (Read Write Inc) and given initial training for people."*

*"The impact across the school has been excellent. The staff have all received STEPS training which has allowed us to improve and adapt how we reduce behaviour incidents and support pupils and staff more effectively. The whole school has benefitted from the RWI phonics which even within the short time it was running showed a huge improvement in the engagement of pupils and the confidence of the staff leading groups. Overall the action plan ensured that staff, parents and pupils benefitted and the majority of the aspects are able to be sustainable for the forthcoming years."*

*"It has enabled us to make vast improvement in reading, maths and SEMH in a considered and timely manner. Staff training has been followed up and not a one off. Our percentage of good or better teaching has increased and we have redeveloped our whole curriculum in the light of training. We were in the top 20% for exclusion and now we have had 0 exclusions."*

*"We have been heavily involved with the OA through our previous role as the Research School for East Cambs and Fenland. The OA has supported us with: recruitment (via the set up of Teach in Cambs/Fenland websites), access to YMCA/mental health resources and phonics/reading CPD."*

*"Support for SEND through review and training and then support and resource to implement change."*



# General OA Feedback



Continued: In 2020, we asked Headteachers and School Leaders 'What impact has the OA had on your school?' This was some of the feedback...

*"Being involved in the Maximising the Impact of Teaching Assistants has enabled us to develop the skills of our teaching assistants and enable them to work more effectively in the classroom. Having the additional funding as part of the Raising Outcomes in Phonics and Raising Outcomes in Reading bids has resulted in an increase in our results across the school. Pupils are more confident to use their phonological knowledge to tackle words they are unfamiliar with and there has been an increase in vocabulary used in context. The Recruitment Incentive Grant allowed us to attract and recruit good teachers in Fenland and provide IT equipment for them. The SEND Review enabled us to support our new in post SENDCO to work towards achieving the SEND National Qualification. Using the audit and review tools enabled us to access many CPD opportunities including the following: training two members of our SLT as STEPS Tutors; all our staff receiving training in STEP On as part of our Professional Day aiding our whole school approach to Positive Behaviour; Mental Health - and Train the Trainer - this has resulted in all our staff (teachers, teaching assistants and midday supervisors) receiving mental health training that will enable them to support any pupil who is experiencing difficulties."*

*"We have participated in more than ten projects and benefitted from all of the support given. Of particular note have been: teaching assistant training via the MITA project which led to increasingly effective work from support staff across the school; Early Years Fund which has led us to offer Early Talk Boost as a successful intervention in nursery and Reception; maths mastery course with the Maths hub — increased knowledge of 2 teachers taking part and has led us to pilot use of mastery approach in Y5 with a view to rolling out to all KS2 in Sept 2021; Engaging with the English hub as an intensive support school for phonics/early reading is already have a dramatic effect on pupil progress after just 10 weeks; completing NPQSL helped our assistant head develop his leadership skills further."*

*"It has enabled us to upskill our workforce and improve outcomes."*

*"It has impacted most on the quality of education. 1. Training staff in Maths Mastery and providing resources. 2. Enhancing english teaching through a focus on vocabulary and reading a range of texts 3. A new phonics scheme to provide consistency of teaching 4. Behaviour - having 2 Steps Tutors 4. Parental engagement - Cafes for All and enrichment activities."*

*"Provided access to training such as STEPS, money has been allocated to fund whole school dyslexia training (on hold due to COVID), ELSA training for a TA."*

*"Funding for phonics related reading books has enhanced the reading diet available to children considerably. Training in STEPS has supported staff to have a deeper understanding of therapeutic approaches to managing behaviour and within a whole school approach - the tools within Steps such as anxiety mapping has supported staff to meet the needs of children more effectively."*

*"The OA has provided funding that has been very specific in ensuring that it reaches the target groups intended."*

*"As it is a new leadership team since September 2020 - Head, AHT, SENDCO and mostly new teachers (incl. NQT), we are unable to comment on impact of previous years."*

# General OA Feedback



**Continued: In 2020, we asked Headteachers and School Leaders 'What impact has the OA had on your school?' This was some of the feedback...**

*"Whole school understanding of the SEND wave process and assess, plan do review. All staff use a therapeutic approach (STEPS) to support pupil behaviour which is now at least good at all times. Wider awareness of wellbeing and how to support need across the school staff and children"*

*"It has allowed us to do things we would not have been able to do; or allowed us to do things we were going to do better! Steps training has begun to change attitudes. Money for phonics / early reading support has made a huge difference."*

*"The OA has enabled us to focus upon areas which require development within the school without being hindered by the barrier posed by potential large spend. The programme has helped us to focus on our developmental needs as a school and highlight areas where we can make changes purposefully to what is happening in school. It has also helped us to be aware of additional areas which schools can be supported in developing such as healthy eating and to become aware of other school's successes e.g. phonics scores increased to beyond 95% pass rate through increased focus."*

*"The OA programme has had a significant impact on X during the past three years. The courses, resources and ability to access support, professional colleagues and educational practitioners has be invaluable."*

*"Opportunities for training and resources to enhance our provision and practise which we would not have had the opportunity for otherwise. It has also allowed us to undertake whole-staff training at once, to ensure consistency of approach and also that all were able to attend. The overall impact of this has meant we have highly skilled and confident staff and over the past three years we have seen an improvement in outcomes and pupil progress."*

*"CPD in Sounds Write for all teachers and the implementing the programme from Nursery through to Y2 so far. Teaching staff have been given the time to develop leadership skills and thereby develop and begin to implement the new curriculum."*

*"From a leadership perspective, we have benefitted greatly. Through recognised, accredited CPD, leaders have improved their skills and have a much greater impact on the wider work of the school."*

*"We have appreciated the DFE having a spotlight on the area. As a head I have tried to be proactive and ensure that we have benefited in as many ways as possible. We have been a part of a bid as a part of our Trust hub and also a part of cluster bids. The OA has also raised my awareness of initiatives that I might otherwise have missed. Staff have been able to access some relevant CPD. It has been beneficial to be part of the work of the area. All staff and children gain when the Head has and can act upon timely information."*

*"As new headteacher at X, I can see that the OA programme has had a positive impact upon teaching and learning at the school. Within my first term as headteacher, the chance to engage with the OA programme has been invaluable. Linking with an NLE and time working with the OA team — to discuss rationales and approaches — has supported me as I have crafted the best approach for the school moving forwards."*



## OA Strengths Directory

We are pleased to share with you the [OA Strengths Directory](#). This is designed as a networking tool for Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) Clusters and to enhance special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provision.

The directory was produced following the first SEND Reviews that were completed as part of the OA Inclusion Offer.

It provides strengths highlighted by settings in each of the SEND Review areas of focus:

- Experience
- Engage
- Effective
- Expectations
- Embed



The directory includes links to resources and school websites, with brief summaries of how schools have used the resources to enhance their SEND provision.

## OA Sharing Learning Hub

**The Eastern Opportunity Areas' Sharing Learning Hub - unlocking potential and inspiring change.**

The Ipswich, Norwich and Fenland & East Cambridgeshire OA teams have been developing the Eastern Opportunity Areas Sharing Learning Hub. This online space captures the 'Big Ideas' (projects and initiatives) carried out in the OAs over the past four years. The hub will host case studies, resources and examples to showcase the learning of schools, colleges, settings and partner organisations.

The aim of the Hub is to help make sure that no child or young person in our area ever gets left behind again. Through the shared learning of a concerned, connected community of leaders, teachers and educational practitioners, who believe in new approaches to key priorities, we want to continue to help young people across the Eastern region unlock their potential and improve their chances in life. Learning through a culture of sharing.

[We are pleased to inform you that the Sharing Learning Hub is now LIVE!](#)

## Opportunity Area Insight Guides

The long-term objective of the Opportunity Areas programme is to transform the life chances of children and young people in 12 areas of the country with low social mobility. In doing so, it aims to learn more about what works in improving education outcomes in coastal, rural and urban areas. The programme seeks to tackle regional inequality by convening resources, using evidence-based approaches and testing new approaches to unlock the barriers that hold young people back in geographic areas where the educational challenges are greatest. The programme is being evaluated and reports will be available during the course of 2022. In the meantime, with this series of insight guides, we are sharing the experiences of those working hard to make a difference in the Opportunity Areas for others to learn from.

These insight guides are another way for us to further spread that knowledge, by sharing the lived experience of those working hard to make a difference in the opportunity areas. They offer an invitation to others who face similar challenges to gain insights into this place-based way of working with a view to exploring similar approaches and interventions to help young people elsewhere and help level up our country. The OA insight guides are being developed by people who have been closely involved in the projects across the twelve OAs. They give the view of the lived experience of those working hard to make a difference in the OAs. They offer the chance to gain insights into this place-based way of working, with a view to exploring similar approaches and interventions to help young people elsewhere.

The insight guides will cover a range of topics, including:

- careers education
- teacher recruitment, retention and workforce development
- early years
- school improvement
- place based working

[View the insight guides online.](#) More insight guides will be added to this page over time.

**Opportunity Area**

# **Fenland and East Cambridgeshire**

**Delivery Years 2017-2020 (Year 1 – 4)**

**Evaluation Report - Executive Summary**

Riikka Hofmann & Sonia Ilie

Faculty of Education University of Cambridge

March 2022





## The Fenland and East Cambridgeshire Opportunity Area

Low social mobility continues to be a substantial barrier to the realisation of children and young people's full potentials. A key lever for improving social mobility rests in addressing the educational inequality associated with differences in socio-economic background. This is because socio-economic disadvantage continues to be linked to fewer educational opportunities, lower educational attainment, and worse labour market outcomes.

The Opportunity Area (OA) programme is a Government flagship programme, announced in 2016 and launched in 2017 to tackle low social mobility and entrenched regional disadvantage among young people through place-based educational interventions. The programme focuses on pupils who are most likely to encounter barriers to social mobility. A key part of the programme's strategy is to improve education, by addressing deep-rooted issues that affect children and young people's outcomes.

The Fenland and East Cambridgeshire Opportunity Area (FECO) is one of twelve Opportunity Areas across the country, selected because of low levels of social mobility. The initial challenges for FECOA revolved around the attainment gap between children from different socio-economic backgrounds; the fact that disadvantaged children in the area performed relatively less well compared to similar children in other parts of the country; enduring gaps in literacy and communication skills; and the provision for children with disabilities or special educational needs. The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated these issues and posed further barriers to social mobility nationally and in the area. FECOA programmes have adapted to the pandemic context to address the substantial disruption to the educational process.

### ECO Priorities and Themes

**Priority 1, Themes: Early Years and School Improvement:** Accelerate the progress of disadvantaged children and young people in the acquisition and development of communication, language and reading.

**Priority 2, Themes Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) and Special Educational Needs (SEND):** Strengthen the effectiveness of support for children and young people with mental health concerns and those with Special Educational Needs.

**Priority 3, Themes Post-16 routes and Youth Voice:** Raise aspirations and increase access for young people to a wide range of career choices and post-16 routes.

**Priority 4, Theme Recruitment and Retention:** Recruit, develop and retain the best leaders and teachers in Fenland and East Cambridgeshire.

## Background to this document

The Fenland and East Cambridgeshire Opportunity Area (FECO) commissioned researchers from the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, to generate a synthesis of evidence of impacts of FECOA programmes delivered during the first four years of the programme (2017-2020). The synthesis reviewed just under 200 distinct documents, monitoring forms, evaluation reports, and external evidence. In determining the impact of FECOA and its constituent programmes, the synthesis also accounted for the impact of the pandemic on the ability to generate evidence of impact at a time of substantial disruption. The impacts reported here represent a snapshot of the wide range of evidence reviewed and do not cover all elements of the provision, given the diverse range of activities undertaken during the first four years of the programme.

[View the full document on our website](#)



## Impacts, by theme

### Priority 1

#### Theme: School Improvement

The School Improvement Programme made up a large proportion of the delivery under this theme, alongside the **Evidence-based Practice Fund**, a **Phonics Resource Grant Scheme**, provision for **Teaching Assistants** and others. Many schools' plans for both implementation and evaluation of programmes under this theme were disrupted by the pandemic. Pandemic impact notwithstanding, participants reported overwhelmingly positive experiences of engagement with the programmes, positive outcomes at school level, and very clear self-identified positive impacts on pupil knowledge and confidence.

Schools participating in the universal offer under the School Improvement Programme in Year 4 reported improvements in language outcomes for children; teachers benefiting from professional development opportunities; and diversifying pupil experiences.

#### Theme: Early Years

Activity under this theme covered a range of programmes, including **Phonics for Success**, **Five to Thrive**, **Keep Talking FEC**, the **Library Community Work** project, and others, and at times overlapped with the School Improvement Theme, particularly around literacy outcomes.

Practitioners participating in **Phonics for Success** reported increased knowledge, confidence and engagement with phonics; In the community, library memberships and reading time increased.

Evaluation results by the training provider around **Phonics for Success** pointed to substantial increases in knowledge, higher for childminders than for qualified teachers, and linked to increases in self-reported confidence to deliver phonics. Additional increases in confidence were noted by the provider from engagement with participants during their own recording of their process and while working together. While always possible to strengthen the evidence base around impact, such conclusions suggest that this element of the provision was successful.

### Priority 2

#### Theme: SEMH and SEND

A wide range of programmes was delivered in Years 1 to 4 under this theme, covering a range of issues around inclusion, the provision of education for children with special educational needs and the training of professionals (including teachers) to support this provision. The **SENDIASS FEC** programme aimed to increase the time for which parents received support in relation to a child with SEND. Evaluation evidence estimated a 13% increase in the time spent directly supporting parents, clear progress towards the expected aim. The **STEPS** programme saw the generation of a case study around a school whose staff had engaged with the training, noting the shifts in staff practices and an associated reduction in the number of exclusions — the ultimate aim of this programme — of over 80% over 3 years. The **EHWS** programme, engaging with children's wellbeing practitioners, was also seen to be effective, with broad indications that staff had been successful in reducing anxiety, improving low mood and reducing behaviour problems for the children with whom they had worked. Other elements of the provision under this theme saw disruption from the pandemic both in terms of implementation and the collection of any evidence around impact.

A case study from a school whose staff received **STEPS** training showed a reduction of exclusions from 85 to 15 over 2 years.



## Priority 3

### Theme: Post-16 Routes

From the pupil perspective, work under this theme is the closest to the point of final outcomes from education and a potential move into further/higher education and the world of work. Programmes reflected this, and included amongst others, a **Careers Information Advice and Guidance** programme. While the pandemic disrupted the collection of data and therefore the generation of evidence of impact, teachers participating in this aspect of the provision reported being more knowledgeable about talking about career options for their students, being better prepared and more confident to support their students, and improvements to their own career guiding skills as a result of their engagement with the programme.

While the pandemic significantly impacted implementation of post-16 activity, emerging evidence suggests increased student and teacher knowledge and confidence

The **Cultural Enrichment Programme**, another element of the provision under this theme, saw both teachers and students reporting an increase in students' skills and knowledge and teachers' abilities to deliver effective in-school activity. More than half of participants in the **Aim Higher** programme (part of the Essential Skills for Life initiative) reported it had supported their thinking about their post-16 future, with two school case studies suggesting better social and emotional outcomes too. Monitoring documents revealed steady though somewhat uneven progress towards the Gatsby benchmarks which is underpinned by the desired outcomes from this theme.

### Theme: Youth Voice

Programmes under this theme looked to generate engagement from young people, higher aspirations and expectations and stronger community links. The **Youth Advisory Boards** saw sustained engagement from young people, key community stakeholders, and relevant local institutions. The informal evaluation of the Youth Advisory Boards suggests improved visibility for young people's voices, with young people reporting improvements in feelings of empowerment around issues they deemed important.

Similarly, the varied and provider-led **detached youth work** carried out alongside the Youth Advisory Boards were deemed in early monitoring reports to be a "definitive success" despite pandemic-related disruptions, with reports from the different providers all offering positive accounts of the implementation of their respective activity.

Despite the pandemic, Youth Advisory Boards have become well-established and sustainable across the region. Long-term relationships are still being developed.

## Priority 4

### Theme: Recruitment and Retention

Activities falling under this priority involved training provision for existing teachers, including early career teachers, a **recruitment marketing campaign, apprenticeship/internship programmes, bespoke local careers guidance** and others. Sign-up to the programme was consistently high and more than 90% of programme participants gave positive or very positive feedback, with a range of self-reported positive impacts. The 1-2-1 guidance led to significant recruitment increase: 199 participants in 2019-20, 86% applied for a post being offered, and the programme generated 37 additional teacher trainees in the region.

The **foundation teacher training programme** in FEC also achieved increased applications and recruitment. 100% of the 45 early career teachers participating in in-house mentoring to address Covid-19 training gaps reported increased knowledge and confidence, as did their mentors. Outcomes do not yet exist for the recruitment marketing programme, but gaps were identified for improving its reach and sustainability: the website was combined with 'Teach in Cambridgeshire'. Evidence suggests that the theme activities increased the recruitment of local people into teacher training, the mentoring of early career teachers, and recruitment and retention of teachers in the region.

Evidence suggests that the theme activities increased the recruitment of local people into teacher training, the mentoring of early career teachers, and recruitment and retention of teachers in the region.



The observed impacts of the recruitment incentive varied between schools. This suggests that the provision of grants should be accompanied by a better understanding of the change mechanisms and support to schools around the deployment of these resources.

## Impacts, overall

While the pandemic has disrupted the implementation of many activities and, in some cases, the generation of evidence regarding their impact, the data collected suggests a range of positive impacts from the programme. Beyond participant satisfaction, which was consistently very high, these impacts involved increased participation in development activities, and in self-reported knowledge and confidence, of both practitioners and young people themselves, as well as reductions in pupils' behavioural issues and teacher turnover. Moreover, while evidence of impact on pupil outcomes was largely self-reported, quantitative evidence, as well as Ofsted reports, where present, also pointed to positive impacts on pupil outcomes. At programme level, the evaluation suggested a high quality of leadership by the local FECOA team and a high level of support for the programme from local stakeholders, both individuals and institutions. The perhaps even greater programme level impact involves the development of and support for networks and collaboration opportunities across the region which have mediated successful work within institutions.

## Conclusion

This systematic review of evidence is a first step towards ascertaining the programme-level impacts of FECOA. (Full report is available [here](#)) The evidence review suggests that a meaningful, yet minority, proportion of institutions were able to engage in school-led evidence generation and independent (self-) evaluation activity as part of improving their practice, despite the challenging public health circumstances. Such activities were well supported by the FECOA team. This in itself is evidence of significant learning and improvement in the region as a result of FECOA and offers a foundation for further engagement to counter the negative effects of the pandemic. Further support for schools, early years settings, and other providers in engaging in evaluation and evidence generation activity will support both the successful implementation of future provision and the continuous evidence-informed improvement of educational practice to help close the attainment gap in this region. This evaluation suggests the FECOA programme has provided a significant starting point for this work which is worth sustaining. What this evaluation shows is that there is now a substantial opportunity within the FECOA to build on and enhance existing approaches, to move towards systematically evaluating outcomes that matter in a way that can feed directly into improving education, equity, and social mobility.







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