

Preventing school exclusions: collaboration for change

Interim report

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MAY 2023



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Acknowledgments

Many people have contributed expertise to this project.

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We are grateful for Vivien Niblett, the project evaluator. Vivien is a freelance independent evaluator and learning partner, working primarily on social change programmes in the arts and education sectors. In her 15-year career she has worked both in-house in the public and charitable sectors, and as a research and evaluation consultant. She works in theory-based evaluation, typically using mixed methods to explore the process of change both in detail and in context.

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We would like to thank the project advisory board (to the right) for their generous insight and critical friendship over the course of this project.

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Executive summary

Context and aims of the Preventing school exclusions project

School exclusion can change the course of a young person's life: it can have long-term implications for their health, wellbeing, and future opportunities. We also know that exclusions affect some groups more than others, such as those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), from certain ethnic backgrounds, and those growing up in poverty.

The focus of this project has been on strengthening the relationships between partners from schools and other agencies, in order to support headteachers to prevent exclusions. This builds on the recommendations made in our Pinball Kids report¹, which found that strong relationships were necessary at all levels of the education system to prevent exclusions, especially between schools and:

- Pupils, where every pupil has a trusted member of staff at school.
- Families, where they are partners in their children's education.
- Services, where a multi-agency approach enables early identification and timely response to needs.

In September 2021, the RSA embarked on a three-year journey alongside three English local authorities to restore this third level of relationships, between schools and services, to improve joint preventative work. Our work builds on existing evidence and sector-wide interest in joined-up, multi-agency responses. It also stems from a belief that stronger relationships at the multi-agency level can lead to benefits at the first two levels – which we show through the interventions that have emerged from this work.

Content, structure and intended audiences of this report

This interim report details our progress in working with teams in East Sussex, Oldham, and Worcestershire. First, we outline the national and local context for our work and discuss how we came to work with each local authority. The next chapter details our methodology, along with insights from the first two phases of the project and looks towards the third phase. Finally, the report shares year one findings from the project's external evaluation.

This report is aimed at multiple stakeholders within the education system:

- For **researchers and system leaders** wanting to understand local contexts better and facilitate genuine co-production. You'll be especially interested in our work with [youth researchers](#), and the use of [pupil case studies](#), [family journeys](#), [relational value survey](#) and [causal-loop diagrams](#) to unpack the complexity of the local system and find opportunities for intervention(s).
- For **school leaders and service managers** interested in reflecting on the strengths and challenges of your inclusive practice. The [four response tracks](#) can be a useful tool to understand your own patterns related to identifying and responding to pupil needs.
- For **policymakers** interested in more effective approaches to joint working and early intervention. The [pilot activities](#) show what is needed to reconfigure some of the unhelpful patterns and structures found in the [causal-loop diagrams](#). These include formalising school-to-school support on inclusion through channels such as headteacher partnerships and Fair Access Panels; bringing coherence to early-intervention service pathways; testing alternative provision (AP) outreach models; and improving primary-secondary transition through better cross-phase collaboration.
- For **funders** interested in supporting systems change. The [evaluation](#) provides insights into our theory of change and what it takes to enable shifts at a systems level. Our hypothesis is that an evidence-informed, co-designed, and co-owned approach based on all three phases of our work will lead to more effective, sustainable multi-agency collaboration to reduce preventable exclusions.

Key report findings

Interim evaluation findings demonstrate that we are beginning to see positive impact on relationships between multi-agency partners. However, to reach the wider system-level outcomes, **we need policymakers and system leaders to create the conditions necessary for this type of collaboration to flourish**. This can be through directing funding, creating policy, and setting up decision-making infrastructures that facilitate shared priority-setting. It also requires a culture of flexibility to test, iterate, and improve on joined-up offers of support.

1. Partridge, L et al (2020) Pinball Kids: Preventing school exclusions. The RSA [PDF] www.thersa.org/reports/preventing-school-exclusions [Accessed March 2020].

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- > Overall reflections and provocations: the 'so what?' and the 'what more?'

Context

An inclusive education system is one where **every child matters and matters equally**.² School exclusions thus remain a social justice issue; we know that permanently excluded pupils are unlikely to be admitted to a state-funded mainstream school within three years of their exclusion,³ and this disruption in their education has long term negative impact on their health and wellbeing, future educational and life opportunities and outcomes.⁴

The most recent national data⁵ for the academic year 2021-22 shows a six-year peak in suspensions rate in the autumn term, with an uncharacteristic rise in exclusions within primary settings.⁶ These alarming statistics alongside the ongoing disproportionality in experiences of exclusion, where pupils with special educational needs, who have grown up in poverty, who have a social worker, and from certain ethnic minority groups (pupils from Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller and Black Caribbean communities) are all more likely to be excluded than their peers, and are a serious call for change.

Since 2018, the RSA has dedicated itself to understanding and addressing the root causes of school exclusions. Our Pinball Kids research (2020)⁷ revealed that wider societal factors (linked to poverty and economic insecurity), combined with direct and indirect consequences of policymaking (linked to funding, accountability, academisation) had severed relationships at all levels within the education system and this “perfect storm” was behind the rise and persistence of exclusions.

From this research, we laid out a possible recourse for a more inclusive future: restoring of **trusting, reciprocal relationships**, between schools and:

- 1.** Pupils, where every pupil has a trusted member of staff at school.
- 2.** Families, where they are partners in their children’s education.
- 3.** Services, where a multi-agency approach enables early identification of, and timely response to needs.

In September 2021, the RSA embarked on a **three-year journey alongside three English local authorities** to restore the third level of relationships, between schools and services, with the aim to improve joint-working towards reducing exclusions and making local education systems more inclusive.

Whereas we acknowledge that schools need support in all three, we decided to focus on the third level of relationships because, firstly, we believe a stronger focus on the third can have a positive knock-on effect on the first two, and secondly, to contribute to the national, sector-wide interest in the potential of multi-agency coordination to resolve the challenges of our time, like educational inequality.

2. UNESCO (2017) Guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education [online] unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248254 [Accessed March 2023].
3. Thompson, D (2023) What happens to permanently excluded pupils? FFT Datalab [online] ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/2023/01/what-happens-to-permanently-excluded-pupils/ [Accessed February 2023].
4. See, for example: Lamhari, D et al (2021) Youth voice on school exclusions. The Children’s Society [online] www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-04/youth-voice-exclusions.pdf [Accessed February 2023]; Prison Reform Trust (2023) Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile [online] prisonreformtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/January-2023-Bromley-Briefings.pdf [Accessed 20 February 2023]; UCL (2019) Learning from HeadStart [PDF] www.ucl.ac.uk/evidence-based-practice-unit/sites/evidence-based-practice-unit/files/headstart_evidence_briefing_3.pdf [Accessed February 2023].
5. Department for Education (2022) Permanent exclusions and suspensions in England: autumn term 2021 to 2022 [online] www.gov.uk/government/statistics/permanent-exclusions-and-suspensions-in-england-autumn-term-2021-to-2022 [Accessed February 2023].
6. Staufenberg, J (2021) ‘It takes too long to get support: alarm over rising primary school exclusions.’ The Guardian [online] www.theguardian.com/education/2021/sep/18/alarm-over-rising-primary-school-exclusions-england [Accessed September 2021].
7. Partridge, L et al (2020) Op cit.

National interest: multi-agency working to reduce exclusions

Multi-agency collaboration will not solve everything. We know that the majority of exclusions are due to persistent disruptive behaviour⁸ and require other system-level considerations around curriculum and assessment, school culture, and teacher training and development.⁹ However, we also know that rising mental health needs and scarcity in specialist services has overwhelmed all parts of the system,¹⁰ placing unprecedented burden on teachers and school staff in meeting young people's needs. We believe this requires a systematic multi-agency response.

The 2022 SEND and AP green paper¹¹ and the subsequent SEND and AP Improvement Plan¹² acknowledge the current vicious cycle of **late interventions, low confidence in the system, and inefficient resource allocation** that leads to poor outcomes.

Amongst many course corrections, they have highlighted a need for:

- Consistency on how needs are identified and supported, so that decisions are made based on a child's needs in co-production with families.
- A more inclusive education system to ensure children with SEND are set up to thrive.
- Recognition that AP schools can be experts in supporting children whose behaviour or other needs can present barriers to learning.

All of which should be underpinned by **clarity on roles and responsibilities of all partners across education, health, social care, and local government** amongst other stakeholders.

Although an effective multi-agency approach has been recognised by many in the sector as a requisite for an inclusive education,¹³ there isn't currently a unified sense (between practitioners, leaders, or policymakers) of what this looks like.

This is why the RSA has undertaken this work:

- We want to test a model of building relationships back into the system.
- We want to identify what activates and fosters a multi-agency approach that is built on trusting, reciprocal relationships between schools and services, which we believe will enable greater inclusion of all children and young people.

The future we are working towards is one where partners in education, health, care, and local government are coming together to accurately identify needs and provide appropriate and meaningful support for children most in need and their families in ways that are feasible, desirable, and sustainable.

We anticipate that learnings from this pilot will help identify the active ingredients¹⁴ for effective and sustainable multi-agency collaboration, which could be adapted to other localities seeking to improve their approach to partnership working.

Local interest: the three localities

Our partnerships with East Sussex, Oldham, and Worcestershire are underpinned by our mutual belief in the conditions needed for a more inclusive education system, as outlined by the RSA's Pinball Kids report:

- Every child has a strong relationship with a trusted adult in school.
- Every child's parents/carers are engaged as partners in their education.
- Every child attends a school with an inclusive ethos.
- Every child is assessed for learning and other needs throughout their school career and there is capacity to provide appropriate support.
- We know where every child is in the system.

Through these shared commitments, we have worked with each local authority (LA) to understand their journey towards inclusion and consider how this project might support them in building stronger relationships across the system to continue this work.

Below, we outline each local authority's specific reason(s) for joining the pilot.

8. Department for Education (2022) Permanent exclusions and suspensions in England: autumn term 2021 to 2022 [online] www.gov.uk/government/statistics/permanent-exclusions-and-suspensions-in-england-autumn-term-2021-to-2022 [Accessed February 2023].
9. Partridge, L et al (2021) Op cit.
10. See, for example: Gould, M (2023) School mental health teams struggle to keep staff amid rising need [online] www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/school-mental-health-teams-struggle-retain-staff [Accessed April 2023]; Booth, S and Walker, A (2022) Mental health: how schools are dealing with the 'new normal'. Schools Week [online] schoolsweek.co.uk/mental-health-how-schools-are-dealing-with-the-new-normal/ [Accessed December 2022].
11. HM Government (2022) SEND Review: Right support, right time Government consultation on the SEND and alternative provision system in England [PDF] www.assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1106362/SEND_review_right_support_right_place_right_time_accessible.pdf [Accessed April 2023]
12. HM Government (2023) Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan: Right Support, Right Place, Right Time [PDF] www.assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1139561/SEND_and_alternative_provision_improvement_plan.pdf [Accessed April 2023]
13. See, for example: Timpson (2019) Timpson review of school exclusions. Department for Education [PDF] assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/807862/Timpson_review.pdf [Accessed [Accessed 20 January 2021]; DfE (2018) Alternative provision market analysis, ISOS Partnership [PDF] assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/752548/Alternative_Provision_Market_Analysis.pdf [Accessed January 2021]; DfE (2018) Investigative research into alternative provision, IFF Research Ltd [PDF] assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/748910/investigative_research_into_alternative_provision.pdf [Accessed January 2021]; DfE (2015) Research on funding for young people with special educational needs, ISOS Partnership [PDF] consult.education.gov.uk/funding-policy-unit/high-needs-funding-reform/supporting_documents/Research_on_Funding_for_young_people_with_special_educational_needs.pdf [Accessed January 2021].
14. EEF (2021) Active Ingredients summary: Putting evidence to work: a school's guide to implementation [PDF] d2tic4wv0liusb.cloudfront.net/eeef-guidance-reports/implementation/EEF-Active-Ingredients-Summary.pdf?v=1681138577 [Accessed February 2023].

East Sussex

In the 2019 update of its Excellence for All strategy,¹⁵ East Sussex acknowledged that the “most important priority [for schools and wider partnerships was to] ... sharpen our focus on the most disadvantaged groups of learners in our schools and communities”. Pupils with SEND, those eligible for free school meals (FSM), those looked-after, Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups, and those in need of protection were still performing less well than their peers, and more represented in exclusion figures.

As significant work and investment to promote inclusion had already taken place in the secondary phase prior to the RSA joining, our work has focused on strengthening the primary phase, with the scope to understand and action:

How might LA services for children and families collaborate better across the primary phase in order to intervene earlier, and meet the needs of children in order to prevent exclusions?

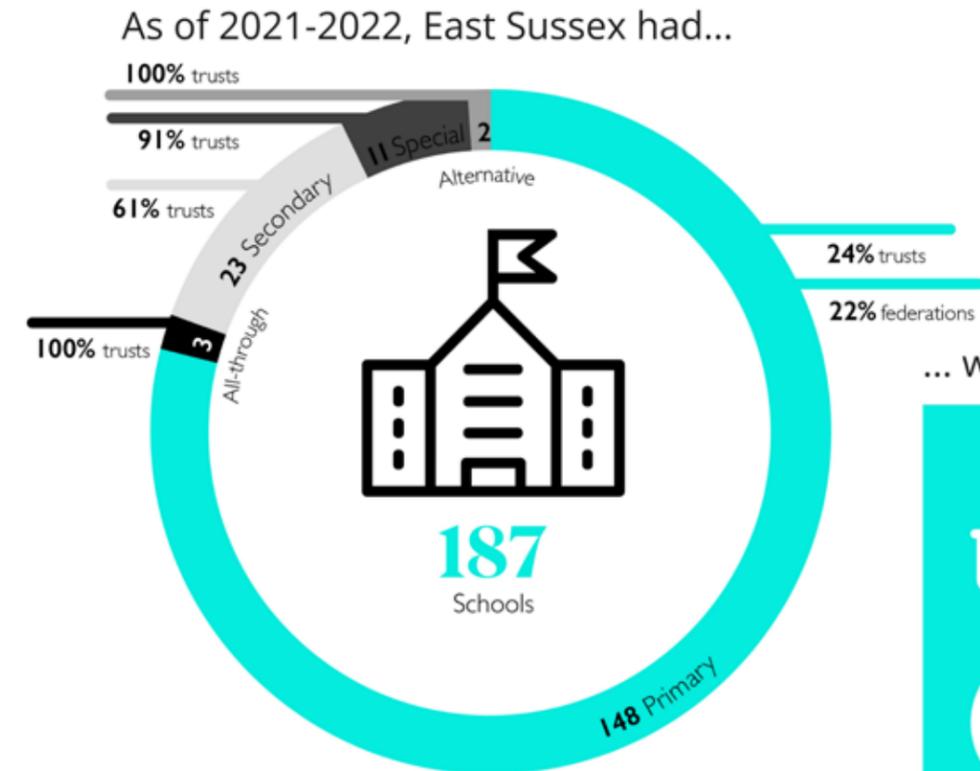
How can we ensure that closer collaboration between the LA and other services in the primary phase leads to a more inclusive local system, and reduced exclusions in the primary phase?

“The RSA project on preventing exclusions is focused on the primary phase and works alongside a parallel piece of work at secondary. It is part of our priority to improve inclusion for children in East Sussex schools, especially the most vulnerable. The local authority is committed to working in partnership with primary schools to implement successful strategies that will enable all children to thrive at school and be successful in their learning.

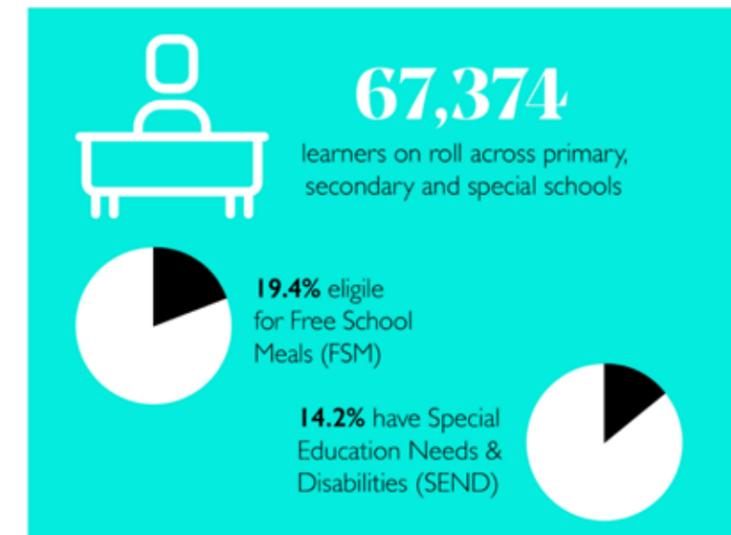
The project is making really good progress and has already created strong links across local authority teams, schools and external agencies. Our local headteachers are working closely together to learn from each other about the best ways to support positive relationships and behaviour. At the recent conference for primary school leaders, headteachers gave an inspiring account of their work to date and the positive difference that the project is starting to make for children in their schools.

Elizabeth Funge, assistant director, education, East Sussex (April 2023)

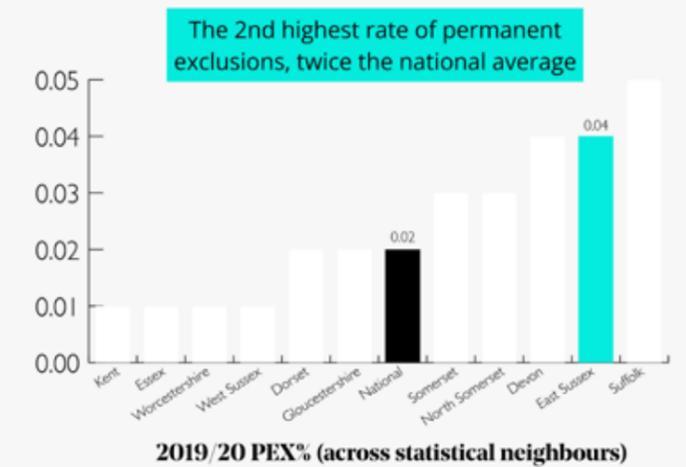
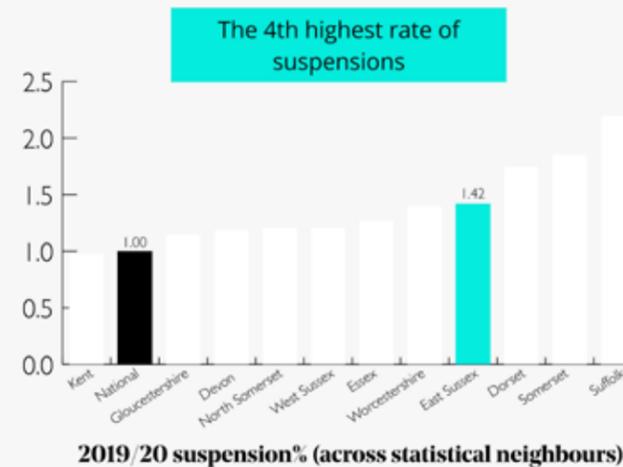
Data dashboard



... with a total of...



Exclusions compared to statistical neighbours



15. For current context, see East Sussex County Council (2021) Excellence for all strategy [online] www.eastsussex.gov.uk/education-learning/management/education-plans/excellence-for-all-strategy [Accessed July 2022].

Figure I: Data dashboard for East Sussex

Oldham

One of the key priorities of the 2019-22 Oldham SEND Strategy¹⁶ was to ensure that “every learning setting in Oldham is inclusive”, with the recognition that more work needed to be done to ensure children with additional needs were engaging and thriving in their education and learning, with lower levels of absenteeism and exclusion.

There was also a recognition that schools could not do this on their own. The Oldham Children’s Partnership was established during the pandemic to address emergent needs in a joined-up, collaborative way.¹⁷ This crystallised the scope of the RSA work in Oldham, which has been to understand what is required to move towards a truly multi-agency approach:

How might we better align the efforts (ie, activities and processes) of multi-agency professionals, including Oldham Children’s Partnership and the education sector, to foster a more inclusive local education system and reduce preventable exclusions?

“Across the local area, there is a commitment to deliver high quality education for all children and young people, including those who may be vulnerable.

We recognise that there are children and young people, who will need support or a different approach, beyond what is ordinarily available in schools. Just as importantly, we want to get the best outcomes for all children and young people, regardless of their circumstances. This can only be done through working in partnership, including with parents/carers, schools and services.

Our SEND and Inclusion Improvement Programme underpins our strategy and clearly sets out the local area’s commitment to delivering high quality support and provision across all our schools and educational settings. The RSA project is part of this and supports our aim to embed a partnership-based approach, to ensure the appropriate range and capacity of support and provision is available in local schools, as part of an inclusive culture.

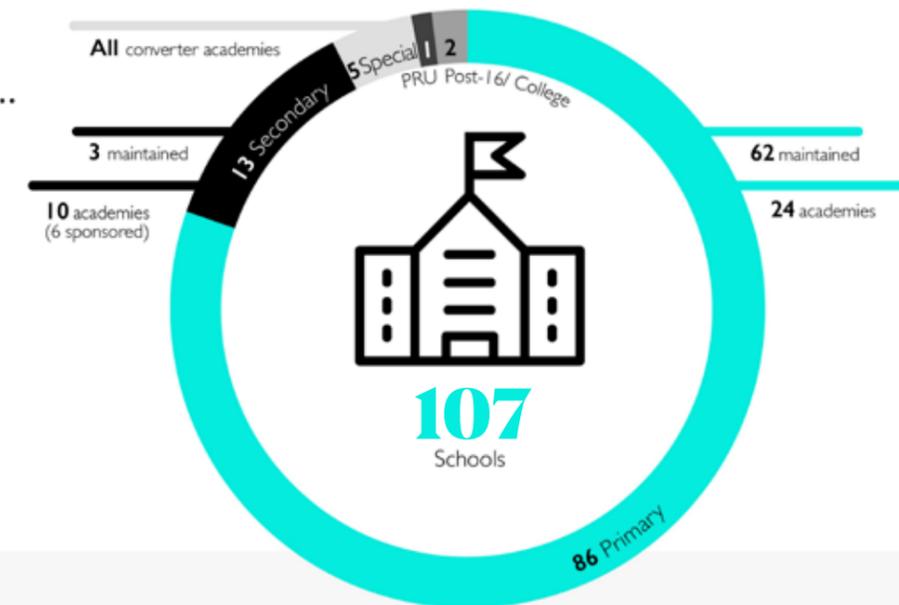
Amber Burton, assistant director SEND and Inclusion, Oldham (April 2023)

16. Oldham Council (2019) Oldham SEND Strategy 2019-22 [PDF] committees.oldham.gov.uk/documents/s110460/App%201%20-%20Oldham%20SEND%20Strategy%20-%207Nov2019%20Final.pdf [Accessed September 2021].
 17. The Oldham Children’s Partnership was made up of senior leaders and representatives from education, healthcare, social care, youth services, and parent and carer forum.

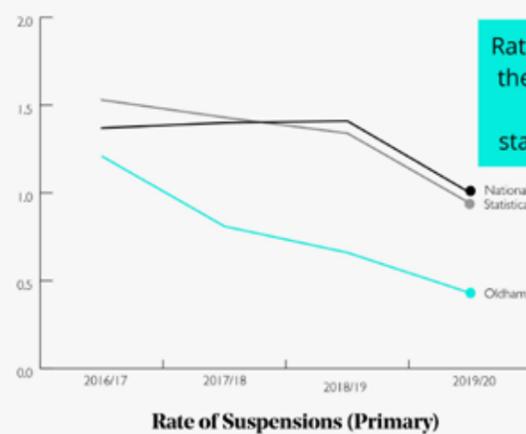


Data dashboard

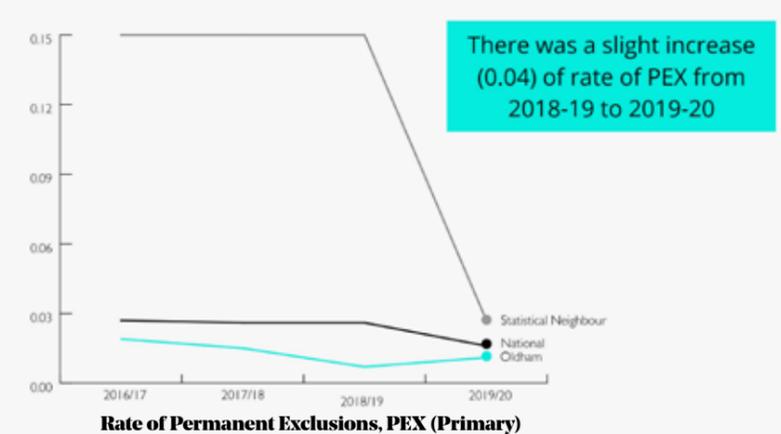
As of 2021-2022, Oldham had...



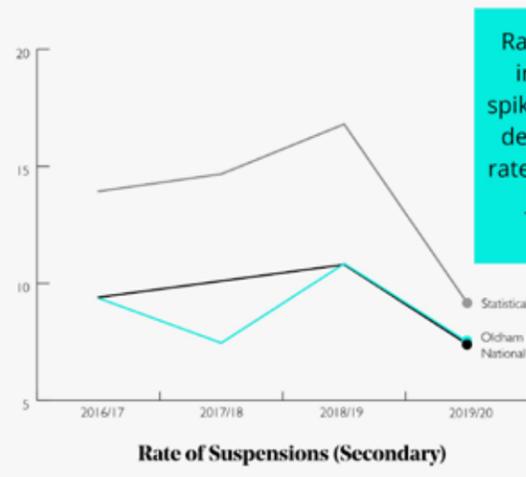
Overall exclusion rates



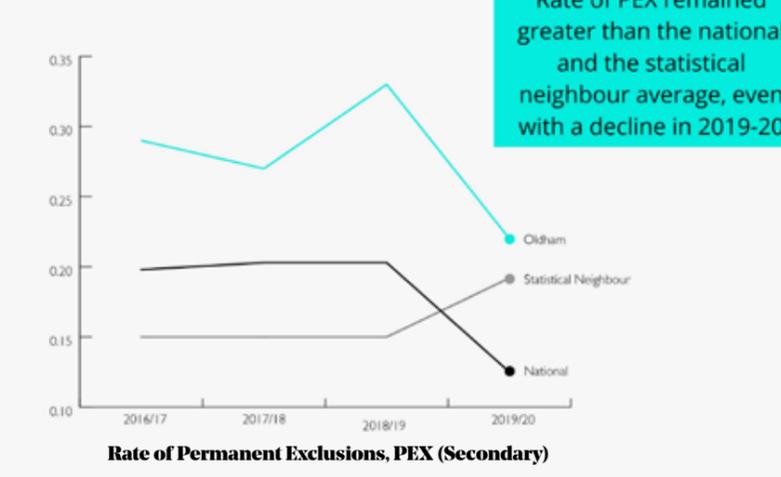
Rate of suspensions and PEX at the primary phase were lower than both national and statistical neighbour averages



There was a slight increase (0.04) of rate of PEX from 2018-19 to 2019-20



Rate of suspensions had an inconsistent trend with a spike in 2018-19 followed by a decline - however the latest rate brought Oldham's rate to just above the national average



Rate of PEX remained greater than the national and the statistical neighbour average, even with a decline in 2019-20

Figure 2: Data dashboard for Oldham

Worcestershire

Worcestershire's Education and Skills Strategy 2019-24¹⁸ has a vision for child-centred systems, where a multifaceted community of support surrounds the child. The strategy, combined with their previously conducted in-house exclusions and alternative provision review, highlighted the need for a more joined up approach, with key priority areas including (but not limited to):

- Supporting mainstream schools to be more inclusive.
- Agreeing on the role and approach of alternative provision in preventing school exclusions.
- Strengthening multi-agency working to prevent exclusions.

Partnering with the RSA, Worcestershire Children First (WCF)¹⁹ is exploring **how WCF can collaborate more effectively with multi-agency partners to support:**

- **A county-wide shift towards a shared ownership of the exclusions challenge?**
- **Better understanding of available interventions including those from alternative provision to support young people at risk of exclusion?**

“The RSA research has been a constant and carefully conducted focus over the last two years of the experiences and outcomes for children, young people and settings and continues to be highly relevant to our whole system priorities, and in particular, as the DfE and DoH have published, the SEND and AP Improvement Plan. It has highlighted the will and desire to be inclusive and the recognition of the barriers and change needed to prevent exclusion. This research project has enabled a system response and developed contributions and capacity because it has had an independent relation with the Worcestershire system. We have been able to integrate the findings and aspects of the action plan into related work to respond to our SEND Accelerated Progress Plan, and this has added value. We look forward to a further period of implementing change and understanding impact.

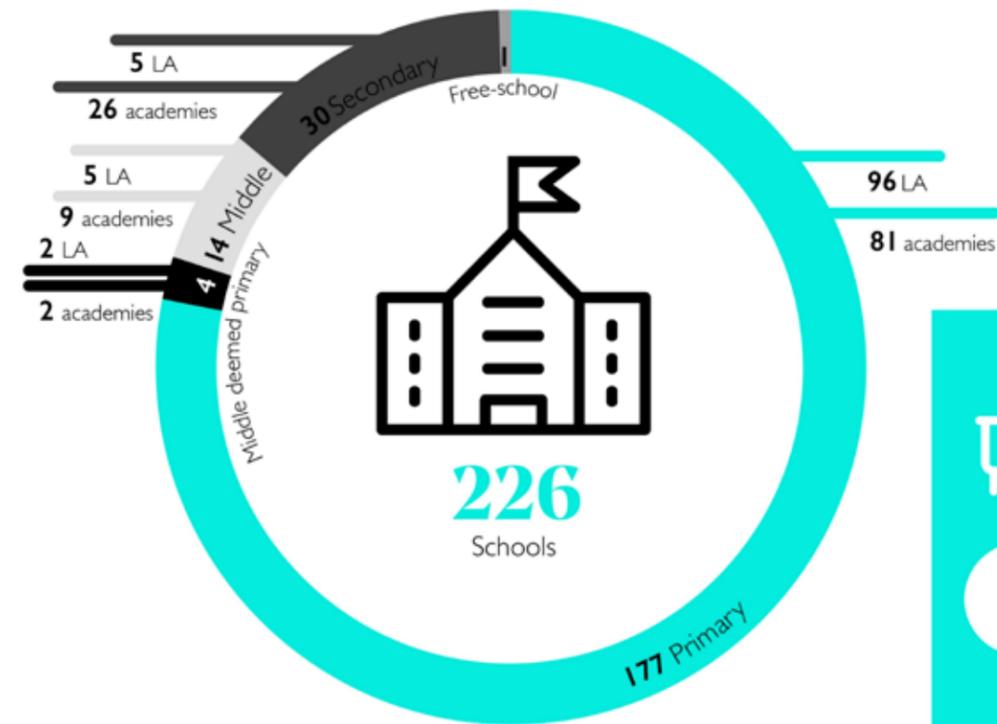
Sarah Wilkins, director of education, early years, inclusion and education place planning, Worcestershire (April 2023)

18. Worcestershire County Council (2019) Worcestershire Education and Skills Strategy: Ensuring a good education for every child in Worcestershire [PDF] [worcestershires.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s22939/Cab%2020190926%20Educ-Skills%20Strat-app1.pdf](https://www.worcestershire.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s22939/Cab%2020190926%20Educ-Skills%20Strat-app1.pdf) [Accessed September 2021].

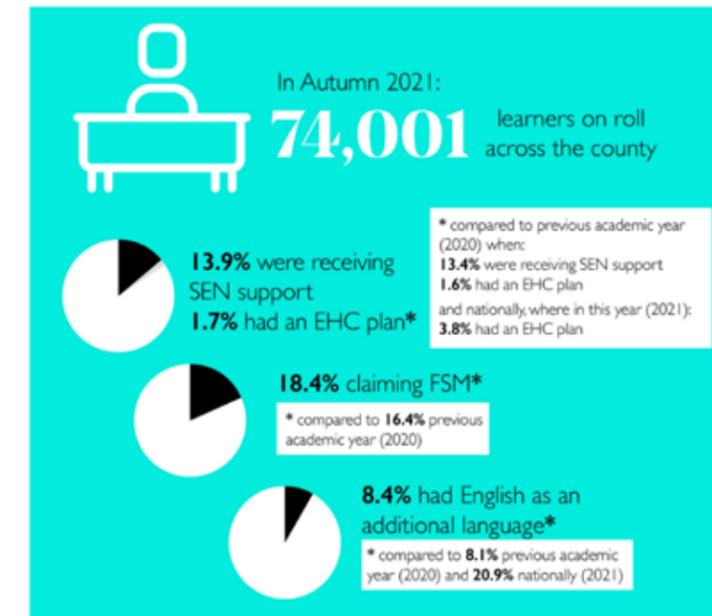
19. [Worcestershire Children First](#) is a company owned by the Worcestershire County Council, responsible for delivery children's services in the county.

Data dashboard

As of 2021-2022, Worcestershire had...



... with a total of...



Exclusions compared to statistical neighbours

Higher rates of permanent exclusions compared to statistical neighbours and national figures, though the gap reduced during 2019-20

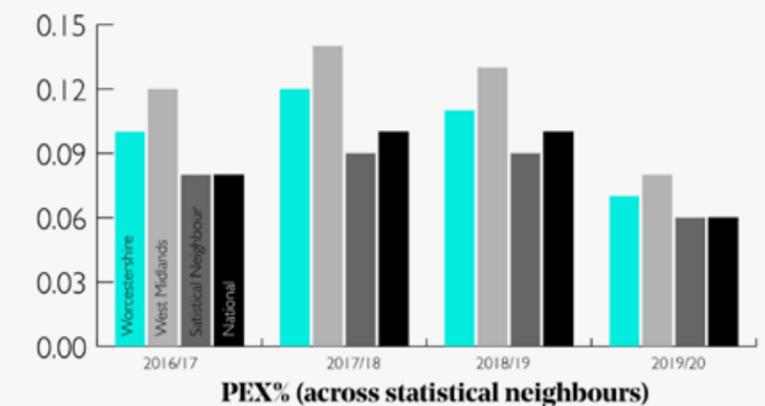


Figure 3: Data dashboard for Worcestershire

Our methodology

Our project has three phases, outlined below.

In the next few chapters we describe what Phases 1 and 2 entailed, and our output and learnings from them. We then share our ongoing work as part of Phase 3.

Click the arrows to be directed to each phase

2021

2022

2023

2024



SYSTEM MAPPING

Phase 1: System mapping

The aim of this phase was to build as much a comprehensive oversight of the local education system as it pertains to inclusion. We did this by identifying and engaging with key organisations and services that work with children and young people, and exploring the character and strength of their relationships with one another.

The local education system

While we endeavoured to speak to a wide range of stakeholders, we were constricted by the project timeline and access to partners. Thus, in this project, by education system we mean:

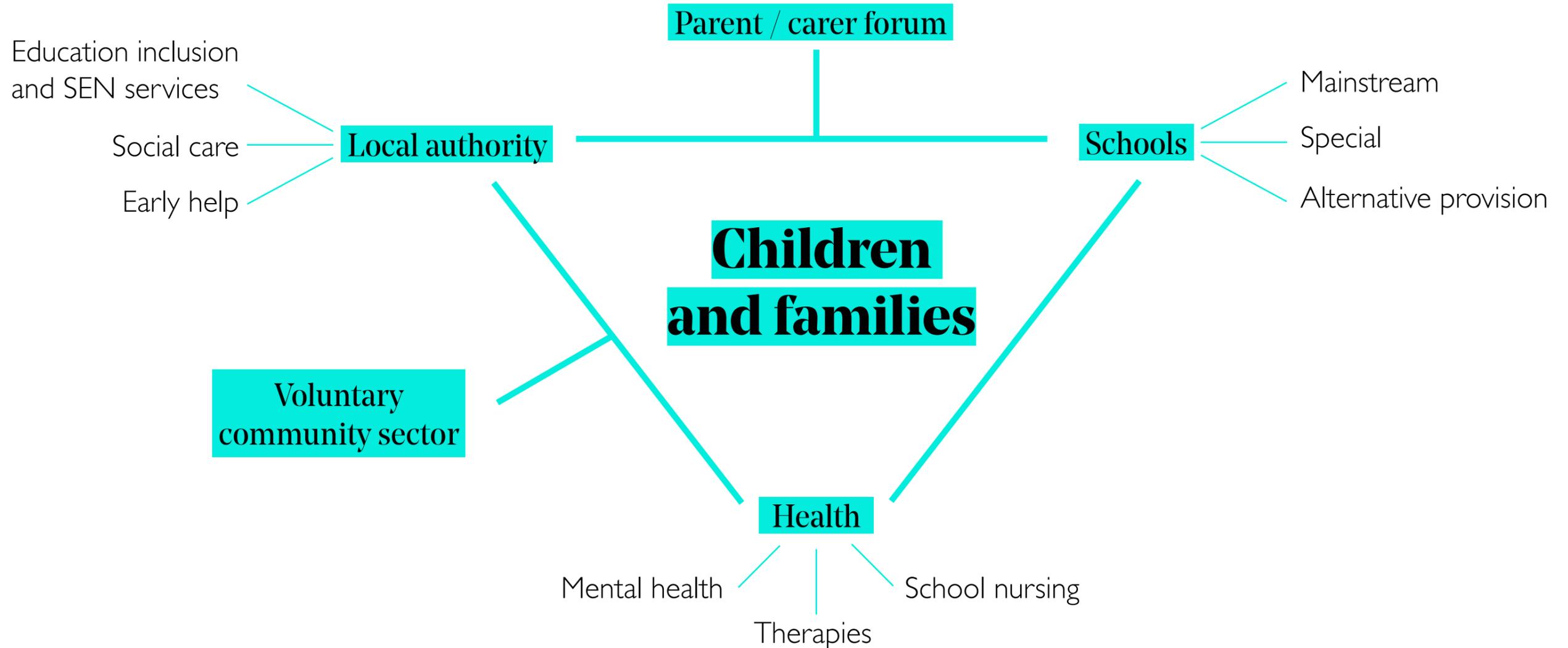


Figure 4: The local education system, for the purpose of this report

How did we do it?

We started with rapid desk research to build local pictures of exclusions and pupil movements based on publicly available data and data provided by the local authority.

The patterns we found within each locality echoed the national trends around disproportionality, and gender-, phase- and year group-related discrepancies. We also found geographical discrepancies within each locality, where certain areas within the locality seemed to be more excluding than others.

These insights directed our qualitative research to understand ‘the why’ and ‘the how’ behind the numbers. This was done through:

- 1.** Interviews with:
 - a.** Children and young people with lived experience of exclusions.
 - b.** Their families.
 - c.** Key multi-agency stakeholders, including leaders from schools, the local authority, health, care, and the voluntary sector.
- 2.** A relational values survey that went out to all multi-agency stakeholders, identified at different levels of the system (senior to child/family-facing), to understand how they relate to one another.

Interviews with children and young people with lived experience of exclusions were co-designed, co-conducted, and co-analysed with local youth researchers aged 18-24, recruited and trained by the RSA.

Our youth researchers were a diverse group, comprising students, local youth councillors, and school support staff. Some had themselves experienced exclusion or difficulties at school, where others had worked closely with vulnerable young people. Each was recruited to bring their unique experiences and perspectives to the research.

We interviewed between three and five children within each locality. Insights from the interviews formed a series of case studies that became a focal point of workshops with local leaders and decision-makers, prompting them with real-life examples to consider practice and policy changes to enable a more inclusive education system.

Interviews with families of children and young people with lived experience of exclusions were conducted with three to five parents/carers of children and young people experiencing exclusion from within each of the three localities.

We worked with trusted intermediaries in each local authority (for example, parent/carer forums) to recruit parents for interviews, ensuring that interviews were organised sensitively and appropriately to their capacities and commitments.

The interviews were designed to understand families’ experiences of supporting their children through the exclusions process. We spoke to parents/carers about:

- Their experiences of their child’s exclusion from school, or where they have been vulnerable to exclusion.
- How parents and carers interact with schools, local authorities, and other children’s services, through the process of exclusion.
- Their views of school exclusions, and what they would like to see improved.

Insights were anonymised and distilled into ‘family journeys’, illuminating the ways in which parent/carers navigated local education systems, and included as a core part of system maps for each local authority.

Participatory principles

The experience of working with youth researchers helped us refine and embed a set of principles for participatory working that will continue to influence our delivery:

1 Do no harm

We supported youth researchers to conduct interviews in as ethical and trauma-informed way as possible, recognising the disproportionate impact of exclusionary practice on pupils who have SEND and social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) conditions; who are already known to local public services; or who have experienced racial prejudice.

2 Accessible and inclusive

We co-designed a simple and transparent recruitment process with local youth groups to reach young people not often consulted or listened to, based around the key questions: 'what excites you about the role of being a youth researcher?' and 'tell us a bit about any experience you have championing young people and/or community issues'. We prioritised motivation over prior or technical experience, and provided bespoke training and remuneration in line with what an assistant researcher would be paid at the RSA. Youth researchers in turn ensured that the interview questions were accessible and inclusive for interviewees.

3 Meaningful participation

We invited young people to shape research about issues relevant to them. Their contribution was therefore integral to the methodology and ethos of the project, rather than an 'add-on'. Youth researchers were involved at every stage of the first phase: designing interview questions, conducting interviews, analysing themes, and feeding back on case studies, which formed a central part of workshops with local decision-makers across education, social care, health, family and children's services, and third sector organisations.

4 Build capacity and will

We applied an asset-based perspective, recognising the wealth of knowledge, experience, and capabilities the youth researchers collectively brought to the project. For example, some had experience with interviews, while others had experience working directly with young people, and some were neurodivergent and had experience of exclusions. Together they were able to support and learn from one another. This approach fostered a particular sense of empathy and understanding with the pupils they were interviewing.

Interviews with stakeholders in **education, health, care, and the voluntary sector** were designed to understand the existing infrastructure and nature of multi-agency collaboration; specifically, what is required to improve the system in supporting children experiencing, or vulnerable to, exclusion, as well as their families. To achieve this, we spoke to interviewees about:

- Their roles and responsibilities towards supporting pupils at risk of exclusion and/or those who have experienced exclusion.
- Whether and how their work overlapped with the work of other local partners – and the successes and obstacles they faced in doing so.
- What they considered to be the drivers and barriers to working more collaboratively and proactively with partners from other agencies.
- What could be improved to enhance proactive and effective multi-agency collaboration.

On average, we spoke to 11 stakeholders within each area, some of whom included:

- School leaders: heads of and/or senior leadership staff with SEND responsibilities within primary, secondary, special, alternative provision settings.
- Local authority SEND and inclusion services team managers.
- Education psychologists.
- Child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) managers.
- Early help managers.
- Social care managers.
- Parent/carer forum leads.

We analysed the interviews through a schools' point of view, by asking: what happens when a need is identified?²⁰ We found that schools roughly follow **'four response tracks'** to support pupils; these range from making adaptations internally to sourcing external support, dependent upon their context and connection with local partners.



Figure 5: Four response tracks

- 1.** This response track is about looking inward, reconsidering one's own pedagogy and practice that may affect a pupil's behaviour and engagement. Within this track there are school-to-school networks of support, including, but not limited to, SEN coordinator (SENCo), mental health lead, and headteacher networks. There are interactions with trusted colleagues within the system, including but not limited to, AP representatives, local authority SEN services specialists, and education psychologists.
- 2.** This response track is about looking outward, sourcing support that the school feels they cannot provide in-house. This may be due to resourcing constraints (time, financial) to meet the identified needs – perceived or actual (sometimes there is a difference between anticipated need determined by schools and actual need determined by expert practitioners).
- 3.** This response track is about referrals for education, health, and care plans (EHCPs); CAMHS; speech, communication, and language therapy; early help, amongst other locally relevant services.
- 4.** This response track is unique to every school. It is about how the culture and the day-to-day practice of the school permits teachers to exercise their agency towards responding to the child's behaviour. If not through response tracks 1-3 above, then it is through other support and sometimes, punitive measures such as detentions, in-house inclusion units, suspensions and ultimately, expulsion.

Hearing from different stakeholders – school leaders, service managers, parent/carer forum representatives – helped us gain a wholesome understanding of the system and identify interdependencies that were leading to unsatisfactory outcomes within the four response tracks. We analysed and presented these interdependencies using causal-loop diagrams²¹ in order to surface the behavioural patterns and structural forces at play and identify opportunities for intervention.

20. Identification of need can happen in various ways, however one of the most prevalent ways is noticeable disengagement from learning.
 21. Lannon, C (2012) Causal Loop Construction. The Systems Thinker [online] thesystemsthinker.com/causal-loop-construction-the-basics/ [Accessed March 2023].

Relational value survey

Originally developed by the Whole Systems Partnership²² for the health and care sectors, relational value is a tool to measure the nature and quality of relationships within a team, organisation, or system through five relational attributes:

- 1.** Integrity: how things connect and run.
- 2.** Respect: how we treat each other.
- 3.** Fairness: how equity is achieved.
- 4.** Empathy: how much we understand each other.
- 5.** Trust: how much we put ourselves in other people's hands.

“Without good relationships and a shared, agreed vision between system partners, achieving positive outcomes for people who use services, their families and carers is significantly compromised.”
—Care Quality Commission²³

For this aspect of the research, we partnered with the Relationships Foundation²⁴ who shared their expertise in measuring and exploring the role of relationships in partnership-working.

We brought together local authority leads from East Sussex, Oldham, and Worcestershire, and enquired:

“What would be the observable indications that relationships between partners are working well to support children with additional needs and/or those at risk of exclusion, and their families?”

We did this by considering relationships across five organisational areas:

- 1.** Culture
- 2.** Vision
- 3.** People
- 4.** Process
- 5.** Infrastructure and technology

We co-designed a survey of 25 unique statements that could explore the nature and quality of relationships within the context of any education system.

This survey was then sent across education, health, care, local authority, and the voluntary sector, where partners at all levels of an organisation (senior strategic leaders to child/family facing professionals) were asked to complete it.

On average, we received 155 responses per local authority, which we then translated into cultural shifts and systemic conditions necessary for a more inclusive education system.

22. Whole Systems Partnership (2023) Measuring relationships [online] www.thewholesystem.co.uk/relational-thinking/measuring-relationships/ [Accessed August 2021].

23. Care Quality Commission (2018) Beyond barriers: how older people move between health and social care in England [PDF] www.cqc.org.uk/sites/default/files/20180702_beyond_barriers.pdf [Accessed August 2021].

24. For more information see: relationshipsfoundation.org/

Relational value survey statements

	Culture the ways we do things round here	Vision what the future will look like	People the human space: empowerment, skills, leadership, etc	Process our routines or systems, how things get done	Infrastructure and technology the physical and virtual space
Integrity how things interconnect and function	There is effective joint working despite any differences in organisational or professional culture.	Our aims in preventing exclusion are clear and shared by all relevant partners.	The right people with the right competencies are involved in preventing exclusion.	Decision-making processes about support for pupils are consistent, reliable and based on good practice.	There is effective communication and data sharing in our work to prevent exclusion.
Respect how we treat others	The strengths and benefits of the different ways in which we work are respected and valued.	The need for different organisations to achieve their own goals is understood.	The work of people in each part of the system to support pupils and their families is acknowledged and valued.	Concerns or needs arising in any part of the system can be expressed and are acted upon appropriately.	When people make decisions about physical space and data systems they consider the impact on others working to prevent exclusion.
Fairness how equity is achieved	Our ways of working seek to ensure that burdens, risks and opportunities are fairly shared.	Expectations of what each organisation will contribute in meeting the needs of pupils and their families are fair.	Everyone is empowered to make a full contribution to preventing exclusion.	The processes for making decisions about pupil placements and support are fair to all parties.	Investment in the physical spaces and IT that people need to support pupils and their families is fair to all parties.
Empathy how much we understand each other	We regularly act in ways that address other organisations' needs.	We all seek to listen to and understand different views about how the needs of pupils should be met.	Efforts are made to understand the pressures and constraints people and organisations are working under.	Decisions about pupils are made in ways that enable understanding of their wider impact on other parts of the system and children and young people.	Any difficulties that people may have in recording or accessing the necessary data about pupils or their families are understood and addressed.
Trust how much we put ourselves in other people's hands	People are willing to make short term sacrifices confident that such actions will be reciprocated by others when necessary.	We trust each organisation to progress their own objectives to achieve the best overall outcomes for pupils.	People are free to innovate and try new things to meet the needs of pupils and families without fear of criticism or failure.	We are able to adopt flexible processes that recognise the complexity in what we are trying to achieve.	We are willing to rely on the data and services/support provided by others.

Phase 1 findings

The key theme that emerged from our research across all three localities was **inconsistency** caused by siloed ways of working.

We found inconsistency manifesting in three ways:

1. Inclusive practice within and across mainstream settings

We found pockets of good practice within and across settings, such as trauma-informed practice, therapeutic thinking, nurture-based practices, and genuine partnership work with families. However, these were not being scaled up or transferred to all settings within each locality.

2. Early intervention pathways

We found significant variation in how schools accessed the options available to them due to the asymmetric nature of information in the system.

3. Primary to secondary transitions

We found primary and secondary schools working individually to support pupils with transition rather than working together.

Although our research enquiry primarily focused on multi-agency working, two of the three emergent inconsistencies were about mainstream schools' practice and approaches to inclusion. While these do not directly relate to multi-agency collaboration, they did bring up considerations for collaboration amongst mainstream schools, special schools, and alternative provision settings, as well as the role of the local authority in enabling school-to-school support.

In the next section, we share insights from the three localities combined.

For each inconsistency, we share what the pupil and family experience is like (ie, the visible impact of this inconsistency on pupils and families), as well as the patterns and structures underneath the surface that seem to be holding that inconsistency in place.

- Pupil experience is shown through the case studies we developed after interviewing children with experiences of exclusion.
- Family experience is shown through family journeys depicting how parents/carers navigated the local system to find support for their child.
- The patterns and structures are visualised through causal-loop diagrams that depict the interrelated nature of factors and issues at play.

1. Inclusive practice within and across mainstream settings



Billie

The following is the experience and perspective of Billie, a year 10 pupil, alongside their parent.

This case study shows the **impact of inconsistency within a school's inclusive practice** on Billie's experience of schooling and their love for learning.

(Please note: because we interviewed a small number of pupils in each locality, we have decided to go with gender-neutral names to ensure pupil anonymity and confidentiality. While gender plays a significant role in pupils' schooling experience, the case studies in this report are shared primarily to highlight the three consistencies found in our research).

Billie is in year 10 and sees the value of learning. They love watching documentaries and even learnt how to rebuild their Xbox, but at this point Billie feels disengaged from schooling.

Billie is dyslexic and struggles with memory processing. Billie and their parent were hopeful that getting an EHCP would unlock support, but they feel Billie's mainstream school is overstretched and unable to offer the help they need.

Billie feels disengaged from school as their interests include hands-on learning experiences, such as making an Xbox, which are not offered at school. They would like to learn more vocational subjects that suit their interests.

Teachers rarely ask about Billie's ambition for the future. Billie is worried about what they will be able to do when they leave school now that they are in year 10.

Billie gets on well with some of the teachers where they feel there is mutual respect, which leads to enjoyable lessons. However, Billie feels that some of the teachers judge them.

“ They have the wrong idea of me and treat me differently. ”

Billie feels labelled as a 'naughty' kid and feels that as a result, teachers are more punitive towards them compared to others.

Billie's parent feels that their child is often given detention, isolation or suspension for 'daft' things including a recent incident where Billie was put into isolation because they had not brought a pencil case to class.

Wednesdays are particularly difficult because Billie doesn't get along with any of their subject teachers on that day. This can lead to bursts of emotions, which sometimes result in walking out of lessons.

Billie also feels that the school's behaviour policy is ineffective; the school uses a 'positive points system', where points can be taken away as a sanction. This form of incentivisation has backfired for Billie.

“ A lot of the time I don't want to go into school because, if I don't go in, I can't lose any positive points, but if I do go in then I lose them. ”

The difficulties at school have impacted Billie's self-esteem, leaving them feeling 'stupid' at school. Billie feels that even when they do well in subjects like maths or art, they don't receive praise or move up a set because of the way they're labelled.

As a result, Billie often refuses to attend school, either completely or on time. When they arrive late to school, they are often placed in isolation, which has now created a vicious cycle.

Billie's parent feels that school communication is often around sanctions for missing school rather than a constructive, two-way conversation to understand and address the root cause of the issue.

All being said, Billie and their parent are feeling more optimistic having recently formed a positive relationship with a member of the school leadership team, Mr W. Billie feels that they can go and talk to Mr W on difficult days and wish that they had the same type of relationship with other teachers. All Billie wants is for their teachers to try to get to know them better, so they recognise the good things Billie has to offer.

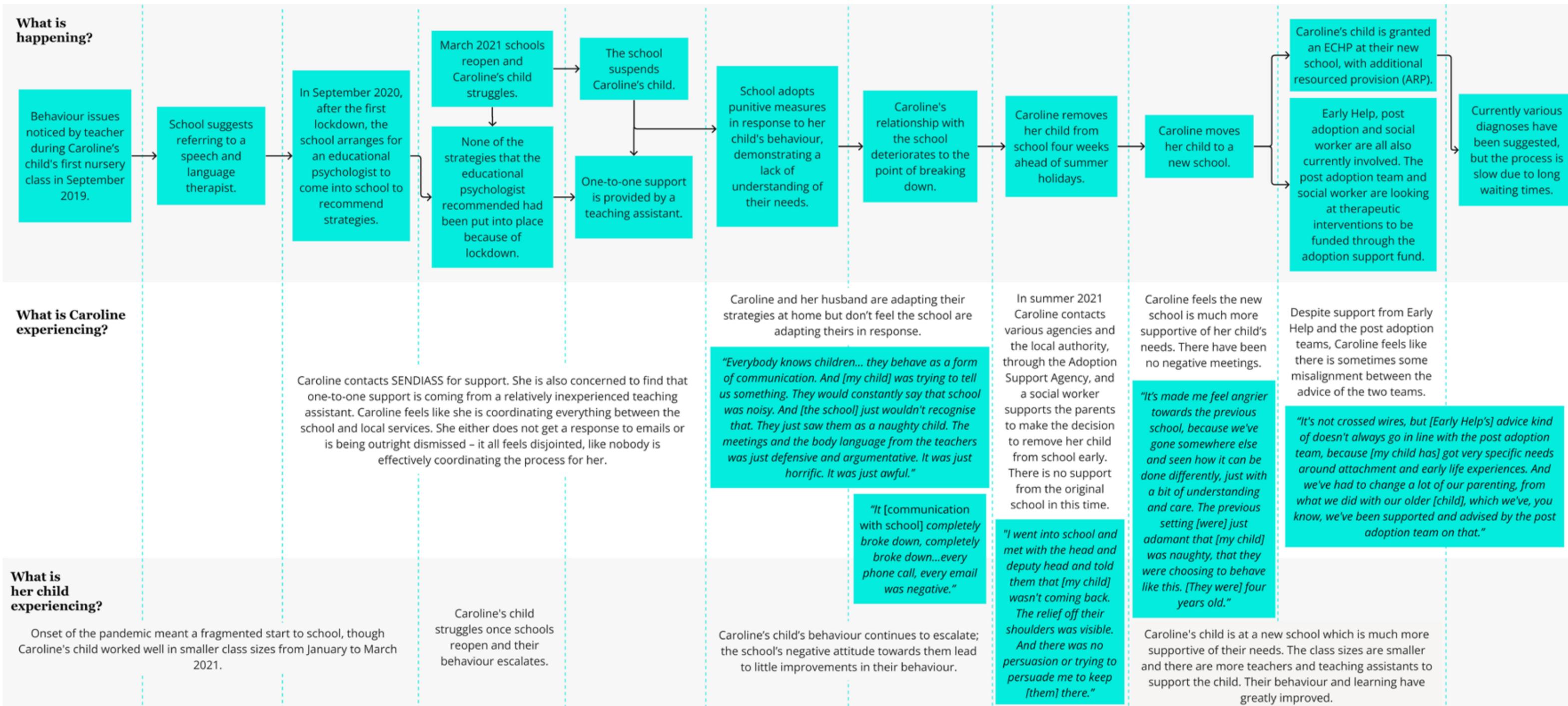
1. Inclusive practice within and across mainstream settings



Caroline and her child

This is the journey of Caroline and her child, through Caroline's viewpoint, from September 2019 when her child started nursery to autumn 2021 when we spoke to her.

While there are a lot of factors at play in this story, such as involvement of various agencies, the inconsistency in mainstream schools and approaches towards Caroline and her child is of particular note.



Behaviour issues noticed by teacher during Caroline's child's first nursery class in September 2019.

School suggests referring to a speech and language therapist.

In September 2020, after the first lockdown, the school arranges for an educational psychologist to come into school to recommend strategies.

March 2021 schools reopen and Caroline's child struggles.

None of the strategies that the educational psychologist recommended had been put into place because of lockdown.

The school suspends Caroline's child.

One-to-one support is provided by a teaching assistant.

School adopts punitive measures in response to her child's behaviour, demonstrating a lack of understanding of their needs.

Caroline's relationship with the school deteriorates to the point of breaking down.

Caroline removes her child from school four weeks ahead of summer holidays.

Caroline moves her child to a new school.

Caroline's child is granted an ECHP at their new school, with additional resourced provision (ARP).

Early Help, post adoption and social worker are all also currently involved. The post adoption team and social worker are looking at therapeutic interventions to be funded through the adoption support fund.

Currently various diagnoses have been suggested, but the process is slow due to long waiting times.

Caroline contacts SENDIASS for support. She is also concerned to find that one-to-one support is coming from a relatively inexperienced teaching assistant. Caroline feels like she is coordinating everything between the school and local services. She either does not get a response to emails or is being outright dismissed – it all feels disjointed, like nobody is effectively coordinating the process for her.

"Everybody knows children... they behave as a form of communication. And [my child] was trying to tell us something. They would constantly say that school was noisy. And [the school] just wouldn't recognise that. They just saw them as a naughty child. The meetings and the body language from the teachers was just defensive and argumentative. It was just horrific. It was just awful."

"It [communication with school] completely broke down, completely broke down...every phone call, every email was negative."

"I went into school and met with the head and deputy head and told them that [my child] wasn't coming back. The relief off their shoulders was visible. And there was no persuasion or trying to persuade me to keep [them] there."

"It's made me feel angrier towards the previous school, because we've gone somewhere else and seen how it can be done differently, just with a bit of understanding and care. The previous setting [were] just adamant that [my child] was naughty, that they were choosing to behave like this. [They were] four years old."

"It's not crossed wires, but [Early Help's] advice kind of doesn't always go in line with the post adoption team, because [my child has] got very specific needs around attachment and early life experiences. And we've had to change a lot of our parenting, from what we did with our older [child], which we've, you know, we've been supported and advised by the post adoption team on that."

What is her child experiencing?

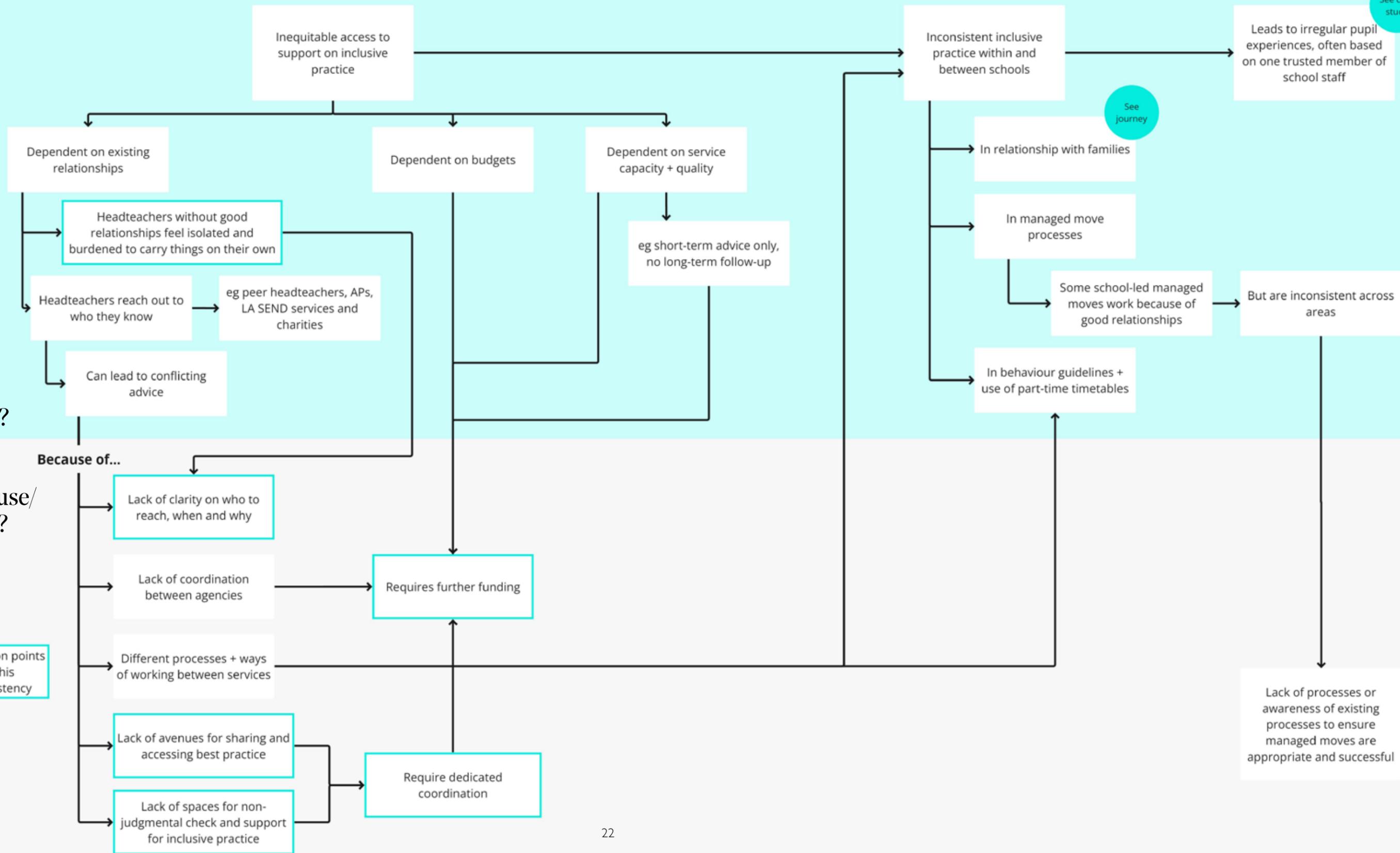
Onset of the pandemic meant a fragmented start to school, though Caroline's child worked well in smaller class sizes from January to March 2021.

Caroline's child struggles once schools reopen and their behaviour escalates.

Caroline's child's behaviour continues to escalate; the school's negative attitude towards them lead to little improvements in their behaviour.

Caroline's child is at a new school which is much more supportive of their needs. The class sizes are smaller and there are more teachers and teaching assistants to support the child. Their behaviour and learning have greatly improved.

1. Inclusive practice within and across mainstream settings



See case study

See journey

What patterns are we noticing emerge?

What structures cause/are caused by these?

Key:
Key tension points for this inconsistency

2. Early intervention pathways



Charlie

The following is the experience of Charlie, a year 10 pupil.

This story highlights the **impact of siloed ways of working**, leading to misidentification of, and thus, a varied response to need from one school to another.

(Please note: because we interviewed a small number of pupils in each locality, we have decided to go with gender-neutral names to ensure pupil anonymity and confidentiality. While gender plays a significant role in pupils' schooling experience, the case studies in this report are shared primarily to highlight the three consistencies found in our research).

Charlie is in year 10 and is currently at their third secondary school in the last two years.

Charlie experienced bullying over social media because of a fallout with a group of friends, and started skipping school as a result. Charlie and their family complained about the bullying but felt as though they were being penalised for it: the school's solution to Charlie's situation was to move them to a flexible learning base away from their peers, and keep them in during break times.

Charlie also felt like they were under constant threat of exclusions, with statements such as:

“ There are loads of people on the waiting list (for the school) and they (the school) will probably kick out kids like you to let others get in. ”

Furthermore, Charlie's behaviour was often misunderstood due to miscommunication about their special educational needs. Charlie has ADHD, yet this went undiagnosed throughout most of their schooling. Even after their diagnosis in 2019, Charlie was missed from the SEND school register. It was only brought to light in a meeting between the headteacher and their parent in March 2021. This breakdown in communication meant Charlie missed out on support and their behaviour was not understood in the context of their ADHD.

Between years 7 and 8, Charlie was sent to another school's isolation unit 10 times and eventually reached a point where the suspensions felt of little consequence because they no longer wanted to be at school. Charlie disliked many of the teachers and felt that the environment was negatively influencing their behaviour.

Charlie's first managed move ended unsuccessfully after a culmination of small incidents. Unhappy about the return to their previous school, Charlie's parent withdrew them from school in the middle of the autumn term. Charlie was learning at home while they waited for a new placement, which wasn't until the start of the spring term.

Charlie has started at a new school on a managed move which has been positive so far. Charlie feels that the new school is a 'good school' that has given them 'a chance'. The school has high expectations, and this is reflected in pupil behaviour. Charlie has drastically changed their behaviour in this new environment saying:

“ I don't misbehave at this school at all. ”

The school has put systems in place to help Charlie get off to a positive start. Aware that Charlie had previously been drawn into disruptive behaviour by their peers, the school has sought to buddy Charlie up with a pupil who has been able to introduce them to a more positive friendship group. Recognising that Charlie sometimes struggles with organisation due to their ADHD, the staff have provided Charlie with a colour-coded timetable which they feel is helping.

Charlie is optimistic about their future at this school and is grateful to have been given another chance in their education rather than a permanent exclusion.

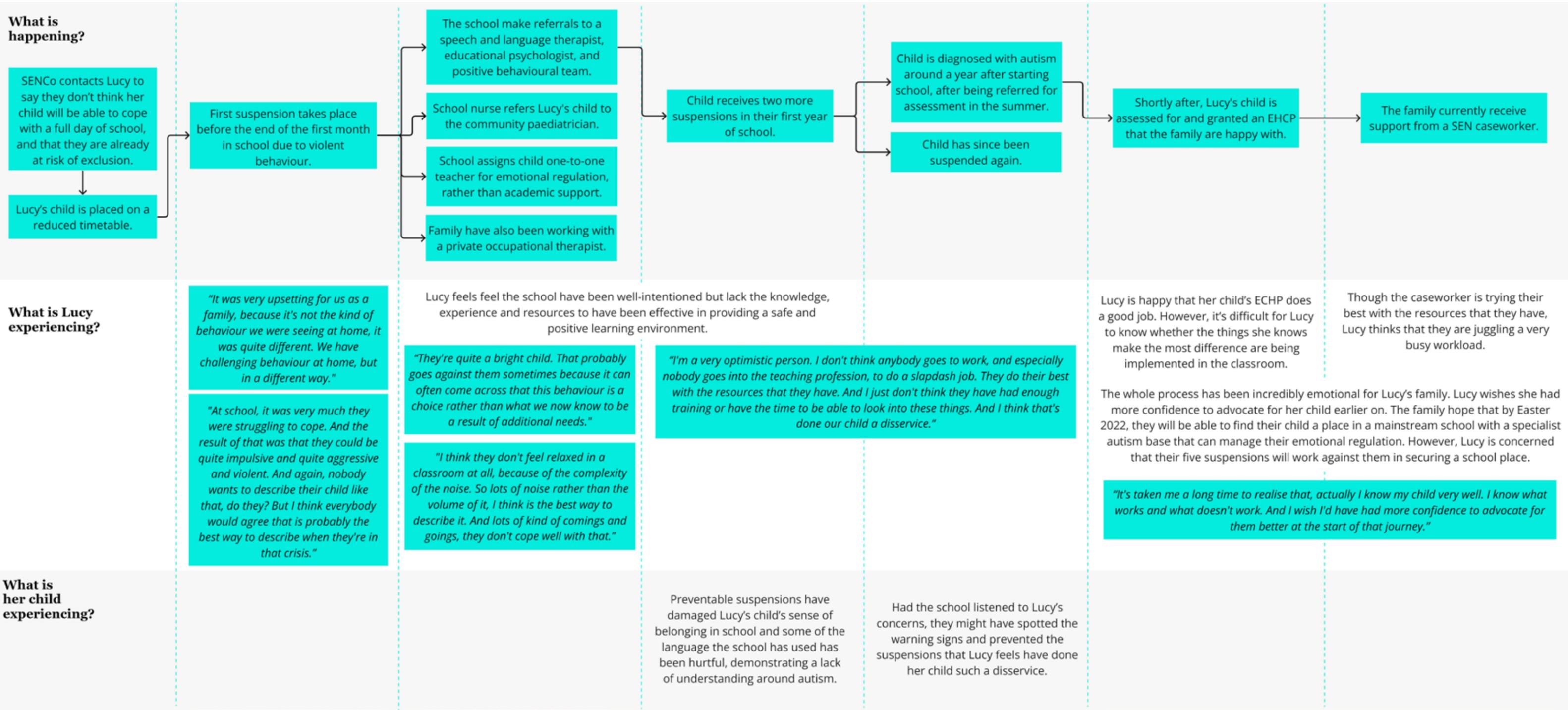
2. Early intervention pathways



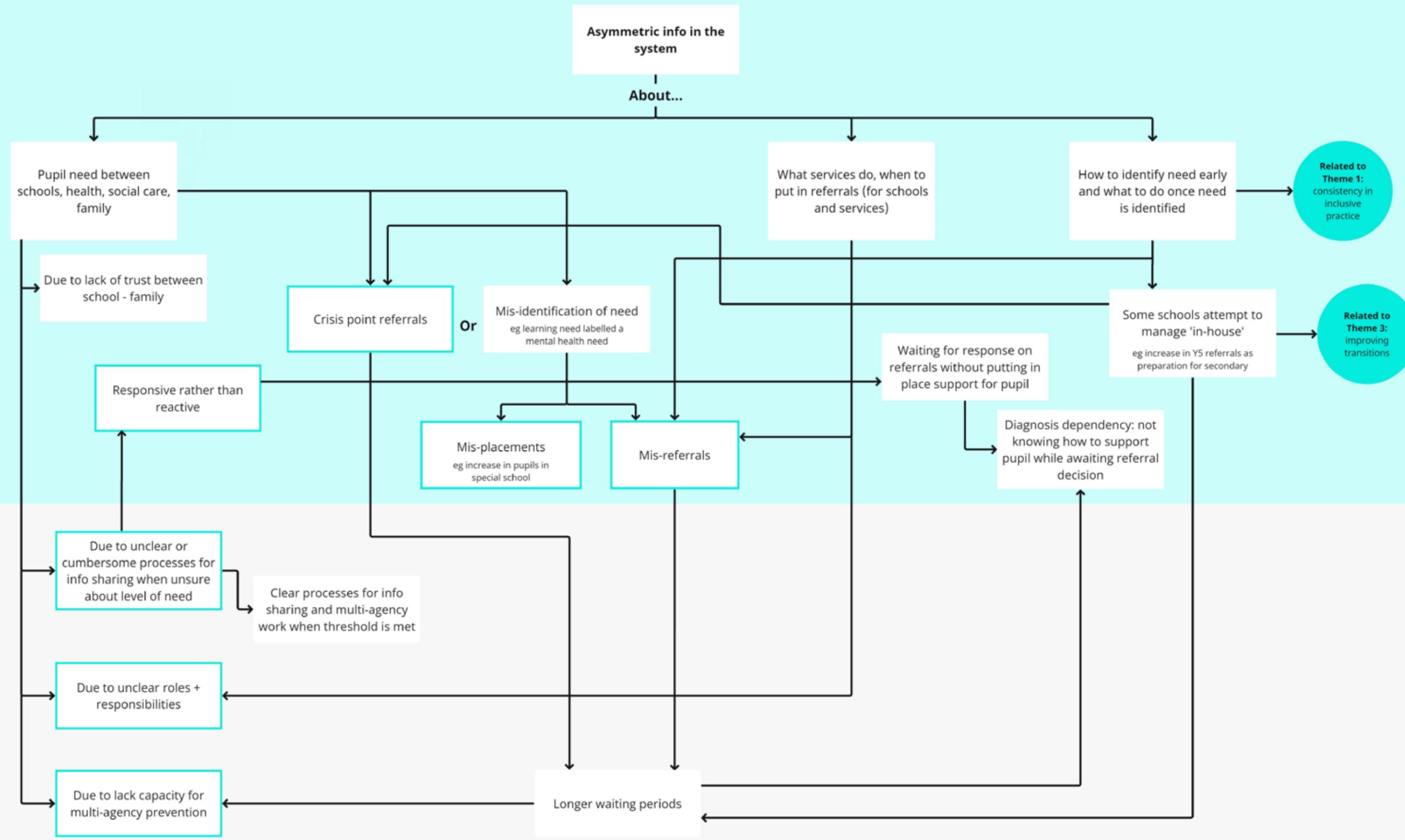
Lucy and her child

This is the journey of Lucy and her child, through Lucy's viewpoint. While Lucy's child has received support from various agencies, the question left on Lucy's mind is why the school was not able to provide

a safe and positive learning environment for her child, and the question for us is whether a joined-up approach between the various services and school could have helped with that.



2. Early intervention pathways



What patterns are we noticing emerge?

What structures cause/are caused by these?

Key:
Key tension points for this inconsistency

3. Primary to secondary transitions



The following is the experience and perspective of Alex, who has just started secondary school and found the **transition challenging**.

(Please note: because we interviewed a small number of pupils in each locality, we have decided to go with gender-neutral names to ensure pupil anonymity and confidentiality. While gender plays a significant role in pupils' schooling experience, the case studies in this report are shared primarily to highlight the three consistencies found in our research).

Alex has recently started secondary school. Alex is shy and has found this transition challenging.

Alex is autistic, with other complex learning needs.

At primary school, Alex learned alongside their peers in a mainstream classroom. They had good relationships with their teachers and peers. This has not been the case since joining Alex's secondary school and they have found the transition to secondary school challenging.

“ I think that everyone who starts secondary school would think that. It's a big school and a lot of new changes. ”

Alex has experienced persistent bullying at this new school. They describe the bullies as being “a bit rough on me”. Alex has told their teachers about the bullying which resulted in detentions, but these have not put an end to it.

Since the bullying started, Alex has started skipping lessons and now spends almost all of their time being educated away from their peers.

“ I'm mainly in this student support base so it's making school a bit rough. ”

The staff in the base support Alex with their academic work and pastoral help with the bullying issues, however Alex would rather be in the class with others.

Alex has also experienced their own share of detentions and suspensions. One suspension that stands out most in their memory was because of a uniform violation.

“ I don't really like to wear my jumper that often. I mainly prefer to wear my coat instead, so I got told off because I wouldn't take my coat off in class, so I got suspended for that. ”

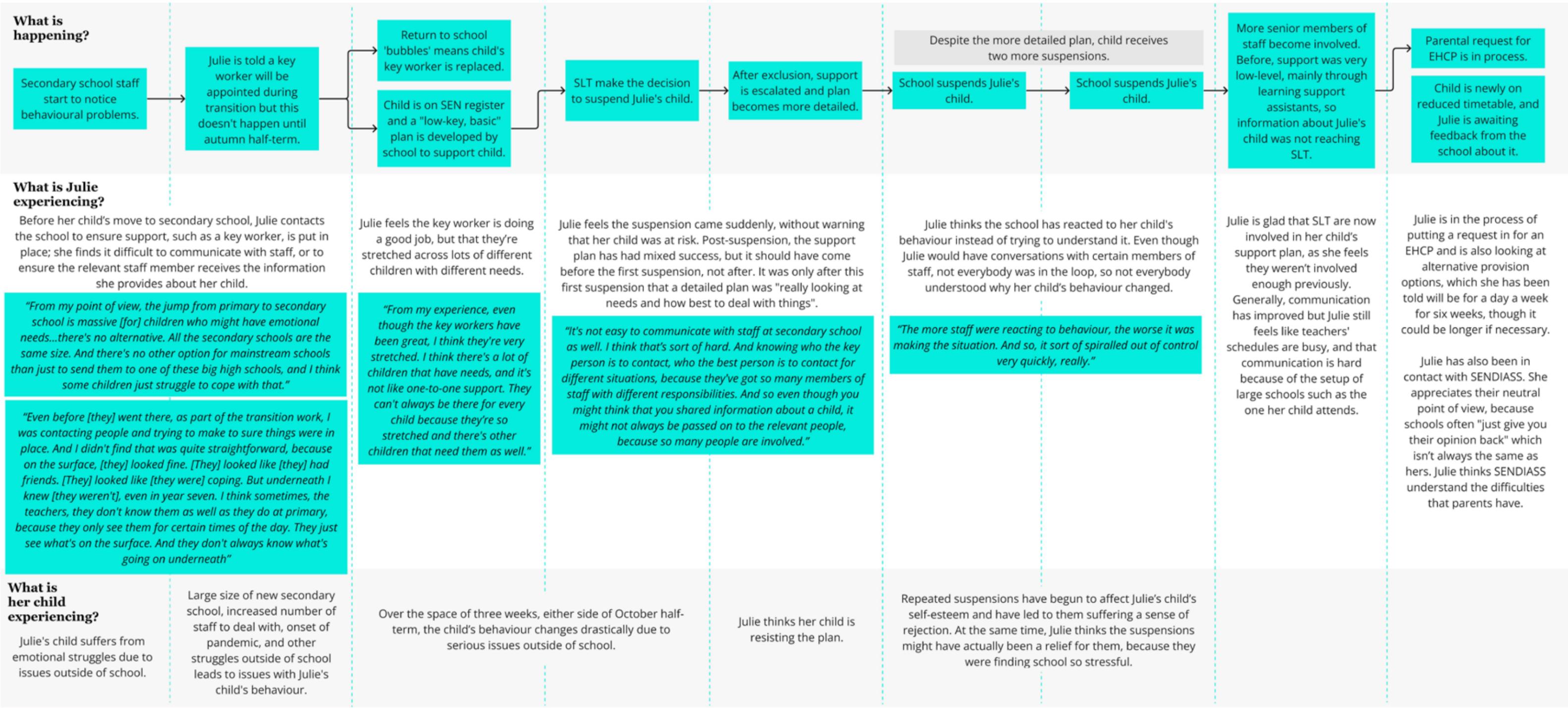
Alex and their family feel unheard by the school. Alex felt annoyed that school staff weren't interested in hearing their explanation that they don't like the feel of wearing a jumper. The parents feel frustrated by the school's expectations despite knowing about Alex's complex learning needs. Alex now wears a jumper because “it's for the best” to avoid another suspension.

3. Primary to secondary transitions



Julie and her child

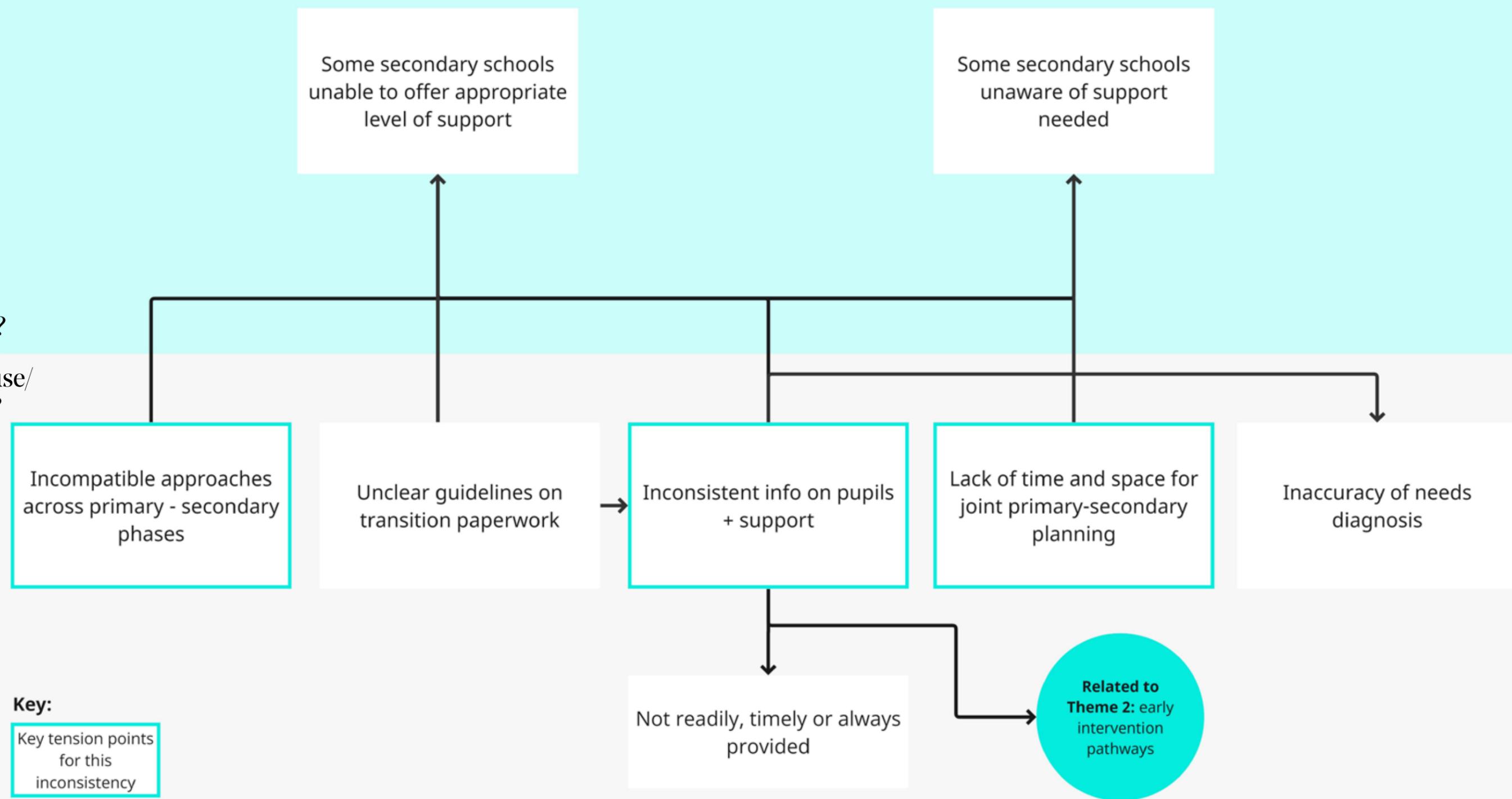
This is the journey of Julie and her child, through Julie's viewpoint. It illustrates a transition gone wrong.



3. Primary to secondary transitions

What patterns are we noticing emerge?

What structures cause/are caused by these?



Key:
Key tension points for this inconsistency

Cultural shifts and system conditions

Uniting all insights are cultural shifts and system conditions required for more collaborative practice across all three localities. These were identified through the relational value survey undertaken by **464 partners** across the three localities.

We believe...

- There can be more effective joint working despite any differences in organisational or professional culture
- Aims in preventing exclusions are mostly clear and shared by all relevant partners
- The right people with the right competencies are not always involved in preventing exclusions
- Decision-making processes about support for pupils can be more consistent, reliable and based on good practice
- There can be more effective communication and data sharing in our work to prevent exclusions

What should we amplify?

- Empowering everyone to make a full contribution to preventing exclusion
- Listening to and understanding different views about how the needs of pupils should be met
- Regularly acting in ways that address other organisations' needs
- Respecting and valuing the strengths and benefits of the different ways in which we all work
- Acknowledging and valuing the work of all people and organisations to support pupils and their families
- Trusting each organisation to progress their own objectives to achieve the best overall outcomes for pupils
- Continuing to rely on data and services/support provided by others

What do we shift towards?

Fairness

- Greater fairness in:
- Expectations of what each organisation will contribute in meeting the needs of pupils and their families
 - Sharing of burdens, risks and opportunities
 - Decision-making processes for pupil placement and support
 - Investment in physical spaces and IT

Empathy

- Greater empathy, where:
- Efforts are being made to understand the pressures and constraints people and organisations are working under
 - Decisions about pupils are being made in ways that enable understanding of the wider impact on other parts of the system and CYP
 - Any difficulties that people may have in recording or accessing the necessary data about pupils or their families are understood and addressed

Respect

- Greater respect, such that:
- When people make decisions about physical space and data systems they consider the impact on others working to prevent exclusion
 - Concerns or needs arising by schools or other partners would always be expressed or acted upon appropriately
 - The need for different organisations to achieve their own goals is understood

Trust

- Greater trust, so that:
- People are willing to make short term sacrifices confident that such actions will be reciprocated by others when necessary
 - We are able to adopt flexible processes that recognise the complexity in what we are trying to achieve
 - People are free to innovate and try new things to meet the needs of pupils and families without fear of criticism or failure

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CONVENING

Phase 2: Convening

The aim of this phase was to turn the research insights into actions to improve the system.

How did we do it?

Convening multi-agency collaboratives

In each locality, we convened a collaborative of multi-agency leaders (partners/collaborative members from hereon): a peer-learning cohort, that worked together to define a joint vision and an action plan for how things could be done differently to reduce preventable exclusions.

While existing relationships, priorities, and commitments heavily impacted participation and ongoing engagement, we did our best to cover a vast portion of the system, ensuring a balance between decision-makers and front-line staff, including parent/carer representatives. However, we acknowledge the absence of key partners such as school governors and voluntary sector leaders.

Locality	Collaborative membership
East Sussex	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Primary headteachers x 5• LA SEND and school improvement officers• CAMHS manager• Early help manager• Social care manager• Parent/carer forum representative• Virtual school representative• Alternative provision representative
Oldham	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Primary senior leaders x 3• Secondary senior leaders x 2• Special school leaders x 3• LA inclusion and SEND manager and representative• Principal education Psychologist• CAMHS emotional wellbeing practitioner• Early help manager• Parent/carer forum representative
Worcestershire	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Primary senior leaders x 2• Secondary senior leaders x 2• LA inclusion and SEND managers x 3• Designated clinical officer for SEND• Parent/carer forum representative• Virtual school representative• Primary and secondary alternative provision representatives

Careful consideration was given to create a space that promoted safety and trust, with a focus on building trusting, reciprocal relationships amongst collaborative members.

Our rules of engagement became the principles that grounded our coming together.

The research insights showed a tendency for professionals and agencies to work in silos, and as a result, feel isolated with self-fulfilling narratives about the unfairness of the system and deep resentment towards one another.

Our priority was to enable a safe space to surface and check existing

underlying assumptions about members in the room, work that requires openness and vulnerability. The rules of engagement helped make this possible by reminding us that everyone in the room came with a shared purpose, even if they had different starting points and perspectives.

This helped us move away from blame towards empathy – understanding one another better: their individual and joint contributions to the system, and unique but interrelated challenges.

Building from these rules of engagement, we designed a series of five workshops that continued to foster stronger collaborative relationships amongst members as they moved from discussion towards action.

Rules of engagement

1. Assume best intent; treat everyone with respect and kindness
2. Be present and actively listen (eliminate distractions like tech)
3. What is said here, stays here (take lessons, but leave stories)
4. You may call in (to discuss an idea), but not call out (as a person)
5. Every experience is valuable; use “I” statements
6. Step up, step back (be aware of the space you take up or not); respect boundaries
7. Respect and honour silence

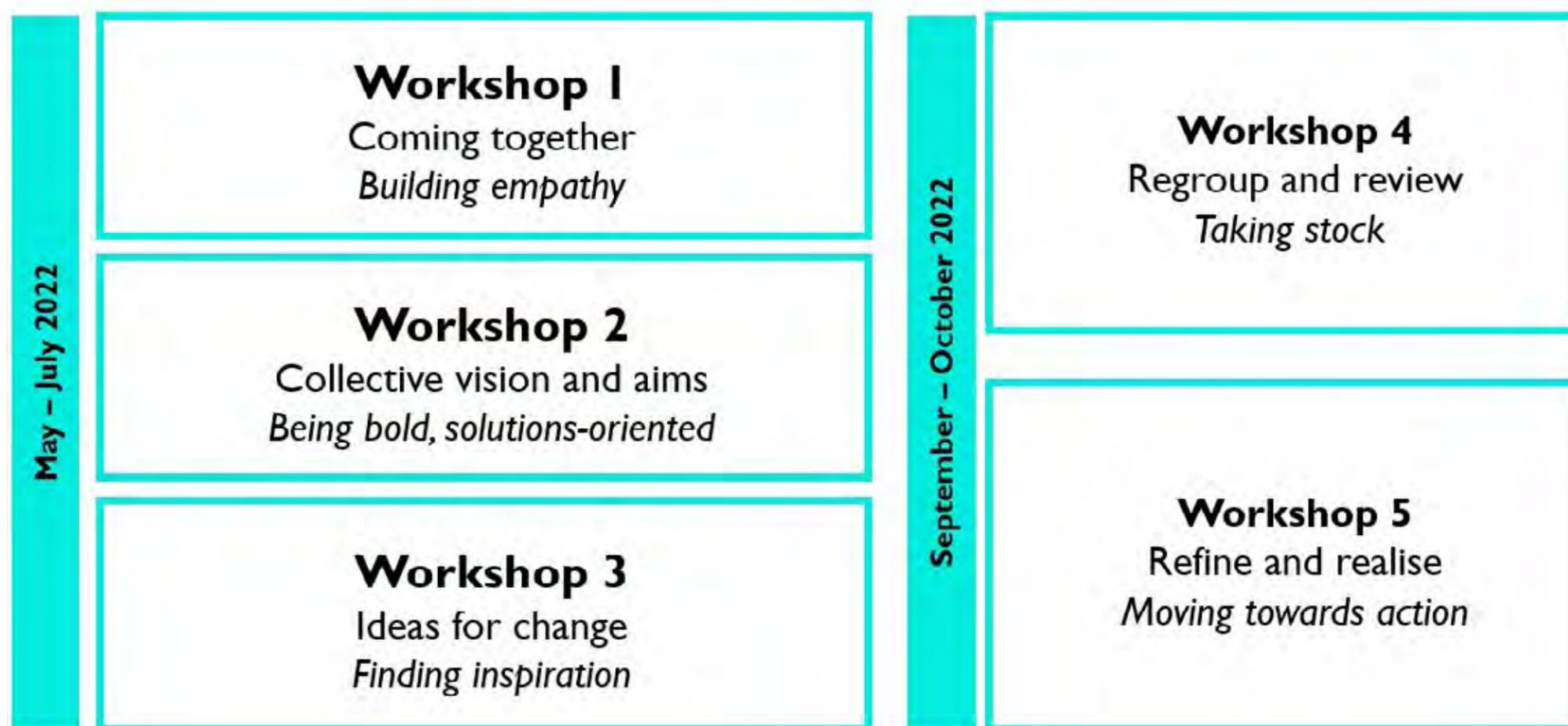


Figure 6: Workshop designs

Principles for collaborative workshops

1 Being solution-focused

Identifying and then taking actions in a complex system is not easy: it requires time, energy and most importantly, will and support of partners within the system.

It requires **reframing** of the current situation and our role in it.

- Some members told us: *“we want to do this but the system doesn’t incentivise”*. So we asked *“what is possible within the existing system and where can we push boundaries?”*
- Others informed us: *“we want to do this, but actually we’re already doing so well / we don’t exclude as much as others”*. So we asked *“what is needed to build on existing good practice, and consider how our individual actions are impacting others?”*

With kindness, we challenged members to move towards solutions, starting with articulating a vision for a better future. Together, we re-imagined a family’s journey in the ‘system of the future’, asking what is needed for that journey to be manifested and how might preventative multi-agency partnerships support it.

2 Remaining solution-agnostic, driven by context and process

We saw ourselves as **process-experts, not place-experts**. While we had ideas of what could improve, we were careful not to dictate our opinions onto the collaborative members. We brought in examples of **promising practice** from within and outside the localities, using these as inspiration for change.

We encouraged **building upon, rather than building new** – identifying where there was already energy and action within the system for change, and how to tap into it.

3 Being adaptive to emerging need

Given the long-term-ness of the project, we must continue to remain flexible and adaptive to the needs of each place.

This didn’t discourage us from dreaming big but ensured that we had **learning loops** to constantly check what remains realistic and achievable, planning for incremental changes rather than daunting overhauls.

4 Our process, their ambition and action

The actions that have come out of the workshops are for the collaborative members to undertake, not the RSA.

The RSA, through this project, is facilitating the process for reflection, action, and evaluation, but the **ownership and implementation** of the actions are for partners in the three localities to champion.

Phase 2 outputs

The five workshops led each collaborative to articulate their vision for a better future with positive pupil experiences and family journeys, and their mission in its realisation.

Local area	Vision	Mission
East Sussex	<p>We want:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is best for the pupil, making pupil-centred decisions involving pupil voice 2. To identify needs and respond sooner in order to avoid escalation to crisis point(s) 3. More flexible and systematic support + provision through multi-agency involvement 4. Parents/carers to feel heard, supported, valued, respected and informed 	<p>Bring together schools and agencies to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Build and share good practice, and 2. Champion the reduction of suspensions and exclusions <p>by ensuring all partners are engaged with families and equipped to identify and address the needs of pupils.</p>
Oldham	<p>We want:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A local culture that maintains high standards of inclusion, while offering support and nurture to those that may be struggling 2. To understand and engage with young people as whole persons (why behaviour is happening + what else is happening outside school) 3. More alignment and shared understanding between schools, services and families, particularly around identification of need 	<p>Work together to shift values and mindsets to foster a more inclusive and child-centered culture across Oldham, because we believe that inclusion lifts both attendance and attainment for all children.</p> <p>This collaborative will be a safe space to test processes and structures that will support us in building a clearer and more aligned system, with shared responsibilities and embedded ways to review and learn from what we are testing.</p>
Worcestershire	<p>We want:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Everyone to work from a mindset of what's best for the child 2. Families to feel supported and respected when they call out for help 3. Unified approach to inclusion across schools and agencies 	<p>Embed collaborative practice to: design and promote improved ways of working (ie child-centric, trauma-informed, accurate and timely information sharing, influenced by best practice) in order to steer thinking, shift cultures and better partner with families and agencies towards a more inclusive local education system.</p>

Collaboratives then decided on pilot activities that could address the inconsistencies found in the research, using the following criteria:

Feasibility: what is practical?

Desirability: what do we most want?

Viability: what will have a lasting impact?

Activities that met all three criteria (the north star) were given preference.

Each collaborative sub-divided itself to multi-agency groups to lead one pilot activity based on need and preference.

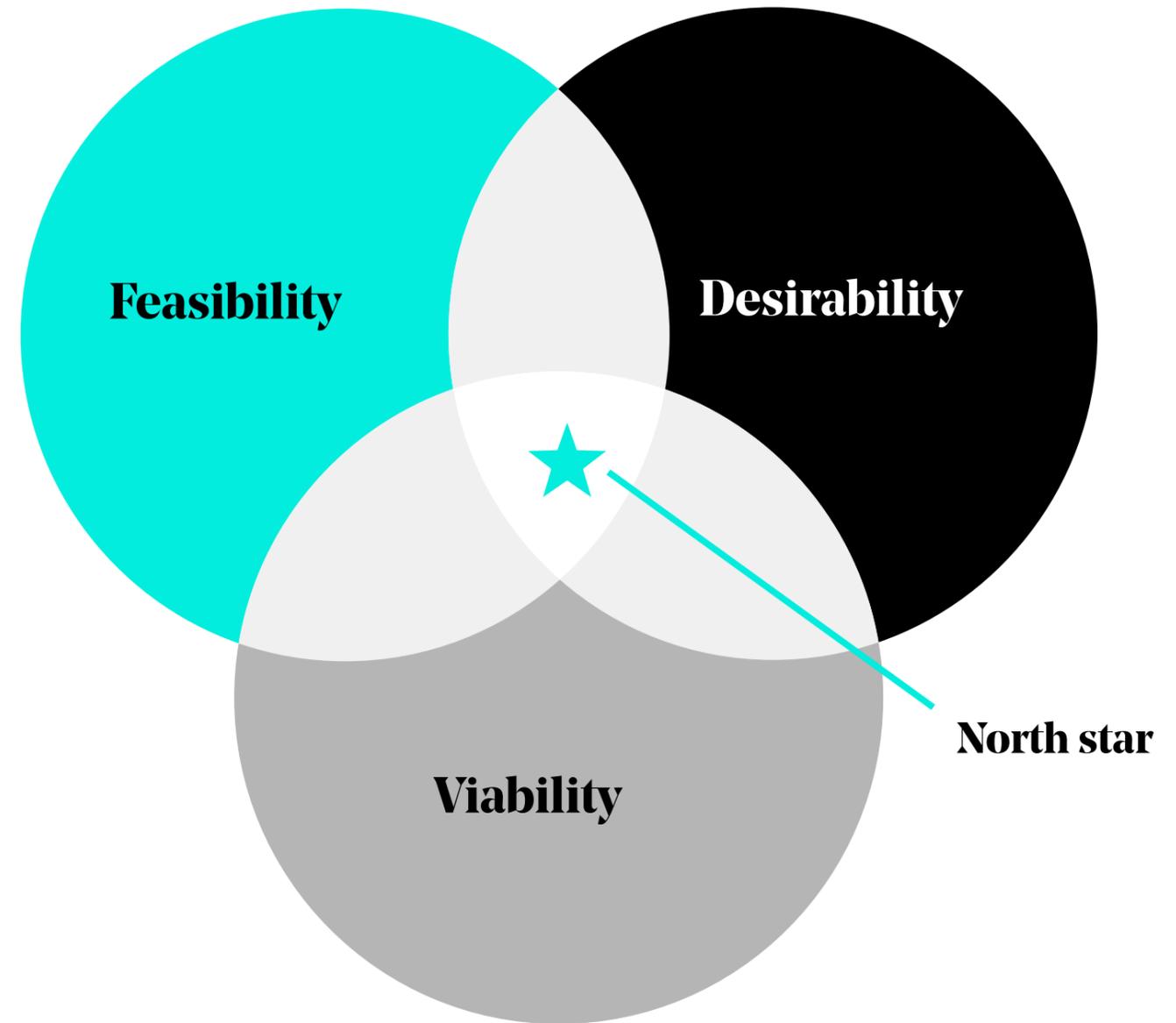


Figure 7: Collaboratives criteria for pilot activities

1. Consistency in inclusive practice

The collaboratives wanted to:

break the pattern of:

- inequitable access to support that leads to inconsistent inclusive practice,

by creating:

- avenues for sharing and accessing promising practice and spaces for non-judgemental check and support.

They are doing this through:

East Sussex	Oldham		Worcestershire	
<p>Behaviour support networks Network designed to implement peer-to-peer support, to be tapped into before involving external services. Attendance would be on needs basis for an opportunity to discuss challenges, share practice and identify possible solutions to support one other.</p>	<p>Inclusion design authority Peer network to develop case studies to share experiences, support individuals in schools and develop practice. This will also involve signposting schools to appropriate services and developing a forum to set and discuss good practice.</p>	<p>Virtual inclusion clinics Extending the scope of existing SENCo clinics to incorporate all-inclusion related discussions and invite non-SENcos to bring in questions and/or concerns related to inclusion.</p>	<p>FAP, primary HT partnership, SENCo network Incorporating inclusion discussion within existing meetings, partnerships and networks, and use them as places for knowledge and practice sharing.</p>	<p>Trauma informed practice Building mechanisms such as EP consultations to ensure consistency in how trauma-informed practice is implemented within individual schools.</p>
Who is involved?				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 x primary headteachers • 1 x LA senior manager and intervention support in inclusion and SEND 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 x secondary headteachers • 2 x special school senior leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 x LA inclusion and SEND manager • 1 x Early Help manager • 1 x primary headteacher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 x secondary senior leaders • 1 x primary SENCo • 1 x LA inclusion and SEND manager • 1 x LA principal educational psychologist and head of inclusion support services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 x virtual school lead for SEMH + previously looked after children advisor • 1 x educational psychologist

2. Consistency in early intervention pathways

The collaboratives wanted to:

break the pattern of:

- asymmetric information in the system about 1) how needs are identified, and 2) when and how to refer to services,

by creating:

- resources and processes that clarify the offer, roles, thresholds, and responsibilities of various services.

They are doing this through:

East Sussex	Oldham	Worcestershire		
<p>Services graduated offer</p> <p>Clarifying and bringing coherence to the continuum of offer from different services so that schools can make the right referral at the right time.</p>	<p>Referral toolkit</p> <p>Improving awareness and understanding of services, and when and how to make referrals.</p>	<p>Joint inclusion and Early Help drop-in</p> <p>Piloting a half-termly drop-in clinic for secondary schools within one district where any staff can get advice from the early help and LA SEND teams.</p>	<p>Health + school</p> <p>Improving NHS visibility and accessibility to school professionals through SENCo, FAP, and the primary headteacher networks.</p>	<p>AP outreach</p> <p>Developing and piloting primary and secondary AP outreach offers.</p>
Who is involved?				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 x CAMHS manager • 1 x primary headteacher • 1 x therapies manager • 1 x MASH manager • 1 x LA inclusion and SEND manager 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 x special school headteacher • 1 x parent/carer forum representative • 1 x health support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 x LA inclusion and SEND manager • 1 x Early Help manager • 1 x primary headteacher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 x designated clinical officer for SEND 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 x primary AP headteacher • 1 x secondary AP headteacher

3. Consistency in primary-secondary transitions

The collaboratives wanted to:

break the pattern of:

- not putting in appropriate level of support during transition for pupils with additional needs,

by creating:

- the time and space for joint primary-secondary planning.

They are doing this through:

East Sussex	Oldham	Worcestershire
<p style="text-align: center;">Y6-7 transition pilot</p> <p>Streamlining transition practices to improve pupils' feeling of safety and belonging and ultimately reduce suspensions and exclusions in the autumn term of Year 7. Maintaining a sense of belonging for families, by creating connections prior to transition.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Universal transition offer pilot</p> <p>Developing early identification tools to be used in primary schools to help identify pupils for targeted additional work and support during transition to secondary.</p>	
<p>Who is involved?</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 x LA inclusion and SEND manager • 1 x virtual school education adviser • 1 x special school head of KS 1 and 2 • 2 x secondary school inclusion leads 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 x principal education psychologist preventative lead • 6 x primary headteachers • 2 x secondary headteachers 	

B



COACHING

Phase 3: Coaching

The aim of the phase is for collaborative members to turn their ideas into action and learn from them.

How are we doing it?

The **groups within each collaborative** are leading the implementation of pilot activities.

The **RSA** is providing coaching on implementation and evaluation, supporting the groups to articulate a theory of change for their pilot activity and put in place evaluation tools to monitor progress and impact on an ongoing basis.

We are also convening collaboratives individually and collectively (all three) to celebrate milestones and discuss emerging opportunities and challenges.

The **local authorities** are leading on project governance and accountability.

See table below for breakdown of partner responsibilities.

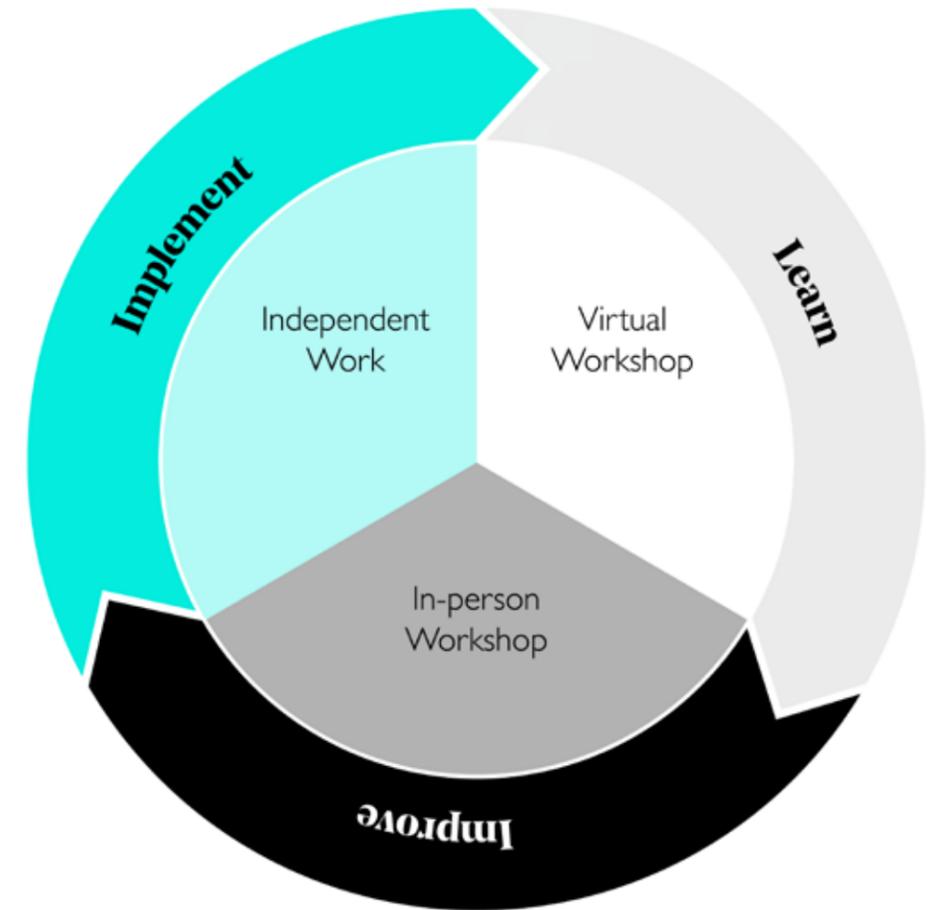


Figure 8: Pilot activity design

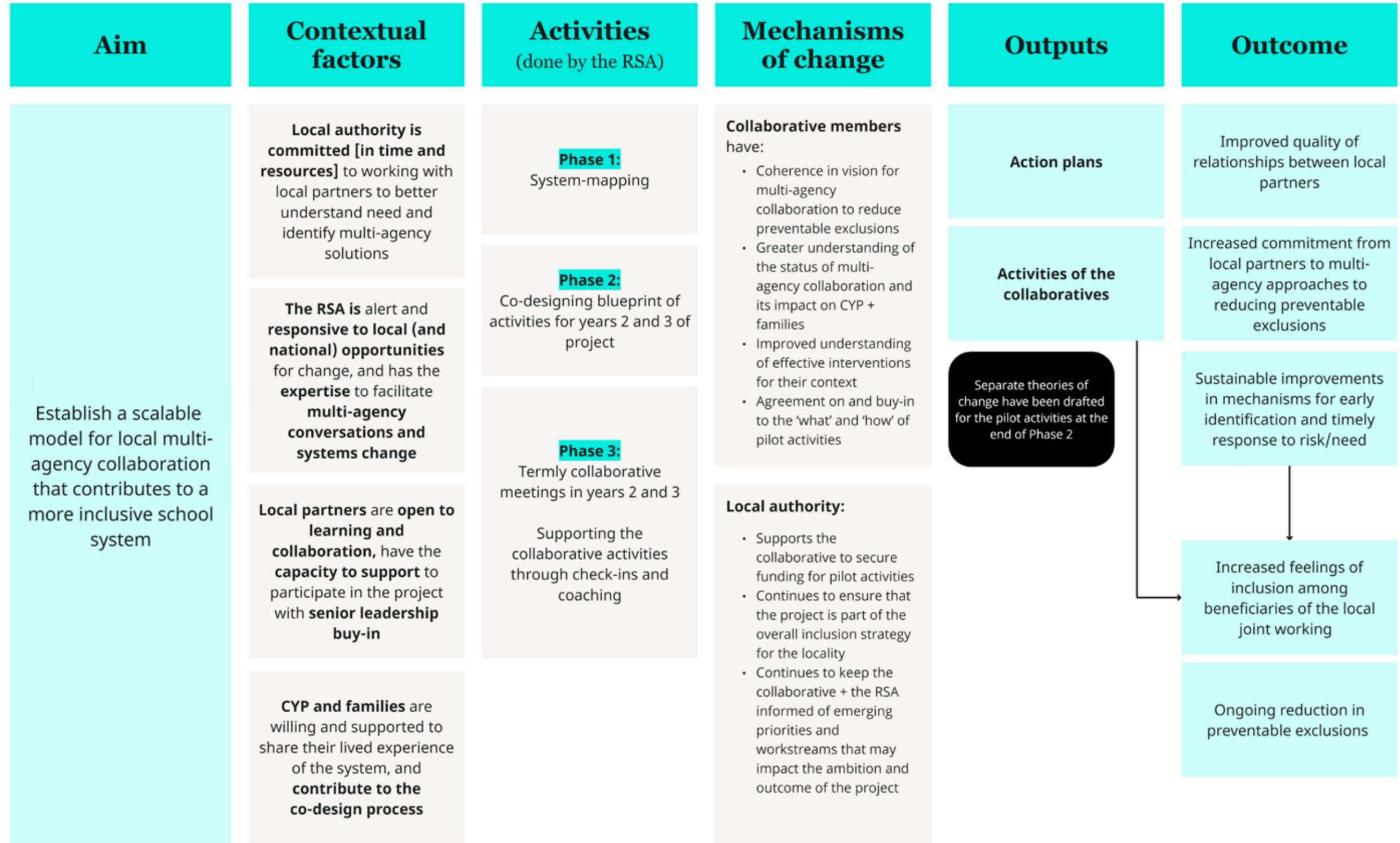
The RSA	Local authorities	Collaborative members
Provide coaching to collaborative members.	Lead project governance.	Action the pilot activities.
Convene collaboratives locally and nationally.	Hold accountability levers.	Champion project.
Share learnings.	Mobilise within locality.	
Co-evaluate the pilot activities.		

Project evaluation

Theory of change

Our hypothesis is that an evidence-informed, co-designed, and co-owned approach based on all three phases of our work will lead to more effective and sustainable multi-agency, place-based collaboration to reduce preventable exclusions.

We have translated this hypothesis into a theory of change, articulating the expected outcomes from this work, at an individual partner level, at an organisational level and at a systems level.



We have also defined measurable indicators of success for each outcome:

- The individual-level outcomes were broken down into five aspects of relationships measured through the relational value survey that we have adapted and used in this project in partnership with the Relationships Foundation.²⁵
- The organisational-level outcomes were broken down into specific changes we expect partner organisations to embody in their operations and resourcing.
- The systems-level outcomes were broken down into sustained changes in infrastructure that would foster greater equity and accessibility of resources and support.

Improved quality of relationships between local partners

[Individual outcomes]

- 1.** Greater **respect** amongst partners (ie how partners treat one another in their ways of working, processes and infrastructure).
- 2.** Improved sense of **fairness** in how burdens, risks and opportunities are shared amongst partners to reduce preventable exclusions (through processes, infrastructures, ways of working, vision and people).
- 3.** Increased levels of **empathy**, ie understanding of one another's roles and responsibilities, pressures and constraints, and of how one partner's decisions affect others in the system.
- 4.** Improved **trust** levels amongst partners, increasing flexibility and joint-ownership of the problem and solution.
- 5.** Enhanced **integrity** in decision-making processes around pupil support (increased consistency, reliability and based on good practice).

Increased commitment from local partners to multi-agency approaches to reducing preventable exclusions

[Organisational outcomes]

- 1.** Improved alignment and coordination of services and agencies supporting schools, CYP and families, so that there is **greater coherence** in the locality's support offer.
- 2.** Release/securing of (joint) funding to for **enhanced access** to preventative/appropriate support provision.

Sustainable improvements in mechanisms for early identification and timely response to risk/need

[System outcomes]

- 1.** More **equitable** distribution of burdens, risks and opportunities to reduce preventable exclusions, and **ways to ensure equity is sustained**.
- 2.** Improved and sustained processes and infrastructures to allow for **more timely and accurate information sharing** about pupil needs (at individual school as well as locality-level).
- 3.** Improved and sustained processes and infrastructures to **access preventative/appropriate provision** with minimal delay.

25. For more information see: relationshipsfoundation.org/

Evaluation methodology

The RSA has commissioned an independent evaluation to run alongside the project to find out:

How, and to what extent, has this RSA work contributed to improved multi-agency working within the collaboratives and their localities?

The evaluation uses the theory of change as the basis for exploring multi-agency outcomes. It is a mixed method, 'before-and-after' evaluation design which uses annual data collection to track change during the project. It comprises:

1. Online survey of all collaborative members.
2. In-depth, semi-structured interviews with local authority project leads (n=3 per year).
3. In-depth, semi-structured interviews with a constant sample of collaborative members (n=16 per year).
4. Discussion workshop with the RSA project team.

In years 2 and 3 of the project, it will also include:

5. Six-monthly monitoring data review.
6. A facilitated peer learning session with collaborative members (once per year).

Year 1 evaluation findings

In this first year of the project, the evaluation aimed to:

- Understand the experience of local partners so far involved in the project (collaborative members, including the local authority project leads).
- Determine baseline for project outcomes.

Overall findings from the survey and interviews indicate that while there is already some progress towards the individual-level outcomes (improved quality of relationships between partners), the organisational and system-level outcomes, unsurprisingly, have long ways to go.

Below, we summarise some of the most noteworthy findings.

A. Individual-level outcomes:

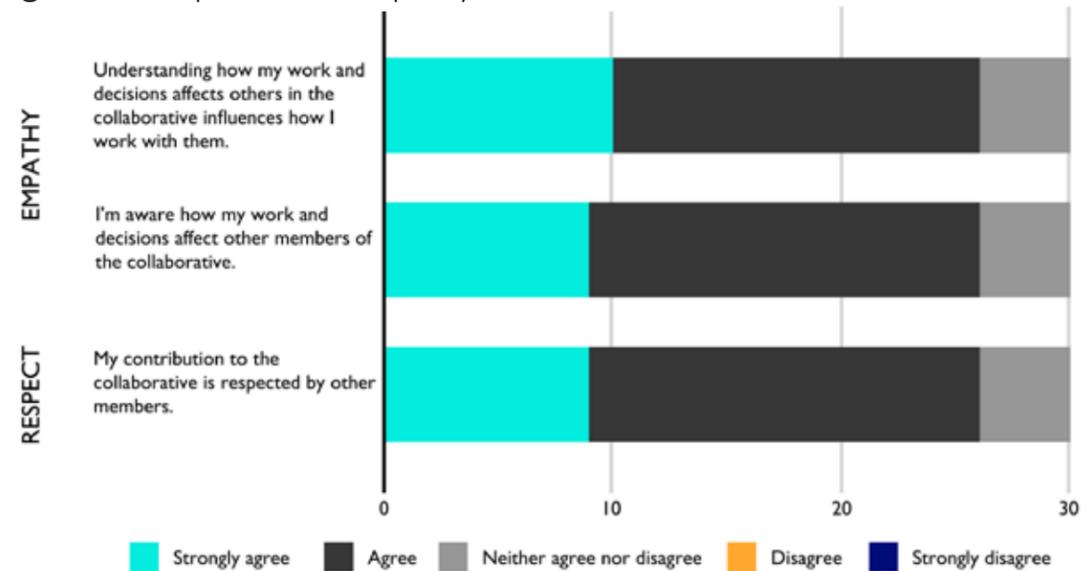
At the individual-level, the project aims to improve the quality of working relationships between members of the collaborative. The evaluation methods asked members to describe how they experienced interpersonal relationships during the collaborative sessions. The survey questions were designed to help understand the extent of respect, fairness, trust, understanding/empathy, and ultimately the integrity of decision-making amongst the group, and the interviews helped to better understand the perspectives of members.

Local partners involved in the collaborative have appreciated the diversity of membership, which has enabled greater **empathy** and **respect** for one another.

“It's been great to work with a variety of different people and hear their different experiences. From my own perspective, I'm more empathetic of what they go through. (Mainstream school)”

“ I remember for example the secondary special schools were talking about their experience in terms of making reasonable adjustments ... [and] there was challenge from mainstream in terms of their capacity to do that, the number of pupils. All of the challenge was respectful and pertinent. (LA) ”

Figure 9: Respect and empathy



Although everyone involved has children’s outcomes as one of their main priorities, the workshops have supported members to establish a genuinely **shared vision and voice** - one that can lead to the organisational-level outcome of alignment in the local offer in the future.

“ We’ve had three long sessions and come to a certain level of agreement, which we wouldn’t have done at the start... so there is a common voice and a couple of actions. (AP) ”

The seniority of some of the members involved, as well as local authority stewardship, has ensured that the ideas developed through the collaborative align with local action plans and strategic priorities. This has ignited **hope** amongst members and a sense of **greater agency** to influence individual change in their own organisations, as well as collective change across the locality.

In some cases, the individual-level changes are already happening. For example, having connected with different services, school leaders involved in at least two of the collaboratives now have a better understanding of who to call when in specific need.

“ Probably being able to sit in this capacity with them and talk freely and idealistically has improved our relationship. I’m more inclined to pick up the phone and talk to them now than before. (AP) ”

“ I am consciously - back in school - making decisions about where I am going to go for support for children - thinking more carefully about which organisation might be able to help with this specific issue. (Mainstream school) ”

And whilst it may be too soon for organisations to be making practice changes, some have started to reconsider elements of their work.

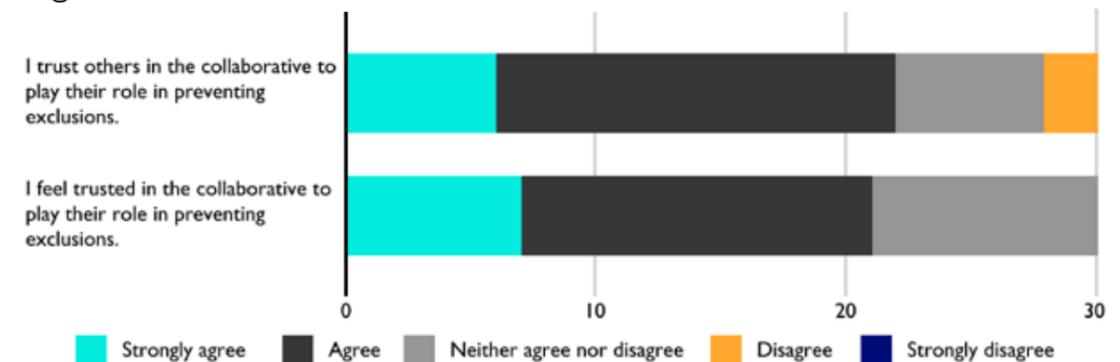
“ I think any learning I take from that, I might go back to our leadership team and say we need to be thinking about exclusions. One headteacher said ‘we exhaust everything, and your single point of access doesn’t recognise that’... so maybe we ought to see that this school has done everything and take their referrals on. (CAMHS) ”

“ I had a fantastic conversation with someone from Early Help who listened to my reality from a schools’ perspective and said ‘I’m really glad I’ve got that information so now I can go and look at how we organise things’, so there’s already an incidental impact. (Mainstream school) ”

Noticeably, **trust** levels were the lowest rated compared to the other aspects of relationships measured in the evaluation survey (ie, respect, empathy, integrity, and fairness). At least a third of collaborative members who completed the evaluation survey disagreed with feeling like they can ‘trust others in the collaborative to play their role in preventing exclusions,’ and/or feel themselves ‘trusted by the other members’ to do so. There are yet snippets of progress:

“ One of the things that came out of that is trust with other services - you sometimes feel people have their own agenda. [Understanding their perspective] helped us to trust a bit more. (AP) ”

Figure 10: Trust



And finally, **integrity** of decision-making and perceived sense of **fairness** had high levels of agreement in the survey. However similar to the work on trust, it may be that as collaboratives develop their work further and begin implementing the action plans, these features of collaborative working relationships will come into clearer focus.

B. Organisational- and system-level outcomes

This project aims to support collaboratives to develop a system that can identify and respond to need in a timely way. This would be characterised by a system that is equitable for partners involved, where information exchange between partners is timely and effective, and where appropriate, preventive provision is accessible to children and families who need it.

This system would require organisations to be flexible and resourceful, contributing to a coherent local offer for pupils and families.

From the evaluation survey and interviews, we found that most collaborative members feel that the current system does not match needs with timely and/or effective provision. As expected, the baseline evaluation findings echo the findings from RSA-led research in Phase 1.

Most professionals in the system feel they are **having to step up and do more** and there is a **need for more equitable distribution** of responsibilities towards reducing exclusions.

Local authorities felt that they are at the short end of the stick.

- “The responsibility falls to us more than it should, we’ll get involved in the gathering of info – when, why can’t the PRU pick the phone up to the school? Our exclusions officer gets a bit bogged down in some of that - and probably thinks ‘it’s just quicker for me to do this, it will speed things up’. (LA)”
- “I think definitely the SEND and inclusion team get drawn into things that social care and schools should be doing, because we are a central point of contact. (LA)”

At the same time, they recognised that **resource constraints** also “put more expectations on the schools... to do this, this, and this [ie,

show evidence of having tried different things] is before you refer to us [the local authority]”.

However, even though organisations find themselves doing more, a lot of what they end up doing is **reactive rather than preventative** due to lack of **clarity of roles or available services**.

- “I suppose what I’m saying is, there is no crystal-clear lines and boundaries - [and] that some practice services are filling those gaps at the expense of those services. (AP school)”
- “Everyone’s so focused on the high end that there is no resource to do the early interventions - across schools, council, Early Help. As a result, people get pushed up to that high end and we’re never getting in early enough so that they don’t get to that high end. So, I don’t know if that’s a gap in provision necessarily, it’s more a lack of resource to get in and do that early work. (LA)”
- “At the moment all services are too consumed with the higher end. We all say we need that early help and prevention work, we all know that. It’s just we’re all here at the high end at the moment. (Mainstream school)”

Furthermore, **information exchange** between schools, families and services remains a cause of concern, especially around communication on referrals, as also highlighted by the RSA Phase 1 research.

Firstly, there is not enough information for schools to understand what is available and how to access it.

- “Headteachers need to be having more opportunities to hear from these agencies from what’s going on, what they can and can’t help with - what their capacity is. Those are things we get frustrated with as a head, and nobody is telling us that. (Mainstream school)”
- Then, there is insufficient response to, and feedback on, referrals.
- “Once a referral is in, you don’t get any feedback. We’re sometimes told it’s been passed to another service, but not which one. So that communication is frustrating. (Mainstream school)”
- “There is a lack of involvement... [and] insufficient communication. (Parent/carer forum)”

Thus, the cycle of inappropriate referrals (ie, referrals that do not meet the thresholds and/or referrals to the wrong service), and long waiting periods due to these referrals continues.

Beyond referrals, **information governance** (how information is shared across agencies) also appears to be variable across the three localities, something we hope to see improve over the course of the project.

These variances mean that some important parts of the local offers for pupils and families incoherent, and partners perceive them as, to a large extent, **inefficient** and **ineffective**. These quotes from mainstream school leaders best illustrates the inefficiency,

“When you're not sure in a school, you go to everyone - which wastes people's time, and it takes longer to get correct support in place. (Mainstream school)”

“Not as consistent as it could be... it's that the systems don't work as smoothly as they could. Sometimes we talk about the children getting what they need eventually - but a lot of children have to go through a lot of failure first. (Mainstream school)”

The offer includes services individually trying their best to support pupils and families, but what is missing is the **coming together, in planning and resourcing**. This was something virtually all of the partners interviewed hoped to achieve through this project.

Considerations for Phase 3

The outcomes baseline for this project has provided a good starting point against which to compare change over the course of the project.

The evaluation so far confirms that all members, including local authorities, see a need for improvement in how their local system operates around school exclusions. To a lesser extent they see a need for their own organisations to change, which isn't surprising as many feel they are doing more than their fair share of the work.

What we do know is that **organisations are making choices in response to the current system**; thus, what we hope to see is that any changes in the system (through this project or otherwise) correlate with changes within and by organisations within the system. These changes involve considerations for who/which organisation continues to prioritise and take responsibility and ownership of this work beyond the RSA, and how this work continues to remain part of each local authority's long-term strategy.

At the individual-level we have seen that **our work so far has already resulted in stronger relationships** between collaborative members. These will continue to require work in order to be maintained and enriched. Finally, as members begin to recruit colleagues into their pilots, these **strong relationships would need to be transferred and experienced by everyone involved in order to ensure sustainable area-wide change**.

Overall reflections and provocations: the ‘so what?’ and the ‘what more?’

This project is attempting to influence long-term change in how partners in education, health, social care, and the local government work together to improve inclusion of all pupils, because we believe **every child matters and matters equally**.²⁶

What we have been able to show thus far is that **relationships matter**. So that we don't end up with isolated, short-term interventions, a **joint vision and mission**, and **joint ownership of, and responsibility for, inclusion matters**.

Our work thus far has encouraged and influenced some individual-level and organisational-level changes. We have engaged with those with whom we have been put into contact and those who have had the willingness and ability (time and resources) to engage: these have mostly been some headteachers and some service managers. We have tapped into local SEND or inclusion partnership boards to ensure that the work of these headteachers and service managers is being recognised, appreciated and most importantly, supported.

For the future that we envision and that we are working towards:

Where partners in education, health, care, and local government are coming together to accurately identify needs and provide appropriate and meaningful support for children most in need and their families in ways that are feasible, desirable, and sustainable.

We need more.

We need coordinated efforts at **all** levels of the education system (and across interrelated systems such as health and economic welfare) where:

- 1. Policymakers** are actively listening to, and enabling, local system leaders to set and deliver on their own priorities based on emerging local needs.
- 2. Local system leaders** are actively listening to, and enabling, practitioners across services and agencies to work together to respond to emerging needs.
- 3. Practitioners** are actively listening to, and co-developing solutions with children and families.

This type of coordinated effort requires **sharing and shifting of power** from policymakers to local system leaders, from local system leaders to practitioners, and ultimately from practitioners to children and families.

It requires directing funding, creating policy, and setting up decision-making infrastructures that facilitate shared priority-setting. It also requires a culture of flexibility to test, iterate, and improve on joined-up offers of support.

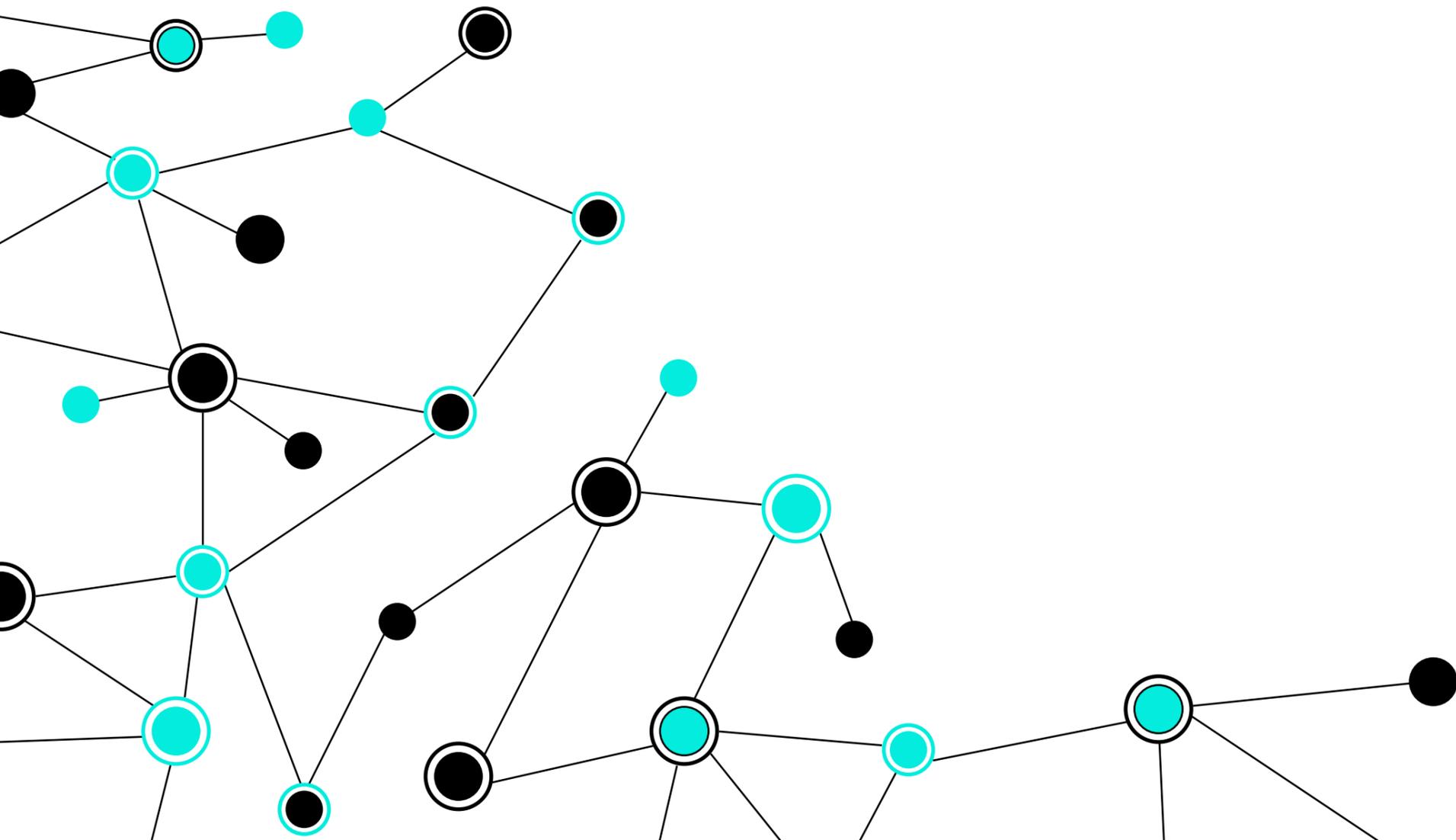
Figure 11: **Transfer of power**



26. Ibid.

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arts, manufactures and commerce.**

**We are committed to regenerate
our world through collective action.**



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