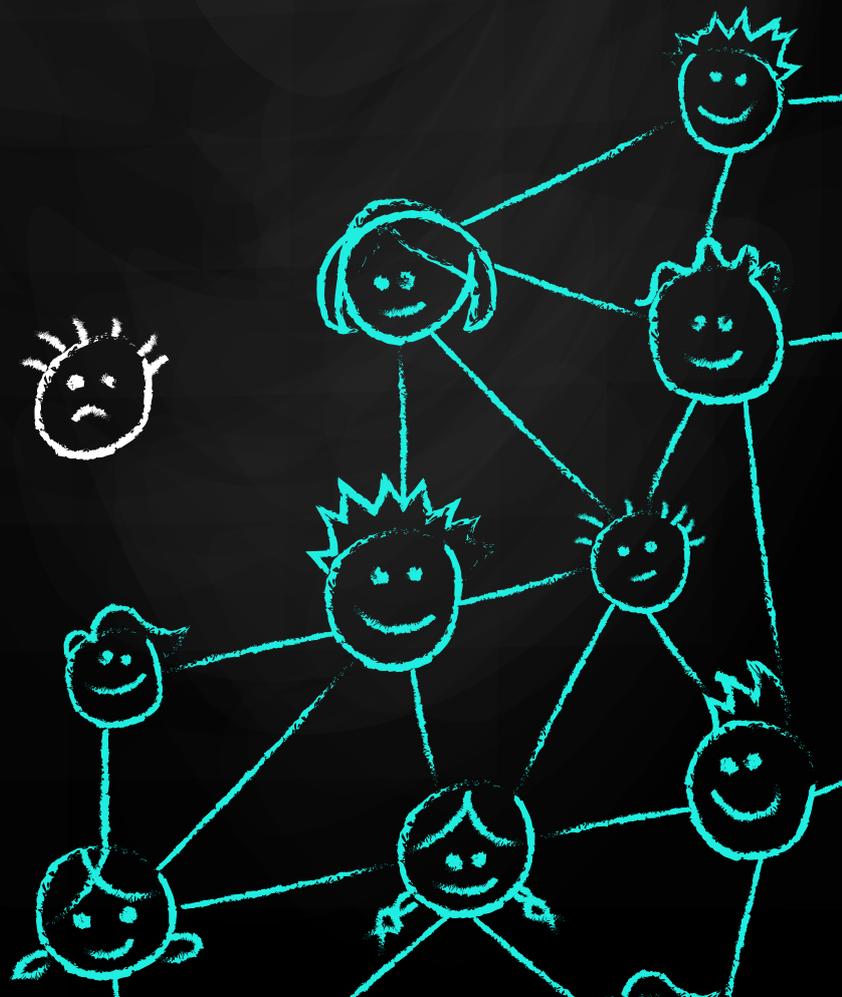


Preventing School Exclusions:

**An External Evaluation
of the RSA's Intervention**



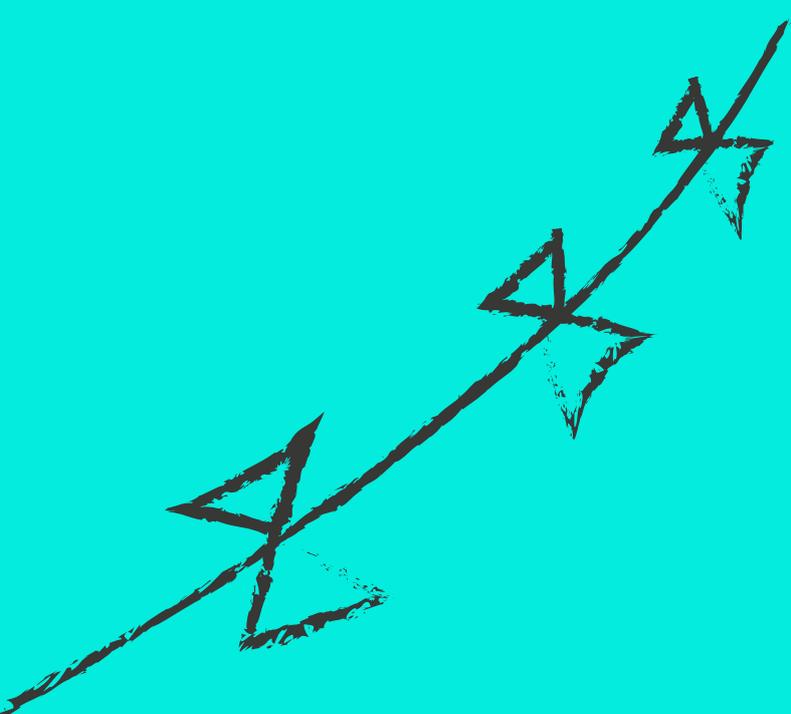
i. Acknowledgements



This programme evaluation was designed, delivered and reported by Vivien Niblett, an independent researcher and evaluator based in Manchester, UK.

This evaluation would not have been possible without the input of the Collaborative Anchors, Collaborative members, and staff at the RSA who took part in the evaluation. Viv would like to extend her sincere thanks to them for sharing their time and thoughts with her and allowing us all to learn from their experiences.

The Preventing School Exclusions project owes a debt to the legacy of Danielle Mason, the RSA's former Director of Education, who co-authored [Pinball Kids \(2020\)](#) with Laura Partridge, Fran Landreth Strong, and Elinor Lobley.



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1. Executive summary

Executive summary

Background

The RSA's Preventing School Exclusions (PSE) project ran between 2021-2024 in three English local authorities. It aimed to set up and facilitate multi-agency 'Collaboratives' to design new ways of local working that better match services to childrens' needs and thereby contribute to reducing preventable school exclusions.

The RSA commissioned this independent process and outcomes evaluation to run alongside the project and to address the following evaluation question: ***How and to what extent has the PSE project contributed to improved multi-agency working in the Collaboratives and their localities?*** This report presents the evaluation's findings at the end of the programme, based upon the programme's Theory of Change.

Process evaluation: How has the PSE project been delivered?

The PSE programme was designed and implemented as a facilitation programme. Working closely with the local authority 'Anchor' in each locality, the RSA programme team researched and presented 'System Maps' of the current landscape for exclusions and convened a multi-agency group to identify priorities and actions for change based upon this. In Years 2 and 3 the RSA provided facilitation and coaching to support the Collaborative 'sub-groups' to deliver the projects within the action plan.

Programme context

The Local Authority commitment to working collaboratively on preventing school exclusions has remained strong overall. However, in two localities other priorities - particularly national funding - have become influential in this area and this has caused the project to lose some of its individual visibility and relevance by Year 3.

The RSA staff model has changed over the three-year programme but consistently offered expertise and skills in facilitating change in local working. However, continuity in relationships and understanding of the history of the locality is an additional factor that has influenced delivery.

The Collaboratives have had buy-in and support from the majority of members each year, though engagement decreased in Year 3. Engaged members have a strong commitment to the project. Where members had left, this was understood to be because the programme had become less relevant to them when combined with the pressures of taking part "on top of the day job".

There was a clear role for the views of children and families in the co-design stage of the project in Year 1, though work with them has continued less formally in Years 2 & 3.

Activities

The PSE programme has been delivered in line with its Theory of Change and these activities were effective. However, in Year 3 the support needs of each sub-group became much more varied, including some members having completed their projects. The programme has needed to be flexible to vary its coaching offer and offer other kinds of local support.

Mechanisms of change

The Mechanisms of Change developed by the programme appear to have helped begin the process of change. For the Collaboratives, it was important to bring together their experiences and views, and present these into an agreed plan with wide support and understanding. A useful addition to these mechanisms would be how to ensure a collaborative mindset was maintained when members became focused on action in their smaller sub-groups.

The Mechanisms of Change for the local Anchors reflect their role as strategic lead for the project in their areas, and for their wider inclusion agenda. One mechanism - funding - hasn't commonly been provided for the work in the Collaboratives, although they have still progressed and made change. The second - strategic alignment - has been made between activities in the collaborative action plans and the broader strategic direction of the local authorities. However, in some localities it has been challenging to ensure this alignment whilst maintaining the collaborative aims and ethos at the heart of the project.

Outcomes evaluation: What has changed as a result of the programme?

Outputs: sub-group activities

All of the sub-group projects identified in the collaborative action plans have progressed to some extent, with many being delivered and now becoming well established practices, offers, or services in the three localities. Without the PSE programme, these changes would either not have happened at all, or would have happened but without a collaborative approach.

Collaboratives reported some of the factors that influenced their work as:

- Available capacity and role within sub-groups;
- Having relevant job role expertise and influence on their sub-group area;
- Methods of engagement with schools outside of the Collaborative;
- Balancing local authority roles in the sub-group; and
- Accessing more senior oversight for multi-agency or new projects

Outcomes

PSE's long term aim is to reduce preventable exclusions through improving the quality of relationships, organisational working practices, and features of the local system. When asked what difference the project has made, members described the specific, concrete results of the sub-group activities. These changes align to the project's wider outcomes but have largely occurred within specific areas of the sub-group working.

1. Executive summary

Quality of relationships

Improved quality of relationships was one of the first changes seen in the programme, reported as arising from the way in which the project was facilitated in Year 1. In particular, members felt more empathy and understanding of others' roles, perspectives and the constraints they work within. This reduced members' tendency to blame or "point fingers" and instead to focus on issues. Most participants reported this experience, and several felt it had endured throughout the programme, though the survey suggests a peak in Year 2.

Organisational Outcomes

- **Funding for preventative/appropriate support provision.**

Additional joint funding hasn't been secured, and most members have felt their resources tighten in relation to need over the three years of the project. Yet there are other ways in which the Collaboratives have brought resources in-line with their aims. For example through: specific pots of money made available for collaborative actions; planned changes in investment towards prevention being aligned to the action plan; and national funding providing a vehicle for projects to continue in two of the localities.

- **Improved alignment and greater coherence in the locality's support offer.**

Collaborative members throughout the programme have reported that they work flexibly to align with others, and there was a small increase in Year 3 in those saying they contributed to a coherent local offer. For example, individual members of the Collaborative have changed their work to help coordinate with other partners and/or align their work to Collaborative priorities. At an organisational level, some new services developed have been aligned around the needs of the child, rather than organisational structures. Some interviewees felt better aligned with their colleagues within their local authority. However, it's not clear that organisations are embodying these changes beyond the projects in this programme.

Systems Outcomes

- **More equitable distribution of burdens, risks and opportunities to reduce preventable exclusions, and ways to ensure equity is sustained.**

Most members of the Collaboratives felt they took on more than their share of responsibilities and there has been little change over three years in this perception. However, there are examples where work on this agenda has taken place, especially through peer-to-peer school support and projects on local Fair Access Protocol. It may be that we are yet to see the wider effect of these changes in the wider system.

- **Improved processes for more timely and accurate information sharing about pupil needs**

The findings on information sharing don't show a consistent picture of change in the programme, but there are examples of how individual projects have benefited from information sharing. For example, projects which have focused on information sharing about individual children, though typically amongst school partners, rather than in a multi-agency setting. Whilst there are several examples of information sharing across the project, some have also encountered challenges in gathering new data when this required resource and buy-in from other partners outside of the Collaborative.

- **Improved and sustained processes to access preventative/appropriate provision with minimal delay.**

Survey data suggests a perceived improvement in services only in Year 2, but with less agreement that this translates into better and more timely access for users. This is consistent with the kinds of progress reported on the projects, where changes to services have been made but there is not yet evidence of their effects to this point. Those running these projects report steady take-up for their services, and this will need to be monitored in the long-run to see if they are more widely accessible and sustainable.

Wider Impact

When asked what difference the programme had made, some interviewees and several survey respondents identified change beyond their sub-group project. They pointed to differences made more widely in their locality or those they expect to have a lasting effect. These were:

- Shifting wider thinking on exclusions and inclusive education;
- Highlighting underexplored areas, specifically primary to secondary transitions;
- Developing an influencing relationship between schools and the local authorities; and,
- Changes in collaboration; mainstreaming partnership working.

Conclusions & considerations for a future model

Over three years, the Preventing School Exclusions project has delivered change in collaborative working at a local level. The project has facilitated local multi-agency groups to identify and collectively agree important priorities for action and supported them so these actions were delivered. Through this, there have been changes to the design, alignment, and visibility of the services aimed at preventing school exclusions in the three localities, with an expectation that these will improve effectiveness in the future. Change has been primarily in the sub-group activities carried out by the Collaboratives, but in some cases can be seen more widely.

However there have been challenges in this model, and the evaluation suggests some potential for improvements in the future:

- Make small process improvements to Year 1 System-Mapping and Convening
- Maintaining membership engagement and managing succession in the Collaboratives Including: incremental gains through administration, connecting with personal and organisational motivations, active management of membership and succession.
- Clarify intention and model for working with children, families and their representatives
- Consider the length of the programme, with a more flexible Year 3
- Review the purpose of the wider Collaborative in Years 2 and 3
- Maintaining the relationships with local authority Anchors and their agenda over a three year programme with contextual change could be a bigger focus of the work. Including: a funded model for accountability, thicker relationships between the RSA and Anchor Organisations, formalising the Collaborative Anchor role, working separately with Anchor Organisations on collaborative leadership.

2. Background

Background

The Preventing School Exclusions project

In 2018 the RSA launched the research project Pinball Kids, which explored the rise of school exclusions in England. It recommended that stronger collaborative working between schools and health, social care and community services could help meet the underlying needs of children at risk of exclusion.

In this context, the RSA's Preventing School Exclusions ('PSE') project was launched in 2021, running for three years in three English local authorities. The project aims were to set up and facilitate multi-agency 'Collaboratives' to design new ways of working locally. These ways of working should better match services to childrens' needs and thereby contribute to reducing the number of preventable school exclusions. The project formally concluded in Autumn 2024.

The RSA commissioned this independent evaluation to run alongside the project and to address the following evaluation question: *How and to what extent has the PSE project contributed to improved multi-agency working in the Collaboratives and their localities?* The evaluation uses the project's existing Theory of Change (page 9) as the basis for exploring how the project has been delivered, and to what extent it has led to multi-agency outcomes. It does this through a mixed method 'Before-and-After' evaluation design which brings together annual interviews and surveys to track change during the project.

This final report summarises findings from Year 1 and adds findings from Years 2 and 3 in order to reflect the experience of the project overall. It follows the Theory of Change structure and is split first into the Process evaluation (of Context, Activities and Mechanisms of Change), followed by an Outcomes evaluation (summarising outputs and evidence of outcomes to date). It closes with a summary of the role of the PSE project in the collaborative outcomes in the three localities, and considerations for a future model.

Figure 1: Programme theory of change: overview

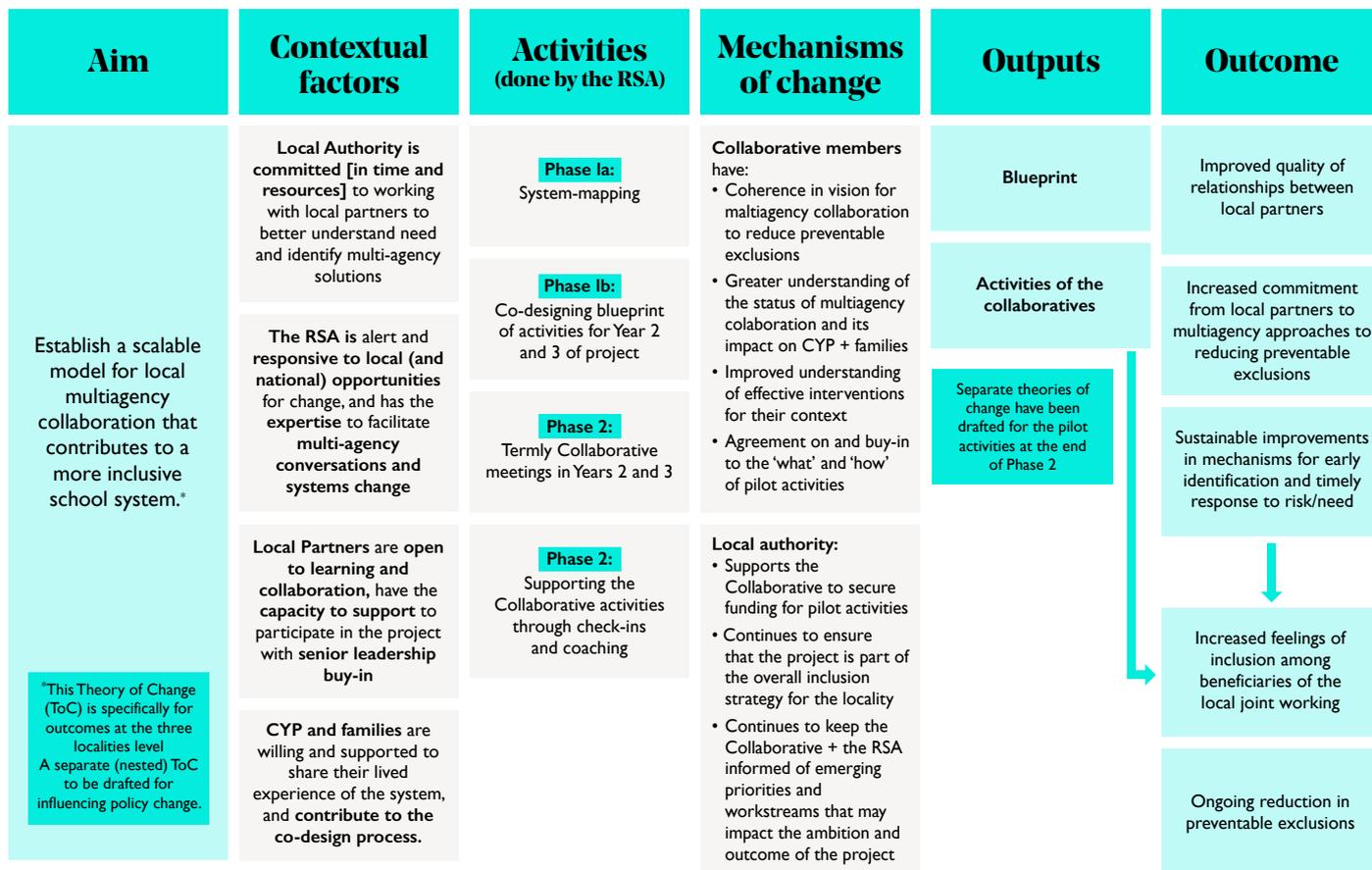
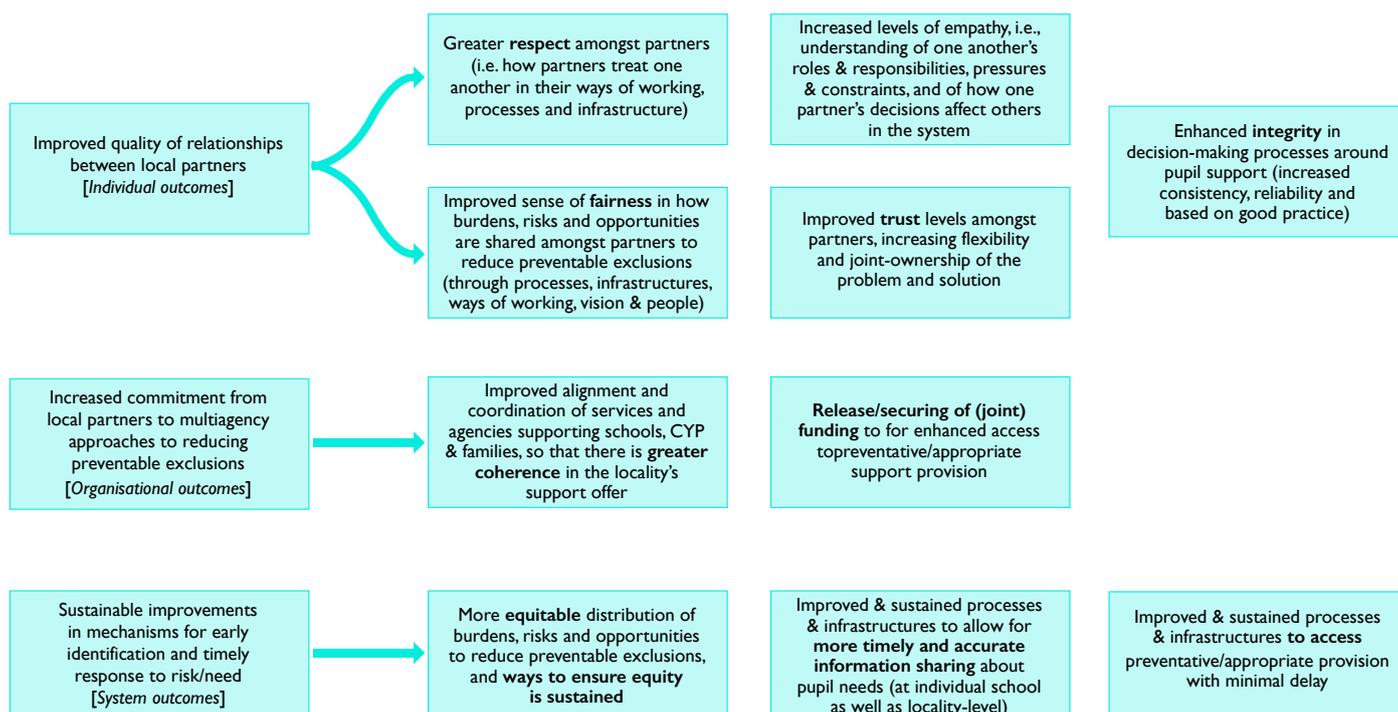


Figure 2: Collaborative outcomes



4. Evaluation design & method

Evaluation design & method

The evaluation is a mixed method 'Before-and-After' evaluation design which uses annual data collection to track change during the project. It has comprised rounds of fieldwork at the end of each academic year covering:

Data collection method	Number of participants		
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
In-depth, semi-structured interviews with project Anchors in the three localities	4	2	3
In-depth, semi structured interviews with a constant sample/purposive sample of Collaborative members	15	14	9
Online survey of all Collaborative members and Anchors	30 / 44 (68%)	25 / 33 (75%)	24 / 36 (66%)
Informal observation at a sample of in-person and online workshops	2	5	2
Group / Individual interviews with the RSA project team.	2	1	2

Sampling and data limitations

The survey has received a fairly consistent response rate of around two-thirds in each of the three years, equal to between 8-10 responses in each Collaborative. These are small numbers and mean that what might be a limited difference in response can appear to have a much larger effect in the data, so we need to be cautious when looking at differences. Where survey responses are compared over time, this report uses both the full set of responses and a Constant Sample of 11 individuals who responded each year. While the latter gives a more solid basis for comparing like with like, it is a small sample and represents between a quarter and a third of Collaborative membership. The former gives a wider perspective from the Collaboratives as they were - with mixed and varied membership each year - but any change over time shown may also reflect changes not related to the programme itself, but instead to change in membership.

Interviewees were selected to form a purposive sample giving a range of views from across sectors and organisation types within each locality. Over the three years,

some interviewees left the programme, and new interviewees (ie. non longitudinal) were recruited. In the third year, there were lower than hoped-for response rates to interviews (both non-responses, and those declining to be interviewed). As noted later in the findings, the sampling being at Collaborative level in Year 1 means that it hasn't fully aligned to cover each sub-group identified in Year 2, though the other methods provide some details for each sub-group.

There is some possibility of selection bias in the research towards members with more time and motivation to engage in both the project and the evaluation. This bias is more likely in the survey sample, which was self-selected, than in the sampled interviews. Although there is a good degree of consistency between their findings, readers of this report may want to keep this limitation in mind. We should also note that this evaluation hasn't included fieldwork specifically from individuals who have left the project, though some of their views were captured in the Year 3.

Process evaluation: how has the PSE project been delivered?

Programme context & activities

The Preventing School Exclusions project

The Preventing School Exclusions ('PSE') project was designed and implemented as a facilitation programme with a "real emphasis on getting to know the local system and then a process in which we act as facilitators of co-design" (RSA Team member, Year 1). This informed the overall shape of the project activities over the three years¹, as outlined below.

System Mapping and convening to form an action plan (Year 1 & early Year 2)

The RSA recruited three localities to the pilot, led in each case by the local Education service as the 'Anchor' organisation. Working with each Anchor, the RSA programme team delivered a programme of consultation and research in each area, drawing together information into three local 'System Maps'.

At the same time, the RSA programme team and the Collaborative 'Anchor' (a member of staff from the Anchor organisation who acted as the local lead) established a local 'Collaborative'. Members were invited with the aim

of bringing together partners from schools, health, social care, and parent carer representatives, all of whom were considered as having a role in preventing school exclusion.

In the following 'convening' phase of the project, the RSA ran five workshops with these groups to explore the issues arising from the Systems Maps, and used these to develop a shared vision, identify priorities for improvement towards that vision, and turn these into a shared blueprint, or action plan, formed of 3 - 5 individual sub-group activities in each locality.

Coaching to supporting delivery of the action plan (Years 2 & 3)

In Years 2 and 3 of the project the RSA's role was to support each of the sub-groups and the overall Collaborative to deliver their action plan, and to support the project at a strategic level through work with the Anchor local authority. They delivered this through continued in-person Collaborative

workshops (two per year) and online national workshops with all three localities (one per year). Alongside this, RSA provided support to individual sub-groups to deliver their projects via coaching and catch-ups.

¹ More information on this process is available in the RSA's interim report, <https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/foundation/new-site-blocks-and-images/reports/2023/05/preventing-school-exclusions-collaborations-for-change-interim-report.pdf>, (slides 36-38)

5. Process evaluation

The project staffing team and structure

As might be expected in a three year programme, the staff team delivering PSE changed over time: both in terms of individuals and the overall staffing structure. Year 1 was delivered by a project team of three action researchers and one Director working across all localities. The project leader from this team became the sole dedicated member of staff working on the project in Year 2, working directly with all three localities.

In Year 3, the RSA changed this model to provide more localised support to each project through a dedicated local collaborative advisor, rather than a single national advisor and project leader. Central and national project coordination moved over to the RSA Delivery team, after the original national project leader and advisor left.

In what context has the project been delivered?

As a collaborative, place-based programme, context was expected to be influential in how it could be delivered, and the Theory of Change anticipates the contextual factors necessary to support change. These are specified for Anchor local authorities, the RSA, Collaborative members, and with children and families. The evaluation has explored these factors each year.

Local authorities make commitment in time and resources to working with local partners to better identify need and multi-agency solutions

The local authority context for this project in each locality has changed over the programme lifetime. Whilst commitment to working collaboratively on preventing school exclusions appears to remain strong, in two localities the role of the PSE project within that has changed over time. This is as other factors – particularly national funding on special education needs and disabilities (SEND), and alternative provision (AP) – have become influential in this area of work. The projects have also been managed differently in each locality, with some project leadership being formalised and stable over the lifetime of the project, whilst others have fluctuated much more.

The evaluation in Year 1 found that all three localities came into the programme with a pre-existing commitment to reducing preventable exclusions, and a belief that doing so required a multi-agency approach. This commitment tended to be framed in terms of a desire to improve their outcomes regarding exclusions, and was in response to external pressures, such as Ofsted, as well as to internally defined goals to improve educational inclusion. At this time, the project was seen as one of the main vehicles for collaboration on the topic of school exclusions.

Since then, all three areas have become part of the national Change Programme for SEND and AP², and both Worcestershire and Oldham are funded in the targeted Delivering Better Value in SEND (DBV)³ improvement programme. These are both large scale Department for Education-funded programmes which, whilst not focused specifically on exclusions, relate very closely to the work delivered in the PSE project.

² Further details on the Change programme: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/transformational-reform-begins-for-children-and-young-people-with-send>

³ <https://www.dbvinsend.com/>

“The analogy I used is it started as a stream of work, but it’s now a river of lots of streams.”

(W, Anchor)

“We started the RSA project a couple of years ago... But as well as that had the Delivering Better Value programme in Oldham, and the [SEND and AP] Change Programme. We also launched our SEND and Inclusion strategy last year, so the work we were doing with RSA is all in that strategy or other projects”

(O, Local Authority)

As a consequence, in both localities the work has been brought within the delivery of these programmes, and whilst the project activity “is still a priority” (O, Local Authority) the project’s aims and identity have become less distinctive and relevant amongst the delivery of these larger, funded programmes.

Interestingly, in East Sussex, which isn’t funded in DBV, the project has maintained more of its distinct identity and relevance. Here the project had always been seen as important to the authority’s own ambition to reduce exclusion, and the project lead has actively managed it in line with this organisational agenda. It may be that as the authority isn’t receiving DBV funding, there is room for this project to retain its individual role.

“I have been doing some of that advocating work - setting up communication channels, linking in with the right senior leaders ... it’s making sure this doesn’t get lost.”

(ES, Anchor)

East Sussex is also distinctive in that despite a department restructure during the project lifetime the project lead has been the same throughout the three years. They have seen part of their role as communicating and sharing the work within the local authority, ensuring it is understood and not missed or duplicated. There has also been Associate Director level involvement in the project in Years 2 and 3.

In Oldham and Worcestershire there have been changes at a senior level in the Education departments, but also in the practical day-to-day leadership of the PSE project itself. Although there was an effort to establish a lead at the beginning, staff turnover means that this hasn’t been consistent. In one authority the person acting as Anchor picked up this role, but never felt it was made official.

5. Process evaluation

The RSA is alert and responsive to local (and national) opportunities for change, and has the expertise to facilitate multi-agency conversations and systems change

The PSE project was designed to be delivered responsively by the RSA through a close working relationship with the Anchors and expertise in local working and methods for change. Although providing particular expertise and skills has been important, continuity in relationships and understanding of the history of the local projects was seen as an important, additional factor in how this work has been delivered.

Over the three years of the project, the RSA has delivered its programme of workshops, coaching and support, and maintained strategic relationships with each Collaborative Anchor and organisation. This role was fulfilled either by the national project lead working on all three areas, and latterly by the three Local Collaborative Advisors. Whilst this staffing model has changed, the individual and team fulfilling this role have had skills in coaching and facilitation for individual, collective, and systems change, as well as knowledge and experience of the education sector, local government, and local area working. These skills were actively recruited for when the new team of Local Collaborative Advisors was brought in in Year 3. It was also a strategic choice to move to this local model, intended to move from the national input of the RSA to embed sustainability through offering more local support. Collaborative members working with the Local Collaborative Advisors confirmed that they had the expertise to support them, but noted that the change in personnel meant a loss of continuity. This affected how well their projects and localities were understood, and the relationships within them. They felt that this was because the national RSA staff member who had originally been with them on the PSE “journey” (W, NHS) and was profoundly embedded in the work:

“[National project lead] had built up a good relationship with everyone, everyone was very onboard with them.”

(ES, Anchor)

“It was about the history, and where we’d come from.”

(W, NHS)

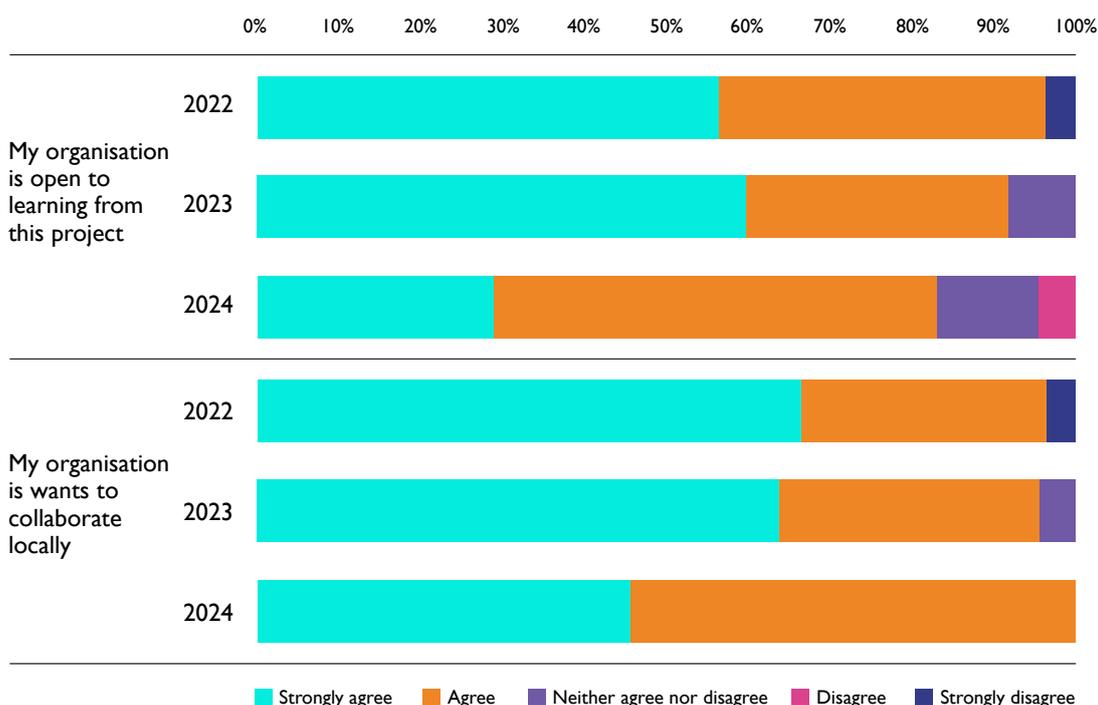
Both Anchors and Collaborative members in each locality highlighted the size and significance of this change on their projects. This had pros and cons, including when it was a benefit to have a fresh perspective, but was non-trivial to their work. This suggests that as well as skills and expertise, continuity has also been influential in how the programme has made change.

Local partners are open to learning and collaboration and have capacity to support the project with senior leadership buy-in

Interviews and data from the annual evaluation surveys suggest a generally favourable context for the project from Collaborative members, with commitment, buy-in, and support from the majority of the participants in each year (Figures 1-3). This does tend to reduce somewhat in Year 3, particularly those ‘strongly’ agreeing, across all domains. This is consistent with the messages from interviews; strong initial commitment to the project being replaced with other priorities by Year 3.

Similar to the Anchor organisations, most Collaborative members had a pre-existing belief and willingness to collaborate as a means to address exclusions, and this remained throughout the project. However, there was a mixture of views in terms of openness to learning, with some participants throughout the three years seeing themselves, often understandably, as representing good practice, and seeing the need for change elsewhere in their sector.

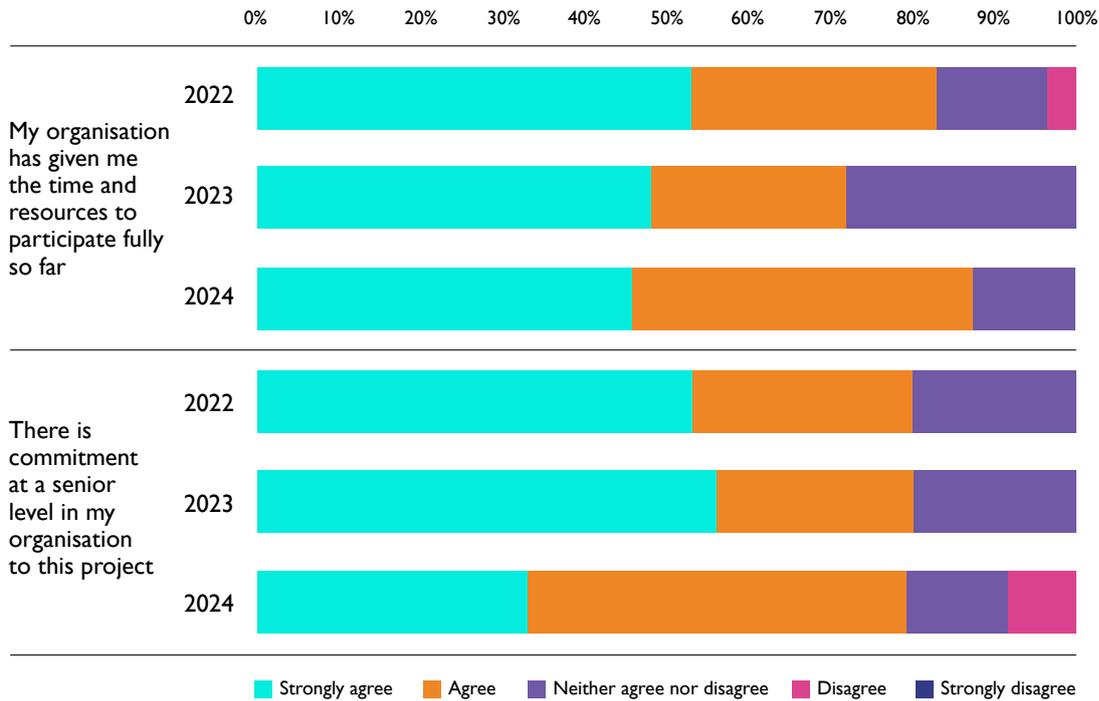
Figure 3: Collaborative members’ openness to learning and collaboration over time, full sample, n=30 (2022), 25 (2023), 24 (2024)



Although the majority agreed to some extent that they had the time and resources to participate, a consistent challenge for members of the Collaboratives was capacity and the challenge of attending sessions and progressing projects “on top of the day job” (O, Local Authority). It has been clear since the first year of the project that many of its participants made the time to take part because they see tackling exclusions as important both professionally and personally. In many cases, members have the autonomy in their roles to direct their own time. There is a perception amongst members that when other members have left, it’s been due to a combination of limited capacity and changed relevance.

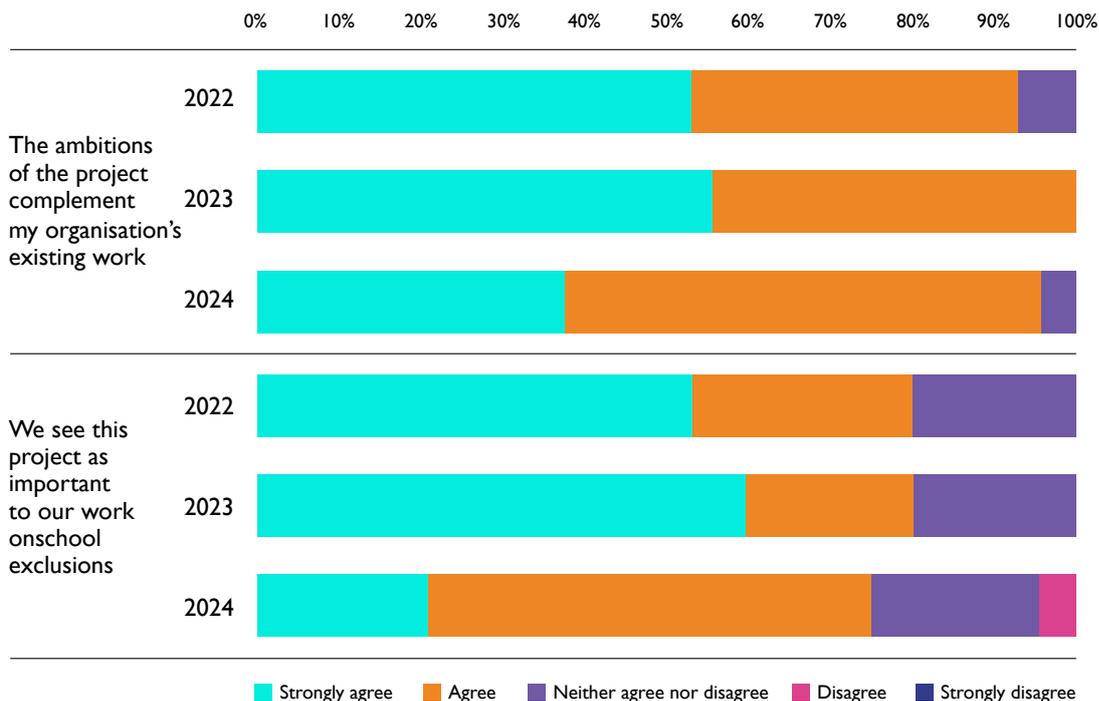
5. Process evaluation

Figure 4: Collaborative members' capacity and buy-in over time, full sample, n=30 (2022), 25 (2023), 24 (2024)



The survey findings on alignment and relevance of the project (Figure 3) for individuals and their organisations show this alignment has always been high, but that strength of feeling about this has dropped ever so slightly in Year 3. The qualitative findings broadly support this, but don't indicate a large change in relevance to most Collaborative members.

Figure 5: Collaborative members' view of alignment and prioritisation of the work over time, full sample, n=30 (2022), 25 (2023), 24 (2024)



Children, Young People and families are willing and supported to share their lived experience of the system and contribute to the co-design process.

The programme Theory of Change highlights the role of children and families in the co-design stage of project in Year 1, though work with them has continued less formally in Years 2 & 3.

The Year 1 evaluation reported on the role of child and family voice in the co-design process of the project. The system mapping stage of the research drew heavily on the experiences of children and young people and used their perspective as a lens to view the local system. These were then the basis of discussions that informed the design of the collaborative action plans. Additionally, in the first year of the project, all three areas had Parent Carer Forum (PCF) representatives on the Collaborative group, but this was reduced to a presence in just one of the areas in Years 2 and 3. In the coaching and delivery phase of the project, consultation with children, young people, and families has instead taken place on an ad-hoc basis through the individual sub-groups and via the existing relationships that Collaborative members have with families.

Activities: How has the RSA delivered the project?

As described above, the PSE project was designed to be delivered in three phases over three years. This section explores how the RSA delivered these phases, and to what extent they proceeded as anticipated. It focuses particularly on Year 3, summarising relevant activities in Years 1 and 2.

Year 1 – System Mapping and Convening

The Year 1 evaluation⁴ reviewed the process of the research and convening stages delivered to that point, and found that:

- The activities delivered with the Anchors and the Collaboratives had been largely successful. Engagement with stakeholders appeared to have developed over time from the launch events through to the workshops.
- Anchors valued the responsive way in which the RSA team worked with them to deliver Year 1, as well as how the team helped adapt the project to the Anchors' local contexts. For the RSA this has required some flexibility, whilst also maintaining key features, such as the System Mapping stage, as fixed in the project design.
- Collaborative members suggested that workshops in the first year of the project offered something distinctive and valuable to multi-agency working. This was due to the combination of: a varied membership; the effective content and activities in the workshops; and a workshop setting that was constructive and guided members to fully explore all views on key issues before moving to action.

⁴ See the Year 1 process evaluation for more detail.

5. Process evaluation

Years 2 & 3 – The role of the RSA

Since the agreement of the collaborative action plans in each locality at the beginning of Year 2, the RSA's team has focused on supporting sub-groups to progress their collaborative projects. In Year 2 this included developing more detailed aims for each sub-group, translating this into a delivery plan and building momentum. As the lead described, at the time their aim was "to help people move along and feel like they are progressing" (RSA Lead, Years 1 & 2). In Year 3, the Local Collaborative Advisors understood that they had a wide brief to offer support to the sub-groups, which were already up and running, to continue delivering their work collaboratively:

"To support groups that had momentum and ownership... to help them think through how to work together."

(Local Collaborative Advisor, Year 3)

"A major part of my role is to support the Collaborative to implement their plans successfully ... helping to clarify with and for them."

(Local Collaborative Advisor, Year 3)

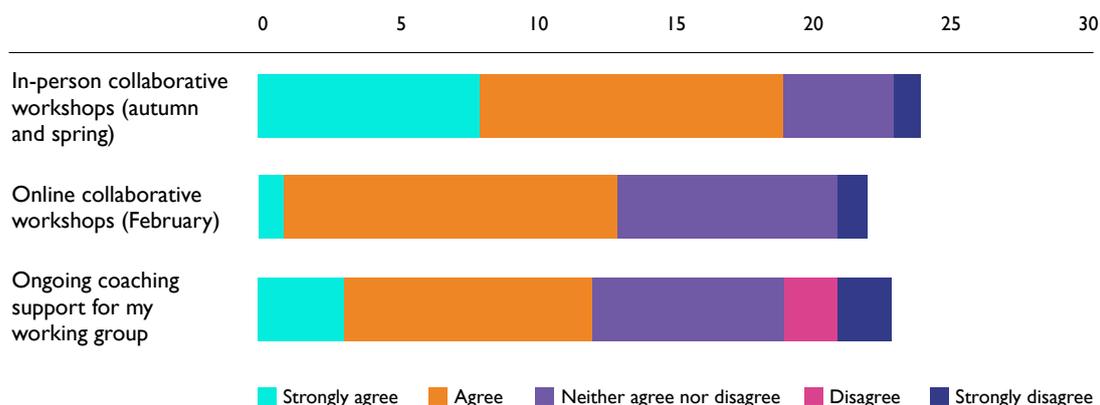
This included working with the Anchor organisations to also support the strategic alignment of the work and how it could be embedded. In Worcestershire, where there had been a gap and a change in project leadership from within the Anchor organisation, the Lead perceived the additional focus "to help them work out the value of collaborative working ... Especially as I had two new people taking on the project. I wanted to help them see what was going on underneath it" (Local Collaborative Advisor, Year 3).

Activities and engagement in Year 3

These aims were delivered by the Advisors this year through local coaching, collaborative workshops (with a common agenda) in each locality, and through a cross-locality workshop which they delivered with the central team.

The evaluation survey asked Collaborative members to reflect on the effectiveness of these activities in supporting their collaborative working, shown in Figure 4 on the next page.

Figure 6: Effectiveness of activities to support collaborative working.
(Non-participants excluded, n=24, 22, 23)



Collaborative workshops

The Year 3 Collaborative workshops were held in October 2023 and in May 2024. As with the workshops in Year 2, these were an opportunity for sub-groups to have focused time together on their projects, using worksheets and activities designed by the RSA to help them plan delivery, as well as to share progress as a wider Collaborative. The final workshop in May included discussions on evaluation and a session on future ways of working as a Collaborative.

Most Collaborative members (19 / 24) reported finding the workshops valuable and important for progressing their work. The data above is consistent with previous years, where Collaboratives found workshops the most valuable part of the RSA delivered programme. Whilst Year 1 workshops were valued for how they supported the Collaboratives to reach a shared action plan⁵; in Years 2 and 3 members said they found the dedicated time and space carved out within workshops helped them to progress their work outside of it:

“It’s been interesting to see how other people’s projects have developed. It’s been good to meet with my team – so it’s very positive to have those workshops to have the time to reflect and think.”

(ES, Primary School)

Despite being highly valued, attendance at workshops has varied throughout the three years of the project and there was a consensus across the localities that it “dwindled” (ES, Anchor) in Year 3. This was seen in at least two localities to have limited how the sessions could make connections and draw on resources across the different sub-groups as they developed and changed:

⁵ See the Year 1 process evaluation for more detail.

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“That’s why the workshops were good, – as we could come back and review and then ‘we’ve realised this now!’ The structure was good for that, but the decline in attendance did not help as the opportunity to shape and shift was limited.”

(O, Anchor)

“We started off three years ago and everyone was keen and there, and over time it has dwindled – and either people not having capacity to come, or don’t see the value as they are already set up on the workstream and know what they need to do... as a result maybe not as productive as it could have been.”

(ES, Anchor)

Cross locality workshop

Each year of the project the RSA has brought together the three Collaboratives in an online workshop to share experiences across their local areas. Although the survey response to the effectiveness of this workshop is mixed - with just half agreeing it supported collaborative working – several interviewees highlighted it as useful. They felt it gave them a sense of perspective on their own work, and in some cases helped to see the connections with projects in other areas. This is a departure from previous years, when participants had struggled to know how to make these connections across localities and felt that the workshops were “too early” (ES, Anchor). It seems that by the Year 3, more members have been able to make those useful connections:

“I found it useful to meet with the other localities, as linked-up with Oldham... that’s been so incredibly useful. I wonder if you need a chance to solidify what works in your area before working with the others.”

(ES, Virtual School)

Coaching and sub-group support

Whilst the timing, design, and structure of the workshops has been the same across the three localities and throughout the project, the coaching support and relationships management offered by the local lead - and subsequently, the Local Collaborative Advisors – is intended to be locally defined and to vary not only within each locality but between projects.

The programme design describes this Phase 3 quite broadly as 'coaching', to support members of the Collaborative to implement and evaluate the action plan. At its core, this support should facilitate rather than deliver change, with a view to longer term sustainability after the end of the programme. That said, in Year 2 the project lead felt they were more hands-on with several projects as they got up and running.

Local Collaborative Advisors in Year 3 have also explored different models of support, some of which have been direct coaching, others have been a variation on coaching, or other kinds of support. These appeared to have largely maintained the facilitation envisaged by the programme design but do flag some challenges in establishing this role.

One of the first tasks of the Local Collaborative Advisors when they came into the project was to get to know the Collaboratives and establish the most appropriate forms of support. However, as with workshop attendance, the challenge encountered in two of the areas particularly has been limited engagement and uptake of this support. Whilst this might suggest projects are working well in terms of sustainability, the challenge has remained of identifying what alternative support is needed, and how they might offer that.

“I imagined that I would be holding weekly coaching calls and sessions, but this hasn’t been taken up. I have tried some group drop-in calls, but people have essentially not had the time. So some coaching has happened within group discussions. There have been a few 1:1 sessions, but not many.”

(Local Collaborative Advisor)

This has required the advisors to develop a flexible offer, based on asking, suggesting, and listening to the needs in each locality. As a result, this support has been highly varied, ranging from facilitating meetings requested by sub-group leaders and offering leadership coaching (eg. Worcestershire), brokering introduction between members and running sessions on specific areas of project management such as evaluation (eg. in Oldham), holding 1:1s on tricky issues and supporting administration (eg. East Sussex), amongst much else. As one advisor and their Anchor described it:

“Less coaching, more consulting people asking what they need and want from me. Quite bottom-up. Then when things felt tricky - having 1:1s to talk things out. Also quite administrative! Been a bit of an everywoman in terms of how I’ve tried to support them.”

(Local Collaborative Advisor)

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“To start with she was trying to put in lots of meetings but she was very open and said ‘what do you need from me? Is this helpful, or is that helpful?’ Quite a collaborative relationship in that respect.”

(ES, Anchor)

As Figure 4 (page 24) suggests, whilst this support was considered useful by half of the participants across the programme, there are as many who felt neutral or negative about its ability to contribute to collaborative working. From interviews with the Collaborative members and the Local Collaborative Advisors, we know that there were sub-groups who didn't use or request support in Year 3. Two experiences of this are described below, and highlight the contrasting needs of sub-groups at this point: one feeling they didn't require support with a project progressing well, and another, experiencing challenges, finding they needed support beyond that which they felt an external programme could offer:

“I did have a couple of coaching sessions... [they] were a great listening ear and challenge and support, just at the time it wasn't where I was in the journey. If it had been earlier, it would have been great.”

(W, Secondary)

“I think it's because of where we are now... when it's completely derailed and having to start again - having those conversations ... deeper, bigger, wider conversations... is for within ourselves [in Oldham].”

(O, Anchor)

A challenge associated with this has been ensuring the Local Collaborative Advisor role, which has been flexible and responsive, has been agreed and understood locally – both through discussion with individual Collaborative members, and with the Anchor organisations. This has been especially important when adapting what has been broadly described as a coaching offer to different circumstances. In Worcestershire, there have been challenges aligning this offer from which the Anchor organisation eventually withdrew. The Local Collaborative Advisor in this area had felt that the sub-group leaders effectively progressed their project priorities from the action plan and were less confident in “creating the connections between different workstream chairs” (Local Collaborative Advisor). Part of this was to encourage more open communication about challenges.

However, two partners interviewed for this evaluation, within the Anchor organisations and outside of it, said they felt that communication wasn't clear, and that information was then being shared with those involved in a way that was neither intended nor expected. This hadn't helped local relationships. This suggests there was some lack of clarity both on the nuts and bolts of how this collaborative approach to coaching would work, but more

broadly a “misunderstanding and misalignment” (W, Anchor) in how the RSA delivered its role to help Collaborative members communicate about challenges and what the Anchor organisation felt was helpful.

These kinds of challenges highlighted the various moving parts that Local Collaborative Advisors and Anchors have needed to negotiate in delivery during the coaching phase – finding and maintaining a relevant offer to really varied needs, but maintaining this in line with local priorities.

Activities: how has the RSA delivered the project?

For the programme to make change its activities need to be both delivered and accessed, even if not in their initial form. It seems that the needs of each sub-group in Year 3 have been more varied than anticipated in the programme design, and this has made finding the right offer for each place more challenging both to deliver and to be accessed. The fieldwork for this evaluation suggests some programmatic and contextual factors that have influenced this in Year 3.

In Year 3, some sub-groups had essentially completed their work, others were progressing it, whilst some were experiencing significant challenges. Finding a coherent offer in Year 3 to this range of needs has been challenging, and potentially contributed to some workstream leaders and Collaborative members seeing the programme as less relevant to them, and so not taking up support. As the previous section discussed, it has always been challenging for people to make time for the workshops and the coaching/support, and they often did so only when they felt it would be valuable to them.

With sub-groups as the focus for the work in Years 2 and 3, the role and purpose of the Collaborative workshops has taken a back seat. For Collaborative members who have delivered their activity, there hasn't been a clear reason to stay involved in the wider Collaborative. This is potentially compounded by the movement of some of these sub-group activities into bigger, local authority-led projects such as the DBV – with the corresponding structures overtaking the project structures of PSE.

“[What’s led to that low attendance at workshops?] I think a combination of capacity, and to some extent relevance. For example, in respect of Early Help inclusion hubs, they were up and running 12 months ago, so continuing to attend amongst limited capacity – what would be the point?... I think once we had that initial vision and identified the workstreams it has since become very separate. I don’t know if that’s a good thing or a bad thing. But it means they [workshops] are less relevant.”

(O, Anchor)

5. Process evaluation

There is a potential circularity in this when taking peoples' capacity into account as well. In some senses more activity might have been an opportunity to explore need and engage more attendees. However, as capacity is a barrier to engagement, this is really hard to keep in balance:

“Maybe other people would have been more engaged if there had been more things, but then we’ve already said that membership was dwindling because they couldn’t prioritise it – so I don’t know, a really hard balance.”

(ES, Anchor)

Mechanisms of change: how has the project begun to make change?

The programme Theory of Change highlights some of the 'mechanisms' - both for the Collaboratives, and for the Anchor organisations - which the project intended to deploy through its activities to help collaboration lead to change. The evaluation asks whether these Mechanisms of Change are evident in the project, and to what extent they have been important for change. It also considers whether other mechanisms might play a role if seeking to create this kind of change again.

Mechanisms of change within the Collaboratives

The Mechanisms of Change within the Collaboratives appeared to have been established through the first year of the programme, and from year two onwards have been reported and largely maintained. These mechanisms mainly reflect on how successfully the project helped the Collaboratives bring together their experience and views, and present these into a plan that would guide action, collaboratively. The first two relate to the aims and commitment to the work, and the second about how that is defined in an action plan.

Aims and commitment: Collaboratives have a i) coherent vision and ii) understanding of the role of multi-agency collaboration in preventing school exclusions.

Workshops in the first year of the project were designed to facilitate the Collaboratives to agree on an overarching vision for how they might work to prevent school exclusions, with an emphasis on what they could do collaboratively, not individually. Rather than a 'vision' per se, several participants described this process leading to a shared view of the challenges their locality faced, what change was needed, and why. In particular, this was through exploring "key issues" (O, Year 2 Survey) from a range of perspectives which allowed "sharing views and shaping ideas" (O, Year 2, Survey).

From the outset of the programme, members of the Collaborative have tended to be those who already believe a multi-agency approach is needed in order to prevent school exclusions. Members felt this has developed into a more specific commitment and belief in what was achievable through collaboration with the specific group of partners in their locality. This includes some shifts in perspective, where members have become more willing to collaborate with specific partners than they have been previously. There is also a sense – explored further in the outcomes section - that changes in individual relationships and understanding of others' perspectives has helped reinforce multi-agency working as a possibility:

6. Mechanisms of change

“Changes in mindset for some individuals, this has then positively impacted on others that they have worked with collaboratively to meet the outcomes and goals of the project.”

(W, Year 2 survey)

“We learnt that we have to collaboratively and collectively work together, not pointing fingers. We know it’s a mess. We know - but we’re more powerful together when we work together to problem solve - and listen to each other’s issues.”

(W, Secondary school)

Defining action: Collaboratives have an i) understanding of effective practice and ii) agreement the ‘how and what’ of the action plans locally

This second pair of mechanisms move the Collaboratives on from agreeing and committing to what they want to achieve in their locality to how they as a group could do so. Several comments reflected that members of the Collaborative were developing this understanding in their workshops as early as Year 1 and the beginning of Year 2. This wasn’t just about practice but more deeply understanding the issues. When asked to describe the biggest success of the project in Year 2, several respondents across the localities talked about having greater awareness both of the “underlying issues” (ES, Year 2 survey) and causes of exclusions, both locally and more widely, as well as of practice that could help address these issues:

“Having the opportunity to get to the core of the underlying issues and attempt to address them.”

(ES, Year 2 survey)

“Realising that good practice is out there - we just didn’t necessarily know where to find it before the project.”

(ES, Year 2 survey)

There was also a strong consensus in Year 2 that this understanding had fed into the right activities being selected and prioritised in the local action plans. In Year 3, collaborative members interviewed remained of the view that the priorities in the action plans were the right ones.

“The right priorities were selected, and I don’t think anyone would disagree. We’ve gone on to have an Ofsted, which essentially highlighted similar priorities, and the DBV analysis again led to some really similar and related themes.”

(O, Anchor)

Delivery mechanism: continuing the collaborative mindset?

What has changed in the third year, which was seen as affecting change, is that there is less shared awareness of activities across the sub-groups, given the move away from collaborative activities to the individual workstreams. This means the role of a ‘collaborative’ mindset has been less influential, which may have some implications for how the work makes change in the longer term. This could be considered a helpful addition to Mechanisms of Change in the programme in Years 2 & 3:

“[what would have improved the project this year?] More sharing of what each work stream is doing so that we are aware of wider developments and potential interlinking factors that influence our work streams.”

(O, Year 2 survey)

An exception to this is in East Sussex, where the Collaborative as a whole appears to have remained more connected and joined up, with all the members interviewed able to speak about the other projects taking place and in some cases contributing toward their delivery. This might be influenced by the fact there are fewer projects in this area (three, compared with four or more in Oldham and Worcestershire) and the close management of the project by the lead at the Anchor organisation. The Local Collaborative Advisor has also established regular cross-sub-group meetings with the leads in Year 3, which has helped keep them connected. However, this has had to be led by the Advisor, suggesting it does need to be a specific programme input.

6. Mechanisms of change

Mechanisms of change within the local authority/anchors

The Mechanisms of Change for the local Anchors reflect the specific role that local authorities were envisaged to have as the strategic lead for the project in their areas, and for their wider inclusion agenda. This has varied over time.

Supporting the Collaboratives to secure funding

Neither Collaborative members nor Anchors noted funding as influential in their work on PSE. The Collaboratives, as a group, haven't sought funding, or commonly pooled cash resources for their sub-group activities, though one exception to this is a self-funded model set up amongst Primary AP in Worcestershire to pilot the Primary outreach model. However, they have all committed time and organisational resources to their sub-group activities on top of their day jobs and organisational business. This is what has enabled delivery in most cases.

Where funding has been needed, there are examples of where additional resources have been made available to take work forward: for example, to fund Transition Ambassador training in East Sussex. Some projects are being funded by the Anchor organisations either to run or continue through the DBV and Change Programmes (eg. Secondary AP outreach in Worcestershire, and Transitions in Oldham). This is part of the wider agenda around SEND and inclusion, rather than specifically on support to prevent exclusions as identified in this project.

Strategic alignment with the inclusion strategy, and communication of this to RSA and to the localities

As discussed in the section on context, at this point at the end of Year 3, there does appear to be alignment between the vast majority of the activities in the collaborative action plans, and the broader strategic direction of the local authority. In Oldham and Worcestershire, projects have been picked up and developed into new pieces of work within the overall delivery of wider projects, and in East Sussex the projects are being continued and mainstreamed into new teams and areas of work. This alignment has been strongly supported by way in which the priorities have fit with wider aims, but it has also required an effort on the part of local Anchors to ensure this alignment, for example advocating for projects, trying to "pull it together" (O, Anchor) across the different strands starting from the first year of the programme and as the action plan was developed, rather than in the later stages of delivery.

One of the challenges encountered, however, is in how to ensure this alignment whilst maintaining the collaborative aims and ethos at the heart of the project. The Theory of Change recognises that this alignment comes from the local authorities as the primary strategic body in each locality, but the challenge has been in how to make this alignment without their leadership distorting the collaboration taking place in the project. Some anchors reflected on how the role of the local authority can be in tension with the shared leadership, and this has become a bigger question as the project has neared its final year.

6. Mechanisms of change

For example, the leads at the Anchor organisation in Worcestershire felt that coming into the Collaborative they needed to clarify some of its work in order to understand how it fit within the new work they were leading in line with their own objectives and other national programmes. In reflection of this, they have developed a role of reporting back to the Collaborative as leads rather than as part of wider discussion.

“We had to bring clarity... It’s been more me going in saying ‘this is what we are doing’ than being asked or directed to do anything. It’s been going on to update on the new stuff we’re working on... and share with the group ‘this is how things are going’ rather than the other way around.”

(W, Anchor 2)

There were mixed views within the Collaborative, which the Anchors were aware of, about how this fit with the leadership established by the Collaborative itself. However, as the Anchors articulated, some areas of work, especially the new ones with which the sub-groups were aligning, need to be overseen and sat with teams within the wider view of the education team:

“But my sense is that the work that needs to be done on preventing school exclusions is being done by [LA] team in a lot of ways. And there is lots of other stuff around that which is also enabling that work – which has captured and overtaken this narrow focus [of PSE project], through the DBV programme.”

(W, Anchor)

This role was also a factor that the Anchor in Oldham reflected on, in the context of how work had been delivered. As they saw it, they had the overall strategic responsibility for inclusion, and whilst they might have a desire to collaborate, they would still find that responsibility “came back to the local authority”.

“The vision built was a strategic one... I think that is one of the overriding things about the idea of a collaborative. It does ultimately always feel like it comes back to the local authority... If it feels like – to schools – this is on top of business as usual, whereas to Local Authority and to Health this is business as usual. It goes back to those power dynamics... our role is to help them to do their job. And their job is to do their job. Collaboration has a different colour to it when you see it like that.”

(O, Anchor)

6. Mechanisms of change

Again, in East Sussex, this dynamic has also been explored, with the Anchor in particular noting the effort - and discomfort - in actively trying to step back from their usual level of leadership and involvement. Again, this may be influenced by not having a strong organisational need to align the project to a large programme, as is the case with the DBV programme, which has brought a certain type of alignment to Oldham and Worcestershire.

So whilst local authorities have aligned this work with the broader local priorities, the challenge remains of how to do this whilst maintaining the collaborative leadership established through the PSE project. Whilst the project leads and Local Collaborative Advisors throughout the project have worked with local partners on this, it may be that this is an area where a more structured focus in the programme could help local authorities, with Collaboratives, explore the specific roles and responsibilities they have and how this will influence their style of collaboration.

Outcomes evaluation: what has changed as a result of the programme?

Outputs: The work of the collaborative sub-groups

In the PSE Theory of Change, the direct outputs of this project are the activities that the sub-groups lead in each locality, based on their Collaborative's action plan. This evaluation is interested in both to what extent the sub-groups have delivered on their action plans and also what has been learnt from them.

This evaluation has used a sampling method for interviews based on gaining sector variation across the full Collaborative, and longitude over the three years. This means that it hasn't gained detailed, first-hand updates on every sub-group project and some have only been covered through the survey or via the Collaborative Anchor. Therefore some activities are covered in more detail than others.

Progress of the sub-groups

The interim report published by the RSA early in the second year of the project outlined the sub-group priorities which formed the area action plans, grouping them by the common themes⁶. The table below summarises briefly each of the projects featured in the initial action plans and describes their delivery, including changes in direction, towards the RSA led programme in May/June of 2024.

⁶ https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/_foundation/new-site-blocks-and-images/reports/2023/05/preventing-school-exclusions-collaborations-for-change-interim-report.pdf, slides 36-38

7i. Outcomes evaluation

Table 1: Summary of action plan progress at the end of Year 3

Oldham			
Sub-group project	Action plan description (Year 2)	Delivery progress as of end of Year 3	Partners in Year 3
Headteacher Inclusion network	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.	Terms of reference were developed for an Inclusion Peer network of headteachers and senior staff at Secondary schools. This group now meets termly. Meetings have included sharing exclusions and other inclusion related data as a basis for review and shared discussion which they can reflect on. Engagement with other schools continues to be a work in progress.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mainstream Secondary schools • Special school
Early Help and Inclusion drop ins, SEND reviews, and SENCo meetings	<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>Joint Inclusion and Early Help drop-in - 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>As part of the RSA project, existing virtual inclusion clinics have been extended to weekly drop-in calls, which schools book onto and are attended by LA inclusion members of staff. This development was completed by the end of Year 2 and has been up and running in Year 3.</p> <p>Separate drop-ins run by Inclusion and by Early Help have been brought together and are now held half termly at two secondary schools in Oldham. A third school has joined in Year 3.</p> <p>In addition, the authority has extended its SEND Review process to include a focus on issues highlighted in attendance data. The Council has carried out around 10 SEND reviews this year.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Authority Education • Local Authority Early Help • Primary school

Oldham			
Sub-group project	Action plan description (Year 2)	Delivery progress as of end of Year 3	Partners in Year 3
Transitions pilot	Universal transition offer pilot – Developing early identification tools to be used in primary schools to help identify pupils for targeted additional work and support during transition to secondary.	Rolling out the transitions pilot of the Early Identification tool didn't happen this year due to lack of support from the primary schools for trialling it. As a result of the work preparing for this pilot, the sub-groups carried out focus groups and captured the experience of young people going through primary to secondary transition, with findings that have been shared with schools and stakeholders. There is now a tool for identifying children who may need additional support in preparation for transitions which has been used by Education Psychology service this year with looked after children, as well as having been shared with all SENCos. As part of a bigger package of funding, the transitions work has a funded member of staff to lead further development of this workstream.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Authority Education • Health • Primary school
Referral routes / Communications	Referral Toolkit – Improving awareness and understanding of services, and when and how to make referrals	This began as bringing together information on the service offers available and relevant to families and those involved in working with children and young people at risk of being excluded. It has since then developed into a bigger piece of work on communications strategy and is being considered for funding by the local authority.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special school • Health • Parent Carer Forum

7i. Outcomes evaluation

East Sussex			
Sub-group project	Action plan description (Year 2)	Delivery progress as of end of Year 3	Partners in Year 3
Behaviour support networks	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 another.	The Hastings & Eastbourne pilot Behaviour Support Network has run 6 times in Year 3 and has been largely oversubscribed. It is led by experienced Headteachers and attended by specialists from LA Inclusion, SEND and educational psychology. There are now Behaviour Support Networks set up and developing in the four other areas of the county.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary schools • Local Authority Education
Transitions	Y6-7 transitions pilot – 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.	This pilot project is still ongoing and is expected to run for a further year, as it wasn't able to run in 2024. To date they have researched and produced a best practice document, based on evidence from the local area and from wider research, which makes recommendations for what secondary schools in East Sussex 'Must, Should, Could' do to improve young peoples' experiences of transition. The subgroup is working with three schools, in different areas of the county to trial elements of the guidance with their feeder primaries. Some funding has been brought in for training on Transition ambassadors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Authority Education • Special school • Virtual school
Inclusions helplines /	Services graduated offer – Clarifying and bringing coherence to the continuum of offers from different services so that schools can make the right referral at the right time.	This has changed considerably from the initial graduated services offer and become a piece of work led by NHS therapies to improve availability of immediate advice via a suite of videos, as well as exploring how universal offers are communicated to schools. This includes the co-ordinated development of a Therapies-led helpline and the LA-led inclusion helpline so they are joined up, and are now clearer and more accessible for schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health • Local Authority Education

Worcestershire			
Sub-group project	Action plan description (Year 2)	Delivery progress as of end of Year 3	Partners in Year 3
Health	Health + school – Improving NHS visibility and accessibility to school professionals through SENCo, FAP, and the primary headteacher networks.	The Health member of the Collaborative has revised the scale of this work over the two years of the programme to focus on the SENCo network and case consultations. They now attend this network, with a regular Q&A slot and opportunity to outline their offer. Rather than working with FAP they felt improving relationships with the WCF Exclusions staff would be more effective, and they are now contacted when health is raised as an issue.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health • CAMHs
SENCo network	FAP, primary HT partnership, SENCo network – Incorporating inclusion discussion within existing meetings, partnerships and networks, and using them as places for knowledge and practice sharing.	The SENCo network was initially developed outside of the RSA project, then brought into it in Year 2 for more formal development and wider engagement from other stakeholders in schools and CAMHS at WCF. The network was intended to provide a forum for practice development for SENCos, and an opportunity for CAMHS to provide specialist training. The network has been up and running throughout Year 3 and has been set up with wider engagement and more formal structures for long term benefit than might have happened otherwise.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAMHs • Primary school
Secondary Headteachers partnership and WASH Primary Partnership		The secondary headteachers partnership is now well established and has not required support from the RSA in year 3. The Primary Headteachers partnership has continued to meet monthly and is being supported more closely by the Local Authority to improve efficacy and consult on future plans for organising the partnership.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secondary schools • Primary schools • Local Authority

7i. Outcomes evaluation

Worcestershire			
Sub-group project	Action plan description (Year 2)	Delivery progress as of end of Year 3	Partners in Year 3
Primary FAP	FAP, primary HT partnership, SENCo network – Incorporating inclusion discussion within existing meetings, partnerships and networks, and using them as places for knowledge and practice sharing.	Primary FAP has been piloted in Redditch, with a view to expanding across localities next year.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary schools • Local Authority Education
Secondary Fair Access Protocol chairing and agenda		FAPs across the county now operate in more of a standardised way, with consistent chairing, agendas and use of data which put greater focus on discussions about inclusion. Decisions on managed moves are effectively managed by the WCF officer with what is perceived as greater willingness from schools to take moves. Increased engagement from WCF leadership in the Fair Access Protocol is improving the quality of relationships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secondary schools
AP Outreach	AP Outreach – Developing and piloting primary and secondary AP outreach offers.	<p>An AP Secondary outreach proposal was developed by the AP members of the Collaborative in Year 2 of the project, and four schools received funding for this at the end of Year 3.</p> <p>An AP primary outreach pilot has been set up and is running with 26 schools in Year 3.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternative provision schools • Local Authority Education
Trauma Informed practice	Trauma Informed Practice – Building mechanisms such as EP consultations to ensure consistency in how trauma-informed practice is implemented within individual schools	Therapeutic Schools training programmes launched in Year 3 and 69% of schools have taken up training, this has also been redesigned to make it more accessible to schools. A new trauma informed practice network of practitioners set up by the lead is now convening workforce network and providing ongoing development around implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAMHs • Virtual School

As the table above outlines, all of the strands of work identified in the Collaborative action plans have progressed to some extent, with many being delivered and now becoming well established new practices, offers, or services in the three localities. Without the Preventing School Exclusions programme, these changes would either not have happened at all, or would have happened but without a collaborative approach.

Whilst some projects have been delivered very closely to the original intention in the action plan, others have been replaced or developed beyond that. For example, the Behaviour Support Network in East Sussex, Inclusion drop-ins in Oldham, and SENCo network and FAP (Fair Access Protocol) in Worcestershire have all been delivered with their original aims largely maintained. Others have changed in nature, for example the Services graduated offer project in East Sussex became a more focused piece of work with a health partner, and the work on referral routes in Oldham has, through its resonances with wider priorities, formed part of a much larger piece of work on communications planned for Oldham.

As well as variation in their alignment with the original aims set out in the action plans, projects have also varied in the time taken to develop. For example, the Inclusion Drop-ins in Oldham were up and running with two schools by the end of Year 2, and seen to an extent as a relatively straightforward expansion of an existing service with a new partner (in this case, Local Authority SEND and Inclusion working with Early Help). In Year 3, this has expanded to be run with another secondary school. The changes to Secondary Fair Access Protocol meeting agendas and chairing were well embedded by the middle of Year 3 of the project, as a collaboration between school leaders who lead FAP meetings.

By contrast, the timelines for projects on Primary to Secondary transitions in both East Sussex and in Oldham are being extended beyond the end of the PSE project. In part this was considered to be because of the scale and scope of the work, which in both cases have become larger over time. Transitions are tied to the summer term of the school year, meaning there is less flexibility in when the pilots can be run. Interestingly these pilots are also a good example of the different paces of the project: with one starting off with a detailed plan and then encountering challenges in delivery, and the other requiring more support to get started and now making steady, although scaled back, progress.

All of these workstreams have created outputs, even if they are not fully completed or have changed from the original intention of the action plan. In Worcestershire, the original project on AP Secondary outreach was not funded until the end of the project, and in the meantime the Alternative Provision Heads group worked with the local authority on a different project - to establish an AP FAP - which, whilst not one of the projects identified through the collaborative process in Year 1, was developed in response to the work of the Collaborative. The early identification tool for transitions in Oldham was not piloted, but the sub-group has gathered and documented pupil voices on the topic and trialled the tool with a smaller group of looked-after children. Both of these projects, the sub-group teams felt, had value, and contributed to the transitions agenda.

What factors have influenced sub-group working?

Interviews with the sample of Collaborative members in Years 2 and 3 included reflections on some of the factors that influenced the progress and success, as they perceived it, of their pilots and projects. By far the strongest themes identified were what might be considered 'personnel' issues: how sub-group members' capacity, role, influence, and resource supported work or made it more challenging.

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Capacity and roles within sub-groups

Capacity to take part in the programme is a challenge in this programme and applied as much to sub-group working as to other project activities. Whilst members were committed to their projects, they did them without additional time or resources, and often on top of their day jobs. Whilst a basic challenge, this is fundamental to how they have been able to make progress.

Members reflected that this was not only time to do the work identified in the sub-group, but that to do it collaboratively requires a considerable amount of administration and coordination to work across multiple partners and individuals. Arrangements where admin has been supported have been valued.

“We try as much as we can to find a date to call a group, we have to go with a date that someone can’t make... or something has come up. Then you think it wasn’t very productive, but you can’t call another meeting as those who did attend feel like it’s overwhelming.”

(ES, Virtual School)

That few members have specific capacity to deliver this work has contributed to less formalised roles and leadership within the groups. Tasks have tended to fall to people based on other factors such as who has the capacity at the right time, or because some people tend to step into these roles. For members taking on a leadership role, this usually “made sense”, but because it wasn’t formally discussed as part of the formation of the groups, there remains a sense of them being “self-appointed” rather than formally agreed and given the mandate to lead.

“I was self-appointed as the transition lead strand - because it felt appropriate and no-one else offered. I had the contacts and the positioning within the system.”

(O, Anchor)

I had capacity and am a control freak - it made sense!

(ES, Virtual School)

The ways in which capacity has been stretched also seems to be a contributor to when people have dropped out when their circumstances change and they can no longer fit the work in, and this can affect how collaborative the work becomes. Two Worcestershire school members who were involved in sub-groups in Year 2 then became Headteachers and have been unable to participate since. The projects in each case have continued, but without this additional perspective.

Job role expertise and influence

As well as the capacity of members to take part, the job role, position, and topic knowledge available to each project was determined by membership of the Collaboratives. The make-up of these teams, and the corresponding expertise and influence available to them, has varied.

Some sub-groups are essentially changing areas of their own work. For example, there was very clear alignment in Oldham Inclusion work that involved Early Help and SEND and Inclusion team, both of whom were represented on the Collaborative. The Behaviour Support Networks in East Sussex have been primarily delivered by a group of schools who felt they had experience to share with the wider sector. These projects have worked well, with fewer challenges in terms of resourcing.

However, in other areas of work, priorities have appeared to sit outside of the roles of the sub-group membership. One of the challenges that was emphasised by members of the Transitions working group in East Sussex was that none of them had transitions within their role. They felt they lacked expertise and influence on this topic, requiring them to build this from scratch, and slowing their progress.

“Nobody in my group knows transition - so we had to go away and learn it from a school and LA perspective before we could do it. And that’s what I mean about having an expert there - if you have an expert, they will identify what the need is. But we couldn’t as we did not have the knowledge.”

(ES, ESCC)

There are also a handful of examples where Collaborative members, including school and health, have acted in a more advisory role and added thoughts and perspective to work which they themselves are not in a position to take forward but can inform.

“I feel like I have been a contributor in terms of ideas but on the ground, I haven’t had much involvement as my job role didn’t lend itself to being part of [sub-group pilot].”

(O, Year 3 Survey)

Whilst all sub-groups have found ways to deliver within their groups, where there were gaps in expertise or knowledge this was perceived by some as a mismatch in the resources, forming a barrier to the work. It’s not clear whether these mismatches were identified at the time as part of the work, or whether groups had to figure this out before they could get started. As one member in East Sussex identified, clarity on this would have helped them identify whether and how it could proceed:

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“What is the purpose of the group - to have an expert to drive it forward, or so those members are learning about the priority but it’s slower? It’s being really clear about what it is that you want to achieve and having the right resources in front of you to be able to achieve it.”

(ES, ESCC)

Whilst the team in this example felt they could still make progress from ‘outside’ of the agenda, in another example an East Sussex sub-group responded by redefining their activity to fit the group membership. For example, during Year 2 the East Sussex group were working on a multi-agency project which had been identified, through the collaborative process, as an action. However, as - for various reasons - membership changed over time, it became clear that this wouldn’t be possible. They responded to this by redefining this action based on which partners were available to be involved:

“We had someone from Early Help, had the Parent Carer Forum, had Social Care, CAMHS, but people started not being able to make workshops. We looked at who are the core people who are going to stick this out and get on with it and tailored the work we did around the people we had ... it was ‘got someone brilliant here, let’s see what they can drive forward’ and the project came from them so we just said ‘let’s do that then!’”

(ES, Anchor)

This was a pragmatic choice which resulted in a widely valued piece of work led by their Health representative. However, this example also highlights how dependent on individual engagement delivery of the priorities has been. Moving on from the original multi-agency project was arguably still “a missed opportunity” (ES, Anchor) for collaborative working which had been identified as a priority.

Engagement with schools outside of the Collaborative

Whilst the project has worked with a range of partners, members highlighted the role of schools as a critical influence on the success of their sub-group working. This was raised as an issue both regarding schools as members of the Collaboratives, as discussed above, but also as influential for many sub-groups developing pilots with schools outside of the Collaborative. For example, in projects to promote or expand a practice, service, or offer; in both Years 1 and 2, members of the Collaborative saw this as one of the biggest challenges for the work going forward.

School-led models of engagement have been seen as really successful in engaging the wider school population. One of the clearest examples given is that of the Behaviour Support Networks in East Sussex which were led by the schools in their sub-group. One particular success has been having the Headteachers on the sub-group lead discussion of it at the area Heads Conferences.

“I didn’t talk about Behaviour Support Network, I just did a bit about the other two [PSE] strands ... So had the Headteachers who had been running these networks talking to other Heads, and there was a real buzz... that’s who they listen to, they don’t listen to us.”

(ES, Anchor)

“Our project really is about getting people through the door... I don’t think that would have happened if it hadn’t been for us standing up and presenting.”

(ES, Primary school)

Having said this, the Behaviour Support Network group have also recognised that the local authority is a central and visible point of reference which can also benefit their communication. However, they used this route only once they were secure in what they were communicating, recognising that in doing this sooner they might have increased uptake but with less understanding that the work was not a local authority offer.

Similarly, the work led by schools in Worcestershire to improve the consistency in how Fair Access Protocol chairs consider inclusion has benefited from engaging school-to-school. The Trust leader and panel chair leading this work felt that modelling and showing their own commitment to the inclusion agenda has made change easier to make than if it had been mandated.

“I am harder on our [Trust] schools than I am on [others] – that made a difference. I have 100% control over my schools, but I can’t do that with the others. I can influence and model, and that’s what they’ve seen. More carrot and less stick... I expected it to be more stick... I feel really privileged, I work with some amazing leaders.”

(W, Secondary)

However, even in other school-led projects, this engagement remains a work-in-progress, and engaging schools outside of the Collaborative remains one of the challenges most commonly cited.

[What has worked less well?] “Ensuring that all schools are engaged in the sub-group. This is growing up and presenting.”

(O, Year 3 survey)

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The Transitions sub-group in East Sussex also ran into this challenge, in a second 'layer' of engagement with the large number of Primary schools working with the Secondaries engaged on the project. So the potential for engagement to affect how quickly work can progress also depends on how well engaged partners could then engage their own network, especially in a large county like East Sussex, with nearly 150 primary schools.

“We had made the assumption that Secondaries would just be able to ask their Primaries to get involved. Because Primaries are good at transitions, we assumed they would be up for it, but they are not! I don't know why.”

(ES, Virtual School)

Where things haven't gone as quickly or as planned in engaging schools outside of the Collaborative, there was a sense from sub-group leaders that having more schools involved in the Collaborative could have helped. This could inform the original design of projects so that they would have a better chance of being taken up by other schools. This wouldn't necessarily have to mean more Headteachers, as one member in Oldham recognised. More SEND, pastoral, and indeed classroom teachers would have helped them connect with those who might then be asked to make changes and take work forwards.

Balancing local authority roles in the sub-group

The second specific role highlighted by Collaborative members was the role of the local authority, especially the education service, within the sub-groups. This in a sense brings to ground level the challenge of balancing the strategic role of the local authority amongst collaboratively led projects.

Across the three localities there was a strong view that local authorities needed to be represented and involved in the sub-group working. They were often able to oversee decision making, have access or oversight of resources, with contacts and positioning that was needed for collaboratively designed projects to come to fruition. In one locality, the strongest criticism of the Collaborative model was a perceived lack of senior decision makers who could give the work “teeth” (Collaborative member), and so limiting the local authority role is not seen as valuable.

However, Local authority leads themselves were often those who acknowledge that their involvement came with a power dynamic and an assumption that they would be in the lead, when they may be actively avoiding that. There are specific examples of where this has been addressed in these projects. The Behaviour Support Network example described above has not only made conscious choices about communications but has carefully balanced the input of the authority to make it most effective, such as offering admin support whilst ensuring leadership decisions are led by schools.

This has required an awareness from the local authority leaders that this work should be school-led, and why that is beneficial for the locality. Anchors in both East Sussex and Worcestershire referred to the wider context that local authorities increasingly need to influence rather than direct schools, particularly with the growing number of Academy schools outside of local authority control.

Levels of senior oversight for multi-agency or new projects

Finally, and although mentioned less by members, looking at the agencies involved in the work in this final year shows that there is less involvement from Social Care, including Early Help, and from Parents Carer Forums. As discussed above, this does not necessarily mean the projects have been less successful, but it does mean they have been different from what was originally envisaged through the Collaborative planning process.

It may be that for some of the broader multi-agency projects identified, additional support would have helped give a better chance of their completion. For example, reflecting on the multi-agency project which didn't go forward in East Sussex, there was a sense that it was "too challenging, too much of a leap" (ES, Anchor) and having some guidance or support for such a significant change may have helped progress. The group working on transitions in East Sussex, breaking ground in an area with no 'owner,' felt that more guidance would have helped them get off to a better start. There might be potential for these projects, where influence over change is more complex, to have some additional input or expertise. One suggestion is this is where a senior sponsor - with both decision making power and broader scope across services - could be more influentially brought into the process.

Outcomes: what difference has the programme made for collaborative working?

The Theory of Change for this programme sets out i) 'increased feelings of inclusion' for beneficiaries and ii) an 'ongoing reduction' in preventable exclusions as its long term aims. The stepping stones towards this are improved collaborative working and resulting changes in how individuals, organisations and systems work. These 'stepping stones' are the focus of this evaluation. It explores the three levels of change in turn, asking to what extent these changes have occurred within the programme. It then presents the unanticipated outcomes that have been highlighted as part of the programme by those taking part.

Quality of relationships

Anticipated outcomes

The expectation was that quality of relationships amongst individuals would allow better collaborative working and enable change to take place at organisational and system level. The programme anticipated the following individual outcomes as indicators of the improved quality of relationships between local partners:

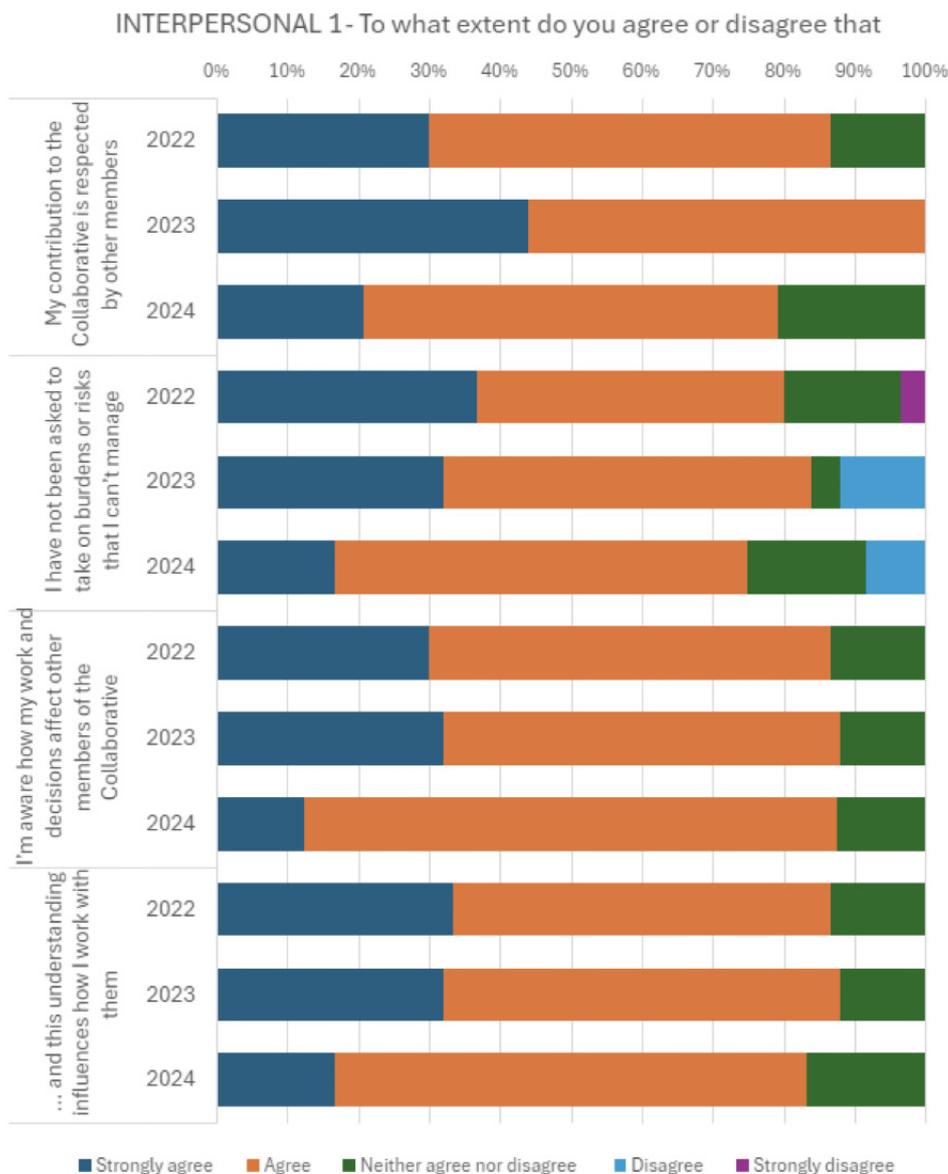
1. Greater respect amongst partners (ie how partners treat one another in their ways of working, processes, and infrastructure).
2. Improved sense of fairness in how burdens, risks, and opportunities are shared amongst partners to reduce preventable exclusions (through processes infrastructures, ways 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 and reliability, and based on good practice).

How has the quality of relationships developed over the project?

Quality of relationships appear to be one of the first changes seen in the programme. The Year 1 outcomes baseline suggested there were already high levels of positive interpersonal relationships amongst the groups, with empathy appearing highest and trust ranking lowest. Evidence about the workshops suggested the project may have already made a contribution to the personal relationships in Year 1. In particular, many interviewees described developing empathy, understanding, and respect as a result of the workshops.

Although a specific focus on quality of relationships has featured much less in the interviews in Years 2 and 3, interviewees described how this way of working, established in Year 1, had endured during the programme. The survey responses in Figures 5 & 6 (shown for the full sample of respondents⁷) reflect this trend to some extent as well. Across almost all the indicators of respect, fairness and empathy (Figure 5), trust, and integrity (Figure 6), there appears to be a ‘peak’ in Year 2 going from the workshops into sub-group activities, which then drops back to similar levels in Year 3. Across the board a large majority (a minimum of 60 per cent, and more commonly over 70 per cent) of these respondents have experienced these positive interpersonal relationships.

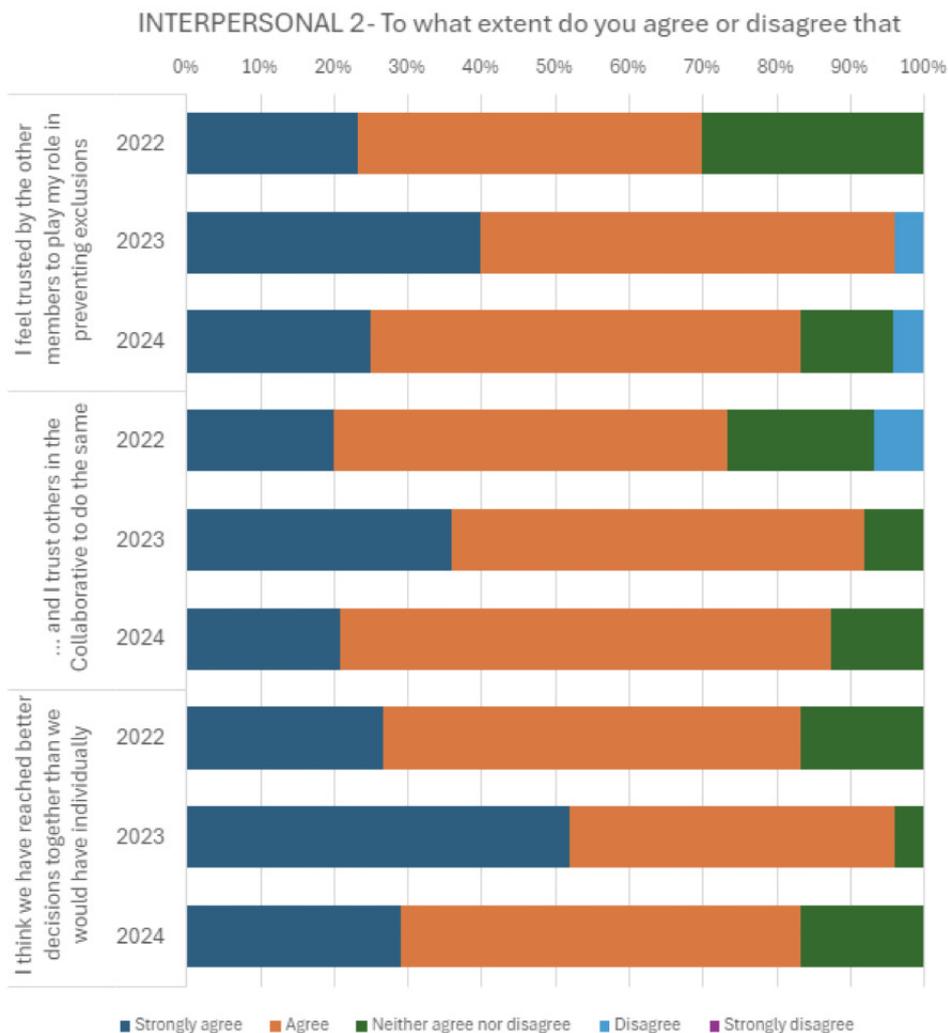
Figure 7: Reporting of interpersonal outcomes (respect, fairness and empathy) over time, full sample, n= 30 (2022), 25 (2023), 24 (2024)



7 The constant sample, which is smaller but more comparable over time, shows very similar trends to the full sample in each set of results discussed in this chapter, giving some confidence that these findings are broadly comparable over time for the respondents.

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Figure 8: Reporting of interpersonal outcomes (trust, integrity) over time, full sample, n= 30 (2022), 25 (2023), 24 (2024)



The Theory of Change explored several different dimensions of interpersonal relationships, although the survey data above suggests limited differences between these. In interviews, the aspect mentioned most often was empathy, particularly understanding peoples' roles, their perspectives, and the constraints they work within. This reduced people's tendency to blame or "point fingers" and listen to each other instead, and was seen as crucial for making a good quality action plan. This is the case across all three localities, where "frustrations" were a feature of collaborative working, but it seems to have been particularly effective in Worcestershire where there is a sense that some but not all relationships have changed, and that this has enabled more effective work:

"I really had significant feelings about some people that weren't great, and we did end up being able to work together, improve our relationships, [though not all]."

(W, Alternative Provision)

“I’ve got to trust that the wider and bigger things are being covered by other parts of the system and the right part of the system.”

(W, NHS)

“We’re at the point where if we need to do something we go straight through to the person.”

(W, Anchor)

Members tended to reflect more broadly on relationship development since Year 1, finding that collaborative sub-group working had fostered positive relationships between members. Several spoke about their colleagues having “been fantastic to work with” (ES, ESCC) and a sense of respect and value for the work they have done, even when this hasn’t necessarily been as planned. People frequently referred in the reflections on the programme to how much they enjoyed working with their sub-groups and that one success of the project has been involving “good people” (O, Year 2 Survey).

There was also a sense that the ways of working and opportunities to work with people would extend beyond the specific projects and had to some extent already come through in other areas of work. Although this wasn’t widespread, it suggests that the project has increased connections and propensity to work together, as well as some aspects of the quality of working relationships.

“We all have different management and different ways of working, but ... it’s taken down other paths of different things. It builds relationships just seeing them face-to-face, ‘what do you do? Oh we could work together on that.’ For me that’s one of the big impacts, the RSA work—it’s opened a lot of doors in promoting multi-agency working.”

(O, NHS)

The examples given suggest that interpersonal relationships have grown out of the collaborative workshops and into sub-group working, and in some cases more widely between partners. Quality of relationships built through the workshops appear to have provided a good basis for the work to go forward.

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Organisational and systems outcomes

Beyond the quality of relationships, the project was expected to make a difference at organisational and systems levels. When asked in interviews about the difference the project has made, members described the specific, concrete results of the sub-group activities. These changes align to the project's wider outcomes but have largely occurred within specific areas of the sub-group working. This evaluation explores what these outcomes have looked like. Again, this evaluation hasn't gained a detailed picture of every project, and so this section discusses key examples which illustrate the ways in which the project has and has not contributed to these outcomes. It doesn't quantify the full extent of change achieved by the project.

Anticipated outcomes

Organisational outcomes

The project aimed to generate increased commitment from local partners to multi-agency approaches to reducing preventable exclusions.

Specifically, it identified the following two indicators of organisational change that partner organisations were expected to embody in their operations and resourcing.

1. Release/securing of (joint) funding for enhanced access to preventative/appropriate support provision.
2. 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.

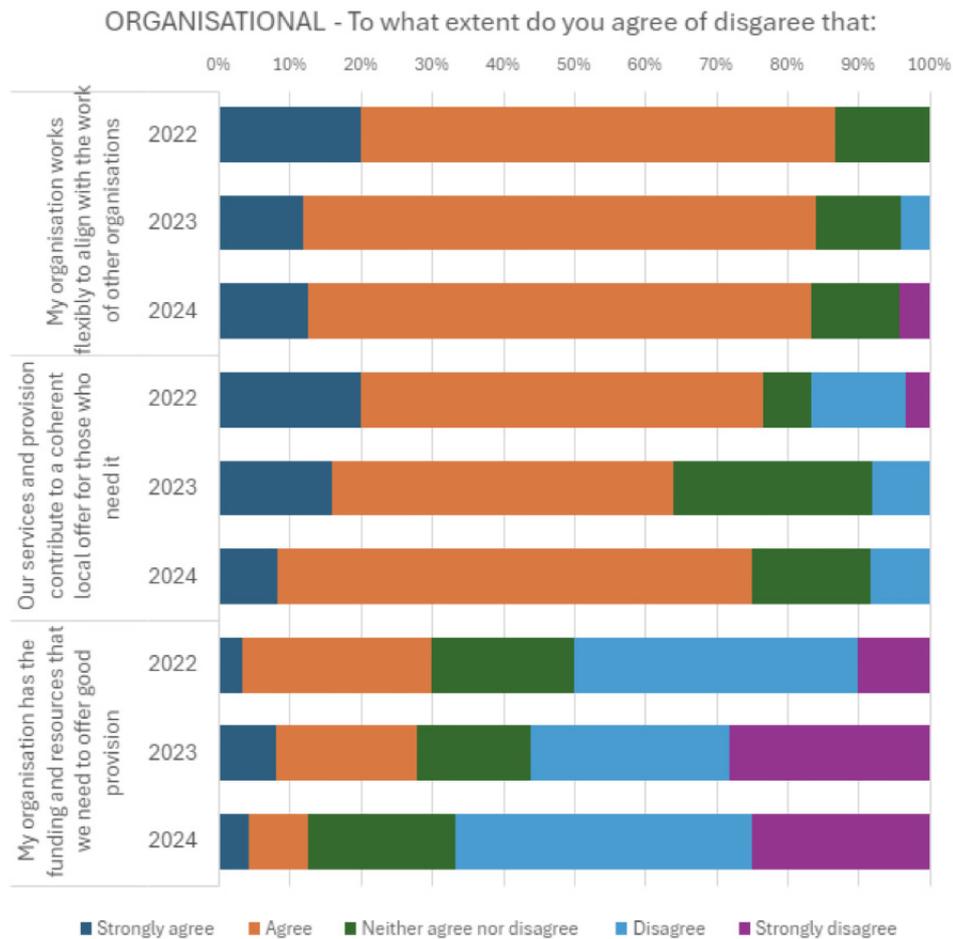
Systems outcomes

At a system level, the project was working towards changes in infrastructure that would foster greater equity and accessibility of resources and support. Specifically, these focused on making sustainable improvements in mechanisms for early identification and timely response to risk/need through:

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.

Increased commitment to multi-agency approaches to reducing exclusions

Figure 9: Reporting of organisational outcomes over time. Constant sample n = 11, wider sample n = 30 (2022), 25 (2023), 24 (2024)



Release or securing of (joint) funding for enhanced access to preventative or other appropriate support provision

In Year 1, the overall message from interviews in each locality is that the system as a whole lacked the resources to offer a service to all children that need it. Moreover, what resources were available were targeted to reactive activities rather than the early intervention that the participants felt would be more effective. No organisations talked about joint funding that they shared with other organisations as part of their resource mix.

Since Year 1, it's not been the case that specific pots of funding have been made available at scale for work arising directly from the Collaborative. Figure 7 above shows that members of the Collaboratives in the full sample (and seen in the smaller constant sample) have felt their resources become more limited in relation to need over the three years of the project. Whilst additional joint funding hasn't been secured, there are other ways in which the Collaboratives have contributed to changes in resources towards their aims.

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As discussed in the section on Mechanisms of Change, there have been a handful of examples where specific pots of money have been made available for activities on the collaborative action plan. In addition to this, some of the work that is taking place has required resources from the relevant service to be used differently, in line with the Collaborative's aims and objectives. For example, setting up the One Point therapies line in East Sussex has required the NHS team to move some clinician time to the helpline and focus on what is considered a more preventative service than the front line. Whilst this was a piece of work that the service knew needed to happen, this project has been delivered through the focus provided by the Collaborative, so would have happened more slowly or in a less joined up way otherwise. As a result, the change in investment in the preventative agenda has been aligned with the aims of these projects.

“It’s no secret that the level of need is high and, whether it’s part of the Preventing School Exclusions work or ensuring that we met our core target within 12 weeks, it does all play in together. The argument needed to be made to take clinicians away from referrals in order to do prevention work, and it’s seeing that there can be an impact.”

(ES, NHS)

Whilst not representing funding from local services made available in service of the Collaborative, there is national funding being received for programmes in all three localities, and this was noted as a significant vehicle for the priorities of the PSE project in both Worcestershire and Oldham. Whilst neither went as far as saying the project was instrumental in gaining this funding, projects and ways of working coming out of the Collaborative are going to be funded going forward through these programmes.

“DBV and Change is all in that one group,... they have all been into one workstream now and have a lead for everything so that people aren’t duplicating work... [What difference did the project make to that?].... I think it gave us the stepping stones in terms of the workstreams that we do now. And some of the partnership working, which wasn’t there.”

(Oldham, Local Authority)

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

In Year 1, there was a recognition that the system was poorly aligned and that many organisations were adapting within the system rather than sticking to their formal role. This allowed an offer to work but relied on organisations working outside of their roles.

- Schools acknowledged that they responded to the system in particular ways, and whilst this might not be described as pursuing alignment with other organisations per se, it was in order to work within the system as it stands.
- By contrast, alternative provision schools saw themselves as part of the scarce provision for children at risk of or who have been excluded, and saw their capacity and delivery as stretched by demand that they can't readily meet. In response, alternative provision schools have taken on additional informal roles.
- These services described most clearly how, in response, they tried to align flexibly to meet demand, including offering interim or short term support whilst a full referral was processed.

The Theory of Change anticipates that organisations involved in the Collaboratives might change how they deliver work, in large or small ways, in order to better align with other organisations in the sector. This might include shifting responsibilities, plugging gaps, or agreeing alternative pathways for those accessing services. These are outcomes that the project has begun to achieve, though we tend to see this within the discrete activities in the action plan, rather than in members' organisations more widely.

The survey responses in Figure 7 show that a majority of Collaborative members agree to some extent that they are flexible in how they align with the wider system and this has not especially changed over the three years. Whilst there is marginally lower agreement that this change makes their offer more effective, this agreement does increase in Year 3. Taken with the qualitative evidence, we might cautiously consider this as an indication of progress.

A number of individual members of the Collaborative have changed their work to help coordinate with other partners and/or align their work to Collaborative priorities. For example, the Worcestershire workstream around Health was focused on the work of an individual staff member. As a result of the project, they have a closer working relationship with the Exclusions and Vulnerable Learners teams which provides them with formal attendance and a role at the WCF-run SENDCo network:

“Through the Collaborative and working with [CAMHS], I feel like it's become a key place where I can be visible and accessible on behalf of health. It's really well attended - I have a defined Q&A slot in each meeting. It's my main way to communicate with schools that's not in a written form.”

(W, NHS)

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Similarly, both of the projects on transition have led to greater awareness of the issue, and some members of the two working parties are now taking transitions into account in their own work. In East Sussex, where there was felt to be a real dearth of expertise on transitions within the group, the project lead has developed a deep level of knowledge on the topic, which now inevitably informs their wider work. In Oldham, one member described how:

“When I’m doing other areas of work, kids in Years 5 and 6, I will now always ask about transition - ask what’s in place so it’s successful.”

(O, NHS)

At an organisational level there are also examples of change. The work between East Sussex County Council and the NHS Therapies services to align their helplines was a choice to deliver these existing projects so they made sense together rather than duplicating or leaving gaps. It has helped to think about this alignment as around the needs of the child. As well as being delivered collaboratively, the Inclusion helpline can now direct relevant calls straight through to the One Point Therapies line. This hasn’t required the two helplines to merge - they are different - but their offer is now aligned with the users in mind:

“Neither came out of this project but they are more cohesive and more linked now, because of the project. Before it would have been ‘these two things are happening’ whereas now it’s ‘this is happening to support children’. So I think that joint working between education and schools health and therapies is more joined up than it would have been.”

(ES, Anchor)

Similarly, the Inclusion Drop-in projects offered in Oldham are a collaboration between the local authority SEND and Inclusion team and the Early Help team within social care. These bring together activities which each organisation already did separately into one offering. The PSE project provided the impetus for quite a simple move to align two different parts of the local authority so they could address the issue that a school might be facing in meeting the needs of one child, or cohort, but which they previously would have needed to speak to two different services about.

“Actually as an Early Help service, it was quite natural to build on the drop-ins I was already running. That was already in existence, so how do we make that bigger, better, and more of a wider reach? To cover SEND, attendance, as well as family and personal issues, covid... And had good feedback so far from the DSL.”

(Oldham, Early Help, Year 2)

Some interviewees in Worcestershire reported that they felt better aligned to their colleagues within the local authority, arising potentially from their role and from changes in the authority's ways of working. For example, with supporting Managed Moves, and flagging to health staff where health issues may be a factor in an exclusion or suspension:

“Whereas now 9 times out of 10, very few [managed moves] come to FAP because [LA officer] has directly contacted schools beforehand and asked ‘can you take them?’”

(W, Secondary school)

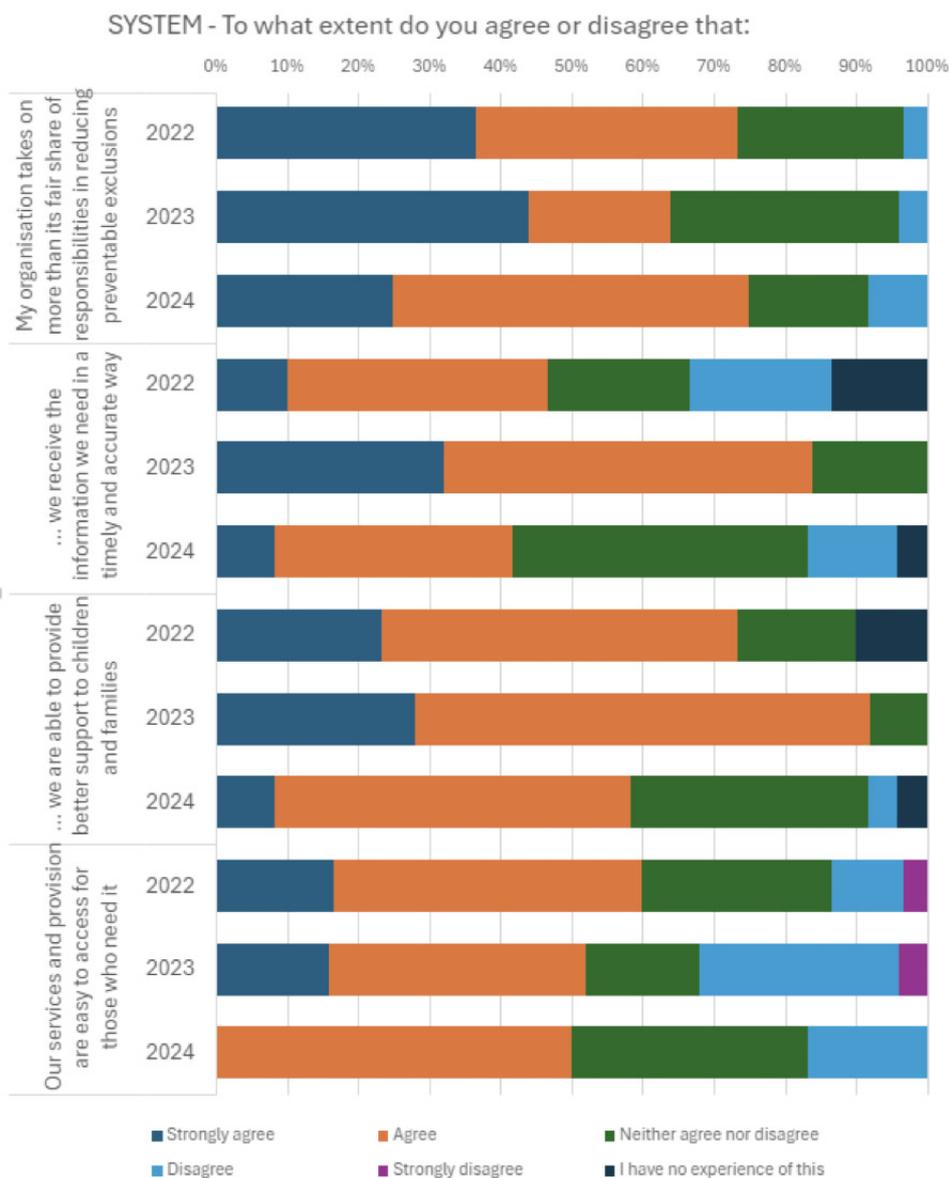
“If there is a health related exclusion, there is now a link where that could be explored... [LA staff members] will just email when they need something. And that's enough for now.”

(W, NHS)

So, resulting from the work we do see changes both in how organisations are seeking and using funding to support projects developed out of the Collaborative, as well as seeing change in the work they themselves are doing. There are changes in practice as a result of the sub-group working, and the wider interpersonal dimensions of the projects. However, it's not clear that organisations are embodying these changes - in fact very few interviewees said much had changed in their organisations beyond these examples of practice.

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

Figure 10: Reporting of systems outcomes over time, full sample
n = 30 (2022), 25 (2023), 24 (2024)



More equitable distribution of burdens, risks and opportunities to reduce preventable exclusions, and ways to ensure equity is sustained

In Year 1, most members of the Collaboratives felt they carried more of a burden or took on more responsibilities than others. This was predominantly about burden rather than opportunities or risks.

- Locality anchors felt that their statutory role as well as their broader visibility meant that responsibilities would often fall to them, even if they weren't strictly theirs or best placed to address them.
- Frontline organisations of all kinds felt they were having to up their thresholds, leaving a gap for schools to have to do a lot before they could access support
- Various organisations felt they morphed in order to offer or add to the support gap.

This suggests that some organisations did perceive themselves to be working beyond their role, not because they are best placed to play that particular role but because of high demand and a lack of clarity on their roles. This means that organisations offering frontline services tend to find themselves doing more.

The survey data in Figure 8, looking at the first indicator on share of responsibilities, suggests that there has been little change over three years in this perception. In fact, most organisations (over two thirds, in both the full and constant sample) felt they were taking on additional burdens. In contrast, the qualitative research found examples of where work on this agenda has taken place. We might interpret this as showing that there is no effect so far of these changes, or that change might be expected to be felt in other parts of the sector rather than in the Collaboratives themselves. It seems likely that these changes are limited in the context of the wider local systems.

Since Year 1, Collaboratives have aimed to provide more support to schools, who often felt they were left with the responsibility to meet the needs of children when they didn't necessarily have the resources or support to do so.

Across the three localities, the project has developed several services aimed at providing more support to schools.

This included peer-to-peer models, aiming to draw on the knowledge of the schools sector and communications offers to make existing support services more readily accessible. For example, the Oldham Inclusion work, the formal role of Health at the Worcestershire SENCo Network, and the pilot of AP Outreach in Worcestershire are all ways in which existing services and areas of advice and knowledge have been, or will be, extended into schools. Work on communications, including the Therapies Helpline and the Referral routes project in Oldham, are designed to clarify the details of the referral routes both for people working with children and young people at risk of exclusion and also their families. These interventions are also designed to help get the right referrals to an appropriate service as quickly as possible.

Some services developed combine both aspects. For example, the Behaviour Support Networks in East Sussex are a forum for Headteachers or other senior staff to bring a case example of a child who they feel is becoming at risk of exclusion for discussion with other professionals. These sessions are a chance to discuss the individual child and for the panel to suggest things the school can try themselves, sharing their own knowledge of what services or referral routes might be helpful to pursue. However, as well as this focus on getting the right support for the child, one of the members working on the subgroup stressed that it is also about support for the Headteacher, recognising the professional and personal support that Headteachers need when faced with a potential exclusion.

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“We were adamant that it should be in person; it is a face-to-face meeting where people need to offload a bit... On more than one occasion had people cry or break down.”

(ES, Primary school)

A second mechanism which aims to distribute responsibilities more equally is the improvements to Fair Access Protocols, which has been a focus in Worcestershire. Here the PSE project has directly supported work on the Mainstream FAP and also influenced work on an Alternative Provision FAP. The Mainstream FAP in particular has been perceived as encouraging fairness in how children at risk of exclusions are served through managed moves, with schools more likely to ‘take their turn’ than was previously felt. This isn’t just that moves are being allocated more quickly, but reflects a sense that inclusion is a shared responsibility.

“Four years ago in Fair Access... we would have to go around the houses as to why someone would need to take that child... [Now] the case gets presented and it’s up on the board whose taken FAP placements this year - and everyone says ‘we’re next on the list, we’ll take them’. That’s a huge shift... A whole culture shift has happened and everyone supports one another very clearly.”

(W, FAP)

However, there is a sense that the issues with availability of Alternative Provision, which was an action plan priority in Worcestershire, have not yet been addressed, and the outcomes of the AP Outreach pilot in the future should help to inform this.

Improved and sustained processes and infrastructures to allow for more timely and accurate information sharing about pupil needs

In Year 1, Information sharing was very widely interpreted and there were no consistent issues in the experiences of partners. Across the three localities there were examples that broadly coalesced around:

- A lack of information in referrals, and on the process and progress of referrals, influenced by a lack of understanding of the referrals and service processes, and capacity for referrals to actually be actioned.
- Service based data sharing around needs - Moving away from information in the referrals process, members also discussed other kinds of information sharing that helped organisations identify and respond to risk and need. This is again a mixed picture, and information governance appears to play out differently in each of the three localities.

What may have changed on this topic is very much in terms of information sharing around the child and between partners. Interestingly the surveys show a big jump in agreement regarding efficient data sharing in Year 2, but this drops away in Year 3. Aside from being linked to the defined activities in the sub-group working, which were uppermost in people's minds in Year 2, it's not clear from the qualitative work what this jump represents.

Sharing information around the individual child

The focus on discussing individual children and young people has been a theme in this work. For example, the Behaviour Support Network was identified as a leading example of this and considered by some in that group as breaking ground in terms of the model of being child focused.

“One of things we’ve learned, from the model they developed in the Behaviour Support Networks, is focusing on a particular child – working around the child.”

(ES, NHS)

Whilst it's been seen as very successful as a model in East Sussex, the children that leaders bring to discussions in the network still tend to be at the “sharp end” and not necessarily where there is still the prevention opportunity that is anticipated in the idea of “timely” sharing. Whilst this remains work in progress, the mechanism is now there, with potential to be improved over time.

“The idea was to get that at that much earlier level – to get that expert advice to do that early intervention. So I don’t think we’ve cracked that but we have the space to try and explore that – and we’ve got that mechanism.”

(ES, Anchor)

Within East Sussex there was also a planned action to develop multi-agency data sharing meetings, something which had been flagged as potentially valuable between NHS, social care, and education especially. This was seen as a way of bringing together information held by different services on the same young person in order to better identify their needs. This, however, is the one area that has been more challenging to deliver in East Sussex, in part because it was seen as too big, or too ambitious. So whilst the PSE project has clearly helped information sharing happen at some level, it has been more challenging for it to happen at this inter-agency and more distinctly multi-agency level.

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Data sharing at school/area level

Away from the model of focusing specifically on individual children and young people, some projects have adapted data sharing approaches amongst schools, both in formal and less formal settings. For example, the school leader who led the work on redeveloping the FAP agendas in Worcestershire sees the role of data - on managed moves and directive provision/ direction off-site – within those groups as key to them becoming effective, open, and transparent:

“Biggest thing is having the data on point, and are you recording the things you need to – and the analysis of that. That’s been transformational, and I don’t use this word lightly. Now we have this across the whole county, and can look at differences and similarities, for example in the bi- and tri-part systems – so you can say... ‘What do we need to do that’s different?’”

(W, Sec)

Creating the right conditions in which sensitive data can be shared and discussed, which is a challenge in the use of exclusion data, has also been the core task and one of the successes of the Headteacher network in Oldham. In this case, working as a peer-led group has been important for building trust around sharing data and discussing frankly what it means. In all cases, the introduction of data is seen as making priorities and issues clearer and providing a neutral basis upon which to explore a response. For example, the Oldham Inclusion team has expanded their SEND reviews with a focus on attendance data (made available through a change in national policy). They find this provides a developmental focus for the local authority and the school, and interestingly brings us back to how data can highlight needs of the individual child.

“When you discuss specific pupils, and have more of an action plan around them, [schools] feel more clarity from that and supported in terms of what they need to do.”

(Oldham, Local Authority)

Whilst there are several examples of information sharing across the project, some also illustrate the challenges of gathering new data. The Oldham transitions pilot was trialling an early identification tool which aimed to highlight which children might be at risk of exclusions when they moved from Primary school to Secondary school. In this case, the challenge for the pilot was in gaining agreement with Primary schools to use the tool to gather data about a child’s needs. The lead in this sub-group felt this was in part because of the perceived additional workload it raised. So whilst data can be useful when it’s shared, this project contains examples of how gathering this data can be a challenge in itself, requiring resource and buy-in from other partners who in this case were outside of the Collaborative.

Improved and sustained processes and infrastructures to access preventative or other appropriate provision with minimal delay

In Year 1, members tended to identify challenges with how the system worked to meet needs.

- All members interviewed perceived a scarcity of appropriate preventative measures and this was arguably the core change that members wanted to see achieved through this project. Most interviewees felt that because resources were stretched they were tied-up on reactive responses to acute need rather being used on the preventative work that could reduce need over time.
- Several interviewees across the localities commented on their own or others' waiting list times as being lengthy. In particular, those of CAMHS and paediatricians' services, and social care including Early Help. Staff in these services acknowledged their long waiting lists and that they had little ability to change these.
- For schools, who are typically the ones making a request for these services, they are too slow. One school talked of how even waiting a day can feel like a risk for some children, in a context when a response can take months.
- Scarce alternative provision.

The last two indicators of systems change in the survey (Figure 8, indicators 3 and 4) suggest a potential improvement in services (again, showing a peak in Year 2), but with less agreement that this translates into better access for users. In fact this drops back by Year 3 on both indicators.

This is consistent with the kinds of progress reported on the project, with changes made to services but with less evidence on their effects to this point. This evaluation can see early indications, from reflections by those running the projects, that there is a take up for these services and they are being accessed. In the long run this will need to be monitored as to whether they are widely accessible. For example, some early change is promising:

“SEND reviews have had impact and the drop-ins, they really de-escalate some situations and mean that schools aren't having to phone around multiple agencies individually.”

(Oldham, Local Authority)

Similarly, some of these projects are intended to offer early support in order to reduce the high end demands. The helpline run by NHS in East Sussex is a good example of a service expected to reduce the need further down the line to referrals, meaning that those children who do need a more high-end clinical service can access it more quickly. Again, it's not possible to know at this stage the extent to which this will happen sustainably as a result, but the initial work on the project is seen by that service as a step towards it.

Looking across these system level outcomes, there are examples through the sub-group working of projects which are making a change to how well the system matches provision to need. However, there were fewer examples given of mechanisms for sustainability of these measures beyond where individual projects had become embedded and were widely seen as successful.

Wider impact of the PSE project

The previous chapters have outlined what most interviewees described as the effect of the programme: the changes achieved through sub-group working. As discussed in the last chapter, these aligned with the organisational and system outcomes in the Theory of Change.

In addition to this, when asked what difference the programme had made, some interviewees and several survey respondents talked about changes at a broader level. They pointed to changes in their locality, either beyond the work of the sub-groups, or which they expect to have a lasting effect. This chapter presents these wider impacts which the PSE project overall has made a contribution to.

Shifting wider thinking on exclusions and inclusive education

Taking part in the programme has maintained a focus in the localities – for three years – on the problem of exclusions, and increasingly on the potential to prevent them. In Oldham in particular, the project Anchor felt the longevity of the project had contributed both to raising awareness, and to a shifting mindset on exclusions as something which can often be prevented.

“Irrespective of the individual workstreams, having that as an ongoing agenda... for three years, even when not much was happening, or people didn’t turn up to session, just the constant presence [of the project] has been really important. I think in Oldham there is definitely much more of a sense that this is something we need to do something about compared to three or four years ago when it was a bit more accepted. I’m not sure it’s made much progress [in reducing number of exclusions], but I think it is in people’s mindset that it’s something you try to avoid.”

(O, Anchor)

Other members of the Collaborative, from within schools and other service partners, talked about their own raised understanding of the exclusions, and their impact on children, and a sense that the “RSA project has kept it at the forefront of peoples’ minds” (O, NHS).

In Worcestershire there is also a strong sense that the project in Years 1 and 2 did put a focus on exclusions as something which needed to be tackled, directing efforts towards it, and providing a “shared sense of direction” (W, Survey Year 3). One interviewee felt that this had helped create an environment in which individual partners have been able to progress their own work which they believe contributed to the same agenda:

“I don’t think it’s changed anything in our schools that wouldn’t have changed anyway, but it’s probably accelerated some of our [inclusion] work, which has got more traction because of the wider things that are happening.”

(W, Secondary)

In particular, the thinking developed in this project around inclusion and prevention has helped link exclusions into work on SEND, and on Alternative Provision - which is a national focus for development and highly relevant to exclusions. Anchors in both Worcestershire and Oldham felt the project had interacted with a rising SEND agenda and contributed, though amongst several other factors, to raising awareness of its importance.

“Just a sense that SEND is more on the agenda and it certainly happened at a good time to raise that awareness and that collaborative working.”

(O, Anchor)

“It has come through the SEND agenda in some ways around preventing exclusions and inclusions.”

(W, Anchor 2)

Highlighted underexplored areas: transitions

A specific example of this raised awareness is on Primary to Secondary transition, which in both Oldham and East Sussex has been identified as an area where understanding and awareness of ways forward have grown dramatically.

“Reassuring that it’s been noticed that actually a poor transition feeds into an increased risk of permanent exclusion – so actually let’s go back a bit and see what we can do to prevent it. [Interviewer: what’s been the role of this project in that?] I think it reinforced it – it will be new to some people to piece that together. Giving it focus multi-agency wise, I’m sure that the people in the local authority knew all about it, but don’t think that always gets shared with health. But when you see it, it’s clear.”

(O, NHS)

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Transitions have been a challenging area for both localities where this was a priority with both sub-groups running into barriers in delivery. However, both projects are being continued beyond the end of the PSE programme. Whilst the need for work on transitions was on the radar in both localities, in identifying it as a priority this project has helped show some practical steps for how it could be taken forward, and “it’s raised awareness higher up about what can be done” (ES, Anchor). In East Sussex, the senior staff in the local authority Education service are looking for a formal home for transition work - which has been absent until work in this project highlighted it. In Oldham the work on transitions is being taken forward by a new member of staff funded through the DBV programme.

An influencing relationship between schools and the local authority

When East Sussex joined the programme in 2021, it was as part of their work on a wider strategic priority of developing a school-led improvement system, for example through their recently established local Educational Improvement Partnerships (EIPs). The work in this project on the Behaviour Support Networks has trialed a schools-led project, delivered with the local authority, and from the perspective of those involved this project has provided a model of working with schools on strategic development. This has been a key outcome of the work on the Behaviour Support Network, and has also provided a model that has potential to be used in the future:

“There has been a real shift to working alongside schools rather than ‘telling’ them what to do ... we were already shifting in that way. This has contributed to that and supported it.”

(ES, Anchor)

“Previously... it felt that things were being done to you, around suspensions and exclusions ... but in that aspect I do think the council have taken on board that, and tried to move forward... I think it is a shift in thinking that wasn’t here previously. But I see it as I’m in the middle of it... the wider community haven’t noticed that yet ”

(ES, Primary)

The local authority has seen the power of working with Heads as a way of influencing and supporting without being directive. This is now a way that the Anchor sees other changes, including some of those within this programme, could be made in the future, supported by “committed headteachers” who they have worked with on the PSE project:

“We’ve got those really committed Headteachers so if we wanted to give other messages we could go through them... transition one could be in the future – and I guess what I’ve learnt is that’s powerful.”

(ES, Anchor)

Something that has worked well here is that the Local Authority lead and schools have been very open about wanting to run a school-led project but recognise the role of the local authority within it, rather than absenting themselves. This has come down to discussion on often small issues, which have helped this project remain school led but strategically supported:

“Our local authority manager was worried about having it on the council website [and appearing LA led] ... but it has been a successful working partnership. We talked about how it should be celebrated that there are so many professionals around the table, working together. It’s a real collaboration.”

(ES, Primary)

This is a wider issue beyond East Sussex. Although there was no consensus on this, suggesting that individual relationships can vary, both Oldham and Worcestershire Anchors felt there were at least improving relationships with schools and Heads, and that the PSE project had played a role in this.

“I think in this project, and across the board, there is a lot of work on co-production and working with school, [rather than] where the local authority tells them what to do.”

(W, Anchor)

“I don’t think it can be attributed directly to the project, but this project is part of a set of activities [with schools] and that relationship with especially secondary schools is the most positive it has been for a while – we had our first Heads Conference recently, and that’s going to be an annual thing now.”

(O, Anchor)

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Changes in collaboration; mainstreaming partnership working

Finally, whilst the previous chapter set out some of the granular ways in which collaboration has taken place, there were several references simply to better partnership working and promoting multi-agency working. This has solidified the partnership working landscape into which larger, funded projects have entered. Whilst not widely considered instrumental in gaining this funding, the examples of partnership working were seen as favourable for the SEND and AP programme, and DBV in Worcestershire and Oldham, where this was a theme.

“The journey we’ve been on, three years ago. Without doing this work, we wouldn’t be in a position as a pilot to be part of the SEND Change pilot. It has been instrumental in doing that.”

(W, Secondary)

“I think it gave us the stepping stones in terms of the work streams that we do now. And some of the partnership working, which wasn’t there ... It probably helped in terms of the partnerships with schools and health.”

(O, Local Authority)

“The big thing is that collaborative working – irrespective of what we have or haven’t achieved tangibly – has been a sense of coming together and building relationships which will stick”

(O, Anchor)

The questions that some partners raise, and will remain to be seen, is whether and how this collaborative working legacy can be maintained going forward.

Conclusions & considerations for a future model

Conclusions: the role of the PSE project in improved collaboration

Over three years, the Preventing School Exclusions project has delivered change in collaborative working at a local level, and through this, made changes to the alignment, visibility, and effectiveness of the services aimed at preventing school exclusions in the three localities. This change has been delivered primarily through the specific activities prioritised and carried out by the Collaboratives. However, whilst change is currently limited to the project scale, there are examples of change of wider organisational and system scope.

The programme method, particularly the early focus on system mapping and convening, was seen as an effective way to identify actionable change. Collaborative members increasingly saw the value of the evidence base represented by the Year 1 System Maps, especially as the project developed. Anchors and Collaborative members valued the convening process with the Collaboratives in Year 1, and how it brought a novel range of partners together with a focus on building relationships and mutual understanding. Workshops were seen as having effective content and activities, providing an environment that was constructive, and guiding members to fully explore all views on key issues before identifying priorities and an action plan. The RSA were considered expert, neutral facilitators in this role.

There is strong consensus across localities that the quality of this process meant the right priorities were identified by this work, ensuring that the subsequent two years of delivery have focused on the activities matched to local needs.

In Years 2 and 3 of the project the RSA has worked as facilitator and coach to support the Collaboratives to translate plans into action. Collaborative workshops have provided a structured approach to delivery, with a focus on clarity of intention and priorities as well as reflective learning. These have helped Collaborative members deliver projects which would otherwise have been difficult to progress on top of their day jobs. A flexible support offer, particularly in Year 3, has helped sub-groups problem solve and move forward as they've progressed their collaborative actions. However, this has been in the context of diverse needs for each sub-group, some of whom have completed their work and others who are still developing it. The majority of the sub-group projects are up, running and growing.

Collaborative members have forged better relationships that support their work together, with greater empathy and understanding of each other's roles, and they have begun to expand their work with partners outside of the Collaborative. These are varied projects which add to, or make progress towards, improved outcomes in collaborative work, particularly at the organisational level, and are moving towards greater change in local systems. The programme as a whole has also contributed to changes in each locality which have the potential for wider influence.

8. Conclusions & future considerations

It's clear the RSA's PSE project has helped bring about change, but as with all local working it has done so amongst a range of other local and national factors. This evaluation finds the PSE project played a specific role in building relationships, identifying and focusing actions on a shared plan, and supporting change to happen. Most members felt this change wouldn't have happened either at all, or as collaboratively, without this project.

Where the programme has encountered challenges it's been in:

- All members interviewed perceived a scarcity of appropriate preventative measures
- Maintaining the level and breadth of multi-agency engagement from partners throughout the project
- Responding to Collaboratives' needs and context as this changed over a long-term programme, especially in Year 3
- Maintaining alignment with local authority agendas over a three year programme, and
- Keeping the strategic collaborative focus whilst also maintaining and progressing specific actions.

What will remain to be seen as projects continue is the extent to which these changes are ultimately sustained and further embedded. However, there are a number of ways in which the work has already begun to make change in how schools and local authorities work together, on improved awareness of the exclusions agenda, and where work from this project has informed and is now being delivered through other agendas.

Considerations for a future model

Make small process improvements to Year 1

The project in its first year was really highly valued, especially in hindsight when at the time people felt it could be faster to move to action. The Year 1 report outlines more detailed recommendations about making this first year effective, but key ingredients to maintain are the research work, the range of partners invited to join the Collaborative, and the style and method of workshop facilitation.

Make small process improvements to Year 1

Membership of the Collaboratives and members' engagement has dropped over the three year programme. This evaluation has heard from a small number of members no longer involved, and their comments reinforce perceptions by their Collaborative peers that this is due to changes in their capacity to attend, and the judgement they make on the continued relevance to their work.

- **There are small gains to be made through administration:** such as setting out workshop dates for the year in advance, offering half-day sessions to accommodate workers with frontline roles, as well as keeping the offers of lunch and accessible venues. There's no strong view that remuneration would make engagement easier, though the buy-out time can be continued to be offered.

8. Conclusions & future considerations

- **Support members to make the connection with their organisation's work as well as their personal motivation, and revisit this throughout the project.** We see from those who remain engaged that capacity can often be made if the work is considered important enough. Members with a degree of autonomy in their role find this easier
- **Active management of membership and succession.** This pilot has shown that who is involved in the Collaboratives determines the work that can happen. Attrition is inevitable in a three year programme, but this natural turnover has a strong effect on what can be delivered. For example, the number of Social Care representatives and PCF partners was reduced greatly by Year 3, and whilst projects have progressed, it raises the question of what more might have been achieved with their representation. Membership is a key lever but there hasn't been a formal approach to managing this. A skills/influence audit to help with Collaborative invites and succession planning for the Collaborative could be more explicitly considered part of the RSA's role, as Anchor leads often didn't feel they have the capacity to consider this alone. It would require resources and additional relationships for the RSA to actively monitor this, as membership is ultimately voluntary and not formalised.

Clarify intention and model for working with children, families, and their representatives

The Interim report from the RSA highlighted an aspiration to devolve power to families, children, and young people. However, involvement of children, families, and their representatives beyond Year 1 has not been formalised. Their voice has been heard in several projects, but it's not clear that it was systematically considered in every sub-group project, meaning the project may be able to do more to make the most of opportunities and address existing power imbalances.

The Year 1 evaluation identified specific issues facing PCF representatives on the Collaborative which can be further explored. Action planning for the project could also more explicitly consider the role of children and their families' perspectives and how they can be involved, whether that be through direct consultation, the involvement of the PCF, or the professional knowledge of Collaborative members.

Consider the length of the programme, with a more flexible Year 3

This evaluation has found that the needs of the Collaboratives were fairly consistent in the first two years of the project, but that this changed in Year 3 when local context had often evolved considerably, and individual projects had progressed to varying degrees. Local Collaborative Advisors responded with on-going needs assessment, but by this time engagement had already started to reduce. It's worth considering a more formal review and forward plan in Year 2, allowing time for the Year 3 offer to be developed and planned. This might include the choice to offer a different kind of support, to taper or target support to specific projects, or agree an early end date for the programme if it's felt that ongoing support won't be needed.

8. Conclusions & future considerations

Review the purpose of the wider Collaborative in Years 2 and 3

The move to focusing on sub-group activity in Years 2 and 3 moved focus away from the Collaborative as the 'unit' of change. There is potential for more connection across the sub-groups, making the most of Collaborative members' expertise, resolving the resources 'mismatch' that challenged some delivery, and generating more of the wider benefits of collaboration found in this evaluation. Local Collaborative Advisors this year have worked hard to promote this, with the structured meetings of workstream leads in East Sussex being a good example of how this has been maintained in one context.

In the longer term, members don't take for granted that the Collaborative should continue. Some see no need for it to continue, whilst others see potential for it to identify and work on new priorities or monitor how existing activities continue. This is a question that could be helpfully explored in Years 1 and 2, so that Year 3 can build towards either a productive closure or help support continuity of the Collaborative group.

Maintaining the relationships with local authority Anchors and their agenda over a three year programme with contextual change could be a bigger focus of the work.

Perhaps the biggest single challenge for the project has been how to remain relevant to the overall Local Authority context, and to maintain the strategic relationship with each Anchor organisation over the three years. As with the Collaboratives, change in staff is a reality of local working, as is limited capacity, and over three years the project has managed to maintain relationships in each locality, but often with little consistency. Each locality and the RSA has a contractual agreement for the work, but it's not clear these terms have been - or could be - enforced. The evaluation doesn't find any easy answer here, but some areas for further consider are:

- **Consider a funded model as a structure for accountability** – where even a small amount of funding is tied to participation, this could help keep the project in view at times of change. Conversely, similar models are run commercially as traded services.
- **Thicken the relationship between Anchors and the RSA with more formal relationship management.** Local Anchor relationships, with usually two or three individuals, have been managed by one RSA individual at both programme and operational level. Additional, secondary relationships between Anchor organisations and the RSA could provide better continuity of relationships on both sides, as this was seen as crucial to engagement.

An additional senior relationship from the RSA would also provide oversight, both for RSA delivery staff to support what is quite demanding work, but also to provide quality assurance and help resolve conflict that may well arise in these relationships. As one Anchor found this year, there has been no clear route to raising concerns about local work with the central RSA programme team, and this has limited their ability to explore and address issues that could have helped maintain relevance and engagement in the programme.

- **Formalise and name the project lead's role as a strategic bridge between the Collaborative and the Anchor** with specific responsibilities and specific support from the RSA to do this. Leads themselves said they focused more on their own sub-group than the Collaborative overall, in part because of the tension of being a 'lead' within an otherwise collaborative process.

8. Conclusions & future considerations

- **Work separately / explicitly with the Anchors on a model of collaborative leadership, both within the Collaborative and at a senior level.** A core issue that has arisen in the pilot is the tension between the 'level playing field' created in the Collaboratives and the strategic responsibilities held by local authorities outside of it. This tension poses a risk to how collaboration can be mainstreamed out of a programme such as PSE. At the moment this is acknowledged but not addressed by the programme at a strategic level. Relationships in this pilot have tended towards embedding collaborative actions into longer term plans, rather than the distinctive ways of working collaboratively - and continuity of this is not a given. The relationships with Anchors could be rebalanced by asking what kind of relationships would enable the collaborative ethos of the work to grow in the future, not just continuity of activity.

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