

# Evaluation of the Stepping Stones pilot

## Final report to the Greater London Authority

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## Acknowledgements

OPM Group would like to thank the three participating schools for their commitment, enthusiasm and availability throughout this evaluation: Gladesmore Community School; Heathcote School and Science College; and The Urswick School. In addition, we would like to thank the Gangs Unite mentors, Stepping Stones students, peer mentors, and parents who participated in the evaluation.

It has been a pleasure to work with the GLA team – their collaborative approach has enabled us to deliver a robust independent evaluation firmly rooted in the practical realities of delivering such a programme. The GLA Peer Outreach Workers also provided valuable support during the first phase of the evaluation in designing and delivering an evaluation workshop with the peer mentors. Finally, we thank the Stepping Stones Advisory Group for providing valuable insight and challenge to inform the design and development of the evaluation.

Project Oracle validated the evaluation methodology as being in line with their standards of evidence and we are grateful for the feedback they provided as part of this process.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. About OPM Group

In 2015, OPM Group, an employee-owned research and consultancy organisation, were commissioned by the Greater London Authority (GLA) to carry out a proof of concept evaluation of the Stepping Stones pilot programme. Stepping Stones aims to ease the transition from primary to secondary school for vulnerable young people through a range of engagement activities and peer mentoring support.

This report presents the findings of the evaluation. Its intended audience is the GLA, participating schools and all schools who are interested in implementing the programme in the future. Its purpose is to demonstrate the impact of the programme in its pilot year (2016-2017), outline the challenges and successes, present an economic assessment of the programme, and share key learnings to help inform the ways in which the programme, or elements of it, can be implemented in other schools.

In addition to this report, we have also produced a toolkit of resources, video case studies and information to help schools implement Stepping Stones, or elements of the Stepping Stones approach, in the future. The toolkit can be found here: [www.london.gov.uk/stepping-stones](http://www.london.gov.uk/stepping-stones)

## 1.2. Background

The transition from primary to secondary school is a period of significant change in the lives of young people. It requires students to negotiate and adapt to a new organisation and culture including a new (often larger) setting with different educational practices, new sets of peers, organisational structures and social interactions. Many children embrace and adapt to these changes, particularly when they are well supported by parents, families and school.<sup>1</sup> There is, however, a significant minority of students who experience uncertainty, risk, and anxiety around transition, or who are not equipped with the necessary skillset to navigate this change successfully. This can adversely impact on educational outcomes including behaviour, attendance and attainment.<sup>2</sup>

The Stepping Stones pilot programme was aimed at vulnerable young people who are considered at risk during the transition from primary (Year 6) to secondary school (Year 7). The programme was designed to secure improvement across three (related) outcomes: attendance; educational goal achievement; and behaviour within school. It was a 'proof of concept' exercise which has also provided learning and resources, in the form of a toolkit, to primary and secondary schools in the capital.

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<sup>1</sup> Supporting learning in the transition from primary to secondary school, University of Bristol, 2010

Evangelou, M. et.al. What Makes a Successful Transition from Primary to Secondary School, Institute for Education, 2008

<sup>2</sup> Rice, F. et al. (2014) Identifying factors that predict successful and difficult transitions to secondary school, University College London

## Delivery

Schools with free school meal rates above 60%<sup>3</sup> in wards of socio-economic deprivation were invited by the GLA to apply to participate and receive funding to deliver the pilot programme. Gladesmore Community School was selected to lead the project, who then identified two further secondary schools to take part: Heathcote School and Science College, and The Urswick School (see next section for contextual background for each school). Combined, they received GLA funding of £430,000 and they contributed a further £24,178 to set up and run the Stepping Stones programme activities.

Gladesmore Community School took the lead role on coordinating and developing the programme. They worked in collaboration with Gangs Unite<sup>4</sup> to design and implement the programme. Gangs Unite is a youth-focused social action group that aims to bring young people together along their common interests, and to help divert often violent energies toward self-empowerment, social change, and unity. They worked with the three Stepping Stones pilot schools to help design the materials and approaches, and delivered aspects of the programme in each of the pilot schools. Gladesmore Community School and Gangs Unite worked with the participating schools, the GLA development team, and OPM Group throughout the design and delivery of the Stepping Stones pilot programme.

The programme commenced student engagement activities from April 2016, in advance of the 2016/2017 school year. The programme was split into the following main elements (further information about how each of these was delivered including materials and resources can be found in the online toolkit: [www.london.gov.uk/stepping-stones](http://www.london.gov.uk/stepping-stones)):

- **Engagement days** with primary school students and liaison with primary teachers and parents to understand student needs and identify those who may benefit from the Stepping Stones programme.
- **Summer School** for incoming Year 7 students prior to the start of term with tailored Stepping Stones sessions.
- **Stepping Stones lessons** throughout Year 7. Each key learning session explores a theme helping young people to develop their confidence and ability to deal positively with a range of social and academic situations.
- **Peer mentoring** for Stepping Stones students from older students (in Year 10). They meet both individually and in group settings on a regular basis throughout Year 7.
- **Adult community mentors** through Gangs Unite providing support with the peer mentoring and Stepping Stones lessons aspects of the programme.

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<sup>3</sup> The national average for secondary schools in England in January 2016 was 13.2% of pupils being eligible for and claiming free school meals. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2016>

<sup>4</sup> <http://gangsunitecic.org.uk/>

- **Aspiration events** in the second half of Year 7, to help Stepping Stones students begin to connect their aspirations to school activities and to broaden their perceptions about what is possible for their futures.

### **Eligibility**

Young people in the transition to Year 7 were eligible to take part in the Stepping Stones programme if they were identified as meeting at least two of the following risk variables<sup>5</sup>.

- Low attainment – based on their teacher’s assessment of their potential.
- Poor attendance – attended recorded below 90%.
- Have a disability, including Special Educational Needs (SEN).
- Poor behaviour – based on their school and/or parents/care’s assessment.
- Cautions – Received one or more cautions in the last 12 months.
- Free School Meals (Pupil Premium) – entitled to FSM.
- Older sibling with history of poor behaviour, contact with the police/justice system, or gang/criminal involvement.

At least 70 students were identified in each secondary school to take part in the Stepping Stones programme and be involved in the evaluation. However, in addition to the criteria above, schools also found that students with other issues such as low self-esteem/confidence, a history of bullying, or having few friends attending the same secondary school could also benefit from the programme.

Students entering Year 10 were asked to apply for, or express an interest in, the peer mentoring role and were chosen because they exhibited certain qualities, including empathy, being relatable and having the potential to act as a positive role model. Around 30 peer mentors were selected in each school.

## **1.3. Evaluation approach**

This evaluation contributes to the evidence base regarding ‘what works’ in supporting vulnerable children and young people in the transition from primary to secondary school. It measures the extent to which the following outcomes have been met:

- Improved educational attainment
- Improved behaviour at school
- Improved attendance
- Successful transition to secondary school overall

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<sup>5</sup> These eligibility criteria were specified by the GLA in the original call for proposals:  
[https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/call\\_for\\_proposals\\_-\\_stepping\\_stones\\_programme\\_.pdf](https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/call_for_proposals_-_stepping_stones_programme_.pdf)

- Greater parental involvement in their child's education and improved parental capability to support siblings and peers in their transition to secondary school.
- Improved confidence, aspirations, and behaviour for mentors.

An economic assessment has also been conducted to explore the economic case for investing in the transition programme.

In addition, the evaluation seeks to identify learning including success factors, challenges, and recommendations for future delivery of the programme.

The research methods we employed to address the evaluation questions are outlined below.

Project Oracle validated the evaluation methodology as being in line with their standards of evidence<sup>6</sup>.



### 1.3.1. Qualitative methods

In-depth qualitative research was carried out in two phases at each of the three participating schools: Summer/Autumn term 2016 and Summer term 2017 (see Table 1).

Qualitative research activity	Summer/Autumn term 2016	Summer term 2017
In-depth interviews with teachers	3 teachers per school	2-3 teachers per school
In-depth interviews with Gangs Unite community mentors	N/A	3 community mentors from Gangs Unite
Focus groups with a sample of parents/carers of Stepping Stones students	5-8 parents at each school	2-8 parents at each school
A paper-based questionnaire for parents/carers of Stepping Stones students	A total of 91 responses from parents across each of the 3 schools	A total of 30 responses from parents across 2 of the 3 schools
Workshops with a sample of Year 7 Stepping Stones students	8-15 students at each school	8-15 students at each school
Workshops with Year 10 Peer Mentors	8-10 peer mentors at each school	8-10 peer mentors at each school

**Table 1: Qualitative research activities**

<sup>6</sup> <https://project-oracle.com/>

### 1.3.2. Quantitative data collection

The following data sets were collected at two to three points in the school year from each school:

Attainment	Behaviour	Attendance
Teachers' assessments of satisfactory progress in English.	Results from the Student Attitudes to Self and School (PASS) survey	Percentage attendance rates
Teachers' assessments of satisfactory progress in Maths.	Internal and external exclusion data (combined)	
	Commitment scores	

Table 2: Quantitative data collection

### 1.3.3. Historical comparison data

All quantitative analysis (except the PASS tests which were newly introduced for the evaluation) compares data from the 2016/17 Stepping Stones cohort with a comparable historical cohort of the previous Year 7 intake (2015/16) in each participating school. While this approach does not provide a true control group, it does give us a broadly similar cohort of students to compare with the current Stepping Stones group. This allows us to better understand the role Stepping Stones plays in any progress observed, compared to what may have happened had there been no intervention.

One limitation of this approach was that in 2016/2017 the secondary school grading system changed for English and Maths, meaning that the grades for students in the year of the evaluation were different from the system used for the comparable cohort in 2015/2016. Therefore, when comparing attainment, we chose to measure teachers' assessments of satisfactory progress rather than the grades themselves.

### 1.3.4. Economic assessment

After identifying the costs and benefits associated with the Stepping Stones programme, a calculation was applied. The calculation identifies three elements in order to assess the programme's ability to provide benefits which outweigh the costs:

- **Net present budget impact** = Net present value of benefits – Net present value of costs
- **Return on investment** = Net present value of benefits / Net present value of costs
- **Payback period** = Calculates the point at which the costs of the intervention have been recouped.

These elements were considered both with and without optimism bias adjustments<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Optimism bias provides a correction for any uncertainty around the available evidence.



## 1.4. Pilot schools: Context

Gladesmore Community School was selected by the GLA to lead the project and identify two further secondary schools to take part. In order to do this, Gladesmore Community School made an open call for applicants using GLA networks, headteacher forums, National Governors' Association, Local Authority Networks and their own informal networks. Schools were invited to apply and were assessed based on eligibility criteria, commitment to the project, and ability to provide resources to the programme. Contextual information about the three participating schools is provided below.

### 1.4.1. Gladesmore Community School

Gladesmore Community School is located in Tottenham in the Borough of Haringey, London. The school operates in a challenging local context with high levels of deprivation (61%+ of students eligible for free school meals), crime and overcrowded housing. More than 40 primary schools feed into Gladesmore Community School from across Haringey, Hackney, Enfield, Waltham Forest and Barking & Dagenham. Poor literacy is one of the significant barriers for vulnerable young people in the area, with some students more than three years behind with their expected reading age. Gladesmore Community School was judged Outstanding by Ofsted in all categories in 2008 and this judgement has been maintained at two subsequent Ofsted inspections. Prior to implementing Stepping Stones, Gladesmore Community School already ran a literacy development programme to boost the low level of basic skills for these students.

### 1.4.2. Heathcote School and Science College

Heathcote School is located in Chingford, Waltham Forest. Although the school does not meet the 60% free school meals criteria for participating in the Stepping Stones pilot (33% were eligible for free school meals in 2016<sup>8</sup>), they were chosen due to several other factors. This included having a large number of students experiencing challenges with the transition to secondary school, including significant emotional and behavioural concerns, being at risk of gang influence, low aspirations, problems with attendance, coming from troubled families and backgrounds, and a negative perception of schooling stemming from their parents' experiences of education. The school is located on a large social housing estate. Heathcote School was placed in 'special measures' by Ofsted from 1999 to 2001. Since then a lot of work has taken place and, from 2007 onwards, the school has been assessed as 'good'. Prior to implementing Stepping Stones, Heathcote was already in the process of building a new wing of the school, specifically for Year 7 students, to further ease their transition to secondary school. This 'Transition Building' will open in the academic year 2017/2018.

### 1.4.3. The Urswick School

The Urswick School is located in the Hackney Central area of the London Borough of Hackney. The Urswick School is a Church of England school based in one of the most deprived boroughs in the

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<sup>8</sup> The national average for secondary schools in England in January 2016 was 13.2% of pupils being eligible for and claiming free school meals. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2016>

country (70% of students eligible for free school meals) and with a diverse student body in terms of faith and background. The Urawick School has fairly recently undergone a significant turnaround in standards and behaviour, after many years of 'failing'. In their 2013 Ofsted inspection, the school received 'outstanding' for leadership/management and behaviour, and 'good' for quality of teaching and attainment – these judgements were confirmed in the most recent inspection in 2017. As the reputation of the school has improved and the physical space has changed, the cohort of Year 7 students has been growing each year. In addition to visiting all primary feeder schools before the start of Year 7 and running a transition event for students with special educational needs (SEN), there are two members of staff employed as adult mentors to provide support around behaviour.

## 1.5. Reading this report

The report is structured into the following sections:

- Chapter 2: Impact on Stepping Stones students
- Chapter 3: Impact on peer mentors
- Chapter 4: Impact on others
- Chapter 5: Learning points including for each element of the Stepping Stones programme
- Chapter 6: Economic assessment
- Chapter 7: Conclusions
- Appendix: Supporting data plus technical detail relating to the economic assessment

## 2. Impact on Stepping Stones students

This chapter summarises the impact of the Stepping Stones programme on the Year 7 students who participated, as captured by the evaluation research. The chapter is organised under the three key areas of focus: **attainment**, **behaviour** and **attendance**. Analysis draws from quantitative data received from schools, and qualitative data from our interviews and focus groups with Stepping Stones students, mentors, parents, and teachers.

### Key findings

- **Attainment:** Two out of three schools saw a strong improvement in the proportion of Stepping Stones students making satisfactory progress in Maths (from 54% to 74%) and English (from 67% to 83%) compared to the historical cohorts.
- **Behaviour:** Shy, quiet students improved their confidence in classroom and social settings. Students with behavioural issues improved their self-awareness, maturity and control over their emotions. In one school positive commitment scores increased from 46% to 74% compared to the historical cohort.
- **Attendance:** Two out of three schools saw a strong improvement in attendance rates among Stepping Stones students compared to the historical cohorts (in one school the proportion of those achieving +95% attendance increased from 54% to 70%).

### 2.1 Attainment

The transition to secondary school can be challenging for new Year 7 students. They enter a different physical environment, meet new peers and teachers, and are introduced not only to new learning structures (such as having a different teacher for every subject and sitting regular exams), but also to academic content that may be more complex than they were used to in primary school.



Our evaluation suggests that many Stepping Stones students found the work more challenging in secondary school; despite this, however, levels of academic achievement since arriving from primary school have been high compared with the historical cohorts, especially among students from Gladesmore Community School and The Urswick School. Overall, Stepping Stones students (and their parents) have felt well supported by schools to achieve in class and with their homework. While Stepping Stones operated within other forms of academic, learning and transition support at each school, several aspects of the Stepping Stones programme were found to add value to the academic progress of the students involved.

**Attainment: Key findings**

- Two of the pilot schools (Gladesmore Community School and The Urswick School) saw a strong improvement in the proportion of students making satisfactory progress in Maths and English.
- In Maths, for these two schools, an average of 74% of Stepping Stones students made satisfactory progress, compared to 54% of the historical cohort.
- In English, for these two schools, an average of 83% of Stepping Stones students made satisfactory progress, compared to 67% of the historical cohort.
- Key reasons for this improvement include:
  - Multiple, complementary layers of support through elements of the Stepping Stones programme and other aspects of school support.
  - The role of peer mentors in encouraging and helping Stepping Stones students to do well in their school work.
  - Meeting individual learning needs in tailored ways.

**2.1.1 Academic progress and ability**

At the end of Term 1, a higher proportion of Stepping Stones students achieved satisfactory progress in both English and Maths at Gladesmore Community School and The Urswick School, compared with the historical cohorts. At Heathcote School, the same is true for progress in English, but for Maths there is a decline in progress when comparing the Stepping Stones cohort to the historical cohort. See Table 3 below<sup>9</sup>.

This is a pattern that continued for the Stepping Stones cohorts in both Gladesmore Community School and The Urswick School. At the end of the Year 7 school year, a greater proportion of Stepping Stones students from both these schools achieved satisfactory academic progress in both Maths and English (see Table 4) when compared to historical cohorts from the previous year.

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<sup>9</sup> Sample sizes for all data relating to Stepping Stones students are based on the Stepping Stones cohorts (66-73 students per school) and historical cohorts (70 students per school).

	Gladesmore Community School		Heathcote School		Urswick School	
	Stepping Stones	Historical cohort	Stepping Stones	Historical cohort	Stepping Stones	Historical cohort
<b>Maths</b>	80%	64%	29%	38%	79%	60%
<b>English</b>	89%	77%	58%	45%	84%	27%

**Table 3: The proportion of Stepping Stones students that made satisfactory progress in Maths and English at the end of Term 1 of the 2016/17 school year, compared to a historical cohort with similar characteristics<sup>10</sup>.**

	Gladesmore Community School		Heathcote School		Urswick School	
	Stepping Stones	Historical cohort	Stepping Stones	Historical cohort	Stepping Stones	Historical cohort
<b>Maths</b>	71%	61%	40%	78%	76%	47%
<b>English</b>	86%	80%	63%	81%	79%	53%

**Table 4: The proportion of Stepping Stones students that made satisfactory progress in Maths and English at the end of the 2016/17 school year, compared to a historical cohort with similar characteristics<sup>11</sup>.**

Academic achievement among the Stepping Stones cohort at Heathcote School has not followed this same pattern. In Term 1 of the 2016/17 school year, the Stepping Stones cohort performed better than the historical cohort in English, but was below the achievement level of the historical cohort in Maths (see Table 3). At the end of the school year however, the proportion of Stepping Stones students that achieved satisfactory progress in both Maths and English fell significantly behind the historical cohort (see Table 4).

Several contextual factors relating to the 2016/17 academic year at Heathcote School are likely to play a role in this decline in attainment for the Stepping Stones students in comparison to the historical cohort (and in comparison to the other two pilot schools). The school found that their Stepping Stones cohort were noticeably more challenging than students in the previous Year 7

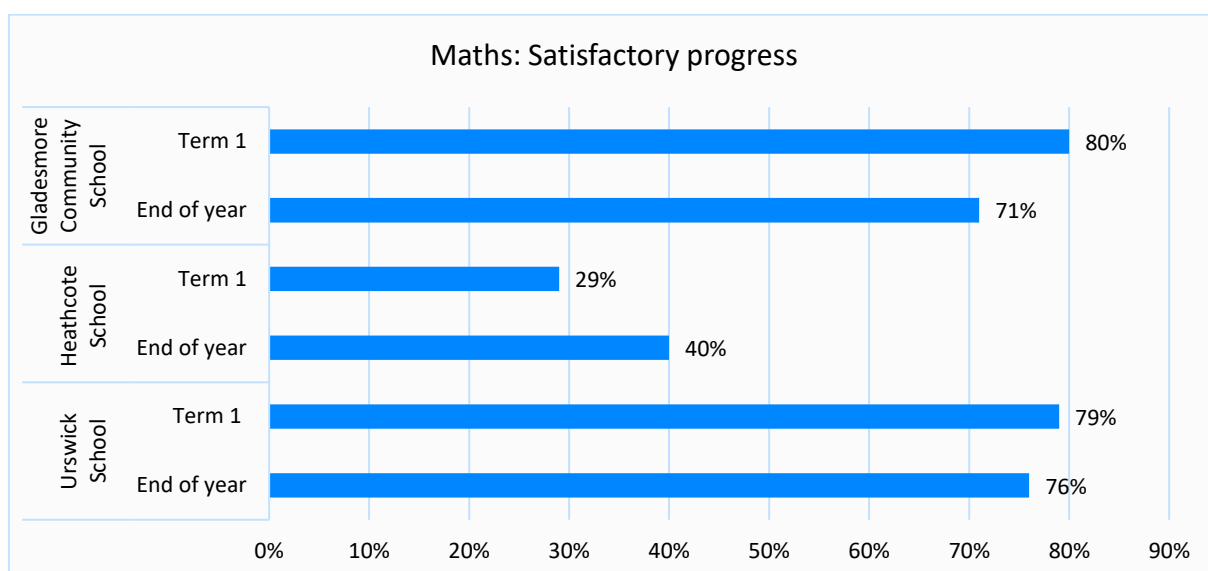
<sup>10</sup> The data in Table 4 from Gladesmore Community School and Heathcote School come from assessment data for Stepping Stones students from Term 1 2016/17; the data for The Urswick School is drawn from a point in the middle of the 2016/17 school year.

<sup>11</sup> The data in Table 3 come from the end of the 2016/17 school year. The schools make a judgement of each student's progress in Maths and English as either 'satisfactory' or 'unsatisfactory' based on their performance whilst taking into consideration their different base levels of knowledge and skills from earlier testing points and their different capacities for learning in each subject.

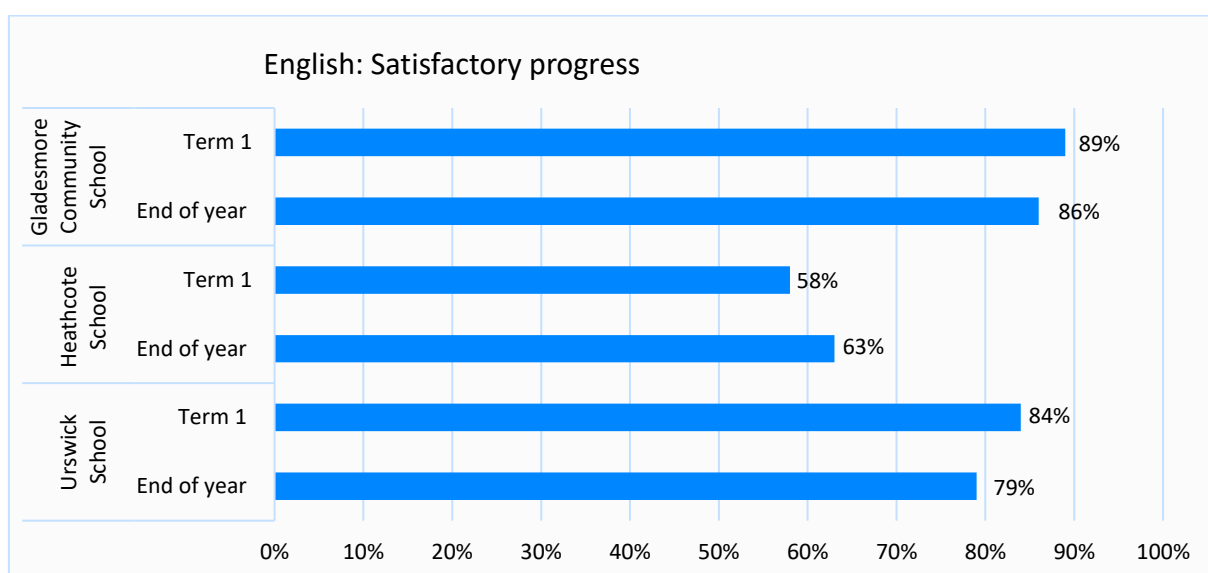
cohort, coming with significant behavioural, emotional and social issues that for many were complex. A considerable number of Stepping Stones students were White British, and this group demonstrates several issues stemming from families with low aspirational backgrounds and a deep-seated negative perception of schooling. In addition, several students who joined the school had not chosen Heathcote School as a first preference, however neighbouring schools had greatly exceeded their Published Admission Number (PAN) and therefore could not accept them. This could have affected the motivation these students had to do well at Heathcote. Other changes at the school also had an impact, such as the headteacher announcing their retirement and significant absences in pastoral staff, which increased pressure on a smaller number of staff who were dealing with a particularly challenging year group. Finally, there was also a change in the data algorithm used by Heathcote School to set the level of expected progress in 2016/17, which has since been determined by the school to have been set disproportionately high. For all these reasons, the historical cohort used for Heathcote School may not be as comparable to the Stepping Stones cohort as first anticipated, and may have had a particular impact on the attainment data.

Despite these challenges at Heathcote School, and the lower levels of attainment when compared to the historical cohort, a higher proportion of Stepping Stones students achieved satisfactory progress in both Maths and English at the end of the year compared to Term 1 (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). This suggests that positive progress in attainment was made among the Stepping Stone cohort over the course of the school year.

In contrast, both Gladesmore Community School and Urswick School saw a dip in satisfactory achievement levels from Term 1 to the end of the year across both Maths and English (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). This may be because assessments of progress at the end of the year reflect all the work completed in that year. Stepping Stones students may have less secure revision skills and so may find it harder to achieve success across a whole year's worth of content compared with the assessments made at the end of Term 1. In addition, support from the Stepping Stones programme wound down slightly towards the end of the school year, as peer mentors had more demands on their time due to preparation for examinations, and this may have affected performance from the Stepping Stones students at this time.



**Figure 1: The proportion of Stepping Stones students that made satisfactory progress in Maths at the end of Term 1 and the end of the 2016/17 school year.**



**Figure 2: The proportion of Stepping Stones students that made satisfactory progress in English at the end of Term 1 and the end of the 2016/17 school year.**

The academic progress made by Stepping Stones students was reflected in observations from parents and teachers, as well as students themselves, at all three schools. Prominent themes were that students were more able to engage in class, focus on tasks, take responsibility for their own work, and manage the completion of homework. One student told of how they found the work in Year 7 to be a challenge and that they consider Stepping Stones has helped them to make academic improvement:

*“The teachers are a bit strict and the work is hard, but Stepping Stones made me improve my work a little bit” – Stepping Stones student, Heathcote School.*

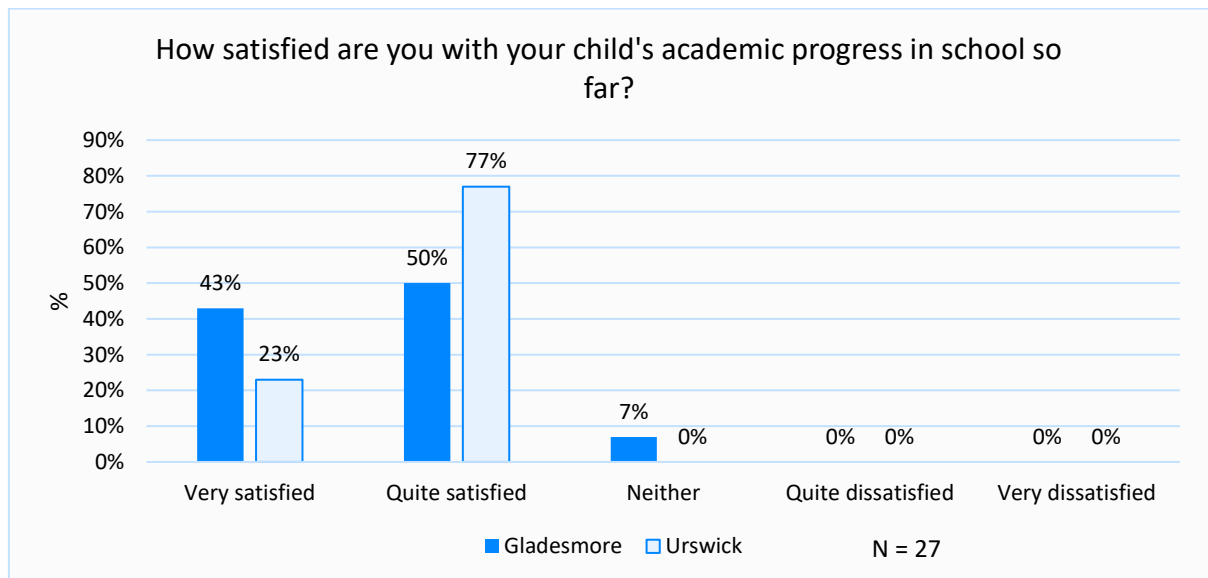
Similarly, parents of Stepping Stones students saw improvements in their children’s achievement at school and pointed out the importance of the recognition students receive from teachers in keeping

them motivated to achieve academically, as well as the impact that settling quickly into their new school surroundings had on their ability to be focused on school work.

*“He’s progressing well at school. It’s come because he’s settled in well” – Parent, Gladesmore Community School.*

At the end of the school year, a few teachers held the opinion that, while Stepping Stones students are undoubtedly performing well in the classroom, it is hard to trace the impact of the Stepping Stones programme on students’ academic achievement and progress because of the interrelated nature of the Stepping Stones support and other aspects of the school’s approach. However, all of the teachers interviewed for the evaluation spoke of the importance of a child’s confidence in their ability to achieve academically at school, with some considering confidence to be a pre-condition for academic achievement. To illustrate this, one teacher drew on a specific example in which the classroom participation, and subsequent academic attainment, of a female Stepping Stones student with a physical disability benefitted greatly from the Stepping Stones programme. Specifically, the additional support helped to increase her confidence in her own voice and ideas to the point where she now feels able to put up her hand to offer responses in class and to work with her peers on joint projects.

Most of the parents we spoke to in focus groups felt satisfied with the academic progress their children were making so far, and the data from the parents’ survey suggests the same (see Figure 3)<sup>12</sup>.



**Figure 3: Survey responses from a sample of parents of Stepping Stones students at the end of the school year 2016/2017. Note this data comes from Gladesmore Community School and The Urswick School only. Parents survey data from Heathcote School was not available at the end of the school year due to staff challenges in collecting completed questionnaires.**

<sup>12</sup> Parents survey data was not available from Heathcote School at the end of the school year due to staff challenges in collecting completed questionnaires. Note also that the sample size is small.



## 2.1.2 The impact of enhanced learning support

Our evaluation suggests that the enhanced learning support provided to Stepping Stones students may lead to the improvements in attainment that have been experienced by many Stepping Stones students. However, as indicated by some of the teachers we spoke to, Stepping Stones operated within other academic, learning and transition support at each school, so the specific impact of Stepping Stones can be difficult to isolate. Despite this, the qualitative research found that Stepping Stones added value for vulnerable students by:

- Integrating with and complementing existing channels of learning support;
- Providing a 'less intimidating' avenue for learning support via peer mentors; and,
- Meeting individual learning needs in tailored ways.

### *Multiple complementary layers of support*

The Stepping Stones students we spoke to for the evaluation said they felt supported to achieve academically in secondary school, both in class and with homework, primarily due to the varied support mechanisms available, including their Year 10 mentors.

In workshop discussions, students pointed to the many avenues to access the help they need including:

- **Teachers**, through giving content support and setting targets;
- **Parents and siblings**, through helping with homework;
- **Homework clubs and reading interventions** for additional support with content and skills;
- **Incentives and recognition** such as winning prizes; and,
- **Peer mentors**, through helping them settle in to the physical and social environment, giving advice on class work and assisting with homework tasks.

Parents we spoke with also pointed out that the multiple complementary layers of learning support available – of which Stepping Stones is an important component – are helping their children be more motivated to learn and progress.

*“There are a number of adults now to talk to and the Stepping Stones mentor who they can relate to more than an adult.” – Parent, Heathcote School*

Parents often noted that the learning support available to their children in secondary school far surpasses anything they experienced in primary school, and that this lifted a burden from their shoulders, especially in the early months of their child's transition. These parents no longer felt that they needed to be the sole supporter (beyond the primary school class teacher) of their child's learning and homework. It is unclear however whether this relates specifically to the Stepping Stones programme or to the experience of secondary school more generally.

*“My son never got a lot of help with homework at primary school – I had to fight for it. None of the teachers seemed to listen.” – Parent, The Urswick School*

### ***Peer mentoring supporting attainment***

The support available to Stepping Stones students from their Year 10 mentors was very valuable in increasing their academic confidence and improving the skills needed to take personal responsibility for their learning, especially regarding homework. The Year 10 mentors were a key component of homework support because they:

- Were available at times when teachers are not (including out of hours);
- Were of a close enough age to the Year 7 students to have a recent memory of transition and the ability to empathise with the transition experience;
- Provided a friendly option for support compared with adults (i.e. teachers, tutors and parents) that often also involved fun or social elements;
- Provided support that may have been missing for some students at home, for example if their parents do not speak English, and/or they do not have older siblings.

In focus groups conducted for the evaluation, parents were particularly keen to distinguish the mentoring component of Stepping Stones as an integral part of their child's smooth transition into secondary school. They pointed to the various ways mentors assisted Stepping Stones students with their school and homework – including the importance of support coming from another young person. For example:

*“My son has got quite a few support needs and different interventions, but Stepping Stones is the only one that's young people based, in terms of who they get the support from. That peer support element is really important.” – Parent, Gladesmore Community School*

*“His mentor was going through homework with him, and she's always available for him even in the playground.” – Parent, Gladesmore Community School*

The Stepping Stones students themselves also spoke highly of their mentors and how they assisted them to improve their school work and their homework by being flexibly available to them to give advice on subjects they'd experienced a few years before, for example;

*“They have helped me get good grades and have made me stronger on my work.” – Stepping Stones student, Heathcote School*

### ***Tailored learning support options***

Several parents also felt that the tailored nature of the learning support provided under the Stepping Stones programme and within the broader 'holistic approach' helped their children reach their academic potential. One explained how impressed they were with the extent to which the school had considered the specific needs of their child from the very beginning of the year:

*“Before the school year started, Urswick had gotten his file from the primary school and had all the info and had written up a plan on things like where to sit him, etc. This made me feel reassured that the school was prepared and interested in my son's learning.” – Parent, The Urswick School*

Similarly, teachers reflected that the development of trusted relationships between Stepping Stones students and their peer mentors and adult community mentors led to increased understanding of specific personal barriers that may be hindering academic progress and an improved ability for schools to address those barriers:

“The more opportunities a student has to build secure relationships with responsible others means the greater the chance of finding out deep meaningful educational barriers to their progress. It is then exploring what are the best options to meet the needs of the student.” – Teacher, Heathcote School

### 2.1.3 Gender differences in attainment

#### Overview

In Term 1 of the 2016/17 school year, a higher or equal proportion of female Stepping Stones students across all three pilot schools achieved satisfactory progress in Maths and English as compared to male Stepping Stones students (see Figure 4). However, this gender difference in attainment is also seen in the historical cohorts, with a higher proportion of girls making satisfactory progress compared to boys suggesting that this is an expected pattern during Year 7 for these students.

At the end of the school year, this pattern remained the same for both Gladesmore Community School and Urswick school, but had shifted in Heathcote School, with male Stepping Stones students outperforming female Stepping Stones students overall (Figure 5).

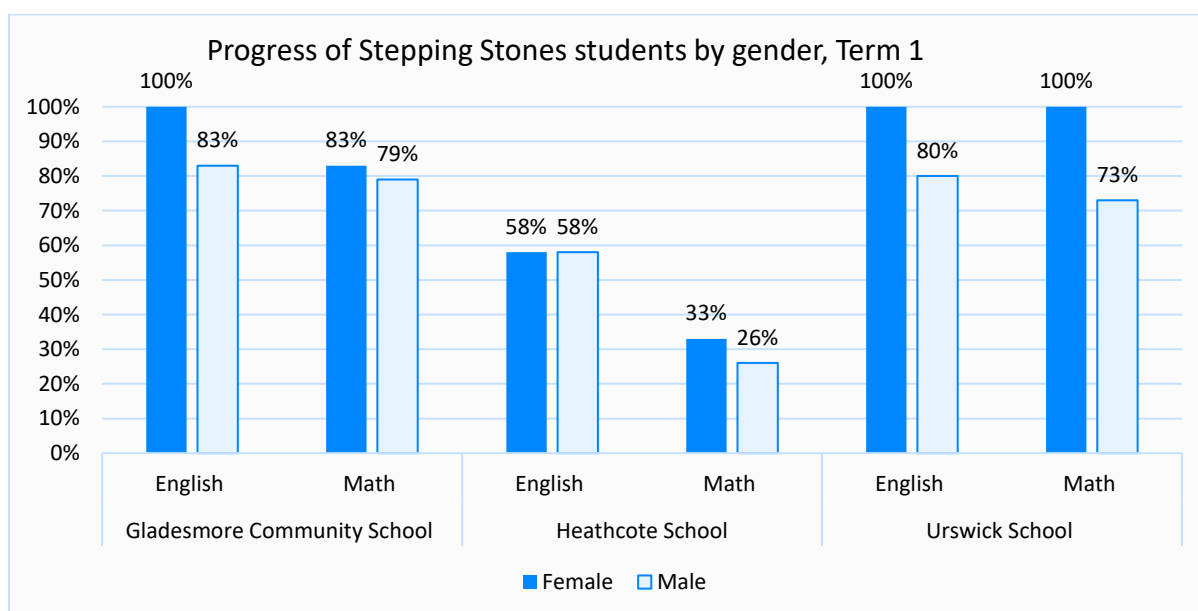
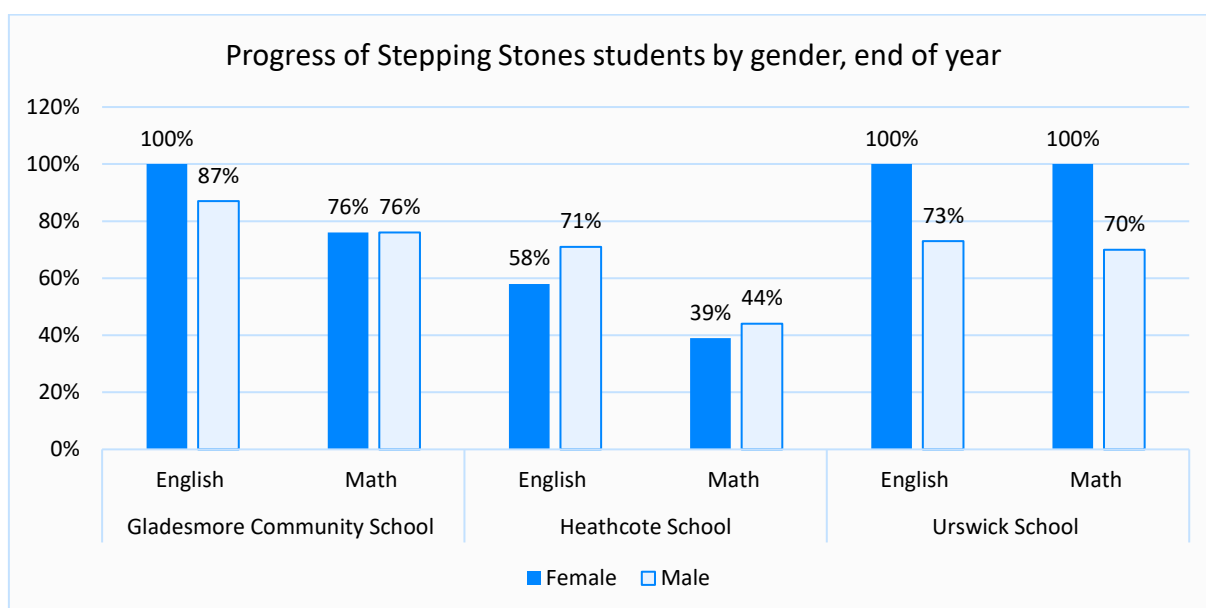


Figure 4: The proportion of Stepping Stones students that made satisfactory progress in Maths and English in Term 1 of the 2016/17 school year, split by gender.

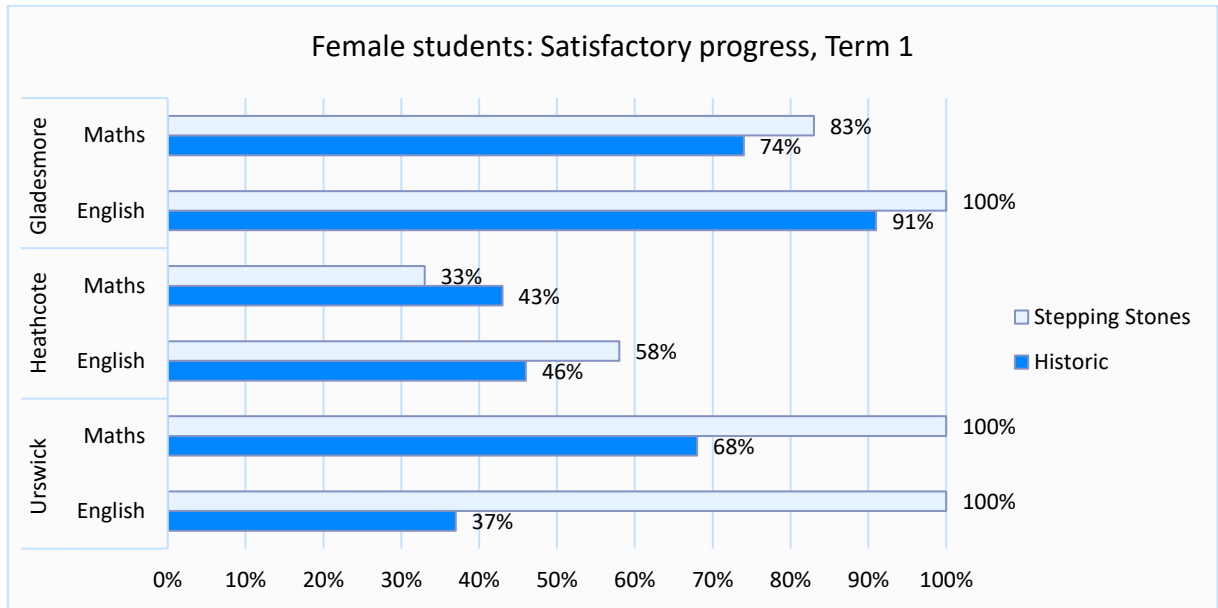


**Figure 5: The proportion of Stepping Stones students that made satisfactory progress in Maths and English at the end of the 2016/17 school year, split by gender.**

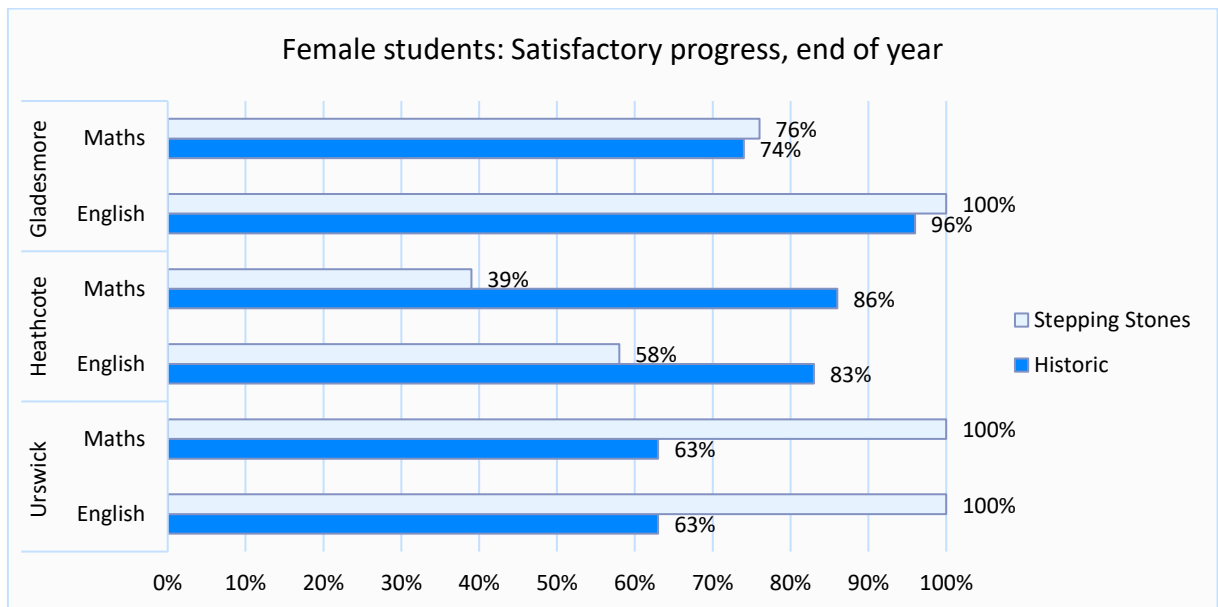
### ***Female Stepping Stones students***

Comparing the progress made by Stepping Stones students to historical cohorts in each school shows that, on average, a greater proportion of female Stepping Stones students achieved satisfactory progress in Maths and English compared to the historical cohorts in both Gladesmore Community School and Urswick School, both in Term 1 and at the end of the 2016/17 school year – see Figure 6 and Figure 7. At Urswick School the difference between the attainment levels of female Stepping Stones students and female students from the historical cohort is striking – with 100% of the female Stepping Stones students gaining satisfactory grades in both Maths and English at both points in the year. This suggests that, overall, the Stepping Stones programme had a positive impact on the attainment of female students. The impact on male students is discussed in the following section.

At Heathcote School, the proportion of female Stepping Stones students achieving satisfactory progress did not meet the same level as the historical cohort at the end of the school year, most likely for the reasons outlined in section 2.1.1. However, in Term 1, a greater proportion of female Stepping Stones students had achieved satisfactory progress when compared to the historical cohort.



**Figure 6: The proportion of female students from the Stepping Stones and historical cohorts that made satisfactory progress in Maths and English in Term 1 of 2016/17 school year.**



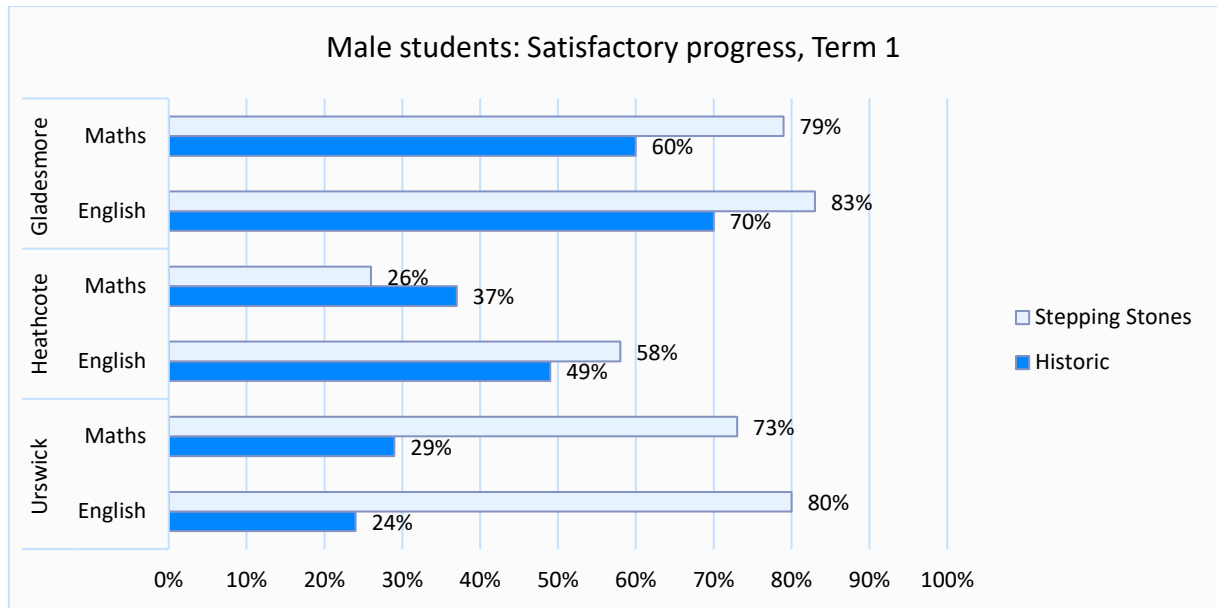
**Figure 7: The proportion of female students from the Stepping Stones and historical cohorts that made satisfactory progress in Maths and English at the end of the 2016/17 school year.**

**Male Stepping Stones students**

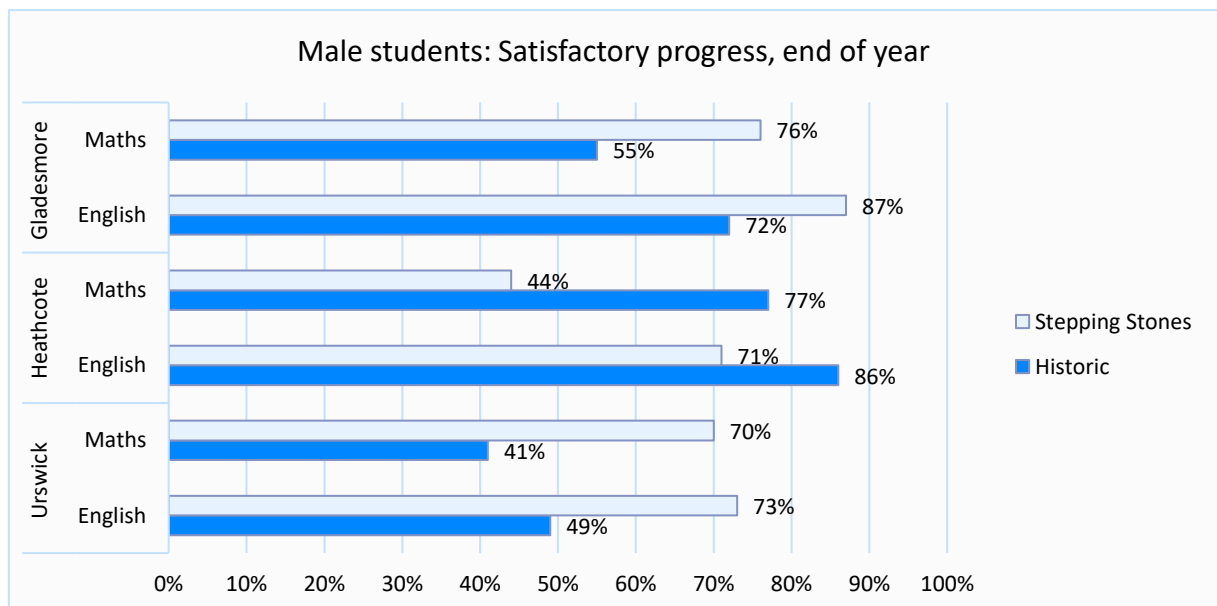
A greater proportion of male Stepping Stones students achieved satisfactory progress in Maths and English compared to the historical cohorts in both Gladesmore Community School and Urswick School, both in Term 1 and at the end of the 2016/17 school year – Figure 8 and Figure 9. At Urswick school the level of achievement by male Stepping Stones students at the end of the school year is outstanding, with almost three times as many Stepping Stones boys achieving satisfactory progress in both subjects when compared to the historical cohort (Figure 9). As with the female students, this

suggests that, overall, the Stepping Stones programme had a positive impact on the attainment of male students.

A similar pattern occurred at Heathcote School for male Stepping Stones students as for female students. The proportion of male Stepping Stones students achieving satisfactory progress was behind the historical cohort at the end of the year (see Figure 9), which again is likely to be due to the reasons outlined in section 2.1.1. However, in Term 1 a greater proportion of boys on the Stepping Stones programme had achieved satisfactory progress in English compared to the historical cohort (see Figure 8).



**Figure 8: The proportion of male students from the Stepping Stones and historical cohorts that made satisfactory progress in Maths and English in Term 1 of 2016/17 school year.**



**Figure 9: The proportion of male students from the Stepping Stones and historical cohorts that made satisfactory progress in Maths and English at the end of the 2016/17 school year.**

While both male and female students found the work at secondary school to be a challenge compared to primary school, the additional learning support provided by Stepping Stones appears to have made a difference to their confidence and ability to step up to the challenge. Our initial focus groups with Stepping Stones students suggested that the additional learning support may have worked especially well for boys. Boys were more likely to reveal that they had struggled with school work and homework in primary school and to say that, in contrast, they found it easier to cope with school work and homework in secondary school, due in part to support from peer mentors and activities like homework clubs.

## 2.2 Behaviour

In relation to behaviour, the Stepping Stones programme worked well for two quite distinct groups of Year 7 students:

- Quieter children who may be shy and withdrawn.
- Children with issues controlling their behaviour.

Our evaluation found that both of these groups of students have experienced

improvements in behaviour – albeit in different ways. In general, the impact for the more reserved students is an increase in confidence in social and classroom settings, as well as self-confidence which translates into these children feeling safer just being themselves. Stepping Stones students with behavioural issues, on the other hand, are now better able to reflect on their own behaviour, and to think before they react.

Quantitative data from the Pupil Attitudes to Self and School (PASS) assessment shows that a large proportion of students maintained consistent scores throughout the year, which is an encouraging result, despite an overall decline in PASS scores across all three pilot schools as the year progressed.

Data from school-based assessments of behaviour and commitment, coupled with qualitative information from our in-depth evaluation research with students, teachers, parents, peer mentors and community mentors indicates that, overall, the behaviour of Stepping Stones students has improved throughout the course of the year, and in comparison to previous Year 7 students with similar behavioural characteristics.



**Behaviour: Key findings**

- Shy, quiet students improved their confidence in classroom and social settings:
  - The Summer School enabled students to become familiar with their peers and teachers before the start of the year
  - Peer mentors provided encouragement, guidance, and wider social networks.
- Students with behavioural issues improved their self-awareness, maturity and control over their emotions:
  - Stepping Stones lessons provided tools and strategies for managing emotions and behaviour.
  - Peer mentors provided positive role models.
- Despite an overall decline in PASS scores as the year progressed, a large proportion of students maintained consistent scores in the PASS assessments throughout the year.
- Two out of three schools saw a strong improvement in commitment scores for Stepping Stones students compared to the historical cohort.
- In one school at the end of the school year, 74% of Stepping Stones students scored satisfactory or higher in their commitment scores compared to only 46% of the historical cohort.

**2.2.1 Behaviour and motivation*****Pupil Attitudes to Self and School testing***

The online Pupil Attitudes to Self and School (PASS) test was administered three times in all three schools – the first PASS test in schools (T1) took place before the school year (at Transition Day events); T2 took place part way through Term 1; T3 was held at the end of the school year.

Across the schools, the PASS scores of Stepping Stones students taking the test showed an overall 'dip' in attitudes towards their own learning capacity and school from both the first test point to the second, and the second to the third. Table 5 below summarises how the proportions of Stepping



Stones students scoring in the top 70% of scores<sup>13</sup> on each PASS dimension tended to decline from the T1 to T2 and again from T2 to T3<sup>14</sup>.

As this was the first year the schools had used the PASS test, there is no historical cohort to compare it to. However, one school carried out the PASS test with the whole Year 7 cohort and found a similar overall decline in scores from the start to the end of the year, suggesting that this could be a trend that occurs for all students in Year 7. This could be related to a shift in the four stages of learning<sup>15</sup>, from “unconscious incompetence” (with associated positive self-assessment) to “conscious incompetence” (as people learn more, they realise how much they do not know and may feel less positive). There is also evidence that as young people get older, they start to pull away from the influence of their parents and teachers<sup>16</sup>, while the influence of their peers becomes stronger<sup>17</sup> and they may start expressing views differently as a result. Not only are the students in a transition from primary to secondary school, but they are also in a transition from childhood to adolescence, with an associated move towards greater independence that may lead to more honest responses.

PASS Dimension	Gladesmore Community School		Heathcote School		Urswick School	
	T1 to T2	T2 to T3	T1 to T2	T2 to T3	T1 to T2	T2 to T3
Feelings about school	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
Perceived Learning Capability	↓	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑
Learner Self Regard	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓

<sup>13</sup> When PASS assessment data is analysed and returned to schools, responses to the questions related to each PASS dimension are shown as percentile scores based on responses from *all* students in *all* schools that subscribe to use the PASS assessment. The scores are also colour coded using a ‘traffic light’ system in which scores in the top 70 percentiles (i.e. top 70% of all students’ responses) are highlighted in green.

<sup>14</sup> At Gladesmore Community School, the number of students taking the assessment at T1 was 54; T2 it was 69; and at T3 it was 66. At Heathcote School, the number of students taking the assessment at T1 and T2 was 69 and at T3 it was 59. At The Urswick School, 65 students took the assessment at T1, 64 at T2 and 58 at T3.

Note that Gladesmore Community School ran the first PASS assessment at their Transition Day on 13 September 2016; this clashed with the religious festival Eid resulting in a low attendance rate and therefore fewer students taking the PASS assessment at T1 (n=54) compared to T2 (n=69). This difference in numbers between T1 and T2 may have a distorting effect on the change that has taken place for the proportions of students scoring in the top 70% on PASS dimensions and represents a challenge in comparing this school’s PASS data to that of Heathcote and The Urswick Schools.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.businessballs.com/self-awareness/conscious-competence-learning-model-63/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://pubs.cde.ca.gov/tcsii/adoldev/adoldev4rec5.aspx> [Accessed 19 January 2018]

<sup>17</sup> Barbour, C., Barbour, N.H. & Scully, P.A. Families, Schools, and Communities: Building Partnerships for Educating Children, 2008 edition, Pearson.

Preparedness for Learning	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
Attitudes to Teachers	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
General Work Ethic	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
Confidence in Learning	↓	↑	↓	↓	↓	↑
Attitudes to Attendance	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
Response to Curriculum	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓

**Table 5: Arrows pointing up and down represent either an overall increase or decrease (respectively), in the proportion of the Stepping Stones cohort achieving a score in the top 70% of scores on each PASS dimension from the first PASS test date to the second, and the second PASS test to the third.**

An analysis of the changes to individuals' scores on each PASS dimension from T1 to T3 shows a similar pattern to what is shown above in Table 5; the majority of Stepping Stones students' PASS scores remain in the same colour-coded band<sup>18</sup> across the year with a small number of students from each school experiencing either an increase or decrease<sup>19</sup> into a higher or lower percentile bracket (respectively). These shifts are shown in Figure 10 to Figure 12 below.

While there is an overall decline in the scores throughout the year, the figures below show that a large proportion of Stepping Stones students show no change from T1 to T3. Since these students are the most vulnerable, and therefore might be expected to show a decline during the transition from primary to secondary school. Indeed, seeing such a large proportion showing no change could be a positive indication that they have coped well with the transition.

<sup>18</sup> When PASS data is returned to schools, an individual's scores on each PASS dimension are colour coded into four coloured bands that serve like a traffic light system – where green shows that the student's response is in a normal range and yellow, pink and red show differing degrees of dissatisfaction. The coloured bands do not encompass the same range of scores, with the majority of scores falling into the green band. The colour coding system works as follows: Green – A score of 30.01 to 100 i.e. in the top 70% of respondents for that dimension; Yellow – 20.01 to 30 (inclusive); Pink – 5.01 to 20 (inclusive); and Red – 0 to 5 (inclusive) i.e. in the bottom 5% of respondents for that dimension.

<sup>19</sup> An increase occurs when a student's score on a PASS dimension goes up from one colour-coded band of percentiles to another (i.e. from red to pink; pink to yellow; yellow to green); a decrease when the student's score changes from one colour-coded band to another in a downwards direction. 'No change' occurs when the student's score on a PASS dimension did not change from T1 to T3.

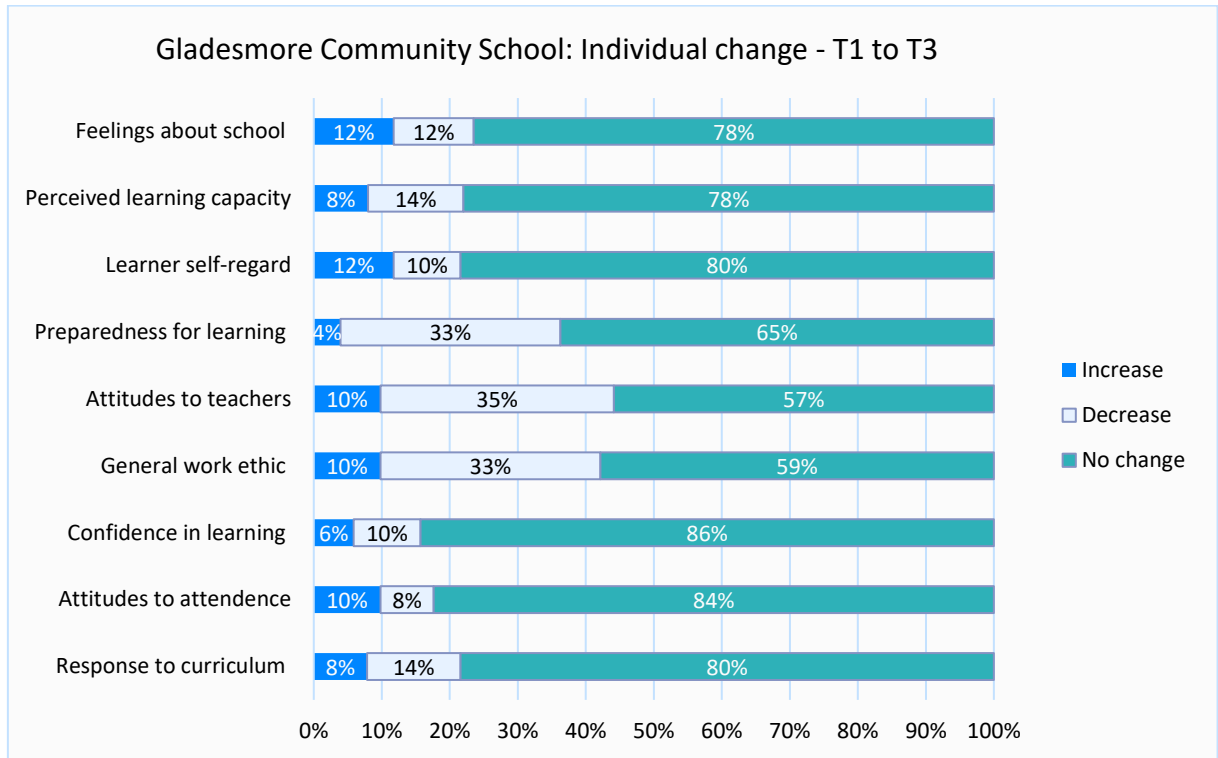


Figure 10: Individual change from T1 to T3 on each PASS dimension for Gladesmore Community School.

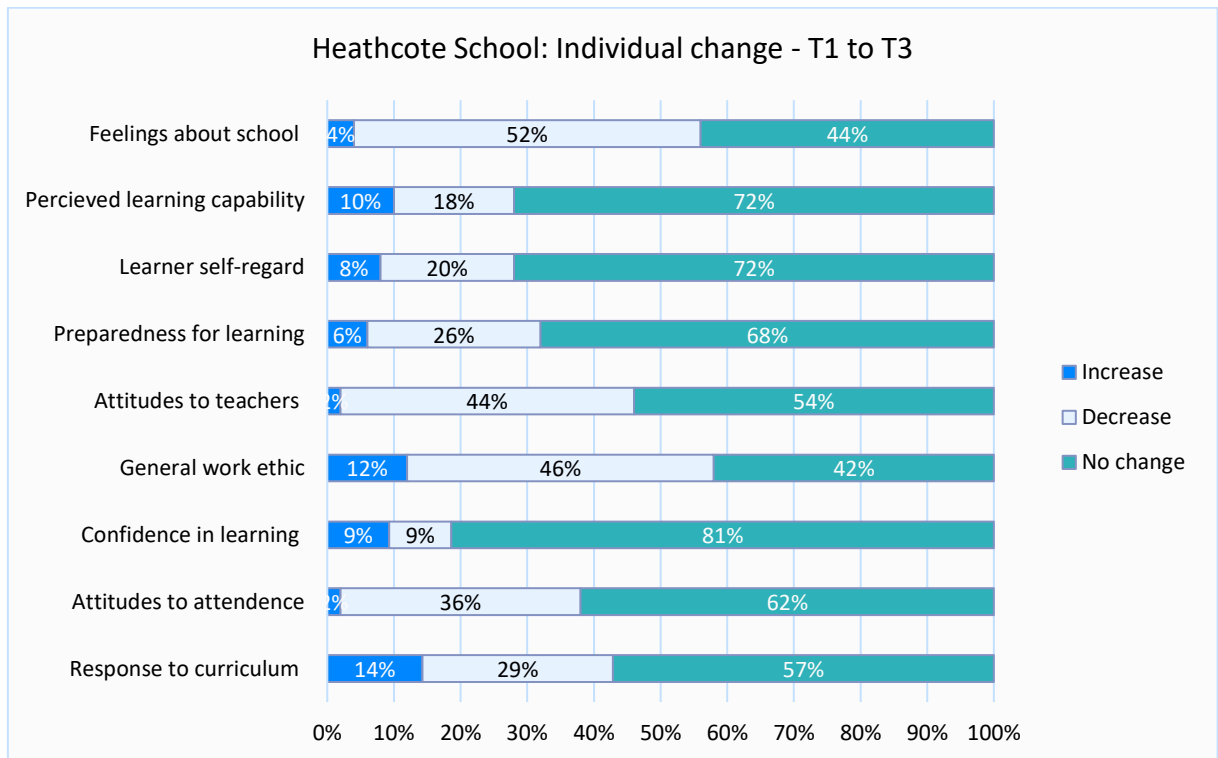
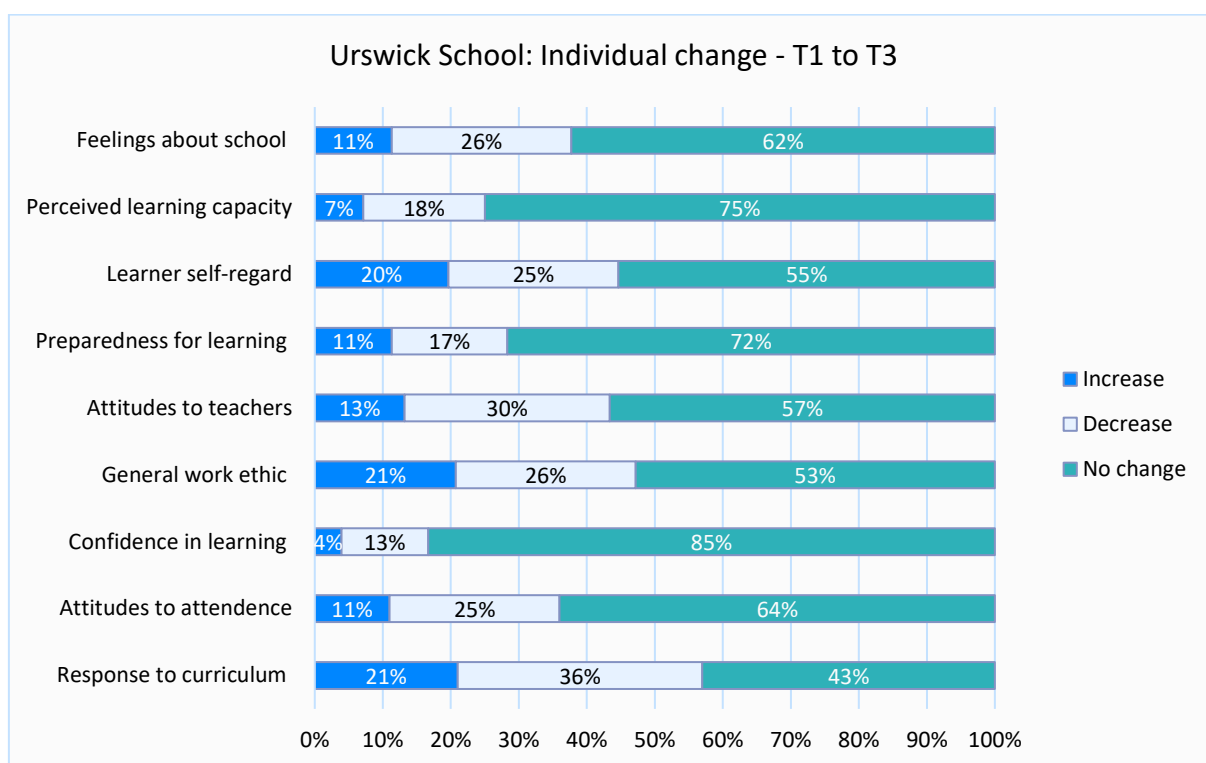


Figure 11: Individual change from T1 to T3 on each PASS dimension for Heathcote School.



**Figure 12: Individual change from T1 to T3 on each PASS dimension for Urswick School.**

A further breakdown of the changes on individual PASS scores on each PASS dimension, split by school and gender, is presented in the Appendix. While there are few strong or stand-out patterns across the three pilot schools, some trends in this data include:

- A trend towards diminished attitudes towards teachers in both male and female Stepping Stones students from Term 1 to the end of the school year;
- A trend towards reduced general work ethic across all schools and both genders; Urswick School however also saw a high proportion of female Stepping Stones students (40%) increasing on this PASS dimension;
- A trend towards increased confidence in learning among girls at both Gladesmore Community School and Heathcote School, which could be linked to broader improvements in confidence among this group (see section 2.2.2).

### ***Progress on behaviour and commitment to school***

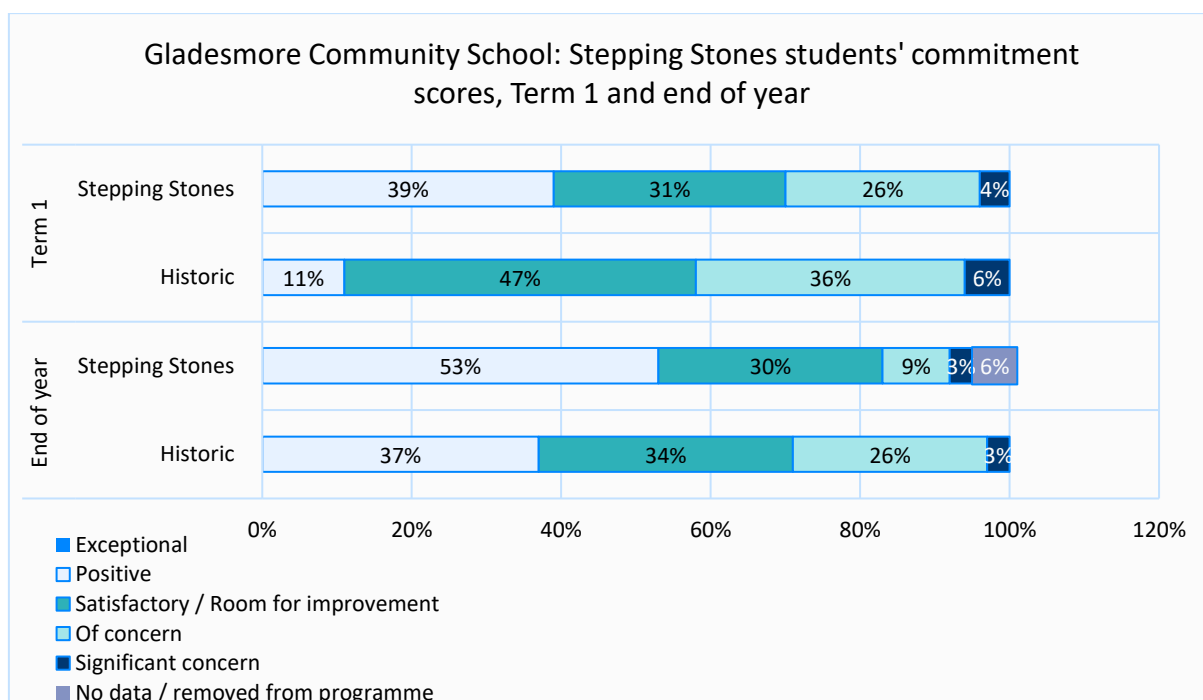
School level data and qualitative evidence from parents and teachers show improvements in the behaviour and commitment of Stepping Stones students to school in comparison to a) historical cohorts and b) the beginning of the school year.

Each of the three schools used a scoring system to monitor the behaviour and commitment students have towards their learning, which can be compared to a historical cohort with similar characteristics as the Stepping Stones cohorts. It is important to note that commitment scores are provided by

teachers and reflect different standards at different schools, so they are not directly comparable across the three schools<sup>20</sup>.

A higher proportion of Stepping Stones cohorts at both Gladesmore Community School and Heathcote School scored satisfactory or higher compared to the historical cohorts. At Urswick School the pattern runs in the opposite direction, with the Stepping Stones students receiving fewer positive commitment scores compared to the historical cohort.

In Term 1 at Gladesmore Community School 70% of the Stepping Stones cohort received a score of satisfactory or positive, compared to 58% of the historical cohort, with fewer students falling into lower bands – see Figure 13. By the end of the school year the proportion of Stepping Stones students who received a commitment score in the positive or satisfactory bands increased to 83%, compared to 71% of the historical cohort.



**Figure 13: Commitment scores of Stepping Stones students and the historical cohort for Gladesmore Community School.**

Similarly, in Term 1 at Heathcote School, a substantial 85% of the Stepping Stones cohort received a score of satisfactory, positive or exceptional, compared to just 51% of the historical cohort. At the end of the year, the proportion of Stepping Stones students in the top three bands remained high – at 74% - compared with 46% of the historical cohort (see Figure 14). Significantly, large proportions of the Stepping Stones cohort received exceptional commitment scores in both Term 1 and at the end of the school year; no students in the historical cohort received a score in this band. Reflections from teaching staff at Heathcote School mirror this data – they felt that in working with a particularly challenging cohort of students, the additional support from the Stepping Stones programme enabled them to make considerable strides in improving behaviour.

<sup>20</sup> See an explanation of the differences and the significance of the scoring bands used in this report in the Appendix.

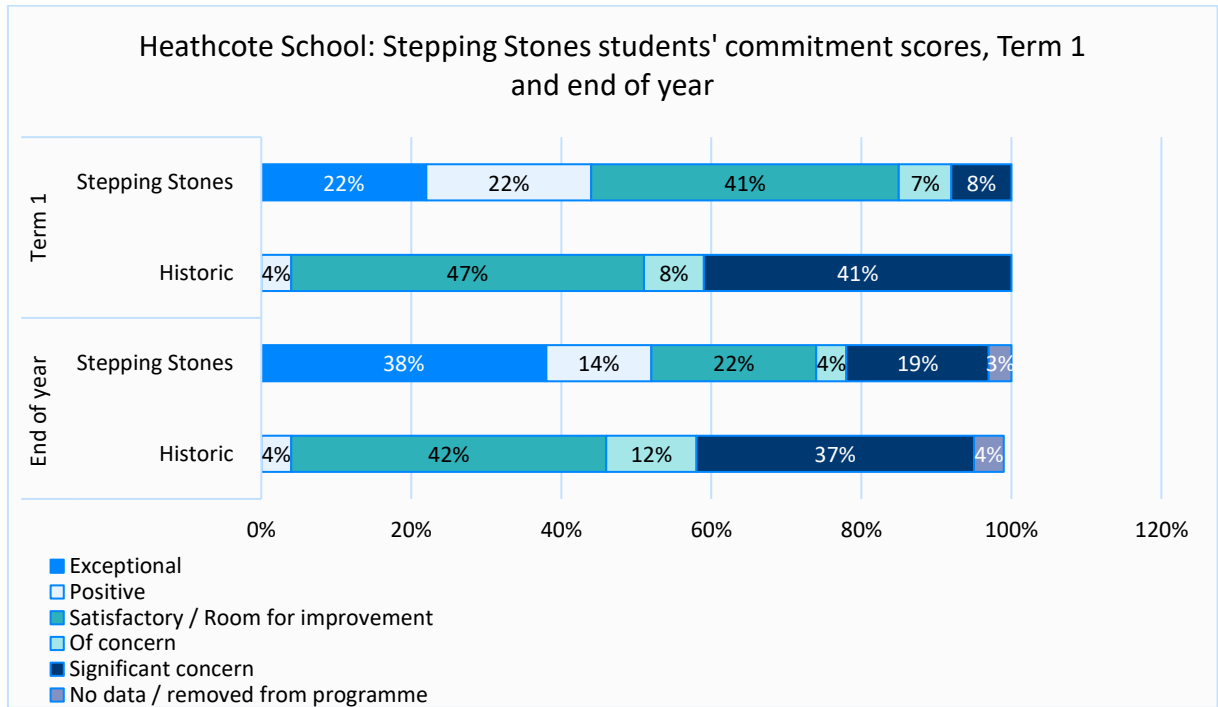


Figure 14: Commitment scores of Stepping Stones students and the historical cohort for Heathcote School.

At The Urswick School, the Stepping Stones cohort did not perform as well as the historical cohort in terms of commitment scores; however, scores for both cohorts were generally high, with 100% of students having either satisfactory or positive scores in Term 1 and almost all scoring in those two top bands at the end of the year – see Figure 15.

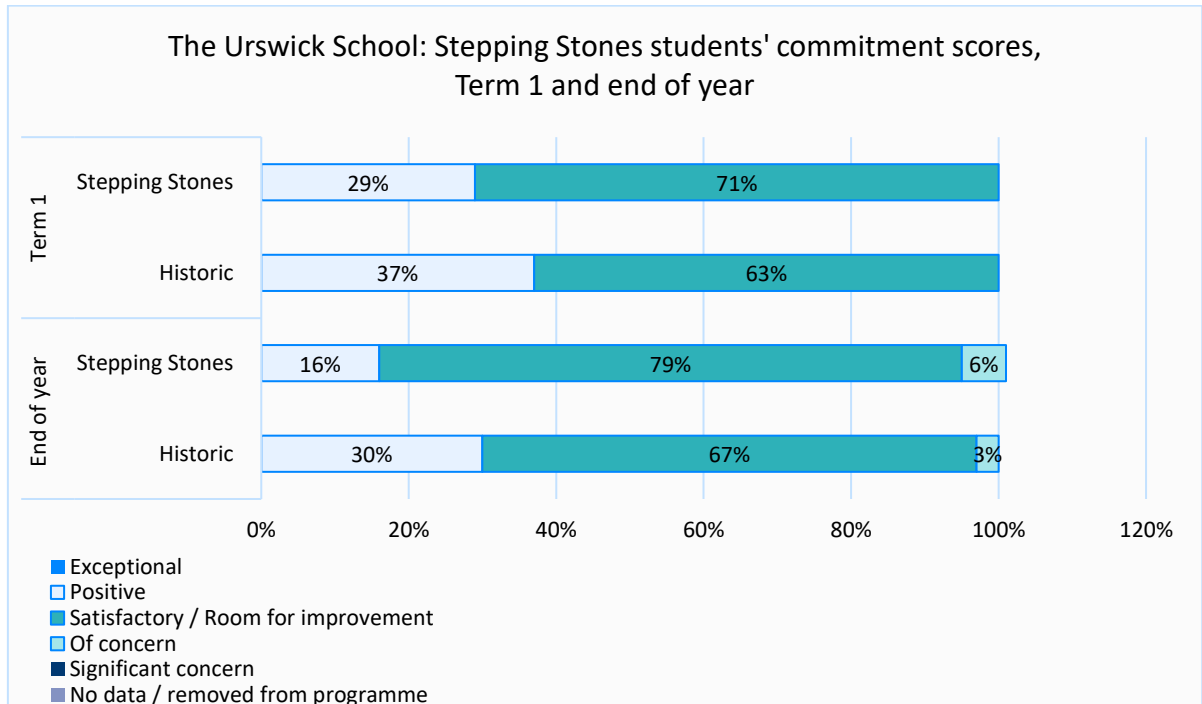
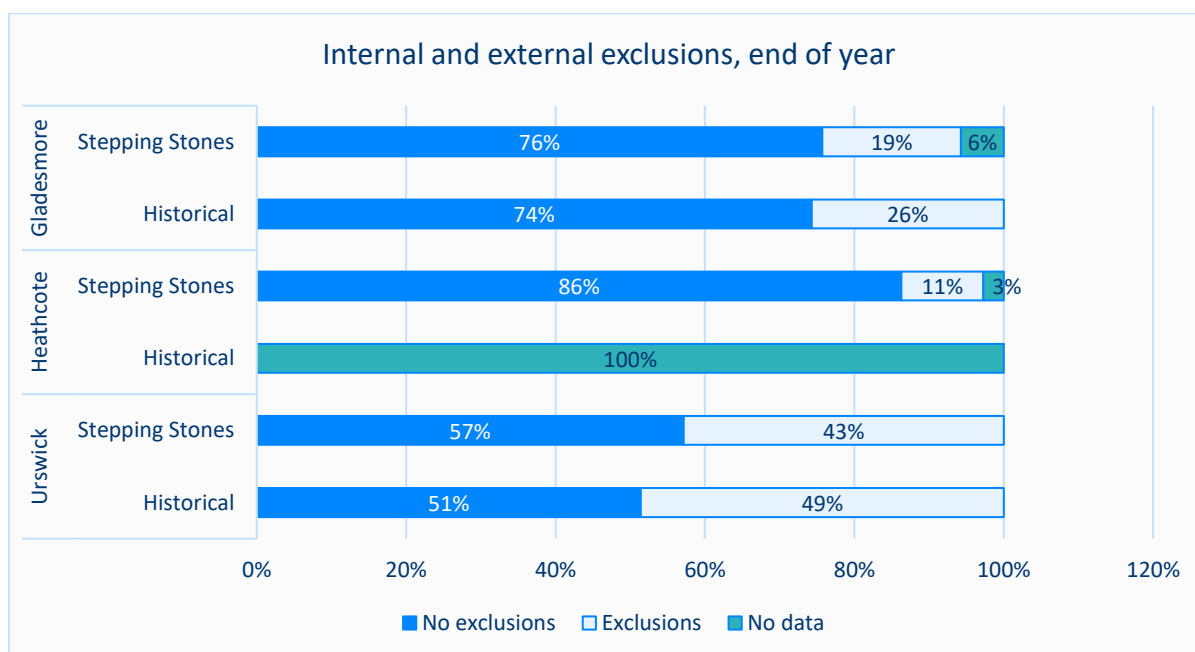


Figure 15: Commitment scores of Stepping Stones students and the historical cohort for The Urswick School.

### Internal and external exclusions

One of the measures used to compare the behaviour of the Stepping Stones students to the historical cohorts was the proportion of students being internally or externally excluded. Internal exclusion (or seclusion) refers to the removal of a student from class (not from the school) for disciplinary reasons, and is not considered an exclusion from a legal perspective. Internal exclusions are used in different ways at different schools, and therefore cannot be directly compared across the three schools. External exclusion is used only for serious offences and is more standardised in its application. In the data presented below we have combined both internal and external exclusion data. Where the word exclusion is used in this report it refers to both internal and external exclusion.

At the end of the 2016/17 school year, data on internal and external exclusions was available for the Stepping Stones pupils at all three pilot schools, however no data was available for the historical cohort at Heathcote School. For the two schools for which there is data, Stepping Stones students were less likely to receive an internal or external exclusion compared to the historical cohorts (see Figure 16). At Gladesmore Community School 19% of Stepping Stones students received an internal or external exclusion at least once, compared to 26% of the historical cohort. At The Urswick School, 43% of Stepping Stones students were internally or externally excluded at least once, while for the historical cohort this was 49%. Internal exclusion is used as a fairly frequent sanction at The Urswick School and assists in maintaining outstanding standards of behaviour in the classroom.

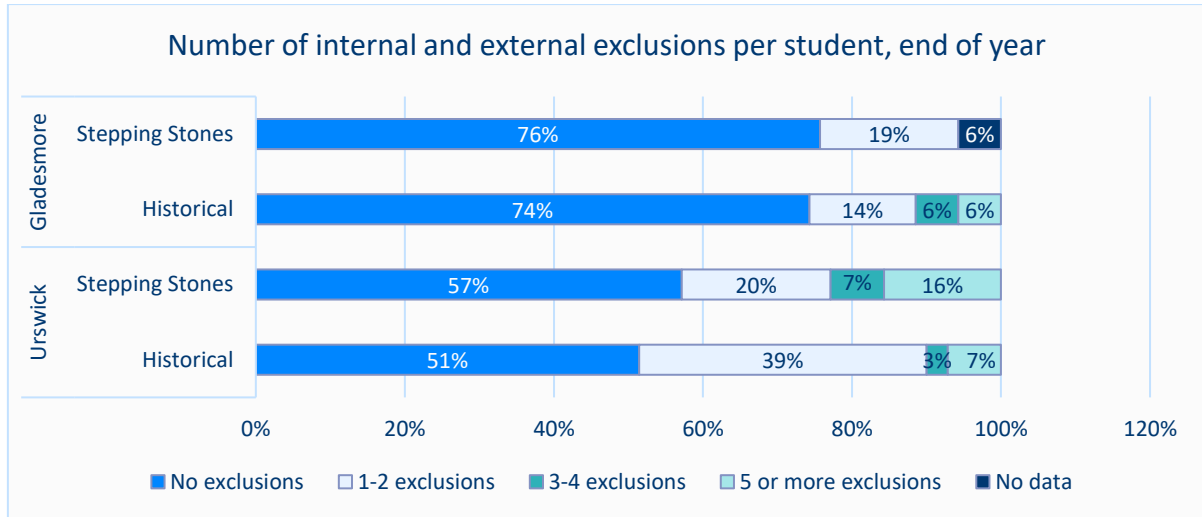


**Figure 16: Proportion of students receiving internal and external exclusions at the end of the 2016/17 school year compared to the historical cohort**

We also looked at the number of internal or external exclusions received per student, at the two schools for which there is historical data. At Gladesmore Community School, Stepping Stones students received a smaller number of internal or external exclusions per student compared to the historical cohort (see Figure 17). Among the Stepping Stones students who received an internal or external exclusion (19%) all of them did so once or twice during the school year. In comparison, 14%

of the historical cohort received one or two internal or external exclusions, while 6% received three or four, and 6% received five or more.

At The Urswick School, although fewer Stepping Stones students received an internal or external exclusion than the historical cohort, those who did so received a higher number than the historical cohort (see Figure 17). 20% of Stepping Stones students received one or two internal or external exclusions, 7% received three or four, and 16% received five or more. In comparison, 39% of the historical cohort received one or two internal or external exclusions, 3% received three or four, and 7% received five or more.



**Figure 17: Proportion of students at Gladesmore Community School and The Urswick School receiving different numbers of internal and external exclusions in the 2016/17 school year compared to the historical cohorts**

### 2.2.2 Increased confidence in social settings and the classroom

A theme that was prominent when speaking with parents of Stepping Stones students, and from the parent questionnaire, was that Stepping Stones had improved the confidence of the students – particularly confidence in social situations and in terms of positive relationships and friendships. This has flow-on effects into the classroom and with students’ ability to remain confidently focussed on academic and extra-curricular achievement. Many of the parents of Stepping Stones students that we heard from have witnessed an increase in their child’s confidence, which began at the beginning of the year and continued for most right through the school year.

The perspective of some parents attending focus groups was that a number of factors are proving effective at improving confidence, including:

- The interaction Stepping Stones students have with their Year 10 mentors, who are able to provide support both around school work, homework and study strategies; and how to navigate delicate social situations;
- The extra layers of adult support available in the schools, such as subject teachers and homework clubs.



“I believe that Stepping Stones has brought the confidence out in my child. It has helped him in a lot of ways. School work. Confidence. He’s never had behaviour problems, but he’s got so many friends now that you know even the teachers tell me he’s such a nice boy to teach. Now he’s getting the help that he needed.” – Parent, The Urswick School

For some children, this increased confidence looked like a newfound ability to speak up or participate in class, for others it meant an increased ability to know when they need help and how to ask for it, for example:

“He has literally gained so much confidence from it – he’s come a long way from where he started. He can now ask for help – he never used to do that. He still gets stuck on certain things but isn’t afraid now to ask for help.” – Parent, The Urswick School

For others, the impact of increased social confidence translated directly to an increased confidence in the classroom and to try harder with their school and homework, for example:

“There has been a big change. Her reading! I’m surprised. She reads with a flow now whereas before she was so frightened to make anyone hear her voice. She’s still quite timid and with her homework [but], over the last month, she is trying to do it for herself. Now she says, ‘Mum I want to try’. She puts so much effort into it. She’s starting to feel more confident with the work.” – Parent, The Urswick School

In Heathcote School, teachers saw Stepping Stones students’ behaviour improve across the whole Stepping Stones cohort, however they noticed that the behaviour of students who were initially quieter and more reserved improved substantially.

“Most significant was working with the community mentors. [It helped them with] speaking up and feeling freer to be open.” – Teacher, Heathcote School

Overall, for those students who started the school year with anxiety or low confidence, there have been significant improvements, to which Stepping Stones contributed.

### 2.2.3 Reflection, self-awareness and maturity

There was a strong view that the behavioural changes seen in the Stepping Stones cohort were underpinned by increases in the students’ abilities to reflect on their own behaviour and be conscious about the choices they are making, with many gaining more self-control. This view was held by teachers, Year 10 peer mentors and adult community mentors, as well as the Year 7 Stepping Stones students themselves. Many of those interviewed attributed these changes directly to the Stepping Stones lessons and their content, and to working with the adult community mentors from Gangs Unite, who made space for students to learn about how they feel, how their behaviour affects other people and strategies to use when they are feeling overwhelmed.

“All the children [we worked with] grew in confidence. Angry and disruptive children have learned how to channel their emotions. They know now how to channel it, they know now the things that trigger it, they know now how to control it a little bit more because they understand that some things are unacceptable in the way that you display your anger. They’ve learned how to talk through their feelings. They have something to

prove now and this has helped them to overcome obstacles which were causing the problems in the first place. The programme gives them the chance to make the right choices.” – Community Mentor, Gangs Unite

Teachers noted that those with more challenging behaviour are now not sent out of lessons so much, and can moderate their own behaviour more. Teachers at The Urswick School included a unit on name-calling and positive relationships in the Stepping Stones lessons and noticed a direct correlation between these lessons and improved levels of empathy, self-regulation and genuine apologising when they slipped up, from students in their Stepping Stones cohort.

“This unit [of the stepping Stones lessons] has put a stop towards some of these behaviours and also raised awareness of it as a problem. In their [in school student] evaluations some students have mentioned that it’s made them a better team-worker.”  
– Teacher, The Urswick School

The Stepping Stones students themselves also reflected on the way elements of the Stepping Stones programme improved how they relate to their peers and respond to challenging situations, for example:

“I learnt how to control my anger, because I was a very angry person, I got angry very easily especially if someone insulted my family. That hurts me, so I would get angry. My mentor said if I get angry I should go to the toilets and wash my face and that will take out the anger” – Stepping Stones student, Gladesmore Community School

Another student from Gladesmore Community School commented that:

“I learnt about self-esteem and how important it is. About behaviour inside and outside of school. And I also learnt about how to say sorry properly and show that you're not going to do it again”. – Stepping Stones student, Gladesmore Community School

Overall, for those students who entered the Stepping Stones programme with challenging behaviours, there were significant improvements in their behaviour underpinned by increased self-awareness, self-reflection, and maturity.

#### **2.2.4 Improved behaviour: feedback from mentors and parents**

The Year 10 mentors also saw the progress their Year 7 mentees made with behaviour. They felt that the mentoring relationships were key to improvements in both confidence and behaviour, because they gave the Stepping Stones students someone to help them work through problems with. Many of the mentors spoke of specific examples of how their mentee’s behaviour had improved, for example:

“Early in the year my mentee was using music as a way to block people out in class, but now listens to less music because he can behave and listen to teachers because he had someone reliable to come and talk to at the end of the day.” – Year 10 mentor, The Urswick School

Similarly, the parents who completed the survey at the end of the school year indicated that their children’s behaviour had improved from the beginning to the end of the school year (see Figure 18).

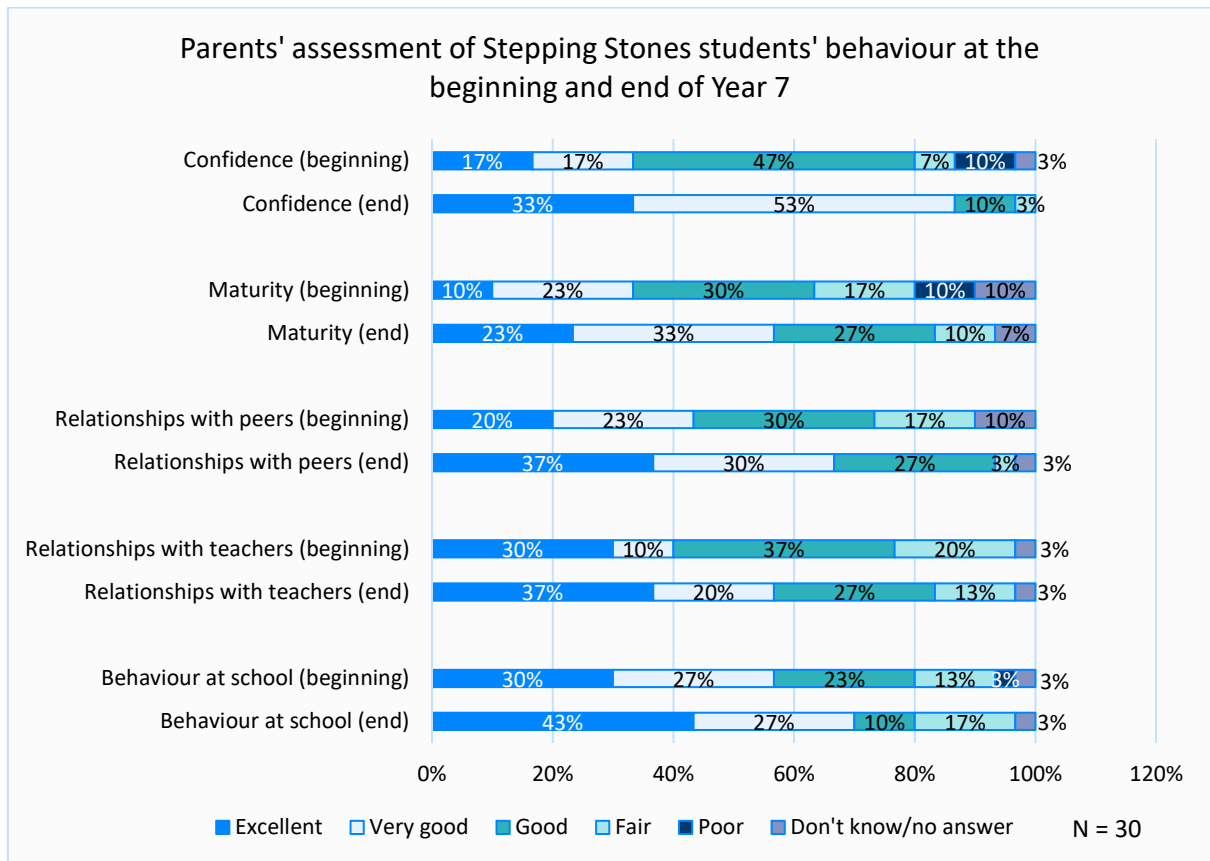


Figure 18: Survey responses from a sample of parents of Stepping Stones students at the end of the school year 2016/17. Note this data comes from Gladesmore Community School and The Urswick School only. Parents survey data from Heathcote School was not available at the end of the school year due to staff challenges in collecting completed questionnaires.

### 2.3 Attendance

The Department for Education considers 95% and higher to be a good attendance rate. If a student has an attendance rate between 90% and 95% schools investigate and determine if there is a good reason behind the low attendance rate. If a good reason is not found, the school is expected to intervene to support the student to improve their attendance at school. If a student has an attendance rate below 90%, the school will refer them to an external agency. These standards are used when presenting the data in this section. The information in this section is drawn from actual attendance results for Stepping Stones students and the attendance results from the historical cohorts; one of the dimensions from the PASS assessment that focuses on attitudes towards attendance; and information from qualitative research with teachers, parents and Stepping Stones students.



**Attendance: Key findings**

- At the end of the school year, two out of the three schools saw a strong improvement in attendance rates among Stepping Stones students compared to the historical cohorts.
- For example, at one school the proportion of those achieving 95% attendance or higher increased from 54% for the historical cohort to 70% for the Stepping Stones students.
- Stepping Stones students feel happier about going to school compared to previous Year 7 groups.
  - The Summer School was particularly effective at easing anxiety about secondary school that could have otherwise led to increased absence.

**2.3.1 Actual attendance results**

Across all three pilot schools, a high proportion of Stepping Stones students have an attendance record of 95% or higher. Significantly, a higher proportion of Stepping Stones students at all three schools had an attendance result of 95% or greater in Term 1 when compared with the historical cohorts (see Table 6).

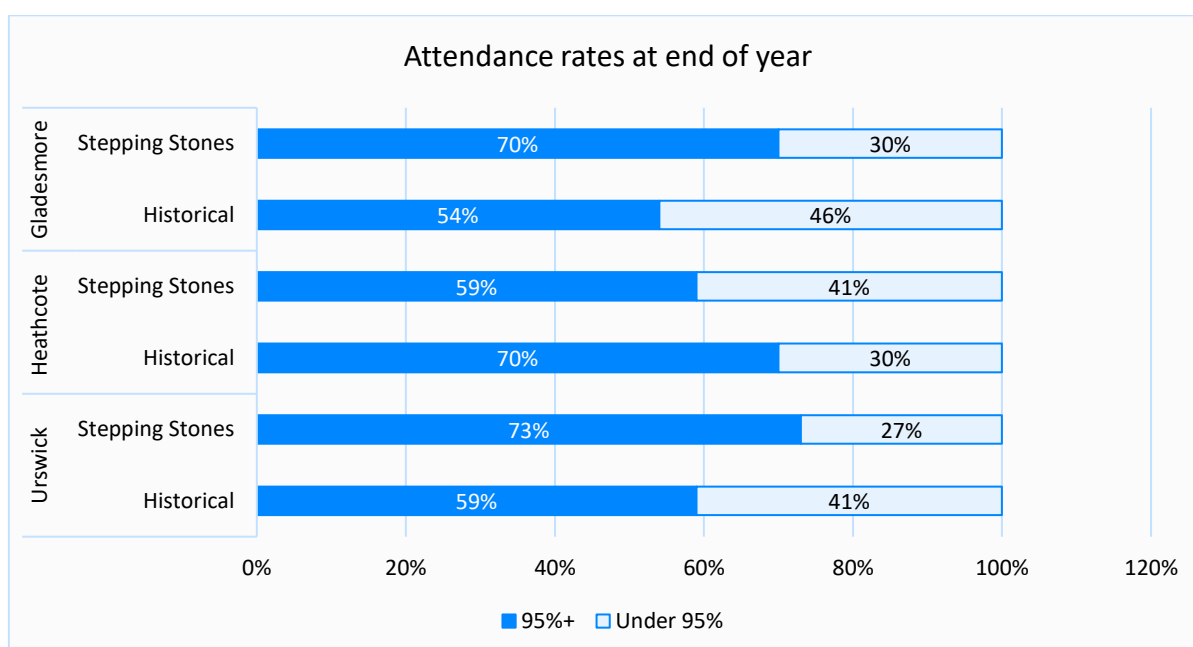
	First term		Whole year	
	<i>Stepping Stones</i>	<i>Historical</i>	<i>Stepping Stones</i>	<i>Historical</i>
<b>Gladesmore Community School</b>				
<b>95% and over</b>	51 (73%)	44 (63%)	46 (70%)	38 (54%)
<b>Under 95%</b>	19 (27%)	26 (37%)	20 (30%)	32 (46%)
<b>Total number of students</b>	70	70	66	70
<b>Heathcote School</b>				
<b>95% and over</b>	54 (74%)	47 (64%)	38 (59%)	48 (70%)
<b>Under 95%</b>	19 (26%)	26 (36%)	26 (41%)	21 (30%)
<b>Total number of students</b>	73	73	64	69

	First term		Whole year	
	<i>Stepping Stones</i>	<i>Historical</i>	<i>Stepping Stones</i>	<i>Historical</i>
<b>The Urswick School</b>				
<b>95% and over</b>	56 (80%)	53 (76%)	51 (73%)	41 (59%)
<b>Under 95%</b>	14 (20%)	17 (24%)	19 (27%)	29 (41%)
<b>Total number of students</b>	70	70	70	70

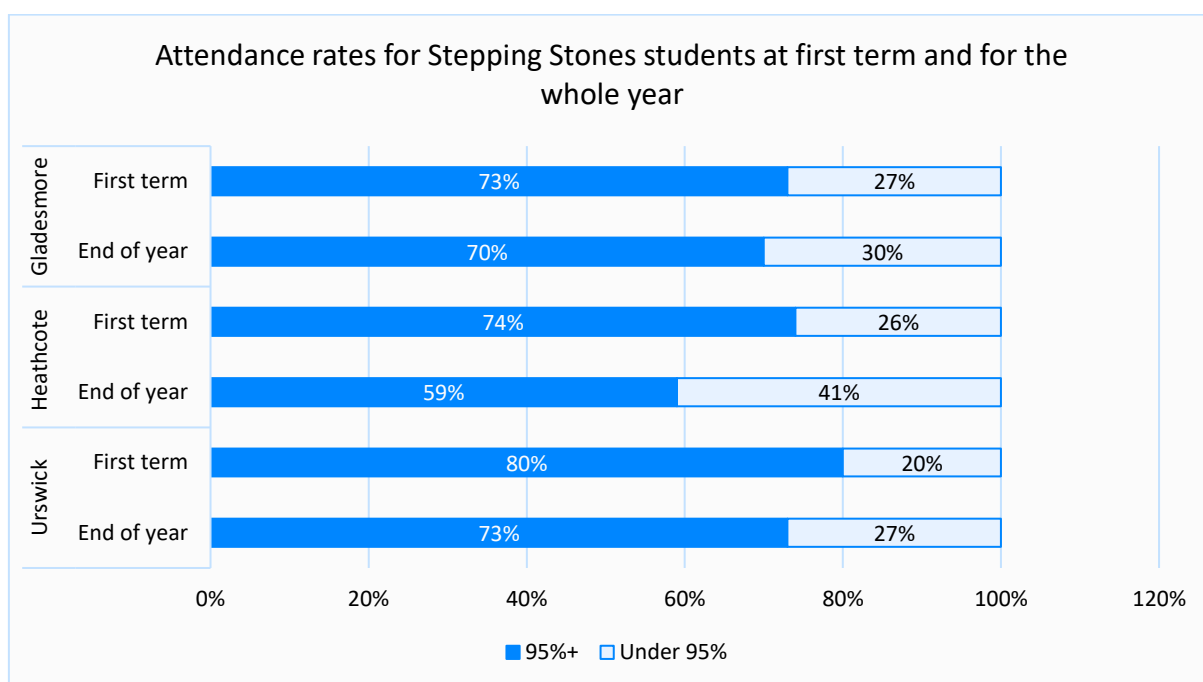
**Table 6: The attendance rates of Stepping Stones students in Term 1 and at the end of the 2016/17 school year.**

This pattern of high attendance continued to the end of the school year at both Gladesmore Community School and The Urswick School (see Figure 19). For the whole school year at Gladesmore Community School, the proportion of those achieving 95% attendance or higher increased from 54% for the historical cohort to 70% for the Stepping Stones students. Similarly, at The Urswick School, the proportion of those achieving 95% attendance or higher increased from 59% for the historical cohort to 73% for the Stepping Stones students.

In contrast, at Heathcote school, attendance for the whole school year was lower for the Stepping Stones students compared to the historical cohort. This may be because the historical cohort attendance rate was higher for the whole year compared to the first term, unlike at the other two schools where both the Stepping Stones cohorts and the historical cohorts had a lower attendance rate for the whole year compared to the first term (see Figure 20).



**Figure 19: Attendance rates at the end of school year 2016/17 for Stepping Stones students and the historical cohorts**



**Figure 20: Attendance rates for Stepping Stones students at both Term 1 and for the whole 2016/17 school year.**

Overall, this data shows that Stepping Stones had a positive impact on attendance in comparison to historical cohorts, and that this was strongly the case at two of the three schools. As previously discussed, the context at Heathcote School in 2016/17 may have affected the progress data for Stepping Stones students in comparison to the historical cohort. Even so, the Stepping Stones students at this school did show improved attendance in the first term when compared to the historical cohort, which suggests that in this regard, they had also made a better transition to secondary school at that stage.

### 2.3.2 Feelings about attendance

Some Stepping Stones students felt anxious and worried about attending secondary school prior to attending. They had concerns about their ability to cope with increased workloads, making friends, and adapting to new rules and expectations. Our qualitative data suggest that these feelings of anxiety can have a negative impact on attendance.

"What you do find is that [students] do end up with more time off unwell - through perhaps stress or anxiety." – Teacher, Heathcote School.

In the focus groups with parents, one mother demonstrated how her son's anxiety led her to keep him out of school. Importantly, she said that Stepping Stones played a key role in changing her son's attitudes toward going to school:

"When he started in September he would be crying, saying 'mummy take me home' and physically vomiting because he was so upset. He was shaking and saying he didn't want to go to school. I let him take a day off after the first few days and the school rang me to ask what the problem was [...] I was so happy that they called me straight away [...] When he started the Stepping Stones programme he just completely changed [...] from how he was when he first came to the school to now, he's just totally different. It was

heart-breaking for me at the start, having to take him to school crying like that, so I'm so happy that he's on the programme." - Parent, Gladesmore Community School.

The Stepping Stones summer school component might be particularly effective for easing concerns and improving attendance for Stepping Stones students from the start of the year. Parents said that Summer School helped their children get an introduction to secondary school and what to expect once school began in September, which addressed some fears.

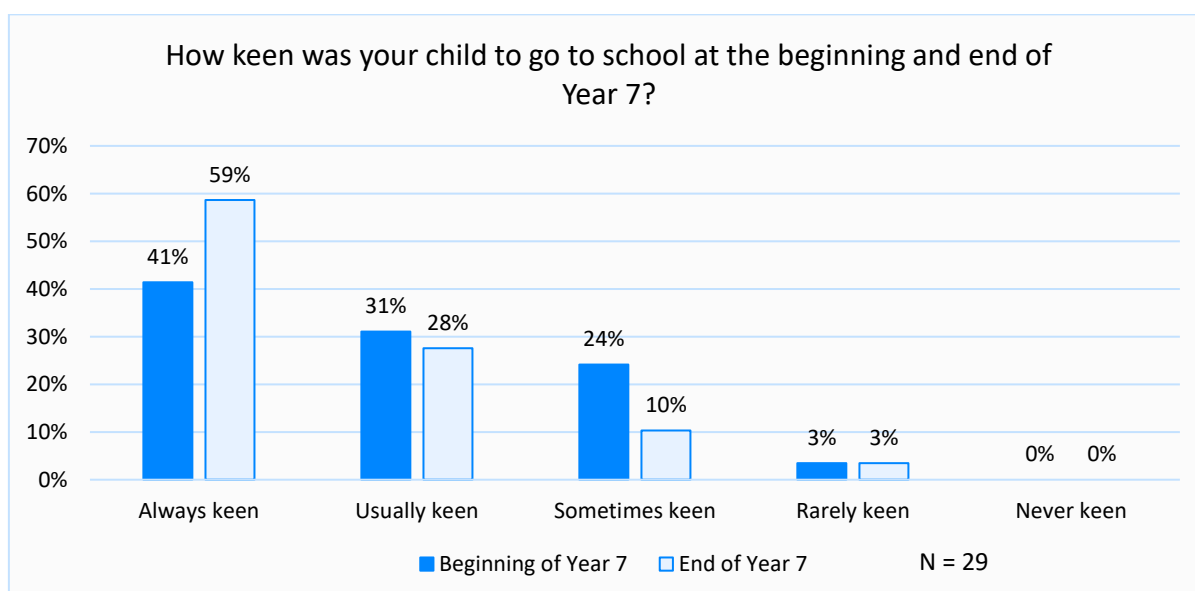
Some teachers (at Gladesmore Community School and The Urswick School) noted that not only were attendance and punctuality higher than they have ever been for Year 7, they have also seen higher attendance at extracurricular clubs. Reflecting on the Stepping Stones cohort in relation to attendance one teacher said:

"Stepping Stones students already seem much more reflective about wanting to be there at secondary school." - Teacher, The Urswick School

Similarly, during focus groups, Stepping Stones students spoke positively about going to school, with some attributing this directly to aspects of the Stepping Stones programme:

"The community mentors have helped me want to go to school and have made me enjoy school" – Stepping Stones student, Heathcote School

One of the questions in the parents' survey asked parents how their children felt about going to school, and how this had changed from the start of the year to the end of the year. On average, there was an upwards trend in how keen they thought their children were to go to school by the end of the school year (see Figure 21). Although this data comes from a small sample of parents, it indicates that some Stepping Stones students felt more positive about going to school as the year progressed, suggesting that they had made a successful transition to secondary school and had settled in well to the new school environment.



**Figure 21: Survey responses from a sample of parents of Stepping Stones students at the end of the school year 2016/17. Note this data comes from Gladesmore Community School and The Urswick School only. Parents survey data from Heathcote School was not available at the end of the school year due to staff challenges in collecting completed questionnaires.**

## 2.4 Summary of impact on Stepping Stones students

Positive impacts were observed for Stepping Stones students in attainment, behaviour and attendance from the first term through to the end of their Year 7 school year.

Overall, attainment for Stepping Stones students is high when compared to the historical cohorts, although there is some variation between schools. This higher attainment can be attributed to multiple, complementary layers of support through elements of the Stepping Stones programme and other aspects of school support. This includes the role of peer mentors in encouraging and helping Stepping Stones students to do well in their school work and meeting individual learning needs in tailored ways.

With respect to behaviour, there have been improvements for two distinct groups of Stepping Stones students. Students who started Year 7 being shy or withdrawn grew in confidence, with the Summer School and peer mentoring aspects of the programme being particularly helpful for supporting this change. Those with behavioural issues gained maturity and the ability to better control their emotions and behaviour, with Stepping Stones lessons and the peer mentoring being particularly effective in enabling this shift.

Overall rates of attendance are good for Stepping Stones students, and for two of the three schools they are significantly improved in comparison to the historical cohort's rates of attendance. This shift is supported by qualitative insights indicating that Stepping Stones pupils feel more positive about coming to school, particularly those who felt anxious at the start of the school year.



### 3. Impact on peer mentors

While the Stepping Stones programme aims to ease the transition from primary to secondary school for Year 7 students, the evaluation also uncovered how the programme impacts on the Year 10 peer mentors. Overall, the impact on peer mentors is more significant than was expected during the design phase of the programme.

Year 10 students were invited to apply to be peer mentors and were selected based on their ability to be positive yet relatable role models for Year 7 students. For example, they were not selected on the basis of their academic achievement, but rather on their experience of having overcome their own challenges in attainment, behaviour, confidence, or attendance. Around 30 peer mentors were selected per school and they were provided with training from Gangs Unite at the end of the 2015/16 academic year, with follow-up training as needed. The training included the following:

- Session 1: Identifying the issues associated with transition and learning what makes a good peer mentor
- Session 2: Active Listening, Peer Mentor Roleplay and Safeguarding
- Session 3: Evaluation of the programme so far and next steps
- In addition, where relevant, peer mentors were given advice on how to work with students with special educational needs (SEN) such as speech & language issues or autism, for example.

From our qualitative research (focus groups with peer mentors; interviews with teachers; and interviews with adult community mentors from Gangs Unite), positive changes for peer mentors were reported in two key areas: 1) skills and behaviour, and 2) future aspirations.

#### 3.1 Skills and behaviour

During our end-of-year focus groups with peer mentors, most discussed how they developed new skills whilst in the role. Even in instances where peer mentors felt the programme could be improved (e.g. having more time with their mentee and more training to manage difficult conversations), they reported experiencing several positive impacts from participating in the programme. Insights from teachers and adult community mentors also support these reflections from peer mentors.

Prevalent themes were: 1) leadership and maturity; 2) listening skills and empathy; 3) communication and confidence.



### 3.1.1 Leadership and maturity

The peer mentors we spoke to recognised the value in developing and demonstrating maturity and leadership in order to be successful and supportive in the mentor role. Having adapted to secondary school themselves, mentors realised they had a role in helping their mentees do the same:

“I’m proud that I helped someone settle into their new school and into a bigger place with more students. And making sure that she is confident around the whole school, and letting her know there is someone she can talk to” – Peer mentor, Gladesmore Community School.

“I have changed my behaviour positively because that is what you have to do when you are influencing a young person’s life. You have to show them the right way” – Peer mentor, Heathcote School.

“I’m proud of my mentee because I know it’s not easy to open up to someone that’s much older than you, especially being in Year 7 and us being in Year 10... I’m proud of myself for being able to open up and adapt myself to whatever type of person [I had for a mentee]” – Peer mentor, The Urswick School.

Many mentors realised that to support their mentees effectively, they needed to be good role models. This included taking responsibility for attending mentoring sessions consistently and on time as well as overcoming their own personal challenges to help mentees. Mentors recognised that by doing so, it set a good example for Year 7 mentees who might benefit from these behaviours being modelled by an older student. For example:

“I learnt to be more responsible, because you have to turn up on time. Being there is what builds the trust, so the more often you are there, the closer you will get to them” – Peer mentor, Gladesmore Community School.

Another peer mentor explained how confronting the difficulties their own mental health condition caused them at school allowed them to better understand their mentees’ struggles to transition to secondary school whilst coping with a mental health condition:

“I struggle with school because I am diagnosed with psychosis; but the responsibility of being a mentor and helping other people with issues is a huge benefit for both me and the children. I feel I am able to relate to the kids who have struggled like me” – Year 10 Mentor, Heathcote School.

Teachers agreed; for example, some observed peer mentors developing an ability to reflect and improve on their behaviour, an indicator that mentors’ leadership and maturity had developed through the Stepping Stones programme:

“The biggest impact for [peer mentors] has been reflection: the ability to reflect and look back at themselves and the mistakes they are making... [It helps them] take responsibility and mature as a person” Teacher, Heathcote School.

“I made a phone call home to a mentor, and his mum immediately sighed, expecting to hear something bad about him. A colleague commented ‘I bet that’s the first time that

she’s ever had a phone call from school that hasn’t been about something negative” –  
Teacher, Gladesmore Community School.

“[The peer mentor role has] raised the responsibility ethos within the year group” –  
Teacher, Gladesmore Community School.

Peer mentors recognised that to help Year 7s transition into secondary school, they needed to model leadership and maturity. By developing these skills, peer mentors were better equipped to provide advice and show Year 7s the way through a new and sometimes daunting experience.

### 3.1.2 Listening skills and empathy

Peer mentors also reported that they gained listening skills and empathy through the role. Most mentors saw that learning to understand their mentees’ aspirations and concerns about school and relationships was a key responsibility in helping Year 7s transition to secondary school and one which they grew an aptitude for over the year:

“[I developed] listening skills. I was able to listen to my mentee’s worries and reassure them” – Peer mentor, Gladesmore Community School.

By learning to listen well, many mentors developed empathy towards the challenges Year 7s faced, and were able to put themselves back into the shoes of a Year 7 student. This enhanced mentors’ ability to recall what it had been like to navigate a new school, peers and teachers, and expectations and support Year 7s to do the same. By drawing on their shared experiences and understanding their mentees better, mentors fostered relationships of trust which allowed Year 7s to open up to their mentors and feel more safe and comfortable in their new school environment:

“The fact that I made someone comfortable enough to tell me things about their personal life - I gained their trust” – Peer mentor, Gladesmore Community School.

“I learned that even though you’re different, you can still always relate. I lost my dad when I was seven, and my mentee’s dad has never been around. I think that made us connect more, and it made us understand that no matter what you’re going through someone is always going to be there to understand what you’ve been through” – Peer mentor, The Urswick School.

Several peer mentors also reported learning to listen and empathise with mentees who they did not share experiences with. For example, at The Urswick School, one mentor said that before joining the Stepping Stones programme she found Year 7s annoying; however, by developing empathy as a mentor, she reported being better able to understand why they had perceived Year 7s could be ‘too quiet’ or ‘too loud’. Another peer mentor said the role made her be more considerate when younger students behaved in a way she would have before found frustrating. This enhanced understanding of younger students may be particularly helpful to foster a supportive school community and to reduce the likelihood of bullying taking place.

During the design phase of the programme, we also underestimated how the mentoring aspect of Stepping Stones might support better understanding between mentors and their teachers. This was a change that some peer mentors recognised in themselves:

“I think I respect teachers a lot more - sometimes you think it's easy what they do, but it's really not. We only have one or two students, but they have to deal with a whole classroom, and I can't imagine that” – Peer mentor, Gladesmore Community School.

Other programme stakeholders agreed. For example, one adult community mentor reported that improved relationships between students and teachers created a more supportive school environment:

“Year 10s have been flipped into a new role; a new understanding of the challenges the teaching staff face, and that has a knock-on effect on other students” – Community mentor

By developing listening skills and empathy, peer mentors were able to better understand their mentees to support them in transitioning to secondary school. It also allowed many mentors to appreciate the challenges their teachers encounter, causing mentors to improve their own behaviour at school and encourage Year 7s to be aware of their behaviour with teachers, too.

In many cases, these skills meant peer mentors could create special bonds with their mentees and teachers, thereby helping to build a supportive school community for Year 7s to transition into.

### 3.1.3 Communication skills and confidence

Peer mentors also reported that they developed new communication skills. This included being better able to socialise with others and communicate with teachers when problems arose:

“I think it developed my social skills because I'm normally used to speaking to people around my age or adults.” – Peer mentor, The Urswick School.

“I'm proud of building a relationship with someone I never would have done otherwise. I never would have thought to approach a Year 7 before, so to know that I can do that makes me proud” – Peer mentor, Gladesmore Community School.

“Having the confidence to talk to the Year 7s about their behaviour and telling them off was a bit of a challenge as I didn't want to seem imposing or distance myself from them...instead [I wanted to] create a platform for transparency” – Peer mentor, Heathcote School.

Other stakeholders also reported positive changes in peer mentors' communication skills and confidence.

“[To] see how confidently and how openly [they spoke about themselves to one another amongst peer mentors]” – Community Mentor.

“Some have really struggled with participation, but then when you put them in a room [with Year 7s], their skills of empathy and communication are very impressive and then watching them grow with encouragement is great” – Teacher, The Urswick School.

Through the role, peer mentors learned to understand how to tailor messages for different audiences and feel comfortable speaking to individuals who they would not normally have spoken to, including younger students and teachers across the school community. For many peer mentors, this improved their breadth of communication skills and bolstered their confidence.

## 3.2 Future aspirations

According to teachers and community mentors in all three schools, most peer mentors showed an interest in having another leadership role in the school after the Stepping Stones programme finished. Because the peer mentor role fostered a deep sense of responsibility and pride in their school, many have sought new leadership roles for Year 11 such as becoming school prefects:

“Almost all of them have applied to be and have been accepted as prefects, so they’re wanting to continue with that role of responsibility” – Community Mentor.

“Lots of Year 10s are now vying to be prefects, and ultimately Head Boy and Head Girl” – Teacher, Gladesmore Community School.

Not only has it inspired Year 10s to take up future leadership roles, but at least one teacher is hopeful that by admiring their mentors, several Year 7 Stepping Stones students may also consider becoming a prefect having seen their role models do the same:

“I’d guarantee a greater number of [these] year 7s will apply for prefect roles than ever before. Because they’ve enjoyed that idea of having someone to look up to and have someone to aspire to as a role model” – Teacher, Heathcote School.

Peer mentors and others also reported that the mentor role encouraged Year 10s to more carefully consider and feel hopeful about their future beyond secondary school. For example, one student explained how Stepping Stones helped him feel he is capable of anything he puts his mind to:

“I suffer from depression and anxiety but coming in and seeing the positive impact I was making [as a peer mentor] really made a difference; Stepping Stones [...] changed my view of certain career paths and encouraged me to keep chasing my dreams” – Year 10 Mentor, Heathcote School.

Other stakeholders also reported how the role will help former peer mentors build a strong CV for college applications or other future roles:

“Some [peer mentors] are now planning their applications to colleges, and [the mentor role] looks very promising in CVs and on personal statements – Teacher, Gladesmore Community School.

## 3.3 Summary of impact on mentors

The peer mentoring component of the Stepping Stones programme not only had a positive impact on Year 7 Stepping Stones students, but also many of the peer mentors. Overall, peer mentors experienced skills development, a sense of greater commitment to their school and confidence in their future aspirations.

In some cases, the impact of the Stepping Stones peer mentoring role has encouraged teachers to see the value of mentoring from older students in other aspects of the school community. As a result, mentoring programmes are being considered in different ways in all three schools, where teachers have recognised a need for extra support for other younger students or at-risk students (such as students with special education needs).

## 4. Impact on other stakeholders

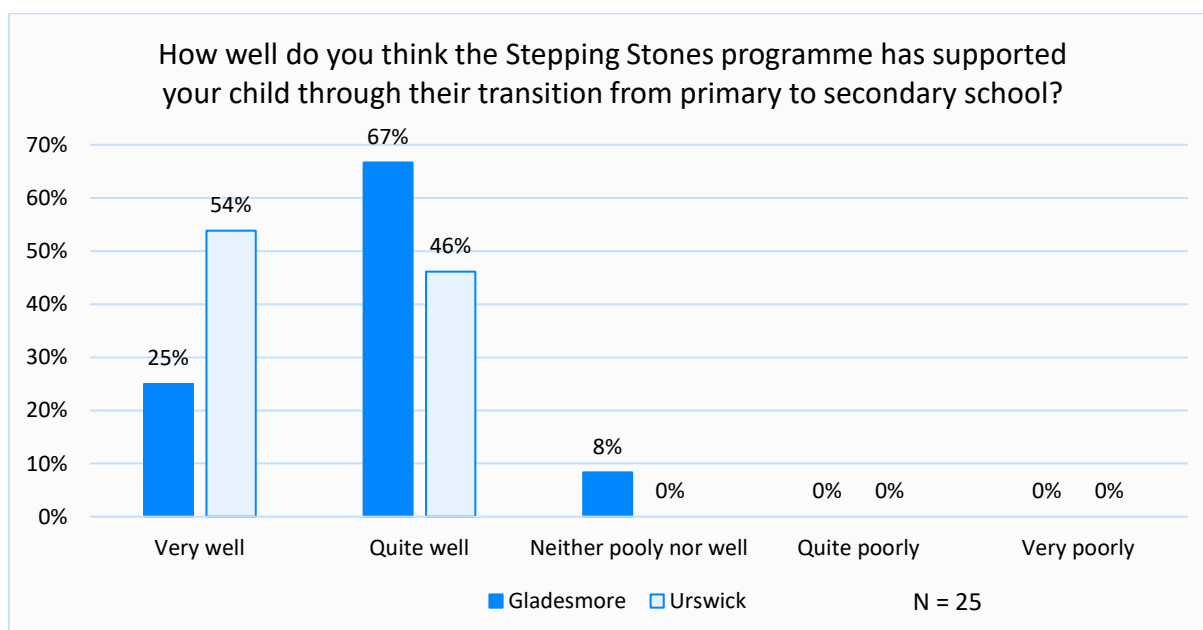
In addition to the impacts on Stepping Stones students and mentors, the evaluation has also shown some impacts on parents, teachers, and on the school community as a whole.

### 4.1 Parents

Our focus groups and survey data found that Stepping Stones made a difference to parents by decreasing their own anxieties about how their children are coping with the transition and in secondary school. They also felt they developed a better understanding of their child, and improved communication with the school over the course of the year. In addition, the Stepping Stones programme also lightened the load of academic and social support that they needed to provide for their children, particularly in comparison to the experience of primary school.

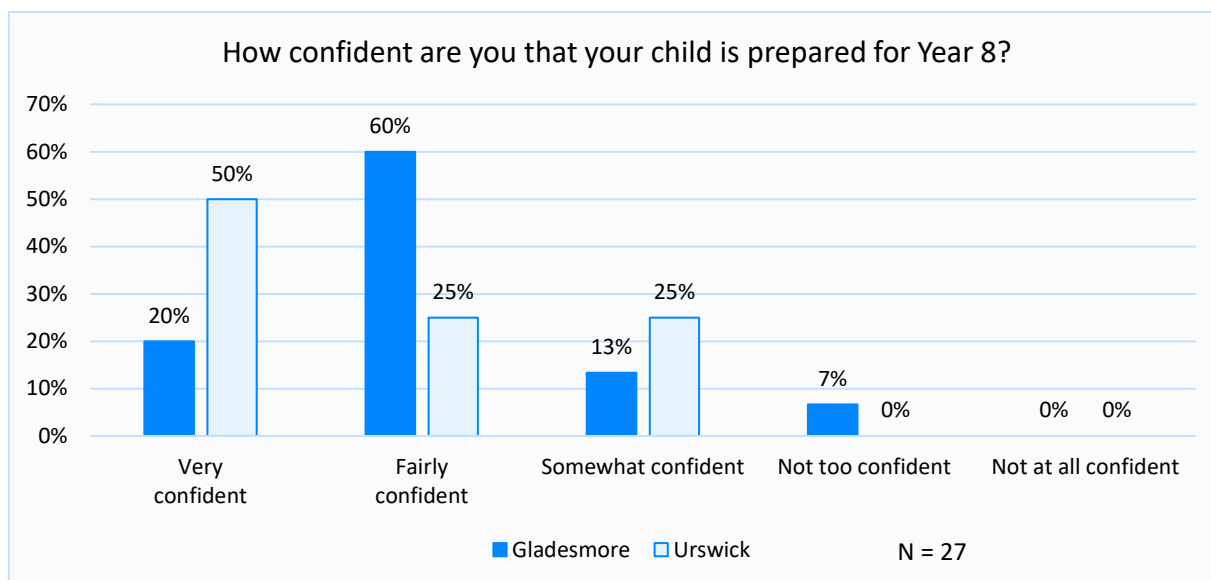
However, it is not always clear how, if at all, these changes can be attributed to Stepping Stones in isolation. This is because in many instances, parents made general statements about processes that could already be in place (e.g. communication about homework through a student's planner; or initiating conversations with their child about how school is going), rather than aspects of the Stepping Stones programme specifically. In some cases, parents said that Stepping Stones teachers could have better supported them in understanding what the programme aimed to do and how.

Responses to the parents' survey indicated that parents think that, overall, the Stepping Stones programme has supported their children well through their transition from primary to secondary school (Figure 22).



**Figure 22: Survey responses from a sample of parents of Stepping Stones students at the end of the school year 2016/17. Note this data comes from Gladesmore Community School and The Urswick School only. Parents survey data from Heathcote School was not available at the end of the school year.**

Similarly, most parents felt confident that at the end of Year 7, their children were prepared for Year 8 (Figure 23).



**Figure 23: Survey responses from a sample of parents of Stepping Stones students at the end of the school year 2016/17. Note this data comes from Gladesmore Community School and The Urswick School only. Parents survey data from Heathcote School was not available at the end of the school year.**

In focus groups, when parents referred to the Stepping Stones programme, it was also in general positive terms:

“Stepping Stones helped him a lot. Without this I think my son's Year 7 would have been different” – Parent, Gladesmore Community School

“The transition between primary and secondary can be quite a traumatic and harrowing experience. She has eased into the secondary school life a lot easier with the help and support” – Parent, Gladesmore Community School

Parents also often said they felt less anxious about how their children are coping because of the additional support their children receive from the Stepping Stones programme and from the schools in general.

“My daughter was scared for weeks after she moved from primary school to her new school. Some days she can get herself in a state, but she knows there is a place in the school where she can go and feel safe. Stepping Stones has made it a lot easier for her and I hope they will continue to provide the support for her.” – Parent, The Urswick School

Several parents said they felt they knew their child better and how to better support them in their school work and transition to secondary school, compared to their experience of supporting their child in primary school. They were reassured by being better able to keep up to date about their child's progress:

“I have spent time with teachers and now know how to support my child” – Parent, The Urswick School.

One teacher noted that the peer mentoring aspect of the programme alleviated the pressure on parents to help with homework, especially if they struggled to provide that support themselves. This is because the peer mentors often helped their mentees with homework tasks. They also thought that peer mentors helped parents feel less anxious about their child's progress at secondary school:

“With the peer mentors, I think [parents] like the positive role models, and again, just having more children for their children to see as doing good things and recognising that it's not so far away or distant with them” – Teacher, The Urswick School.

Overall, while some parents felt unclear about what aspects of their children's support was from the Stepping Stones programme, they felt that the support their children had received in Year 7 had eased their anxiety about how their children would cope with the transition, and most felt positive about their experience and the progress their children had made throughout the year.

## 4.2 Teachers

The most significant impacts of the Stepping Stones programme were on the Year 7 students it intended to support, and the peer mentors who coached their younger schoolmates through the transition to a new environment. While some teachers reported that the programme did not have any impact on them as individuals, others reflected on several things that changed for them and their colleagues. Their comments focused on the following two areas: 1) working more collaboratively to provide tailored, pastoral support to Year 7 Stepping Stones students; and 2) opportunities to work with new people (across different schools and with external organisations) and in different ways (with students and teachers alike). Further impacts on teachers relating to the delivery of the programme are explored in Chapter 5.

### 4.2.1 Collaborative & tailored pastoral support

Across all three schools, the Stepping Stones programme encouraged greater collaboration amongst teachers both between and within the schools because they were more aware of the issues that Year 7 students – and others – encountered at school, home and on the playground:

“[There is] more cross-school, cross-year cooperation between teachers, sharing information and working together to solve problems. Year 10 mentors help facilitate this by raising issues to teachers that they feel year 7s are encountering” – Teacher, Heathcote School.

Increased understanding of students and collaboration with colleagues meant some teachers engaged in more of a pastoral role than before, for example:

“It's taken me down a greater pastoral route; I've become more involved with wider issues of the students than just mentoring; it has led me to work with these students in a wider scope because they see me as a point of contact” – Teacher, Heathcote School.

Having better awareness of each student's individual circumstances allowed some teachers to tailor pastoral support, further easing Stepping Stones' students transition to secondary school:



“Stepping Stones can be a bit of something personalised very much to student needs. We didn’t have much of that happening at a systemic level before” – Teacher, Gladesmore Community School.

Some teachers began to better share information and teaching techniques between them that supported students with special needs. For example, at Heathcote School, Stepping Stones lessons helped a Teacher for the Deaf work more effectively with regular curriculum teachers to improve their inclusive teaching skills for deaf students.

At least one Community Mentor reported that a more collaborative way of working in schools was supporting a positive culture shift where the community was more considerate of each other:

“I think that the culture of the schools did definitely change; you want to have a culture where you’re looking out for each other, you encourage each other” – Community Mentor.

Overall, improved communication and working relationships amongst teachers helped them tailor support for students, including those with special needs, and provide a more inclusive and caring school community.

#### 4.2.2 Working with different people and in different ways

Being involved in delivering the Stepping Stones programme also had the following impacts on teachers:

- An opportunity to work with other schools to share learning, build relationships and find a balance between consistency and flexibility in delivering the programme in different school contexts;
- An opportunity to work with Gangs Unite, an external agency with new perspectives and a different way of working with young people compared to the traditional education environment, and;
- The satisfaction and enjoyment of interacting with students in a more informal and fun way and witnessing the progress the Stepping Stones students and mentors are making as the programme progressed:

“As a teacher, one of the nicest things is that you get to interact with a whole group of students on a really lovely level, you get to talk to them about their weekends, their holidays, their interests. It’s a really positive way to be interacting with a large cohort of students. It feels really nice to start your week this way. It’s a really positive leadership role to have.” - Teacher, Gladesmore Community School

Several other impacts for teachers relate to the running of the programme: the satisfaction of delivering an effective transition experience and the challenges involved in doing so in this pilot year. These success factors and challenges are discussed in the following chapter.

### 4.3 The school community

In the words of a Gangs Unite Community Mentor, “it’s not just the Stepping Stones children that have been affected” by the Stepping Stones programme. Interviews and focus groups with teachers, students and mentors for the evaluation found that the adoption of the Stepping Stones programme had effects that went further than the Year 7 participants and Year 10 mentors.

One of these broader impacts includes a calmer Year 7 cohort that faces less classroom disruption from unsettled students, because the Stepping Stones lessons:

“... take the most difficult kids who represent the biggest challenges, and they give them strategies to move forward. Without the Stepping Stones lessons, the damage done by three or four in every class who aren’t managed and can’t self-regulate, outweighs the benefits of the scheme entirely.” – Teacher, The Urswick School

All three pilot schools also reported that the aspiration levels of students now entering Year 10 and Year 11 have been raised by their exposure to the Stepping Stones programme, whether or not they themselves were peer mentors for the programme. Teachers report that many Year 10 students have stepped up to demonstrate their capacity for responsibility, either through mentoring or applying to be a mentor, and that this in turn has had a knock-on effect and is inspiring students in Year 9 as they prepare to enter Year 10. The Urswick School received twice the number of Year 10 mentor applications as was necessary for the 2017/18 school year.

One teacher noted that the Stepping Stones mentoring plays a role in enriching the community of the school by empowering students with the ability of self-reflection and self-rationalising, increasing their ability for positive social interaction and community spirit. In alignment with this, schools have also witnessed an improvement in the way that peer mentors interact, not only with their mentee or other Stepping Stones students, but also with all younger students.

Teachers from Gladesmore Community School also commented that the Stepping Stones programme complemented the community ethos of their school and helped to strengthen it further as Stepping Stones students and mentors ‘bring others along’:

“Beyond the initial 70 students who were involved, probably now 120 have benefitted in some way from the growing community. The breadth and the reach of this has been much bigger than the seventy that we were looking at initially” – Teacher, Gladesmore Community School

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## 5. Learning points

Schools were very open to learning throughout the set up and implementation of the pilot, with a view to continually improving the programme and sharing their learning with other schools. This chapter summarises:

- 1) the success factors and challenges relating to overall programme coordination, and;
- 2) learning points relating to the specific elements of the Stepping Stones programme.

### 5.1 Overall programme coordination

#### 5.1.1 Success factors

##### *Importance of a senior role leading coordination*

Teachers agreed that an important success factor for the Stepping Stones programme is having a senior member of staff in a coordinating role, with a specific remit, responsibility, capacity, and decision-making ability to implement the programme. Having visible buy-in from the head teacher has also been important as part of this.

It has also been important for the person in this senior coordinating role to develop collaborative working relationships with other teaching staff, gaining buy-in and support for the programme and assistance with delivery so that the programme is fully embedded in the Year 7 curriculum and ways of working.

##### *Flexibility to adapt*

The Stepping Stones programme provides a range of activities and initiatives that can be implemented in different ways. For example, schools might decide to implement some elements for the whole Stepping Stones cohort, some to smaller targeted groups within the cohort, and others to the whole Year 7 group. All three schools have found it valuable to maintain flexibility in the way the programme is delivered. This has enabled them to respond to the specific contexts and challenges in their own school environments, implementing all elements of the programme in a way that best meets the needs of their students.

#### 5.1.2 Challenges

##### *Staff time required in setting up the programme*

Across all three schools, the programme leaders and other teachers noted that setting up and implementing Stepping Stones took more time than anticipated in the pilot year, although the time required is expected to decrease in subsequent years. No-one felt that the resource required meant the programme was unsustainable, but it is important to recognise the time investment needed to deliver the programme, which was estimated to be around two days per week on average at each school. This time commitment was usually spread across several roles, and was greater at the start of the school year and prior to events such as aspiration days, and lower towards the end of the school

year. It is worth noting, however, this was the pilot year which included a significant amount of time for setting up the programme and designing materials and resources therefore it is not expected that delivering the programme will take up as much time in future years. The schools have learnt from this first pilot year and have already been implementing their learning for the new school year, as well as being able to re-use many of the materials they designed rather than developing them from scratch.

**Sharing learning for the future:** By providing the learning about programme coordination and specific elements of the programme, as well as resources and materials as part of our final toolkit, our aim is that other schools will have an easier time setting up the programme in their own contexts.

## 5.2 Specific elements of the programme

The following section summarises the successes, challenges, and learning points from the different elements of the Stepping Stones programme.

### 5.2.1 Liaison with primary schools and parents

#### Key benefits of increased liaison with primary schools and parents:

- Gathering more detailed information about the needs of individual students
- Informing decisions about who would benefit from additional support in Year 7
- Building awareness of Stepping Stones among primary school teachers and parents

At the end of the pilot year of Stepping Stones, schools feel they are now much better equipped to identify students who would most benefit from the programme in the next year. However, this was challenging at the start of the pilot year.

Challenges around selecting the cohort included:

- Having insufficient information from primary schools;
- Difficulties identifying those with problems relating to confidence, self-esteem and bullying (in comparison to challenging behaviour which is flagged immediately by primary schools);
- Having a large number of students who could meet the criteria and associated challenges with refining the cohort;
- Needing to identify the cohort so early in the process (driven in part by the evaluation requirements) rather than waiting to identify some students at the start of term after getting to know them better.

Schools found several ways of addressing these challenges, centred around using a variety of information sources including primary school teachers, students, and parents; and making observations during the Summer School and the first few weeks of term.

**Sharing learning for the future:** Suggestions for ensuring a smooth process of identifying the appropriate cohort include:

- Identify an initial cohort in the summer, but leave space to add another set of students early in the first term;
- Have a bank of follow-up questions to ask primary schools in addition to the standard information they receive about the incoming students.
- Ensure conversations with parents take place in order to provide a fuller profile of the students.

Taking these approaches meant that schools were then better able to support the Stepping Stones students with specific issues because they had more contextual knowledge about their primary school experience. This has helped them to tailor the support and understand the children's experiences in depth.

When discussing Stepping Stones with parents, schools expressed some concerns about what the image of the programme might be, for example whether it would be seen as a negative sign among parents if their child was invited to be part of the programme. As a result, they were purposeful in their messaging about the programme, engaging with parents early in the process – framing it in a positive way and highlighting its supportive nature. This paid off, as reflected in the positive way the students and parents we spoke to referred to the programme, and the fact that several additional students requested to join the programme later in the first term.

However, some parents felt they would like more information about the Stepping Stones programme, as many did not feel that they understood what all the different elements were. Some expressed concerns about their children no longer receiving the additional support when they move into Year 8. Schools may therefore want to consider how they communicate to parents about what support is available in this next transition for their children.

**Sharing learning for the future:** Purposeful positive messaging and providing more information to parents about the programme can encourage them to be supportive of their children taking part and reassure them of what support will be in place when Year 7 comes to an end.

## 5.2.2 Summer school

### Key benefits of summer school:

- Students gain familiarity with school layout; teachers; and fellow Year 7 students before term begins.
- Students develop friendships and confidence.
- Especially important for those who feel anxious about starting secondary school or who lack confidence and self-esteem.
- Teachers get to know incoming students and identify any further individuals who may benefit from additional support.

The Summer School played two roles in the Stepping Stones programme – it was an opportunity to provide specific support to the cohort of students identified for the programme in advance of the school term, as well as a chance to observe and identify other students who might benefit from the programme.

“Through that time [at Summer School], they would have lessons and free time – we could see if they were making friends, and where the issues lie. It set the tone for the rest of the year...I think it was quite successful.” – Teacher, Heathcote

The main benefit of the Summer School for new Year 7 students is to give them a chance to meet each other and their teachers, and get accustomed to the school environment, so that when the first term started the students already recognise people around them and are familiar with the school layout. The Summer School is especially effective for students who are joining the school with very few friends from their primary school.

Although the Summer School has a positive impact on students’ experience of the transition to secondary school, because it is an optional activity it can set up a divide between those who attend and those who do not. To help bridge this gap, at one school, all students who do not attend the Summer School will now be considered for enrolment on the Stepping Stones programme.

“Some students get a head start on knowledge of the building and familiarity with school, and I would say that the students who don’t come to summer school kind of carry that for quite a while actually.” – Teacher, Gladesmore

**Sharing learning for the future:** Students who are unable to attend Summer School may need additional support at the beginning of Year 7 to settle into the school environment. This can be addressed through one-to-one peer mentoring, for example.

### 5.2.3 Stepping Stones lessons

**Key benefits of Stepping Stones lessons:**

- Establish norms of positive behaviour among the incoming Year 7 students.
- Address behavioural issues throughout the school year in a targeted and relevant way.
- Especially effective for those displaying low-level but disruptive behavioural issues.
- Students develop tools and strategies for managing their own emotions and behaviour.

To deliver the Stepping Stones lessons, schools all used the same lesson plans but implemented and adapted the lessons in different ways to best meet the needs of their students. Although the initial idea was that Stepping Stones lessons would be delivered in a targeted way to a small proportion of the Stepping Stones students, some schools found that a larger number of students would benefit from the lessons and have therefore expanded this aspect of the programme.

Stepping Stones lessons are thought to be especially effective for students with challenging behaviour, as the lessons specifically address these issues by exploring strategies to help them manage their emotions and behaviour.

*“The lessons look at strategies for managing themselves, so the early unit is around ‘stop, think, do’ and it takes them really slowly through identifying their own triggers, what they should do, and analysing the consequences of behaviour. It’s very formulaic and procedural, but is essential understanding that can be revisited later.” – Teacher, Gladesmore*

The lessons work well because they are designed to be interactive including role play and scenarios, and because they enable behavioural issues to be addressed repeatedly throughout the year in different ways, reinforcing the expectations about norms of behaviour at school.

Teachers have also found it helpful to have a variety of scenarios to use, depending on which students they have in the lesson. This ensures that the scenarios they use are realistic and relevant but not too ‘close to the bone’ in terms of difficult experiences the Stepping Stones students might have faced.

**Sharing learning for the future:** Using the Stepping Stones lessons resources flexibly can enable schools to adapt the lessons to the needs of their students.

Schools can choose how to target these lessons, for example, by delivering them to all Stepping Stones students, or to specific groups.

## 5.2.4 Peer mentoring

### Key benefits of Peer mentoring:

- Students lacking confidence and self-esteem (or with experience of being bullied) gain guidance, advice and friendship networks.
- Students with behavioural issues gain positive but relatable role models.
- Students struggling with homework gain support and guidance from an older peer (especially important where such support is not available from parents or older siblings).
- Mentors develop in maturity and responsibility, often leading them to become prefects in the following year.
- Teachers can give more responsibility to the peer mentors where appropriate, building a wider school community culture of responsibility.

The peer mentoring between Year 10 mentors and Stepping Stones students proved to be a very effective and popular element of the programme. The peer to peer nature of the relationship strengthens the messages of the teachers and the school, by being delivered by students the Year 7s look up to, relate to, respect, and can have fun with. Parents also reflected that this was a unique aspect of the Stepping Stones programme in comparison to other interventions their children might be receiving.

Schools have learnt a lot about coordinating the peer mentoring element of the programme through trying different models and approaches. The Urswick School chose to delay matching individual mentors and mentees until a few weeks into the first term. This allowed for some time to observe interactions and avoided so much rearranging of the mentor pairs.

*“Matches that are working the best are those where the pairs developed a personal connection straight way.” - Teacher, The Urswick School*

Gladesmore have also found that a flexible approach to the mentoring relationships works well – in some cases the one to one relationships work very effectively, but they also have some mentors and mentees working together in more of a group setting. They have also found that mentors are taking responsibility for finding ways to make the relationships work most effectively, before any problems arise:

*“The benefit of having a flexible approach is that if a relationship isn’t working, the students have tended to just shuffle things themselves. So the matching has been adjusted ad hoc before issues have come up.” - Teacher, Gladesmore Community School*

Similarly, Heathcote School found it to be important that the peer mentoring is flexible enough for mentors and mentees to evolve and develop together.



**Sharing learning for the future:** Schools were sometimes surprised at the individuals who made the most effective mentors, and found that the right match between mentee and mentor was more important than the skills and experience of the mentor per se. As a result, it is helpful to have a mix of different qualities and experiences in the appointed mentors, including:

- Those with clear leadership qualities
- Those who have made significant progress in addressing their own behavioural problems
- Those who are quieter or more reserved
- A mix of levels of academic achievement
- A mix of hobbies and extracurricular interests
- Mentors with special educational needs or disabilities (who can relate to Year 7 students with similar experiences)

**Sharing learning for the future:** In future years, schools have several ideas for how to adapt or expand the peer mentoring programme including:

- Group mentoring, for example having a small group of mentors working with several Year 7 students, to help find the best fit for peer mentoring relationships more gradually, and to provide more flexible support in case an individual's mentor does not attend a session.
- In contrast, one school found that one-to-one peer mentoring was most effective, and they will move away from group mentoring in the coming year.
- Subject-specific mentoring: for some Year 7 students, especially those whose parents do not speak English and/or who do not have older siblings, peer mentors played an important role in helping them with school subjects and homework. Formalising this approach through subject-specific mentoring groups could help to facilitate this learning.
- Ending the formal peer mentoring after the first two terms, because it is most valuable in those early terms to ease the transition period, and mentors found it more challenging to commit to the mentoring at exam time in their final term of Year 10.
- Exploring options for mentoring for other year groups in addition to Year 7 students.
- Running mentoring sessions on different days of the week e.g. avoiding Monday mornings, to help maximise attendance.
- Having an "admin mentor" or coordinating role to help free up staff time, as well as providing a way to get involved in mentoring for those who do not want to be peer mentors themselves.

Mentors and Stepping Stones students also had some ideas for how to make mentoring sessions more effective, especially in the early stages when relationships are being formed. These ideas included having more games and activities that mentors can use to break the ice and get to know their mentees, and more prompts for what to talk about, such as interests outside of school.

In order for peer mentoring to be effective and not overly burdensome for mentors, it is also important that mentors are well supported both in the initial training they receive and in having on-

going support. For example, some mentors found the initial training was not engaging enough and did not give them a clear picture of what the role would be like. It is important that they have a named adult to go to when they need guidance or advice on how to deal with specific issues, especially if sensitive or personal topics arise during their conversations with mentees. The adult community mentors played a particular role in providing this guidance as part of the Stepping Stones programme.

**Sharing learning for the future:** Peer mentoring training should be thorough and engaging to help prepare mentors for their role. After the first year of the stepping Stones programme, previous peer mentors and previous Stepping Stones students should be involved in delivering the training to new peer mentors to help share their learning and experiences in a relatable way.

It is helpful to set clear expectations for the mentoring role, and to provide adequate support from adults throughout the year.

If these things are in place, but individual mentors are not committing to their responsibilities or are struggling with balancing the mentoring with their studies, they should be stepped down from the role, or another alternative such as an “admin mentor” role should be considered.

### 5.2.5 Community mentoring

#### Key benefits of Community mentoring:

- Provide support to peer mentors to help them develop and flourish in their mentoring roles with adult guidance (freeing up teaching staff time)
- Provide a relatable adult role model for young people with a more informal and flexible approach than teachers
- Take a strengths-based approach to supporting the development of soft skills and positive behaviours
- Identify and address additional needs of students more quickly e.g. mental health issues; specific personal barriers to academic progress
- Provide tailored support for students with special educational needs or disabilities

Adult community mentors (from Gangs Unite) were an integrated part of delivering the Stepping Stones programme in the pilot year. The role of the community mentors included:

- Delivering training for peer mentors
- Providing ongoing support for peer mentors and for Stepping Stones students throughout the year
- Delivering Stepping Stones lessons in some cases
- Providing bespoke support in the classroom for specific students
- Delivering informal activities during breaks and after school

For example, at The Urswick School, the community mentors have been integrated into the programme in a very structured way including helping with matching mentors to mentees following the mentor training, meeting fortnightly with peer mentors to discuss any issues, and taking small groups for lessons on specific topics. At Heathcote School, community mentors have played an important role in helping to integrate Stepping Stones students with special educational needs or disabilities into classroom activities in addition to their other roles.

Teachers valued the input of the community mentors in the programme, and found they were able to build very positive relationships with the students and identify their needs very well.

*“I was impressed with the community mentors, the way they related to the young people, and just the message of positivity and confidence and self-worth, through communication, interaction, games and reflective activities” – Teacher, Heathcote*

The work with community mentors involved some adaptation along the way in scheduling and coordination. For example, in one school it was challenging to have the community mentors in school on only one day of the week rather than being a consistent presence.

From the community mentors’ perspective, their involvement worked best when there was a good balance between structure and flexibility in their role. Flexibility was vital in order for them to respond to the needs of the students and support them effectively, including having time to provide one-to-one support as well as scheduled group activities.

**Sharing learning for the future:** Adult mentors who are not teaching staff can provide valuable additional support to Stepping Stones pupils and peer mentors alike, as well as alleviating pressure on teaching staff time. Their role works best when there is a balance between structure and flexibility in how they work within the school.

### 5.2.6 Aspiration days

#### Key benefits of Aspiration days:

- Broadening horizons about what futures are possible
- Enjoyable trips that sow the seeds of thinking differently about their futures

Aspiration Days were incorporated into the Stepping Stones programme because it was identified that vulnerable students often find it difficult to make a connection between what they do at school and what they could do in the future, especially if they come from families where low aspiration is the norm. It was important to present career options that were linked to the students’ interests and that provided different options from going on to further education, in order to engage them in the activities and help them to relate to the options they were exploring. For this reason, a range of different activities were included (see Table 7).

Aspiration Day	Aim	Activity
<b>Workshops with The Investigator<sup>21</sup></b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Trigger a thought process about future careers</li> <li>2. Inspire and motivate students to draw a link between achievement in school and a successful future</li> <li>3. Raise aspirations</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Motivational speech</li> <li>- Breakdown of a film to reveal 'hidden' messages about the importance of utilising your potential</li> <li>- Turning negative thoughts into positive speak</li> </ul>
<b>Trip to Kidzania<sup>22</sup></b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Broaden the range of careers which students were considering and raise aspirations</li> <li>2. Give students an economic experience of working and earning</li> <li>3. Challenge some false assumptions about jobs e.g. working in a chocolate factory will be fun</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students got to try out a range of careers e.g. air conditioning maintenance; window cleaning; journalism; policeman</li> <li>- Students could earn money (Kidzos) and then spend this money on other activities e.g. climbing wall or choose to pay it into the Kidzania bank</li> </ul>
<b>London Youth and Public Services Fair</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Broaden the range of careers which students were considering and raise aspirations</li> <li>2. Expose students to a variety of voluntary activities which they could engage in now which would help prepare them for future careers / enhance their CVs</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students got to speak to a range of public sector workers and to try out different aspects of their jobs e.g. CPR; simulation of piloting a jet</li> <li>- Students spoke to different voluntary groups about the work and participated in a range of linked activities e.g. St John's Ambulance; Saracens Rugby Club.</li> </ul>
<b>Premier League Enterprise Programme</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reducing underachievement and improving educational outcomes</li> <li>2. Increasing awareness and understanding of Enterprise and/or Entrepreneurship</li> <li>3. Improving employability and life skills to enable beneficiaries to be more work ready</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- An inspirational talk from 2008 Apprentice winner Lee McQueen.</li> <li>- Students took part in workshops from partner organisations Metro Bank and MACE to discuss topics including financial management and employment prospects in the construction industry.</li> </ul>

<sup>21</sup> The Investigator is a motivational speaker that aims to develop "more enriched awareness of the universal contributions and achievements of a culturally diverse society." <http://theinvestigator.org.uk/>

<sup>22</sup> Kidzania is an "interactive kids' city combining inspiration, fun and learning through realistic role-play for children 2-14. Kids independently explore an 80,000 square foot kid-sized city with over 100 exciting careers that they can try." <http://www.kidzania.com/>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students then completed a team task to bring about the desired outcomes whilst competing against another group.</li> </ul>
<b>University Visit</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Raise aspirations of students</li> <li>2. Expose students to experience of higher education and options available</li> <li>3. Inspire and motivate students to achieve</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students take part in a variety of workshops to do with university life</li> <li>- Students take part in a tour of the LSE campus</li> </ul>

**Table 7: Aspiration activities**

The Aspiration Days were enjoyable for Stepping Stones students, and it worked well when the peer mentors attended too, as it was something different and interesting they could all do together towards the end of the school year. The impact of the different activities was not clear in terms of whether they changed anything for students immediately, but an important learning point is that at this stage of their development, just sowing the seeds of thinking about different career options, types of work, how to manage their money, and how to motivate themselves is a valuable step.

*“At Kidzania, being somewhere where they could make their own economic decisions was what a lot of them focused on. Lots of these students have never had that kind of freedom to consider money; their family situations are difficult and complicated.” – Teacher, Gladesmore*

For some of the trips, additional structure was needed, especially for those with some behaviour problems, in order to keep everyone engaged.

**Shared learning for the future:** In future years, some schools will run Aspiration Days for the whole of Year 7 rather than only Stepping Stones students, and will run a wider variety of options that meet different needs, interests and abilities, including more traditional routes such as further education as well as the practical activities they delivered in the pilot year.

## 6. Economic assessment

### 6.1 Approach

The economic assessment aimed to identify the costs associated with delivering the pilot programme, the benefits that could be monetised, and the overall budget impact for both the education providers and wider public finances.

After identifying the costs and benefits associated with the Stepping Stones programme, a calculation was applied. The calculation identifies three elements in order to assess the programme's ability to provide benefits which outweigh the costs, two of which are calculated using discounted cash flows (net present value)<sup>23</sup>:

- **Net present budget impact** = Net present value of benefits – Net present value of costs.
- **Return on investment** = Net present value of benefits / Net present value of costs
- **Payback period** = Calculates the point at which the costs of the intervention have been recouped.

These elements were considered both with and without optimism bias adjustments<sup>24</sup>.

A summary of the overall economic assessment is presented here. In addition, the short, medium, and long-term economic impacts of the programme are separated out and are available in Table A12 in "Appendix 2: Economic assessment in detail".

### 6.2 Overview of findings

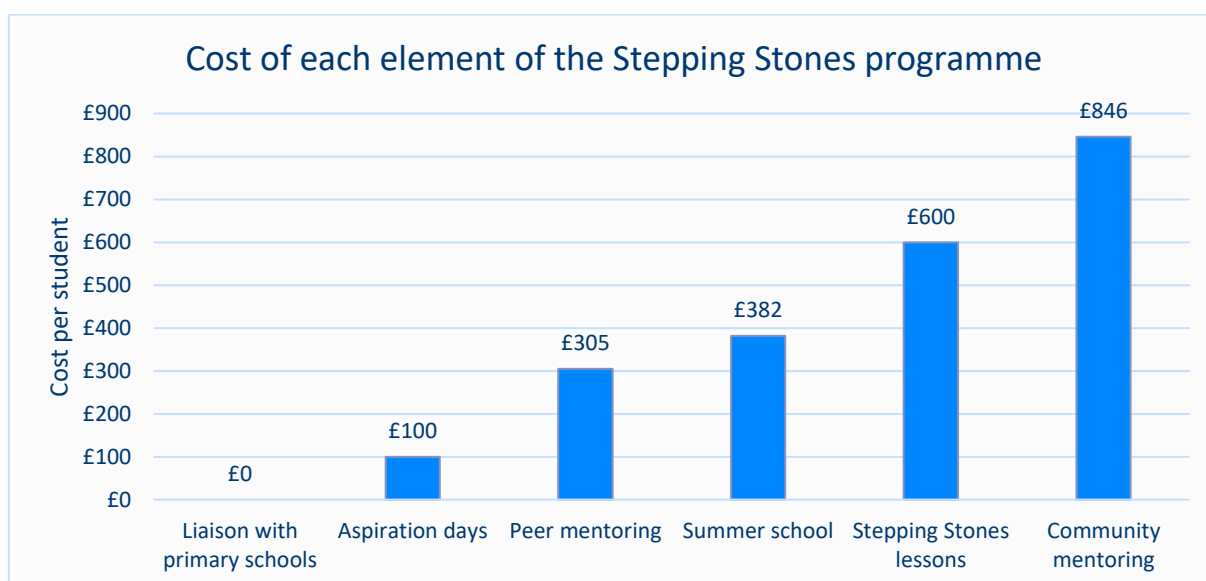
The Stepping Stones programme costed an average of £151,393 per school and £2,282 per student. The cost per element of the programme ranges from £100 per student for the Aspiration Days to £846 for the Community Mentoring (Gangs Unite) – see Figure 24.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> **Net present value:** The costs are discounted under the principle that cash available today is worth more as the same amount of cash available in the future. This is discounted using a net present value (NPV) of 3.5% and £1 in one years' time is worth  $\frac{£1}{(1+NPV)}$  which at 3.5% equals £0.97 and similarly £1 in two years' time is worth  $\frac{£1}{(1+NPV)^2}$  which at 3.5% equals £0.93.

<sup>24</sup> Optimism bias provides a correction for any uncertainty around the available evidence.

<sup>25</sup> In addition, the evaluation was commissioned at £70,000, and there were costs related to project management at the GLA. These costs have not been included in calculations as they will not be relevant for schools that decide to implement the programme themselves.



**Figure 24: Cost of each element of the Stepping Stones programme (per student)**

Overall, the net present budget impact is £552k with a return on investment of 220%, when considering public finances (see Figure 25). **This shows that, when the impact on public finances is taken into consideration, the Stepping Stones programme more than pays for itself.** A summary of the findings is provided below and in Figure 25, with further detail provided in Appendix 2: Economic assessment in detail.

- **Costs:** The total spend of Stepping Stones is £454,178 including £430,000 funding from the GLA and £24,178 in match funding from the schools. This is an overall average cost of £151k per school and £2k per student enrolled on Stepping Stones.
- **Benefits:** The benefits include reducing truancy, reducing exclusions, improving behaviour, reducing the number who go on to become NEETs, reducing the number who achieve no qualifications, which have been considered at a programme wide level. Table 8 details how these benefits have been valued.
- These benefits have been linked to the measured outcomes for the Stepping Stones students, compared to the historical cohorts from the previous year: improved attendance, reduced exclusions, improved behaviour and improved attainment.
- **Overall:** when we include a correction for optimism bias, there is a net present budget impact of £552k to public finances, with a return on investment of 220% and a payback period of 5 years. In addition, there are £259k of personal benefits to those gaining qualifications who would not have done otherwise.

Benefit	Approach to valuing the benefit
<b>Reduced truancy</b>	The lifetime cost of truancy is estimated at £21,906 to public finances and of this £1,200 is to education <sup>26</sup> .
<b>Reduced internal and external exclusions</b>	The cost of an internal/external exclusion has been estimated based on the cost of typical staff time required for the management of an incident plus the cost of the exclusion cover for a temporary exclusion of three days. This is a benefit to education.
<b>Improved behaviour</b>	The cost of improved behaviour has been estimated based on the historic cost of the staff time needed to manage behaviour and a reduction in pastoral team time for those achieving improved behaviour. This is a benefit to education.
<b>Reduced NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training)</b>	The lower estimate of the costs to public finance of an individual being NEET is £56,301 from research undertaken for the Audit Commission <sup>27</sup> .
<b>Reduced students with no qualifications</b>	The lifetime cost of not having qualifications is estimated at £45,000 <sup>28</sup> , note however this cost is treated as a personal cost to the individual and not a cost to public finances so is not included in further calculations.

**Table 8: Estimating the unit costs of the benefits**

The net present budget impact to education alone is -£116k, with a return on investment of 75%. This means that, when looking only at the impact on education providers, the programme does not pay for itself. However, given this is a pilot, subsequent years are likely to cost less because all of the set-up and the development of resources and materials has been completed, while substantial learning points have been taken into account and shared. A reduction in costs of a minimum of 22% would see a positive net present budget impact to education alone.

There are also other benefits which have not been costed in our analysis, such as the impact on peer mentors and other Year 7 students. The evaluation indicates that these impacts could be significant, so the economic assessment provides a conservative estimate of the return on investment.

The total net present budget impact to public finance includes the benefits to the wider public purse, as well as education. For example, this includes the wider costs of truancy and the cost to public

<sup>26</sup> Combating Truancy: A Family Lives Report, J Colechin, 2011

<sup>27</sup> Estimating the life-time costs of NEET: 16-18 year olds not in Education, Employment or Training, Coles et al for the Audit Commission, 2010

<sup>28</sup> The cost of exclusion: counting the cost of youth disadvantage in the UK, Prince's Trust, 2010



finances of being NEETs after secondary school. This is the net present budget impact shown in Figure 25.

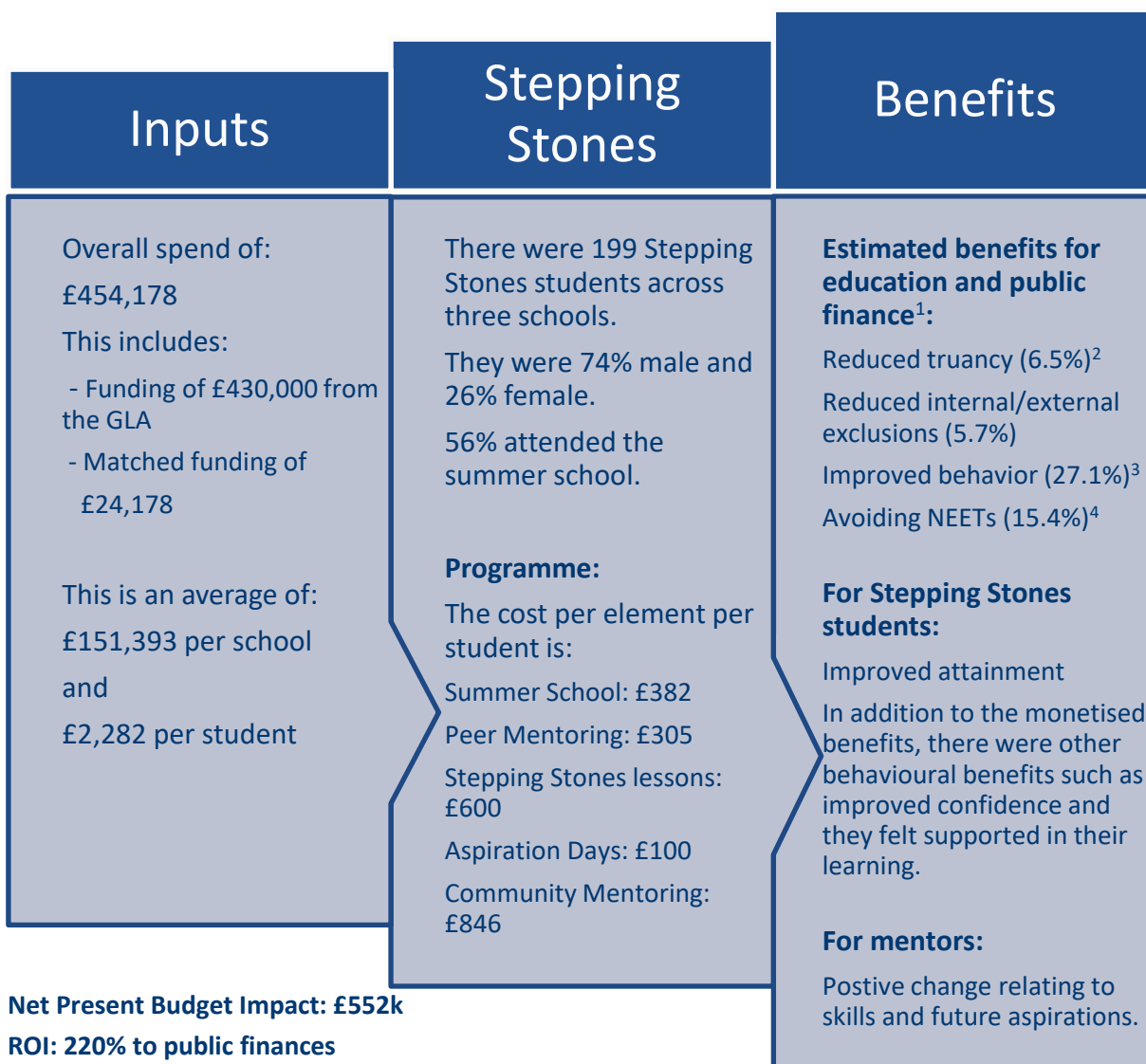


Figure 25: Summary of economic assessment<sup>29</sup>

Further detail about the economic assessment can be found in Appendix 2: Economic assessment in detail.

<sup>29</sup> Notes for Figure 25:

1. Brackets show the observed reduction when compared to the historic cohort. This is using the median school's improvement.
2. This is based on the improvement seen in students' attendance, measuring those achieving at least a 90% attendance.
3. This is based on the improvement in the number of students scoring 'positive' or higher in the commitment score.
4. This is based on satisfactory progress in both maths and English.

## 7. Conclusions

The Stepping Stones programme in 2016/17 was funded by the GLA as a proof-of-concept pilot, aiming to ease the transition from primary to secondary school for vulnerable young people.

The evaluation aimed to determine the success of the pilot in terms of the impact on attainment, behaviour, attendance, and transition to secondary school for the Stepping Stones students; the impact on peer mentors and others involved in the programme; and the economic impact of the programme on the education system and wider public finances. In addition, the evaluation has collated valuable learning points to help inform the development of the programme and to support other schools to implement the Stepping Stones programme, or elements of it, in the future.

The evaluation findings have been presented in this report alongside an online toolkit of resources and learning points that schools can access at no cost.

### 7.1 Key findings

#### 7.1.1 Economic assessment

The Stepping Stones programme costed an average of £151,393 per school and £2,282 per student.

Overall, when taking the impact on public finances into account, the programme more than pays for itself. Our economic modelling indicates that the net present budget impact is £552k with a return on investment of 220%, when considering public finances.

#### 7.1.2 Impact on Stepping Stones students

The evaluation demonstrates that the Stepping Stones pilot had a substantial positive impact on the attainment, behaviour, and attendance of vulnerable young people in their first year at secondary school.

##### ***Attainment***

- Two of the pilot schools saw a strong improvement in the proportion of students making satisfactory progress in Maths and English.
  - In Maths, for these two schools an average of 74% of Stepping Stones students made satisfactory progress, compared to 54% of the historical cohort.
  - In English, for these two schools an average of 83% of Stepping Stones students made satisfactory progress, compared to 67% of the historical cohort.

##### ***Behaviour***

- Shy, quiet students improved their confidence in classroom and social settings
- Students with behavioural issues improved their self-awareness, maturity and control over their emotions
- Despite an overall decline in PASS scores as the year progressed, a large proportion of students maintained consistent scores in the PASS assessments throughout the year.

- Two out of three schools saw a strong improvement in commitment scores for Stepping Stones students compared to the historical cohort.
- In one school at the end of the school year, 74% of Stepping Stones students scored satisfactory or higher in their commitment scores compared to only 46% of the historical cohort.

### **Attendance**

- At the end of the school year, two out of the three schools saw a strong improvement in attendance rates among Stepping Stones students compared to the historical cohorts.
- For example, at one school the proportion of those achieving 95% attendance or higher increased from 54% for the historical cohort to 70% for the Stepping Stones students.
- Stepping Stones students feel happier about going to school compared to previous Year 7 groups.

### **Transition to secondary school**

Overall, the findings above demonstrate that the vulnerable students enrolled on Stepping Stones have, overall, made a more successful transition to secondary school than previous comparable Year 7 groups.

Should these positive changes be sustained as the young people progress through secondary school, they could result in longer term benefits such as reduced likelihood of becoming NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and increasing the number who achieve qualifications, with overall improved life prospects in the future.

#### **7.1.3 Impact on peer mentors**

Although they were not the subjects of the programme or the evaluation, the impact of Stepping Stones on the Year 10 peer mentors is important to recognise.

Overall, peer mentors developed leadership skills and maturity, listening skills and empathy, improved communication skills and confidence, a sense of greater commitment to their school and confidence in their future aspirations. Many peer mentors have gone on to become prefects, and one school received twice the number of peer mentor applications as was necessary for the 2017/18 school year, demonstrating the wider impact of peer mentoring on older students.

These improvements were especially significant because peer mentors were chosen not for their level of achievement at school, but for their ability to be relatable to the incoming Year 7 students. This included, for example, peer mentors who had challenging behaviour or who had struggled with school work in the past, but who had overcome some of these issues over time. For these Year 10 students, the positive changes in their skills and aspirations raised them up further, at a point where they were soon to transition themselves into sixth form, or life beyond education.

## 7.2 Key learning points for future delivery

To help schools make decisions about which elements of the programme may be most relevant for their own situations, the cost of each element, the key benefits associated with it, and the key learning points are summarised below. However, it is important to note that our impact assessment is based on the delivery of all elements, therefore, the key benefits associated with each element below are indicative only, rather than evidenced through quantitative data.

Please note that all costs are based on delivering the pilot, and these are likely to be reduced for schools implementing the programme now because the design of the materials and resources has already been completed.

### 7.2.1 Liaison with primary schools and parents

**Cost per student:** None assigned (because primary school liaison happened prior to Stepping Stones anyway, it was the way schools approached this that changed).

**Key benefits:**

- Informing decisions about who would benefit from additional support in Year 7.
- Building awareness of Stepping Stones among primary school teachers and parents.

**Key learning points:**

- Have a bank of follow-up questions to ask primary schools in addition to the standard information they receive about the incoming students.
- Purposeful positive messaging and providing more information to parents about the programme can encourage them to be supportive of their children taking part.

### 7.2.2 Summer school

**Cost per student:** £382

**Key benefits:**

- Young people gain familiarity with school layout; teachers; and fellow Year 7 students before term begins. Especially important for those who feel anxious about starting secondary school or who lack confidence and self-esteem.
- Teachers get to know incoming students and identify any further individuals who may benefit from additional support.

**Key learning points:**

- Students who are unable to attend Summer School may need additional support at the beginning of Year 7 to settle into the school environment. This can be addressed through other aspects of the programme such as one-to-one peer mentoring, for example.

### 7.2.3 Stepping Stones lessons

**Cost per student:** £600

**Key benefits:**

- Establish norms of positive behaviour among the incoming Year 7 students and address behavioural issues throughout the school year in a targeted and relevant way. Especially effective for those displaying low-level but disruptive behavioural issues.
- Students develop tools and strategies for managing their own emotions and behaviour.

**Key learning points:**

- Using the Stepping Stones lessons resources flexibly can enable schools to adapt the lessons to the needs of their students.
- Schools can choose how to target these lessons, for example, by delivering them to all Stepping Stones students, or to specific groups.

### 7.2.4 Peer mentoring

**Cost per student:** £305

**Key benefits:**

- Young people gain confidence, self-esteem, advice, social networks, positive and relatable role models, and support with homework.
- Mentors develop in maturity, contributing to a wider school community culture of responsibility.

**Key learning points:**

- It is helpful to have a mix of different qualities and experiences in the appointed mentors.
- Training should be thorough and engaging to help prepare mentors for their role and adequate support should be provided from adults throughout the year.

### 7.2.5 Community mentoring

**Cost per student:** £846

**Key benefits:**

- Provide a relatable adult role model for both Stepping Stones students and peer mentors.
- Take a strengths-based approach to supporting the development of soft skills and positive behaviours, and free up teaching staff capacity.

**Key learning points:**

- The community mentoring role works best when there is a balance between structure and flexibility in how they work within the school.

### 7.2.6 Aspiration days

**Cost per student:** £100

**Key benefits:**

- Broadening horizons about what futures are possible
- Enjoyable trips that sow the seeds of thinking differently about their futures

**Key learning points:**

- In future years, some schools will run Aspiration Days for the whole of Year 7 rather than only Stepping Stones students, and will run a wider variety of options that meet different needs, interests and abilities, including more traditional routes such as further education as well as the practical activities they delivered in the pilot year.

### 7.3 Recommendations for further research

Our evaluation was conducted during the pilot year of the Stepping Stones programme and followed students through their first year at secondary school. The evaluation has provided valuable evidence about the short-term impact of such a programme on the transition from primary to secondary school for vulnerable young people. Should further research be undertaken to track these same students through their school life, it could uncover important insights relating to the longevity and sustainability of the impact of the Stepping Stones programme.

### 7.4 Summary

Overall, the pilot has proved that delivering the Stepping Stones programme can have substantial positive impacts on vulnerable young people as they transition to, and settle into secondary school. Although improvements in attainment, behaviour and attendance were not observed consistently at each school, and from each data set, this proof-of-concept evaluation provides compelling evidence of the positive impacts that can be realised through the support that the programme provides. In addition, our economic assessment indicates that the programme more than pays for itself when the impact on public finances is taken into consideration.

# Appendix 1: Additional outcomes data

## PASS data



Figure A1: PASS test results per dimension by gender for Gladesmore Community School



Figure A2: PASS test results per dimension by gender for Heathcote School





Figure A3: PASS test results per dimension by gender for The Urswick School

## Behaviour and commitment scores

Behaviour and commitment scores are determined in different ways in each school, and use different scales (see table below):

Gladesmore Community School	Heathcote School	The Urswick School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers report on both Effort and Behaviour for each student. For the purposes of this study to ensure comparability with other schools, the two figures have been combined to give an overall commitment score.</li> <li>The score is between 0 and 5</li> <li>It captures the overall behavioural and motivational situation of each student</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'Net behaviour score' scores students' effort and behaviour</li> <li>Scores are in a range between 300 to negative 300</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The score is between 0 and 5</li> </ul>

**Table A1: The different combined behaviour and commitment scores used by the three Stepping Stones pilot schools.**

For the purposes of this research, the scores have been split into five 'bands' that align with the way each school interprets the data and enable approximate comparisons of students' behaviour across the schools – see the table below.

Commitment score band	Gladesmore Community School	Heathcote School	The Urswick School
<b>Exceptional behaviour</b>	<p><b>'Super6'</b></p> <p>This score is reserved for exceptional students and is rarely used.</p>	<p><b>A score of 140 or above</b></p> <p>Student displays exemplary behaviour and is considered a role model for others</p>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Positive</b>	<p><b>A score of 4.00 or above</b></p> <p>The student has a very positive attitude to learning. They complete work to the best of their ability and are actively engaged in their learning. They are consistently very well behaved.</p>	<p><b>A score of 80 to 140</b></p> <p>Student displays very positive behaviour</p>	<p><b>A score of 1 to 1.49</b></p> <p>Student's attitude to learning is very positive. Every effort is made to complete work to the best of their ability and full equipment is brought in every day.</p>
<b>Satisfactory / Room for improvement</b>	<p><b>A score of 3.50 to 3.99</b></p> <p>Student could do better. Their effort and behaviour may be monitored by a tutor or they may be identified for extra support, such as a homework club</p>	<p><b>A score of 20 to 80</b></p> <p>Student is generally well behaved and satisfactorily motivated</p>	<p><b>A score of 1.50 to 2.49</b></p> <p>Student's attitude to learning is generally positive. They make an effort to complete work to the best of their ability and full equipment is brought on most days.</p>

<b>Commitment score band</b>	<b>Gladesmore Community School</b>	<b>Heathcote School</b>	<b>The Urswick School</b>
<b>Of concern</b>	<p><b>A score of 3.00 to 3.49</b></p> <p>Student's behaviour and/or motivation is of concern and the Head of Year 7 or members of the pastoral care team will be working with the student</p>	<p><b>A score of 0 to 20</b></p> <p>Student's behaviour is being monitored</p>	<p><b>A score of 2.5 to 3.49</b></p> <p>Student's attitude to learning is poor. Work is often not complete to the best of their ability and they have to be regularly reminded to bring full equipment.</p>
<b>Significant concern</b>	<p><b>A score of 2.99 or below</b></p> <p>There is significant cause for concern</p>	<p><b>A score below 0 (negative score)</b></p> <p>Student's behaviour is a serious cause for concern</p>	<p><b>A score of 3.49 or greater</b></p> <p>Student's attitude to learning is poor. Minimal effort is made to complete work and it is seldom to the best of their ability. Equipment is frequently missing.</p>

**Table A2: How the combined behaviour and commitment score bands relate to the Gladesmore Community School, Heathcote School and The Urswick School scoring systems.**

## Appendix 2: Economic assessment in detail

### Costs

The total spend of the Stepping Stones programme was £454,178. This is an overall cost of £151,393 per school and £2,282 per student enrolled on Stepping Stones. The cost per element of the programme ranges from £100 per student for the Aspiration Days to £846 for the Community Mentoring.

### Costs of programme

The total spend of Stepping Stones is £454,178, including £430,000 funding from the GLA and £24,178 in match funding from the schools. This is an overall cost of £151,393 per school and £2,282 per student enrolled on Stepping Stones.

Table A3: Costs of the programme

Cost	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	Total
<b>Costs</b>	£33,931	£336,197	£84,049	£454,178

### Cost apportionment

The costs have been apportioned and allocation to the different elements of the programme: Summer School, Peer Mentoring, Stepping Stones lessons, Aspiration Days and Community Mentoring, see Figure A9 for more detail.

### Cost per element

There were 199 Stepping Stones students across the three schools, hence an average of 66 students per school. The average cost per school of the elements, including matched funding are as follows:

- Summer School = £28,494 (£382 per student)<sup>30</sup>
- Peer Mentoring = £20,215 (£305 per student)
- Stepping Stones lessons = £39,813 (£600 per student)
- Aspiration days = £6,608 (£100 per student)
- Community Mentoring = £56,103 (£846 per student)

<sup>30</sup> This is for 160 students at Gladesmore including students outside of the programme and only Stepping Stones students at the other two schools, where an average of 48% of the Stepping Stones cohort attended.

## Benefits

The benefits which have been used in the economic assessment include reducing truancy, reducing internal/external exclusions, improving behaviour, reducing the number who go on to become NEETs, reducing the number who achieve no qualifications, which have been considered at a programme wide level.

These benefits have been linked to the measured outcomes for the students, compared to the historical cohort from the previous year: improved attendance, reduced exclusions, improved behaviour and improved attainment.

## Monetising benefits

At a high level, our approach to monetising the benefits is to:

1. Establish the total number of students. This is set at 199 as the total number of Stepping Stones students across the three schools.
2. Establish the potential cohort for each benefit: it is generally assumed that all benefits are universal and are not targeted at specific students; see Table A4.
3. Set the percentage of this cohort who achieve this benefit based on observed differences between the Stepping Stones students and the historical cohort; see Table A4.
4. Set the deadweight percentage i.e. what benefits would have been received by this cohort regardless of Stepping Stones. This has been set at 10% to say that 1 in 10 of the students may have received the improvements seen due to other changes since the previous year’s comparator cohort.
5. Establish the potential unit value of the benefit.
6. Include an optimism bias correction for the uncertainty around the available evidence.

See Figure A4 for an overview of the calculation and Table A4 for the assumptions applied.

Figure A4: Approach to benefits

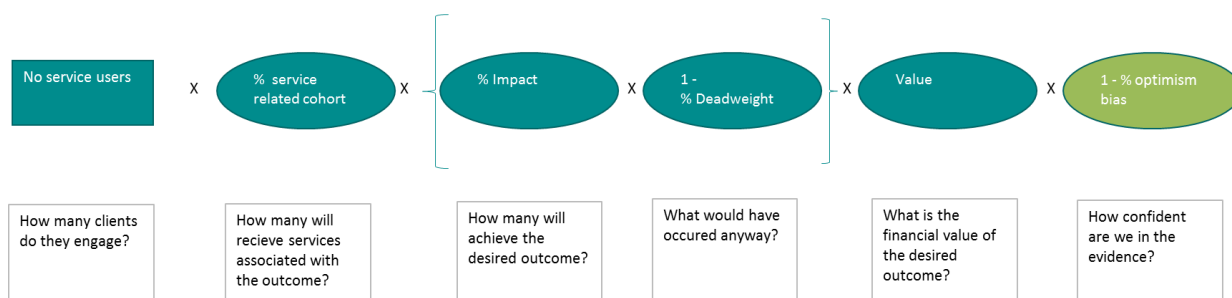


Table A4: Benefits assumptions

Benefit	Linked to outcome	Receiving benefit	Achieving benefit	Unit cost	Per annum
Reduced truancy, cost to education	Attendance	100%	6.5%	£1,200	£240 <sup>31</sup>
Reduced internal/external exclusions	Exclusions	100%	5.7%		£2,916
Improved behaviour	Behaviour score	100%	27.1%		£972
Reduced NEETs	Attainment	31% <sup>32</sup>	15.4%	£56,301	£853 <sup>33</sup>
Reduced students with no qualifications	Attainment	31% <sup>34</sup>	15.4%	£45,000	£900 <sup>35</sup>
Reduced truancy, cost to public finances	Attendance	100%	6.5%	£20,706	£4,141 <sup>36</sup>

### Receiving benefit

It is generally assumed that all benefits are universal and not targeted at specific students. However, for some students the outcome would not occur regardless of Stepping Stones so this needs to be accounted for in our calculations. For example, when we consider avoiding NEETs only a small subset of students would typically go on to be NEET. From the school statistics, the percentage of students staying in education or employment for at least two terms after key stage 4 is 87%-93% across the three schools. Whilst we assume that pupils on Stepping Stones are more likely to become NEET than

<sup>31</sup> This cost has been averaged out over five years of school.

<sup>32</sup> Note for the NEETs assumption, the percentage of students staying in education or employment for at least two terms after key stage 4 is 87%-93% at the schools in 2013/14. For this reason, we have estimated the total students in year 7 to be 558 across the three schools and of these, based on this rate, 62 may be expected to become NEETs in the future. Given 62 is less than the 199 Stepping Stones cohort we have estimated the proportion who may receive this benefit at  $62/199 = 31\%$ .

<sup>33</sup> This cost has been averaged out over 66 years between the ages of 16 and 81.

<sup>34</sup> Similarly to NEETs, 11% of young people in England do not have qualifications. If we estimate 11% of the year 7 students this is also 31% of the stepping stones students,  $11\% \times 199 = 61$ .

<sup>35</sup> This cost has been averaged out over 50 years between the ages of 18 and 67.

<sup>36</sup> This cost has been averaged out over five years of school.

the general student population, the percentage seen to become NEET historically is smaller than the estimated 36%<sup>37</sup> who are enrolled in the Stepping Stones programme. For this reason, we have reduced the percentage receiving the benefit within the Stepping Stones pupils to a cohort which is similar in size to the numbers observed to have received this outcome in the past.

### ***Achieving benefit***

The percentage of Stepping Stones students who will receive the benefits identified have been calculated based on observed differences between the current Stepping Stones students and the historical cohort from the previous year. We have used the median change from the three schools as our estimate of change, see Table A5.

We chose to use the median change from the three schools, rather than the mean, due to the level of variation seen across the three pilot schools (see Chapter 2). Using the mean would provide a misleading average value, whilst using the median provides a more realistic value. This assessment is made on the basis of our in-depth primary research presented in Chapter 2 of this report.

Whilst using the weighted average rather than the median reduces the value of the calculated benefits the overall net present budget impact for public finances remains positive, offering a return on the investment.

**Table A5: Change in outcomes between Stepping Stones and comparator group**

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Gladesmore Community School</b>	<b>Heathcote School</b>	<b>Urswick School</b>	<b>Median</b>
<b>Attendance:</b> Under 90%	-6.5%	8.6%	-7.1%	-6.5%
<b>Exclusions:</b> Internal and external	-6.0%	3.5%	-5.7%	-5.7%
<b>Behaviour score:</b> Positive or higher	18.9%	48.8%	27.1%	27.1%
<b>Attainment:</b> Satisfactory in both English and Maths	15.4%	-34.3%	32.9%	15.4%

<sup>37</sup> Based on the 2013/14 students completing key stage 4 we expect somewhere in the region of 558 students in year 7 across the three schools, with 199 enrolled on Stepping Stones this represents 36%.

## Unit costs

The unit costs of benefits have been identified as follows:

- Reducing truancy:** Combating Truancy: A Family Lives Report<sup>38</sup> sets the lifetime cost of truancy at £44,468 which includes an education, health, social care, crime and personal lost earning element. They state the split between costs to the individual and to society as roughly fifty-fifty: £22,562 in costs to the individual, and £21,906 costs to society. The education aspect is £1,200 and the remained of the societal cost is £20,706 which we have assumed is largely to public finances. The cost to education and the wider costs have been averaged out over a five-year secondary school period.
- Reducing exclusions:** The cost of exclusions per annum = (cost of an incident + cost of the external cover for exclusion period) \* number of exclusions. The cost of an incident has been estimated at £810 based on the typical staff time required for the management of an incident, including administration, detention, meetings and follow-up monitoring. The cost of an exclusion has been estimated as £825, this is 3 days of supervision at a daily rate of £275. For the Stepping Stones students who were excluded in year 7 the median school had 1.8 exclusions per student (see Table A6). This is a total calculated cost of £2,943, see Figures A10 and A11 for more details. These costs have been assumed each year in the students' secondary school life.

Table A6: Estimating the number of internal or external exclusions per student

Category	Gladesmore Community School	Heathcote School	Urswick School	Median
<b>Number of students excluded (internal/external)</b>	13	5	30	
<b>Number of internal/external exclusions</b>	15	9	112	
<b>Average number of internal/external exclusions per student</b>	1.2	1.8	3.7	1.8

- Improved behaviour:** The historical cohort were assumed to have historically taken up 75% of the pastoral team's time, with a cost per annum per student of £1,320. Students whose commitment score is positive or higher would not need significant additional pastoral care alongside what they receive as part of Stepping Stones, this has assumed to be 25% of the

<sup>38</sup> Combating Truancy: A Family Lives Report, J Colechin, 2011



historic time. This is a total calculated cost of £990, see Figure A10 and A11 for more details. These costs have been assumed each year in the students' secondary school life.

- **Reducing NEETs:** The lower estimate of the costs to public finance of an individual being NEET is £56,301 from research undertaken for the Audit Commission<sup>39</sup>. This cost is assumed to occur between the ages of 16 and 81.
- **Reducing the number of individuals with no qualifications:** In the Cost of Exclusion report from the Prince's Trust they estimate the lifetime cost of not having qualifications at £45,000 and report that in England 11% of 16-24 year olds had no qualifications in 2009. This cost is averaged out over a working life aged 18 to 67. Note this cost is treated as a personal cost to the individual and not a cost to public finances and is not included in further calculations<sup>40</sup>.

## Summary of benefits

Table A7 provides a summary of the assumptions used for the benefit calculation, as shown in Figure A4. These monetised benefits have been considered within the school period of 2016/17 to 2020/21 for school related benefits (truancy, exclusion and behaviour) and as wider lifetime costs elsewhere.

For all these benefits we have assumed that the benefit is consistent throughout a student's school life. This is to say that Stepping Stones changes a student's path within a school leading to reduced reducing truancy and internal/external exclusions and improved behaviour throughout a student's school life. It is understood that truancy and exclusion tend to increase with students' ages, so we may be underestimating rather than overestimating the impact of Stepping Stones beyond Year 7. On the other hand, with time and distance from Stepping Stones, a reduction in the impact may be expected to some degree. Therefore, on balance, we are assuming these two effects cancel each other out, and the benefits remain consistent throughout a student's school life.

**Table A7: Calculating the benefits**

Benefit	No. students	Receive	Achieving outcome	Deadweight	Annual Cost	No. students receiving
<b>Reduced truancy, cost to education</b>	199	100%	6.5%	10%	£240	12
<b>Reduced internal/external exclusion</b>	199	100%	5.7%	10%	£2,916	11
<b>Improved behaviour</b>	199	100%	27.1%	10%	£972	61

<sup>39</sup> Estimating the life-time costs of NEET: 16-18 year olds not in Education, Employment or Training, Coles et al for the Audit Commission, 2010

<sup>40</sup> The cost of exclusion: counting the cost of youth disadvantage in the UK, Prince's Trust, 2010

<b>Reduced NEETs</b>	199	31%	15.4%	10%	£853	9
<b>Reduced students with no qualifications</b>	199	31%	15.4%	10%	£900	9
<b>Reduced truancy, cost to other public finances</b>	199	100%	6.5%	10%	£4,141	12

## Economic analysis

**We have identified and described the types of cost and benefits associated with Stepping Stones. Our final step is to understand how the costs and benefits balance and understand the return on investment of the programme.**

### Overview

The economic assessment uses three elements to assess a programme's ability to provide benefits which outweigh the costs, two of which are calculated using discounted cash flows<sup>41</sup>:

- **Net present budget impact** = Net present value of the benefits – Net present value of the costs.
- **Return on investment** = Net present value of the benefits / Net present value of the costs
- **Payback period** = Calculates the point at which the costs of the intervention have been recouped.

These elements have been considered both with and without optimism bias adjustments.

### Results

The costs and the benefits have been described in the previous sections and these are utilised in the model. For a correction for optimism bias, costs have been increased by 5% and benefits decreased by 5%, this is included in the discounted totals below.

- **Costs:** include the funding from the GLA and the matched funding from the schools. When discounted this cost is £459,082.

<sup>41</sup> **Net present value:** The costs are discounted under the principle that cash available today is worth more as the same amount of cash available in the future. This is discounted using a net present value (NPV) of 3.5% and £1 in one years' time is worth  $\frac{£1}{(1+NPV)}$  which at 3.5% equals £0.97 and similarly £1 in two years' time is worth  $\frac{£1}{(1+NPV)^2}$  which at 3.5% equals £0.93.

- **Benefits:** include avoiding NEETs, achieving qualifications, reduced truancy, reduced exclusion and improved behaviour. When discounted this cost is £342,812 for education and an additional £667,908 to other public finance.

Table A8 shows the total discounted cost and the total discounted benefits to both education and other public finances. These assumptions provide a negative net present budget impact of -£116,269 when considering the benefits received within education alone and a positive net present budget impact £551,639 when the wider public finance benefit is considered. This has a return on investment of 220% and a payback period of 5 years when considering the impact on public finance. In addition, there are £258,560 of personal benefits to those gaining qualifications who would not have done otherwise.

The table also breaks the benefits down into the short, medium and long-term benefits. Whilst the costs are incurred in the short term and the benefits within this period do not outweigh the costs, it is in the medium term, whilst the pupils are still in secondary school, during which a positive net present budget impact is obtained. There are then further longer-term benefits associated with a reduction in NEETs and the associated cost to public finances.

**Table A8: Costs and benefits per annum**

Category	Short term		Medium term		Long term	
	education	other public finance	education	other public finance	education	other public finance
<b>Cost: -£459,082</b>						
<b>Reduced truancy</b>	£5,071	£87,497	£6,981	£120,460	£-	£-
<b>Reduced internal/external exclusion</b>	£53,862		£74,153		£-	
<b>Improved behaviour</b>	£85,304		£117,441		£-	
<b>Reduced NEETs</b>		£-		£-		£459,951
<b>Total</b>	£144,237	£87,497	£198,575	£120,460	£-	£459,951

Without the optimism bias adjustment, overall there is a smaller negative net present budget impact of -£76,366 when considering the benefits received within education and a higher positive net present budget impact of £626,696 when the wider public finance benefit is considered. This has a return on investment of 243% and a payback period of 5 years.

## Summary of economic analysis

While the Stepping Stones programme may not represent value for money when looking at the financial benefits to the school alone, all the benefits associated with the programme should be considered. On the basis of the impact on wider public finance as well as the benefits to the individuals enrolled on the programme, Stepping Stones does represent value for money. It is also worth noting that this programme was a pilot and subsequent years are likely to cost less as a result of the experience gained of running the pilot and developing materials to support it. If a reduction in the operating costs after the pilot was at least 22%, the net present budget impact to education alone would also be positive. In addition, there are other benefits which have not been costed in our analysis, such as the impact on peer mentors and other Year 7 students.

The programme offers financial benefits to education through reduced truancy, reduced internal/external exclusion and improved behaviour and wider benefits to public finances through reduced crime, health care and social services use, and costs associated with unemployment, underemployment and inactivity.

## Cost apportionment

Table A9: Detailed cost apportionment

Type of cost	Summer school	Peer mentoring	Taught programme	Aspiration days	Adult mentoring	Set up costs	Match funding	Grand Total
Direct staff costs								
Facilitators for mentees		£2,157			£99,593		£7,716	109,466
Facilitators for Stepping Stone Days								
Peer mentor training		£3,740					£2,572	£6,312
Summer School	£59,906				£4,992		£1,543	£66,441
Management costs								
Project leader	£4,493	£23,962	£26,209	£1,797	£14,976		£7,202	£78,639
On costs	£11,981							£11,981
Writing course materials	£1,498	£8,986	£18,571					£29,054
School coordinators			£67,194	£3,894	£38,939			110,027
Materials and photocopying	£599		£1,106	£63	£100	£455	£5,144	£7,468
Other costs								
Materials for mentors	£60	£17,972			£749			£18,780
Events, rewards and enrichments activities	£2,396	£599		£13,014				£16,010
<b>Total funding</b>	£80,932	£57,415	£113,080	£18,768	£159,349	£455		<b>430,000</b>
<b>Match funding</b>	£4,551	£3,228	£6,358	£1,055	£8,960	£ 26	<b>£24,178</b>	
<b>Total cost</b>	<b>£85,483</b>	<b>£60,644</b>	<b>£119,438</b>	<b>£19,824</b>	<b>£168,309</b>	<b>£481</b>		<b>454,178</b>

## Cost assumptions

**Table A10: Cost calculation for internal/external exclusions**

Description	Assumption/Cost	Unit	Notes
<b>Estimate of cost of an internal incident<sup>42</sup></b>			
Teacher reporting the issue	15	minutes	This could be sending an email or filling in an incident form etc.
Member of the pastoral team investigate	67.5	minutes	This would be expected to take between 15 mins to 2 hours. The midpoint of this range is used as the assumption.
Letter home / Phone call home	15	minutes	
Internal paperwork	15	minutes	This could include updating files, referral forms etc.
Detention	120	minutes	This could take 1-3 hours, depending on the offence. The midpoint of this range is used as the assumption.
Meeting with parent	60	minutes	This meeting would typically be up to an hour in length.
Meeting with victim parents	60	minutes	This meeting would typically be up to an hour in length.
Restorative Meeting	60	minutes	
Follow-up monitoring (ongoing)	585	minutes	This would be expected to be in the region of 30 mins per week. The estimate used is for half a year in term time e.g. 30 mins * 39 weeks / 2.
<b>Total time estimate per incident</b>	<b>997.5</b>	minutes	
Percentage of member of staff's time	1.3%	%	
<b>Cost of an internal incident</b>	<b>£795.11</b>	Per incident	1.3% x £60,500
<b>Estimate of staff members cost</b>			
Gross salary for member of staff	£47,298	£	Max teaching upper pay ranges Inner London <sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> These assumptions were developed with the participating schools and are based on internal rather than external exclusions.

<sup>43</sup> [getintoteaching.education.gov.uk/funding-and-salary/teacher-salaries](https://getintoteaching.education.gov.uk/funding-and-salary/teacher-salaries)

Description	Assumption/Cost	Unit	Notes
Salary on costs e.g. NI and pension costs	28%	%	Assuming pension contribution rate of 16.5% <sup>44</sup> and 13.8% National Insurance <sup>45</sup> cost with a NI threshold of £8,112 for the employer paid NI.
Total cost of member of staff	£60,500	£	This is the estimated salary costs plus on-costs to the employer.
<b>Estimate of staff members time</b>			
Directed time <sup>46</sup>	1,265	hours	Directed time refers to the hours which staff can be asked to work during the academic year. This is currently 1,265 hours over 195 days of the year.
Full time staff term time minutes	75,900	minutes	This is the directed time in minutes.
<b>No. internal/external exclusions per student</b>			
Median from Stepping Stones students	1.8	Internal/external exclusions	This is the observed median school's average number of internal/external exclusions per pupil.
<b>Typical type of exclusion</b>			
Days exclusion	3	days	As these are year 7 pupils this is mainly internal exclusions in the region of 1-5 days. The midpoint of this range is used as the assumption.
<b>Cost of exclusion supervision</b>			
Exclusion supervision cost at TBAP	£275	£	This is a local cost for supervision cover from the Tri-Borough Alternative Provision (TBAP) Multi-Academy Trust.
<b>Calculated cost:</b>			
Cost of incidents	£1,431.20		1.8 x £809.83
Cost of exclusion cover	£1,485.00		1.8 x 3 x £275
<b>Estimated cost of internal/external exclusion</b>	<b>£2,916.20</b>	Per annum	

<sup>44</sup> [www.teacherspensions.co.uk/employers/managing-members/contributions/calculating-contributions.aspx](http://www.teacherspensions.co.uk/employers/managing-members/contributions/calculating-contributions.aspx)

<sup>45</sup> [www.gov.uk/national-insurance-rates-letters/contribution-rates](http://www.gov.uk/national-insurance-rates-letters/contribution-rates)

<sup>46</sup> [www.naswt.org.uk/advice/conditions-of-service/directed-time.html](http://www.naswt.org.uk/advice/conditions-of-service/directed-time.html)

**Table A11: Cost calculation for improved behaviour**

Description	Assumption/Cost	Unit	Notes
Stepping Stones as proportion of pastoral team's work <sup>47</sup>	75%	%	
Number in pastoral team	6	FTE	
Pastoral team cost	£363,002	£	This is 6 x £60,500, using the staff costs from table A10.
Historic cost of cohort's pastoral care	£272,252		75% x £363,002
Historic number of students	210	pupils	The historic cohort was 70 students at each of the 3 schools.
Historic cost per student per year	£1,296		£273,252/ 210
Proportion of pastoral team's time required for positive or higher behaviour	25%	%	Those with positive or higher behaviour will still need pastoral care but to a lesser extent.
Cost of improved behaviour per student	£972		As the students are estimated to require 25% of the time previously spent by the team, this is a reduction of 75%. With an associated cost of £1,296 x (1 – 25%)

<sup>47</sup> These assumptions were developed with the participating schools.



## Cost and benefit profile

**Table A12: Cost and benefits discounted with optimism bias**

Cost	Short Term			Medium Term			Longer term				Total	
	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25		Other
Sum of cost	-£35,628	£341,070	-£82,384	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	- £459,082
Reduced truancy: Education	-	£2,579	£2,492	£2,408	£2,326	£2,247	-	-	-	-	-	£12,052
Other public funds	-	£44,501	£42,996	£41,542	£40,137	£38,780	-	-	-	-	-	£207,957
Reduced internal/external exclusion	-	£27,394	£26,468	£25,573	£24,708	£23,872	-	-	-	-	-	£128,015
Improved behaviour	-	£43,386	£41,919	£40,501	£39,131	£37,808	-	-	-	-	-	£202,745
Reduced NEETs	-	-	-	-	-	-	£6,969	£6,969	£6,969	£6,969	£432,076	£459,951
Reduced students with no qualifications	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	£5,528	£5,341	£247,692	£258,560
<b>Net Present Budget Impact (for education) cumulative</b>	<b>-£35,628</b>	<b>-£303,339</b>	<b>-£314,844</b>	<b>-£246,363</b>	<b>-£180,197</b>	<b>-£116,269</b>	<b>-£116,269</b>	<b>-£116,269</b>	<b>-£116,269</b>	<b>-£116,269</b>	<b>-£116,269</b>	<b>-£116,269</b>
<b>Net Present Budget Impact (for public finance) cumulative</b>	<b>-£35,628</b>	<b>-£258,838</b>	<b>-£227,347</b>	<b>-£117,324</b>	<b>-£11,021</b>	<b>£91,687</b>	<b>£ 98,656</b>	<b>£105,625</b>	<b>£112,594</b>	<b>£119,563</b>	<b>£551,639</b>	<b>£551,639</b>