



## Evaluation of The Mayor's Stepping Stones programme

Final report

12th February 2021

SUPPORTED BY  
**MAYOR OF LONDON**



<b>Client</b>	Greater London Authority
<b>Title</b>	Evaluation of The Mayor's Stepping Stones programme
<b>Subtitle</b>	Final report
<b>Dates</b>	last published 12/02/2021 last revised 16/04/2021
<b>Status</b>	Final
<b>Version</b>	Version 3.3
<b>Classification</b>	Open
<b>Project Code</b>	11059
<b>Author(s)</b>	Tim Bidey, Fanny Goterfelt, Dr Robin Kimber, Neil Reeder, Paula Escobar
<b>Quality Assurance by</b>	Dr Pete Welsh
<b>Main point of contact</b>	Tim Bidey
<b>Telephone</b>	07702 515 710
<b>Email</b>	<a href="mailto:tim.bidey@traverse.ltd">tim.bidey@traverse.ltd</a>

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, Traverse would like to thank the 15 Stepping Stones coordinators and their colleagues for their continued commitment to and support of the evaluation over the past two years.

Second, we would also like to thank the Stepping Stones students and their parents, peer mentors and community mentors for taking the time to participate in the evaluation and sharing their views and experiences.

Third, we would like to thank the GLA and the Stepping Stones programme team, who worked to support the evaluation and its delivery from start to finish, alongside their own management, support and monitoring of the programme.

p. 2 Angel Square, Torrens Street, London, EC1V 1NY

e. [info@traverse.ltd](mailto:info@traverse.ltd) w. [www.traverse.ltd](http://www.traverse.ltd)





## Contents

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. Impacts on Stepping Stones pupils.....</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1. Academic progress.....	8
2.2. Behaviour .....	12
2.3. Attendance .....	18
<b>3. Impacts on Stepping Stones mentors .....</b>	<b>22</b>
3.1. Behaviours .....	22
3.2. Personal qualities and skills.....	23
3.3. Other impacts.....	25
<b>4. Wider programme impacts .....</b>	<b>27</b>
4.1. Parents.....	27
4.2. Teachers.....	29
4.3. Schools.....	30
<b>5. Economic assessment.....</b>	<b>32</b>
5.1. Approach.....	32
5.2. Overview of findings.....	33
<b>6. Programme activities and learning.....</b>	<b>36</b>
6.1. Programme management.....	37
6.2. Peer mentoring .....	39
6.3. Stepping Stones lessons .....	42
6.4. Summer school.....	44
6.5. Community mentoring.....	46
6.6. Aspirational and careers-based activities .....	48
6.7. Primary school engagement.....	50
<b>7. Programme support and learning.....</b>	<b>52</b>
7.1. The Stepping Stones toolkit .....	52
7.2. GLA support events.....	53
7.3. School-by-school support .....	54
7.4. Evaluation activities .....	55
<b>8. Conclusions and recommendations.....</b>	<b>57</b>
8.1. Key messages.....	57
8.2. Concluding comments .....	59
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>60</b>

---



## Introduction

This first chapter describes the background to the Stepping Stones programme, the programme itself, and the evaluation design and methodology. It then sets out the structure of the rest of the report.

### 1.1. Background

The transition from primary to secondary school is a period of significant change in the lives of young people. It requires them to negotiate and adapt to a new educational setting and culture, including a new (often larger) school with different practices, peers and social interactions.<sup>1</sup>

Evidence from the UK and abroad indicates that, overall, transition is associated with stagnation or a 'dip' in pupil attainment.<sup>2</sup> Many young people are nervous or have concerns about this transition but, for most, these concerns quickly subside.<sup>3,4</sup> In particular, young people that are well-supported by parents, families and school tend to embrace and adapt to these changes around them.<sup>5,6</sup>

However, a significant minority of young people do not transition as smoothly and experience longer-term uncertainty, risk, and anxiety. Evidence around *who* these young people typically are is varied. Some studies have linked gender, ethnicity, socio-economic and Special Educational Needs status to varied experience of transition.<sup>7</sup> Others have found that young people from vulnerable groups are more likely to experience risk factors that can inhibit successful transition.<sup>8,9</sup>

Where young people do struggle with transition, it is associated with a decline in social, emotional and psychological wellbeing and can manifest itself in school as lower grades, disruptive behaviour and poor attendance.<sup>10,11</sup> There is also evidence to suggest that how transition between schools is managed, and whether difficulties experienced during transition are addressed, can also affect exclusion rates in the first three years of secondary school (when exclusion rates peak).<sup>12,13</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Anderson, L. et al. 2000. 'School transitions: beginning of the end or a new beginning?'. *International Journal of Education*, 33, 325-339.

<sup>2</sup> Evangelou, M. et al. 2008. *What makes a successful transition from primary to secondary school?*. Nottingham, United Kingdom: Department for Children Schools and Families.

<sup>3</sup> Qualter, P. et al. 2007. 'Supporting the development of emotional intelligence competencies to ease the transition from primary to high school.' *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 23, 79-95.

<sup>4</sup> Rice, F. et al. 2011. 'Assessing pupil concerns about transition to secondary school'. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 81, 244-263

<sup>5</sup> Evangelou, M. et al. 2008. *What makes a successful transition from primary to secondary school?*. Nottingham, United Kingdom: Department for Children Schools and Families.

<sup>6</sup> Sutherland, R.J. et al. 2010. *Supporting learning in the transition from primary to secondary school*. Merchant Venturers.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Rice, F. et al. 2014. *Identifying factors that predict successful and difficult transitions to secondary school*. University College London

<sup>9</sup> Evangelou, M. et al. 2008. *What makes a successful transition from primary to secondary school?*. Nottingham, United Kingdom: Department for Children Schools and Families.

<sup>10</sup> Anderson, L.W. et al. 2000. 'School transitions: beginning of the end or a new beginning?'. *International Journal of Education*, 33, 325-339.

<sup>11</sup> Galton, M., Morrison, I., & Pell, T. 2000. *Transfer and transition in English schools: reviewing the evidence*. *International Journal of Education*, 33, 341-363.

<sup>12</sup> Graham, B. et al. 2019. *School exclusion: a literature review on the continued disproportionate exclusion of certain children*. Department for Education.

<sup>13</sup> Trotman, D., Tucker, S. & Martyn, M. 2015. *Understanding problematic pupil behaviour: Perceptions of pupils and behaviour coordinators on secondary school exclusion in an English city*, *Educational Research*, 57 (3): 237-253.

It is also documented that the effects of a difficult transition from primary to secondary education can also be long-lasting, affecting attainment and wellbeing into adulthood.<sup>14</sup>

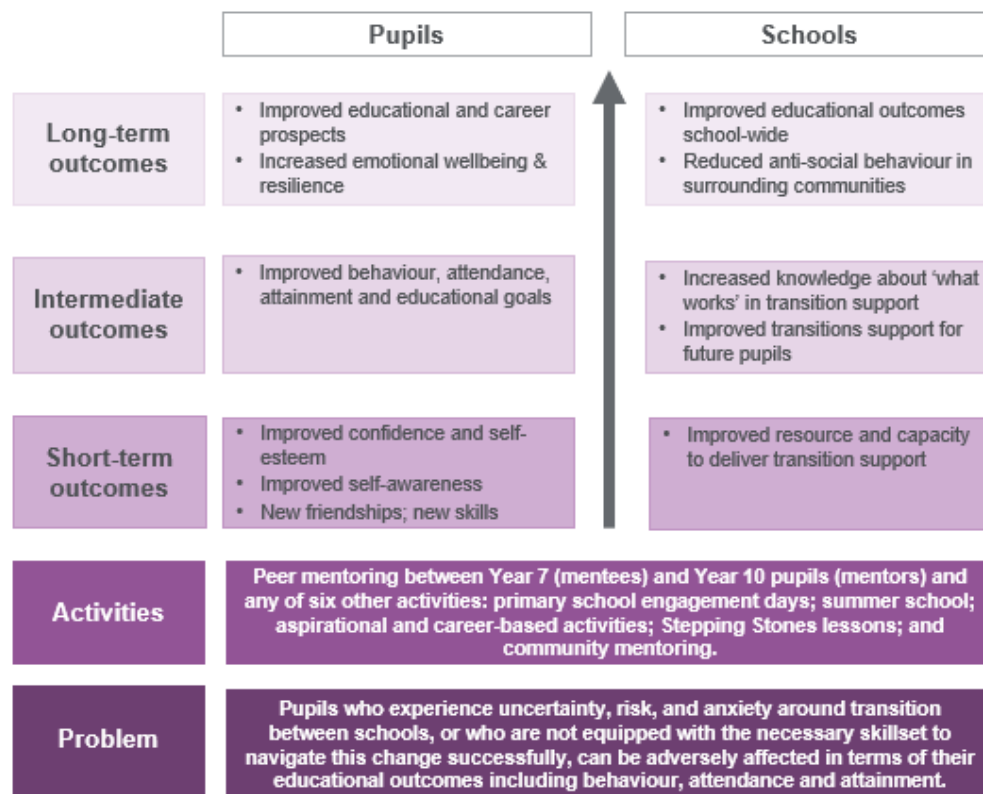
## 1.2. The Stepping Stones programme

The Stepping Stones programme aims to support vulnerable young people in their transition from primary to secondary school.

The programme was designed in 2016 by teachers from three secondary schools in London – Gladesmore Community School, The Urswick School and Heathcote School and Science College – in collaboration with the non-profit Gangs Unite and the Greater London Authority (GLA).

The programme focused on supporting improvement in pupil attainment, behaviour and attendance through the delivery of six interrelated activities, summarised in the logic model on the next page. Programme activities are described in detail in **Chapter 6** and a full programme logic model is in **Appendix A**.

**Figure 1: Stepping Stones summary logic model**



The programme was piloted with 300 young people across Gladesmore, Urswick and Heathcote schools in the 2016/2017 academic year. An independent evaluation of the pilot programme by Traverse (formerly OPM Group) concluded that the Stepping Stones programme could have a positive impact on the academic progress, behaviour and attendance of vulnerable young people and support transition in their first year at secondary school.

The Mayor subsequently announced a scale-up of the programme through his Young Londoners Fund – allowing two new cohorts of pupils to be supported in the

<sup>14</sup> Evangelou, M. et al. 2008. What makes a successful transition from primary to secondary school?. Nottingham, United Kingdom: Department for Children Schools and Families.

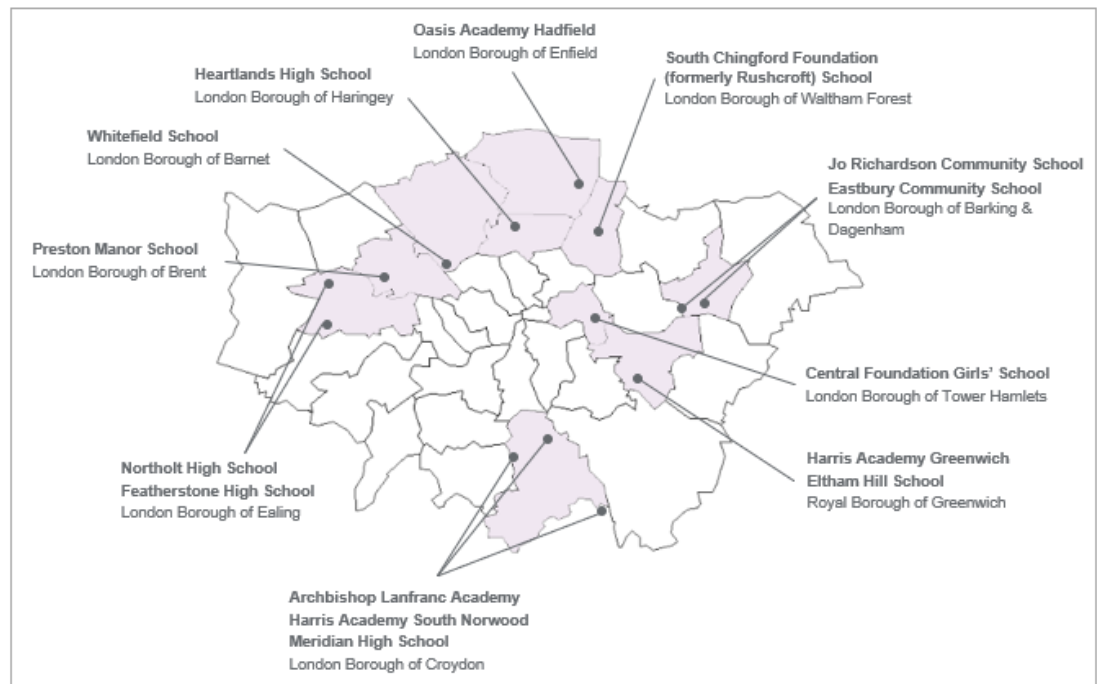


2018/19 and 2019/20 academic years. The grant programme was launched in the spring of 2018 as an open application process. Schools were eligible if they were located in a borough with a borough-wide free school meals rate of 60%+.

### 1.2.1. Stepping Stones programme 2018-2020

The Stepping Stones programme 2018-2020 awarded 15 secondary schools across 10 London boroughs with up to £50,000 each to deliver the Stepping Stones programme between July 2018 and December 2020 (**Figure 2**). Full school descriptions can be found in **Appendix B**.

**Figure 2: Stepping Stones schools 2018-2020**



Funded schools were required to deliver the core peer mentoring element of the Stepping Stones programme but, unlike in the pilot programme, were free to pick and choose between the five other programme elements in line with the needs of their pupil population.

Schools were asked to each deliver the programme to a minimum of 100 Year 7s and 40 Year 10s over two academic years. In total, the 15 funded schools supported over 2,079 Year 7 pupils in their transition from primary to secondary school education, of which 507 pupils had Special Educational Needs (SEN). An overview of pupil demographics is provided on the next page (**Figure 3**).

Funded schools tended to target three overlapping categories of pupils:

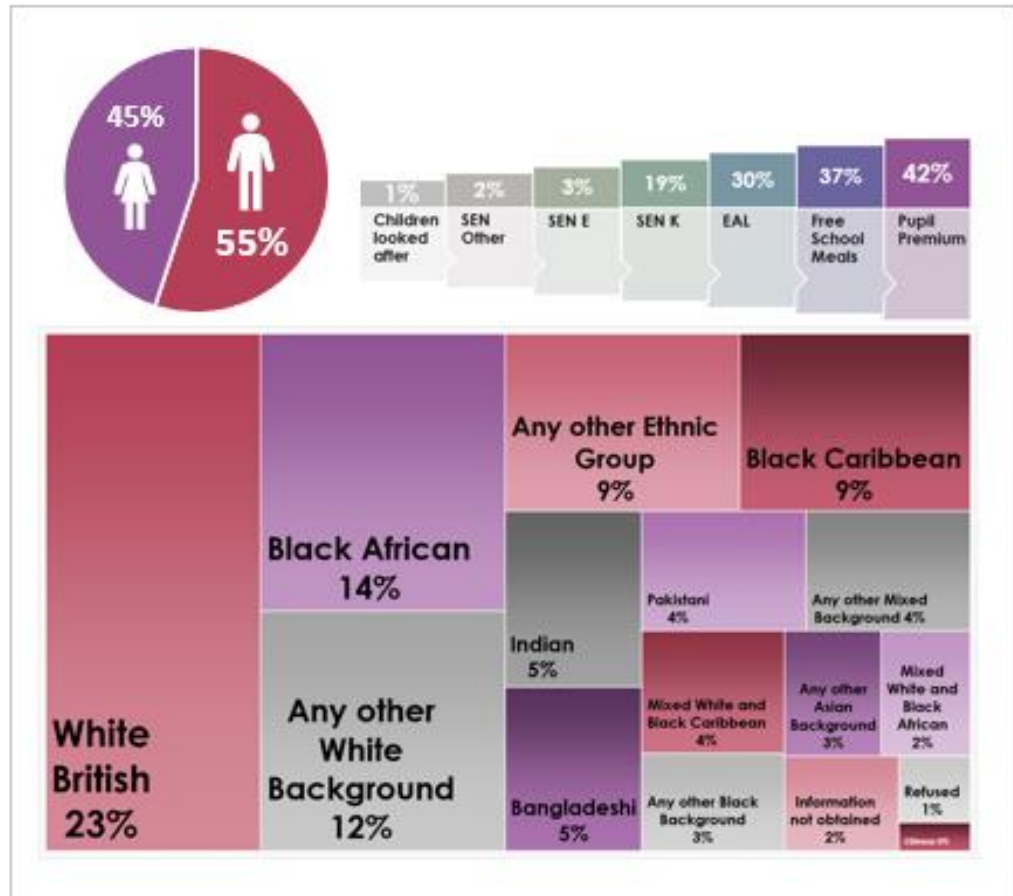
- Young people with issues controlling their behaviour and/or poor records of attendance, behaviour or areas of other concern in primary school;
- Socially anxious and/or shy, quiet young people who had strong records of attendance, behaviour and attainment in primary school, but where there were concerns regarding the transition; and
- Young people with Pupil Premium and/or Special Educational Needs status.

While most schools worked with these specific groups of vulnerable young people through targeted activities such as peer mentoring and summer school activities, it

should be noted that some schools also sought to extend other Stepping Stones activities to as many Year 7 pupils as possible in order to draw maximum benefit from the funding.

Schools also supported over 896 Year 9s, 10s and 11s through the programme as peer mentors.

**Figure 3: Stepping Stones pupil demographics – gender, pupil status and ethnicity (Year 7s)<sup>15</sup>**



The programme will fund 15 further schools in 2020-2022 under the management of the Mayor's Violence Reduction Unit.

### 1.2.2. Programme disruption

It should be noted that funded schools varied their management of the programme and delivery models across the first and second year of the programme in response to two factors beyond their control: the grant award timeline; and the COVID-19 outbreak in the UK.

#### Grant award timeline

Funded schools were awarded grants in July 2018 – the end of summer term – which meant that not all schools were able to fully prepare for the first year of the programme. This included more limited engagement with primary schools, less targeted recruitment into the programme and examples of where schools were

<sup>15</sup> Gender and ethnicity percentages are proportion of total Stepping Stones pupils where data was provided in response to these categories. Pupil status percentages are proportion of the total number of Stepping Stones pupils on the programme.



unable to run summer school activities.

Schools were in a better position in terms of recruitment, management and delivery at the start of the second year of the programme, where they had far longer to select, recruit and deliver early activities to pupils.

### **COVID-19 outbreak**

Funded schools were in their second year of delivering the Stepping Stones programme at the point of the **COVID-19 outbreak** in the UK.

The government temporarily closed all schools for most pupils in England from March 2020 on the advice of medical and scientific experts in order to manage the spread of COVID-19 and relieve pressure on the health care system. Vulnerable children and the children of critical workers were still allowed to attend school. Schools in England subsequently shifted to remote education for most pupils, who continued to learn from home for much of the remaining 2019/2020 academic year.

These events severely disrupted Stepping Stones activities planned for spring and summer terms, many of which were reliant on face-to-face delivery. Most schools subsequently adapted their programmes to support pupils during this difficult period, which is explored within the analysis of each activity in **Chapter 6** of this report.

The GLA also allowed secondary schools to use programme underspend as a result of COVID-19 to purchase digital technology to support pupils vulnerable to digital exclusion (for example, laptops, WiFi dongles), or extend their activities into the 2020/2021 academic year.

## **1.3. Stepping Stones programme evaluation**

Traverse were commissioned by the GLA in August 2018 to undertake an independent evaluation of the Stepping Stones programme.

This report presents the findings of the evaluation, exploring the impact of the Stepping Stones programmes across the 15 schools and the key learning that can be drawn from them.

### **1.3.1. Evaluation aims and design**

The evaluation aimed to investigate the impact and process of the programme to assess whether it achieved its desired outcomes and, in doing so, build on the existing evidence base of what works to support successful transition to secondary school for vulnerable pupils.

To achieve this, the evaluation consisted of three strands:

- An outcome strand that adopted a quasi-experimental design, which included self-selected historical comparison groups.
- A process strand that sought to identify learning including success factors, challenges, and recommendations for future delivery of the programme; and
- An economic strand that sought to establish the economic impact of the programme on the education system and wider public finances.

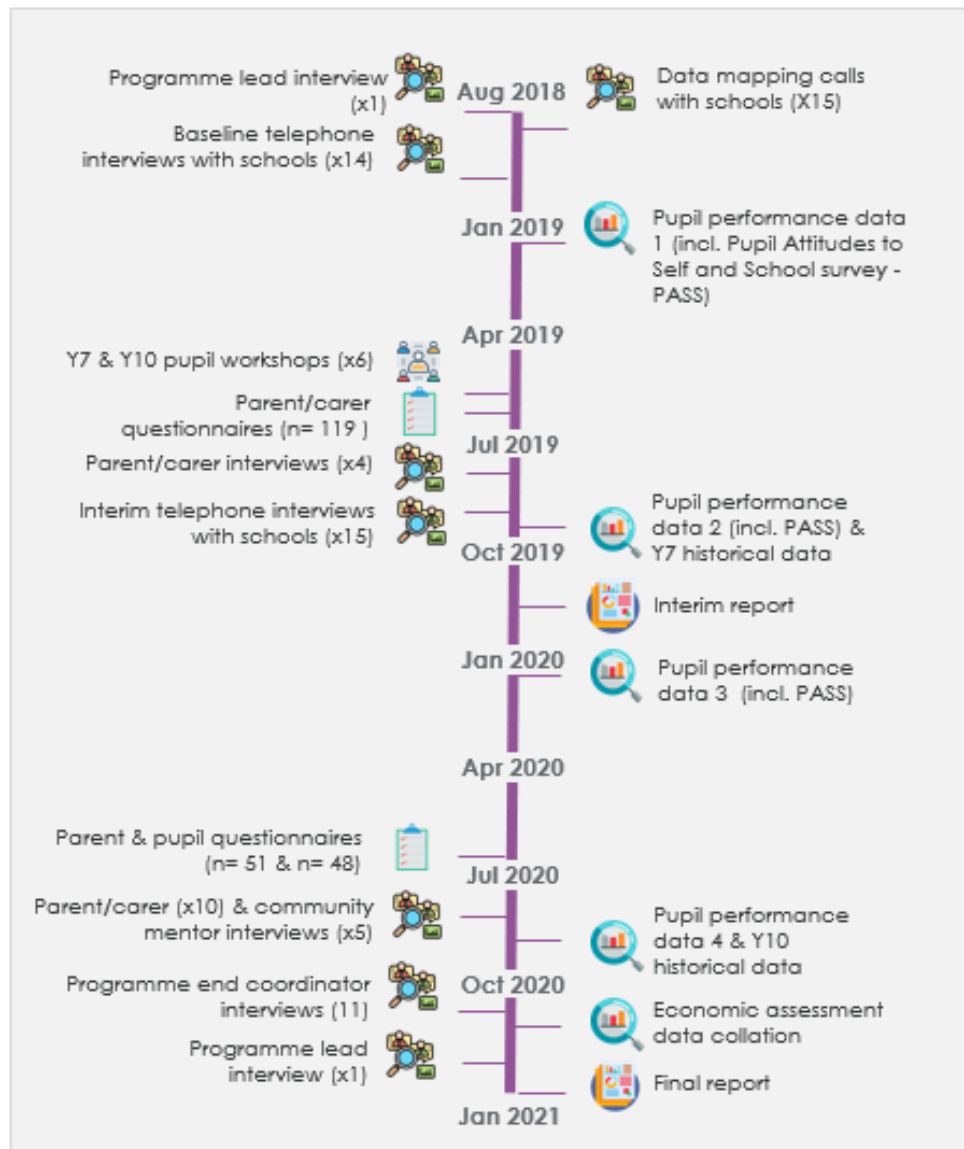
The evaluation design was validated by [Project Oracle](#) in line with their standards of evidence. A summary of the questions that underpinned the evaluation is in **Appendix C**.



### 1.3.2. Evaluation methodology

A mixed methods approach was carried out across funded schools. An overview of this is presented in the diagram on the next page, while more detailed descriptions are in **Appendix D**.

**Figure 4: Overview of the Stepping Stones programme evaluation methodology<sup>16</sup>**



### 1.3.3. Limitations and caveats

The Stepping Stones programme encouraged adaptation and innovation among funded schools in how they delivered the programme, linked to specific school contexts and the needs of the pupil population. The result was the delivery of 15 distinct programmes that adopted varied approaches to pupil recruitment, combined different Stepping Stones elements and delivered different types of activities.

While this complexity provides a rich opportunity to explore a range of alternative approaches, it also poses challenges to evaluating the impact of the programme as a whole. The ability of the evaluation to assess the impact of the programme was

<sup>16</sup> Icons made by [DinosoftLabs](#), [Eucalyp](#), [Freepik](#) and [Prosymbols](#) from [www.flaticon.com](http://www.flaticon.com).



also limited by:

- **Outcome data sources.** Although the approach to data collection was discussed and agreed with individual schools before the start of the programme, there were considerable problems in collecting data across the programme as a whole. School-specific data systems and measures, missing data and varied data collection timelines meant that not all data could be standardised and included within the evaluation. Some schools also struggled with the administrative time required for this task. Not all schools are included in the outcomes evaluation for this reason. For this reason, graphs of quantitative data only show schools which provided a complete set of the data being shown.
- **Attribution of impact.** Many schools had previously delivered some form of transitions support, which historical comparison groups are likely to have benefited from. This limits the extent to which the evaluation can draw firm conclusions on the impact of Stepping Stones.
- **Changes to delivery.** Some schools delivered Stepping Stones activities to a wide range of pupils in their first year of delivery, followed by more targeted delivery with 'vulnerable' pupils in the second year of the programme. This potentially dilutes the perceived impact of the programme.
- **COVID-19.** The dramatic change in pupils' learning environments limited the extent to which the evaluation could assess impact across the second year of the programme. The closure of schools precluded face-to-face workshops groups with pupils (which were replaced with paper questionnaires), while quantitative data could only be collated and analysed across the autumn and spring terms, rather than the full academic year. This means that the quantitative data for the second year, including attendance, exclusions and progress, represent only the first part of the year when students were in school.

Given these caveats, the impact evaluation in this report should still be treated with caution. Longer term follow-up to track the impact of the programme beyond the end of transition activities would provide additional valuable insights into the true impact of the programme.

## 1.4. Reading this report

The report is structured into the following sections:

- Chapter 2: Impacts on Stepping Stones pupils
- Chapter 3: Impacts on Stepping Stones mentors
- Chapter 4: Wider programme impacts
- Chapter 5: Economic assessment
- Chapter 6: Programme elements and learning
- Chapter 7: Programme support and learning
- Chapter 8: Conclusions and recommendations



## 2. Impacts on Stepping Stones pupils

This section presents the impact of the Stepping Stones programme on the Year 7 pupils who participated. The chapter is structured under three main outcome areas: academic progress; behaviour; and attendance.

### 2.1. Academic progress

Primary to secondary school transition can present particular challenges to academic progress and attainment. Pupils have to continue learning while negotiating and adapting to a new, more challenging school setting with different academic structures, subjects and expectations.

Pupils also suffer a 'learning loss' while not in school over the summer break, which is felt more starkly in subjects such as Maths that have hierarchical learning structures. In total, two in five pupils fail to reach expected academic progress after transitioning to secondary school.<sup>17</sup>

The information in this section is drawn from pupils' progress data in the first (autumn) and final (summer)<sup>18</sup> terms, compared to a year average for historical comparison groups. Progress measurement systems were often unique to schools and so, where possible, data has been standardised into a single system. This is complemented by parent/carer attitudinal responses; and qualitative research with coordinators, parent/carers and pupils.

#### Summary

- There is strong evidence to suggest that the Stepping Stones programme had a positive impact on academic progress, especially in Maths where there was an estimated 5.1% improvement in progress compared to historical comparison groups. Pupils with Special Educational Needs and pupils in receipt of Pupil Premium saw similar improvements.
- While the causal links between Stepping Stones activities and pupil progress are less clear than for behaviour and attendance, several coordinators reflected that improvement in these areas would in turn contribute to improved progress and attainment.
- The proportion of Stepping Stones pupils at or above expected progress in English and Maths across Stepping Stones schools was lower in Year 8 than in Year 7. This may suggest that some pupils struggle after 'exiting' the Stepping Stones programme and the support that it provides.

#### 2.1.1. Academic progress data

Looking across the four schools where data was standardised against a historical comparison group<sup>19</sup>, there is strong evidence to suggest that the Stepping Stones

<sup>17</sup> Galton M., Gray J., Ruddock J. 1999. The Impact of School Transitions and Transfers on Pupil Progress and Attainment. London: Department for Education and Employment.

<sup>18</sup> Pupil performance data was not collected in summer 2019/20 due to the disruption to the closure of schools and disruption to young people's education in March 2020. Spring term data in March 2020 was therefore treated as the evaluation 'end date' for cohort 2 of pupils.

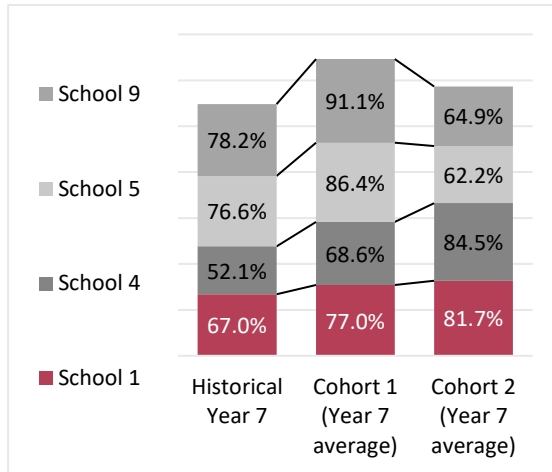
<sup>19</sup> Fewer schools were able to be included within this portion of the evaluation as their measurement systems could not be standardised within a programme-wide system.



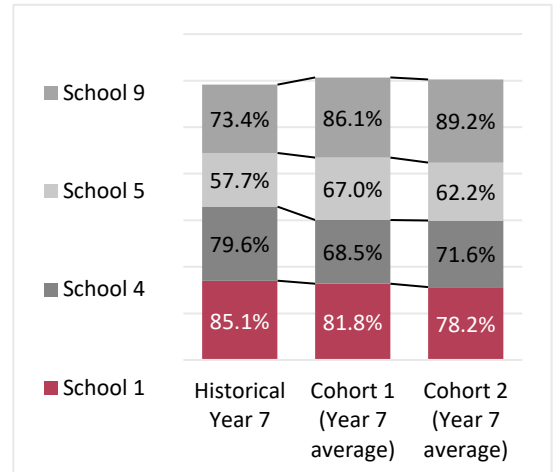
programme had a positive impact on pupil progress.

All four schools had at least one Stepping Stones cohort where the proportion of pupils at or above expected progress<sup>20</sup> levels in Maths exceeded the historical comparison group (**Figure 17**). As in the pilot programme evaluation, this impact was slightly less pronounced in English, where only two schools had at least one Stepping Stones cohort that exceeded the historical comparison group (**Figure 18**).

**Figure 17: Proportion of Stepping Stones pupils at or above expected progress levels for Maths, compared to a historical comparison group**

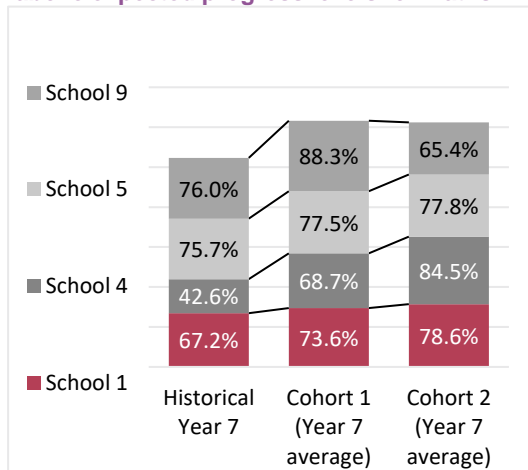


**Figure 18: Proportion of Stepping Stones at or above expected progress levels for English, compared to a historical comparison group**

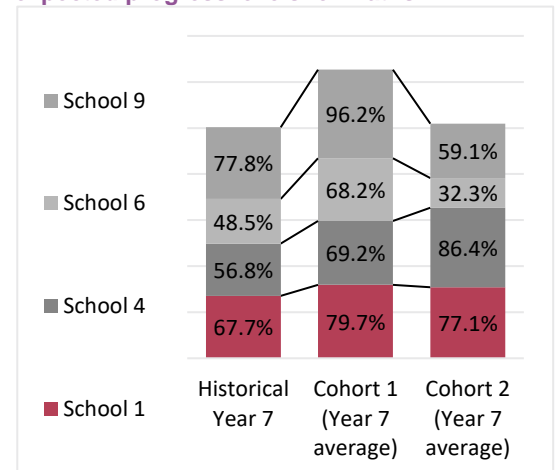


When examining different pupil sub-groups, similar improvements in the proportion of pupils at or above expected progress levels in Maths were observed for young people with Special Educational Needs (**Figure 19**) and those eligible for Pupil Premium (**Figure 20**). Similar to the overall programme data, there was less of a suggestion that the Stepping Stones programme supported improved progress in English for these sub-groups.

**Figure 18: Proportion of Stepping Stones pupils with Special Educational Needs at or above expected progress levels for Maths**



**Figure 17: Proportion of Stepping Stones pupils eligible for Pupil Premium at or above expected progress levels for Maths**

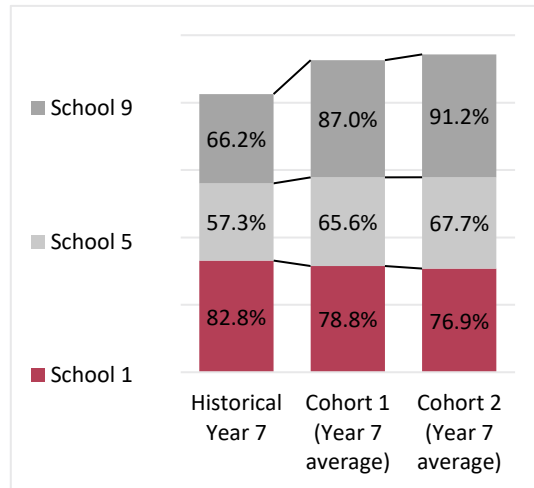


<sup>20</sup> This is the amount of progress a pupil makes relative to the amount they are expected to make. If they are below expected progress, they are likely to still be progressing, but not at the rate the school expects.

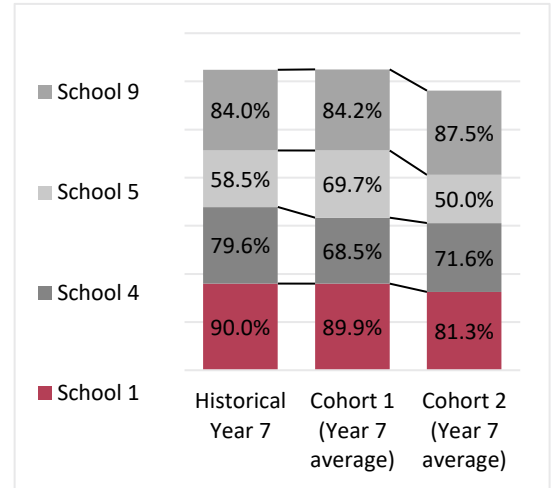


The programme also appears to have had a greater impact on the academic progress of boys than girls. For boys in Year 7, progress in English for both cohorts was distinctly better than it has been historically (**Figure 21**), whereas there was little reported difference for Year 7 girls (**Figure 22**).

**Figure 21: Proportion of male Stepping Stone pupils at or above expected progress levels for English in Year 7, compared to a historical comparison group**



**Figure 22: Proportion of female Stepping Stones pupils at or above expected progress levels for English in Year 7, compared to a historical comparison group**



In addition to pupil progress data, two other data sources evidenced good academic progress for Stepping Stones pupils:

- Four of six schools who undertook Pupil Attitudes to Self and School (PASS) surveys in the first year of the programme also reported that pupils' motivation to undertake and complete curriculum-based tasks showed an overall increase.<sup>21</sup>
- Stepping Stones parents were asked at the end of Year 7 how satisfied they were with their child's academic progress. 83% were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with their child's academic progress over Year 7.

### 2.1.2. Stepping Stones support

The direct links between Stepping Stones activities and pupil progress are less clear than for behaviour and attendance, but several coordinators acknowledged that improved behaviour and increased attendance would in turn contribute to improved progress and attainment:

“[Without] higher level of permanent and fixed term exclusions with missed education, this would have impacted academic achievement. [Exclusions] mean being behind for a long period of time because it's hard to catch up.” – Coordinator

<sup>21</sup> The [PASS survey](#) is a statistically reliable measure of highly subjective and sensitive issues, which focuses on uncovering emotional or attitudinal problems (such as low self-regard or attitudes to attendance) likely to hinder achievement at school.





“[Stepping Stones] has helped improve behaviour and subsequently academic progress” – Coordinator

Some coordinators and pupils, however, were able to point towards specific Stepping Stones activities that they felt had supported pupil progress and attainment. As in the pilot programme evaluation, this included where pupils received advice from mentors on how to approach school and homework:

“My buddy was kind, supportive and always tried her best to give me constructive advice on how to deal with school work... Everything was very nerve-wracking and I couldn't handle it all but my mentor assisted me in organising my time.” – Stepping Stones Pupil

Several coordinators also highlighted how running homework clubs as part of Stepping Stones, sometimes run by peer mentors, was a key pillar of Stepping Stones support. Some parents also referenced the significance of the support that their young people had received around homework.

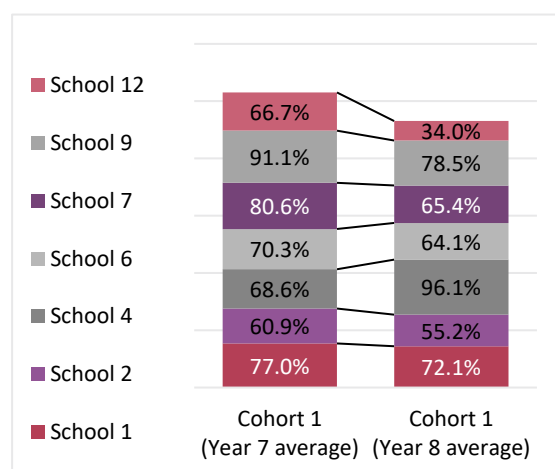
### 2.1.3. Sustained progress

The evaluation also tracked the academic progress rates of the first cohort of Stepping Stones pupils across the whole of Year 8.

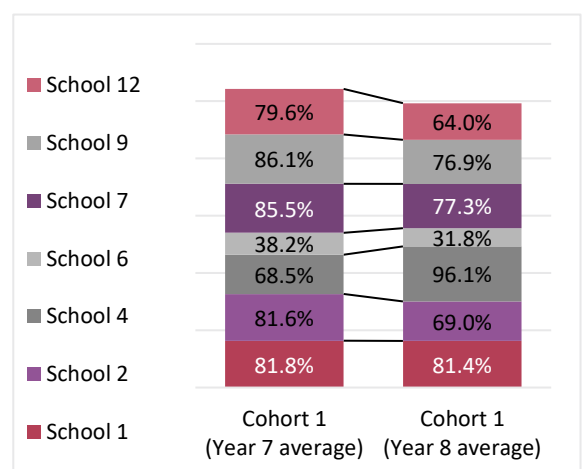
As shown in **Figures 23 and 24**, the proportion of Stepping Stones pupils at or above expected progress in English and Maths was consistently lower in most Stepping Stones schools in Year 8 than in Year 7.<sup>22</sup> Lower proportions of pupils at or above expected levels of progress were also reported for young people eligible for Pupil Premium and those with Special Educational Needs.

This may suggest that some pupils struggle after ‘exiting’ the Stepping Stones programme and the support that it provides when entering Year 8. Some coordinators also suggested that the positive impacts of the programme, in general, would be greater if some support activities continued.

**Figure 23: Proportion of Stepping Stones pupils at or above expected progress levels for Maths in Year 7 and Year 8**



**Figure 24: Proportion of Stepping Stones pupils at or above expected progress levels for English in Year 7 and Year 8**



<sup>22</sup> The historical comparison data from schools did not include Year 8 academic progress data, so there is no historical cohort to compare this to.



## 2.2. Behaviour

### Summary

- There was evidence to suggest that the Stepping Stones programme helped reduce the number of exclusions. Overall there was an estimated 1.1% fall in exclusions compared to historical comparison groups, due to improvements among pupils with Special Educational Needs. This builds on the pilot programme evaluation evidence base.
- The summer school activities helped to improve the self-confidence of socially anxious, shy or quieter pupils.
- There was evidence to suggest that the programme had helped improve the self-awareness and maturity of young people who struggled to control their behaviour.
- The proportion of pupils with one or more exclusions continued to decrease in Year 8, though coordinators highlighted that this could be susceptible to how well pupils cope with new challenges from Year 8 onwards.

While not all pupils joined Stepping Stones programmes with a record of behaviour issues, evidence suggests that where young people are anxious about or during transition, this can lead to challenging or disruptive behaviour in school. This can affect attendance and, in turn, attainment as part of a negative cycle.

The information in this section is drawn from exclusions data in the first (autumn) and final (summer)<sup>23</sup> terms, compared to a year average for historical comparison groups. Not all schools in the evaluation are included here as some did not have exclusion policies, while others did not return data (see **Chapter 1.3.3**). This data is complemented by parent/carer questionnaire responses and interview data from coordinators, parent/carers and pupils.

### 2.2.1. Exclusions data

Secondary schools typically use two tiers of exclusion: internal exclusions for disciplinary reasons, where pupils remain on the school premises but do not go to all of the same lessons as other pupils; and external exclusions for serious offences, where pupils are prohibited from school premises.

Internal exclusions are frequently used differently by schools, and are therefore difficult to compare across schools, while external exclusions are more standardised. At the same time, some schools, including schools in this evaluation, have policies that purposefully rule out exclusions. To support comparison across schools, data in this section is a combination of both internal and external exclusion data to capture all disciplinary actions taken.

Looking across the five schools that returned exclusions data against a historical comparison group, there is evidence to suggest that the Stepping Stones programme helped reduce the number of exclusions. This is in line with the

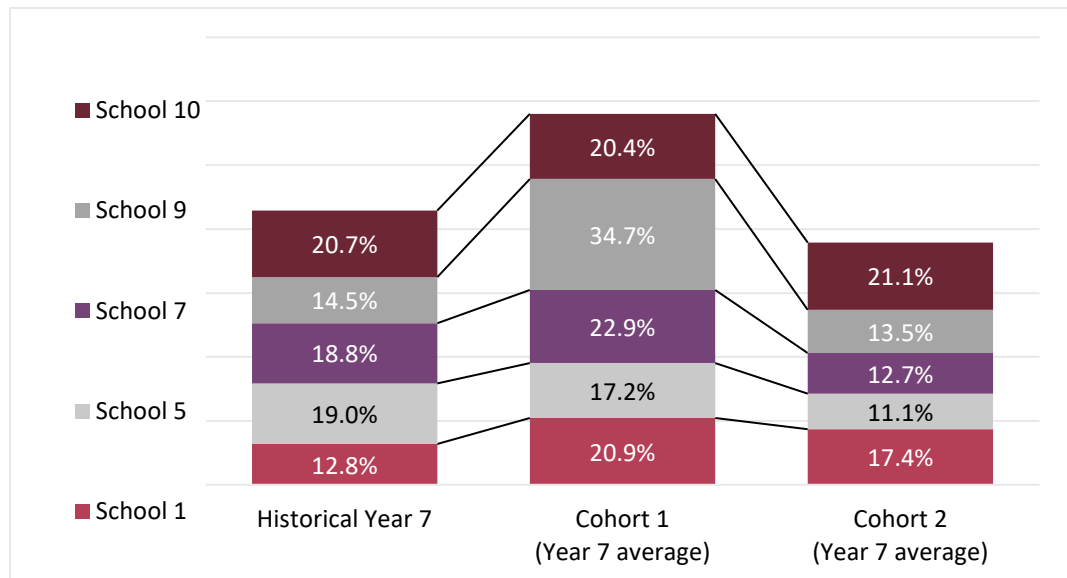
---

<sup>23</sup> Pupil performance data was not collected in summer 2019/20 due to the disruption to the closure of schools and disruption to young people's education in March 2020. Spring term data in March 2020 was therefore treated as the evaluation 'end date' for cohort 2 of pupils.

anticipated outcomes in the programme logic model and pilot programme evaluation findings.

As shown in **Figure 5** below, four of five schools had at least one Stepping Stones cohort where the proportion of pupils with an average of one or more exclusions over the year was lower than the historical comparison group, primarily driven by reductions in exclusions among pupils with Special Educational Needs

**Figure 5: Proportion of Stepping Stones pupils with 1 or more exclusions, compared to a historical comparison group**



Overall decreases in exclusions were also supported by qualitative reflections from coordinators in several other schools, where historical comparison data was not available:

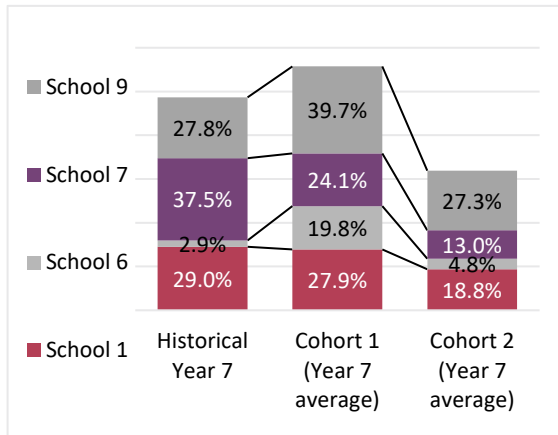
“[There’s been a] massive reduction in... exclusions in KS3. Lots of pastoral managers and assistant principle has said [Stepping Stones] has had direct impact on this” – Coordinator

“The behaviour in [Year 7] has been better. Apart from the very top end, far less external exclusions and internal exclusions.” – Coordinator

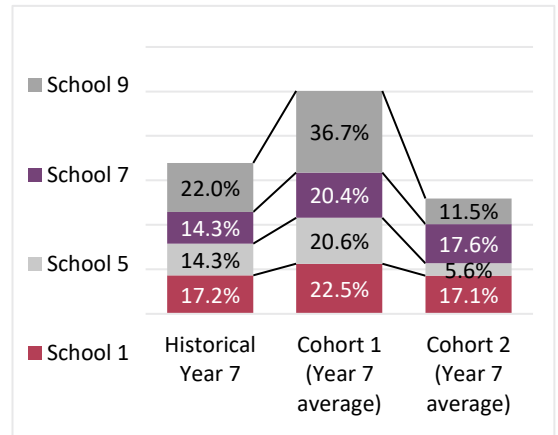
When examining different pupil sub-groups, similar reductions in the proportion of pupils with one or more exclusions were observed across schools for pupils with Special Educational Needs and pupils in receipt of Pupil Premium. This can be seen in **Figure 6** and **Figure 7** on the next page.



**Figure 6: Proportion of Stepping Stones pupils with Special Educational Needs with a year average of 1 or more exclusions, compared to a historical comparison group**



**Figure 7: Proportion of Stepping Stones pupils in receipt of Pupil Premium with a year average of 1 or more exclusions, compared to a historical comparison group**



## 2.2.2. Personal development & Stepping Stones support

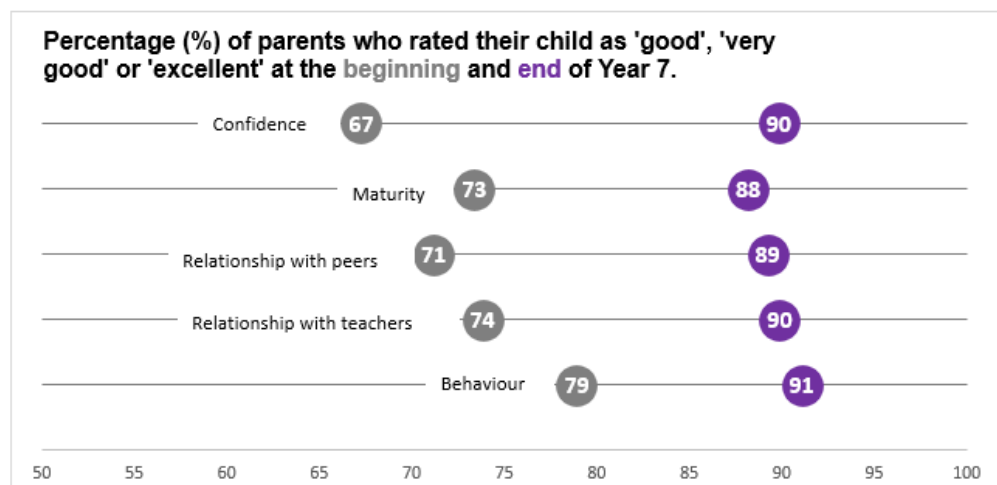
As reported in the evaluation of the pilot programme, some of the main attributes that underpin good behaviour (and, by extension, lower exclusion rates) are also some of the main reported benefits of the Stepping Stones programme.

As shown on the next page (**Figure 8**), parents consistently reported that their child's confidence, maturity, relationship with their peers, relationship with teachers and behaviour had improved by the end of Year 7.

While parents were not asked to directly attribute this to Stepping Stones, 74% of parents felt the programme had supported their child 'quite well' or 'very well' through transition from primary to secondary school. As detailed throughout this section, many parents also provided examples of where Stepping Stones activities had contributed to changes in their child.

This section explores these changes (as outlined in **Figure 8**) in turn and how the Stepping Stones programme was felt to have supported these.

**Figure 8: "At the beginning of Year 7, how you would have rated your child's..." (n= 168) and "Now, at the end of Year 7 / beginning of Year 8, how would you have rated your child's..." (n= 168)**





### 2.2.3. Self-confidence

Coordinators, mentors, Stepping Stone pupils and their parents all reflected that the Stepping Stones programme had helped to improve pupils' self-confidence. In turn, this was felt to have supported good behaviour.

What this looked like in practice often depended on the child in question, and varied between socially anxious or shy, quieter young people and young people that struggled to control their behaviour.

Building on the findings of the pilot programme evaluation, qualitative evidence suggests that the Stepping Stones programme helped socially anxious, or shy, quieter young people improve their social confidence and confidence in school settings as they were able to:

- **Meet new friends**, which eased some of the social pressures and anxieties around starting secondary school. This was especially important in schools with large numbers of feeder primaries, where pupils were unlikely to be in the same form as their friends.

"It allowed the quiet ones to create a bit of sense of belonging. Some of the students find it hard to maintain friends, they're isolated. The sessions allowed them to create a sense of belonging." – Coordinator

- **Get to know the school**, including increased familiarity with the size, layout and systems of the school, as well as the teachers.

"... Going to the secondary school [during summer] when it was quiet... they really get to know the school... it just helps them with the orientation, getting to see what it's going to be like, the layout where the different classes are." - Parent

After the start of the school year, several other Stepping Stones strands were also identified as supporting social confidence:

- Stepping Stones lessons were reported to be particularly beneficial in increasing pupils' self-esteem and helping them address anxiety-related problems.
- Peer mentoring was also reported to help more socially-anxious pupils feel special and feel that they had someone familiar to easily ask for help or advice; and
- Community mentoring could help pupils gain social confidence through more regular conversations with their peers and/or an adult.

Improvement in confidence was reflected within parents' perceptions of their child's education. 89% of parents that returned a parent carer questionnaire felt that their child's confidence was 'good', 'very good', or 'excellent' at the end of Year 7, compared to 67% at the start (**Figure 8**).

### 2.2.4. Self-awareness and maturity

Several coordinators reflected that, for young people who struggled to control their behaviour, the programme had a particular impact on their self-awareness and maturity. In several schools, this focused on pupils learning to identify, accept and





control their emotions, as well as potential negative influences on them:

“One of our students who has been probably the biggest concern in the year group, at the end of this year... he said, 'Sir, if I am completely honest, I think I should probably stay off the playground'... he feels if he goes out and plays in the playground he is going to get himself into...trouble... He decided to stay inside and stay calm. It was quite a mature choice to make.” –

Coordinator

Improvements in maturity were also reflected within parents' perceptions of their child. 88% of parents that returned a parent carer questionnaire felt that their child's maturity was 'good', 'very good', or 'excellent' at the end of Year 7, compared to 73% at the start of the year (**Figure 8**).

### 2.2.5. Relationships with teachers

There was some evidence to suggest that the Stepping Stones programme had also helped to improve the relationships between Stepping Stones pupils and teachers. Several coordinators reflected that they had observed improved pupil behaviour in lessons, which complements the quantitative data around reduced exclusions.

Coordinators also reflected that other aspects of their relationships with pupils, such as communication, had improved in general. This enabled them to intervene early when problems started to occur:

“Children who were just terrified of secondary school, and have settled in, they are able to talk to us. Some of those students who wouldn't have spoken to us, now come straight to us saying this is happening.” –

Coordinator

This improvement was again reflected within parents' perceptions of their child's education. 90% of parents that returned a parent carer questionnaire at the end of Year 7 felt that their child had a 'good', 'very good', or 'excellent' relationship with teachers, compared to 74% at the start of the year (**Figure 8**).

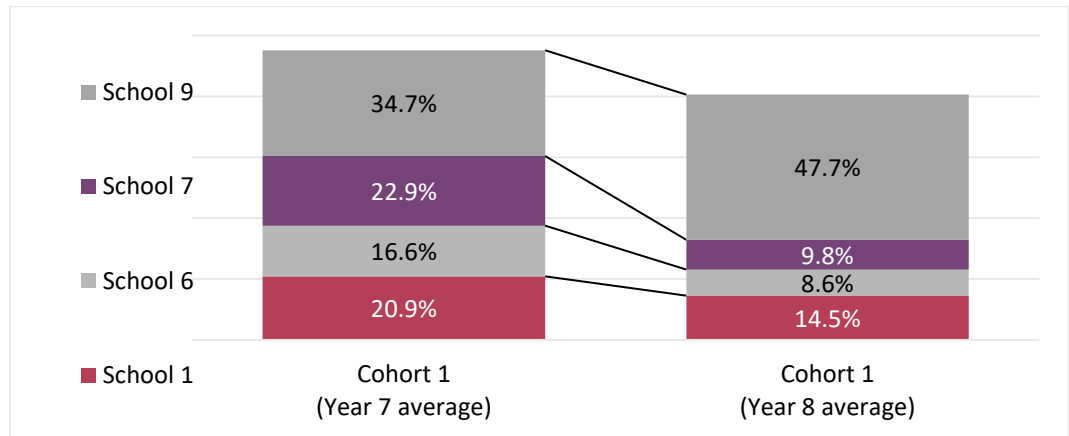
### 2.2.6. Sustained behaviour

The evaluation also tracked the exclusion rates of the first cohort of Stepping Stones pupils across Year 8. As shown in **Figure 9** on the next page, the proportion of Stepping Stones pupils with an average of one or more exclusions was lower in three of four schools in Year 8 compared to Year 7.<sup>24</sup>

---

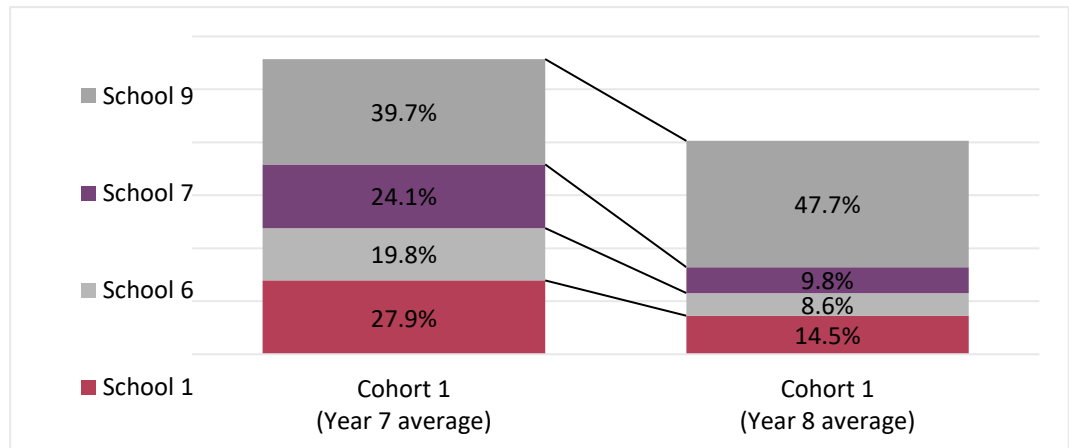
<sup>24</sup> The historical comparison data from schools did not include Year 8 behaviour data, so there is no historical cohort to compare this to.

**Figure 9: Proportion of Stepping Stones pupils with 1 or more exclusions in Year 7 (2018/19) and Year 8 (2019/20)**



As **Figure 10** shows below, the proportion of pupils with Special Educational Needs with one or more exclusions was also lower in three of four schools in Year 8 compared to in Year 7. There was not enough Year 8 data available to disaggregate by pupils eligible for Pupil Premium.

**Figure 10: Proportion of Stepping Stones pupils with Special Educational Needs with 1 or more exclusions in Year 7 (2018/19) and Year 8 (2019/20)**



However, coordinators had more mixed views on the likelihood of sustained positive behaviour in Year 8. While several coordinators felt that good behaviour might continue due to the changes in confidence, maturity and other foundations put in place, others were less sure due to the new challenges that pupils face in Year 8. This included reduced attention and support at a time when many pupils start experiencing hormonal changes.

“The ones with behaviour issues... they start to act out in Year 8 and 9 because the hormones are starting to act in.” – Coordinator

For these reasons, several coordinators planned to continue support for select groups of Year 8, providing peer mentoring (or support continued conversation between mentors and Stepping Stone pupils) as well as other activities such as specific Stepping Stones lessons.



## 2.3. Attendance

Poor transition can also affect pupil attendance rates in Year 7, which is directly linked to attainment. The Department for Education expects young people to achieve a 95% attendance rate in a school year, which is equivalent to 10 missed school days. This standard is used as the benchmark within the Stepping Stones programme evaluation.

The information in this section is drawn from an average of pupil's attendance in the first (autumn) and final (summer)<sup>25</sup> terms, compared to a year average for historical comparison groups. This data is complemented by parent/carer and pupil questionnaire attitudinal responses; and qualitative research with coordinators, parent/carers and pupils.

### Summary

- There is evidence to suggest that Stepping Stones contributed to higher attendance rates in some schools, especially for pupils in receipt of Pupil Premium. Overall, there was an estimated 5.5% increase in attendance compared to historical comparison groups.
- Summer schools helped directly address many of the fears that socially anxious or shy pupils had about secondary school, which increased their confidence and supported attendance early in the school year.
- The evidence suggests that free 'breakfast clubs' and community activities also supported attendance among more vulnerable groups of young people.
- In 5 of 8 Stepping Stones schools, the attendance rates of cohort 1 pupils either sustained or improved in Year 8. This further suggests that Stepping Stones pupils made a successful transition to secondary school.

### 2.3.1. Attendance rates

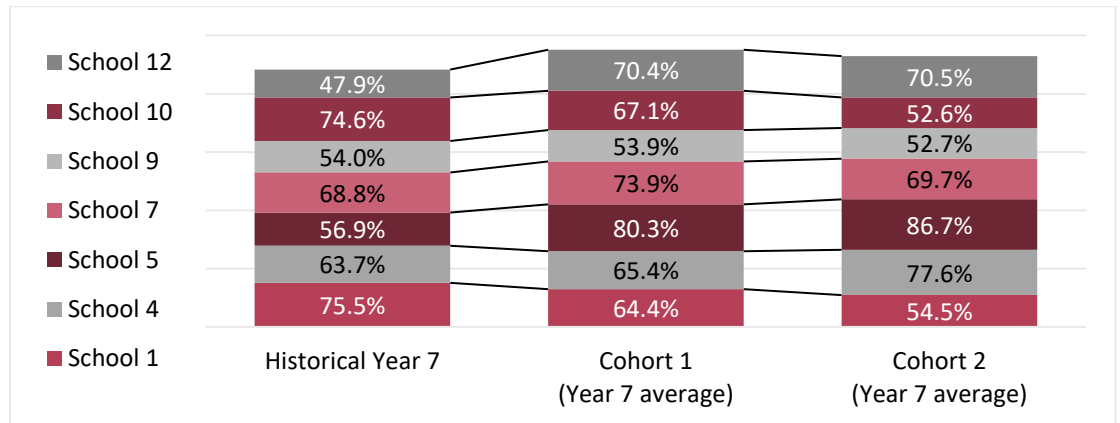
Looking across the programme as a whole (**Figure 11**), a high proportion of Stepping Stones pupils had an average attendance of 95%+ or higher.

The data also suggests that the programme may have contributed to higher attendance rates in some schools. Across the 7 schools that returned attendance and historical comparison data, 4 schools had at least one cohort that exceeded their historical comparison attendance rate. This included increases in average attendance rates in excess of 10% in three schools.

<sup>25</sup> Pupil performance data was not collected in summer 2019/20 due to the disruption to the closure of schools and disruption to young people's education in March 2020. Spring term data in March 2020 was therefore treated as the evaluation 'end date' for cohort 2 of pupils.

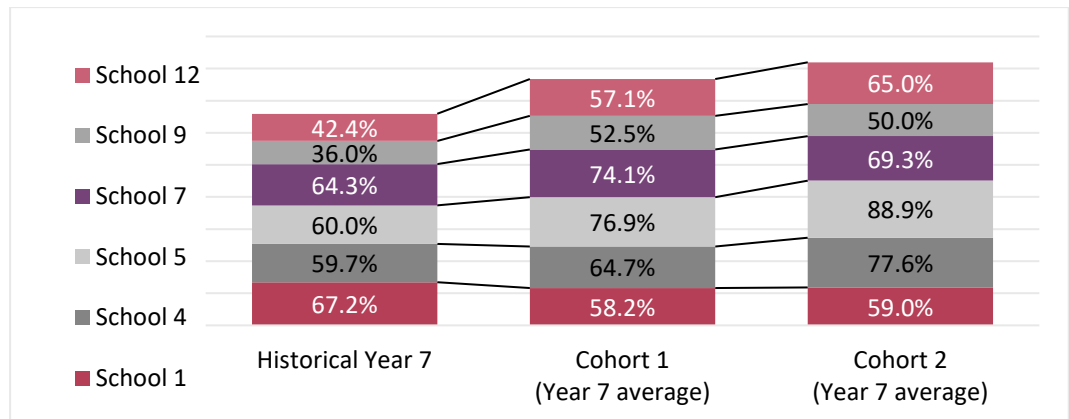


**Figure 11: Proportion of Stepping Stones pupils with 95%+ attendance rate in Year 7 versus historical comparison group**



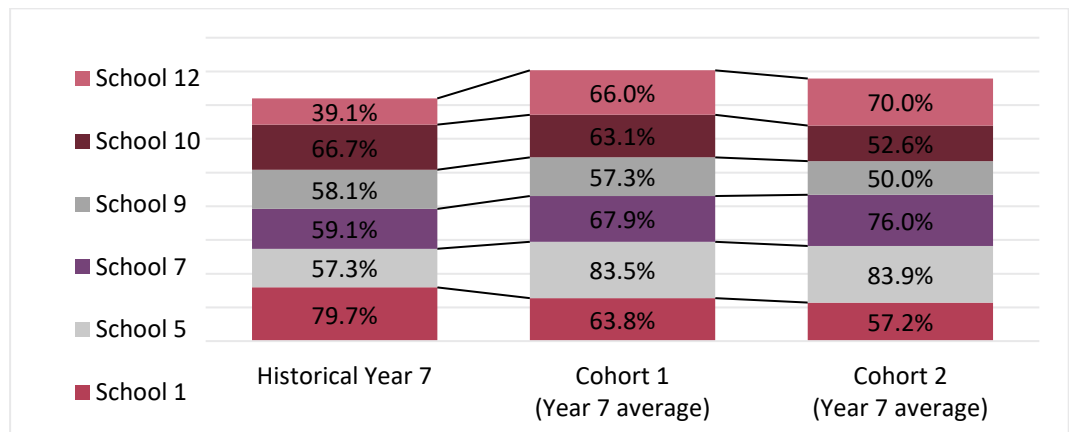
When examining different pupil sub-groups, there was a strong suggestion that the programme had a particular impact on the attendance rates of young people in receipt of Pupil Premium. As shown in **Figure 12** below, 5 of 6 schools that provided this data saw pupils eligible for Pupil Premium in both of their Stepping Stones cohorts exceed their historical comparison attendance rates.

**Figure 12: Proportion of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium with 95%+ attendance rate in Year 7**



The programme also appears to have had a greater impact on the attendance of boys than girls. As shown in **Figure 13** below, three of six schools that returned data saw boys exceed their historical comparison attendance rates by 10%+, whereas improvements in the proportion of girls were far smaller.

**Figure 13: Proportion of Stepping Stones males with 95%+ attendance rate in Year 7**

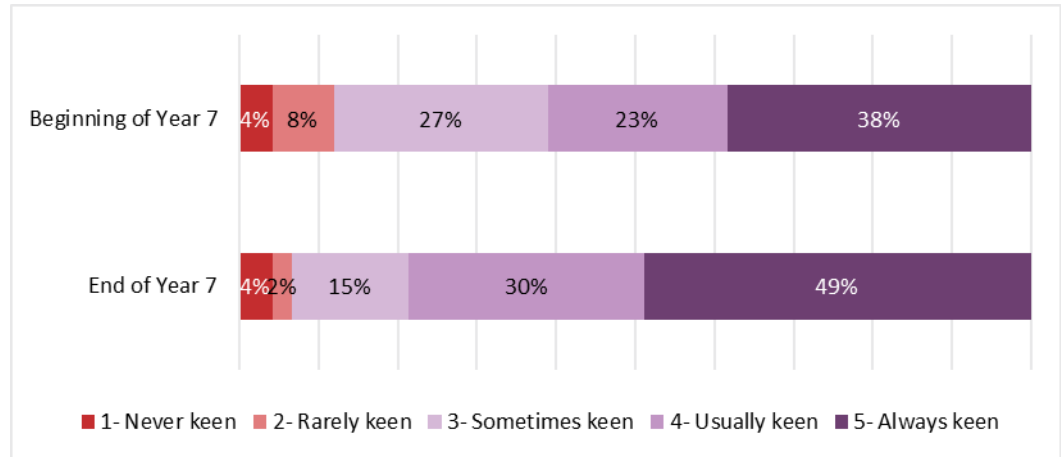




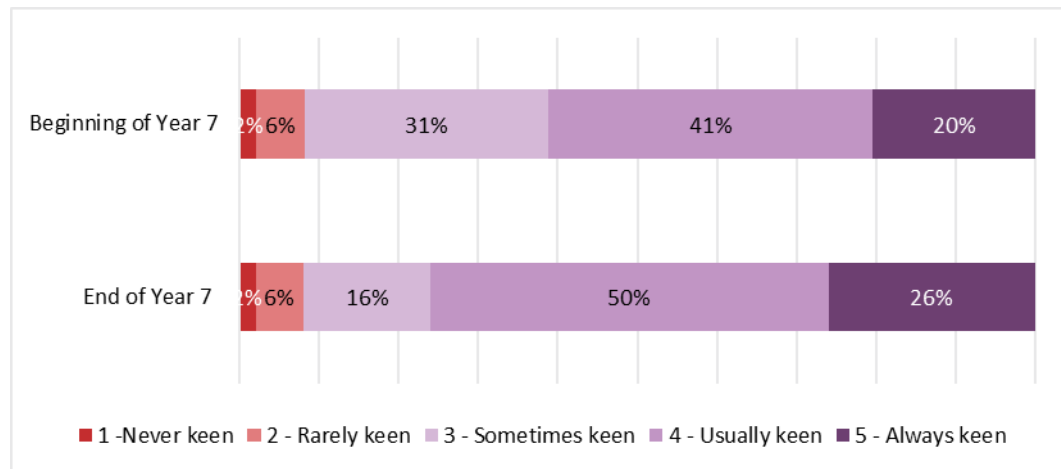
Stepping Stones parents were asked about how keen their child was to go to school at the start and end of the year. Pupils were also asked the same question in the second year of the programme, though only a very small number of responses were received.

As shown in **Figure 14** on below, a greater proportion of parents reported that their child was 'usually' or 'always' keen to go to school by the end of the year. The same positive shift was also observed in pupil responses (**Figure 15**).

**Figure 14: 'How keen was your child to go to school at the beginning and end of Year 7?' (n= 167)**



**Figure 15: "How keen were you to go to school at the beginning and end of Year 7?" (n= 50)**



In addition to attendance rates at school, coordinators also highlighted that reduced rates of internal and external exclusions meant that pupils spent more hours in school and lessons.

### 2.3.2. Stepping Stones support

Several schools felt that improvements in attendance were a direct result of the Stepping Stones programme and the tailored support it provided.

The summer school format was reported to have helped directly address many of the fears that socially anxious or shy pupils had about secondary school, which increased their confidence, enabled them to settle quicker into school life and supported attendance early in the school year.





“Year 7 attendance this year is at 96.8%. As a school our attendance is around 95% and we have never had such high attendance for Year 7... They have been coming in everyday because they have a sense of ownership and belonging. Stepping Stones has allowed them to settle quicker.” – Coordinator

Other activities also supported the attendance of specific groups of vulnerable young people. Some schools developed new activities such as ‘breakfast clubs’ that included a free breakfast alongside peer mentoring, which encouraged some pupils arrive early for the formal school day. Community mentor sessions provided young people who struggled to control their behaviour with an additional incentive to be in school.

“We have a breakfast club called magic breakfast. It goes beyond just what breakfast provides. Lots of students come in earlier for it. Year 7s attendance is the highest in the school.” – Coordinator

“Students were more likely to be in school... the day they had [community mentor] sessions on.” – Community mentor

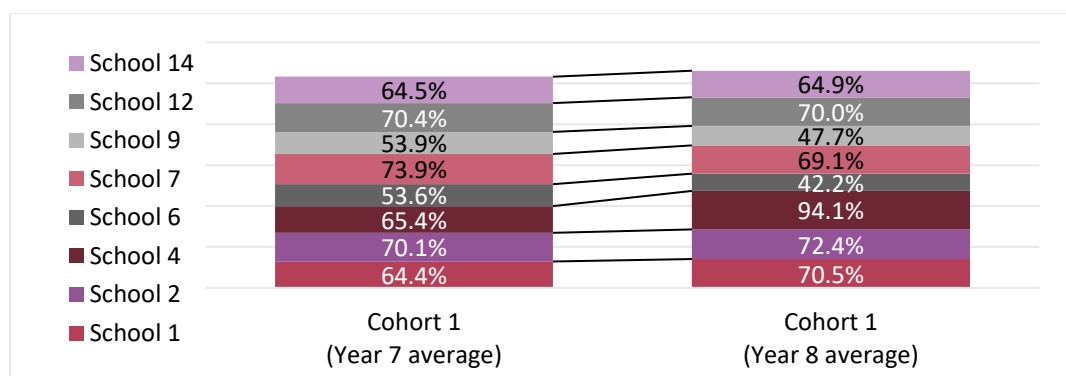
One school reported that, after their breakfast clubs ended (after their funding unexpectedly ran out due to a miscommunication with their funding partner), Stepping Stones pupils turned up on time for morning sessions less often. The impact of these elements on attendance are explored further in **Chapter 6.2**.

### 2.3.3. Sustained attendance

The evaluation also tracked the attendance rates of the first cohort of Stepping Stones pupils across the whole of Year 8.

As shown in **Figure 16**, the proportion of Stepping Stones pupils with an average attendance rate of 95%+ in Year 8 either sustained or increased in 5 of 8 Stepping Stones schools.<sup>26</sup> Read in the context of the rest of this chapter, this adds further weight to the suggestion that Stepping Stones pupils made a successful transition to secondary school, in part due to specific elements of the programme such as the summer school.

**Figure 16: Proportion of Stepping Stones graduates with 95%+ attendance rate in Year 7**



The same pattern of sustained attendance rates was also observed for pupils eligible for Pupil Premium and pupils with Special Educational Needs.

<sup>26</sup> The historical comparison data from schools did not include Year 8 attendance data, so there is no historical cohort to compare this to.



## 3. Impacts on Stepping Stones mentors

This chapter presents the impact of the Stepping Stones programme on peer mentors. Most mentors were Year 10 pupils. Schools often selected a mixture of 'model' pupils and less 'traditional' mentors. The latter often had lived experience of difficulties during transition, or were still experiencing ongoing challenges with their behaviour that it was hoped the mentor role might help address.

This impact of the programme on Year 10 pupils was a key focus of the evaluation after the pilot programme evaluation found that the impact of the Stepping Stones programme on mentors was more than expected. This included the conclusion that the programme had helped to improve Year 10 mentors' behaviour, soft skills and future aspirations.

The chapter explores these and other areas in more depth and is structured into two main outcome areas: behaviour; and development of personal qualities and skills that underpinned behavioural changes. The analysis in this section draws on quantitative data received from a sample of Stepping Stones schools, as well as qualitative data from coordinators and mentors.

### Summary

- The peer mentor role helped change the behaviours of mentors. This included reduced behavioural incidents for pupils with poorer behaviour records and more active bystandership around schools.
- There was evidence that these behavioural changes were driven by changes in personal qualities and skills as a result of training for and undertaking the peer mentor role. This included increased maturity, self-confidence and communication skills. This builds on the findings of the pilot programme evaluation.
- The evidence was less conclusive around other hypothesised outcomes, such as improved attendance and progress. While an analysis of mentor pupil performance data and several anecdotal reports suggest that these also improved in some schools, the evaluation did not explore qualitatively what might have led to these improvements.

### 3.1. Behaviours

Most coordinators reported that participation in the programme had helped change the behaviours of mentors in schools. This was especially the case where mentors had been selected, at least in part, to help support their own development and behaviour, though this was not successful for all pupils.

#### 3.1.1. Leadership

Peer mentors and coordinators reflected that the 'role model' nature of the mentor position had helped some mentors maintain or improve their own behaviour as an example to others. This included reduced behavioural incidents around school, especially where less 'high achievers' were selected as mentors, and improved support of teachers:

"Year 10... were the most challenging group that we have had in terms of



behaviour and attendance. It has transformed... there are students that have significantly shifted and changed. [They said] 'we have to grow up – some of the younger kids are looking up to us' – we have had massively reduced behaviours incidents." – Coordinator

One school also provided examples of where involvement in the Stepping Stones programme had inspired mentors who were not traditional 'high achievers' to focus more on their studies to set a good example to their Stepping Stones pupils and others, while there were also anecdotal reports of record numbers of head boy and girl applications driven by Stepping Stones mentors.

The public nature of the mentor role also helped teachers to maintain improvements in the behaviour of mentors that had previously struggled with behaviour, as it was a useful tool to easily remind and motivate those pupils that they needed to keep setting an example for others.

### 3.1.2. Active bystanders

Peer mentors started to act as active bystanders in some schools, building on an increased awareness, sense of responsibility and experience of interacting with younger year groups, and speaking up or intervening to keep situations around schools from escalating.

This included examples of where peer mentors had intervened in playground incidents between pupils, or visited form groups to resolve issues between different pupils.

"We have had a few examples where Year 10s have taken themselves to form groups to sort out issues between students." – Coordinator

This also helped to contribute to an increased sense of community in schools, as explored in **Chapter 4.3**. One coordinator also reported that some mentors had started to intervene and challenge the behaviour of their own classmates. For example, if another pupil was being disruptive during class time.

## 3.2. Personal qualities and skills

There was a strong indication that these 'surface' behaviours among peer mentors were driven by changes in peer mentors' maturity, self-confidence and soft skillset. There was also a suggestion that these changes tended to be more pronounced among more 'risky' peer mentors that were, in part, selected for the role to help support their own development and behaviour.

### 3.2.1. Maturity

Most coordinators reflected that they felt peer mentors had become more mature as a direct result of their role. While coordinators acknowledged that many pupils tend to naturally mature during Key Stage 4 years, the peer mentor role had helped catalyse, support or accelerate this process in pupils.

"I think this is a year group that really needed to grow up, and I think this helped. It's a small year group... Stepping Stones has really helped them grow" – Coordinator

This was especially the case for mentors with poorer behaviour records. The peer



mentor role was, for many of these pupils, the first time that they had been invited to and/or participated in a formal initiative.

“Early Year 10s find adult conversation hard – looking you in the eye, shaking your hand, having an adult chat... the more challenging mentors grew as people through this programme because they had a lot more adult conversations.” – Coordinator

For many, it was also the first time that they had been challenged and trusted to take responsibility for something within the school.

### 3.2.2. Self-confidence

Some coordinators and peer mentors reported that the role had helped improve self-belief and self-confidence. Across all mentors, this was primarily linked to the recognition, trust and responsibility that came with the role though. This was again felt to have had a more profound impact on pupils who had not been granted responsibilities within school in the past.

“The sense of responsibility and that they were perceived as adults really helped with their self-esteem.” – Coordinator

For a few less academically gifted pupils, the peer mentor role also helped change their perceptions of what they could achieve – as it drew on a far broader skillset than graded assessments and showed them new possibilities:

“The work was unusual because it didn't have any of the normal lessons' expectations. [There were] no criteria to hit or marks to gain. [They] can't really go wrong... the work changed student perceptions of what they can do and how” – Coordinator)

As reported in the pilot programme evaluation, some mentors also improved their self-confidence through trying something new and the requirements of the role, including more regular face-to-face interactions with adults and young people of a different age (in a world where more and more of young people's communication happens over social media). Several mentors reflected that, as a result, they had more confidence to speak to new people and were more willing to go into situations that they would have previously avoided.

### 3.2.3. Communication and other soft skills

Peer mentors also developed a wide range of soft skills through the role they played in support of Stepping Stones pupils. Building on the pilot programme evaluation findings, this predominantly focused on communication skills such as enabling discussion and active listening, but also extended to broader, supporting qualities and skillsets such as empathy, emotional literacy and problem-solving:

“You have to be patient that some of them might not open up straight away. You have to try to find things you have in common.” – Peer mentor

“They are forced to develop [communication skills]. Some of them really struggled with their mentees and how they would engage with them. I think it's part of emotional literacy – they are forced to reflect; they are also talking to the teachers to try and understand how to engage with students. Really thinking in an emotionally mature way on how to reach students.” –



### Coordinator

There was some suggestion that these qualities and skillsets were also highly transferable and could help peer mentors with their educational lives and future professional lives. For example, practicing applying for a job through applying for the role, building the experience section of their CVs, or learning how to establish connections with people from different backgrounds.

“I think this experience will help me with group work in the workplace.” – Peer mentor

### 3.3. Other impacts

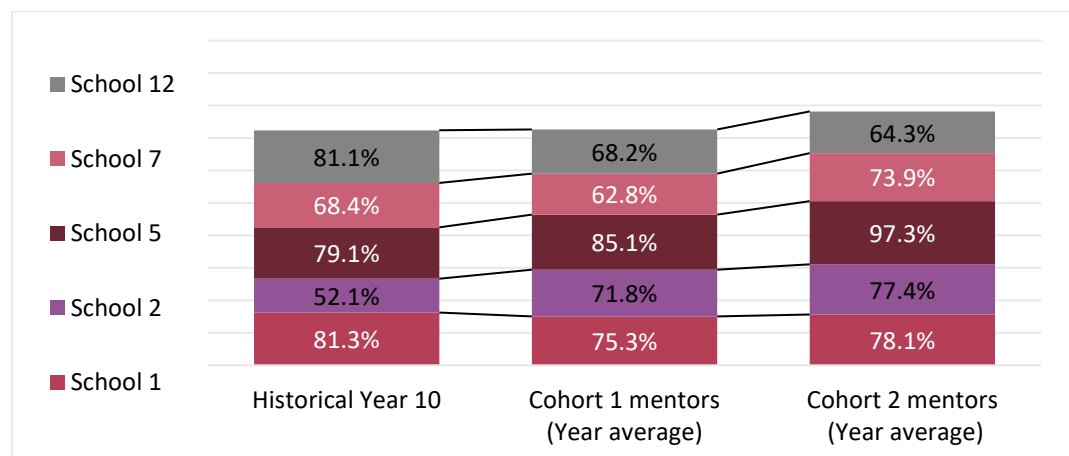
While most schools observed clear improvements in peer mentor behaviour as a result of the Stepping Stones programme, the evidence was less conclusive around other hypothesised outcomes, such as improved attendance, academic progress and attainment.

#### 3.3.1. Attendance

Several coordinators reported anecdotally that peer mentor attendance had improved as a result of their involvement in the Stepping Stones programme. This included punctuality at the start of the day in one school.

As **Figure 25** shows below, there is some evidence for this across the programme as a whole. Looking at the second year of the programme, 3 of 5 schools that returned pupil performance data had at least one mentor cohort with a higher proportion of pupils at a 95%+ average attendance rate compared to a historical comparison group.

**Figure 25: Proportion of cohort 1 and cohort 2 mentors with attendance 95%+ versus a historical comparison group**



#### 3.3.2. Academic progress

Several coordinators also reported anecdotally that peer mentor progress in English and Maths had improved as a result of their involvement in the Stepping Stones programme.

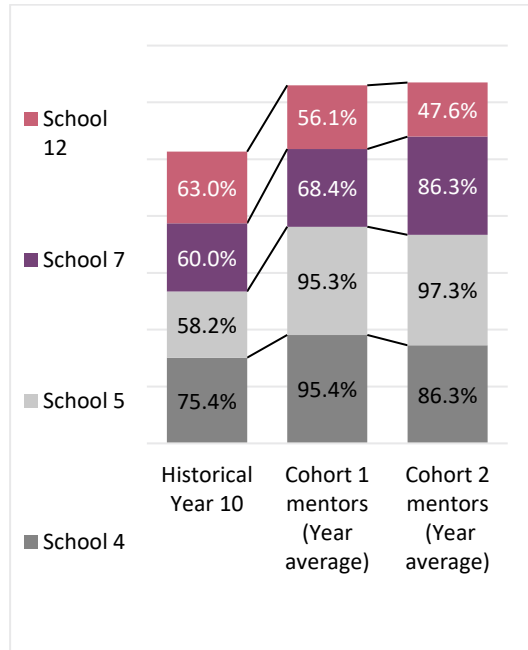
As **Figures 26** and **27** show below, there is again some evidence for this across the programme as a whole. Looking at the second year of the programme, 3 of 4 schools that returned pupil performance data had a higher proportion of mentors at



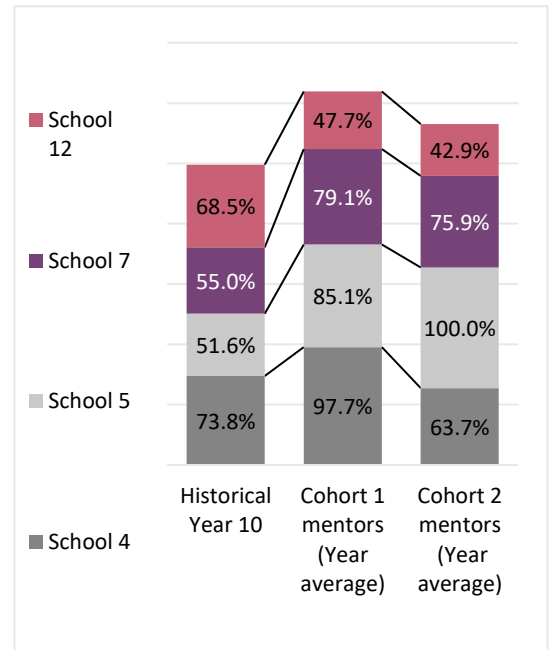
or above expected progress in Maths and English, compared to historical comparison groups.

While this was not explored qualitatively within the evaluation, these findings may be linked to associated outcomes around leadership, role modelling and aspirations.

**Figure 26: Proportion of cohort 1 and cohort 2 mentors at or above expected progress in Maths versus a historical comparison group**



**Figure 27: Proportion of cohort 1 and cohort 2 mentors at or above expected progress in English versus a historical comparison group**





## 4. Wider programme impacts

This section presents the wider impacts of the Stepping Stones programme. The chapter is structured under three groups: parents; teachers; and schools. The analysis in this section draws on qualitative data from coordinators and parents.

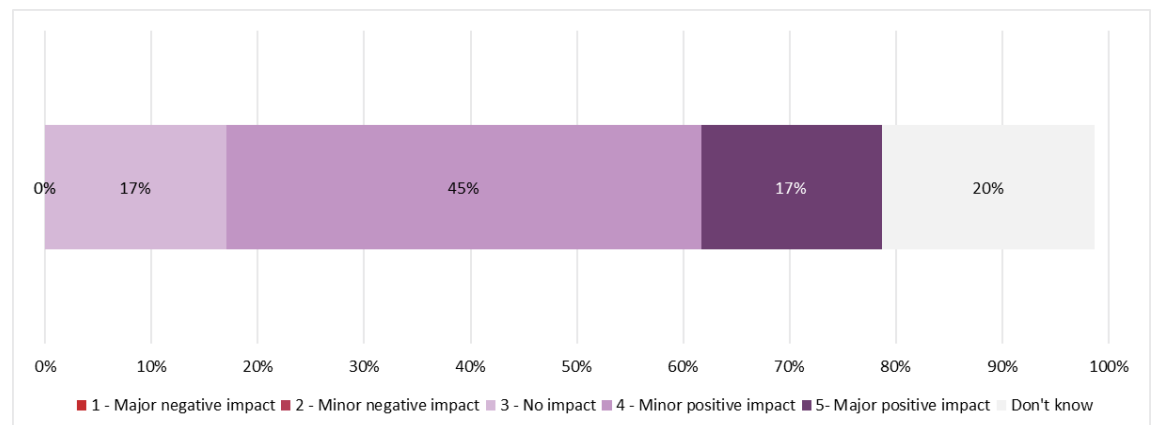
### Summary

- Parent carer questionnaires and interviews add further evidence that the programme also has an impact on parents, mainly focused on reduced anxiety surrounding their child's transition.
- The Stepping Stones programme provided teachers in some schools with a clear focal point around which schools organised transition activities, which helped to systematise transitions support.
- The programme was felt to have contributed to creating a culture shift in school communities, characterised by more positive interactions between pupils in different Key Stage groups and year groups.
- Stepping Stones also helped some schools improve their transitions support offer and internal processes, as well as create or strengthen relationships with local primary schools through increased interactions.

### 4.1. Parents

Most parents who completed the parent/carer questionnaire distributed in the second year of the programme reported that the Stepping Stones programme had a positive impact on them (**Figure 28**).<sup>27</sup>

**Figure 28: On a scale of 1-5, to what extent would you say your child's participation in Stepping Stones had a positive impact on you? (n= 48; 8 schools)**



Most parents were able to identify at least one aspect of the Stepping Stones programme (typically peer mentoring, summer school, or Stepping Stones lessons). This suggests that, while many parents also made more general statements about school-wide support processes, parents were able to attribute the changes in their lives at least in part to the Stepping Stones programme.

Although qualitative feedback was only received from a small number of parents,

<sup>27</sup> This question was only explored in the second year of the evaluation after emerging qualitative evidence. This question not asked in the 2018/19 parent/carer questionnaire.

four main areas of impact for parents emerged through parent questionnaire responses and parent and coordinator interviews.

#### 4.1.1. Reduced anxiety

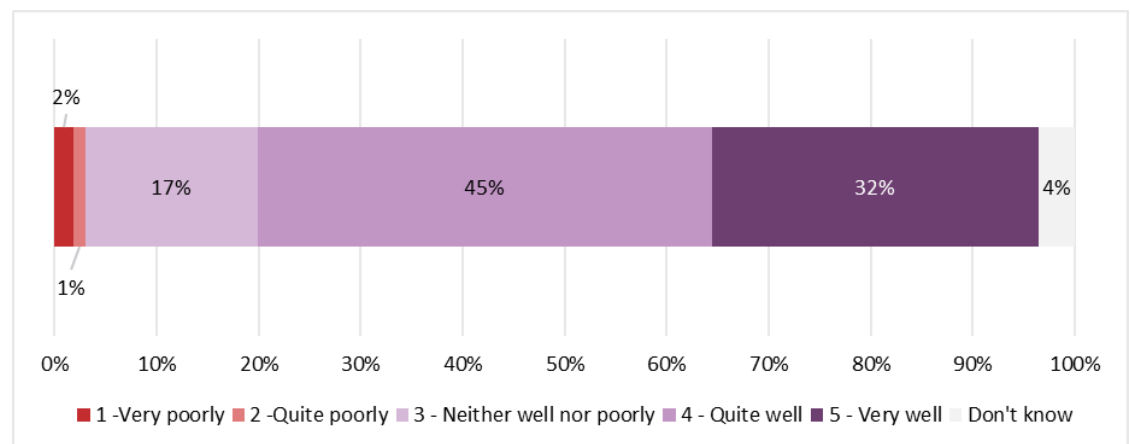
As observed in the pilot programme evaluation, parents mainly reported that they had been less anxious about their child and the transition process due to the Stepping Stones programme (than they might have been otherwise). In particular, parents highlighted the reassurance that came from knowing their child had someone else to talk to at school in the form of a peer mentor.

“Knowing that someone was there for my child and helping him... I was feeling really relaxed about how he was going to make it... what they've done in Year 7 is much appreciated from me.” – Parent

Several parents also commented that they were happy to see their child enjoy the programme and make new relationships through it. However, a few parents interviewed commented that they would have liked to have received more information from their schools about what their child was covering and doing on the programme.

Overall, as shown below in **Figure 29**, 77% of parents felt that the Stepping Stones programme had supported their child either ‘well’ or ‘very well’ through their transition from primary school to secondary school.

**Figure 29: “How well do you think the Stepping Stones programme has supported your child through their transition from primary school to secondary school?” (n=166; 9 schools)**



#### 4.1.2. Help at home

Several parents reflected that the Stepping Stones programme had helped ease the pressures they faced as parents. As in the evaluation of the pilot programme, this focused for the most part on how Stepping Stones had led to young people needing less support from parents (either because they did not need it, or had more sources of support to draw on). However, this also included how activities such as the summer school helped to support pupils during more difficult times of the year such as the school summer holidays.

“I didn’t have to worry... because they were helping her. And when she [came] home she was doing her homework and stuff... they could help her.” – Parent



Several coordinators reported that the holistic support around Stepping Stones pupils – including regular check-ins from form group tutors and teachers – had been of particular help during the first UK COVID-19 national lockdown.

#### 4.1.3. Increased engagement

There were some examples of where the Stepping Stones programme had also helped to improve parental engagement in education in several schools.

Where schools proactively focused on parental engagement, the delivery of Stepping Stones activities in advance of or early in the academic year provided teachers with an opportunity to contact and form early, stronger relationships with parents that paid dividends later in the academic year.

“We held a celebration event at the end of summer school... [it was] an opportunity for us to meet them and get a positive footing with the parents of some of the most vulnerable pupils... [it] meant we had rapport from the start.” – Coordinator

Parent engagement done right meant that parents had increased understanding of their child's involvement in Stepping Stones, and were generally able to be part of the school community to a larger extent. One school reported that Stepping Stones had increased parental buy-in and attendance at parents' evening was now above 94%, while another reported that increased communication with parents led to more constructive, helpful conversations about their young people.

#### 4.1.4. Individual benefits

Several schools took a more holistic approach to working with Stepping Stones pupils and also ran more targeted activities with their parents. For example, one school delivered a parent club that trained parents in interview skills:

“A lot of great responses from parents about the parent club. Parents who have been on the course have all been very positive. Some are getting jobs for first time in their lives. Sometimes the parents come to lunch with their daughters too.” – Coordinator

This impact – given the likely knock-on effects on pupil's home lives – presents a new potential area for the Stepping Stones programme model to explore.

## 4.2. Teachers

The data suggests that the Stepping Stones programme had more of an impact on teachers in schools where transitions support was less coordinated or developed prior to the introduction of the programme. The main impacts of the programme included:

### 4.2.1. More coordinated support

In some schools the Stepping Stones programme provided a clear focal point around which teachers could organise transitions activities. These tended to be schools where they had previously run various transitions activities, but in isolation from each other. The introduction of Stepping Stones brought these activities under a single 'brand', which made it easier for teachers to strategize and develop holistic support for pupils across multiple activities. This builds on the pilot



programme evaluation findings that Stepping Stones provided the basis for greater collaboration between teachers and the basis for tailored support.

#### **4.2.2. Improved understanding of transitions and behaviours**

Several schools reflected that participation in the programme had helped to improve teaching staff's understanding of the issues young people face during transition from primary to secondary education, why they find this difficult and the different anxieties they face. This, in turn, was felt to have helped teachers to have more empathy and know how best to respond.

"Teachers became more understanding of student behaviours... [We helped them] realise it's not necessarily bad behaviour, it might be something that goes on at home...[we] add some context... the teachers don't have as much communication." – Community mentor

Peer mentors also helped to improve teaching staff's understanding of specific pupils and their anxieties or the challenges they faced by relaying important pieces of information to them.

#### **4.2.3. Access to additional resources**

Teachers in a few schools benefited from the influx of Stepping Stones materials and resources designed to help teachers in their delivery of transitions activities. This focused on the Stepping Stones lessons plans, which helped Year 7 teachers in their delivery of the PSHE curriculum. The impact of the Stepping Stones toolkit and the resources contained within it is explored further in **Chapter 7.1**.

### **4.3. Schools**

The Stepping Stones programme contributed to cultural shifts within school communities across most of the funded schools.

This included anecdotal reports from several coordinators of school-wide reductions in exclusion rates and incomplete homework rates following the introduction of the programme, though this could not be directly attributed to the programme due to the large number of other activities taking place in schools.

#### **4.3.1. Increased sense of community**

The programme was felt to have contributed to creating a culture change in school communities, characterised by more positive interactions between pupils in different Key Stage groups and year groups.

This had helped to create more of a 'family feel' within schools, where larger numbers of older pupils had started to acknowledge their role and responsibilities towards helping younger pupils adjust to life in a new school, especially where they had previously received support themselves:

"[It's] helped to create a culture where everyone understands we all need to... look after younger students.... Because older students had mentors themselves, [we] don't have that, 'I'm a senior you're a younger student' attitudes between Year 9s down to Year 7s anymore." – Coordinator

This also builds on one teacher's feedback in the pilot programme evaluation that



the Stepping Stones programme had helped to build community spirit and positive social interactions between mentors and younger students.

#### **4.3.2. Improved relationships with primary schools**

While some schools already had good relationships with their feeder primary schools at the start of the programme, others improved their relationships as a direct result of the Stepping Stones programme.

Stepping Stones funding enabled these schools to widen their networks across or beyond their main feeder schools, and/or strengthen their relationships with existing schools. This included more visits by senior management and SEN support staff and assemblies in primary schools – sometimes attended by Year 7s.

In one case, the primary school visit led to a realignment of their Key Stage 3 curriculum:

“[We] went in and went and observed the English, Maths and Science teams in their schools... we found that we are pitching our expectations way too low when [Year 7s] come in. The curriculum will be adapted for next year in Year 7... we were just repeating what they were doing in Years 5 and 6.” – Coordinator

However, some schools struggled to engage primary schools in the first year of the programme due to the rapid start-up following grant awards, while others found that relationships ‘fizzled out’ over the course of the year. This is explored more in **Chapter 6.7**.

Schools were also unable to continue to build on relationships and complete face-to-face visits in May 2020 due to COVID-19 health restrictions.

#### **4.3.3. Improved transitions processes**

There were also examples of where delivering the Stepping Stones programme had provided schools with the resource and time to experiment with, establish and embed new practices in support of transitions activities and processes. For example, the introduction and use of the Pupil Attitudes to Self and School (PASS) survey to spot and monitor attitudinal or emotional issues in pupils (a requirement of the evaluation), or more systematic reviews of primary school data to inform the development of Year 7 form groups with more balanced behavioural challenges.

“Elements of the programme are becoming an established practice in the school – mentoring, the use of PASS, identification of vulnerable Year 7s. That is going to become a part of school life.” – Coordinator

The culmination of the above impacts, in addition to schools offering more transition and enrichment activities compared to previous years, meant that some schools felt they had improved their reputation for transition in the eyes of parents and local primary schools.

“I’ve been talking to many parents not to be worried about sending children to [the school] because they have a special programme for children who need additional support in the transition and ensure that they are very good and know what they are doing.” – Parent

## 5. Economic assessment

This section presents the costs associated with delivering the Stepping Stones programme, the benefits that could be monetised, and the overall budget impact for education providers and wider public finances.

The analysis in this section draws on financial monitoring and pupil performance data provided by a sample of Stepping Stones schools and a set of benefits assumptions drawn from Traverse calculations and Greater Manchester Combined Authority [GMCA] unit cost database).

### Summary

- Our assessment of the **net present benefit** – benefits minus programme costs – is that the Stepping Stones programme had a value of £307,500.
- Our assessment of **return on investment (ROI)** is that:
  - For public services, over a 12-year period the ROI is 198%, so that for every £ spent, there is a net gain of £0.98.
  - For schools, over a 12-year period the ROI is 154%, so that for every £ spent, there is a net gain of £0.54.
- The ROI of 198% is in line with the financial return estimated by the evaluation of the pilot programme, adding further weight to the social benefits of the programme.
- Our estimate of the **payback period** is 3 years and 2 months. This is the point at which the cumulative benefits meet the costs of delivering the programme of £313,000.

### 5.1. Approach

This economic assessment identifies the costs associated with delivering the programme, the benefits that can 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)

- 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.

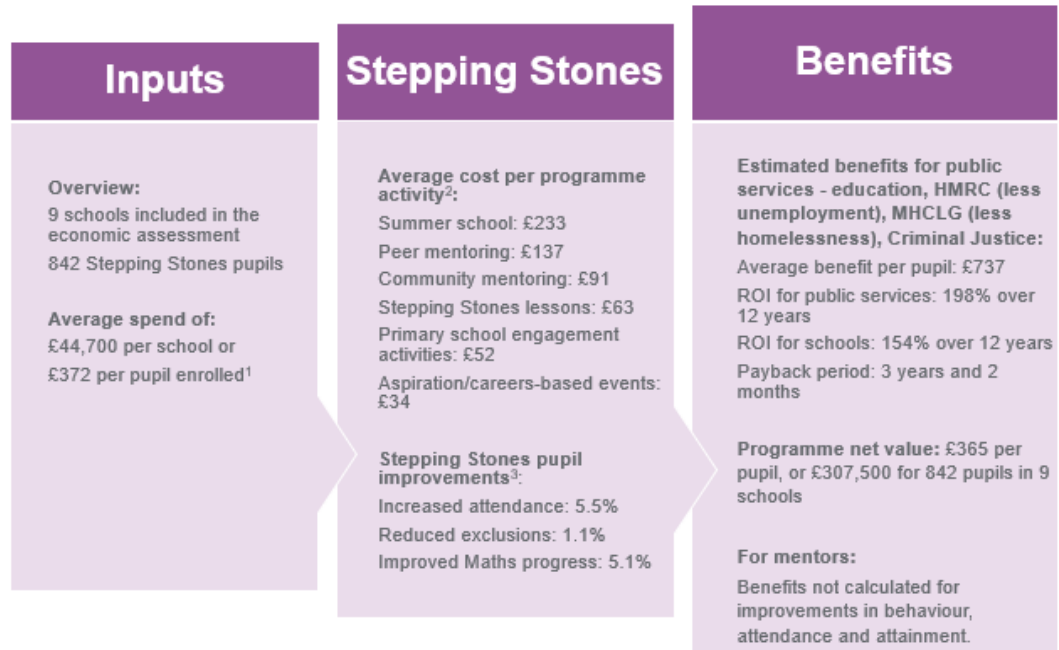
A summary of the economic assessment is presented here. A comprehensive description of the short, medium, and long-term economic impacts is in **Appendix E**.



## 5.2. Overview of findings

The diagram below (**Figure 30**) provides an overview of the economic assessment. This is explained further in the sections that follow.

**Figure 30: Overview of economic assessment findings**



<sup>1</sup> Includes a 5% optimism bias factor.

<sup>2</sup> Based on average proportion of pupils that participated in each element.

<sup>3</sup> Average improvement compared to historical comparison group.

### 5.2.1. Inputs and cost

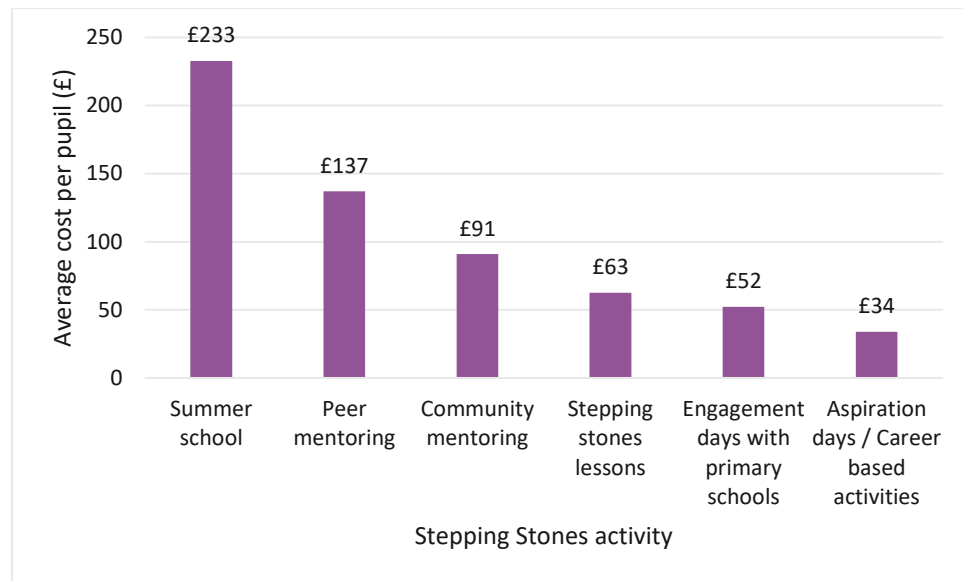
This Stepping Stones programme cost an average of £44,700 per school among 13 schools, or £356 per pupil enrolled on the programme.<sup>28</sup>

Of these 13 schools, 9 schools provided both financial data and pupil participation data for the different Stepping Stones activities. This enabled us to calculate the average cost per pupil for each programme activity in these schools (with programme management and general costs split equally across all elements).

The cost per activity ranged between an average of £34 per pupil for aspiration days and careers-based activities – which were often made available to most pupils – to £233 per pupil for the summer school activity, which required significant expense to run outside of standard school terms.

<sup>28</sup> These figures relate to 13 schools in the programme, of which 10 provided reliable financial data, and so these calculations are an estimate. In addition, some schools rolled over expenditure outside of the evaluation window into the 2020/2021 academic year due to disruption caused by COVID-19.

**Figure 31: Cost of each element of the Stepping Stones programme (per student) Benefits**



It should be noted that these unit costs are considerably less than those reported in the evaluation of the pilot programme, which was delivered to a far smaller number of pupils while the programme was being designed, delivered and refined. For example, Stepping Stones lessons and aspiration days/career-based activities were typically made available to most pupils in Year 7.

### 5.2.2. Benefits

The benefits that have been used in the economic assessment include reduced exclusions, improved behaviour, reduced truancy, a reduced number of pupils who go on to become not in education, employment or training (NEET) and a reduced number who achieve no qualifications, which have been considered at a programme wide level.

The percentage of Stepping Stones students who will receive the above benefits have been calculated based on observed differences between the Stepping Stones students and the historical comparison groups. This includes improvements in attendance, reduced exclusions, improved behaviour and improved academic progress as outlined in **Chapter 2**

The initial results are encouraging. At a programme level they indicate a:

- 5.5% improvement in attendance;
- 1.1% fall in exclusions (due to improvements among pupils with Special Educational Needs); and
- 5.1% improvement in academic progress in Maths.

However, the results also show a 6.6% reduction in relative progress in English – though even here, results are better in four out of seven schools with all relevant data, and so we believe that the pattern of results is sufficient to indicate a 5.5% reduction in the risk of not being in employment or training as a young adult.



### 5.2.3. Comparisons of costs and benefits

On the basis of the calculations above, the benefit per pupil is £737. For a cohort of 842 pupils across the 9 schools included within the economic assessment, this equates to a benefit of around £620,000.

This can be contrasted against the cost of the programme. The cost per pupil, after allowing for a 5% optimism bias factor, is estimated at £372 per pupil, which amounts to a cost of £313,000 for a cohort of 842.

Our assessment of **net present benefit** is that there is a value of £307,500.

Our assessment of **return on investment** is that

- For public services, over a 12-year period the ROI is 198%, so that for every £ spent, there is a net gain of £0.98.
- For schools, over a 12-year period the ROI is 154%, so that for every £ spent, there is a net gain of £0.54

The ROI of 198% (over a 12-year period) for the programme is in line with the 212% ROI estimated by the evaluation of the pilot programme.

Our estimate of the **payback period** is 3 years and 2 months, as the point at which the cumulative benefits meet the costs of delivering the programme (£313,000).

Such statistics should, however, be considered in the light of various important wellbeing benefits that are not included – though these have not been measured, there are strong reasons to believe that there is much intrinsic value in supporting children to achieve their potential, as opposed to long periods of unemployment, underemployment and inactivity.



## 6. Programme activities and learning

This chapter presents how the six Stepping Stones programme activities were managed and delivered by schools. This includes:

**Table 1: Stepping Stones activities**

Activity	Description	Schools
Peer mentoring	Peer-to-peer mentoring between Stepping Stones pupils (in Year 7) and older pupils (typically in Year 10).	All schools
Summer school	Summer educational activities for incoming Year 7 pupils prior to the start of term.	13 of 15 schools
Stepping Stones lessons	Tailored lessons throughout Year 7. Each session explores a theme to help young people develop their confidence and ability to deal positively with a range of social and academic situations.	All schools
Aspirational and careers-based activities	Activities that help pupils to start to broaden their perceptions about what is possible in their future, and connect aspirations to school activities.	All schools
Community mentoring	Mentoring and/or specialist activities delivered by external organisations	11 of 15 schools
Primary school engagement days	Activities between Stepping Stones schools, primary school teachers and primary school pupils to understand pupil needs and identify those who may benefit from the Stepping Stones programme.	All schools
Other	New programme activities such as parent clubs and other parent-focused activities.	Various

Each sub-section explores the different approaches adopted by schools across the programme, their impacts, what worked well and less well, and the main learning points for future delivery.

The analysis in this section draws on qualitative data from coordinators, pupils, mentors and community mentors.



## 6.1. Programme management

This section presents approaches to and key learnings from coordination and design of the programme across schools.

### Learning summary

- Management of the programme worked best when built into a senior staff member's role, supported by key activities delegated to other staff.
- A more focused approach with smaller numbers of pupils engaged in core activities (such as peer mentoring) kept programmes manageable and best supported pupil outcomes.
- The summer school and Stepping Stones activities early in the autumn term were highlighted as critical delivery points in support of pupil transitions.
- Recruitment into/out of the programme should be flexible for at least the first term of the school year as pupils' behaviour and support needs sometimes changed during the first few weeks of term.

### 6.1.1. Programme coordination

The Stepping Stones programme was led by one or more coordinators in each school. The role was complex: in addition to leading the set-up of the programme and its different activities, the coordinators needed to ensure they remained responsive and flexible to changes throughout the programme.

Coordination was often built within a senior staff member's role to support visibility of the programme (for example, Head of Year). However, as in the pilot programme evaluation, several coordinators also emphasised that effective programme management relied on the delegation of specific programme strands or activities.

Where schools kept the role and its responsibilities centralised (and not delegated to colleagues), particular problems arose when coordinators left and had to be replaced. For two schools in particular, a change of coordinator at the midpoint of the programme contributed to diminished activities in the second year, while a third school dropped out of the programme completely.

### 6.1.2. Recruitment approaches

Schools were asked to each deliver the programme to a minimum of 100 Year 7s and 40 Year 10s over two academic years.

Many schools recruited large numbers of pupils into the first year of the programme. This was, in part, because their selection process had taken place within the context of a rapid project start-up that limited or prevented activities that could help schools establish vulnerable pupils, such as primary school engagement days or summer schools.

Some schools changed their approach in the second year of the programme and halved their pupil numbers, in addition to reducing the number of programme activities delivered. Several coordinators highlighted that this more focused approach resulted in a more manageable programme and better outcomes for (a smaller number of) pupils.

*“We moved from 100 to 64, and mentees we moved down from 45 – 32 that*



*worked better. More manageable, more focused.” – Coordinator*

Within this, most schools struggled to engage parents due to language, cultural and socio-economic barriers, especially where more vulnerable pupils had parents that were not positively engaged with the school. Disengaged parents sometimes posed a challenge to the recruitment of Stepping Stones pupils, as their support was required for pupils to participate and become fully integrated with the programme.

Moreover, one school reported resistance from some pupils to join the programme. This was due to stigma attached to previous transition programmes where pupils had been placed in separate groups for extra support, making them more prone to bullying.

Schools therefore worked hard to raise the profile of the programme to ensure both parents and pupils would find Stepping Stones attractive: from framing Stepping Stones as a positive intervention, to incentivising participation through free breakfasts, or providing special uniforms and badges that provide ‘status’. As a result, most schools reported a growing interest among Year 7 and Year 10 pupils over the course of the programme.

### **6.1.3. Recruitment timelines**

Coordinators emphasised the need to keep recruitment flexible in at least the first term of the school year.

As reported in the evaluation of the pilot programme, primary school data and pupil observations were used to assess pupils in the first instance. However, coordinators also reported that the behaviour and support needs of pupils sometimes changed during the first few weeks of term. Some schools therefore waited a few weeks into the first term of Year 7 before formalising groups of Stepping Stones pupils, to ensure they reached the pupils who would benefit most from the programme.

*“Don’t discount pupils based on primary school data. Give pupils a few weeks of term first to identify those who really have transition issues. Hold back some interventions because of this.” – Coordinator*

### **6.1.4. Programme timeline**

The summer school and Stepping Stones activities early in the autumn term were highlighted as critical delivery points for the Stepping Stones programme. These activities helped identify pupils who would benefit from the programme and/or were in greater need of additional support and set the tone for the rest of the year.

Some coordinators also highlighted that the Stepping Stones programme takes time to properly establish in schools. For many, the second year of the programme was easier to deliver as coordinators had learned valuable lessons in the first year of the programme. However, they also emphasised that delivery of the programme needs to be responsive to new groups of pupils and their individual needs.





## 6.2. Peer mentoring

GLA required schools to run peer mentoring activities as part of their programmes. It was therefore often the main activity of schools – and was also commonly referred to as the most important element of the Stepping Stones programme. Apart from a few schools which already had smaller mentoring programmes in place prior to Stepping Stones, peer mentoring was an entirely new element for most funded schools.

### Learning summary

- Both 'high achievers' and pupils that still encounter challenges can be effective mentors with the right pupil, but the latter need sufficient support.
- Early training at the end of Year 9 ensures mentors are sufficiently prepared.
- Works well when profiles of mentees and mentors are reviewed to ensure a match of interests, backgrounds and lived experiences.
- Sessions before school may require additional incentives such as free breakfasts; can alternatively integrate into the school timetable (e.g. form time).
- High visibility programmes can help to support mentor behaviour.
- A highly sustainable element of the programme now that mentoring systems have been developed and refined.

### 6.2.1. Approaches

The pilot programme schools developed a standard approach to peer mentoring where older students (in Year 10) met Stepping Stones pupils in individual and group meetings on a regular basis throughout Year 7.

The funded schools took this model and developed several different peer mentoring models, which were further refined as the programme evolved.

The main variations across different schools' approaches included:

**Mentoring allocation:** Most schools allocated mentors to specific pupils. Mentors and mentees either met one-to-one or in smaller groups of mentees with one mentor. The latter was reported as a particularly successful approach by one school: coming along to a peer mentoring session with one or more friends made mentees feel less intimidated and increased turnout. Other schools took a more flexible approach and created small groups of mentors and mentees that all met together.

**Mentor recruitment:** Most schools recruited Year 10s as mentors, though one school recruited Year 8 and 9s. Most schools required mentors to go through a formal application process, similar to a job application. Mentors were typically reliable, 'good', high achieving pupils. However, several schools selected pupils with poorer records of behaviour, or quieter, shy pupils that had shared, lived experiences as mentees.

"In the first year we had the high achievers, second year we deliberately selected the students who might be overlooked for the slightly more able, forthcoming students. That was a really good thing. That showed them that we



knew who they were and that we appreciated them.” – Coordinator

Other schools chose to target pupils who had previously experienced their own challenges but since developed well.

**Session frequency:** Most schools scheduled a weekly, breakfast-based peer mentor session in the first year of the programme to support attendance and punctuality at school. However, by the second year of the programme, some schools had shifted peer mentoring sessions to be embedded within form time or run as an afterschool club to avoid timetable clashes.

Some schools further flexed delivery throughout the programme: from encouraging informal meetings across the week, to running more than one session a week due to success of the activity. One school also used mentors during some lesson times to provide additional learning support to some of their most problematic pupils.

**Session structure:** Most coordinators tried to schedule semi-structured peer mentoring sessions, allowing time for a pre-planned focus area (such as preparing for exams techniques or resolving conflicts with friends) but also non-formal catch ups, and mentor-led games and quizzes. One school specifically mentioned how they used their peer mentoring session to help Stepping Stones pupils to set and review weekly targets.

**Mentor training:** All schools provided some sort of training for their mentors around, for example, safeguarding, conflict resolution and how to be an active listener. The timings and extent to which this training was carried out varied across schools.

#### Peer mentoring during COVID-19

Schools varied in how they tried to continue strands of peer mentoring during the pandemic. Whereas some struggled and deemed it largely impossible due to safeguarding concerns, or lack of staff available, others used digital resources to maintain communication between mentors and mentees throughout lockdown. Online activities ranged from creating google classrooms for mentors and mentees, virtual introduction movies, daily challenges for mentors and mentees to do around the house and monitored online chat forums.

### 6.2.2. What worked well

- **Formal application processes:** Some schools raised the profile of the mentor role by advertising it as a job. If pupils wanted to apply, they had to submit a CV, application letter and go through a structured selection process. This helped pupils understand the requirements and importance of the role before applying.
- **Strategic mentor selection:** Schools highlighted the importance of having a mix of mentors and selecting mentors with a specific purpose in mind. For example, some schools specifically selected mentors who had lower levels of academic achievement and might benefit more from the programme, or selected mentors who had shared lived experiences to the challenges some mentees faced, such as problems controlling their behaviour.
- **Early training for mentors:** Some schools trained their mentors in Year 9, which ensured mentors were sufficiently prepared once the school year started. This also meant that mentors could assist with summer schools, which



helped schools create early, appropriate matches between pupils and mentors.

- **Targeted matches:** Reviewing pupil profiles and trying to pair pupils with similar needs and temperaments was often essential to ensuring a good match between mentors and mentees. Where the right match was made, mentees were observed to behave better and more respectfully listen and communicate with their mentor. That said, some mentees matched with Year 10s felt that it might be easier to relate to younger mentors in Year 8 or 9.
- **Mix of activities:** Several schools highlighted the importance of running a mix of activities, from using 'lighter' ice breaker activities to help improve communication between mentors and mentees, to activities designed to stimulate conversation around emotions and feelings.

"We also introduced some board games in breakfast sessions, and it really improved communication between mentors and mentees... in that first term, they are not quite sure what to say, but we felt that it really broke the ice, and the discussion and the mentoring really came out of that. – Coordinator

- **Mentor led models:** A few schools mentioned that having mentors involved in planning activities and peer mentoring sessions had helped mentors to take more responsibility within the programme, while activities were also more creative as a result.
- **Visible programmes:** Some schools reported that making the programme visible for all pupils to see had helped support leadership and role modelling among mentors and identify clear contact points for younger pupils. Successful approaches included mentor badges or separate uniforms, as well as holding mentoring sessions in clear visible spaces.
- **Sustainability:** Coordinators felt that, now that their mentoring systems have been developed and refined, this programme element would be one of the easiest to sustain without further funding.

### 6.2.3. Challenges

- **Short timescales:** A few coordinators reflected on the challenge of the relatively short timescale of the mentoring and Stepping Stones programme. Some others wanted to see mentoring continue into Year 8, to really make an impact on mentees, but struggled to maintain peer-mentoring aspects for longer than Year 7 due to resource needs.
- **Attendance rates:** Some schools struggled with attendance of both mentors and mentees, especially when sessions were held before school without incentives, such as a breakfast club. One school and several mentees highlighted how damaging it could be when mentors did not turn up for mentoring sessions. Schools that encountered these problems typically rescheduled sessions into school hours, such as form time.



### Case study: Peer mentoring – South Chingford Foundation School

*“Our mentor programme is amazing. We are a small school so the impact of them around the school is incredible. We have always had peer mentors in our school, but since Stepping Stones we marketed it a lot more.” - Coordinator*

South Chingford Foundation School's peer mentoring programme received positive feedback from students, teachers and parents. Mentors were trained in July, before the start of term, which enabled them to be involved in the summer school and meet Stepping Stones pupils before the start of the school year.

The school has a small number of students, so the school wanted to make as many pupils as possible aware of the mentors. They provided specific uniforms for mentors to reflect their leadership role and ensure mentors were clearly visible to their mentees and other pupils.

Peer mentors also attended parent evenings and open evenings to give more insight into the Stepping Stones programme.

The school decided to keep the mentor/mentee relationship when pupils moved into Year 8 and Year 11 as almost all mentors wanted to continue in their roles and felt responsible towards continuing support for their mentees.

### 6.3. Stepping Stones lessons

Stepping Stones lessons, contained within the online toolkit, explored key themes that helped young people to develop their confidence and ability to deal positively with a range of social and academic situations.

Stepping Stones lessons were referred to by several schools as one of the most useful and successful elements in the programme that provided schools with a better, more focused approach to supporting pupils. Whereas PSHE lessons sometimes addressed similar topics compared to Stepping Stones lessons, the Stepping Stones lesson templates enabled teachers to offer more focused support through providing clearer outlines, content and instructions on how to deliver these types of lessons.

#### Learning summary

- Provides schools with creative opportunities to help pupils explore and reflect on feelings and behaviours, especially disruptive pupils. This was particularly beneficial in increasing pupils' self-esteem and helping them address anxiety related problems.
- Templates can be easily and quickly adapted to school contexts.
- Incorporate within PSHE lessons to overcome timetable challenges and/or use specific lessons to support more vulnerable groups.
- Appoint a passionate member of staff to ensure effective delivery.
- A highly sustainable element of the programme due to low cost (£63 per pupil) and delivery in school hours. Many schools reported that they planned to continue Stepping Stones lessons after the funding ended as resources were easy-to-use and easily embedded within school delivery.



### 6.3.1. Approaches

Schools varied significantly in their approach to delivering Stepping Stones lessons.

**Number of lessons:** While some schools delivered all lessons within the toolkit, others selected specific lessons or parts of them and incorporated them as part of larger workshops or programmes already in place at the school. For schools who delivered lessons on a weekly basis, it was common that these were incorporated within PHSE lessons.

**Target pupils:** While lessons were often delivered to all Stepping Stones pupils, several schools delivered specific lessons to targeted vulnerable groups of pupils, such as those with behavioural issues

**Lesson adaptation:** Some schools used the lessons straight from the toolkit, while others adapted them accordingly to the needs of their pupils.

### 6.3.2. What worked well

This section summarises the main messages from what either consistently worked for most schools or where a couple of schools tried something different which proved to be successful:

- **The template format:** Stepping Stones lessons were referred to as a set of resources that are a good starting point and could be easily adapted to school-specific context and pupil needs, which saved teachers' time.
- **The relevance of lessons:** Coordinators reflected positively on the quality of the template lessons in the toolkit, while content that supported pupils to reflect on and explore their feelings and behaviours was felt to have the potential to have longer-term impacts on pupils.
- **PSHE class delivery:** Most schools decided to deliver Stepping Stones lessons as part of the weekly scheduled PSHE lessons. Coordinators felt that this set-up worked well, as PSHE lessons were already scheduled in pupils' timetables and had teachers in place delivering the resources.
- **Sustainability:** Most coordinators felt that this programme element would be one of the easiest to sustain without funding. One school reported that Stepping Stones was already permanently incorporated into PSHE lessons.

### 6.3.3. Challenges

Some schools struggled to deliver all of the lessons that they would have liked from the toolkit due to staff shortages and limited spaces within the Year 7 timetable. Several coordinators highlighted that effective delivery rested on appointing the right, passionate member of staff to deliver the lessons, but that this was challenging due to teacher capacity and timetable changes throughout the year.



### Case study: Stepping Stones lessons – Eltham Hill

*“All Y7 received Stepping Stones lessons as delivered through PSHE. This is easier to manage as (we) already have teachers delivering the resources.” - Coordinator*

Eltham Hill delivered Stepping Stones lessons every week as part of PSHE. This worked well, because they already had a teacher in place to deliver the lessons.

The school also used content from the Stepping Stones lessons in their weekly after-school club, which was an additional element to the programme, targeted at Stepping Stones students, but also attended by other pupils.

Eltham Hill reported that the Stepping Stones lessons had given them more resources to work with students in creative ways, and opportunities to increase their extracurricular activities.

## 6.4. Summer school

Summer school activities were delivered to groups of incoming Year 7 pupils prior to the start of the academic year, often with tailored Stepping Stones sessions. While some schools already delivered summer school programmes prior to participating in Stepping Stones, which they then built on, for other schools this was a new activity only made possible with the funding.

### Learning summary

- Beneficial for young people who struggle with social interactions or anxiety; helps overcome fears in advance of the school term.
- Works best as a social – rather than an academic – space.
- Provides a breadth of activities to ensure there is ‘something for everyone’.
- Can be hard to engage the most vulnerable pupils and parents; be particularly mindful of pupils not able to attend summer schools at the start of term.
- One of the least sustainable programme activities due to high cost (£233 per pupil) and delivery outside of normal school hours.

### 6.4.1. Approaches

Some schools invited all incoming Year 7 pupils to summer school activities, while others targeted specific groups that they felt would particularly benefit from the support. For example, socially anxious, shy and quieter pupils.

The main aim of summer schools was for incoming Year 7s to meet each other, make friends and get to know their new teachers. When summer schools were run, how long they lasted, and what they consisted of varied between schools, but common activities included art, drama, cooking classes, nutrition workshops, numeracy and literacy classes, and sport activities.





### Summer schools during COVID-19

Although a few schools ran summer schools in 2020, most found it difficult to run due to challenges around keeping different year groups in separate bubbles.

#### 6.4.2. What worked well

- **Social spaces:** Summer schools worked particularly well as a social space where pupils, teachers and parents could all get to know each other and form relationships before term started, rather than as an academic space. When asked about what they had liked most about being part of the Stepping Stones programme, Year 7 pupils referred to summer school as 'fun' and 'good' and a place where 'you got to meet people before you started'.
- **Range of activities:** Whereas a few schools wanted to ensure there was a clear balance between academic and social/sports activities, others reflected on the importance of providing a breadth of activities so that pupils could find something they liked.

#### 6.4.3. Challenges

- **Engagement:** Some schools found it hard to engage more vulnerable pupils in summer schools, especially pupils who might need additional support and/or those whose parents might be less engaged in their education.
- **Unequal support:** Some schools were concerned about the potential imbalance created between summer school attendees and other Stepping Stones pupils at the start of Year 7. For example, as in the pilot programme evaluation, one coordinator observed that pupils who came straight into mentoring programmes without first attending the summer school were notably behind their peers. One school also reported how those Stepping Stones pupils who did not attend summer school found it more difficult to engage with the Year 10 pupils during peer mentoring support.
- **Sustainability:** Schools who did not have some form of summer school provision prior to Stepping Stones reflected that this activity was one of the most unsustainable elements of the programme and would need to be restricted in terms of outreach, length or activities in order to continue.



### **Case study: Summer school – Central Foundation Girls' School**

*“The parent engagement has been brilliant too – that was probably something we didn't do much of until now. We did a lot of work with them over the summer”.*  
– Coordinator

Central Foundation Girls' School incorporated parental engagement activities within their summer school. They ran activities with parents as they dropped off the students to attend summer school, which enabled them to get to know the parents better. Activities varied, but included talks from the previous year's parents, as well as baking, volunteering and sewing courses.

The school worked hard to sustain the positive relationship with parents created during summer school throughout the year. They provided parents with free access to the school gym for a year to increase the possibility of parents staying connected to the school. Teachers also purposefully chatted to parents when they picked up their children from school.

The school reported improved attendance at parent evenings by the end of the year.

## **6.5. Community mentoring**

Most schools delivered some form of targeted community mentoring throughout the Stepping Stones programme. This was a completely new activity for most schools made possible only by the Stepping Stones funding. Community mentors included local football clubs and registered charities such as a Young Women's Network.

### **Learning summary**

- Beneficial for pupils with challenging behaviour – provides a non-judgemental space and relatable role models.
- Also helps pupils gain social confidence through providing opportunities to talk with and work alongside peers and adults.
- Works best delivered outside of a school space and/or classroom, which enables pupils to feel more relaxed.
- Pupils benefit from less structured sessions where they lead conversation.
- Can be difficult to identify a reliable, affordable external partner amid a crowded market of providers.
- Many schools were reliant on the funding to pay community mentors, and therefore felt that this strand of the programme would be particularly difficult to sustain.

### **6.5.1. Approaches**

Approaches to community mentoring varied between schools.

A few schools worked closely with community mentors on the design and delivery of activities throughout the entire programme. For example, one school worked closely with Crystal Palace for Life to help shape the Stepping Stones programme as a whole and deliver core elements of the programme, such as Stepping Stones lessons and peer mentoring. A representative from Palace for Life was present in



the school most days to provide support to students.

Other schools adopted a more targeted approach, where they selected pupils that were struggling to meet with community mentors for tailored session(s). For example, another school worked with Football Beyond Borders to deliver weekly sessions that explored social and emotional competencies with a smaller group of vulnerable pupils. When COVID-19 hit, they successfully transferred their support online, and focused on individual wellbeing chats with the same students.

A few schools also used their community mentors to help them set-up, organise and run afterschool or external activities. For example, one school worked with different freelancers who specialised in creative fields. Individual community mentors worked together with the students to, for example, put on exhibitions of students' work at local galleries and create a series of music and performance workshops for the students.

### Community mentoring during COVID-19

Many schools that were working with external community mentors paused delivery of this element due to staff being on furlough. However, several schools have been able to rollover funding into the 2020/21 academic year to continue the community mentoring element for current Year 8 students.

Some schools managed to carry on aspects of community mentoring online. However, for many students the online space proved less therapeutic and intimate (compared to playing a game of football or having a face-to-face conversation).

## 6.5.2. What worked well

- **Non-judgemental spaces:** Community mentors highlighted that providing a space, with separate norms compared to the classroom, allowed pupils to feel more relaxed, less judged, and ultimately more willing to share their thoughts and be more creative and expressive.
- **Pupil-led conversations:** Less structured sessions where pupils themselves could lead the conversation were highlighted as impactful. In a safe space, pupils found it easier to share thoughts and frustrations and seek emotional support in their peers and community mentors.

“Our classroom sessions are very conversation based. There’s lots of room for them to direct the sessions. Often elsewhere they are pushed to an end goal throughout a lesson, but we allowed them to dictate what conversations they had... they can let out their frustration, get advice, share things with their peers.” – Community mentor

- **Open communication with schools:** Community mentors and coordinators both reflected on the importance of open communication between community mentors and schools. When done well, schools would clearly see the value of community mentoring for pupils as well as in what teachers learned about pupils.
- **Informal communication with an adult:** Community mentoring provided



pupils with a space and time where they could access support from or have a chat with an adult.

### 6.5.3. Challenges

- **Cost:** Several coordinators reported that community mentor services were often prohibitively expensive (even when delivered by local charities) and therefore felt it was one of the least sustainable areas of the programme. One school struggled to find a service that was different enough to their standard support to justify these costs.
- **Quality assurance:** Several schools found it difficult to select a reliable provider due to the high number of providers in this area, but a lack of professional quality assurance. One coordinator suggested that compiling a shared list of recommended providers would make it easier for busy coordinators to more easily source high quality, appropriate support.

“Often what you get [with]... people coming in to tell you how brilliant they are. Students can sniff that out immediately. [It is important] to get mentors trained in how to mentor. And then to have a register that schools can access via the Mayor's office or whatever, that would be really good impact I think.” – Coordinator

- **Limited time and space:** One community mentor reflected on the difficulties of having an external organisation involved in a school setting, which involves much more than just the Stepping Stones programme. The limited time and space often restricted the role and involvement of the community mentor.

#### Case study: Community mentoring – Harris Academy South Norwood

*“We felt that it was important that we were visible at all times. Out on the playground, in the canteen [...] Just having an open-door policy – if a child didn't have a great day, been kicked out of the lesson, we would know what was going on”.* – Community mentor

Harris Academy South Norwood partnered with Palace for Life Foundation – a registered charity that helps young south Londoners grow through the power of sport – as their community mentor organisation. A representative of Palace for Life was on site for four days each week, and embedded in the school structure, which both the mentor and the school felt was critical to the success of the programme.

The community mentors typically supported the delivery of Stepping Stones lessons, where focus was put on mental health, mindset and confidence. They worked in smaller group settings (with around eight students per group), to ensure all students had the opportunity to speak and share.

The community mentor organisation represented the diverse background of the students and operated in the local area. This made community mentors more relatable and laid the foundations for a good working relationship between pupils and community mentors.

### 6.6. Aspirational and careers-based activities

Aspirational and career-based activities aimed to help Stepping Stones pupils begin



to connect their aspirations to school activities, and broaden their perceptions about what is possible for their futures.

Most schools ran similar activities prior to Stepping Stones, but the Stepping Stones programme supported schools to organise more activities and trips.

#### Learning summary

- Holds particular benefits for raising aspirations about what pupils can achieve in the future, which also supports pupil motivation.
- Finding the 'right' representative essential to making careers seem relatable and achievable. Local community members tend to fulfil this.
- Can be difficult to organise amid a crowded school timetable and gain parental permission.

### 6.6.1. Approaches

Schools varied in their approaches to how they chose to implement aspirational and career-based activities throughout the calendar year.

A few schools scheduled yearly career-based days, when they invited organisations and individuals to come and speak to pupils about future career possibilities. Others organised shorter but more frequent workshops, sometimes with help from the community mentors or parents.

“We have ‘discovery hour’ and following that we have arranged for students to go on a trip to further expand their knowledge of sciences or a museum and that has been really beneficial getting students to listen to colleagues and talk about careers and listen about what they can achieve outside school.” -  
Coordinator

Some schools further used the funding to organise aspirational trips to, for example, universities, museums and theatres.

### 6.6.2. What worked well

- **Targeted activities:** Although some schools already had aspirational days built in to their calendar year, coordinators reflected positively on including these as part of the Stepping Stones programme. This ensured these types of activities reached a targeted group who might otherwise be overlooked/not attend.
- **Aspirational trips:** Trips and days out were particularly effective at raising the aspirations and motivations of pupils. Coordinators reported that pupils were more receptive and engaged during these sessions as they heard from people outside the school setting.
- **Parental involvement:** One school reported that they had successfully started a new project with parents of Stepping Stones pupils, which involved parents helping to deliver a training day in school on life skills and jobs.
- **Local community contacts:** A few schools highlighted the importance of including people and contacts from the local community when delivering career-based activities, as it made the activities seem more relatable and achievable to pupils.

“We used external people and contacts who are successful and from the



local community. They matched the school demographics. That's gone well." – Coordinator

### 6.6.3. Challenges

- **Time restrictions:** For some schools, an already fully booked calendar year made it difficult to set aside enough time for these types of days – trips took up a lot of time, both for staff to organise and for pupils to attend.
- **Lack of parental trust:** A few schools struggled with parents not allowing their child to attend some of the trips, especially where overnight stays were involved.
- **Finding the right representatives:** A few schools struggled with finding the 'right' people, businesses and organisations to come and speak to pupils about career opportunities.

## 6.7. Primary school engagement

Schools were asked to identify their core feeder primary schools and sign a partnership form that they would collaborate on engagement activities.

These primary school engagement activities with primary school teachers, pupils and parents aimed to help funded schools build stronger networks and relationships with their feeder schools. This, in turn, would help funded schools better understand pupil needs and identify those who may benefit from the Stepping Stones programme.

### Learning summary

- Provides schools with a better understanding of new Year 7 pupils; more targeted programme.
- Builds awareness among parents of transitions support – and improves their perceptions of schools.
- Pupil observations help teachers to better understand knowledge/behaviours.
- Some schools struggled to maintain relationships with primary schools following initial cooperation early in the year.

### 6.7.1. Approaches

Activities broadly aligned with those observed during the pilot programme evaluation. In addition to coordinator visits to primary schools, schools also raised awareness through providing information during transition days or afternoons where primary school children (and sometimes parents) visited the school. Some schools engaged parents early on in Year 6 spring term to inform them about Stepping Stones and summer school.

### 6.7.2. What worked well

- **Pupil observations:** A few schools reflected on, in addition to reviewing primary school data, reviewing primary school curricula and observing pupils' participation in class to better understand the knowledge and behaviour of new



pupils.

- **Friendship afternoons:** One school referenced 'friendship afternoons' as a particularly successful method of getting both primary school pupils and their parents to visit the school. Parents received presentations and pupils got to meet other pupils and teachers.
- **Virtual engagement:** Due to COVID-19 one school transferred their primary school engagement online. They made virtual video tours for new pupils and met with vulnerable pupils digitally.

### 6.7.3. Challenges

Some schools struggled to find ways of engaging primary schools on an ongoing basis due to time pressures: plans to meet after contact around the application for funding stage 'fizzled out' or coordinators had struggled to find ways to continue communication following initial cooperation early in the year.

#### Primary school engagement during COVID-19

School closures meant programme schools lost their face-to-face visits to primary schools and much of their parental engagement in the spring term 2020. The missed-out opportunities for primary school engagement was described as a 'big loss' for the 2020/2021 academic year.

#### Case study: Primary school engagement – Heartlands High School

Heartlands focused their primary school engagement on two of their feeder schools, for which they created a smaller mentoring programme. 12 of the school prefects from the high school received external mentoring training and ran smaller sessions over the summer to speak with students from the primary schools.

Heartlands also worked closely with the headteacher from one of the feeder schools to review the curriculum and observe Year 6 lessons to better understand the level of knowledge Year 7 pupils would have on arrival. They also worked with the headmaster of the same school to ensure the primary school was well equipped to prepare their Year 6 students for transition. They shared reading books and planners and emphasised the level of organisation that would be expected from students once they transitioned.





## 7. Programme support and learning

This chapter brings together reflections on the support provided to Stepping Stones schools by the GLA and Traverse.

The GLA delivered a suite of support activities and resources to help Stepping Stones Coordinators in their roles. This included an online toolkit, programme-wide 'share and learn' events between schools and a school-by-school support approach delivered by named GLA leads.

Traverse evaluation activities also sat alongside GLA support, and were designed to support learning and development at both a programme and school-specific level.

The analysis in this section draws on qualitative data from coordinators.

### Summary

- Stepping Stones schools used the toolkit to support their design and delivery of the programme. The Stepping Stones lessons, mentor training and summer school resources were the most popular.
- The toolkit had more limited uptake beyond Stepping Stones coordinators in a crowded market of school resources. Clearer aims, objectives and uses and the inclusion of case studies were suggested as improvements.
- Programme-wide 'share and learn' events enabled teachers to share 'what works' in supporting transitions and other tips, which supported improved approaches in schools.
- A flexible, school-by-school approach with named leads was essential to participation in grant monitoring and evaluation.
- Coordinators struggled to return pupil attendance, progress and behaviour data using school systems and on top of a busy workload. Future school-based evaluations would benefit from more rigorous evaluability assessments to establish whether schools can be meaningfully included in quantitative methods.

### 7.1. The Stepping Stones toolkit

The online toolkit was created and published as part of the pilot programme evaluation. It includes:

- Information about the Stepping Stones programme
- An outcomes-focused summary of each programme element;
- Editable resources that were designed by the three pilot programme schools to help teachers run the programme and deliver Stepping Stones activities; and
- Video case studies.

Stepping Stones Coordinators were also invited to an induction event at the start of the programme where one of the pilot programme schools introduced the toolkit and how to use it.

All of the Stepping Stones coordinators subsequently reported that they had used the toolkit to support the design and the delivery of the programme in their schools.

#### 7.1.1. What worked well



Most coordinators accessed the toolkit prior to the start of their programme to help them decide which of the programme strands would be most beneficial to their pupils and what activities they would run within these.

Of the downloadable resources within the toolkit, most coordinators had used the Stepping Stones lesson templates to help run programme-wide transitions lessons, or respond to specific behaviour incidents with smaller groups of pupils. The peer mentor training and summer school resources were also popular.

The toolkit resources and the templates within them worked best as a time-efficient starting point for coordinators when designing transitions activities. As intended, this worked best when the templates were adapted to the specific learning environment and culture of schools:

“It’s important for schools to make their own brand of [the toolkit resources]. [We] took the materials and adapted them so they were embedded in our culture. The Stepping Stones lessons on themselves wouldn’t have worked, it needed to be merged with our own systems.” – Coordinator

### 7.1.2. Challenges and suggested improvements

However, although some coordinators shared the toolkit with colleagues, the resources had more limited uptake beyond Stepping Stones activities.

Coordinators reported that the toolkit faces stiff competition among a crowded market of pupil support resources and that the toolkit would benefit from more clearly stating its specific aims, objectives and uses. Coordinators also recommended the inclusion of case studies – focused on different approaches schools had taken or ways resources were used – to help teachers use the resources within the toolkit.

## 7.2. GLA support events

The GLA ran four support events for coordinators over the course of the programme: an induction session that outlined the programme aims, strands and toolkit resources in June 2018; and three ‘share and learn’ sessions in March 2019, February 2020 and May 2020.

The three ‘share and learn’ events in particular were highlighted as valuable learning opportunities. Coordinators shared different approaches to delivering the Stepping Stones programme at these events, discussed where activities (and their design) had worked well or less well, and learned of solutions to problems they had encountered.

These events also helped coordinators reflect on their achievements and progress (or lack thereof), and leave feeling reassured in their work:

“Share and learn helped us realise how much we are doing. When you explain [what you are doing at the event] you realise that you are making an impact.” – Coordinator

Across the programme, there were also clear examples where information that had been shared at these events had gone on to benefit schools, from programme design tips to funding sources for activities such as breakfast clubs. This helped schools to fund and run these elements.



### 7.2.1. What worked well

Group events at City Hall (or, later in the programme, online) represented a time-efficient learning opportunity, where coordinators could meet a range of peers with different ideas, challenges and solutions in a short space of time. This was deemed essential to their uptake.

### 7.2.2. Challenges and suggested improvements

Some coordinators had aimed to take advantage of the Stepping Stones 'network' and pursue other learning opportunities (such as school-to-school visits) over and above the annual 'Share and Learn' events. However, in reality, most coordinators struggled to find time or gain permission from senior management due to capacity pressures.

There was a strong suggestion from coordinators to build on this appetite for shared learning in future programmes, including similar, time-efficient shared learning opportunities that schools can engage with in their own time. For example, a shared documents resource that outlines programme design approaches or lists of recommended community mentors, as well as an online forum where teachers can ask each other questions.

## 7.3. School-by-school support

Schools were provided with a dedicated, named GLA lead at the start of the Stepping Stones programme – and flexibility was built into grant reporting requirements in acknowledgement that these came in addition to teachers' everyday responsibilities and workload.

Most coordinators reflected positively on this school-by-school approach through named leads. This model of support was effective because it was flexible to the specific challenges and needs that individual schools faced during the programme, and was underpinned by an acknowledgement that schools would experience the programme's grant monitoring requirements differently dependent on their own capacity and available resource at any given time during the programme.

### 7.3.1. What worked well

In particular, coordinators valued:

- Clear, thorough communication from named leads about grant reporting requirements at key milestones – with patience and flexibility around deadlines;
- Knowing that named leads were there to provide additional support or guidance over the phone, if required;
- A flexible, school-by-school approach to grant management in the wake of COVID-19, where schools were supported to adapt their programmes to respond to the specific needs faced by their pupil populations in the wake of COVID-19 (for example, the provision of digital equipment to mitigate digital exclusion, or rolling over unspent costs to support early transitions activities for 2020/21).

“They are very willing to help, they are not just saying, ‘we have given you this now you have to give us this, that’s the end of it’, they are very much



willing to help you to do what you need to do” – Coordinator

- When GLA leads built on their knowledge of specific schools' programmes and shared specific resources to support their design and delivery of the programme.

### 7.3.2. Suggested improvements

There were no suggested improvements to this element of support.

## 7.4. Evaluation activities

Schools were provided with a named Traverse lead and, as outlined in **Chapter 1.3**, were required to: capture pupil performance data for Stepping Stones pupils at four timepoints<sup>29</sup>; provide a historical comparison group of previous pupils; and participate in three reflective telephone interviews across the programme.

### 7.4.1. What worked well

Most schools reflected positively on the ethos of the evaluation and engaged positively across different evaluation activities. There was some suggestion that the formative design of the evaluation had helped coordinators to reflect on their delivery of the programme on an ongoing basis:

“...It was really helpful and useful. [The evaluation activities] gives us the chance to look at things. If the project was only being evaluated at the end of the year we wouldn't notice all the outcomes happening.” – Coordinator

Similar to the feedback received for programme support, coordinators valued having a named lead who could provide additional support when required, as well as flexibility around data return deadlines during busy periods at the start and end of the academic year.

### 7.4.2. Challenges and suggested improvements

As noted in **Chapter 1.3**, schools consistently struggled to return quantitative performance data on pupil attendance, behaviour and educational outcomes throughout the evaluation. This task placed a significant demand on coordinator time in the absence of a school data manager and, at times, was a burden among competing priorities.

Issues with performance data tended to relate to where different data categories and/or different year group data sat across different databases systems, which meant that these datasets had to be retrieved individually and then reconciled. Other challenges included where school performance systems (and the data they collected) were different between years groups or had changed between different year groups, which prohibited the inclusion of a historical comparison group.

“Within our system it's a very difficult thing to bring together, especially termly. Our data is not all in the same place so it requires a lot of finesse on Excel to pull it all together...” –Coordinator

The culmination of these issues was that, even when returned, some school data returns were not of sufficient quality to include within the programme evaluation.

---

<sup>29</sup> Schools were originally required to capture pupil performance data at six timepoints (at the start, middle and end of the academic year), but this was later revised to four timepoints to reduce evaluation burden on coordinators.



Although a quantitative data mapping assessment was completed at the start of the evaluation, this suggests that future schools-based evaluations would benefit from a more rigorous evaluability assessment to establish whether schools can be meaningfully included within an evaluation.

Some coordinators also expressed frustration in the first year of the programme at the use of separate GLA (expenditure monitoring) and Traverse (economic assessment) financial monitoring sheets, which took additional time to complete. These were merged for the second year of the programme in response to feedback, but this underlines the importance of ensuring monitoring and evaluation tools are aligned wherever possible at the start of programmes.



## 8. Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter presents an overview of the key learning from the evaluation of The Mayor's Stepping Stones programme for: funded schools (2018-2020); other schools interested in or delivering Stepping Stones activities; and the GLA itself.

### 8.1. Key messages

#### 8.1.1. For programme-funded schools 2018-2020

Funded schools have built on the evaluation of the pilot programme and demonstrated that the Stepping Stones programme had substantial positive impacts on vulnerable young people as they transition to, and settle into secondary school.

There is strong evidence to suggest that the programme contributed to improvements in behaviour and helped reduce the number of exclusions, particularly for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Pupil Premium status. There is also evidence to suggest that Stepping Stones contributed to higher attendance rates in some schools, especially for pupils in receipt of Pupil Premium, as well as socially anxious or shy pupils.

As in the evaluation of the pilot programme, there is also evidence to suggest that the Stepping Stones programme had a positive impact on pupil progress in Maths. While the links between Stepping Stones, academic progress and attainment are less clear, it is widely acknowledged the improvements in academic progress and behaviour are linked.

Improvements in exclusion and attendance rates continued for the first Stepping Stones cohort in Year 8. However, the proportion of Stepping Stones pupils at or above expected progress in English and Maths across most schools was lower in Year 8 than in Year 7. This may suggest that some pupils struggle after 'exiting' the Stepping Stones programme. Schools should consider 'step down' activities for more vulnerable pupils as they enter Year 8.

#### 8.1.2. For other schools interested in Stepping Stones activities

The funded schools generated a substantial amount of learning around what works best in regard to management of the Stepping Stones schools and their activities. This learning is summarised in the Stepping Stones toolkit.

While this learning often varied between schools, their specific contexts and pupil populations, there is also a set of clear, overarching messages for future schools interested in the programme. Recommendations from this learning include:

- **Management of the programme typically works best at a Head of Year or Transitions level, with visible buy-in from senior leadership.** Key programme activities (such as peer mentoring) should also be devolved to reduce risk around staff turnover.
- **The peer mentoring and summer school activities should be considered the main elements of the programme.** They are consistently linked to improvements in attendance and academic progress, and should be considered the main elements of the programme. The former holds benefits for pupils at the start and throughout the academic year, while the latter is critical for addressing the concerns of socially anxious, shy or quieter pupils. Schools



with a limited budget should focus on an approach centred on peer mentoring, Stepping Stones lessons and a targeted summer school to improve value for money of the programme, though the impact of this would need to be evaluated.

- **The programme is easier to manage and works best when core activities are targeted towards Year 7 pupils most in need of support.** Some elements such as Stepping Stones lessons can be more easily delivered to whole year groups.
- **The Stepping Stones programme holds clear benefits for less 'traditional' mentors,** who might themselves be experiencing challenges around their own behaviour. However, not all mentors will excel in the role and adequate support is needed to ensure that mentees do not suffer where this approach doesn't work. Overall, the evidence suggests that a balance of 'high achievers' and less 'traditional' mentors works best.

### 8.1.3. For the GLA

This evaluation has found that the Stepping Stones programme was successful in helping schools to develop their transitions offer and supporting a large number of pupils' progression from primary to secondary school – including during the COVID-19 pandemic.

There is evidence to suggest that a part of this success rests on the GLA's approach to being a funding partner. Schools thrived on the school-centred approach that lay at the heart of the programme, from the selection and development of programme activities specific to school contexts and pupil populations, to flexibility around grant monitoring deadlines and the reallocation of funding after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendations from the evaluation include:

- **Ensure a long lead-in between commissioning and the start of the new academic year on programmes of this type,** to enable schools to fully prepare and deliver early transitions activities to the first cohort (for example, primary school engagement days and summer school support).
- **Consider what support relevant partners in funded education programmes might need to overcome obstacles that might otherwise limit their engagement.** While some funded schools engaged well with their feeder networks through the Stepping Stones programme, there was some suggestion that others struggled because of the challenges primary schools faced themselves (such as capacity to contribute to the programme). Schools would also benefit from some form of quality assurance of community mentor organisations.
- **Continue to provide a mix of face-to-face and online events,** which are most appropriate formats within the context of the capacity pressures teachers face. Group, shared learning events not only support the exchange of lessons learned, but also provide reassurance and support self-belief.
- **Highlight the value of the most affordable, sustainable activities of the programme such as peer mentoring and Stepping Stones lessons.** The programme works as a 'packaged' programme for schools looking to develop or rebrand their transitions activities, but there is also value in schools with more structured transitions drawing on specific activities to strengthen their





offer.

- **Ensure that educational toolkits have clearly stated aims, objectives and uses to set them apart in a crowded market of resources.** The Stepping Stones toolkit (and the templates within it) were a highly valued resource for schools participating in the programme, but need to be made clearer to support wider appeal and uptake.
- **Future evaluations may benefit from more rigorous evaluability assessment phase to establish whether schools can meaningfully contribute to impact assessment.** While schools are supportive of programme evaluation and its ethos, and can benefit from data summaries returned through evaluations, impact evaluation and quantitative data collection can quickly increase burden on coordinators. This is especially the case where coordinator management time is not ringfenced, or they lack the support of a data officer.

## 8.2. Concluding comments

The Stepping Stones programme has successfully supported the transition of two cohorts of vulnerable pupils from primary to secondary school and left a clear legacy of new or developed transitions structures and practices in funded schools.

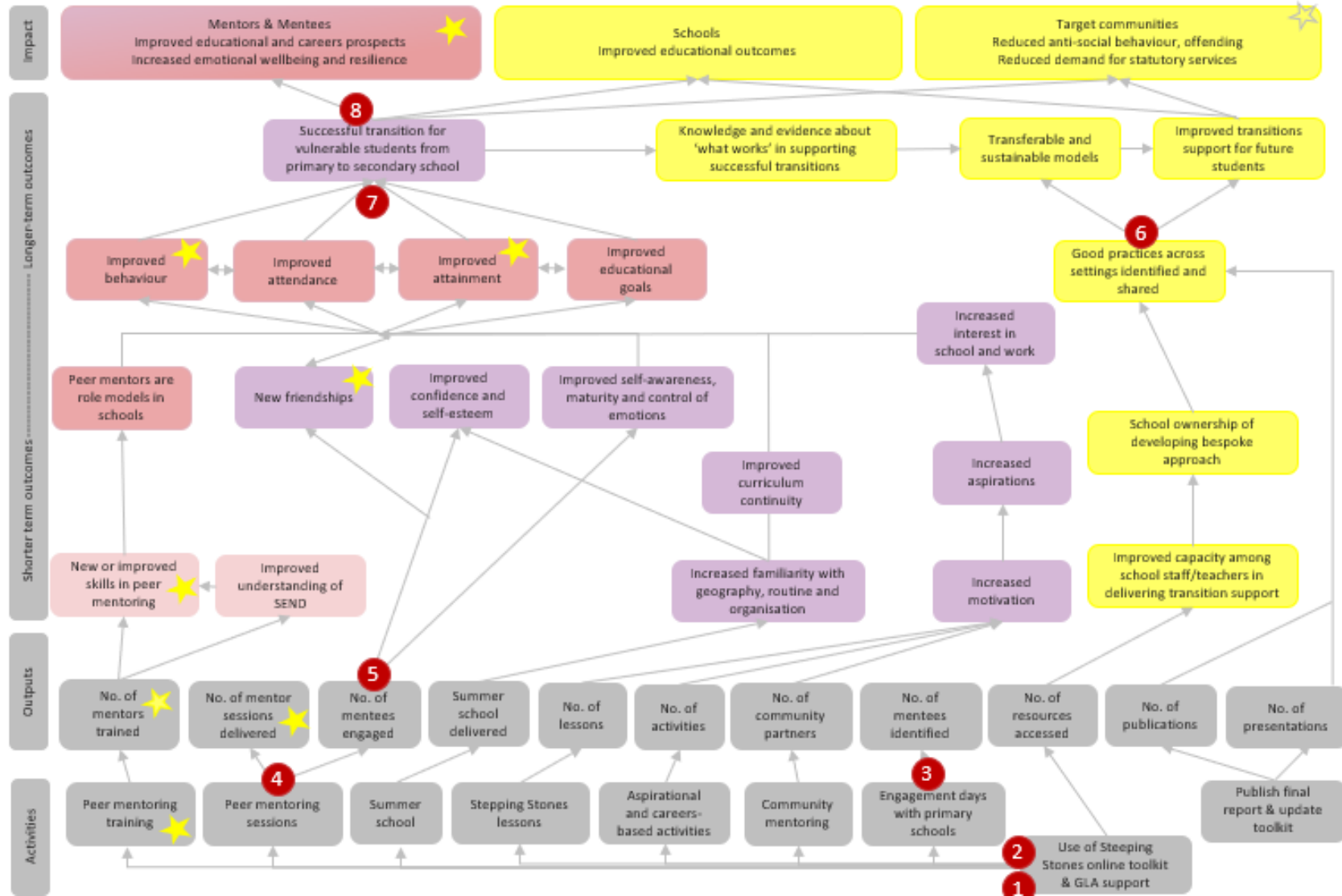
As the programme ends, funded schools have built on the momentum of the programme and continue to deliver Stepping Stones activities to the new 2020/21 academic year amid the COVID-19 pandemic. It is notable that most schools plan to continue peer mentoring and Stepping Stones lessons in the future – both activities that required resource to ‘set-up’ and adapt within the school, but fewer ongoing costs. In contrast, fewer schools will continue the more expensive elements of the programme that require products or services to be purchased in addition to or outside of standard school activities, such as summer schools, community mentoring or aspirational trips.

The evaluation has also added further weight to the findings of the evaluation of the pilot programme, and has generated further transferable learning around what works in supporting young people through transitions activities. This learning has clear potential to support the GLA, funded schools and future schools interested in commissioning and running Stepping Stones activities, or to directly inform the design and development of other transitions activities in the future.



# Appendix A: Stepping Stones logic model diagram

Figure A-1: Stepping Stones logic model diagram



- Stars highlight where Stepping Stones outcomes fed into the Mayor's Young Londoners Fund programme aims.
- Red, numbered circles highlight key assumptions from the start of the programme, detailed on the next page.
- Coloured boxes denote anticipated outcomes for: mentees (purple); mentors (pink); mentors and mentees (red); and schools (yellow).



Assumption no.	Assumption
1	Schools use the Stepping Stones toolkit and it is sufficient information to inform the development of effective programme elements and activities.
2	The Stepping Stones Programme maintains a core element of uniformity across schools as developed in the toolkit.
3	Primary school engagement days create meaningful relationships that enable at risk pupils with problems relating to confidence, self-esteem and bullying to be identified (in addition to pupils with behaviours that may challenge which are automatically flagged by primary schools).
4	Pupils are successfully matched with mentors, and feel engaged in this bond.
5, 7	Pupils stay engaged in the programme throughout the year, attending taught lessons, trips and peer mentoring sessions on a regular basis.
6	Schools share best practice and take opportunities to be involved with self-reflection and learning.
8	The programme is systematic and sustained across the schools such that it builds skills, develops self-discipline and improves confidence in a way that encourages young people to see a positive path for their future.
<b>Theoretical assumptions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Many vulnerable young people are not equipped with the necessary skillset to navigate transition successfully.</li><li>• Supporting 'at risk' young people at this key developmental stage has a positive impact on a young person's outcomes in later stages at school and ultimately, in their later life, in areas like emotional wellbeing and labour market outcomes.</li><li>• A successful transition to secondary school includes: developing new friendships and improving their self-esteem and confidence; settling in so well in school life that they cause no concerns to their parents/carers; showing an increasing interest in school and school work; getting used to their new routines and school organisation with greater ease; and experiencing curriculum continuity.</li><li>• All pupils &amp; their parent/carers will voluntarily be involved in the evaluation.</li></ul>	



## Appendix B: Stepping Stones schools

### **The Archbishop Lanfranc Academy, Croydon**

The Archbishop Lanfranc Academy is located in the most deprived LSOA in the Borough of Croydon. The academy serves an area that is affected by the issues surrounding poverty, youth crime and violence, where 41.2% of pupils classified as Pupil Premium and 58.4% of pupils have a first language that is not English. Archbishop Lanfranc has operated for four years, and in their first Ofsted inspection (May 2017) received 'Good' ratings in all areas. Since then, they have seen an increase in their Year 7 intake, from around 80 to 130. They have also gone through the process of re-brokering and became the only secondary school in an all-primary MAT (Pegasus Trust) since 2018. Prior to implementing Stepping Stones, Archbishop Lanfranc already offered transition support opportunities to address some of the challenges in attainment, engagement and motivation. These included engaging community mentors through various intervention programmes and a mentoring programme between Year 10 and Year 7 girls.

### **Central Foundation Girls' School, Tower Hamlets**

The Central Foundation Girls' School is located in Bow in the Borough of Tower Hamlets, London. The school serves 1,500 young women aged 11-19, 65% of which are in receipt of Pupil Premium, 98% of which come from minority ethnic groups (mainly from a Bangladeshi heritage), and 54% of which have English as an additional language. The school is based in an area where levels of deprivation are among the highest in the country, including very low incomes, high crime rates, and poor-quality housing. Central Foundation Girls' School has a pool of 30 feeder primary schools, which highlight pupils coming alone from a school so they may set up friendships during summer school. The school has been rated 'Good' by Ofsted since 2011 and offers a range of after-school activities under the umbrella Central+, which is run by a full time Community Manager, to develop pupils' cultural capital and provide opportunities that many would not readily have access to. These include activities such as educational, skills-based and fun challenges, sports and more adventurous activities, and some accredited courses. Prior to implementing Stepping Stones, the school already offered a robust transition programme with DFE Summer School Funding, until the funding stream ran out and they were forced to reduce the scale.

### **Eastbury Community School, Barking & Dagenham**

Eastbury Community School is a large mixed, community comprehensive school located in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham. Rated 'Good' since 2013, it became an all-through school for pupils aged 3-19 in 2015 and currently serves 1,871 pupils. The school has a high ethnic diversity (91%) and high percentage of pupils who speak English as a second language (66%), with the most common languages being Urdu, Bengali, and Albanian. The local area is the third most deprived borough in the UK, with issues of poverty, a rise in violent crime (with a 178% increase in knife crime the last 5 years involving under 25s) and the highest rate of child obesity in London. More recently, the school has had to support young people who have siblings or family members that have been victims of knife crime. They have also worked in partnership with other local schools and agencies in order to support specific young people and their families who may have been victims of extremist views, or at risk of exposure to radicalisation. Prior to implementing Stepping Stones, Eastbury Community School already offered a careers education component and had an Additionally Resourced Provision on site for deaf pupils.



### **Eltham Hill School, Greenwich**

Eltham Hill School is a maintained secondary school located in the London Borough of Greenwich, serving girls aged 11-19. The school went from a 'Satisfactory' Ofsted rating in 2012 to 'Outstanding' in 2014. An IB World school, Eltham Hill School has a 37% Pupil Premium entitlement and 32% have English as an additional language. The school offers a coeducational Post 16 with an IB Career Related Programme, alongside A Levels. Their most vulnerable pupils are at risk of being involved in crime, violence and also not gaining education or employment beyond school-leaving age. Prior to implementing Stepping Stones, the school had a history of running similar projects and found their pupils valued a structured induction programme involving a range of activities. Due to funding, the school was no longer able to offer an extensive transition programme.

### **Featherstone High School, Ealing**

Featherstone High School is a non-selective, academy converter located within the London Borough of Ealing. The school serves 1,612 pupils with a 36.6% Pupil Premium entitlement. A founding member of the Grand Union Multi-Academy Trust, the school is graded 'Outstanding' by Ofsted. Featherstone High School is a diverse school— with 79% of pupils not having English as a first language, 99% hailing from minority ethnic groups, 16% on free school meals, and 40% classed as disadvantaged. Pupils come from the most deprived wards in the borough—Southall Green, Southall Broadway and Norwood Green are classed as being in the 20% most deprived in London—which also have high rates of knife crime. Featherstone saw a massive increase in 2017 for the top A/A\* grades from 17% to 27% of all passes, as well as pass rates in 16 subjects well above the national average and a 100% pass rate for A Levels. The school has been recognized by the National Endowment Foundation for challenging disadvantage, among other awards.

### **Harris Academy Greenwich, Greenwich**

Harris Academy Greenwich is a secondary school located in Eltham in the London Borough of Greenwich. The Eltham area faces many challenges—including unemployment, deprivation, crime, low aspirations, poor health, shortened life spans, alcoholism and drug abuse—particularly in the housing estates which the school serves. Since turning around the infamous 'Eltham Green', as the school was formerly named, crime rates in the area have fallen. Over a third of pupils are entitled to free school meals and 49.89% are Pupil Premium. There are 58 languages spoken in the school and around a quarter of pupils are EAL. A predominantly white working-class pupil cohort, 52% are White British and 65% are boys. Some pupils also faced serious mental health issues. Prior to implementing Stepping Stones, Harris Academy Greenwich offered a one-to-one meeting with Year 6 parents, a transition day for all new pupils, visits to main feeder schools to meet with SENCOs and child protection officers, and maths training to teachers at their biggest feeder school, Middle Park Primary.

### **Harris Academy South Norwood, Croydon**

Harris Academy South Norwood is a mixed comprehensive academy located in the London Borough of Croydon. In September 2017, Harris Academy South Norwood and Upper Norwood fully amalgamated to become Harris Academy South Norwood. The school serves 1,600 pupils, 45% of which are pupil premium, and has over 30 feeder schools. A large majority of pupils are from minority ethnic groups and a larger than average number of pupils speak English as an additional language. The South Norwood area has a significant immigrant population, has a high rate of unemployment and





deprivation, and has seen a rise in violent crime, particularly knife crime, in recent years. Prior to implementing Stepping Stones, Harris Academy South Norwood offered multiple engagement opportunities for parents and pupils in Year 5-6 to learn about the school and making the transition, which included a secondary day experience and a transition day in July for pupils that would be joining the school that autumn.

### **Heartlands High School, Haringey**

Heartlands High School is a secondary academy in the London Borough of Haringey, serving 1,050 pupils. Heartlands pupils have a diverse cultural make up and come from an area struggling with issues of high deprivation, domestic violence, lone parents, mental health and crime. Noel Park is in the top 5% of most deprived areas in England, with the highest number of families receiving Early Help Support in Haringey. Heartland High School was rated 'Good' by Ofsted in 2016. Of its pupils, 52% are Pupil Premium, 8% have an EHCP, and 1.8% are LAC or Adopted from Care. As such, pupils at the school have struggled with poor attendance and punctuality (with Pupil Premium pupils making up 78% of pupils who arrive late), behaviour, learning and achievement, safeguarding (72% of disadvantaged pupils currently make up the Child Protection register), and poor parental engagement and support. Prior to implementing Stepping Stones, Heartlands High School offered a character development programme called SEARCH to Key Stage 4 pupils.

### **The Jo Richardson Community School, Barking & Dagenham**

The Jo Richardson Community School is a LA maintained school serving pupils aged 11-18 and located in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham. The school, rated 'Good' by Ofsted in 2013, opened in 2002 and operates as part of an inclusive Sixth Form Consortium, the 'Southern Consortium', with four other local schools. Pupils live in an area with many challenges, including increasing violent assaults, domestic violence, and high deprivation (top 20% most deprived areas in the country). It's also seen increasing referrals to CAMHA and Social Services due to difficult home situations. 48% of pupils are entitled to free school meals and 40% are Pupil Premium. The school used to be largely White British (46.2%); however, the percentage of ethnic minority groups has rapidly increased (next largest group is Black African at 16.2%). Prior to implementing Stepping Stones, Jo Richardson Community School already offered a self-funded breakfast club, organised high profile work placements for pupils, and offered a comprehensive ACHIEVE visits programme where pupils were able to experience different places outside of their comfort zone (though interest in the latter two has decreased due to parents' increasing financial challenges and fears for the children's safety).

### **Meridian High School, Croydon**

Meridian High School is a community secondary school that serves an area of deprivation in the London Borough of Croydon. Pupils attending the school have significant challenges in their lives as a result of the neighbourhood they live in, which is surrounded by more affluent areas but very much isolated from the rest of the borough. With 63.4% of pupils in receipt of the Pupil Premium and 83% of pupils residing on the New Addington estate, pupils face various social and emotional challenges including high multi-deprivation (bottom 16% in England), particularly in education and skills (bottom 12%) and health (bottom 5%). The area also suffers from a prolific gang culture, which contributes to higher crime rates (in March 2018 there were 73 incidents of violent and sexual crime on the road of the school). The school's recent Ofsted inspection resulted in a 'Requires Improvement' rating. Prior to implementing Stepping Stones, there had been 45 crimes



reports logged for pupils from the school alone.

### **Northolt High School, Ealing**

Northolt High School is a secondary foundation school located in the London Borough of Ealing, serving pupils aged 11-19 (37.2% of which are Pupil Premium and 26% of which are eligible for free school meals). From when it opened in 2004, the school has had an uphill climb in Ofsted ratings, going from 'Inadequate' in 2012 to 'Requires Improvement' in 2013, until reaching 'Good' in 2015. The local area has seen an increasing threat from gang related crime, with an increase in discovery of weapons hidden in public areas close to schools, gang related deaths and injuries involving guns and knives, drug abuse and arrests for possession (in increasingly younger pupils). Prior to implementing Stepping Stones, Northolt High School offered gang and knife crime education, an Art Therapy space, and a well-established Year 11 mentor scheme for younger pupils. The school also offered a one-day programme to address gang crime for Year 7 pupils.

### **Oasis Academy Hadley, Enfield**

Oasis Academy Hadley is a large all-through academy for children aged 2-18 located in the London Borough of Enfield. The school has maintained a 'Good' Ofsted rating since opening in 2009. Of the school's pupils, 90% come from the 30 most deprived areas in the country and 66% receive Pupil Premium. There is a high proportion of pupils with English as an additional language (69% with over 60 languages spoken). The Enfield area, especially the Ponders End area, has seen increasing gang related crime and the borough is ranked sixth in London for serious youth violence (there were 397 serious youth violence incidents in Enfield in the year ending April 2018). Vulnerable pupils also face issues of instability, homelessness and lack of basic nutritional needs. Prior to implementing Stepping Stones, Oasis Academy Hadley offered a transition programme that included visits to feeder schools and one-to-one meetings with all Year 6 parents. The school also offered a week-long summer school to introduce new pupils to their new environment.

### **Preston Manor School, Brent**

Preston Manor School is an all-through academy for children aged 4-19 located in the Borough of Brent, London. The school was rated 'Good' by Ofsted in 2016. The local area is very ethnically diverse, reflected in the 63% of pupils that have English as an additional language. Many pupils face challenges of poverty and literacy, with 40% of pupils receiving Pupil Premium and 62% of pupils with lower levels of literacy compared to the national average. Committed to inclusion, its pupils also include looked after children, pupils with EHCPs and SEN support. Prior to implementing Stepping Stones, Preston Manor School offered a range of mentoring opportunities for vulnerable pupils, including a Year 12 peer mentoring programme, the BBC (Black Boys Council), and the S.T.A.R.S. (Successful, Talented, Astonishing, Responsible Students) programme. The school also offered pupils one PSHE (Personal, Social, Health and Economic education) lesson per week.

### **Rushcroft Foundation School, Waltham Forest**

Rushcroft Foundation School is located in the North-East London Borough of Waltham Forest, a borough exhibiting high levels of deprivation and a significantly imbalanced and declining economic profile. The school became a sponsored academy with specialisms in Arts, Humanities and Sports in order to provide a structured solution to the area's challenging circumstance. Below average in size, the school was rated 'Good' by Ofsted





in 2016 and 41% of its pupils are Pupil Premium. The school has seen increasing numbers of pupils from minority ethnic groups (81%) and pupils with English as an Additional Language (59.2%), as well as an increasing number of boys (52.3%). Pupils come to Rushcroft Foundation School already facing challenges with attainment, behaviour, deprivation and mobility from 35 different feeder schools. The school also faces the challenge of roll turbulence, with 109 mid-term admissions in 2016-17 (or 16% of its roll), many of which were from overseas with limited English. Prior to implementing Stepping Stones, Rushcroft Foundation School already offered a small peer mentoring programme and Saturday school programme for identified and vulnerable pupils, as well as a previously successful summer programme for Year 7 pupils in the past.

### **Whitefield School, Barnet**

Whitefield School is a secondary school and sixth form located in the London Borough of Barnet. The school, which converted to academy status in 2011, is in an area of high social deprivation and gang violence, with 41% of its pupils qualifying for free school meals. Its pupils come from up to 40 different primary schools, many arriving with low prior attainment. Many pupils have only recently arrived in the country and come with complex socio-economic and emotional issues. The school has been consistently rated 'Good' by Ofsted. Prior to implementing Stepping Stones, Whitefield School already offered a robust transition programme, which included a 3-day induction, a light touch summer school programme, and a primary liaison programme. However, the school had recently had to scale back their summer programme and additional support throughout Year 7 due to funding constraints.



## Appendix C: Evaluation questions

Figure C-1: Evaluation questions

Impact evaluation questions	
Evaluation question	Sub-question
Did the programme result in improved outcomes for pupils (both Year 7 and Year 10)?	Did the impact vary for different sub-groups of children (i.e. did it help those with special educational needs and disability more than those without; was it more effective with girls than boys or vice versa, etc.)?
	Did deprivation levels impact on the success of programme (was it more or less successful in schools with higher rates of Pupil Premium entitlement)?
	Did geographical location have an impact (i.e. inner London school vs. outer London setting)?
	Is there any evidence that positive impact seen will be sustained as pupils progress through secondary school into Year 8?
What was the impact on parents and carers?	Were they more involved because of this programme in their child's participation and progress in school?
What was the impact on teachers and the wider school community?	
What was the extent of additionality?	

Process learning questions
How effective was each element of the programme run? How did this compare to the pilot programme (where schools ran all 6 programme elements)?
What were the main strengths and lessons learnt from the programme?
Did the project stakeholders (pupils, parents/carers, teachers) perceive that the intervention had been successful?
What did stakeholders perceive to be the key drivers of the interventions' successes or failures?
Was the funding successful in allowing learning from the pilot programme to be scaled up? Did the funding make a difference to schools?
Was the Stepping Stones Toolkit (including resources from the pilot programme) used effectively by participating schools?
What were the main challenges in delivering this programme to vulnerable young people transitioning to secondary school?
What would be done differently next time on a programme with these objectives?

Economic impact questions
What were the costs of the project?
Did the project represent good value for money?
To what extent has the project embedded learning from the project and ensured sustainability beyond the funding period?

## Appendix D: Methodology

This section provides a detailed overview of the evaluation methodology.

### Qualitative data collection

Table D-1: Qualitative data collection methods in Years 1 and 2

Evaluation activity	Year 1 (2018-19)	Year 2 (2019-20)
<b>Stepping Stones coordinators telephone interviews.</b> In-depth telephone interviews at the programme start (autumn 2018), interim (summer 2019) and end (summer/autumn 2020).	15 baseline interviews 15 interim interviews	13 project end interviews <sup>30</sup>
<b>Year 7 pupil workshops.</b> One-hour, face-to-face workshops with a sample of Stepping Stone pupils in three different Stepping Stones schools at the end of the academic year. A purposive sample of schools was created that considered: borough; school phase and type; pupil population; and the size and composition of the Stepping Stones programme in each school. Teachers then selected pupils for the workshops based on a rough sampling quota based on demographics.	3 workshops in 3 schools	Cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions – replaced with a pupil questionnaire.
<b>Year 10 pupil workshops.</b> One-hour, face-to-face workshops with a sample of mentors in three different Stepping Stones schools at the end of the academic year. A purposive sample of schools was created that considered: borough; school phase and type; pupil population; and the size and composition of the Stepping Stones programme in each school. Teachers then selected pupils for the workshops based on a rough sampling quota based on demographics.	2 workshops in 2 schools	Cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions.
<b>Paper-based questionnaires with parent/carers.</b> A short, paper-based questionnaire (with an online response option) in the summer term. The questionnaire was distributed by Stepping Stones coordinators to all parent/carers of Stepping Stones, returned via self-addressed envelopes.	119 responses (11% response rate) across 8 schools	51 responses (6% response rate) across 9 schools – delayed handout due to COVID-19

<sup>30</sup> One school was unavailable for interview at the end of the programme; one school ceased delivery at the end of the first year.



<p><b>Paper-based questionnaire with Year 7 pupils.</b> A short, paper-based questionnaire distributed in the summer term. The questionnaire was introduced in the second year of the programme after the cancellation of pupil workshops due to COVID-19. The questionnaire was attached to the parent/carer questionnaire (see above) and distributed by Stepping Stones coordinators to all parent/carers of Cohort 2 Stepping Stone pupils, returned via self-addressed envelopes.</p>	N/A	48 responses (6%) across 9 schools
<p><b>Parent/carer interviews.</b> 45-minute, incentivised telephone interview at or after the end of the academic year. Interviewees were recruited via the parent/carer questionnaire. A sample of parent/carers was created based on questionnaire responses, including: school; reported programme impact (quantitative and qualitative); and programme knowledge.</p>	4 interviews at 1 school	10 interviews across 6 schools
<p><b>Community mentor telephone interviews.</b> One-hour telephone interviews with community mentors at the end of the academic year.</p>	N/A	5 interviews
<p><b>Programme lead telephone interviews.</b> One-hour telephone interviews with the GLA programme leads at the start and end of the programme.</p>	1 interview with 2 programme leads	1 interview with 2 programme leads
<p><b>'Share and learn' events.</b> Two half-day events that brought Stepping Stones schools together to discuss successes, challenges, solutions and next steps. Notes from the 'Share and learn' events were not included in the content analysis, but were cross-referenced for key themes.</p>	2 events	2 events



## Quantitative data collection

Schools were collected for quantitative data analysis where they: 1) returned data at the start and end of at least one of the two programme years; and 2) they submitted data within the evaluation's standardised systems, or were able to explain how their school systems related to the standardised system.

In the diagrams below:

- Green = data submitted
- Yellow = data returned with issues
- Red = data not returned
- Grey = data not applicable to school

**Table D-2: Quantitative data collection methods in Years 1 and 2 -Stepping Stones pupils**

Year 7s	Attendance			Exclusions			Behaviour & Effort			English			Maths		
	Y1	Y2	Historical data returned	Y1	Y2	Historical data returned	Y1	Y2	Historical data returned	Y1	DR5	Historical data returned	Y1	Y2	Historical data returned
School 1	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
School 2	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
School 3	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
School 4	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
School 5	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
School 6	Green	Green	Green	Green	N/A	Green	Green	N/A	Green	Green	N/A	Green	Green	N/A	Green
School 7	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
School 8	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
School 9	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
School 10	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
School 11	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
School 12	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
School 13	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
School 14	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green

**Table D-3: Quantitative data collection methods in Years 1 and 2 -Stepping Stones mentors**

MENTORS	Attendance			Exclusions			Behaviour & Effort			English			Maths		
	Y1	Y2	Historical data returned	Y1	Y2	Historical data returned	Y1	Y2	Historical data returned	Y1	Y2	Historical data returned	Y1	Y2	Historical data returned
School 1	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
School 2	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
School 3	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
School 4	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
School 5	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
School 6	Green	Green	Green	Green	N/A	Green	Green	N/A	Green	Green	N/A	Green	Green	N/A	Green
School 7	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
School 8	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
School 9	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
School 10	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
School 11	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
School 12	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
School 13	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
School 14	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green

## Historical comparison data

Stepping Stones schools were asked to provide historical comparison datasets of Year 7 and Year 10 pupils from the 2015/16 and 2016/17 academic years. These datasets consisted of pupils that they would have selected for the Stepping Stones programme if it had existed at that time.

8 of 15 schools provided historical datasets for previous groups of Year 7s and 6 of 15 schools provided historical datasets for previous groups of Year 10s (albeit not across all data categories). Year 7 historical comparison datasets were assessed for their level of comparability through reviewing the proportion of pupils with Special Educational Needs in them. 7 datasets that had a variance of 10% or less were included within the evaluation.



All quantitative data analysis (except for the PASS tests, which were newly introduced in schools for the evaluation) then compared data from the 2018/19 and 2019/20 Stepping Stones cohorts with the comparable historical cohort intake (2016/17 and/or 2017/18) in each school.

It should be noted that this approach does not constitute a true control group, but it does provide a broadly similar cohort of pupils to act as a comparison point. This enables the evaluation to better understand the role Stepping Stones plays in any progress observed, compared to what may have happened had there been no intervention.

### **Economic assessment**

The economic assessment methodology is detailed in full in **Appendix E**.



## Appendix E: Economic assessment

### Outline of approach

This economic assessment identifies the costs associated with delivering the programme, the benefits that can 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)

- 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.

### Cost of the programme

The economic assessment included 13 schools that returned financial monitoring and pupil performance data.

The total expenditure across these Stepping Stones schools over the period 2018/19 to 2019/20 is of the order of £580,000 (this comprised £482,300 funding from the GLA and £98,800 in reported match funding from the schools).

This expenditure represents an overall cost of £44,700 per school among 13 schools, or £356 per pupil enrolled on Stepping Stones.

This is an overall cost of £44,700 per school, and £356 per pupil enrolled on Stepping Stones.

It should be noted that these figures relate to 13 schools in the programme, of which 10 provided reliable financial data, and so these calculations are an estimate.



**Table E-1: Costs of the programme (2018-19 to 2019-20)**

Cost	2018-19	2019-20	Total
Costs (sample of 10 schools) (£000s)	197.7	249.8	447.5
Scaling factor to 13 schools	+25% pupils	+34% pupils	
Costs (estimate for 13 schools) (£000s)	247.3	333.7	581.1
Cost per school (£000s)	19.0	25.7	44.7
Pupils in 13 schools <sup>31</sup>	842 (cohort 1)	791 (cohort 2)	1,633
Cost per pupil	£294	£422	£356

### Cost per activity

We also reviewed cost per pupil for the different elements of Career-based activities, Community based mentoring, Engagement days with Primary Schools, Summer School, Peer Mentoring, Stepping Stones Lessons, and Summer School.

Our review is based on the sample of 9 schools with data on both costs and numbers of pupils participating in the various elements<sup>32</sup>. In estimating cost per activity, we reallocated cross-cutting expenditure (which covers such items as “costs to release staff for training” and “Stepping Stones co-ordinator”)<sup>33</sup>, and took into account the proportions of pupils that undertook the different elements. Our calculations of the cost per pupil of the elements are shown in the table below.

**Table E-2: Cost per pupil**

	% of pupils	No. of pupils taking element in activity sample	Cost of element (£000s)	Cost per pupil (£)
Aspiration days / Career based activities	74%	389	29.07	33.9
Community mentoring	47%	250	45.80	90.9
Engagement days with primary schools	47%	251	35.69	52.1
Peer mentoring	70%	368	119.93	137.1
Stepping stones lessons	70%	368	57.58	62.6
Summer school	54%	286	132.57	232.7

As can be seen, the Summer School component was the most expensive at £233 per pupil, followed by peer mentoring at £137 per pupil. If all pupils took all elements then the cost would be £609.

<sup>31</sup> Source of pupil numbers – data returns from schools to Traverse

<sup>32</sup> Cost per pupil in the sample of 9 schools was £377, slightly above the level reported by the full set of 13 schools

<sup>33</sup> Cross-cutting expenditure accounted for 36.4% of costs in 2018-19 and 37.5% of costs in 2019-20



## Benefits

The benefits which have been used in the economic assessment include: reducing truancy, reducing exclusions, improving behaviour, and reducing the number who go on to become NEETs.

These have been linked to the measured outcomes for the pupils, when we compare them to the previous year's cohort, of improved attendance, reduced exclusions, improved behaviour and improved attainment.

### Monetising benefits

At a high level, our approach to monetising the benefits – as set out in Figure E-1 - is for each aspect of benefits to:

1. Establish the total number of pupils that benefit, noting that there are two cohorts.
2. Establish the types of benefits that we would expect to see; this may differ in line with the pupils' characteristics, most notably whether they are SEN or not, as this represents an important indicator of differing outcomes for pupils.
3. Establish the potential unit value of the benefit. This relates to the amount of financial loss to the public sector that is avoided by preventing adverse outcomes (such as homelessness or unemployment as a young adult). The incurrence of such costs is sometimes known as social cost, and the ability to reduce it equates to social value.
4. Set the percentage of this cohort who achieve this benefit based on observed differences between Stepping Stones pupils and the comparator pupils.
5. 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 pupils may have received the improvements seen due to other changes since the previous year's comparator cohort.
6. Include an optimism bias correction for the uncertainty around the available evidence.

Table E-2 provides an outline of calculations in relation to determining the initial scale of social costs to be prevented, which is then reduced in line with attainment and deadweight.

Figure E-1: Approach to benefits

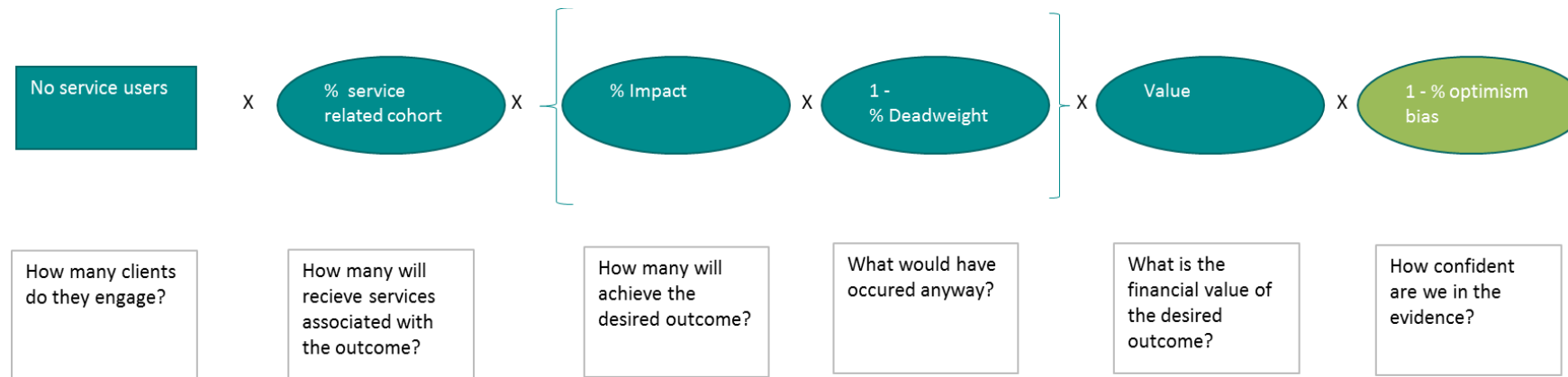


Table E-2: Benefits assumptions (drawn from Traverse calculations and Greater Manchester Combined Authority [GMCA] unit cost database)

Benefit	Linked to outcome	Time period	Scale of social cost
Reduced truancy (cost to education)	Attendance	In programme	½ * £1,965 p.a. cost of regular truancy (GMCA) * 5 years
Reduced exclusions	Exclusions	In programme	Temporary exclusions £1,485 p.a. * 5 years
Improved behaviour	Behaviour score	In programme	Behavioural interventions £1,320 p.a. * 5 years
Fewer pupils with poor life chances (unemployment & underemployment)	Academic progress and attainment	After	Average cost per pupil not in education or training as a young adult £4,950 p.a. (GMCA)
Fewer pupils with poor life chances (criminal justice system / homeless)	Academic progress and attainment	After	Average cost of entering CJS as youth offender £3,800 * two periods / Cost presenting as homeless £2,900 * two occasions (both GMCA for unit costs)



The rationale for truancy, exclusions and behaviour costs are:

- **Truancy:** The GMCA unit cost database cites a £1,965 annual cost of a regular truant who is missing at least five weeks of school per year. We scale this down by half to £982.5 to reflect a less severe but still prominent issue for this cohort;
- **Reduced exclusions:** The cost of an exclusion has been estimated as £825, representing 3 days supervision at TBAP 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, which equates to £1,485 per year.
- **Improved behaviour:** The Stepping Stones cohort of 70 per school are assumed to have historically taken up 75% of the pastoral team's time (two staff at £61,000 p.a. each), with a cost per year per student of £1,320. These costs have been assumed each year in the students' secondary school life.

### Proportions of pupils causing social costs

In assessing the proportion of pupils causing social costs, we draw on truancy and exclusions data from the schools; and the Social Finance 2016 report "New insights into improving outcomes for at-risk youth"<sup>34</sup>, which sets out findings from an analysis of at-risk youths in Newcastle. The latter study estimates (p67) that the average proportion of time that individuals with behavioural or SEN difficulties spend NEET while aged 17 to 19 is of the order of 15% or so; and that around 3% present as homeless, and around 6% are arrested or receive an ASBO (p42). If children are also in the children at risk or looked-after child categories then risks associated with unemployment, homelessness and criminal behaviour rise considerably – in which case our analysis provides an underestimate in this respect.

### Achieving benefit

The percentage of Stepping Stones students who will receive the benefits identified have been calculated based on observed differences between the Stepping Stones students and the comparator group, as show in Table E-3.

Our perspective is that the results are relatively encouraging, in that they indicate a 5.5% improvement in attendance; a 1.1% fall in exclusions (due to improvements among pupils with Special Educational Needs); and a 5.1% improvement in academic progress in mathematics.

However, the results also show a 6.6% reduction in relative progress in English – though even here, results are better in four out of seven schools with all relevant data, and so we believe that the pattern of results is sufficient to indicate a 5.5% reduction in the risk of not being in employment or training as a young adult.

---

<sup>34</sup> [www.socialfinance.org.uk/resources/publications/new-insights-improving-outcomes-risk-youth-newcastle-experience](http://www.socialfinance.org.uk/resources/publications/new-insights-improving-outcomes-risk-youth-newcastle-experience)



**Table E-3: Change in outcomes between Stepping Stones and comparator group**

Outcome		Pupils in sample	Weights	Cohort 1 year 1	Cohort 1 year 2	Cohort 2 year 1		Intervention	Control group		Change versus control group
<b>Attendance</b>	SEN	374	23.4%	62.8%	63.7%	62.0%		62.6%	60.0%		2.6%
	Non-SEN	1,227	76.6%	65.8%	65.8%	67.4%		66.6%	60.2%		6.4%
	Overall	1,601		65.1%	65.4%	66.1%		65.7%	60.2%		5.5%
<b>Exclusions</b>	SEN	319	27.7%	21.1%	9.3%	10.1%		9.7%	13.9%		-4.2%
	Non-SEN	832	72.3%	14.1%	8.6%	7.0%		7.8%	7.7%		0.1%
	Overall	1,151		16.0%	8.8%	7.9%		8.3%	9.4%		-1.1%
<b>Maths</b>	SEN	249	27.9%	74.8%	57.2%	50.9%		58.5%	58.3%		0.1%
	Non-SEN	645	72.1%	67.1%	71.0%	74.0%		71.5%	64.5%		7.0%
	Overall	894		69.2%	67.2%	67.5%		67.9%	62.8%		5.1%
<b>English</b>	SEN	308	22.6%	75.1%	71.3%	52.9%		63.1%	80.7%		-17.6%
	Non-SEN	1,057	77.4%	75.4%	69.7%	71.3%		71.9%	75.3%		-3.4%
	Overall	1,365		75.3%	70.1%	67.1%		69.9%	76.5%		-6.6%

Note that the assessment of the outcome for the intervention is calculated with weights of 25% for cohort 1 year 1, 25% for cohort 1 year 2, and 50% for cohort 2 for attendance, Maths and English; and with weights of 50% for cohort 1 year 2 and 50% for cohort 2 for exclusions.



## Benefits calculation

The following Table E-4 provides a summary of the assumptions used for the benefit calculation. These monetised benefits have been considered for a given cohort for school related benefits (truancy, exclusion and behaviour) and as reductions in social costs that would otherwise be borne elsewhere.

**Table E-4: Calculating the benefits**

Benefit	No. students	Cost per pupil affected	Adverse outcome (baseline)	Impact on outcome	Change in outcome (baseline * impact)
Reduced truancy	842	£4,915	100%	5.5%	5.5%
Reduced exclusion	842	£7,425	100%	1.1%	1.1%
Better behaviour	842	£6,600	100%	5.5%	5.5%
Reduced NEETs	842	£29,700	15%	5.1%	0.765%
Reduced homeless	842	£5,820	3%	5.1%	0.153%
Reduced crime	842	£7,600	6%	5.1%	0.306%

The next step in assessing the financial effects is to multiply change in outcome against unit costs, taking into account:

- The time period that the benefits occur within
- Time discounting - adjustment for a lower value of £1 gained in the future compared to the present (at a rate of 3.5% per year in line with HM Treasury 'Green Book' guidance)
- Deadweight effects – as per the interim evaluation, we have assumed that around 10% of the unadjusted attributed effects would have occurred anyway
- Optimism bias - as per the interim evaluation, we have assumed that benefits are over-optimistic by 5%

The results are shown in Table E-5, incorporating, for illustrative purposes, an assumption that the two projected spells of homelessness ensue at the start and end of young adulthood, and that the two projected spells of criminal justice engagement occur close to those.

Table E-5: Benefits by year / and age of cohort for cohort size of 842 (£000s)

Year / Age	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	Total
	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	
<b>Theme</b>													
<b>Attendance</b>	45.5	45.5	45.5	45.5	45.5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<b>227.3</b>
<b>Exclusions</b>	13.8	13.8	13.8	13.8	13.8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<b>69.1</b>
<b>Behaviour</b>	61.1	61.1	61.1	61.1	61.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<b>305.3</b>
<b>Employment</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	31.9	31.9	31.9	31.9	31.9	31.9	<b>191.3</b>
<b>Homelessness</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	3.8	-	-	-	-	3.8	<b>7.5</b>
<b>Criminal justice</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9.8	-	-	9.8	-	<b>19.6</b>
<b>Total</b>	120.3	120.3	120.3	120.3	120.3	-	35.6	41.7	31.9	31.9	41.7	35.6	<b>820.0</b>
<b>Discount factor</b>	100%	96.6%	93.4%	90.2%	87.1%	84.2%	81.4%	78.6%	75.9%	73.4%	70.9%	68.5%	
<b>Total (with discount)</b>	120.3	116.3	112.3	108.5	104.9	-	29.0	32.8	24.2	23.4	29.5	24.4	<b>725.6</b>
<b>...less 5% optimism bias</b>	114.3	110.4	106.7	103.1	99.6	-	27.5	31.1	23.0	22.2	28.1	23.2	<b>689.3</b>
<b>Fully adjusted - Total less 5% optimism bias, less 10% deadweight</b>	102.9	99.4	96.0	92.8	89.7	-	24.8	28.0	20.7	20.0	25.3	20.9	<b>620.4</b>
<b>Cumulative benefits</b>	102.9	202.3	298.3	391.1	480.8	480.8	505.6	533.6	554.3	574.3	599.5	620.4	
<b>... of which schools</b>	102.9	202.3	298.3	391.1	480.8	480.8	480.8	480.8	480.8	480.8	480.8	480.8	

Schools attain benefits of the order of £480,000. The above suggests a benefit per pupil of £737, of which schools receive £571.





## Comparisons of costs and benefits

On the basis of the calculations above, the benefit per pupil is of the order of £737, which for a cohort of 842 equates to a benefit of around £620,000. This can be contrasted against the cost of the programme. The cost per pupil, after allowing for a 5% optimism bias factor, is estimated at £372 per pupil, which amounts to a cost of £313,000 for a cohort of 842.

Our assessment of **net present benefit** is that there is a value of  $£737 - £372 = £365$  per pupil, and  $£620,000 - £313,000 = £307,500$ .

Our investment of **return on investment** is that, for public services as a whole, the ratio between benefits and costs is:  $£737 \div £372 = 1.98 : 1.00$ , that is an ROI of 198% over a 12-year period. For schools, the ratio between benefits and costs is  $£571 \div £372 = 1.54 : 1.00$ , that is a 154% ROI over a 12-year period. The overall ROI of 198% is broadly in line with the 212% financial return estimated by the evaluation of the pilot programme.

Our estimate of the **payback period** is 3 years and 2 months, as the point at which the cumulative benefits in table 5 meet the costs point of £313,000.

Such statistics should, however, be considered in the light of various important wellbeing benefits that are not included – though these have not been measured, there are strong reasons to believe that there is much intrinsic value in supporting children to achieve their potential, as opposed to long periods of unemployment, underemployment and inactivity.

**TRAVERSE**

