

YOUNG PEOPLE, THEIR SOCIAL NETWORKS AND SCHOOL SUPPORT: EXPLORATORY ANALYSES OF FRIENDSHIPS, WELL-BEING AND MULTI-AGENCY WORKING IN TWO SECONDARY SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

We present here a compendium comprising three short reports drawing on further analyses of data collected for an earlier report from the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning (WBL) on the development and impact of young peoples' social capital in secondary schools (Stevens et al. 2007).

Social capital is generally thought of as the benefit which is conferred on individuals by social networks and relationships. These networks give the individual access to resources leading to benefits both for the individual (emotional support, shared knowledge) and for society (in terms of increased social cohesion, reduced conflict and better mental health in the population). Increasingly social capital is regarded as something to be promoted by policy and practice, alongside individual human and economic capital. This more holistic approach is reflected in policy initiatives designed to address the wellbeing of children and young people in the round: initiatives such as *Every Child Matters* (Department for Education and Skills, 2003), and the recent *Children's Plan* (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2007), where the focus is not only on children's educational attainment but on their happiness, enjoyment and ability to make a positive contribution to society. Relatively little is known, however, about the social capital of children and young people, most research in this area having focused on adults.

Our earlier report sought to help address this knowledge gap by using in-depth analysis of the social capital and networks of students in two Inner London secondary schools. Both schools reflected the highly ethnically and socially diverse nature of the borough within which they were located, but differed from one another in both composition and ethos. Throughout the reports the two schools are referred to by pseudonyms, *Rose Park* and *Oak High*. The names of individuals referred to have also been changed to protect the anonymity of those who participated in this research.

Our earlier research used a mixed methods approach combining face to face interviewing with questionnaire responses. It explored three particular forms of social capital – students' attitudes to social diversity, their sense of school belonging and their experiences of social support – and the role which schools could play in promoting these.

In this compendium we use the data collected in that study to follow up on three different, but related themes:

- students' friendship networks,
- student psychological well-being, and
- multi-agency working.

All the reports draw on small-scale analyses of selected data collected as part of the original research project. They use a variety of approaches including network mapping, descriptive quantitative analysis, and qualitative techniques. The first two reports are quite closely linked, focusing on the students themselves and the relationships between different elements of social capital, psycho-social resources and behaviour, students' background characteristics and features of the school. The third examines multi-agency working as a means of supporting students in these schools who have particular needs, and explores the experiences of school staff and other professionals in applying this approach. However, all three reports have a common focus on students' well-being and those aspects of school life which go beyond teaching and learning.

We should emphasise that the reports are brief and exploratory; we make no claims about providing definite or comprehensive answers. Rather we wanted to draw on our existing data in order to make a further contribution to an understanding of these important and topical issues, and to suggest further questions that might usefully be explored.

We are immensely grateful to the staff and students of *Oak High* and *Rose Park* schools, and to their local authority colleagues, for their co-operation throughout the original research and for ongoing participation and support in the production of this further compendium.

1. SOCIAL MIXING, COMMUNITY COHESION AND SOCIAL ISOLATION

An exploratory analysis of friendship networks in two Inner London secondary schools

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Introduction

Most research has focused on social capital for adults; less is known about young people's social capital. Our earlier report, based on research in two diverse Inner London secondary schools, explored three particular forms of social capital: students' attitudes to social diversity, their sense of school belonging and their experiences of social support. Here we report on exploratory analysis of students' friendship networks. Drawing on data from the same two schools, we investigate both students' 'bridging social capital' (their networks with a wide range of different people) and their 'bonding social capital' (close ties with people similar to themselves). In the light of increasing ethnic diversity in urban schools, and the new duty on schools to promote social cohesion, we ask to what extent friendship networks are demarcated by social class and ethnicity, and what kind of students appear to be isolated from friendship networks altogether.

Key Findings

- Most students had a large number of friends in school and had more friends in-school than out-of-school, indicating the importance of school as a site for friendship formation.
- Students who said they had few/no in-school friends also tended to say that they had few out-of-school friends. Providing opportunities for friendships to develop at school therefore seems particularly important, as does taking a holistic approach to building young people's social capital, which takes account of family and community settings.
- There was no indication that any social or ethnic group was particularly more isolated than any other in these culturally diverse schools.
- These very diverse schools offered opportunities for friendships with students of other ethnicities and these seemed to be taken up: approximately four fifths of students were in ethnically mixed friendship networks. However, there were also closely bonded same-ethnicity groups of friends.
- Nearly a third of Bangladeshi students said that most of their friends in-school were the same ethnicity. 29% of both Pakistani and Black African pupils thought most of their friends were the same ethnicity, compared with less than a quarter of White British pupils and 18% of Black Caribbean pupils. Boys were over-represented among those who said they had a majority of in-school friends of their own ethnicity.

- For all ethnic groups, students' in-school networks were more diverse than their out-of-school networks, highlighting the importance of diverse schools in promoting community cohesion.
- Students who said they had few friends were more likely to have special educational needs, either low or high attainment and be born outside the UK than other students. They were also more likely to report low self-esteem, loneliness, unhappiness and not belonging at school.
- Students who said they had few friends were not the same students who actually appeared isolated when networks were mapped. Actually-isolated students did not typically report low self esteem or loneliness. These findings need further exploration but may suggest the importance of perceived friendships for psychological well-being for students in their teenage years.

All findings are based on data from only two schools, both particularly ethnically diverse, and are based on a short exploratory analysis. They should be seen as indicative of issues that might be more widely explored, rather than conclusive in their own right.

Background

Social capital is an important notion in British social policy. It is seen as a desirable characteristic of communities and societies, underpinning community and social cohesion and mitigating crime and social dislocation. It is also regarded as a valuable asset for individuals, enabling access through social networks to employment, skills, health and other individual benefits. While most research has been on adults, developing young people's social capital seems particularly important in relation to the principles of Every Child Matters. There is increasing interest in the topic.

This paper focuses principally on 'bridging social capital': the idea that networks with a wide range of different people can provide access to productive resources not available to people within their own group. Advocates of comprehensive schooling have long argued that the opportunity for mixing and friendship across social divides is one of the most valuable that state schools can provide (Benn and Chitty 1996). In the context of socially and ethnically diverse societies, schools in diverse urban settings can provide a site for the social integration of young people from different social, economic, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, benefiting both individuals and society as a whole by promoting social inclusion and community cohesion (McGonigal et al 2007). This is a particularly important issue at the current time, as urban areas (and London in particular) become more ethnically diverse, and a particularly topical one for school leaders, as they grapple with their new duty to promote community cohesion.

However, the opportunity for social and cultural mix may or may not be realised, not just because more advantaged families may choose to avoid diverse schools, but also because of students' desire to mix once they are in

school, and the practices of schools themselves. Recent qualitative work by Reay (2007) reported on the experiences of white middle class families who chose to send their children to multi-ethnic inner city schools. Despite the declared interests expressed by such families in the benefits of diversity, Reay found that stratification on lines of class and ethnicity remained evident and that there was very little 'real' social mixing within the schools. Gillborn and Youdell (2000) noted that pressure to achieve good examination results can also lead to academic separation of children on class and race lines, a practice which might also be expected to result in more segregated friendship groups in the absence of other opportunities for mixing. Given these findings, our first question is whether social and ethnic mixing was taking place in the two diverse school settings that we studied.

We also look at evidence of 'bonding social capital': the idea that close networks with similar people can provide supportive resources. Research by Savin-Williams and Berndt (1990) and by Hartup (1993) highlight the importance of friendships for adolescents and emphasise the ways in which close friendships foster both social and emotional growth. Further research finds that friendship support is positively associated with self-esteem and self-worth (Armsden and Greenberg 1987, Buhrmester and Yin 1997). However, Way and Green (2006) highlight a lack of research concerned with the ways in which contextual factors, particularly the school, affect friendship trajectories. Notwithstanding the desirability of mix, it might be hypothesised that in highly diverse settings, young people might also seek friendships with people from similar backgrounds and cultures, with whom they might feel particularly comfortable and safe and where cultural identities might be affirmed. US literature supports this, finding that adolescents friendships are largely racially homogenous (Clark and Ayers 1992, Joyner and Kao 2000, Way and Chen 2000, Moody 2001, Giordano 2003), although Smith and Schneider (2000), researching two very diverse Canadian urban schools, found a lack of ethno-centrism in friendship formation, except in the case of selecting best friends. We explore whether this was the case in our two case study schools.

Finally we look at young people who seem to lack both bonding and bridging social capital in school, being isolated from friendship networks of any kind. We examine the characteristics of these students and the relationships between social isolation, self-esteem, mental well-being and school belonging.

In summary, we address three research questions:

- What is the nature of young people's friendship networks in and out of school?
- To what extent are friendship networks demarcated by social class and ethnicity?
- Are some students isolated from friendship networks, and if so, what are their characteristics?

Methodology

The paper draws principally on self-completion survey data collected from 1584 students in two schools, *Rose Park*¹ ($n=850$) and *Oak High* ($n=734$). Both schools are co-educational comprehensives in Inner London, and both have considerable ethnic and social class diversity. At the time of the research (2006-7), more than 70% of the students in both schools were not of white British origin. *Rose Park* had a slightly more middle-class intake, fewer students eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) and a greater diversity of ethnic groups. *Oak High* had a higher proportion of FSM students, fewer middle-class students, a higher proportion of boys, and had slightly less diversity within its minority ethnic population.

The survey itself covered a range of topics related to social capital including students' attitudes to social diversity, their access to social support and their sense of school belonging. Data was also collected about students' social background characteristics, socio-psychological resources and educational and wider outcomes. Most of this data was analysed for our first research report on the project (Stevens et al. 2007). Students were also asked about their friends and social networks, and these are the data that we analyse here.

In a first question, students from all the years in both schools were asked to say the number of friends that they had in school and out of school, according to pre-defined bands (0, 1-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20 and 21 or more). Students in Y10 and above were also asked whether their friends both in and out of school were of the same ethnicity.² We analysed these data using SPSS software. In addition, students were also asked to circle their friends on a list of people in their own tutor group and to indicate how often they 'hung out' with each circled friend. They then completed the same exercise using a list of all the students in their year group. Thus each student could be linked to each other student in his/her year. We recorded these data by manually creating network maps, in which mutually acknowledged friends were shown with doubled-headed arrows and unreciprocated friendships with single headed arrows. As this was a short project, and partly designed to explore the value to be gained by different ways of measuring bridging and bonding social capital, we confined our analysis to a sample of the data: two randomly selected tutor-groups in Year 10 in *Rose Park* (a total of 42 students), for whom links to all other students in the year were recorded; and two tutor groups in Y9 in each school (a total of 36 students in *Rose Park* and 42 in *Oak High*) for whom only in-tutor-group networks were mapped.³

It became evident from early analyses of these six tutor groups that some students had circled a great many people in the year as their friends but said that they only hung out with them once a week or less. In these cases, the

¹ Names of schools have been altered.

² These questions were not asked of younger age groups in the interests of a shorter questionnaire.

³ Our primary reasons for choosing Y9 and Y10 were to open up the possibility of linking to interview data for Y10 and to explore whether networks were different in Y9, before GCSE option choices, and Y10. The latter proved not to be the case.

identification of a friendship was rarely reciprocal. Accordingly we re-defined friends with the more stringent criterion that they must be people with whom a student hung out several times a week or every day.

Finally, 53 Year 10 students were interviewed during the original research to explore their attitudes to social diversity, their access to social support and their sense of school belonging. We also draw on these interviews where relevant to provide more qualitative perspectives, although the interviews did not specifically focus on friendship ties.

Findings

The nature of young people's friendship networks

Across all the students in both schools, most young people appeared to have extensive friendship networks in school. When asked to state their number of friends, nearly half of students said that they had 21 or more friends in school and, just 8% had 5 friends or fewer. Across the sample as a whole, boys were likely to report having a large number of friends. Broadly speaking this picture was born out by our closer analysis of the friends listed by students in Years 9 and 10. Again, very few students (6%) listed fewer than 5 friends.

The average number of friends listed was 17. There was considerable discrepancy between exact numbers listed and numbers of friends estimated. Typically only about a third of students who estimated a particular band of friends (say 11-15), listed a number of friends in the same band. However, more than three quarters listed numbers in the same or adjacent band. This may be accounted for by the fact that students could only list friends in the same year, or may indicate that estimating numbers of friends is relatively difficult. Interestingly, girls listed slightly more friends than boys, although boys had been more likely to estimate having particularly large numbers of friends.

Although students in these schools were taught in tutor groups for most of Key Stage 3 (11-14) and for some subjects in Key Stage 4 (15-16), the data suggest that friendships are by no means limited to tutor groups. On average only about two-fifths of a student's total friends within their year were in their own tutor group; the rest in other tutor groups. This pattern may well vary between schools depending on the extent of setting for different academic subjects, and of course by age, since groups in Y10/11 will be determined by GCSE or other course choices.

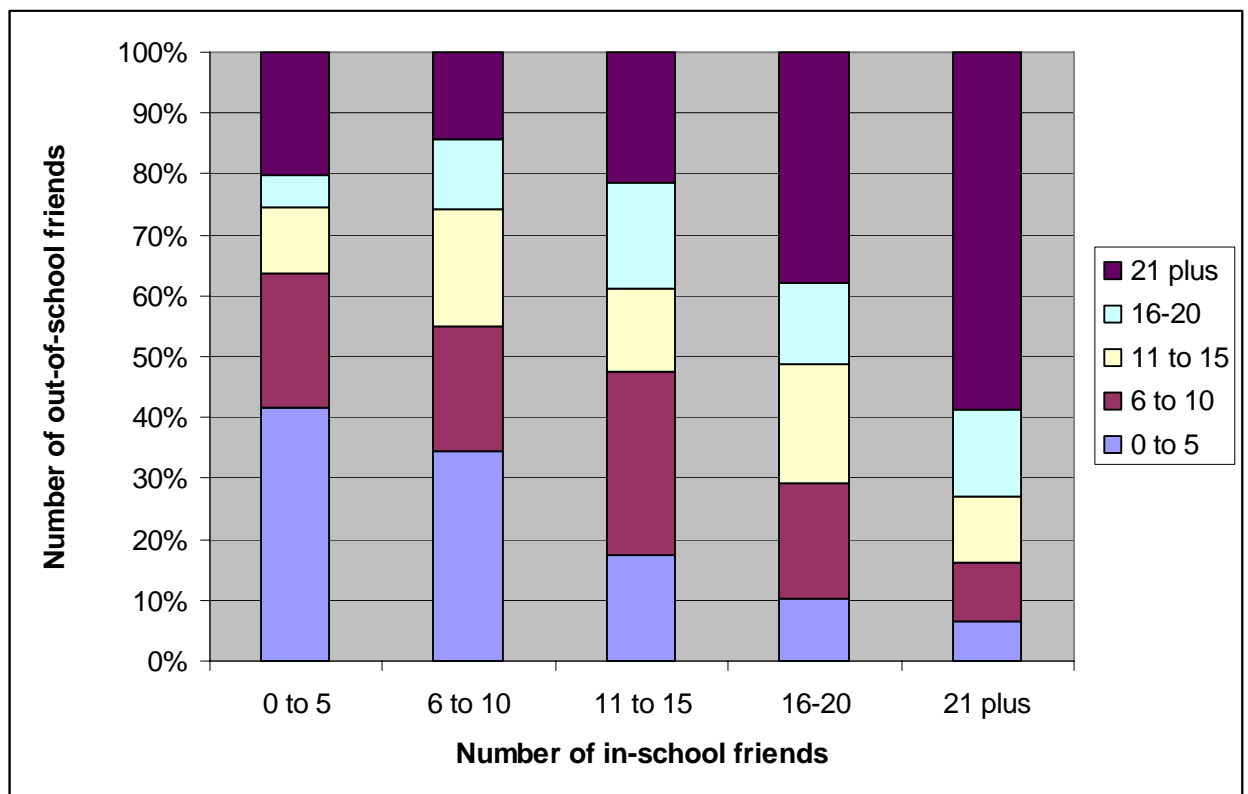
The friendship maps showed no consistent network patterns. For example, one Y9 tutor group consisting of 28 boys⁴ had all but four of its students linked to each other in two large friendship groups. In another tutor group, most students were only linked to one or at most two other students, with hardly

⁴ All boy tutor groups were a feature of some year groups in Oak High, where the proportion of boys was very high (66%). The school had experimented with all-boy groupings rather than having mixed groups in which girls were in a small minority.

any linkage between the groups. The clearest, but perhaps not surprising, finding was the highly gendered nature of friendships. In most tutor groups, there was virtually no cross-over between girls' and boys' networks. This pattern was also largely reproduced when we mapped networks across the whole of Y10.

Estimated numbers of out-of-school friends were slightly lower than estimated numbers of in-school friends, indicating the importance of school as a site for friendship formation. Nevertheless, nearly two-fifths of students claimed to have 21 or more friends outside the school, and just 3% said they had no out-of-school friends. Perhaps the most important finding is that students who said they had few in-school friends also tended to say that they had few out-of-school friends (Figure 1.1). There did not appear to be a trade-off between having friends at one's school or elsewhere. In this light, providing opportunities for friendships to develop at school seems particularly important. Moreover, since reporting a lack of friends at school seems likely to indicate a propensity to be socially isolated more generally, a holistic approach to young people's social capital is probably important for schools, taking into account family and community settings.

Figure 1: Comparison between numbers of in-school and out-of-school friends



Ethnicity, social class and friendship networks

Using two measures of social class – parental education and parental occupation – we found no significant association between social class and the number of in-school friends reported, and this was also borne out by our network mapping. We also found no difference between ethnic groups in the total numbers of friends reported, except in the case of Black African students, who were slightly more likely to report having 0-5 friends (12% compared with 8% in the general population). Thus there is no indication that any social or ethnic group necessarily becomes isolated.

Students were not asked whether their friends were of the same social class as them but from Y10 upwards they were asked about ethnicity. The ethnic diversity of the schools studied was reflected in diverse friendship groups for most students. Only 18% said most or all of their friends in school had the same ethnicity as them. Two thirds of students said that some or about half of their friends were of the same ethnicity and another 15% said none of their friends were of their own ethnicity. This did vary, however, by ethnic group. Nearly a third of Bangladeshi students across the two schools said that most of their friends were the same ethnicity. 29% of both Pakistani and Black African pupils thought most of their friends were the same ethnicity, compared with less than a quarter of White British pupils and 18% of Black Caribbean pupils. This could not be explained by differences in the total size of friendship groups. Boys were over-represented among those who had a majority of friends of their own ethnicity in school.

Network analysis confirmed this pattern. In Y10, we mapped the friendships of 99 students, including the 42 in the two sampled tutor groups and anyone connected to them. Most students were in mixed friendship groups, but there were clusters of same ethnic group friends. We identified three distinct same-ethnic groups (incorporating 17 students or 17%) in which nearly all students were mutually linked to each other and where only one was linked to any other students in the year (i.e. the students had bonding but not bridging capital):

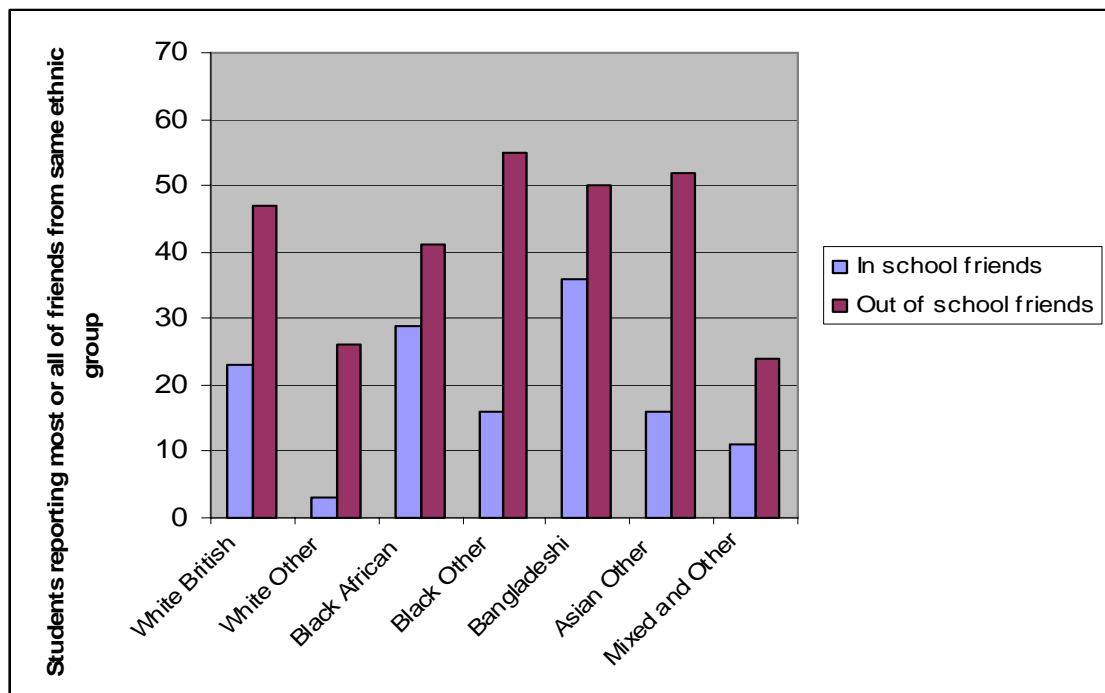
- A group of six black African girls from three different tutor groups;
- A group of five white British girls from four different tutor groups;
- A group of five white British, Irish and Other boys from four different tutor groups.

Additionally there was a group of three Pakistani and one Indian boy and a looser grouping of Pakistani girls and a boy who, while they were not all mutually connected to each other, were more connected to each other than to other students. Similar clusters were found within tutor groups in Y9.

Furthermore, for all groups, out-of-school networks were more likely to be configured along ethnic lines than in-school groups, suggesting that the opportunities that diverse schools provide for students to mix with diverse others are taken (Figure 1.2). Again this was not explained by the overall numbers of out-of-school friends for different ethnic groups. Students of Asian heritage, followed by White British students, were most likely to report

ethnically homogenous out-of-school friendships. Differences between in-school and out-of-school networks were generally more pronounced among 'other' ethnic groups: categories which comprise a large number of smaller minority groups. The data indicates that such students do mix with people of their own ethnic group outside of school, but are inevitably involved in much more diverse groupings within school because of the small size of their ethnic groups. This highlights the potential importance of socially diverse schools in relation to community cohesion.

Figure 1.2: Ethnic Group Friendships In and Out of School



Closer examination of the data reveals some gender differences. These data need to be treated with some caution given small numbers in some groups (n=24 for Bangladeshi girls), but are nevertheless plausible and supported by the accounts of school staff. Over half of girls from Bangladeshi and other Asian groups said most or all of their out-of-school friends were of their own ethnic group, but their in-school networks were much more diverse. This suggests the particular importance of school as a site of social mixing for girls from homes where after-school socialising with other groups is limited by familial and cultural expectations. On the other hand, fewer boys had homogenous out-of-school networks and there were less marked differences between ethnic groups. In contrast to the position for girls, a similar proportion of Bangladeshi and Black African boys reported homogenous networks in-school as out-of-school, indicating perhaps a readier preference of boys to cluster with friends of their own ethnic group in school.

Social Isolation

Finally, we looked more closely at characteristics of the 8% of students who said that they had very few (0-5) in-school friends, with a view to identifying students who appear to lack both bonding and bridging capital.

There were significant associations between reporting a very small number of friends and having special educational needs (SEN), having low attainment in Maths and English at Key Stage 3 and not being born in the UK. This could suggest that students who are at an educational disadvantage may also find it more difficult to make friends. However having above average attainment at KS3 was also associated with having few friends. The possibility of social isolation for those who worked hard at school was also suggested in our qualitative interviews:

'the people who, like, do more school work than they do socialising aren't very popular.'

(Girl, Y10, Mixed White and Black, above average attainment)

Consistent with other studies (Armsden and Greenberg 1987, Buhrmester and Yin 1997), the data also suggests that isolation matters in relation to self-esteem and sense of school belonging, although whether isolation is a cause or an effect is unclear. There was a significant relationship between the number of friends reported and self-esteem such that reporting five friends or fewer was associated with low self-esteem. Similar patterns were found for students who reported being unsure of who they were, being unhappy and lonely on a daily basis, being unable to be themselves at school and feeling that they did not belong at the school. Saying one has few friends may of course in itself be a symptom of feeling unsure of oneself, unhappy or lonely.

This quantitative analysis using the variable of having five or fewer friends overlooks additional factors such as whether the reported friendships are mutual (both friends rating each other), how densely bonded the friendship networks are, how many friends a student has between 0 and 5 and how frequently they report spending time with those friends. Thus we also used our network maps of students for two tutor groups in Y10 to explore friendship patterns of students who said they had few friends, and students who despite saying they had a number of friends turned out to actually have very few mutual friends on the network analysis i.e. those with double arrows. Based on the maps, we developed two distinct categories of students who appeared more isolated than others, as follows:

Category	Description	Possible number of friends	Number found in sample (n=42)
Total isolates:	Individuals completely isolated and not mutually linked to anyone else	0	1
Isolated pairs/threes:	Students mutually linked to one or two other people who themselves were not linked to anyone else	1 or 2	4

Note: A third category (semi-isolates or 'loose connectors') also emerged. These were students who were only mutually linked to only one other person who was themselves mutually linked to at least one other person (ie on the end of a chain). However, missing data in these particular cases made it difficult to establish where these students were really isolated.

This analysis yielded some interesting findings. Firstly, the students who appeared isolated in this analysis were not the same people as those reporting 0-5 friends. Only one of the students who said they had 0-5 friends actually appeared to be isolated using this method. All of the other students who had said they had few friends actually appeared to be friends with several people who were also friends with other people. Thus they were linked in to a much larger group by several ties. On the other hand, the students who appeared to be isolated according to the network mapping tended to report moderate or large numbers of friends. However their listing of friends did not indicate that they regularly hung out with these people, nor did other people list them as people whom they regularly hung out with.

Secondly, the students who appeared isolated in the network analysis did not typically replicate the characteristics of those who said they had 0-5 friends. All of them were born in the UK, all were female and four were white British. They were a mixture of high, average and low attainers. Although most had one of the psychological characteristics associated with the students who said they had few friends, they did not consistently report feeling unhappy, lonely or unsure of themselves. Nor was there any consistent indication that they felt isolated, or were disengaged from school or isolated in life in general. All but one (who did not answer) said they were very close to friends at school, suggesting that, perhaps for girls in particular, few close friends can be as valuable as many less close friends. Moreover, while only two reported taking part in any organised social activities at or outside school, even the apparent total isolate reported hanging out with friends outside school suggesting that these girls were perhaps not lacking in bonding capital. All also had close relationships with their parents and other family members, valued being good at school work, generally had a positive self concept relating to their own abilities, and reported little deviant behaviour.

While no firm conclusions can be drawn from an analysis of five students, the examination of these cases raises some important issues for the way that we think of friendships, social capital and well-being. Having no or very few friends may not, it appears, be negatively related to well-being, although a perception of having few friends may be. It seems possible that bonding

capital might be gained from a very few relationships, possibly both in and out of school. There may be gender differences in friendship preferences and the value gained from them (Smith and Schneider 2000, Kawachi and Berkman 2001), and possibly ethnic or cultural differences, given the predominance of white British girls among the isolated students. Finally, what is not clear is whether the isolated students chose to be isolated or not. Having few friends, and being unable to have friends are two different things: the latter perhaps being more important in terms of school practice than the former.

Conclusions and implications

These findings paint a positive picture of mixing across ethnic groups that is consistent with our earlier report on the positive attitudes to social diversity held by many of the students in these schools (Stevens et al 2007). The greater mix of in-school compared with out of school networks suggests the importance of diverse schools as a site for building community cohesion. Future work could usefully test whether the same pro-mix attitudes and actions pertain more widely and in schools which have larger single ethnic groupings, compared with the extensive diversity found in both the case studies analysed here. Given that out-of-school networks are less mixed than in-school networks, we also need to ask the extent to which inter-group relationships, and the attitudes gained with them, are sustained once students leave school and move into further and higher education and into work.

We found some evidence that having no friends, or rather reporting that one has no friends, is associated both with educational disadvantage and with educational excellence, and that it is related to students' psychological well-being. We also found that those who report lacking friends in school also report being socially isolated outside of school. Thus it appears important that schools work to boost the esteem and belonging of students who feel that they do not fit in, but in the context of a holistic approach which recognises that students may face similar issues in other areas of life. Further analysis might also point to the value that might be gained from such interventions, contrasting the friendship patterns and perceived well-being of students with deviant behaviour with those of students who appear to be more engaged.

Finally, this exploratory, mixed methods analysis highlights some of the complexities of measuring social networks and their relationships with school participation, attainment and psycho-social resources via self-completion questionnaires. Combining network analysis with reported numbers of friends revealed an important difference between perception and actuality, and demonstrated the importance of mutuality. Several students reported many friends but had very few mutual ties in practice. However, missing data (whether because of student absence or non-participation) leads to substantial incompleteness when mutual friendships are being mapped. Moreover, both methods lead to emphasis on numbers of friends, rather than exploring the need for friendships, which may differ by age, gender and possibly cultural background, and the reasons why different people seek and value friendships: for self-esteem, social standing, social mobility, or

aspirations. In relation to social capital for young people, it is not necessarily clear that loose ties with many people offer greater value than bondedness with a smaller number, and at what point and in what way social isolation becomes problematic. Quality of friendships may be key. All of this suggests the importance of assessing social networks using multiple methods, including students' own qualitative accounts.

2. WELL-BEING AND PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL

An analysis of psychological well-being in two Inner London secondary schools

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Introduction

In this briefing paper we focus on students' reports of their psychological well-being. Drawing on data from the two inner London secondary schools discussed above, we investigate the characteristics of students who experience this aspect of well-being and those who do not. In the light of the duty on schools to promote young people's well-being, we consider the importance of students' sense of belonging to the school and the support they receive from it, as well as the extent of their friendship networks, and ask what schools can do to promote well-being among their students.

Key findings

- There were significant correlations between different measures of well-being (self-esteem, self-concept of ability, self-efficacy, lack of depressive symptoms, sense of school belonging and sense of school support), so that those reporting positive well-being on one measure were more likely to report positive well-being on other measures.
- Most students reported high levels of well-being, but some groups were slightly less likely to do so: girls, those from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds, those with higher levels of special educational needs (SEN), and those with English as a first language. Gender was correlated with all of the measures of well-being.
- Attending school, good behaviour and having friends were associated with well-being but:
- Well-being, school belonging and school support all declined slightly with age.
- For all findings, differences between groups of students with different characteristics were significant but small.

Background: well-being and children and young people's policy

This report provides some additional statistical analyses on the psychological well-being of young people with data collected in an earlier research project, drawing on data from two diverse inner London secondary schools (Stevens et al., 2007).

The well-being of children and young people is a high-profile issue, particularly since the UK was ranked by UNICEF in the bottom third of economically advanced nations for child well-being (UNICEF, 2007). The Government's recent agenda reflects this concern, with the *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* programme of reforms placing a duty on local authorities and key partners to cooperate in order to improve the well-being of children, and indeed the creation of Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) in 2007 indicating the Government's commitment to the well-being of children in the round, not just to their educational achievement. This has been followed through with the creation of the *Children's Plan* (DCSF, 2007), and there is a specific Public Service Agreement (PSA target) to "improve the health and well-being of children and young people" – as well as further targets, relating to increasing the number of children and young people on the path to success, and reducing poverty, which also connect with aspects of well-being.

According to the DCSF, schools will be crucial in achieving these goals. Schools are now to be inspected for their contribution to all of the Every Child Matters outcomes – not just academic attainment. At present, one of the major mechanisms that the DCSF is using to promote well-being is through the roll-out to primary and secondary schools nationwide of the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme, which focuses on psychological and subjective aspects of well-being through themes such as 'Good to be me' and 'Going for goals!'. However, there may be additional steps that schools can take to promote their pupils' well-being. Recent WBL research underlines their likely importance. Gutman and Feinstein (2007) found that children's experiences in primary school were significant predictors of their social, emotional, and behavioural well-being, while our analysis of friendships in this series of reports found that friendships in school were important: students who said that they had few or no friends in school also reported having few friends outside school, and were more likely to report low self-esteem, loneliness, unhappiness and not belonging at school than other students. In terms of curriculum, pastoral care, inter-agency links and day-to-day social relationships, schools are sites where well-being can be fostered and sustained.

Definitions of well-being and our approach

How success in this can be measured, however, is not straightforward, as well-being can encompass different dimensions and has therefore been defined according to different criteria. UNICEF, for example, defined well-being according to six dimensions: material well-being, health and safety,

education, peer and family relationships, behaviours and risks, and children's own subjective sense of their well-being. In terms of meeting specific Government targets, well-being is defined slightly differently, but again with a very broad compass. For the duty of cooperation to ensure children's well-being, the five Every Child Matters outcomes constitute a legal definition of the term: staying safe, being healthy, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being. Schools' contributions to these different dimensions will be made in different ways.

The indicators against which the DCSF is measured for its delivery of the PSA to improve health and well-being – implying a definition of the term – cover physical health and “emotional health and well-being” as measured both by provision of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and by children and young people's own perceptions. As explained below, it is these dimensions of well-being upon which we concentrate here, since it was data on these dimensions that we collected in our original study on young people's social capital. Our measures principally relate to psychological aspects of well-being, including young people's reports of their self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-concept of ability and symptoms of depression. These factors fit broadly with the DCSF's notion of “emotional health and well-being” as measured by young people's own perceptions. Self-esteem is defined as self-acceptance and a basic feeling of self-worth (Rosenberg, 1965). Bandura (1994) describes self-efficacy as an individual's beliefs about his or her capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events affecting their lives. Self-concept of ability refers to the beliefs a child has concerning their abilities to do well in school (Harter, 1982), which has been shown to relate positively to children's mental health, social relationships, and school achievement (e.g. Damon and Hart, 1982). Depression relates to an individual's mood and feelings such as sadness, loneliness, negativity and lethargy. It has been related to poor overall functioning, and interpersonal and behavioural problems (Reinherz et al., 1999).

We also particularly examine students' perceptions of the school, considering their feelings of school support and school belonging. School support is a measure of whether students feel close to, and supported by, their teachers and other adults in the school. School belonging is defined as “the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment” (Goodenow and Grady, 1994, quoted in Stevens et al., 2007). Our earlier work (Stevens et al., 2007) considered sense of school belonging because of its overlap with dimensions of the Every Child Matters and community cohesion agendas. In a review of the literature, Osterman (2000) concludes that students who feel more accepted at school tend to be more engaged in learning and committed to school, and that students' feelings of school belonging also influence their feelings about themselves.

In this report we examine whether these aspects of well-being are correlated with each other and with students' background characteristics. In order to build upon our first brief, which focused on friendship networks in the school,

we also examine how students' friendships in the school are associated with their well-being. Finally we consider the relationship between the variables for well-being and behaviour.

We draw on our original data to ask two questions:

- What are the characteristics of students who experience these psychological aspects of well-being and those who do not?
- How does the school environment relate to young people's psychological well-being and thus how could schools promote it?

Methodology

The paper draws principally on self-completion survey data collected from 1584 students in two schools, *Rose Park*⁵ ($n=850$) and *Oak High* ($n=734$). Both schools are co-educational comprehensives in Inner London, and both have considerable ethnic and social class diversity. At the time of the research (2006-7), more than 70% of the students in both schools were not of white British origin. *Rose Park* had a slightly more middle-class intake and a greater diversity of ethnic groups. *Oak High* had a higher proportion of students receiving free school meals, fewer middle-class students, a higher proportion of boys, and had slightly less diversity within its minority ethnic population. It also had a somewhat stricter ethos than the more liberal *Rose Park*.

The survey itself covered a range of topics including students' attitudes to social diversity, their access to social support and their sense of school belonging. Data was also collected about students' social background characteristics, educational and wider outcomes, and socio-psychological resources.

Measures used

While the literature contains many different definitions of well-being, it is conceived here in terms of four types of psychological resource. The table below lays out the measures, the individual questions which contributed to their construction and the relevant scales.

Measure	Questions	Scale
Depression	How often do you: feel unhappy, sad or depressed? lose your appetite or eat a lot when you get upset? feel lonely? feel that difficulties are piling up so high you can't overcome them?	1 = never to 5 = daily
Self-esteem	How often do you: feel good about yourself? feel happy with yourself the way you are?	1 = never to 5 = daily

⁵ Names of schools have been altered.

	feel sure of who you are (what kind of person you are)?	
Self-concept of ability	How likely is it that you will do well at school? How good at schoolwork are you? If you were to rank all the students in your tutor group from those who are very good in doing schoolwork to those who are not very good at schoolwork, where would you put yourself?	1 = very unlikely to 5 = very likely 1 = not very good to 5 = very good 1 = those who are not very good to 5 = those who are very good
Self-efficacy	It is easy for me to stick to my aims and realise my goals I can deal very well with unexpected events I can solve most problems if I try hard If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution I can usually handle whatever comes my way	1 = never to 5 = always

All of these are well-established concepts. The pupil-reported measures used in this study were based on established questions and scales from the psychological literature. In addition we looked at two further, school-related measures: sense of school belonging and sense of school support.

Measure	Questions	Scale
School belonging	I can be a success at this school I can reach my goals through this school Adults at this school listen to students' worries Adults in this school do something about students' worries I can be myself at school I feel like I belong at this school The rules at my school are fair Students of all racial and ethnic groups are respected at my school I feel safe at my school	1 = never to 5 = always
School support	When you have a problem how often can you depend on the following people to help you out or give you advice? a) teachers, b) other adults in school Do you feel you are very close to the following people? a) teachers, b) other adults in school	1 = never to 5 = always 1 = not close at all to 5 = very close

In addition we looked at social and behavioural measures:

Measure	Questions	Scale
Number of friends	How many friends do you have who go to your school?	None, 1 to 5, 6 to 10, 11 to 15, 16 to 20, 21+
Deviance	Please say how often you: arrive late for lessons skip classes skip a whole day of school cheat during tests copy somebody else's homework or schoolwork fail to do homework/schoolwork get into physical fights with somebody steal from somebody vandalise property drink alcohol	1 = never to 5 = daily
School attendance rates	Attendance rates were supplied by the two schools as a percentage	

Socio-demographic variables in the dataset consisted of gender, ethnicity, being born in the UK, years lived in the UK, having English as a first language, special educational needs (SEN) level, year at school, parental occupation and highest parental education. The ethnicity measure allowed for a large number of options (23 in total) so for the purposes of this analysis, wider categories were used based on the ethnic diversity of the two schools. The collapsed categories are White British, White Other, Black African, Black Other, Bangladeshi, Asian Other, Mixed and Other. Students were asked if they had been born in the UK, if they had lived their whole lives in the UK, and if not, how many years they had lived in the UK. Students were also asked if they had English as a first language or not. SEN levels were obtained from the schools, and students were scored as needing no provision, school action, school action plus or statemented. Parental occupation was categorised according to the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) scale and then grouped into four categories: unemployed, unskilled (SOC scale 7-9), semi-skilled (SOC scale 4-6) and highly skilled (SOC scale 1-3). Highest parental education was calculated based on students' reports of parents' education as having left education at 16 or before, 18 or before or having gone to college or university.

Results

We examined the means and standard deviations of our measures. A descriptive analysis of the main measures of psychological well-being was followed by the correlation of these variables with one another and with the socio-demographic data. Finally, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed to determine whether there were significant differences among the ethnic categories. These analyses were descriptive and therefore do not imply causality. Moreover, we did not control for the possibility of spurious findings. However, this approach is consonant with the exploratory and small-scale nature of this study.

Table 2.1 shows the key descriptive statistics for each measure

Table 2.1: Descriptive statistics for measures

Measure	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Depression	1568	1.00	5.00	2.19	.84
Self-esteem	1572	1.00	5.00	4.00	.86
Self-concept of ability	1578	1.00	5.00	3.93	.65
Self-efficacy	1544	1.00	5.00	3.58	.68
School belonging	1535	1.00	5.00	3.62	.68
School friends	1511	0.00	5.00	3.75	1.38
School support	1477	0.00	5.00	2.17	1.07
Deviance	1554	1.00	5.00	1.49	.395

Findings

Levels of well-being

For all measures, students in these schools overall reported high, positive well-being. As Table 2.1 shows, average measures for most aspects (self-esteem, self-concept of ability, self-efficacy and sense of school belonging) were between 3.5 and 4.0 on a scale of 1 to 5. Reported levels of school support and depression were lower (on average about 2.2), although clearly low levels of reported depression are a sign of positive well-being. Further, low levels of school support did not mean that students were necessarily unsupported, simply that support was not perceived to come from the school: Stevens et al (2007) reported that generally students did feel supported, but that much of this came from family and friends.

The psychological measures of well-being examined in this report were significantly correlated with each other. For example, a person with higher self-esteem was more likely to have a higher self-concept of ability ($r = .335$, $p < 0.001$) and less likely to suffer from depression ($r = -.443$, $p < 0.001$). We found that perceptions of school belonging and school support were also associated with positive scores on these scales: a heightened sense of school belonging was associated with higher levels of self-esteem, self-concept of ability and self-efficacy⁶, and with lower levels of depressive symptoms ($r = -.269$, $p < 0.001$). Higher levels of school support were associated, but to a lesser degree, with higher levels of self-esteem, self-concept of ability and self-efficacy⁷. However, there was no association between school support and depressive symptoms.

⁶ All correlation coefficients between +.3 and +.4, significant at the 0.001 probability level.

⁷ All correlation coefficients between +.10 and +.15

Who has high well-being? The characteristics of students with positive psychological well-being

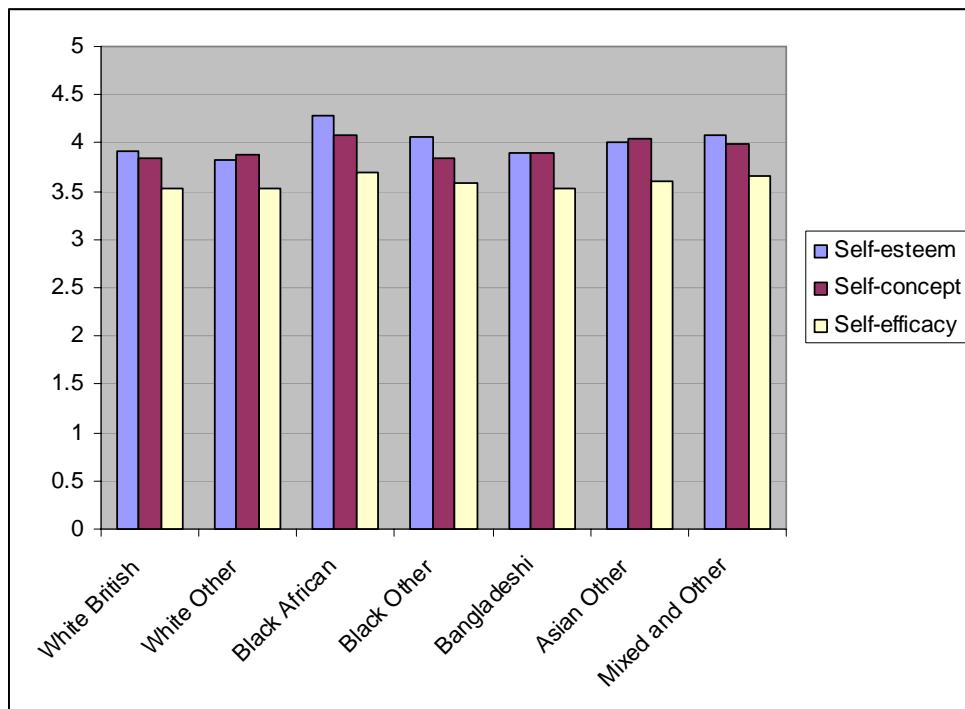
Differences between groups of students with different characteristics, although statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), were small (in all cases, $r < +/- .5$). That said, those reporting higher levels of well-being were more likely to be:

Of higher socio-economic status. Students from higher socio-economic backgrounds generally reported more positive well-being than students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Students who had parents with higher levels of education reported higher levels of self-esteem, self-concept of ability, self-efficacy and school belonging. Students of parents who were higher on the occupational scale had higher levels of self-concept of ability, self-efficacy and school belonging. However, neither socio-economic indicator was correlated with depressive symptoms or school support.

Boys. We found that boys had better psychological well-being than girls, reporting higher self-esteem and self-efficacy. They also reported fewer depressive symptoms than girls and higher numbers of in-school friends. However, there was no correlation between gender and school support or school belonging.

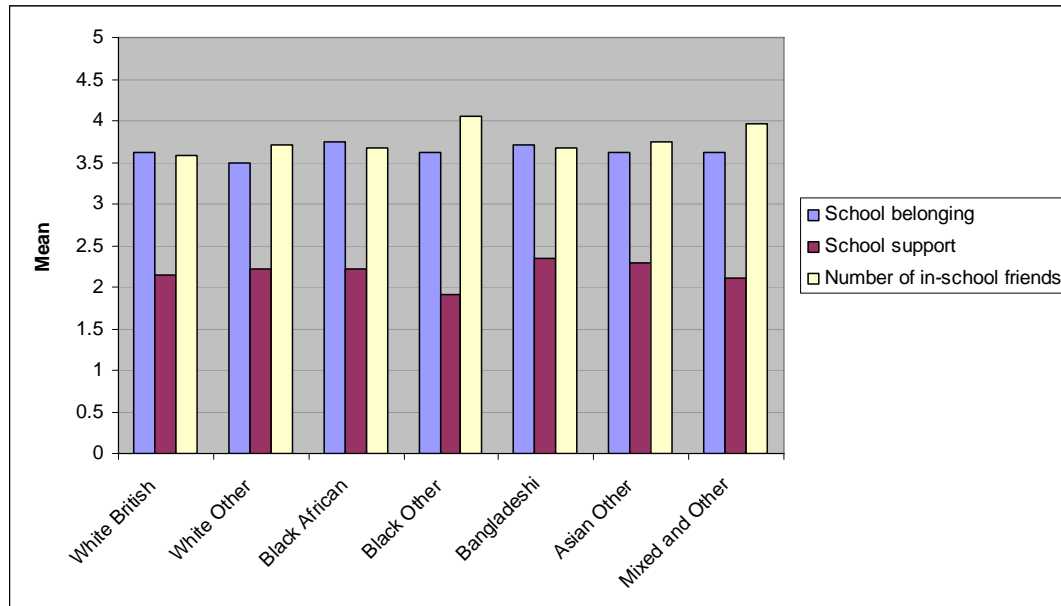
Black African. Ethnicity was correlated with the measures for self-esteem, self-concept of ability, and self-efficacy. The following graph shows the differences between the ethnic groups for each of the three measures. Black Africans report the highest level for each of the psychological measures of well-being. Those in the White Other category report the lowest levels of self-esteem, White British students report the lowest self-concept of ability and Bangladeshi students report the lowest levels of self-efficacy.

Figure 2.1: Psychological measures of well-being by ethnicity



There were also differences in school belonging, school support, and school friends among the different ethnic categories. As shown in Figure 2.2, Black African students report the highest levels of school belonging, while students in the White Other category have the lowest levels. In terms of school support, Bangladeshi pupils report the highest levels of school support, while students in the Black Other category report the lowest levels. For school friends, students in the Black Other category had the most friends on average, while White British students reported the lowest number of in-school friends.

Figure 2.2: School belonging, school support, and school friends by ethnicity.



Born outside the UK but resident for a substantial period of time in the UK. 78% of students had been born in the UK. Periods of residence for the 22% of students not born in the UK varied between a year and most of their lives. Students born outside the UK reported higher levels of self-esteem than those born in the UK. Those born outside the UK who had shorter periods of UK residence reported higher levels of school support than those born or had lived most of their lives in the UK – perhaps due to their greater need for support as more recent arrivals to the country. Consonant with this interpretation, those born outside the UK who had lived in the UK for a longer period were less likely to experience depressive symptoms and were also more likely to have more friends than more recent arrivals.

Speakers of languages other than English. Those students who did not have English as a first language reported higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of self-concept of ability than others. They also had higher perceptions of school belonging and school support. Given that this study does not control for other influences, it seems likely that there is a large element of cross-over between this measure and being born outside the UK.

Students without special educational needs. Students with higher levels of SEN had lower levels of self-concept of ability and self-efficacy, higher levels of depression and fewer in-school friends. There was no significant correlation with self-esteem or school belonging, but students with SEN did report higher levels of school support.

What contributes to well-being and what are its consequences?

It is not possible to say definitively what contributes to, or is a consequence of, well-being as it is not possible to establish causality for any of the associations found. However, there were a number of interesting relationships.

School differences

We examined whether there were differences between the two schools in students' reports of their psychological well-being, and found no differences, except for the measure of depressive symptoms. Although there was not a large difference between the means for depressive symptoms between the two schools, students at *Rose Park* had higher rates of self-reported depressive symptoms (mean=2.3) than did students at *Oak High* (mean=2.1). In support of Stevens et al's (2007) findings, we also found differences between the schools on school support, but not on school belonging: students at *Rose Park*, the school with a more liberal ethos, reported a lower sense of school support than students at *Oak High*. However, as noted above, there was no correlation between school support and depressive symptoms.

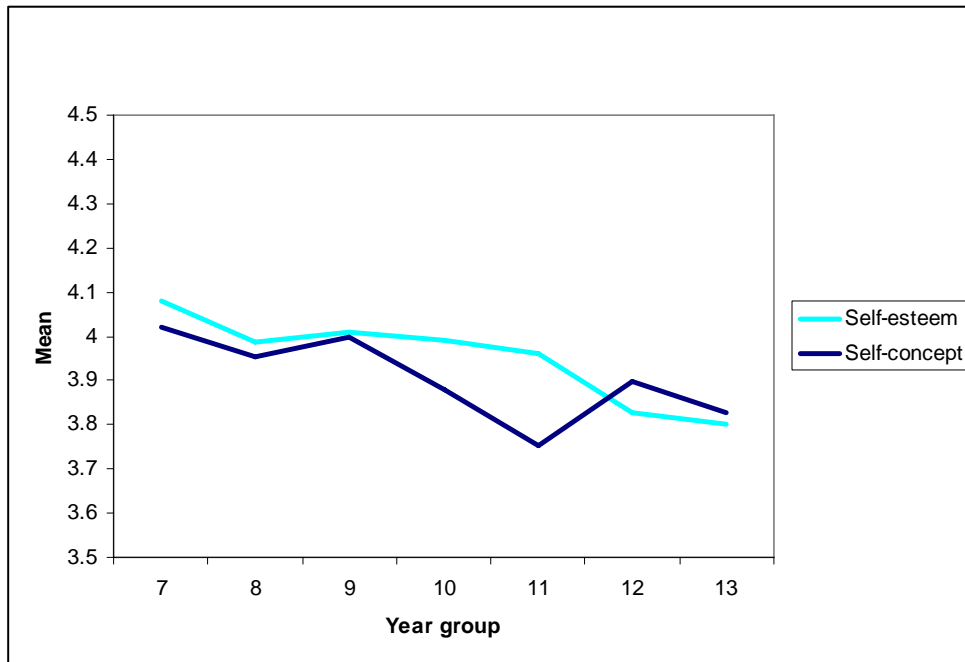
Number of in-school friends

Number of reported in-school friends was negatively correlated with the measure for depressive symptoms, and positively correlated with self-esteem, self-concept of ability and self-efficacy, suggesting that a larger social network is associated with positive well-being in children. However, these are estimated numbers of in-school friends, which, as found in our analysis of friendships, did not always match with the actual numbers of friends.

Year group

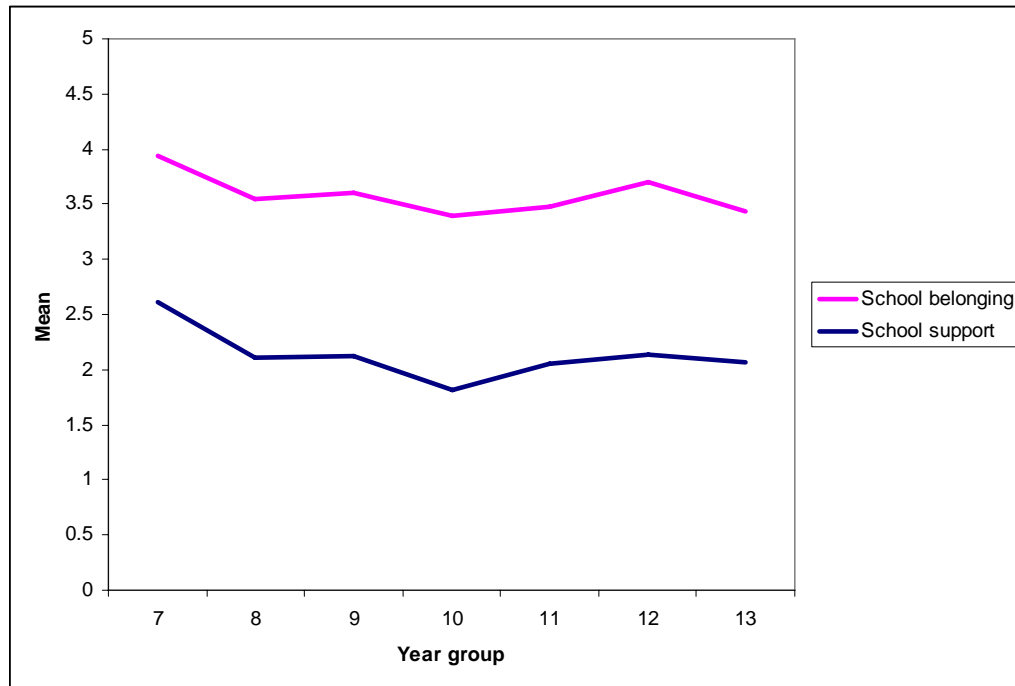
As students progressed through school, their self-esteem and self-concept of ability declined. Self-esteem and self-concept of ability were correlated with students' year at school. As shown in Figure 2.3, there was a steady decline in students' self-esteem from year 7 to 13. Self-concept of ability also declined from year 7 to 13, dropping steadily from year 9 to 11, then increasing in year 12 before decreasing slightly in year 13. However, we should bear in mind that on a scale of 1 to 5, even at the lowest point students are reporting that they are more likely to have a good sense of self-concept of ability than not.

Figure 2.3: Self-esteem and self-concept of ability by year



School belonging and school support generally declined across the school years. However, there was no association between number of in-school friends and students' school year. As shown in Figure 2.3, school belonging and school support were at their highest when students joined the school in year 7, then dropped steadily until year 10. The levels of school belonging and school support rose again in year 12 before decreasing the following year. Although there is not much variation around the mean, a possible interpretation of these results is that students feel a sense of school belonging and support when they join the school in year 7, then disassociate themselves more from school as they go through their early teens. At year 12 those students who continue with their education may re-identify with the school, but this drops again in year 13 as they prepare to leave.

Figure 2.4: School belonging and school support by year.



Behavioural characteristics

There were negative correlations of deviance with the well-being measures showing that those students with higher self-esteem, self-concept of ability and self-efficacy, fewer depressive symptoms and higher perceived levels of school belonging and school support were also likely to be more well-behaved. However, deviance was positively correlated with number of school friends, showing that students with less deviant behaviour were likely to report fewer friends.

Attendance was positively correlated with self-esteem, self-concept of ability and self-efficacy, school belonging and perceived school support and negatively correlated with depression, suggesting that those with higher attendance rates have higher levels of well-being on all measures. Those who attend more regularly also report having more friends.

Conclusion and implications

Within the scope of this exploratory analysis we aimed to paint a broad picture of the factors associated with well-being within these two schools, and highlight where relationships exist. These are associations, without controls for possible spurious effects or interactions, and therefore do not imply causality; however, these findings indicate that different groups may experience somewhat different levels of well-being, related to their experience and background characteristics (including gender, ethnicity, SES, year group, time spent in the UK and speaking English as a first language). Thus, recognising that different students may benefit from different approaches may entail personalising not only academic learning, but also programmes such as SEAL, which are designed to boost children and young people's emotional well-being.

Interestingly, there was little difference in young people's well-being between the two schools, despite differences in the environments which the schools offered. This is perhaps explained by the findings of Gutman and Feinstein (2007) indicating that children's individual experiences within the school environment are more important for their well-being than the overall mean-level differences between schools. Since this study considered only two schools, however, future work could usefully test whether this is the case.

While further work will be needed to provide a more generalised understanding of the differences in well-being between different groups of students and what might account for this, and while not all factors are necessarily amenable to policy, there are measures that schools can take to foster a sense of school belonging and ensure that students feel supported. The decline in older students' well-being, sense of school support and sense of school belonging, particularly as they enter key stage 4, suggests that this time of transition may be a particularly important point at which to intervene to boost students' psychological well-being. Furthermore, schools may rightly be concentrating support on those who do not have English as a first language and those who are more recent arrivals in the UK. However, since there is some evidence that students who were born in the UK and have English as a first language have lower scores on some measures of well-being, as well as perceptions of school belonging and support, there may be steps that schools can usefully take to boost the engagement and well-being of these students too.

Meanwhile, qualitative data (reported in Stevens et al., 2007) suggests some of the steps that students themselves would like schools to take: organising activities that celebrate students' social differences and related identities and that bring students and staff closer together; allowing students to express their own individuality and have a 'voice' in the decision-making process; considering students' interests in developing the curriculum and pedagogy; personalising the school by making the school environment appealing to young people; and focusing not only on achievement, but also on enjoyment of school.

Effective support for children's well-being may have implications not only for their enjoyment but also their achievement: evidence suggests that children who enjoy school are also more likely to do well (Gutman and Feinstein, 2007). Achieving in school is likely to result in positive feedback which in turn informs a sense of well-being. The interconnectedness of different aspects of children's lives is increasingly recognised in educational policy: in the provision of a 'personal tutor' for every young person, as set out in the *Children's Plan*, for instance, it is envisaged that this tutor will get to know the student well, know what they are learning and understand their needs in the round, with concern for their personal development and choices about their future. The present findings suggest that finding ways to boost the self-esteem and sense of support and belonging of students who feel that they do not fit in could pay even broader dividends.

3. MULTI-AGENCY WORKING IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

A case study of implementation in practice

Peter Stevens, Ruth Lupton and Tashweka Anderson

Introduction

Our first report in this series examined students' friendship networks, and the second focused on students' reports of their psychological well-being. In both cases, we drew on data collected from the students themselves. Here we analyse interview data from staff in the two schools and local authority (LA) that were the subject of the original study. We approach the issue of young people's well-being from a different angle, looking at the ways that the LA and schools were responding to government policy to encourage multi-agency working to support the most vulnerable children and families. We ask what features seemed to characterise successful multi-agency working, and to what extent, and how, policy intentions were reflected in the implementation of multi-agency working at ground level.

Key Findings

Is multi-agency working an effective approach to meeting the needs of young people?

- Professionals interviewed for this study considered multi-agency working an important and positive policy initiative and were generally happy with the way it was organised in their borough and schools;
- In particular, school-based services were seen as highly beneficial because they helped professionals to integrate their ways of working, develop a shared identity and understanding of each other's roles and respond more quickly to emerging problems and because they facilitated access to services for children and families.

To what extent are policy intentions reflected in the implementation of multi-agency working at ground level?

Practice in these schools did not entirely reflect policy intentions. Difficulties in implementing a multi-agency team in one school had led to its withdrawal. Multi-agency meetings tended to concentrate more on specific crisis situations rather than on needs assessment and on school and community-wide concerns. There were variations in the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) between schools, but both schools tended to use it primarily to organise referral, rather than, as policy suggests, for assessment.

What can be done to improve practice in multi-agency working?

- The CAF is only likely to be fully effective if its purpose (assessment of need, preferably at an early stage) is understood and embraced by school staff. If the CAF is seen as a bureaucratic tool, it is likely to be avoided as being too time-consuming.
- The use of the CAF by staff in school can be increased by providing adequate training. In these two schools, the CAF was used more where a wider group of staff were trained and assigned responsibility as lead professionals than where the task fell to one senior individual. In particular, implementation of electronic systems for creating, sharing and storing CAFs (e-CAF) must be supported by adequate training and effective software. In this case, a local e-CAF system proved time-consuming and unfriendly to users, creating a barrier to the use of the CAF for early assessment.
- Effective multi-agency working, whether school-based or not, can benefit from a structured approach, involving a small group of professionals who have frequent face-to-face contact and adapt and broaden their roles to fit with those of other professionals in a genuinely integrated fashion.
- Inter-professional training, the role of the lead professional and the CAF are important tools in realising more effective communication and sharing of information and reducing the sources of tension and confusion in expectations experienced by professionals in a multi-agency context.
- The involvement of parents in realising effective multi-agency working is considered crucial but difficult and can be increased and improved by:
 - Focusing parental involvement more on preventative issues rather than crisis situations;
 - Having social services based at school, as this is perceived to lower the threshold for parents and children to take advantage of them (e.g through self-referral) and facilitate access of services to children and their families.

Background and methodology

Recent policy initiatives on children, schools and families put strong emphasis on the importance of multi-agency working (DCSF 2007; DfES 2003; DfES 2005), in order to achieve the outcomes set out under the Every Child Matters programme (ECM): that all children can have the opportunity to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being.

ECM, and the subsequent Children's Plan (DCSF 2007) signal a general shift in children's services away from crisis response and towards prevention. Their successful implementation demands services that are not designed around professional boundaries but shaped in response to the needs of children, young people and families, with the resources and professional expertise of different agencies organised in an integrated way to meet those needs.

Integrated service delivery is intended to be realised through a variety of different mechanisms, including extended schools, children's trusts, the common assessment framework (CAF), the planned ContactPoint information sharing index, lead professionals and multi-agency teams. In this report, we examine the operation of some of these mechanisms in practice, drawing on evidence from one Inner London borough that is of particular interest because it started developing mechanisms for multi-agency working in children's services earlier than most.

Our data is drawn from interviews conducted in two co-educational comprehensive schools in the borough, *Oak High*⁸ and *Rose Park*, as part of our earlier research on young people's social capital. The data was collected during the period autumn 2005 to summer 2007. Both of the schools were involved in multi-agency working and, in particular, they were implementing two new approaches to facilitate front-line delivery of multi-agency services: the *school-based multi-agency team* and the *Common Assessment Framework (CAF)* for assessment and referral. They were also introducing the role of the '*lead professional*' (LP) as a key point of contact for children and families in the delivery of integrated services. Additionally, *Oak High* was a fully extended school, while *Rose Park* was developing extended services.

Qualitative interviews at both borough and school level were used to explore how these arrangements were working in practice. First we conducted loosely structured interviews with nine professionals occupying relevant senior positions within the local authority. On the basis of these data, we developed a more structured set of interview questions for staff in the two schools, focusing on their relationships with other professionals, their experiences, perceived barriers and facilitating factors in realising multi-agency working and its related tools, and how particular school contexts made a difference. In each school, the majority of staff working in or with the school in providing additional services to children and their families were interviewed (18 members of staff in *Oak High* and 11 members of staff in *Rose Park*). They included teachers, tutors, heads of year, deputy heads, headteachers, nurses, social workers, educational psychologists, police officers, and Connexions advisers.

Drawing on these accounts, this paper addresses two particular questions:

⁸ Pseudonyms are used when referring to schools, individual participants and school or borough based initiatives or projects.

1. What features characterise successful multi-agency working?
2. To what extent are policy intentions reflected in the implementation of multi-agency working at ground level?

Multi-Agency Arrangements in the Two Schools

Multi-agency teams and meetings

At the time of the research, *Oak High* had a multi-agency team based at the school as part of a pilot project⁹ initiated by the borough and involving all the schools (from early years to secondary) in one particularly disadvantaged locality; eight schools in all. *Oak High* hosted the locality team, providing office space so that the core practitioners could operate more locally for at least part of each week.

Rose Park did not have a multi-agency team on site. Nevertheless, the school (like *Oak High*) held regular Team Around the School (TAS) meetings and Team Around the Child (TAC) meetings when needed. Arrangements at *Rose Park* were more consistent with the concept of a multi-agency panel than with a multi-agency team, in which team members typically work in the same organisation and management structure and have a collective team ethos (DCSF 2008).

Multi-agency meetings tended to be more informal and loosely structured at *Rose Park* than at *Oak High*, consistent with the differing ethos and working practices of the two schools (Stevens et al. 2007). However, both schools tended to find that they focused more on specific cases and crisis management than on prevention.

The Common Assessment Framework (CAF)

The CAF is designed to be a uniform and comprehensive assessment process for practitioners to assess the strengths and needs of children and young people and to plan, co-ordinate and review actions.

Both the schools were using the CAF, and were part of a limited national project to use it as a referral as well as an assessment tool¹⁰. In practice, they both tended to use it primarily for referral not for early assessment, for a number of reasons that are explored later. However, each school used the system, and its related lead professional role, rather differently. In *Rose Park*, the Head of Student Support (HSS) almost always completed the CAF, and

⁹ The pilot project revealed that while some schools found the Local Authority's school-based multi-agency meeting model a very useful strategy, some found that it was not an effective use of professionals' time and that it would be better to focus on 'direct work'. After the first year, the size of the locality team was reduced, and after two years it was withdrawn from the local base. After this, the Local Authority started adopting an advisory role, in which it offers schools examples and guidance of how and why to implement effective multi-agency working.

¹⁰ The CAF and eCAF were initially designed by the government as assessment tools only. The schools in this borough were asked (and initially told) to use the eCAF also as a referral tool.

was the lead professional (LP) in relation to CAF cases. This school generated around the borough average number of CAFs per year (6-7). In *Oak High*, a number of different professionals completed the CAF and took on the lead professional role. This school generated four times as many CAFs as *Rose Park*¹¹.

The CAF was implemented in the borough through a local electronic system (the e-CAF), designed to allow practitioners to create, store and share case details during the assessment and delivery process. In July 2007 (after the fieldwork was completed) the government announced its intention to implement a single national IT system to support CAF. The experiences of the practitioners in this local study thus provide some useful pointers for the national programme.

Table 3.1 summarises arrangements in the two schools.

Table 3.1: Multi-agency working arrangements in the two schools

	<i>Oak High</i>	<i>Rose Park</i>
Multi-agency Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully operational multi-agency team based at school 2005/6. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No multi-agency team at school.
Multi-agency meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organised TAC meetings when required. Organised TAS meetings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highly structured; Participation obligatory; Involvement of a large, specific group of professionals mainly based at school; Focus less not on prevention but on 'crisis-management' of students at risk of exclusion. The lead professional and its role were specified during the Team Around the School (TAS) meeting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organised TAC meetings when required. Organised TAS meetings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unstructured, more informal meetings; Participation not obligatory; Involvement of a small, unspecific group of professionals mainly based at school; Focus not on prevention but more on 'crisis-management' of students at risk of exclusion. More informal processes involving the HSS and few professionals determined lead professional and role.
CAF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CAFs used primarily as a referral tool and not as an assessment tool. Major user of CAF – over the last year initiated the highest number of CAFs of all secondary schools in the borough (24 CAFs). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CAFs used primarily as a referral tool and not as an assessment tool. Over the last year initiated 7 CAFs, which is close to the average of CAFs in the borough (6 CAFs). The Head of Student Support

¹¹ These differences can be explained in part by the higher proportion of children in need at *Oak High*. *Oak High* had a more disadvantaged population. In *Oak High* 62% of the students were eligible for free school meals (compared with 32% in *Rose Park*) and 46% of the students were given special educational provisions (compared with 14% in *Rose Park*).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many different professionals can undertake a CAF and be the LP. 	(HSS) usually undertakes CAFs and is the LP.
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Findings

The following sections focus specifically on the implementation the multi-agency team and the CAF, and then on a range of wider issues that emerged as important in developing effective multi-agency working.

School based multi-agency teams

Friendly territory

Almost all respondents argued that basing staff from other agencies within a school can greatly facilitate effective inter-agency working, enabling professionals to respond more quickly to emerging issues, develop a greater understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities and develop closer relationships with other professionals and a shared sense of identity or belonging:

RESEARCHER: "Do you think that it is easier to provide good services being part of the school most of the time?"

CATHY: "Definitely because I don't think it's just about being here, I think it's about being here and knowing what's going on. Knowing how the system works in the school, knowing/building relationships with people. It's about building rapport and relationships and I think if you're outside of school and you're coming into school, that's a difficulty, because you're constantly an outsider."

Interview Oak High – member of support staff

In addition, the respondents felt that the availability of other agencies on site lowered the threshold for parents and children to take advantage of them (for example through self-referral):

IRENE: "I think a lot of parents probably would prefer [social services] to be on the school site because they know the school and, you know, they've got a relationship of trust with the school, um and it's also easier, I guess, in terms of picking up, you haven't got to go to another venue to go and pick your child up."

Interview Rose Park – member of support staff

MARY: "Parents seem to feel a lot more relaxed about coming to see those professionals in a school set up than they would if they were going to the [names of social services centres], or a building where you can identify somebody going in there is going in for a service, um [in schools] it's much more laid back."

Interview Oak High – member of support staff

Children’s and particularly parents’ reluctance to be involved with social services was explained by a fear that social services ‘would take the child away from home’ or the practical difficulties or uneasiness experienced by children and families around visiting different social services at different locations, which might in part be explained by the stigma associated with dependency on social services. By providing such services in one place (the school) that is trusted by parents, and run by professionals whose professional boundaries and identities are less likely to carry stigma and more likely to be seen as child and family-friendly, schools can increase parents’ and children’s involvement with social services.

The importance of communication

However, *Oak High’s* experience with the multi-agency team pilot project suggests that having a multi-agency team on site (per se, rather than simply having some services based at the school) does not guarantee effective integrated service provision. The latter also requires effective communication between team members, a willingness of professionals to embrace the multi-agency philosophy and broaden professional boundaries and a work environment that allows for frequent and easy face-to-face interaction opportunities (for instance by putting different professionals in the same office, see also: Boddy et al. 2006, Brandon et al. 2006). Staff in both schools seemed to prefer meetings involving a small group of school-based professionals over larger meetings involving external agencies.

Both *Oak High* and the local authority felt that the pilot project could have been much more successful in realising effective multi-agency working and mentioned the following shortcomings:

Table 3.2: Problems cited by LA and *Oak High* for lack of effective outcomes in the *Working Together* (WT) project

<i>Local Authority</i>	<i>Oak High</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although the geographical areas covered by the different professionals overlapped, they were not wholly coterminous, which did not help in developing a shared sense of identity; • Since practitioners were only working part of the week in the area, and the local school office was quite small, there was sometimes a preference for working from their main office; • Some practitioners working in the school did not relate directly to the school; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were no clearly defined aims and objectives for the initiative; • A lack of clear management structure, particularly the interface with schools and other services; • Poor set up process, with no clear implementation plan; • There was a lack of clarity of roles within the team; • Ineffective communication of the team with the school at a number of levels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - with senior management; - with Heads of Year and the Inclusion department; - with the school community, so there was little opportunity for self-referral;

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor communication and planning (for example: no minutes or action points and meetings were sometimes organised when practitioners could not attend); • Particular problems with a key practitioner based in school who was criticised by the school for not responding quickly to requests, failing to keep records adequately, and failing to effectively communicate their availability, leave and presence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - no regular reporting to any member of school staff. <p>Overall, there was little attempt to be part of the school community. The team was insular and removed in terms of mode of operation and personnel.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Response to referrals was slow and tracking and monitoring of referrals was often ineffective; • The team was labour intensive with a large proportion of admin staff; • The referrals procedure was bureaucratic.
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It is interesting to note that *Oak High* and the LA pointed both to structural/organisational features and individual shortcomings as the main barriers to the effective functioning of the multi-agency team. After the locality multi-agency team was discontinued, both addressed these learning points. The LA produced guidance on possible structures and contents of school-based TAC and TAS meetings. The school implemented multi-agency office sharing arrangements, shared training and more structured TAS meetings with a formal agenda, minutes and action points, involving a smaller group of school-based participants. In this way, some of the benefits of a multi-agency team were achieved without it being formally constituted as such.

In *Rose Park*, where staff and students could not benefit from a large school-based multi-agency team, success of multi-agency working was explained much more in terms of personal relationships built up between different key professionals inside and outside the school and the skills and willingness of the individuals involved. However, staff in *Rose Park* also argued for more structure in relation to service provision as they felt that students 'slipped through the net' because of insufficient clarity and enforcement of staff responsibilities. In addition, staff in *Rose Park* experienced more problems in working with outside agencies than their colleagues in *Oak High*, in particular with social services. All this suggests that having more experience with multi-agency working, and a close relationship with the LA in realising this, benefits the quality and use of such service provision (see also: Boddy et al. 2006, Brandon et al. 2006).

Common Assessment Framework

Professionals in both schools considered the CAF an important tool in developing effective multi-agency working to meet children's needs.

However, there was a strong consensus amongst those interviewed that the local electronic implementation of the eCAF was difficult to use (see also: Brandon et al. 2006). It was criticised in both *Oak High* and *Rose Park* for being very time-consuming (up to 1.5 hours for one form) and lacking user-friendliness (e.g. work could be lost if it is not saved every fifteen minutes, and

the content of the forms has changed over time). This extract from an email sent to the research team by a teacher in *Oak High* illustrates the problems:

JOHN: “[the eCAF] has not impacted positively at all on my role and is more of a barrier to refer rather than an aid. Last paper system was simple and easy to complete. This is certainly not. Time is a consideration and the process is not user friendly at all. Too complicated – not easy to dip in and out of. Too much info is required that maybe of no relevance to the case e.g. siblings, home issues, when parental contact made, health etc. Far too many sections to complete; not easy to use – finding the address of a new referral can take ages to happen. Not easy to print off a copy – have to know the system. Too many computer glitches that can get in the way of a successful session. Logging in a nightmare if you fail the once on the second stage, have to go back to the beginning. Designed for IT enthusiasts rather than a time pressed teacher.”

Email *Oak High* – member of staff

Views such as this were widely held among the interviewees, despite the fact that all had received specific training to undertake the local electronic implementation of the CAF. They were prevalent both at *Rose Park* and at *Oak High* where staff had more experience in working with eCAFs through their involvement with the multi-agency team project, and they were shared both by members of the teaching staff and social services based at school. Such difficulties were cited as one of the main reasons why, although the government and Local Authority consider the CAF primarily as an assessment process, the schools in this study tended to use it primarily to organise referral.

Furthermore social services staff argued that the time-consuming nature of undertaking eCAFs prevented them from spending more time for face-to-face meetings with parents and children, and increased rather than decreased the time needed to deal with emerging needs. Hence, while the data suggests that professionals see the eCAF as a potentially useful and important, design and implementation of accompanying electronic systems is crucial.

Responses to these difficulties differed between the Local Authority and the schools. Although the LA considered it understandable that practitioners seemed to perceive the eCAF as too time-consuming or claim to lack sufficient (staffing) resources to use it effectively as both as assessment and referral tool, they also suggested that such views reflected the need for a significant ‘culture shift’ required to take up the CAF in place of other assessment approaches; something that would take time to develop.

This illustrates a more general finding: while the LA pointed more to changes required by professionals (attitudes, experience, knowledge and skills), professionals in schools were more likely to point to problems with the infrastructure (software, ambiguity of expectations), lack of resources and failure of other professionals to work effectively with the school. In response, the LA was making some changes to the e-CAF, and strengthening guidance

and support arrangements (Table 3.3). *Oak High* was reviewing staff responsibilities and training. However, the example of *Rose Park* seems to indicate the likelihood of avoidance strategies if electronic systems are cumbersome and difficult to use. Again, *Oak High's* more intensive involvement with their Local Authority in implementing (and testing) multi-agency tools may explain its more proactive response to the e-CAF difficulties (see also: Boddy et al 2006, Brandon et al. 2006, UEA 2007).

Table 3.3: Strategies mentioned by LA, *Oak High* and *Rose Park* in managing CAF related problems

<i>Local Authority</i>	<i>Oak High and Rose Park</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Clearer regulations</i> – the LA is strengthening guidance and regulations to make clear that in certain situations professionals have to refer by using the eCAF. • <i>Additional support</i> – the LA plans to offer schools additional guidance and assistance through a team of IT experts who can offer phone support and can take control of users' computers from remote distance to assist completing an eCAF. • <i>Improving infrastructure</i> – from April 2008 the eCAF should be more user-friendly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Providing less information</i> – some professionals at <i>Rose Park</i> admitted to leaving particular sections in the eCAF blank or with minimal information to speed up the process of undertaking an eCAF. • <i>Reducing referrals</i> – in both schools professionals tried to limit issuing referrals by first exploring alternative, often school-based solutions. • <i>Involvement of more staff</i> – <i>Oak High</i> is exploring the use of administrative staff to help professionals undertaking sections of the eCAF that contain non-sensitive information. • <i>Further training</i> – <i>Oak High</i> is also considering the possibility of further training for Heads of Year.

Other issues influencing multi-agency working

This section relies on the qualitative interviews with staff in and outside the two schools to investigate the factors and processes that influence effective multi-agency working. The following issues are discussed: role ambiguity and tension, training, parents, families and student involvement and communication and sharing of information.

Role ambiguity and tension

Most of the problems mentioned in realising effective multi-agency working relate to confusion and tension between people's professional roles and related expectations and ways of working. Social workers, teachers, educational psychologists, police officers and nurses all have particular views on their own roles and those of other professionals. Effective multi-agency

working requires professionals to know each other's roles and to make the necessary adaptations to integrate each other's responsibilities and expectations.

Some professionals experience 'role tension', or a situation in which different people have different expectations of the professional's role. For instance, several professionals working with both school staff and families felt that sometimes both parties expected them to choose 'their side' or accused them wrongly of favouring either parents or school staff. Such tension can also occur when people have unrealistic expectations of a professional's role. For example, a police officer reported that some staff in school expected him to search students for possession of allegedly stolen objects, while he was allowed to search only for possession of weapons or drugs. A recurring theme was the misunderstanding between school staff and social workers in terms of what they could do to solve particular problems, and related to this the kind of solutions or support they could offer:

LAURA: "A suggestion that was made about some of the ... children with acute behaviour problems ... coming from somebody who should have known better was – well why don't we ask each of these children to do a piece of work that they start on now and that they can then bring that in and link with one particular teacher in the school and they can talk to them about it and they can then follow it up and finish it in school. And I'm thinking: How? When? Where? I mean, UNBELIEVABLY naïve suggestion! And sometimes this sort of attitude from social services about – you can just let a child not do some work – well, yes, but you've got to supervise them, you've got to have other people with them. Where do we find the staff for it? It just – it's impossible."

Interview Oak High – member of teaching staff

At the core of these tensions are different professional roles and ways of working, which are rooted in particular working conditions and experience of training. While school staff have a more short-term, specific, *ad hoc* and informal approach to solving problems (providing support), social workers approach similar problems more on a long-term basis, from a more holistic approach (including for instance family situation), following more rigid and formal procedures and regulations. One particular area that resulted in considerable conflict was the way in which staff working for school and professionals working for social services defined a 'child in need'. Similarly, Rodger et al. (2007) found that professionals held on to different definitions of what constitutes 'prevention' (see also: UEA 2007). The interviews suggest that school staff hold a lower threshold of what constitutes a child in need compared with social services and/or, related to this, social services appear more cautious in committing limited resources. For example, some staff in *Oak High* were appalled by the decision of social services not to provide financial support to a family of refugee children who went to the school.

On the other hand, some professionals working in social services argued that some schools do not fully embrace the multi-agency agenda because they

have a set of different priorities: while schools are primarily concerned (and evaluated) by their students' success in realising valued educational outcomes, social workers are more concerned by the general well-being of children and families. While the former focus on teaching and learning and expect individual children to adapt to the needs of the school community, the latter are focused on individuals' needs and expect the organisation to adapt to the needs of the individual. Different professionals argued that the school's ethos, and related to this the willingness of the headteacher to embrace multi-agency working, is crucial in bringing these different approaches together (see also: UEA 2007).

Another source of potential confusion and tension concerns 'role overlap', in which different professionals feel that they or other professionals to some extent are providing the same service at the same time (see also: Rodger et al., 2007). This is perceived as a potential waste of time and resources, and can also cause friction between professionals in determining the boundaries and expectations of each other's roles.

Finally, professionals also experienced tension in performing their role because of a perceived conflict in expectations they themselves held in relationship to their position. For example, social workers and police officers had a duty to report illegal immigrants to the authorities, but often 'turned a blind eye' in relationship to the illegal status of immigrant families whose children went to their school because they considered the consequences of reporting this as harmful to the children's needs.

However, despite these possible sources of role-tension and confusion, the professionals in both schools appreciated working with each other in a multi-agency context and managed to overcome these difficulties on most occasions. The social worker based at *Oak High* offers a good example of what it requires to bridge such role confusion and tension. She took a particularly broad view of her role, attending many school-based meetings, offering advice to teachers and applying lower thresholds in defining 'children in need' than typical of social services. As a result of her accommodation of others' needs and expectations, she was generally praised for her work by both professionals based in and outside the school.

Training

The importance of appropriate training was recognised by the schools and the Local Authority (see also: Boddy et al. 2006, Brandon et al. 2006). Even after benefiting from the experiences and training provided through the multi-agency team project, *Oak High* decided to offer its staff additional training in multi-agency related activities, including the opportunity for all members of staff to receive child protection training. In line with such initiatives, the interview respondents valued inter-professional training, or opportunities where teachers are 'not just taught to teach' but take on a broader role and skills, such as 'emotional literacy', emphasising issues that are shared by different professionals.

The data also suggests the importance of 'on the job' training, in that different professionals can learn to work more effectively in a multi-agency team through practice. Again, it seems that having a multi-agency team on site helps to develop opportunities for professionals to learn from each other in developing multi-agency working. The police officer based at *Oak High* for instance explained how he learned from teaching staff in school to adopt a 'less forcible response' to playground incidents, adapting to the expectations and strategies employed by other professionals in a specific school context. Hence, appropriate training, preferably inter-professional training with a focus on teaching professional broader roles, and having experience of working in multi-agency teams helps to improve the delivery of such services.

Parent, family and student involvement

Staff in both schools considered it paramount to have parents and their children 'on board' in providing effective services (see also: Brandon et al. 2006). As one teacher put it: "We can make a 20% difference: if we get the parent involved we can make a 60% difference". However, in both schools, in particular in *Oak High*, staff in school found it difficult to involve parents in school, especially parents from specific ethnic minority groups and/or a working class background. Parents' involvement in processing eCAFs, and particularly, obtaining consent from parents was also considered as a source of tension, and sometimes a cause of delay in targeting services to young people (see also: Rodger et al., 2007). Although many of the staff interviewed in *Oak High* felt that their extended services agenda (which in relationship to parents involved sending newsletters, asking parents their opinion about policies, organising parent-evenings, a Parent Alliance and parent training opportunities at school) has made a difference and increased parental involvement in school, they also felt that there was considerable room for improvement.

Parents' reluctance to be involved with schools and service delivery more generally was explained mainly by pointing to alleged indifference of parents, lack of capacity (e.g. language) or resources (e.g. time) to communicate effectively with school and social services, fear or distrust of school and welfare institutions, which are in turn explained by pointing to parents' personal, less positive experiences with such institutions. One professional argued that some parents are involved with too many services, which makes it harder to arrange and meet appointments and juggle the various sources of support provided.

In particular, professionals in schools found it at times difficult to convince parents of the 'right action' (e.g. counselling) in relationship to their child. This was perceived to be very problematic in cases where the school felt that a quick response was required to deal with a crisis situation. However, it was argued that an increased focus on preventative work with parents, rather than involving parents mainly in 'high-end' crisis situations, would increase and improve their collaboration with social services:

HELEN: "[Parental involvement] is difficult at the higher end of

involvement. So when you're dealing with Child Protection you engage the families but often what you're doing is not what they want... so you can work with them and you can engage with them but the nature of the involvement can result in people disengaging with you or resisting that involvement because they disagree with you. And that's why I think there needs to be more resource at the preventative end. 'Cos if you're working with families at the preventative end, families are pleased to see you on the whole because they're a bit stressed out, struggling with their kids, they've got a few problems and they'd quite like the help on the whole. But if you wait till it's the end where you've got serious concerns for a child's welfare then they're like frightened of your involvement."

Interview *Oak High* – member of support staff

In sum, while parents' involvement is considered very important by professionals in realising effective multi-agency working, such involvement also appears difficult to realise. Involving parents in school through extended services, focusing parental involvement more on preventative issues rather than mainly high-end situations and making social service delivery more transparent and easily accessible are perceived as effective strategies to increase and improve the involvement of parents in multi-agency working.

Communication and sharing of information

A final area that impacts on effective multi-agency working, and which relates to most of the issues already mentioned, concerns (lack of) effective communication and sharing of information (see also: Boddy et al 2006, Brandon et al. 2006). Both school staff and professionals working for outside agencies criticised each other for not communicating information to each other. For example, when staff in *Oak High* called the police and an ambulance in response to an issue related to a student in school, the social worker of the child was disappointed that she was not informed by school staff about what had happened.

Although a lack of information sharing was often perceived as the result of negligence or ignorance, two more general motivations often resulted in professionals not disclosing information to each other. First, some professionals, in particular tutors, felt that they were not in a position to disclose information to others as it was given in confidence by a student with whom they had developed a close and trustworthy relationship. A second motivation concerns child protection related issues, where social services found it inappropriate if not illegal (for instance in relationship to medical records) to disclose information to other professionals, or where they felt such information sharing – or communication more generally – needed to follow certain procedures and regulations:

KIRSTI: "Externally, I mean, sometimes the barriers could not be more blatant. I can remember trying to get in touch with social services about a girl who'd been on their books about three months earlier and being

told that that was a case that they had closed and I was now to fill in a six-page form. And when I explained, I said: 'well you know the family you've got the phone number', oh no, once it's closed you must fill in another six-page (form)."

Interview *Rose Park* – member of support staff

This example illustrates again that different professionals often have different perceptions and expectations of what is appropriate in delivering service provision. It seemed that friction over a lack of information sharing was most likely to occur when both motivations were in play, as the parties involved often felt that they 'needed to know' about any relevant information as they already managed to build a close relationship with and/or detailed picture of the young people or families involved. Professionals argued that the CAF, the appointment of a lead professional and more clarity about the employed protocols and related responsibilities in sharing information are important tools to help improve effective communication and sharing of information.

Summary and Conclusions

What features characterise successful multi-agency working?

This case study of the development of multi-agency working practices in two schools within the same borough highlights a number of factors that seem key to effective multi-agency working:

- School-based services, because they:
 - Facilitate professionals to integrate their ways of working, develop a shared identity and understanding of each other's roles, and respond more quickly to emerging problems;
 - Make services more accessible to parents.
- Relatively small teams that are integrated into the school community;
- Physical location of staff in the same office;
- Shared training, to enhance greater understanding of each other's roles;
- Structured meetings followed by action notes to ensure follow-up;
- Trying to involve parents in preventative issues rather than just high-end situations.

To what extent are policy intentions reflected in the implementation of multi-agency working at ground level?

The case studies point to a shared commitment to a multi-agency approach between professionals at ground level. In general, those interviewed for this study considered multi-agency working as a positive and important policy initiative and were generally happy with their experiences of multi-agency working and the way in which this was organised. However, while the professionals interviewed considered it essential to move to a focus on prevention rather than crisis management there appeared to be gaps between

policy intention and actual implementation.

In particular, while the CAF was considered a useful and important approach, the volume of information required and the time-consuming and user-unfriendly nature of the local electronic system meant that in practice it was used for referral rather than assessment purposes, and was considered too time-consuming in a context where much effort is directed to dealing with crisis situations. In some cases it was circumvented by providing less information or looking for solutions that did not require referral. The greater use of the CAF at *Oak High* where more staff were trained to initiate and use it suggests that the system is more likely to work when distributed and with close support of the LA instead of falling on a single senior member of school staff and with less LA involvement. Even here, however, the eCAF was too resource-intensive and difficult to use to make it effective for regular assessment.

Furthermore, the research suggests that professionals may in practice adopt a more narrow approach to the purpose of multi-agency working than government intends, seeing it principally as a response to 'crisis' situations rather than a wider strategy to bring professionals together to work on school and community-wide concerns and on issues related to prevention, information sharing and referral.

However, this does not mean that schools are opposed to a broader interpretation of the purpose of multi-agency working. Staff interviewed in these schools subscribed to the broader agenda. Rather, the more circumscribed focus appeared to arise in response to three basic factors:

Overall level of resources to implement multi-agency working: The more intensively resourced *Oak High* made a much larger number of referrals than other comparable schools in the area, indicative of a broader and more preventative focus of their multi-agency working.

Focus on the teaching, learning and achievement agenda: While schools have a duty to take care of the school's community cohesion and students' general health, wellbeing and safety, their priority is still the educational attainment of their students. Hence, further development of multi-agency working in schools would need to address these respective priorities assigning greater importance to non-educational outcomes and processes, including multi-agency working, which focus not only on teaching and learning, but also on students' broader needs, related to their health, wellbeing and safety. However, this would require a different approach to school curriculum and evaluation, the role of teachers and the training and evaluation of teacher practice.

Professional roles and strategies of service provision: While there is a growing understanding of the importance of multi-agency working amongst school staff, existing multi-agency tools, such as the local implementations of the eCAF and multi-agency teams in this study, do not always seem to fit with the agenda of teaching and learning. Teachers' preference for ad hoc, fast

and less time-consuming strategies in response to children's needs and social-workers' preference for face-to-face interactions with clients requires an adaptation of such tools to meet the needs of the professionals involved.

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