

## **School-Home Support – Written evidence (CPF0002)**

- School-Home Support works with schools, local authorities and other children's settings, to provide personalised support to children and families, tackling the underlying barriers to a successful education to improve the life chances of children. Our assistance is provided by our School-Home Support Practitioners who work directly with those children, and their families, to get them back at school, ready to learn, whatever it takes. Our submission draws on the insights and lived experiences of the children and families that we work with, as well as our on-the-ground Practitioners, along with our own statistics and wider research.

### **School-Home Support**

- We know that our School-Home Support Practitioner model, where Practitioners are based at school (and yet independent of school), helps build trust with families. The families we work with open up and confide in our Practitioners, which allows us to work through issues. The families become more resilient and are able to better engage with their child's learning and are better equipped to deal with any future challenges. In addition, our support has an enormous impact on the child:
  - 71% of children we supported improved their attendance.
  - 63% of children we supported were more engaged with their own learning.
  - 72% of parents became more engaged with the learning of their child.
  - One year of help from School-Home Support saw young people 54% more likely to achieve five A\* to C grades.

### **What are your biggest concerns about the long-term impact of the pandemic on the families you work with?**

For many vulnerable families on the cusp of the government's definition of vulnerable, they were not being seen at school during the pandemic. Their School-Home Support Practitioner was one of the few people they saw for months on end - as we undertook doorstep visits throughout the lockdown. School is a protective environment. Children not being seen in the safe space of school is extremely worrying.

For some children home is not always a safe place. Issues that escalated or arose during the lockdown will have a long term or lasting effect on them. And that is what continues to worry us as part of the legacy of the pandemic.

So what's been going on at home? We can see quite clearly from some of our data:

- A 133% increase in domestic violence in the last year.
- An increase in poverty - with interventions around housing and money increasing by 460% in the autumn term alone.
- In total, the need for our services has quadrupled since the first lockdown was announced.

In order for the government to successfully close the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their better off peers, we would advise that they consider what has been going on at home. The emotional wellbeing of not only the child but also the family needs to be met and support to build family resilience is offered so families emerge from the pandemic stronger.

### **Statistics and relevant information**

- We recently surveyed a third of our Practitioners to see what the situation looks like now children are back at school, and what their concerns are for the future:
  - 68.2% said they were more or much more concerned about children and families.
  - 50% have seen attendance drop since schools reopened.
  - 63.6% said children are much less engaged in learning as they were previously.
- Families are needing more support than ever before. In the latest autumn term, 79.7% of our cases required five or more interventions. We forecast that this will continue, if underlying issues with the rise of people living in poverty, stays the same.
- Young Minds found that 67% of children and young people surveyed believed that the pandemic will have a long-term negative effect on their mental health.
- The current situation has widened the disadvantage gap for children and young people. Department for Education data suggests the attainment gap could be as much as 75% between disadvantaged pupils and their better off peers once the COVID-19 crisis recedes.

- 53% of schools in the UK have more than 9% of students persistently absent (by this we mean lower than 95% attendance). That's around 11,000 schools. We want to ensure that we are able to help as many of those children to improve their attendance and attainment, closing the attainment gap.

**Q. To what extent has parents and children's mental health been affected?**

The vast majority of our cases have an element of poor mental health - whether it be the parent or child.

As one of the providers of the government COVID-19 response project ([See, Hear, Respond](#)) all 115 families we worked with had mental health issues that were caused by the pandemic, which resulted in children facing issues reintegrating into school.

We know that vulnerable families have really been struggling. Demand for our services has quadrupled and we expect that to grow even bigger - with our Practitioners commenting that they have seen an increase in demand for their help since the return to school on 8 March.

One child we worked with was so anxious about COVID-19 that his attendance dropped to 7% at one stage. We supplied him with a laptop so that, on days when he was too anxious to go to school, he could still continue to learn and so didn't fall as far behind.

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**Q. Are you seeing signs of increasing domestic abuse or child safeguarding issues?**

We've seen a 133% increase in domestic violence in the last year. And child safeguarding issues have increased sevenfold.

We had a safeguarding case recently where Mum had taken Dad back for lockdown as he had lost his job and would not be able to afford to travel to see their son. Within weeks the domestic abuse started again, which their son witnessed. The father was eventually arrested.

For many vulnerable families on the cusp of the government's definition of vulnerable, they were not being seen at school during the pandemic. Their School-Home Support Practitioner was one of the few people they saw for months on end - as we undertook doorstep visits throughout the lockdown.

School is a protective environment. Children not being seen in the safe space of school is extremely worrying. Issues that escalated or arose during the lockdown

will have a long term or lasting effect on them. And that is what continues to worry us as part of the legacy of the pandemic.

**Q. What challenges have new parents experienced, and what do we know, if anything, about the long-term impact this may have on babies born this year?**

We don't do much work with new parents or babies - as our objective is to get children back into school, ready to learn - but we know that the families that we have worked with (some of whom have babies and very young children) have been extremely isolated - with many observing that their School-Home Support Practitioner is the only person they have seen in months.

[With so many people plunged into poverty by the pandemic](#), babies are possibly being impacted upon negatively by the stresses their parents or carers are facing.

**Q. To what extent have families been able to access the support they normally access (e.g. from social services, mental health services, other third sector organisations etc), and what might the long-term impact be of any lack of support?**

Families have struggled to access support they would normally access. In one local authority, where we work across all secondary schools, the council said that we were the only support service to continue as normal.

One family made homeless that we worked with struggled to contact the council - and kept reaching a voicemail message that said that the office was closed due to the pandemic. Thankfully our Practitioner was able to help find them temporary accommodation in this instance.

The long-term impact of a lack of support over the numerous lockdowns is the growth of waiting lists. This is both because of a lack of support over the pandemic and because the demand has grown. In one area, prior to the pandemic a mental health assessment was done within a week and a young person would commence youth therapy within six weeks of that. There's now an eight month waiting list for this service.

In addition, we have noticed that a large number of referrals that used to reach the threshold for Children's Social Care are now being knocked back or sent to non-statutory agencies such as Families in Need. This means that families are not getting the support they need.

**Q. To what extent are you seeing increasing numbers of families affected by poverty and unemployment, and what might the long-term implications of this be for those children and parents?**

We have seen a 460% increase in the autumn term alone of families requiring help with money and housing.

We know that poverty and unemployment create barriers in children's learning. For instance, if a parent is struggling financially, children are likely to be hungry - and that's going to affect their ability to concentrate at school. If they cannot afford to heat their house in winter it means that children may struggle to sleep and this will impact their attainment in school - and affect their health.

The families we are helping are requiring more support than we've ever seen before. 79.7% of our cases required five or more interventions. In order for the government to successfully close the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their better off peers, we recommend that they should take into consideration what is still going on at home - and ensure the emotional wellbeing of not only the child but also the family is being met.

A headteacher said she had a 25% increase in pupils now qualifying for Free School Meals due to their parents losing their jobs during lockdown.

It is also worth noting the situation for families with no recourse to public funds - who were struggling to get by before the pandemic, but whose situation has become so much worse during the pandemic. We have worked with one family in East London who came to the UK on the father's visa. The father recently died of COVID-19 and the family are now on no recourse to public funds - and are living in absolute poverty. Their School-Home Support Practitioner is very concerned about the family's ability to survive.

**Q. Have there been any positive impacts of the pandemic for the families that you work with?**

There have been some examples of positive impacts - with some families having more time to bond and improve familial relationships; and we've seen that some children with SEND have benefitted from smaller classrooms - but the positives are few and far between. The situation we're facing at the moment is alarming to us.

Our frontline workers were recently surveyed and 68% said they were more concerned about children and families - and 63% said children are much less engaged in learning than they were before the latest lockdown.

**Q. To what extent is government (local or national) attempting to monitor or assess the potential long-term impact on families?**

There's nothing that we have seen on the ground at the moment.

**Summary and recommendation**

- In order for the government to start to close the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their better off peers, we would advise that they

consider what has been going on at home. The emotional wellbeing of not only the child but also the family needs to be met and supported to build family resilience in order for families to emerge from the pandemic stronger. Only when the child's situation at home is stable can they be in school ready to learn.

- School-Home Support works directly with children and families in this way and achieves great results.
- We have worked successfully in partnership with Blackpool Council since April 2019. In that time we have worked with a total of 366 young people for support with attendance or behaviour.
  - **Engagement in learning has improved for 85%** of our young people.
  - Pupil behaviour has improved for 66% of our young people.
  - Parental engagement in their child's learning has increased for 84% of our young people.
  - **73% of the young people referred as being at risk of permanent exclusion have remained in education** following School-Home Support intervention - resulting in a huge saving for the local authority and schools.
  - **17% of graduate cases are now successfully accessing Further Education.** We feel this is a model for other local authorities and would do wonders in helping to bridge the attainment gap in the world after the pandemic.

*22 April 2021*