Parents in Partnership 2016 Evaluation

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Introduction

Parent and carer engagement, and family learning, are currently areas of high priority within Scottish education. Family learning features within *How Good is Our School 4* (Education Scotland, 2015) as a quality indicator, and parental and carer involvement features as a driver within the *Excellence and Equity in Scottish Education: A Delivery Plan for Scotland* document (Scottish Government, 2016a).

'Parents in Partnership' is a model for a parental involvement project, developed in Renfrewshire and undertaken for the first time in one Renfrewshire Council high school in 2015. The model was revised in response to feedback from the 2015 participants, and in 2016 'Parents in Partnership' was expanded into three schools, which were supported by CELCIS to implement this approach. In the 2015 iteration of Parents in Partnership, the project was funded to increase parental and carer involvement and to support them during their child's transition from primary to high school. The aims remain consistent within the 2016 project, with the additional aim of beginning to explore how an increase in children's attainment might be related to parental and carer involvement.

Data collection took place for evaluation and research purposes to: help identify any benefits and/or drawbacks of the project, to explore any changes to parents' and carers' knowledge, understanding, and attitudes that may have resulted from it, to inform any future iterations of this specific model of parental involvement, and to identify any generic learning to share more widely.

This evaluation incorporated a range of methods, to explore behaviours and attitudes that are associated with an increase in attainment (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003). In this report, we discuss and highlight the findings, consider the extent to which the project met the intended aims, and explore how the individual project components contributed to the outputs and indicators.

The 'Parents in Partnership' model (project outline)

The 'Parents in Partnership' (PIP) model is described in the 2016 Project Handbook, which was designed to support implementation, and was intended for distribution to all staff involved in the project as part of a training/CPD session. It is a 6-8 week programme for the parent/carers of pupils in S1 (first year of high school), involving attendance at their child's school for around half a day each week. As a group, parents and carers attend 'school subject sessions' based on lessons experienced by pupils in S1. These are 'taught' to parent/carers by subject specialist teachers, who use or demonstrate the teaching methods and curricular language that would be used with S1 pupils. This is to enable parent/carers to become familiar with common teaching practices and language used in classrooms, and to give an insight into school routines and structures. As part of these sessions, teaching staff also explain how parents and

carers can support pupils' learning and emphasise that subject-specific knowledge is not necessary to support children at home and discuss the child's learning.

Parents and carers also attend a 'Lifeskills' session, facilitated by a member of staff from a relevant provider (such as a local authority service, community group, or local college). The following table shows a typical weekly schedule for parent/carers.

Table 1: Typical weekly timetable for parent/carers

10.30am – 10.45am	10.45am – 11.35am	11.35am – 12.25pm	12.25pm – 13.15pm
Tea/coffee and hot rolls	School Subject 1	School Subject 2	'Lifeskills' input

Feedback from the original (2015) PIP project suggested some areas of the model that were considered especially important ('core components'), and some that seemed to be less vital but still potentially useful in order to achieve expected and intended project outcomes ('additional components'). For the purposes of this project, a core component was defined as an element that must be present in planning or delivery, in order for the project to meet its intended outcomes. Additional components were identified as elements which were thought likely to contribute to maximising intended project benefits, and which schools were therefore strongly encouraged to consider.

The following components, derived from the 2015 project and subsequent feedback, were described in the 2016 Project Handbook.

Core components:

- A project coordinator (Head Teacher)
- Consistent space
- Bus tickets/reimbursement of travel costs to parent/carers
- Hot rolls, cakes, fruit and tea and coffee
- Attendance at CPD session for all staff involved
- The voluntary nature of the teaching component
- Classroom Assistant to accompany parent/carers group, during their time in school
- Consistent identification of parent/carers
- Consistent recruitment process
- Consistent engagement and supportive retention process
- Lifeskills input

Additional components:

- Lesson selection to ensure balance of content, style etc.
- Contact with Lifeskills providers
- Family activity
- Building a team ethos
- Ongoing contact with parents
- Inclusion of all staff
- Final week - all Lifeskills

Readers can find an expanded explanation of these core and additional components in Appendix A.

The Handbook also included recommendations in regards to the process to recruit parents and carers. This included the methods that schools should use to identify parents - use of the Extended Support Team (EST) framework and the professional knowledge of both Home Link and teaching staff.

Indicators were used to guide the selection of families to receive an invitation to participate in the project. This included parents and carers of:

- Pupils who are looked after, at risk of being looked after, or have previously been looked after
- Pupils on the child protection register
- Pupils who are young carers
- Pupils living in SIMD quintile 1 (i.e. deciles 1 and 2)
- Pupils identified as having additional support needs
- Pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds
- Pupils for whom English is a second or additional language
- Pupils who have been included in the Home Link transition programme

And

- Where appropriate, pupils who have been identified at either a primary school or secondary school Extended Support Team[1] meeting in regards to a significant concern in relation to a wellbeing indicator.

An implementation timetable included within the Handbook gave a suggested timeline for making contact with parents and staff in relation to the project to ensure both timely dissemination of information and to reduce burden on schools. The Handbook recommended that parents were sent a letter inviting them to the programme followed up by a phone call from either a member of the Home Link team or teaching staff. A member of the Home Link team would then offer a home visit to parents who expressed an interest in attending or wished for more information. The model described in the Handbook also specified which members of staff should be responsible for each part of the engagement activity, based on experience of the previous iteration of the model.

Evaluation purpose and approach

The evaluation explored how the 'core' and 'additional' components of the PIP model were delivered, the extent to which schools had achieved fidelity to the model, and the impact or influence any variations may have had.

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1 Extended Support Team meetings are the in school support forums that schools use to raise and discuss any concerns and support required relating to any aspect of a child's education or wellbeing

The key questions for the evaluation were:

- What were participants' (parents, carers, and staff) experiences of the project?
- What are the key activities and core components of the project?
- Are there differences in relevant outcomes when measured pre- and post-project?
- What changes would be required to the current model to make it more effective?

Data were collected in a number of ways:

- Parent registration form
  - The registration form asked for demographic information about parents and carers, including postcode (from which SIMD[2] categorisation could be established), additional support needs, and any supportive strategies that would be helpful. Information about pupils was also collected, including whether the child had any additional support needs, and whether the child was looked after or on the child protection register. The adult's relationship to the child was also recorded, as it was recognised that some foster carers, residential house staff, or kinship carers could take part in the project.
- Pre-programme questionnaire
  - Parents/carers were asked to answer questions using a seven point Likert rating scale of their understanding and knowledge of various aspects of high school routine, school structure and curriculum, and their intended involvement with school.
- Post-programme questionnaire for parent/carers
  - All questions in the pre-programme questionnaire were included, with the addition of open space for general feedback on the project.
- Focus groups
  - Focus groups were held with parents/carers, teachers, project coordinators, classroom assistants, and Home Link staff who had been involved in the programme to gain a deeper understanding of the information gathered through the pre- and post-project questionnaires.
- Teacher reflection sheets
  - Questions relating to teachers' understanding, attitudes, and experience of delivering lessons were completed by teaching staff who had delivered a lesson to parents.

It was recommended that parents and carers had the opportunity to complete their registration form and questionnaires alongside a Home Link worker (or other staff member), to ensure appropriate support for those requiring assistance with literacy or comprehension. While this opportunity was intended to facilitate participation, the presence of a Home Link worker may have influenced parents or carers' responses in some cases.

Teachers completed their questionnaires independently, having had these forms explained during attendance at CPD sessions. It was agreed that project coordinators in

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2 Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation – A postcode-level indicator of relative deprivation. More information here: www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/SIMD

schools would not read the teachers' completed forms to allow them to feel free to include any anxieties or concerns that they held.

Project and evaluation outline

Project

The project took place between August and October 2016. Selected parents and carers of S1 pupils were invited to attend a seven-week programme, one day each week in school. During the programme, they had the opportunity to experience twelve of the sixteen subjects in the broad general education curriculum, and received advice and information sessions from a range of Council, College, and third sector providers.

Parent/carers met every week as a group and were offered hot rolls, fruit and tea and coffee from 10.30am until 10.45am. They then attended two 'school subject' classes from 10.45am until 12.25pm, where one (or occasionally two) specialist subject teachers delivered sessions that were reflective of lessons that an S1 pupil would be taught. A Classroom Assistant (or other staff member in a similar role) accompanied the group throughout their time in school, to provide and model learning support where appropriate.

After attending lessons, parents attended an advice and information session provided by the local authority, college, or third sector organisation. These included money advice, energy advice, internet safety, stress awareness, 'Mindset', goal setting, and homework tips. Local authority run services were presented by relevant council staff, and two inputs were delivered by a Learning Advisor from the Communities and Outreach team from West College Scotland. One input, 'Mindset', was delivered by a third sector organisation that had already secured a tender to deliver a similar input to specific groups of children across all high schools in the authority.

Participants

Schools

Renfrewshire Council has highlighted parental and carer involvement as one of their strategic priorities within both education and employability work. Each of the 11 high schools in the local authority was given information about Parents in Partnership. They were asked to consider if the model would be suitable for their needs in regards to engaging with parents. The Development Officer (Employability) (a member of local authority staff) also spent time with schools to discuss the model in more detail and foster understanding of the staff resource that would be required to fully implement the project. It was agreed that the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in

Scotland (CELCIS) could support up to three schools with the planning, delivery, and evaluation of the project.

In this way, through a process of mutual selection, three high schools were identified to take part. The selection of schools was finalised by the Development Officer after taking into account schools' level of readiness in regards to resources, any previous experience with the project and other operational projects that were planned or underway and that could influence the effectiveness of the project or the outcomes it aimed to achieve. Although the council supported all 11 high schools to implement parental engagement projects, some of them very similar to Parents in Partnership, only the identified three implemented the Parents in Partnership model with CELCIS support. Therefore, although the authority as a whole delivered an overarching parent and carer engagement programme, only three schools delivered Parents in Partnership. The table below gives information about the three schools that were involved.

Table 2: Profile of schools involved in Parents in Partnership

School [3]	Approx. Roll	Urban/Rural[4]	Pupils living in 20% most deprived data zones	Approx. % of roll registered for free school meals[5]	Approx. % of pupils from minority ethnic group
1	800	Large urban	<35%	Around 18%	<10%
2	1000	Accessible small town	<5%	Around 5%	<5%
3	700	Large urban	<45%	Around 23%	<10%

Parent/carers and S1 Pupils

The Home Link Service within Renfrewshire provides enhanced transition support to children who have been identified, by their primary school or other agencies, as requiring additional support with the transition from primary school to high school. Children are referred to the enhanced transition programme for a range of reasons, including having additional support needs in relation to learning or physical difficulties or disabilities, low attendance in primary school, concerns around peer relationships, or coming from a primary school out with the 'cluster', amongst others.

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3 Roll, urban/rural classification, proportions (in datazones; from minority ethnic backgrounds) are from Scottish School Contact Details, September 2015 (Scottish Government, 2016b).

4 Large Urban: settlements of 125,000+people. Accessible small towns: settlements of 3,000 - 9,999 people, within 30 minutes' drive of a settlement of 10,000 or more. Further information here: www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/About/Methodology/UrbanRuralClassification [Accessed 27/2/17]

5 From Healthy Living Survey, February 2016 (Scottish Government, 2016c) - based on roll at survey date.

Parents of children who had been referred to the enhanced transition programme formed the basis of the target group for the project but, in addition to this, parents were also approached based on a set of criteria that had been agreed by schools (see page 4). The criteria chosen reflect characteristics that through practitioner insight, research, and policy, have commonly been associated with lower educational outcomes and experiences.

Each school initially identified and approached around 30 parents to take part in the project; therefore, around 90 were approached in total. Data were not collected from parents who were approached but chose not to attend, so their reasons for this are unknown. A total of 38 participants completed registration forms. Subsequently, one participant did not attend any school sessions and this data is therefore excluded from further reporting. The remainder of this section therefore reports data from 37 parent/carer registration forms.

The parents and carers who participated in PIP described their relationship to the children in S1 as follows:

- 31 mothers
- 3 fathers
- 1 grandmother
- 1 aunt
- 1 for whom no relationship information was given

One mother and father pair attended for the same child. One participant made use of the nursery contact facility, an arrangement through which the high school liaised with nursery providers to negotiate an earlier or later finish time for young children to allow parents to attend the project.

Six parent/carers identified themselves as having additional support needs (one with a diagnosed medical condition and the others having visual or literacy difficulties). This information was collected to allow teaching and support staff the opportunity to work with parents prior to the start of the project to ensure any necessary support was available to allow parents to access the project and the curriculum.

Parent/carers were also asked whether they had any other children at high school and seven noted having children at the school other than the S1 child for whom they were attending PIP (one in S3, two in S4, one in S5, two in S6, one not given).

Across the three schools, the proportion of project participants living in areas within each SIMD quintile[6] was as follows:

Table 3: Number of project participants by SIMD quintiles

SIMD	Number of project participants	Proportion of project participants (%)
SIMD 1 (most deprived)	17*	45.9%
SIMD 2	3	8.1%
SIMD 3	6	16.2%
SIMD 4	3	8.1%
SIMD 5 (least deprived)	7	18.9%
SIMD unknown	1	2.7%
	37	100.0%

*note that two of these individuals attended for the same child.

Parents and carers reported the following regarding the current circumstances of their children in S1 (data from only one parent per child are included).

Table 4: Profile of S1 pupils, as reported by parents / carers

	Young carer	English is first language	Ethnic minority background	Involved in Home Link Transition	On Child Protection Register	Has additional support needs
Yes	3	34	1	17	3	15
No	33	2	35	19	33	21
Total	36	36	36	36	36	36

Two children were identified as being 'looked after' (one at home/in foster care and one in kinship care). In response to 'Who is the child's main carer?' several participants gave multiple responses.

No primary school attendance information was given for six pupils. For the remaining 30, some responses were given as figures and some as comments. Figures were given for 25 pupils, and were generally greater than 85%, with only one lower than this (60-75% - we believe potentially associated with issues around bullying). Other comments indicated attendance as 'good' or 'great'. We noted that some parents were able to provide this information themselves, but some figures were provided by school representatives via the council database.

6 Determined from postcodes provided on registration forms, using Scottish Government's SIMD2016 Postcode Lookup: www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/SIMD

Evaluation

At the conclusion of the programme, a full set of paperwork (registration form, pre-programme questionnaire, and post-programme questionnaire) was available for 23 parent/carers.

Table 5: Number of parent/carers attending programme

School	Registration forms completed	Full set of forms completed
School 1	8	6
School 2	10	10
School 3	20	7
Total	38	23

We also held a number of focus groups to deepen knowledge and understanding of participants' experience of the project:

- Three focus groups were held with parents who had taken part in the project. Schools were asked to invite no more than six parents to each group to allow conversation to be productive. In total, ten parents and carers participated in focus groups.
- There was one focus group held for teachers, at which two of the three participating schools were represented (two teachers from each). Teaching staff from the remaining school were unable to attend due to prior commitments.
- There was one focus group held with five members of Home Link staff who had been involved in the project across the three schools.
- One focus group was held with all three members of support staff who supported parents weekly at the groups. This group comprised two classroom assistants and one teacher.
- A key staff focus group was held with the nominated project coordinator in each school. This role had been devolved to a Project Leader in School 1, a Depute Head Teacher in School 2 and a Business Support Manager in School 3. The Development Officer (Employability) was not able to attend this group but their observations were noted during on-going conversations throughout the duration of the project and the Graduate Intern (Employability) and a member of council staff who had responsibility for management and coordination of the overall project alongside the Development Officer also attended the focus group.

Data gathered from these various forms and focus groups, were analysed using relevant methods and findings are presented below.

Main evaluation themes and findings

Here we draw on findings mainly from the focus groups, first describing participants' experiences before exploring findings related to the core and additional components.

Participants' responses

Focus groups

A total of ten parents and carers took part in focus groups, they were asked a range of questions on their experience of the project, what benefits (if any) there were to attending, and whether involvement in the project had led to any changes. Four teachers were also asked to comment on themes from the aggregated responses of parents and carers to being in school and participating in 'lessons'.

Benefits for parents and carers

In general, parents and carers felt that the project had been enjoyable and beneficial. Three inter-related main themes emerged around the benefits of attending:

- Understanding and reassurance around high school life and context
- Communication with their children
- Communication with the school

Understanding and reassurance around high school life and context

Parents and carers who participated in the focus groups referred to a number of areas in which they felt they had gained a better understanding in relation to school. These included:

- Subjects and the curriculum
- Expectations and demands on pupils (for example, around homework, and the physical and mental demands of the school day on children)
- The support available in school and how to access it

Discussions suggested that participation in PIP enabled the parents and carers to gain knowledge and understanding about high school in two main ways. They were able to learn about, for example, subject content and homework expectations as part of the school subjects inputs, but they also learned through experience of the high school life, such as the geography of school, the routine of changing classes, and different teaching styles. Several parent/carer focus group participants reflected on their own (sometimes negative) school experiences, and emphasised their new understanding of how things have changed since their own school days. Some indicated that they felt reassured about high school life and that their children were safe and cared for there:

> 'I felt safe actually, is what I did, I felt safe, I felt I was in good hands' (Parent/carer)

> 'The really one-to-one approach with all the children, it's really good, they're really well looked after' (Parent/carer)

Communication with their children

This increased knowledge and understanding of subjects and school life enabled parents and carers to have more informed conversations with their children at home. Some participants, for example, described having conversations with their children about the activities they had done in class as part of PIP, and relating these to their children's classwork. Parents also noted that prior to the project, they were at times unsure of the information their child told them about school particularly in relation to homework or friendships. They felt that the project gave them an understanding of the reality of school life and homework expectations that helped them to challenge their children

appropriately if they felt their child was exaggerating incidents or misrepresenting expectations around homework. Some parents and carers reported being more proactive if their children said they had no homework; the parent/carers had a better understanding of whether this was likely, and some could suggest consolidation and revision activities from websites that they had found out about during PIP sessions. As well as influencing the communication with their children about school, parents and carers indicated that their own confidence and level of comfort in communicating directly with the school had improved, and that they now knew who to contact about any difficulties. Parents and carers now regarded teaching staff as approachable, and could communicate to their children that teachers could be approached for help with any difficulties:

> *'I feel like now, if I had a problem with my child, and I needed to approach the school, although the school is very approachable, I would find it easier.'* (Parent/carer)

Communication with the school

Some participants also indicated that their confidence in approaching the school went beyond reactively responding to problems; they felt able to be more proactive in asking questions and seeking support if needed:

> *'It makes you feel as if the lines of communication are open.'* (Parent/carer)

> *'I think it's good that you do get this access to seeing that kind of thing, because I would never ever have phoned the school and said, "Do they get homework?" or "Should they have...?" What I probably would have done, would have asked other mums...'* (Parent/carer)

Staff who were involved in the project also perceived a change in the parents and carers' comfort and confidence in attending and communicating with school. Several explained how they felt the PIP project had improved parents and carers' perceptions of school and reduced any associated fear.

> *'I think for a lot of [the parents] they're so scared of school, or their own experiences, that they would never have dreamed if they had a concern about their child, they would never dream of picking up the phone to the school'* (Teacher)

> *'… Humanising teachers a bit helped a lot. Just reducing all those stereotypes of what they thought a teacher was and how they think their kid's being treated. I think a lot of them were reassured about how warm and nurturing the school is as well, uh-huh. We care, and we get that your kid's not confident and we're doing something about it, I think that was good for them to know'* (Teacher)

Participants in other staff focus groups also suggested that PIP benefitted parents and carers by demonstrating that school:

'… isn't really a scary place, and there are people to talk to' (Support staff member)

Moreover:

'The staff actually care, and it's that they care about their child, and I think that's a huge thing because [some parents] didn't have that before.' (Home Link staff member)

A notable demonstration of the difference attending PIP may have made to participants came from those who had older children, and had already experienced the P7-to-S1 transition without the PIP programme. One parent reported some degree of familiarity with the school from parents' nights and other events for her older child, but felt that she had not learned as much from those as from PIP. Another explained that with her older child, she was only ever in school for parents' evenings and Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, and never felt the need to approach the school about anything. She explained: *'But this time I felt […] I feel now as if I'm part of something'.* Focus group participants were also asked to discuss whether the project had resulted in any other changes. One parent reported having gone back into work following a 'Lifeskills' session that included discussion about 'making a future for yourself'. This parent mentioned this in relation to the PIP project, and it was implied (although not explicitly stated) that this was related.

Benefits for pupils

In addition to perceived benefits for parents and carers, focus group participants were asked if they believed the project had resulted in any benefits for children.

Support at home

A teacher who had emphasised the importance of reading, and how this could be achieved and supported at home in her delivery of the PIP session, reported that the children of some of the parents who had attended were regularly reading at home, which had not previously been the case.

'Kids who were not reading at home are now reading at home, which for us is a game changer in English. If you can get them reading in first year, even if, I mean their target's fifteen minutes a night and they're setting wee timers to do it. But I think once the parents realised that's all it was, it's fifteen minutes and talk about it like it's a movie [...] And when they realise, "Oh I can do that", brilliant, and off they went, and I've now got kids who weren't reading at all when they came in the door reading regularly.' (Teacher)

Other teachers did not report such noticeable changes amongst pupils, but noted that they had little contact with children of PIP participants who were not in their own classes, and could not therefore comment on any changes. Furthermore, one teacher suggested

that because PIP took place relatively early in the new school year, there had been little opportunity for teachers to get to know the pupils making it difficult to recognise whether anything had changed. Participants in the Key Staff focus group suggested that any influence of PIP could not be identified at this early stage; additionally, they felt the on-going connections might result in changes rather than the seven-week programme alone:

> *'It is very hard to evaluate this at this time, because… some of the [parents]…are quite complex in their own needs as well, so a five or a seven week programme or whatever isn't maybe, so it's about keeping that connection going, and what you're hoping is through doing that programme you've now got a bit of a connection.'* (Key Staff member)

Participant's responses: questionnaires

Information from the questionnaires completed by participants before and after the programme also gave an indication of what parents and carers gained from participating, and what changes may have occurred since the project. Parents were asked to rate a series of statements on a seven-point scale before and after their involvement in the project. These ratings were then compared using statistical testing to determine whether there was a difference that was statistically significant at the *p=0.05* or less level [7].

For the following statements, statistical analysis explored differences in the ratings parents and carers gave at the end of the project, compared to the scores they gave before the project began.

- How much do you know about the high school your child has moved to?
- How much do you know about the curriculum in high school?
- How much do you know about a standard high school day and the pattern it follows?
- How well do you know the high school building?
- How well do you feel you know the staff in high school?
- How comfortable would you feel approaching high school re your child's education?

Significant differences were found between the pre-project and post-project ratings for each of these six questions, with ratings having improved at the post-project time point.

Questionnaire respondents were also asked a series of yes/no questions about their knowledge of high school:

- Q1. Do you know who to contact at high school about any issues or concerns you might have?'
- Q2. Do you know what support is available to children in high school?

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7 This indicates that we can be reasonably confident about where there was a real difference between pre- and post-programme scores rather than apparent differences being due to chance alone. These tests do not tell us about the size or importance of any changes and due to the small numbers of project participants involved, should be interpreted cautiously as these participants may not be representative of others.

- Q3. Do you know who your child's guidance teacher is?
- Q4. Do you know about any extracurricular activities that are available to your child at high school?

The figure below shows the number of parent/carers who responded 'Yes' before and after the project[8] to each of these questions.
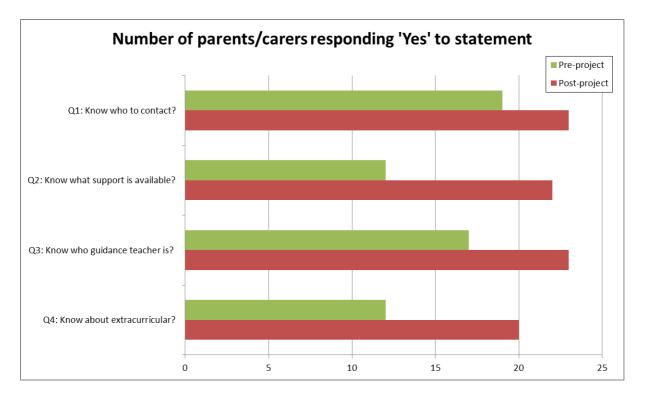

Figure 1: Parents knowledge of high school pre and post project

The analysis of the first six 'rating scale' statements and the 'yes/no' statements gives a good indication that parents and carers felt that their knowledge of various aspects of high school and school life, and level of comfort in approaching the school, had improved by the time the project ended. This reflects the findings from the focus groups with parents and carers.

On several individual 'rating scale' statements, parents and carers tended to give high scores before the project began, and so there was little change recorded in the post-project questionnaire for those statements. Aggregating statements into thematic indices however, can suggest whether there have been changes more broadly.

A 'Child talks about school and homework' index included aggregated data from the following questions:

- How often does your child start a conversation about school when they're at home?

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8 Note that not all of the other respondents indicated 'No'. Some gave ambiguous or unclear answers.

- How often does your child talk to you about homework?
- How often does your child ask for your help with their homework?

The analysis suggests that children reportedly initiated more discussions about school and homework following the project.

Several further indices were analysed from the questionnaires, for example a 'morning behaviours' index, which included the statements:

- How willing is your child to get up for school in the morning?
- How willing is your child to go to school in the morning once they are awake?

No significant change was found in relation to morning behaviours, or the other indices that were analysed. Further information about these indices and the statistical analyses that were conducted is given in Appendix B.

These statistical results are very encouraging. They appear to indicate that the programme had a positive impact on the participants. They are limited, however, by the size of the study and in the absence of data from a control group of parents and carers (i.e. a similar group who were not involved in the project); we cannot definitively say that any changes resulted from participation in the project. Furthermore, these findings must be treated with caution as the questionnaires relied on self-report and subjective-report of parent/carer and child behaviours; we cannot be certain of the extent to which these reflect actual behaviours.

Recognised ('core' and 'additional') components

Identification and selection of parent/carers

- Core Component: Consistent identification of parent/carers

Parents generally reported a lack of clarity, both for themselves and for other parents who may have been interested in attending, around why some had been selected to take part and others had not. In some cases, parents and carers had reached their own conclusions about this. In one parent/carer focus group, participants reported some speculation and suspicion within the community, including negative assumptions and implied stigma, because selection criteria were not explicit. There was some feeling that schools should explain the reasons for selection in the introductory letter.

In focus group discussions, questions around selection were often connected to discussions around the benefits of the project and the idea that it should be made available to a wider group or to all S1 parents. Some participants suggested that the project should be offered to all S1 parents, and selection based on those who are interested should take place at that stage to achieve manageable numbers, as a means of reducing possible stigma and increasing the reach of the project.

The question of whether and how the 'reach' of the project should be extended was discussed in most of the focus groups. Although parent/carers and staff reported that there were other parents in the school community who would have liked to have attended PIP, there was recognition that this could influence the size, character, and cohesion of the participant groups. While participants noted that the small group size was beneficial[9], there were concerns around whether resource-intensive nature of the project (in terms of planning and managing, as well as the seven weeks of direct input) was appropriate when only a small number of families would benefit. There was however, the recognition that intensive and focused support is the most appropriate form of support for some children and parents and carers.

Relatedly, several focus group participants discussed the purpose of the project along with consideration of whether the 'right' parents had been targeted and/or had been able to participate. The three pilot schools approached the selection of parent/carers differently, and one member of staff appreciated the flexibility of this approach:

> *'I was glad about the criteria, that we were able to kind of get it to suit the needs of our school, that we didn't just concentrate on SIMD 1 and 2 [deciles]' (Support staff member)*

Some participants however questioned the precise aim of PIP (to improve the engagement of a specific group of parents who had been identified as needing such support, or to engage parents more generally across the school community), and whether this aim had been met.

While parents in all three groups reported enjoyment and benefit from their involvement in PIP, some were described in staff focus groups as having been quite engaged with school already, suggesting that at least some of the parents who attended were not those in most need of support to engage with school. However, there was an overall feeling amongst staff that the attendance of these parents and carers was still beneficial, both for those attending and for the wider group. Teachers felt that some parents they would have liked to have seen were not there, but did not know whether those parents had been invited, but had declined.

Amongst the parent/carer focus groups, there was general support for the idea that PIP should be available to all S1 parents. A range of views were expressed, however, around the value of limiting places to first-time S1 parents (i.e. those who did not already have older children in the school). In the Home Link workers' focus group, one participant noted that first-time S1 parents *'certainly had more anxieties than the ones who maybe had two or three children within the school'.* It was also noted however, that having an older child in the school did not necessarily mean that there was an existing positive

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9 Group size is further discussed under 'Breakfast Session'

relationship. A similar mix of views was expressed in the Support Staff focus group, with one member of the group reporting that parents and carers had been asking questions as part of the programme that were relevant to their older children too.

The needs of families whose new S1 entrant had particular health, or additional support needs, or had come from out with the usual feeder primary/catchment area, were also recognised.

Parents and carers with younger children generally felt that they would like to participate in PIP again, as part of the transition arrangements for those children and keep up with any changes; although there was some uncertainty around the value of a second round of 'Lifeskills' inputs. In relation to the limited number of available places on any future iteration of the programme, there was generally agreement that priority should be given to those who had not attended previously.

Identification of parent/carers: Fidelity issues

The project Handbook and CPD session set out the criteria against which parents should be selected. The information collected from both parents and staff during focus groups would suggest that these selection criteria were not shared with parents when they were invited to take part in the programme, leading to a lack of clarity around reasons for inclusion in the project. Feedback from parents and carers has been clear that clarity around their reason for selection would have made them feel more at ease at the beginning of the project and therefore it would be recommended that criteria for selection is explicitly shared with parents and carers during the initial approach to be part of the project.

There were also some concerns raised by staff about the engagement of the parents who did attend; some felt that the project did not reach the intended target group and some felt that those who attended the project were already well engaged with school. There was no guidance given to schools in the Handbook regarding prioritising parents or children's characteristics as part of the selection criteria. It would be useful in future iterations if schools had guidance on how to prioritise referrals or targeting of parents in line with their strategic priorities around parental and carer engagement.

It has not been possible through focus groups to determine how rigorously schools adhered to the recommended process for identifying parents, however, through informal conversations with project coordinators it is known that there was a great deal of variation in what mechanisms schools used to identify parents, and which members of staff were included in these discussions and subsequent decisions. The PIP Handbook recommended both a timeline for contact and identification of parents and carers however, due to operational reasons it was not always possible for schools to implement these recommendations. Contingency planning for both variation from recommended timescales and staff involvement, may be helpful in any future implementation to ensure both consistency and clarity for parents and carers.

Recruitment

- Core component: Consistent recruitment process (for parent/carers)
- Additional component: Inclusion of all staff

The three schools initiated the recruitment of parents while the pupils were still in P7, but used different approaches; one made an initial face-to-face approach to identified parents through the Home Link service, while the others sent introductory letters to those initially identified for invitation.

In the focus groups, parent/carers reported their generally positive response on hearing about the project. They largely welcomed the opportunity to support their children by finding out more about the school. There were, however, some uncertainties and a lack of clarity around what the project would involve; some parent/carers reported that they had not realised it was a seven-week programme, and there was a sense from some that they had not read the information in detail, but had simply signed and returned the form. Some anxieties around the requirements of the programme were also reported, mainly in relation to the school subjects input:

> '[The Home Link worker said] "Don't worry, we'll supply you with the jotters and the pencils" and my stomach just went...cos I was thinking "What IS this?" and in actual fact it was, it was absolutely fine.' (Parent/carer)

In several of the focus groups, there was discussion around the ways in which more reluctant parents and carers could be encouraged to participate in the project. Suggestions included:

- Greater involvement of primary schools
    - In targeting and selection of parents and carers
    - In helping sustain any existing positive relationships
    - In engaging parents and carers in this sort of activity earlier, so that it is more familiar by S1
    - Integrating PIP more fully with the programme of transition that P7 pupils are engaged in
    - Having an introductory meeting in the primary school while pupils are in P7
- Holding initial sessions in more comfortable or familiar environments, such as community centres
- More information and detail about what the project involves
    - Include feedback from past participants / Ask previous years' participants to 'champion' the project
    - Explain that it's a mixed group, not just those parents who are already involved in everything
    - 'Let them know you're not going to be participating in an actual lesson, it's just information and maybe a few games and getting to know other parents' (Parent/carer focus group)

It was also recognised by members of most focus groups than some of the parents in greatest need of support to engage with school could not be engaged through this type of input, but would need more tailored, individual, or intensive support.

As discussed, schools recruited parents in a number of different ways. The recruitment process was recommended through experience of what worked for parents and schools during the 2015 iteration of the model. It may be that schools used their existing knowledge and considerable professional expertise to assess what would work most effectively for parents that were already known to the schools or the Home Link service.

Although involvement from the primary school Home Link service was recommended, it is not clear how much involvement there was, and there was variation between schools as to the extent to which the Home Link service was used to recruit parents.

During data collection, there was little reference to the use of the implementation timetable. This set out recommended methods and timescales for letters, phone calls, home visits, and contact with teachers. It is not clear whether this lack of reference is due to lack of use of this timetable or due to it not being felt a relevant part of the model to participants. Information from focus groups does indicate variation between schools in when and how parents were contacted and by whom.

As with the core component 'consistent identification of parents' the implementation of these core and additional components, appears to have varied from what was recommended within the Handbook. Operational resourcing may have impacted upon this; however, the use of both the timeline and the use of the template contact letter for parental contact could have reduced ambiguity.

It is also unclear from data collected how involved the whole school were with PIP, or if involvement and awareness was restricted to those who were delivering or organising the delivery. The involvement and awareness of the whole school would still be recommended to promote an inclusive ethos within schools and afford staff not directly involved in the delivery to have an awareness of PIP.

Attendance and support to attend

- Core component: Bus tickets/reimbursement of travel costs
- Core component: Consistent engagement and supportive retention process

Some parents and carers expressed surprise that the project was not better attended; however, it was not known how many places had been offered overall. There was a general perception that those who attended the project from the outset had continued to attend, and that those who had missed individual sessions had done so due to work or other issues, rather than from 'drop out'. This indicated that parents and carers would have liked to attend, but were unable to due to other commitments. In contrast, participants in the Key Staff focus group felt that there had been a slight dip in attendance towards the end, possibly indicating that seven weeks was too long for some. Attendance data from schools indicates that there was some 'drop out' between weeks

one and three of the project but then retention of parents and carers within the group remained consistent.

Some parents and carers reported having support from Home Link to attend in the early weeks, through the provision of transport or being accompanied to the school. Participants in one parent/carers' focus group in particular reported that the reminder texts encouraged them to keep coming back. Home Link workers themselves reported that the provision of support and reminders was not an onerous task, because *'once the parents bought into it, they bought in to it, and just turned up'*.

In terms of support to attend, the more onerous part of the process seems to have been the practical issue around the bulk purchase of bus tickets, which was reported to be challenging for some (despite all schools approaching the same bus company). It became necessary for some parent/carers to be given a cash advance, or reimbursement for a purchased ticket, although parents did not always request this support.

It was recognised that this had the potential for significant influence on some parents' ability to attend, but that some would not wish to reveal that they would struggle to meet the bus fare themselves or needed reimbursement. One school asked all those due to attend whether they planned to drive, and issued tickets to all other parents and carers.

The encouragement and response that parents and carers experienced in school on project days seemed to have an importance influence on their willingness to remain engaged:

> *'They made us feel that we were doing a good job by coming here, so they were praising us and that made you feel, yeah, you've got me on-board, I'm going to stick on board now, I'm going to give it 100%.' (Parent/carer)*

Attendance and support to attend: Fidelity issues

The issue with bulk purchasing of bus tickets prevented some schools from providing these in the recommended way and presented an unintended potential barrier to both participation of parents and delivery for schools. This would indicate a systemic barrier that could potentially be addressed at Senior Management Level within the Local Authority or through existing procurement processes to ensure that school staff are not spending a disproportionate amount of time on administrative tasks.

The supportive retention process of sending texts, which could be pre-programmed into the school IT system, would appear to have worked well for both parents and schools, providing support and encouragement for parents and for being a low burden component for schools. This pre-programming of texts messages was recommended in the Handbook, this element that has been found to be effective and helpful for both staff and parent/carers contributing to retention of parents and carers throughout the PIP project.

Staffing and roles

- Core component: A programme coordinator (Head Teacher)
- Core component: Classroom Assistant
- Core component: The voluntary nature of the teaching component
- Core component: Attendance at CPD session for all staff involved
- Additional component: Inclusion of all staff

Focus group discussions with staff provided an insight into the ways in which specified roles were actually carried out in the three pilot schools and the balance of activities and responsibilities between the roles. In each of the three schools, the project coordination role was devolved to members of staff with very different remits. This has incidentally provided information and insight into which members of staff within schools have the most suitable existing remit for alignment with the coordination task. There were also differences between schools in regards to when the coordinator was officially designated. In one school, this role was clear from the initial discussions around the project, in another the project coordinator was appointed in May, and in one school the coordinator was appointed at the beginning of the summer holidays. This presented some challenges in relation to support offered to coordinators from CELCIS and to timelines for recruiting parents and teachers and liaising with Home Link staff.

Key staff reported that the project was time-consuming to set up and run. One participant suggested that there was an initial underestimation of how long it would take for the lead person to set the project up, but that once the main elements were in place, the project ran smoothly:

> 'It was a lot of writing letters and talking to staff and preparing presentations [...] after a few weeks, I mean I kind of felt like it kind of ran itself after a few weeks,' (Key Staff member)

Nevertheless, there was still a week-to-week time commitment to ensure that everything was in place and progressing as intended.

One school had more limited support from Home Link, and so the project coordinator and a member of the pastoral care team were more involved in direct tasks such as recruiting parent and carer participants; this in turn influenced the amount of time they had to devote to the running of the project.

Home Link workers themselves reported some sense that they had done a great deal of initial work to 'sell' the project and sign-up parents, but had little on going involvement with participants, although this was perhaps thought to be less of an issue in one school where the Home Link room was used as a 'base' for the parents. Home Link workers also suggested that there was too much paperwork, which was potentially off-putting to parents and carers, but recognised that this was a consequence of having to evaluate the work. There was a suggestion in the Home Link workers' focus group that there should be greater involvement of Guidance Staff in PIP; some parents were reported to be

approaching Home Link with issues that were in the remit of the guidance teacher, because the Home Link worker was a more familiar person.

Some parents and carers also indicated that greater involvement of guidance staff would have been welcomed as part of PIP. Other key groups of staff who were 'missing' from PIP, identified in parents and staff focus groups, included office staff as the 'front line' of parent and carer contact to the school. In one school, a specialist base supports children with both Autism Spectrum Disorder and children with complex and specific learning difficulties. Some of the parents who attended PIP in this school had children who attended the base, and said they would have liked the opportunity to meet staff from there in the same way as they had done with the mainstream subjects.

In their focus group, the support staff who had accompanied the parent/carers groups throughout the project noted that they had little input into the planning and arrangements, although they were generally the ones who spent most time with the parents through the seven weeks of the project. Not all support staff were given a Handbook or access to the relevant CPD session ahead of their involvement with the project. They suggested that this would have helped them feel more confident in their role.

Overall, there was a general recognition that, having run the programme once, it would be easier to do so again. Participants highlighted that access to funding was important, particularly for purchasing resources and catering for parents and carers.

Staffing and roles: Fidelity issues

Due to the variance in appointments of project coordinators, there appear to have been some differences between schools in other aspects of the project. The involvement of all staff is one aspect of this, where in some instances support staff did not feel as included or as informed as in others. The programme coordinator role is crucial to the success of the project and the data collected gives an insight into the unique role that they undertake in the planning, delivery and delegation of responsibility. The ability to problem-solve and adapt to unforeseen issues would appear to be an important attribute within the project coordinator role.

The timescales for appointment of project coordinators led, in some schools, to teachers being asked to take part in the project rather than volunteering. There is no evidence from the data to suggest that the teaching staff who took part were reluctant or unwilling in any way, but the implication is that other members of staff may not have had the opportunity to be involved. Parents and carers identified that they would have liked to have more contact with other members of staff in schools, particularly office and guidance staff. Had schools been able to follow procedures for the inclusion of all staff, as set out in the Handbook, this may have provided these opportunities to parents and carers.

It is unclear how involved the school as a whole was in the project. Parents suggested that they would have liked more time with guidance staff and the opportunity to meet other members of staff. Staff who were not involved in direct delivery of the project may not have been as aware of the project as the model intends.

There was a consensus that the project is less burdensome in second and subsequent years. There is also the suggestion that the majority of the workload, is prior to the start of the project and that, although a certain amount of time per week is required for smooth delivery, the project is straightforward to deliver once it is underway.

Breakfast session

- Core component: Hot rolls, cakes, fruit and tea and coffee
- Core component: Consistent space
- Additional component: Building a team ethos

The offer of breakfast seems to have been highlighted specifically as an incentive to one group of parent/carers; however, feedback suggests that the opportunity to meet in a relaxed and informal way ahead of the school subject sessions was the most important feature of the 'Breakfast Session'. Although some project participants were reported to have known each other previously (e.g. through their children having been to same primary school or local clubs), there were no reported instances of parents (or their children) having known each other particularly well before the project began. The relaxed and informal shared space was important in helping participants to get to know one another and form a cohesive group.

Parent/carers focus group participants, as well as staff focus group participants, reported that the PIP participants seemed to have got on well as a group. Generally, it was recognised that keeping the size of the group small was important, particularly for parents and carers who may have been more anxious in a bigger group of strangers. A participant in the Key Staff focus group reported that:

> 'They were quite diverse, our group, too, they wouldn't have been a group that you would have thought would have naturally kind of gelled together, but they did and there was some quite strong vocal personalities within the group, but they did, they formed their own kind of identity.' (Key staff member)

Other staff focus group participants reported individual instances of potentially difficult situations, including one pair of participants with a history of conflict. These situations had resolved themselves however, without any need for school staff to intervene.

Parents and carers themselves highlighted the importance of shared characteristics within their groups. They felt it was important that groups were not just for 'gung ho' mums (as they were described by one participant in a parent/carer focus group), and some reported that they felt comfortable sharing information about their own child's difficulties once they realised that the children of the other parents in the group also

faced similar challenges at school. While some parents with additional younger children would be keen to do the programme again, they suggested that this could also depend on how well they got on with the new group.

This informal group time was also an important opportunity for teachers and other school staff (including those not directly involved in PIP) to introduce themselves in a casual way to the parents and carers. In one school, this was an explicit feature of the session, with specific staff groups or faculties invited to attend each week. While participants in the parents and carers focus groups reported that informal opportunity to meet school staff was valuable, one participant in the teachers' focus group also reported that meeting parents in this context before delivering the lesson made her feel less anxious.

Breakfast session: Fidelity issues

Contrary to what was anticipated, food and refreshments themselves do not appear to have been a motivating factor for parents to attend the project. What does appear to have been of particular value to parents is the opportunity to come together as a group, to get to know each other and find common characteristics with each other. Therefore, although parents and carers said that they did not view breakfast as a factor in their consideration of attending the group or not, the knowledge that breakfast was available provided a signal to parents and carers that they would be valued, looked after and that there would be an informal dimension to the project. It was a nurturing aspect to the project and provided a space for parents and carers to get to know and bond with each other.

In the school where there was an explicit timetable or organisation around meeting different staff groups, this worked well for parents; allowing both teachers and non-teaching staff to be involved in the project other than direct delivery and allowing parents to meet a wider selection of staff. It is not clear how this may have contributed to a 'team ethos' within the staff group, however, and this would be helpful to explore further in any future iterations of the project.

'School subject' sessions

- Additional: Lesson selection

In conversations about the duration of the programme, parents and carers were generally happy with the seven weeks because this meant there was enough time to have a session on the majority of subjects studied by pupils in S1; most were keen to retain this broad coverage rather than reduce the length of the programme.

Overall, there was a sense that parents and carers found the sessions fun and enjoyable. Some parents and carers reported anxieties about their involvement in specific school subjects, mainly around the expectations and requirements of the subject. Maths and PE were the subjects most commonly named as evoking anxiety. However, parents who had

been anxious generally reported that their experience of the class had been manageable or even fun. They usually attributed this to characteristics or actions of the teaching staff:

> *'Every week, looking to the next week, we'd be going "Oh, god, no, art, can't draw, no. Maths, can't count, no. PE, can't do it." But in actual fact every class was good, it was […] The teachers and the staff and everything, they really did, I think really, really well, and made us feel at ease'* (Parent/carer)

Teachers were advised in the programme Handbook to deliver a session along similar lines to a S1 class, with some time for discussion and explanation. In their focus group, teachers suggested that the balance of the 'S1 lesson' with other elements has been different for each of them. Teachers generally felt that while it was useful for parents to see an element of a lesson, this should not be the bulk of the session, and it was important to have time for questions, discussion of homework expectations, and so on.

There was some suggestion that the 'classroom experience' element was not necessary for every subject, and that the programme could be shortened by providing this only for selected subjects, and condensing others into information sessions around the curriculum, homework, and how to provide support at home.

Parents in one school accumulated a suite of written information relating to each subject (such as revision websites), and found this useful at home. One parent, who had not received written information to take away, felt that this would have been useful to her own child, but also as a means of sharing PIP learning with other parents who had asked about the project.

Some parents and carers reported that they had received little 'lesson' style input, but instead had had discussions and information with some *'wee fun exercises'.* Several parents and carers emphasised how different school is from when they were pupils. It is not clear whether the 'fun exercises' delivered as part of PIP were in fact representative of normal lesson content. Certainly, some parents and carers were expecting a more didactic teaching style:

> *'I thought I had to take part in lessons, likes of actually sit like a pupil and take part in the kind of lessons, the way. But, see when you went in it was more laid back and they were just showing you how much it had changed since I'd been in school, so. And it's more kind of relaxed, and more, a lot of them are using technology, in the maths section especially, and I'm sitting going "Whoa, I wish they had that when I was there, maybe I would have actually came!"'* (Parent/carer)

The maths classes were highlighted by a number of parent/carers as particularly useful, in part because of the advances in technology, but also for demonstrating the ways in which pupils are expected to present their work. They noted that this was very different from their own school experience.

As discussed above in 'Staffing and Roles', some parents felt that more input from the wider school context (such as office staff, guidance team, 'the base') would have been welcome. Home Link workers also suggested that there should be some brief input from the careers service, since this would be relevant to the pupils in S2.

Overall, parents and carers highly praised the teaching staff who had been involved in delivering PIP sessions, for engaging, listening, and making them feel safe and at ease:

> *'I really do think they put themselves out there and gave it 110% commitment, so hats off.' (Parent/carer)*

Members of one parent/carer focus group were particularly vocal in recognising the time commitment and effort from the teachers to ensuring the programme went well. Participants in the Key Staff focus group also reflected on teachers' enthusiasm:

> *'The response was brilliant, I mean there wasn't one department that we struggled to get a teacher for, and they were quite happy with it.' (Key Staff member)*

Teachers themselves reported that preparation to deliver the session did not take long, and those who were delivering PIP for the second time felt that having done it once made them feel more comfortable. Those who were delivering PIP for the first time however, suggested that they would have liked more guidance on how to structure their session in terms of the balance of lesson content and discussion. One teacher who had previously been involved in PIP reported that clearer guidance was given at that time, including that activities involving reading and writing should be avoided, to prevent putting pressure on parents and carers who had literacy difficulties. This had influenced the decision that a practical lesson, followed by discussion, was most appropriate.

Teachers in the focus group felt that some degree of 'free reign' in session design was good, but could result in a lack of consistency for parents. They had no specific recommendation on how to conduct the session, but felt that it would depend on personality and teaching style of the individual teacher. They suggested that the most important features were to open lines of communication, demonstrate that the subject is not scary, and explain how school and subject functions, what support is available, and how to access it, etc. One teacher emphasised the importance of letting parents and carers know that there is no need to be a subject specialist at home, and instead encourage them 'get in amongst it with [their children] and figure it out'. There was also the suggestion from one teacher that literacy as part of the session for parents and carers should not be avoided, since by including it they could demonstrate how pupils with literacy difficulties can be supported.

School subject sessions: Fidelity issues

It is recommended that all teaching staff are contacted by the head teacher and invited to submit a lesson plan based on what they would propose to deliver to parents. Head

teachers should then consider all lessons and create a timetable that allows parents to experience the fullness of the curriculum content, activities, and styles. Focus group discussions and informal conversations suggest that in some cases, teaching staff were approached directly and asked to deliver a lesson. This may account for some of the uncertainty from teachers over what their lesson should have contained, how to balance the mix of activities and what information it should cover. Despite the intentions outlined in the Handbook, the data suggest that the Head Teacher, or project coordinator, did not have an overview of what was being delivered across the timetable. This would have been useful both in regards to providing clarity for teaching staff about activities that are helpful and interesting for parents and carers and to enable them to better understand feedback and 'what works' for parents.

'Lifeskills' session

- Core component: Lifeskills input
- Additional component: Contact with Lifeskills providers
- Additional component: Final week all Lifeskills?

There was a mixed response to the 'Lifeskills' element of the programme. While some parents and carers found some sessions useful, there was a general sense (amongst staff, as well as parent/carers) that the content of the Lifeskills sessions was not tailored to the needs of the project participants. The Lifeskills programme was developed based on what was effective for parents during the 2015 model. In order to facilitate evaluation it was recommended that all schools use the same providers.

Some parents and carers also felt that this sort of input was not what they had expected or wanted from attending the programme. Parents in one school in particular felt that this part of the programme had not been properly explained to them. There was a sense of frustration and irritation that these sessions were taking up time that could be used for more school-relevant sessions. The parent/carers wanted and expected the sessions to be more focused on the school, and the needs of their children. The suggestions from parents and carers were:

- Retain CEOPS (internet safety awareness), which was described as 'eye opening'
- 'Live and Learn' got positive response across three schools. This organisation also works directly with the pupils.
- The college information session could have more focus on pupils' potential future at college.
- Stress awareness session could have more focus on stresses that children may experience in relation to exams, etc.
- A single session to cover the available council and support services such as energy advice. Some parents suggested that while these individual sessions were not directly relevant to them at this time, it was useful to have an overview of what is available. Others reported finding the input useful, and one focus group participant reported switching energy supplier because of the session. The project coordinator in one school highlighted that the majority of parents changed energy providers.

- One parent reported having attended a useful programme on sexual health and wellbeing through the primary school, which was *'exceptionally informative to the parents'.* There was agreement within the group that this would be a useful addition to PIP, and could include elements around puberty, and how children change through adolescence, particularly as there is such wide variation between individuals in S1. General health and wellbeing of children at school was also mentioned.
- One parent/carers group suggested that they would have found it useful to have a session on how the council deals with bullying in school.
- A session on the Parent Council was also suggested. Some parents and carers were unclear on the role and function of the Parent Council at high school, and that the work of this group is more visible in Primary. Others suggested that they had previously held misconceptions about Parent Councils, and that having more information could increase the number of parents and carers belonging to the group.

The perspectives of support staff who had attended the 'Lifeskills' inputs sessions largely reflected the views of parent/carer responses. They proposed that there should be more than one session on Mindset/Live and Learn, and CEOPS, and that energy advice should be part of a broader 'council services' input. Staff in focus groups generally felt that there was a need for 'Lifeskills' inputs to be selected and arranged by someone with an overview of the needs of the particular group of parents, and delivered by presenters who would be able to gauge the group, understand their issues, and deliver flexibly in response to that. Home Link staff suggested that these inputs should be delivered by people from within the community, so that parents then have the option to attend an existing class or session with that person.

There was some discussion around the possibility of parents and carers having the opportunity to select (or vote for) useful and relevant inputs from a list, in advance of the programme (potentially while pupils were still in P7 or as part of the sign-up process). Some were in favour of this suggestion, but there was also some recognition that sessions that would have been worthwhile might be rejected on inaccurate first impressions.

'Lifeskills' sessions: Fidelity issues

The model recommends that project coordinators make contact with Lifeskills providers prior to their input to allow the session to be tailored to the specific group of parents attending the project. Feedback from parents and carers would suggest that this is important to ensure that Lifeskills providers understand the needs and interests of the group and to ensure that the input has a clear link to how the information being provided could be useful to their family and child. This was an area where there was a difference in levels of contact between school and providers, which could have had an impact on the content and activities provided not being wholly appropriate for the group. Parents' feedback also suggests that a more explicit focus on how the information being provided could benefit their child would have been of use to highlight the relevance of the input.

Post-project activity

- Additional component: Family activity
- Additional component: On-going contact with parents

All three schools included an 'end of programme' activity for participating families. These varied between the three schools in terms of the type of activity and the involvement of pupils. Two schools had lunch out of school (one with teachers, parents, and pupils, and one with just the adults). This was described as enjoyable, and although pupils were reported to be a little embarrassed initially about going for lunch with their parents and teachers:

> *'… in actual fact they loved it, and they got out of PE which apparently was a massive bonus, cos it ran a bit late, so they were overjoyed by that.'*
> *(Parent/carer)*

At the conclusion of the programme in one school, children whose parents had attended PIP took part in a session together at school with activities around careers aspirations, teamwork, etc. In another school, vouchers for a visit to a local restaurant were given to the parent/carers who had attended. One reported that they had not been told in advance that they would get these: *'It was a nice wee surprise'*. Similarly, the schools that took parents out for lunch did not appear to have used this as an incentive for parent participation. Parents and carers reportedly appreciated the *'personal touch'* that this element of PIP demonstrated.

In the staff focus groups, participants recognised the importance of maintaining the relationship between the school and parent/carers through PIP. Although the focus groups took place soon after the end of the programme, and therefore little follow-up activity had taken place, schools had some ideas and plans in place for on-going contact with parents and carers. These included termly catch-up sessions, linked to the schedule of parents' nights, and the possibility of having some input for this cohort of parents and carers again as their children progress through school. Parents and carers in one school had also established their own routine of meeting up outside of school, using the same time of week when the PIP sessions had taken place.

Post-project activity: Fidelity issues

The findings suggest that while the 'family activity' was not a motivating factor for attendance, parents and carers were pleased and grateful for their outings or vouchers, and felt that this indicated that the schools had recognised and placed value on their attendance. Parents and carers commented that this recognition had been 'special' for them. It seems that an important component is to ensure parents and carers feel recognised for their important contribution to the success of the project.

Other themes

Timing and overall structure

A question on the most appropriate time of year in which to run the PIP programme, and whether the seven-week duration was appropriate, was asked in most of the focus groups.

Some participants suggested that running the programme towards the end of the school year when pupils were in P7 would be preferred. This would allow a closer link with the transitional activity being offered to the P7 pupils themselves, and could minimise the chance of a negative reaction of pupils to their parents being in school. Some participants felt that this could improve the availability of high school staff whose exam classes were out of school on exam leave, but in contrast, some staff suggested that holding the programme around the time of national exams would make it more difficult for teaching staff to be involved.

Overall, the focus group participants agreed that running the programme in the early stages of S1 was preferred. Having the programme while the pupils were still in P7 raised concerns around the 'gap' of the summer break, although this was noted as likely to be less of an issue for pupils with enhanced transition provisions.

School staff tended to agree that it was helpful that pupils had some opportunity to settle in to high school before the programme began, but were clear that the timing of the programme early in S1 did not allow them to have an in-depth knowledge of individual pupils. The timing of the programme did allow parents and carers to have specific information about timetabling and subject teachers that may not have been available before the summer break, providing opportunities for discussions about any real rather than hypothetical questions:

> '…As it was, I think in hindsight it was probably a good time to run it, from the parents' perspective…it was quite good that their children had already started and they could make comment on things as time went on.' (Key Staff member)

> 'The parents actually quite liked the fact it was September because they'd had a few, any teething problems, they could bring to the table and discuss it here with the other parents, and they also had a chance to look at timetables. And so, they'd an idea of things they wanted to see and things they wanted to do and things they wanted to ask, whereas if you did it before the pupils came up to the school, then that door might be closed.' (Home Link staff member)

There were some concerns that seven weeks was too long for the programme to run. This was particularly the case for working parents and carers who had to use annual leave entitlement, or rearrange shifts, in order to attend. Work commitments were the main reasons given for non-attendance, and were described as the main barrier to male parents and carers taking part in the project.

In general, parents and carers felt that seven weeks was appropriate because they valued the chance to experience the majority of subjects that S1 children were offered, which would not be possible in a shorter timeframe. Some would have preferred four weeks but with longer days, or perhaps the option to select certain weeks from an offer of several options. Others stated that a full morning or afternoon, rather than sessions overlapping lunchtime would make attendance easier to manage in terms of shift work, and being there to drop off or collect children rather than attend at different times from them.

Conclusions and recommendations

1. Both qualitative and quantitative feedback from participants indicates that parents and carers felt they gained a lot from being involved with the programme. All participants were able to identify benefits of taking part, regardless of which school they were associated with or the demographic characteristics of the parents. Parents and carers highlighted their increased knowledge of the school environment and staff, and many participants felt that the programme should be offered again and more widely. It is therefore recommended that:

- It would be beneficial for parents and staff to implement the programme again in the future.

A range of approaches were used for identifying, selecting, and approaching parents and carers to take part in the project. Some parents were however, unclear around the reasons that they had been invited to take part. The following recommendations address these issues:

- The project should target both parents of children who have been identified as requiring some element of additional support, or parents who are known to require (or are likely to require) additional support from services.
- The reasons that parents have been invited to take part should be explained clearly during initial contact with parents about the project.

2. The findings suggest that the core and additional components identified within the Handbook had some influence on the conduct and outcomes of the project. Although we recognise that flexibility is required for schools, due to operational pressures that may exist in a school environment, feedback from most research participants indicated that close adherence to the PIP model was an important factor in the overall success of the project. However, we recommend some developments to the original core and additional components:

- Lesson selection by the Head Teacher should become a core component of the model, rather than an additional component. This should ensure that there is a good balance of different lesson types, teaching styles, and content across the programme.
- Contact with Lifeskills providers should be a core component of the model rather than an additional component, and project coordinators should liaise with Lifeskills providers to shape and design their input in line with the needs and interests of the parent/carer group.

- The involvement of all school staff should be a core component, with a more formal allocation of time to allow parent/carers to meet additional staff groups, such as office, support, and guidance staff.

Furthermore, in light of the findings we suggest the following recommendations in relation to the conduct of the programme:

- Lifeskills should be clearly linked to either clear parental involvement opportunities within school (e.g. Parent Council opportunities) or have an explicit link to benefits for children.
- The implementation timeline should be followed as closely as possible to ensure adequate time is available for both contact with parents and preparation of staff members.

3. There was some debate amongst staff around the length of the project, the timing of the project in relation to the school calendar and the time of day of the project. Various reasons were cited, particularly in relation to time of day of the project, as to potential changes that could make it more convenient for parents to attend. We therefore recommend:

- Parent/carers should be given some introductory information about the project when their child is still in primary school, ideally towards the end of P7 (to align with pupils' transition activities).
- The project should be run between the start of S1 and the October holidays or between the October and Christmas holidays.
- The programme should be at least four weeks but no longer than six weeks long. It is important to ensure that the group spend enough time together that they feel they are able to build relationships but not so long as to be perceived as a long term commitment to parents and carers.
- As many subjects as is practicable for the school to provide from the broad general education curriculum should be provided for parents and carers to access
- The project should be held either at the start or towards the end of the school day, but allowing enough time for three fifty-minute inputs; with consideration also being given to ensuring there is a space within the timetable for the group to eat together.

4. It was important that a member of staff at a central level had oversight of the project, in addition to in school project coordinators, to ensure consistency, and an appropriate level of support. We therefore recommended that:

- A member of staff at local authority level should have overall responsibility for the implementation of the project in schools.

Robust linking of attainment to supportive interventions remains a challenge within the current system due to the lack of standardised attainment measures; however, the introduction of the National Improvement Framework will enhance schools' ability to do this, as standardised testing will provide measurements of attainment at key milestones in a child's educational journey.

Appendix A: Core and additional components

- A project coordinator (Head Teacher)
  - A single person within each school who has overall responsibility for the administration, planning, and coordination of the project. In all materials this responsibility is placed with the head teacher but with recognition that it can be delegated to any other member of staff within the school who has sufficient capacity to carry out the role and is deemed (by the head teacher) to be sufficiently experienced.
- Consistent space
  - The same space every week where parents meet at both the start and end of the day, preferably not a classroom but a more comfortable space. Both to differentiate between time as a parent group and lesson delivery, but also to recognise parents' status as adults within the school.
- Bus tickets/reimbursement of travel costs
  - Any public transport costs that a parent incurs in getting to or from the project should be reimbursed by school to ensure parents do not incur any financial costs for attendance. This can be in the form of pre-paid bus tickets or in the form of cash on production of a bus ticket.
- Hot rolls, cakes, fruit and tea and coffee
  - Parents should be offered something hot to eat on arrival at school, along with tea, coffee, and/or soft drinks.
- Attendance at CPD session for all staff involved
  - All staff involved in the project should attend a CPD session prior to their involvement in the project. This includes any member of Home Link staff involved in the project, the project coordinator, any class teacher delivering a lesson and all support staff who will be accompanying and supporting parents. The CPD session, as well as informing staff on logistical components of the project, should contain information about the needs of the parent group and supportive strategies to effectively engage with parents.
- The voluntary nature of the teaching component
  - Teachers should volunteer to deliver a lesson rather than be compelled to by the head teacher. Volunteering is indicative of the required level of motivation to undertake the additional workload associated with being part of the project.
- Classroom Assistant
  - One member of staff per school is responsible for meeting parents on arrival and accompanying them to all lessons and Lifeskills inputs. This member of staff should also model, and where appropriate, provide, classroom learning support to parents. This member of staff is responsible for 'on the day' organisation and logistics of food collection, bus ticket/money reimbursement and set-up and clear up of the communal space.
- Consistent identification of parent/carers
  - Parents and carers should be identified using a set of pre-agreed criteria both within and between schools to ensure consistency in the target group of parents. Any child or parent who has an additional support need, as defined in the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) 2009 act, should be considered for inclusion in the project.
- Consistent recruitment process

- o Parents and carers should be recruited using the same methods both within and between schools. For example, all parents should receive the same letters inviting them to attend the programme and be offered more information by a follow up phone call from a member of staff.
- Consistent engagement and supportive retention process
  - o All schools should offer all parents on-going support to continue to attend the programme. This support should be agreed prior to the programme between schools and any support services involved. This may involve supportive phone calls home or offers of support with coming into school if assessed as appropriate. All parents should be offered the same opportunities to support them to engage.
- Lifeskills input
  - o The project should contain a Lifeskills input every week from agencies or services that are relevant to the parents attending. Lifeskills inputs should be supportive, informative, and delivered in a manner that will be engaging for parents.

Additional components were:

- Lesson selection
  - o The head teacher should invite all teaching staff to be involved. Those that wish to volunteer to deliver a lesson should submit a lesson plan to the head teacher who will select which lessons and teacher(s) should be involved. The aim should be to ensure an even balance of activities, skills, and content across the timetable.
- Contact with Lifeskills providers
  - o Project coordinators should have contact with the Lifeskills provider who will be delivering an input to parents to ensure the input is planned with the needs of the group in mind. This will also allow for any logistical requirements to be discussed and agreed.
- Family activity
  - o A family activity can be offered as an incentive for parents to take part. This can be organised by schools, who may also wish to take part, or vouchers or money can be provided for parents to organise independently.
- Building a team ethos
  - o Project coordinators should look for regular opportunities to bring staff involved together and keep them involved with updates on project progress to ensure staff are aware of how the project is progressing.
- Ongoing contact with parents
  - o Parents should be contacted at key points during the week to support engagement; thank you texts should be sent on the day of or the day after their attendance and a reminder text should be sent the day prior to or on the morning of the project every week.
- Inclusion of all staff
  - o All staff should be briefed on the project and then receive on-going communication about progress to build an inclusive ethos for both staff and parents.
- Final week - all Lifeskills
  - o The final week of the project should comprise purely Lifeskills inputs and time for a 'celebration' for parents with certificates and time to discuss their involvement and complete post programme questionnaires.

Appendix B: Statistical information

Wilcoxon's Signed Rank Test for related samples was carried out on the following data. Significance is accepted at the p<0.05 level, however, many results would also be accepted at a higher threshold.

Significant differences were found between the pre-project and post-project ratings (with higher scores given at the post-project time point) for the individual questions in the following table:

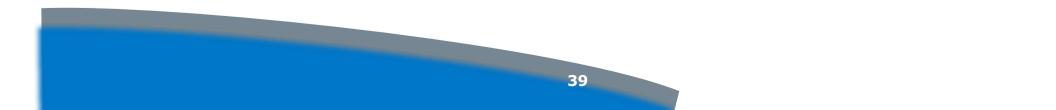| Participant Code	Q1 How much do you know about the high school your child has moved to?		Q2 How much do you know about the curriculum in high school?		Q3 How much do you know about a standard high school day and the pattern it follows?		Q4 How well do you know the high school building?		Q5 How well do you feel you know the staff in high school?		Q6 How comfortable would you feel approaching high school re your child's education?	
	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST
1	7	7	4	7	7	7	4	7	1	7	7	7
2	4	7	4	7	4	7	3	6	3	6	4	7
3	7	7	7	6	7	7	5	5	5	5	7	7
4	6	7	4	5	5	7	4	5	4	7	4	6
5	5	5	4	5	4	6	4	5	2	5	6	6
6	7	7	2	7	7	7	7	7	1	6	7	7
7	2	7	2	7	2	7	1	4	1	5	7	7
8	6	6	6	6	6	6	7	7	6	6	7	7
9	3	6	3	5	3	6	2	5	1	4	4	6
10	4	7	4	7	3	7	3	6	4	6	6	7
11	2	6	1	6	1	6	2	6	1	5	4	7
12	4	6	4	6	6	7	3	6	2	6	5	7
13	5	7	5	7	6	7	4	7	4	7	5	7
14	4	6	2	6	3	7	1	6	1	5	5	7
15	5	6	5	7	6	7	4	4	4	5	7	7
16	4	7	3	7	5	7	4	7	6	7	4	7
17	7	6	7	7	6	6	4	4	4	4	7	7
18	4	7	1	7	6	7	4	7	3	7	7	7
19	4	5	4	5	3	6	2	5	2	5	3	6
20	6	7	4	6	7	7	7	7	4	6	7	7
21	2	6	1	4	2	5	2	4	2	4	7	7
22	4	6	2	6	6	7	2	3	3	5	7	7
23	2	5	3	5	5	6	1	.	1	3	6	6

P-values were as follows:

Q1: p=0.000, Q2: p=0.000, Q3: p=0.000, Q4: p=0.000, Q5: p=0.000, Q6: p=0.004

The table below shows the data that were aggregated into thematic indices.

Participant Code	How often do you intend to attend parent's nights in your child's high school?		How often do you intend to attend other events in your child's high school? (concerts, awards		How willing is your child to get up for school in the morning?		How willing is your child to go to school in the morning once they are awake?		How often does your child start a conversation about school when they're at home?		How often does your child talk to you about homework?		How often does your child ask for your help with their homework?		How often do you ask your child about school?		How often do you ask your child about homework?		How often do you offer to help your child with homework?	
	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST
1	7	7	7	7	1	7	2	7	4	6	1	1	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
2	7	7	7	7	4	6	6	7	5	5	5	6	5	6	7	7	7	7	5	6
3	7	7	7	6	5	7	7	7	4	6	2	5	1	5	7	7	7	7	5	7
4	7	7	7	7	6	7	7	7	7	6	7	7	7	6	7	7	7	7	7	7
5	7	7	6	6	6	7	7	7	6	6	5	5	5	5	6	6	6	6	6	5
6	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	2	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
7	7	7	4	4	7	7	7	7	4	5	6	5	4	5	7	5	7	6	4	3
8	7	3	4	3	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
9	7	7	7	7	6	6	7	6	7	7	7	7	5	6	7	7	7	7	5	7
10	7	7	6	6	5	6	6	7	4	4	4	6	6	6	7	7	7	7	7	6
11	7	7	6	6	5	5	6	7	4	5	5	6	5	6	6	7	7	7	6	6
12	7	7	6	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	6	6	4	4	7	7	7	6	7	5
13	7	7	5	7	5	4	5	4	6	5	4	3	6	5	7	6	7	7	5	6
14	7	7	7	7	7	7	6	7	4	7	6	7	5	5	7	7	7	7	7	6
15	7	7	7	6	6	5	7	7	2	2	3	2	2	2	7	7	7	7	7	5
16	7	7	7	6	7	7	7	7	6	5	5	5	3	2	6	7	6	7	3	4
17	7	7	6	6	7	7	7	7	6	4	6	6	5	4	7	7	7	7	7	7
18	7	7	4	4	7	7	7	7	7	7	1	3	2	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
19	7	7	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	6	5	6	5	5	7	6	7	6	5	4
20	7	7	7	7	6	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	5	5	7	7	7	7	7	7
21	7	7	7	7	7	6	7	6	7	6	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
22	7	6	7	7	6	3	6	4	5	6	6	5	1	5	7	7	7	6	5	6
23	7	7	7	7	6	7	6	7	2	4	2	4	6	6	7	7	7	7	6	7
Indices	Intentions				Morning Behaviour				Child Initiates Conversation						School Conversations		Homework			
									School Conversations		Homework									

Wilcoxon's Signed Rank Tests for related samples were conducted. A significant was found for the 'Child Initiates Conversation' index (p=0.039), which included statements on child-initiated conversations about school and homework. No significant differences were found for the other indices.

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About CELCIS

CELCIS, based at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, is committed to making positive and lasting improvements in the wellbeing of Scotland's children living in and on the edges of care. Ours is a truly collaborative agenda; we work alongside partners, professionals and systems with responsibility for nurturing our vulnerable children and families. Together we work to understand the issues, build on existing strengths, introduce best possible practice and develop solutions. What's more, to achieve effective, enduring and positive change across the board, we take an innovative, evidence-based improvement approach across complex systems.