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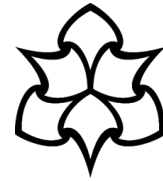
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Manchester Metropolitan University  
Crime & Well-Being Big Data Centre



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# **Greater Manchester Violence Reduction Unit BLOCKS Implementation Evaluation**

**August 2024**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report presents the findings of an implementation evaluation of the first year of operation of the BLOCKS programme. The BLOCKS programme, delivered by the Salford Foundation, is a child centred intervention aimed at supporting vulnerable primary school children to successfully transition into a secondary school setting. The evaluation sought to understand how the programme was put into practice, set out to achieve its intended outcomes and the factors that influenced these processes. It also set out to assess emergent evidence of the impact of the programme.

The BLOCKS programme was established in response to a growing concern, held by primary schools in Greater Manchester, that knife carrying and intergenerational violence was increasing and that this was affecting younger children than in recent years. Pupils exhibiting these behaviours were recognised as having the greatest risk of disengaging with education and a heightened vulnerability to criminal exploitation and involvement. To counter these challenges, the BLOCKS programme was established in 10 primary schools located in deprived areas in Greater Manchester. The programme intended to engage a maximum of 15 children per school, providing 1-to-1 mentoring sessions. Its core curriculum aimed to empower and support children to become more self-aware, improve their confidence and self-esteem; manage their emotions, understand the impact of their actions on others and to stay safe.

The BLOCKS programme established a theory of change explaining the actions required to achieve the intended outcomes of the programme. It has been designed to be 'live' in that it is capable of being revised and augmented as new evidence becomes available. The theory of change is informed by evidence of the factors associated with a heightened likelihood of engagement in violent behaviours and of the *potential* of mentoring programmes to reduce problematic behaviours.

A client journey for the BLOCKS programme was developed, explaining its various stages of delivery and their associated key data capture opportunities. The key stages were identified as: the referral process (i.e., eligibility data); 'distance travelled' following engagement with the programme (i.e., data generated from the entry and exit self-reflection forms); and the next steps or outcomes for the child (i.e., client throughput data). The BLOCKS programme

developed and adapted its data capture procedures surrounding the key stages of the programme during its roll-out.

Teachers' perspectives of the BLOCKS programme were overwhelmingly positive. The schools held a clear understanding of the aims and objectives of the programme, as well as of its eligibility criteria. Some found the criteria helpful though others would have preferred greater flexibility in referring children. The teachers reported that children who participated in the programme exhibited positive changes in their behaviour and (almost all of them) had made a successful transition to high school. They all wanted the programme to continue.

The BLOCKS programme adapted to meet a set of emergent challenges during its rollout. Programme staff believe that the changes made to the eligibility criteria served to target it at those children experiencing the greatest need. The programme staff took on the responsibility of securing consent for children to participate. This was achieved through making home visits, which enhanced the willingness of parents to allow their children to participate. Training and advice were provided to programme staff by a psychotherapist working on behalf of the Pennine Trust. This support helped underpin the effectiveness of the programme in working with vulnerable children. It also helped programme staff to cope with the stresses associated with working with a vulnerable client group.

The evaluation explored the potential of securing schools' data to enable a more complete account of the challenges being faced by children, and families of the children, attending the schools participating in the programme. The types of data sought were hoped to illuminate the context in which the programme was being deployed. The availability of these data varied markedly across schools, with data relating to routine measures (e.g., attendance) as opposed to that requiring the professional judgement of their staff (e.g., well-being) being most likely to be available.

The evaluation was able to undertake a preliminary assessment of the programme referral data, and the entry and exit self-reflection forms (i.e., distance travelled data) completed by children participating in the programme. Of the children for whom data were recorded, remembering that the data capture procedures were developed during the roll-out of the programme, the vast majority met 3 or 4 referral criteria. Assessment of the 108 entry and exit self-reflection forms, completed by children participating in the programme, indicated

statistically significant and positive changes in 5 out of the 8 questions asked. This finding is suggestive of the programme generating a positive change amongst the children participating in the programme, as measured on their exit from it.

### *Recommendations*

- *Continue to develop and augment the theory of change with reference to emergent evidence from the programme and the international evidence base. Ensure that any further evaluation captures both the content and method of delivery of the BLOCKS programme.*
- *It is necessary to ensure the consistent capture of data from year 2 onwards. This will enhance the prospect of undertaking a robust programme impact evaluation.*
- *The GM VRU should consider making participation in any ongoing review or evaluation of the programme a requirement of a school's receipt of the BLOCKS programme. Relatedly, the BLOCKS programme should continue to monitor the quality of communication with the designated school liaisons.*
- *The further evaluation of the BLOCKS programme should include an assessment of the role (content and method of delivery) of the psychotherapist in the delivery of the BLOCKS programme and in the support of its staff*
- *Data relating to routine measures, whilst only providing a partial account of the context in which the programme is being deployed, would benefit any future impact evaluation. These data would allow an evaluation of the nature and scale of the challenges being faced by the schools participating in the programme.*
- *To ensure a robust impact evaluation, it will be necessary that programme maintains its revised data collection and recording procedures (i.e., capturing each stage of the client journey). The assessment of client data requires being extended to include client throughput data.*

## **1 Introduction**

This report presents the findings of an implementation evaluation of the first year of operation of the BLOCKS programme. The BLOCKS programme, delivered by the Salford Foundation, is a child centred intervention aimed at supporting vulnerable primary school children to successfully transition into a secondary school setting. The implementation evaluation sought to understand how the programme was put into practice, set out to achieve its intended outcomes and the factors that influenced these processes. It also set out to assess emergent evidence of the impact of the programme.

To address these issues, it was determined to undertake the following steps:

- Develop a theory of change for the programme
- Develop a map of the client journey for the programme
- Undertake a qualitative analysis of teachers' perspectives of the programme
- Undertake a qualitative analysis of programme staff perspectives of the programme
- Undertake an assessment of participating schools' ability to provide additional data to support the evaluation of the programme
- Undertake both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the outcomes of the programme

The report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 provides an account of the background to the establishment of the BLOCKS programme
- Section 3 presents the theory of change, and associated evidence base, underpinning the delivery model of the BLOCKS programme
- Section 4 details the expected journey of a child (client) engaged in the BLOCKS programme. The client journey identifies the moments when data can be collected, data that might subsequently be used to assess the impact of the BLOCKS programme
- Section 5 provides an account of teachers' perceptions of the BLOCKS programme
- Section 6 presents an account of programme staff perceptions of BLOCKS
- Section 7 presents an assessment of the wider availability of schools' data that might inform an impact evaluation.

- Section 8 offers an analysis of the BLOCKS programme client data, generated in its first year of operation. Specifically, it evaluates the extent to which BLOCKS clients meet the programme's intended assessment criteria and the distance-travelled by the children participating in the programme (in its first year of operation).
- Section 9 outlines a set of conclusions and recommendations.

## **2 Background**

In June 2021 the Greater Manchester Violence Reduction Unit (GM VRU), in partnership with the Innovation Hub, held a primary school summit. This event was prompted by a growing perception, held by primary schools, that knife carrying and intergenerational violence was increasing and that this was affecting younger children than in recent years. 83% of attendees (primary school teachers/school staff) at the summit noted worsening primary school pupil behaviour, with respect to violence and threats of violence. Pupils exhibiting these behaviours were recognised as having the greatest risk of disengaging with education and a heightened vulnerability to criminal exploitation and involvement. To counter these challenges, the summit concluded that some primary school children require additional support to address these behaviours and to successfully transition to a secondary school setting.

In June 2022 the GM VRU released a tender for a child centred intervention for primary school children. The intention was that the intervention be deployed in 10 pre-selected primary schools located in deprived areas in both North and East Manchester. It was proposed that the intervention would develop one-to-one work with pupils, with the aim of building emotional resilience in support of their transition from primary to secondary school. It was determined that the intervention should be targeted upon the most vulnerable and high-risk pupils, and as they move through the latter stages of primary school. It was recognised that these children might have substantial vulnerabilities spanning learning needs, mental health problems, exposure to Adverse Childhood Experiences, behaviour problems, limited parental support and so forth. Further, it was expected that the schools would be best placed to identify these students and would do so based on changes in a child's behaviour, requiring the intervention to work in partnership with the schools in which it would be based. The intervention was planned to be funded for 3-years, at a total cost of £900k. The budget was drawn from Home Office Serious Violence funding, with £300k being made available to the intervention per academic year.

The Salford Foundation was successful in securing the tender, with their proposal to establish primary school transition support in the form of the BLOCKS programme. The BLOCKS programme is informed by previous work undertaken by the Salford Foundation in delivering mentoring to primary school aged children through the Boost Mental Toughness Project, and a previous iteration of the BLOCKS programme delivered in Salford. The BLOCKS programme



intended to engage a maximum of 15 children per school for a period of six months (See Section 8 BLOCKS client data). It is delivered by case workers who meet with the children, providing weekly 1-to-1 mentoring sessions that run both in and out of term-time. The case workers are supported by a clinician, provided by the Pennine Trust, who offers advice on the needs of individual children whilst also providing pastoral support to the case workers themselves. The programme is managed by a project lead who oversees the interface between the programme and the schools.

Whilst BLOCKS seeks to deliver bespoke programme content tailored to each pupil, founded on their interests, risk factors and family context, it is built around a core curriculum based on four themes:

1. My Identity
2. My Relationships
3. My Environment
4. My Future

Cumulatively, the activities embedded in these themes aim to empower and support children to become more self-aware, improve their confidence and self-esteem; manage their emotions, understand the impact of their actions on others and to stay safe. It is hoped that noticeable improvements in these outcomes might be discerned over the duration of the child's engagement with the programme. The Salford Foundation believe that such changes will be sustained, and that the improved positive behaviour of children will serve to deliver improved educational and wellbeing outcomes.

### 3 Theory of Change

A theory of change explains both the 'mini-steps' that are required to achieve the long-term outcome of a programme and the connections between the mini-steps. The theory of change for the BLOCKS programme, presented in Figure 1 (below), was co-produced by the Salford Foundation and MMU. It draws on a review of the evidence-base of the risk factors associated with engagement in violent behaviours and that underpinning mentoring programmes. The key components of a theory of change are: the rationale (Figure 1, Why: science-based assumptions) of the underlying need and context of the intervention and the specific risk-factors associated with children's heightened likelihood of engagement in violent behaviours; the target group receiving the intervention (Figure 1, Who: participants); the inputs into the programme and the underlying assumptions on how changes may happen (Figure 1, How: intervention); and, the intended outcomes of the intervention (Figure 1, What: short-, medium- and long-term outcomes). The theory of change has been designed to be consistent with the overarching GM VRU logic model and is best understood as being 'live' in that the intention is to revise and augment the model as the BLOCKS programme matures during its first three years of operation.

#### *The evidence-base supporting the BLOCKS programme: eligibility criteria and mentoring*

The BLOCKS programme theory of change is informed by evidence of the factors associated with a heightened likelihood of engagement in violent behaviours and of the *potential* of mentoring programmes to reduce problematic behaviours. The BLOCKS programme utilises evidence of the former as the basis of the eligibility criteria for a child participating in the programme. Bright (2015) categorises such risk factors into five domains: individual; family; school; peer group; and community. For the age group for which the BLOCKS programme is intended (primary school years 5 and 6), the evidence base identifies numerous factors as significant in predicting future violent offending. For example, and within the family domain, family disruption and limited supervision are recognised as the most significant predictors. It is important to note that family disruption can take many forms. Murray and Farrington (2008: 133), for instance, find the impact of a parent being imprisoned (as a form of family disruption) to be a risk factor for the child engaging in antisocial behaviour and offending, as well as experiencing other problems such as mental ill health, drug abuse, school failure, and

unemployment. Similarly, within the peer group domain, a child having close friends (and family members) involved in violence and wider criminality is a robust predictor of them engaging in future violent behaviours. The significance of a child witnessing and experiencing violence, and of experiencing parental separation, are recognised as key eligibility criteria by the BLOCKS programme. It is also relevant to note the potential interplay of risk factors across multiple domains in prompting future violent behaviour. For example, individual attributes such as aggression, risk taking, and a lack of guilt are associated with the increased likelihood of a child engaging in violent behaviours. Such attributes can also be seen to be associated with risk factors in the school domain such as truanting, low school performance and commitment. Other individual risk factors include low levels of aspiration, poor emotional control and low levels of pro social values. In concluding this section, it is important to note that the BLOCKS programme relies upon the schools to identify which pupils exhibit the risk factors used to inform its eligibility criteria, set within the broader context of pupils at risk of disengaging with mainstream education.

The evidence base underpinning mentoring is positive though not robust (<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/mentoring-2/>). The College of Policing (2016) identifies mentoring as an effective strategy in their crime reducing toolkit, its inclusion being based on a systematic review of the evidence base. Whilst its review indicates that mentoring programmes tend to have a crime reducing impact it also notes that in a small number of cases there can be a negative outcome to such programmes. Crucially, and in most instances, the review identifies that the exact content of the mentoring sessions is unknown or not specified in most analyses, so it is difficult to say conclusively if it is the subject matter or the method of delivery that is responsible for the success or otherwise of the mentoring. This point is also noted in the rapid evidential review of mentoring as a strategy to prevent gang involvement, youth violence and crime produced by the Early Years (O'Connor and Waddell, 2015). This report categorises mentoring within the approaches that appear promising but have limited evidence to support them. It identifies skills-based programmes and family focused approaches as the most robustly evidenced of the successful interventions.

**Figure 1 Theory of Change for the BLOCKS programme**

Why: science-based assumption	Why: science-based assumption	Who: participants	How: intervention	What: short-term outcome	What: medium-term outcome	What: long-term outcome
<p>BLOCKS has been developed to address:</p> <p>1) Early identification of CYP at risk of engaging in risk taking and criminal behaviours in the future due to risk factors such as ACE's and school engagement</p> <p>2) Local stakeholders recognising that the available statutory responses on their own were not working effectively to meet the needs of CYP.</p> <p>3) A belief amongst local stakeholders of the need to take an asset based approach with CYP on a voluntary basis which may work more effectively to prevent future offending and improve school transition.</p> <p>4) An understanding around the impact of ACE's and Trauma on CYP</p>	<p>CYP's propensity for involvement in youth violence is increased by:</p> <p>a) Having close relationships with peers, associates and family members who are involved in serious violence, organised crime and gangs<sup>1</sup>.</p> <p>b) Low levels of aspiration<sup>2</sup>.</p> <p>c) Risk-taking attitudes and behaviours (such as carrying weapons)<sup>3</sup>.</p> <p>d) Poor emotional control<sup>4</sup></p> <p>e) Low levels of pro-social values<sup>5</sup></p>	<p>Young people aged 10-11 from identified Primary schools in Manchester City Council.</p> <p>Must have experiences 3 or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Witnessed or experienced violence</li> <li>- Parental separation</li> <li>- Parental mental health</li> <li>- Criminal involvement</li> <li>- Substance misuse in the family home</li> <li>- Risk of disengaging from mainstream education</li> </ul> <p>CYP will not be eligible if they already have interventions from multiple other services.</p>	<p><b>One-to-one mentoring/coaching sessions around Healthy Relationships, Emotions, their environment and their future</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gives CYP access to a positive role model with whom they can identify and who can model positive behaviour</li> <li>- Helps CYP understand the level and dynamics of risk associated with their behaviours</li> <li>- Provides sessions on social and emotional learning</li> <li>- Gives CYP knowledge about how to understand and control their emotions</li> <li>- Encourages CYP to consider options for their future and supports them to make informed, positive choices</li> <li>- Helps CYP transition well from Primary school to Secondary school</li> <li>- Helps CYP develop skills to sustain healthy, positive relationships</li> <li>- Gives CYP strategies to disengage from contextual factors that might carry risk</li> </ul>	<p>CYP has improved understanding of the risks associated with behaviour</p> <p>CYP have improved pro-social values and behaviours</p> <p>CYP have improved skills in emotional regulation</p> <p>Increased number of CYP reporting they have a trusted relationships with a positive role model</p>	<p>CYP demonstrate pro-social values and behaviour</p> <p>CYP has fewer contacts with police</p> <p>CYP have positive and healthy transitions to secondary school</p> <p>CYP engages with more positive role models and has more positive trusted relationships</p> <p>CYP report that they have improved positive relationships with peers, associates, family members, school and other conventional societal interventions.</p>	<p>For the treatment group there is a reduction in:</p> <p>a) Violent criminal offences</p> <p>b) Organised crime</p> <p>c) Gang membership</p> <p>d) Non-violent offences</p>

## 4 Client Journey

A high-level client journey through the BLOCKS intervention, based on the original intention of the programme, is illustrated in Figure 2a (below). The same client journey with the key data capture opportunities for the evaluation is illustrated in Figure 2b (below). The client journey can be described as follows. It commences with the identification of the schools in which the BLOCKS programme is to be delivered. The schools were selected by the GM VRU on the basis that they were in deprived areas in GM, and as such likely to be supporting children with above average vulnerabilities, and that they were willing to participate in the programme.

The cohort identification referral process serves to identify children that the school regard as eligible to participate in the BLOCKS programme. To this end, the Salford Foundation Operations Manager meets with key school staff with the aim of explaining the intent and referral criteria of the programme. The BLOCKS programme has the following referral criteria:

- the child has witnessed or experienced violence
- the child has experienced parental separation
- the child has experienced parental mental ill health
- the child has a family member engaged in criminality
- there is substance misuse in the family home
- the child exhibits a risk of disengaging from mainstream education

To be eligible to participate in the programme a child must have experienced at least three of these criteria. The programme requires teachers / safeguarding leads at the school to compile a list of those children whom they believe would meet these criteria. Here it is important to note that whilst the engagement (or not) of a child within the school setting might be self-evident, the remaining criteria will only be known to school staff through pupil or parental disclosure, or through the involvement of outside agencies. This highlights the quality of the relationships that teachers require building with children, their families and the other agencies working in the community to accurately identify children meeting the criteria of the programme.

In this pilot phase of the BLOCKS programme, the same number (maximum 15) of places were made available irrespective of the size of the school or of the demand for the programme.

Once the list of children was compiled, parents were contacted by the school to gain their consent for the child to participate in the programme and to complete their registration. Following this, the BLOCKS programme mentor, based in the school, was able to commence work with the child.

The programme (school / young person meetings) commences with the mentor receiving background information from the school staff about each child. The mentor then meets with each child, explaining the programme and the reason(s) for their inclusion on it. Thereafter, the mentor meets with each child on a weekly/fortnightly basis to work through the 4 modules comprising the programme, with each module spanning 5-6 sessions. At the commencement and end of their engagement with the programme, the children are encouraged to complete a self-reflection form (Note: In year one of the programme, some children also completed the self-reflection form mid-way through the programme). Clarification is offered, if needed, but otherwise the forms are completed independently by each child. Assessment of these data (see Section 7) provides one measure of the progress of each child. Specifically, it enables an assessment of whether the child has become more self-aware, improved their confidence and self-esteem, enabling them to better manage their emotions and understand the impact of their actions on others and to stay safe.

The decision on the next step for each child takes place upon their completion of the programme and (typically) at the end of the school year. At this point the Operations Manager and programme mentor meet to discuss the progress of each child. The BLOCKS programme deploys a traffic light system, classifying each child as being red, amber or green, indicating the level of support they are assessed to need in the next academic year. If classified as red, the child is assessed as requiring support for another year, due to the extent and complexity of their on-going needs. If classified as amber, it is determined that child can exit the programme but that further supporting information is required (from the school) to refer the child to another appropriate helping agency. In this instance, data is captured by school staff and mentors using the BLOCKS Star Tool, Supporting Information and BLOCKS Referral forms. If classified as green, it is assessed that the child has made sufficient progress to exist the programme.

Figure 2b identifies four potential data capture opportunities for the evaluation, these being: the eligibility criteria of children participating in the programme; schools context data; the

completed self-reflection forms of children participating in the programme; and the decisions made on the next step for children participating in the programme. Each of these data offer the potential to offer insight on the efficacy of the BLOCKS programme. The eligibility criteria of children participating in year one of the programme and their self-reflection forms were available to this phase of the evaluation.

Figure 2a BLOCKS programme Client Journey

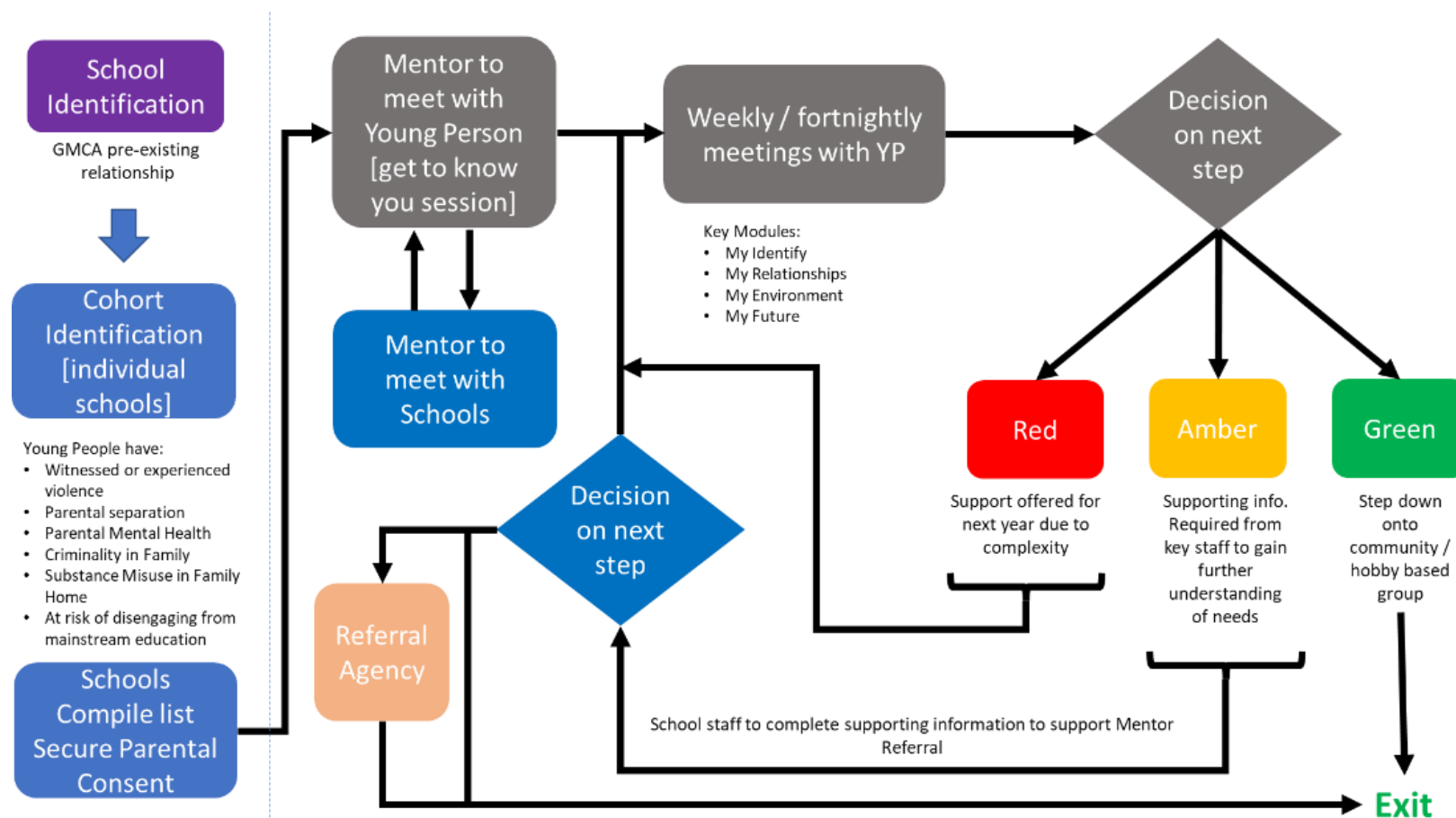
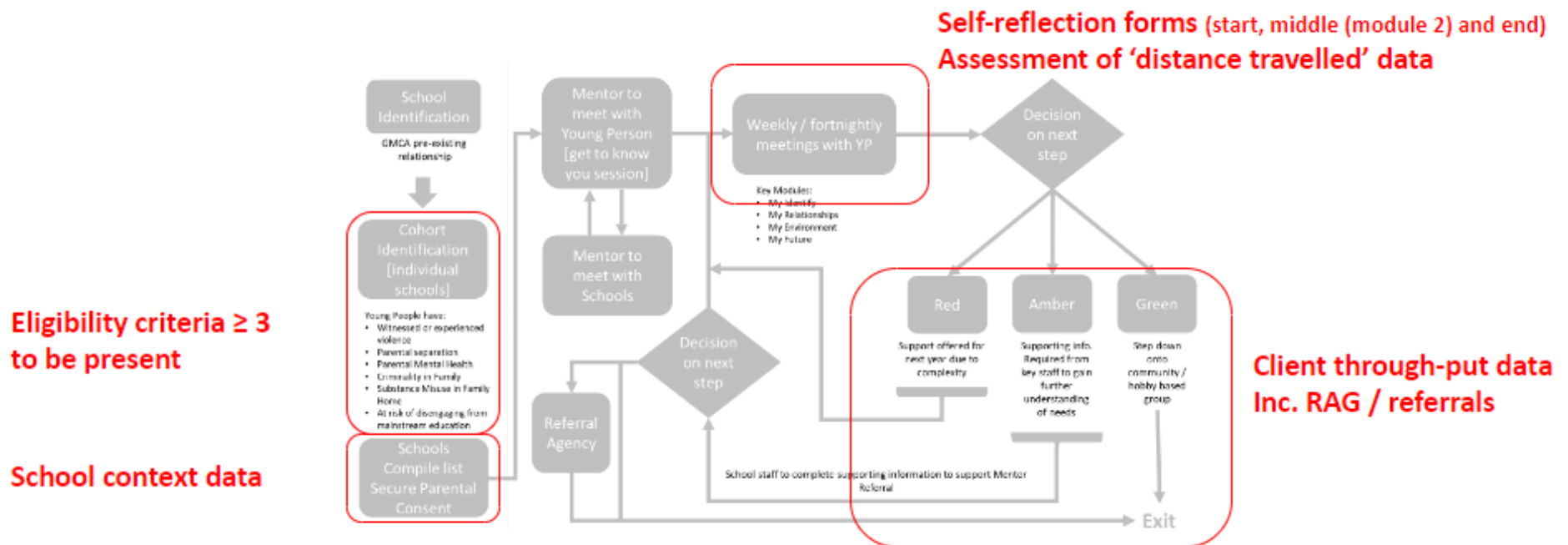




Figure 2b BLOCKS programme Client Journey data capture opportunities



## 5 Teachers' perspectives of the BLOCKS programme

This section of the report presents an overview of teachers' perspectives of the BLOCKS programme. It spans an account of their understanding of the programme and the referral of children to it, to an assessment of the successes achieved by the programme. Those interviewed were responsible for identifying children eligible to participate in the BLOCKS programme and liaising with the programme mentor and the Salford Foundation Operations Manager. They were also well placed to note any changes in the behaviour and attitudes of the children participating in the programme. Of the 10 schools that participated in the programme, 5 made staff available to be interviewed. In these terms, the findings must be treated with caution and as they are not necessarily representative of the views of all schools participating in the programme.

### *Awareness of the BLOCKS programme*

The teachers reported that their school had been invited to participate in the programme by their Academy Trust CEO or Director of Education. They noted that the Operations Manager spent considerable effort in explaining the ambition of the programme. To this end teachers recognised that the BLOCKS programme intends *"supporting children to make successful transitions to High School, but also supporting them to choose good pathways that will keep them away from criminal activities that some of them are involved with or might become involved with in the future"* and *"making sure that children are aware of the dangers in the community and helping them build strategies and coping mechanisms that will enable them to cope with these dangers"*.

### *Referral process*

The referral process developed across the first year of the programme's implementation. Initially, teachers were asked to select pupils that they regarded as exhibiting problematic behaviours and who were in danger of disengagement with school. Thus, teachers reported that they sought to identify children who were *"vulnerable or at risk in terms of potential criminal exploitation"*, *"potentially disengaged in school"* and *"on whom we had a bit of contextual intelligence in terms of what they were up to out and about at school and maybe getting into a little bit of trouble"*. On this basis, some teachers reported that *"we had quite a long list of children that we were thinking about referring to the programme because we*

*considered them quite vulnerable, at risk from exclusion and with links to criminal activities in the community. It was agreed that all our children would benefit from the programme” and “if we (i.e., the BLOCKS programme) had more resource, we would have referred more children. But because of this constraint, we’ve had to pick the children with the most pressing needs”.*

In time, a set of referral criteria were established for the programme (see Section 4 Client Journey). Some teachers reported that once the Operations Manager had explained the referral criteria of the programme, and that a child’s participation rested on them possessing three or more risk factors, that this helped them in the selection process. However, whilst recognising the need to establish more formal eligibility criteria to manage the demand for the programme, other teachers preferred the freedom that the initial selection process gave them. They noted that *“some children don’t fit into those boxes and actually it would be really valuable to put them on the programme”, “it was more difficult because there were children that we wanted to [select but we] couldn’t, because they didn’t fit the criteria” “it was just that typically they ticked 2 boxes and our more sort of general concerns about their mental health or things like social complexity [were not included]”*. In instances in which schools did not have sufficient children who met the eligibility criteria, the decision was made to open selection to year 5 as well as year 6 children or to offer some places to a neighbouring school that shared the same BLOCKS mentor. In overview, whilst the eligibility criteria enabled the targeting of the programme and it also served to highlight varied demand across the participating schools.

### *Barriers to participation*

For a child to participate in the BLOCKS programme, parental consent was required. Access to parents was noted as being difficult, with *“some parents not answering the phone”*. In some instances, therefore, the children were regarded as being receptive, but their parents weren’t. In each of the schools, 1 child who was eligible to participate was unable to do so because of a lack of parental consent. This issue was addressed (see Section 6 Programme staff perspectives of BLOCKS) by transferring the process of gaining parental consent from the school to the programme mentors. To support this exercise, the mentors undertook home visits, whilst the programme developed a video to help explain the mentoring offer to families.

Relatedly, the teachers were concerned that some children, who participated in the programme, were less frequently engaged / unable to engage during the summer months. Another issue affecting participation, noted by the teachers, was that of language (i.e., when English was not the first language of the family/child). Finally, one teacher noted that *“one thing I did find, there were three children who were top of my list to refer. But they were in Year 4 (i.e., a year younger than the programme’s referral criteria) and not eligible for the programme. These problems are starting at an earlier age. We could have done with this programme being available for younger children”*.

### *Success*

As children are used to a variety of adults and agencies being present in the school environment, the teachers reported that there were no issues between the children participating in the programme and the other children in the school, i.e., the programme did not result in the stigmatisation of participating children. In the first year of the programme’s operation, some children benefitted from the programme over the course of a full academic year, whilst some only received the programme for part of the academic year. Nevertheless, the teachers reported that the programme generated beneficial outcomes across both cohorts: *“The majority of our children were in Year 5, so they are getting the full benefit of the programme. The level of (behaviour-related) incidents with these children has reduced. While older pupils, going from year 6 to year 7, may not have had a full year of intervention, all bar one have progressed to High School without the need for further referrals or support, which shows great impact”* and *“I have not had incidents of children being reported of engaging in problematic behaviour out of school”*. One teacher concluded that *“it’s good to have the additionality of the BLOCKS programme which provides the resource for children that need more, for those with higher needs, greater vulnerabilities and risks”*.

In any given school, BLOCKS runs on a particular day during the week, but it will vary the lesson that the student is taken from to engage with the programme’s activities. The teachers do not regard the students missing lessons as problematic because *“the kids that [the programme is] working with have barriers to their learning that [the mentor] addresses more so than the English or Maths lesson that they’re coming out of”*. The teachers regarded the BLOCKS mentor as *“trusted adults”*, acting as constant throughout the child’s final year of primary school.

### *Communication with BLOCKS programme staff*

The relationship between school staff and outside agencies plays a key role in the success of any partnership. Here it is important to note that BLOCKS staff were held in high regard by teachers, *“(name) is great a real asset to the programme. We meet regularly to pass on any issues regarding the children. (name) provides a briefing on the development of the programme, so we know what to expect”*.

### *Exit strategy and recommendations*

The teachers expressed concern at the prospect of the BLOCKS programme not continuing, noting that *“it would be really sad if the project stopped because it is having a real impact with children”*. Further, the teachers recommended that the programme be extended beyond its current primary school setting, noting that year 7 children have different needs. Thus, one teacher commented that *“High School is different to Primary School. Will they (the children who have participated in the BLOCKS programme) regress or will the benefits persist?”*, whilst the other noted that *“a year is a short term, the project should be extended to support the children over a longer time period – even if this is a lighter touch”*. In response to these insights, participation in the BLOCKS programme (see Section 4 Client journey) has been extended for a small number of students, identified as requiring on-going support into year 7. Programme mentors work with these students to improve the likelihood of their successful transition to High School. Finally, all teachers recommended that the BLOCKS programme become a permanent feature in schools because, and in their view, *“it is working”*. However, a couple of schools indicated that their preference was for the eligibility criteria to be relaxed, with one teacher stating that *“I think it's a really good model. It was better when the criteria were more open. I understand the need for criteria.”*

### *Conclusion*

Teachers' perspectives of the BLOCKS programme are overwhelmingly positive, though it should be noted that only 5 of the schools participated in this aspect of the evaluation. The teachers reported having a clear understanding of the aims and objectives of the programme, as well as of its eligibility criteria. Some found the criteria helpful though others, whilst recognising the need to establish such criteria, would have preferred greater flexibility in referring children to the programme. The teachers noted varying demand for the programme

across their schools and that BLOCKS staff worked to overcome barriers to the participation of children. The teachers reported that the children were not stigmatised for participating in the programme, exhibited positive changes in the behaviour and (almost all of them) had made a successful transition to High School. Finally, the warmth of teachers' feelings for the programme were reflected in their desire for it to be continued.

## 6 Programme staff perspectives of BLOCKS

This section of the report presents an overview of programme staff perspectives of the BLOCKS programme. The programme co-ordinator, 5 mentors and a representative of the Pennine Trust participated in this aspect of the evaluation. The section focuses on the adaptations made to the programme in response to the challenges that it faced in its first year of operation. It also addresses the role of the Pennine Trust in the delivery of the programme.

### *Referral process*

As noted previously (see Section 5 Teachers' perspectives of the BLOCKS programme), and at the outset, the schools selected the pupils to participate in the programme. The schools identified children that they regarded as vulnerable, who were exhibiting problematic behaviours and in danger of disengagement. However, and following case reviews by the BLOCKS programme team, it was found that this led to children with marked differences in vulnerability being referred to the programme. These differences were manifest in the varied speeds at which the children were able to move through programme content. In response, it was determined to amend the eligibility criteria for the programme. As the programme co-ordinator noted, *"we thought we needed to give a bit more direction [to the identification of] young people to join the programme. Those six referral criteria are narrow enough to slim it down and direct it [i.e., to enable the programme focus on those young people with the greatest needs], but wide enough to give schools the flexibility to target the right people"*. Changing the eligibility criteria also led to the mentors being provided with more information surrounding the vulnerabilities of the children. A mentor commented that, *"it's quite beneficial for us as mentors because it kind of gives us a little bit more of an insight as to what this child might be facing. Then we can kind of pre-plan what we could do to help them stay in school"*.

### *Barriers to participation*

As noted previously (see Section 5 Teachers' perspectives of the BLOCKS programme), the schools faced a challenge in gaining parental (or guardian) consent for some of the children to participate in the programme. Whilst grateful for the substantive efforts made by the schools, the Salford Foundation took on this responsibility, believing that its direct contact with parents would improve the likelihood of gaining consent. The mentors believed that the

reluctance of some parents to grant consent was rooted in their lack of understanding of the programme and of the Salford Foundation, and linked to a distrust of public services, *“the parents would be looking at the programme like it's somebody from outside. They didn't know the Salford Foundation, it sounds very close to social worker, and they didn't want that in their house”*. The mentors made home visits to explain the ambition of the programme and to hopefully gain parental consent. Acknowledging the sensitivity attached to establishing a programme aimed at children *“identified as being at risk of criminal exploitation”* and recognising that *“parents want to know why their child has been referred to the programme”*, the mentors explained that the programme had been designed *“to support the child in transitioning to High School”*, something that they found that most parents / guardians *“were kind of quite open to”*. Whilst the mentors continue to work solely with the young people, they believe that the good relationships they have developed with parents (or guardians) has benefited the delivery of the programme, i.e., the parents are supportive of BLOCKS working with their children.

#### *Delivery format*

At the outset, programme sessions were delivered on a fortnightly basis. However, the mentors realised that if a child missed a mentoring day it would lead to break in contact with the programme of at least one month. They were concerned that this might serve to undermine the momentum of their work with the children, negatively impacting the effectiveness of the programme. Relatedly, the BLOCKS programme moved to introduce holiday provision, offering a variety of one-to-one activities in neutral or home settings, that would then be built upon when the child returned to school. In overview, the mentors were keen to emphasise the value of providing continuity of support to the children participating in the programme.

#### *Communication with school staff*

The mentors noted that the designation or role of the key contact in the participating schools varied. The key contacts ranged from a Deputy Head of a school to a school safeguarding officer. Despite this, the mentors reported that they benefitted from excellent liaison arrangements and communication with the schools. It was typical for a mentor to observe that *“the school gave us all the information we needed about the [children]”*. Further, and as



the programme became established in each school, the mentors reported that they felt that they had *“become part of that school culture”*. This was viewed as helpful. Positive relationships with school staff were observed to support information sharing about the participating children, which in turn enhanced the effectiveness of the programme’s delivery.

#### *The role of the Pennine Trust*

The BLOCKS programme mentors are supported by a specialist psychotherapist working on behalf of the Pennine Trust. The psychotherapist describes their role as *“providing consultation and training...thinking about working with the young people, ideas of how to put that into practice...I also provide the team with some training around working with trauma, attachment, self-care and so on”*. In overview, this support ensures that the mentors have the appropriate toolset to work with vulnerable children in general, as well as guidance about how to work with specific children. The mentors warmly welcome this support as it *“extends beyond the mandatory training provided by the Salford Foundation”*. Further, that it enables them *“to discuss the children that they are working with, enabling them to move on the mentoring”*. The psychotherapist notes that a key aspect of the support that they provide is to ensure that the process of mentoring does not have a negative impact on programme staff. They recognise the challenge of working with a cohort of children who have all had traumatic experiences and exhibit behavioural problems, stating that *“it can be really hard [for mentors] to sit with some of the difficult content and know some of the experiences these children... managing this includes thinking around looking after ourselves, remembering what's within our control, remembering to safeguard ourselves for longevity in this work”*.

The psychotherapist regards their role to have grown in significance since the eligibility criteria of the programme have been tightened as, *“now mentors are working with children with at least three specific experiences rather than the more general criteria used initially”*. The psychotherapist notes that mentors tend to ask for support on cases in which the parent or guardian is currently (or has recently been) in prison, is experiencing mental ill-health, or is involved in a criminal case. Further that the mentors are best placed to provide the children with support because of the *“great relationships that they have established with these children”*.

## *Conclusion*

The interviews with programme staff (i.e., the programme co-ordinator and 5 mentors) highlighted numerous ways in which BLOCKS has been adapted to meet emergent challenges. Changes to the eligibility criteria for the programme were believed to have helped target the programme at those children experiencing the greatest need and, inadvertently, to have helped mentors to prepare for working with specific children. During the year, the mentors took on the responsibility of securing parental (or guardian) consent for children to participate in the programme. This was achieved through making home visits, which mentors believed served to overcome uncertainties about the programme and to enhance support from parents. The delivery format of the programme was adjusted to ensure the continuity of contact with children over the course of the school year. The mentors report excellent liaison arrangements with school staff. Finally, the mentors welcomed the training and advice provided for them by a psychotherapist working for the Pennine Trust. This was seen as helpful for working with the client group in general and with certain children in particular. The psychotherapist also helped the mentors to cope with working with a particularly vulnerable client group.

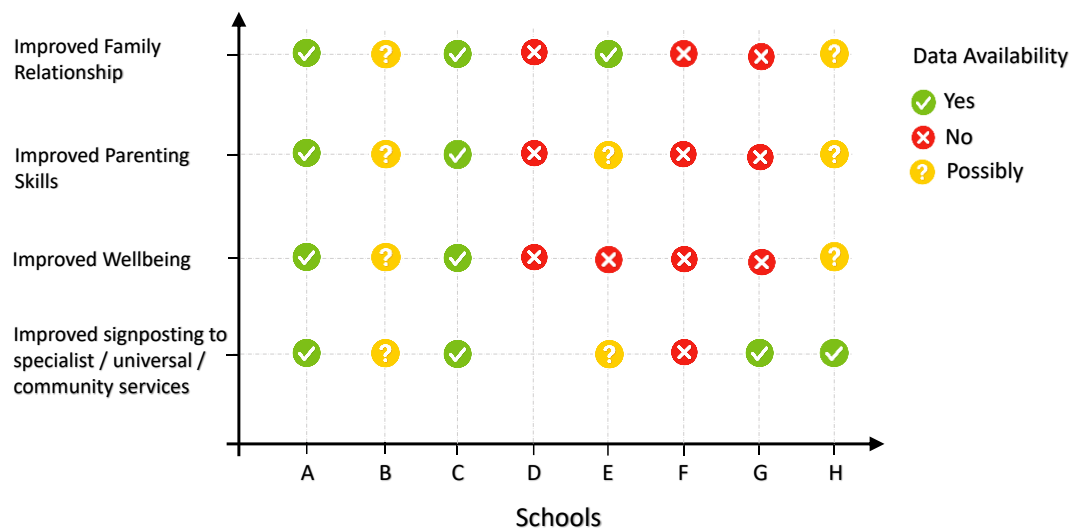
## 7 Schools' Data

At the inception of the BLOCKS programme, the GM VRU explored the potential of securing schools' data. The ambition was to develop a more complete account (than that presented in Section 2) of the challenges being faced by the children (and the parents / families of the children) attending participating primary schools, as well as of the achievements of the programme. The findings of this exercise, as derived for each participating school, are presented in Figures 3 and 4, below.

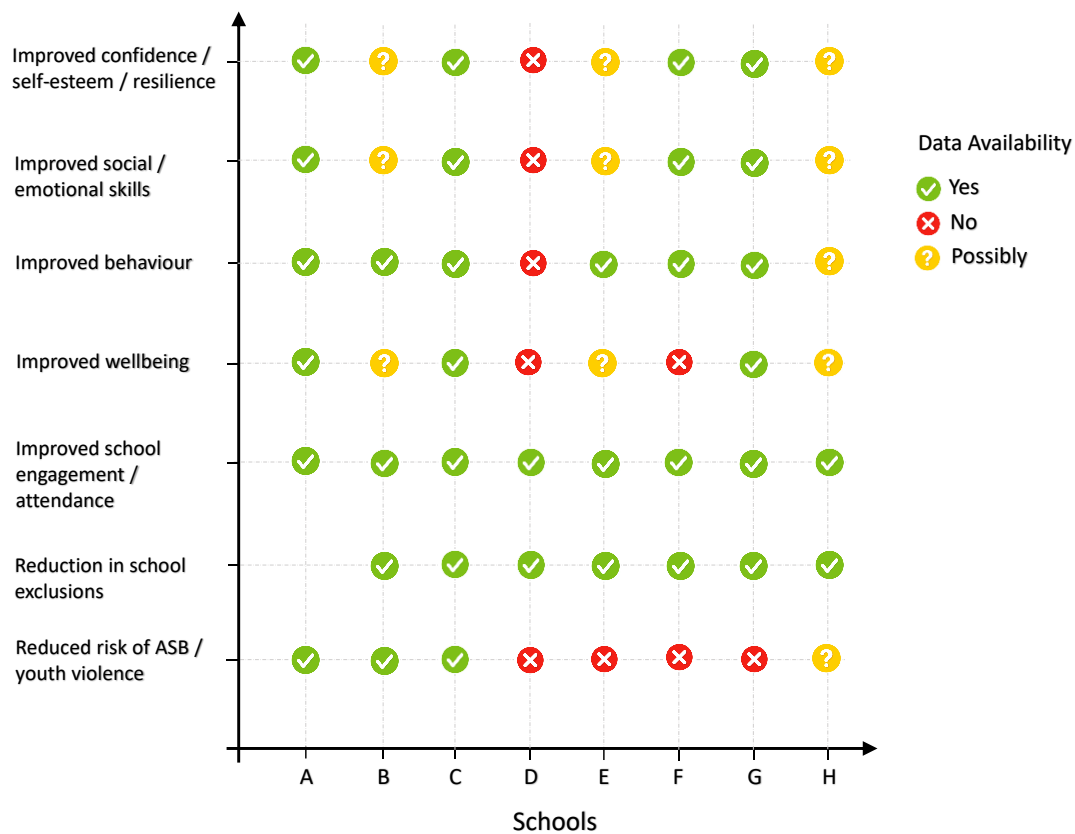
Figure 3 identifies the availability of parent / family-related data in each participating school related to the evidencing of: improved family relationships; improved parenting skills; improved (family) well-being; and improved signposting to services. It is apparent that only schools A and C perceive that they possess data spanning all the categories requested. The remainder of the schools stated that they possibly could or could not provide data spanning most of the categories requested. Of the four categories probed, measuring improvements in signposting is the data that schools were most likely to be able to provide (4 of 8). Given that factors in a child's homelife are associated with likelihood of their involvement in criminality and their risk of criminal exploitation (See section 3), not being able to have a measure of these represents a challenge to the BLOCKS programme and its evaluation.

Figure 4 presents the child-related data that the schools are confident of being able to provide. The categories requested include data relevant to the evidencing of: improved confidence; improved social skills; improved behaviour; improved well-being; improved attendance; reduced exclusions; and a reduced risk of youth violence. In overview, it is apparent that the schools are more confident of being able to provide these data categories. Almost all the schools report the likelihood of being able to provide attendance and exclusions data, whilst 6 of the 8 schools report being able to provide data relating to improved behaviour. Of the remaining data categories, typically those requiring judgements to be made by school staff, only a minority of the schools reported that they would be able to provide such data.

**Figure 3 School Transitions Evaluation Data Availability (Parents / Families)**



**Figure 4 School Transitions Evaluation Data Availability (Pupils)**



## *Conclusion*

The schools participating in the BLOCKS programme were more likely to report the availability of data relating to children as opposed to data relating to the children's parents / families. Moreover, of the data relating to children, the schools were more likely to report the ability to provide data relating to routine measures (e.g., attendance) as opposed to that requiring the professional judgement of their staff. In overview, the limited availability of these data highlights the value of the data capture procedures established by the BLOCKS programme. It also highlights the important roles played by teachers in identifying vulnerable children and mentors in engaging with children's parents and families. Accessing data relating to routine measures would provide some assessment of the challenges faced by the schools participating in the programme, enabling the work of the BLOCKS programme to be set in context.

## 8 Client data

This section of the report presents insights generated from three types of client data captured by the evaluation. These include referral data (i.e., the risk factors exhibited by the children referred to the BLOCKS programme), distance-travelled data (i.e., the self-reflection forms completed by children at the beginning and end of the programme) and vignettes (i.e., typical client programme engagement narratives). The analyses of these data are presented in turn. In the first year of operation 141 children were referred on to the programme. Of this number, 108 completed the entry and exit self-reflection forms (See distance-travelled data, below). To ensure that analyses in this section speak to a consistent cohort of children, it deploys the data related to these 108 children. The differences in the counts of data relating to different moments in the client journey reflect the referral criteria and data collection tools being developed as the programme was rolled out in its first year of operation, i.e., some children joined the BLOCKS programme prior to these being established.

### *Referral data*

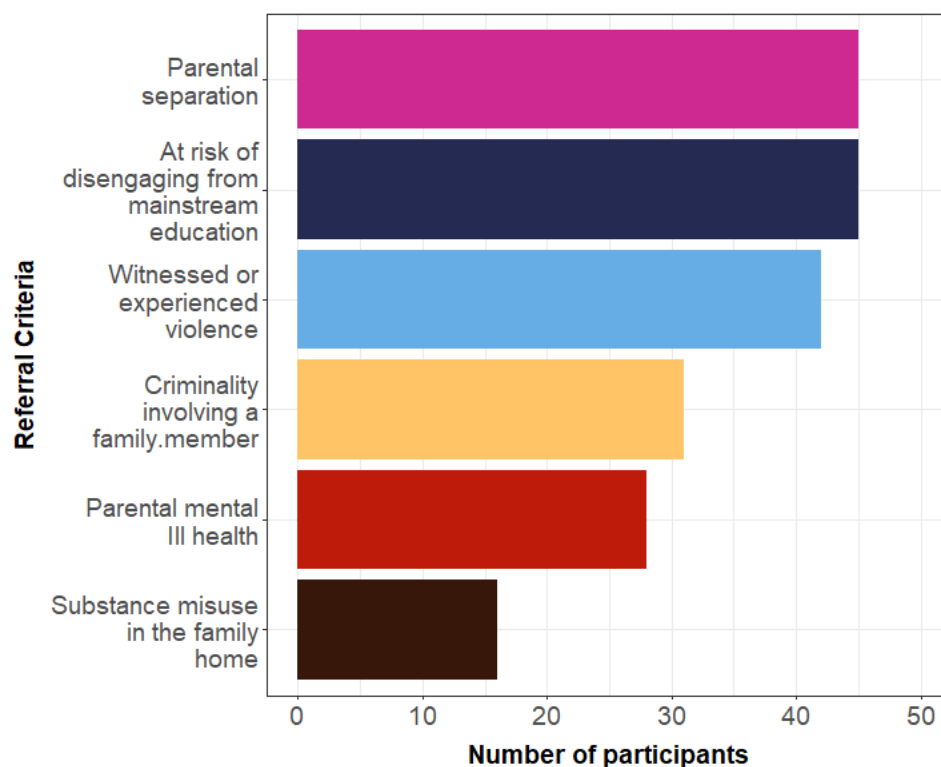
To target the programme at those with the greatest vulnerabilities, programme eligibility (See Section 4 Client Journey) was determined by a child possessing 3 or more of a total of 6 risk factors. Prior to the eligibility criteria being established, as noted in Sections 5 and 6 of the report, the schools selected children to participate in the programme that they considered to be at risk of exclusion and known to possess various vulnerabilities. Table 1, below, indicates that referral data were collected for 59 of the 108 children who completed the exit self-reflection form. Referral data were not recorded in 49 cases, as these children were accepted on to the programme prior to the establishment of these criteria. Of the 59 children for whom referral data were recorded, 6 met only 2 eligibility criteria, whilst the majority (47 or 80%) met 3 or 4 criteria. A small number of children (6) met 5 or 6 criteria.

**Table 1            Programme participant referral data**

<b>Number of criteria met</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Missing data	49
1	0
2	6
3	26
4	21
5	3
6	3
Total	108

Figure 5, below, identifies the risk factors attributed to the 59 children for whom eligibility criteria were recorded. As is evident from the figure, parental separation, and the risk of disengaging from mainstream education were the most prevalent risk factors, being present in 45 of 59 cases. The child having witnessed, or experienced violence, was also identified in a large proportion of cases.

**Figure 5            The referral criteria exhibited by the children participating in BLOCKS**



## Distance Travelled

The BLOCKS programme is comprised of activities that aim to empower and support children to become more self-aware, improve their confidence and self-esteem; manage their emotions, understand the impact of their actions on others and to stay safe. To ascertain whether a child's engagement with the programme serves to deliver noticeable improvements in these outcomes, children are asked to complete a self-reflection form. The form, comprising eight questions, is intended to be completed at the commencement and at end of the child's engagement with the programme. Of the 114 children who completed an entry self-reflection form, 108 completed an exit self-reflection form. By comparing the answers to the entry and exit self-reflection forms, it is possible to assess the distance travelled by the children. These data are presented in Table 2, below. In overview, and across all questions, positive responses were evident in 41.2% of cases, negative responses in 24.7% of cases, and no change in 28.7% of cases. The highest number of positive (55%) and negative (32%) responses are associated with Q7 (*'I am able to bounce back from challenging situations.'*). The lowest number of positive responses (15%) are associated with Q4 (*'I like spending time with family.'*), whilst the lowest number of negative responses (20%) are associated with Q2 (*'I like school and I'm doing well.'*).

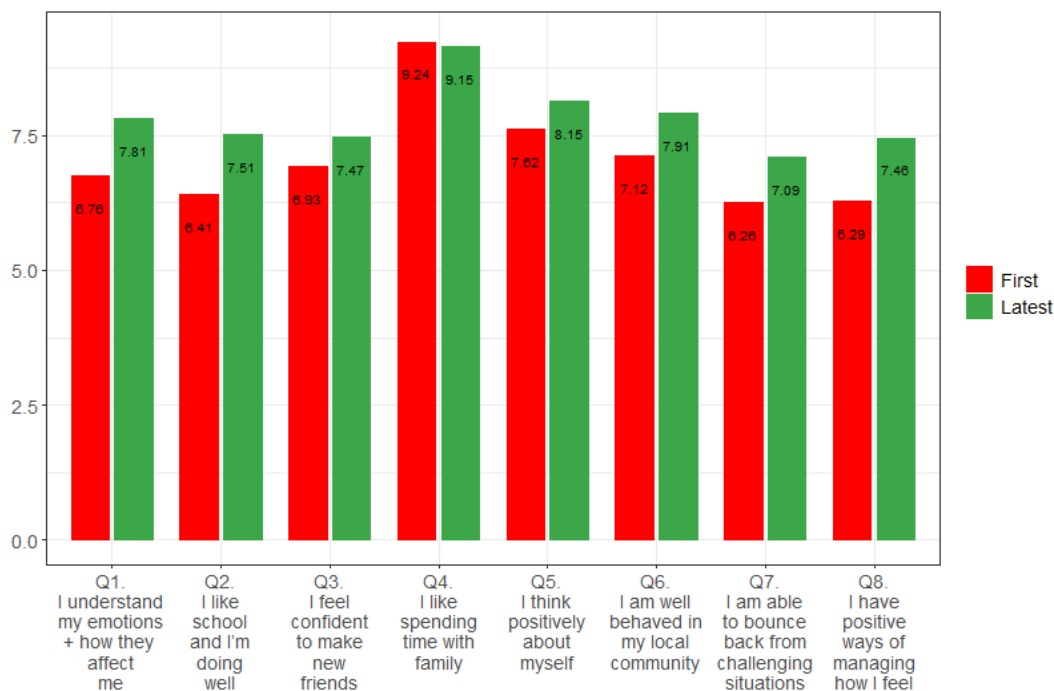
**Table 2** Summary of distance travelled from entry to exit self-reflection forms

Assessments	Positive	No Change	Negative	Missing Data
<b>Q1. I understand my emotions + how they affect me.</b>	52 (48%)	28 (26%)	28 (26%)	6
<b>Q2. I like school and I'm doing well.</b>	56 (52%)	30 (28%)	22 (20%)	6
<b>Q3. I feel confident to make new friends.</b>	41 (38%)	34 (31%)	33 (31%)	6
<b>Q4. I like spending time with family.</b>	16 (15%)	69 (64%)	23 (21%)	6
<b>Q5. I think positively about myself.</b>	45 (42%)	37 (34%)	26 (24%)	6
<b>Q6. I am well behaved in my local community.</b>	52 (48%)	31 (29%)	25 (23%)	6
<b>Q7. I am able to bounce back from challenging situations.</b>	59 (55%)	14 (13%)	35 (32%)	6
<b>Q8. I have positive ways of managing how I feel.</b>	55 (51%)	19 (18%)	33 (31%)	7
<b>TOTAL</b>	376 (41.2%)	262 (28.7%)	225 (24.7%)	49 (0.05%)

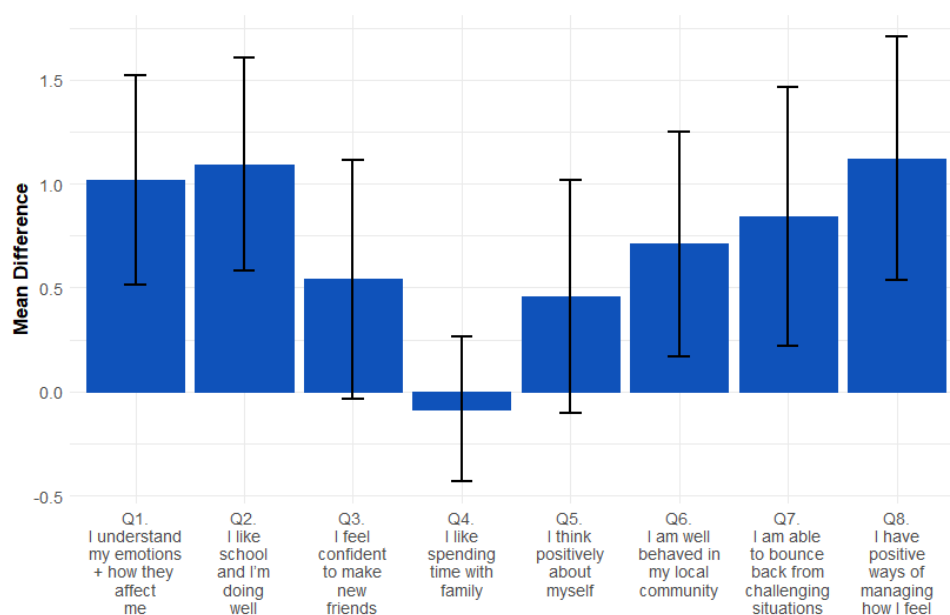


Figure 6, below, presents a comparison of the entry and exit self-reflection form mean scores. These data indicate that positive changes were observed in the responses to 7 of the 8 questions contained in the survey. Only Q4 (*'I like spending time with family.'*) exhibits an overall negative change from the entry to exit self-reflection form. Figure, 7, below, presents the findings of a paired t-test. This test enables an assessment of the statistical significance of the changes between the mean scores of the entry and exit self-reflection forms. In overview, the results of this test indicate that statistically significant improvements in the mean scores were attained in 5 out of 8 questions (i.e., Q1, Q2, Q6, Q7, and Q8). This finding is suggestive of the programme generating a positive change amongst the children participating in the programme, as measured on their exit from it.

**Figure 6      A comparison of the entry and exit self-reflection form mean scores**



**Figure 7      The significance of the mean score differences**



### *Vignettes*

The BLOCKS team, supported by MMU, developed several client case studies. These are derived from a composite of various children who participated in the programme. The purpose of the vignettes is to illustrate the diversity and complexity of the challenges faced by the children, how the programme seeks to support them, and instances of both success and disengagement. In terms of this latter purpose, it is important to emphasise both the strengths of the programme, and its limitations, set against the environment in which it operates.

The BLOCKS team reported that the programme worked well for many children. The first case study (below) illustrates how a child, who fully engages with and completes the programme, can build their overall resilience as well as learn strategies for managing their emotions. These children can build their networks within the school, becoming more involved with its activities.

### **Case study 1**

A young person was referred to the BLOCKS programme due to concerns around their (negative) relationships in their local community and their sibling's involvement in criminal activity. The YP has grown up in a single-parent household where English is spoken as a second language. Therefore, an older sibling plays a vital role in bridging communication between the parents and school. Despite financial constraints, the family try their best to make sure that their child has access to most things they need for school and social life. The YP really enjoys learning about science and technology in school. However, challenges emerge when emotions escalate, impacting their ability to regulate feelings, occasionally resulting in disruptive behaviour during classes.

On joining the BLOCKS programme, the YP started a journey of learning about themselves and how their emotions affect them. They have also spent time with their mentor discussing identity and communication skills. Following the use of strategies and broadening their understanding, the positive impact is evident in various aspects of YP's life, from their attainment in school to personal growth. The YP faces encounters with gang-related threats and violence. With this information being shared by school staff, the mentor has been able to support the YP in finding coping mechanisms and support in their local community to try and distance them from being around community violence and group activity. Anxiety and low self-esteem have also been a feature of the sessions in Blocks. The YP was initially concerned about attending high school, and so work has been carried out around this, seeking to address some of the unknowns that the YP expressed about high school in their sessions.

Recent conflicts, such as not being invited to a party, provided an opportunity for YP to apply the coping strategies. Recognising emotions and choosing to remove themselves from potentially challenging situations showed a new approach to conflict resolution. As this YP continues to grow, ongoing support in emotional regulation and conflict resolution remains a key focus in sessions. Exploring extracurricular opportunities further enhances their growth. Collaborative efforts with in-school services and local support programmes are being used to provide further support. As a result of the network of support they have received the YP also took the opportunity to become the head boy at school, bringing them a great source of pride for them and their family.

In contrast, whilst some children initially engage with their BLOCKS mentor, outside influences sometimes serve to influence the number of sessions they are able or willing to attend, noting that the sessions take place during school hours. In consequence, the child leaves the intervention without having accessed the full level of support available to them. These are cases in which more limited successes (below) is achieved.

### **Case study 2**

A young person was referred into the BLOCKS programme due to concerns around their involvement in anti-social behaviour in their local community and a couple of incidents of disruptive behaviour in school. At home, the YP has 2 siblings. Previously the family has faced challenges, particularly with the children being placed in foster care due to incidents of violence towards their parents, and incidents of domestic violence in the family home. The YP has had to navigate a challenging journey through multiple foster homes. The BLOCKS programme was intended to be a main source of support for the YP, with the referral stemming from a combination of violent outbursts at school and a noticeable disengagement from education. The YP's history

includes participation in fights, witnessing violence in the family home, instances of throwing objects within the school premises, and an apparent lack of interest in learning.

The YP's dad is currently serving a prison sentence in relation to crimes linked with Domestic Abuse and GBH. The YP has witnessed these incidents, and this has had a profound impact on them. The school and the YP's mentor are seeing the wider impact of this on the YP's attendance, education, and behaviour. They have detailed knowledge of what led to his dad being arrested and convicted. The YP's dad has also spent time in hospital, where there were concerns as to whether his dad would survive the illness or not. When the YP's dad was arrested for GBH, they were present to see this all happen. They have shared in their mentoring session about the way this has made them feel, and that they don't want to believe it happened. They don't want to say anything bad about their dad and the situation and try to think positively.

The YP is also not allowed to visit dad in prison. They get to speak to dad on the phone, but this is not often. Processing the "loss" of their dad has been a focus of sessions. Being able to speak about this with someone has been very valuable to them, as they feel they cannot talk about it with their mum. The YP has been focusing on identity and relationships with their mentor, whilst also developing coping strategies. Throughout YP's journey within the program, challenges emerged within their friendships, leading to a time of disconnection with their mentor and support in school. This disconnection spanned over school sessions and some school holidays, so the time in which the YP has spent in the programme has been inconsistent, therefore limiting their progress in the programme.

Lastly, there are those children whose disengagement (below) is greater still and whose participation may not be supported by their parents / family members. Reflecting on the aims and ambition of the BLOCKS programme, these children would appear to have the most to benefit from engagement with it, but their behaviour, attendance and lack of family support present significant barriers to this.

### **Case study 3**

A young person was referred to the BLOCKS programme due to a significant risk of disengaging from mainstream education and by displaying challenging behaviour both in and out of school. This has been highlighted by school staff and a parent. At home, Dad has been struggling with a chronic illness and has exhibited verbal abuse and violence towards social workers, police, and school staff. The challenges with the young person's engagement have been seen mostly during school holidays. There is a noticeable decline in participation during the summer holidays, with a development of conflict and disruptive behaviour in the local community. In addition to this, the family dynamics further complicate matters, as an older brother has moved back home against advice from professionals. This has created tension between the family and professionals supporting the family. Communication with school and other professionals became challenging making it difficult for the mentor to arrange sessions in the school holidays. This has significantly impacted the YP's progress through the programme and there is a gap in progress compared to other young people on the programme.

This young person has been receiving support since January, exploring modules on identity and relationships with their mentor. However, barriers to progress exist, including challenges in managing emotions and disengagement during sessions. Difficulty maintaining healthy friendships has been a sticking point for the YP previously, particularly when it was thought that the YP was being used by a local gang to transport packages.

This led to the YP pulling away from a lot of their friendships and having low trust for others. The family's resistance to social workers and other professionals has extended to school staff, significantly impacting on parent's trust and support of their child's involvement with Blocks.

Whilst engagement remains a challenge, there are glimpses of improvements. There have been some breakthroughs with attendance with the mentor tailoring the time and content of sessions to help engage them. There has been a noticeable development in their attitude towards sessions following the relocation of the brother. Additionally, sessions discussing relationships and healthy boundaries have contributed to improving friendships and helped the young person to focus more on their healthy relationships.

### *Conclusion*

The preliminary assessment of client data was limited by the availability of data. The shortfall in is, at least in part, a reflection of the referral criteria and data collection tools being developed as the programme was rolled out, i.e., some children joined the BLOCKS programme prior to these being established. Where referral data is available, it indicates that the vast majority (47 or 80%) met 3 or 4 of the eligibility criteria. The assessment of the 108 entry and exit self-reflection forms, completed by children participating in the programme, indicated statistically significant and positive changes in 5 out of the 8 questions asked. This finding is suggestive of the programme generating a positive change amongst the children participating in the programme, as measured on their exit from it. The vignettes are a useful tool to help illustrate the diversity and complexity of the challenges faced by the children, how the programme seeks to support them, and instances of both success and disengagement.

## 9 Conclusion and Recommendations

This report has presented the findings of an implementation evaluation of the BLOCKS programme. Delivered by the Salford Foundation, the BLOCKS programme is a child centred intervention aimed at supporting vulnerable primary school children to successfully transition into a secondary school setting. The implementation evaluation:

- Developed a theory of change for the BLOCKS programme
- Developed a map of the client journey for the BLOCKS programme
- Undertook a qualitative analysis of teachers' views of the BLOCKS programme
- Undertook a qualitative analysis of staff views of the BLOCKS programme
- Undertook an assessment of the potential of participating schools to provide additional data to support the evaluation of the BLOCKS programme
- Undertook a both a quantitative and a qualitative analysis of the BLOCKS programme client data

In this section of the report the key findings of these exercises and a set of recommendations, inclusive of the next steps of the evaluation are presented.

The BLOCKS programme theory of change explains the actions (and relations between these actions) that are required to achieve the intended long-term outcomes of the programme. The theory of change is consistent with the overarching GM VRU logic model. It has been designed to be 'live' in that it is capable of being revised and augmented as new evidence becomes available to guide its development. The theory of change is informed by evidence of the factors associated with a heightened likelihood of engagement in violent behaviours and of the *potential* of mentoring programmes to reduce problematic behaviours. The evidence base for the former is substantive, whereas the evidence base for the latter is best described as promising though equivocal – it being uncertain as to whether the subject matter or the method of delivery is the key factor in the success of such programmes. The evidence base identifies skills-based and family focused approaches to offer the greatest promise.

### *Recommendation*

- *Continue to develop and augment the theory of change with reference to emergent evidence from the programme and the international evidence base. Ensure that any further evaluation captures both the content and method of delivery of the BLOCKS programme.*

The client journey for the BLOCKS programme explains its various stages and the key data capture opportunities that they present for an evaluation. Beyond the identification of participating schools, and of the data that they possess that might support an evaluation, the key stages of the programme were identified as: the referral process (i.e., eligibility data); ‘distance travelled’ following engagement with the programme (i.e., data generated from the entry and exit self-reflection forms); and, the next steps or outcomes for the child (i.e., client throughput data). The BLOCKS programme developed and adapted its data capture procedures surrounding the key stages of the programme during its roll-out.

### *Recommendation*

- *It is necessary to ensure the consistent capture of data from year 2 onwards. This will enhance the prospect of undertaking a robust programme impact evaluation.*

Teachers’ perspectives of the BLOCKS programme are overwhelmingly positive, though only 5 of the schools participated in this aspect of the evaluation. The schools held a clear understanding of the aims and objectives of the programme, as well as of its eligibility criteria. Some found the criteria helpful though others would have preferred greater flexibility in referring children. The teachers noted varying demand for the programme across their schools and that BLOCKS staff worked to overcome barriers to the participation of children. The teachers reported that participating children exhibited positive changes in their behaviour and (almost all of them) had made a successful transition to High School. They all wanted the programme to continue. In overview, it is evident that the engagement of teachers with the BLOCKS programme is vital to its success, not least in their identification of, and sharing information about, children.

## *Recommendations*

- *The GM VRU should consider making participation in any ongoing review or evaluation of the programme a requirement of a school's receipt of the BLOCKS programme. Relatedly, the BLOCKS programme should continue to monitor the quality of communication with the designated school liaisons.*

The BLOCKS programme was adapted to meet a set of emergent challenges in its first year of operation. Programme staff believe that the changes made to the eligibility criteria for the programme served to target it at those children experiencing the greatest need. Further, the year, the mentors took on the responsibility of securing parental (or guardian) consent for children to participate in the programme. This was achieved through making home visits, which enhanced the willingness of parents to allow their children to participate in the programme. The delivery format of the programme was adjusted to ensure the continuity of contact with children over the course of the school year. It is important to recognise the training and advice provided to programme staff by a psychotherapist working on behalf of the Pennine Trust. Mentors believed this support helped underpin the effectiveness of their work with vulnerable children in general and with certain children in particular. The psychotherapist also helped the mentors to cope with the stresses associated with working with a particularly vulnerable client group.

## *Recommendation*

*The further evaluation of the BLOCKS programme should include an assessment of the role (content and method of delivery) of the psychotherapist in the delivery of the BLOCKS programme and in the support of its staff*

The GM VRU explored the potential of securing schools' data to enable a more complete account of the challenges being faced by all children, and the parents / families of the children, attending the schools participating in the programme. The types of data sought were linked to the aims and ambition of the BLOCKS programme. As such, these data would serve to illuminate the context in which the programme is being deployed, serving as a benefit to future outcome and impact evaluations. The availability of these data varied markedly across schools. Data relating to children as opposed to their wider family was more likely to be reported as available. Specifically, data relating to routine measures (e.g., attendance) as



opposed to that requiring the professional judgement of their staff (e.g., well-being) was most likely to be available.

#### *Recommendation*

- *Data relating to routine measures, whilst only providing a partial account of the context in which the programme is being deployed, would benefit any future impact evaluation. These data would allow an evaluation of the nature and scale of the challenges being faced by the schools participating in the programme.*

The evaluation was able to undertake a preliminary assessment of the programme referral data, and the entry and exit self-reflection forms (i.e., distance travelled data) completed by children participating in the programme. It determined to focus on the data relating to the 108 children who had completed both self-reflection forms. Of these children, referrals data was missing in 49 cases. Of the 59 children for whom data were recorded, the vast majority (47 or 80%) met 3 or 4 referral criteria. The shortfall in these data is, at least in part, a reflection of the referral criteria and data collection tools being developed as the programme was rolled out, i.e., some children joined the BLOCKS programme prior to these issues being resolved. Assessment of the 108 entry and exit self-reflection forms, completed by children participating in the programme, indicated statistically significant and positive changes in 5 out of the 8 questions asked. This finding is suggestive of the programme generating a positive change amongst the children participating in the programme, as measured on their exit from it. The vignettes help illustrate the diversity and complexity of the challenges faced by the children, how the programme seeks to support them, and instances of both success and disengagement.

#### *Recommendations*

- *To ensure a robust impact evaluation, it will be necessary that programme maintains its revised data collection and recording procedures (i.e., capturing each stage of the client journey. The assessment of client data requires being extended to include client throughput data.*

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