

Research


Children's Workforce
Development Council



Championing the Extended Schools Social Workers role – Prevention and Practice

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Childrens Workforce Development Council (CWDC)'s Practitioner-Led Research projects are small scale research projects carried out by practitioners who deliver and receive services in the children's workforce. These reports are based in a range of settings across the workforce and can be used to support local workforce development.

The reports were completed between September 2009 and February 2010 and apply a wide range of research methodologies. They are not intended to be longitudinal research reports but they provide a snapshot of the views and opinions of the groups consulted as part of the studies. As these projects were time limited, the evidence base can be used to inform planning but should not be generalised across the wider population.

These reports reflect the views of the practitioners that undertook the research. The views and opinions of the authors should not be taken as representative of CWDC.

A new UK Government took office on 11 May. As a result the content in this report may not reflect current Government policy.

Acknowledgment

This research would not have been possible without the host borough's strong interest in striving to improve and develop services further that generates a healthy interest in research. I pay tribute to the thoroughly impressive range of well thought-out and integrated children's services with long serving professionals who work incredibly effectively together for the betterment of children's lives. Praise is expressed to management for their sensitive rollout of the extended schools social work service, which has demonstrated the department's forward thinking approach and is testament to an interest in developing new approaches to safeguarding children.

Strengths identified in the schools researched should be celebrated. One of the privileges in this role is working with a range of experienced competent practitioners including parental workers, counsellors, mentors, welfare officers, school nurses, psychologists, CAMHS workers and of course, teaching staff. Whether it is the development of a pervading inclusive ethos, parenting education programme, accessibility for children with severe learning disabilities or creative approach to mentoring, schools researched have individually responded innovatively to advancing the social inclusion agenda.

Lastly, thanks to all who participated both in formal interviews and informally sharing their views including team colleagues as well as my manager for providing the flexibility necessary to complete this project. This report has been steered towards completion with mentoring support from Professor Jane Tunstill to whom I owe a debt of gratitude.

Championing the Extended Schools Social Worker role – Prevention in Practice

Abstract

Introduction

The *Every Child Matters (ecm)* policy and rollout of Extended Schools agenda, has massively changed the social agenda in schools and there an industry of practitioners working in schools has arisen. Enter professional social workers into the arena and the *Extended Schools Social Worker (ESSW)* role is born. This report charts the development and progress of this role and explores its remit and scope.

Methodology

Five participants included a team colleague, school link person, school manager, educational psychologist and social care manager were interviewed to obtain a rounded view of the ESSW role. A composite case study was constructed based on generic details that typify issues tackled in this preventative role. This served as a basis for discussion about the role. A series of reflections linked to how the policies were implemented in practice, termed 'reflective policy' were then grouped in themes.

Findings:

The findings suggest that social workers do have an important role to play in prevention and are having a positive effect on the profession's image. Referrals are seen to arrive in social care by a circuitous route and ESSWs are bringing social work skills and knowledge to improve safeguarding approaches in schools. The level of severity of casework has been on the rise, in a climate of increasing demand on social care systems. There are risks associated with the role and although the acknowledgment of consent prior to family engagement is a helpful one, it brings a new risk of managing what is known prior to consent. There is a need for greater management resources and sustainability. A more equal partnership with schools promoted. Strengths include the range of activities tailored to local community needs, the scope of the role and opportunities to link with and promote CAF (Common Assessment Framework) systems including TACs (Team Around the Child).

Contact Details:

Neil Sanis can be contacted through the CWDC

1. Introduction

Projects arising out of education and social care mergers are creating a new breed of social worker, versant in safeguarding children but working on a more preventative level. This piece explores the role of an Extended Schools Social Worker (ESSW) working across six primary schools, one children's centre and social care and charts the development of the project and some of the hurdles experienced.

The findings were generated across interviews with key professional associates and an ESSW's reflection of the team's challenging first year. They highlight a number of themes, which echo themes in the sparse existing knowledge base on the topic. These include: how schools see social work, the effect of stigma in the profession, the value of prevention and tensions between this 'non-statutory' arena and statutory work.

Before proceeding, a word about the use of the term 'non-statutory' in this report. There is a longstanding literature (see Tunstill et al, forthcoming) that highlights the extent to which the different duties in the 1989 Children Act (DOH, 1989) have been accorded a varying understanding of 'statutory imperative'. That is to say the statutory duty laid out in section 17 of the act to promote and safeguard the welfare of children in need has been seen as 'dispensable' in a period of financial resource deficit. Section 47, by comparison, which covers the statutory responsibilities for *child protection* concerns and investigations has not been 'vulnerable' in this way and is often (inaccurately) equated with 'statutory responsibility'. For the purposes of this report, 'statutory' is being used to denote cases which meet the thresholds determined by pan-London procedures (NHS London et al, 2007) for mandatory social care involvement which includes complex child in need cases as well as child protection ones.

Many services tackling social issues have arisen in schools as their pastoral role has increased and schools have developed as a hub for the community. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) has become a multi-professional vehicle for addressing needs in a preventative way and the process of embedding the CAF in schools is considered including the supportive role it plays as well as some of the resistances encountered.

This project has been undertaken as an exploratory, rather than 'definitive' study of the work of ESSWs and highlights their role in strengthening the standing and positive image of social work in schools and the communities. Social work skills are viewed as beneficial and relevant to the school mix. The distinctive nature of preventative work produces hurdles but there is a clear case for developing this area. Whilst complementary to statutory services, it is important that the intrinsic worth of such a service – configuration is recognised.

2. Aims

- scope the role of Extended Schools Social Worker, as delivered across a small cluster of schools
- link into the (currently) limited research in this field to identify existing relevant insights and contribute further to developing this important area
- identify possible early qualitative indicators for benefits of preventative social work, including what they might look like, as well as the range of new permutations made possible by the role
- explore what schools are doing already and how the CAF is embedding itself in school processes
- identify possible strategies for overcoming some of the challenges in developing the service

3. Context

3.1 Policy and research

The extended services 'core offer' being rolled out to all schools by 2010, reflects a social and 'community-oriented' policy mandate. It includes, for example, parental support, a programme of activities, childcare and faster referral for professional interventions (DfES, 2005). The Every Child Matters policy (DfES, 2003, 2004), which led to the Children's Act 2004 (DfES, 2004), has brought a social agenda to schools, built on a safeguarding framework (DoH, 2000) that originates in social care (Reid, 2005). It promotes more integrated working between schools and creates more intervention and regulation around local safeguarding (Parton, 2006, Blewett et al., 2007).

A short literature review was undertaken in order to inform the scope and design of the project. Wilkin et al (2008)'s research into social work in extended schools found only an additional four articles related to social workers in schools or children centres (Boddy et al., 2007, Rose et al., 2006, Wilson and Hillison 2004, 2005). Themes explored included:

- value placed on responsive, preventative and early intervention services
- recognition for more integrated working
- how the profile of safeguarding is raised through this work
- the need for sustainable models beyond a fixed-term project
- building management resources into funding

The research explored the suitability of schools for locating social workers. Schools offer rooms for group sessions and a familiar environment for children. Parents may, however, prefer meeting away from their children's school and could be concerned about confidentiality. The differences between professional and non-professional workers, which were identified, included the way in which social workers tended to work with more complex cases requiring specialist interventions (Tier 3, Tier 4). Whilst non-professionals had the existing advantage of lacking a stigmatising image, in fact social workers could actually succeed in improving and enhancing their own potentially stigmatising image of the profession through this work.

There are hurdles due to cultural differences between education and social care professionals, with a consequent need for workers to understand the respective roles of colleagues. Locating

social workers in schools could break down barriers and help school professionals understand threshold decisions (Wilkin et al., 2008).

Research into the delivery of social work services through children centres (ie *SureStart*) (Tunstall, and Allnock, 2007) has raised issues that parallel the task of linking schools with social care. “*Tensions between preventative and protective roles*” (ibid., p6) were highlighted, with the need for more seamless connections, better communication, IT systems and multidisciplinary teams. There were difficulties encountered in interpreting the data on referrals. Case examples showed new models of joint working arising from this synergetic partnership.

The CAF has an important role to play as an inter-agency tool (Cleaver and Walker, 2004), which “*should standardise practice and reach decisions based on sound evidence and full information...*” (Buckley et al., 2004:1). The CAF could be used to assess whether social care involvement is necessary (Buckley et al., 2004). Another piece of practitioner research referred to difficulties practitioners have in managing information, which “*would never find their way to the CAF document but are held by the practitioners as important elements of the case*” (Gosling, forthcoming).

3.2 Overview of Extended Schools Social Work Project

The extended schools social work role was introduced in 2004 after a secondary school was presenting a high level of referrals to social care as well as a high exclusion rate.

Following a successful pilot¹ placing a social worker practice manager, social worker and trainee in a secondary school, this service continued through to 2007 with a social work practice manager and four social work students. The practice manager approached schools in cluster meetings with support from Social Care to set up what became known as the ‘core offer’ where four social workers would work across the borough with a social worker covering approximately 25 schools each.

The ratio of social workers to schools necessitated a consultative role and demand grew from the schools for more direct involvement in cases. Hence, a questionnaire was circulated within

¹ Reduction of referrals from 50 in 2004 to 15 in 2005 and increase in child protection referrals following better understanding and clarification.

participating schools in order to gauge interest in this as well as gather feedback about the service overall. This resulted in a 20% response rate. With social workers being spread quite thinly some schools found the service patchy. Positive feedback was also received including a strong interest in direct work. This led to reformulating the model.

The 'Enhanced Offer' was developed based on working in a small cluster of about five schools. The model, initially running for two years, required joint funding from social care, early years and youth partnering with schools approached to make a small contribution. It was for schools to fund the service after this period if they wished. Other services such as CAMHS, behaviour support and educational welfare were consulted and the extended schools cluster coordinators helped put the offer together and develop the service level agreement (SLA).

Presentations were given to forums where schools met to consider the enhanced offer proposal for professionally qualified social workers that could undertake casework with a preventative and early-intervention focus. After further meetings with intensive discussions, drawing on the expertise of extended schools coordinators, details were finalised and the first clusters were set up in January 2009. Under this model, the team has since grown from initially six social workers, managed by a dedicated manager responsible for the rollout of the project, to fourteen social workers, with seven students and an additional half-time managerial post. There are now 70% of state schools across the borough signed up to delivering the enhanced offer, which aims to:

- ensure referrals include the necessary information to help make a decision
- promote awareness about thresholds
- encourage schools to undertake preventative social work when cases are not meeting thresholds
- share information appropriately where there are issues of concern with children

Social Care has seen a significant rise in referrals coupled with a bottleneck from delays in cases being closed by the long-term team. This, coupled with industry wide difficulties in recruitment has meant that the project has developed against a backdrop of growing pressure to limit statutory referrals and manage post statutory input. The project structure altered to reflect this. A new multi-disciplinary team with a gate-keeping mandate took over the duty

function and some of the initial investigative work. This has led to school communities and in turn the ESSWs needing to tackle more severe issues at a local level.

4. Methodology

The project used qualitative methods, which were selected as being appropriate to a small-scale exploratory study (Patton, 2002). A critical path analysis approach, which is regularly used in social policy literature, was adopted (Thompson, 1995) to trace the development of the school social worker role. It incorporated a series of reflections linked to policies. Hence, the term 'reflective policy' was used to denote an approach of arriving at policy implications in the formation of the role, through reflective practice; where the policy issues generated were sifted from reflections which relate more to personal practice (Harris, 1996, Howe, 2002).

Interviews with five practitioners were undertaken during the middle two months of the six-month research period. The participants were mixed in terms of gender, ethnicity and role and were chosen because of their already identified links with the practitioner/researcher's work.

Their roles were as follows:-

- school link person (specialising in pastoral care and special needs)
- ESSW team colleague
- educational psychologist
- school manager
- social care manager

Following discussion with the research mentor, a semi-structured interview format was developed. This consisted of a questionnaire, beginning with a series of questions about a hypothetical case example, on which participants were invited to give their views. The questions explored in general, the overall ways in which they felt the ESSW role could contribute; and then asked pre-defined questions to elicit a qualitative view of Extended Schools Social Work (see Appendix A).

The case example was designed to incorporate a range of different presenting issues encountered in the work, and, at the same time, to be non-identifiable or linkable to one specific case. This strategy was chosen to create the necessary environment for gathering responses, whilst avoiding any ethical issues, which might prevent the proposal's passage through the Local Authority's ethics committee. This consideration was important in the context of the need to produce something meaningful in a very strict timescale. An iterative process was adopted, by which to understand the relationship between the interviews and the following reflections, at

each of the post-interview stages, and so be able to identify the next set of themes to be explored.

The transcriptions of the interviews were read and their content analysed in order to identify and highlight the key emerging themes, and then to further explore these issues with a group of other ESSWs in an ESSW team meeting. The feedback generated by these workers, provided an additional range of perspectives, which could be incorporated into the findings.

At three stages of the project in discussions with the research mentor, the researcher reported back on the data reflection process and was thereby helped to 'sift through' and ultimately to prioritise the most relevant information.

5. Findings

5.1 Themes from Interviews

5.1.1 How vulnerable children are worked with

The effect of what can be seen to represent *nothing short of a revolution* in schools, following *Every Child Matters* (ECM) is that (all) human resources, training and funding are recognised as essential for meeting statutory and professional responsibilities to safeguard children. There have been sweeping changes as schools have become the potential hub of the community, and their pastoral role has massively increased, including extending both opening hours and the range of activities available to children in schools.

Although schools have an increased social focus, they are education driven and attainment target driven. Therefore, key indicators such as behaviour, attendance and achievement still inform decisions. Other than statutory issues requiring mandatory timescales, schools attempt to resolve problems with a range of measures including counselling, circle-time, friendship groups, self-esteem and anger-management mentoring.

Typically, it takes two terms using internal methods, building up a picture, to acknowledge that external agency involvement is a priority to meet the most complex needs of children/families. Therefore, children with pervading complex social issues and from dysfunctional families may not have these issues professionally addressed if they are not (negatively) impacting on education in some way. Many schools had experienced home-school workers to support parents with social issues impacting on education and parenting courses had also been rolled out across the borough. A need was identified for schools to develop their own capacity as well as links with community resources.

Whilst schools had developed through the extended schools agenda over the past five years, the dominant education-driven mindset still required change for the new safeguarding agenda to become better established. At the feedback stage after presenting the findings of this research to the ESSW team, one ESSW said *“My experience is that schools don’t take safeguarding responsibilities as a high priority. I appreciate they are overwhelmed with their education targets etc but schools appear to lack commitment to this role and often only respond to CP disclosures, even then not always responding when they should”*. The solution proposed by

social care is based on successful establishment of a series of inter-agency highlighting meetings in secondary schools, which, as large institutions, they are able to draw professionals from a range of agencies.

The greater number and smaller size of primary schools mean it is impractical for the same routine visits, which allow agencies to sit around the table and discuss prospective cases or contribute in a forum to existing ones. Out of the seventy schools reached by the ESSW service, twelve now have some form of smaller comparable forum; whilst all the secondary schools ESSWs work in now have these highlighting meetings. A school manager versant in child protection responsibilities, explained that, similar to other primaries encountered, they have pupil progress meetings each term to look at barriers to learning. Clear indicators of safeguarding issues that emerge from these meetings would be taken up with the ESSW and other appropriate agencies. This system shows that safeguarding is systematically built into education systems and a parallel system, which takes up resources and would be costly to implement, encountered resistance.

5.1.2 Bringing qualified social workers into the mix

Social work involvement in schools was regarded positively and recognised as having a distinct skill set through training and experience dealing with social issues. Their ability to gather information, undertake assessments, signposting expertise and knowledge was felt useful. ESSWs were described by school professionals as “*the glue that holds things together,*” being able to undertake direct work with families and advise schools when cases became statutory. The social worker value base was no longer seen to be particularly exclusive, as person-centred principles such as respect and empathy and inclusive principles have already permeated schools.

One participant expressed the view that there are a “*...lot of people around schools: Learning mentors have commitment but are not professionally trained and skilled in that kind of work. They are not experienced in asking the right questions. Sometimes there are awkward questions and you have to do it in the right way*”. However, the range of experienced practitioners now working through schools was also seen as a compatible resource for safeguarding children that could prove invaluable.

It could be observed that, as statutory social work had become increasingly narrow in its remit, the gap of preventative work had had to be filled by non-professionals. This helped explain some of the difficulties in promoting the service to schools initially and the overlap experienced in the initial stages of the rollout, where boundaries were blurred.

5.1.3 Tackling Stigma

There was no escaping the stigma surrounding social workers. Even the title of the role could produce barriers to engaging with specific families. This was counterweighted by the longer-term benefit from promoting a good name for the profession, even if occasionally, parents complained to schools after home visits from ESSWs, in spite of giving consent. The aforementioned parenting workers had a role in building trust and laying the groundwork for later social work involvement if necessary. Feedback from the ESSW team included a comment that *“our presence in schools creates a range of anxieties for the teachers ... (that we might find poor practice) and of the parents (that we might take their children away)...”* which it was felt needed careful and sensitive handling. Another said that presence in schools was having a positive effect and already changing perceptions in the community.

Schools were seen as good places to begin discussions around social issues with families, because of the relationship, and because education could be used as a hook to build issues around. ESSWs led different activities including parenting workshops, sessions on ‘demystifying social work’ and ‘what is reasonable chastisement?’ These helped break down barriers and enabled parents to talk about things more freely. Preventative social work was also seen to have an important role in uncovering hidden issues like domestic violence. It was also felt imperative to offer a real alternative to statutory involvement, which was perceived as *“locking the stable doors after the horse had bolted”* as one participant put it.

5.1.4 Integrating schools and social care

Experience of the challenge of explaining the role of preventative social work to schools was corroborated by other ESSWs. Also, school managers expressed the extent to which what they termed ‘social work’ had crept into their role with the school link participant feeling frustrated that fifty per cent of her role was more ‘social work’ than education. There was consensus that the ESSW had a useful role to play in bridging the communication gap with social care and building relationships with schools, which would, as one participant put it, *“make discussions*

more meaningful". There was a clear need identified to keep schools updated about changes in social care following the recent developments outlined in section 3.3.

5.1.5 Tension between prevention and statutory

Although the service had been marketed as pre-statutory and preventative, this was interpreted differently between schools and social care. The new multi-disciplinary team processing incoming social care referrals held a gate keeping function to reduce the influx of cases. ESSWs were originally tasked with interviewing parents directly to help social care clarify the nature and/or appropriateness of child protection referrals, which led to some duplication of roles during the period where the new referral team was being established. The question of whether these types of investigations are preventative is a contested area. Whilst social care managers recognised the term 'prevention' in a broad sense, it was often used to mean *diversion from formal interventions*. The school manager interviewed expressed injustice at paying for ESSWs to deliver what they saw as statutory work. In response to this, the social care manager interviewed said that this 'antipathy' was not uniform, and many secondary schools expected ESSWs to perform social work, which clearly met statutory thresholds². Changes in the types of complex cases being dealt with by statutory services has led to managerial pressure for ESSWs to be engaged in more serious kinds of cases.

5.1.6 Role of Recording

Recording was something that participants felt should be limited and purposeful and one said they were "*drowned in the stuff*". The value of recording was that cases are inevitably re-referred and with sensitive recording, it is possible to see what has been done, and identify particularly useful/successful input. The social care manager said "*The need to have space for direct work is important but there is no escaping that recording is essential and mandatory, so that if cases reached statutory teams, eg with child protection investigations, knowledge was available.*" However, there is an ongoing debate about the optimum level of detail necessary. More specifically, capturing this level of preventative data on a system shared with social care creates ethical issues and the assumption that a sophisticated social care system is appropriate for school use warrants consideration. The difficulties in meeting this imperative are explored further in the reflective section.

² Post research note: Emphasis later shifted so that the new referral team more clearly held the remit for investigations of a child protection nature.

5.1.7 Priorities for Preventative Social Work

Given the day-to-day experience of ESSWs on the ground, in the localities, their work could include intervening at any point before, during or after crises. Therefore, prevention could be seen as an *approach* rather than merely as one level; and relevant to the spectrum of severity. There may be a point where social issues tip the scales for a child, perhaps as a third generation within a long-standing dysfunctional family system. Something as simple as the space needed for a child to do their homework could provoke such a crisis.

Different views about priorities showed the range of strengths of the service.

- getting professional interventions through the CAF
- building CAF compliancy in schools
- providing creative preventative programmes
- responsive case work without the pressure of statutory timescales
- tackling engagement for hard to reach families
- assisting the cycle encompassing the move through to statutory and then back again to the community
- linking on statutory cases to help inter-agency communication

Commenting on this collation of views, The Social Care manager said, “The scope is huge”.

It is unsurprising, therefore, to discover a year into the project that ESSWs have developed a very wide range of activity. The role provides an opportunity to respond creatively to meet the particular needs of each school community.

5.1.8 To CAF or not to CAF?

The CAF was praised as a tool, albeit a lengthy one, because it protects confidentiality, enables appropriate information sharing, is useful and informative for future Social Care involvement, and for unpacking issues in complex cases. For a specialist assessment, however, it was felt to be too basic and rigid. There was also confusion as to whether it was a form or an assessment. Clarity was needed when making a referral to CAMHS, for example in respect of the nature of information actually needed. The borough’s unique method of scoring CAFs led to a pattern of skewing in its completion by practitioners, in order, to secure valuable services.

In situations where agencies were contesting the necessity for involvement, such as in the case of a threshold decision by social care, schools resented the request for CAFs. The school link asked *“if everybody is meant to be doing CAFs, how come it is always the schools doing them and never receiving them from other agencies?”* Changing training to incorporate opportunities for shadowing experienced CAF practitioners may help demystify them and encourage more practitioners to begin using them. This would meet Ofsted’s recent recommendation that more CAFs should be done. However, there is an emerging perception of over-utilisation of the CAF, which is an interesting development worth exploring further in the future.

It was stated from the outset to schools that ESSWs were not there to do schools CAFs for them, but would contribute in CAF processes, facilitate TACs (Team Around the Child – ie inter-professional network for a CAF case) and help build the CAF compliancy of the school. ESSWs have their own assessment and current policy allows for either using this or using the CAF. This avoids duplication where a CAF is already needed eg CAMHS referrals from schools require CAFs.

5.2 Reflections

5.2.1 Beginning the role

In the core offer, ESSWs covered approximately twenty-five schools each. It was not possible to do justice to the role with this arrangement and the coverage was somewhat patchy. Schools held high expectations for the depth of involvement with the micro-cluster model. However, despite detailed negotiations and careful planning, each ESSW encountered inter-professional and resource obstacles establishing working practices in the schools. ESSWs attempted to conduct a needs analysis, to understand the schools’ processes for highlighting vulnerable children; identify which services in-house or external agencies were used; and clarify priority issues for helping identify how the role could best contribute. In this process, ESSWs encountered hostility or disinterest, which created challenges in setting up the service.

This needs analysis proved useful in developing services and managing expectations for the researched cluster. Whilst recruiting more social workers and getting the contracts signed between stakeholders in the micro-clusters some ESSWs covered more than one cluster. It was not possible to do justice to either and this proved to be a frustrating experience for schools and social workers in limbo between the two models.

5.2.2 Mobility

The cluster researched was composed of schools networked by a commercial partnership and children centre catchment area. The schools recognised the ESSW as a shared resource and wanted flexibility to be built in to maximise the benefit across the cluster. Unlike other teams, ESSWs work without a base. They are also required as a core function to develop relationships with different schools and get to grips with their unique systems, ethos and cultures as well as work with colleagues at all levels in school organisations.

This model has created a nomadic social work, which is potentially fragmented and composed of a series of disjointed meaningful moments. The isolation in a role remote from social care has implications for what type of casework should be expected.

There is no clearly defined threshold for ESSWs and unlike other social workers, there is no formally allocated gatekeeper responsible for allocating cases and this puts a very high premium on the input on a very supportive and insightful manager! In addition to doing the job that is formally commissioned and paid for, and which is visible to senior managers, there is a second role, which involves, making on an almost altruistic basis, efforts to help colleagues negotiate a risk-driven system.

With this type of social work, there is also greater onus being put on ESSW decisions, which creates issues of higher risks and accountability. Mobile networked laptops allow referrals to be logged and tasked to managers for decisions. In practice, however, the lack of managerial capacity built into the project from the outset, means there is a time lag and a higher degree of autonomy for the ESSW in decision-making. Putting this into perspective, a school head said that *“school professionals did not benefit from the same supervisory mechanisms and constantly had to grapple with complex social issues”*. In response to the conflict between navigating between the roles of a supportive worker on the preventative end and sometimes being seen in a punitive way for having to address parental failings, the head teacher said, *“welcome to my world”*.

The mobility includes navigating between unequal partners with unequal statutory authority. Although in theory this initiative is a partnership between schools and social care, in reality, the fact that contractually ESSWs are the employees of social care, inevitably puts social care in a

stronger position to dictate to the ESSWs the nature of the work even if this has been identified unilaterally by social care. This can create a power imbalance in making decisions as to how complex issues in the role are handled. To address the isolation in the role, team meetings have been increased from monthly to fortnightly. However, although they are informative and critical debate is encouraged, there is no corresponding equivalent from the schools' side to balance the equation. Meetings between school managers and social care managers are infrequent, in stages rather than structured into a routine. In this structure, there is no corresponding forum where ESSWs come together in a meeting managed by a school manager.

One way to capture this difference is in terms of a dichotomy between individualism and community. Social work activity and expertise is only "visible" to social care when it appears on an individual's file. This means there is a disproportionate emphasis given to casework, which is only one of a range of – the (often unrecorded) community interventions, which are possible in the school setting. However, although this puts a high premium on individual casework, it should be stressed that group activities are happening and seen as valid and worthwhile activities.

5.2.3 Clarifying Policy around Consent and Recording

As ESSWs travel from school to school, they are privy to conversations from school professionals who have concerns that encompass a range of issues. The process whereby such respective 'narratives' become social care referrals, is not normally the subject of analysis in child protection teams, whereas in this role it is highly relevant. These conversations can raise potentially alarming signals that warrant investigation. This requires sophisticated skills that encompass building a degree of trust in school workers whilst promoting good safeguarding practice.

The point at which a family consents to ESSW involvement is where a contact record can be officially logged onto the joint database shared with statutory Social Care for the borough. There is therefore a concerning trend towards information of a preventative nature being captured on a social care system. Before that happens, the ESSW can be holding onto information, which does not of itself, hit the child protection thresholds, require professional obligation to kick in, and prompt a statutory referral. Nevertheless, this very fine edge before the official contact is logged constitutes a holding zone, with much higher associated

professional risk than statutory social workers are normally navigating with. Experience reported, by school practitioners, reflects skills in engagement and working with difficult family situations. Delicate conversations with families take place, which can encourage them to edge towards accessing statutory services. However, it may well be that the arrival of professional social workers into this arena is leading to faster route to action and persuasive discourses between social worker and practitioner.

Working Together (HM Government, 2006), clarified that it is imperative to obtain consent when information sharing between agencies in non-child protection circumstances. Straddling between schools and social care the ESSW has a dual role: part school worker, part social care worker. When working in a non-statutory role, it is important to be vigilant to the complexities this brings.

Consent is one of the defining features of the protocol for the team. Therefore, these issues need to be recognised and accorded further examination and research. Social workers (ie ESSWs) are now seeing the process by which information gathered leads to action, they are holding onto key information and need to be mindful that sharing agency checks without consent is also problematic. Schools need to come on board as equal partners in the recording debate and have an opportunity to express their informed views about what happens with the information ESSWs are privileged to receive. There was regular feedback suggesting some school professionals and parents/carers may engage more readily if they did not have the spectre of social care recording looming over every referral. There was a definite distinction encountered between school social work and statutory social work.

Unlike CAFs where parents always see everything, recording on social care systems provides for intelligent boundaries, which can protect for example, a parent who has made a disclosure about domestic violence. The extended schools social work assessment can be completed more speedily than the CAF - particularly useful when the information is needed urgently to form a social care referral.

5.2.4 What *is* social work in schools

From encounters with statutory workers and established school practitioners in the early stages of the role, there was a sense that the identity of the role needed clarifying, reiterating and,

ultimately strengthening. In the initial meetings setting up the role, school managers asked “*What do social workers actually do?*” School managers expected greater involvement from statutory social workers on cases and their view of ‘social work’ (see 5.1.4) might resemble aspects of what social work looked like in the sixties. Despite initial hurdles, there was a strong sense that a social work service in schools was needed; a view which school managers themselves developed as the process of embedding school social workers got underway and positive results from specific cases emerged. The schools in the researcher’s cluster appreciated a ‘hands-on’ approach to delivering social work, and the availability of an accessible local social worker. The role lent itself to adapting pre-existing skills plus having wide scope for developing new initiatives.

Statutory social workers in the wider teams appeared to lack a clear understanding of the detailed *nuances* of the role. Sharp contrasts between their respective sets of duties became apparent. The ESSW had more opportunity for direct engagement with children with less recording and structural constraints and the nature of the role lent itself to developing a sense of how to assess and respond to ‘lower’ tiers of need. Occasional opportunities for statutory social workers to participate in school social work may be beneficial given that the existing bias of much of their activity is to solely or predominantly child protection/level 4 work.

5.2.5 Creative Permutations

There is managerial pressure to deliver statistics that justify the service. However, because of the individualistic approach of social care/social work mentioned above, group interventions are not weighted in the same way. This also means that delivering meaningful preventative work with the school worker role creates a complication, as the ESSW cannot account for this within the social care mechanisms. This leads to greater recognition and therefore encouragement for ESSWs to deliver a less preventative and progressive agenda. Fortunately, the team manager and department recognise the role ESSWs can play in helping children achieve the *ECM* outcomes, which provides ample room for preventative initiatives. This is a borough that is ultimately concerned with children’s welfare in real terms and the ESSW service has been fortunate in attracting managers who hold these concerns in mind.

Streamlining the role between clusters, out of a concern about non-uniformity, could easily jeopardise the organic way in which the role needs to develop, ie from the ground up - rather than top down. Also, one model may not necessarily fit all. By comparison with the inter-

agency highlighting meetings adopted across many secondary schools, a single solution for identifying vulnerable children in primary schools has not yet been developed. Pupil progress meetings provide a regular forum for schools to pick up safeguarding issues which can be channelled into discussions with the ESSW as well as feedback mechanisms from class teachers for picking up concerns. Care should also be taken to ensure over-emphasis on individual records in social care, does not devalue other work with results that are harder for social care to measure.

Developing relationships, building CAF compliance, supporting teachers with socially oriented issues and outreach work in the community are becoming integral to the role. Joint parenting workshops across schools have enabled local communities to come together to share experiences. There are other new permutations emerging such as linking mentoring with other agencies supporting better outcomes. Early findings show school based work is preventing statutory referrals and broadening social work (see table 1).

Intervention	Issue	Effect on service	Which service?
Mediation between schools and parents	Child not coming to school	Referral prevented	Attendance and Welfare service (statutory)
Mediation between parents and teenagers	Conflict and physical abuse	Referral prevented	Social Care Frontline Team (statutory)
Group work using rap music to promote friendship and social skills	Therapeutic issues for children with absent fathers	Live case closed following inter-professional meetings	CAMHS (statutory)
Case work	Severe chronic overcrowding	CAF processes	Housing
Linking work between school and disability team	Sexualised behaviour	Child protection	Children With Disabilities team (statutory)
Group work – creating the school news magazine	Behaviour	Referral made with mum on board	Youth Inclusion
Mediation between rival gang members	Anti-social behaviour	Preventing youth offending	Youth Offending Team (statutory)
Family support from agencies working together in Team Around the Child (TAC) meetings which are part	Subsequent abuse	TAC systems in place to assist engaging	Child Protection (statutory)

of CAF processes including children centre family worker for hard to reach family			
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Table 1 Extended Schools Social Worker interventions in schools

What makes this list exciting is that social work skills and experience are being applied to solving a whole range of hitherto un-tackled problems that have been picked up in schools.

6. Implications for Practice

This project has shown that there is an appetite for preventative, early intervention work in schools and social work skills are highly relevant for working in this arena. In this case, bringing social workers into schools has led to new permutations and creative possibilities that are only just beginning to be explored. However the role creates a different kind of accountability given the varied programme and disparity from one cluster to another. The sensitivity of managers to the nuances of this work is crucial and in the borough studied, exemplifies good practice in this arena.

Based on their own experience and reflections, it is possible to identify a number of important implications for other agencies and for future policy and practice.

1. The ambitious rollout of a small cluster-based model for delivering extended schools social work presents a range of challenges; and it is crucial that good management resource availability as well as sustainability are built into the model.
2. In undertaking any alterations to existing models/roles, care needs to be taken in minimising operational disruption. Strategies to avoid disruption might include *sensitive* approaches for organising office resources in schools; awareness raising; publicising linking mechanisms with schools; and designing referral mechanisms and tailored action plans for each school.
3. The successful rollout of such project will involve marketing, educative and ambassadorial activities features and the ESSW can play a vital role in managing the links with each of the organisations, a task of some importance.
4. School social worker decision-making needs to acknowledge the value of the social care delivery of both *preventative* and *reactive* work, in order to manage the higher-level cases. Otherwise there can be associated risks with the role, and further work is needed

to develop well-integrated systems to avoid ESSWs becoming a dumping ground for high threshold cases.

5. Working at different schools in a schedule in this cluster model creates mobility issues. A flexible approach between schools is needed in order to distribute the resource fairly, whilst building in flexibility to respond to casework on a needs-led basis.
6. A hub and spoke model may be worth considering where multi-disciplinary teams based in localities can manage and prioritise referrals with pooled expertise; and then visit schools to deliver an inclusive service package that includes prevention.
7. The power imbalances between schools and social care needs acknowledging ie as chief stakeholders, the structure should accommodate consultation with schools on decisions impacting the development of the service.
- 8 Greater acknowledgement is needed of the value of local community interventions versus individual casework so that community models can be given due credence. The concept of preventative social work needs to be strengthened and further embedded in the communities and council organisation.
- 9 More discussion and informed debate is necessary about the balance to be struck by the service, between early intervention on a preventative basis, and more formal intervention in respect of safeguarding.
- 10 The new emerging permutations should continue to be nurtured and encouraged and the creative possibilities of the role in terms of direct work with children and families advanced.
- 11 Taking account of both the findings of this project as well as previous research, there is a need for new research to pay greater attention to the interface between social care systems and schools, the ramifications of which are only just beginning to be grappled with. In particular a qualitative study of cases would be helpful to see if and how they match the picture painted above, of ESSWs having the capacity for changing children and families' lives and increasing the tools and expertise available in schools.

7. Conclusion

Whilst the method of deployment of the service requires careful consideration, moving to a micro-cluster model has increased the depth of work that has been possible, enabled relationship building and facilitated better cohesiveness. This has had corresponding challenges as the shift from ESSW as a visiting council official; to becoming part of the school team has been huge. Nevertheless, the role is still a dual one, bridging social care and schools. This fact means there are inevitable complexities around consent, information sharing and recording; as well as the challenge of minimising the stigma of bringing social work right to the community. The high profile, visibility of a preventative social worker deploying the values of the profession, however, can help repair the profession's image and successes from direct case involvement are already demonstrating the value of the profession in a school context.

This context has a major impact on the delivery and characteristics of a social work service, in that it produces something of a hybrid: part-education, part-social care. Though tensions exist with the statutory responsibilities around child protection for example, there are benefits to establishing and maintaining a balanced link between education and social care. It delivers better communication between services and ESSWs can help model a seamless approach to meeting the need of some children for safeguarding services as well as identifying and meeting the needs of all vulnerable children. Preventative social work is perhaps less straightforward than statutory social work, which *only* addresses child protection. Indeed, its strength lies in the scope and breadth of quite a creative range of services. This study highlights the distinctive flavour of Extended Schools Social Work. Whilst it sits on the safeguarding continuum with existing pastoral work in schools at one end and statutory social work at the other, it deserves to be considered worthwhile and meaningful in its own right.

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Appendix A – Case Study and Interview Questions

Introduction

A small case study will be used to form the basis of the interview. There are two parts to the interview: The first part will invite you to give your thoughts about the Extended Schools Social Worker (ESSW) role in relation to the case study using your professional viewpoint. The second part will be a discussion about some of the key issues. Following this you will be invited for any reflections or additional thoughts you would like to have included. The time allocated for this will be no more than an hour.

Case Study

Abdi is a very sensitive child (age 8) who lives with his mother and her new partner and five siblings in a two-bedroom apartment by East Town Housing Association. He is slightly below his peers academically and his teacher is worried that he does not mix well with his peers and sometimes appears anxious, withdrawn and uncommunicative. Abdi's father lives part in this country and part in another and there is a conflict between his two parents. It is noticed by professionals working with Abdi that his behaviour is erratic when dad is in contact. Abdi's mum is pregnant with a child conceived with her new partner and there is concern about the possibility that she suffers from depression.

Interview Questions

Part 1 – Interprofessional working with Abdi and his family

- i) Looking at this case study could you give an outline of the work your agency would provide to support this child and family?
- ii) At what point if this was a family you were working with would it be brought to your attention in practice and ideally?
- iii) What contribution do you feel colleagues can make to support the best outcome for your work?
- iv) How do you see the ESSW supporting Abdi and his family?
- v) How do you see the role of the ESSW in supporting inter-professional working on this case?
- vi) How do you think the ESSW can contribute in helping Abdi and his family get access to other services
- vii) Which services would you consider would play the most significant role in this case?
- viii) With regards to the interventions needed for this family, what role do you think the ESSW might have, either singly, in a group or with the family?
- ix) What, in your view, are the best factors which contribute to family engagement and access to services?

Part Two – Discussion about the ESSW role

- i) Given your answers to part one, how useful do you think is the notion of an Extended Schools Social Worker? How easy do you think it is to define the ESSW role in comparison to e.g. a statutory social work role or educational psychologist?
- ii) Do you think the pre-statutory preventative nature of the role helps or hinders the social worker's ability to have difficult discussions e.g. around parenting? Explain.
- iii) Do you think the emphasis on schools input into social issues has increased? If so, what do you think the impact on the school-parent partnership is, as a result?
- iv) If you were the manager of the service and had to prioritise the focus of the role what would you choose? (Using the following list, please number them in order of priority)
- Prevention through direct work with the community including workshops on particular themes et al
 - Early intervention with specific individuals/families; engaging with families, assessing and referring (CAF)
 - Supporting schools processes around highlighting and helping vulnerable children inc. training and consultancy
 - Links with social care on statutory referrals, helping schools make threshold decisions
 - Helping schools with post-statutory monitoring and support
 - Providing consultations in school highlighting meetings inputting from a professional social work perspective
- v) Where do you think the biggest gain through having the ESSW can be made on the following spectrum:-

Prevention ->Early Intervention ->Statutory ->Post-Statutory

- vi) Where do you think the role should focus on in terms of level of need

1	2	>2<3	3	4
Universal	CAF		Children in Need	Child Protection
Services/ Single agency				

- vii) What do you think the balance should be between doing and recording? Hence, if you had to give a percentage emphasis totalling 100%, between interacting with children, schools and families and recording what would it be? How valuable to the sense of the role do you see the link into Social Care Systems?
- viii) If Social Care has to operate a more stringent gate-keeping policy due to pressure on its services, how do you think the school in partnership with the ESSW could reduce the number of referrals?

Part Three

What are the key messages you would like to see come out of this research?

How do you think the role could be developed further?

What are the main barriers/challenges that need to be overcome?

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