WELL Project Evaluation Report Year 1 – 2021-2022

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Executive Summary

Chapter 1: Background

The WELL (Western Excellence in Learning and Leadership) project is a three-year place-based improvement programme (2021-2024) which aims to sustainably improve educational outcomes for all young people in West Cumbria, particularly those facing disadvantage. It is working with all primary and secondary schools in Allerdale and Copeland (n=121), offering a range of support structured in three strands: i) raising standards, ii) closing the gap and, iii) wellbeing. The project is hosted by Cumbria County Council, but with an independent Board and team, working closely with the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and its Research School network.

This report sets out findings from the first year of the project evaluation. The evaluation is underpinned by Improvement Science and is structured in two strands (implementation and process and impact evaluation) designed to address a series of questions posed by the WELL project board.

It is important to recognise the context for schools and communities in this period, emerging from the Covid pandemic. This context has also impacted on the evaluation.

Chapter 2: Improving schools at scale in remote and rural areas: findings from the literature

England has over 5,000 rural schools, of which a third are very small (<110 pupils). Common challenges include: geographic, social and cultural isolation; limited employment opportunities; transport costs; stretched budgets; recruitment, retention and workload issues for staff; and, in small schools, narrower curriculum options. In 2017/18, rural areas in England had lower achievement in English and Maths GCSE for all levels of deprivation compared with urban areas.

The expansion of academies and roll-back of Local Authorities has led to fragmentation and a loss of place-based coherence in terms of how schools are provided with support and challenge across England. The existence of multiple different hubs (Maths, English, Behaviour etc) can be confusing for schools and make it challenging to access support, particularly in remote and rural locations. The government's ambition is that all schools will be part of a 'strong' MAT by 2030. However, as yet, few Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) have proved willing or able to operate across rural areas.

Key lessons on place-based improvement from the Opportunity Area programme include: the need to consult widely and listen to stakeholders – building trust; avoiding a 'one size fits all' model - fostering collective action; and drawing on partners and expertise from beyond the locality.

Schools have been encouraged to adopt evidence-informed approaches to improvement through the EEF. An initiative in a rural county found that the effectiveness of implementation depends on internal school capacity, while securing take up from schools most in need of support is a challenge.

Chapter 3: Establishing WELL - stakeholder views on the school landscape and priorities

Schools in Allerdale and Copeland face distinctive challenges, largely resulting from the region's isolation, sparsity and socio-economic conditions.

The reduced capacity of the Local Authority coupled with limited engagement with curriculum hubs and MATs all indicate the need for a place-based improvement programme such as WELL. There was strong support for how WELL has been set up, in governance terms.

Current educational provision in Allerdale and Copeland has many strengths. For example, the number of schools judged as Requiring Improvement or Inadequate by Ofsted is relatively low.

Schools in Cumbria have been proactive in forming and participating in clusters and system leadership networks. However, many schools lack the capacity to engage in these efforts and there are underlying issues with competition – in particular at secondary level.

Schools are working to balance shorter-term recovery priorities, including addressing student well-being issues, with longer-term accountability and teaching and learning-related priorities. The WELL priorities reflect this and the team has been flexible in responding to emerging requirements.

School leaders are under considerable pressure in the face of tight resources and limited capacity. There may be a need to consider how WELL supports headteachers in years 2 and 3.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 To what extent has the WELL project been successful in engaging schools and supporting them to identify, prioritise, access and implement evidence-informed improvement approaches?

- The WELL project faced challenges initially due to Covid and lockdowns, but this has not prevented the new three-year project from engaging schools successfully.
- Some schools report some barriers to participation, for example in relation to the paperwork and time commitments involved. However, the WELL team are widely seen as trusted, credible and flexible, and this has largely helped to overcome these issues.
- In the baseline survey (autumn 2021) 72% of heads were 'confident', and 27% were 'somewhat confident' that engaging with WELL would benefit their school.
- All six case study schools have implemented improvement projects using WELL funding. Funding schools in this way has increased engagement and leveraged additional resources from schools.
- The wider WELL PD menu has been accessed widely by schools. This provision is viewed positively, helping to build staff skills in important areas, such as mental health.
- Inevitably, in such a large and complex project, levels of engagement vary. We heard reports that not all schools have had the time or appetite to get fully engaged.

4.2 To what extent has school leadership and classroom teaching in schools in the west of Cumbria become more evidence-informed as a result of the WELL project?

- WELL has increased access to sources of evidence – albeit from a relatively low base.
- The WELL team in partnership with the various Research Schools are seen to have provided good support, helping to bring evidence to life and to make it more accessible.
- Over time school leaders have become more comfortable with the EEF implementation process and its associated jargon e.g. 'active ingredients'.
- Case study headteachers and schools feel able to think more clearly about evidence and its use, in particular through the use of the implementation guidance.
- School leaders have different views and approaches on how far to engage their staff with evidence. Middle leaders, class teachers and teaching assistants in schools have varying levels of awareness of WELL and of how evidence can inform their practice.
- Schools that engaged with the action research have developed more sophisticated understandings and types/uses of evidence.
- Some school leaders are engaging more critically with evidence, for example recognising that 'robust' scientific evidence does not offer easy solutions and must always be adapted to different contexts by thoughtful professionals.
- Schools are beginning to make evidence-informed changes as a result of WELL. Case study schools are implementing projects with varying areas of focus reflecting the needs and priorities of each school. Some of these interventions are more clearly evidence-based than others.

4.3 To what extent has WELL enabled improved pupil outcomes, in particular in terms of the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils?

- WELL has ensured that schools are focussed on meeting the needs of disadvantaged children as a priority, while also strengthening schools' capacity in wider areas.
- Some school-level data is showing an upward trend for pupils who involved with WELL funded interventions. More targeted projects in some schools have clearer evidence of impact.
- We analyse student outcomes in the phonics test and at Key Stages 2 and 4, comparing averages in Allerdale and Copeland with both Cumbria and national averages in the years before the pandemic and 2022. This shows that, on average, schools in West Cumbria tend to perform below their peers in the county and nationally, in particular at secondary level.
- We also compare schools in Allerdale and Copeland with a matched sample of schools (from across Cumbria for phonics and Key Stage 2, and nationally for Key Stage 4).
    - In 2022, WELL supported primary schools performed broadly in line with schools of similar characteristics matched from the wider Cumbrian population of schools across the three outcomes assessed (phonics and Key Stage 2 reading and mathematics). None of these outcomes shows a statistically significant difference.
    - In 2022, WELL supported secondary schools performed below the national sample of schools with similar characteristics in both Attainment 8 and Progress 8. These differences were statistically significant, but we urge caution in reading too much into this finding. More encouragingly, for disadvantaged pupils, WELL schools performed slightly better on average than the matched sample for both Attainment 8 and for Progress 8.

4.4 To what extent have WELL-supported enrichment opportunities - particularly the Cumbrian Award - impacted on school practices and/or pupil aspirations for learning?

- Due to the delay in launching the Cumbrian Award, we have not focussed on this element in detail in year one. This will be a strand in the action research project in years 2 and 3.

4.5 To what extent has WELL enabled the development of a more outward facing and collaborative school system in west Cumbria, with the potential for systemic learning and improvement to be sustained over time?

- The WELL project is helping to break down barriers between schools and to facilitate collaboration, in particular at the level of senior leaders. The face to face events have played an important role in this. Where WELL has paired up schools working on similar themes and provided support to clusters this has also helped to foster collaboration.
- By bringing in expertise from the EEF and from Research Schools and PD providers from outside Cumbria, WELL is helping to create a more outward facing system in Allerdale and Cumbria.

Conclusion

We make four recommendations for how the project could be further strengthened in years 2 and 3.

i. Strengthen and deepen school engagement in the WELL project generally and in evidence-informed practice and improvement specifically
ii. Further develop networks and encourage a culture of collaborative improvement
iii. Consider providing a new programme of support for headteachers to lead change
iv. Prioritise efforts to strengthen local coherence in support of schools

1. Background to the WELL project and the independent evaluation

1.1 About the WELL project

The WELL (Western Excellence in Learning and Leadership) project is a three-year place-based school improvement programme (2021-2024) funded by Sellafield Ltd/ the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA). The project aims to 'sustainably improve educational outcomes for all young people in West Cumbria, particularly those facing disadvantage' (WELL, 2022), with a focus on all primary and secondary schools in Allerdale and Copeland (n=121). This is to be achieved through the offer of compelling professional development, teacher development, targeted strategies, building local capacity, and developing evidence informed practice. The project is underpinned by access to evidence informed practice, working closely with the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and their Research School network. The project is hosted by Cumbria County Council, but has an independent Board and a small dedicated team, led by Dale Hill (Project Director) and Vicki Clark (Project Manager).

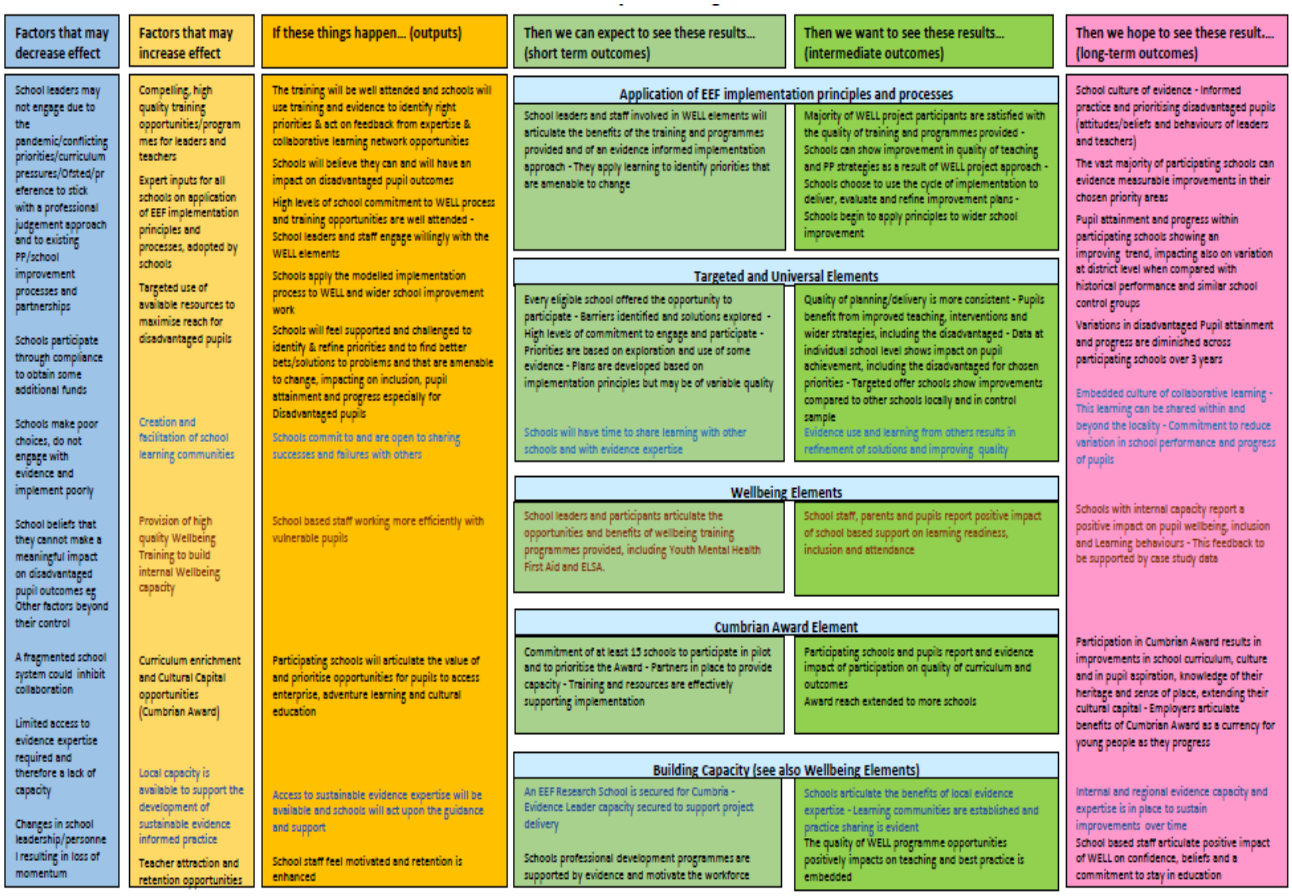
The WELL project was launched in summer 2019, with initial funding of £1.7m. The project's first two years were impacted by Covid-19, but an initial evaluation report in December 2020 indicated that 'the right approach is being taken overall' across the project.[1] In 2021, Sellafield and NDA committed a further £3.9m to extend the project over a further three years (2021-2024). This report provides evaluation findings from year one, covering the 2021-22 academic year.

The project has the following objectives – to:

- use evidence informed approaches to improve pupil attainment, especially for disadvantaged pupils
- provide high quality, research led professional development and proven intervention programmes – promoting the use of the EEF tiered model - in order to improve the quality of teaching, especially of disadvantaged pupils, impacting on pupil attainment and progress.
- support the development of teachers in Allerdale and Copeland as motivated, evidence informed professionals.
- provide curriculum enrichment opportunity and capacity in order to improve resilience and readiness to learn, including for the most vulnerable pupils, impacting on attainment.
- secure education, employment and training outcomes and raised aspirations including for vulnerable pupils including high quality employer experiences in partnership with Cumbria Careers Hub.
- achieve school cultures of evidence informed practice, prioritising closing of the achievement gap.
- create an outward facing school system willing to share and learn with others locally and nationally.

The WELL team developed an initial Theory of Change (ToC) for the project at the outset. This was revised in January 2022, following a workshop with the evaluation team. The revised framework is based on a model developed by 'Let's think'. It shows how the various project activities are designed to address barriers and ensure action by schools that will lead to changes in practice and improvements in teaching, learning and pupil outcomes over the project period. This ToC provides an important conceptual 'map' which the evaluation is designed to test and inform.

[1] See: https://sway.office.com/CbeKPOVTqmg9wUTY?ref=Link



In order to achieve the project objectives, WELL activities are organised into three strands: i) raising standards, ii) closing the gap and, iii) wellbeing. Under these strands sit the following project elements:

- Making the most for disadvantaged pupils and Pupil Premium strategies
- Training and retaining teachers conference
- Universal offer
- Targeted offer
- Enhancing Local capacity
- Wellbeing and learning readiness
- Cumbrian Award
- Employability skills

A key feature of the WELL approach – representing just over half of the total budget in 2021-2022 (see Appendix 1) – is the grants provided to participating schools. 'Universal' grant schools (n=97) receive a minimum annual grant of £4500 per year of the project, while 'Targeted' grant schools (n=23) – which, between them, educate 60% of the disadvantaged pupils in Allerdale and Copeland - receive grants of between £13,800 and £22,600 per year, depending on number of disadvantaged pupils in the school (See Appendix 2 for a list of schools showing Targeted and Universal grants).

A major focus for the WELL team and project since it launched has been to provide training for all schools on the EEF's 'Putting evidence to work – a school's guide to implementation' (Sharples et al,

2018). All 121 schools have attended training on these resources during 2021-22.[2] School leaders have then been encouraged to undertake an internal review to identify a problem they want to address. Universal schools can select a priority focus within the EEF's tiered model of teacher development, targeted intervention or wider strategies. Targeted grant schools may choose more than one tier, linked to chosen priorities. Based on this work, school leaders completed and submitted a WELL-developed action plan proforma as a basis for receiving the school's grant. All schools have then been encouraged to apply the EFF implementation guide approach in how they work to develop and embed their chosen initiatives (see footnote).

In addition to the grants and projects within schools, the WELL project has provided or facilitated access to a range of other opportunities for schools, all of which fit within the ToC and the project strands and elements (see Appendix 3 for a full list). Most of these opportunities take the form of professional development/training (PD) programmes for school staff. The need for these programmes was identified based on consultation with school leaders across Allerdale and Copeland during the early phases of the project. Having identified these priorities, the WELL team sought to identify and make available PD programmes that were evidence-based, for example promoting interventions/approaches that had been evaluated and shown to be effective by the EEF where available. These PD opportunities were optional – school leaders could decide which elements they wanted to prioritise. Schools could also choose to spend WELL grant funding on other (i.e. non-WELL provided) training programmes or resources, in line with their school-defined priorities.

In addition, as indicated in the aims and project elements, WELL has worked to build place-based capacity for improvement across Allerdale and Copeland. For example by: providing funding for a Research School based in Allerdale and Copeland;[3] facilitating school networks to share practice and link together schools with shared interests; supporting teacher retention initiatives; and through support for the Cumbrian Award accreditation, training and delivery for pilot schools.[4]

1.2 About the evaluation

In summer 2021 a team from the University of Nottingham (Toby Greany, Mike Adkins and Georgina Hudson), in partnership with CUREE (Philippa Cordingley and Bart Crisp), was commissioned to evaluate the three-year WELL project. This report sets out findings from the first year of the project (September 2021 – July 2022).

[2] In the first phase of WELL (i.e. before the current evaluation period), all 121 schools received a combination of face to face and online training on the EEF 'Putting evidence to work implementation guide', provided by the Shotton Hall Research School. In autumn 2021 – due to the Covid-19 lockdown - Shotton Hall ran a webinar for all schools, which included a quiz. Schools were expected to watch and complete this before their action plan could be signed off and grant issued. During the course of the year, Dale Hill (WELL Project Director) recorded three videos on specific aspects of implementation which were shared with schools. In summer 2022 (June) all schools attended either face to face or online training (five schools completed this online in September).

[3] The Cumbria Research School is based at Ashfield Junior School in Workington. This Research School has taken on responsibility for providing EEF implementation guide training for WELL and for developing more local capacity for evidence-informed improvement in 2021-22, thus reducing the reliance on Research Schools based outside Cumbria.

[4] The Cumbrian Award was developed during 2021-22. Following a decision to pause in year 1, schools will engage with this initiative in years 2 and 3 of WELL. For this reason, this report does not include any findings on the Cumbrian Award.

The evaluation team's approach is underpinned by Improvement Science (see Box 1). Reflecting the Improvement Science philosophy, a key tenet of the approach has been to work in partnership with the WELL project team and schools in west Cumbria, providing formative as well as summative evidence which can help the project to achieve its aims.

Box 1: What do we mean by Improvement Science?

Improvement Science (IS) recognises that organisations are complex and so assumes that teachers and schools must be individually and collectively engaged in a continual process of learning how to improve, developing 'practice-based evidence'. This learning is structured in cycles of improvement, designed to develop, test, and refine interventions aimed at addressing specific problems.

Improvement Science has been widely adopted in health and other fields (Bradley et al, 2009). In education, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching,[5] in the US, has been integral in promoting Improvement Science, which it describes in six steps:

i. Make the work problem-specific and user-centered, starting with the question: "What specifically is the problem we are trying to solve?"

ii. Variation in performance is the core problem to address, so the aim should be to help everyone learn together how to improve at scale.

iii. See the system that produces the current outcomes. Go and see how local conditions shape work processes. Make your hypotheses for change public and clear.

iv. We cannot improve at scale what we cannot measure. Embed measures of key outcomes and processes to track. Anticipate unintended consequences and measure these too.

v. Anchor practice improvement in disciplined inquiry. Engage in rapid cycles of Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) to learn fast, fail fast, and improve quickly.

vi. Accelerate and broaden improvements through networked communities.

At the project outset, an Evaluation Plan was developed and agreed with the WELL project team and signed off by the Project Board. Before data collection began, the evaluation received ethical approval from the University of Nottingham School of Education Ethics and Research Integrity Committee. This included the preparation and approval of a Data Management Plan, to ensure that data is handled securely. Ethics approval included a commitment to maintain anonymity for schools and individuals that participated in the evaluation, not least so that respondents would feel able to provide honest assessments of the WELL project to the evaluation team. For this reason, case studies and quotes included in this report are anonymised – although we recognise that there is a risk of these being identifiable due to the local focus of the project and evaluation.

The evaluation tender – issued by Cumbria County Council - set out a series of research questions to be addressed. The chapters of this report reflect the questions agreed as the core focus of this evaluation based on discussions with the WELL Project Board.

The first phase of the evaluation involved a literature review. This aimed to identify relevant evidence relating to large scale school improvement programmes in rural contexts and the factors that make them more or less successful. It also included a focus on the current issues facing rural schools in England today. This review forms the basis of the next chapter in this report.

[5] See https://www.carnegiefoundation.org/ accessed 15.3.19

The evaluation is structured in two strands:

i) Implementation and Process Evaluation (IPE) – this seeks to assess the various project elements across the universal and targeted offers. As far as possible this draws on a core set of data collection processes, thereby helping to minimize data collection burdens on schools. In 2021-22 this comprised the following aspects:
    - Observations: four WELL-run workshops/PD sessions
    - Key stakeholder interviews: n=8, including representatives from Ofsted, Local Authority, school system leaders (CASL and LASL), Research School and Teaching School Hub
    - Online survey (December 2021): 81 responses (68% of all schools)
    - Case studies: documentary analysis, visits, observations and interviews with senior leaders, teachers and wider staff (n=30) in six schools, including follow up interviews to assess change over time. The sample of volunteer schools was selected to be broadly representative – for example, with two secondary schools, one all-through and three primaries; mainstream and special; three targeted and three universal; geographical spread (Allerdale and Copeland, coastal/rural) and Ofsted grade (Outstanding/Good/ Requires Improvement)
    - Action research: 15 primary and secondary schools participated, of which 12 schools submitted completed action research write-up "posters" summarising their projects.

ii) Impact Evaluation – this drew on pupil assessment and demographic data provided by the Local Authority (LA) based on national tests and exams held in 2022. For a detailed explanation of how these data were analysed to assess impact see Appendix 2.

This report draws from these various strands to provide an overall assessment of the WELL project's first year, structured against the questions identified by the project Board in Chapter 4.

1.4 A note for readers – some context, caveats and acknowledgements

The WELL project is an ambitious, place-based attempt to make a difference across 121 schools in Western Cumbria. Evaluating progress and impact at this scale and with relatively limited resources presents significant methodological and practical challenges. For example, although WELL includes an important focus on enhancing well-being for children and young people after the pandemic, the evaluation is not designed to assess whether or how levels of well-being are improving. Instead, we focus on the questions set by the project and the ToC that underpins them, seeking to provide an overall picture of how (well) the project has been established and the extent to which schools have been engaged in a clear and appropriate set of activities, with some questions for consideration as it progresses to years 2 and 3.

This report focuses on the first full year of the WELL project's operation and work with schools. The focus at this stage is thus on baseline findings which we can build on in years 2 and 3. This would be the case at any time, but is particularly relevant given the context of schools after the Covid-19 pandemic. This has been an extremely difficult period for schools – and for the children and families that they serve. Wider research has shown that the impact of the pandemic has continued to be felt throughout the 2021-22 academic year, for example in terms of increased learning gaps between more and less advantaged pupils, high rates of absenteeism from school, high proportions of children and young people experiencing mental health issues, and continuing high rates of Covid

among staff (Greany et al, 2021; Greany et al, 2022). Without doubt, these issues made engagement in additional activities more challenging for schools than in 'normal' times - including WELL itself and the evaluation/action research.

The pandemic also has implications for assessing impact, given that national exams and tests were largely suspended during the pandemic while teacher and school assessed outcomes were subject to significant 'grade inflation'. This makes it challenging to track historic data, while results over the project period (2022-2024) will reflect a series of ministerial decisions aimed at addressing 'grade inflation'. Even in 'normal' times, we would not expect to see significant impact on national test outcomes from one year of activity across such a large number of schools. This is partly because schools in the project have (rightly) chosen not to focus money and effort only on exam year groups and have sought to address wider issues (e.g. mental health/wellbeing) which will take time to impact on academic outcomes.

In line with our 'improvement science' approach, we have sought to provide formative feedback to the project team and schools throughout the year where possible. Beyond this, we have actively supported the project aims where feasible – most obviously via the action research strand, which aims to equip participating schools to become more evidence-informed in their work while also providing valuable insights for the evaluation team. This means that we see ourselves as critical friends to the project, rather than as completely 'objective' evaluators.

Finally, we would like to thank the WELL project team and the many system leaders, school leaders and staff who have contributed to the evaluation this year. We are grateful for your time and professional generosity.

2. Improving schools at scale in remote and rural areas: findings from the literature

Key points:

England has over 5,000 rural schools, of which a third are very small (<110 pupils). Research shows that rural schools are an essential feature of remote communities and can offer many advantages, for example in how they connect young people to their communities and prepare them for life, work and citizenship. Nevertheless, common challenges facing rural schools include: geographic, social and cultural isolation; limited employment opportunities; transport costs; stretched budgets; recruitment, retention and workload issues for staff; and, in small schools, narrower curriculum options.

In 2017/18, rural areas in England had lower achievement in English and Maths GCSE for all levels of deprivation compared with urban areas.

International evidence from school systems that achieve high levels of performance and high levels of equity demonstrates the importance of coherent place-based support for all schools. This coherence can be achieved in different ways, for example by adopting standardised practices across all schools or through more flexible models that rely on shared values and networked approaches to collective knowledge sharing.

Government policy has initiated a profound but incomplete process of fragmentation and realignment across the English school system. The expansion of academies and roll-back of Local Authorities has led to fragmentation and a loss of place-based coherence in terms of how schools are provided with support and challenge.

The existence of multiple different school-based curriculum and support hubs (Maths, English, Behaviour etc), each working in different ways and across different footprints to provide Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for schools can be confusing and make it challenging for some schools to access the support they need, particularly in remote and rural locations.

The government's ambition is that all schools will be part of a 'strong' MAT by 2030. However, as yet, few Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) have proved willing or able to operate across rural areas.

The Opportunity Area programme invested in place-based working in 12 local areas over a five-year period. Key lessons to emerge (which chime with wider research) include: the need to consult widely and listen to stakeholders – building trust; avoiding a 'one size fits all' model - fostering collective action; and drawing on partners and expertise from beyond the locality. In addition, we set out key considerations for designing rural school improvement networks (see Box 2.1)

Schools in England have been encouraged to adopt evidence-based approaches to improvement through the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and its Research Schools network. One initiative aimed at incentivising schools in a rural county (Suffolk) to adopt EEF programmes was found to have achieved good take up overall. However, the effectiveness of implementation within schools appears to centre on the schools' leadership capability and staffing capacity, while securing take up from schools in coastal areas and those most in need of support is a challenge.

2.1 Introduction

This chapter draws together research and evidence in order to set the WELL project and the evaluation findings within a wider context. It starts by exploring international and national literature relating to rural areas and schools, highlighting both strengths and common areas of challenge they

often face. It then briefly reviews national education policy changes in England in recent decades before focussing on the implications for the 'middle tier' that sits between schools and central government (i.e. the space in which WELL is seeking to achieve impact) and place-based improvement in rural areas more generally.

2.2 Rural Schools and Communities: strengths and challenges

There is no single definition of 'rural': some see it as a socially constructed concept, based on a sense of community or a set of norms and values, while others define it through geographic and demographic factors, such as population density or distance (OECD, 2016). In this literature review we adopt a definition of 'rural' as including agricultural communities, former mining towns, and remote coastal towns, which captures the diversity of contexts in Allerdale and Copeland.

Rural schools are recognised as having many strengths when compared to schools in urban areas. For example, international evidence reveals how rural schools can connect young people to their communities and prepare them for life, work and citizenship, including through the innovative use of technology (Echazarra & Radinger, 2018).

However, international evidence (Echazarra & Radinger, 2019; Murphy, 2020; Hillier *et al,* 2022) does also highlight a number of challenges facing rural schools and their communities: 1) distance from more populated areas can result in issues such as professional retention, transport and access troubles, a lack of socialisation beyond the rural community, and a reduced number of local services; 2) sparse populations can often result in small schools with low pupil numbers; 3) ageing populations - younger members often migrate to urban centres, while elderly residents remain; 4) rural poverty and disadvantage; and 5) limited ethnic diversity compared to urban populations. In England, a report on coastal towns by the House of Lords found that the "sense of isolation and 'end of the line' feel has left small town, seaside communities overlooked and feeling unloved by the Government, local councils, service providers and businesses alike" (HoL, 2019:2).

Rural schools make up approximately 20% of England's schools - around 5000 schools in total, of which a third are very small (<110 pupils) (CofE, 2018). There has been minimal large-scale research into rural schooling in England over the last two decades (Hargreaves, 2009), although a number of more recent studies have examined related areas, such as coastal schools. This research highlights the following issues:

- Policy neglect: Rural localities are often overlooked within policy, which is seen to be largely urban-centric (Rural Services Network, 2021; Bell & Jayne, 2010)
- Limited access to improvement initiatives: Educational isolation makes it harder to access resources for school improvement (Ovendon-Hope & Passy, 2019). Schools in rural areas, particularly coastal areas with high levels of deprivation, are often neglected in government-run school-improvement initiatives, which have tended to focus on inner city schools (Odell, 2017; Passy & Ovendon-Hope, 2020). Similarly, recruitment and retention of teachers and school leaders can be challenging in rural and remote contexts (Hargreaves 2009).
- Financial challenges: The legal presumption against closure means that small rural schools are generally expected to remain open, even when they serve very small numbers of pupils. There have been attempts to alleviate running costs for rural schools, through initiatives such as the National Funding Formula (NFF), but this has been criticised for only allowing minimum staffing levels (Rural Services Network, 2021a).

- Increased mental health challenges: Young people in rural areas often face mental health challenges (Shucksmith, 2004) and, in recent years, are more likely to have felt the negative impacts of Covid19 (Phillipson et al, 2020).
- Limited aspirations and opportunities: School leavers in isolated areas are likely to experience limited employment opportunities (Passy & Ovendon-Hope, 2020). Limited resources, deprivation and hardship have a detrimental effect on how young people in rural areas perceive and experience education, impacting on motivation and aspiration (Muijs, 2015; Wenham, 2020). Studies have shown that pupils in rural and isolated locations often feel that they have not received adequate careers advice and find the transition from school to further education to be problematic (Wenham, 2020).
- Breadth of provision: Small rural schools can find it hard to provide the curriculum breadth on offer in larger schools, while provision for children with special needs can be hard to access in sparsely populated areas (Hargreaves, 2009; Muijs, 2015).
- Educational outcomes and equity: Hargreaves (2009: 126) reviews a range of studies and concludes that small and rural schools are generally "successful in meeting and often exceeding the government's assessment and inspection standards". However, more recent research finds that pupils in isolated schools tend to perform lower than their peers in less isolated schools (Odell, 2017). Other evidence indicates wider challenges for educational equity: in 2017/18, rural areas had lower achievement in English and Maths GCSE for all levels of deprivation compared with urban areas (DEFRA, 2020).

2.3 Policy Changes and the Implications for Rural Schools and Localities in England

This section starts with a brief overview of key national reforms over recent decades. It focuses in particular on the implications of these reforms for place-based school systems and what is known as the 'middle tier' that sits between individual schools and central government. It concludes by homing in on what is known about how these developments have played out in rural areas.

The focus of educational reforms in England in recent decades has been on raising pupil standards, improving school and teaching quality, and enhancing equity. The 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) shaped England's current school system, laying the ground for the National Curriculum, national tests, Ofsted inspections and parental choice of school. The Act also introduced Local Management of Schools (LMS – aka School Based Management or school autonomy), giving school governing bodies and head teachers control over budgets, staffing and other operational areas. By 2009 school leaders in England were ranked among the most autonomous in the world in terms of their decision-making powers (OCED 2011). Increased school autonomy involved a parallel reduction in the influence of England's 152 Local (Education) Authorities (LAs), although they retained a role in overseeing and funding locally maintained schools. The ERA reforms also aimed to increase choice for parents and to strengthen competitive pressures between schools by introducing new schools as well as various new types and categories of school (Courtney 2015).

The New Labour governments in power from 1997–2010 built on the ERA framework, developing what came to be known as a 'high-autonomy-high-accountability' system (Greany and Waterhouse 2016). New Labour invested heavily in education, creating a range of national strategies and programmes that aimed to 'drive up' standards, particularly in key areas such as literacy and numeracy (Barber 2008). Meanwhile, there was a parallel focus on enhancing equity, for example by seeking to integrate schools with wider services for children (Raffo, Dyson and Kerr 2014).

Many New Labour initiatives included a more or less overt focus on encouraging schools to collaborate, both with each other and with wider partners. Perhaps the most significant and successful New Labour school improvement initiative was the London Challenge (Ainscow 2015; Baars et al. 2014), which had multiple strands but included a focus on brokering successful schools to support under-performing schools: an initiative that later developed into the National Leaders of Education (NLEs) programme. New Labour also established a legal framework for inter-school partnerships in 2002, enabling maintained schools to federate together, with a single governing body (and, often, executive head teacher) overseeing two or more schools (Chapman, Muijs and MacAllister 2011). Labour also legislated for and introduced the first academies and academy chains (Hill 2010): in practice, the number of these was small in New Labour's time, but these initiatives laid the ground for the subsequent development of academies and Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) by later Conservative governments.

The election of Conservative-led governments since 2010 has seen wide-ranging changes in the policy framework for schools. Many of these changes have built on the existing ERA framework, but with a notable change of emphasis. For example, the National Curriculum was revised to be more 'knowledge-based', with parallel changes in the design and content of national tests and exams. Another emphasis has been to encourage or require schools to adopt more evidence-based approaches to improvement, with the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) given a leading role in producing and disseminating evidence to schools (Coldwell et al, 2018). These changes have combined with real-terms reductions in the education budget and in cuts to wider services for disadvantaged children, placing considerable pressures on schools (Lupton and Thomson 2015).

A core thrust of the changes introduced since 2010 has been to develop what the government has termed a 'self-improving, school-led system' (DfE 2010), in which partnership and collaborative working between schools would be an essential requirement (House of Commons 2013). The government argued that these reforms would 'dismantle the apparatus of central control and bureaucratic compliance' (DfE 2010: 66) by 'moving control to the frontline' (DfE 2016: 8). In practice, as Greany and Higham (2018) show, the government's approach has been to combine top-down hierarchical pressure and coercion with a mixture of incentives aimed at encouraging lateral school networks that support centrally defined priorities.

The most significant development in this area has been the expansion of academy schools, enabled by the passage of the Academies Act in 2010. A decade later, more than a third of all primary schools (35 per cent) and more than three quarters of all secondary schools (77 per cent) had become academies. Academies are non-profit companies that are wholly funded and overseen by national – rather than local – government, so their expansion has led to a significant reduction in the capacity and role of England's LAs and an increase in the role of the central Department for Education (Greany 2020). An academy can operate as a single stand-alone school, but most are part of a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) (Greany and McGinity 2021).[i] There are now more than 1200 MATs in England, operating anywhere between two and 50+ academies within a single organizational structure overseen by a board and Chief Executive. The government's recent white paper (DfE, 2022) set out the ambition for all schools to join a 'strong' MAT by 2030.

The second main strand of policy in this area has been the use of 'system leadership' and school-to-school support (Cousin 2019). This has involved high performing schools and school leaders being designated by the government, for example as Teaching Schools/Hubs, Maths Hubs, English Hubs, Behaviour Hubs, Computing Hubs and so on.[6] These 'system leader' schools receive core funding and have a remit to support other schools to improve, including through the provision of Continuous Professional Development (CPD).

The development of MATs and wider 'system leadership' initiatives can be seen as an attempt to replace the support previously provided to schools by LAs, thereby reshaping the 'middle tier' that operates between individual schools and central government. International evidence from school systems that achieve high levels of performance and high levels of equity demonstrates the importance of coherent place-based support for all schools (Cousin, 2020; Cousin and Crossley-Holland, 2021). This coherence can be achieved in different ways, for example by adopting standardised practices across all schools or through more flexible models that rely on shared values and networked approaches to collective knowledge sharing (Glazer et al, 2022). Importantly, while LAs provided place-based support for all schools pre-academisation, the new arrangements are widely described as fragmented and messy, including by the Department for Education itself (2022) (see also Gilbert, 2017, Bubb et al., 2019, Cousin, 2020). Greany (2020) analysed five case studies of locality-level change in England, focussing in particular on the changing roles of local authorities (LAs), showing that these change process have been uneven and often fraught, with significant implications for place-based coherence, equity and legitimacy.

Partly driven by the 'levelling up' agenda, one strand of national education policy in recent years has focussed back on place, seeking to address systemic fragmentation through more co-ordinated models of improvement – mostly obviously through the Opportunity Areas (OA) programme and the new Educational Investment Areas. The OA programme ran for 5 years until 2022 and received £108 million. It took a place-based approach to improve young people's life chances in 12 local areas, which face entrenched and widespread social and economic challenges. As well as funding, the areas were allocated a high level of decision-making autonomy to deliver projects which met local area needs. Learning from the OA programme has been drawn together in five guides published by DfE (locality working, school to school support, inclusion, mental health and wellbeing, and teacher recruitment - DfE, 2022). The locality working guide (DfE, 2022a) highlights important points, including: the need to consult widely and listen to stakeholders who live, work, and learn in the locality; moving away from a 'one size fits all' model, instead towards enacting collective action; drawing on delivery partners from beyond the locality in order to access new approaches and expertise; and the need to build trust and allay concerns by engaging stakeholders as partners from the outset. The school to school support publication focusses on the delivery of 'Implementation Matters (IM)' workshops for system leaders in Bradford that were designed to guide the development and implementation of action plans that would aid in the delivery of actions towards the school improvement plan (DfE, 2022b). An evaluative report found that the intervention resulted

[6] These hubs have been created at different times and with different remits and geographical spans: 'Maths Hubs' in 2014, 'English Hubs' in 2018, 'Computing Hubs' in 2019, 'Behaviour Hubs' in 2020 and 'Teaching School Hubs' in 2021. At present there are 40 Maths Hubs, 34 English Hubs, 34 Computing Hubs, 22 Behaviour Hubs and 87 Teaching School Hubs in England. In addition, there are 28 Research Schools and 10 Associate Research Schools that work with the Education Endowment Foundation to disseminate research.

in increased access to expert advice and knowledge, collaboration within the school, better personal development for headteachers, enhanced professional networks and contact with other schools, and strong partnerships between headteachers and their wider schools (DfE, 2022b).

Meanwhile, in order to counter fragmentation, LAs and school leaders have sometimes worked in more 'bottom up' ways to establish partnerships that can care for all children in a locality (Gilbert, 2020). For example, over 30 area-based education partnerships have voluntarily formed "with the central purpose of improving local issues of quality and equity which cannot easily be tackled by autonomous schools working in a fractured system" (https://aepa.org.uk). These partnerships aim to take responsibility for the quality of education in a local area, act as an engine of improvement by brokering connections and initiatives across schools, stimulate innovation, bridge the divide between different types of schools and provide a framework to allow schools to work together. It is notable that the majority of these partnerships operate in urban areas, although some shire counties do have equivalent models – including CASL and LASL in Cumbria.

What are the implications of these changes for rural schools and rural localities? As noted above, there has been limited research into rural schools in recent years and this, coupled with the tendency for education policy to prioritise urban schools, makes it challenging to assess the impact of these reforms on rural areas. The research that does exist suggests that:

- Shire counties – which encompass most rural areas and are generally larger than urban unitary authorities – have often (but not always) responded more gradually to the recent reforms, with lower proportions of schools becoming academies and larger LA school improvement teams (Crawford et al, 2022; Greany and Higham, 2018; ISOS, 2014).
- Rural schools have often been proactive in forming local collaborative arrangements, including through federations. In his review, Muijs (2015: 304) concludes that "collaboration may be especially valuable for rural schools. It can help address some of their specific issues such as a lack of resources or scale, and may aid in raising standards and performance".
- As yet, relatively few MATs have proved willing or able to operate across rural areas due to financial and practical constraints (Education Select Committee, 2017).
- Initially, areas of deprivation, such as rural coastal towns, experienced limited impact from national initiatives designed to raise standards (Ofsted, 2013). More recent reports have identified some evidence of progress across samples of rural and coastal schools, including rises in pupil attainment and increased investment in professional development for teachers (Ovenden-Hope & Passy, 2015).
- Some rural schools find it challenging to locate appropriate CPD for teachers (DfE, 2019).
- One initiative aimed at incentivising schools in a rural county (Suffolk) to adopt EEF programmes between 2016-18 was found to have achieved good take up by schools overall, with schools reporting few barriers to implementation of their chosen interventions. However, the report notes that the effectiveness of implementation within schools centres on the schools' leadership capability and staffing capacity. Furthermore, researchers found that "'Good' and better schools (as judged by Ofsted) and schools that were shown to be already evidence-engaged were comparatively over-represented" – indicating the consistent challenge involved in securing take up from schools in coastal areas and those in need of support.

Conclusion

The evidence outlined here provides a strong rationale for place-based programmes such as WELL. Rural schools face additional challenges compared to their urban counterparts, but they are frequently neglected in national policy-driven initiatives. The fragmentation of the school system in England in recent years, as a result of academisation and the roll back of LAs, has created particular challenges for schools in terms of where and how they can access support and CPD for staff. WELL seeks to provide a level of place-based coherence and support for schools, with the potential to both plug gaps in existing provision and to generate sustainable models of collaboration. The evidence outlined here provides some valuable pointers in terms of how WELL might best operate to secure engagement from schools, in particular drawing on learning from the OAs programme. This evidence also signals some of the learning in relation to strengthening evidence-informed practice in schools in rural areas, where there is a need to consider the skills and capacity of schools to integrate evidence into wider school improvement processes and to engage weaker schools. A final implication of this review is that WELL will need to accelerate the development of lateral networks which bring together schools and wider providers of CPD, in particular the various curriculum hubs, if it is to generate a sustainable improvement culture that stretches beyond the life of the WELL project itself. Box 2.1, below, draws on a review of evidence on designing rural school improvement networks in the US to set out some key considerations of how such lateral networks can be encouraged (see also Greany and Kamp, 2022).

Box 2.1: Lessons from the literature on designing a network for rural schools in the US

- *Shared Goals* - important early on to articulate the desired outcome(s) for a network.
- *Site Selection and Participation* - create an environment that makes participants want to join the network.
- *Form of Networking Activities* – focus on collaboration that supports common goals. Consider the kinds of learning relationships needed – avoid a "meeting" culture or focus on implementing externally prescribed changes.
- *Focus* - decide on the work needed to achieve specific and meaningful goals.
- *Leadership and Network Steering* – requires leadership that initiates, supports, and steers, providing clarity, focus, and discipline in execution.
- *Resources* – external facilitators can: "disturb" the network with new ideas and strategies, support evidence-informed judgment, and provide links to wider organizations and communities. Provide release time for participants if possible and ensure they are not overwhelmed.
- *Network Citizenship* - establish clear expectations for member participation and accountability. Selection of network protocols and tools should address risks - including under- and over-participation, groupthink, vagueness of focus, slowness of pace in moving to action, lack of visible products or short-term benefits, and excessive efforts to secure top-down regulation of the network.
- *Knowledge Circulation* – design roles and relationships to ensure inclusive access to knowledge and develop routines for knowledge sharing and development.

Adapted from Hargreaves, A., Parsley, D., and Cox, E., (2015) Designing Rural School Improvement Networks: Aspirations and Actualities, *Peabody Journal of Education*, 90:2, 306-321

2. Establishing WELL: stakeholder views on the school landscape and priorities

Key points:

Schools in Allerdale and Copeland face distinctive challenges, largely resulting from the region's isolation, sparsity and socio-economic conditions.

The reduced capacity of the Local Authority coupled with the relatively limited engagement with newer government-supported hubs and the small number of MATs operating in Allerdale and Copeland all indicate the need for a place-based improvement programme such as WELL.

In terms of current educational provision, there are many strengths for WELL to build on. For example, the number of schools judged as Requiring Improvement or Inadequate by Ofsted is relatively low.

We highlight key contextual and cultural features of the school landscape in Allerdale and Copeland that the WELL project needs to take account of. On the one hand schools in Cumbria have been proactive in forming and participating in clusters and system leadership networks, most notably LASL and CASL. Equally, many schools lack the capacity to engage fully in such 'school-led' improvement efforts and there are underlying issues with competition – in particular at secondary level – which suggest a need for more proactive facilitation.

In terms of school priorities, these centre on how to balance shorter-term recovery priorities, including addressing student well-being issues, with longer-term accountability and teaching and learning-related priorities. Schools have a clear focus on addressing disadvantage – and it is clear that this requires a broader approach than simply focussing on quality first teaching in the classroom. Given this, the WELL areas of focus appear well designed and the WELL team has been flexible in how it has responded to emerging requirements.

School leaders are under considerable pressure in the face of tight resources and limited capacity. There may be a need to consider how WELL supports headteachers in years 2 and 3.

Finally, we asked our system leader interviewees for their views on how WELL has been set up, as a separate project with its own board and dedicated team, under the auspices of the Council. There was universal support for this approach, which was seen as preferable to other possibilities which might have been considered.

3.1 Introduction

Children and families in Allerdale and Copeland[7] benefit from significant opportunities, with rich community assets, active quality of life, and relatively high levels of participation in education and training among 16-17-year-olds in the years before the pandemic (Cumbria Community Foundation, 2019).

One particularly salient feature of Allerdale and Copeland is its isolation from other parts of England and even from the more popular tourist areas of the Lake District. Allerdale and Copeland's schools fall within the categories of 'rural' and 'rural town and fringe' in a mixture of village, hamlet and

[7] At present, Allerdale and Copeland exist as two separate districts and boroughs, however as of 2023 Cumbria will be amalgamated into two unitary authorities and both districts will have their functions transferred to a new authority to be known as Cumberland.

coastal settings. As we explored in the previous chapter, remote and rural communities face additional challenges and West Cumbria is no exception, with some highly deprived areas and above average levels of childhood obesity and mental health concerns (Cumbria Community Foundation, 2019). The most recent Indices of Deprivation report positioned Allerdale and Copeland as IMD Decile 1, meaning that they sit within the top 10% of deprived LSOAs (Lower-layer Super Output Areas) nationally (IoD, 2019).

Educationally the region has many strengths, including that around 91% of local schools inspected by Ofsted had been graded as either Good or Outstanding in autumn 2022 (See Table 2.1 below). However, as we explore in more detail in Chapter 4, average pupil outcomes across all Key Stages were mostly below the national average before the pandemic and this trend has continued in 2022. As a place-based project, WELL is seeking to address these challenges and improve outcomes for all children, in particular for the most disadvantaged.

Table 2.1: Ofsted judgements of schools in Allerdale and Copeland (November 2022)

Ofsted Overall Effectiveness	Count (%)
Outstanding	18 (15.4%)
Good	88 (75.2%)
Requires Improvement	6 (5.1%)
Inadequate	4 (3.4%)
No Rating	1 (0.9%)
Total Number of Schools (N)	117 (100%)

This chapter draws together views from system and school leaders relating to the context of West Cumbria and the educational challenges and opportunities that WELL will need to consider. These findings are drawn mainly from the interviews but with some findings from the survey.

3.2 The School Landscape in Allerdale and Copeland

A commitment to place, but with challenges resulting from isolation and deprivation

Across all the interviews there was a strong sense of community and connection to West Cumbria. Many interviewees were Cumbrian 'born and bred', having left the county to attend university or further education but then returned (sometimes later in life), displaying a strong sense of connection to the communities they served. As a result, schools appeared highly committed to serving their local communities and to increasing social mobility for children and young people. One example was a case study primary school in a very deprived community, where senior leaders were committed to outreach and expressed a sense of responsibility for showing pupils the world outside their immediate locality, given that many pupils had 'never been off the estate'. Another case study secondary school in a deprived, coastal town has appointed two associate heads to focus on engaging the community and developing enrichment and extra-curricular activities.

Despite their commitment to their local communities, interviewees highlighted challenges facing Allerdale and Copeland which chime with the themes from the literature. This included a sense of isolation, feeling 'forgotten', often coupled with experiences of deprivation and inter-generational poverty - "when we talk about West Cumbria, it is certainly a place which is characterised differently from the rest of the county insofar as… some of the indices of social deprivation… are worse over there". Deprivation within the area was attributed to the decline in agricultural, maritime, and mining industries which had previously formed an integral part of the local infrastructure and

economy – “those things don't really exist anymore in terms of the employment sector, which has translated to higher levels of unemployment and the associated socio-economic deprivation that would accompany that. So yeah, high levels of unemployment, lots of alcoholism or drug abuse”.

Some Head teachers reflected on how their own experience had motivated them to prioritise closing disadvantage gaps within the area:

> *“I grew up in similar circumstances. I was fortunate, I had a very, very supportive family and education was my way to move on in the world and I'm very passionate about that for our children. So with values like ours of huge deprivation, like I said, 58% pupil premium. We've got 25% of our kids on safeguarding, huge, massive deprivation, 4th generation unemployed. You know the pits closed, the steel works closed, the harbour is closed.”*

All schools interviewed reported elements of deprivation to varying degrees, even those perceived to be more ‘affluent’. For example, one case study school has a reputation for excellence and staff explained that it is sometimes mistaken for an independent school by parents, but the headteacher argued that many of the families it serves exist just above the threshold for Pupil Premium. One example given was children whose parents run guest houses and B&Bs, who are expected to help out with the family business, which can impact negatively on their schoolwork.

In addition to the socio-economic challenges of the area, schools felt a sense of geographic isolation. This was also reflected in the survey, where nine in ten (90%) headteachers agreed or strongly agreed that Allerdale and Copeland’s remoteness can make school improvement challenging. Head teachers felt that there were ‘quite isolated’ from the rest of the country, even in relation to the most local cities and towns such as Carlisle and Penrith, and there was a sense of exclusion from the national agenda – “Isolated at times, a little bit out of touch at times, from what's going on nationally”.

This sense of isolation also operated within Allerdale and Copeland, largely due to its size and the diversity of its schools – “With coastal towns, with urban towns, with tiny villages, with big primaries, with a city, we're very spread out geographically”. As a result, one system leader explained that they found it “quite hard to think of it as a homogenous place.” The sparsity of the landscape, coupled with the parental choice agenda affecting catchment areas, meant that some pupils needed to be bussed in to school from distances of up to an hour away, making it harder for schools to develop a strong sense of community. One interviewee argued that the “issue of small schools” presented a particularly significant challenge for improvement across the area, for example because headteachers in these schools might be teaching for two or three days a week and have very small staff teams with no capacity for backfill to attend external PD events, making it difficult for these schools to engage with an initiative such as WELL. These factors combined to make it difficult for schools to collaborate and to offer school to school support.

Competition, Fragmentation and Academisation

According to many interviewees the challenges of isolation are compounded by competition between schools, fragmentation across the ‘middle tier’ that supports schools and the government’s push for academisation.

In the survey, 50% of secondary respondents and 32% of primary respondents agreed with the statement 'there is a clear local hierarchy of schools in my area, in terms of their status and popularity with parents.' The interviews reinforced this sense of a stratified secondary sector, with significant competition between schools in order to attract pupils and associated resources – "They rely very heavily on the migration of students from other catchments, in order to maintain, to have sufficient pupil numbers." These issues could also impact on primary schools – for example if the school was positioned as a feeder to a popular secondary: "there's no catchment area, so much anymore in primary, so parents can bring their children from wherever they want to, but also sometimes it gives them that choice of what secondary school they go to." Adding fuel to this fire, there were reports of a 'dip in numbers' in some areas of the county:

> *"We have a very high number of surplus places in the county across the place... (and) that has a negative impact on standards, but also a perverse incentive around behaviours and people are a bit cagey, they're not quite as open."*

One interviewee described the competition between secondaries as 'toxic', but there was also a view that recent improvements – including in Ofsted grades - in some local secondary schools that had previously been seen to be failing had helped to even the playing field somewhat. Nevertheless, the competitive environment between secondary schools was seen to have created a culture of gatekeeping, whereby schools felt they needed to guard their 'best kept secrets' (we explore evidence of changes to this culture as a result of WELL in section 4.4).

The combination of feeling isolated from national policy initiatives coupled with local competition and status hierarchies between schools was seen to have shaped responses to the academy agenda in Allerdale and Copeland. Overall, West Cumbria has relatively low numbers of academies when compared to other parts of England: around 19% of primaries and 54% of secondaries in Allerdale and Copeland were academies by autumn 2022, compared to 39% of primaries and 80% of secondaries nationally. Around 80% of the academies in Allerdale and Copeland are part of one of the seven Multi-Academy Trusts operating in the area.

Several interviewees argued that low levels of academisation reflected a sense of distrust of the national agenda among headteachers in particular. For example, one system leader suggested:

> *"The multi-academy trust thing, I think maybe part of that comes down to the isolation that this area faces and being out of the loop of that national agenda, on lots of things, over time, so that sort of breeds distrust.... people don't trust what it's all about, because they're not sure what it's all about and what the benefits are."*

Several head teacher interviewees expressed strong opposition to the academisation agenda, expressing fears that schools would 'become businesses rather than places of education' and that outside partners or 'larger city schools' would not understand the place-based needs of small rural primary schools (although such views are by no means uncommon in other parts of the country as well – for example, see Greany and Higham, 2018):

> *"I worry about the academy side of things. I know that at some point, apparently, we all have to be going to go into an academy. I will go in kicking and screaming. That's me, personally. I don't necessarily like... how can I put it? From some of the academies that I've seen, the way*

> *they run, that isn't for me, and that isn't for my school, and it isn't for my children, and it's certainly not for my parents in this community."*

Competition between schools and, sometimes, personality clashes between individual leaders, in particular at secondary level, was also seen as a factor in whether schools would choose to join or create a MAT - "all of the schools in the West, I've already said a bit, they're quite competitive. So the idea of joining either [name] or [name] will not go down well with any of these secondary schools."

Other factors were also seen to be at play in the academisation agenda. For example, one system leader argued that the Regional Schools Commissioner had experienced difficulties in finding sponsors to take on failing schools in the area, due to the distances and costs involved. Another highlighted the issue of large numbers of diocesan schools which have additional criteria around which schools they can form a trust with.

Reduced Local Authority Services and the Emergence of New Middle Tier Providers

As a result of academisation and wider cuts to services in recent years, the role and capacity of Local Authorities in relation to school support and improvement has been significantly reduced. This was being experienced by all schools across Allerdale and Copeland, but particularly the maintained schools. Despite its reduced capacity, the Local Authority was still valued by schools. Interviewees indicated that different schools have responded differently to these changes, with secondary schools in particular more likely to work independently. Meanwhile, new government-sponsored providers – most significantly the newly created Teaching School Hub – have begun to establish themselves, although it is notable that wider government initiatives, such as the Maths Hub, English Hub and Behaviour Hub, do not appear to have engaged many schools in the region.

The LA continues to support its maintained schools at differentiated levels depending on each school's needs. Interviewees in these schools expressed a continuing sense of connection to the LA and valued the support it provides: "My LA advisor is at the other end of the phone whenever I need her. She's there, she comes to our meetings, she sends the stuff that we need to know about". The LA team attends school cluster and network meetings throughout Allerdale and Copeland, where their input is widely valued.

Despite this continuing support, system leaders argued that LA services and capabilities had been "pared back to almost nothing". One argued that the impact of LA support was "minimal" as "their ability to do anything is very much limited" and the reduced funding has meant less financial support for schools.

There were different views on how schools were responding to these changes, which appeared to reflect differences in the capacity of schools in different circumstances to be more or less proactive in seeking out alternative forms of support. At a broad level, LA support was being taken up by maintained primary schools, while secondary schools preferred to rely on head teacher networks or other secondary schools for peer support and academies and those in MATs rarely engage with LA services. Within this overall picture, some schools – particularly small, remote schools - appeared to face greater challenges in identifying where and how to access support: there "just isn't the manpower at the local authority anymore to be able to do that". Other headteachers argued that they had been left to "come up with something" in lieu of the LA but had found creative ways to do

this: “it used to have, you know, there would be a geography specialist working for the local authority that you would ring and say ‘How do you do this?’ There isn't anybody (now) and I think we've made better links actually with secondary schools as well and using their specialist teachers”.

Clearly, part of the challenge for the LA is how to both support its remaining maintained schools while also forging new ways of working with academies and MATs. System leaders indicated that the LA had begun to work more responsively to achieve this: “I think there had been previously a little bit more of a partisan approach around ‘these are our local authority schools’ rather than ‘This is just our complex education landscape, and we have to learn to work within it’, so that's very much the flavour, and I think COVID and our approach to that has only served to enhance the depth of that system leadership in the county.”

Meanwhile, as outlined in the last chapter, the government has supported a variety of new ‘middle tier’ hubs and initiatives aimed at addressing the gaps left by the roll back of LAs, such as Maths Hubs, English Hubs, Behaviour Hubs and so on. Half of the case study schools referenced working with at least one of these bodies, suggesting that they have begun to achieve engagement across West Cumbria but have by no means replaced the support that was previously available through the LA. The two exceptions to this are the Research School funded by WELL (see Chapters 1 and 4) and the newly established Teaching School Hub (TSH), which started work in autumn 2021.[8] The TSH footprint covers the whole of Cumbria, with responsibility for securing participation in the government’s new Early Career Framework and National Professional Qualifications. This footprint means that the TSH it is “not in competition with anyone” and it thus hoped to “draw the whole county together”, in particular forming a sense of cohesion amongst the “diverse profile of secondary schools”. According to the TSH lead, its initial efforts had been well received – “we've been very successful at getting primary and secondary to work better together”. Across our wider interviews there was some evidence of schools engaging with the TSH, where it was seen as being “quite good in bringing in people from outside of Cumbria”.

Clusters, Networks and System Leadership

In the context of reduced support from Local Authorities, the government has encouraged schools to collaborate in lateral networks through its ‘self-improving, school-led system’ agenda (Greany and Kamp, 2022; Greany and Higham, 2018). The survey indicated reasonably strong commitment to collaboration, with two thirds (64%) of respondents agreeing that schools in the area collaborate together well, and a similar proportion (60%) disagreeing that a lack of trust between schools hinders meaningful collaboration. However, in line with the points made above regarding competition and status hierarchies, almost one in five respondents (19%) (particularly secondaries) agreed that a lack of trust hinders collaboration,

The interview data revealed a relatively strong network infrastructure in Allerdale and Copeland which was seen as helping schools to navigate external changes (including the pandemic) and to collaborate on shared priorities. The core of these networks is the local clusters, which all schools belong to and which are supported by the LA. These local clusters are then networked together

[8] One of our system leader interviewees was from the Teaching School Hub, which will certainly have influenced our assessment of its role and level of engagement compared to the other hubs (which were not interviewed, except the Research School).

through the LASL (Local Association of System Leaders) and CASL (Cumbria Association of System Leaders) networks, as this system leader headteacher explained:

> *"In the West, we've settled lots of network meetings, so instead of it just being the heads who meet at the cluster meetings, we now have subject leader meetings; we have early years; we have SENCO; we have DSL (Designated Safeguard Leader) meetings; we've gone for economy of scale for training. It's a place where we support each other and what we do with the West, the week before the LASL meeting, we have a cluster leads meeting. So if you look at it, a three-week programme - in week one, the clusters meet, and the cluster leads collect any concerns, recommendations, anything, questions that need to be asked. The cluster lead sends me to the cluster lead meeting with myself and the facilitator [name], and we collate any of that information to pass on to CASL, which is the place where all of the LASLs joined together to see if there's Cumbria wide issues."*

The clusters were well-received by schools who utilised them, with three of the case study schools citing them as invaluable networks for sensemaking and sharing best practice. Head teachers operating within these clusters would sometimes form sub-networks, whereby they created groups based around certain priorities - "we have a heads and chairs cluster meeting as well that I set-up through the cluster where our heads and chairs meet and then we did an action plan from it and one of the actions was Ofsted". System leaders felt that this way of networking enabled stronger leadership and more collaborative working at primary level. Meanwhile, secondaries preferred to rely on wider but still geographically based networks – ""the secondaries are organised into consortia North, South and West.....no, North, Very South, West and a little bit of East".

One issue seen in other areas of England is the question of whether and how academies and MATs engage in local cluster arrangements, given that they have their own priorities and ways of working (Greany and Kamp, 2022). Academies in Allerdale and Copeland were reported to have distanced themselves from the clusters and networks - "There's been some debate amongst the academies themselves, that is my understanding, as to how they should be represented. There was at one point we asked, did one academy person want to come and represent a group of academies, but they weren't keen on working that way". It was felt that, for some academies, the meetings were not focused enough on attainment and standards, but mostly that disengagement was a cause of "I don't think they can quite decide how to organise themselves".

3.3 Improvement Priorities

In the survey, carried out in autumn 2021, school leaders highlighted four priorities for their school this academic year: Mental health, wellbeing and pastoral care of pupils; improving teaching and learning; improving outcomes in specific subject areas (particularly English); and Covid recovery and 'catch up'. The interviews carried out throughout the year broadly chimed with this picture, showing equal importance given to wellbeing, curriculum development, and school quality and improvement. Woven within these priorities was a desire to close disadvantage gaps caused by deprivation and isolation and to address issues relating to Covid recovery. Curriculum development priorities could be seen to place a strong emphasis on improving outcomes in literacy and oracy, which had suffered as a result of the pandemic.

One system leader explained that "its complex out there", suggesting that schools were having to balance short-term recovery priorities against longer-term accountability priorities. This is particularly

challenging in the context of tight budgets: for example, in the survey, while 85% of school leaders agreed that their school had the capacity it needed to improve over the next few years, only a quarter (24%) agreed (and 45% disagreed) that their school would have sufficient funding to employ the staff it needs. Related to this view was a sense that many school leaders – in particular headteachers - were struggling in the context of rapid change, renewed accountability pressures and tight resources. One described a "perfect storm" of "less funding, greater demand" while another reported a feeling that they were "never doing anything right". We make suggestions in the Conclusion for how WELL might seek to address issues of headteacher well-being and support.

Wellbeing and Covid Recovery

In the short-term, schools were having to focus on Covid recovery which could be seen to have an impact across the board - "Obviously coronavirus did massively hinder us." This was mostly felt in terms of increased mental health and wellbeing issues for children and young people - "even before COVID you know wellbeing, social emotional work has been our like very high priority". Most head teachers interviewed gave the sense that, if they didn't address the social and emotional impacts of Covid on their pupils, then outcomes would be negatively affected long-term. There was also an emphasis on "making sure that there is more access to counselling services", as this type of service had proven difficult to access, even prior to Covid.

The central WELL team and LA had responded proactively to the changing priorities of schools during and after the pandemic - "we put on a whole range of youth mental health first aid training. We were originally going to put one day sessions on, but because of the needs of the pupils, we moved that slightly more expansively, we put them as two day full qualifications".

Disadvantage and Deprivation

Interview data indicated that addressing the disadvantage gap was a high priority for all schools, and this was often the underlying motivation for other school improvement priorities - "the need to address the disadvantaged gap, disadvantaged difference in attainment of pupils, the wellbeing, resilience, and aspiration of the young people with lots of unemployment, third generation unemployment, aspiration, cultural capital".

These issues required schools in the most deprived contexts to focus on a much wider range of strategies than just the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms, particularly in the context of cuts to wider services. For example, one headteacher explained how "teachers were on the phone four times a day to really quite needy and anxious mums. The parent support advisor and the learning mentor they used to go to the home and help parents get children up and bring them in and get routines in place, all of those things. We feel that services have been cut to the knife edge with social care, you know, and family action and waiting lists are getting longer".

In a similar vein, school leaders needed to ensure that their staff had the skills and capacity to create an orderly learning environment: "a common thing here is how schools are coping with those challenges of supporting those pupils, and making sure that they've got experienced and qualified staff to work with those pupils in the right way. Sometimes that's also leading to issues with challenging behaviour in schools as well that people are struggling to deal with. And I think that's got worse over the last two years".

Finally, an awareness of Western Cumbria's isolation had led to an emphasis on social mobility for many schools - "it's very much about broadening horizons and letting the children know there's another world out there".

Accountability, Attainment and Curriculum

In the survey, three quarters (75%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'Making sure my school does well in Ofsted inspections is one of my top priorities as a leader'. The interviews reinforced this finding and indicated how schools were responding.

Both primary and secondary schools felt the pressure of attainment and accountability pressures in the context of renewed Ofsted inspections and national tests after the pandemic-induced pause: "pupil outcomes have got to improve." Schools were mainly seeking to address this through the refinement of their curriculum, in line with Ofsted's current focus on this area: "at the minute our focus is getting the curriculum right and that's been a big job". This was seen as challenging given the parallel need to support children who's learning and development had been impacted by the pandemic: "this year we're back to, back to square one. You know, SATs, phonics checks, you know. So for us, our curriculum is really challenging. We're having some really challenging conversations (with teachers)".

There was evidence of this curriculum across all the case study schools, but particularly in primary, where the Ofsted shift has required a rebalancing towards wider curriculum areas (i.e. beyond literacy, numeracy and science) and on a more knowledge-based approach: "since May last year, we've been back to the full curriculum. We've overhauled the foundation curriculum, teaching lots of new subjects, lots of new topic areas, and things like that, which I think is really good for the teachers because we are being challenged to teach new things." There was a clear sense amongst interviewees that this focus on curriculum was driven by a need to satisfy changing Ofsted requirements.

Literacy and Oracy

In parallel with the push on the wider curriculum, four out of six case study schools were also focussed on developing oracy and literacy as a priority in their improvement plans. This was largely due to the pandemic which had significantly impacted upon reading, comprehension, and speech and language across all age groups - "last year we had 56% speech language communication (in early years), we've never had it that low". Primary schools in particular recognised the need to develop "children's oracy and being able to function with, like, higher vocabularies", after the lockdowns. Several primaries were also focusing on phonics, by adopting government-approved schemes, although there were significant debates within the action research group around the merits of these models:

> *"One of the things has been really sort of like pushing on our development of literacy and oracy and pushing that through with our children… (So) with mixed feelings we took on doing ReadWriteInc, you know a couple of years ago, because it was recognised that year we weren't quite matching national levels within the phonics checks. And then there was an impact on reading and writing."*

At secondary level, the focus was also on reading, as we illustrate through case studies in Chapter 4.

Conclusion

Schools in Allerdale and Copeland face distinctive challenges, largely resulting from the region's isolation, sparsity and socio-economic conditions. Without doubt, there are many strengths to build upon and the number of schools judged as Requiring Improvement or Inadequate by Ofsted is relatively low. Nevertheless, the reduced capacity of the Local Authority coupled with the relatively limited impact of newer government-supported hubs and the limited role of MATs in this area all indicate the need for a place-based improvement programme such as WELL.

We highlight the key contextual and cultural features of the school landscape that the WELL project needs to take account of, as well as the main priorities for schools following the pandemic and a return to national accountability expectations. On the one hand schools in Cumbria have been proactive in forming and participating in clusters and system leadership networks, most notably LASL and CASL. Equally, many schools lack the capacity to engage fully in such 'school-led' improvement efforts and there are underlying issues with competition – in particular at secondary level – which suggest a need for more proactive facilitation. In terms of school priorities, these centre on how to balance shorter-term recovery priorities, including addressing student well-being issues, with longer-term accountability and teaching and learning-related priorities. Given this, the WELL areas of focus appear well designed and the WELL team has been flexible in how it has responded to emerging requirements.

Finally, we asked our system leader interviewees for their views on how WELL has been set up, as a separate project with its own board and dedicated team, under the auspices of the Council. There was universal support for this approach, which was seen as preferable to other possibilities which might have been considered, such as asking LASL/CASL to lead the project.

3. Findings

In this chapter we draw on findings from all strands of the evaluation to address the six questions posed by WELL, although – due to the delay in launching the Cumbrian Award - we have less to report on question 5.

4.1 To what extent has the WELL project been successful in engaging schools and supporting them to identify, prioritise, access and implement evidence-informed improvement approaches?

In this section, we consider evidence on school engagement in WELL overall. In the following section we focus on how schools are engaging with evidence and the extent to which this engagement is beginning to impact on school and classroom practice.

Key points

The WELL project faced challenges initially due to Covid and lockdowns, but this has not prevented the new three-year project from engaging schools successfully.

The WELL project team has worked hard to engage schools and to overcome any initial concerns.

Some schools do report some barriers to participation, for example in relation to the paperwork and time commitments involved. However, the WELL team are widely seen as trusted, credible and flexible, and this has largely helped to overcome these issues.

In the baseline survey (autumn 2021) 72% of heads were 'confident', and 27% were 'somewhat confident' that engaging with WELL would benefit their school.

All six case study schools have planned and implemented improvement projects using WELL funding. Funding schools in this way has increased engagement and leveraged additional resources from schools – phrases such as 'we couldn't have done this without the WELL funding' are common.

The wider WELL PD menu has been accessed widely by schools. This provision is viewed positively by interviewees, helping to build staff skills in important areas, such as mental health.

Inevitably, in such a large and complex project, levels of engagement vary. We heard reports that not all schools have had the time or appetite to get fully engaged.

The evidence is clear that, overall, schools across Allerdale and Copeland have engaged positively with WELL in its first full year of operation. All state-funded schools have attended WELL events, claimed project grants and submitted action plans (See Appendix 3 for details of school engagement in WELL-run PD programmes and events). This is despite the contextual challenges explored in the last chapter, which include geographic isolation, large numbers of small schools with limited capacity and the various pressures on school leaders following the pandemic. It is also despite the challenges faced by the project itself in its initial phase, when the scope for engaging schools during the pandemic lockdowns was challenging. This background could potentially have led to a loss of impetus, but the WELL project team have communicated well and have worked flexibly in partnership with schools throughout the year to ensure that the project is addressing school needs. That said, as we explore in this section, there have been some relatively minor concerns and some

schools appear to be less actively engaged – though this is hardly surprising for a project of this size and complexity in its first full year of operation.

In the baseline survey, conducted in autumn 2021, 98% of respondents reported that they felt excited about participation in WELL. Additionally, 72% were confident, and 27% were somewhat confident that engaging with the WELL project would prove to be beneficial for their school. Survey respondents were also confident that the WELL project's aims would be met and that disadvantaged children and young people would ultimately benefit.

Overall, the WELL project has been warmly received amongst system leaders, although they acknowledged that there were some initial challenges to overcome. Some interviewees argued that in its early stages the project was seen as somewhat overwhelming – "at first everyone was a bit worried". There were also concerns that the project might not reflect the particular needs of the area – "I didn't feel they [the funders] had a particularly good understanding of the amount that schools do in order to support children to be in the correct place to learn". These concerns mostly stemmed from the existing pressures on schools, as outlined in the last chapter, but there were also some debates around strategy – for example, the correct balance between well-being and outcomes across the programme.

In the survey, while 56% of respondents said there would be no barriers to engagement with the WELL project, the remaining 44% identified three main barriers: time, the impact of Covid, and staffing and capacity in schools. These barriers – which fit with the analysis of the wider context for schools in Allerdale and Copeland in the last chapter – were also referenced in the interviews with heads and system leaders. Time was the most commonly cited barrier: "Time and focused effort is required to make development work a success and competing priorities and distractions for staff and leaders' time can negatively impact on the work." Linked to this, there were some concerns about the additional administrative responsibilities associated with the project: "Keeping up with the comms and grant requirements is hard, especially when heads get so many comms from so many agencies." For a small number of respondents the project was seen as overly bureaucratic, as this quote from a survey respondent indicates: "The paperwork required is onerous and the criteria for the funding can be confusing and a barrier. Applying for relatively small amounts of money is hugely time-consuming due to the evidence required".

These issues were largely allayed by the efforts of the central WELL team, who worked hard to communicate the key aspects of the project to schools and to ensure that any initial wrinkles were ironed out:

> *"We then had a piece of work in the autumn to get the message out that we have this project, folks. My job was then to engage with 121 schools and say there's a project here that we're looking to do. And the very first part was about some sustained input with myself, working with the EEF, offering the schools a sustained programme on putting evidence to work for disadvantaged pupils in Allerdale and Copeland."*

Interviewees recognised and welcomed the effort and responsiveness of the WELL project team in how they worked to not only communicate the project but also build relationships and engage in dialogue with schools. This happened through multiple face to face and online meetings, which helped to overcome school concerns and communicate requirements:

> *"I emailed Vicky (WELL project manager) and said 'tell Dale (WELL Project Director) my next (cluster) heads meeting is then and I want him there!' So that was really good and she said 'no problem'. She booked it in and that was done. So I told the guys at the cluster and they were like: 'Ohh okay'. Like they were getting a bit nervous because they probably weren't where they wanted to be. But I said it doesn't matter. Let's just bring all our stuff with us and say: 'What's this? What do we have to do? Where's this?' And I said 'we can work through it with Dale'. We came away from that meeting going: 'I get it now'."*

Not surprisingly, relationship building takes time and in the early phases some schools had less developed relationships with the team. Some interviewees reported that these schools had some initial concerns about the project, relating to: a fear they might be 'done to', that the project would add another layer of accountability, and/or that it would not add sufficient value to be worth investing time in:

> *"I would say in some schools, it's probably been absolutely fine, and everybody's been more than happy to engage. They know Dale. They know what Dale is about. They get on with Dale, Dale's commitment to improving things for the pupils in the local area. I think some heads.... found that more difficult to engage with and maybe you know a bit more standoffish about 'Well, what is this all about? Does this mean that we've got to explain ourselves to somebody else?'".*

The project began in stages, with schools being put into 'waves' to make the process more 'quality and manageable'. The aim of the initial sessions for schools was to encourage them to identify improvement priorities, in sessions delivered by the Shotton Hall Research School (see Chapter 1). In addition to strengthening school engagement and awareness of research, these sessions were used by the WELL team to identify and refine the area based foci for the project:

> *"As the schools were coming together and doing the explore phase and talking through best practice and looking at the evidence, they were identifying for their groups of schools and their individual schools, particular priorities and they were being challenged around those. So that's where things around literacy and phonics and maths and so on, we were then speaking to all of the providers on the EEF toolkit. And saying this is emerging, reading is emerging as a real priority for us, accelerated reader, the West of Cumbria are identifying reading, is this one that you would be thinking? That's what we were doing behind the scenes."*

Due to the impact of Covid and the associated lockdowns, the WELL project evolved to incorporate significant online training. It also developed a stronger focus on mental health and wellbeing than had been initially intended. According to the Project Director, this did not mean that the emphasis on evidence was lost: "We showed them the research that was being produced by the EEF on the impact of the pandemic and we put half a million pounds of the first grant into schools to be able to focus on the resilience and catch up and learning for their pupils."

As the project progressed, the relationships built by the WELL team with schools and their focus on communicating with headteachers and their staff helped to allay initial concerns and clarify key terminology: "I think probably with Dale having worked for the local authority... He knows what should be there and what was beneficial in the past, and I think he's probably been exactly the right

person to bring that forward and to the and to identify what he's needed. Even when half the time it bamboozles me". The central team were perceived as having enough local knowledge and an appropriate professional knowledge of the school system to efficiently engage with schools and to help them to address their needs.

The case study visits and interviews provided clear evidence that the grants offered to schools – universal and targeted – which schools could choose how to spend, have been the most important factor motivating school engagement with WELL. In most schools this grant funding has also led to a much sharper focus on addressing the needs of disadvantaged children than would otherwise have been likely. Case study 1, below, describes how one secondary school used its WELL funding to strengthen staff's understanding of disadvantaged students interests and needs through the use of profiles. At the time of the survey, in autumn 2021, 95% of responding schools had already selected their priority area/s and developed their action plan for how to utilise the grant. One survey respondent explained: "This funding is proving vital in our drive to improve outcomes for disadvantaged children, which would not have otherwise been possible." Similarly, one interviewee explained: "I would honestly say that the WELL project has been a real catalyst in terms of changing how we do things in the school for the better, specifically for disadvantaged students". These sentiments were echoed by all of the case study schools, though it was clear that the funding had also unlocked additional school resources to enable the projects to happen.

In addition to undertaking their grant-funded project, the case study schools – including the school in Case Study One - had all accessed the wider WELL PD offer (See Appendix 3). Overall, interviewees welcomed the range and quality of this PD offer, which was seen to meet the needs of their staff and improvement priorities. As part of the evaluation we observed PD sessions run by the EEF and the Cumbrian Research School. These sessions consistently emphasised evidence from the EEF as a basis for decision-making by schools as well as the implementation guidance as a process for structuring change. It could be seen that there were varying levels of engagement within these sessions, with some schools participating and asking questions, and others choosing to take notes and listen. We assume that these differences were due to the variations in knowledge about evidence between schools.

Case Study One: a secondary school using WELL funding to enhance capacity for understanding and addressing the needs of disadvantaged students

This small secondary school is located in a coastal town, with above average levels of children on Free School Meals, meaning that it received targeted funding from WELL. The school's headteacher has focussed on developing a student-centred ethos with an emphasis on high quality teaching and extra-curricular enrichment activities.

The school has appointed a Pupil Premium Mentor (separately to the WELL project funding) - "It's her job essentially to help with those individual students, to interview them on a one to one basis" (though other staff are also involved). From this, the school has created Pupil Premium Profiles for each student and also for students with SEND. The headteacher explains that the idea is "not treating pupil premium as a homogeneous blob, but looking at individual students… it's a bespoke personalized approach to addressing the issues of chronic underperformance of pupil premium students." The interviews and profiles ensure the school gets "to know individual students in terms

of context" and can then "improve… our staff knowledge of those individual students" (Headteacher).

The school is using the WELL funding to build on the existing profiles, extending these to cover additional year-groups: "the WELL project (has)… moved it on in terms of the pace and how broad we've been able to go in terms of targeting all of the pupil premium students" (headteacher). Class teachers are given directed time to read the profiles and decide on any interventions that might be required.

In addition, the school has accessed several WELL-provided CPD programmes:

- pastoral leaders are trained as mental health professionals
- senior leaders have accessed a programme on the use of teaching assistants – "which was really useful and really insightful" (Assistant head)
- a senior leader attended sessions on professional development and how to embed this in the school.

3.2 To what extent has school leadership and classroom teaching in schools in the west of Cumbria become more evidence-informed as a result of the WELL project?

In this section we focus on how schools have engaged with evidence as a result of WELL and how they are utilising evidence in their practice.

Key points:

WELL has increased access to sources of evidence, mainly from EEF, for busy school staff – albeit from a relatively low base.

The WELL team in partnership with the various Research Schools are seen to have provided good support, helping to bring evidence to life and to make it more accessible.

Over time school leaders have become more comfortable with the EEF implementation process and its associated jargon e.g. 'active ingredients'.

Case study headteachers and schools feel able to think more clearly about evidence and its use, in particular through the use of the implementation guidance.

School leaders have different views and approaches on how far to engage their staff with evidence. The most common model appears to be cascade/drip feed, but some schools have asked staff to engage more fully, for example through action research. Middle leaders, class teachers and teaching assistants in schools have varying levels of awareness of WELL and of how evidence can inform their practice.

Schools that engaged with the action research have developed more sophisticated understandings and types/uses of evidence including from pupil and parent voice and to provide formative as well as summative feedback on progress.

Some school leaders are engaging more critically with evidence, for example recognising that 'robust' scientific evidence does not offer easy solutions and must always be adapted to different contexts by thoughtful professionals.

Schools are beginning to make evidence-informed changes as a result of WELL. Case study schools are implementing projects with varying areas of focus reflecting the needs and priorities of each school. Some of these interventions are more clearly evidence-based than others.

Overall, there is good evidence that WELL has been successful in engaging schools with evidence from the EEF, albeit from a relatively low base. The requirement for all schools to attend training on the EEF's implementation framework, tied to the action planning and use of grant funding within schools, appears to have been particularly important in engaging schools with evidence. The project has also helped to make relevant evidence accessible to busy school leaders. The Research Schools have supported this process, with evidence that participants valued this practitioner perspective on evidence use. The schools that engaged with the action research appeared to develop a more sophisticated understanding of different types of evidence and how this can complement practitioner knowledge and an understanding of context to inform decision-making, practice and organizational learning and improvement. A small number of interviewees demonstrated a more critical engagement with evidence and how it could be used to inform practice, which we view as a healthy response.

The survey in autumn 2021 indicated that schools varied in their engagement with evidence at the outset, with only a minority feeling confident in this area: 20% of respondents strongly agreed, while 65% somewhat agreed, that leaders and staff were drawing on evidence to inform their practice. Less than a quarter (23%) of responding schools had previously engaged with one or more projects or events run by the EEF and/or its Research Schools network.

Although there were exceptions, interviewees indicated that, on the whole, prior to the WELL project, evidence was not widely prioritised or used in schools across Allerdale and Copeland: "I would say probably quite a low base across the area, pockets where people were more engaged and were a bit further down the line, but I think if you took an average across the area, I would say fairly low". Another view was that it was "a very mixed picture depending on the mindset of the head teacher". One interviewee suggested that schools would only engage if there was funding attached, potentially leading to surface-level commitment:

> *"We're certainly interested in it, but to be honest, it's not been our massive priority. And then I think quite a few schools are like... because we do it when we have to. Do you know what I mean? If you're being brutally honest? If we've had to do it to get some money, we have done it".*

One reason for this previously low level of engagement was that evidence use is not a mandatory part of the accountability criteria used by Ofsted. Some interviewees argued that schools and teachers could still be excellent even without an overt focus on evidence, and suggested that lower performing schools should prioritise other areas first (because Ofsted would focus on these areas): "That doesn't mean to say there's not some fantastic teaching going on in those schools… I think it's what their priorities are, and not necessarily to do with research-informed practice".

Overall, there was a consistent view that the WELL project had begun to improve the use of evidence by schools: "I think it's certainly got better this year, that primarily came from when WELL began, and that real push that Dale has got on the use of evidence... I suppose if you looked at the graph and it was a bit like that before over the past two years, it's gone like that just because of WELL..."

The requirement for all school leaders to attend training on the EEF implementation guide was the main vehicle for engaging schools with evidence. In the survey, 55% of respondents were somewhat confident, and 41% were confident that engaging with the implementation planning process would enable them to lead change successfully. Our observations of these EEF and Research School-run PD sessions indicated that participants were provided with 'robust' evidence from the EEF as well as tools such as the implementation planning guide. The EEF itself appeared to be well regarded amongst the school leaders and teachers we interviewed, especially when its resources were mediated by serving practitioners from the Research Schools:

> *"The disadvantage one (PD session) was very good because you actually had [name] there from the Research School and he was leading it, so you knew you had someone who was knowledgeable with looking at the evidence base behind it".*

At first, it seems that some of the language used in the implementation guide and wider EEF training could be off-putting, or overly jargonistic (e.g. active ingredients). However, this diminished for most school leaders over the course of the year as they attended more sessions: "there is a sense of a growing engagement now, I think, with the implementation planning process and seeing the benefits that it brings and the point of it. Perhaps more support was needed with everybody, with that from the start".

The implementation planning sessions also gave leaders structured access to evidence and provided them with a valuable opportunity to reflect on how they might use this in their schools:

> *"We were given some of the research studies that would support us. It gives us like an extra starting point on where to look at and how to build that into our future planning as well. And having the time to look at that because we know there's all the research out there that would really help but actually finding that time to look at it and be reflective is quite difficult".*

These PD sessions have been complemented by wider communications from the WELL team which have helped to make EEF evidence more accessible to schools:

> *"One of advantages for the WELL is that they often tag in the part of the research to look at. So you are pinpointed, you're not ploughing through looking for it. So you can actually spend your hour, whatever it is, reading that piece without reading 10 pieces that aren't needed."*

Case study visits showed how the implementation guide PD sessions, linked to the WELL action planning templates, were used by schools to structure their thinking in terms of how evidence could be embedded into practice. Initial interviews, at least in some cases, gave the impression that research and evidence were not considered a priority - "We haven't needed research, we've needed action". However, as the project progressed, school leaders became more confident in their ability to interpret and utilise evidence within school-level decision making, using the implementation guide as a structure for this, as the following quote highlights:

> *"It (the implementation guide) makes everything more logical thinking for me… Instead of going, 'this is good and I think this will work'… It's 'OK, this is what I'm thinking. This is what I think will work, but how will I know? What are my challenges going to be? What could be the solutions? Where are my non negotiables?' My active ingredients took me quite a while to get my head around."*

The interview data indicates that this growth in confidence was attributed to WELL sessions on implementation planning, but also to action research sessions (among those that participated) and wider opportunities to network with other schools during these events. The WELL team were also credited, particularly in regard to prompt and efficient communication, effective signposting, and school visits from Dale to discuss projects in more detail:

> *"We could take our documents to work on (at the PD sessions), so that we will give an input and then we were given time to reflect on what we were doing as a school, which was really useful. And input from other schools about what they were doing, and time to network with others to say 'what's worked well for us and what's worked well for them'."*

Importantly, these processes appeared to engage and persuade some leaders and teachers who had initially been more sceptical about the value of officially sanctioned evidence, as this quote indicates:

> *"It kind of like gives you confidence sometimes in what you're doing, if you're going to change something, you know, like, say go back to ReadWriteInc [a government promoted phonics programme]. You know some of the things that are kind of not naturally what I would do as a teacher... But the evidence is that it's going to work for those children. You know, for nearly all of those children in terms of improving their reading, so kind of, like, I am led by the evidence, you know, in spite of, you know, what I might feel emotionally about it."*

Case Study Two: A rural primary school that has accessed various strands of WELL PD and where the headteacher sees her role as drip feeding evidence to staff

This small rural primary school has relatively low levels of children in receipt of Free School Meals.

The headteacher has engaged with the WELL project enthusiastically and has developed an action plan that covers multiple strands. The (universal) WELL grant is being used to enable teachers to attend subject-specific PD. Every teacher at the school is a subject leader, so this aspect extends to the majority of the staff. The funding is also used to train Teaching Assistants (TAs) to use interventions such as Talk Boost, so that children with additional needs can be supported outside class. In addition, the headteacher attends sessions for the Great Teaching Toolkit which she delivers back to staff in school through a cascade approach.

Staff interviewed – including class teachers and TAs as well as middle and senior leaders - are all positive about the impact of increased release time to attend CPD: "It's given everyone the opportunity to know their subject more and to collaborate more… Without that time, I wouldn't have had the time or knowledge to be able to share that."

These staff had had minimal engagement with the evidence-based aspects of WELL, explaining that the headteacher typically attends sessions and feeds back. The headteacher herself mostly relies on EEF resources and uses the implementation language and approaches across all her work, although she has also completed an MA in educational leadership. She explains that she does not push staff to engage with evidence directly as she feels this would overload them:

"I break it (i.e. EEF evidence) down…. (but) it doesn't sink in the first time round. And you just pick out key bits. So actually it's a process that I go through to do it. So then when I'm going through with staff how to change it, I'm not going through in detail any of this, so you know, I don't go through all that. I drip feed it through… then I'll tell them which of the two were focusing on, because if I give them that and say, read that and get on with it, can you imagine?"

15 schools volunteered to participate in the action research strand of the project, which was run by CUREE as part of the evaluation (in line with the 'improvement science' approach). One survey respondent that was participating in this strand articulated a desire for partnership working to strengthen evidence use in schools: "Staff feel respected by the wider education community that we are being acknowledged as the research practitioners we are, and being given this opportunity to link to universities and take part in action research. So often it can feel like we are all working in a vacuum away from the bigger communities and schools."

Schools involved in the action research were encouraged to identify their own research question/s, based on a problem of practice within their schools, and to gather evidence – including from EEF – which could help them investigate this issue. Most schools aligned this work with their existing school project funded through the WELL grant, with senior leaders attending the action research sessions and completing the posters at the end of the year. The action research approach encouraged school leaders to consider of wider set of evidence than only the EEF, for example including data generated within schools (including for wider purposes, such as lesson observations or findings from moderation sessions) as well as practitioners' own understandings of their school and students' contexts. Observations of action research sessions and the posters produced by 12 of the participating schools revealed that participants had been making field notes, accessing peer reviewed journals, reading relevant textbooks, engaging in online videos and resources, using attainment data and drawing on pupil, parent and teacher voice as sources of formative as well as summative evidence to inform school improvement and learning.

Over the course of the year there were noticeable changes in the action research participants' approaches to evidence. At the start of the project, attention was strongly focused on the school-level challenges and interventions emerging from the diagnostic process. During the various action research workshops and surgeries over the course of the year, school leaders often engaged in robust professional dialogue which encompassed different perspectives on evidence and how it can best inform practice. The CUREE team encouraged participants to focus on the overarching question – 'How (successfully) are we using evidence to inform our school's improvement journey and work? Moving into a space where leaders were more able to reflect on their own practice to address this question took time. Specifically addressing school-level challenges depended on leaders beginning to feel they had metacognitive control of the detail of their projects. Increasingly over time, attention moved from implementation towards leadership, especially in terms of how to secure quality and rigour around an intervention and how to embed new practices. This often took place as a result of sharing information between schools, and/or using tools to generate evidence and consider how to go about doing so in a different context in the future:

> *"Our participation in action research is giving us the opportunity to concentrate at a much more detailed and more sharply focused way on one area for development (reading - phonics specifically). We know this is a smart way of working and achieving sustainable change, but in the reality of school life, with its many immediate pressures, it isn't an approach we've purposefully taken before."*

We noticed that some interviewees and participants – whether they were involved in the action research or not - engaged with the push for evidence-based practice more critically, for example by asking questions about whether and how generic evidence can be adapted across different contexts and about the limits of an approach that only acknowledges interventions that have been 'proven' through Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs). For example, one participant in a PD session observed: "EEF is a great starting point but not always relevant to the local". Another interviewee questioned the appropriateness of the evidence available, given that this would not always support actions to address emerging and future needs:

> *"There's a risk where evidence-informed practice that we stifle creativity because we look for where the evidence is and by definition, if you haven't got any evidence, because the thing*

> *hasn't happened yet, and if you follow that to its natural conclusion, we wouldn't do anything new because there is no rationale based on evidence informed practice to do it in the first place."*

This critical engagement was also apparent in one of the case studies. The headteacher argued that the EEF reports were "all over the place", and so instead the school had "created our own programme based on the broader evidence base", including by drawing on academic journals and tools for evaluating impact, because "I suppose, you know, I think for me the wellbeing thing is something that is not easily evidenced."

Case study three, below, outlines how one school participated in the action research, combining this with its WELL-funded activities. All year-group teachers were asked to undertake action research in order to ensure that the selected oracy intervention was adapted to the needs of different year groups and embedded within the practice of individual teachers. It includes the school's action research poster, produced at the end of the year.

Case Study Three: a primary school that engaged in the action research to adapt its intervention to the needs of different year groups

This one and a half-form entry primary school is in a coastal town, with a very local catchment. It has high levels of children on Free School Meals and above average levels of children with SEND.

The headteacher was newly appointed this year, so had taken some time to get to know the school and establish priorities before finalising the school's WELL grant spending. The main focus is on speech and language, with staff members given release time to attend Voice 21 training (a national oracy initiative) as well as for subject leadership training and for build skills in specific interventions for lower ability children (Word Shark and Number Shark).

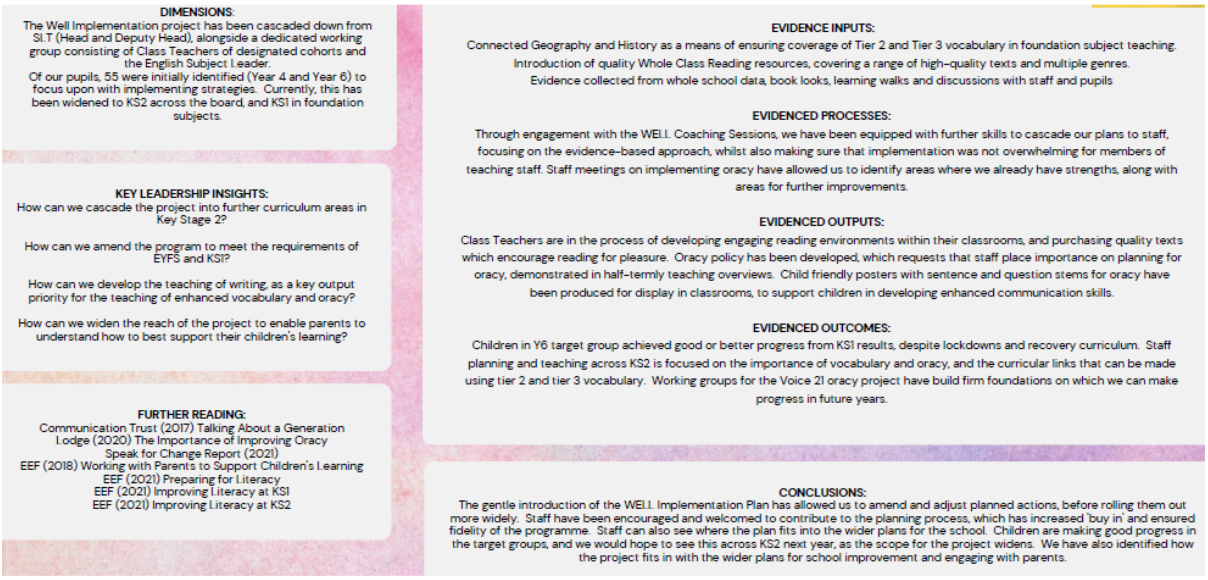
Earlier in the year, the project's leaders were not wholly convinced that evidence should be the main driver of decision-making: "You do what you know works, you don't necessarily want to change it because you know it works." However, follow up interviews later in the year revealed that engaging with WELL – and particularly the action research sessions - had shifted this view. Each year group teacher was asked to undertake their own action research project to implement the oracy intervention within their year group and to assess the impact. This was seen as important in order to ensure that the approach was contextualised and embedded within the practice of each teacher:

"The plan has to be implemented quite differently across the phases. So it's like this is what worked for us, which elements of that can you take to work with your yearsm or how can you tweak it to make it work better with your years? Because I'm an upper Key Stage Two teacher, have been for several years now. I'm not an expert at nursery, you know, but our nursery teachers know what they can take from that and implement down in their end. So it's been about having really open conversations and supporting each other."

The headteacher explained that this action research formed part of teachers' annual performance reviews, with the expectation that year group teams would generate new knowledge on how to implement improvements in oracy across the school. This was a collaborative effort and was well received by staff who felt that they had an appropriate degree of autonomy over the changes being

made in their classrooms. The headteacher explains that the idea is not for staff to 'reinvent the wheel' but to make small and sustainable changes that could lead to long-term improvement.

Figure 1, below, shows the school's Action Research poster produced at the end of the year.



Finally, we turn to the question of whether the increased engagement with evidence by schools and school leaders is leading to more evidence-informed teaching in classrooms. The scope of the evaluation does not allow us to observe individual lessons or teachers at the level of depth required to track change independently, so we are largely dependent on interviews with middle leaders, class teachers and/or Teaching Assistants in schools to assess the extent to which the key messages and interventions promoted through WELL are understood and adopted by these key groups. We also conclude this section with our own reflections on the extent to which the case study schools' selected projects were informed by evidence.

Our interview data showed that leaders in all the case study schools had engaged selected members of their team in shaping and implementing their school's WELL-funded initiative. These team members were generally members of the school leadership team, particularly in secondaries, where a member of SLT generally leads on implementing the project. As we have noted throughout this section, schools have also drawn on the WELL PD offer to provide training for a wide range of staff, including teachers and TAs in many cases. In most schools, leaders had also begun to cascade messages about the importance of evidence as well as specific evidence-based interventions or approaches to their staff, through meetings and school INSET sessions. Case study two was one example of this, where the headteacher explained that they 'drip feed' evidence to staff, because they don't want to overwhelm busy practitioners. The following quote is another example of this approach:

> *"When we've been out on the (WELL) meetings, we've brought them back in, fed back to staff, shared documentation with them and it gives us a chance to prove that we're not just doing this because we think we should be. It's actually backed up by evidence".*

Overall, our interviews with middle leaders, class teachers and TAs in case study schools revealed a mixed picture in relation to understanding and adopting evidence. Almost all were aware of WELL

and of their school's intervention project and many had attended WELL-provided training in a specific area or intervention (e.g. ELSA), about which they were universally positive. Where staff had been trained in a specific intervention they could describe how this had influenced their practice. Three of the case study schools also participated in the action research and this appeared to lead to deeper level of engagement with evidence among participating staff. Beyond this, relatively few of these interviewees could articulate a wider understanding of evidence and how it could inform professional practice across a school.

Reflecting on the case study schools, we identified a range of approaches to utilizing evidence in their selected projects. One school could articulate clearly how its chosen intervention reflected a rigorous evidence base, working with a targeted group of children outside the mainstream classroom. In this school the implementation plan clearly aligned to the EEF guidance, but was also informed by the school's participation in the action research, which allowed the team to evaluate emerging impact and consider wider implications for whole school leadership. Another school had developed a thoughtful approach to utilizing evidence and evaluating changes in practice and children's learning, albeit in an area that is not addressed by EEF. Two other schools were clearly informed by EEF evidence in their selected approach, while the other two had chosen interventions that were not specifically evidence based, but which nevertheless addressed priorities identified by the school with a clear focus on disadvantaged children. Meanwhile, all six schools had accessed one or more WELL-provided PD programmes which are clearly informed by evidence. We reflect further on this range of practice in the conclusion, but our main conclusion is that the WELL team had adopted the best possible approach by encouraging all schools to access and consider evidence, but by not being overly prescriptive in the interventions that schools then choose they have been successful in engaging schools in approaches that can be developed over time.

4.3 To what extent has WELL enabled improved pupil outcomes, in particular in terms of the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils?

This section focusses mainly on the findings from the impact evaluation, but we start by briefly highlighting relevant findings from the Implementation and Process Evaluation (IPE).

Key points

Implementation and Process Evaluation Findings:
The focus of WELL on disadvantage, including through targeted funding, implementation planning and a broader CPD programme, has ensured that schools are focussed on meeting the needs of disadvantaged children as a priority, while also strengthening schools' capacity in wider areas. Some case studies and action research posters from targeted funding schools demonstrate this focus very clearly.

Some school-level data is showing an upward trend for pupils who have been involved with WELL funded interventions. More targeted projects in some schools have clearer evidence of impact.

Impact Findings:

Overall outcomes:
In Phonics, between 2018-2021 Allerdale and Copeland schools averaged:
- 78.5% achieved the expected level, against a Cumbrian average of 78.3% and a national average of 80.6%

By 2022 Allerdale and Copeland schools averaged:
- 73.1% achieved the expected level, against a Cumbrian average of 72.5% and a national average of 75.5%.

At Key Stage 2, between 2016-2019 Allerdale and Copeland schools averaged:
- 104.5 in reading, against a Cumbrian average of 104.5 and a national average of 104.
- 103.5 in mathematics against a Cumbrian average of 103.6, and a national average of 104.1

In 2022, Allerdale and Copeland schools averaged:
- 104.0 in reading against a Cumbrian average of 104.5, and a national average of 104.8.
- 102 in Mathematics, against a Cumbrian average of 102.7 and a national average of 103.8

At Key Stage 4, between 2016-2019 Allerdale and Copeland schools averaged
- An Attainment 8 point score of approximately 44.3 against a Cumbrian average of 46.4, and a national average of 46.6
- A Progress 8 point score of -0.22, against a Cumbrian average of -0.12, and a national average of -0.02.
- An Attainment 8 disadvantaged point score of approximately 35.6 against a Cumbrian average of 35.2, and a national average of 36.9.
- A Progress 8 disadvantaged point score of approximately -0.64 against a Cumbrian average of -0.63, and a national average of -0.43.

In 2022 Allerdale and Copeland Schools averaged:

- An Attainment 8 point score of 42.5, against a Cumbrian average of 47.4 and a national average of 48.8.
- A Progress 8 score of -0.58 against a Cumbrian average of -0.18, and a national average of -0.03.
- An Attainment 8 disadvantaged point score of approximately 35.3, against a Cumbrian average of 35.3, and a national average of 37.6
- A Progress 8 disadvantaged point score of -0.92, against a Cumbrian average of -0.83 and a national average of -0.55

Comparing schools in Allerdale and Copeland with a matched sample of schools

In 2022, WELL supported primary schools (targeted and universal, including infant and junior schools) have performed broadly in line with schools of similar characteristics matched from the wider Cumbrian population of schools across the three outcomes assessed (phonics and Key Stage 2 reading and mathematics). None of these outcomes shows a statistically significant difference. This is to be expected in this first year of the evaluation.

In 2022, WELL supported secondary schools (targeted and universal) on average performed below the national sample of schools with similar characteristics in both Attainment 8 and Progress 8. These differences were statistically significant, although we urge caution in reading too much into this finding given the multiple analyses conducted and the context of national assessments after the pandemic. More encouragingly, for disadvantaged pupils, WELL schools performed slightly better on average than the matched sample for both Attainment 8 and for Progress 8.

Implementation and Process Evaluation

Across the various strands of the IPE, but particularly through observing PD sessions on implementation planning and through the case studies and action research, we have been able to observe how the WELL project has encouraged and supported schools to develop and implement focussed initiatives aimed at improving outcomes, in particular for disadvantaged pupils. In the survey, almost all headteachers (96%) were confident that disadvantaged children in their school would benefit from the WELL project.

As we noted in the last section, key to this has been the targeted and universal grants. By giving relatively small amounts of money to schools, tied to the development of an action plan and the adoption of the EEF implementation planning approach, WELL has been successful in generating focussed action in every school that the evaluation team has visited or engaged with. The focus on disadvantage, in particular by giving larger grants to the targeted groups of schools, has ensured that schools are focussed on meeting the needs of disadvantaged children as a priority, while also strengthening their capacity in wider areas.

The case studies and action research posters all demonstrate this focus. We include a case study and an action research poster as examples below, with other examples provided in other sections. Importantly, the case studies and posters reveal a range of practice, for example between schools that:

- focus on a specific group/s of pupils versus a whole class or whole school approach;

- focus on strengthening teaching and learning in the classroom (or, as in the case study below, through an academic intervention), versus schools that seek to address wider issues, such as pupil well-being or career aspirations;
- adopt specific evidence-based interventions (e.g. Reciprocal Reader), versus schools that seek to develop evidence-based teaching more generally (e.g. Great Teaching Toolkit), or that seek to develop new practices in areas where the evidence base is currently less well developed (e.g. learning outside the classroom, or pupil premium profiles).

This range of practice reflects the flexibility of the WELL funding and approach, which has – rightly, in our view – allowed each school to identify its own priorities and projects within broad parameters. As we outline in the previous sections, the requirement for schools to attend the EEF implementation training and to adopt this in how they plan and implement their project is helping to build school leaders' understanding of evidence-informed leadership and improvement. As we explore in previous sections, the schools that chose to participate in the Action Research appeared to find this particularly useful in helping them to gather and reflect on a range of forms of evidence within school and to consider the implications for evidence-informed leadership more widely. Of course, a more prescriptive approach – for example, one that required schools to focus on interventions that could be expected to accelerate academic attainment in core subjects – might possibly achieve more rapid impact on national test and exam results. However, such an approach might well fail to recognise the diversity of school contexts and pupil needs (in particular following the pandemic) and might have been less successful in engaging the passion and creativity of school leaders and teachers in this first year. Therefore, on balance, we conclude that the broader approach adopted by WELL has been the right one, although we make suggestions in the conclusion for how to build on the existing work which is helping leaders to reflect on their approach and to share good practice in themed areas.

Finally, it is clear that the wider menu of support for schools, in particular the PD provision focussed on developing staff skills and capacity in relation to mental health and well-being, has also been valued highly by schools.[9] In the survey, conducted in autumn 2021, school leaders rated 'mental health, wellbeing and pastoral care of pupils' as their most important priority overall. Evidence collected via a separate evaluation for the WELL project – which includes parental feedback in some schools – supports this finding. This strand appears particularly important in the context of wider post-pandemic challenges in relation to school attendance and rising mental health concerns among children and young people nationally. As we note elsewhere, the emphasis on mental health and well-being might be expected to have a positive impact on inclusion/attendance and, potentially, educational outcomes in the long run.

[9] See Appendix 3 for details, but examples of this well-being support include: trained for over 100 Emotional Literacy Support Assistants across 70 schools; mental health first aid training for 121 teachers in 54 schools; support for school clusters to collaborate on a range of interventions to support learning readiness and resilience of pupils (includes Lego Therapy, Draw and Talk, Nurture Group training, Neurodiversity training, Forest Schools and well-being training for lunchtime supervisors); and work with all secondary schools to offer targeted careers advice to 30% of identified year 9 pupils.

Case Study Four – a secondary school using its WELL funding to develop students' reading comprehension skills

This large secondary school is based in a rural town, with over a thousand pupils on roll. The pupil population reflects relatively low levels of disadvantage and additional needs, but nevertheless the school received targeted funding from WELL as it has a significant number of children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

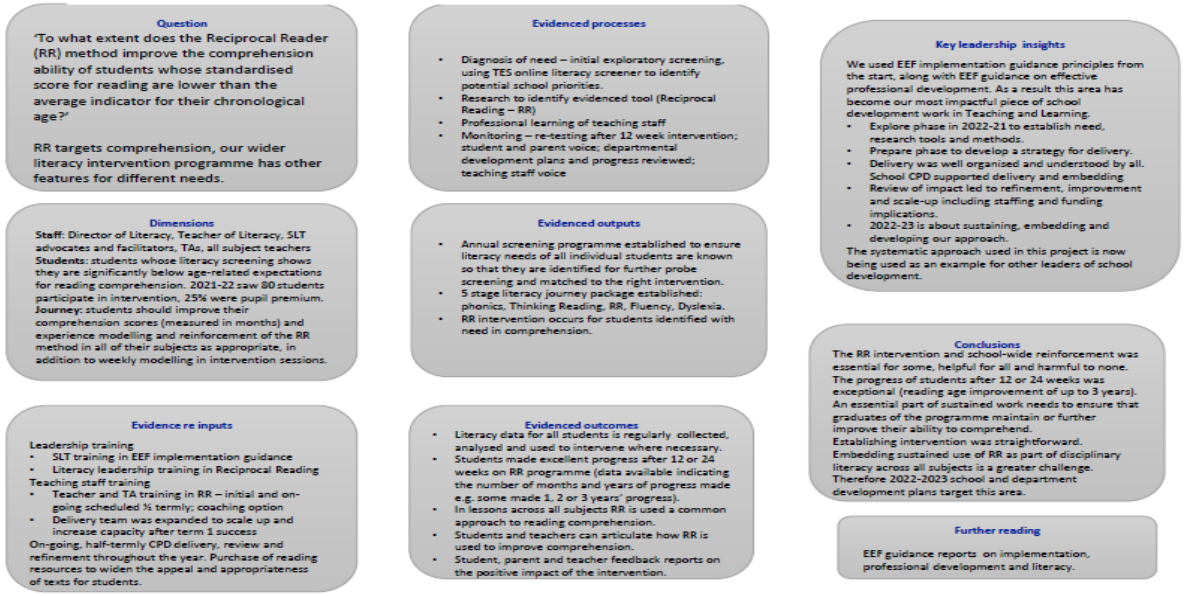
The school has used its WELL funding to implement the Reciprocal Reader intervention, developed by the Fisher Family Trust (FFT), although funding has also been used to provide wider training for teaching staff depending on needs, support autistic children in partnership with Autism Cumbria, and train associate staff and TAs in areas such as mental health.

The Reciprocal Reader intervention in the school is targeted on pupils in years 7, 8 and 9 who are assessed as having reading ages below their chronological age. In the Year 7 group, all of these students are on the school's SEND register or have an EHCP, speak English as an additional language, and/or are disadvantaged. According to the school's Assistant Head, who oversees the project, they selected Reciprocal Reader because it "suits our context, we thought we could deliver it well and I liked the look of the evaluation (evidence) so far". The school has an implementation plan and is seeking to "deliver a quality intervention, with real integrity and then measure it to see the impact".

The target students receive two small-group Reciprocal reader sessions each week over a six-week period. In order to minimise time out of class, one session runs during form time while the second occurs during a writing skills lesson. Three members of staff attended training run by FFT initially and they then cascaded this to the wider staff group of English teachers and TAs who deliver the intervention. A key challenge is to ensure that the approach is embedded into the wider curriculum, including into subject areas beyond English – not only so that the target groups of students can develop their reading abilities, but also so that wider pupils can benefit.

Over the course of the year the school assessed pupils reading ages on a regular basis in order to track progress and assess impact. This revealed that a majority of target students in all three years groups were making strong progress. The Assistant Head also interviewed a number of class teachers across the school later in the year in order to understand attitudes towards the project as well as barriers to reading comprehension for students. This review indicates promising impact from the intervention, although a key challenge remains to embed the approach across the wider curriculum and subject departments.

Figure 2: Action Research poster produced by a (different) secondary school seeking to develop students' reading comprehension skills



Impact evaluation approach

As the WELL activities are spread across primary and secondary schools, we have focused on several measures to assess how treated schools (both targeted and universal offer schools) have fared in the early stages of the programme. Our outcome variables of interest were: percentage achieving the expected level in phonics; average scaled scores in reading and mathematics at KS2; average attainment 8; and average progress 8 score.

It is important to recognise that these national assessment outcomes represent relatively coarse measures for the purposes of evaluating the WELL project. As we outline in Chapter 1 and elsewhere in this report, the project is broad and ambitious, incorporating multiple elements and seeking to achieve impact across 121 schools. Several of the WELL elements are focussed on activities – such as enhancing well-being, broadening the curriculum or strengthening employability skills – that are clearly valuable but that might take many years to achieve any discernible impact on test outcomes. Furthermore, the case studies carried out through the IPE strand of the evaluation show that schools have largely chosen to focus their WELL-funded evidence-informed improvement projects on areas that have the potential to achieve impact over the medium term – for example, by seeking to develop literacy skills in Key Stage 3, rather than by focussing solely on exam preparation in Key Stage 4. One way to mitigate these issues would be to have asked schools to undertake additional, more focussed assessments (for example to track the development of literacy skills in KS3) which might be expected to measure the specific interventions being adopted. In the event, it was decided not to pursue this approach due to budget limitations and the additional pressures it would have created for participating schools.

As noted in Chapter 1, in 2020 and 2021, national Key Stage tests were cancelled due to school closures, remote learning and staff and pupil absences. Limited testing did continue with phonics and

through the use of available commercial tests, and KS4 GCSEs were awarded by teacher/centre assessment only. In 2022, in-person examination of pupils returned with primary and secondary pupils sitting the national Key Stage tests. However, the DfE agreed with primary schools that the academic year would be transitionary with performance tables not made publicly available. At this stage of the project and taking account of the disruptive impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, it has been important to undertake a baseline analysis of the performance of participating WELL schools in Allerdale and Copeland. However, the limited testing and transitionary year agreements, outlined above, forced amendments to our original proposals.

We created a matched sample of similar schools that we could use to compare with WELL project schools (using non-parametric matching). This allows us to assess how WELL project schools have achieved in 2022 when compared with an equivalent group of schools. A detailed description of the approach is included in Appendix 2. Due to the lack of publicly available statistics for phonics and Key Stage 2 in 2022 we could not create a national comparative sample of schools. Instead, we accessed school-level statistics for all Cumbrian schools (268 primary schools) from Cumbria County Council. However, for secondary schools, given that the number of schools within Cumbria is low at just 39 open schools, the use of a county based comparative sample was not feasible. Fortunately, the transition year publication agreement was not extended to secondary schools, meaning that the national data tables for KS4 were published.

The aim of statistical matching is to create a synthetic, similar, and well-balanced control group based on key observable characteristics. The matching process is an iterative process that is a compromise between complexity and minimising imbalance (i.e. where the standardised average differences between the two conditions are minimised – ideally within 0.1 standard deviations). As outlined in Appendix 2, we matched schools on a number of key characteristics including: the type of school (academy/maintained etc), number of pupils, urban vs rural location, latest OFSTED rating, intake gender, percentage Free School Meals (FSM), and average student achievement at the school over a three-year period immediately before the pandemic. For primary schools, we adopted nearest neighbour matching using mahalanobis distance without replacement, and for secondary schools, the same, but with replacement.

How have schools in Allerdale and Copeland performed overall?

In this section we provide a description of school performance in Allerdale and Copeland overall, which is compared with the Cumbrian and national averages (i.e. not based on a matched sample) both historically and for 2022.

As discussed above, phonics testing continued in Cumbria during the pandemic and so we draw on more recent data. Between 2018 and 2021, Allerdale and Copeland performed slightly above the Cumbrian average with 78.5% of pupils achieving the expected level, although both Allerdale and Copeland, and Cumbria more generally (78.3%), were below the national average of 80.6%. In 2022, the previous historical trend has persisted, with Allerdale and Copeland schools averaging approximately 73.1% of pupils achieving the expected level, Cumbria as a whole trailing slightly with an average of 72.5%, and both slightly below the national average of 75.5%. Clearly the pandemic has had an important impact here for Allerdale and Copeland schools, and although they are slightly outperforming Cumbrian schools more broadly, the difference between these schools and the national average has remained.

KS2 national testing was more heavily disrupted during the pandemic and so we draw on earlier school data. Between 2016 and 2019, in reading, Allerdale and Copeland schools were at parity with Cumbrian schools more broadly, with an average scaled score of 104.5, and slightly ahead of the national average of 104. In Mathematics, Allerdale and Copeland schools and Cumbrian schools more broadly achieved similar scaled scores with an average of 103.5 and 103.6 respectively. These were both slightly behind the national average of 104.1.

By 2022, Allerdale and Copeland schools averaged 104 points in reading, and were below the Cumbrian average of 104.5 and further below the national average of 104.8. This pattern was similarly found with the mathematics scaled scores, with Allerdale and Copeland averaging 102.0, Cumbrian schools more broadly averaging 102.7 and schools nationwide averaging 103.8. On the limited amount of data so far, this would suggest that the impact of the pandemic has been particularly noticeable in Mathematics with a significant drop in average scores, although there has been a smaller impact on reading.

At KS4, national testing was again heavily disrupted by the pandemic with centre/teacher assessed grading being used for two academic years. As such we draw on the school-level statistics from 2016-2019. These showed that Allerdale and Copeland schools were fluctuating above and below the Cumbrian average while trailing the national average by a small margin. For average Attainment 8 point score, Allerdale and Copeland schools scored 44.3 against a Cumbrian average of 46.4 and a national average of 46.6. However, amongst disadvantaged pupils, the schools averaged a score of 35.6, against a Cumbrian average of 35.2 and a national average of 36.9. For Progress 8, Allerdale and Copeland schools averaged a score of -0.22 compared to a Cumbrian average of -0.12 and a national average of 0.02. With disadvantaged pupils, Allerdale and Copeland schools averaged a score of -0.64 compared to a Cumbrian average of -0.63 and a national average of -0.43.

In 2022 it appears that Allerdale and Copeland schools have been particularly impacted by the pandemic. For Attainment 8 they had an average point score of 42.5, against a Cumbrian average of 47.4 and a national average of 48.8. For disadvantaged pupils the average for Allerdale and Copeland was the same as the Cumbrian average of 35.3, compared to a national average of 37.6. On Progress 8, Allerdale and Copeland schools averaged a score of -0.58 against a Cumbrian average of -0.18 and a national average of -0.03. For disadvantaged pupils, Allerdale and Copeland schools averaged -0.92 compared to -0.83 for Cumbria more generally and -0.55 for England as a whole. However, some caution should be exercised with Progress 8 for disadvantaged pupils, as the three-year average disguises a negative trend in England and Cumbria more generally, and this is a pattern than has continued post-pandemic.

How have WELL-supported schools performed against a matched sample?

Primary schools:

For primary schools (including infant schools), Table4.1 below presents the results from the matched sample analysis of schools modelling the percentage achieving the expected level in phonics in 2022, controlling for the school-level treatment assignment, the historical average percentage achieved in phonics between 2019 and 2021, whether they were designated as a WELL phonics school, whether they were located in a rural or urban setting, and a mean centred percentage FSM score.

The intercept (or average score) for the control condition was 73.15%, with the average treatment effect on the treated for WELL schools in the first year of programme was 1.07% with a confidence interval (CI) of -4.19 to 6.32. As the confidence interval crossed the 0 boundary, the result cannot be considered statistically significant. We cannot conclude that there is a difference between the two conditions (i.e. WELL schools and the matched sample) at present.

Table 4.1: School-level percentage of pupils achieving the expected level in phonics in 2022, matched sample comparison between Allerdale and Copeland primary schools against Cumbrian schools with similar key characteristics

	Percent Achieving Expected Level	
Predictor	Estimate	CI
Intercept	73.2	69.4 – 76.9
Treatment	1.1	-4.2 – 6.3
Average Percent Achieved in Phonics 2019-2021	0.37	0.2 – 0.6
Well Phonics School: Yes	1.0	-6.5 – 8.4
Urban Location: Yes	2.7	-3.6 – 9.1
Percentage FSM	-0.3	-0.5 – -0.1
N	170	
R^2/R^2 Adjusted	0.15/0.12	

Source: Cumbria County Council and Department for Education

Table 1.2 below presents the results from the matched sample analysis of primary schools (including junior schools) modelling the two core KS2 scaled outcomes for reading and mathematics in 2022, controlling for the treatment condition, urban or rural location, percentage of FSM and the average reading/mathematics scaled score from 2016-2019.

For the reading outcome, the average score for the matched control condition after the covariate adjustment was 103.6, with the average treatment effect on the treated estimated at -0.31 points with a confidence interval of -1.33 – 0.71. As previously, the confidence interval crossed the 0 boundary and so the result cannot be considered statistically significant.

For the mathematics outcome, the average for the for the matched control condition was 99.2 after the covariate adjustment, with the average treatment effect on the treated estimated at 0.29 points with a confidence interval of -0.73 to 1.31. As with the results for reading, the treatment effect was not statistically significant.

While not a true baseline (because the WELL project has been operating for a year already), we see that WELL supported primary schools (targeted and universal offer) have performed broadly in line with schools of similar characteristics matched from the wider Cumbrian population of schools. This is to be expected: at this early stage of the project, we would not expect to find a statistically significant effect. The analysis will be updated with further data later in years 2 and 3 of the evaluation to examine changes in performance over time.

Table 1.2: School-level Reading and Mathematics Scaled Scores in 2022, matched sample comparison between Allerdale and Copeland primary schools against Cumbrian schools with similar key characteristics

	Reading Average Scaled Score		Mathematics Average Scaled Score	
Predictor	Estimate	CI	Estimate	CI
Intercept	103.6	95.9 – 111.2	99.2	91.8 – 106.6
Treatment	-0.3	-1.3 – 0.7	0.3	-0.7 – 1.3
Reading Average	0.0	-0.1 – 0.1	-	-
Urban Location	0.6	-0.9 – 2.1	1.3	-0.1 – 2.8
Percentage FSM	-0.1	-0.1 – 0.0	-0.1	-0.1 – 0.0
Maths Average	-	-	0.0	-0.1 – 0.1
N	151		151	
R^2/R^2 Adjusted	0.07 / 0.05		0.06 / 0.04	

Source: Cumbria County Council and Department for Education

Secondary schools:

For secondary schools, as reported in Table 4.3 and Table 4.4, the results from the matched analysis models four core outcomes of the school-level averages of Attainment 8 and Progress 8 for all pupils and those from disadvantaged backgrounds in 2022, controlling for the treatment condition and percentage of FSM pupils.

Starting with all pupils (Table 4.3), with Attainment 8, we can see the control condition average score of 48.8, and an average treatment effect on the treated of -3.3 points for the WELL schools, with a confidence interval of -6.2 to -0.3. For Progress 8, the control condition score was 0, with an average treatment effect on the treated of -0.38, with a confidence interval of -0.7 - -0.1.

Table 4.3: School-level Attainment 8 and Progress 8 scores in 2022, matched sample comparison between Allerdale and Copeland secondary schools against national schools with similar key characteristics

	Attainment 8		Progress 8	
Predictor	Estimate	CI	Estimate	CI
Intercept	48.8	47.1-50.6	0.0	-0.2 – 0.2
Treatment	-3.3	-6.2 - -0.3	-0.38	-0.7 - -0.1
Percentage FSM	-0.6	-0.8 - -0.5		-0.1 – 0.0
N	33		33	
R^2/R^2 Adjusted	0.372 / 0.330		0.248 / 0.198	

For disadvantaged pupils (Table 4.4), the control condition Attainment 8 score was 40.6 points, with an average treatment effect on the treated of -4.1, with a confidence interval of -7.4 - -0.8. Finally, for Progress 8, the control condition score was -0.40 with the average treatment effect on the treated of -0.40 (-0.8 - -0.1).

Table 4.4: School-level Disadvantaged Attainment 8 and Disadvantaged Progress 8 scores in 2022, matched sample comparison between Allerdale and Copeland secondary schools against national

	Disadvantaged Attainment 8		Disadvantaged Progress 8	
Predictor	Estimate	CI	Estimate	CI
Intercept	40.6	38.6 – 42.6	-0.4	-0.6 – -0.2
Treatment	-4.1	-7.4 – -0.8	-0.4	-0.8 – -0.1
Percentage FSM	-0.3	-0.5 – -0.1	0.0	0.0 – 0.0
N	33		33	
R^2/R^2 Adjusted	0.372 / 0.330		0.248 / 0.198	

schools with similar key characteristics

As with primary schools, while not a true baseline (because the WELL project has been operating for a year already), secondary WELL schools have performed below the average matched national sample, but unlike the primary school analysis, these were statistically significant differences. However, we should be cautious for two reasons. Firstly, given the multiple analyses conducted, we should adjust for this and after applying a Bonferroni correction none of the p-values of the analysis will remain statistically significant. Secondly, when compared to the descriptive analysis figures for 2022 above, the pattern is more nuanced than this. While the margins of difference were not as large as for the full sample of pupils, for disadvantaged pupils, the treated schools, on average, performed slightly better for Attainment 8 and for Progress 8. With further data in the coming years of the programme this analysis will be significantly updated to understand the change in performance over time.

4.4 To what extent have WELL-supported enrichment opportunities - particularly the Cumbrian Award - impacted on school practices and/or pupil aspirations for learning?

Due to the delay in launching the Cumbrian Award, we have not focussed on this element in detail in year one. This will be a strand in the action research project in years 2 and 3.

However, Case Study Five provides one example of how a school has used WELL funding to provide enrichment opportunities which can impact on pupil aspirations for learning.

Case Study Five: a primary school has used its WELL funding to develop an enrichment project within school

This is a small rural infant school with relatively low levels of children on Free School Meals or with SEND. The school had three main areas that it was focusing on in the academic year: first, reading, writing and phonics, where it had worked with the English Hub to adopt ReadWriteInc; second, adopting 'mastery maths' and embedding this into the curriculum; and third, SEND and inclusion, where the school has already engaged with ELSA training but chose to focus on curriculum enrichment for a targeted group of pupils as its WELL-funded priority.

The project was developed by the Head, based on his reading of research journals. He decided to focus on wellbeing and outdoor learning post pandemic, as he felt that reading, writing and maths were already receiving sufficient attention. The aim of the project was for pupils to experience a greater sense of wellbeing, thereby improving engagement in learning, socio-emotional skills, oracy and, ultimately, academic outcomes. The project was designed in collaboration with year 2 teachers and a TA.

The focus is on a selected group of children (13 or 14 in each group) who have been identified by their teachers as having emotional social concerns and/or oracy needs. The selected pupils go out with the headteacher and a TA every Friday over a six-week period. They visit local places with open access and rich habitats. There is a focus on noticing seasonal changes and learning about the natural environment. The school started with a Year Two group of as the 'pilot' and then extended this to Year 1. WELL funding was used to buy insulated waterproofs, binoculars, journals, watercolour pencils, new rucksacks, as well as backfill for the TA to attend sessions. There was a deliberate attempt to link the activities to the ELSA interventions taking place within school.

The school also engaged in the action research and its poster is included below. This highlights how the school has evaluated the impact, including through parental and staff surveys, and reflected on the wider implications for leadership across the school.

Figure 3: Action research poster from Case Study School Five – assessing impact of an enrichment programme for selected Key Stage one pupils

4.5 To what extent has WELL enabled the development of a more outward facing and collaborative school system in west Cumbria, with the potential for systemic learning and improvement to be sustained over time?

This section builds on the analysis of the school landscape in Chapter 2. It draws on evidence from all strands of the IPE to reflect on how the WELL project is enabling a more outward facing and collaborative approach across schools.

Key points

Chapter 2 set out the distinctive challenges facing schools in Allerdale and Copeland, relating to the region's isolation, sparsity and socio-economic conditions. These include performance challenges, a diverse mix of schools, a fragmented 'middle tier' and a historic culture of competition, particularly at secondary level.

Despite these challenges, system leaders across Cumbria have worked hard to maintain a coherent ethos and approach (in particular through CASL and LASL), with some strong evidence of schools collaborating together well.

Overall, our evidence indicates that the WELL project is helping to break down barriers between schools and to facilitate collaboration, in particular at the level of senior leaders. The face to face events have played an important role in this. Where WELL has paired up schools working on similar themes and provided support to clusters this has also helped to foster collaboration.

By bringing in expertise from the EEF and from Research Schools and PD providers from outside Cumbria, WELL is helping to create a more outward facing system in Allerdale and Cumbria.

There is a need for the WELL team to focus on how they can work with partners across the region to convene the various initiatives underway in order to develop a more cohesive and long-term approach. This might help to address a view that sustainability could be an issue once the WELL project's three-year funding ends.

In Chapter 2, we argued that schools in Allerdale and Copeland face distinctive challenges, largely resulting from the region's isolation, sparsity and socio-economic conditions. We suggested that the reduced capacity of the Local Authority coupled with the relatively limited engagement with newer government-supported hubs and the small number of MATs operating in the area all indicate the need for a place-based improvement programme such as WELL.

We also highlighted the key features of the school landscape in Allerdale and Copeland. This includes the fact that the two districts are geographically spread out and far from homogenous: schools serving very different contexts – for example between a secondary schools in a deprived coastal community and a small rural primary – can make purposeful collaboration challenging.

Despite this, schools across Cumbria have been proactive in forming and participating in clusters and system leadership networks, most notably LASL and CASL. However, many schools in Allerdale and Copeland lack the capacity to engage fully in such 'school-led' improvement efforts, due to their small size, and there are underlying issues with competition – in particular at secondary level – which suggest a need for more proactive facilitation.

Earlier sections of this chapter shed further light on this context. For example, schools in most areas of England appear to have a reasonably well-developed understanding of evidence and how it can inform practice, building on 12 years of focussed work by the EEF and a much longer history of schools-university partnerships (Coldwell et al, 2018; Greany et al, 2014). In contrast, as we show in section 4.2, schools in Allerdale and Copeland had relatively limited engagement with evidence before the WELL project began. This supports the need for a more outward facing system which is able to overcome its geographic isolation to engage with wider work and thinking.

As we noted in Chapter 2, there is clear evidence of competition between schools in Allerdale and Copeland, in particular at secondary level. In our interviews we heard examples of schools gatekeeping their expertise and ideas: "you kind of need to keep some of your best kept secrets as well, you know. Because we, you know, we are, we are competing". We also observed how secondary schools are working to strengthen their relationships with local feeder primary schools, which can be seen as examples of collaboration to support transition, but can also be viewed as a form of competition (i.e. to secure an intake at Year 7): "we worked really hard on that, and so currently we've got a programme of students coming from all of the feeder primary schools".

Notwithstanding these findings, other evidence indicates that many schools do collaborate together, independently of WELL. In the survey, 64% of respondents agreed with the statement 'most schools in Allerdale and Copeland collaborate together well', while 98% of respondents agreed that 'my school is open to sharing practice with other schools in the area'. In the interviews and case studies we observed various examples of schools collaborating. One system leader explained that a key driver for this had been the reduction in support from the Local Authority: "I think as the Local Authority, as the courses haven't been there, we've had to work together to come up with something that will help to be supportive model because there just isn't the manpower at the local authority anymore". The local clusters appeared to the main vehicle for school collaboration among primary schools, with secondaries working in the larger consortia: "So the clusters we work together on different areas… we might look at subject leadership together... We've looked at disadvantage together. But I think that's very much in the initial stages and needs to go wider". However, there was a notable disparity between the clusters, with some having a much stronger approach to collaboration. These differences were partly explained by Covid, which had impacted on the ability of schools to come together, but could also relate to the maturity of clusters (some had been established from pre-existing networks, while others were more recently constructed) and the capacity and skills of the headteachers to engage in productive collaboration in each case.

Overall, our interviews with system and school leaders together with evidence from the survey and observations of PD sessions all indicate that the WELL project is helping to break down barriers between schools and to facilitate collaboration, in particular at the level of senior leaders. It is also clear that by bringing in expertise from the EEF and from Research Schools and PD providers from outside Cumbria, WELL is helping to create a more outward facing system in Allerdale and Cumbria.

This was most evident in the PD sessions we observed, which brought leaders together from across Allerdale and Copeland. At these sessions we noticed various examples of leaders from neighbouring or close proximity schools meeting each other for the first time or for the first time since the pandemic. The style and focus of the sessions helped to create a sense of shared learning (i.e. we can all get better at using evidence) and a collective focus on addressing the needs of disadvantaged children in Allerdale and Copeland, which may have helped to overcome differences

between schools as a result of phase, location or Ofsted grade. It appeared particularly important that some of these sessions were held in person, despite the costs and distances involved. While it has been helpful that WELL has offered schools online PD opportunities, in particular through the pandemic, it was clear that school leaders valued opportunities to connect in person and saw this as a higher quality experience.

Interviewees attributed advances in collaboration to the networking opportunities at WELL training sessions, where it was recognised that informal discussions were encouraged and facilitated. Schools had previously felt unable to engage in these ways due to geographical and accountability factors. It is interesting that the following quote highlights that some schools have found the shift towards collaboration 'quite difficult':

> *"Being involved in the WELL project, there is definitely now more opportunities to come together with schools from different phases and the special school as well... So I think, before quite separate, not a lot of communication on a big scale going on between (schools), but getting better. And I think WELL is really helping with that. And it's perhaps not... some people are finding that quite difficult, I think, to do and to work in a different way, but it's certainly better communication-wise and links between schools is better than it was."*

One of the case study schools provided a good example of how senior leaders have become more outward facing as a result of WELL. Initial interviews at the school revelated that collaborative working was a new concept, although attitudes were already changing: "The culture has shifted. It definitely has to be more open and say look how can we work together. And I think that element of competition between the schools is… it is far less because I would never shared when I was a year six teacher. I wouldn't have shared my plan with you." The school's senior leaders were engaged with other schools in their local cluster, including through a headteachers WhatsApp group, however, until participating in the WELL, the school had not considered looking beyond this group for collaborative opportunities. Through attendance at the WELL sessions and conversations with the WELL project lead, staff at the school had become more confident about collaborating: "we've had to learn that in the last few years where we've looked and we thought, actually, why are we in competition? Why not work together and share best practice?"

One helpful approach adopted by the WELL central team was to group schools according to their improvement interests at these sessions: "there has been… Dale Hill has been trying to pull bits together from the plans to see who can match together to work together". There was emerging evidence to suggest that this has worked well for most schools, who reported that they had been able to 'draw on expertise' and feel that they are 'part of a wider community'. This included secondary schools focused on shared themes, such as developing literacy/reading in Key Stage 3, where it was notable that the leaders involved (who were below the level of headteacher) quickly moved to sharing practice and experiences. In the conclusion, we reflect on the need to try to strengthen these links between practitioners in schools below the level of headteachers, in order to develop deeper and more sustainable collaborations.

One interviewee who chaired a local cluster argued that the clusters should become more WELL-focused: "a focus on WELL within the cluster, something that… encouraged clusters to work together would be good." We heard examples of headteachers signposting WELL deadlines and opportunities at cluster meetings as a way of ensuring schools were on track and not missing out on training that

could benefit their improvement priorities. Later in the year we heard of an example of WELL funding being made available to clusters to work on shared goals and activities in relation to wellbeing.

Looking across the wider 'middle tier' and school system, we highlighted in Chapter 2 how this has become more fragmented as a result of academisation, the roll-back of the LA and the emergence of multiple different government-sponsored hubs. There was an emerging view among system leader interviewees that the WELL programme was helping to create some cohesion at this level, although it was acknowledged that this was in its infancy and there was still much work to be done:

> *"I think the one for all of us within WELL to work on is that outward facing… actually, sharing and training others let's say, to supporting their schools. We're not there yet".*

Part of the challenge for some was that by introducing new providers and initiatives, WELL was adding to the complexity for schools:

> *"I do think at the moment we have had an awful lot of external kind of offers that have come into West Cumbria and it would be nice to see some of that just becoming a little bit more kind of tied together."*

This suggests a need for the WELL team to focus on how they can work with partners across the region to convene the various initiatives underway to develop a more cohesive and long-term approach. This might help to address a view that sustainability could be an issue once the WELL project's three-year funding ends:

> *"I think without the WELL it might go back to being more fragmented. I think the whole system of LASL and the WELL together, pulls the schools into a big family, really. Whereas in the past, not too distant past, there used to be a lot of competition and secretiveness among schools. There's a lot more willingness in primary, I can't speak for secondary, in primary there's a lot more willingness to share good practice and there are two forums where those things can come together."*

Another view was that WELL should be seen as a pilot for the rest of Cumbria, and that "it can be broadened and should be broadened out". This suggestion reflected a view among several interviewees that the WELL project had 'put Cumbria on the map', drawing attention from national bodies such as EEF to how they can best operate:

> *"I think WELL has really really brought to the fore, in fact, I think WELL helped contribute towards the EEF seeing Cumbria as a place to come to, as a model, so I think that's been really, really positive for the whole county, actually".*

Case Study Six: a special school that is collaborating across Cumbria and nationally

This relatively large special school is in a coastal town setting on a new campus site with a local mainstream secondary school. It has expanded its intake considerably to reflect needs across the county. The school has high levels of children on Free School Meals. Many children travel long distances to attend each day.

The school has a number of improvement priorities, which include managing the changes required given the increase in pupil numbers, raising attainment in writing and maths and developing a range of strategies around wellbeing. The particular focus of its WELL-funded work is on preparing 6th form pupils for life beyond the school. This involves looking at employability by arranging work experience, where the LA and the five special schools in the county are working together to create a core offer for preparation after leaving school, which is due to start in 2023. The school is opening a new 6th form and there is an ambition to extend provision from 21 to 25.

As a special school there is a sense that relationships with other local schools are "good", but not strong due to the differences in intakes and contexts which make it hard to identify common agendas: "As a special school we're out on a limb. With mainstream schools we're a bit of a mystery… The agendas between the schools are very mainstream focused, so there's a lot of, I would say, the mechanics of you know, so 'how are we gonna pass the phonics test?' Or 'how are we going to do the times table test?' Relationships are good, but the content of the agendas aren't always… more often not suitable for us." There is occasional tension, with the school feeling that some mainstream schools manipulate diagnoses for challenging pupils so that they can be sent to the special school.

Given this, the school collaborates with other schools across and beyond the county: "staff are really good at sourcing training both within Cumbria and outside of Cumbria and also we link with the [special school focussed academy trust based in south of England]." There was a view among staff that the WELL project could help to bridge gaps within Cumbria: "I think the WELL could facilitate schools working together in a how to improve teaching and learning type of arena."

5. Conclusion

WELL is a large scale and ambitious initiative which is seeking to achieve significant change across multiple schools. This is in the context of the pandemic and the many wider challenges that all schools in England are facing, including funding, recruitment and progress. The evaluation is seeking to track complex and continuing change across this landscape, though an Improvement Science approach. This report represents a baseline, which we can build on in years 2 and 3.

Throughout this report we have highlighted areas that have developed well in the first year, as well as areas that require further attention in the second and third years of the project.

To summarise what we see as the main strengths:

- The decision to establish WELL as a separate project with strong links to the Local Authority, EEF/Research Schools, CASL and LASL and other external providers has helped to ensure a distinctive focus (i.e. developing evidence-informed leadership and practice) while also building coherence and a joined up approach across Allerdale and Copeland. We reflect on how this might develop further below.
- During its first full year of operation, the WELL project has been successful in engaging schools across Allerdale and Copeland. This reflects the hard work, credibility and responsiveness of the core team, who have invested considerable effort into building relationships and establishing a collective vision.
- The decision to provide grants to schools tied to action plans and the implementation planning process has helped secure engagement and ensure that evidence-informed implementation gains traction. Inevitably, as we explore in this report, levels of engagement and commitment vary between schools, so there will be a need to strengthen and deepen this work in Years 2 and 3.
- WELL has developed a reasonably clear and focussed offer which addresses schools' different needs. It has sometimes been challenging to be responsive to schools while also remaining strategic and focussed. The revised Theory of Change should enable a more strategic approach to evidence-informed change. At a practical level, the production of an annual calendar and improved communications for year 2 will help ensure all schools can benefit.

In addition, as we would expect, the impact evaluation does not yet show evidence of improved test outcomes using national assessment data compared to similar schools. Adopting a more focussed assessment model by schools in Years 2 and 3 might allow for a more nuanced assessment of impact.

Finally, we highlight areas that we think could be developed in years 2 and 3:

Strengthening and deepening school engagement in the WELL project generally and in evidence-informed practice and improvement specifically.

We do not think there is a need for any major changes in the approach, rather the priority should be to strengthen and develop it. We anticipate that some of the schools that have been less actively engaged in year 1 will become more so as they begin to understand the process and to observe how other schools are benefitting. Training in implementation has already commenced in year 2 and schools are in the process of completing their action plans and claiming their grants. We do not think the WELL team should be overly prescriptive in policing the types of evidence that's schools prioritise in these plans, but we do think that school leaders should be challenged to fully justify

their decisions – building on their learning from their school projects in year one. The aim should be for all school leaders to be more confident and critically reflective in how they draw on evidence to inform decision making – not to impose a narrow definition of acceptable 'robust' evidence on all schools.

Developing networks and encouraging a culture of collaborative improvement

As we outline in the final section of Chapter 4, we think WELL has begun to strengthen networks between schools and to encourage a more outward facing culture. This work can continue through the face to face events, the use of external providers and focus on connecting up schools with similar areas of interest/focus. Where possible, this work should seek to reach down further into schools, so that networks develop not only at headteacher levels, but also at the level of middle leaders and classroom teachers. There may also be value in funding some projects at cluster level, as a way to strengthen collaborative working at this level.

Support for headteachers to lead change

We note the finding from the EEF evaluation in Suffolk that the impact of efforts to develop evidence informed practice within schools relies heavily on the skills and capacity of individual school leaders. In addition, our wider work over the past 18 months (Greany et al, 2021; Greany et al, 2022) has highlighted the many challenges that headteachers nationally face and we are aware that these also apply in Allerdale and Cumbria. We suggest exploring the potential for a programme aimed at heads: this could combine some face to face development sessions or peer visits geared around the leadership of evidence informed improvement, coupled with more personalised or peer group support through coaching and mentoring.

Strengthening local coherence

Our wider research shows how fragmentation across the wider system can make it difficult for schools to access support where they need. The WELL project is already working to address this, but it is time limited so there is a need to consider how to develop longer term coherence. We are aware that the WELL team have been working to engage regional partners that can support school improvement in Allerdale and Copeland (such as the Teaching School Hub, Maths Hub, English Hub etc). At present, we are less aware of how the project is working to ensure that locally active MATs are working together, and with the LA, on shared priorities. We suggest the project should prioritise these efforts in year 2 so that a more sustainable way of working can be developed from year 3 onwards.

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Appendix 1: WELL project budget: 2021-22

Element	Budget	Percentage
Central Costs - Wages / Expenses /Finance and Data support	167,841	8.7%
Element01: Making the Difference for Disadvantaged Students	59,500	3.1%
Element02: Training and retaining teachers conference - MADE	16,900	0.9%
Element03: Compelling Offer - Universal/Targeted/Compelling Menu Grants (22-23 GTT and RR)	970,670	50.4%
Element04: Enhancing Local Capacity - Research School and Local Evidence Expertise	116,460	6.0%
Element05: Wellbeing Investment and Support Staff Training - Inc ELSA	180,321	9.4%
Element07: External Evaluation	101,750	5.3%
Element08: Cumbrian Award	169,253	8.8%
Element11: Covid Recovery Response	100,000	5.2%
Element12: Communications: Website, Media	20,000	1.0%
Element13: EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS	25,000	1.3%
Total	**1,927,695**	100.0%

Appendix 2: WELL Schools – Targeted and Universal

School name	Universal or Targeted Offer	School type	LA / Academy (inc Free)	Multi-Academy Trust	District Council
All Saints' CE Primary School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Allonby Primary School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Ashfield Infant School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Ashfield Junior School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Bassenthwaite School	Uni	Primary School	Academy	Keswick School Multi Academy Trust	Allerdale Borough Council
Beckstone Community Primary School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Blennerhasset School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Boltons CE School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Borrowdale CE Primary School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Bowness-on-Solway Primary School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Braithwaite CE (VA) Primary School	Uni	Primary School	Academy	Good Shepherd Multi Academy Trust	Allerdale Borough Council
Bridekirk Dovenby CE School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Broughton Moor School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Broughton Primary School	Uni	Primary School	Academy		Allerdale Borough Council
Crosscanonby St John's CE School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council

Dean CE School	Uni	Primary School	Academy	Good Shepherd Multi Academy Trust	Allerdale Borough Council
Dearham Primary School	Uni	Primary School	Academy	West Lakes Multi Academy Trust	Allerdale Borough Council
Derwent Vale Primary and Nursery School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Eaglesfield Paddle CE Primary	Uni	Primary School	Academy		Allerdale Borough Council
Ellenborough Academy	Uni	Primary School	Academy	Good Shepherd Multi Academy Trust	Allerdale Borough Council
Ewanrigg Junior School	Tar	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Fairfield Primary School	Uni	Primary School	Academy	Learning for Life Trust	Allerdale Borough Council
Fellview Primary School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Flimby School	Uni	Primary School	Academy	Be The Change Multi Academy Trust	Allerdale Borough Council
Grasslot Infant School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Holm Cultram Abbey CE School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Holme St Cuthbert School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Ireby CE School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Kirkbampton CE School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Kirkbride Primary School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Lorton School	Uni	Primary School	Academy	Good Shepherd Multi Academy Trust	Allerdale Borough Council

Maryport CE Primary School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Netherton Infant School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Northside School	Uni	Primary School	Academy	Cumbria Education Trust	Allerdale Borough Council
Oughterside School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Our Lady and St Patrick's Catholic Primary School	Tar	Primary School	Academy	Mater Christi Multi Academy Trust	Allerdale Borough Council
Plumbland CE School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Richmond Hill School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Rosley CE School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Seaton Academy	Uni	Primary School	Academy		Allerdale Borough Council
Seaton St Paul's CE Junior School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Silloth Primary School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
St Bridget's CE School, Parton	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
St Gregory's Catholic Primary School	Tar	Primary School	Academy	Mater Christi Multi Academy Trust	Allerdale Borough Council
St Herbert's CE VA Primary and Nursery School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Harrington	Tar	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
St Matthew's CE School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council

St Michael's CE School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
St Michael's Nursery and Infant School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
St Patrick's Catholic Primary School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Thomlinson Junior School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Thursby School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Victoria Infant and Nursery School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Victoria Junior School	Tar	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Westfield Nursery and Primary	Tar	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Wiggonby CE School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Wigton Infant School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
West Cumbria Learning Centre	Uni	Pupil Referral Unit	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Beacon Hill Community School	Tar	Secondary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Cockermouth School	Tar	Secondary School	Academy		Allerdale Borough Council
Energy Coast UTC	Uni	Secondary School	Academy		Allerdale Borough Council
Keswick School	Tar	Secondary School	Academy	Keswick School Multi Academy Trust	Allerdale Borough Council
Nelson Thomlinson School, The	Tar	Secondary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Cleator Moor Nursery School	Uni	Nursery School	LA		Copeland District Council
Frizington Nursery School	Uni	Nursery School	LA		Copeland District Council

Park View Nursery School	Uni	Nursery School	LA		Copeland District Council
Arlecdon School	Uni	Primary School	Academy	West Lakes Multi Academy Trust	Copeland District Council
Beckermet CE School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
Black Combe Junior School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
Bookwell Primary School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
Bransty School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
Captain Shaw's CE School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
Distington Community School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
Ennerdale and Kinniside CE Primary School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
Frizington Community Primary School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
Gosforth CE School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
Haverigg School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
Hensingham Primary School	Uni	Primary School	Academy	Cumbria Education Trust	Copeland District Council
Jericho School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
Kells Infant School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
Kirkland Church of England Academy	Uni	Primary School	Academy	Good Shepherd Multi Academy Trust	Copeland District Council

Lowca Community School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
Millom Infant School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
Monkwray School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
Montreal CE Primary School	Tar	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
Moor Row School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
Moresby Primary School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
Orgill Primary School	Tar	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
Seascale School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
St Bees Village School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
St Bega's CE School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
St Begh's Catholic Junior School	Tar	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
St Bridget's Catholic Primary School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
St Bridget's CE School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
St Gregory and St Patrick's Catholic Community School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
St James' Catholic Primary School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
St James' CE Infant School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
St James' CE Junior School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council

St Mary's Catholic Primary School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
St Patrick's Catholic Primary School	Tar	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
Thornhill Primary School	Uni	Primary School	Academy	West Lakes Multi Academy Trust	Copeland District Council
Thwaites School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
Valley Primary School	Tar	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
Waberthwaite CE School	Uni	Primary School	LA		Copeland District Council
Threlkeld CE Primary School	Uni	Primary School	Academy	The Good Shepherd	Eden District Council
Netherhall School	Tar	Secondary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
Solway Community School	Uni	Secondary School	LA		Allerdale Borough Council
St Joseph's Catholic High School	Tar	Secondary School	Academy	Mater Christi Multi Academy Trust	Allerdale Borough Council
Workington Academy, The	Tar	Secondary School	Academy	Cumbria Education Trust	Allerdale Borough Council
Millom School	Tar	Secondary School	LA		Copeland District Council
St Benedict's Catholic High School	Tar	Secondary School	LA		Copeland District Council
West Lakes Academy	Tar	Secondary School	Academy	West Lakes Multi Academy Trust	Copeland District Council
Whitehaven Academy, The	Tar	Secondary School	Academy	Cumbria Education Trust	Copeland District Council
Cumbria Academy for Autism	Uni	Special School	Academy		Allerdale Borough Council
Mayfield School	Tar	Special School	LA		Copeland District Council

Appendix 3: WELL elements/PD offer and attendance by schools

WELL OFFER	ATTENDANCE BY SCHOOLS (OUT OF 118 – NB: Most sessions optional)
November 2022 Implementation Workshop	117
EEF Professional Development Workshop 19th October 22	17
Compelling Offer 2022-23	118
Reciprocal Reading 22-23	17
Great Teaching Toolkit 22-23	11
June 22 Implementation Workshop	118
Making a Difference in Education MADE in Cumbria March 2022	43
ELSA	85
Cumbrian Award	18
Yr10 Tutoring Funding Summer 21	15
Compelling Offer 2 21-22	113
• EEF Promising Project - Embedding Formative Assessment	2
• EEF Promising Project - Onebillion	26
• EEF Promising Project - Philosophy For Children	4
• EEF Promising Project – Reciprocal Reader	18
• EEF Promising Project - Thinking, Doing, Talking Science	15
• EEF Promising Project – Accelerated Reader	4
• Making best use of Teaching Assistants	18
• Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools	19
• Using Digital Technology to improve learning	22
• Effective Learning Behaviours	16
• Improving Primary Literacy	7
• Early Mathematics	12
• Preparing for Literacy	10
COVID Resilience Funding Autumn 20	116
School Engagement Project 20-21	19
Evidence Leader in Education Trained 20-21	5
KS4 Revision Funding March 2020	13
Making The Most For Disadvantaged Students 20-21	83
ICAN Talkboost 19-21	53
Youth Mental Health First Aid	54

Appendix 4: Impact evaluation school matching process

As outlined in Chapter 4, the lack of publicly available phonics and Key Stage 2 school-level statistics for 2022 has meant that a national comparative sample of schools is not feasible. As an alternative, we drew up a data sharing agreement with Cumbria County Council to collect comparable local authority derived school-level statistics for all Cumbrian schools. The county-based sample drew on 268 open primary schools. However, for secondary schools, given that the number of schools within Cumbria is low at just 39 open schools, the use of a county based comparative sample was not feasible. Fortunately, the transition year publication agreement was not extended to secondary schools, meaning that the national data tables for KS4 have been published.

We pre-processed primary and secondary data into two key datasets, combining data from the Department for Education's 'get information about schools' website and the performance tables which held provide information on the following:

- Type of Establishment coded as (Academies, Free Schools and Local Authority Maintained).
- Number of pupils.
- Urban vs rural location recoded into a dichotomous (urban vs. rural).
- The latest OFSTED rating (Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement, and Serious Weaknesses).
- The school intake gender (Boys, Girls and Mixed).
- Percentage FSM.
- Percentage that achieved the expected level in 2022 (Phonics).
- Percent that achieved the expected level in level in 2018-2021 and averaged for each school (Phonics).
- Reading average scaled score in 2022 (KS2).
- Reading average scaled score between 2016-2019 (KS2).
- Mathematics average scaled score in 2022 (KS2).
- Mathematics average scaled score between 2016-2019 (KS2)
- Attainment 8 average in 2022 (GCSE)
- Attainment 8 average in 2017-2019 (GCSE)
- Progress 8 average in 2022 (GCSE)
- Progress 8 average in 2017-2019 (GCSE)
- KS2 Average Point Score for the KS4 cohort (GCSE)

Using the *MatchIt* package in R (Ho, Imai, King and Stuart, 2007) we carried out non-parametric matching to create a subset of WELL treated schools, alongside a subset of control schools that were as similar as possible to account for confounding across the key indicators detailed above, excluding the outcome variables. The matching process for primary schools consisted of 1:1 nearest neighbour matching without replacement with a propensity score estimated using mahalanobis distance of the treatment on the covariates. Using the matching diagnostics, we were able to see that all standardized mean differences for the covariates were mostly below 0.1 indicating good balance between treatment and the synthetic matched control. However, for percentage FSM and urban vs. rural variables returned standardised differences of 0.23 and 0.12 which were larger than the target. We incorporated these variables into the model to make further adjustments for the imbalance. The summary data for the primary school matching is presented in Table A4.2.

Table A4.2: Summary of balance for matched primary schools

Parameters	Means Treated	Means Control	Std. Mean Diff
Type of Establishment Group: Academies	0.19	0.19	0
Type of Establishment Group: Local authority maintained schools	0.81	0.81	0
Number of Pupils	133.59	134.46	-0.01
Average of Phonics score in 2019-2021	79.27	80.06	-0.06
Percentage FSM	16.96	14.28	0.23
Rural School	0.81	0.76	0.12
Urban School	0.19	0.24	-0.12
Ofsted Rating: Outstanding	0.78	0.78	0
Ofsted Rating: Good	0.14	0.14	0
Ofsted Rating: Requires improvement	0.07	0.07	0
Ofsted Rating: Serious Weaknesses	0.01	0.01	0

Source: Cumbria County Council and the Department for Education

The matching process for secondary schools was more of a challenge given the smaller population of secondary schools to draw upon, even using a national sample. We used 2:1 nearest neighbour matching with replacement with a propensity score estimated using mahalanobis distance of the treatment on the covariates. For the secondary matching we used a reduced subset of urban and rural classification, the average attainment 8 score for the school, KS2 average points score for the cohort and school level percentage FSM. Using the matching diagnostics, we were able to see that the standardized mean differences for the covariates. Here the mean differences were close to 0 across almost all variables indicating adequate balance. The exception was percentage FSM with a standardised mean difference of 0.17. To account for this, we added a percentage FSM control to the models discussed below to adjust for this minor imbalance. The summary for the secondary schools matched sample balance is presented in Table A4.22.

Table A4.3: Summary of balance for matched secondary schools

Parameters	Means Treated	Means Control	Std. Mean Diff
Rural School	0.83	0.83	0
Urban School	0.17	0.17	0
Attainment 8 Average from 2017-2019	44.33	44.90	-0.09
KS2 Average Scaled Score for 2022 cohort	103.60	103.59	0
Percentage FSM	22.20	20.48	0.17

Source: Cumbria County Council and the Department for Education

[i] Three quarters of all primary academies and half of all secondary academies were part of a MAT in February 2020.