

## **Story Links: A parent-partnership intervention to support pupils at risk of exclusion that uses therapeutic storywriting to support pupils' emotional well-being and reading skills.**

### **Aims and rationale**

Story Links uses therapeutic storywriting to engage parents of pupils (6-11 years) at risk of exclusion in the education of their child. For many of these pupils, emotional difficulties in school can be related to attachment difficulties with their parents or carers. Story Links is a solution-focused programme which uses the metaphor in joint storywriting to encourage the parent/carer to think about the needs of their child within the educational setting.

The Story Links project aims to deliver a training programme to five cohorts of professionals supporting pupils at risk of exclusion (strand 1); to evaluate the impact of the intervention delivered by these professionals on pupils' emotional well-being and reading skills (strand 2); and to produce a training manual to support further dissemination of the model (strand 3).

The pupils targeted will be on the SEN register for behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESDs) and are some of the most vulnerable in our schools. For many of these pupils, their emotional difficulties can get in the way of their learning and very often their reading skills are below those of their peers (Cole, Visser & Upton, *Effective Schooling for pupils with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 1998). The National Audit of Support, Provision and Services for Children with Low Incidence Needs (2006) identified both a lack of support for children at risk of educational exclusion and schools' limited capacity to support pupils with BESDs (6.32 & 6.37).

The above audit also highlights the need to improve parent partnership in meeting the needs of these pupils and identifies a lack of support for parents (3.39 & 6.25). Recent research (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003) has shown that up to the age of eleven years parental involvement has a significant impact on pupils' achievement. However, the parents of this group of pupils are often the least likely to engage with the school (Social Exclusion Unit: *Reaching Out*, 2006). The Story Links intervention aims to involve parents in the mutually enjoyable activity of spontaneous storymaking and parents are particularly encouraged to use the adult ability to think in metaphor in order to address some of the emotional needs of their children. The typed-up story is then sent home to be read with the parent and is also used in school in two 20 min literacy sessions with a teaching assistant (TA). Hence the written story becomes a positive attachment object - reminding both the child and parent of a positive shared educational experience.

### **Funding**

The Story Links project is supported by both the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation and the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA). The TDA award will support the evaluation aspect (strand 2) of the overall project.

## **Key staff**

Trisha Waters: Senior lecturer in Special Educational Needs University of Chichester & Director of the Centre for Therapeutic Storywriting

Helen Simons: Professor of Evaluation and Education, University of Southampton, & Visiting Professor in the Centre for Evaluation Research at London Metropolitan University

## **Evaluation Methodology**

The evaluation will adopt a case study design (including both qualitative and quantitative methods). The case is the story links programme. The overall aim is the exploration of the utility of the story links model for enhancing emotional well being and academic development of children at risk of exclusion due to behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESDs) and who may also have poor reading skills. The main evaluation will take place in six sample schools although additional data relating to rates of exclusion will be collected for the whole group of pupils engaged in the intervention. The design provides the opportunity to gain in-depth data on pupil, teacher and parent experience of an intervention that targets a hard-to-access and vulnerable target group. Data on rates of exclusion from the in-depth sample will be related to data for the whole target group. The findings will contribute to an understanding of the impact of the programme on pupils' emotional well-being, behaviour and learning.

The evaluation will assess the impact of the Story Links intervention on the emotional and social well-being of the pupil; engagement of the parent with their child's learning; rates of exclusion; incidents of challenging behaviour that could lead to exclusion; reading skills; and pupil engagement with learning in the classroom.

The training programme will also be evaluated in terms of impact on professionals' parent-partnership skills.

## **Expected Outcomes**

- Improvement in behaviour of pupils in sample schools
- Improvement in reading skills of pupils in sample schools using standardised test
- Reduction in incidents that could lead to exclusion
- Reduced stress for pupils, parents and professionals supporting target group
- Improved parent/pupil/school relationships
- Increase in parent-partnership skills of professionals attending training

## **Timetable**

The project will run over the 20 months from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008 and finish in November 2009. See attached work plan for details.

## **Benefit realisation**

### **Outputs**

- Professional training for 30 educational professionals supporting above pupils, drawn

- from schools in South of England
- Project evaluation report
- Training manual – to be disseminated through various SEN local and national networks

### **Dissemination**

The cohort of mainstream primary schools involved in the evaluation will be representative of other schools around the country with some of them drawn from areas of socio-economic deprivation. Hence, if shown to be successful, the model will be suitable to be rolled out in other schools around the country including those in socially deprived areas. The evaluation report will be presented at local and national conferences and published in a peer-referenced journal.