



Evaluation Executive Summary



DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY FOR GREATER MANCHESTER'S COMMUNITIES

Introduction

This report evaluates the first year of the Blocks programme, delivered by the Salford Foundation, which supports vulnerable primary school children in transitioning to secondary school. The evaluation examines the programme's implementation, its intended outcomes, influencing factors, and initial evidence of impact.

The Blocks programme was initiated in response to **rising knife carrying and intergenerational violence in Greater Manchester primary schools, particularly affecting younger children**. Those exhibiting such behaviours faced **increased risks of disengagement from education and vulnerability to criminal exploitation and violence**. The programme was launched in **10 primary schools in deprived areas of the region to address these challenges**.

Blocks works

The programme engaged **up to 20 children per school**, offering **1-to-1 mentoring to enhance social skills and emotional regulation**. Eligibility required experiencing at least **three of the following**

- **Witnessing violence**
- **Parental separation**
- **Family mental health issues**
- **Family criminality**
- **Substance misuse at home**
- **Risk of disengagement from mainstream education**

School staff completed the referral criteria, with consent obtained from parents/carers. Each participant received **weekly support from a trusted mentor, present in schools two days a week** to understand the community's needs better.

The programme's core curriculum empowers children to **enhance self-awareness, confidence, self-esteem, emotional management, and understanding of their actions' impacts**, promoting safety. It consists of four modules: **my identity, my relationships, my environment, and my future**.

The Blocks programme includes a **flexible theory of change** that outlines **necessary actions for achieving desired outcomes** and can be **updated with new evidence**. This theory is **based on research linking factors that drive violent behaviour and the effectiveness of mentoring programmes** in mitigating such behaviors.

The client journey for the Blocks program outlines its delivery stages and key data capture points: **referral process (eligibility data)**, **'distance travelled' post-engagement (entry and exit self-reflection data)**, and **outcomes for the child (client throughput data)**.



Positive Impact of the Blocks Programme


Qualitative data was gathered through teacher interviews and group feedback on the Blocks programme, yielding overwhelmingly positive responses. Schools clearly understood the programme's aims and eligibility criteria, though while some found them helpful, others desired more flexibility in referring children.

The teachers reported that children who participated in the programme **exhibited positive changes in their behaviour** and had mostly made a **successful transition to high school**. They all wanted the programme to continue.

Adapting to Challenges: Enhancing Blocks' Effectiveness and Impact

The Blocks programme adapted to emerging challenges by securing parental consent through home visits, which **increased participation willingness**. Programme staff received training from a psychotherapist affiliated with **Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust**, enhancing their effectiveness and helping them manage stress while working with vulnerable children.

An evaluation conducted a preliminary assessment of referral data and self-reflection forms from participants. **Most children met 3 or 4 referral criteria**, and **analysis of 108 entry and exit forms** revealed **5 statistically significant positive changes** in 7 of the 8 questions asked.



“They have made huge progress - he hasn’t been fighting in school and is learning to manage his emotions in a healthier way.”

Transformative Impact of the Blocks Programme

The following statements showed a statistically **significant positive** change:

I understand my emotions and how they affect me*
I like school and I’m doing well*
I feel confident making new friends.
I think positively about myself.
I am well-behaved in my community*
I can bounce back from challenges*
I have positive ways to manage my feelings*

These findings indicate that the programme **positively impacted participating children**, suggesting the potential to **scale the Blocks programme to benefit more children in similar contexts**.

Teachers’ perspectives of the Blocks programme were overwhelmingly positive. The schools held a clear understanding of the aims and objectives of the programme, as well as of its eligibility criteria. The teachers reported that children who participated in the programme exhibited positive changes in their behaviour and (almost all of them) had made a successful transition to high school. They all wanted the programme to continue.

[Click here to read the full report](#)

* Statistical significance is a mathematical test to determine if the change in these score is likely a genuine effect rather than due to chance.

Case Study

Jaxon is currently in y7 and has been working with the Blocks Manchester team since April 2023, when he was in Y5. Jaxon lives with his mum, as dad is currently in prison for armed robbery, awaiting sentence. Jaxon is very close with his family and spends a lot of time at his nanas and aunties in between weekend visits to see dad. His mentor spent intentional time getting to know Jaxon, his likes and dislikes, who his friends are and the adults around him, this gave an insight that he is very close with his family.

Jaxon was given the “cheeky chappy” label by teachers. He was initial referral to BLOCKS was due getting into several fights inside and outside of school and the risk of disengagement from education due to this. Jaxon struggled to control his emotions expressing, himself, that when he got angry, he just saw red.

His mentor has worked with Jaxon to aid in his understanding of his emotions and how to manage his emotions through being able to self-assess. Learning his body reacts to different emotions and the signs to look for in himself. He said that when he was angry his face got warm, his heart rate increased, and his thoughts begin to race. His mentor and Jaxon discussed ways to cope when this happens to us and what we can do to aid ourselves in calming down and avoiding turning to fights. Learning several coping strategies he gained the ability to process his feelings more, assessing that he is feeling a less positive emotion and able to choose a coping strategy suitable for the situation. Jaxon expressed his favourites were scrunchies, square breathing and 54321.

The work and knowledge Jaxon has gained about himself through Blocks has been shown, both in school and in the community. His mentor was made aware of an incident via a catch up with staff at school. Over the weekend in the easter holidays 2024, Jaxon and group of pupils from the primary school were in McDonalds, located by the Etihad. Jaxon had ordered his food sat down with the group and they began to get a little rowdy. This was due to another group of young people coming into the McDonalds and sitting near them, verbally shouting at them and throwing fries. This led to both groups of young people being asked to leave McDonalds due to the disruptive behaviour. As they exited a fight breakout out between the two groups of young people. Due to the strategies and safety plans Jaxon has learnt through his sessions on Blocks, he removed himself and avoided getting involved with the fight. Jaxon went back into McDonalds to ask for help from an adult. At this time, a teacher from his school happened to be in McDonalds, so he went over to the teacher and asked them for help to defuse the fight that was on going outside.

Throughout Blocks sessions Jaxon has become more open to discussions about what he is feeling and hasn't been involved with a fight in school. He has been kept on the Blocks project through his transition into high school, as his dad is due to be sentenced in November and the decision was made to keep the support because of this.

“Blocks has helped me understand more about myself. I think this is important because it means I can deal with them a lot better and when I am getting angry, I just do some scrunchies instead of fighting.” Jaxon



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