

Social workers in schools (SWIS)

Background

The SWIS programme trial is one of the largest randomised controlled trials (RCTs) ever undertaken in CSC in the UK, involving around 280,000 students across 291 schools based in 21 local authorities in England. It was set up to evaluate the effectiveness of SWIS on the need for CSC services.

The trial was funded by the DfE with the following outcomes:

Primary: What was the impact of SWIS in reducing rates of section 47 enquiries compared with usual practice

Secondary : What was the impact of SWIS on:

- Rates of referral to CSC, section 17 assessments and children entering care
- The number of days children spend in care
- Educational attendance and attainment (Analysis relating to these outcomes will be reported separately in March 2024)

Economic evaluation research question

- What was the cost and cost- effectiveness associated with SWIS per section 47 enquiry prevented?

Ealing social workers in schools programme

The SWIS programme became operational in October 2020, with our SWIS Social workers embedded in eight nominated schools. Since that time it has proven itself to be very impactful for schools, families and young people.

- Improved relationships between schools and social care,
- Improved communication and interagency working,
- Destigmatised the role of social workers
- Strengthened joint approach to safeguarding.

Resulting in:

- Rapid & seamless responses to concerns.
- Families accessing the right support as the need arises.
- SWIS Social Worker expertise and guidance leading to enhanced safeguarding knowledge and practice within schools, improved access to services and improved outcomes for children/families.

Ealing SWIS co-produced videos

There are two videos related to the Ealing SWIS programme in which the impact of SWIS is discussed:

1. Impact of SWIS from the Schools and young persons' point of view
2. Impact of SWIS from the SWIS Team's point of view.

We would like to thank the staff and young people at Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School and Villiers High School for their generosity and support in participating in a SWIS video project, in which they shared their views and recommendations regarding the Ealing SWIS model.

Results and impact of, 'The Social Workers in Schools (SWIS) trial: An evaluation of school-based social work summary' March 2023

We were very disappointed with the main conclusions of the evaluation, in which it was recommended that support for SWIS is not continued or scaled up further because it did not have the impact on Children's Social Care outcomes (reduction in referral rates) that DfE policymakers desired.

The report concluded that there was no evidence of benefit from the SWIS intervention on the rate of section 47 enquiries. All effects of SWIS on the secondary outcomes (number of S17 enquiries, number of days children spent in care) were small and not statistically significant. In addition, they concluded that the intervention was not cost effective for the cost and cost- for professionals (social workers and school effectiveness associated with SWIS staff), per section 47 enquiry prevented.

There was however a contrast between the quantitative results about the impact of SWIS on S17 and S47 enquiries and the qualitative data gathered as part of the implementation & process evaluation (IPE).

- Overall, SWIS was well received by social workers, school staff and students.
- The non- statutory work was particularly valued, and those involved noted that accessibility of social workers and opportunities for informal interactions were important.
- Most of the students interviewed reported feeling positively overall about SWIS (More than 80% of students "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that "It's good that my school has a social worker"), feeling they trusted the social worker, and that the social worker understood them better than any school staff.
- SWIS had an influence on other parts of the CSC system, particularly "front door" processes in local authorities.

Read the full report: [The Social Workers in Schools \(SWIS\) Trial: An evaluation of school-based social work](#)

DfE funding for SWIS programme withdrawn

The DfE informed us that as the overarching conclusion of the evaluation report is that the intervention did not have a significant effect on the key outcomes measured – with a clear recommendation that, based on the evidence at this stage, SWIS is not continued or scaled-up further. DfE funding would not continue for the SWIS programme after July 2023 in the 2023/24 academic year.

Ealing SWIS programme finished in July 2023

Unfortunately, as a result of this funding decision, the Ealing SWIS model and offer to the eight nominated schools ended on 14 July 2023.

This decision was very disappointing for the council, schools and young people as there have been so many benefits to the SWIS model in Ealing.

The wide ranging impact of SWIS was referenced in the national evaluation, which aligned with the views of our nominated schools.

Enthusiasm to learn from SWIS

It is very disappointing that the DfE decided not to continue to fund and roll out SWIS, as there have been so many benefits from SWIS for Children's Services, schools, pupils and families and we still believe it is an example of best practice.

At our June 2023 meeting with nominated schools and those schools interested in the SWIS model, it was acknowledged that financially we will not be able to continue with the current SWIS model, but there was enthusiasm to learn from our experience and build upon the knowledge and strengths gained and continue to explore and discuss with school partners how we can progress with this impactful work.

Thank you

We would like to thank all the SWIS team members, the nominated and comparator schools, the SWIS Management Group, Ealing Performance Information team and members of the ELP Safeguarding and Wellbeing group, for their enthusiasm, hard work and professional expertise in supporting and developing the Ealing SWIS model.

Nominated schools in Ealing

Ealing was asked to nominate 16 secondary schools to participate. The external evaluators from Cardiff University randomly selected the eight schools to receive a SWIS social worker, with the remaining eight schools playing an important role as the comparator group.

Schools selected to receive a SWIS social worker

- Brentside High School
- Villiers High School
- Greenford High School
- William Perkins CE High School
- Northolt High School
- The Ellen Wilkinson School for Girls
- Cardinal Wiseman Catholic High School
- Ealing Alternative Provision.

When it was necessary, SWIS Social workers also worked with associated 'feeder' Primary schools to the high schools.

Schools selected to be within the comparison group

- Featherstone High School
- Ark Acton Academy
- Drayton Manor High School
- Alec Reed Academy
- Dormers Wells High School
- Elthorne Park High School
- Twyford CE High School
- Belvue School.



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[Ealing Social Workers in Schools-SWIS Programme Update April 23.pdf \(pdf\)](#)

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