

The SWIS trial: An evaluation of school based social work

Short summary for schools

Introduction

This academic year [What Work's for Children's Social Care](#) (WWCSC) are trialling an intervention that involves social workers being based within schools (SWIS) in order to help address safeguarding issues. This is being evaluated by a team led by Cardiff University, using a randomised controlled trial (RCT) study design. This information sheet gives a brief summary of the evaluation, and it is designed to give school staff an overview of what the study is about and why we are doing it this way. We are busy setting the study up and more detailed information will be available soon. In the meantime, if you have any questions about either the programme or the evaluation you can contact programmes@whatworks-csc.org.uk.

Background

The SWIS trial builds on a set of pilot studies completed in 2019/20 which explored the feasibility of putting social workers into schools in this way ([report summary](#), [final report](#)). The central idea is that having a social worker linked to and based within a secondary school can have a range of benefits. In particular, to improve the service delivered to children and families, enhance interagency working, reduce risks to children and lead to better outcomes. The previous pilot studies found some indications of a reduction in child in need and child protection work, though these were small studies and we need to test it on a larger scale to find out more about the potential benefits. There may also be negative effects so it is vital that we evaluate it properly, which is why we are doing a larger scale evaluation. The study is led by the [Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre](#) (CASCADE, Cardiff University) and [Centre for Trials Research](#) (CTR, Cardiff University), in collaboration with [Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences](#) at the University of Oxford.

What does the evaluation involve?

The study involves 21 local authorities and around 300 schools across England. Around half of these schools will be allocated to an 'intervention group', which means they will receive a social worker. The other half will form a 'control group', and will continue as usual without a social worker allocated as part of the project. Schools will be randomised to one or other group, and at the end we will compare the groups in relation to some key outcomes (e.g. numbers of child protection enquiries, and some other social care and educational outcomes including attendance and attainment).

Why do we randomise?

Choosing which schools get the intervention using this method is the most rigorous way of creating two groups for comparison. It means that we can be confident that any differences are due to the intervention and not some other difference between the groups. Another option would be to simply choose which schools go in each group, but that way we might end up with more of a certain type of school in one group and this would compromise any comparisons we made. With limited resources, it is also a fair way of deciding which schools receive a social worker and which do not – especially as we do not know whether the intervention is going to improve outcomes. An RCT is the best way of working this out, so by the end of the study we should be in a strong position to weigh up how worthwhile SWIS is.

How are schools involved?

Most of the data we collect will be from Children's Services or the National Pupil Database, and this will be aggregated and not identifiable. We will use codes or pseudonyms in any publications so schools will not be identifiable. We will also be inviting school staff to take part in online surveys throughout the study. We will also do some case study 'visits' to schools who have a social worker – some virtual and some actual visits if circumstances allow. We will interview key people involved and observe the social worker during these, and if your school is chosen we will be in touch with more details. Towards the end of the study we will do some 'retrospective interviews' with school staff (and others) to understand what has gone well and what might have been done differently. We are also keen to find out more about the intersection between education and social care generally, so we are working on ways to involve all schools (including those in the control group) in this.

Ethical approval

Cardiff University have given ethical approval for the project, and anyone involved in an interview, survey or other individual data collection activity will do so voluntarily on the basis of informed consent procedures.

Timeline of project

The trial runs until Summer 2021, when we will report on our main social care outcomes, and we will publish a final report with additional outcomes (educational attainment and attendance) in Summer 2022.

Further information

If you have any questions or would like further information please contact programmes@whatworks-csc.org.uk