



# Implementing HeadStart

a review of Year 1 delivery in schools  
from the perspective of Youth Practitioners and school staff

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in partnership with



## Acknowledgements

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## HeadStart

This report focuses on HeadStart Newham. HeadStart is a National Lottery funded programme developed by the Big Lottery Fund. It aims to understand how to equip young people to cope better with difficult circumstances, preventing them from experiencing common mental health problems before they become serious issues.

The programme supports a broad range of initiatives for building resilience and emotional wellbeing in 10 to 16 year olds in order to:

- improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people
- reduce the onset of mental health conditions
- improve young people's engagement in school and their employability
- reduce the risk of young people taking part in criminal or risky behaviour.

The programme is being delivered in six local authority areas between 2016 and 2021: Blackpool, Cornwall, Hull, Kent, Newham and Wolverhampton. HeadStart Newham is delivered in partnership with the London Borough of Newham.

## The Big Lottery Fund

The Big Lottery Fund is the largest distributor of money from the National Lottery. Every year it distributes around £600 million pounds for good causes, all thanks to the players of The National Lottery. A significant proportion of this funding goes on strategic programmes. HeadStart is one of those programmes.

## Summary

### Introduction

HeadStart Newham<sup>1</sup> is an early help service for 10-16 year olds with emerging mental health difficulties. HeadStart works with young people in schools, the community and with parents, through a combination of whole school work and targeted interventions.

During the first year of the programme, HeadStart partnered with eight secondary and twenty primary schools across Newham. At the end of the initial delivery year research was conducted to collate the lessons learnt, from the perspectives of delivery staff and schools about the facilitators and barriers to implementation.

### Methodology

A qualitative research design included a focus group with HeadStart Youth Practitioners, an interview with a Senior Youth Practitioner and five interviews with school staff. Fieldwork took place during summer 2017. All research encounters were audio recorded and thematically analysed.

### Summary of findings

The first year of HeadStart delivery was a learning curve for both Practitioners and schools. Youth Practitioners were excited to be part of a new youth service. However, they experienced setbacks in finding their place in the team and felt their skillset was underutilised. Practitioners encountered challenges to implementing interventions, such as a lack of training and guidance, and navigating how to support young people on group-based, short-term interventions. Practitioners had a clearer sense of their role by the end of the year and had suggestions to strengthen provision. They advocated for time to support the whole school

work and provide some one-to-one support to young people, alongside group interventions. They highlighted a need to standardise intervention materials for consistency. Practitioners wanted management to acknowledge their contributions, include them in decision-making and integrate with wider council youth services. Despite frustrations with service organisation, Practitioners remained ambitious for HeadStart.

Schools were positive about HeadStart support. Partnering with HeadStart could enable schools to prioritise pupil wellbeing, but this required buy-in from senior leadership and required a designated staff member with support from other staff, to develop. The combination of whole school support with a dedicated Resilience Training Lead and targeted interventions by specialist Youth Practitioners were welcome resources. School leads explained that a bespoke and gradual approach to implementing whole school change worked well, as did having interventions for particular Year groups, delivered to suit the school timetable. By the end of the first year, leads had a clearer understanding of HeadStart, its work and the time commitment required by the school. Leads believed that small positive steps had been made to support pupil wellbeing, but that whole school change would take time. There remained uncertainty about how to describe interventions to pupils and parents due to the stigma attached to mental illness. Leads explained the tension around taking pupils out of lessons for non-academic interventions, and therefore expected delivery to strike a balance between fun and learning, pupil behaviour to be managed, no late session cancellations, and session feedback and a measure of pupil outcomes. Schools suggested a need to engage parents in the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.headstartnewham.co.uk/>

progress that their child had made during the intervention. For a sustainable whole school approach, an induction for new school staff was required.

### **Making use of the findings**

The findings identify areas of delivery that HeadStart Newham may wish to review:

- Training needs of Practitioners to deliver consistent and effective interventions
- Supporting schools and Practitioners to address challenges to intervention delivery
- Utilising Practitioner skillset to enhance service provision through dedicated one-to-one support for pupils and integrating with wider council youth provision
- Supporting schools to develop a sustainable whole school approach
- Engaging schools with intervention delivery and pupil outcomes
- Review communications and schedule planning with schools.

## **Our learning**

HeadStart Newham is committed to refine service delivery, based on evidence and our learning. This section sets out how HeadStart has responded to the research findings.

## Our learning for Practitioners

## HeadStart Newham's response

### *Training.*

Practitioners reported gaps in induction/ training, e.g.:

- job role of the team
- the target population criteria and assessing if a pupil meets it
- how to deliver interventions, the intended outcomes and change mechanisms

- We are now clearer about roles
- Recommendation forms have been refined. The target population criteria is clear. However, saying 'no' to a pupil that doesn't meet the criteria remains a challenge
- In 2017/18 Practitioners received intervention training, but training remained largely 'on the job'. We're piloting a quality assurance framework for all interventions

### *Delivering interventions.*

Practitioners experienced challenges to delivery, e.g.:

- inconsistent intervention materials across Practitioners
- low quality equipment and resources
- low awareness of HeadStart among school staff, limited communication between the Practitioner and the designated school lead, unsuitable rooms and handovers between practitioners
- confidence that young people's needs are met, rushed 1:1s and scope to tailor interventions, no links to other youth services in the borough

- We now have session plans and templates, that retain scope to tailor materials to the group's needs
- We order equipment termly, newly appointed Support Practitioners will ensure sufficient stock.
- We've recruited Support Practitioners to provide cover and the use of session plans will help with handovers. We could benefit from a central system for school/intervention information.
- We have improved communication with schools, e.g. recommendation forms, marketing packs, the introduction of HeadStart Early Mental Health Teams
- We know we need to start planning HeadStart delivery before the start of a new academic year
- We need to provide a differentiated approach to different groups and pupils and document this in session plans
- We're trialling mini-interventions, providing 1:1 pupil support
- We've started to connect with wider youth services

### *Job satisfaction.*

Practitioners wanted to enhance the service and professional development, e.g.:

- provide 1:1 support to pupils
- shadow/learn from each other
- involvement in decision-making
- included in communications to schools
- contribute to whole school work
- reward and recognition
- a better office space

- Mini-interventions provide opportunities for 1:1 support for pupils
- This remains limited but useful. Peer observations and sharing best practice will be part of the quality assurance framework
- Practitioners are included in communications, yet some information is still missed. School Team Reflection help to share information and problem solve.
- Co-delivering school staff training and meetings with the RTLs happens more frequently.
- We recognise good practice in a range of ways, e.g. featuring Practitioners in films, case studies, presenting at local and national events and across HeadStart partnerships.
- We moved to a bigger office with a variety meeting spaces.

## Our learning for Schools

## HeadStart Newham's response

### *Embedding whole school work.*

- Ensuring Head Teacher buy-in
  - Support the designated school lead to deliver whole school strategy
  - Supporting the induction of new staff for sustainable change
  - Facilitate schools to share learning from one another
  - Consider inclusion of wellbeing support for school staff
- We have bi-annual check-ins with senior leadership to discuss the WMF survey, the annual review and resulting actions
  - Based on our learning we've developed an organigram to support schools to delegate HeadStart responsibility at a senior level
  - We run school forums to support networking and sharing learning, and centralised staff training
  - We recognise the need to support Staff wellbeing, however, this is not a discrete part of our funded remit. We hope that staff do benefit from the strategies and approaches that we share with young people around building resilience

### *Delivering interventions.*

- Provision of recommendation criteria
  - Consider Year 9 pupils to be mentors for More than Mentors
  - Marketing materials about interventions for teachers, pupils and parents
  - Intervention information, e.g. session plans, to support schools to understand the intended learning outcomes
  - Review behaviour management
  - Invite school staff to observe/support interventions
  - Regular session feedback to ensure schools are aware of activity and can address issues
  - Avoid cancelling sessions
  - A measure of pupil outcomes at the end of intervention and a report for parents
  - Supporting pupils to consider next steps, after interventions
- Recommendation forms have been refined, include the criteria and must be submitted digitally via the website
  - We've taken on board school feedback, they can now choose to have Year 9 or 10 mentors
  - We now have branded resources and available in print and online
  - This have been done for all targeted school interventions.
  - RTLs have provided behaviour management training to all Practitioners. Learning walks are being introduced to monitor all aspects of interventions, including behaviour and pupil engagement
  - It's accepted good practice for Practitioners to involve relevant school staff in interventions, and we encourage this
  - Regular session feedback is not yet standard practice, as it's dependent on the relationship between the school and the Practitioner. There are examples of good practice which we hope to build on
  - We are appointing Support Practitioners to provide cover for sessions, in case of absence
  - Schools now receive pupil and group outcome reports at the end of interventions to highlight progress and facilitate exit pathways for young people

### *Partnership working with HeadStart*

- Limit the number and frequency of email communications to schools.
  - Communications to be from a dedicated contact
  - Provide an activity schedule so schools can plan for it.
- HeadStart have a communications strategy and take a more considered approach to who contacts school, when and with what information
  - Schools receive a schedule of planned activity at the start of the academic year

If you would like a full report, please contact:

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