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# **PATHS TO SUCCESS**

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**Public Report 1**

**November 2012**

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### **About PATHS**

#### **What is PATHS?**

PATHS stands for Promoting Alternative THinking Strategies. PATHS is a social and emotional learning curriculum that helps children to manage their behaviour, understand their emotions and work well with others. It is a universal intervention for all children in the class, and consists of a series of lessons that cover topics such as identifying and labelling feelings, controlling impulses, reducing stress and understanding other people's perspectives. The full PATHS curriculum contains lessons for children in Reception through to Year 6. However, for the PATHS to Success project we are focusing only on pupils in Key Stage 2 (Years 3-6).

PATHS was originally developed in the United States by Mark Greenberg and Carol Kusche. It has since been adapted for the English context by the children's charity Barnado's. It has also been translated for use in a number of other countries including Croatia, the Netherlands and Switzerland.

#### **There are three main components of PATHS:**

1. The main component is the taught curriculum. PATHS utilises a 'spiral' curriculum model, whereby (i) topics and concepts are revisited; (ii) units and lessons are developmentally sequenced; (iii) new learning is linked to previous learning; and (iv) the competence of learners increases with each successive visit to a topic or concept.

The taught curriculum is supplemented by:

2. Generalisation activities and techniques that support the application of new skills during the course of the school day. All members of the school staff are encouraged to make use of 'teachable moments' to help children understand how and when they might use these strategies and skills.

3. Parent materials, such as additional send-home activities that aim to extend learning to the home environment.

## The PATHS to Success Project

Research tells us that there has been an increase in emotional and behavioural difficulties among children and young people in the last 30 years. Also, a recent international survey ranked the UK last among 21 developed countries in childhood wellbeing. It is therefore crucial that we examine the effects of interventions like PATHS - which aim to prevent such problems before they occur - so that we can determine whether all schools and children in England would benefit from this kind of work. Our main aim is to examine the impact of the PATHS curriculum on the social and emotional wellbeing of children in primary schools in England.

### What is the PATHS to Success project?

Primary schools in the ten Local Authorities in Greater Manchester were approached to participate in the PATHS to Success project funded by the National Institute for Health Research.

The research project is led by Professor Neil Humphrey at the University of Manchester, and aims to examine the impact of the 'Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS)' curriculum on the social and emotional wellbeing of children in Years 3-6 in primary schools in England. The project runs from January 2012 until March 2017. The implementation and impact of PATHS will be examined over a two-year period from September 2012 to July 2014. There will then be a two-year follow up period from July 2014 to July 2016 in which we will examine whether any impact of PATHS is sustained.

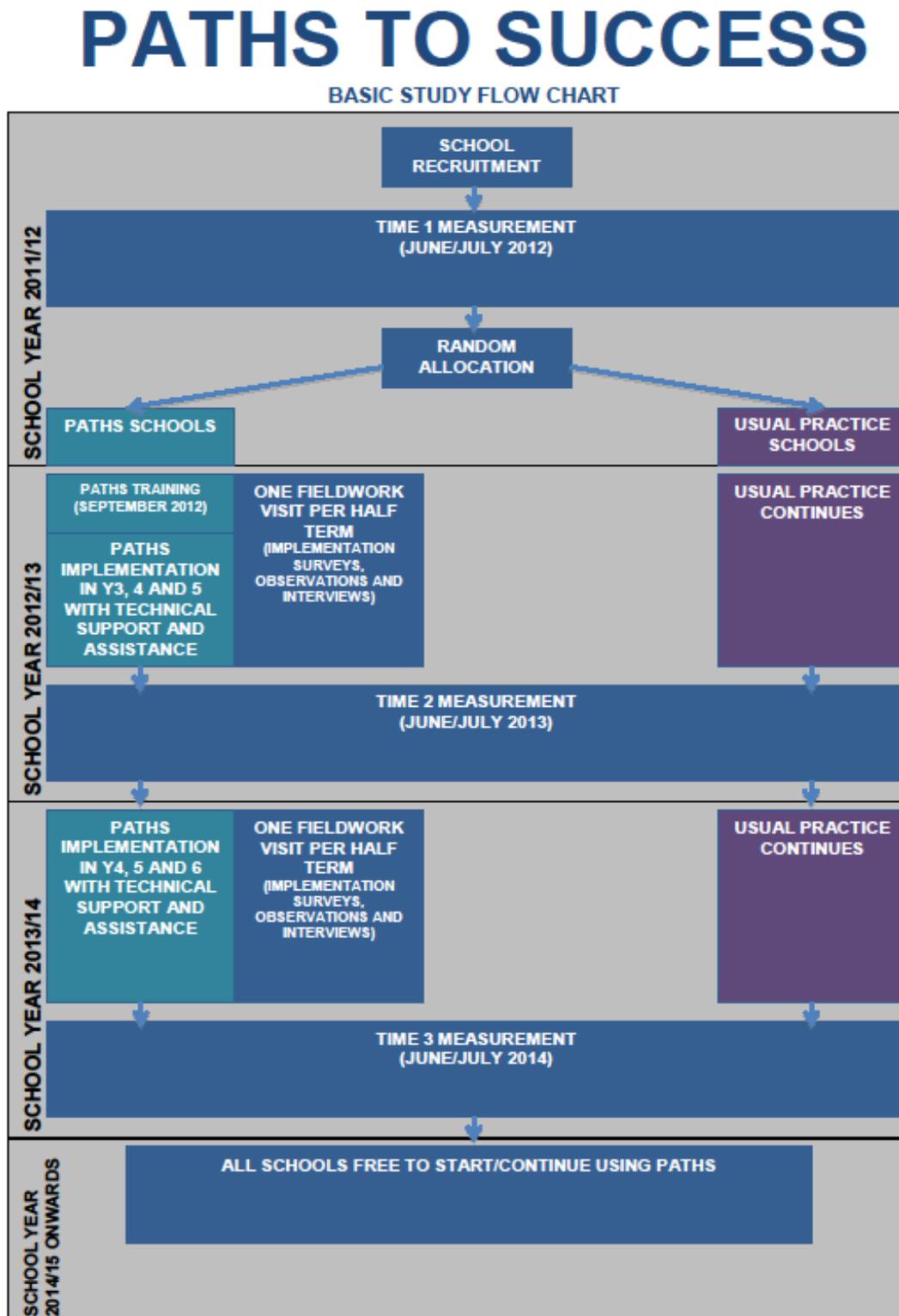
### What does the study involve?

Our research will use a 'randomised controlled trial' design - this is the gold standard method for testing if an intervention works. We will randomly allocate the schools to an intervention group or comparison group. The intervention group schools will be trained to provide the PATHS intervention. Their teachers will then use the intervention materials to deliver lessons twice a week over a two-year period to pupils in Years 3, 4 and 5. The comparison group schools will continue their usual practice during this period. Members of our team will work with and support intervention schools to ensure that PATHS is implemented properly, and we will record any changes they make to see if this affects later outcomes. We will work very closely with schools on this aspect, collecting data on things like dosage (e.g. do schools deliver the required number of lessons?) and fidelity (e.g. do schools deliver PATHS as it was intended in the intervention manual?) and also talking to teachers, pupils and their parents about their experiences of taking part. At the end of the two-year period, schools will be free to continue (or, in the case of control schools, start) to implement PATHS (see Figure 1).

The children who were in Year 5 at the beginning of the project and transfer to secondary school at the end of the main trial will be followed-up for a further two years to see if the PATHS curriculum impacts upon their adjustment to their new school, and also to see if any intervention effects are sustained over time.

We will take a range of measures, including teacher, pupil and parent surveys, at regular intervals to help us find out if PATHS is effective. These measures include children's social and emotional competence, health related quality of life, school attendance and academic attainment. We will also perform analyses that will tell us if the intervention provides good value for money.

Figure 1: Study Flow Chart



## Progress so far

### Recruitment

Invitation letters to participate were emailed and posted to primary schools across Greater Manchester, and an introductory recruitment event was held at the University of Manchester for interested schools. 56 primary schools, representing 7 of the Local Authorities in Greater Manchester, were recruited between March and May 2012. 45 of these schools completed baseline measures and were therefore eligible for randomisation. 23 schools were randomly allocated to the intervention group and 22 schools to the comparison group.

These 45 schools (which yielded a total sample size of 5,162 pupils) are nationally representative in terms of school size, attendance and the proportion of pupils with special educational needs. However, they have slightly larger than average proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals and speaking English as an additional language. This is most likely a reflection of our recruitment area (which is predominantly urban) and the perception of need for interventions like PATHS among certain schools.

### Baseline assessments

Baseline data on pupil outcomes including social and emotional competence and health related quality of life was collected from pupils, parents and teachers in the Summer term 2011/12. Surveys were completed on-line via a secure, password-protected website. On-site support was provided for schools that needed help to complete the surveys. In some cases this included use of paper copies. We received 4,501 teacher surveys, 4,517 pupil surveys and 731 parent surveys. 15 schools (11 PATHS schools, 4 usual practice schools) completed additional academic assessments, which provided data on the reading and maths attainment of 1,487 pupils.

A 'usual practice survey' was also completed to determine the starting point of each school with regard to social and emotional learning (SEL) and related areas. This survey explored the named initiatives, programmes and interventions that schools were already implementing (e.g. SEAL) and specific activities in which social and emotional skills are explicitly taught. One survey per school was completed by the designated PATHS co-ordinator in the school. Usual practice surveys have been completed for 42 of the participating schools.

All teachers implementing the PATHS curriculum have completed an 'implementer characteristics survey' to measure different characteristics that we think might influence the approach taken in implementing the PATHS curriculum, e.g. emotional self-efficacy, teaching efficacy, views on social and emotional learning, and school climate.

### Training

Intervention schools have been assigned a PATHS Psychologist from the University of Manchester and were invited to attend a one day PATHS to Success training session in early September. The training was led by staff from Penn State University and our three PATHS psychologists. Teachers of Year 3, 4 and 5 classes at each school were asked to attend. At least one member of staff from all 23 schools attended, and in most cases all teachers of the Year 3, 4 and 5 classes attended. Where this was not possible, 'twilight' training sessions have been conducted at the schools by our PATHS Psychologists and/or the training has been cascaded back within the school by the attending staff members, with support from the schools' PATHS Psychologist.

## Results

### Baseline surveys

- Data from the baseline surveys completed by teacher, pupils and parents show that scores were in the expected ranges and showed the expected developmental trends, e.g. social skills improving with age and problem behaviour decreasing with age.
- The proportion of children scoring in the normal, borderline and abnormal ranges for our mental health questionnaire was comparable to national norms. For example, teacher reports of total difficulties showed 78.8% of the sample scoring within the normal range, 10.2% at borderline and 11% abnormal, compared to 80.3% of pupils nationally within the normal range, 10% borderline and 9.7% abnormal.
- Teacher and parent surveys correlated reasonably well, which is also typical.
- There were no meaningful differences between survey scores for pupils in intervention and control schools.
- Analysis of our academic assessment data showed that the pupils in our sample were performing at age equivalent levels.
- Results from the usual practice survey showed that on the whole, schools had been using more universal (for use with all pupils) than targeted approaches (for use with specific groups of pupils considered to be in need of additional support). The SEAL whole school resources, SEAL whole class lessons and National Healthy Schools Programme were the most widely used programmes.

Overall, as these baseline findings are showing the expected trends, this provides a sound foundation to help us find out if PATHS is effective in improving children's outcomes.

## Developments

Supplementary resources have been produced to support high quality implementation in intervention schools. Hard copies have been distributed and can also be accessed from the project website. For instance:

- An Implementation Guidance Manual for teachers
- A Guide for School Leaders
- Additional training events, e.g. evening sessions at schools which will be open to all staff
- 'Jump Start' introductory lessons to PATHS
- Information leaflets for parents/carers
- Information leaflets for school support staff
- Lesson timetables
- Materials for PATHS Pupil of the Day, such as badges and letters for parents
- Materials for emotion labelling, such as feeling faces cards and feelings dictionaries

## Next Steps

- Our PATHS Psychologists are visiting their respective intervention schools twice each term to provide support in implementing the PATHS curriculum.
- During the support visits the PATHS Psychologists observe PATHS lessons and provide feedback to teachers, assist with group work, talk to pupils about what they have been learning, model PATHS lessons for teachers and answer any questions school staff have about PATHS.
- The PATHS Psychologists have also been delivering information sessions for whole school staff about PATHS and in some schools are delivering information about PATHS to parents through PATHS Parent Information evenings.
- In addition to the support visits, the PATHS Psychologists will be conducting research visits to interview staff regarding implementation progress, what has helped and hindered the delivery of the curriculum, and their views of PATHS.
- The PATHS Psychologists will also formally observe PATHS lessons, assessing a number of factors including how closely the lesson plan is adhered to, and the level of pupil engagement.
- The implementer characteristics survey data is in the process of being analysed.