An Evaluation of the Greater London Authority’s Parent Advocacy Project in Pupil Referral Units

Final Report

March 2012

White Consulting Limited and London Metropolitan University

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WITH GEORGIE PARRY-CROOKE
Acknowledgements
The WCL and LMU would like to thank the GLA for commissioning this work; Graham Robb for his design and delivery of this project; the headteachers, staff and partners of the five participating PRUs (The Tuition Centre, Barking and Dagenham; The Study Centre, Ealing; Abbey Manor College, Lewisham; The Tuition Centre, Hillingdon; The Limes College, Sutton); the respective local authorities; Carers of Barking and Dagenham; parents; pupils; and all other partners for their willingness and participation in this project. It has been insightful working with you, and your views have led to the shaping of this evaluation, this report and the accompanying handbook.

Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>PRU</td>
<td>A Pupil Referral Unit is an establishment maintained by a local authority that is specifically organised to provide education for children who are excluded, sick, or otherwise unable to attend a mainstream or special maintained school(^1).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent Advocacy</td>
<td>For the purpose of this project, ‘parent advocacy’ means providing services that support and challenge a parent in engaging with their children and their PRU, to empower their position in relationships and encourage improved school outcomes by their children.</td>
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<td>Pathfinder</td>
<td>Commonly, a pathfinder implements strategies and policy that have little evidence of being implemented in a particular space before. There is little previous evidence of parent-advocacy activities in PRUs, and so the five PRUs taking part in this project were pathfinders; discovering the benefits and challenges of parent advocacy implementation and finding elements of good practice.</td>
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<td>Project</td>
<td>The term ‘project’ in this report refers to the GLA funding of parent advocacy in five pathfinder PRUs (unless otherwise stated in the report).</td>
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<tr>
<td>B&amp;D</td>
<td>Barking and Dagenham</td>
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<td>TC</td>
<td>Tuition Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>Local authority</td>
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<td>DFE</td>
<td>Department for Education</td>
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<td>NC</td>
<td>National Curriculum</td>
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<td>GLA</td>
<td>Greater London Authority</td>
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<td>LMU</td>
<td>London Metropolitan University</td>
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<td>WCL</td>
<td>White Consulting Limited</td>
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\(^1\) [http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/maintained/a00198404/pupil-referral-unit-pru](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/maintained/a00198404/pupil-referral-unit-pru)
Summary
WCL and LMU were commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the GLA parent advocacy project from January 2011 to March 2012. This report evaluates the impact of the parent advocacy project based on requirements set out in the Project Initiation Document (PID)².

1.1.1. Background
The parent advocacy project is part of Project Brodie, an initiative from the Mayor for London’s ‘Time for Action’ programme that aims to tackle youth problems and violence in the capital. The project drew on tools and techniques that are recommended by the GLA’s Project Oracle³; which included creating a ‘theory of change’ with each pathfinder and creating a ‘logic model’ (see page 14, and the appendix) to set the foundations for a robust evidence structure. Further, the five pathfinders that took part in this project varied in functions and structure; by completing an initial theory of change and logic model, this provided some consistency across the board.

The parent advocacy project provided five PRU pathfinders (Barking and Dagenham, Ealing, Hillingdon, Lewisham and Sutton) with funding to support and challenge parents; to encourage parent interaction with PRUs and build better relationships between parents and children. A total of 68 parents and 70 children were engaged in this project and participated in the data collections.

Another core aim was to encourage children to improve their attainment, attendance and behaviour in PRUs by primarily focusing on working with parents to promote parent confidence in supporting their children (parent advocacy). Overall, 68 families received support and advice, who on the whole welcomed the project.

1.1.2. Results and findings
The PRU pathfinders engaged parents in a variety of ways; each PRU experiencing both successes and challenges. It is important to recognise that the strategic relationship between PRUs, PRU headteachers and the local authority played a crucial role during the set-up and integration of the project into the PRU pathfinders. The five PRU pathfinders delivered the project with enthusiasm and (funding allowing) wish to carry on delivering advocacy services once the GLA initiative has finished; Barking and Dagenham have already allocated funding to keep the services running⁴.

³ See annex.
³ http://www.london.gov.uk/priorities/crime-community-safety/time-action/project-oracle
⁴ Barking and Dagenham’s Education leadership allocated £10,000 to the work from April 2012
Successes in the project

- This project has strived to positively engage parents to support and challenge their children. It has road tested new ways of working in PRUs. The five pathfinders have varying structures (see below), and the aim has been to recognise and explore different ways of implementing parent advocacy in each case.
- This small investment of £100,000 total has demonstrated important learning. The information gained in observations and data has been insightful, as it appears parents have gained from their experiences.
- PRU staff learning has played a key role with new techniques that impacted staff; for example training in a parenting programme in the Hillingdon pathfinder; and family counselling practices in Sutton.
- Project developments have been continuously assessed through PRU data systems; through a jointly constructed central risk register; and by a mix of roles which included building a ‘team’ sense among the PRUs and stressing rigour in practice through joint seminars.
- A network of support for PRUs was important to share practice. This work can help parents but staff in PRUs can feel isolated from other staff. Seminars, visits and one-to-one work demonstrated demand for a professional network among PRUs.

Challenges in the project

- The readiness of PRUs to tackle this project was overestimated. The project initiation seminars and visits did not go far enough in ensuring the readiness of the PRUs.
- PRUs required further support than initially thought to engage parents and collect data. For example, Hillingdon struggled to engage parents before the first data collection (April 2011).
- Collecting data from PRUs proved challenging with numerous instances of incomplete data returns. Some pathfinders benefited from intense support to complete datasets.
- Parent data and its capture were especially difficult; for example, Ealing used an alternative questionnaire to the STAR parent measure\(^5\) (used from July 2011 onwards) after a pathfinder seminar debated the issues of using the STAR format or an alternative.
- Comparison of PRUs has been problematic as they did not collect data in the same manner. For example, numeric, percentage and narrative assessment methods were used by different PRUs to measure child attainment. This required (in some cases) a coding system for data. Further, a designated intervention could have been prescribed but using different delivery models; or the target type of children/parents could have been specified to ensure some consistency across pathfinders.
- It has been a time of significant structural change in LAs, PRUs and schools. This was a challenge that could not be mitigated. Hillingdon, for example, had difficulties as the role of headteacher was subject to short-term recruitment, and this limited PRU staff engagement.

Recommendations for improvement

Three priorities have emerged as a result of this review, and are essential to progression and meeting challenges if a similar project is to be implemented.

1. Governance roles – the details of the scope of the project should be more clearly defined ahead of implementation. This should include: specific staff roles in supporting the initiative, who will be delivering the service, and the collection of data.
2. Data collection and maintaining the schedule – measures should ideally be a standard format across PRUs but we acknowledge that local autonomy in educational leadership makes this increasingly a challenge for projects. Future initiatives should try to establish

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\(^5\) Further information on the family STAR can be accessed via http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk/family-star/
**Recommendations for improvement**

consistent attendance and behaviour coding systems so that data is collected and analysed uniformly. Being clear about tools for analysis from the very start is critical.

3. **Communicating services as ‘advocacy’** – the variation in definition was evident in the bids for this project. The working definition of the service was agreed in Quarter Two (July 2011). The PRU, LA, and parents all needed to be aware of the interventions and focus. Communication between those delivering services and PRU staff should be encouraged to exchange knowledge about individual cases and strategies being used with parents.

**1.1.3. Introduction to the five PRU pathfinders**

Below is a map of London with the five PRU pathfinders highlighted in red. The map is followed by a table providing a brief description of each PRU and their respective initiative.

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**Diagram 1: Borough location of PRU pathfinders**

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**Barking and Dagenham – The Tuition Centre**

Barking and Dagenham is a small outer London borough that lies on the eastern side of outer London. It is still one of the most industrial parts of the capital and consists largely of council-owned housing estates.

It appears an effective model was implemented in B&D Tuition Centre (TC), which successfully outsourced parent advocacy work to third-sector party **Carers of B&D**. The initiative yielded some instances of successful relationships being forged between the local authority (LA), TC and parents. The LA has been engaged in data collection and will continue to fund parent advocacy services. It should be noted that the relationship between the service providers and TC staff was difficult to build or sustain during the period of this project, and is a suggested area for improvement.

**Ealing – EOTAS The Study Centre**

Ealing is a West London borough that has a high level of ethnic diversity and a high population of young people (0-19). Using free school meals as an indicator of deprivation, Ealing is above the national average at primary school level (23% and 16% respectively) and at secondary level (26% and 13% respectively).

The Study Centre in Ealing implemented a new process to help parent/carers at the outset of their experience in the PRU. The Parent Liaison met all Parent/Carers of excluded children that came to

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*Commercial in Confidence*
The Study Centre. The aim of this meeting was to support the parent/carer’s transition into the alternative provision, and to offer support through the parent advocacy service. Those parents engaged were offered one-to-one work, referral to other services, sign-posting and advice.

### Hillingdon – The Tuition Centre

Hillingdon is a vibrant outer-London Borough, and represents a very diverse population. It is the second-largest London borough, which can result in long travel distances between children and their school/alternative provision.

The Hillingdon model struggled early on, due to only one member of LA staff delivering the parent advocacy service and limited parent engagement. There were changes in PRU leadership (three different headteachers during the 15-month period), which proved chaotic until the new academic term (September 2011). During the last six months of the project, the Hillingdon model provided a strong group focus for parents, through which they actively chose to create a Parents’ Association at the PRU. Parent advocacy in Hillingdon was led by the LA, with improving engagement with the PRU as the project progressed.

### Lewisham – Abbey Manor College

Lewisham is the second-largest inner London borough and benefits from a culturally and ethnically diverse population. Lewisham has a slightly younger age profile than the rest of the UK. Children and young people (aged 0-19 years) make up 24.5% of residents, compared to 22.4% for inner London and 24.4% nationally. Lewisham has 35,800 pupils within its 91 schools.

The Lewisham model provided a family support officer and lead learning mentor who worked with eight inhouse staff; they conducted home visits as well as meetings in the PRU with parents. The family support officer provided a ‘roll-on, roll-off service’ where parents were supported for a length of time to suit their concerns (e.g. one session or multiple), and provided advice and support for particular situations; for example, to parents at risk of prosecution for their child’s non-attendance. Lewisham had a narrow focus on entry screening and system analysis. Lewisham does not reintegrate Key Stage 4 students into mainstream school, and so the focus is on gaining academic and vocational qualifications through ‘Functional Skills’.

### Sutton – The Limes College

Sutton has a mixed economy and is a South London borough with areas of high deprivation, including the St Helier estate – the largest estate in Europe with the highest deprivation factors. There are also areas of affluence. Sutton schools reflect this cross section of society. The borough still maintains the grammar system. The PRU works closely with all secondary schools through a behaviour partnership.

The pathfinder, The Limes College, engaged parents through a family-centric way of working. Group activities were conducted using open and equal discussion space. The project supported training in Family Group Conferencing, although the technique was not used during the project. The PRU headteacher has strong links to other LA headteachers, which could be conducive to further parent advocacy activities, and promotes the ease of shared knowledge surrounding the college’s involvement in this project.

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8 http://www.pru.hillingdon.sch.uk/
9 http://www.lcpru.lewisham.sch.uk/
10 http://www.leadinglewisham.co.uk/
11 http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/QualificationsExplained/DG_173874
12 http://www.thelimescollege.org.uk/

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1. The parent advocacy project

1.1 Context

The parent advocacy project incorporates the idea that by intervening earlier in the lives of at-risk children (in this case, those who have been excluded from mainstream school) and engaging the family in the child’s education, better family relationships could improve family life and encourage better attendance and behaviour at school.

In October 2005, the Department for Education (DfE) released the White Paper, “Higher Standards, Better Schools for All – More Choice for Parents and Pupils”13. A central belief of this paper was that parents are an integral part of raising the standards in schools, and their children’s experience of education. This continues to be a core issue today through initiatives such as the parent advocacy project, where parents are fundamental to achieving positive change in the attitude and behaviour of their children.

Furthermore, early intervention as an approach has been championed as an obvious way to improve the lives of children from a primary stage. In 2008 there was cross party consensus14, led by Graham Allen MP and Iain Duncan Smith MP, to address the growing concern surrounding social disorder. Graham Allen was commissioned by the government to produce a report on early intervention, which was published in 2011. It focused on key recommendations for government spending to attempt a change in funding allocation during early years (0-3 years), and made economic comparisons between three scenarios when facing social disorder: doing nothing at all; continuing with existing policies; and replacing those policies with early intervention policies. The review recommended £27 million should be allocated to early intervention policy, as at the time of review prevention spending stood at 4% of total health spending. Allen’s early intervention reports continue to resonate in terms of effectively tackling social disorders before the issue becomes prevalent15.

In addition, a “Review of Best Practice in Parental Engagement: Practitioners Summary” was released by the DfE in September 2011, which covered research on parents of children aged 5-19, and included evidence-based messages on interventions to support parental engagement in their children’s learning. It suggested that parental engagement has a large and positive impact on children’s learning16, which supports the aims of the parent advocacy project that were laid out in its original commissioning in late 2010. From a PRU perspective, Charlie Taylor, the government’s Expert Adviser on Behaviour, released a report in March 201217 that focuses on the future for alternative provision. Improving alternative provision and the behaviour of children in alternative provision have been given national attention through this latest report.

In the wider sector of parental support and advice, further programmes such as the Positive Parenting Programme and Families and Schools Together18 are available as tools to engage parents and the wider family to develop better parenting strategies as a way of improving the life chances of

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13 https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/Cm%206677#downloadableparts
14 http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/default.asp?pageRef=269
15 http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/early-intervention-next-steps.pdf
16 https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFE-RR156
18 http://www.familiesandschools.org/international.php
children. The Positive Parenting Programme\(^{19}\), also known as Triple P, was used by Hillingdon as part of this project (using the GLA grant to purchase the programme and to train PRU staff). It is an evidence-based parenting programme that aims to prevent severe behavioural, emotional and developmental problems in children by enhancing the knowledge, skills, and confidence of parents. Individual programmes such as Triple P are useful as they promote the use of robust data systems, and contain well-researched parenting strategies.

The parent advocacy project aimed to reflect some of the policy documents, initiatives and programmes that promote parents in their children’s education that have arisen over the last decade. Parents are the key players to enable interaction between the child, the PRU, the LA and other agencies.

The GLA wants all young Londoners to have the opportunities and support necessary to be the very best that they can be. Through this project, both parents and children were given the opportunity to overcome challenges and build stronger working relationships with each other, and the PRU.

In a school context, it has been acknowledged by Ofsted that schools rarely give parents ‘sufficient guidance on how to help their children learn more effectively\(^{20}\) and so parent and carer engagement is now part of an Ofsted inspection\(^{21}\). With this in mind, this project worked with children and parents to promote engagement and commitment to learning; and as a further reflection of this project, this report provides an adjoining handbook\(^{22}\) for professionals, providing further information on suggestions for implementations of this project.

### GLA Mayor’s Time for Action

**Project Brodie:** The GLA required an initiative that worked to improve attainment; reduce truancy, unauthorised absences and exclusion; and to tackle the concern through parent advocacy. The aim of this project as part of Brodie was not to endorse any one method but to: find methods that work; to recognise the successes and the lessons learnt; and disseminate the findings to encourage other parent advocacy schemes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The need</th>
<th>This project involved an exciting area to be exploring in London, as more evidence is needed about ‘what works’ in initiatives that aim to address those at risk of not attaining as they should, truancy concerns and behavioural issues.</th>
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<tr>
<td>What really works</td>
<td>The parent advocacy project focused on the importance of family values and education to support a child and increase the prospects and outcomes for children in PRU’s.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Important values</td>
<td>To support parents who have children in PRUs to understand and work through emotional, social, and behavioural difficulties of their children. Key to this project in achieving its aims has been to understand the needs of the parents and to make sure the parents understand this need themselves as part of supporting their children.</td>
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\(^{19}\) [http://www1.triplep.net/](http://www1.triplep.net/)


\(^{22}\) The adjoining handbook was written by Graham Robb (Lead on design and delivery of this project), and outlines the different models of parent advocacy used by the five pathfinders, with recommendations for professionals who are considering implementing parent advocacy in their school, PRU or other alternative provision.
1.1.1. The role of PRUs in promoting parent advocacy

Currently, PRUs play a varied role in the education system, depending on what they offer as an alternative provision. Their role is subject to change in the future; for example, a current DfE pilot is exploring how schools retain responsibility for the education of the children they exclude, which could transform the role and work of PRUs. It could potentially promote a reinvigorated drive for successful placement and reintegration, with possible impact on PRUs, their intake and turnover of schoolchildren in a year; an issue to keep in mind when considering this project for future implementation.

In relation to responsibility for excluded children, during discussions with staff (PRU and LA) in interviews, seminars and observational visits, the extent to which PRUs should be involved in implementing parent advocacy services was discussed. Also explored was how the parent advocacy services relate to the local parenting service – whether LA-run or externally commissioned. For reference, three out of five PRU pathfinders (Ealing, Lewisham and Sutton) have implemented parent advocacy services themselves, with the remaining two (Hillingdon and B&D) delivering services through external partners.

Diagram 3: Who should run parent advocacy services? (The case for and against)

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<tr>
<th>PRU</th>
<th>Local Authority</th>
<th>Third Sector Provider</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>FOR</strong></td>
<td>1. Services and education are all inhouse. This has meant good communication between school leaders teaching staff and parent advocacy staff. 2. Genuine ownership and best for children if it is built into the PRUs ‘way of working’. 3. Good opportunity for knowledge transfer with an inhouse service. 4. Presents an opportunity for the PRU to hold other services to account, by presenting referrals and following cases.</td>
<td><strong>FOR</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AGAINST</strong></td>
<td>1. PRUs are limited in the type of services they can offer to parents, e.g. cannot support appeals or hearings. 2. Need a key link with LA Parenting strategy to be sustainable. 3. There can be a conflict of interest between parent and PRU, and staff may find this balance difficult. 4. Capacity for concentration on service delivery as the top priority.</td>
<td><strong>AGAINST</strong></td>
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23 http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/behaviour/exclusion/b00200074/exclusion-trial
1.2 Overview of the project, its aim and objectives

‘The main aim of parent advocacy is to ensure parents have a voice and that they understand the complexity of the system they have found themselves in,’ Survey Respondent, Professional (linked to parent advocacy project)

The aim of parent advocacy is to engage and empower parents to be more effective in supporting and challenging their children on entry, throughout, and after exiting a PRU. It is also important to consider how to make parents effective partners with staff in PRUs, schools and statutory agencies in addressing the needs of their children. Below are the types of interventions conducted in each PRU pathfinder as a way of promoting these beneficial relationships.

Barking and Dagenham: interventions delivered
Third-sector provider Carers of B&D ran group sessions at the PRU once a week. They were effective in supporting parents to better understand their children. Carers of B&D completed in-depth analysis on a case-by-case basis, ensuring it knew each child’s profile, and the support the parent required. The group sessions also encouraged parents to realise they were not alone, and that other parents face the same trials. Parent advocacy in B&D provided practical support to those who needed it. Following a project seminar, B&D implemented the use of ‘Bridging the Gap’ (see Sutton below).

Ealing: Interventions delivered
Ealing implemented a counselling model with a parent liaison role. The parent liaison met with parents on a one-to-one basis, providing support through telephone conversations and one-to-one sessions. Ealing helped parents to provide effective support to their children, and provided professional support through workshops (which all PRU parents could attend) to highlight relevant issues such as misuse of illegal substances, parenting issues and managing behaviour; and a Connexions talk about future education and careers. The assistant headteacher had regular contact with parents via telephone, talking them through progress of the project and the evaluation questionnaire Ealing PRU created instead of using the STAR outcomes tool.
Hillingdon: interventions delivered
Hillingdon adopted the use of Triple P, an evidence-based parenting programme that aims to enhance the knowledge, skill and confidence of a parent. Parents who engaged in the pathfinder at Hillingdon attended a group session once a week, and built strength from talking together about their issues with their children and at home. Hillingdon has empowered parents to create a Parents’ Association that functions as a forum to help parents engage with the PRU.

Lewisham: interventions delivered
Lewisham concentrated on meeting parents on a one-to-one basis with a Family Support Officer (FSO). The FSO met parents first at home, where they addressed challenges with their children in a familiar environment. A follow-up meeting took place in the PRU to encourage parents to see the PRU staff as an open support network.

Sutton: Interventions delivered
Sutton ran parent sessions that promoted parent empowerment. It supported self-reflection by parents on their situation, embedding a strong PRU staff/parent relationship and building the collective ability of parents to support each other. Some children attended the group sessions to promote a better relationship between parent and child in the group. This activity has been running for five years, and has benefited in part from the parent advocacy funding. ‘Bridging the Gap’ parenting sessions use a seminar and group-session format, reflecting on parent strategies.
1.2.1. The PRU project and evaluation deliverables

The initial project deliverables related to the quantitative project aims (as noted below). However, these evolved as the project progressed and resulted in the deliverables.

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<th>Project deliverables</th>
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<td><strong>Five PRU pathfinders</strong> were chosen from 13 applications as eligible for parent advocacy funding by the GLA in December 2010. The project began in January 2011.</td>
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<td><strong>68 parents</strong> were engaged. The aim in January 2011 was to help more than 100 families throughout the project. In one of five PRU pathfinders, the target of 20 families was achieved. In others, due to limited staffing and resources, the 100 families target was revised to 65 (in May 2011), which was achieved.</td>
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<td><strong>70 children</strong> were engaged achieving the revised total of 65 families/children. Overall, the number of children engaged outweighed the total number of parents engaged; as on some occasions, two siblings attended the PRU, and one parent engaged.</td>
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<td><strong>Six seminar sessions.</strong> The GLA ran a briefing seminar before bids were invited, plus five seminars (which took place in January, June, October and December 2011 and March 2012) as part of the project, which were designed to enhance communication across the five PRU pathfinders. The sessions discussed the theory of change, the path for the project moving forwards, and the contents of this report. The seminars were problem-solving events, and tested ideas with a variety of project stakeholders.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quarterly reports on progress and lessons learned are being pulled together into a handbook to assist other PRUs implement parent advocacy.</td>
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The evaluation objectives outline the evaluation team’s deliverables, as agreed in the Project Initiation Document with the GLA team. The evaluation aimed to: fully reflect the benefits of the project to pathfinder PRUs, parents and children; to build a robust evidence base; and to highlight examples of best practice in the parent advocacy project.

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<tr>
<th>Evaluation deliverables</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Parent and child data</strong> – the family STAR outcomes framework quantitatively assessed progress in parents’ outlook. Four PRU pathfinders used this method, while one chose to create a questionnaire that reflected STAR, but was deemed less invasive than STAR as a tool by the PRU. To measure child progress (attendance, behaviour, attainment and attitude), data was collected by each PRU at four points across the project. Cross-evaluation between PRUs was difficult because each child measure was interpreted differently by each pathfinder. Qualitative data from observations, interviews, and the survey have been used to reinforce the quantitative datasets, and present a fuller picture.</td>
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<td><strong>Observations</strong> – the evaluation team conducted three onsite observations at three PRU pathfinders (Barking and Dagenham, Hillingdon and Sutton), and conducted telephone interviews with parents at Ealing and Lewisham. Observations were deemed unsuitable for those PRUs that ran primarily one-to-one parent</td>
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24 Further information on the family STAR can be accessed via http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk/family-star/
25 The service delivery team in Ealing PRU decided that the measures in the STAR outcomes tool were too personal for the needs of this project.
Evaluation deliverables

advocacy services and so phone interviews were conducted to maintain a level of privacy.

Survey – an online survey was completed in February 2012 to assess the perceptions of the parent advocacy project by relevant professionals. The online survey was given to:

- PRU pathfinder headteachers and staff
- Parent advocacy service deliverers
- Relevant local authority staff
- The central GLA team
- Other support workers linked to the PRU pathfinders

Analysis and Final Report - four data collections were planned and completed throughout the project – in April, July, October 2011 and January 2012. This data was collated and analysed, the full results of which can be found in the adjoining PowerPoint documents. This report summarises the project as a whole, considering the benefits and challenges that have been experienced by the five PRU pathfinders, the parents and their children. A Handbook adjoining this report recognises different starting points of PRUs, the different models of delivery and advises other PRUs how to analyse their readiness to deliver parent advocacy work in a sustainable and rigorous way.

1.2.2. Risks encountered in the evaluation deliverables

When completing analysis during the project, the evaluation faced a number of risks and issues. Below are some of the more potent risks that were experienced. These were documented as they arose by the central team, RAG rated, and revisited periodically to assess progression, depending on what mitigating action was being taken.

Drop out over holiday periods – engagement during the summer holidays (2011) decreased across all pathfinders. A mitigating action suggested for future implementations would be to collect data at the beginning and after the end of the holidays to maintain a solid dataset. Data needs to be collected at regular intervals so there are comparable quartiles.

Parents no longer requesting the service – during this project, the target aims of parent engagement had to be lowered as engaging parents at the beginning, and sustaining their engagement, proved difficult. A mitigating action suggested advancing the skill set of parent workers and their access to training to support better engagement.

Maintaining PRU focus in light of organisation and staff pressures – to maintain a PRU focus, the project management team aimed to engage the respective PRU headteacher where possible to ensure commitment from within the PRU structure. Seminars also performed a cross-borough forum function to share knowledge about PRU organisation and staff pressures, and how to tackle them.

Overall, the pathfinders delivered a variety of effective interventions (the number of which can be seen in the diagrams above); and achieved the revised target of families to engage. All of the evaluation deliverables were completed, thanks to the dedication to data submission by the

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26 This results and analysis of this survey are available in the appendix
27 Risks were rated ‘red’, ‘amber’, or ‘green’ depending on the urgency of the issue, and were rated again when they were revisited to assess progression.
pathfinders. Although the evaluation measures proved a challenge to implement by some of the pathfinder’s parent advocacy models, the evaluation identified alternative methods of evaluation and analysis when needed.

1.3 How the project was delivered

1.3.1 Project methodology

The project ran for 15 months across the academic years of 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 (specifically from January 2011 to March 2012). The GLA supported the initiative, and invited WCL and LMU to run an evaluation of the scheme alongside its delivery. WCL and LMU focused on:

- Project management, advice, and desktop review (and research)
- Core evaluation engagement and design
- Core evaluation engagement delivery – including initial and interim visits and observations
- Ongoing data analysis throughout the initiative

This project was evaluated using a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods. Parent advocacy services focused on supporting parents in unique ways, and so a variety of methods were used to aptly capture the outcomes of this project. The evaluation of this project was akin to action research, as parents and their children were asked to participate in a form of self-reflective inquiry in order to improve understanding and children’s behaviour. The dynamic nature of this work has led to interesting conclusions and suggestions of potential, which are outlined in the adjoining handbook of this report.

The following diagram outlines the qualitative methods used during this project by WCL, LMU and the management team. The seminars were an extremely productive tool for sharing knowledge and progress about the project. In the survey conducted of professionals linked with the parent advocacy project, more than half of the respondents replied that shared knowledge between the five pathfinders should continue past the end of this project, conveying the success of the seminars and the shared-team approach.

The survey was completed in February 2012, the results of which can be found in the appendix.
As already mentioned, WCL, LMU and the management team used a variety of techniques to collect data. The following diagram outlines the quantitative methods used. Quantitative data collection provided the foundations for a robust evidence-based project, and it was therefore important that all project stakeholders were clear about the expectations of them relating to the resource and skill needed to complete datasets.

### 1.3.2. Project approach

The approach to this project, particularly in terms of data methods and expectations, should have been more clearly outlined to the pathfinders prior to implementation. However, the work done with the pathfinders to create a logic model and theory of change was beneficial in terms of creating a group starting point. This section looks at: the overall project approach; the logic model and theory of change agreed at the outset; and the parent and child measures used to determine the impact of parent advocacy services.
As part of a group activity, a simple logic model was used to get PRU pathfinders to think about the overall path of this project (as individual PRUs and as five collective pathfinders). The logic model was then referred to in GLA seminars to discuss the project’s progress towards its aims.

Project Oracle methodology was used to create a theory of change and was completed with each of the PRU pathfinders. A theory of change aims to define the building blocks that work towards desired change. In this project, a theory of change was used to assess the starting points of each PRU pathfinder individually, and the activities they planned to implement to bring about the long-term goal of effective parent engagement and better behaviour and attendance from engaged children.

1.3.3. Evaluation of parent and child measures

For measuring the impact of the project on engaged parents, the family STAR was used by four out of five PRU pathfinders. The STAR outcomes model covers eight areas of parenting that are essential to enabling children to thrive. These eight measures map a journey of change. They are judged out of 10 by parents as a self-reflection of their situation, rating from 1-2 (stuck), to 9-10 (effective parenting). The eight measures are as follows:

1. Promoting good health
2. Meeting emotional needs
3. Keeping your child safe
4. Social networks
5. Supporting learning
6. Setting boundaries
7. Keeping a family routine
8. Providing home and money

Ealing pathfinder decided the family STAR was too invasive given the one-to-one counselling model being used and so project staff created a questionnaire consisting of 15 questions. The assistant headteacher interviewed parents via telephone, and recorded their answers. It should be noted that the questionnaire was only completed at two data collection points (July 2011 and January 2012), which feature in the adjoining PowerPoint analysis.

To analyse the impact of the project on the engaged children, PRU pathfinders measured attendance, behaviour, attainment and attitude using different methods, limiting the possibility of comparison other than to identify general trends of progress. The following table illustrates the data methods in the four measures for each pathfinder:

---

29 See annex for Theory of Change template
30 http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk/family-star/
31 The questionnaire template is attached in the appendix of this report.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>B&amp;D</th>
<th>Ealing</th>
<th>Hillingdon</th>
<th>Lewisham</th>
<th>Sutton</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>Percentage (%)</td>
<td>Percentage (%)</td>
<td>Percentage (%)</td>
<td>Percentage (%)</td>
<td>Percentage (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Percentage (number of positive behaviour points gained using the PRU points system)</td>
<td>Percentage (self-management of behaviour in RRS(^{32}) assessment)</td>
<td>Narrative, number of positive and negative points gained (PRU points system)</td>
<td>Number of exclusions received each term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Pupil PASS assessment(^{33}) online of attitude to school and learning</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>McSherry(^{34}) system of weekly merit points, measured out of 40(^{35})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.3.4. Data access
Access to data has been dependent on both staff willingness and their respective school’s systems. For example, Ealing has a fairly robust data system with specific tests that account for these measures; Hillingdon re-implemented (in the spring term 2011) a ‘readiness for reintegration’ assessment that is fairly robust – assessing pupil’s self-management of behaviour and attitude (among other measures). The relative robustness of PRU data systems, the leadership, and the ability to access and disseminate have been vital, though not always successful, in this work.

2. Evaluation of the project processes
2.1 Work and management processes
With five pathfinders, the GLA and an independent evaluation running in parallel, work and management processes were important to keep this relatively short project on track. The work processes describe the tools and techniques for engaging the five pathfinders in this project and promoting shared knowledge. The management processes describe a number of issues that had to be effectively managed so as to stay within the remit of the project and to establish an evidence base. Overall, the processes used were successful and effective, with some particular processes (such as the Stixy website – see below) needing further resource and commitment to implement its use effectively.

\(^{32}\) RRS refers to Hillingdon’s ‘Readiness for reintegration’ assessment, taken by all children on entry to the PRU, and at each half term. This has been re-implemented since January 2012.
\(^{33}\) [http://www.w3insights.pass-survey.com/index.htm](http://www.w3insights.pass-survey.com/index.htm)
\(^{34}\) See Jane McSherry (2001) *Challenging Behaviours in Mainstream Schools*; ‘coping in schools scale’
\(^{35}\) During the timeline of this project, the McSherry structure changed, and so Sutton PRU followed a new system. This meant in data collection three and four (October 2011 and January 2012), the behaviour points were measured out of 190, not out of 40 as they had been in data collection one and two (April and July 2011).
2.1.1. An assessment of the work and management processes

In the following graphs, the processes have been evaluated according to ease and success of implementation (see below). Processes have been scored (by the evaluation team based on their experiences during the project and evaluation) out of a total of three; 0 being difficult implementation/not successful and 3 being relatively easy to implement/successful.

2.1.2. Overall delivery of the processes

To accompany the graphs, the following tables outline the work and management processes in further detail, and the reasoning behind the evaluation. Of the work processes committed in this project, the introduction seminar was the most successful and was implemented with relative ease, and represented good practice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work processes</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Evaluation of success and ease of implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial implementation of the PRU parent advocacy programme</td>
<td>The programme began in January 2011 after briefing and selection process. It involved a number of parties: PRU headteachers, PRU parent advocacy staff, third-sector providers, the GLA, the evaluation team (WCL and LMU), and the parents and children themselves. Good communication is vital to success.</td>
<td>The initial implementation of the project went smoothly, with the five pathfinders implementing different models of parent advocacy services. Data collection progress was more challenging than anticipated, and PRUs required further resource and support to understand the data collection template.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction seminar</td>
<td>Run by the GLA (on 28 January 2011), the five pathfinders attended a seminar as part of an effort to create a shared-team approach to the initiative, and to build a logic model and theory of change.</td>
<td>The feedback from pathfinders conveyed that the session was productive and useful to gauge a timeline for the project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stixy website</td>
<td>The GLA identified a website called Stixy to help encourage the multiple stakeholders involved in the project to work closer together.</td>
<td>Adoption by PRUs was limited. However, new technology must be a way to minimise the isolation of practitioners in PRUs in the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observational</td>
<td>WCL and LMU conducted three</td>
<td>The visits added value to the picture of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Commercial in Confidence
The following table conveys the management processes – the most successful of which was ‘governance of PRU Advocacy project’. The central team and the evaluation team both maintained regular contact with the PRUs, LAs and service deliverers in face-to-face meetings, telephone conversations and email communications. This meant that any issue or concern that arose came to the attention of the central team early, and could be mitigated and controlled, or monitored during the period of the project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management processes</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Evaluation of success and ease of implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Budget and time management</td>
<td>The budget and timeline were clearly laid out at the beginning of the project, with all parties agreeing to meet deadlines – for example, data collection.</td>
<td>Unavoidable circumstances such as school summer holidays impacted time management for PRUs and their efforts to keep parents engaged. This further impacts the budget as more resources are required to re-engage parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance of PRU advocacy project</td>
<td>The governing responsibility lay with the GLA, which guaranteed communication with PRUs about the initiative, and visited each PRU three to six times to support and address concerns. Between visits, project newsletters and telephone checks with pathfinders dealt with routine and immediate issues. PRUs required more support than originally envisaged on the issue of data gathering. The GLA assigned another employee to the project to provide further time and another central point of contact for support and advice.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing performance</td>
<td>The performance of this project relied on parents voluntarily engaging with PRUs, i.e. attending meetings and taking advice on board. It required a greater joint effort and additional resources than originally anticipated to meet the data collection schedule. Further, the target for total number of parents engaged in this initiative was revised down in July 2011.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection points</td>
<td>Four data collection points were devised at the beginning of the project, with optimum spacing between quartiles to harmonise with the school calendar. Data collection did not always calibrate with PRU deadlines and timetables, meaning a delay in data collection until assessments (Parent STAR and children measures) were complete.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

36 It should be noted that Ealing and Lewisham ran one-to-one sessions with parents and therefore observations were not feasible. WCL and LMU conducted phone conversations with parents and staff (separately) as an alternative.
37 See GLA Parent Advocacy Quarterly Report Two – Executive Summary available on request from GLA or WCL.
2.1.3. **Findings for work and management processes**

It is important to have general agreement on work and management processes prior to implementation of any project, as it promotes a detailed structure for how the work will progress and conveys any limitations. The adjoining Handbook to this report further outlines these processes should a school, PRU or other alternative provision consider implementing parent advocacy.

### 2.2 Parent improvement

*Parent feels they have made good progress and stated that of all the people they have spoken to over the years, this has been the most useful experience*, Parent Advocacy Service Deliverer

*‘I think it would be a good idea for all schools to have this service – parent advocacy doesn’t have the stigma that a social worker title has’, PRU Staff Member*

The PRU pathfinders each had their own processes and interventions – the successes, challenges and sustainability of which are outlined below. Each PRU pathfinder implemented very different, but apparently effective processes, with some (such as Hillingdon) learning from the processes of others during project seminars, and subsequently adopting processes into their own parent advocacy interventions.

The following charts summarise the findings for each of the pathfinders (see appendices).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barking and Dagenham</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description:</strong> Carers of B&amp;D is a third-sector provider that delivered the parent advocacy service. It focused on hard-to-reach parents and provided a service of respite to help parents with letters of appeal. Each parent was allocated an individual file to monitor progress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sustainability:</strong> The B&amp;D parent advocacy programme has provided value for money. As further resources have been allocated by the LA, the service delivery will continue. This should have a positive impact on parents and provide advice and support about appeals and PRU structures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Successes:</strong> Group dynamics in the interventions conducted led to friendships and helped retain a core group of parents. Parents also received one-to-one mentoring and home visits in more difficult cases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Challenges:</strong> B&amp;D found it difficult to get away from the stigma of being a PRU and worked hard to sell services to parents. The project faced further challenges surrounding the fact that the local authority won the work but the PRU had been excluded from the bidding procedure, meaning that the partnership (between the provider and the PRU) was not always cohesive.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ealing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description:</strong> Ealing’s model offered parenting services to new parents; hard-to-reach parents; and parents who had English as a second language. In each case the Parent Liaison looked at the child’s history with a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sustainability:</strong> The parent liaison role will continue as it has been subsumed into an existing role at the PRU. Meetings with parents will continue. For example, a group of Somali mothers with children at the PRU</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Ealing

View to assessing the parent's and child's relationship. Work was completed in one-to-one meetings, with supplementary workshops where, it should be noted, all parents with children at the PRU could attend, regardless of participation in the project.

**Successes:** The service is offered to every parent on their child’s entry to the PRU. Every case engaged was able to receive one-to-one mentoring, and workshops were run by relevant professionals and offered another outlet of support to parents.

**Challenges:** Ealing had to be cautious about how many support chains parents were linked with, as the parent advocacy work can be duplicated by other outlets as happened in a small number of cases. Further, the LA has had little to do with the project since its implementation, which could be a suggestion for improvement and inclusion of partners should this project continue.

### Hillingdon

**Description:** In this parent advocacy model, the children were not a direct focus, but they were in favour of their parents working in the group sessions to enable progress. Parents attended a group session, and are in the process of creating a Parents’ Association at the PRU.

**Sustainability:** Parents gained support and confidence in dealing with their children through this project. Initial home visits with two inhouse service deliverers will become part of the future structure of the PRU; as well as the Parents’ Association and Triple P parenting programme that has been introduced. This continuity will be further possible to implement as the service deliverer is now deputy at the PRU.

**Successes:** The service deliverer was inspired following a GLA seminar in October 2011 to engage parents further using different techniques used by the other pathfinders. By September 2011, the pathfinder had a core group of six parents attending group meetings each week (September 2011 to January 2012 – excluding three weeks for half term and the Christmas break).

**Challenges:** In the beginning of the project, the PRU had not been involved enough – effort had only been from the LA. This changed when the service deliverer took a deputy role in the PRU in January 2012.

### Lewisham

**Description:** Lewisham PRU used an initial assessment to target the right parent and child for this project, which considered risk around non-attendance. All work was completed on a one-to-one basis with a family support officer, with an initial home visit, followed by getting the parent(s) into the PRU for further meetings should they be required.

**Sustainability:** The Lewisham model will continue, with the potential for local authority engagement and further collaboration with existing support structures in the PRU and local authority.
**Successes:** The initial assessment used before starting work was useful for determining which parents and children needed the most support concerning attendance and behaviour. Further, fewer parents ‘dropped out’ because the intervention was systematic, closing cases when support had been introduced and completed.

**Challenges:** There has been little LA involvement thus far. Further, due to confidentiality issues, it was difficult for other local parenting projects to share information with the parent advocacy service.

### Sutton

**Description:** The core service in Sutton was to provide restorative justice support and improve parents’ capacity to navigate school services. The aim to deliver family group conferencing was not achieved. Despite training provided for staff, no ‘target family’ was deemed eligible to gain from the family group conferencing in their current state.

**Successes:** Sutton has a robust children’s services database profile and there is a strong partnership between schools and the PRU that leads to a cohesive approach in the local area.

**Sustainability:** Sutton has a strong family-centric structure, and so parent advocacy activities could continue to aid parents in further tailored group sessions.

**Challenges:** Sutton had no significant challenges during this project; apart from the data measures it was using changed part way through the project. This was solved through coding the data where possible and providing further data as an alternative measure.

### 2.3 Findings from the data collection and analysis

‘I come to this group on my day off and I wouldn’t ever miss it, it is great’, Engaged Parent, Sutton PRU

When asked if they had seen any change in their parent at home, a child replied, ‘Well Mum smiles more.’

A Child Participating in the Parent Advocacy Project, Barking and Dagenham PRU

Overall, parents appeared appreciative for the types of interventions they have received, which have helped them as adults (by giving them time to relax and talk with other parents); helped them as parents (by suggesting ways to improve their relationship with their child); and were helping them to help their children in school (by gaining a deeper and more comprehensive understanding their child’s predicament in the PRU). Parent participants in observations and interviews conveyed that they have gained a lot in terms of improving relationships with their children; suggesting that they saw parent advocacy sessions as a trusted outlet to talk about challenges with their children. They also conveyed a better understanding of the education system and how it works when alternative provision plays a part.

When analysing the children’s data in this project, there were specific cases of real improvement, which was reflected in service deliverer observations (supplied in case study formats which have been incorporated into the analysis – see appendix). During the period of this project, a fifth of the children engaged had been reintegrated to mainstream school (by January 2012). This cannot be
explicitly linked to the efforts of parent advocacy; however parent advocacy services in the B&D pathfinder contributed to a number of exclusion cases being overturned; allowing these children to return to mainstream school.

As stated, the number of children reintegrated cannot be causally linked specifically to the introduction of the parent advocacy project. However, in discussions with children during observations and interviews, those who were aware of the project’s existence and the work being done with their parents, said they felt that they argued less with their parents, and that their parents were noticeably happier and ‘smiled more’. Further analysis is shown in appendices 5 to 9, with supporting graphs and commentary.

2.3.1. An example of data analysis

The following are screenshots of the adjoining analysis documents in the appendix (specifically V to IX); which explain the analysis of individual case data conducted during the course of the project.

In terms of data collection, this project encountered fragile and inconsistent data systems. This included a variety of measures (for example, on children’s behaviour) being recorded inconsistently, making it difficult to demonstrate a child’s progress over the 15 months (and four data collection points) across the project. Further, comparing PRUs has been a challenge as each PRU used a different set of measures (see in point 1.3 or the adjoining handbook for further detail), which may have been avoided if this issue had been foreseen at the commissioning stage. The following chart describes the findings from the data collections overall, and the observations and interviews conducted throughout this project.
26

**2.3.2. Developing good practice**

The different pathfinders showed elements of good practice during the parent advocacy project. For example, Sutton ran a family-centric project from within the PRU, and B&D ran a family-centric project through a third-sector provider. The key in both examples has been regular communication in a variety of ways with parents and children; conscientious data submission; and the ability to adapt to any issues should they arise (for example, Sutton faced difficulties with its data measures, and Carers of B&D had an apprehensive relationship with PRU staff). These examples of best practice are outlined further in the adjoining handbook.
2.3.3. Parent advocacy implementation: considerations

Readiness: At the beginning of the project, there were issues with the readiness of the pathfinders to start the work. In all five pathfinders, parent selection and engagement started later than planned. Other PRUs taking on this work should test assumptions of readiness and set manageable targets for engagement. Parent advocacy is a project that relies on leadership, staff training, data systems and then crucially the voluntary involvement of parents—which is difficult to gauge if parents have little contact with the PRU beforehand. The following table lays out the number of parents engaged at four points throughout the 15-month project. The target engagement by the end of the project was 60 to 65 (modified down from 11538).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B&amp;D</th>
<th>Ealing</th>
<th>Hillingdon</th>
<th>Lewisham</th>
<th>Sutton</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total parents engaged</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The total number of parents engaged during the project is 68 and the total number of pupils was 70.

Existing data systems: PRU data systems are strong on attendance, but there are significant differences on all other pupil and parent measures. It is recognised that devolution to local decision making means there is a barrier to a data standard for collection. This means it is less likely that any robust evaluation in one school or PRU can hold external validity against other schools or PRUs that decide to implement parent advocacy services. The minimum that can be done is to get internally robust data systems that align with school partners and LA services. It may be that collaboration between LAs allows more cross-border coherence of data standards.

Indirect challenges: The difficult work of some PRUs should be considered when assessing outcomes of the parent advocacy project, such as local government decisions that might impact on their structure and resources; Hillingdon PRU, for example, experienced significant changes in the leadership team during the lifetime of this project (since January 2011). The necessary timescale needed to complete this kind of project should take into account the likelihood of reduced parent engagement following the school holidays.

3. Learning from the evaluation

Five PRUs were successful in becoming pathfinders for this GLA initiative. Each interpreted the project in different ways; which had strengths and weaknesses in terms of ease of evaluation and their perceived successes. PRUs do not have a standard structure across local authorities, and so one model of parent advocacy services may not fit across all PRUs. The different interpretations then, allow for possible assessment of good practice in individual cases using a variety of activities (the adjoining handbook delves further into this consideration). However, the difficulty in terms of evaluation is that cross-analysis between the pathfinders has been limited, and therefore so is the external validity of this project, as we cannot suggest how this project could be best implemented in other PRUs. PRU leaders had a key role in establishing, sustaining and driving the work. Staff development and staff roles were also important to successful service delivery. Advocacy cannot be done by all staff—but everyone needs to be aligned with the purpose of supporting parents.

38 See Quarterly Reports One and Two; Executive Summary available on request.
The in-depth analysis of the parent advocacy services implemented by the pathfinders is covered in the PowerPoint documents adjoining this report. Overall, respondent parents were grateful for the services provided, and have found them to be constructive in discussing their challenges, both with their children and on a day-to-day basis. Practitioners found the work engaging. However, PRUs should be clearer about the volume of work they can practically deliver with the budget available, and how willing they think parents will be to engage. This kind of project – with a limited budget and limited staffing – is only realistically feasible on a small scale; unless these two components are increased.

3.1 Shared learning by pathfinders and GLA Central Team

In a seminar discussion with PRU staff, parent advocacy practitioners, and local authority staff, the answer to what they wanted from this project was simple. A few of the examples are given below.

![Diagram 3 – what do local professionals want from parent advocacy services?](image)

This initiative worked on the principle that ‘parent advocacy’ meant providing services that support and challenge the parent in engaging with the PRU and their children, to empower their position in both relationships and encourage improved pupil attendance. This collective definition was produced in June 2011. It harnessed an innovative approach to promoting the role of the parent in their child’s life, particularly in relation to their education and behaviour. Building links and rapport has been central to the success of parent advocacy. The aim was to look at the situation and empower the parent to correct it with a vision to the possible future they can create for themselves and their child, not the past. When reflecting on this project and its aims for parents in a project seminar (December 2011), one PRU pathfinder headteacher remarked that “it has been about creating a framework of hope”.

In the same seminar (December 2011), pathfinder practitioners and the central team in the GLA reflected on the preconditions for readiness that could determine the successful creation of a ‘framework of hope’. The following four points were deemed critical to building a successful foundation.

1. **Risk assessment tool** – a PRU needs to decide if it is in a position to commission a parent advocacy work and what model of service it wishes to implement, such as counselling, family group, Triple P and Bridging the Gap. A PRU needs a robust infrastructure,
including substantial safeguarding, workforce and links with other agencies to assure there is not duplication of service for parents.

2. **Training** – PRU staff need skills and training to work with parents in group and individual sessions, ensuring both specialist staff and all staff understand what is being done. Before implementation, a PRU needs to be clear about who will be delivering the work, and the number of parents and children that can realistically be involved and supported effectively. For more extensive interventions such as counselling, there are issues surrounding supervision of staff and adequate training that need to be satisfied prior to implementation.

3. **Target cohort** – PRUs need to identify a selection process for parents. For example, if they are the most hard to reach, or from the concept of the ‘middle group’ who naturally received fewer previous interventions because their cases have not been a priority. An issue for pathfinders (for example, Ealing and Sutton) has been how to satisfy a ‘good endings’ strategy, to mitigate overdependence on the service by aiming for the parents to be confident enough to depend on themselves.

4. **Data systems** – PRUs need to be able to monitor and evaluate parent advocacy services through robust data systems that preferably are in line with LA and local school data practice.

Once an adequate risk assessment has been considered, and the overall aims and what local service providers would like to gain from parent advocacy has been established, it is important to consider how to neatly bring projects to a close. Overall, parent advocacy services tend to have stopped once the child has returned to mainstream school. However, the following are some examples of continuing service.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barking and Dagenham: When a child was reintegrated into mainstream school, the parent was still invited to group sessions at the PRU. They were welcome to participate if they felt the need for further support. There were fewer limitations on who the service could provide for as it was run by outside partners and so they potentially had more time to conduct follow up work.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ealing:</strong> In some individual cases, where parents were ill and therefore missed their weekly appointment, parent advocacy meetings continued, despite the child having returned to mainstream school. This was to ensure some continuity of service and to provide proper closure and a ‘good ending’ to the programme of meetings. Parents interviewed found this further provision supportive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sutton:</strong> Sutton PRU has a solid relationship with the schools surrounding the PRU, and reintegration schools. Once children returned to mainstream school, some parents continued to use the service and attend the group sessions; but the service deliverers acknowledged the importance of mitigating overdependence on the service, and aimed to support parents to support themselves.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These aspects of shared learning have helped reflect on the overall path for all five PRU pathfinders, and have shaped the message of the adjoining handbook. This project has had a positive shared learning experience, and has gained strength from the seminar process, creating a group environment to discuss these issues in depth and come to a shared understanding. PRUs can be seen as a promising starting place for organisations such as the GLA to commission services such as parent advocacy. In the March 2012 seminar with pathfinders and the central team it became clear that the
children who end up in PRUs and their parents can be some of the most vulnerable in society, and also require other services; such as parent advocacy, mental health, social work and so on. From a crime and safety perspective, it could be possible for the GLA to commission further projects like this pathfinder to influence the working practice and support structures in alternative provision. This learning could be informed further by the parent advocacy project, report and the adjoining handbook. Through effective commissioning of services like parent advocacy, PRUs, local authorities and third-sector providers can provide a role that helps parents to network services and support that they and their children need.

3.2 Similar initiatives in schools and PRUs

As discussed in section 1.1 (the context), early intervention is favoured as a strategy to change children’s lives for the better and from an early age. The following initiatives are compared to the GLA PRU parent advocacy project, in terms of duration and project aims. A comparison to other initiatives is useful as it shows how the parent advocacy project fits in context with other initiatives, and highlights other findings in projects working with parents, children and PRUs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>Initiative Lead</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRU Parent Advocacy Initiative</td>
<td>PRU/LA/charity (GLA initiative)</td>
<td>15 months (2010/11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back on Track</td>
<td>PRU led (through London Councils)</td>
<td>2009-2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Intervention Projects</td>
<td>Government initiative, often run by charities</td>
<td>Since 1995(^{39})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting Parents involved: A field experiment in deprived schools</td>
<td>University (Paris School of Economics and J-PAL Europe)</td>
<td>1 year (academic year 2008/09)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Back on Track** – the Pan London Back on Track project set out to meet a number of key strategic London-wide improvements while reflecting the individual nature of PRU provision in London. The pilot aimed to reach as many PRUs as possible through a wide of pan-London activities. The outcomes and objectives for the pilot stemmed from consultation with PRU heads and local authority leads for behaviour and attendance. PRUs, whatever their formal function, are part of a key local partnership structure. Back on Track was designed to reinforce that partnership support and engagement\(^{40}\).

**Family Intervention Projects** – the statistics released in September 2011 illustrate an overwhelmingly positive picture of how intensive family intervention can successfully turn around the lives of families who have many complex problems, often present for generations within the same family. The outcomes for families who left the intervention are very encouraging with a 58% reduction in the number of families involved in anti-social behaviour such as vandalism, alcohol-related or rowdy behaviour\(^{41}\).

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\(^{40}\) For further information, please see [http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/policylobbying/children/schools/pru/backontrack/](http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/policylobbying/children/schools/pru/backontrack/)

Getting Parents involved: A Field Experiment in Deprived Schools — this French initiative focused on similar objectives to the parent advocacy project, by addressing behaviour and truancy challenges in children by working with the parents (mainstream schools). The work consisted of a Random Control Trial conducted in 37 French middle schools, encompassing 200 classes and some 1,000 (22%) parents of sixth graders[^43] for one school year in 2008/09. Parents were asked to voluntarily participate in a programme of parent/school meetings on how to improve their involvement in their children’s education. The evaluation found that treated families effectively increased their school and home-based activities. Children of families who were directly targeted by the programme developed more positive behaviour and attitudes in school. The evaluation found (positive) spill over effects of the programme on classmates of treated families[^43].

This ‘Field Experiment’ project is highly relevant to what the parent advocacy project has tried to achieve on a smaller scale in five London boroughs. The Field Experiment has relied on a robust evidence structure that should be considered as a good example for future possibilities of parent advocacy implementation in PRUs.

### 3.3 In retrospect: delivery of the project and evaluation

The following table has information taken from the shared risk register that triangulated views of central team members during the project, conveying some of the issues raised. A methodology for using a risk register is commended to PRUs in the adjoining handbook. The following table is an example of three issues that arose, and the mitigating action that was decided upon by the central management team.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue/risk</th>
<th>Mitigating action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>During the course of this project, the evaluation consisted of collecting four measures for each child, quarterly; and eight measures for parents quarterly[^44]. To support PRUs in this data collection, a template was created, an example of which can be seen in the appendix. Further, data collection for the first six months of the project proved difficult for the pathfinders to complete. To mitigate this, the GLA provided additional support in the form of another employee’s time to work on the central team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of clarity about the detailed data measures required of the project at the beginning</td>
<td>The central team ran introductory workshops during the bidding process and at the beginning of the project. This potentially leant to stronger bids by PRUs and local authorities, and meant there was greater understanding of what the project wanted to achieve.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducting observations</td>
<td>Observations were redesigned in some cases to take into account that PRU contact with parents is on a one-to-one basis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As well as dealing with issues as they arise, this project (and in part, the evaluation) looked at the sustainability of supplying parent advocacy services in PRUs. The following are presented as key points to consider, determining if parent advocacy services could continue at a sustainable level, meaning that it could continue to engage parents and children after this project’s completion.

[^43]: Ibid
[^44]: The four measures for engaged children were: attendance, behaviour, attainment and attitude. For parents, the eight measures were (as per the family star)
1. **PRU support** – parent advocacy support staff and headteachers expressed satisfaction with the outcomes, and support the need for further funding to keep this project running after the pathfinder project has finished. It is notable that in all cases the PRU/LA hopes to continue funding the work.

2. **Diversity of Model** – a variety of models were implemented during this project, suggesting the possibility of ‘best fit’ for further parent advocacy projects with different structures.

### 3.3.1. A perspective on delivering a parent advocacy initiative: cost and benefit

This project has run over 15 months with a parallel evaluation. The project has potential high value for local authorities, as it promotes a reduction of cost for high-cost ‘troubled’ families, by intervening at an early stage and addressing the challenges families face in context with each other, and not in a vacuum.

The following table shows an analysis of the percentage spend of the parent advocacy grant in different areas, by each PRU. The evidence suggests that the actual spend on training was low, and the majority of the parent advocacy grant was spent on project delivery. This suggests that this pathfinder project was primarily focused on delivery, and incurred minor cost in other areas such as training and materials.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% on Project delivery</th>
<th>% on materials</th>
<th>% on training</th>
<th>% Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B+D</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ealing</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillingdon</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewisham</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sutton</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The adjoining handbook further illustrates structures for successful implementation.

### 3.4 Using and sharing the findings

This report is to be disseminated to schools and PRUs to show the work and effort being provided by PRUs and local authorities, and suggest models of best practice for engaging parents in their children’s education as a way of increasing children’s attendance as a result of understanding the importance of education, the importance of home life, and the legal enforcements. The adjoining handbook has been created to provide a comprehensive outline of the PRU pathfinder models and methodologies, for further PRUs and practitioners to consider undertaking the provision of parent advocacy services.

This report, along with the handbook and supporting analysis, are available online via the GLA’s and London PRU network’s website.\(^45\)

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\(^{45}\) Page destination for this report if it is to go live on the website, and therefore cannot reference yet. TBC.
Appendices

I. Theory of change template
II. Parent advocacy data collection template
III. Survey analysis
IV. Data analysis – Barking and Dagenham
V. Data analysis – Ealing
VI. Data analysis – Hillingdon
VII. Data analysis – Lewisham
VIII. Data analysis – Sutton
IX. PID