



# EmpathyLab

## Pioneer Schools

Evaluation Report 2016 - 2018



People don't realise how hard it is to make friends in new places and how mean people can be. We should try be more welcoming to people who have had a hard past. They are people too! Even so people who have had a hard past can not be pushed to make friends. They need a little time and space. DO NOT turn them away! I think too many people judge people by their past, looks, background or what they wear. Be kind.

**#ReadforEmpathy - Read stories. Build empathy. Make a better world.**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	Background to report .....	2
2.	Empathy: its importance, definition and malleability .....	3
3.	EmpathyLab's schools programme and methodology .....	4
4.	Key impacts 2016 - 18 .....	6
	IMPACT ONE: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND ETHOS .....	6
	IMPACT TWO: EMPATHY SKILLS/WELLBEING .....	10
	IMPACT THREE: CURRICULUM GAINS .....	14
	IMPACT FOUR: PRO-SOCIAL ATTITUDES AND SOCIAL ACTION .....	17
	IMPACT FIVE: FAMILY INVOLVEMENT .....	21
5.	Reflections: success factors; challenges; opportunities .....	23
6.	Next steps .....	26
7.	Acknowledgements .....	26
	Appendix 1: EmpathyLab's work with pioneer schools 2014-2018 .....	27
	Appendix 2: Pioneer schools, 2016-18 .....	28
	Appendix 3: Evaluation .....	29

*Books that make you feel empathy can just change the way you are. They really actually change you.*

**Troy, aged 10**

*I used to think refugees were different from us. Now I don't.*

**Chantelle, aged 10**

*EmpathyLab is a return to what teaching should be – it inspires such a natural, meaningful and enjoyable way of teaching and learning. There is such a buzz around the school.*

**Yvonne Hartley, Year 2 teacher, The Spinney School**

*Empathy is now embedded in our school's culture. Children, parents, teachers, TAs, governors - everyone involved with our school knows what empathy is and why it is important. Empathy is an everyday topic of conversation.*

**John Dalziell, Chair of Governors, St Michael's Primary**

*A major influence on raising standards in reading within the school is using empathy as a tool to develop understanding, within texts and concepts*

**Inspector visiting St Michael's Primary**

*What an amazing way to teach the kids the whole concept of empathy. I love the way you are bringing the idea to life so cleverly and with so much fun involved. That's what education is all about!!!*

**Parent**

## 1. BACKGROUND TO REPORT



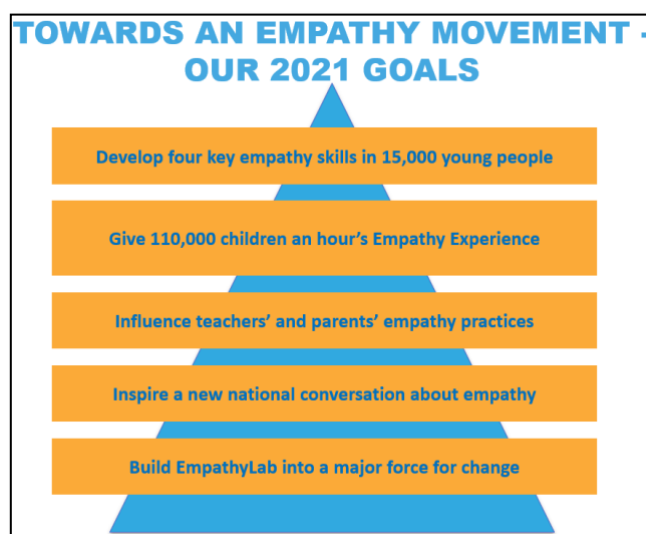
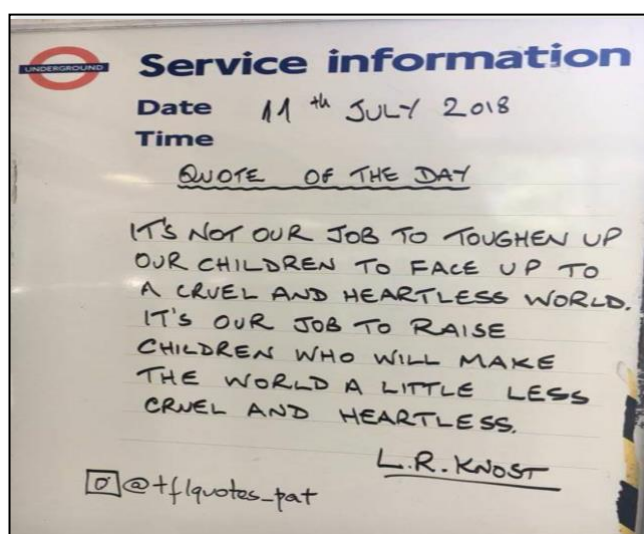
**Barack Obama**

*Empathy is a quality of character that can change the world.*

Scientific evidence shows that an immersion in quality literature is an effective way to build our empathetic understanding of others<sup>1</sup>. When EmpathyLab was founded in 2014, it set out to understand whether society was making the most of this link, and to explore the implications of the research. Work started with a large cross-disciplinary Think-In at the South Bank Centre, and quickly uncovered that educationalists, academics and authors were as keen as EmpathyLab's founders to see if stories could be used more deliberately to develop young people's experience of empathy and their ability to put it into action.

From 2014-18 the organisation has been experimenting, Lab-like, building on that Think-In guidance. Senior founders have made a significant pro-bono commitment to testing a range of interventions, supported by a team of expert advisors and volunteers.

There is clearly a demand and a need for this work, because each of these interventions has had more interest and impact than the founders could ever have dreamt. They have now established EmpathyLab more formally, as a not-for-profit CIC, with an ambitious three-year development plan.



EmpathyLab's mission is to empower the rising generation to drive a new empathy movement. These are its three-year goals, alongside a tube notice capturing the belief that young people offer the greatest hope we have of building a more caring and less divided world.

This report covers one aspect of EmpathyLab's work – a schools programme called Empathy Explorers. It is written by the EmpathyLab founding team, and details the impact of work from 2016-18 with 11 pioneer school partners.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ejournals.lib.vt.edu/valib/article/view/1474/2159>

## 2. EMPATHY: ITS IMPORTANCE, DEFINITION AND MALLEABILITY



**Dame Jacqueline Wilson**

*To be a successful human being you need to be in touch with other people's feelings.*

### DEFINING EMPATHY

Empathy is the ability to connect to other people's feelings and perspectives in a meaningful way. It is made up of three very distinctive elements, as illustrated in this framework, which are brought into play in different combinations at different times.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF EMPATHY

EmpathyLab sees empathy as a beacon of hope in our divided world; a much-needed force for connection and understanding. Equipping young people with strong empathy skills can be a major engine for social change, because understanding others helps us become better citizens, partners and workmates.

Yet our children are growing up in a society with a major empathy deficit. Hate crimes are at their highest level since records began<sup>2</sup> and there are growing concerns about the empathy-draining effects of social media. Increased empathy is good for society and vital for young people's life chances, especially in an increasingly global world.

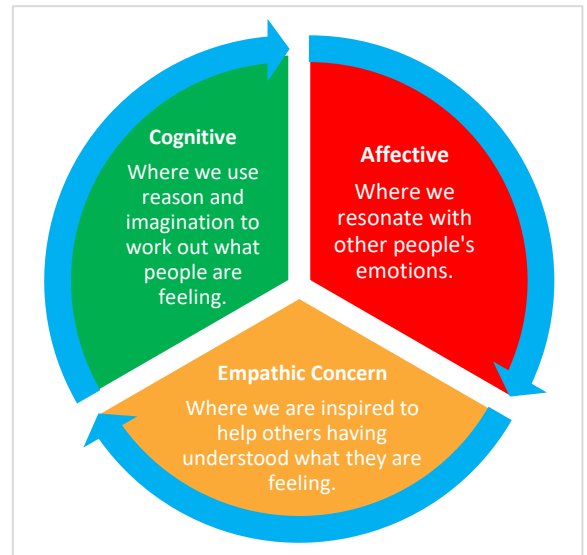
Psychologists highlight empathy's central place in the bank of social and emotional skills young people need to thrive. Research reveals the significance of these life skills, showing that social and emotional skills are more significant for young people's academic attainment than their IQ<sup>3</sup>.

94% of employers say that social and emotional skills are as important in the workplace as academic qualifications<sup>4</sup>. The OECD spotlights the urgent need for investment in this area and in 2020 will report on a major study.

### HOW TO BUILD EMPATHY

Humans are not born with a fixed quantity of empathy. With repeated experiences, practice and learning our plastic brains can change and 98% of us are capable of improving our empathy skills, at any time in our lives<sup>5</sup>.

Researchers posit a number of ways to develop these skills<sup>6</sup>. EmpathyLab's distinctive strategy is based on using stories as a tool, building on research showing that reading can build real-life empathy. Scientists have identified that our brains react to fictional worlds as if they were real. The empathic emotions we feel for book characters



<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hate-crime-statistics>

<sup>3</sup> Public Health England, 2015. The link between pupil health and wellbeing and attainment.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/370686/HT\\_briefing\\_la\\_youtvFINALvii.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/370686/HT_briefing_la_youtvFINALvii.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Sutton Trust, 2017. Life Lessons.

<sup>5</sup> Simon Baron-Cohen, *Zero Degrees of Empathy*, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Roman Krznaric, *Empathy Revolution*, 2015; Michelle Borba, *UnSelfie*, 2016.

helps us develop the same sort of sensitivity towards real people. Reading gives children a safe way to practice social skills<sup>7</sup>.

### 3. EMPATHYLAB'S SCHOOLS PROGRAMME AND METHODOLOGY



**Professor Robin Banerjee**, University of Sussex, Psychology Department  
*Research identifies empathy's relevance to behaviour, mental health and achievement. There is a pressing need to avoid 'bolting on' work on children's socio-emotional skills, so EmpathyLab's strategy of integrating work on empathy with literacy is both efficient and hugely potent.*

This report covers EmpathyLab's 2016-18 work with a group of eleven pioneer schools, involving 3077 children in empathy-focused work. A previous report covers experimental work in the preceding academic year 2015-16<sup>8</sup>.

#### HOW EMPATHYLAB WORKED WITH SCHOOLS 2016-18

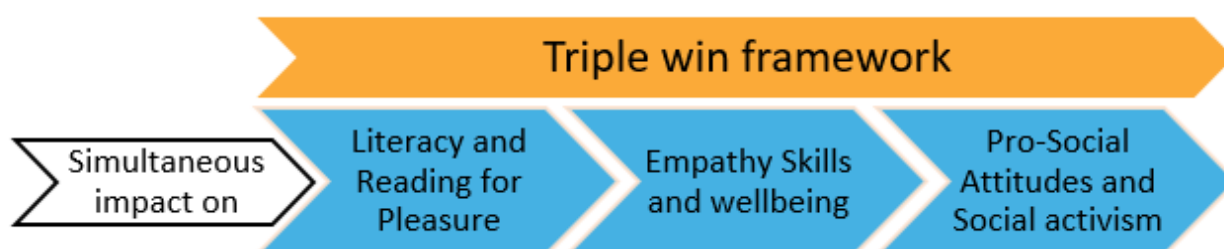
The EmpathyLab schools were very different, from a state primary in a deprived area of Sheffield (with 60% Pupil Premium children) to a small Hertfordshire prep school. The group included one secondary school – the International Community School in London. Other locations included Great Yarmouth, Carlisle, Cambridge, Newark, Rochdale and the New Forest. See Appendix 2 for a full list.

##### The Pioneer Group

The EmpathyLab Pioneer Group was supported by academic partners Robin Banerjee, Professor of Developmental Psychology at the University of Sussex, and Teresa Cremin, Professor of Literacy at the Open University. It met three times a year to share impact, inspiration and challenges. Topics included the science of empathy; the relationship between empathy and reading for pleasure and how to choose a good empathy book. A major focus was on how to use EmpathyLab's tools to deliver on school improvement.

##### Programme Design and Inputs

EmpathyLab supported each Senior Leadership Team to integrate this "triple win" approach into the School Development Plan, and ensure that a sharper empathy focus helped deliver on existing school priorities.



Through a shared online platform, schools were provided with planning tools and resources, including professional materials for teachers, and child-led tools such as Empathy Awards (made by children to book characters showing exceptional empathy). The tested tools now form a year-round, whole-school programme called Empathy Explorers.

<sup>7</sup> Keith Oatley, *Fiction: Simulation of Social Worlds, Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 2016

<sup>8</sup> Available at: <http://www.empathylab.uk/empathylab-school-trial>



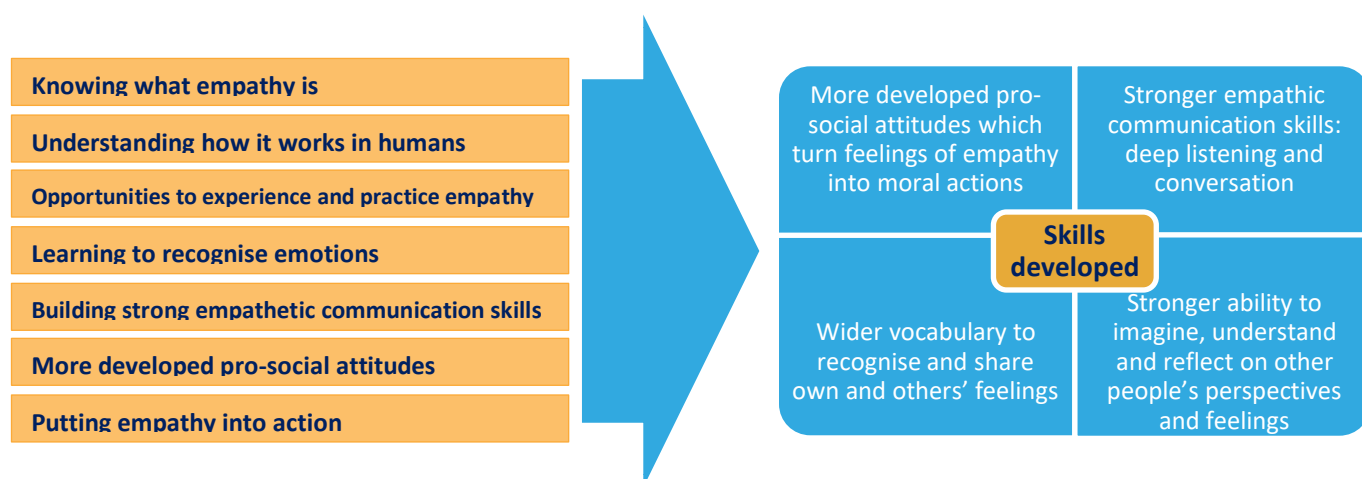
## METHODOLOGY AND EVALUATION

The group's 2016-18 lines of inquiry explored how and if this triple win framework:

- improves literacy skills and reading for pleasure
- increases children's understanding of empathy and improves four target empathy skills
- impacts positively on wellbeing and behaviour
- inspires children to put empathy into action
- motivates families to get involved in children's empathy work
- embeds teachers' understanding of the educational importance of empathy, and changes teaching practices
- influences school ethos and strategy

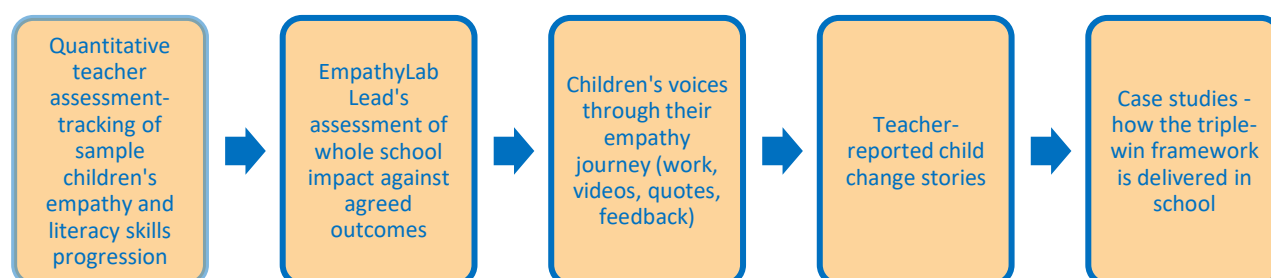
The programme's evolution was based on the growing evidence of what worked and what didn't, exploring the impact of taking children on an 'empathy journey', and the possibilities for developing four specific empathy skills. A number of challenges presented themselves along the way – see section 5, page 23.

### The child's empathy journey and skills developed



EmpathyLab provided a range of quantitative and qualitative tools to support the schools' understanding and analysis of the impact made. This diagram gives an overview of the evaluation methodology - see Appendix 3 for more detail<sup>9</sup>.

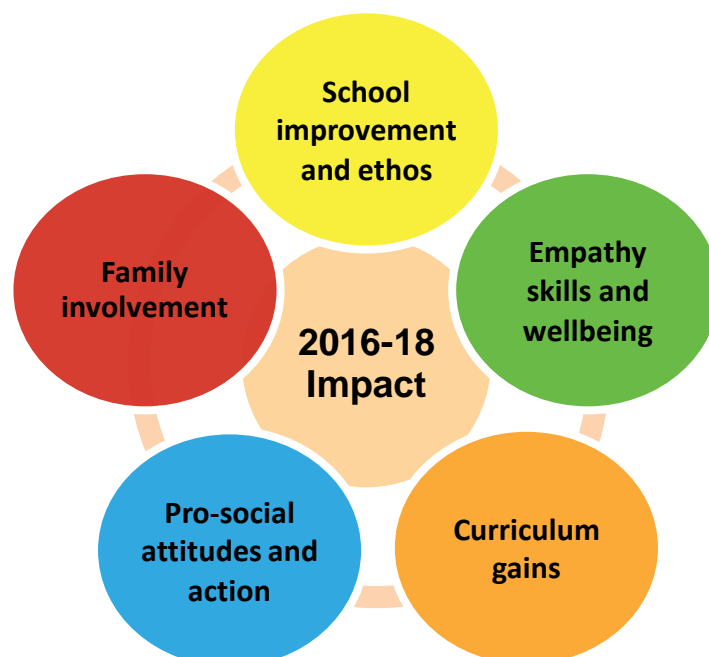
Figure 1: overview of the 2016-18 evaluation methodology



<sup>9</sup> Children quoted in the report have been given a pseudonym based on their first initial

## 4. KEY IMPACTS 2016 - 18

In 2016 EmpathyLab reported five key areas of impact. Work during 2016-18 saw a significant impact in these same areas, with additional impact on teacher wellbeing, broader curriculum gains (beyond literacy), whole school improvement, pro-social attitudes and pupil leadership.



### IMPACT ONE: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND ETHOS

*"By focusing on the essential skills of numeracy and literacy we neglect others equally vital to our youngsters' futures, ...working in teams, interacting civilly with individuals from different cultural backgrounds and thinking for themselves while acting for others."* **Sir Tim Brighouse, 2018**

*"Work on social and emotional learning must be seen as...lying at the core of effective teaching and learning, and integrated with the wider policies of the school – from pedagogy to parental engagement."* **Promoting Emotional Health, Wellbeing and Resilience. Public Policy Institute for Wales, 2016**

### WHAT HAPPENED

Recognising the importance of an integrated approach to social and emotional education, EmpathyLab worked with each Senior Leadership Team to create a bespoke plan which fused Empathy Explorers into existing school priorities.

This was followed up with teacher training and continued professional development focused on the psychology of empathic relationships and how books build empathy. Teachers used a research base to integrate empathy practices into the curriculum, influencing content and delivery.

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## IMPACT ON SCHOOL PLANNING AND PRIORITIES

Evaluation found a significant impact on schools' strategic planning priorities and learning values. All the schools adapted their School Development Plan to integrate a focus on empathy and the application of EmpathyLab's practices.

- Coddington Primary made empathy its overarching school value; Moorlands Primary Academy adopted empathy as a core value, celebrating children who demonstrated good empathy skills with certificates in assembly.
- Kenilworth Primary made empathy one of its three 17/18 priorities. See the *Maths, English and Empathy* case study on Page 10.
- At Robert Ferguson Primary *"our involvement has elevated empathy's place in our curriculum and ethos. It has become a golden thread running right through our school curriculum. Our pupils now have a profound understanding of what it means to be empathetic."* **Graham Frost, Headteacher**
- At Bewick Bridge Community School *"the programme has had a really big impact. Our education system makes things very complicated, but with its focus on building empathy through stories, EmpathyLab helps us focus on the essence of education. It adds value to other school initiatives."* **Rebecca Simister, Headteacher**



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## IMPACT ON STANDARDS

The increased empathy focus in the approach to literature and book-talk has had an impact on academic results.

*"Empathy work has been an important factor in greatly improved SATs results. Our focus on digging deeper into the text by studying the characters has improved inference and prediction skills. Children's predictions are now based on what they know about characters. Continuous engagement with higher quality texts for empathy work has developed vocabulary and improved text navigation skills."*

- 2016: reading 64%; writing 49%.
- 2018: reading 74%; writing 63%.

**Jon Biddle, Year 6 teacher, Moorlands Primary Academy**

*"A major influence on raising standards in reading within the school is using empathy as a tool to develop understanding, within texts and concepts."*

**SIAM's inspection report, St Michael's Primary**

*"EmpathyLab helped us delve deeper into the text through characters and perspective-taking. This has led to improvements in reading results."*

- KSI percentage achieving greater depth – 2017: 20%; 2018: 34%
- KS2 reading results – 2017: 44%; 2018: 67%

**Helen Mulligan, Deputy Head, Bewick Bridge Community Primary School**



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## IMPACT ON RELATIONSHIPS AND POSITIVE LEARNING CLIMATE

Schools reported improvements in relationships and learning climate as a result of teaching about empathy and focusing more on book characters' feelings. This created a safe space for emotions to be explored more generally.

*"Empathy helps us to connect with others and is what motivates us to take action to make the world a better place. At the Spinney School we really value the impact that EmpathyLab has on academic outcomes, the influence it has on relationships throughout the school and the development of pro-social skills such as collaboration, responsible citizenship and conflict resolution. It's a win-win!"*

**Rachel Snape, Headteacher, The Spinney School**

*"In my class, exploring empathy, characters and feelings has opened up new kinds of conversations with the children. This has built so much more of a connection between us all."*

**Kate Lunt, Year 2 teacher, Bewick Bridge Community Primary School**

*"EmpathyLab has been invaluable in helping me step back and analyse how I can immerse children in stories in a way which enables classroom dialogue about feelings. This drives improvement in relationships, wellbeing and standards in reading and writing."*

**Carrie Canon, Deputy Head, Robert Ferguson Primary**

*"All our children can talk about empathy; how others feel, how their actions make others feel, and what it is like to stand in someone else's shoes. Empathy is embedded in our school's culture and is an everyday topic of conversation. Children, parents, teachers and TAs, governors, everyone knows what empathy is and why it is important. We all want to do more for our students than simply have them achieve academic success. EmpathyLab helps us to do this."*

**John Dalziel, Chair of Governors, St Michaels Primary**



Claire Williams, Deputy Head, Kenilworth Primary School

EmpathyLab is one of the best projects we have ever undertaken as it is having such a visible impact on children's development, behaviour and literacy skills. It supports the children to develop lifelong skills that benefit them both as readers and members of a community.

## Case study: Maths, English and Empathy

*During 2016, we were shocked by series of incidents in which our children seemed absolutely incapable of realising that their actions had hurt others. We felt that empathy was disappearing from their lives and that it was essential to rebuild it. We got in touch with EmpathyLab.*

*After joining the Pioneer Group and attending training, we returned to school determined to put empathy at the heart of our development plan. It linked excellently to English and Maths targets because you need empathy skills and emotional wellbeing to understand literature, access the curriculum and succeed in later life. We made our 17/18 priorities **Maths, English and Empathy**.*

*We wanted the whole school community to use a common language surrounding empathy. We trained all staff and governors, making sure that we all meant the same thing and didn't confuse empathy with sympathy. We then introduced the topic to children through whole school assemblies using different storybooks to support EmpathyLab's themes including how to look from other people's perspectives, active listening and how body language gives you clues about people's real emotions. Within classes, each teacher adapted the excellent resources to further develop the understanding of empathy.*

*The children's enthusiasm led to us adopting the idea of playground 'Empathy Leaders', building on work done by Beck Primary. Children applied for these roles and are now available if other children need somebody to talk to. They wear their empathy leader jackets with pride. I had expected this role to need a lot of adult support – but I was incredibly wrong!*

*Engaging with EmpathyLab has had such a visible effect. When dealing with difficult situations, we now focus on the role of empathy. In turn the children now respond immediately to the idea of using their empathy skills, answering questions about the other person's point of view. They then use their empathy to find solutions, helping situations to be resolved constructively. They now view each other as supports, and have come a long way from the cohort that prioritised themselves and their own emotions.*

*The number of behaviour incidents has dropped significantly, from 147 in 2017 to 87. Exclusions have also reduced significantly. Our recent Ofsted inspection commended behaviour stating: "Leaders have based the curriculum plan on the importance of pupils' mental and physical well-being. This...is also evident in the importance placed on being a good team member and the focus on empathy".*

*The work has also had a significant effect on reading – children can identify how characters are feeling and explore these emotions at a far greater depth. For our reading SATs results, our progress measures rose by 1.8 points, and we are also seeing improvements in writing as the children create characters with greater depth. In year 6, our writing progress score has risen 4.95 points.*

### What the children say:

On a scale of 1-10 how important do you think it is to have empathy in our school? Why?

10 because we all have lots of different feelings and you can help somebody with your experiences and other people can help you. When I feel sad the empathy explorers have helped me and I've helped others and before we didn't help each other as much if you didn't have lots of friends.

Has learning about empathy caused any changes?

Yes I have people to talk to now and I love being an empathy explorer and helping other people. Now everyone knows what empathy is.

Has learning about empathy caused any changes?

Yes I have people to talk to now and I love being an empathy explorer and helping other people.

## IMPACT TWO: EMPATHY SKILLS/ WELLBEING

*"We must slow down a bit and leave room for the central role of empathy in our relationships with pupils. Empathy is the foundation of safety."* **Settling Troubled Children to Learn, Bomber and Hughes, 2013**

*"If you are interested in fostering children's well-being and resilience, then there is strong evidence that empathy should be a key priority."* **Professor Robin Banerjee, Psychology Department, University of Sussex**

*"We live in a highly inter-connected world where how you interact with others matters. The ability to adapt...respect and work with others increasingly distinguishes those societies that are building improved social cohesion and economic growth, and those who are not."* **The Power of Social and Emotional Skills, OECD, 2015**

### WHAT HAPPENED

Empathy Lab provided schools with a clear framework defining empathy and how it is different from sympathy, together with guidance on teaching strategies based on the different elements of empathy (see page 4).

The group's shared development days featured regular expert input from psychologist Professor Robin Banerjee. This underpinned a deeper understanding of the centrality of empathy to relationships in the school community, and to pupils' wellbeing, resilience and achievement.

EmpathyLab recommends a whole school methodology, based on expert guidance about the importance of this for social and emotional learning. It aimed for an inclusive approach which simultaneously supports pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Teachers used a range of Empathy Explorer assembly and classroom resources to teach all children about empathy, and, through literature, to give them new empathy experiences and ways to reflect on these. Examples of tools were: briefings on book talking techniques; storykits and booklists; resources to enact the child-led schemes Empathy Awards and Empathy BookSpotters.



## IMPACT ON TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDING OF EMPATHY

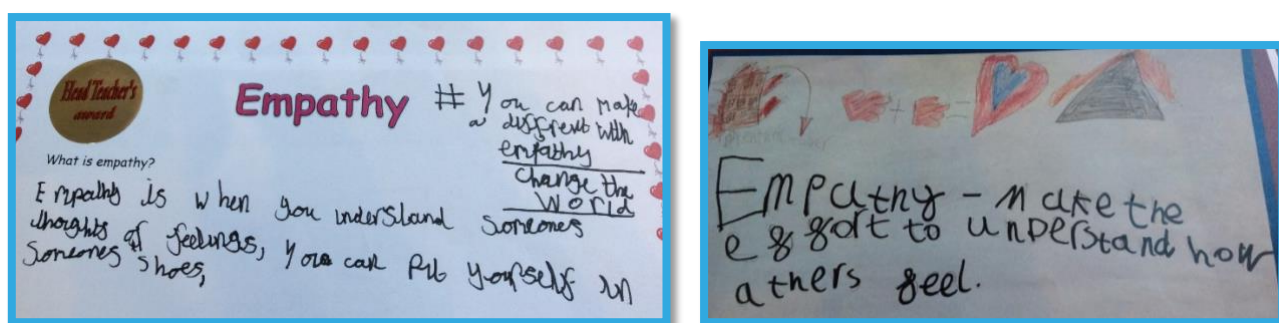
The programme has significantly impacted on teachers' understanding of empathy – its educational importance, its different components, how to teach about it, and how to use books to develop it. A significant challenge was to embed a whole-school understanding of what empathy is, and isn't.

All the schools say staff now understand more about the educational significance of empathy, and that teaching practices have changed to incorporate EmpathyLab approaches.

## IMPACT ON CHILDREN'S EMPATHY SKILLS

Qualitative and quantitative data shows a substantial impact on children's understanding of empathy. 100% of teachers report that most children now have a far better understanding of what empathy is, how it works and why it matters. The group's infant school found that four-year-olds were able to understand the meaning of the word.

**Figure 2: children in Year 5 at Robert Ferguson Primary School explain their understanding of empathy**

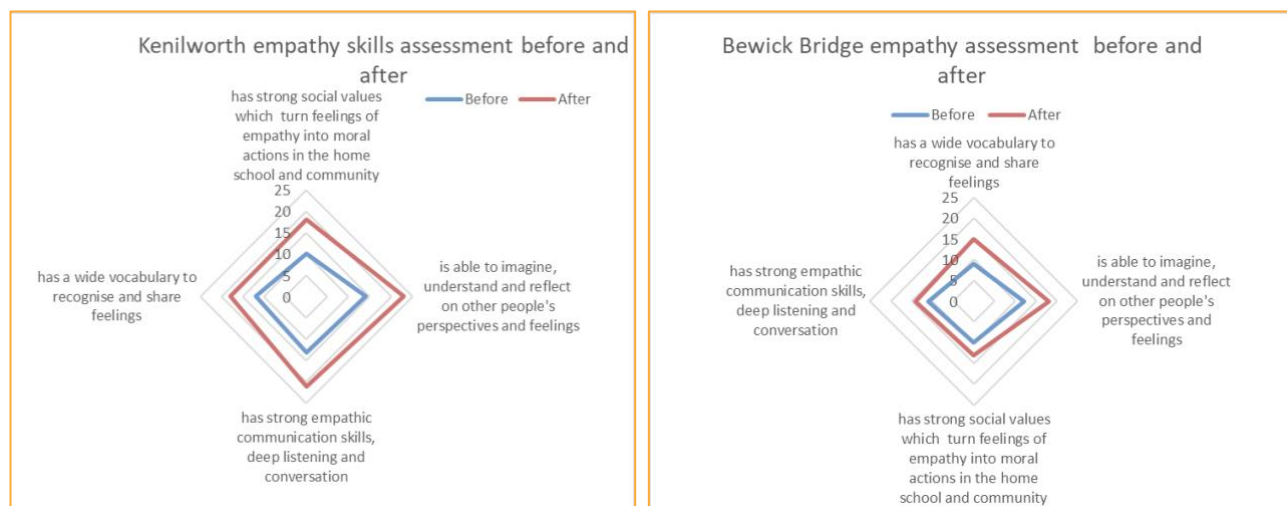


**Figure 3: % improvement in empathy outcomes for case study children, across the schools able to supply full data (7/11)**





Figure 4 the teacher's "before" and "after" assessment of an individual case study child



This is what children say:

- “Empathy is when you know how somebody else is feeling and you want to help them. Sometimes you know because you have experienced it and sometimes you have to put yourself in their shoes and think about how it must feel. You can show empathy in what you say and do. You think about how they feel and you try to help.” **Ryan, Year 5, Kenilworth Primary School.**

#### September “before” and July “after” responses from Year 5 pupils at the Spinney School

- September:** “I know a little bit about empathy, just vaguely. I think it is a way of getting on with other people. I am not sure.” **July:** “I think that empathy is a way to feel with other people and to reflect. I think it is important because if there was no empathy, people wouldn’t be friends and would be on their own.”
- September:** “I think empathy is knowing how someone is feeling.” **July:** “I think that empathy is connecting with someone’s emotions and understanding how they feel in different ways. I think it is important because it helps people get through life easier.”

#### Focus on empathy skill: broadening children’s emotional vocabulary

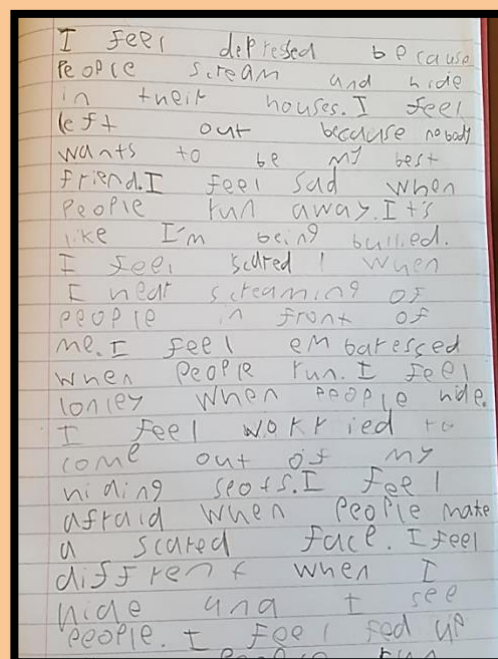
- “It was obvious as the work progressed that the children were becoming more confident at understanding how characters felt. Their use of adjectives to describe them developed from the basic ‘happy’ and ‘sad’ to ‘worried’, ‘excited’, ‘nervous’, ‘frustrated’ and so on.”

**Rob Snelling, Reception teacher, Moorlands Primary Academy**

- “There was a significant improvement in the language that the children used when discussing feelings in the classroom. Their empathy vocabulary had been broadened and they were able to give accurate and more detailed descriptions of another child’s feelings (e.g. instead of saying that Fred is sad, they would say Fred is feeling anxious about the school trip tomorrow and that he will be in a group by himself).”

**Tom Allen, Year 2 teacher at Moorlands Primary Academy**

- “I was honestly astonished...I had expected a focus on Empathy to help, but I wasn’t prepared for it to make such a change. I’ve never seen kids so focused on their own emotions and the emotions of others - hearing Year 5 boys honestly expressing potentially embarrassing emotions like ‘I would be scared’ or ‘I would feel lonely and shy’ was pretty amazing.” **Robin Stevens, author visiting Kenilworth Primary.**

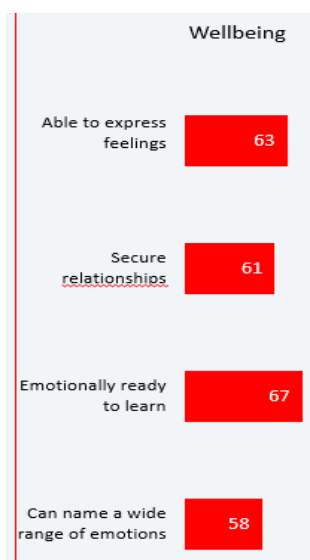


## IMPACT ON CHILDREN'S WELLBEING

Teachers and children provided feedback showing a positive impact on children's wellbeing. This chimes with experts' emphasis on empathy's pivotal role in helping children feel safe and, at school, safe enough to learn. And with Ofsted's wellbeing descriptor for the Outstanding grade: "pupils showing respect for others' ideas and points of view, resulting in pupils feeling safe at all times."

75% of teachers reported that children were calmer and less stressed. 100% reported that children could more easily name and share emotions.

**Figure 5: percentage improvement across a range of wellbeing dimensions, combining the results from the pioneer schools.**



*"D's ability to empathise with book characters has developed this year after much discussion. She did get very troubled at times by her emotions and her peers, but she is now more able to recognise emotion in others and herself and keep calmer in situations that she finds more challenging. She can refer to book character's feelings and relate them to her situations. "I feel a bit like when Hal was lonely and didn't like the dark." Janet Rosewall, St Hilda's School*

*"Tom is a Year 6 boy; Kenilworth is his 7<sup>th</sup> school. He has found it hard to empathise with others. Having learnt about empathy, he has been reflecting, and sees that he didn't "do empathy". He is now much better at apologising, and thinking about how to be empathetic. The work has given him space to reflect, a language, and the knowledge of how other people do it. This is very thrilling!" Claire Williams, Deputy Head.*

*"At the beginning of the year I didn't really think about empathy because I didn't know what it was and now I feel like I know more about it and I am able to be empathetic to people. Normally if someone's upset I would have said "oh are you ok?" and then left them to it. Now I say "I know how you feel" and give them more time to be supportive. I feel more empathy towards characters when I'm reading, like in Harry Potter when Harry had to get sent to his aunty and uncle I felt empathy for his life under the stairs. In the past I would've found it funny." Tom*

*"The expansion of their emotional vocabulary will empower them to identify and manage their states of mental health and wellbeing – for the rest of their lives." Suzie Young, The Spinney School*

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## IMPACT ON TEACHERS' WELLBEING

EmpathyLab provided evidence of the benefits (social, emotional and cognitive) of teaching children about empathy explicitly and implicitly through sharing and deeply engaging with stories. This gave teachers a sense of permission to dedicate time to doing this. They were equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills and EmpathyLab provided a range of fun and engaging tools.

- "EmpathyLab has given us a chance to reclaim the fundamentals of teaching, and provide pupils with an essential tool for life. It has enabled me to engage with a vital element which had been lacking – using books to teach, share and celebrate emotions, and explore how others feel as an essential part of a child's education. I have learnt so much." Kath Fox, English Co-ordinator, Coddington Primary.*
- "This work opens up opportunities to focus on high quality literature, children's personal and emotional responses to it explored through talk, and the sharing of what it means to be human. This underpins the development of positive relationships and, in turn, has a direct effect on the wellbeing of both teachers and pupils. Belonging to a group sharing practice creates a sense of community that directly impacts teachers' motivation and wellbeing." Helen Mulligan, Deputy Head, Bewick Bridge Community Primary School.*
- "Having felt somewhat disillusioned with the system and the obsession around data and statistics, EmpathyLab has provided an opportunity and a "licence" to teach the way I believe is the way to teach. A return to real teaching." Helen Law, Year 2 teacher, Coddington Primary*



## IMPACT THREE: CURRICULUM GAINS

*"Literature opens our eyes to the world beyond us and helps us respond more empathetically to difference and diversity. Children, however, need a language to describe empathy, help to discuss it and time to consider the consequences. Without such opportunities we cannot be sure empathy will develop. Helping children to develop empathy as readers can both enrich their skills and enhance their pleasure on the journey."* **Professor Teresa Cremin, Faculty of Well-Being, Education and Language Studies, The Open University.**

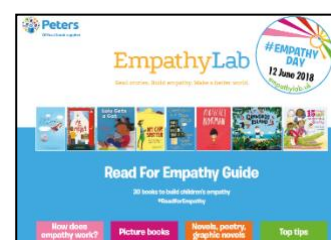
Ofsted's descriptors for the outstanding grade for Outcomes for Pupils and Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment cite that *"pupils read widely and often across subjects to a high standard"; resources and teaching strategies reflect and value the diversity of pupils' experiences and provide pupils with a comprehensive understanding of people and communities beyond their immediate experience."* **Ofsted Common Inspection Framework, 2018.**

## WHAT HAPPENED

A crucial element of EmpathyLab's approach involves giving children empathy experiences through stories. To enable this, teachers were given training and resources to improve their understanding of which texts are good for empathy work, and built their knowledge of diverse, contemporary texts through themed lists (e.g. loneliness; refugees; anger; perspective taking).



EmpathyLab provided guidance on the empathy-building effect of focusing reading and discussion more on characters and their feelings than on the plot. Empathy Storykits for individual books offered ideas for creative, immersive activities to inject excitement. An Empathy Awards scheme was created, in which children make awards to book characters. Voting results were announced in red carpet ceremonies on Empathy Day.



Strong links were made to the reading for pleasure movement, with regular input from EmpathyLab's Expert Advisor, Professor Teresa Cremin. She helped teachers explore the role of empathy within the reading for pleasure pedagogy, emphasising the humanity of the relationship between the teacher and pupil, and the importance of imagination in our ability to empathise both with book characters and each other.

## IMPACT ON READING FOR PLEASURE

Teachers reported an increase in key areas associated with increased reading for pleasure, and attributed this to an increased emotional engagement with the texts.

- 100% said children in their classes now had a wider reading range
- 87% said they had observed an increase in the frequency of children reading

They said:

- *"There is more engagement with reading for pleasure across the school. There is a broader range of authors being read, including Morris Gleitzman, Katherine Rundell, Frank Cottrell-Boyce, Polly Ho-Yen, etc. Children are borrowing more books from class and school libraries, and there is more peer discussion about books."* **Jon Biddle, Moorlands Primary Academy**
- *"EmpathyLab has introduced me to a wonderful range of new books – it has given me the chance to really enjoy books with children – looking at reading for pleasure, reading for meaning."* **Justine Davidson, Robert Ferguson Primary**

Children's reflections were fascinating. These are from a Year 6 class at Moorlands Primary Academy, a Great Yarmouth school with a challenging catchment.

- *"I find empathy in books really interesting, as I didn't used to think how people were feeling, I just used to read. Now I feel a lot more imaginative, it gives the story a lot more background about what might have happened and why."* **Rosanne, Year 6**
- *"Can you enjoy books so much without understanding empathy? I don't think you can because it won't mean as much to you. It's just reading them. You don't just read the book, you have to stop and think and then go back to the reading."* **Chloe, Year 6**
- *"Thinking about empathy when I read makes me want to read more, because I get so much more involved in the story."* **Mohammed, Year 6**

## IMPACT ON ENGLISH SKILLS

Immersion in the characters and their feelings helped children understand the text much more deeply, leading to improvements in comprehension skills such as inference, deduction and prediction. This helps achieve aims in the English Programme of Study which states that pupils should be taught to *"understand both the books that they can already read accurately and fluently and those that they listen to by drawing inferences", particularly about characters' feelings, thoughts and motives.* **Ofsted Common Inspection Framework, 2018**

This can produce a "double win" – improved reading and writing, alongside a classroom environment in which feelings are openly discussed, through the safe distance literature creates.



Figure 6: percentage improvement across a range of English skills (teacher assessment combined from the pioneer schools).

- *"You teach how to empathise and you can't help but infer at the same time". 80% of teachers at our school stated inference had improved because of an empathy focus, and that children can infer on a deeper level."* **Amy Willoughby, Assistant Head, Beck Primary**
- *"The quality of writing when developing characters has increased dramatically as the girls now have an enhanced ability to recognise emotions. Ensuring that the readers of their writing care about the characters they have created means they have to use highly developed empathic skills."* **Janet Rosewall, St Hilda's**
- *"During class book talk, there is more emphasis on characters and less on plot. Predictions when reading are more linked to what is known about characters."* **Jon Biddle, Year 6 teacher, Moorlands Primary Academy**
- *"When studying Varjak Paw we focused primarily on writing from a character's perspective. The children produced their best writing of the year, full of empathy and understanding. Their vocabulary has become noticeably more varied, and they were often begging to keep on writing."* **Richard Ruddick, Year 4 teacher, Moorlands Primary Academy**

## IMPACT IN OTHER CURRICULUM AREAS

Schools found links between the teaching of empathy and areas of the curriculum other than reading and writing.

*“Empathy Lab work has enhanced other curriculum strands, particularly Global Learning with its focus on social justice.”* **Graham Frost, Headteacher, Robert Ferguson Primary**

- *“It’s not “yet another thing” – it complements and adds value to other school initiatives, including the teaching of mindfulness and working with the Open University’s reading for pleasure drive.”*

**Rebecca Simister, Headteacher, Bewick Bridge Community School**

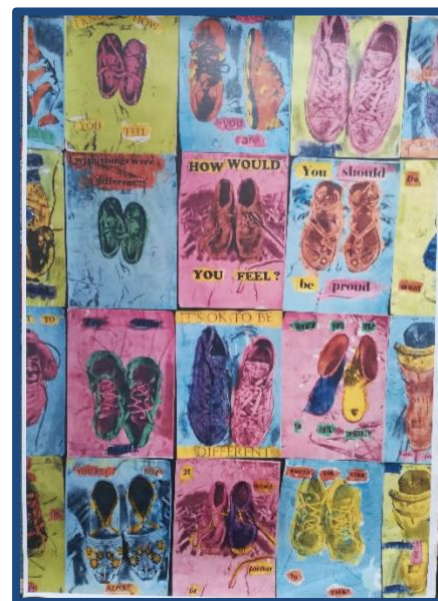
- *“The most notable improvement has been in how Pupil C responds to Philosophy for Children sessions, and in Global Learning sessions where we are tackling difficult concepts such as hunger, poverty, inequality and social action.”*

**Justine Davidson, Teacher, Robert Ferguson School**

Some schools reported an improvement in the way children engaged with history and geography topics as they used their empathy skills to put themselves in the shoes of people in other places and times.

Art is another curriculum area that schools have reported benefitting from their engagement with empathy, as shown by this example from Robert Ferguson Primary School.

St Hilda’s built links to the PSHE curriculum: *“There’s been a noticeable shift since becoming involved. Empathy has been incorporated into the PSHE curriculum and Empathy Day has become an annual whole school event. The introduction of empathy into the ‘Value of the Month’ framework has sparked valuable discussions with children exploring scenarios through role play, stories and video clips. Pupils are more able to their own emotions and those of their peers, which has helped when resolving playtime dispute.”* **Melanie Charles, St Hilda’s**



## IMPACT FOUR: PRO-SOCIAL ATTITUDES AND SOCIAL ACTION

*“Isn’t it time to now have empathy clearly written into all our behaviour policies in schools? Where it has, the turnaround has been significant.”* **Settling Troubled Children to Learn, Bomber and Hughes, 2013**

*“The role of educators in encouraging young people to develop a social justice mentality is more important than ever... and will eventually produce positive outcomes such as challenging stereotypes and promoting equality on a personal level or affecting changes within society.”* **From a Charity to a Social Justice Mentality, Simpson, J., 2016.**

### WHAT HAPPENED

The third element of EmpathyLab’s “triple-win” focuses on taking action. Once children experienced empathic concern, and really understood other people’s perspectives, they were supported to put empathy into action – on a personal level, in the context of school actions, and in the wider community.

The model is supported by the research base on the links between empathy and our impulse for social justice<sup>10</sup>.



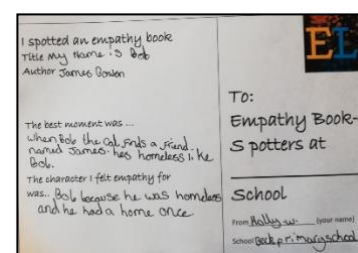
Figure 8: putting empathy into action

Two group training sessions linked to the Global Learning scheme which helps schools focus on developing a social justice rather than a charity mentality<sup>11</sup>.

There was a strong child-led focus to Empathy Explorers, encouraging children to see themselves as active participants in an empathy programme. Participation in decision-making enables children to learn the skills needed to be active citizens<sup>12</sup>. Activities were devised to kick-start this, like BookSpotters, where children added recommended empathy-boosting books to a shared schools online database. Another popular idea was Empathy Awards, a voting scheme in which children



make awards to book characters showing exceptional empathy. On Empathy Day, Year 6’s at Moorlands Primary devised and taught empathy lessons to other year groups.



<sup>10</sup> Decety, J. and Cowell, J., 2015. Empathy, justice and moral behaviour. *AJOB Neuroscience* 6 (3), University of Chicago.

<sup>11</sup> Simpson, J., 2016. A study to investigate, explore and identify successful interventions to support teachers in a transformative move from Charity Mentality to a Social Justice Mentality.

<sup>12</sup> Johnson, K., 2004. Children’s voices: pupil leadership in primary schools. *NCSL*

EmpathyLab supported the ideas bubbling up from the schools themselves, for Empathy Leaders and an Empathy Council.

Having established the children's active interest and leadership, each school decided on a social action theme – such as refugees, friendships and loneliness – and EmpathyLab supported these with reading lists and Empathy Storykits. The latter offer ideas for creative, immersive activities which help children expand their emotional understanding of people in challenging situations. Schools consulted with parents and local groups before deciding on their social action in the wider community. This sometimes proved a useful way of engaging parents with this work, which several schools otherwise found a real challenge.

## Impact on pro-social attitudes and behaviour



## Improved behaviour and conflict resolution

Improved conflict resolution was not a specific outcome EmpathyLab was aiming for, so it was illuminating to hear teachers saying that the approach was helping children resolve conflicts more easily. They attributed this to the building of a whole school common language around empathy and the skills involved.

- *"It's noticeable how much the word "empathy" now comes up especially at playtime, in the context of trying to sort out the minor disputes so common in school life."* **Emily Garrill, Teacher, The Spinney School.**
- *"Understanding a fictional narrative very much relies on children understanding themselves. We found that the language used in the playground, in assembly and in lessons has started to shift. Pupils are developing the ability to feel with others, understand their emotions and different perspectives. EmpathyLab is most certainly helping us to promote the Fundamental British Values."* **Janet Rosewall, St Hilda's**
- *"When dealing with difficult situations, we now focus on the role of empathy. In turn the children now respond immediately to the idea of using their empathy skills, answering questions about the other person's point of view. They then use their empathy to find solutions, helping situations to be resolved constructively. In 2017 the number of incidents recorded internally were at 147, and are now 87. The number of exclusions have also reduced significantly."* **Claire Williams, Deputy Head, Kenilworth Primary School.**

Three of the pioneer schools had inspections during the time EmpathyLab worked with them, and in each case their empathy work was very positively noted. The Ofsted inspector for Kenilworth Primary said: *"Leaders have based the curriculum plan on the importance of pupils' mental and physical well-being. This...is also evident in the*



*importance placed on being a good team member and the focus on empathy. Pupils enjoy taking responsibility, including as ‘empathy leaders’, and they talk positively about the way they work as a team in the school and say the school is ‘like a family’. This is evident in the good behaviour and relationships.”*

### Children as leaders of empathic behavior

Some schools established peer-led support schemes, including Empathy Leaders in the playground, and an Empathy Council. The EmpathyLab group structure enabled the sharing of ideas between the schools, leading in turn to more pupil leadership initiatives.

#### EMPATHY LEADERS

After some playground incidents of pupils having no-one to play with, Beck Primary teachers decided to take advantage of children’s enthusiasm for empathy learning to create an Empathy Leaders scheme. Key Stage 2 classes wrote “dos” and “don’ts” for the role, and nominated a class member. Leaders were trained and now provide playtime support for peers, showing real sensitivity and maturity. Children can go to Empathy Stops if they feel sad, lonely or simply need a friend. In the second year, previous leaders trained the new ones.



*“The children’s enthusiasm for Empathy Explorers has led to the creation of new ‘Empathy Leaders’ roles (an idea adapted from Beck). In the playground they are available if children need somebody to talk to. Children applied for these roles and were interviewed by myself and a governor. They wear their Empathy Leader jackets with pride and are highly visible on the playground. They are not there to solve problems, but are available to show empathy and support.”* **Claire Williams, Deputy Head, Kenilworth Primary School**

### Literature and pro-social attitudes

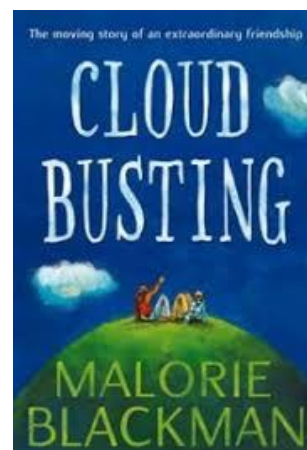
EmpathyLab encountered examples of the power of literature-based empathy work to shift children’s mind-sets:

- Gwen, aged 10, read Eva Ibbotson’s *One Dog and His Boy*, where the protagonist is lonely. It made her reconsider her attitude to a girl she had previously thought was stuck up. Realising she was actually lonely, she decided to start playing with her.
- *“The most notable improvement has been in how Tyler responds to Philosophy for Children and Global Learning sessions where we use literature as one tool to tackle difficult concepts such as poverty. Previously his answers wouldn’t have been thought out and comments were often made to make his friends laugh. As we focused on empathy, his responses became more thoughtful and he considered others’ perspectives.”* **Justine Davidson Teacher, Robert Ferguson School**

### Case Study: building pro-social attitudes - tackling bullying through a book study

*“In a class that had problems with bullying and damaging relationships, we used Malorie Blackman’s *Cloudbusting* to explore the issue. There were uncanny similarities between the storyline and the behaviours we were seeing at school (including those of witnesses or bystanders). However, by not addressing this and by focusing solely on the narrative and the characters, we were able to unpick some of the complexities and tensions. We were able to identify the roles assumed by different individuals in the situation (bully, victim, bystander, conscious/unconscious supporter).*

*Children who play particular roles were suddenly able to see themselves in the characters, without us having to name this. This gave them new perspectives and enabled them to talk about the reasons for and consequences of that behaviour – without ever having to talk about themselves. This meant there was no personal*





emotion (shame, fear, guilt, anger) to get in the way and children could suggest what needed to change for everyone to get what they needed.

While all discussion related to the book, fiction carried into reality. It was particularly moving to see children who for years have been unable to reflect on their own behaviour, reflect, analyse and amend the behaviour of the character they were most like as well as themselves.” **Helen Mulligan, Deputy Head, Bewick Bridge Community Primary School**

## IMPACT ON SOCIAL ACTION IN THE WIDER WORLD

As the work unfolded, schools started to use the empathy work to develop stronger links with the wider community. Those in their second or third year of implementation reported that though it was initially challenging to implement this aspect, it gradually became easier and more impactful, as the approach became embedded.

- “Our EmpathyLab work has given real focus and purpose to our aim to be a force for good within our community. For us, it is vital that children can respond to the feelings of others and understand that their actions really can have a good impact on the wider world. We’re now really involved with supporting people in a tangible way, locally and further afield.” **Kevin Lee, Headteacher, Moorlands Primary**

Figure 7: extract from Moorland Church of England Primary Academy's SIAMs inspection report, 2018

wider community feels much better informed about the daily life of the school. A focus on the virtue 'empathy' has had a positive impact upon learners, who are proactively involved in projects reaching out to the wider local community. For example, older pupils speak enthusiastically about supporting the elderly in the village through 'Young at Heart' and about putting on a tea party for them. As part of National Poetry Day, pupils posted their own poems through residents' doors. Pupils are regularly involved in supporting 'The Village Pantry' food bank, showing compassion and care for those in need. Charitable giving, with active support for Christian Aid and other appeals is well-embedded into school life.

- “Our empathy theme this term is loneliness - we read lots of linked books, and talked deeply with children and parents about how to put empathy into action. Children now visit the local care home to read to older people, and we’ve set up an inter-generational choir. As a result of being involved with EmpathyLab, our whole little community is better off.” **Kath Fox, English Co-ordinator, Coddington Primary**
- “Each teacher has adapted the excellent EmpathyLab resources to further develop the understanding of empathy. Our next step is to develop the power of empathy to inspire social action. Year 5s have been exploring *The Boy in the Tower* by Polly Ho Yen and arranged a visit from the Samaritans. Year 4s have been learning about loneliness through the Mr Stink Storykit and are now creating links with the local care home.” **Claire Williams, Deputy Head, Kenilworth Primary School**
- At Moorlands Primary, after reading *The Old Woman Who Named Things*, which focuses on loneliness and the elderly, Year 4/5 organised a tea party for the local Young At Heart group.



## Case study: refugees

*"My Year 6 class focused on refugees. We spent time reading books, such as Boy Overboard by Morris Gleitzman and Welcome to Nowhere by Elizabeth Laird, as well as non-fiction including Who Are Refugees and Migrants? by Michael Rosen.*

*The impact on the children was striking. It was the first thing that they spoke to their parents about at the end of the day and they immediately wanted to have a class meeting to think of ways that they could help. Several of them talked about how when they had seen stories about refugees on the news, they didn't really pay attention before, but felt they now would.*

*The school invited speakers from Amnesty International and the local charity Great Yarmouth Refugee Outreach Support (Gyros). Each pupil wrote a letter to a child refugee from Syria as part of Amnesty's Write for Rights campaign, and the two Gyros representatives (who were both refugees) shared their stories of fleeing home. The school also organised a refugee sleepover for the year 6 students to give them a small insight into what it would be like to be a refugee.*

*To hear genuine first-hand accounts about life as a refugee was a unique experience for the children, and caused a genuine shift in their attitudes. Before getting involved with EmpathyLab, we might have just tried to raise some money (perhaps more akin to sympathy than empathy).*

*The focus on empathy across the year had a significant impact on the children's attitudes – and led to an improvement in their emotional vocabulary and comprehension skills. The Amnesty letters were undoubtedly the most powerful pieces of written work my students have produced, simply because they knew there would be a genuine audience for their work. Year 6 students have since been involved with planning lessons about refugees for other year groups, which has created a real sense of cooperation and teamwork among the class."* **Jon Biddle, Year 6 teacher, Moorlands Primary Academy**

- *"I used to think refugees were different from us. Now I don't."* **Chantelle, Year 6**
- *"It was some of my favourite work that we've ever done. We're learning about the real world and we're all part of it. Like, everyone, not just us and the people we know."* **Ahmed, Year 6**

## IMPACT FIVE: FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

*"School improvement and effectiveness research consistently shows that parental engagement is one of the key factors in securing higher student achievement. Where schools build positive relationships with parents and work actively to embrace racial, religious, and ethnic and language differences, evidence of sustained school improvement can be found."* **Review of best practice in parental engagement, DfE, 2011**

*"Primary schools in areas of challenge and social deprivation told us about the importance of parents being actively involved in school life and understanding that social action was as relevant to their lives as to the lives of their children."* **How Social Action is being applied to good effect in schools and colleges, Ofsted, 2016**

## WHAT HAPPENED

EmpathyLab produced a range of tools to help schools engage parents in EmpathyLab work: letters home, book bag labels, book review bubbles, question prompts, VIP invitations to Empathy Award ceremonies, handouts for parent workshops and 'top tips' sheets for how to build empathy at home. The learning group and shared online platform helped schools share ideas and resources, including parent questionnaires and examples of practice.

## IMPACT ON FAMILIES' INVOLVEMENT

Several schools ran parents' workshops, introducing them to the empathy work done by the children and sharing resources. Some established reading cafes with an empathy focus. Many found this a challenging area, and that engagement was helped by organising events at which children were presenting their empathy work to their families.

Once parents were engaged they were very supportive as shown in these quotes from Beck Primary's empathy workshops: *"I am amazed my child has understood this. They have been teaching me about empathy". "This is such an important skill. All schools should be teaching this."*

### Case Study: involving parents at Moorlands Primary Academy

#### 2016-2017

- Invited to fill in Book Spotter questionnaire (40% response)
- Book Spotters parent workshop- looking at children's personal reading histories with a focus on empathy books (50% attendance)
- Several parents asked what 'empathy books' they could buy for their children (list sent home, put on school blog and in village magazine)
- Suggestions from parents of possible charities, action groups and visitors

#### 2017-2018

##### Spring term

- Open session to discuss importance of empathy and Empathy Lab
- Empathy assemblies with parental attendance
- Class empathy storytime (Reception-Y6) – parents invited

##### Summer term

- Empathy reading cafés, with emphasis on vocabulary for feelings (simple activities that families can do together, matching emotions to pictures, sharing and labelling texts that explore feelings, etc)
- Empathy Day family workshop event involving Jo Cotterill

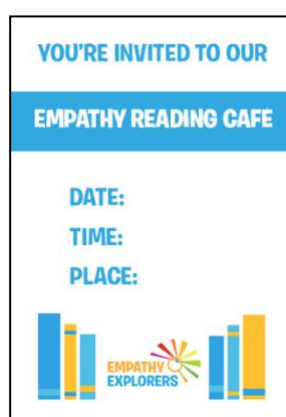
*"We enjoyed coming in to school to hear about the children's empathy work and to see what they had been doing. It's great to know that they're learning important skills about how to get along in the real world and not just about how to pass SATs tests."* **Parent of Year 6 child at Moorlands Primary Academy**

### Case study: parents' empathy sessions at Netley Marsh Infants

*As the programme launched, families were invited to a cosy evening on World Book Day to have hot chocolate whilst sharing recommended empathy books. EmpathyLab's founder gave a talk and found a high level of interest and attendance – the Head of Learning said "parents seemed to instinctively grasp that to succeed in life, and be a force for good, children need to understand and relate to others well."*

*Each child was given a book bag with an Empathy Explorers label, and prompt book-talking questions to guide their book sharing. They filled in Empathy Book-Spotter reviews with their parents, which were used in big corridor displays. An after-school workshops for targeted families helped children develop a wider vocabulary for emotions words.*

*Parents and children went on a special empathy book-buying visit to Hampshire Schools Library Service, which generated wild excitement. The Headteacher capitalised on families' interest by holding empathy book-talking sessions at the local library. The library partnership has developed as an important element of EmpathyLab work, with Hampshire Libraries reporting that it has resulted in one of the highest levels of Summer Reading Challenge participation in the county.*



## 5. REFLECTIONS: SUCCESS FACTORS; CHALLENGES; OPPORTUNITIES

EmpathyLab has been building the Empathy Explorers programme since 2015, using an inquiry-led process. Founders are delighted by the difference it is making both to pupil outcomes and to whole school culture and improvement, especially as the programme has been delivered on a largely pro-bono basis, and often faced challenges familiar to organisations partnering with already over-stretched schools. By building on the learning from experimental work in the initial cohort of pioneer schools, the five new schools joining the group in 2016 were able to achieve substantial impact in just one academic year.

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### FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

**A spirit of collaborative inquiry:** the learning group structure used worked well - a mixture of schools, academic supporters and EmpathyLab leaders learning together over a sustained period, and able to share honestly about what worked (and just as importantly, what didn't). Everyone shared, swapped and contributed new ideas to the Lab.

**A whole school approach:** In line with expert guidance participants found that Empathy Explorers works best as a whole school programme. The process of embedding empathy education is a learning journey, and needs long term commitment and deep understanding. An important factor in the success of this work is the spending of an initial period ensuring the adults in the school community (teachers, governors, families, community partners) are crystal clear about the definition of empathy, its component parts, and its educational relevance. This ensures that before the children are involved, there is a firm, shared understanding and language about empathy and the skills involved. Teaching strategies can then be based on this, and on the research into how books can build empathy.

**Consistent but adaptable model in all settings:** it was important that the programme could work in any school, because every child deserves the chance to develop strong and emotional skills. It is encouraging that evaluation shows real impact in very different schools, from Beck Primary in a disadvantaged area of Sheffield (600 children, 60% of whom receive Pupil Premium), to St Hilda's - a Hertfordshire prep school with 140 girls. Interestingly, teachers involved also highlighted the importance of teaching empathy skills to children from more privileged backgrounds, citing "entitled" behaviour which can be addressed through empathy education.

**Child agency and ownership:** once the children develop a deeper understanding of empathy and the skills involved, they often become engaged and enthusiastic, and can play a key role in building an empathetic school culture. EmpathyLab found (not surprisingly) that the more ownership they can have, the more embedded the approach becomes – successful and inspiring child-led work included Empathy Leaders in the playground, teams of Empathy BookSpotters, older children teaching empathy lessons to younger ones.

**Clear guidance and tools:** The implementation overview and the range of suggested resources and approaches provided by EmpathyLab meant that schools had a toolbox to guide them, while still having flexibility to adapt things as necessary to suit their particular context.

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## PROGRAMME CHALLENGES

**Clarity about empathy:** because empathy is a common term, EmpathyLab found that there are many assumptions and misconceptions about it. It was sometimes difficult to avoid people's confusion between empathy, sympathy and kindness. It is vital that the adults involved are 100% confident about this, and the component parts of empathy, with the teaching strategies needed for each. It is hard work to ensure that all members of the school community have strong active listening skills, which are at the heart of embedding empathy. Addressing this needed a lot of honest reflection.

**Delivery model:** the Empathy Explorers model is to inspire, train and support teachers, who then plan and carry out the work – EmpathyLab staff do not deliver the work directly in the school. This places a lot of importance on the continued commitment of the staff, and the involvement of school leaders. It works best with explicit SLT and Governor backing and active involvement, clear links to the School Development Plan, and two staff members as designated leads - an EmpathyLab lead (often the deputy head, or the English Co-ordinator) plus another staff opinion former.

**Measurement:** finding the right way to measure the impact of the work was a challenge, bearing in mind the capacity both of EmpathyLab and overstretched school staff. Careful work was needed to gather and match sources of data – an end of programme overview based on a range of dimensions from the EmpathyLab lead, and “before” and “after” tracking data of individual children.

**Parental involvement:** while some schools have seen some real successes in involving parents through their EmpathyLab work, other schools had less success, with poor attendance at workshops or reading cafes and greater difficulty communicating key messages successfully. This continues to be a challenge for schools not just for this initiative but more generally too. Finding ways for parents to engage further with their child's learning at school continues to be a key area for development.

**Keeping it fresh:** schools are subject to a barrage of new opportunities, and it is a challenge to keep a programme fresh and engaging. It can be difficult to keep the teaching and development of empathy through the EmpathyLab approach as an ongoing practice, rather than something that has been 'done', 'ticked off the list' and bumped off the priorities by something else. The main factors in keeping it fresh were a deep commitment from the Senior Leadership Team; children taking the lead; author involvement. It also helped when the programme complemented existing initiatives, such as Mind Up, Philosophy for Children (P4C) and Reading for Pleasure.

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## OPPORTUNITIES

A lot has changed in the four years since EmpathyLab started work in 2014. The need for an empathy education programme has never been greater. Hate crimes are at their highest level since records began, and we face new challenges to the civility and standards of our public life. There are increasing concerns about young people's mental health, and the potentially empathy-draining effects of social media.

### Empathy education

There is a new wave of debate about the 21c skills young people need. Sir Tim Brighouse is just one of many experts who believe the curriculum is not fit for purpose, saying *“by focusing on the essential skills of numeracy and literacy we neglect others equally vital to our youngsters’ futures - high-level IT skills, working in teams, interacting civilly with individuals from different cultural backgrounds and thinking for themselves while acting for others.”*

This is bringing social and emotional skills into sharper focus. The Government has a new advisory group focusing on character education, and is planning to introduce new character benchmarks to measure performance of schools. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has a workstream focusing on social/emotional skills, and is issuing a major report in 2020. The Sutton Trust's *Life Lessons* report found that 94%



of employers believe social and emotional skills are at least as important in the workplace as academic qualifications.

Since empathy is a pivotal social/emotional competence, featuring in all emotional intelligence frameworks<sup>13</sup>, this backdrop presents new opportunities. Empathy Explorers Integrates empathy education into schools' existing literacy and literature work, thus overcoming the "bolt-on" problem so often bedevilling social/emotional programmes.

### **Partnerships**

EmpathyLab sees major opportunities to integrate a range of partnerships into an empathy education programme, Between 2017-19, public library services' participation in Empathy Day has gone from 19 to 98, and there is building interest at national and local level, as libraries explore the strategic significance of their empathy-building role. Netley Marsh Infants developed an excellent model of a school partnership with their local library.

EmpathyLab is developing powerful alliances with authors, illustrators and publishers. These offer rich empathy-building opportunities to schools and families, through author events, festivals, book promotions and bespoke events, such as Puffin's empathy-themed *StoryMaker Show* which will be streamed live to schools for 2019's Empathy Day, featuring authors such as Malorie Blackman and Eoin Colfer.

Two other partnerships illustrate the scope of a story-driven empathy movement. EmpathyLab involved one of its pioneer schools in a refugee project with The Scouts, who have a major life skills focus. This has led to the incorporation of empathy-focused elements in the BookReader badge. Hopster TV has worked with EmpathyLab to produce an APP which helps children build their recognition and understanding of emotions, linked to their empathy-focused TV programme *Saturday Club*.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://casel.org/core-competencies/>



## 6. NEXT STEPS

All EmpathyLab's pioneer schools want to carry on in the learning group, continuing to build and share empathy practices. In 2018/19 most aim to strengthen the elements of family involvement and social action which need further development.

Meanwhile, the organisation's iterative development process has resulted in a body of work that enables it to move into a new phase. EmpathyLab was one of ten organisations awarded a *Future Ready Fund* grant from Nesta, the innovation foundation<sup>14</sup>. The Fund supports early-stage, high potential interventions focused on developing social and emotional skills.

This means that from May 2019 Empathy Explorers will be introduced to eight new Welsh schools, and further extended in a secondary school setting. To August 2020 this critical pathfinder project will test and develop the programme further, against the backdrop of the new Welsh curriculum, which places a major emphasis on health and wellbeing. Partners in the Welsh programme are the school improvement body ERW, and a Swansea school cluster led by Pentrahafod Comprehensive.

By late 2020, the testing and development work done in Wales will enable EmpathyLab to scale up its offer to further schools. The Nesta funding enables it to deepen evaluation, trialling the use of a standardised measure – the Basic Empathy Scale.

EmpathyLab will also deepen work with its academic advisors. With the Open University Centre for Educational Research, it is exploring the impact of developing work on empathy for fostering reading for pleasure. The partnership with the University of Sussex's Psychology Department enables an exploration of the psychological evidence base for reading's impact on the development of children's empathy. This would be a significant step forward, as the existing research base focuses largely on adult responses.

EmpathyLab's mission is to empower the rising generation to drive a new empathy movement. Never has it been more needed.

## 7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

EmpathyLab would like to thank its wonderful partners in the 11 pioneer schools – the staff, governors, families. And especially the children.

A start-up such as EmpathyLab needs the belief and backing of partners. A special thank you to Professors Robin Banerjee and Teresa Cremin, and all at Peters Books and The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education.

Along the way EmpathyLab has been enormously helped by a team of expert volunteers, and would like to thank them, profoundly: Ali Richardson, Ann Scott, Helen Mulligan, Laura Scott, Mary Edwards, Courtney Froelig, Marie Armstrong, Nayla Aramouni, Jane Yates, Deborah Michel, Anna Purkiss.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/future-ready-fund-winners/>

## Appendix 1: EmpathyLab's work with pioneer schools 2014-2018

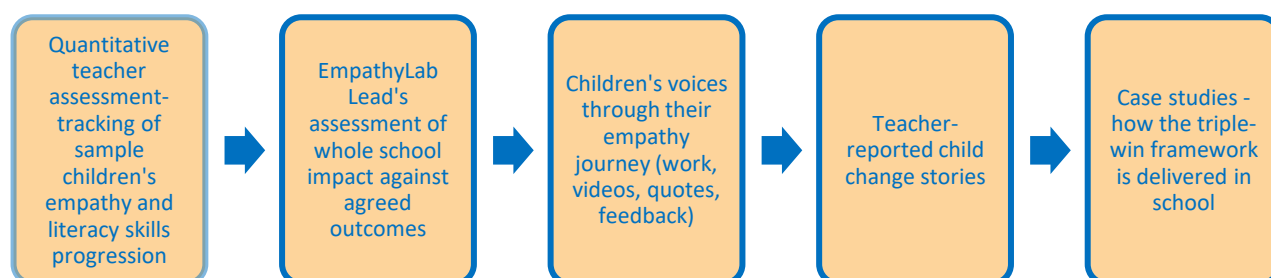
2014 Foundations of schools programme	2015 Formed learning group to test programme ideas and training	2016 Expanded and formalised programme	2017 Tested fully fledged Empathy Explorers programme	2018 Evaluated programme as basis for roll out
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Literature review – “why empathy matters in schools”</li> <li>Cross disciplinary Think-In at South Bank Centre</li> <li>Guidance from Think In attendees and other experts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learning partnership formed with first cohort of pioneer schools</li> <li>Academic partnership formed with Open University) and University of Sussex</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consulted on digital resources and training methodology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Five new primary schools join the learning partnership</li> <li>New partnership with Peters Books to support book selection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Impact report published November 2018, using new evaluation framework.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creative development of first ideas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Built framework for SLT planning to integrate empathy education</li> <li>Prototyped and tested 15 programme ideas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Narrowed down to 6 main programme ideas. Tested.</li> <li>15-16 evaluation completed as basis for next stage</li> <li>impact report published</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tested new integrated six step programme</li> <li>Merged six most effective activities into one programme</li> <li>Developed Empathy Explorers brand</li> <li>Piloted Empathy Day</li> <li>Piloted use of Read for Empathy Guide</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Further tested new integrated Empathy Explorers programme</li> <li>Delivered Empathy Day, linked to national activity</li> <li>Drew on 2018 Read For Empathy collection</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Guardian blog, prompting partnerships with pioneer schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two shared development days</li> <li>Bespoke consultancy</li> <li>Shared digital platform</li> <li>Expert input from ongoing academic partners; authors Bali Rai and Gillian Cross</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Three shared development days</li> <li>Bespoke consultancy</li> <li>Shared digital platform</li> <li>Expert input from ongoing academic partners; Sir Peter Bazalgette; Louise Johns-Shepherd (CLPE)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Three shared development days</li> <li>Bespoke consultancy</li> <li>Shared digital platform</li> <li>Expert input from academic partners; Professor Maria Nikolajeva; author Jo Cotterill; Jane Yates Trained 30 authors, for ongoing work with children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two shared development days</li> <li>Expert input from on-going academic partners, Professors Cremin and Banerjee</li> </ul>

## Appendix 2: Pioneer schools, 2016-18

Schools	Location	Type	No. of children/young people involved
Beck Primary School	Sheffield	State Primary	760
Bewick Bridge Primary School	Cambridge	State Primary	300
Coddington Primary School	Newark	State Primary	434
International Community School	Central London	Independent, secondary	90
Kenilworth Primary School	Borehamwood, Hertfordshire	State Primary	206
Moorlands Primary Academy	Great Yarmouth, Norfolk	Academy	328
Netley Marsh CE Infants School	New Forest, Hampshire	State Infant	90
Robert Ferguson Primary School	Carlisle	State Primary	427
St Hilda's	Bushey, Hertfordshire	Independent	120
St Michael's CE Primary School	Rochdale	State Primary	112
The Spinney School	Cambridge	State Primary	210

## Appendix 3: Evaluation

### Overview



### Evaluation Detail

Quantitative: Overview self-reporting from teachers; tracking data. Qualitative: Children's case studies; interviews with classroom teachers and school leaders; observations from academic partners; analysis of children's work

### Evaluation baseline (September 2017)

Your priority outcome(s)	Your reason for these	Any existing measures used for these (e.g. school behaviour log; reading progress assessments)
<b>Name your three chosen case study children</b> 1 child exceeding expected reading levels 1 child at the expected reading level 1 child working towards the expected level	Their gender, age and year group	Notes
<b>Name the six chosen children from your target group for tracking</b> 2 exceeding expected reading levels 2 at the expected reading level 2 working towards the expected level	Their gender, age and year group	Notes

### DETAILED TARGET OUTCOMES

Literacy	Empathy skills	Wellbeing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased reading for pleasure</li> <li>Wider reading range</li> <li>Increased reading frequency</li> <li>Better at reading critically</li> <li>More expressive and persuasive writing</li> <li>Wider vocabulary for feelings</li> <li>Better at inference, deduction and prediction</li> <li>Better speaking and listening</li> <li>Better at analysing the writer's craft</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stronger ability to imagine, understand and reflect on other people's perspectives and feelings</li> <li>Wider vocabulary to recognise and share own and others' feelings</li> <li>Stronger empathic communication skills: deep listening and conversation</li> <li>More developed social values which turn feelings of empathy into moral actions in the home, school and community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Calmer/ less stressed</li> <li>More ready to learn</li> <li>Emotions can be named and shared</li> <li>More secure relationships</li> </ul>
Social action	Family involvement	School ethos and strategy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Putting empathy into action as an individual</li> <li>Putting empathy into action as a school</li> <li>Putting empathy into action in the wider community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents/carers understand the importance of empathy skills to child's life chances</li> <li>Strategies learnt to use stories to build empathy</li> <li>Now linking into school empathy activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EmpathyLab approach is embedded across the school e.g. SDP; pupil voice</li> <li>Staff understand the educational importance of empathy</li> <li>Teaching practices have changed</li> </ul>