Final report: An interim evaluation of the Broadening Educational Pathways bursaries scheme for looked after and vulnerable children attending independent day/boarding schools

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Introduction

We are pleased to provide this report detailing our evaluation of the Broadening Educational Pathways bursaries scheme for looked after and vulnerable children attending independent day/boarding school. The findings presented are based on three strands of evaluation. First, we consider the educational outcomes for LAVC who received a SpringBoard bursary and compare these outcomes with a matched control group, created by accessing the Department for Education (DfE) National Pupil Database (NPD). Second, we provide a tentative estimate of a costs-benefit analysis. Third, we present findings from our interviews with six bursary recipients and six members of staff working in organisations involved in delivering the scheme. In sum, the evaluation report provides a rounded assessment of the scheme's achievements towards reaching its aims and how the scheme is experienced by recipients and its facilitators.

Whilst there is no monetary value that could accurately reflect the subjective experience of living a whole, healthy and satisfying life, similarly, there is no cost that can accurately reflect the emotional, psychological and physical struggle in the life for a looked after vulnerable child. This evaluation has been conducted amidst a crisis in children's social care and with the backdrop of the independent review of children's social care draft report (*accessible here*, 2022). The problems associated with children's social care are substantial not least in regards to their educational journeys. The number of looked after children in England rising, having reached an all-time high of 80,850 in 2021 (DfE, 2021). The estimated cost of statutory spending on children's social care is also rising (The Case for Change, *accessible here*, 2022) even though the total cost has remained almost level. One consequence from this is that cuts were made to non-statutory spending in areas of support for youth and extra-curricular opportunities being slashed. The downstream costs are also significant. Murray, Lacey, Maughen and Sacker (2020) suggested there is a 70% increase in likelihood of all-cause mortality for those who spend time in out-of-home care as a child compared to those who don't. LAVCs are more likely to become involved in the criminal justice system than those who do not enter care (Ministry of Justice and DfE, 2016). The chances of becoming not employed in education or training as a care leaver, far outweigh those who are never in care (DfE, 2021) and care leavers are disproportionately represented amongst the homeless community in adulthood (Reeve, 2011). Most importantly for the BEP bursary scheme, are the educational outcomes for looked after and vulnerable children. The educational outcomes for looked after children are significantly lower compared to children that are not looked after by the state. A Department for Education (2020) report suggests the average KS4 attainment 8 scores for looked after children in 2019 was 19.1 compared to 44.6 for non-looked after children. This is a considerable attainment gap that the bursary scheme aims to address.

Children's social care is expensive, and poor care leads to poor educational outcomes and so the cycle continues. Investing in young people with the potential to flourish in an independent school setting could provide benefits. The cost of doing nothing cannot be sustained. There is the potential for value for money in the scheme by avowing the costs associated with required resources downstream. Limiting chances of poor health, lower academic attainment, criminal justice involvement and homelessness. PWC (2021) have recently estimated these outcomes alone might cost, at a minimum, £2.3b per annum.

The Royal National Children's SpringBoard Foundation (RNCSF) were commissioned by the Department for Education to deliver the bursary scheme for LAVC to attend independent day/boarding schools. The aim of this scheme is to both improve educational outcomes for a selected sample of LAVC and to provide a more stable and caring environment than they would otherwise be exposed, due to family hardship and circumstance. In the next sections of this report, we present the findings from three interrelated studies that have considered the educational outcomes, cost-benefits of the scheme and the experiences of those receiving and administering the bursaries.

Study 1

Educational outcomes

Improving academic outcome through the bursary scheme

There is a dearth of high quality evidence available within the published academic literature that assesses improvement in academic outcome for looked after vulnerable children who attend independent day/boarding schools. Though some evidence, consistent with the principle, has been found. For example, a programme in the US looked at socially disadvantaged children attending SEED schools that offer a holistic education experience with curricula that addresses both the academic and non-academic development of children (Curto & Fryer, 2014). Findings have suggested that for each year a child is in a SEED school, they achieve small to modest gains with effect sizes of around 0.211 in reading, 0.229 in math scores. Caution is required, however, when interpreting the findings as Curto and Fryer (2014) suggest, the effect might be driven by gender, with girls significantly outperforming boys in the study.

A more recent study looked at the rate of change in academic and non-academic outcomes. Behaghel, de Chaisemartin and Gurgand (2017) noted that improvements in academic subjects for disadvantaged children attending boarding schools took two years to be observed and was more pronounced in higher ability students. Their analysis included data gathered from children who had been randomly selected to attend boarding schools after entering a lottery in the US and in France. Behaghel, de Chaisemartin and Gurgand (ibid) suggest that as the adjustment to boarding takes approximately two years for academic effects to be observed, the transition might itself be disruptive to academic development. The learning from this is that the careful management of transition is likely to maximise academic benefit earlier in the educational journey.

A study by Foliano, Green and Sartarelli (2019) in the UK looked at the effect of boarding by comparing the effect of attending a selective and resource-rich English boarding school on the educational achievement of pupils with low socioeconomic status, with the effect of attending selective grammar day schools and independent day schools. Their findings suggest that pupils attending a selective boarding school achieved significantly better GCSE results. For boarders, the probability of obtaining at least five GCSEs at A-A* is about 32% and 29% higher relative to the values for matched pupils in selective non-boarding grammar schools and independent day schools, respectively.

Implementing a boarding intervention to improve academic attainment for looked after and vulnerable is oriented towards improving life chances. It is broadly accepted that by improving academic attainment better life chances can be created. This is achieved by increasing the ability to have choice which is a socially determining factor in terms of longitudinal outcomes. Post-16 educational outcomes for looked after children are poor when compared to the outcomes for all individuals. Nelson and Anderson's (2021) Department for Education report showed that around thirty percent of all individuals from 2005/6 to 2008/8 KS4 cohorts became university graduates. Compare this to just eight percent of children who had been looked after for at least one year and only six percent for those looked after for a single day and it is easy to see how life choices become limited by academic attainment.

Steel, Erhardt, Phelps and Upham (2015) looked at data from The Boarding School Association (TABS) in the US. Linking their dataset to an administrative dataset, findings showed that boarding school attendees were more likely to complete their university studies than matched non-boarding controls, even after controlling for socio-economic advantage. That advantages for boarders continue later into their education journeys is not surprising, especially if we take the view that education capital is accumulative. It is possible that, the transition to university is something that being a boarder prepares you well for; living out of home when attending boarding might help prepare students for out of home living at university. Similarly, there is evidence (Jack, 2019) that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds who receive a bursary to attend an independent day/boarding school can do better if/when they move on to more elite universities, as they have had the opportunity for other forms of social and cultural capital to be endowed upon them when compared to similarly disadvantaged youth who have attended state schools at the same universities. Therefore, it is possible that boarding can provide a protective layer by ensuring that a young person will be more likely to achieve their potential in completing university if they are exposed to the benefits of elite education earlier in their academic journey. Steel et al (ibid) also found that other life chances following boarding school were improved, suggesting boarders were more likely to be employed, have excellent health, earn more per annum, and were more likely to volunteer than graduates who did not attend boarding school.

The literature we review here shows some evidence that looked after vulnerable children and/or disadvantaged youth might benefit both through academic and other life outcomes from the opportunities provided through bursaries to attend independent day/boarding schools.

Evidence we sourced from 'grey literature' can further support the suggestion that boarding for disadvantaged looked after and vulnerable children is advantageous. SpringBoard Foundation's data presented in their Impact Report published in 2019 reported that bursary recipients achieved, on average, two grades higher per GCSE subject taken, than the national average for similarly vulnerable children. In addition, SpringBoard bursary recipients had a higher chance of securing places at university or entering further education or apprenticeships. This number was reported to be 89% compared to the national average of 67% for disadvantaged youth. SpringBoard's rate of entry to university for bursary holders was eighty two percent compared to only thirty five percent nationally for disadvantaged young people.

Finally, a SpringBoard's commissioned independent evaluation (Plaister & Thomson, 2021) of their social mobility programme looked at Royal National Children's Springboard Foundation's (RNCSF) Partner Referral Scheme on Key Stage 5 outcomes. This measured the likelihood of achieving two or more A-Levels (or equivalent) and attainment at A-Level (or equivalent), on young people who had achieved A-Levels and equivalent qualifications by the end of 2019/20. The findings showed that bursary recipients, when matched against similar children through the NPD, achieved more and better A-Levels (or equivalents) than matched controls.

The evidence above, accumulatively, provides a foundation upon which the BEP programme is based. The task of this evaluation is to see whether implementation yields the gains we expect in light the existing literature.

Methodology

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Study 2

The cost-benefits of the bursary scheme: A first approximation

Our first study has provided what we believe to be the first evidence for the effectiveness of a bursary scheme supporting LAVC to attend independent day/boarding schools in the UK using a matched control as the comparator. For continuation of funding and/or scaling of the bursary scheme, evidence estimating the potential cost-benefit ratio of the bursaries is important. In this next study, first we introduce literature outlining the economic imperatives of improving educational outcomes for LAVC. This includes, highlighting several links such as those between academic attainment and earnings leading to higher tax revenues and, lower universal credit claims. There are others too such as the cost of looked after children's involvement in the criminal justice system, the cost for access to statutory homelessness services and the potential physical and mental health outcomes of looked after children. We then submit a first approximation of the cost-benefits of the bursary scheme, providing an outline of our methodology and presenting our findings whilst clearly acknowledging the limitations and cautious approach we adopted to interpreting the data.

The link between attainment, employment and earnings

The outcomes of the bursary scheme are varied with the link to employment opportunities, earnings, health and wellbeing as central to the scheme. It is envisaged that bursary recipients will have better opportunities for employment, higher earning potential, and better health and wellbeing as a result of attending an independent day/boarding school. Nelson and Anderson (2021) looked at the Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) for looked after children. The data for KS4 cohorts 2005/6 looking at rates of employment, benefits claimed and, for those who were in work, earnings were compared with the national average of the cohort. Looked after children were four times more likely to be receiving benefits compared to all individuals and were earning around £6000 per annum less when compared with all individuals in the sample after 11 years after leaving education. This figure increased from £4000 less per annum 8 years after GCSEs suggesting, the gap widens over time.

The data showed that 11-years after GCSEs those in employment were just 22% for children looked after for at least one day and 28% for those looked after for at least 12months. This was compared to 57% for all individuals in the cohort being in employment. With such low levels of looked after children being in employment 11-years after GCSEs, it is clear that improving GCSEs is a first step goal for educational interventions.

Hodge, Little and Weldone (2021) analysed the LEO data to look at the link between GCSEs and earnings. Their analysis found that "the value of an additional grade in overall GCSE attainment in undiscounted (lifetime) earnings is £23,000 (Hodge et al., 2021, p. 7)" meaning "[A] one-grade improvement in overall GCSE attainment is associated with average increase in the present value of lifetime earnings of £8,500 (p. 6)". The report also stated that the "largest marginal returns are associated with moving from grade D to grade C, and from grade C to grade B, in most subjects (p.

7).” The marginal returns ranged from £15,000 to £25,000 for moving from grade D to grade C and from £16,000 to £30,000 for moving from grade C to grade B. The marginal returns are greater for males than females. There was on average a smaller return per grade for FSM eligible pupils (£7,763 to 8,186) than ineligible pupils (£8,593 to 8,779).

The report by Hodge and colleagues (2021) does not identify looked after children specifically. They do, however, provide data for those who are categorised as disadvantaged through their eligibility for FSM. Data is also provided for KS2 Tercile. The predicted undiscounted lifetime earnings were lowest for FSM eligible females from the bottom KS2 Tercile (£746,000) compared with non-FSM girls from the same bottom KS2 Tercile (£880,213). FSM eligible boys from the bottom Tercile were predicted to earn (£1,207,000) which was lower than when compared with non-FSM boys from the same bottom Tercile (£1,350,119). SpringBoard uses academic ability as one of its criteria for eligibility for a bursary as a buffer to help mediate the transition to boarding from home. Considering those from the higher Tercile is then important. The highest earnings were for non-FSM males in the top KS2 Tercile (£1,8849,77) and by non-FSM girls in the top KS2 Tercile (£1,348,779). These compared to FSM eligible boys from the top KS2 Tercile (£1,587,776) and FSM girls from the top KS2 Tercile (£1,120,795). KS2 performance and gender are clearly important factors producing different levels of returns on grades.

Britton, Deardon and Waltmann (2021) used the LEO dataset to investigate differences in the lifetime returns to undergraduate degrees by socio-economic background. Their report suggested that the average returns to undergraduate degrees for both men and women from the bottom SES quintile groups are around £140,000. This figure is consistent with the gap identified in the GCSE attainment.

Education, earnings and wellbeing for looked after children

Murray, Lacey, Maughan and Sacker (2020) conducted a longitudinal study and found children who were looked after in any form of non-parental care had, on average, increased all-cause mortality hazard ratio of 1.62 (95% CI: 1.43, 1.86) times higher than adults who had never been in care. This finding lasted up to 42-years later meaning that, on average, an adult who had been looked after as a child was 70% more likely to have died. This excess mortality was reported to be most often recorded as 'unnatural' such as: deaths due to self-harm, accidents and mental and behavioural causes. The study found no significant differences between males and females and suggests the chances of living a longer, healthier, adult life is far lower for looked after children.

The Health Foundation (2021) analysed data from the Office of National Statistics and found a significant relationship between average net annual income and healthy life expectancy. The assumption here, is improvement in income might be related to healthier life expectancy. Healthy life expectancy is defined as the number of years that an individual is expected to live in a good state of health. Living in a good state of health for more years rather than less will most probably save costs to the state due to lowering need for the provision of health services.

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Study 3

SpringBoarder perspectives

This evaluation included interviews with five SpringBoarder's who each had each received a bursary to attend an independent boarding school. The interviews were conducted to gather in-depth, independently sourced accounts of the experiences of bursary recipients. Each participant volunteered to take part, provided their informed consent to be interviewed and for their data to be

used within this evaluation. Participating SpringBoarders had already left compulsory education and were either in their final year at boarding school or had already left boarding after year 13. All participants were aged 18-19 years at the time they were interviewed. In the next section of this report, we provide the findings from our analysis of those interviews. First, we provide anonymised basic pen portraits of the participants, describe our methods and analytic approach and then present the themes that were identified.

Pen portraits

SpringBoarder A, was age 19 and currently studying in a UK university. Prior to receiving the bursary he lived in a large city in England and then moved to an independent boarding school setting in rural England that he attended from age 11-18. He received the bursary from year 7 to 13 and found boarding to provide many opportunities for his growth and development.

SpringBoarder B, was age 19 and was also currently studying in a UK university after receiving a bursary for five years. Prior to receiving the bursary, she had been attending an independent day school with specialist learning support and then moved to an independent boarding school in rural England where her brother was also a student.

SpringBoarder C, was age 18 and was currently taking a gap year prior to going to university. He had attended an independent boarding school from age 11 to 18, receiving a bursary throughout this time. The experience of boarding had been positive and transformative although he felt that improvements for bursary holders' experience were posible.

SpringBoarder D, was in Year 13 and in second year of bursary at a co-ed boarding school. From 4 months old until aged 5, SpringBoarder D had moved from the maternal home and through the care system living with different carers. Whilst boarding, they assumed leadership roles in school, developed confidence, articulated ambition and motivation, feeling these were all nurtured by school.

SpringBoarder E was in Year 13 and had been a bursary recipient for four years in a specialist performing arts school. They identified experiences and opportunities at school, stability and support of school staff as positive aspects to their experience as a bursary recipient.

SpringBoarder F was in Year 11, had been a recipient of the bursary for four years after disruptive early childhood experiences. They feel very well supported emotionally, socially, and academically to be ambitious and see the bursary as a wonderful opportunity.

The interviews were conducted over the internet using Microsoft Teams, were recorded and transcribed using an automated transcription facility integral to the Microsoft software. Interviews lasted between 40 and 65 minutes. The interviewers adopted a low-direction approach to the interviewer's questioning style, creating an atmosphere of safety and trust to enable participants to share openly about their experiences and to cover the most salient topics to the participants. Following the interviews, transcripts were checked for accuracy and sent to the participants to review and check whether they were satisfied with the content.

The transcripts were then analysed. The approach to analysis taken was called thematic analysis based on the approach developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This requires that researchers engage with the data over a period of time, immersing themselves in the text, iteratively developing themes and revisiting the original transcript until a set of themes is settled upon. In line with Braun and Clarke (2006), an inductive process of coding was carried out. First, two researchers independently coded the transcripts, identifying the most prominent and salient themes. These were then shared between the two researchers before a second round of analysis was carried out. At this stage, the themes were refined and connected to examples of text from the interviews themselves. This led to the creation six themes: *Transitions to boarding; Do I belong here? Searching and striving for*

authenticity; Access and opportunity; Broadening horizons, Learning beyond subjects; and Feedback for SpringBoard. Each of these themes are set out below with a description of their meaning and quotes from the SpringBoarder's own voices used to represent them.

Key themes

Table 1. Key themes: SpringBoarder perspectives

Theme	Subtheme
Transitions to boarding	Getting the bursary, emotional process, homesickness
Do I belong here? Searching and striving for authenticity	Belonging, authenticity, family and independence, knowing myself, tension in realising family hopes and efforts and, being less influenced by family
Access and opportunity (Social Capital)	Meeting the needs for support, Getting involved with activities, accessing support from teachers
Broadening horizons (Cultural Capital)	Interacting with a wide range of people, money isn't everything, Springboard connection/network
Learning beyond the subject (Education Capital)	Social and communication skills, character strength, ambition, autonomy, leadership
Feeding back to SpringBoard	Being with others in similar situations, schools need to be more understanding, more support in school for the challenges of being LAVC

Transitions to Boarding

Transition to a boarding school for a looked after and/or vulnerable child can be a challenging process (Yao, Deane & Bullen, 2014). Being away from home, moving in to a new environment, surrounded with unfamiliar people and buildings, all potentially present an overwhelming degree of stimulation and new information for assimilation. For the SpringBoarders that we interviewed, these were important elements of the process of transition being reported. Whilst these do, of course, all sound like common features of the transition for any child, there were some important differences too. We learned about the wide range of feelings SpringBoarders endure as they go through the process of getting their bursary place. Whilst no two accounts were identical, there were some clearly significant experiences. For SpringBoarder C, the bursary was only confirmed at a very late stage and this had created significant stress and anxiety. This was followed by the shock for them in arriving in a new place after such uncertainty meant they had to adapt quickly,

> "I think it's a shock for anyone coming into a completely new school, no matter what sort of school, [you] are coming to a new place where you don't know how things work, everything's a bit different, especially boarding. And as well, I've never boarded before, so coming into a school where I was actually living there, that was a bit of a shock, but then,

although it was a, that[living there] was a big shock that would also fundamentally be the reason I settled in so quickly…

I think getting used to the way things worked as well, that was always going to be a challenge. So we had like a longer school day which I wasn't used to and things like that. And on the weekend I wasn't able to see my friends and stuff like that. So yeah, there were definitely some challenges."

For SpringBoarder A, the bursary had been shocking in a different way as they were unclear as to why they were getting the bursary or even who was providing it. They seemed almost unaware of much of the organising and administrative processes being worked on out of their awareness and had little information about what they were getting in to. The resulting emotions were powerful, "It was a lot of guilt" …and "fear", "fear of the unknown 'cause no one knew anything about boarding schools in my area." These two accounts were quite different to SpringBoarder B who had been asking their parent if they could go to their preferred school for several months following a visit; for them, the only issue was whether they would be successful in getting awarded a bursary. For others, there was clearly much more by way of parental influence in driving the process and selection of schools. The role of parents, carers or professionals seeking the bursaries is important; whilst some participants they felt very agentic in the process, others seemed to be more passively engaged and almost felt they 'just ended up' in their school without really being aware of how they got there or why the school was chosen for them.

Each SpringBoarder interviewed reported feeling homesick when they first arrived at their boarding school. They all stated there was support available if needed and none felt they were treated harshly for feeling homesick. However, there were some important yet subtle differences between SpringBoarder's experiences of homesickness. For many children whose parents decide that they will place their children in a boarding school, this does not really provide a choice for the child whereas, for a SpringBoarder, the bursary project initiative is driven by a strong commitment to placing the child at the centre because of their circumstances and home life. The boarding schools, it is considered, might be a far more stable environment for them. Consequently, their sense of homesickness was often related to the change in culture, being in a new environment, possibly being surrounded by countryside and people who look and sound different; rather than a feeling of being given or sent away from home. SpringBoarder A said,

"I mean, I think the best way to describe it is a culture shock. because it's like I was, I'd just gone to a different world…

In the, in the inner city with people who look and sound completely different to people in the countryside. So, when, when, I went up to [name of school and location], and it was, there wasn't a shop in sight. There was no street lighting. There was just some fields on fields and not many buildings and everyone spoke differently. Everyone looked differently, dressed differently to, to the last detail. Everything is different, so apart from our language I guess, it was a real culture shock and it was difficult at first."

As the above quote shows, homesickness for some SpringBoarders is also about missing a place than people. About missing a sense of 'where I am from' as much about missing a parent figure or specific people. The interviews showed that school transitions are important for multiple reasons. They can, and often do, provide the opportunity for learning about the process of change providing learning for future life transitions – such as going into higher/tertiary education, apprenticeships, work, partner/close relationships across the lifespan. Some early transitions will leave significant imprints on memory and shape behaviours, attitudes and motivation for and towards the remainder

of life. SpringBoarders said that they had felt supported through their transitions to boarding but that they were, nonetheless, not easy to go through.

Do I belong here? Searching and striving for authenticity

Having navigated and survived the transition to boarding school, SpringBoarders faced a further set of challenges. The different surroundings, environments and rule structures offered a significant contrast, often representing a place that can feel disorientating, confusing and yet, to some, was also liberating. We have labelled this theme *Do I belong here? Searching and striving for authenticity* because it captures the challenges but also represents the beginning of a process where SpringBoarders conveyed a sense of realising the opportunities available to them through the bursary.

Belonging is a key feature for wellbeing in vulnerable children (Zufferey & Tedmanson, 2022) and is also linked to successful educational transitions (Cuervo, Barakat & Turnbull, 2015). Settling in and feeling 'at home' in a boarding school can take time but once achieved students reported they were happy. SpringBoarder E said,

> "It was definitely a shock at first because I'd never been to boarding school before and it was just a very different environment. This is also my first private school, so it was like very different people to what I was used to. The boarding house took a lot of time getting used to, but now people in the house are my closest friends, so now it's like a lot. I didn't even know (laughs) it's really nice."

The feeling of being somewhere so different clearly highlights the issue of sense of belonging. Springboarder A commented on the internal struggle to feel like they belonged,

> "Psychologically, I was having these constant battles with myself. These feelings like gratitude, and as I say, like peace... a bit of freedom, but also kind of like I don't feel like I fully belong, although I have made some good friends and everything else. But there was, these are all internal battles. I wasn't. It was just like I wasn't bullied or anything like that. It was all very much internal, like an identity thing."

This quote really demonstrates what we have termed the struggle for authenticity. Adolescence is a challenging time; one where young people are striving for a sense of their true emerging identity. Going through a significant transition to boarding school at this time in life presents an environmental influence on the process of struggling and striving for authenticity. Finding a place to belong after transitioning to boarding and meeting people from very different backgrounds was tough for SpringBoarder A. They described how their feelings changed gradually over time,

> "The way I understood the world was more like this…There are almost like two types of people, those who are kind of meant to succeed or have been given the conditions where they can succeed and those who've had say um, you know, kind of a, with a lack of opportunity, or poor or with other things like. So, I think when I almost had this irrational, kind of image of people who were wealthier or of a higher class or whatever. I saw them as like, they're going to be smarter than me, or they just knew more things. Or they, you know, were just these like brainboxes, and they're at a stage that it was just unattainable to be. That was actually in the back of my mind when I was joining the school; but I learned that these are regular people. And I started to almost break down the way that I started to see the world in terms of class and wealth and all these other things.

There were those that didn't see this struggle in such successful terms. For example, SpringBoarder C recalled how he had seen peers also in the scheme struggle with not feeling they belonged and acting out their frustrations.

"I think I would say it was both slightly sad and frustrating, 'cause I mean there were these people sort of self-sabotaging one of the most important opportunities they would have had in their lives. But again, it wasn't necessarily 100% their fault because again, the staff who were dealing with them weren't perhaps aware or trained to deal with that level of instability, perhaps. You know they required perhaps delicacy, as opposed to just when they do something wrong. Tell them off and then give the detention which is the normal approach. You break the rules. You get punished. Yes, and there was no looking past the depth. You know, why did they break the rules? I think there were about seven or eight of us who joined in the first year, and I was the only boarding one who made it to the final year."

Striving for authenticity also means becoming the self that one believes themselves to be, rather than not being what we believe others want us to be *as if* it is own valued choice. It is about self-discovery and following our inner valuing. Boarding, it seemed, might in some instances allow for an opportunity to reconnect with things that are more intrinsically valued rather than taking on values from others. Parents figure significantly as a source of external valuing for young people. Striving for authenticity means being less influenced, perhaps, by the demands of parents and instead being driven by internal values. SpringBoarder D described the struggle through this process whilst boarding where we can see they described wanting to please their parent and also striving toward becoming their own self. They said that boarding,

"made me like push myself as well as just like from my mum because like she worked hard to get me this opportunity, I just don't want to lose it. I don't want to disappoint her. And at the same time...I've just like become more comfortable in myself after joining this school because I'm less influenced by like my mum and my brother"

The process of joining a new boarding school and feeling that one belongs took time. Through this process, Springboarders described the struggle for authenticity as one of coming to know themselves better, finding out who they are, what their preferences and intrinsic aspirations were. In coming to learn more about the self, SpringBoarders also described their experiences of seeing others struggle.

Access and opportunity

The SpringBoarders all expressed they had personally benefitted from access to the bursary through the benefits associated with attending an independent boarding school. The academic literature comments on the benefits of boarding school as an opportunity for increasing the life chances through enhanced social, cultural and educational (human) capital (Bass, 2014). Our analysis of the interviews supports this and suggests that SpringBoarders learn how to use their acquired social capital gained through the experience of attending an independent boarding school.

It is helpful to understand that social capital was a concept introduce by Bourdieu (1983) and refers to the extent that a person has access to a network of resources often in the form of mutually recognised acquaintance and connection, from which a person has access to 'credit' in the form of drawing from the available resource. SpringBoarders were able to and learned how to draw from the available resources within their well supplied school in the form of academic tutoring beyond the formal lesson, through smaller class sizes, from the facilities (such as for sports, craft, etc), and wider opportunities. Below are some of the ways that SpringBoarders described their experiences at school that also highlight the process of learning how to identify and draw from available social capital.

As we have noted in our previous two themes SpringBoarders have a number of challenges to navigate. To help do this successfully, they are able to draw on the network of support available to them within the school. For example, SpringBoarder D said,

> "Mrs [teacher's name] was definitely a big help because she was always checking in. As well as my housemistress at the time [house mistresses' name]. She was very helpful because she'd say whenever you need a chat, just come to my office whatever you need and she was really sweet. That definitely helped because it was kind of like, knowing that you have an adult looking after you that wasn't a teacher made it feel more homely."

SpringBoarder C also had support from the adults around their boarding school that made it known that it's okay to ask for help,

> "Well, I think I had my housemaster and house mistress so they were really helpful and within the first couple weeks they will always, you know, be speaking to new boarders, especially on Friday in the week and on the weekends and stuff like that. But then they also planned a lot of things on the weekends to help you interact with other boarders"

These examples of support for social and emotional needs are further added to by SpringBoarder B who also shows how academic support was available beyond what they previously had at other less well-resourced schools,

> "My chemistry teacher sat with me after lessons and he would just go through the maths with me over and over until it made sense and I knew it. At an Independent School, you know that the teachers would offer to do this."

The way that access and opportunity in the form of social capital and learning how to use this to enhance life chances is encapsulated in the quote below from SpringBoarder A who said,

> "you're rubbing shoulders with people who are in, whose parents may be in influential positions or who have similar ambitions. And are going to do great things when they're older potentially and, everyone has got this kind of, everyone has got big goals so being around those people is infectious."

Broadening horizons

Another way in which SpringBoarders described their experiences was in terms of the advantages of being surrounded by a wide range of people, typically from much more privileged backgrounds. SpringBoarder A said they found it helpful and informative when they had spent time with other young people whose family environment provided opportunity for learning about important things such as, being able to engage in conversations about sports, significant historical events, film or art. They also spoke of the importance about learning about managing money and knowledge about how managing personal finances was passed on through the generations within the family, "Even like the way they spent money was completely different and I find out personal finance is kind of a family taught skill".

In a slightly longer extract it is possible to see how, for one SpringBoarder, this process of learning about different forms of capital was challenging. They had to learn for themselves what is important to them in ways that differ from their prior expectations but also in ways that shows they did not have the intergenerational privilege of wealth to rely upon:

> "People in poverty don't normally learn about it [managing personal finances] or the value of reading, or when people are talking about their interests. Often, when people have an interest in like more poverty stricken areas, you almost have to justify it, in the sense of like is there a lucrative side to it? If I told my family outside about how you can make money from this, make money for that, whereas people will go off to study like Fine Arts and things;

like that was like it's not an obvious career path…So I think I learned that there's real meaning outside the financial, because when you're when you've got, actually a Kanye West lyric, which says having money isn't everything but not having it is. So when you're poor, you're always thinking about where's my next meal, where's my next pay-check, so everything becomes dominated by money. So I think in my own outlook on life, I've realized that I really, I'm not materially minded, although I thought I was when I first joined the school, I was seeing all these fancy cars and fancy clothes and think, oh I want that. But in reality, I don't. I want things which bring me meaning, I want a family, I want to make social change. I wanna, you know, have purpose."

Other ways in which learning was enhanced and cultural capital is accumulated by SpringBoarders is through the opportunity to travel as a bursary recipient. SpringBoarder C explained how being able to travel was transformative for them, seeing the world beyond their school and home and how this opened their mind to an array of potential future opportunities they may have never otherwise known or considered,

> "But the biggest one, which is my favourite, especially ones about year 10 or 11, is the trip or activities because after we come here from [country of birth], which I was too young to properly remember any of that, so I hadn't left the country before, but the school regularly did overseas trips which they partially could pay for if you're a bursary student and, SpringBoard helped with quite a few others. I remember the first trip I went on was one to Rome in Italy. And that was so amazing to experience all the other cultures. Since, I mean that wasn't the last I ended up, I think of so many Berlin, a Belgian one. Skiing in the Alps, but it was truly amazing. Because these are the sort of things I never would have done, even if I was at home just because financially.

These two SpringBoarders demonstrate how the boarding school provided them with the opportunity to learn and see the world beyond what would otherwise have been possible. The learning opportunities can be understood as a means for accumulating social and cultural capital.

Learning beyond the subject

School is often a place where young people learn about subjects that interest them or are selected for them based. However, school also provides the environment for learning about other human capabilities that provide the means for advancing life chances beyond their qualifications. The SpringBoarders we spoke to told us how they had learned more than their subjects including: learning about and developing better social and communication skills, developing character strengths and personal values, seeing their ambitions grow, they realised and connected with their autonomy and became leaders amongst other young people. These were benefits attributed by SpringBoarders to their experience of boarding.

The ability to communicate well is important for becoming more autonomous in life and in the boarding school SpringBoarders could develop these abilities. SpringBoarder F said,

> "When I was younger I had very little confidence. I had a stutter. Yeah, and I just couldn't do public speaking. I've started debate to help me with my public speaking. I'm not very good at it at the moment, (laughs) but it's helping me become more comfortable with talking in front of other people.

> I'm on student council and talking, like learning how to properly talk with people older than me, like the headmaster, people in like positions of power and not being like really, really nervous.

 Being socially skilled and able to relate to a wide range of people was also something developed through boarding. SpringBoarder C said,

"At my school, particularly, it was quite an International School. There were students from all over the world and effectively growing up with people from all different continents and stuff, I think is probably one of the most valuable things because it really teaches you perspective; and how that everyone has their own sort of cultural views. But you still have to live together. You can't argue or get annoyed at someone who's going to be sleeping in next door."

The SpringBoarders were often able to be autonomous and self-directing, taking responsibility for setting their own goals and learning about themselves. They described taking on opportunities such as drama and acting, the Duke of Edinburgh awards and other extracurricular opportunities were all reported as valued elements of boarding.

Feeding back to SpringBoard

In our interviews we asked each SpringBoarder for their views on what might have helped them when they were starting out or if they could have their time again what would have helped them more. The responses varied from 'nothing it was really excellent' to concerns for others who did not have the chance suggesting the 'bursary schemes needed to be more widely known about and advertised'. There were some other proposals suggested too. SpringBoarder A, for instance, suggested that whilst it is understandable that schools do not want to make bursary recipients stand out as being different, there are times when being connected to other bursary holders within the school would have been helpful. This quote captures the sentiment,

"I feel like when I first, so when I first started talking about it to people, like telling people where I was from and how I got here, because people really didn't know until lower sixth. Every time I spoke about it, I was this is the best thing in the world. This is like I was really selling it and because I was so happy at what happened and don't get me wrong. It was life changing and I'm still very, very, grateful for what happened, 100% but, I think as I've left and as I'm kind of learning more. I'm learning to critique it a bit as well, and I feel like. That's why I've been really thinking about recently, like what could have been done better and? I don't know like. The first thought that comes to mind is when I left school I was told that there were other SpringBoarders in the school and I had no idea. I was the first one at [name of school] but when I was in like lower sixth there were people in lower years who were there and I would have loved to meet them."

There is and was good support for these SpringBoarders in their boarding schools. Throughout the interviews, we picked up on some factors that might also be useful for SpringBoard and schools to consider. For example, at times, the interviews stated that there might have been more understanding and empathic approaches to helping SpringBoarders making the transitions to boarding, be more flexible when responding to minor rule breaking and doing more to connect bursary recipients to others like them studying within the school.

Interview Study 2 – key informant perspectives

We also conducted a series of interviews with key informants (KIs) to develop an in-depth understanding and insight into the experiences of staff working within the BEP programme bursary project. The intention at this stage of our research was to gather information to inform the independent evaluation pertaining but not limited to experiences, perceptions and views of the benefits as well as drawbacks and, the project's relevance for the communities and schools in which they work; identifying expectations of any barriers and challenges associated with the recruitment, placement and support of children and recommendations for overcoming these.

The participants we recruited represented a range of staff working within independent boarding schools, charities working with both SpringBoard and the independent boarding schools, virtual schools, and staff within the Royal National Children's SpringBoard Foundation. In total, six staff members were interviewed. The analysis of interviews was once again carried out using Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis. On this occasion, we used two stages of analysis. First, we repeated the same process as for the SpringBoarder analysis by inductively generating themes. Second, we conducted a deductive analysis. The deductive approach is described in more detail below.

Having identified a set of theme through the indicative thematic analysis, one of the researchers used the SpringBoard Broadening Educational Pathway Programme Initiation Document to identify SpringBoard's own 'success criteria' for operationalising the bursary scheme and sets out its processes and stages for implementing the scheme. In addition to this, the SpringBoard approach to addressing previously identified weaknesses in delivering a boarding school bursary scheme was highlighted as informing the design of and programme delivery. These two features of the SpringBoard approach were then used to conduct a deductive thematic analysis. We found that the inductive analysis provided a wide range of thematic areas from which we generated 11 main themes. We then analysed these inductively generated themes to conduct the deductive thematic analysis; using the SpringBoard success criteria provided three overarching themes within which we could nest those inductively generated findings. Thus providing a robust and trustworthy analysis of the interview data whilst building in a process analysis and evaluation of how the bursary scheme was being implemented.

Presentation of key themes

We identified 3 main themes generated through a deductive approach that are mapped directly to the SpringBoard BEP 'success criteria' identified in the *BEP for LAVC Programme Initiation Document*. These three main themes contain 11 nested themes that were generated through the inductive approach. Table 2 below shows both the main themes and nested themes.

Main Themes generated using deductive approach	Nested sub-themes generated through inductive approach
Inputs	*Relationships and relational working* *Referrals* *Assessment* *SpringBoard as a partner*
Outputs	*Fitting in and transitions* *Emotional labour* *Families*
Outcomes	*Learning for the whole person* *Academic success* *Human Capital* *Aspirations*

Inputs

The first theme identified 'Inputs' and was generated as a deductive theme taken from the SpringBoard success criteria with four nested inductively generated sub-themes that were: Relationships and relational working, Referrals, Assessment and, SpringBoard as a partner. Each of these is expanded upon below and we incorporate an evaluation in the analysis of the data rather than limiting this to a purely descriptive presentation of the interview data.

Relationships and relational working

This sub-theme was represented by three factors common across all interviews. These were, partnerships, processes and attitudes. Partnerships referred to building relationships between schools and local authorities including with the virtual school in the area, working with and building relationships with foster carers, families, social workers and other relevant professionals. Processes represented the aim of creating safety through the process of both identifying the future SpringBoarders and of the appropriate schools. This was achieved by being consistent and creating a sense of a caring stable environment. Attitudes referred to being caring, compassionate and showing acceptance of the child, their family and their circumstances by building and being in empathic relationships whatever role the professional occupied.

Referrals

This sub-theme showed how different schools and agencies working with SpringBoard worked together to identify the right child for the scheme. This was clear evidence of implementing the learning from previous less successful schemes identified by Murphy et al (2020). Referrals were often facilitated through different routes including those directly from the family or through the virtual school and local authority. Whilst the relationships were clearly evolving and partnership working was evident, schools were able to be autonomous in how they engaged with their local community to identify looked after children and this was valued by schools as a form of good practice on the part of SpringBoard. Previous research by Murphy et al (2020) also highlighted the importance of finding the right school, for the right child at the right time and this finding suggests that SpringBoard are implementing learning in the scheme.

Assessment

This sub-theme showed that, as part of the identification of appropriate looked after children, a rigorous range of tasks and processes are involved. First and foremost, participants reflected on their own individual approaches which were remarkably similar across different institutions. Perhaps surprisingly, each interviewee reported they had relied on personal feelings, at the level of gut responses to inform decisions about making assessments of the suitability of a child for the programme. A combination of perception of what is required and experience in the role intersects with experiences from the personal past life of the professional, often grounded in their own family life or educational journey, to inform the decision making process. This linked closely to relationships as a theme; all the staff involved indicated their approach was deeply relational as a method of assessment and selection of children for the scheme. These personal and visceral processes were built upon by more explicit and concrete methods such as, current academic achievement. Academic ability was considered important but was clearly not the lone criteria. Entrance exams, interviews with staff in schools and with SpringBoard were always conducted. Some common characteristics that appear to be looked for in the children were that the child was perceived as being 'willing to engage' and 'have a go at things' being able to 'adapt to the boarding environment'. There was a recognition that adjusting to boarding was not easy for the children, especially those from more unsettled backgrounds and the home visit would often be an important step for getting to understand the child more fully.

SpringBoard as a partner

This final sub-theme was defined by statements referring to the connection between the schools, local authorities, children and families and SpringBoard. In our interviews, when asked about partnership working with SpringBoard, participants shared statements such as 'they just get it' and 'they're un-shockable, you can tell them anything'. Participants referred to the knowledge and experience that SpringBoard brings to the process of finding the right child for the programme whilst others acknowledged that the schools feel they are permitted a high degree of autonomy in how they work with the child once the child is placed and settled. The support provided by SpringBoard was also recognised at every stage saying 'they're always there if we need them'.

Outputs

SpringBoard success criteria identified and specified 'outputs'. Outputs in the success criteria were related to the matching of looked after children to available places at independent day or boarding schools that best suited their needs and interests and also providing support and guidance to ensure the child thrives within their placement. This theme has three of our inductively generated sub-themes nested within it, these were Fitting-in and transitions, Emotional labour and, Families.

Fitting in and transitions

The participants interviewed all acknowledged how difficult the transition to boarding can be for a looked after child and, all participants thought that SpringBoard did an excellent job to help schools, children and their families to navigate this process delicately. Five of the six participants were all able to describe instances and examples in their work showing how they approached the task of changing negative perceptions of boarding schools that many people hold in order to support the family through the child's transition into boarding. Participants were aligned in agreement with the need to break down barriers between independent schools and the wider public and specifically within the local communities in which they are often situated.

When considering a bursary placement, there are many challenges to be faced and it is an emotional time. This was recognised as being hard for families especially when they first bring a child into the school. The culture of some independent schools is different as one participant said, 'we have oil paintings hanging on the walls here – that's intimidating for some visitors'. Similarly, the same participant said we use 'different language and have different terminology that some children will never have heard or understand. You know we have "prep" which basically is just homework'. The cultural differences, the physical buildings and atmosphere around the school were all important features to be discussed, explained and introduced to new families approaching the schools for the first time.

Emotional labour

The emotional labour involved for staff supporting looked after children who were new to boarding was evident across all interviews. Emotional labour was seen as part of an entire 'approach' to the work involved when matching a child and is was captured partly in the first theme of relationships. However, we are giving this theme further treatment as some specific accounts of the emotional work were particularly notable. First, it is important to note that all of the staff we interviewed were emotionally dedicated to providing a caring, safe, stable and consistent environment for the children receiving bursaries. Interviewees expressed genuine emotion when reflecting on instances when the placement had not work out as planned.

The emotional labour was also recognised as being difficult for teachers in schools who feel out of their depth in supporting the young people who have often experienced very challenging personal events in their life prior to coming to a boarding school. The need to continue to support teachers to develop their skills was identified as an important learning edge for many participants (we pick this up again in the section below on human capital). It was noted that teachers need support to develop

their emotional capacity for offering support to others. Having SpringBoard to call upon helped the teachers and staff to grow in their confidence to contain and hold increasing levels of distress and empathically support children to process their distress without affecting behaviour negatively. Similarly, connections between the school, local authorities and social workers was important and valued in being able to ask questions and get information that alleviated emotional distress amongst school staff. One participant reported how sometimes issues relating to a child that can seem 'really big in the context of a boarding school can, easily, be put into perspective with a few minutes on the phone to a social worker.' Supportive and partnership working enabled school staff to develop their capacity for supporting a vulnerable child. SpringBoard's support added to this and the training to support schools was valued and could be developed further.

There were substantial evidence of a high level of ongoing year-round support provided to the children once they had started at the school. It was recognised that it is important for children to have exposure to a family environment; one school described the role of house parents and the extensive resources available through the pastoral support team that children can access at any time.

Families

The role of supporting families as part of the bursary scheme is integral; as it is often at times when families are in difficulty that children are drawn to access the bursary. The bursary scheme was reported as being able to provide support for families crucial to enabling the individual child to gain the most out of the opportunity. This additional social benefit is important and requires particular attention. One teacher said they actually help 'keep families together' by offering a bursary place.

Bringing the family alongside during the process of assessment and then in the transition into the school was very important. One participant in a pastoral role at a boarding school indicated about 90% of their working time dedicated to supporting the bursary children, was actually spent supporting the child through support directed towards the wider family. The relationship with the main carer was considered very important. Sometimes, parents found their child leaving home so difficult they would try to hold the child back or want them to come home after they had gone to the boarding school. This would often be a stressful time for the child and pastoral staff would support the child. The schools that SpringBoard have identified for their partnerships all have to meet specific accreditation standards including a requirement to provide excellent pastoral support for these vulnerable children.

Outcomes

A key success criteria for the SpringBoard scheme is to evaluate the 'outcomes' delivered through the BEP bursary funds. One of the central aims of this criteria is to deliver on 'life transforming outcomes' that can be evidenced by academic progress and attainment, raised aspirations and broadened horizons, enhanced employability prospects and improved social skills, resilience, self-confidence and wellbeing. Some of these elements of the criteria will be assessed through other aspects of our evaluation. Others can be mapped by our nested inductive sub-themes of Learning for the whole person, Academic success, Human Capital and Aspirations.

Learning for the whole person

Where pastoral care was considered an emotional challenge for the staff and teachers involved, the quality of pastoral care provided meant that the looked after and vulnerable children were being cared for in emotional, psychological and physical ways. The care was holistic. The children were given access to pastoral staff and could be in contact with SpringBoard staff if required whenever needed. This support was extended year-round ensuring the young person was not left to fend for themselves during the holidays when the usual structure of their boarding life was removed. Whilst

academic success was considered important, it was also set in context of what the individual child's goals were. Children got the chance to learn about and develop aspects of themselves that they otherwise would not. In one example, a looked after child was attending an independent day school. The interviewee, working in a virtual school, reported how the child was able to express himself in ways that were never going to be given opportunity in his state school; in the independent he found other children with similar interests. Another example referred to having interests in science or literature where children realised that their subjects could also become their passions. Learning was more than merely the reception of information – it was supported to become part of who they are not just what they know. The nature of education seemed to be perceived differently for those children attending a boarding school to a state school. It was to take on a less instrumental role in the child's life.

The opportunities from enrichment was considered a real benefit. This was highlighted through the wide range of sports, the facilities available, the scope of inclusivity by having an a greater number of teams around the child were all considered as uniquely available within the independent boarding school setting compared to what the child would otherwise have available through the state sector.

Academic success

Academic success was carefully presented by all participants interviewed as important but never as the only goal and often not as the most important outcome. For example, staff in schools were keen to point out that academic success would come from taking care of the children in a more holistic way. This criteria is elaborated more in other sections of this report and specifically in the quantitative analysis of GCSE results.

Human Capital

Human capital represents those attributes and capabilities that a young person develops, acquires and through their experiences at their school flourishes. Whilst academic success is important, developing a wide range of life and social skills was considered essential and was reported as being available to children through the scheme. For example, children learnt how to take responsibility, work within the boundaries of a structured day, they took up new hobbies and learnt the qualities of discipline in applying themselves to learning instruments, playing different sports. Staff believed that the children learn to be themselves and develop their potential.

The human capital acquired through attending a boarding school was considered to give the child a set of personal skills and characteristics they can transfer into a range of life circumstances including interviews, attending social events going to university or becoming an ambassador for the scheme or participating in the other events offered by SpringBoard. One school reported on their increasing integration within the local community. Students from their schools were involved in community work, supporting local charities and supporting other local vulnerable children through activities at their school. The perceived social benefits of this are very evident to the staff involved.

Aspirations

Becoming a person with aspiration is a key success criteria for the scheme. School staff were clear that the bursary opportunities were able to 'make things happen' for the children that could give them the sense of achievement and, of being able to believe in themselves. At one school there was a message that 'our children are encouraged to look up' and this was considered to be something that looked after children had to learn as they often arrived with lower confidence and less self-belief than their peers. This theme has been expanded on significantly in the interviews with the young SpringBoarders themselves.

Summary

To summarise the evaluation to this point, it appears a growing body of evidence is emerging that supports the work being done by SpringBoard in the implementation of the BEP scheme. This has been reflected in the interviews with SoringBoarders and the staff from a range of organisations who spoke in an overwhelmingly positive way about SpringBoard. We heard how the high degree of autonomy given to schools, the close and deeply relational approach that SpringBoard brings to this work, is significant in the success reported in our interviews.

Conclusion

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