



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

Integrated Areas Programme: Schools Linking Evaluation

Strand Report



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Glossary of terms

Term	Definition
DLUHC	The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The government department responsible for creating great places to live and work, and to give more power to local people to shape what happens in their area.
IAP	Integration Area Programme. A DLUHC programme aiming to improve community cohesion involving various interventions including Community Ambassadors, Community Conversations and Schools Linking.
Schools Linking	Schools Linking is a national programme that aims to promote integration and cohesion by facilitating social mixing between pupils in schools within areas that have been identified as places with segregated communities. It is delivered by The Linking Network through its network of facilitators.
The Linking Network (TLN)	The Linking Network (TLN) charity delivers the Schools Linking programme across England through its network of facilitators.
Linking teachers	Teachers that participated in the Schools Linking programme in 2020/21
Non-Linking teachers	Teachers that did not participate in the Schools Linking programme in 2020/21 (i.e. the comparison group, of non-Linking teachers).

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), now the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), launched the Integration Area Programme (IAP) in 2019, trialling a new localised approach to social integration in five Local Authorities (LAs). This programme was borne out of the Integrated Communities Strategy green paper, published in March 2018, which outlined the government's vision for building strong integrated communities where people – whatever their background – live, work, learn and socialise together, based on shared rights, responsibilities, and opportunities.

As part of the IAP, Local Authorities (LAs) collaborated with the Linking Network (TLN) to promote integration and cohesion by facilitating social mixing between pupils in schools within areas that have been identified as places with segregated communities (as discussed in Chapter 1). The planned IAP-related outcomes for the Schools Linking programme were for linking activities to:

- Enable meaningful social mixing between young people in different schools
- Improve pupils' willingness to meet different types of young people
- Improve pupils' confidence in meeting young people of different ethnicities religions and economic background
- Improve pupils' understanding of different races, religions and cultures
- Improve pupils' awareness of the importance of respecting other people.

DLUHC (then MHCLG) commissioned IFF Research to carry out an independent evaluation of the implementation and impact of Schools Linking in four IAP areas: Bradford, Blackburn with Darwen, Peterborough, and Walsall, between 2019 and 2021. Due to various issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic, Schools Linking was only delivered in one of these areas during 2020/21 (Bradford). The evaluation was therefore extended to include Linking activities in non-IAP areas, as there were no specific differences to the delivery of Schools Linking in the IAP areas compared to schools in non-IAP areas. The evaluation draws on surveys of participating teachers, before and after Schools Linking took place, qualitative depth interviews with participating teachers, and a comparison survey of teachers in schools that were not participating in Schools Linking.

Schools Linking Programme

The Schools Linking approach

The Linking Network (TLN) charity has been delivering the Schools Linking programme through its network of facilitators across English schools since 2007. The Integration Area Programme funding supported the extension of the programme to schools not yet involved in IAP areas, and one IAP area (Peterborough) not previously involved in the programme.

Schools Linking aims to promote integration and cohesion by facilitating social mixing between pupils in schools within areas that have been identified as places with segregated communities. Schools Linking operates in, and is open to, all types of primary and secondary schools who wish to take part, including special schools. A range of school types participate including local authority, community independent, and free schools, and academies.

The programme takes place within an academic year and in a typical year, prior to COVID-19, consists of three or four structured visits between paired school classes. Headteachers register their interest in Linking by contacting the Linking Network's facilitator in their local area. A local facilitator organises and oversees the connecting pairs of schools, with respect to each school's priorities and reasons for signing up to Linking. Teachers attend training sessions, before Linking begins, to introduce them to the aims of the programme, the broad structure of Schools Linking, and to support them on how to facilitate Linking sessions. Schools Linking typically consists of two paired classes involving children of the same year group.

Key findings

Outcomes

The academic year 2020/21 has been a challenging one for schools and pupils. Schools Linking activity has been significantly reduced or put on hold, and the nature of activities has had to change to reflect COVID-19-related restrictions, moving from face-to-face to virtual.

Despite the challenges in delivering Schools Linking activities in 2020/21, the majority of primary Linking teachers who took part in the evaluation surveys were positive about the impact it had on their pupils, based on self-reported measures. Primary Linking teachers were positive about the programme's effects on many IAP-related outcome areas:

- Around 8 in 10 (83%) primary Linking teachers felt their pupils respected other young people from different backgrounds more after taking part in Schools Linking.
- Four-fifths (79%) of primary Linking teachers felt their pupils felt more sense of belonging to the local area.
- Four-fifths (79%) of primary Linking teachers felt their pupils felt more comfortable talking to young people from different backgrounds about what makes them similar and what makes them different.
- Two-thirds (65%) of primary Linking teachers perceived their pupils to be more comfortable talking to young people who have views they disagree with.
- Three-quarters (75%) of primary teachers felt that their pupils had had more opportunities to mix (including virtually) with young people from different backgrounds.
- Around 7 in 10 (71%) primary teachers felt that their pupils were more motivated to work with young people in the local area to improve the neighbourhood.

Analysis of outcome measures pre- and post-Linking also identified positive results. The teachers completing the survey at the end of the programme were consistently more likely to rate their pupils' confidence in mixing, and their understanding of shared similarities with people from different backgrounds to them, more highly than the teachers at the baseline. The following measures showed significantly higher ratings by the end of the Linking programme compared to the baseline:

- The extent to which teachers felt their pupils were interested in other cultures (increasing from 64% at baseline to 75% by programme end).
- How confident teachers felt their pupils were in mixing with people from different backgrounds, particularly pupils from a different religion (which increased from 52% to 72%) and locality (which increased from 50% to 69%).
- The extent to which teachers felt their pupils are aware of similarities between themselves and others from different backgrounds to them, increasing from 23% to 72%.
- The extent to which teachers felt their pupils assume that others from different backgrounds and places are the same as them, increasing from 21% to 42%.
- Teachers' perception of their pupils' opportunities to mix with people from different backgrounds, increasing from 12% to 48%.
- The extent to which teachers thought their pupils were able to reflect on similarities and differences between themselves and others, increasing from 32% to 61%.

These findings complement other evaluation evidence about the positive benefits of Schools Linking within participating schools, from teachers' self-reported reflections and the qualitative research.

However, evidence about the impact of Schools Linking was less conclusive when comparing the attitudes and perceptions of participating teachers at the end of the school year, to a comparison group of teachers who did not take part in Linking. There were no significant differences between teachers' perceptions of how interested pupils were about learning about people from other cultures, or in teachers' ratings of their pupils' awareness of similarities between themselves and others from different backgrounds to them. Teachers in the comparison group rated their pupils more confident to mix with others from different backgrounds to them (78% rated pupils as a five or four, the highest ratings), than teachers who had taken part in Schools Linking (among whom 64% rated pupils as a five or four). Teachers from the comparison group were also more positive that their pupils had opportunities to mix with people from different backgrounds to them. This may be because the non-Linking schools were more mixed in terms of pupil demographics, and therefore had more opportunities to mix with pupils who are different to them (as reported by their teachers); because social mixing is more common in some geographical areas than others; or may reflect other differences between the schools or teachers which are not observable from the survey.

Conclusions

The impact of Schools Linking in 2020/21 was affected by changes introduced as a result of COVID-19 restrictions and increased pressures within schools, with a move from face-to-face to virtual interactions and less time available for Schools Linking activities. Teachers who had also taken part in Schools Linking in previous years reported that they preferred some element of face-to-face interaction over a virtual-only approach. However, the findings suggest that even a limited programme of Schools Linking activities, carried out online, has a positive effect on pupils and helped to support IAP related outcomes in participating schools, particularly improving pupils' confidence in meeting young people of different ethnicities, religions and economic backgrounds; and improving pupils' understanding of different races, religions and cultures. Linking also had a positive influence on young people's sense of belonging to the local area.

Evidence from the pre- and post-Linking analysis shows significant positive impacts within participating schools, in terms of increased interest in other cultures; confidence in social mixing, particularly meeting people from different religions and localities; and increased awareness and understanding of people from different backgrounds to themselves.

For the primary teachers whose pupils successfully Linked with another class, the overall consensus in the qualitative interviews was that Schools Linking contributed to pupils becoming more confident with interacting with other young people of different ethnicities, religions and economic backgrounds.

However, it is worth noting that the Schools Linking teachers reported less positive outcomes than teachers in comparison schools, in terms of confidence in social mixing. This suggests that Schools Linking improves pupils' outcomes, but does not raise them to the level seen in some other similar schools. It is difficult to draw firm conclusions from comparisons between the Linking and non-Linking teachers, due to the limited profile information on their schools and the lack of a baseline for the comparison group. The lower ratings reported by teachers in Linking schools do indicate that Schools Linking is being targeted at schools where there is greater need for this type of intervention, and suggest a need for sustained involvement in the programme, or similar activities. Further evaluation would be useful to see if these metrics improve over more time than an academic year. The reasons for these differences could perhaps be explored in more detail in future, through an assessment of which factors encourage schools to find out more about and then participate in the Schools Linking programmes.

1. Introduction

1.1 Integrated Communities Strategy and the Integration Area Programme

The Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper¹, published in March 2018, outlined the government's vision for building strong integrated communities where people – whatever their background – live, work, learn and socialise together, based on shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities. The Government highlights that integration is the responsibility of all communities and leads to improved health, education and employment outcomes. The paper outlined eight themes for achieving this vision and the government's Action Plan², published in February 2019, updated on progress for delivering this vision.

As part of the strategy, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) launched the Integration Area Programme (IAP)³, trialling a new localised approach to integration in five local authorities (Blackburn with Darwen, Bradford, Peterborough, Walsall and Waltham Forest). In addition to using an evidence-based approach to identifying areas likely to benefit from the programme, DLUHC chose to work with these local authorities because they had already demonstrated a keen grasp of the challenges they face and had used evidence to inform how to address local needs. IFF Research was commissioned to undertake a national evaluation of the IAP, to gather learning and to gauge the impact of the interventions implemented in the participating areas.

Each area produced a locally focussed integration strategy, outlining the activity they will take to create stronger, more-integrated communities in their local area. The area-specific integration challenges identified in their strategies are summarised below:

- *Blackburn with Darwen*⁴ – Their 2018-2021 strategy states there are people of different ethnicities and religions living in segregated areas of the borough, and this can hinder building positive relationships within their community. This segregation (groups of people existing separately and not mixing) is reflected in some schools and sections of their local economy.
- *Bradford*⁵ – Their 2018-2023 strategy states local schools are not as mixed or diverse as the Council knows it can be to bring about benefits of social mixing; the local authority has the third highest level of residential segregation in England; economic participation is lower than the average, with women's participation a

¹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/696993/Integrated_Communities_Strategy.pdf

²https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/778045/Integrated_Communities_Strategy_Govt_Action_Plan.pdf

³ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/integration-area-programme>

⁴ <https://theshuttle.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Blackburn-with-Darwen-Integration-Area-Strategy-Final-1.pdf>

⁵ <https://bdp.bradford.gov.uk/media/1363/stronger-communities-together-strategy.pdf>

particular challenge; lack of English proficiency; low democratic participation in parts of the District; and a lack of meaningful social mixing across the District.

- *Walsall*⁶ – Their 2019-2021 strategy states the number of residents from minority ethnic groups and from Central and Eastern Europe settling in the borough has risen in the last two decades. The borough also welcomes asylum-seekers and refugees as part of the asylum dispersal system.
- *Peterborough*⁷ – A rapidly growing city due to migration has brought unique challenges, amongst opportunities. Challenges include widening gaps in life expectancy between the least and most deprived areas and net international immigration higher than the regional or national average. Peterborough has the fourth highest increase in England in the proportion of non-British pupils and its pupils are more than twice as likely to speak English as an additional language compared to the national average. Social exclusion has also persisted for some ethnic minority groups and poorer White British communities.

IFF and DLUHC independently reviewed the strategies then collated and mapped the interventions; those that were common across local authorities became the focus of evaluation. For Schools Linking, two classes in different primary or secondary schools are linked based on differences in a range of characteristics, like ethnicity, faith and belief and free school meals uptake. Teachers of linked classes are trained, and their classes take part in three to four linking activities. In the IAP areas, the Linking Network runs the programme in Bradford, and in Blackburn with Darwen, Peterborough, and Walsall, the programme is run by the local authority (LA), with the support of the Linking Network.

1.2 Schools Linking Programme

The Schools Linking approach

The Linking Network (TLN) charity has been delivering the Schools Linking programme through its network of facilitators across England since 2007. The Integration Area Programme funding supported the extension of the programme to schools and one area (Peterborough) not previously involved in the programme. There were no planned changes to the delivery of Schools Linking in the IAP areas compared to schools in non-IAP areas.

Schools Linking aims to promote integration and cohesion by facilitating social mixing between pupils in schools within areas that have been identified as places with segregated communities. Schools Linking operates in, and is open to, all types of primary and secondary schools who wish to take part, including special schools. A range of school types participate including local authority, community independent, free schools and academies.

The programme takes place within an academic year and in a typical year, prior to COVID-19, consists of three or four structured visits between paired school classes. Headteachers

⁶ https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/ffd8a6_a4bdd91b47eb47f29d4c17e6764be14f.pdf

⁷ <https://democracy.peterborough.gov.uk/documents/s39328/6.%20Appendix%201%20-%20Interim%20Integrated%20Communities%20Strategy%20-%20Belonging%20Together.pdf>

register their interest in Linking by contacting the Linking Network's facilitator in their local area. A local facilitator organises and oversees the connecting pairs of schools, with respect to each school's priorities and reasons for signing up to Linking. Teachers attend training sessions before Linking begins, to introduce them to the aims of the programme, the broad structure of Schools Linking, and to support them on how to facilitate Linking sessions.

Schools Linking typically consists of two paired classes involving children of the same year group.

The typical structure of Schools Linking is summarised below.

- Before the first session, classes exchange photographs, names and identity work linked to the PSHE, Citizenship and English Curriculums.
- The first session takes place in a neutral venue in the local area. The neutral venue varies within and by area: examples include a museum, an art gallery or a football club. Facilitating teachers access age-specific resources from The Linking Network⁸ and lead the sessions to support social mixing amongst pupils.
- The second and third sessions take place in each of the schools.
- Between sessions, teachers are encouraged to utilise resources to maintain contact between classes, such as writing to each other or sending videos.
- A celebration event may also be held, after the final Linking session.

This approach had to be rapidly adapted during the 2020/21 academic year, due to the impact of COVID-19 on schools (discussed in further detail in Chapter 2).

Schools Linking programme structure

There are three phases to the Schools Linking programme, spanning the academic year. Pupils are guided to explore the following themes of identity, diversity, community and social cohesion:

- Phase 1: Who am I? Who are we?
- Phase 2: Where do we live? How do we all live together?
- Phase 3: Celebration and goodbyes

In 2020/21, the programme was modified so that it could be delivered virtually.

Phase 1

During Phase 1, Linking classes explore aspects of their own identity, and discover and explore the identities of the children in the Linked class. There is a focus on discovering similarities within and between Linked classes, such as aspects of identity, family, hobbies, culture, as well as acknowledging and celebrating differences. Classes are encouraged to share work around identity to start to build relationships and a sense of togetherness.

⁸ <https://thelinkingnetwork.org.uk/what-we-do/school-linking/>

Classes then reflect on the identity work they receive, developing skills of enquiry, reflection and empathy.

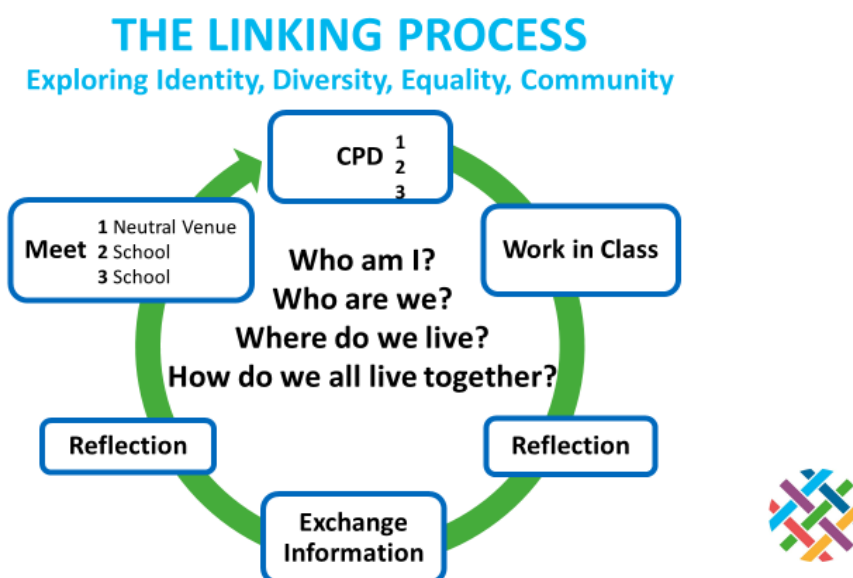
Phase 2

In Phase 2, Linked classes explore and appreciate the place and community where they live including the natural world. There is a focus on building and developing connections with the Linked class, and wider community, or environment. Together, Linked classes are encouraged to think about the things they care about and plan social actions they can take to make changes for the better in their school, community and the wider world.

Phase 3

Phase 3 provides Linked classes with an opportunity to reflect on and celebrate the year's linking activities, to consolidate what has been discovered and learned throughout the year. Phase 3 concludes with an opportunity to say goodbye (virtually) to the Linked class. This Schools Linking programme approach and structure is illustrated in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1 The Schools Linking Programme process⁹



Aims of the Schools Linking programme

The overarching aim of the Schools Linking programme is to build common ground between pupils from schools with different demographic backgrounds, providing opportunities for pupils to mix with children they may not otherwise meet within their local communities or beyond. Participating schools are diverse in terms of geography, ethnic, religious and socio-economic backgrounds of the communities in which they teach.

TLN aims to achieve the following outcomes for pupils through Schools Linking:

- To develop and deepen children and young people's knowledge and understanding of identity/ies, diversity, equality and community.

⁹ CPD stands for continuous professional development.

- To develop skills of enquiry, critical thinking, reflection and communication.
- To develop trust, empathy, awareness and respect.
- To provide opportunities for children and young people to meet, build relationships, work together and contribute to the wider community.
- To provide opportunities for adults who work with children and young people to share good practice, increase understanding of the issues of identity and community in their districts and to broaden perspectives.

2. Evaluation aims and methodology

2.1 Integration Areas Programme evaluation aims

The overarching Integration Areas Programme (IAP) evaluation aimed to understand the impact of the interventions across areas and share transferable learning about what works to improve integration. Specifically, the national evaluation aimed to:

1. Measure the profile of locally-delivered events or activities and their participants;
2. Measure outcomes of local intervention approaches; and to a lesser extent
3. Learn lessons about factors influencing local event delivery.

There are three strands to the overall IAP evaluation, linked to three interventions: Community Conversations, Community Ambassadors and Schools Linking. Common outcomes were identified across the IAP interventions, although not all are relevant or measured for every intervention.

The outcomes that the national evaluation aims to measure as a whole, are as follows:

1. Increased levels of meaningful social mixing between communities
2. Reduced isolation / loneliness
3. Feeling more at ease with and / or trusting people from different backgrounds
4. Understanding and respecting differences between people from other backgrounds
5. Improved sense of safety in the community
6. Increased feeling of empowerment to make positive change in the community
7. Reduced indicators of prejudicial views
8. Increased sense of comfort communicating with different groups
9. Identifying shared values and vision
10. Increase in spaces seen as shared
11. Improved perception that people from different backgrounds get along well in your area
12. Reduced levels of anti-social behaviour in the areas targeted by the interventions
13. Improved perception of whether hate crime/community tensions are a problem in the local area
14. Improved appreciation of the need to respect differences in the local area

Across all strands of the IAP evaluations, a mixed-methods design was implemented. The design aimed to assess programme impact through pre- and post-intervention surveys with beneficiaries and delivery staff, in addition to qualitative interviews to understand how and why impacts occurred.

2.2 Schools Linking evaluation aims

The Schools Linking evaluation aimed to measure the extent to which the IAP outcomes had been met in respect to Schools Linking activities, in four IAP areas: Blackburn with Darwen, Bradford, Peterborough, and Walsall. This evaluation evidence would build on the

existing evidence base around Schools Linking^{10,11}. In the original design, the overarching aims for the evaluation of the Schools Linking Programme in participating IAP areas were therefore to:

1. Measure five key IAP-related outcomes of linking activities, including:
 - a) Do linking activities enable meaningful social mixing between young people in different schools?
 - b) Do linking activities improve pupils' willingness to meet different types of young people?
 - c) Do linking activities improve pupils' confidence in meeting young people of different ethnicities, religions and economic background?
 - d) Do linking activities improve pupils' understanding of different races, religions and cultures?
 - e) Do linking activities improve pupils' awareness of the importance of respecting other people?
2. Measure the profile of linking activities and participating teachers and pupils;
3. Understand how the types of activities, the settings in which they take place and how they are delivered affect the outcomes. This includes any suggestions from teachers in terms of future delivery.

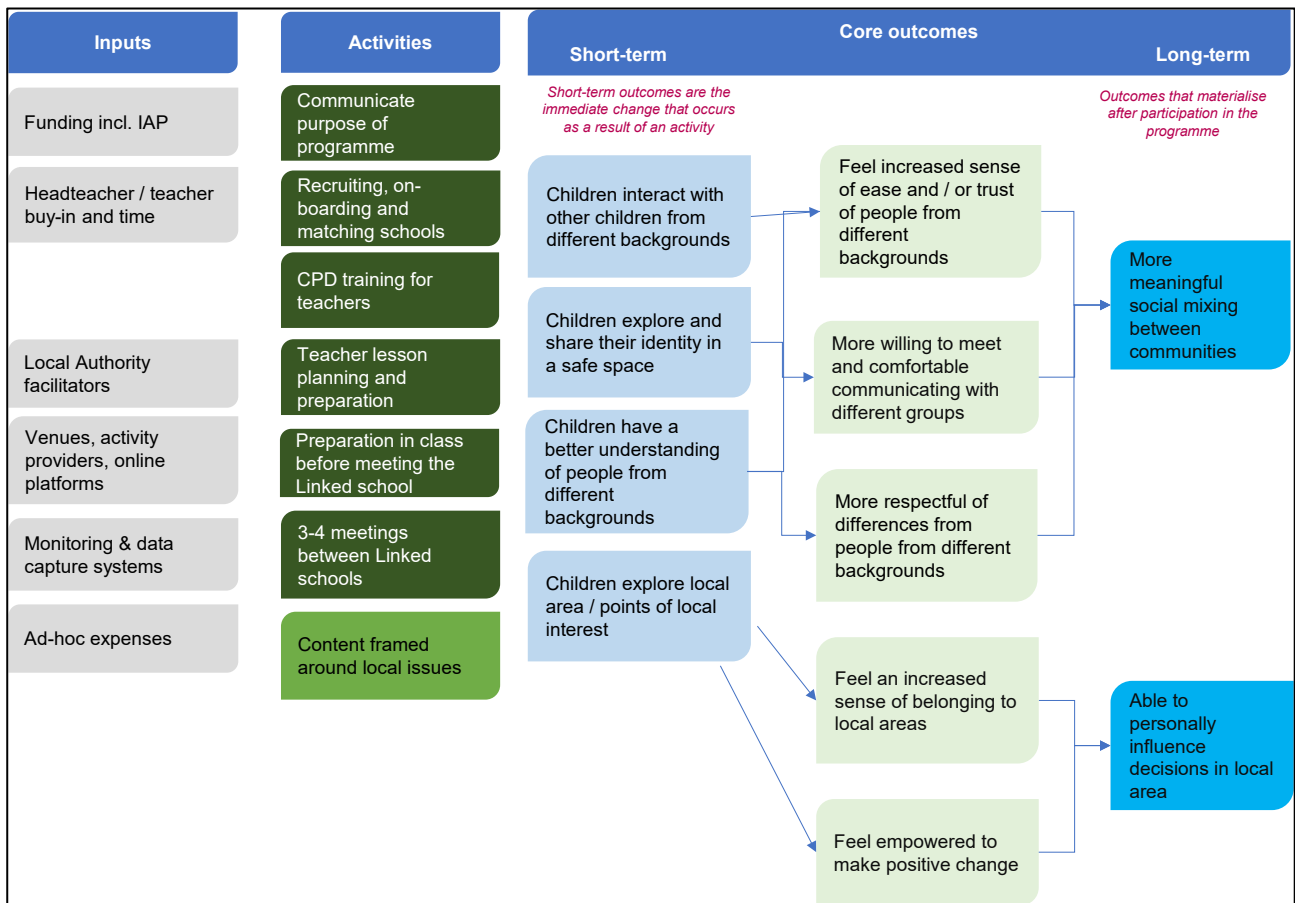
The high-level logic model (Figure 2.1) below summarises how the activities undertaken as part of the Schools Linking programme are expected to lead to some of the relevant outcomes listed above. For example, it shows how Linking activities are designed to support teachers to enable improved interaction between pupils from different backgrounds, leading to increased ease and trust in meeting with people from different backgrounds, more willingness to communicate with and understand people from different backgrounds, greater understanding of what makes people similar and different (and more respect for differences), and increased sense of local belonging.

¹⁰ Linking and Social Cohesion, An Evaluation of The Linking Network's School Linking National Programme, Chris Shannahan, Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University, July 2018

¹¹ Kerr, D. et al. (2011) Evaluation of the School Linking network: Final report, Research report DFE-RR090, National Foundation for Educational Research. Available at:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/182402/DFE-RR090.pdf

Figure 2.1: Schools Linking Logic Model

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2.3 Schools Linking: original evaluation methodology

In the original Schools Linking evaluation design, teachers and secondary school pupils taking part in Linking were due to complete a baseline survey before starting the first Linking activity and a follow-up survey after the final Linking activity. Teachers' and pupils' responses between the baseline and follow-up surveys would be linked using a unique identifier, so that change over time could be detected and measured. This approach was also planned for a comparison group of teachers and secondary school pupils not participating in Schools Linking.

As a result of the severe impacts of COVID-19 on the delivery of Schools Linking within the IAP areas, the evaluation scope was broadened to include teachers in all areas participating in Schools Linking in 2020/21. The evaluation therefore aimed to look at these aims in relation to all areas participating in Linking, and not limited to IAP areas as per the original evaluation design.

The impact of COVID-19 on the delivery of Schools Linking, and its effect on the evaluation methodology is discussed further in Appendix B.

2.4 Schools Linking: revised evaluation methodology

Given the agreed broader scope to include all areas in England participating in Schools Linking in 2020/21, the evaluation methodology was revised to the following:

- An online survey of teachers who had participated in Linking¹²,
- An online comparison survey of teachers who had not participated in Linking
- A small number of qualitative follow-up interviews with teachers who had participated in Linking

The data collection took place in July-early September 2021, after completion of the year's Linking activities.

Survey of Linking teachers

TLN's Baseline and End of Linking surveys were used to inform the design of the Linking teachers' survey and the comparison survey of non-Linking teachers' (discussed below). TLN's baseline survey had already been completed at this point, and the data was incorporated in the analysis stage. In total, 143 participating teachers completed the baseline survey, 102 participating teachers completed the end of year Linking survey, and 186 teachers not participating in Linking completed the comparison survey, towards the end of the school year (Table 2.1). In this report, the findings from the participating teachers' baseline survey are compared with the participating teachers' end of year Linking survey.

The Linking teachers' survey asked teachers to report their perceptions of their pupils' social mixing attitudes and behaviours, including:

- Extent to which pupils are aware of similarities between themselves and others from different backgrounds to them
- Pupil confidence to mix with others of a different ethnicity, religion, level of affluence, Special Educational Needs (SEND) status, locality
- Extent to which pupils respect others from different backgrounds

The survey also included a set of self-reflective questions, asking teachers to reflect on changes they may have noticed in their pupils as a result of taking part in Linking. This included measures such as a sense of belonging, respecting others, and feeling comfortable to talk with others about their similarities and differences.

Teachers were also asked how many virtual exchanges, virtual meetings or activities took place, and the TLN resources they made use of, as well as some school profiling

¹² The Linking Network collected baseline data among 143 teachers in non-IAP areas prior to the start of their Linking activities, for their own research purposes. After broadening the scope of the evaluation to all participating areas, this baseline data was incorporated into this analysis; the findings and limitations of this data are discussed in Chapter 6. It should be noted that baseline data is not available for all teachers who completed the follow-up survey, and it has not been possible to link specific teachers' responses between the baseline and follow-up surveys.

measures. This included teacher perceptions¹³ of whether the proportion of pupils in their class on Free School Meals (FSM) and from a minority ethnic background¹⁴ is higher, lower or about the same as the national average.

The survey was distributed to primary and secondary Linking teachers via TLN and through the use of a third-party teachers' panel.

Online fieldwork ran from 5th July to 18th August 2021. The survey took between five and seven minutes to complete.

A comparison survey of teachers not participating in Schools Linking

Primary and secondary teachers in LAs identified as not having taken part in Schools Linking in 2020/21 were invited to take part in a one-off comparison survey of non-Linking teachers, conducted towards the end of the school year. The list of areas identified is shown in Appendix A. These areas were initially chosen¹⁵ as they had similar profiles to areas that took part in Linking, in terms of the proportions of pupils on FSM and the proportion of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds. However, it was not possible to identify the demographic profile of each individual school.

The non-Linking teachers' survey asked teachers the same questions relating to their perceptions of pupil social mixing attitudes and behaviours, as the Linking teachers' survey. In this report, the findings from the participating teachers' end of Linking survey are compared to the findings from the one-off comparison survey of teachers who did not participate in Linking.

The survey was distributed by a third-party teachers' panel and teachers were screened on whether they had taken part in Schools Linking at the start of the survey. Online fieldwork ran from the 2nd to the 28th July 2021. The survey took between 5-7 minutes to complete.

Qualitative interviews with Linking teachers

Teachers who completed the online survey were invited¹⁶ to take part in a 40-minute qualitative interview about their experiences of delivering Linking in the 2020/21 academic year and what impact, if any, they felt the activities had on the children in their class. Qualitative interviews were carried out between 7th July and 2nd September 2021.

¹³ Teachers' perceptions of their classes in terms of deprivation, FSM status and ethnic profile were used as a proxy for school profile data, as it was not possible to collect this in the revised evaluation methodology.

¹⁴ The term 'minority ethnic backgrounds' was not defined in the survey. It was intended to be used to refer to ethnicities other than White British, inclusive of other White backgrounds.

¹⁵ The profile of areas was looked at an aggregate level using data from the DfE School Census Survey data 2020. Areas that had a similar profile to the IAP areas were chosen to form the comparison group, from which teachers were invited to take part in the non-Linking survey.

¹⁶ 61 teachers who completed the Linking survey indicated their interest (and provided contact details) in the qualitative interviews. From this, 8 teachers participated in the interviews against a target of 20. By necessity, the timing of the interviews took place late in the summer term and over the 6-week holiday, which is likely to have impacted on teachers' availability to take part.

Table 2.1 outlines the revised evaluation methodology and achieved interviews that formed the basis of the revised evaluation and this report.

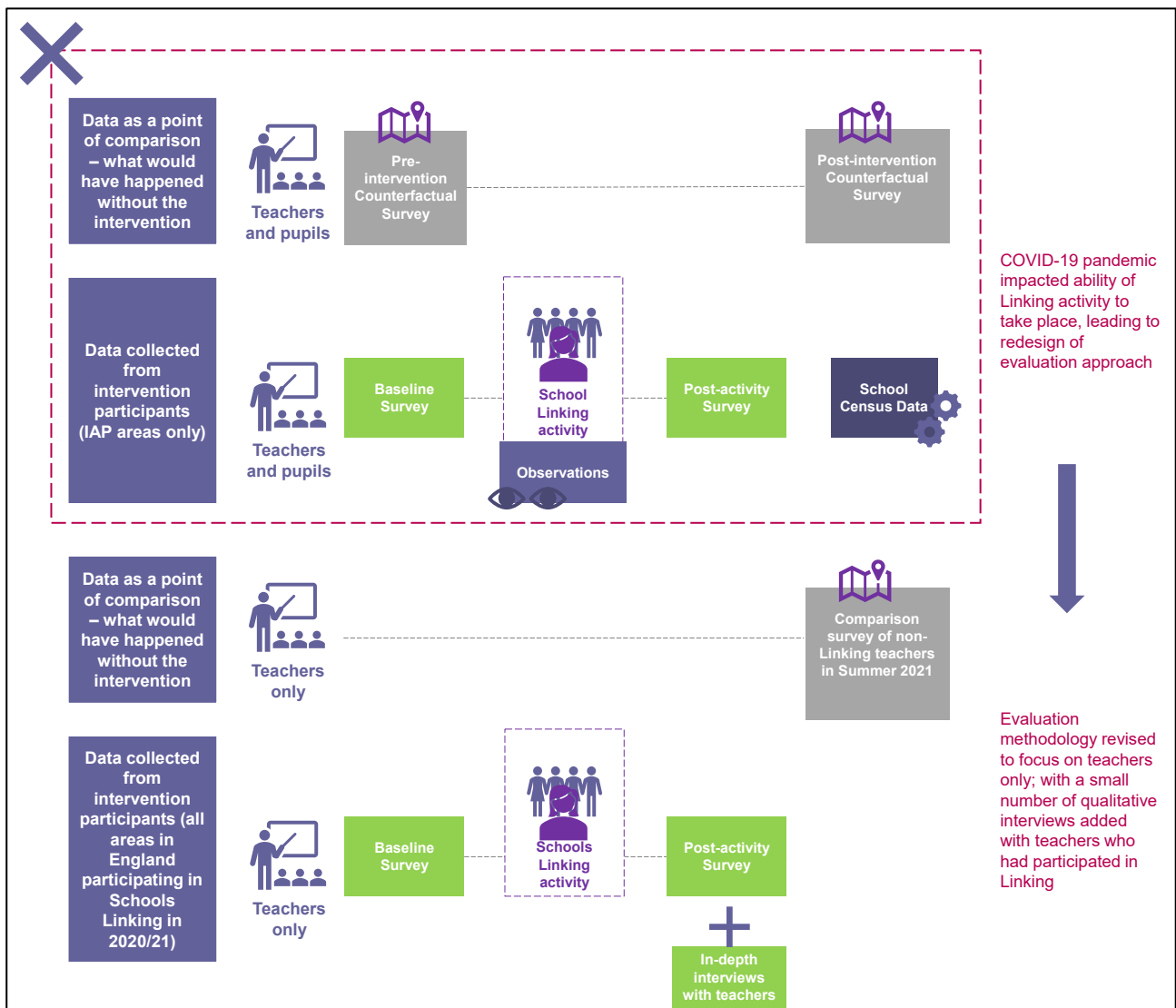
Table 2.1: Revised evaluation methodology and achieved interviews

Evaluation element	Completed surveys and interviews¹⁷	Evaluation element	Fieldwork timing
Baseline survey of Linking teachers	143	Online survey of teachers involved in Linking completed surveys at the start of their schools' involvement in Schools Linking.	02/10/2020 – 20/06/2021
End of Linking teachers' survey	102	Online survey of Linking teachers after completion of the year's Linking activities	05/07/2021 - 18/08/2021
One-off comparison survey	186	Online survey of teachers who had not taken part in Linking at all	02/07/2021 - 28/07/2021
Qualitative interviews with Linking teachers	8	Interviews with teachers after the final Linking activity	06/07/2021 – 02/09/2021

¹⁷ The base size varies by question and will be shown in each chart.

The original and revised evaluation approach is illustrated in Figure 2.2 below.

Figure 2.2: Schools Linking original and revised evaluation approach



2.5 Methodological limitations

The findings in this report provide insight into how Schools Linking was delivered during 2020/21, a year of unprecedented disruption for schools and wider society. The report provides evidence about teachers' assessment of the impacts of Schools Linking on pupils' social mixing behaviours relating to IAP objectives, during this time. It also provides qualitative evidence on the perceived impacts of Schools Linking, the challenges of virtual versus face-to-face delivery, and identifies learnings for improvements.

However, there are some important methodological limitations to consider when interpreting this report.

- By May 2021 it became clear that Bradford was the only IAP area that was able to deliver the Linking programme during 2020/21, and it would not be possible to collect baseline data other than from a small number of teachers in Bradford. Therefore, this research evolved to incorporate baseline data that had already been collected by TLN, from a range of other areas which took part in Schools Linking. It was not possible to follow-up with the same group of teachers who participated in Linking at two time points (pre and post Linking).
- End of programme data was collected from teachers across 19 LAs¹⁸ which took part in Schools Linking, at the end of the academic year, rather than focusing only on IAP areas. As a result of broadening the scope of the evaluation to include non-IAP areas, the report covers the delivery and impacts of the Schools Linking programme as a whole, and not in relation to the specific IAP areas. Teachers in all participating areas received the same training and guidance to deliver Linking, so there were no area-specific differences in this.
- The comparison survey was conducted at the end of the academic year and as a 'one off' survey capturing measures at that point in time, as it was not possible to collect any baseline data from a comparison group earlier in the academic year¹⁹.
- The comparison group of teachers was generated from a panel of individuals rather than from selecting a sample of comparison schools. Although this more targeted approach had been part of the original methodology, it was not possible to continue this approach in light of COVID-19 disruptions. Teachers in the panel survey were not asked to identify their school, due to confidentiality. Instead, to provide an indication of their school's profile, teachers were asked in the survey about whether the proportion of pupils receiving free school meals (FSM) and the proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is higher, lower, or about the same as the national average (which was provided as a percentage for them to compare with). There could be discrepancies between teachers' perceptions and their school's actual profile, for example teachers may not have considered some ethnic backgrounds in their assessment of the ethnic profile of their class.

The original evaluation design included longitudinal observations of Linking in primary schools, and a survey of secondary school pupils, prior to and at the end of taking part in Linking. Due to COVID-19 it was no longer possible to carry out observations or a pupil survey, so the measures relating to social mixing behaviours among pupils are based on teachers' perceptions. It is possible that teachers' perceptions are influenced by whether or not they have had the opportunity to observe such behaviours among their pupils. There may also be other factors, not related to Linking, that may have affected teachers' perceptions.

Efforts were made to focus the comparison survey on teachers in local authorities and year groups which were similar to those covered by Schools Linking, but the absence of profile data on Schools Linking teachers and schools at the point the survey was

¹⁸ London is counted as one local authority, as the survey did not include an option for teachers to specify their particular London borough. In total, 27 teachers in London completed the Linking teachers' survey in the summer term.

¹⁹ Due to delays and changes related to COVID-19 it was not possible to confirm the number and profile of schools taking part in Schools Linking in the IAP areas until Spring 2021. At this point it was decided to extend the evaluation to participating Linking schools in non-IAP areas. It was too late to conduct a 'baseline' comparison survey by that point.

conducted means that it was not possible to target an exact 'like for like' comparison, or to control for all possible differences using Propensity Score Matching, due to the limited profile data available. The report does not therefore provide conclusive quantitative evidence on the impact of Schools Linking. It does provide evidence on whether and how Schools Linking supports IAP objectives, based on teachers' assessments of the impacts on their pupils, as well as wider evidence on delivery.

Assessing Schools Linking outcomes and programme impact

The changes made to the evaluation design meant that it was not feasible to conduct a full impact assessment of Schools Linking i.e. where the same cohort of teachers is surveyed and measured over time, before the first Schools Linking activity and after the final Linking activity.

This report provides evidence in support of Schools Linking achieving IAP aims through the following ways:

- A comparison of a group of teachers who took part in the Schools Linking programme in 2020/21 with a group of teachers who did not take part in the programme.
- A comparison of teachers who completed a baseline survey before carrying out Linking activities, with a group of teachers who completed a survey after completing Linking activities. Because of changes to the evaluation design, the baseline and end of programme surveys were not conducted among the same teachers. To compensate for the lack of linked baseline data among the specific group of teachers who completed the end of Linking survey, teachers were asked to reflect on changes they may have observed in their pupils, after taking part in the year's Linking activities.
- Qualitative interviews with eight teachers who delivered Linking, covering their experiences of carrying out Linking with their class, views on what has worked well and what impact, if any, they feel it has had on the children in their class.

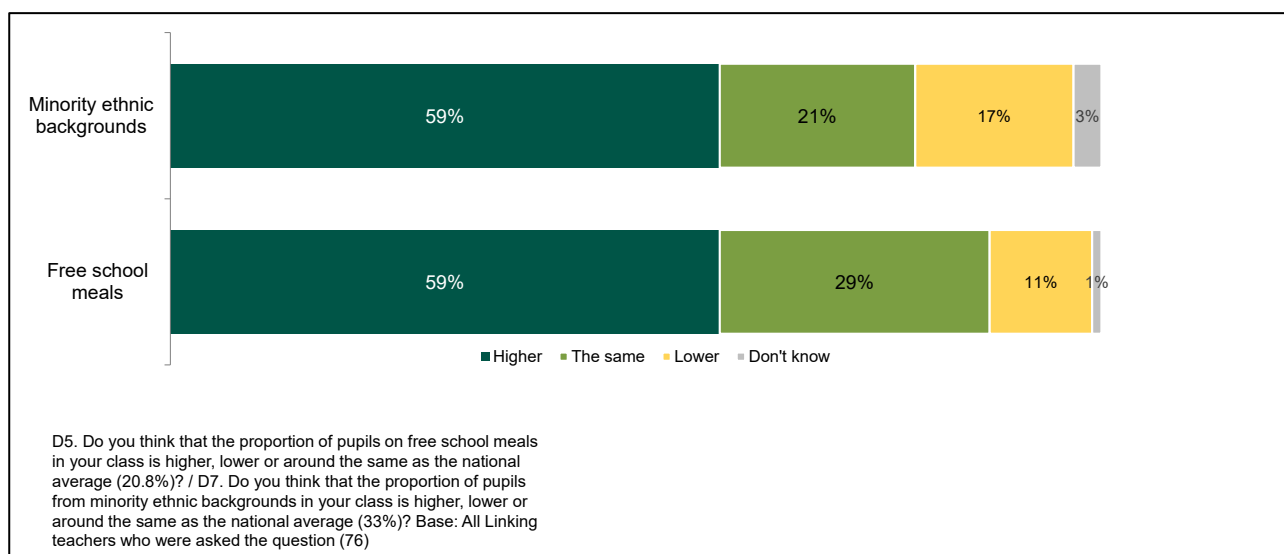
3. Profile of surveyed class teachers

This chapter outlines the profile of classes participating in Linking, as well as those not participating in Linking, as reported by teachers in the Linking and non-Linking surveys, respectively. This section also explores teachers' self-reported confidence in working with diversity.

3.1 Profile of classes participating in Linking

Teachers who participated in Linking and completed the Linking survey tended to teach in schools with perceived higher levels of pupil deprivation and higher proportions of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. Over half (59%) of Linking teachers felt that the proportion of pupils on free school meals in their class was higher than the national average (which is 20.8%), and the same proportion (59%) felt that they had a higher proportion of students in their class from ethnic minority backgrounds compared to the national average (which is 33%). Just over half (55%) of Linking teachers said their school was in an urban area, while 33% said it was in a mixed area, and 9% described it as being in a rural area.

Figure 3.1 Profile of classes participating in Linking



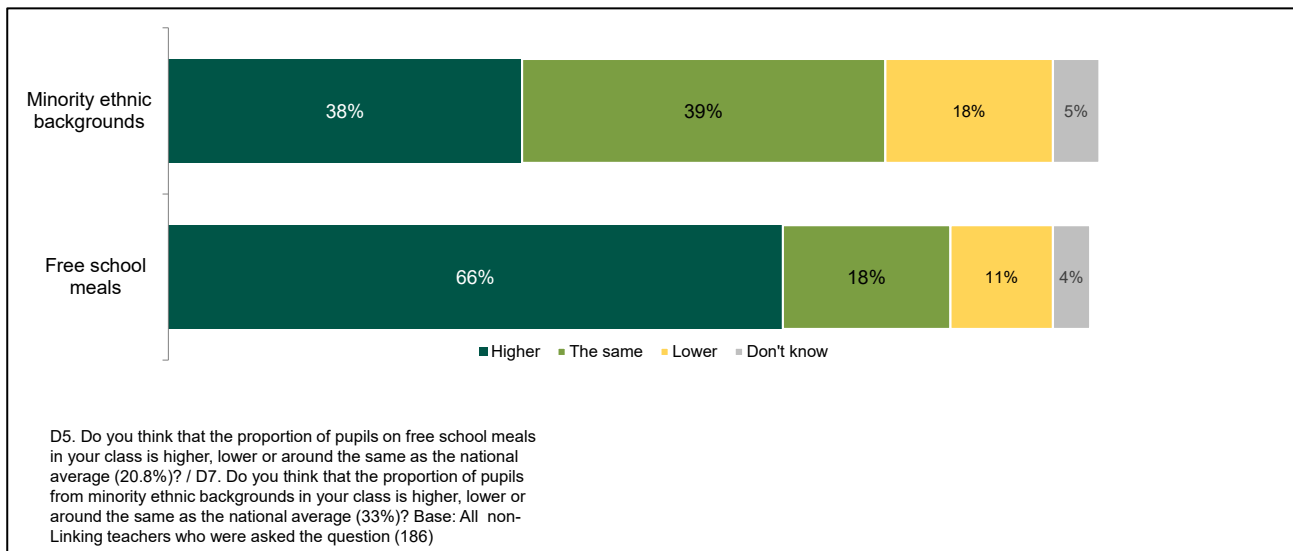
Around three-quarters (75%) of Linking teachers who completed the Linking survey taught primary classes (Reception to Year 6), while the remainder (25%) taught secondary classes (Year 7 to Year 13). The proportion of Linking teachers that taught secondary classes and completed the survey was greater than the proportion of secondary schools that took part in Linking in 2020/21 (c. 5%). As a result, the findings presented in Chapter 5 on 'Programme outcomes and impact' focus on primary classes only. This is so that data from secondary classes does not skew the results, as they are over-represented in the achieved interviews compared to the population.

On average, Linking teachers had taught at their current school for 7.9 years and had 10.4 years teaching experience on average. Just over three-quarters of Linking teachers identified as female (78%).

3.2 Profile of classes not participating in Linking

The majority of non-Linking teachers who completed the comparison survey also felt that their school had a greater proportion of students in receipt of free school meals (66%) compared to the national average. Non-Linking teachers varied in the extent to which they felt the proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds was the same, higher or lower than the national average. A similar proportion each felt that their class was higher (38%) and lower (39%) than the national average, while just 18% thought it was the same. Non-Linking teachers were less likely than Linking teachers to report the proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds as higher than the national average. Most non-Linking teachers (72%) taught in urban areas, while just under one-quarter (23%) taught in a mixed area. Just 3% of non-Linking teachers said they taught in a rural area.

Figure 3.2 Profile of classes not participating in Linking

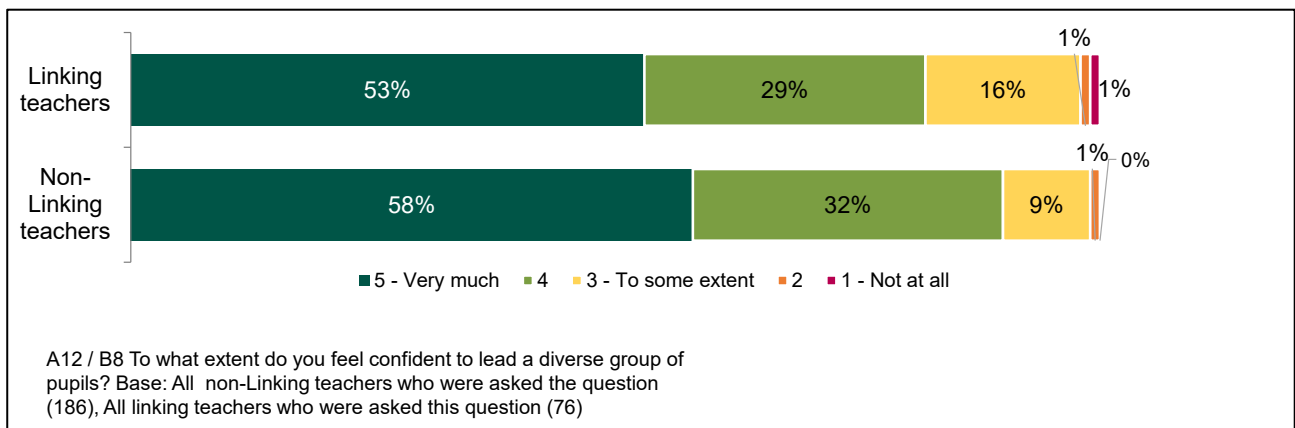


Non-Linking teachers taught on average for 7.1 years at their current school and had a total of 11.1 years teaching experience on average. Most non-Linking teachers who completed the survey taught primary classes (92%), while 8% taught secondary classes. As with Linking teachers, just over three-quarters of non-Linking teachers identified as female (79%).

3.3 Teacher confidence in working with diversity

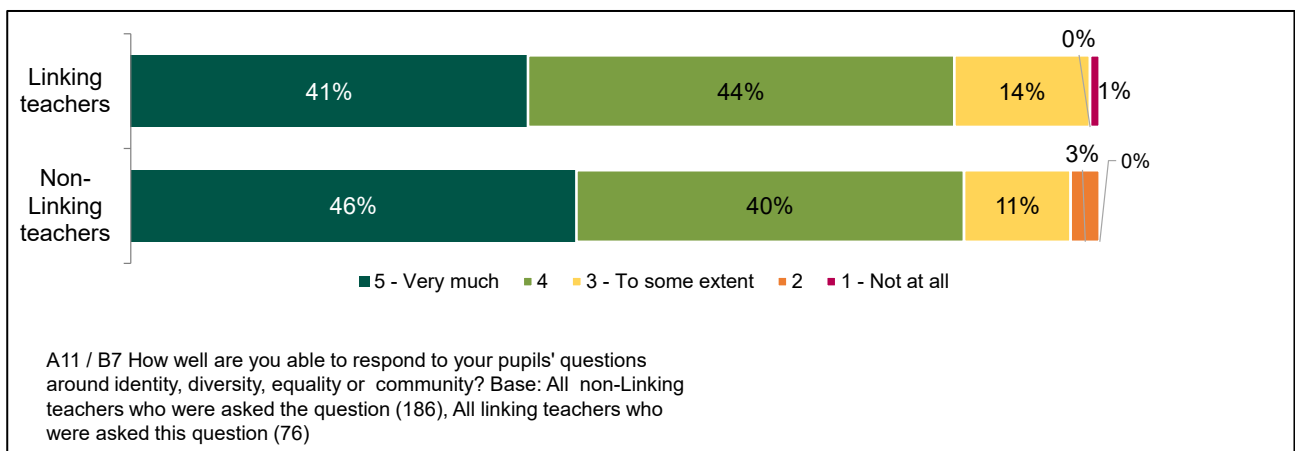
Most Linking teachers (82%) gave a high confidence rating when asked the extent to which they felt confident to lead a diverse group of pupils (53% gave the highest rating of 5 'very much' and 29% provided a rating of 4). Just 3% of Linking teachers provided the lowest confidence ratings of 2 or 1, indicating 'not at all'. There was no statistically significant difference in the confidence of non-Linking teachers, among whom 89% rated themselves as 4 (32%) or 5 (58%).

Figure 3.3 Teachers' confidence to lead a diverse group of pupils



When asked how well they are able to respond to pupils' questions around identity, diversity, equality or community, most Linking teachers (85%) gave the highest ratings (41% gave a rating of 5 'very much' and 44% gave the second highest rating of 4). Just 1% of teachers gave the lowest ratings (2 or 1 'not at all'). This was very similar to non-Linking teachers (85% rated themselves as either 5 (46%) or 4 (40%).

Figure 3.4 Teachers' ability to respond to questions around identity, diversity, equality or community



From these results we can conclude that teachers in Linking and non-Linking schools felt equally confident in leading a diverse group of pupils and or in responding to pupils' questions about identity, diversity, equality or community.

4. Delivery of Schools Linking during 2020/21

This chapter sets out teachers' views on the training and materials they received to deliver Schools Linking, the number and type of Linking activities conducted, and the range of resources used. This chapter illustrates the preparation and planning undertaken by both TLN and teachers prior to the delivery of Linking activities as well as providing reflections on what teachers found most useful.

4.1 Linking teachers' views on CPD training

In 2019/2020, teacher training was moved online. Linking teachers received two 'live' online CPD training sessions each lasting 1.5 hours, delivered by TLN. In advance of each training session, teachers were encouraged to complete independent learning using videos and resources on TLN's website. During the live CPD training, teachers had the opportunity to meet their Linked teacher in Zoom 'breakout' rooms to share information about their school and class, to plan activities for their classes including when and what activities they will exchange between classes, and in what ways they will engage families.

Most teachers (93%) were very positive about the CPD training they received (22% gave a rating of 'very useful' and 71% rated 'fairly useful'). Support from the local facilitator was also rated highly, with 84% rating either 'very useful' (28%) or 'fairly useful' (56%).

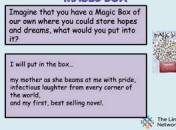



Teaching resources

During the pandemic TLN created resources for teachers to use with pupils directly (schools remained open for those who were vulnerable or whose parents were key workers) and for pupils who were learning at home. Over 100 resources were made available, including lesson plans and class handouts, PowerPoint presentations, assemblies, display materials, family engagement activities, songs, template letters and home learning resources. In response to teacher feedback, TLN created resources that helped teachers to explore and provide support with topical issues, for example the BLM movement or how to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19.

A wide range of resources were made available by TLN for Linking teachers to use and send home to families to support Home Learning during the COVID-19 lockdown periods. These resources were also available for families to access directly to the TLN website. Examples are shown in Figure 4.1.

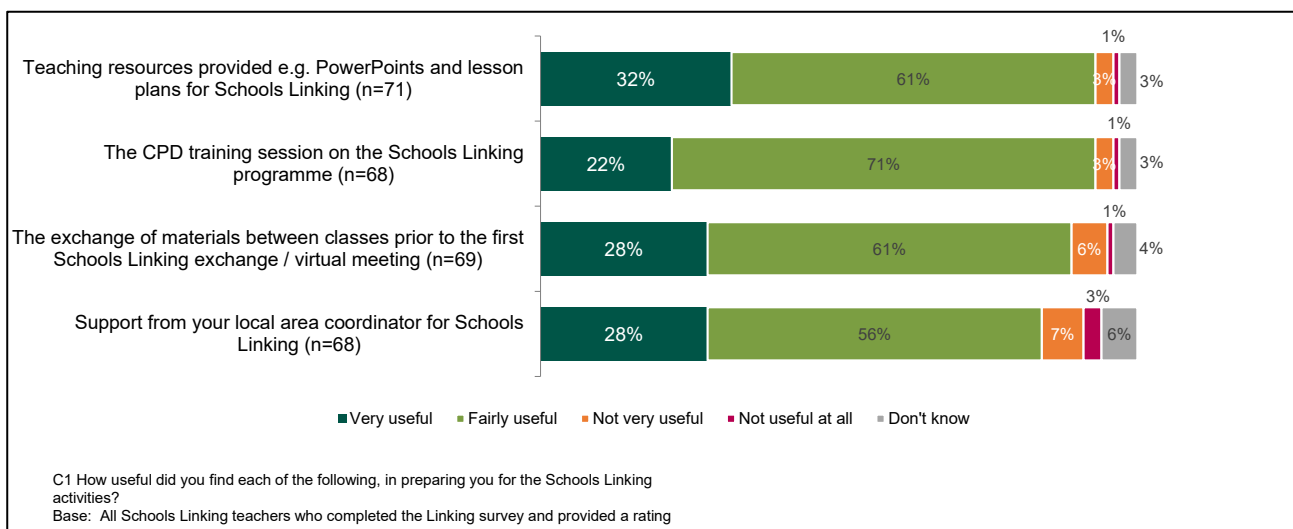
Resources were made up of a mixture of PowerPoints (to make these as accessible as possible, some PPTs included a voiceover in English and Urdu), home learning activities (which were made available in combination of Word documents and PDF files) and videos. The mixed-media resources enabled pupils to watch, listen and reflect on the resource content, replicating how activities are delivered in the classroom by teachers.

Figure 4.1 Examples of Schools Linking teaching resources, made available by The Linking Network

	<p>HELP DURING CORONA</p> <p>Surviving lockdown is hard. Looking after our mental health is crucial. If you need help talk to someone, a family member, friend or teacher might be able to help. Here are some places you can get help...</p> <p>Looking after our mental health during Covid Surviving lockdown is hard. Looking after our mental health is crucial. Many of us are finding we have good days and bad days. If you are struggling with anxiety, worry or feeling stressed then please talk to someone. You might have a family member, friend or someone at school who you can trust.</p> <p>We've pulled together a list of places you can get help if you are finding it hard to cope. Here are some places you can get help.</p> <p>https://thelinkingnetwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/mental-health-1-1.pdf</p>	
<p>MAGIC BOX</p> <p>Imagine that you have a Magic Box of your own where you could store hopes and dreams, what would you put into it?</p> <p>I will put in the box...</p> <p>my mother as she beams at me with pride, infectious laughter from every corner of the world, and my first, best selling novel.</p> 	<p>Magic Box</p> <p>Imagine having your own Magic Box and being able to put anything you want inside it. Use the poem by Kit Wright, to think about what you would put into your Magic Box – set your imagination free! You could then use our PowerPoint and Home Learning Activity to create your own box or write your own poem.</p> <p>Magic Box PowerPoint</p> <p>Magic Box Powerpoint PDF version</p> <p>Magic Box Home Learning Activity</p>	<p>The Linking Network's Guide to Social Distancing</p> <p>Social distancing saves lives. But how does it work? What actually is the R rate? We have created a compelling home learning resource for secondary pupils, highlighting the importance of staying home and staying safe. Please take a look...</p> <p>Senior medical staff at Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust have kindly checked over the content of this resources as we know how important it is for this information to be accurate.</p> <p>Click on the link to download the PowerPoint.</p> <p>https://thelinkingnetwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/The-Linking-Network's-Guide-to-Social-Distancing-1.pptx</p> <p>Or watch and listen to a video version</p> 
	<p>Identity Maps</p> <p>When we talk about 'identity' we mean all the things that make a person who they are. Use this PowerPoint and/or the home learning sheets to explore and discuss the things that make up your identity. You could even make an Identity Map to show this, which you could then share with others!</p> <p>Identity Map PowerPoint</p> <p>Identity Map Powerpoint PDF version</p> <p>Identity Map Home Learning Activity</p> <p>Identity Map Example with Photos</p> <p>Identity Map Example without Photos</p>	<p>Reflecting on the death of George Floyd and the importance of Human Rights</p> <p>The aim of this session is to allow you to reflect on the Black Lives Matter movement, the death of George Floyd and the importance of human rights for all. Hopefully, it will also remind pupils that the acts of a small minority do not reflect the beliefs or practices of the majority. It should also allow us to reflect on positive ways forward.</p> <p>Reflecting on the death of George Floyd and the importance of Human Rights (Powerpoint)</p> <p>Reflecting on the death of George Floyd and the importance of Human Rights (Video)</p> 

Overall, 93% of teachers found the TLN teaching resources useful (33% provided a rating of 'very useful' and 61% rated 'fairly useful') in preparing them for carrying out Schools Linking activities. Following this, 88% found the exchange of materials between classes prior to the first Schools Linking exchange / virtual meeting useful (28% rated 'very useful' and 61% rated 'fairly useful').

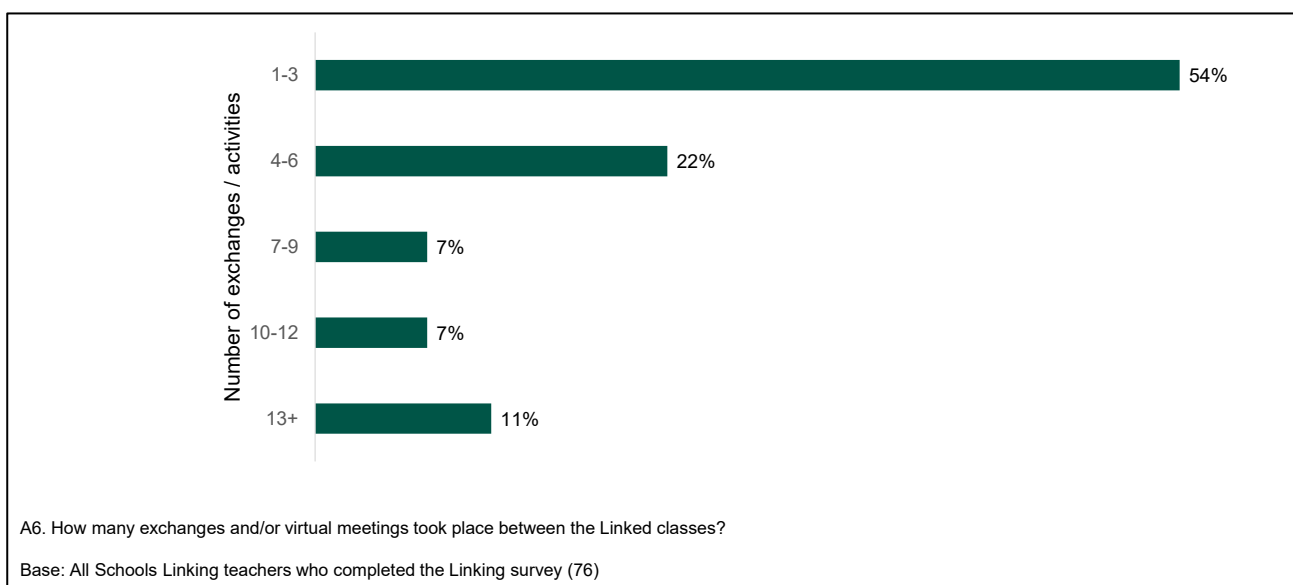
Figure 4.2 Views on CPD training and resources in preparation for Schools Linking



4.2 Number of activities or exchanges between the Linked classes

Teachers were asked how many exchanges, virtual meetings or activities took place between the Linked classes over the past academic year. In a typical year prior to COVID-19, schools participated in three events across the academic year, with some schools choosing to hold a fourth celebration event in the summer term. As shown in Figure 4.3, over half had one to three exchanges (54%) while Schools Linking was delivered virtually in 2020/21. Around one in five (22%) had carried out four to six exchanges over the year, while one in ten had taken part in thirteen or more (11%).

Figure 4.3 Number of exchanges, virtual meetings or activities that took place between the Linked classes over the past academic year



Teachers were given the guidance and resources to carry out virtual exchanges and activities, and it was their choice as to how many activities to participate in. Some teachers chose to incorporate Schools Linking activities within their broader curriculum and therefore carried out a greater number of activities than the average. The qualitative interviews highlighted that this academic year (2020/21) was a very challenging time for teachers, and many struggled to find time to fit in Schools Linking activities. Linking teachers said that a lot of their time was spent helping children to adjust to home learning or to catch them up with work, as well as attending to their social and emotional needs. For example, one Linking teacher said:

"We hadn't been teaching for two terms, there was a lot of teaching to catch up on and pastoral care, everything was a step lower than usual, we would have liked to have done it [Linking activities] more regularly, but we had a lot of other things to do."

Year 3 teacher, Hackney

Overall, Linking teachers reflected that although they found the training robust and had prepared them to carry out the activities, Schools Linking was less of a priority for teachers in 2020/21 compared to previous academic years.

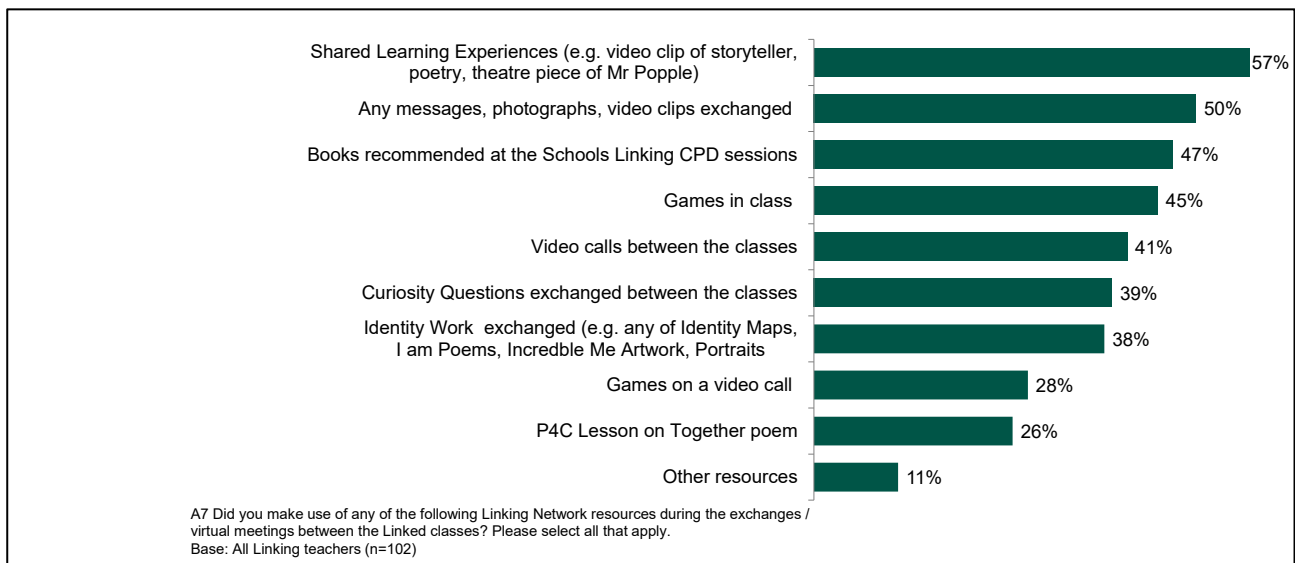
“The training in the autumn term was high quality and we had the opportunity to plan with the [linked] school but we never really got off ground, it was less of a priority. The kids’ timetables are jam packed, we had so much to catch up on, so we didn’t have capacity to do Linking.”

Year 3 teacher, Bradford

4.3 Linking Network resources used

Linking teachers were asked which Linking Network resources they made use of during delivery of Linking activities, exchanges or virtual meetings between the Linked classes. As shown in Figure 4.4, almost three in five (57%) teachers had used the Shared Learning Experiences and half (50%) had exchanged messages, photographs and video clips. The next most common resources teachers had made use of were the books recommended at the Schools Linking CPD sessions (47%) and playing the games in class (45%).

Figure 4.4 Linking Network resources used



Teachers that took part in the qualitative interviews had high praise for the resources made available by TLN and had delivered a wide variety of activities with their classes. For the teachers who took part in the interviews but were not successful in Linking with another class, they were still able to use the activities and resources available from The Linking Network website to deliver the content (e.g. the I AM poem). One new teacher to the Schools Linking programme had high praise for the resources and activities:

"The activities were really engaging. It [the resources] gave me a starting point because I was new to it, so initially I was a little bit unsure. But all the resources were provided. Everything was there for me and it was then just a case of me delivering it to the class."

Year 5 teacher, Rochdale

The book recommendations appeared to be particularly popular, including 'Here We Are' by Oliver Jeffers, 'The Rainbow Fish' by Stevie Kline and 'Giraffes Can't Dance' by Giles Andreae. Linking teachers used these books as starting points for wider discussions with their class related to empathy, kindness and difference.

One class teacher created an identity box with the class, filled with pictures, objects and other personal items to the children, to share with their Linked class in the post. The teacher noted that through the identity box, the pupils enjoyed looking at photos of the Linked class' school uniforms and reading about the activities they did after school. The teacher reflected this helped the children to understand that there are both similarities and differences between themselves and the children in the Linked class. One teacher liked the fact that the resources were all editable, so they could adapt them to their classes' specific needs and 'pick and choose' what they wanted to do each session.

4.4 Virtual meetings between the two Linked classes

Some teachers carried out Zoom-based 'virtual linking', where their classes met the other on a video-call. Teachers provided examples of how TLN resources helped their class to prepare for the virtual meetings.

One teacher found the 'Curiosity Questions' resource useful in helping their pupils to think of questions that they could ask the pupils in the Linked class. The teacher reflected that their pupils had a mixed reaction when firstly watching a video of the children in the Linked class, for example for many children it was new to them to hear of different hobbies, names, and to see religious dress among the pupils in the other class, such as turbans. The teacher observed that a few of the children had negative reactions to observing difference, and as a result the teacher built in some additional learning about different religions, in this case Sikhism which at that point was not part of the school's Religious Education curriculum. Later in the year, the Linked classes met in real-time on a Zoom video-call and used the TLN games resources. The teacher observed that one of the children who had earlier expressed negative attitudes relating to difference was gradually more able to participate and to feel comfortable meeting children in the Linked class, where there was a greater mix of ethnic and religious diversity than their own class. The teacher reflected that playing games helped the child to 'let his guard down' and to have a positive experience with children from different backgrounds.

Teachers made use of video-calls between the two classes so that pupils could introduce themselves in person and create a more personalised connection which was then followed up by further exchanges:

"The classes initially met over Zoom, each child stood up and introduced themselves and shared a fact about themselves and asked a question/showed a picture, using the Curiosity Questions to help them think of something to ask."

Year 3 teacher, London

“We had several Zoom sessions with our Linked class which my students thoroughly enjoyed. We exchanged cards that we sent by post to our Linked school and we also made friendship bracelets for them.”

Year 11, 12 and 13 teacher, London

In addition to using the resources to carry out virtual Linking via video-call, classes also exchanged letters with their Linked class using the same resources; one area had an internal post system within their local authority’s education system, so were able to send letters often at a low price and knew they would arrive quickly.

4.5 Schools Linking activities during the home-schooling periods

TLN encouraged teachers to make Linking activities available to pupils during the home-learning period, while schools or classes were closed during the national or regional lockdowns, or ‘school bubble’ closures.

In the qualitative interviews, some teachers reported trying to engage in Linking activities whilst children were home learning but were unsure how engaged pupils were with these activities, as often it was the teacher sending the resource worksheet or PowerPoint home for the parents to read and deliver. One teacher commented that naturally these activities were engaged with most by pupils whose parents spoke English, so were able to understand the activity and help their child to participate. This teacher suggested in the future, the resources could be translated into additional languages, to support parents who may have limited English to engage their children with the activities at home.

4.6 Maintaining the links between classes

Three in five Linking teachers (60%) said that they had plans in place to maintain the link between the two schools, whereas 40% said they did not.

All teachers interviewed in the qualitative research were keen for their class to continue to participate in Linking, and were particularly enthusiastic about resuming Linking in a face-to-face format. Teachers interviewed felt that face-to-face Linking offers greater opportunities to mix with young people from different backgrounds in a way that is qualitatively different to exchanging work or carrying out virtual Linking using video calls. A few teachers had already identified other types of schools they would like to link with, for example a SEN school. Another teacher was keen to embed Linking activities in the curriculum, so that the topics could be explored throughout the year and not just in the context of the Schools Linking programme.

Previous Schools Linking evaluations in 2011²⁰ and 2018²¹ highlighted the importance of face-to-face meeting of Linked teachers prior to the start of linking activities, to begin the linking relationship. Both evaluations found that preparatory activities prior to face-to-face Linking (similar to virtual linking e.g. letter sharing) did lead to positive outcomes, but these outcomes were bolstered by the fact they were followed by face-to-face contact.

²⁰ Kerr, D. et al. (2011) Evaluation of the School Linking network: Final report, Research report DFE-RR090, National Foundation for Educational Research. Available at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/182402/DFE-RR090.pdf

²¹ Linking and Social Cohesion, An Evaluation of The Linking Network's School Linking National Programme, Chris Shannahan, Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University, July 2018

5. Programme outcomes

This chapter covers the outcomes of Schools Linking as they relate to the IAP programme, teachers' views on impact (which are self-reported), and the extent to which the programme has met its aims.

The 2020/21 school year has been far from typical for schools and pupils, and the Linking programme has been strongly affected. Schools Linking activities in 2020/21 were significantly curtailed, given the extremely challenging context of COVID-19, national lockdowns and regional restrictions, the shift to home learning for many pupils, and restrictions on meeting in person. The number of activities and participating pupils dropped, and the nature of the linking activities had to change. The discussion of outcomes and perceived impact takes these changes and challenges into account.

5.1 Programme aims and planned outcomes

In relation to young people, IAP aims are to *'promote more social mixing, particularly among young people'* and *'to work with schools' providers and local communities to promote more integrated schools and opportunities for pupils to mix with others from different backgrounds'*.²²

The overarching aims for the evaluation of the Schools Linking Programme in participating IAP areas were to:

- Measure the profile of linking activities and participating teachers and pupils;
- Measure five key IAP-related outcomes of linking activities (see below);
- Learn lessons about factors influencing the successful delivery of linking activities; such as participants/community features or activity type; and
- Build on lessons learnt and participants' feedback to further improve programme delivery.

The planned outcomes for the Schools Linking programme were for linking activities to:

- Enable meaningful social mixing between young people in different schools
- Improve pupils' willingness to meet different types of young people
- Improve pupils' confidence in meeting young people of different ethnicities, religions, and economic background
- Improve pupils' understanding of different races, religions, and cultures
- Improve pupils' awareness of the importance of respecting other people

Schools Linking activities aim to achieve these outcomes by leading pupils from segregated communities through four questions:

²²

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/696993/Integrated_Communities_Strategy.pdf

- **Who am I?** – creating opportunities to explore the multiple aspects of identity
- **Who are we?** – celebrating diversity, including similarity and difference
- **Where do we live?** – promoting community, understanding locality and developing a sense of belonging for all locally, nationally, and globally
- **How do we live together?** – championing equality, challenging prejudice in all its forms and promoting active citizenship

As discussed in the methodology section, changes to activities and audiences over the course of the evaluation made it necessary to take an iterative approach to the design of the evaluation.

The rest of this chapter explores the extent to which Linking generates meaningful social mixing between pupils in different schools. In the context of this evaluation, meaningful social mixing is defined as involving conversations with young people from different ethnic, religious or socio-economic backgrounds. More specifically, this chapter reports on teachers' perceptions of pupils' willingness to meet young people from different backgrounds; confidence in doing so; understanding of different races, religions and cultures; and awareness of the importance of respecting other people.

5.2 Achieved outcomes

The outcomes reported on in this chapter are based on the following key sources:

- Surveys of primary Linking teachers after completion of Linking activities for the school year 2020/21. These included an IFF-designed survey distributed to Linking teachers in IAP areas using a third-party teachers' panel in Summer 2021, and a Linking Network survey distributed to Linking teachers in non-IAP areas in Summer Term 2021.
- A survey of teachers not taking part in Linking, in non-IAP areas, which aimed to provide context for the Linking surveys. This IFF-designed survey was distributed to non-Linking teachers using a third-party teachers' panel in Summer 2021.
- Depth qualitative interviews with eight teachers, as well as open text (qualitative) responses to the primary Linking teachers' and primary non-Linking teachers' surveys.

The main source used is the primary Linking teachers' survey, with some comparison figures from the survey of non-Linking teachers. This is because the questions and scales are consistent between surveys. Chapter 6 covers changes in perceptions and confidence of pupils who participated in Schools Linking over time, by comparing the views of (two different groups of) teachers in participating schools before they started Linking activities and at the end of the school year.

The meaningful social mixing outcomes discussion is based on comparing responses from primary Linking and non-Linking teacher surveys. Teachers were asked to indicate their response on a scale from 5 'very much' to 1 'not at all'.

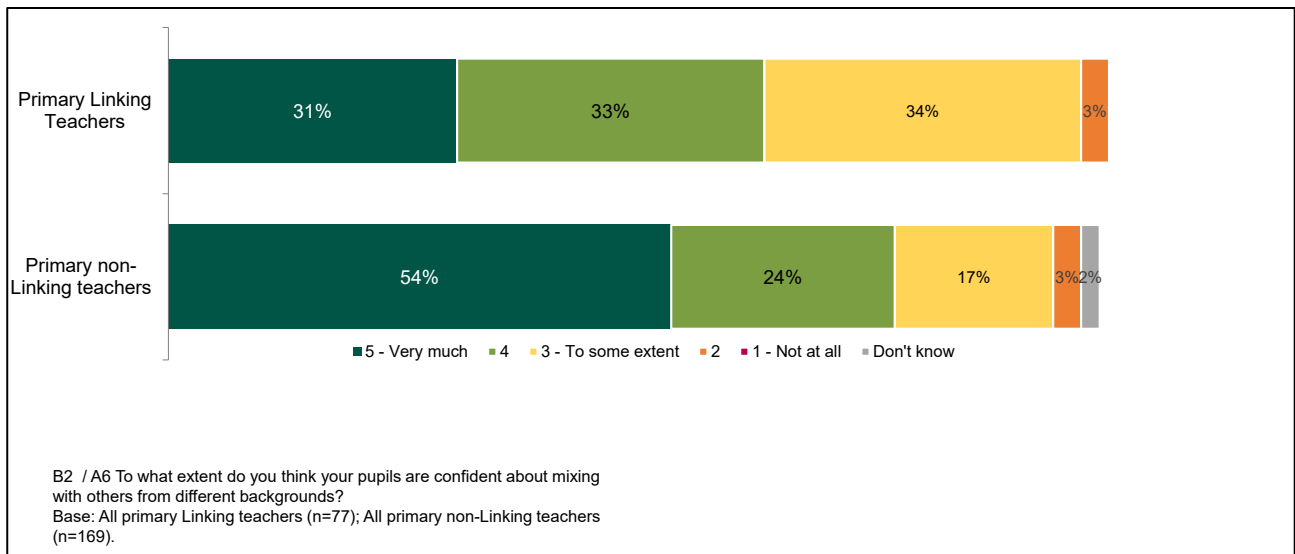
5.2.1 Pupil confidence and interest in mixing

Primary school Linking teachers were asked the extent to which they feel their pupils are confident mixing with others from different backgrounds. Around two-thirds (64%) of

primary Linking teachers gave the highest ratings of pupil confidence to mix with others from different backgrounds (31% rated this as 5, 'very much', and 33% gave a rating of 4).

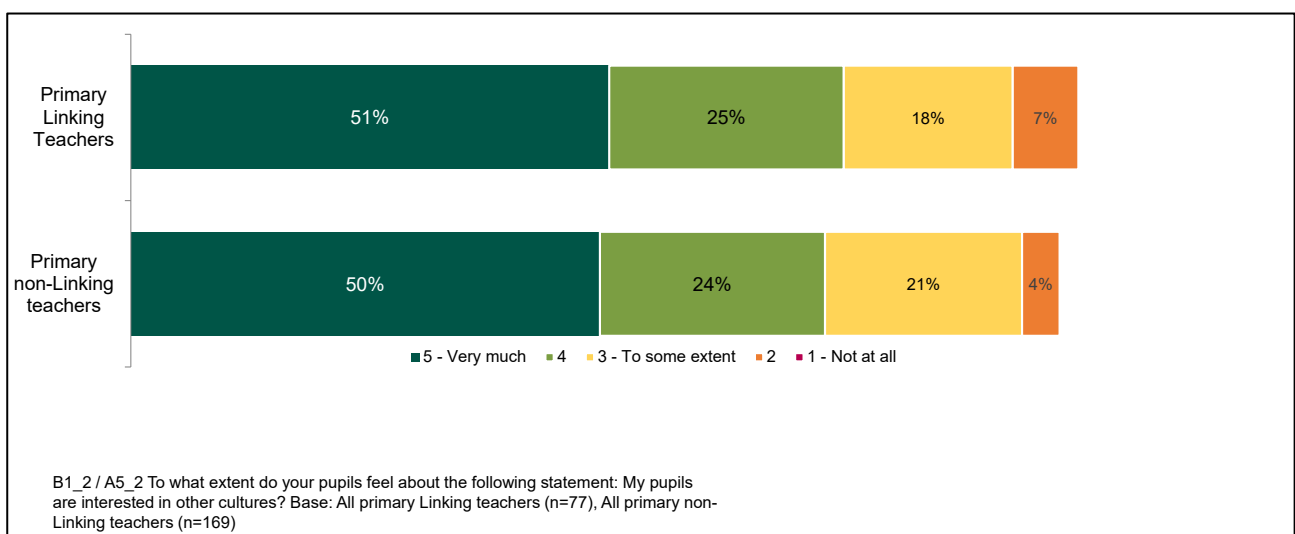
Non-Linking primary teachers rated their pupils' confidence to mix with others from different backgrounds significantly more highly, compared to Linking teachers. Nearly 8 in 10 (78%) non-Linking primary teachers gave the highest ratings (54% gave a rating of 5, 'very much', and 24% gave a rating of 4).

Figure 5.1. Teachers' perceived level of confidence among their pupils, in interacting with others from different backgrounds



Primary teachers were also asked to consider how interested their pupils were in other cultures. Three-quarters (75%) of primary Linking teachers gave the highest ratings (51% rated 5 'very much' and 25% gave a rating of 4). Just 7% gave the lowest ratings (a rating of 2). There was no significant difference in the comparison group (Figure 5.2) which showed very similar results.

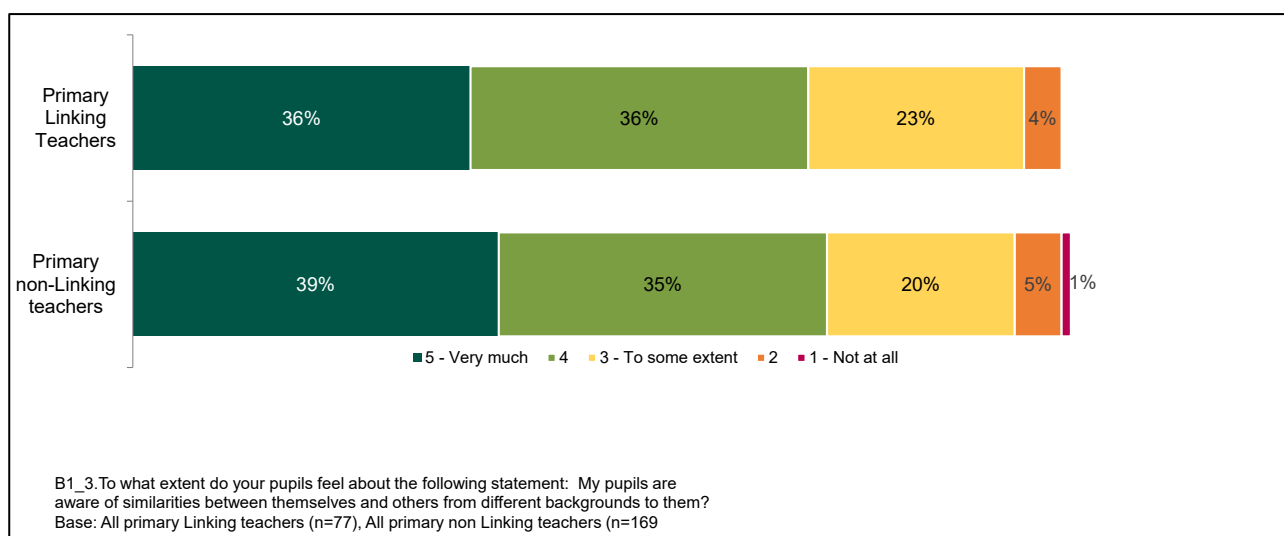
Figure 5.2 Teachers' perceived level of interest among their pupils, in other cultures



5.2.2 Awareness of similarities and differences

There was no significant difference between Linking and non-Linking teachers with regards to the extent they felt their pupils are aware of similarities between themselves and others from different backgrounds to them. Around three-quarters (73%) of primary Linking teachers gave the highest ratings, with 36% of teachers each rating 5 'very much' and 4. Just 4% of primary Linking teachers gave the lowest ratings (a rating of 2). The results for primary non-Linking teachers were very similar (Figure 5.3).

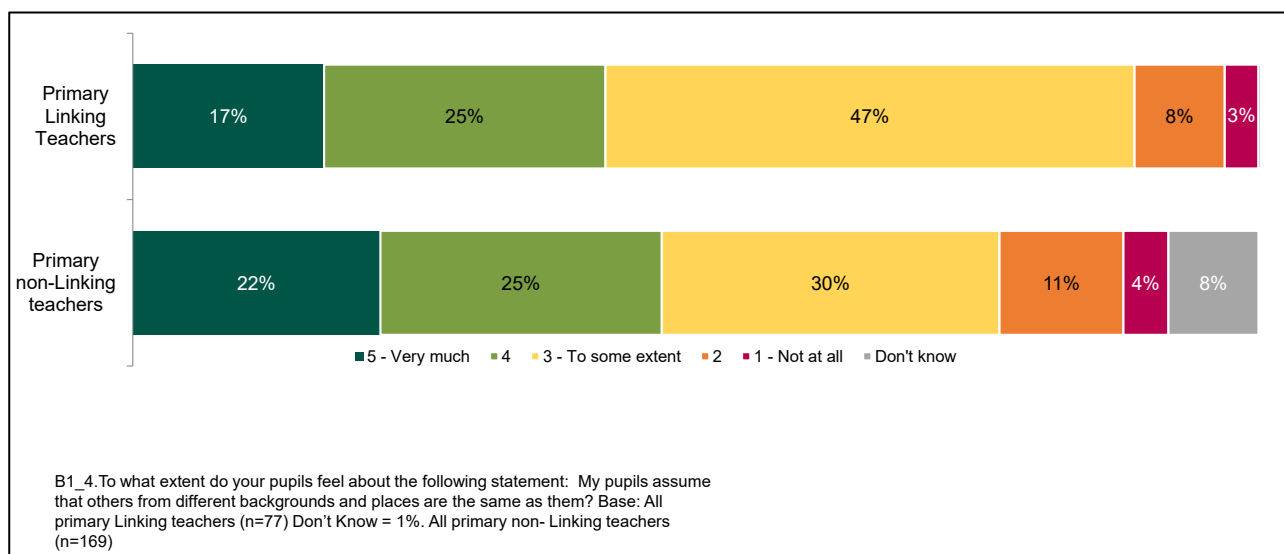
Figure 5.3 Teachers' perceived level of understanding among their pupils about similarities between themselves and others from different backgrounds



Primary teachers were asked the extent to which their pupils assume that others from different places and backgrounds are the same as them (Figure 5.4). Around two-fifths (42%) of primary Linking teachers agreed that pupils assume that others from different places and backgrounds are the same as them (scoring either 4 or 5 'very much'). Overall, nine in ten (88%) primary Linking teachers perceived that their pupils did this at least to some extent.

Nearly half (48%) of primary non-Linking teachers gave the highest ratings when asked the extent to which their pupils assume that others from different backgrounds and places are the same as them (22% gave a rating of 5 'very much' and 25% gave a rating of 4). A minority (14%) of primary non-Linking teachers provided the lowest ratings (4% rated 1 'not at all' and 11% gave a rating of 2).

Figure 5.4 Teachers' perceived level of pupils' assumptions about similarities between themselves and those from different backgrounds



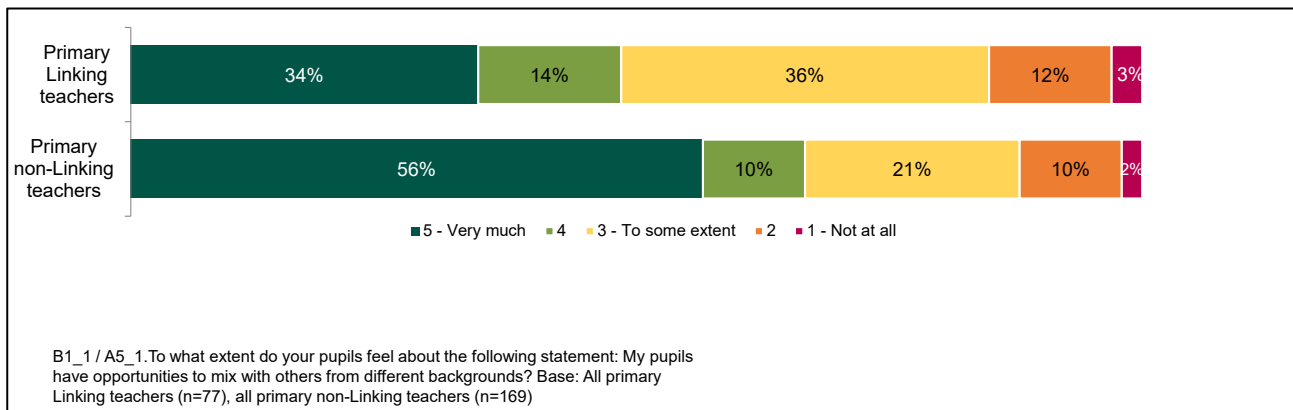
5.2.3 Meaningful social mixing

Primary Linking teachers were asked to reflect on the experiences of pupils who had taken part in Linking in the past academic year (2020/21), and to provide answers on a five-point scale from 1 'not at all' to 5 'very much'. Primary non-Linking teachers were asked the same questions, but not in specific relation to Schools Linking activities, as these teachers had not delivered Schools Linking in the past academic year.

First, teachers were asked to what extent they agreed that their pupils had opportunities to mix with others from different backgrounds, in terms of: ethnicity, religion, socio-economic, geographic, SEND (Special Education Needs or Disabilities) and/or other characteristics. Nearly half (48%) of primary Linking teachers agreed that pupils did have opportunities to mix with others from different backgrounds (51% gave a rating of 5 'very much' and 25% gave a rating of 4). A minority (14%) of primary Linking teachers gave the lowest ratings when asked the extent to which their pupils have opportunities to mix with others from different backgrounds (3% rated 1 'not at all' and 12% gave a rating of 2).

Two-thirds (66%) of primary non-Linking teachers gave the highest ratings when asked the extent to which their pupils have opportunities to mix with others from different backgrounds (56% rated 5 'very much' and 10% rated 4). Just over 1 in 10 (12%) gave the lowest ratings (2% rated 1 'not at all' and 10% gave a rating of 2). The higher ratings provided by primary non-Linking teachers may reflect that they are more likely to work in schools or areas with higher levels of diversity compared with Linking schools (many Linking schools have a large majority of pupils of a single ethnicity). The fact that non-Linking teachers felt their pupils had more opportunity to mix with others from different backgrounds may help to explain why they rate their pupils' confidence at mixing with pupils who are different to them more highly, compared with Linking teachers.

Figure 5.5. Teachers’ perceptions of their pupils’ opportunities to mix with others from different backgrounds



For teachers who had taken part in Linking activities in 2020/21, the reduction in the number of times pupils Linked (e.g. number of video calls) and the quality of this compared to traditional ‘face to face’ Linking, influenced the extent to which they felt there was meaningful social mixing between the pupils. Many of the teachers we interviewed felt that more sessions and face-to-face activities would have been preferable:

“In a normal school year, it would probably be more so. When they did the Zoom session the children asked each other questions. However, they didn’t do too many of those sessions. It would have been good to have been able to do more to allow the children to see each other.”

Primary teacher, Rochdale

Where video calls and letters were exchanged, the primary Linking teachers saw the value in this creating a connection between pupils and carrying out at least some social mixing, even if it wasn’t a one-on-one conversation with another child.

Primary Linking teachers whose classes either weren’t allocated a Linked class or whose Linked class was not responsive reported that there was no meaningful social mixing between pupils in different schools. However, one teacher felt that due to the varied demographic make-up of her class, her pupils experienced social mixing daily with children who were different to them.

Teachers were clear that ‘normal’ patterns of Schools Linking activities would provide more opportunities for meaningful social mixing than those which they had been able to carry out in 2020/21.

“I think linking would be much more beneficial face to face. This was my first experience as even though we shared videos and did a video call it was still really hard for the classes to build a relationship. It was still a nice experience and they enjoyed sharing their work and finding out about them”.

Year 4 teacher, Leicester

5.2.4 Pupils' confidence in interacting with other young people of different backgrounds

Primary teachers were asked for their views on how confident their pupils were with children from other backgrounds, in terms of: different religions, locality, ethnicity, those who have more or less money than them, and interactions with young people with (or without) Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND). Primary teachers were asked to provide their answer on a five-point scale from 1 'not at all' to 5 'very much'.

Primary Linking teachers gave the highest ratings in terms of pupil confidence to mix with others from a different religion (71%, with 29% rating 5 'very much' and 43% rating 4). This was followed by confidence to mix with others from a different kind of locality (69%, with 38% rating 5 'very much' and 31% rating 4).

Two thirds (65%) of primary Linking teachers gave the highest ratings in terms of pupil confidence to mix with others of a different ethnicity (29% gave a rating of 5 'very much' and 36% gave a rating of 4). Around 6 in 10 (62%) primary Linking teachers gave the highest ratings in terms of pupil confidence to mix with others with (or without) (SEND, with 27% rating 5 'very much' and 35% rating 4).

Primary Linking teachers perceived pupils to have the least confidence to mix with others with a different level of affluence. Just over half (57%) of primary Linking teachers gave the highest ratings for pupil confidence to mix with others with a different level of affluence (31% rating 5 'very much' and 26% rating 4).

Primary non-Linking teachers reported higher ratings than Linking teachers on pupil confidence to mix with others from a range of backgrounds, and this registered as statistically significant except for confidence to mix with others from a different locality, even after controlling for known profile differences (see Figure 5.6).

Nearly 9 in 10 (88%) primary non-Linking teachers gave the highest ratings for pupil confidence to mix with other young people with (or without) SEND (58% rated 5 'very much' and 30% rated 4). Around 1 in 10 (12%) gave the lowest confidence rating (2% rated 1 'not at all' and 10% rated 2).

A similar proportion (86%) of primary non-Linking teachers gave the highest ratings for pupil confidence in mixing with others of a different ethnicity (60% gave a rating of 5 'very much' and 26% gave a rating of 4), compared to 65% of primary Linking teachers that rated 5 or 4.

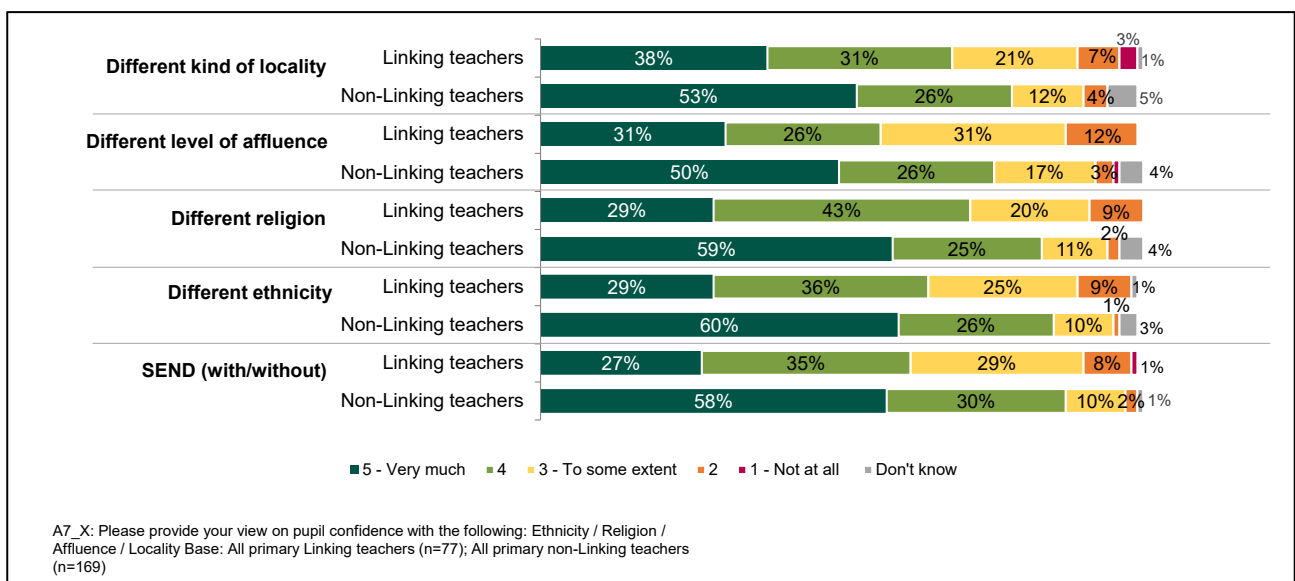
Just over 8 in 10 (84%) of primary non-Linking teachers perceived their pupils to be confident in mixing with others of a different religion (59% rated 5 'very much' and 30%

rated 4), while (79%) of primary non-Linking teachers perceived their pupils to be confident mixing with pupils from a different kind of locality (53% rated 5 ‘very much’ and 26% rated 4).

In terms of pupil confidence to mix with others of a different level of affluence, 76% of primary non-Linking teachers gave the highest ratings (50% rated 5 ‘very much’ and 26% rated 4), compared to 57% of primary Linking teachers.

Non-Linking teachers’ higher ratings for pupil confidence to mix with others from varied backgrounds may be in part due to non-Linking teachers reporting that their pupils have opportunities to mix with others from different backgrounds to a greater extent than reported by primary Linking teachers. Pupils in non-Linking primary schools may be more confident mixing with those from different backgrounds already, due to being in a more mixed school. Although Linking teachers were more likely than non-Linking teachers to report that the proportion of pupils in their class from an ethnic minority was higher than the national average, this does not necessarily imply that the class was ethnically diverse, as the majority of pupils may have been of the same ethnicity.

Figure 5.6 Teachers’ perceptions of their pupils’ confidence mixing with other pupils of a different religion, ethnicity, locality, level of affluence, and SEND status



For the primary teachers whose pupils successfully Linked with another class, the overall consensus was that Schools Linking contributed to pupils becoming more confident with interacting with other young people of different ethnicities, religions and economic backgrounds. Teachers acknowledged pupils had less contact with other children more generally as a result of restrictions related to COVID-19, but despite this, Linking activities offered some opportunity for them to interact with children they may not have had the chance to ordinarily meet. Another teacher felt that their class would still find a face-to-face meeting awkward but were on a positive journey since starting Schools Linking and engaging with the Linked class.

“They are on their journey towards accepting others and feeling comfortable with accepting difference. It takes more time to adapt to new

things, for example even doing a Zoom meeting, and with a physical meetup – they would find that challenging."

Year 3 teacher, Derby

"The resources within the linking project promote diversity and equality and get you fully immersed into all of those things so that the children feel comfortable in themselves but also comfortable with other people who might not be from their background.... When they go out into that big wide world they will have a real understanding of other people and other backgrounds, other religions."

Primary teacher, Rochdale

5.2.5 Improved pupils' willingness to interact with different types of young people

Overall, teachers felt their children were already willing to interact with other pupils, before Schools Linking and it was a case of them not having current social contact with different types of young people. Teachers whose pupils Linked with another class found their children were mostly excited and eager to speak with the other class. One teacher thought any social connection after the lockdown was a positive experience for their pupils.

"They loved it – it was something that was different, it was real, it had a context – a lot of learning they can do is very abstract – learning about maths in COVID-19 meant no counters and money, so it was nice to be doing something that was real and can see the impact of building a strong connection with a human. Because of COVID-19 it was incredibly important."

Year 3 teacher, Hackney

One teacher had an experience where a child expressed some prejudiced views towards a child in the Linked school, through comments on their physical appearance and religious dress. The teacher dealt with this matter by explaining to the child that what they said was not 'ok', and introduced a scheme of work in the school about the child's religion which was the predominant religion at their Linked school (and in their area). After doing this, and continuing to video call each week, the teacher found the child was gradually more comfortable with the Linked Class and participated more in games and activities.

5.2.6 Improved children's understanding of different races, religions and cultures

Primary Linking teachers were asked to share an example of any misconceptions their pupils had about pupils from different backgrounds (e.g. stereotypes; misunderstandings about different groups). Of the examples shared by teachers (n=12), the common theme was an assumption that children that looked different to them would be different to them as people. For example, one teacher reported her pupils perceived children with 'unusual' names would not be able to speak English, or that by their skin colour, their pupils assumed they were not from Britain.

Schools Linking was viewed as a good opportunity by teachers to start class discussions about topics such as race, religion and culture, using the activities as a launch pad for these discussions. The exposure to different pupils sparked these conversations, and the pupils were curious and asked the teacher questions about, for example, the religion of pupils in the Linked class. Some teachers used the opportunity to teach the children about the specific religion of children in the other class, and introduced it to their syllabus, or gave more background information on the ethnic origin of children from the Linked class. For example, one teacher taught about partition in India and Pakistan.

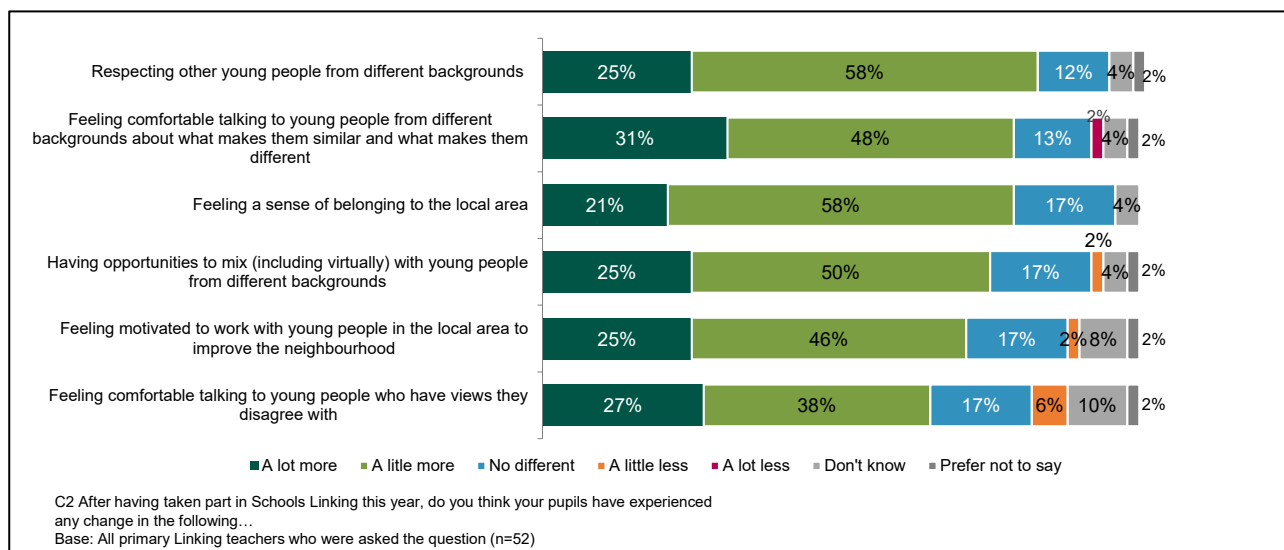
Teachers were mostly confident in responding to questions about difference to help improve their pupils' understanding, due to their past teaching experience and the CPD sessions (one teacher referred to the 'having difficult conversations' resource).

5.2.7 Changes reported as a result of Schools Linking

Despite the challenges in delivering Schools Linking activities in 2020/21, the majority of primary Linking teachers were positive when asked about the impact they perceived it had made on their pupils:

- Around 8 in 10 (83%) primary Linking teachers felt their pupils respected other young people from different backgrounds more after taking part in Schools Linking (25% a lot more and 58% a little more), with none saying they respected others less.
- Four-fifths (79%) of primary Linking teachers felt their pupils felt more sense of belonging to the local area (21% a lot more and 58% a little more), with none saying they felt a lesser sense of belonging.
- Four-fifths (79%) of primary Linking teachers felt their pupils felt more comfortable talking to young people from different backgrounds about what makes them similar and what makes them different (31% a lot more and 48% a little more). A small proportion (2%) of primary Linking teachers said pupils felt less comfortable)
- Two-thirds (65%) of primary Linking teachers perceived their pupils to be more comfortable talking to young people who have views they disagree with (27% a lot more and 38% a little more). A minority (6%) of primary Linking teachers perceived their pupils to be less comfortable.
- Three-quarters (75%) of primary teachers felt that their pupils had had more opportunities to mix (including virtually) with young people from different backgrounds (25% a lot more and 50% a little more). A small proportion (2%) felt their pupils had fewer such opportunities.
- Around 7 in 10 (71%) primary teachers felt that their pupils were more motivated to work with young people in the local area to improve the neighbourhood (25% a lot more and 46% a little more). Just 2% perceived their pupils to be a little less motivated to work with young people to improve the neighbourhood.

Figure 5.7: Primary Linking teachers' perceived changes among pupils as a result of Schools Linking participation



These self-reported findings suggest that even a limited programme of Schools Linking activities, carried out online, has a positive effect on pupils and helped to support IAP related outcomes, particularly improving pupils' confidence in meeting young people of different ethnicities, religions and economic background; and improving pupils' understanding of different races, religions and cultures. A pre- and post- analysis of the impact of taking part in Schools Linking is presented in Chapter 6.

5.3 Summary

The academic year 2020/21 has been a challenging one for schools and pupils. Schools Linking activity has been significantly reduced or put on hold, and the nature of activities has had to change to reflect COVID-19-related restrictions. The Linking Network and participating schools have adapted and aimed to continue providing opportunities for linking activities.

This context, as well as the changes that were required to the evaluation design, means that it is difficult to fully assess the outcomes from Schools Linking in IAP areas for 2020/21. Participating teachers noted that the specific context of the academic year 2020/21, including COVID-19 and home learning, and the 'virtual' linking that therefore took place, mean that outcomes for pupils have been more limited than usual:

"I feel that the impact this year has been limited due to circumstances. My children have not benefited as much from this year's involvement."

Year 6 teacher, Oldham

"I think linking would be much more beneficial face to face. This was my first experience as even though we shared videos and did a video call it was still really hard for the classes to build a relationship. It was still a nice experience and they enjoyed sharing their work and finding out about them."

Year 4 teacher, Leicester

There were a number of differences in views between Linking and non-Linking teachers, particularly around how confident pupils were in mixing with children from different backgrounds, where the non-Linking teachers gave higher ratings. This may be because the non-Linking schools were more mixed in terms of pupil demographics, and had more opportunities to mix with pupils who are different to them (as reported by their teachers); because social mixing is more common in some geographical areas than others; or may reflect other differences between the schools or teachers which are not observable from the survey. It is difficult to draw firm conclusions from comparisons between the Linking and non-Linking teachers, due to the limited profile information on their schools and the lack of a baseline for the comparison group. The lower ratings reported by teachers in Linking schools do indicate that Schools Linking is being targeted at schools where there is greater need for this type of intervention, and suggest a need for sustained involvement in the programme, or similar activities, and further evaluation to see if these metrics improve over more time than an academic year.

The findings from the qualitative interviews and self-reported measures from the follow-up survey of teachers suggest that even a limited programme of online Schools Linking activities has had a positive effect on pupils and helped to support the IAP programme outcomes. Chapter 6 explores this further, by comparing results from baseline and post-intervention surveys of teachers participating in Schools Linking.

6. Change over time in participating schools

This chapter considers change over time in schools participating in Schools Linking. It uses findings from a baseline survey of Linking teachers and a follow-up survey of a different group on Linking teachers to identify changes in the key outcome measures, before and after taking part in Schools Linking.

6.1 Methodology

The survey carried out among Schools Linking teachers *before* their pupils were involved in the Programme provides a 'baseline' profile of the perceptions of the pupils about people from other backgrounds and their confidence mixing with the people outside of their own background. These surveys provide valuable information on pupils' 'starting points' (albeit based on the teachers' views rather than directly reported by the pupils). In combination with the survey carried out among Schools Linking teachers at the end of the Programme (see Chapter 2), the findings can be used to estimate how far pupils' perceptions and confidence shifted by the end of their involvement in Schools Linking.

Ideally, the changes in perceptions and confidence of pupils would be measured using the baseline and follow up responses of the *same* cohort of teachers. However, the programme and evaluation changes made as a result of COVID-19 meant that too few of the same teachers completed the baseline and follow up surveys to take this approach.

This analysis therefore uses the responses of all Schools Linking teachers who completed comparable baseline measures to those collected in the follow up survey, with the following numbers of teachers contributing to the analysis.²³ As with elsewhere in the report, the findings focus on primary schools only:

	Baseline	Follow up
IAP evaluation primary teachers survey	0 ²⁴	52
TLN primary teachers survey	143	25
Total	143	77

As the baseline and end of programme surveys are based on different samples of teachers, there is a risk that the two samples are not strictly comparable. The two samples may, for instance, differ somewhat in terms of the school demographics, and this could explain some of the change observed. Only very limited data is available to test this however, as the only variable consistently collected across both samples was the year group that the teachers were working with, where a small difference was observed. To

²³ Both IAP and TLN teachers were asked to complete baseline surveys. However, the measures fielded in the IAP teacher baseline survey did not match those collected in the follow up survey.

²⁴ Although a small baseline survey of teachers in Bradford took place, changes in the evaluation methodology meant that this baseline data was not useable for the evaluation as the questions no longer corresponded with the follow-up survey, which had to be revised to match the follow-up survey conducted by TLN in non-IAP areas.

deal with this observed difference, the profile of baseline teachers was weighted so that it matched the follow up teachers in terms of the year group with which they were working.²⁵

It is also important to note that, even if the two samples are comparable after the weighting, we cannot say how far the changes in perceptions and confidence are *as a result* of taking part in Schools Linking, and how far pupils' views may have changed naturally or because of other factors (e.g. other events or things being reported in the press).²⁶

The sections below report on the weighted baseline and follow up responses among primary Linking teachers. Statistical tests of whether the differences between baseline and follow-up are significant have been carried out.²⁷ Statistically significant differences are highlighted with an asterisk.

The following sections report on changes over time in relation to pupils':

- Interest and confidence in mixing with people from other backgrounds;
- Awareness of similarities and differences between themselves and others;
- Social mixing;
- Understanding of others from different backgrounds.

6.2 Pupils' interest and confidence in mixing with people from other backgrounds

Before and after pupils took part in Schools Linking, teachers were asked the extent to which they felt that their pupils were interested in other cultures, and about how confident they felt their pupils were mixing with people from different backgrounds.

Figure 6.1 shows the extent to which teachers felt - at the start and end of Schools Linking - that their pupils were interested in other cultures. As with all the measures in this section, teachers answered on a five-point scale from 'very much' (a score of five) to 'not at all' (a score of one). They also had the option of 'don't know' or 'prefer not to say'. Before Schools Linking, two thirds (64%) of teachers felt that their pupils were interested in other cultures (scoring four or five). By the end, this proportion had risen to three quarters (75%); an 11 percentage point difference. This difference is statistically significant. Here, and for each subsequent figure, the mean score at baseline and follow up is provided at the base of the table. With a higher score denoting a 'better' outcome, the difference in the two

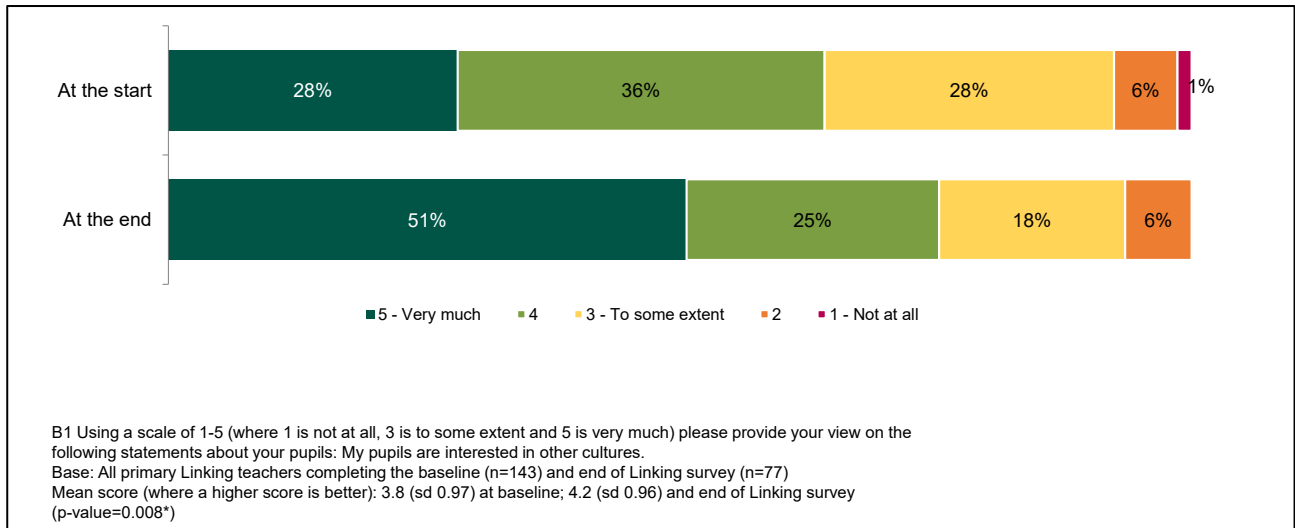
²⁵ Ideally, a richer set of variables would have been used for matching. However, this was the only matching variable consistently available across the surveys.

²⁶ As part of the evaluation, attempts were made to collect data from a comparable group of teachers who had not taken part in Schools Linking. However, in the event, these teachers were not sufficiently similar (even after propensity score matching with the available variables) to carry out a formal impact assessment with a counterfactual.

²⁷ Two types of tests have been carried out: an ordinal test of whether there is a shift across the response categories and a t-test of whether there is a shift in the mean scores. 'Don't know' and 'prefer not to say' responses have been excluded from the tests. Standard chi-squared tests were also completed including these two categories, but the results are almost identical to the ordinal tests so are not reported on.

mean scores (3.8 out of 5 at baseline; 4.2 out of 5 at follow up) is also statistically significant. Throughout this section, the mean score significance levels mirror those of the full scale.

Figure 6.1. Teachers’ perception of extent to which “My pupils are interested in other cultures”



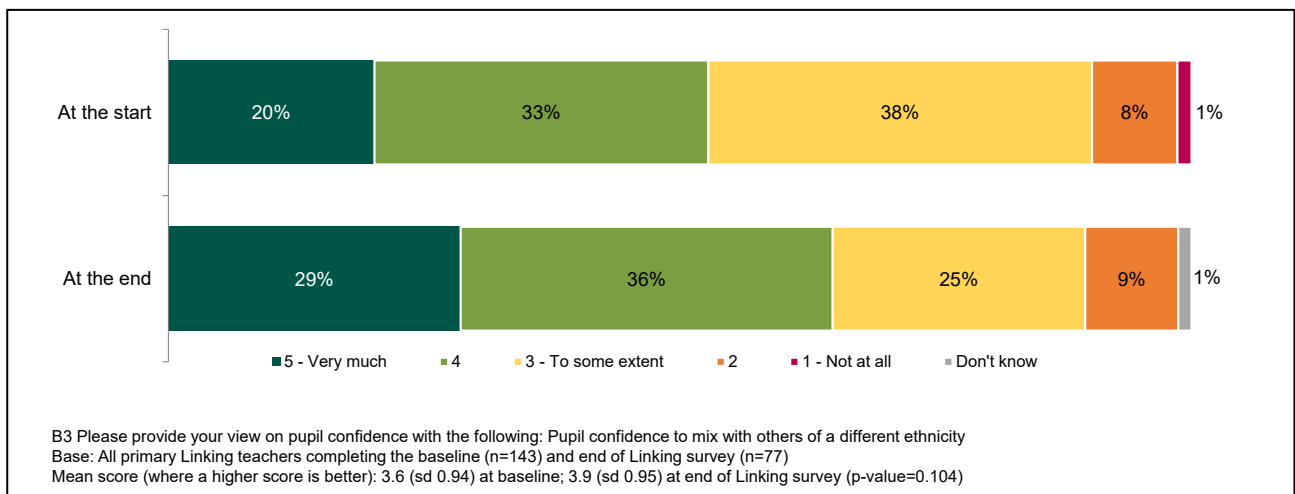
Figures 6.2 to 6.6 report on the extent to which teachers thought their pupils were confident mixing with different groups – others of a different:

- Ethnicity (Figure 6.2)
- Religion (Figure 6.3)
- Locality (Figure 6.4)
- Level of affluence (Figure 6.5)
- With/without Special Educational Needs or Disability (SEND) (Figure 6.6)

Some of these differences may be immediately visible to pupils (for example, ethnicity or religion, if some pupils wear headscarves or turbans as a marker of religious faith). Others, such as affluence or SEND, may be less apparent to pupils. In addition, there may be some overlap between the different characteristics, for example, affluence and locality, or ethnicity and locality in some areas. Given the focus of the Schools Linking Programme, we might have expected the greatest change in relation to ethnicity, religion and locality, although the Programme’s emphasis on mixing and inclusion might have had wider effects. In fact, Figures 6.2 to 6.5 show greater levels of confidence about mixing with all of these groups by the end of programme stage, with the level of change in relation to religion, locality and affluence all statistically significant.²⁸

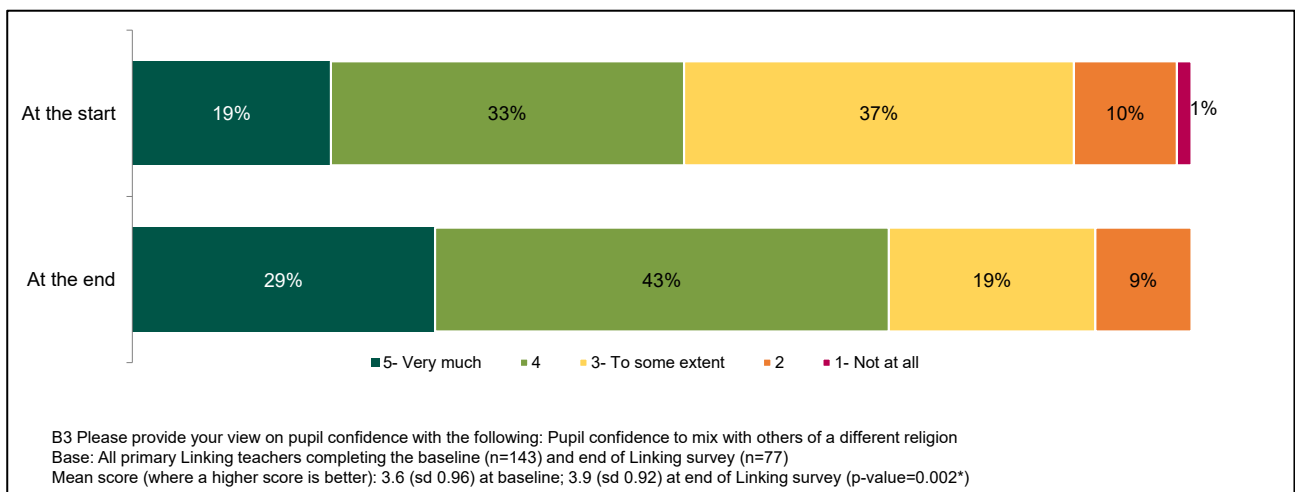
²⁸ Likewise the change in the mean score was statistically significant for these three measures.

Figure 6.2. Teachers' perception of extent to which they think their pupils have confidence to mix with others of a different ethnicity



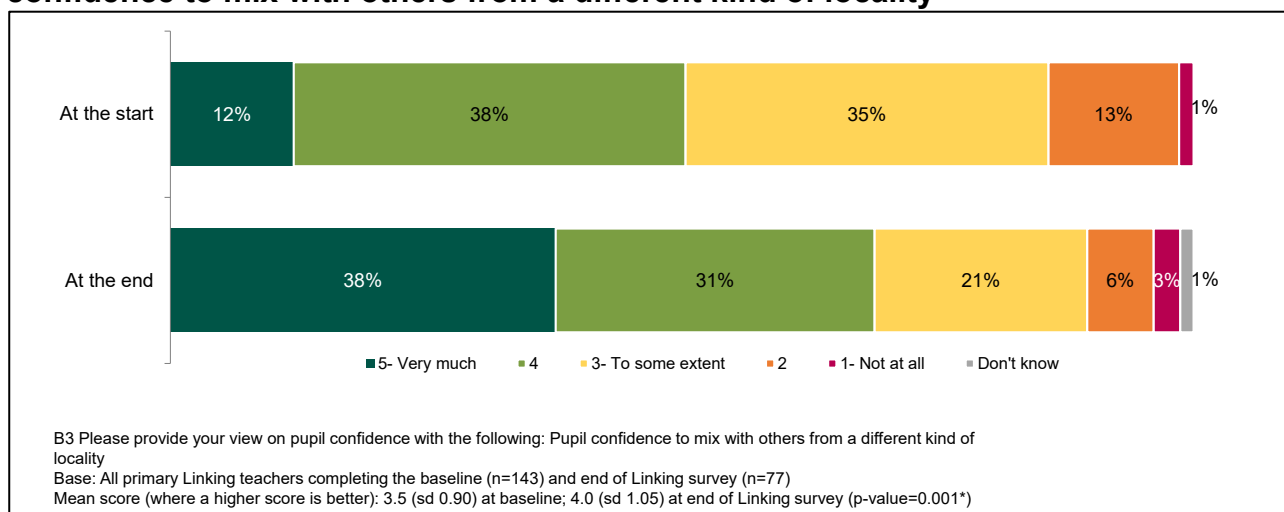
Prior to taking part in Schools Linking, 20% of teachers reported pupils were very confident in mixing with others of a different ethnicity, and 33% that they were confident. After Schools Linking, 29% of teachers reported pupils were very confident in mixing with others of a different ethnicity, and 36% that they were confident. This is an increase of 12 percentage points, although this difference has not registered as statistically significant.

Figure 6.3. Teachers' perception of extent to which they think their pupils have confidence to mix with others from a different religion



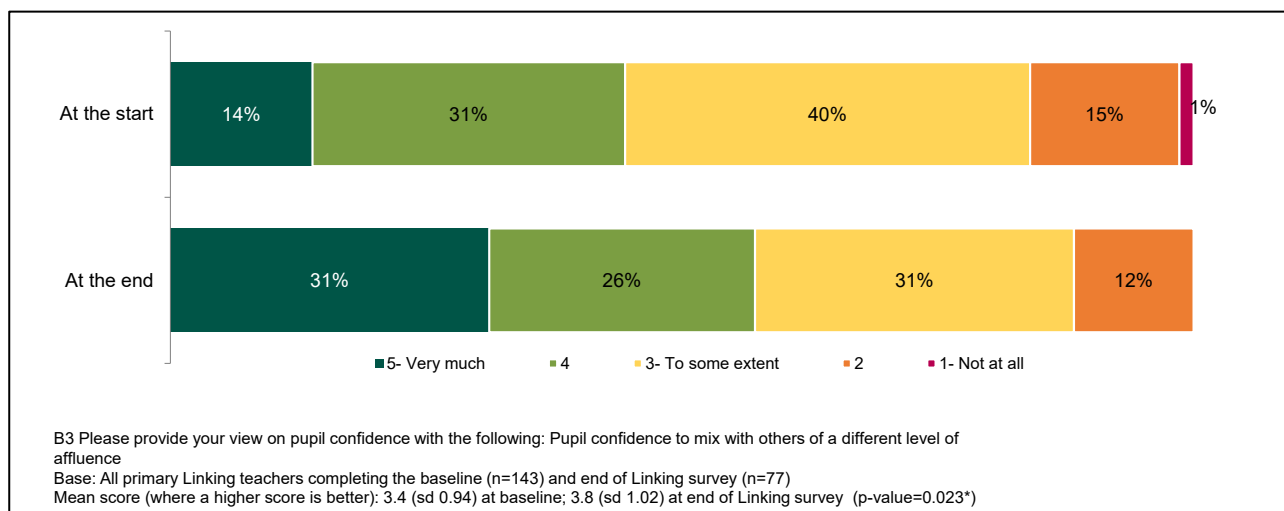
Similarly, pupils were reported to be more confident in mixing with others from a different religion at the end of Schools Linking. Prior to taking part in Schools Linking, 19% of teachers reported pupils were very confident in mixing with others from a different religion, and 33% that they were confident. After Schools Linking, 29% of teachers reported pupils were very confident in mixing with others from a different religion, and 43% that they were confident – an increase of 20 percentage points.

Figure 6.4. Teachers' perception of extent to which they think their pupils have confidence to mix with others from a different kind of locality



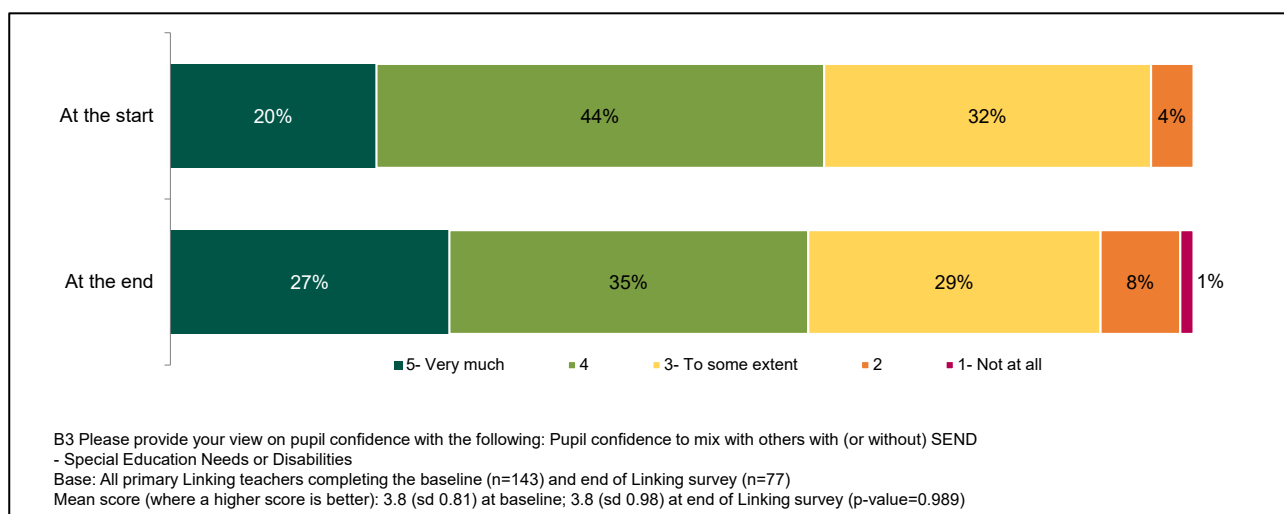
Confidence in mixing with others from a different locality also increased significantly. Prior to taking part in Schools Linking, 12% of teachers reported pupils were very confident in mixing with others from a different locality, and 38% that they were confident. After Schools Linking, 38% of teachers reported pupils were very confident in mixing with others from a different locality, and 31% that they were confident – an increase of 19 percentage points.

Figure 6.5. Teachers' perception of extent to which they think their pupils have confidence to mix with others of a different level of affluence



Pupil confidence in mixing with others of a difference level of affluence also increased significantly, although the percentage point change was lower than for some other types of difference. Prior to taking part in Schools Linking, 14% of teachers reported pupils were very confident in mixing with others of a different level of affluence, and 31% that they were confident. After Schools Linking, 31% of teachers reported pupils were very confident in mixing with others of a different level of affluence, and 26% that they were confident – an increase of 12 percentage points.

Figure 6.6. Teachers’ perceptions of extent to which they think their pupils have confidence to mix with others with (or without) Special Education Needs or Disabilities



Prior to taking part in Schools Linking, 20% of teachers who completed the baseline survey reported pupils were very confident in mixing with others with (or without) SEND, and 44% that they were confident. After Schools Linking, 27% of teachers who completed the end of Linking survey reported pupils were very confident in mixing with others with (or without) SEND, and 35% that they were confident – an increase of 7 percentage points for high levels of confidence, but a decrease of 9 percentage points for those who were confident (4). These differences were not statistically significant.

In the qualitative interviews, one teacher felt that the TLN-recommended books about empathy, inclusion and differences had helped the children to welcome a new child to the class who had a disability. The teacher felt that the children were more welcoming than they would have been, if not for taking part in Linking and carrying out the activities around differences and inclusion.

6.3 Pupils' awareness of similarities and differences

The surveys also included measures aimed at assessing whether Schools Linking could encourage pupils to see more similarities between themselves and people from other backgrounds. Before and after Schools Linking teachers were asked about the extent to which:

- “My pupils are aware of similarities between themselves and others from different backgrounds to them”
- “My pupils assume that others from different backgrounds and places are the same as them”

Again, the picture was positive in relation to the level of change in perceptions between the start and end of the programme.

Figure 6.7 shows a large and statistically significant shift in perceptions for the first of the two measures. Before Schools Linking, only 3% of teachers said their pupils were ‘very much’ aware of the similarities, and 20% were aware. At the follow up, more than a third (36%) said their pupils were ‘very aware’ and a further 36% were aware – a change of 49 percentage points.

Figure 6.7. Teachers’ perception of extent to which “My pupils are aware of similarities between themselves and others from different backgrounds to them”

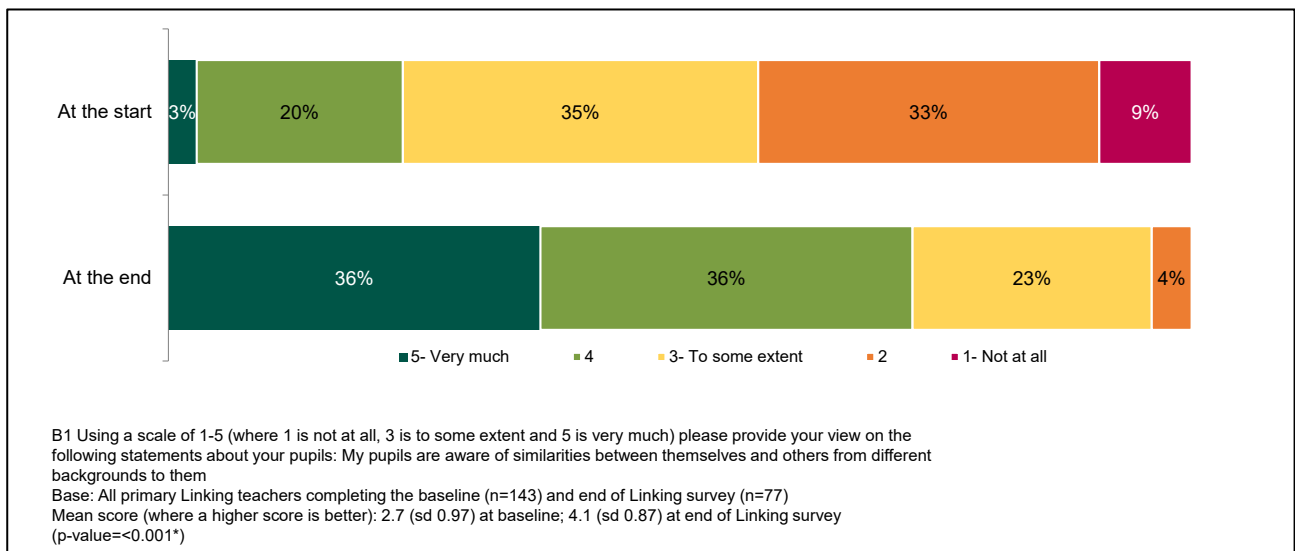
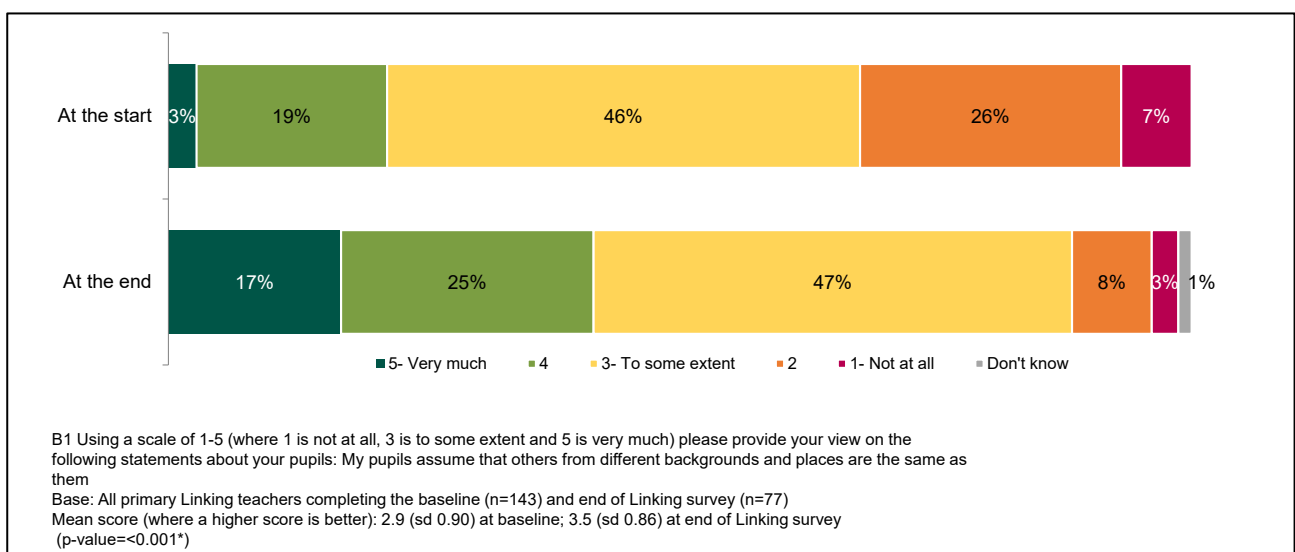


Figure 6.8 shows a similar and, again, statistically significant improvement in perceptions in relation to the extent to which teachers think that pupils assumed similarities between themselves and others from different backgrounds. Twice as many teachers gave a score of four or five at follow up, compared to baseline (42% compared to 21%).

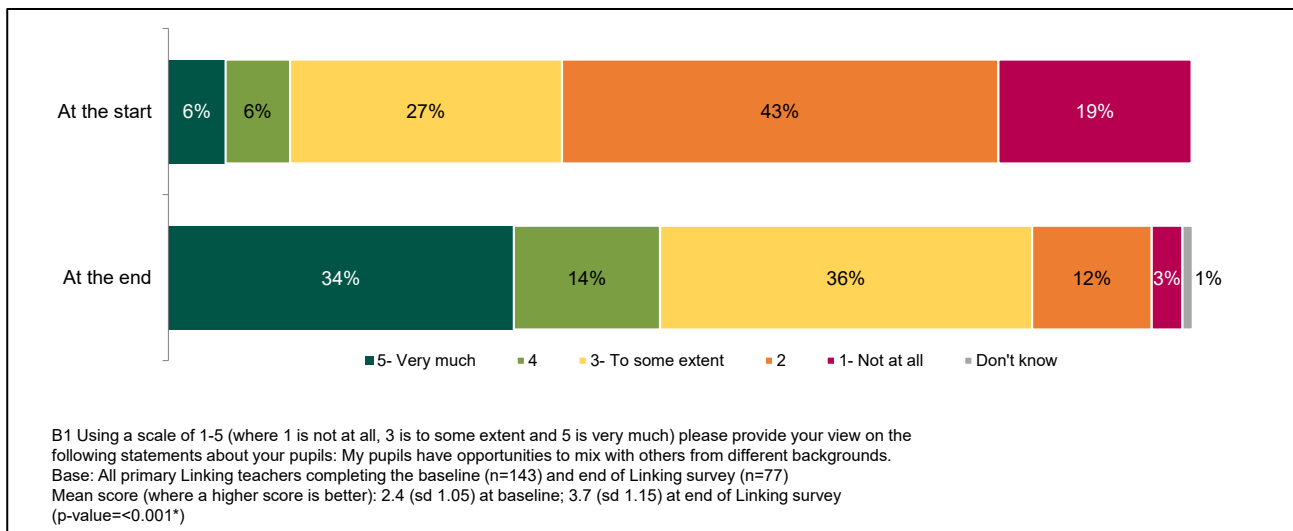
Figure 6.8. Teachers’ perception of extent to which “My pupils assume that others from different backgrounds and places are the same as them”



6.4 Meaningful social mixing

Schools Linking has also improved pupils' opportunities to mix with people from different backgrounds (Figure 6.9). At the start, only 12% of teachers reported that pupils had opportunities to do so (scoring 5 or 4). By the end of Schools Linking, that proportion had risen to half (48%).

Figure 6.9. Teachers' perception of extent to which "My pupils have opportunities to mix with others from different backgrounds"

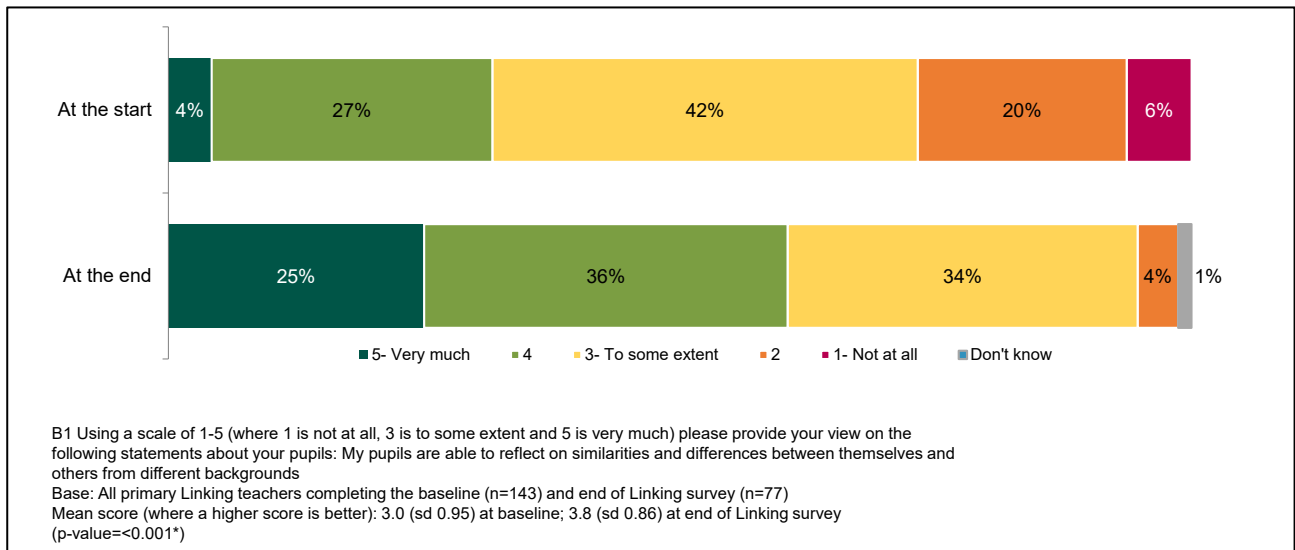


6.5 Improved understanding of different races, religions and cultures

Finally, teachers were asked two questions aimed to measure the extent to which Schools Linking improves pupils' understanding of people from other backgrounds. In the original evaluation design it was planned to survey secondary school pupils about these themes, however as this was no longer possible due to COVID-19, teachers were asked the extent to which they thought their pupils were able to reflect on similarities and differences between themselves and others, and how far their pupils had misconceptions (e.g. stereotypes) about others from different backgrounds. While there was a statistically significant improvement in teachers' reports after Schools Linking on the first measure (Figure 6.10), this was not mirrored regarding the second (Figure 6.11).

Before Schools Linking started, a third (32%) of teachers felt that their pupils could reflect on people's similarities and differences (scoring a four or five) (Figure 6.10). At the end of Schools Linking, this proportion had almost doubled, to six in ten (61%).

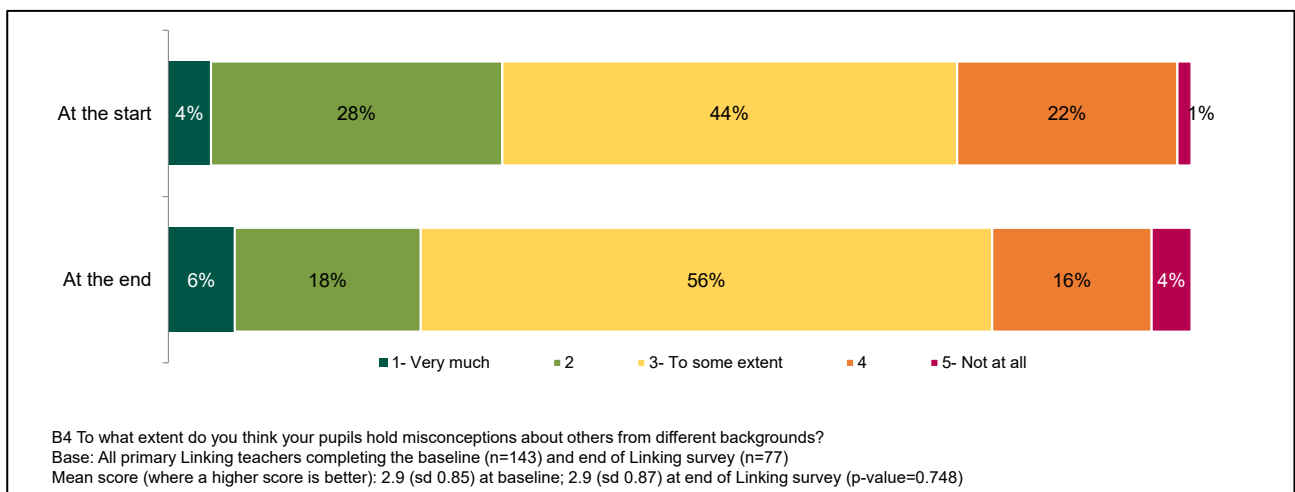
Figure 6.10. Teachers’ perception of extent to which “My pupils are able to reflect on similarities and differences between themselves and others from”



For the question asking teachers about the extent to which they thought their pupils had misconceptions about others, a ‘better’ response was to say ‘not at all’. This is different to all the other measures, where a better response was ‘very much’. The scoring for this question has therefore been reversed with ‘very much’ having a score of one rather than five.

The change in the proportion of teachers thinking that their pupils had misconceptions about others fell from a third (33%) at the start (scoring very much (score one) or two) to a quarter (25%) after Schools Linking. However, this difference was not statistically significant.

Figure 6.11. Teachers’ perception of extent to which they think their pupils have misconceptions about others from different backgrounds



6.6 Summary

Across a range of measures which captured their views about the perceptions and confidence of their primary school pupils, the teachers completing the survey at the end of Linking were consistently more likely to rate their pupils' confidence in mixing more highly than the teachers at the baseline.

Although competing explanations for the better 'after' responses cannot be completely ruled out, these findings complement other evaluation evidence about the positive benefits of Schools Linking, from teachers' self-reported reflections and the qualitative research. However, it is worth noting that, even by the follow up, the Schools Linking teachers still report less positive outcomes than teachers in comparison schools (see Chapter 5). This suggests that Schools Linking improves pupils' outcomes, but does not raise them to the level seen in some other similar schools. The reasons for these differences could perhaps be explored in more detail in future, through an assessment of which factors encourage schools to find out more about, and then participate in, the Schools Linking programmes.

7. Conclusions

7.1 Outcomes and impact: policy implications

The planned IAP-related outcomes for the Schools Linking programme were for linking activities to:

- Enable meaningful social mixing between young people in different schools
- Improve pupils' willingness to meet different types of young people
- Improve pupils' confidence in meeting young people of different ethnicities religions and economic background
- Improve pupils' understanding of different races, religions and cultures
- Improve pupils' awareness of the importance of respecting other people.

At the end of the year, participating teachers reported improvements among their class in a range of IAP-related outcome measures as a result of taking part in the Schools Linking programme. This was evident from the self-reported data, but also when comparing teachers' ratings on a pre- and post-programme basis. Teachers completing the survey at the end of Linking were consistently more likely to rate their pupils' confidence in mixing more highly than the teachers at the baseline.

These findings suggest that even a limited programme of Schools Linking activities, carried out online, has a positive effect on pupils, particularly improving pupils' confidence in meeting young people of different ethnicities, religions and economic background; and improving pupils' understanding of different races, religions and cultures.

However, evidence on the impact of Schools Linking during the 2020/21 academic year in participating schools compared with a comparison group, is not conclusive. Teachers in the comparison group rated their pupils more positively on some social mixing measures even after propensity score matching. There could be a range of factors contributing to this. Because the evaluation was unable to conduct a baseline among comparison schools, due to school closures and various other reasons, the extent of change between the two samples across the academic year is unknown, and it could be that there has been a larger 'improvement' in social mixing measures in the participant group than in the comparison group. The impact of Schools Linking is also acknowledged by participating teachers to be lower than usual during 2020/21 due to the virtual nature of linking activities compared with previous years, but 'how much' lower is unclear because of lack of comparable historic data. Further, there could be additional 'unknown' factors between the comparison and participant groups which cannot be controlled for through the matching process. For example, teachers in the comparison group were more likely than those taking part in Schools Linking to say their pupils had opportunities to mix with others from different backgrounds to themselves, which suggests they came from more diverse schools. Because of changes in the evaluation methodology due to COVID-19, including how the survey had to be conducted, using a third-party panel, it was not possible to target teachers in a matched sample of schools or to collect detailed school-level data.

7.2 Programme delivery implications

The 2020/21 school year has been far from typical for schools and pupils, and the Linking programme has been strongly affected. The evaluation has taken these changes into account. The changes to the programme have allowed some comparison and reflection on 'typical' patterns of linking activity versus that delivered in 2020/21.

Implications for the delivery of Schools Linking and similar interventions in the areas covered by the evaluation include:

- Face-to-face activities and repeated contact with linked classes seemed to work more effectively in developing relationships and helping pupils to challenge prejudices, as reported by teachers.
- Online interactions allowed for some discussions between pupils, and could be used as a trigger for learning more about other cultures, faiths and ethnicities.
- However, the Schools Linking programme should ideally move back to more face-to-face interaction once it is safe to do so in terms of the risk of COVID-19 transmission. This will allow pupils to experience meeting children from other backgrounds in person and to have direct interactions, as the programme was designed and intended. This would also provide an opportunity to conduct further evaluation to understand why schools are motivated to take part in the programme and the extent to which it impacts on IAP-related measures, including collecting the views of pupils, which was not possible for this study.

7.3 Evaluation implications

The delivery and evaluation of the Schools Linking programme have been very significantly affected by the impact of COVID-19, associated lockdowns and regional restrictions, the shift to online learning for many children, and restrictions on meeting in person. While COVID-19 is unprecedented and similar external factors are unlikely to recur in the near future, there are a number of lessons for future evaluation of similar programmes.

There were some limitations to the original impact evaluation design:

- Conclusions on impact would arguably be challenging because of the relatively small scale of the Linking activities themselves.
- The evaluation would not be able to assess long term or sustained impacts because of the nature of the intervention and the evaluation parameters (including duration). A longitudinal element to the evaluation involving participating pupils, for example involving a follow-up with pupils at several time points, could be beneficial to explore whether taking part in Linking activities has a 'lasting' effect on pupils (and their schools). However, it would be challenging to maintain the involvement of schools over time, especially among those in the counterfactual group, who are more difficult to engage in the evaluation to start with given that it does not relate to a specific programme they are delivering.

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic, associated lockdowns, and pausing of linking activities in most areas and schools meant that some elements of the original evaluation design were no longer possible (for example, observations of activities, and inclusion of a survey of secondary school pupils).

Changes to activities and audiences over the course of the evaluation made it necessary to take an iterative approach to the design of the evaluation. Future evaluations of similar programmes should take note of the need to show flexibility, and adapt evaluation methodologies and approaches, where external factors pose such significant challenges for programme delivery.

There has been some useful learning around how to evaluate locally focused social integration interventions:

- Most pupils taking part in Schools Linking are age 7 to 9 so careful consideration was taken on how best to capture views and experiences without raising awareness of discrimination and prejudice. Teachers' views of their pupils' attitudes and behaviours were used to capture the voice of these younger pupils. The original design also involved a programme of structured observations of Linking sessions in primary schools, which it was not possible to continue due to COVID-19. Developing more qualitative approaches for understanding and valuing diversity would add value in future research but was out of scope for this evaluation.
- Utilising questions from established surveys benefits comparability of surveys across evaluations and studies. Simplifying questions and response options and including clear and simple descriptions and examples of terms used worked well. Where a future evaluation design uses surveys for young people, question wording does need to be adapted and cognitively tested.
- Teachers are busy and all efforts were made to minimise the burden placed on them to take part in the evaluation. Administering the survey among teachers at the start of Schools Linking training, and assistance from delivery partners in distributing packs of secondary school pupil surveys and prepaid envelopes, worked well in the initial evaluation design pre-COVID. However, once training sessions were no longer held face-to-face, and after COVID-19 restrictions were introduced, this approach was no longer possible.
- In this evaluation, it was not possible to establish the full profile of classes participating in Schools Linking, yet evaluators need to understand the profile of Linking classes, including the number of pupils and teachers, to monitor response rates and to make judgements on impact assessment. As some linking is only established at short notice, evaluators need to be responsive in order to ensure pre-linking views are captured before activity takes place.

Appendix

A. Local Authority areas identified for comparison survey of teachers not participating in Schools Linking

Local authority
Barnsley
Coventry
Croydon
Doncaster
Dudley
Gateshead
Halton
Kingston upon Hull, City of
Knowsley
Liverpool
Medway
Portsmouth
Reading
Salford
Sandwell
Sefton
Slough
South Tyneside
St. Helens
Stoke-on-Trent
Sunderland
Tameside
Thurrock
Wakefield
Wigan
Wolverhampton

B. Impact of COVID-19 on programme delivery and evaluation methodology

Delivery of Schools Linking was heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on school closures and the capacity of LA staff to deliver the programme within IAP areas. The original evaluation design within each of the four IAP areas included baseline and follow-up surveys of Linking teachers and secondary school pupils before the first Linking activity (Autumn / Winter terms 2019/20) and after the final Linking activity (Summer term 2020). Observations of the first meeting between Linked schools were planned in the Autumn / Winter terms (2019/20). To assess the impact of Schools Linking, a counterfactual survey of teachers and secondary school pupils with similar characteristics to participating schools was planned at both baseline (Autumn / Winter terms 2019/20) and follow-up (Summer term 2020).

The first national lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic was announced by government on 23rd March 2020, shortly after schools were ordered to close on Friday 20th March. From 23rd March 2020 to July 2020, schools remained closed to most pupils and home learning was in place.

During this time, TLN continued to support schools to carry out Linking activities related to identity, diversity and respecting differences, while most students were learning from home. Teacher lesson plans were adapted for virtual delivery and TLN made several resources available to schools such as: activities around identity work, guidance around video calls and shared Virtual Linking sessions, book, poem, and game suggestions. TLN also developed Home Learning resources, for teachers to send to parents, that supported social cohesion and connection.

Due to the school closures, it was agreed with DLUHC and TLN that the evaluation, which had collated some baseline data between January and March 2020, would be paused for the remainder of the 2019/20 academic year. It would re-start in the Autumn term of the 2020/2021 academic year.

However, shortly after the start of the 2020/21 academic year, areas in the Midlands, North East and North West experienced high levels of COVID-19 infection and were subject to regional restrictions in October 2020. These restrictions affected school opening in these areas, and some schools remained shut, including in Bradford and Blackburn with Darwen (IAP areas). A second national lockdown was introduced on 31st October until 2nd December 2020 affecting all areas in England, after which regional restrictions were maintained up until the Christmas period. Shortly after the new year, on 6th January 2021, a third national lockdown was introduced, and schools closed again. Schools re-opened for primary and secondary students from 8th March 2021.

TLN confirmed that Bradford was the only IAP area that would be delivering Schools Linking activities during the remainder of the 2020/21 academic year. The management, co-ordination, and delivery of Schools Linking in Bradford is run by staff at TLN, while delivery of Linking in all other areas, including the IAP areas of Blackburn with Darwen, Peterborough, and Walsall, is run by the local authority (with the support of the Linking Network). Staff in these three LAs experienced a shift in work focus and furlough of LA staff as a result of COVID-19, meaning they did not have the resource to deliver Schools Linking.