



# EVALUATION REPORT

## THE NEW SCHOOL FIRST YEAR EVALUATION

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### Introducing The New School.

The New School is a pioneering educational charity seeking to transform the education system to better serve children and young people, particularly those who are most disadvantaged. Our independent school currently serves 72 young people from our local community in South-East London. Young people come from a variety of backgrounds, including 75% previously home schooled.

I created The New School because I believe we can do things differently. I have seen the problems of our profession from the inside: teaching to the test, the youth mental health crisis, the damaging and unnecessary exclusion of young people from the system. But it does not have to be this way.

At The New School, we believe that not only are these problems avoidable, but that education can provide answers to even bigger social problems. For us, a more equitable society starts in school, with every young person having a voice and a choice in their education. We want every child to feel they have agency; a sense of purpose and goals, and the skills and competencies needed to action those goals. We encourage young people to express themselves and to know that their opinions and thoughts matter. This creates many positive benefits: improved self-esteem, mental health and confidence, which in turn improves their engagement in learning.

We focus on relational practice; trusting, healthy relationships are at the heart of our work. Young people trust us and each other. We use restorative justice, a radically different approach to dealing with behavioural challenges; it is about empathy

and taking responsibility, over punishment. And we measure what matters. We have developed a comprehensive alternative outcomes framework that goes further than mainstream academic performance measures, so that we can really understand what enables young people to thrive in education and in doing so make a positive impact on their future lives.

I'm delighted that this evaluation shows the great progress we've made in establishing our model of education during its first year, with young people reporting a strong sense of belonging, growing confidence in learning, and high levels of life satisfaction. At a time when young people's mental wellness is a big concern in the UK, to find that the greatest positive impact the school has had is on young people and parent/carer wellbeing, is of huge importance. As we know early intervention for young people can have lifelong effects, and the benefits of improved wellbeing for young people's life chances is substantial.

As a new school in its infancy, we are grateful to the University of Nottingham in providing this independent evaluation and their recommendations. This enables us to continue to develop our educational model, centering young people at the heart of their education, and giving them the tools to live happy fulfilled future lives.

We are committed to understanding the impact of what we do in order to hold ourselves accountable, but also to refine and develop our practice. We will continue to challenge, flex, and develop our model as we seek to positively impact education in the UK.

**Lucy Stephens**  
Founder and Director, The New School



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Vignette 1: Achieving wellbeing, the transformative effects of The New School.

In 2020, as the pandemic spread, UK society locked down. Ellie's father was designated as a Key Worker which meant that she could go into school. During the period of the first lockdown she was studying at a different school and she and her parents decided she would be better off at home. By the time of the second lockdown she was studying at The New School, and Ellie and her parents were happy for her to go to school.

Her mother explains. "When the first lockdown happened I was relieved, to be honest. I felt I could have [Ellie] at home and get her physically and emotionally well again [after the problematic experiences she'd had at her previous school]... but during the second lockdown we didn't need that".

Her father continued. "[she] was at The New School by then. She was healthy and happy and we felt that she would get something from being at The New School every day that we couldn't give her at home."

"As a father, I can't describe the relief of dropping your child off at school and she's buzzing to go in. Knowing that she will come out at the end of the day, not exhausted and cross or tearful but relaxed and full of chatter."

Ellie's previous primary school was rated outstanding by Ofsted, and the staff were well trained, professional and keen for the children to do well. Given this Ellie's parents had expected her to thrive there, and she had been looking forward to joining the school. However, they found the school too competitive, fuelled by external targets, and underpinned by strict discipline due to the large class sizes. Ellie did not have the rewarding and fulfilling school life her parents had hoped for, and her negative experience, and the stress associated with it, came as a real surprise to them.

Large classes (the school was oversubscribed) and a need to fulfil externally set benchmarks, made it a place where individual children, particularly if like Ellie they were, as her mother put it, "quiet and no trouble", easily felt lost and unheard.

Ellie didn't refuse to go, "she wasn't a particularly complaining child", but as the first term proceeded, she became more and more distressed. She cried when she was picked up and her emotional state worried her mother. Ellie was finding the pressures of the school very stressful, creating fear and a sense of failure. As her mother explains: "She was afraid that she might be late and be given a 'card' (a disciplinary sanction). There was [also] a sticker system for achievements – if you could write your name, you got a sticker. She couldn't and she cried because she felt she had failed."

"Since Ellie has been at The New School", her mother comments, "our wellbeing as a family has definitely improved - because she is happy. We have met some fantastic families and teachers. I think a child is raised by a community and here you feel you are part of it all."

"We just wanted our daughter to be going in every day to a place that helps her to be happy, healthy - and curious. At The New School we have found that place." Family Case Study child Ellie (7).

### 3 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“The school has a real sense of community and is run by staff and teachers who are passionate, caring and real leaders - even if perhaps they don't 'lead' in a way that mainstream schools would consider to be the right way.” (Family survey)

The New School aims to give young people a different kind of educational experience by creating an inclusive and democratic school community, promoting social justice and fostering positive wellbeing. It aims to help young people flourish and achieve through self-directed learning and to foster a strong sense of agency. This is achieved via four overarching, and overlapping, strategies:

1. Democratic education. This entails the use of teaching methods that provide young people with choices over what and how they study. These include an individualised curriculum, self-directed time, the use of flexi-schooling, and the use of teaching approaches which involve children in decisions about what and how they will study.
2. Relational practice. This requires the development of sustained supportive relationships. It is achieved through small class sizes, the use of democratic approaches to teaching which allows for student choice and self-direction, restorative practice in which young people are treated with respect and supported to resolved conflict in a constructive manner, and a collective management system which allows young people to have a voice in decision making.
3. Sociocracy. This is a method of managing organisations, such as schools, that include both adults and young people in making decisions about the way it operates. This is achieved through ‘sociocracy circles’, in which participants share their views with each other and make collective decisions. Circles are used throughout the school involving staff, parents, and young people in decision-making.
4. Restorative practice, and the associated community accountability policy. This is an approach to managing conflict in which all parties involved can speak and reach an appropriate resolution. This enables all voices to be heard and holds people to account for their actions, but also provides a non-confrontational way to address harmful and damaging behaviours while avoiding blame and punitive methods of discipline.

The New School has an ambition to provide young people with an education which allows them to develop the skills, emotional intelligence and resilience to prosper into adulthood. This includes supporting young people both socially and academically for the next stage of their life to participate in education, in employment, and in wider society. The aim is to achieve this working alongside the wider education system.

The way the principles above are applied over the course of a school day varies. But Lucy Stephens, the Director, has mapped out what could be considered to be a 'typical' day at The New School.

A day at The New School.

We are constantly evolving our educational offer in response to young people's needs and the findings of our ongoing evaluation and research – and no two days are the same. However, at the time of writing, a typical day at The New School will broadly be structured as follows:

9.00-9.20a.m – all classes start with a morning check-in. This may be done in class or in the forest. It's a time to come together to discuss the day ahead, to address any issues, and to get to know each other a little better. Classes may also share breakfast at this time.

9.20-11.45a.m – classes will have timetabled literacy and maths sessions, as well as a specialist subject (art, media/ICT, science).

11.45-12.30p.m – we all eat lunch together at communal tables, with everyone serving and sharing the food laid out in the middle of the tables. Eating family style, allows young people to develop autonomy over their eating, regulate portion control, try new foods if they wish or select a plain option if they prefer.

12.30-2.00p.m – young people have a range of activities that they sign up for. This could be a specialist project (science, media/ICT, art), sports, forest school, music. On a Wednesday this will look like workshops put on by all staff according to their interests/skills e.g. juggling, dungeons and dragons, school newspaper, capoeira.

2.00-3.00p.m – Self-directed time, where young people can choose what they do; often using their My Learning Plans to structure their session. The My Learning Plans are a tool we use for young people to set their goals, to decide what they want to work on, to develop their social and emotional skills, and to develop their agency in learning.

3.00-3.15pm – Check-out. The class come together to read, discuss the day, and address any issues.

Lucy Stephens, Founder and Director

### 3.1 FINDINGS ON THE NEW SCHOOL MODEL

The New School has developed a Theory of Change which shows how the practices of democratic education are intended to shape the lives of young people and identifies five outputs, and four outcomes (see Appendix 1). Table 1 and Table 2 show the extent to which these have been achieved within the school, based on the findings of the evaluation.

<b>Outputs</b>	<b>How outputs relate to the findings of the evaluation.</b>
<i>Self-directed learning and practical experiences reflecting passions and interests</i>	Providing classes and individual children with the chance to co-create what and how they learn, and the provision of self-directed time has meant that students at The New School can pursue their passions and interests in learning. This is supported through a curriculum that introduces new ideas and practical experiences which might then become future passions and interests. This takes time to develop in children, and so was not as evident for some children who had recently joined the school but there is evidence that giving young people voice and autonomy in their education can increase their confidence.
<i>Positive and trusting relationships and safe spaces nurture young people to achieve their goals</i>	The democratic approach to teaching which enables staff and students to co-create approaches to learning, and the use of sociocracy circles to support collective decision making, have enabled students to develop trusting relationships with each other and their teachers. Families consider their children are safe and looked after, and there is evidence that young people are achieving the goals they set for themselves. The restorative justice approach has led to improvements in discipline and to the development of trusting relationships.
<i>Young people are inspired by peers and role models and know more about life's opportunities</i>	The school has created a close and collegial community characterised by supportive relationships. This has provided a chance for children to form wider friendship groups and so establish forms of peer support. Many students have established positive relationships with peers and staff that were not previously part of their educational experience. This has not yet translated into them being inspired by their peers, or having a better grasp of life's opportunities, but this should become more evident as the school and children develop together. This, however, remains a priority for future development.
<i>Young people have a stake in their school life through enacting their decision-making agency</i>	The use of approaches to teaching which allow for the co-creation of learning experiences between students and between students and staff have provided young people with the opportunity to influence decision-making. This is enacted in various ways, including collaboratively setting learning goals, choosing projects and activities, and participating in decision making sociocracy circles. There is evidence that young people are starting to take more responsibility for their learning, developing their skills and 'being themselves' and to have a stake in the life of the school.
<i>Young people connect with school resources and real-world learning experiences</i>	The school gives students many opportunities for practical learning, for example in arts and creativity, science and technology, as well as in self-directed activities and forest skills. These opportunities enable learners to see learning as relevant for them. There is evidence that young people meet these opportunities with enthusiasm, making good use of the resources available to them in classrooms, communal spaces and outside the school. The school may need to consider how resources, teaching and real-world learning experiences remain relevant and beneficial for older students, in particular in considering life beyond the school.

**Table 1: summary of findings for student outputs.**



### 3.2 FINDINGS ON STUDENT OUTCOMES

Student outcome	Key findings	Evidence snapshot
<b>Self-efficacy</b>	<p>Through the use of democratic teaching methods (including self-directed time, offering choices about learning and facilitating group decision making), the majority of students have been able to develop their skills as self-directed learners.</p> <p>This has resulted in improvements in children’s confidence as learners and in their abilities to engage in the social life of the school.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the autumn term, 72% (28/39) of students had met at least one of their self-directed learning goals, rising to 77% (33/43) in the summer term. By the end of the year, 65% (28/43) had met three or more goals. All students (39/39) who have been at the school for three terms have met, or partly met, at least three self-directed learning goals. (My Learning Plan)</li> <li>• <i>“Huge growth in confidence as well as progress across all academic subjects.”</i> (Family survey)</li> </ul>
<b>Self-esteem</b>	<p>Through teaching strategies which allow learners to follow their own interests and enthusiasm, children have been able to produce work in which they take pride. This and the sense of belonging which has arisen from their active involvement in school life (achieved in part through sociocracy circles) have enhanced how they feel about themselves.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 94% (34/36) of families think their child(ren) can express and develop their personal attitudes and values at The New School. (Family survey)</li> <li>• <i>“Something I am proud of. My newspaper article. I was the first person in the whole class to finish ... my teacher she said, ‘today I am going to make copies of them’.”</i> (Family case study)</li> <li>• <i>“He has grown in confidence; he can ask questions, he ... can speak up.”</i> (Family case study)</li> </ul>
<b>Educational engagement</b>	<p>Students are happy to attend the school and engage in their learning. The majority (75%) of the children had previously been home educated. Providing an environment where they feel safe to attend and engage in their learning is a considerable achievement. This arises from a climate in which children are respected and supported, in part through the independence they are given, and in part through the strength of the school community. The use of ‘My Learning Plan’ to set and review targets collaboratively is providing one means by which children are able to be more engaged in their learning and to make progress in becoming self-directed learners. Resulting student academic progress is consistent with progress seen across the education sector during the Covid-19 pandemic, but remains a priority for development.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Average attendance for 2020-21 was 94%. The two pupils identified as being school refusers prior to joining The New School, both have attendance of 93%. 89% (40/45) of students have attendance over 90%. (Attendance data)</li> <li>• 74% (31/42) of students reported a positive change in their attitude to learning and the curriculum between the autumn and summer terms. (PASS data)</li> <li>• Teachers report that between the autumn and summer terms, 85% (33/39) of students have improved their purposeful attention at school, 92% (36/39) of students participate more constructively, and 95% (37/39) of students have improved how they relate to and learn with their peers. (Boxall profile)</li> <li>• Across the year, all pupils have made progress in phonics and 98% (40/41) have made progress in reading. 76% (31/41) have made progress in all of reading, writing and maths. (Teacher assessment data)</li> </ul>
<b>Life satisfaction</b>	<p>The considerable majority of students have high levels of life satisfaction. This is a noted improvement for children who had suffered from stress and emotional problems in previous schools. The positive impact the school has had on pupil and parent wellbeing is the strongest finding from this evaluation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the spring term, 61% (14/23) of students in year 3-6 agreed to some extent that their life was ‘better than most kids’, increasing to 73% (16/22) in the summer term. In the summer term, 82% (18/22) of students in years 3-6 agreed to some extent that their life was going well. (My Outcomes)</li> <li>• <i>“There has been a holistic change in every part of my daughter’s life since the start of TNS. Once she became happy at school and felt listened to and a valued member of the school the rest of life became so much happier.”</i> (Family survey)</li> </ul>

Table 2: summary of findings for student outcomes.

### 3.3 FINDINGS AGAINST THE CORE EVALUATION QUESTIONS

#### **Core question 1: what does this evaluation say about how well the school is responding to its social context and specifically to the needs of children?**

The New School has successfully developed an approach based on democratic education, relational practices, sociocracy, and restorative justice. This has established a supportive and fulfilling educational environment for children. It has also established a climate in which children who had previously been home schooled feel able to attend. The numbers of electively home educated children in the UK are growing and there are concerns that not enough is known about them or the education they receive.

Given the statutory duty of local councils to review and manage this group of children The New School has developed a model of education which could provide for a community of children who have been, or who feel, marginalised from mainstream education, with the resulting loss of the benefits associated with the provision of schooling. This could provide valuable assistance for local councils in meeting their obligations. The creation of a climate in which children feel they belong has also demonstrably improved the wellbeing of almost all children, some of whom had suffered significant wellbeing and mental health issues before joining The New School. Through this The New School is providing a service to children, their parents and to the local community, and also to local councils.

Cost benefit analysis calculations show that the benefits of the school to the children, their parents and society are already exceeding the running costs of the school. For the 2020-21 academic year the best fit benefit cost ratio was 2.40:1. In other words for every £1 invested The New School provided a monetisable benefit of £2.40 (N.B. this was the best fit in a range from 1.06:1 (low) to 3.46:1 (high)). It should also be emphasised that not all benefits can be assigned a financial value and there are a great many which are incalculable. This demonstrates a significant contribution after only one year of work.

Projections of future growth of the school suggest that benefits will grow much quicker than costs. Once the school reaches full occupancy (planned to be 120 young people in the 2025-26 academic year) the same calculations estimate that the benefit-cost ratio will be 3.88:1 (this is the best fit in a range from 1.70:1 (low) to 5.58:1 (high)). This calculation is made on the assumption that the population of young people in 2025-26 shares the same proportional make up as the 2020-21 academic year, where (for example) 75% of the children had been previously home schooled, and that they, their families, and the state, as a result, receive the benefits achieved during or projected to arise from the 2020-21 academic year.

#### **Core question 2: What are the strengths and weaknesses of the democratic model used by The New School and how well is it being applied?**

The New School has successfully implemented many processes associated with democratic education. These include: self-directed time, the use of flexi-schooling, sociocracy circles, and the use of teaching approaches which empower children to collaborate with teachers to decide how, and sometimes what, they learn. However, some staff are still uncertain about the best ways to implement them, and this leads to some inconsistency in their application. Where children are able to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by democratic education, they develop a sense of belonging in the school which in turn leads to positive changes in student self-perception and attitudes to learning.

#### **Core question 3: What outcomes do young people achieve and how do these outcomes relate to the democratic model used by the school?**

Student engagement and discipline have both improved over the first year of operation. The school has achieved this despite the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdowns which interrupted the progress made in the first term of the 2020-21 academic year. Students made progress in academic learning over the course of the very challenging period of the pandemic. Student attainment was not always at

target levels, and progress was not always as rapid as students, parents, and the school would hope. However, young people's progress was comparable with that seen in mainstream schools over the equivalent period.

Children are benefitting from an approach to teaching which employs democratic methods. They are showing improvements in both self-esteem and self-efficacy and in engagement in their learning. They are forming strong relationships with peers and teachers and together this is providing them with satisfaction in their learning and educational experiences. One illustration of this is that two children who had previously been school-refusers when at other schools, now have attendance of over 92%. There is less evidence of children being inspired by their peers or of real-world learning, but these, especially the first, should emerge from the successful establishment of a supportive community. Nonetheless they remain a priority for development.

The main benefit identified in this evaluation was to the wellbeing of children and their families. Given current concerns about poor wellbeing in children and the resulting effects of this on their future mental health and life chances, investment in The New School presents a chance for early intervention for children and young people that can have lifelong affects.

**Core question 4: What are teacher experiences of working at the school and specifically of supporting young people and creating meaningful learning experiences**

Teachers expressed their belief that democratic approaches to learning had enabled their students to develop as self-directed learners and cited strategies which encouraged co-creation and gave young people choices over their learning including self-directed time and the policy of offering choices for children in what and how they learn. Staff also spoke about the challenges they had experience during the first year of the school. This entailed what some described as a "steep learning curve". Some had found working in the school extremely challenging or had felt that their expertise had not been fully recognised. There was, however, a general appreciation for democratic models of school management, including the forms of consultation and dialogue associated with staff sociocracy circles.

### 3.4 RECOMMENDATIONS.

1. To build on the successes of the first year, to further develop the approaches to teaching (and in doing so address any issues of inconsistencies). Staff should agree a consistent and shared set of theories, language, and tools for democratic education. This would also address some of the uncertainties some teachers feel about their role and provide a means for inducting and supporting new members of staff. This would also allow staff to learn from their experiences of developing democratic pedagogy over the first year.
2. Develop the use of the theory of change to establish it as a means for collective review and planning. The Theory of Change (Appendix 1) provides a conceptual and practical model for The New School. Allowing for community ownership over this document would enable further negotiation over the practical implications for meeting these aspirations. This would also contribute to recommendation 1.
3. Establish a focus on improving student attainment and progress which builds on the successful establishment of the school community, and which is communicated with parents. The school has achieved many successes in a difficult period, but there is now a need to develop and improve children's attainment and progress so that it is in line with the social and wellbeing improvements already achieved. This includes a need to build on successes in building young people's self-efficacy to develop children's metacognitive abilities (to understand themselves as learners). This focus on attainment should also become a topic for communication with parents who felt that the emphasis on relationships and self-directed learning should now be complemented with a more explicit dialogue about curricula and student progression in learning. This becomes especially significant given recommendation 4.
4. Develop plans for democratic education with older children. The plans for the school to expand and grow will mean that the demographic of the school will change. There is a need to consider how the needs and competencies of older students differ from the current age groups and how the approaches of the school should be adapted. This should also clarify routes to level 2 (GCSE or equivalent) qualifications, which have a demonstrable benefit to life chances. These are not always consistent with democratic pedagogy but there are lessons from how others, including Summerhill, have managed this which could help the school to develop their own approach.
5. Be more explicit about the contribution of the school to pupil, parent and staff wellbeing. Enhancing learner wellbeing is already a priority but the strength of data on the improvements to both child and parent wellbeing from children attending the school suggests that there is scope to make this aspiration a more explicit priority and demonstrable benefit of the school.
6. Review and rationalise the use of data in the school. This arises, in part, from the planned development of the school and the resulting older year groups noted in recommendation 4. This also builds on recommendation 5, concerning child and parent wellbeing. Establishing a means of recording a range of experiences related to the findings of this evaluation, including improvements in parental wellbeing, and evidence about young people's progression through the school, would provide evidence of actual benefits to contrast against those predicted in the cost benefit analysis.
7. On the strength of recommendation 6 build on the Cost Benefit Analysis undertaken for this evaluation to document the actual achieved benefits of the school to children, parents and to the local area, and to identify other benefits provided by the school. This can be adjusted to show changing demographics of the student population and resulting benefits arising from recommendation 6.
8. Disseminate the lessons learned over the first year and the findings of the evaluation to allow others, including those in mainstream education, to learn from them. Of particular importance is being able to communicate the wellbeing problems experienced by some in the school community in previous schooling and how these were resolved at The New School. This can draw from the narrative literature review conducted for this evaluation to provide a scholarly context for this work.

## 4 BACKGROUND

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW SCHOOL

The New School was established with the ambition to “positively change the way we educate our children in the UK” by providing them with a sense of agency. This is intended to be achieved by creating an inclusive and democratic school community, promoting social justice and fostering wellbeing. The key elements of this approach can be considered under four overarching strategies which have been introduced in the executive summary. These are:

1. Democratic education.
2. Relational practice.
3. Sociocracy.
4. Restorative practice.

These features of the school are intended to enable and encourage children to take responsibility for themselves as learners and for their behaviour around the school. Alongside the school’s pastoral care system, this supportive relational culture is intended to promote mental wellbeing amongst young people. The school’s aim and mission, the ways in which these are intended to be achieved, and the effects the school aspires to have on children are outlined in the school’s Theory of Change. These are set out in Appendix 1. This is an approach which has a basis in research academic literature. For example, there is considerable evidence that teachers can have considerable impact on children’s wellbeing, both good and bad<sup>1</sup>.

Whilst approaches to schooling which are punitive can have a negative impact on wellbeing, approaches which foster belonging<sup>2</sup>, give a chance for children to be heard, and allow them to participate in decision-making help develop well-being<sup>3</sup>.

This is associated with academic achievement. Children who experience better mental health and wellbeing are more likely to do well at school, increasing career prospects later in life<sup>4,5</sup>. “In contrast children who experience severe behavioural problems generate high demands on the education and social care systems as well as on health services, with adverse consequences that persist into adulthood” (McDaid, 2011: 7)<sup>6</sup>.

The work of schools can sometimes be seen as a trade-off between wellbeing and achievement, where pressures to succeed result in better academic results but poorer wellbeing. This, however, need not be the case<sup>7</sup>, and there is every reason to believe that employing methods which foster belonging and develop active pupil participation can both support student wellbeing and allow children to achieve.

### 4.2 STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

The New School opened its doors to its first cohort of students in September 2020. This cohort comprised 45 students and their families, 34 of whom (75%) had previously been home schooled. There were also two

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<sup>1</sup> Clark, A E, Flèche, S., Layard, R., Powdthavee, N., and Ward, G. (2018), *The Origins of Happiness*, Princetown: Princeton University Press.

<sup>2</sup> Sanders, J. and Munford, R. (2016) ‘Fostering a Sense of Belonging at School—Five Orientations to Practice That Assist Vulnerable Youth to Create a Positive Student Identity’, *School Psychology International*, 37(2), pp. 155–171.

<sup>3</sup> See for example: Haraldstad, Å., Tveit, A.D. and Kovač, V.B. (2021) ‘Democracy in Schools: Qualitative Analysis of Pupils’ Experiences of Democracy in the Context of the Norwegian School’, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, pp. 1–17.

<sup>4</sup> Bücker, S. et al. (2018) ‘Subjective well-being and academic achievement: A meta-analysis’, *Journal of Research in Personality*, 74, pp. 83–94.

<sup>5</sup> Bortes, C. et al. (2021) ‘The Bidirectional Relationship Between Subjective Well-Being and Academic Achievement in Adolescence’, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 50(5), pp. 992–1002

<sup>6</sup> McDaid, D. (2011) *Making the long-term economic case for investing in mental health to contribute to sustainability*. EU, Brussels.

<sup>7</sup> Heller-Sahlgren, G (2018). *The Achievement – Wellbeing Trade-Off in Education*. London: Centre for Education Economics.

children who struggled to fit into school and whose parents chose to withdraw them from mainstream schooling. Most of these children had been home educated for ideological reasons, but, in two cases, parents were home-schooling their children because they refused to attend schools. This proportion of previously home-schooled children is much higher than in mainstream schools (where it is typically less than 1%).

As previously Electively Home Educated (EHE) children form such a large proportion of the school's population, their experiences are a significant ongoing theme in all elements of the evaluation. Based on the first year of operation, it appears The New School has provided a significant service for this community of parents and children by creating an environment in which EHE children can not only attend, but in most cases, flourish.

A second significant theme throughout this evaluation concerns the numbers of children whose previous experiences of schooling had detrimentally affected their mental health and wellbeing. Many of these, but not all, overlap with the EHE cohort as they had been withdrawn from schools where they were experiencing difficulties to be home educated. The ability of The New School to enhance child and parent wellbeing is another significant finding as it constitutes a benefit for a significant proportion of the school population.

Other aspects of the makeup of the student body at The New School are more comparable to other schools. Of the 45 students, 13 (28.9%) are eligible for free school meals (compared to 20.8% in schools nationally), 11 (24.4%) are identified as having Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND, compared to 15.9% nationally) and 18 (40%) are from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds (compared to 33.6% nationally).

#### 4.3 MONITORING EVALUATION AND THE USE OF DATA

The New School is a data rich school. The monitoring and evaluation processes in the school are designed to address the elements set out in the Theory of Change (see Appendix 1). Some of this data, such as absence, progress and achievement, are common to all schools; however, other sources of data are distinctive to The New School. The timing of this data collection is shown in Appendix 3<sup>8</sup>.

1. Student background and demographic data. This includes data on pupils' gender, age, ethnicity, EAL and, entitlement to free school meals. It also includes information about previous schools, whether the child has been home educated and their SEND status and associated needs
2. Student attendance. Attendance data is recorded across the year. The New School operates a 'flexible Friday' and this is also taken into account when reporting
3. Student behaviour. The New School records negative behaviour incidents including the nature and severity of the incident, the staff involved, and the intervention chosen. In the summer term, the school also began recording incidents of positive behaviour
4. Student attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics, recorded through termly teacher assessments
5. Boxall profile. An instrument used to measure the social, emotional and behavioural development of children. Boxall is a termly teacher assessment of pupils against two key areas: 'organisation of experience' and 'internalisation of controls'
6. Pupil Attitudes to Self and School (PASS). A self-report instrument which involves a termly on-screen assessment in which pupils self-report on items including self-efficacy and motivation
7. The 'My Outcomes' survey. A combined self-report survey which is composed of the Student Resilience and Student Wellbeing scales. This is future orientated
8. Goal setting recorded in 'My Learning Plan'. Each term, pupils identify up to three personal goals. Records are kept of the associated skills and the main activity through which the goal is to be worked on. Goals are reviewed at the end of the term and rated 'met', 'part met' or 'unmet'

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<sup>8</sup> This report refers to the 2020-21 academic year and the ways in which monitoring and evaluation processes were managed during that year. Changes have subsequently been made to the way in which data is collected, including the frequency of it, by the school.

#### 4.4 THE WIDER CONTEXT DURING THE PERIOD OF THE EVALUATION

The New School opened its doors in September 2020 in the midst of a pandemic. This evaluation was commissioned in December 2020 and was due to start in January 2021. However, the evolution of the pandemic and the introduction of nationwide lockdowns posed considerable challenges for both the school community and the conduct of the evaluation. The original evaluation design had been based on an Action Research approach, but the disruption resulting from Covid-19 restrictions, especially the lockdown early in 2021, meant that many staff no longer had the capacity to participate in this element of the evaluation. There were also changes to the timing of data collection and to the nature of the evaluation itself. The evaluation was originally intended to start in January 2021 and be completed in August. However, it was not possible to start data collection until the end of March so completion was postponed until the end of November.

It is important to emphasise this, because the disruption caused by the pandemic means that the first year of The New School's operation is unlikely to be typical. The data on which this evaluation draws provides a detailed picture of the experiences of staff, children and their families over this period, and there is evidence of the effects of this disrupted year on many aspects of the school, not least on children's social and academic progress. This is consistent with the wider context of schooling in England, with Ofqual reporting that children had generally fallen a month or so behind expectations. This 'learning loss' was most extreme for primary aged children (all children at The New School are currently in this age group) and most evident in Maths<sup>9</sup>.

A second significant feature of the context in which The New School was founded and this evaluation conducted concerns the proportion of children who had previously been Electively Home Educated (EHE). These constitute a significant proportion (75%) of the student body. The reasons behind parents' decisions to home educate their children, and the actual nature of that home education experience are very diverse. However, there are a number of considerations in understanding this cohort and in appreciating the actual and potential contribution of The New School:

1. The actual numbers of children who are home schooled in England is not known, a situation described as 'astonishing' in a report by the House of Commons Education Select Committee in July 2021.<sup>10</sup> However, even before the Covid-19 pandemic, estimates indicated that the numbers of children being home educated was increasing, with a 2018 report suggesting there had been significant growth in the numbers in England.<sup>11</sup>
2. Monitoring home education is the responsibility of local authorities who are required to ensure that home educated children are "receiving a suitable full-time education".<sup>12</sup> Where this is not the case local authorities are obliged to serve a "school attendance" order.
3. During the period of enforced home-schooling resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, parents in England reported negative effects of home-schooling on their mental health and wellbeing<sup>13</sup>
4. Many of the children at The New School are being home-schooled because of negative experiences of mainstream schools

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<sup>9</sup> This is based on studies of student experience in 2020, i.e. before the opening of The New School. No analysis has been reported for learning loss in 2021. For more information on the 2020 study see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/learning-during-the-pandemic/learning-during-the-pandemic-quantifying-lost-time--2>

<sup>10</sup> See: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5802/cmselect/cmeduc/84/8402.htm>

<sup>11</sup> See: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn05108/>

<sup>12</sup> See local authority guidance on Home Schooling:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/791527/Elective\\_home\\_education\\_guidance\\_for\\_LAv2.0.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/791527/Elective_home_education_guidance_for_LAv2.0.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> A study by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) showed that home schooling had had a detrimental effect on parent's mental health see:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsongreatbritain/19february2021#homeschooling>

Increasing concerns for the wellbeing and mental health of children is the third significant factor in relation to the context in which this work was conducted. There is a recognition that the wellbeing of children in England is low by comparison with other countries and that this situation is getting worse.<sup>14</sup> Equally, the proportion of children experiencing mental health difficulties in the UK continues to increase, with the NHS reporting a rise in the proportion of children presenting with mental health concerns from one in nine in 2017 to one in six in 2020.<sup>15</sup> Children's wellbeing is very much a cause for concern, and there is a need to better understand why this situation seems to be worsening and what can be done about it. The mission of The New School to provide an educational experience which promotes and supports children's wellbeing means that the lessons learnt from their experience, and from this evaluation, can have relevance for a much wider audience.

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<sup>14</sup>This is outlined in a 2020 report from the Department for Education:  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/925329/State\\_of\\_the\\_nation\\_2020\\_children\\_and\\_young\\_people\\_s\\_wellbeing.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/925329/State_of_the_nation_2020_children_and_young_people_s_wellbeing.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> This is detailed in a survey undertaken by the National Health service:  
[https://files.digital.nhs.uk/CB/C41981/mhcyp\\_2020\\_rep.pdf](https://files.digital.nhs.uk/CB/C41981/mhcyp_2020_rep.pdf)



## 5 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The New School opened in September 2020 and this evaluation was commissioned in December that year. The aim of the evaluation is to examine the first year of operation of the school. This had both summative and formative aspirations in that the evaluation reports on the achievements of the school over that period and provides a stimulus for planning for the next stage of development of the school.

The data used throughout is drawn from all but two of the cohort of children who attended the school during the 2020-21 academic year, their families, and the staff who worked in the school over that period. Two families did not consent to participate in this evaluation and so data referring to them or their children have been excluded from the evaluation. The evaluation was designed to answer the following four core questions.

- Core question 1: what does this evaluation say about how well the school is responding to its social context and specifically to children as members of that community?
- Core question 2: What are the strengths and weaknesses of the democratic model used by the new school and how well is it being applied?
- Core question 3: What outcomes do young people achieve and how do these outcomes relate to the democratic model used by the school?
- Core question 4: What are teacher experiences of working at the school and specifically of supporting young people and creating meaningful learning experiences?

This was achieved across seven strands of activity. This drew on data collected by the school as part of its day-to-day operations and data collected solely for the purpose of this evaluation. This included a study visit conducted by three researchers, who observed classes, spoke to children and staff alike and attended sociocracy circles (student and staff). This is not treated as a separate strand of research but was nonetheless useful to provide a greater understanding of the work of the school. A second smaller element of the project was conducting staff action research. The original aim was for all staff to be involved in action research over the course of the year. The pressures of work and interruptions to the progress of the year resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic means that this was not a major feature of the evaluation. However, some action research was conducted, although less than planned, and an example of what this entailed is shown in Appendix 2. The seven main research strands are described below.

### 5.1 STRAND 1: ANALYSIS OF SCHOOL DATA

This strand entailed an analysis of data to ascertain student attendance, behaviour, attainment, and progression over the course of the 2020-21 academic year. The New School collects data on attainment, progress, attendance and behaviour and enhances this through the use of a suite of data collection instruments intended to examine student progress and experiences against the Theory of Change (see Appendix 1).

Together this comprised eight sources of data:

1. Student background and demographic data
2. Student attendance
3. Student behaviour, derived from incident reports
4. Student attainment and progress in phonics, reading, writing and mathematics
5. Boxall profile. An instrument used to measure the social, emotional and behavioural development of children
6. Pupil Attitudes to Self and School (PASS), a self-report instrument completed by students
7. My Outcomes, an instrument which measures student wellbeing and life satisfaction through the Student Resilience Survey and Student Wellbeing survey
8. My Learning Plan, an instrument to enable students to set themselves goals and record their progress against them

## 5.2 STRAND 2: FAMILY CASE STUDIES

The second strand entailed the conduct of eight in-depth case studies. The family case studies involved detailed examination of the experiences of a group of children and their families. Eight families were identified from an initial analysis of data from Strand 1 to provide a representative sample of the wider school population. School data about the participating children was used to establish how they were performing, and this was followed by interviews with 12 children and their parents and guardians. The interviews were semi-structured, conducted online, and were approximately forty-five minutes in duration. There were also two follow up telephone interviews.

## 5.3 STRAND 3: FAMILY SURVEY

A family survey provided opportunities for a wider group of families to share their experiences of The New School. The survey comprised 16 closed questions and 4 open questions and provided both quantitative and qualitative data. Responses were received from 36 families, covering more than 40 of the 45 children included in the evaluation. The items in this survey were developed to address the elements of the Theory of Change (see Appendix 1). They outlined the aim and mission of the school and identified the outcomes (i.e. what children would gain from their time at the school). They also identified target outputs (i.e. the kinds of behaviours the school wants to encourage in young people).

## 5.4 STRAND 4: STAFF FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups with staff were held twice during the project, four in March 2021 and three in July 2021. These provided eight hours of recorded data in total. The focus groups explored four related areas:

1. Staff experiences of working at The New School
2. The relevance and importance of democratic education to staff, with a particular concern for student voice, autonomy, and participation
3. The contributions staff believe they make to young people's learning and development, with particular attention to the things that staff feel make a difference to young people's learning
4. The developmental priorities for staff in the short and medium term, in relation to their own practices and those of the school as a whole

## 5.5 STRAND 5: INDIVIDUAL STAFF INTERVIEWS

Individual interviews were undertaken with 13 members of staff (five teachers, three specialist teachers and five staff in administrative, support and leadership roles). These provided data on the experiences of staff working in the school and the development of the school over its first year of operation. It gave participants a chance to explain what they understood democratic education to be and how their practices and those of their colleagues were consistent, or otherwise, with this conception of education. Interviewees were also able to talk about the children in the school, their backgrounds, characters, progress in learning, and social and emotional development. In total over 20 hours of individual interviews were conducted between July and September.

## 5.6 STRAND 6: REVIEW OF WELLBEING AND DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION LITERATURE

The sixth strand entailed a narrative literature review. This brought together literature in the following areas:

1. Defining wellbeing as the term is applied in psychiatry, psychology and sociological contexts
2. How children's wellbeing relates to schooling
3. The practices associated with schooling, and especially democratic schooling, which could underpin and support children's wellbeing

4. How child wellbeing impacts on children's behaviour, attendance and attainment in school
5. The longer term effects failure to provide for children's wellbeing has on them and their life chances

The review gave a wider context to the data collection and findings and provided a basis for inferences about how the findings could explain successes or challenges in the current work of the school, and predictions about children's successes in their school life and beyond. This was instrumental in developing a cost benefit analysis.

## 5.7 STRAND 7: COST BENEFIT ANALYSIS.

The final strand of the evaluation concerned the calculation of a cost benefit analysis. This sought to achieve the following:

- To provide a financial impact metric, in the form of a benefit-cost ratio, that could be used to establish the financial value of the social impact of this model of education
- To assess the relative cost of outcomes in making a case for scaling this model as a sustainable alternative to mainstream education and/or provision for excluded or SEND young people
- To support a future social investment model or social outcome contract income stream for the school

The calculation of the cost benefit analysis was the culmination of the data collected in this project. This drew from existing research on the costs of a range of contemporary issues including, but not limited to a) the cost of failing to provide adequately for child wellbeing, b) the relative costs and benefits of different forms of education, in particular home schooling, and c) the costs of people not being in education, employment or training (i.e. NEET).

In undertaking this Cost Benefit Analysis, The New School were keen to avoid 'spurious' use of data on longer term cost savings to 'justify/promote' their approach. A key part of the brief was establishing the cost and value proposition against the current spend in different parts of the education system. To do this we sought to develop a mechanism that is transparent and can be shared with commissioners to support a new pedagogy linked to the need for early intervention for young people who could benefit from this model of education. We also aimed to establish a hypothesis for longer term cost comparisons with the current system to identify a) possible savings in comparison to existing education funding, and b) value for money, where this might save future costs. It was recognised that the cost per pupil for The New School would be higher than in many mainstream schools, so the evaluation and cost benefit analysis are designed to be considered in tandem when assessing the appropriate cost and business case for different educational models to support students.

## 6 EVALUATION FINDINGS: THE APPLICATION OF DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION AND THE EFFECT THAT THIS IS HAVING

This section presents the findings from each strand of the project and draws on the Theory of Change which sits at the heart of the model of education adopted by the school. The findings are presented under two overarching themes: how the democratic model of education has been applied (addressing issues of process) (see 6.1) and the effects this has had on young people (addressing outcomes and outputs) (see 6.2).

### 6.1 HOW THE DEMOCRATIC MODEL OF EDUCATION HAS BEEN APPLIED

This part of the findings reports on how well the democratic model of education has been applied, how staff and young people have embraced this approach and what challenges have emerged as a result. This is presented as six themes, each illustrated with extracts from data.

#### 6.1.1 RELATIONAL PRACTICE AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

**The New School has established an environment with positive relationships between staff, parents, and young people.** The New School's approach is for "relationships between the young people and staff... [to be] more equal and less authoritarian" (Teacher interview).

The attention to forming productive relationships meant that children "formed strong bonds with their teachers straight away" (Family Survey). This aspect of The New School is seen to set it apart from many mainstream schools:

"In all the mainstream schools that I have worked in the focus on relationships and kindness was really only the 'tip of the iceberg', but, at TNS, all staff respect and believe in relationship building, respect and integrity." (Teacher interview)

This contrast with mainstream schools was commented upon in many family case studies, with one parent saying, "It's not so much about the communication with parents but with children – they are treating children as human beings – not herding them like cows" (Family case study). This view is shared by most parents. In the family survey 91.6% agreed or agreed strongly with the statement: 'My child develops positive and trusting relationships at The New School'. Only one respondent disagreed with this statement.

A central feature of this work is a practice termed 'sociocracy circles'. This was described as a means to reach "class agreements" (Staff focus group) through dialogue amongst a group of students and a member of staff. This changes the dynamics of classrooms to enable children to be more involved in decision making and has been transformational for some staff who commented that "listening to the children's sociocracy circles" was "absolutely amazing" (Staff focus group). Children were also able to talk about their experiences of these circles and explain how they were used:

"We do it through things called circles. There are a lot of ways to do it like making a circle where you can decide... things like move subjects around – have literacy at a certain time, making agreements like democracy." (Family Case Study)

This is a strategy which has taken time to implement and develop but it now appears to have been embraced by most of the school community.

"In the beginning there was much more resistance to the circles [but]... now it has become established and there are some children who are always in circles ... but now that it is established as a language in the school they understand, the kids understand, what they do." (Family case study)

There is a recognition that they are “still a work in progress but are resulting in better solutions and better actions” (Teacher interview). The use of sociocracy circles sits at the heart of the ways in which The New School has been able to form constructive relationships between children and staff so quickly.

Interviewees in the family case studies reported that the relationships between the staff and the parents were also very good. Parents feel that staff have “time to talk”, that they “are interested in my child” and “observant” of each child’s needs and skills. The individual learning plan meetings where young people, along with their parents(s)/carer(s), meet teachers to discuss their work and make plans was commented on as being much more valuable than Parents’ Evening in mainstream schools. Together these strategies provided the basis for constructive relationships, which enabled children to play an active role in decision making:

“I think the way actually they go about teaching works for us, and it came at the right time. Just not, for instance, using a structure imposed on the pupils. No, we don’t want that. Right now he [my son] is very much part of that whole process of decision making. So I think that allows us the maximum freedom from stress in our home.” (Family Case Study)

The New School has used multiple strategies to develop constructive relationships between young people and between them and their teachers including restorative justice. This is an approach to managing conflict in which people affected by other’s behaviours, and those whose behaviour caused harm, are able to speak and reach an appropriate resolution. One member of staff explained that “the relational approach [including restorative circles] replaces the standard comprehensive school application of rewards and punishment” (Staff focus group). Children are able to be “an intrinsic part of the decision-making process of these restorative circles” (Staff focus group) and this has given them reassurance that their concerns will be addressed.

“We know that if things go wrong, it’s going to get worked out. It’s not just going to get left and it’s not going to get brushed off. There’s always going to be a resolution. It may not be today, but it may be tomorrow. So... I think the children are reassured by that, definitely.” (Family Case Study)

Other parents in the family case studies spoke about the difference restorative justice had made to their children, in one instance describing how it had improved their son’s “emotional intelligence” (Family case study). The second vignette emphasises the difference which the use of restorative justice made to Alex.

Vignette 2: an example of conflict resolution through relational processes.

Alex is a white British male, who previously attended a local primary school. His attendance at The New School is 92.5% which, whilst low, is close to the school average. His Boxall profile (developmental strands) shows he has made negative progress in 4 of the 10 areas, and no progress in one other, and he is in the bottom half of the year group in these five areas. Boxall is assessed by teachers and measures organisation of experiences and internalisation of controls. He scores lowest of his year group for two criteria: ‘is biddable and accepts constraints’ and ‘maintains internalised standards’. He has registered three level 1 behaviour incidents, one each for ‘interrupting others’ learning’, ‘not being where agreed’ and ‘child’s behaviour impacts on someone else’.

While this might suggest that Alex is not doing well at the school, the family case study provided a different picture. His mother is aware of his behavioural difficulties and thinks that the restorative circles have led to some positive changes. “They have been brilliant for Alex, who is quite ‘alpha’ and has strong ideas about things - ‘we have to do it this way’. What is lovely is that he is being massively helped with those struggles. His teacher is picking up on them really quickly and they matter in the context of The New School. In fact, they are really important.”

His teachers have commented that he needs to develop self-awareness and empathy; the use of reflection inbuilt into the shared sociocracy circle is having that effect. Alex also described restorative circles, and their effect, in a positive way:

“We have a thing called a restorative circle. It is this thing where you get the two people, one who is annoyed about what the other person did and the other one who did it, and one person says their side of the story and the other person says their side. So yes, it is a bit like that. One person listens to what the other person says, and the other person listens to what the other person says. Then we find a way to make a solution from that. [if you can't find a solution then] you keep working at it.”

When studying at mainstream school, Alex's lack of self-worth manifested itself in anxiety, something he was seeing the wellbeing team about. His mother commented: “We thought The New School would help him with building relationships. We felt that in 'TNS' he would have a chance of developing into a happy adult, and, for me, that trumps everything”. On PASS (Pupil Attitudes to Self and School), he rated himself 100 (out of 100) for 'preparedness for learning' and 'response to learning'. However, in contrast, for both 'feelings about school' and 'learner self-worth', he rated himself as less than 20, suggesting that self-worth remains an issue for him. But despite this his mother said how successful the transition to The New School has been as “he no longer needs to see a wellness team for anxiety” suggesting that whilst his self-assessments remain low, he is nonetheless being helped in this area and making progress.

His last comment shows his appreciation of the physical space of The New School: “My favourite space is the garden - well - the green space. It is nice and wild, there are structures in it and the sun shines. You can run.”

This case study emphasises some important points regarding the assessment of students and the judgements reached in this report. Against some measures Alex does not perform well, but the family case study shows that there is progress. This also relates directly to one of the aspirations outlined in the theory of change (Appendix 1), namely: positive and trusting relationships and safe spaces nurture young people to achieve their goals. Staff and students have established trusting relationships. These have allowed children to feel safe at the school and allowed them to choose their own goals through discussion with their teachers, who support them in achieving and then reviewing those goals.

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#### 6.1.2 AN ENVIRONMENT THAT SUPPORTS PARTICIPATION AND A LEARNING COMMUNITY

**The New School has created a welcoming social and physical environment which supports active participation of young people in school life and in their own learning.** Productive, caring, and supportive relationships between staff and pupils provide the foundation for the establishment of The New School as “a sustainable and positive community” (Teacher interview). This has changed how children feel about schooling. As one parent commented about her daughter “the supportive, flexible and empowering culture has step-changed her confidence, and she looks forward to going to school, where she is growing as a person as well as learning” (Family survey).

The welcoming climate of the school is due, in part, to its small size, which has allowed “parents, teachers and children to be [a] peaceful community” (Family case study). One parent contrasted this with the competitive environment she experienced when her child attended mainstream school:

“Well, I would say that you've got... that level of intimacy because the school is quite small because the kids are on first name terms with the staff... There's a real sense of community and family which I feel was missing [at mainstream school]... I'm not saying I had no friends at my child's old school, or, that you know, the mums didn't get together and it was all of that, but it was a competition. Our kids were competing. But it's a very different thing now.” (Family case study)

The way the community interacts is based on “an open dialogue” where “people seem to be there for you, each other and the kids” (Teacher interview). The “school and community ethos” (Teacher interview) was another feature of the school which was compared favourably with mainstream schools:

“The school has a real sense of community and is run by staff and teachers who are passionate, caring and real leaders - even if perhaps they don’t ‘lead’ in a way that mainstream schools would consider to be the right way.” (Family survey)

Families felt that they were being offered a partnership with “highly trained and committed staff” (Family case study). The welcoming, inclusive approach of staff is recognised and appreciated “from the lady on the door to the head of the school. Everybody” (Family case study). Together this creates “an oasis in this mad world” where “my children, and me, we are understood” (Family case study).

This is extended to a social, informal environment. One mother describes going to a “getting to know you picnic kind of thing” as being like “entering a utopian dream. I just, yeah, absolutely. I was just overwhelmed. I have been here for a year now – and it is not Utopia, it’s real. Of course, it’s not perfect - there are issues - but it has transformed my daughter’s life” (Family case study).

There were also comments on the physical environment of the school. Parents appreciated the open spaces and the dedicated Art room. They noted the “large, naturally lit, uncrowded rooms”, hearing their child saying, “Look, it’s so spacious!”. They described the use of outdoor green areas as giving children “space to think”. Children also commented on the physical environment, including using the library as “a quiet space”, and going to the “forest” where “there is a big tent like a flower where you sit together” (Family case studies). One child felt that the ability to find somewhere quiet to be alone when feeling stressed was the most significant element of the physical environment.

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### 6.1.3 CHOICE AND AGENCY FOR SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING AND PARTICIPATION

**The New School has successfully provided opportunities for children to exercise choice and take responsibility for their own learning.** The provision of flexible approaches to learning is an important feature of democratic education and aims to enhance children’s autonomy, one of the school’s stated aims (see Appendix 1). This was described by one parent as creating an environment “where my children have agency over their learning” (Family survey). One way this flexibility is achieved is through specialist workshops:

Child: “Workshops! Every half term we get to choose what options, so next term there was cooking. I love that, but I did that in first year, so then I changed to Capoeira. There is, say, football, some boys are crazy about it. We do parkour. I love parkour, but it is not a workshop”

Mother: “they have a wide choice; Brazilian dance ‘capoeira’, pottery, weaving, Dungeons and Dragons with the teacher”

Child: “We have sheets and you sign up for it – then whoever has the laptop, says to go to that workshop, but you stay in it for six weeks.” (Family case study)

Another way student choice is offered is through ‘flexi schooling’, which enables parents to keep their child home for one day a week to allow them to work on projects. This was appreciated by parents who felt it enhanced time together as a family.

“Another good thing about TNS. They offer flexi schooling – you can pick a day to keep your child at home – we sign an agreement – she doesn’t go in on Fridays – it is a project day – many children use that. We love it - it is so good to have that family time... In the last school she, by Friday, would be

tired from the week. All of Saturday she took to recover and then Sunday would be fine – then it would all start again. Like a treadmill.” (Family case study)

Choice is also achieved through negotiations about learning related to ‘My Learning Plan’. Children set goals and learning priorities through discussion with teachers, but the use of ‘My Learning Plan’ is led by the child:

“The individual learning plan meetings (parents(s)/carer(s) + child + teacher) are also wonderful, as it’s the kids that get to decide what topics they wish to include in their plan, and, during the meeting, they are asked rather open-ended questions to get them thinking lots.” (Family case study)

The success with which The New School has provided opportunities for choice and encouraged children to become self-directed learners was reinforced by the responses in the Family Survey. 94.4% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “My child can pursue their passions and interests at the new school”, whilst 86.1% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “My child can make decisions at The New School”. This is not universal, as one respondent selected ‘disagree’ for both questions; nonetheless, this does show success in implementing flexible learning for almost all children.

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#### 6.1.4 DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION IN PRACTICE

**The New School has successfully developed democratic approaches to pedagogy, but this is work in progress, and there is now a need to establish more shared norms/expectations and practices across the school community.** The school has established a suite of core practices which enact its democratic values, and this “is already happening here amongst the children, in small, age-appropriate ways” (Staff focus group).

Democratic education at The New School is achieved through provision of self-directed time, structured into the school day, the use of flexi-schooling, which allows students, through negotiation with the school, to study at home one day a week, a policy of offering choices which provides young people with the ability to make conscious decisions to engage with their studies, and the use of negotiated teaching which enables children, both individually and collectively, to make decisions about what and in some instances how they will study.

The implementation of these led one participant in a teacher interview to comment that “the focus on embedding democracy in our work is much better than in any place of work that I have been in” (Teacher interview).

However, some teachers have struggled to apply the process of democratic education: “there is sometimes a lack of structure in the sessions and thus learning is not always consistent, and staff do not always know what they want or what is expected of them” (teacher interview). One area in which the school has tried to address this and achieve greater consistency in reviewing existing practices is in the application of a policy termed the ‘opt-in policy’:

“We’ve had to re-evaluate certain principles that we’ve had as it just wasn’t fitting in with what we were experiencing... One of the things that we found we had a bit of a struggle with was this ‘Opt-in Opt-out’ policy in which young people could opt out of specialist subjects. It meant that our young people weren’t always trying things out.” (Staff focus group)

This op-in/opt out policy has now been replaced by an approach in which children are offered choices about what and how they learn. Inconsistency was also commented upon by parents of a year 2 child in the family case studies.

Mother: “Yes that was one of the things I expected was that the children would be more free flow”

Father: “Yes free flow. We expected free flow”



Mother: “well... one child can move around – because he can’t take it. Because he can’t sit still”

Child interjects “and 2 girls can move around”

Mother: “But there is one child in reception who does move around [turns to child] ... do you feel OK with that? Does it mean that you can get on with your Maths – if a child doesn’t want to do Maths instead of disrupting the class, they can go somewhere else. – do something else”

Child: “Yes but I would like to move around.” (Family case study)

There is an acknowledgement that freedom isn’t intended to mean “complete freedom, it’s a kind of non-ideal theory of democratic education and policies have to be changed to be workable” (Staff focus group). There is also a recognition that there are pressures on the school which might limit some of its democratic aspirations:

“I expected it to be more like a 1970s democratic school. Yeah, a lot of outside play and choice and creative kind of self-led work by the child, and maybe, I don’t know, an adult doing activities and then a child deciding to join in, let’s say someone building a go cart ... and then a child can come and join and do that; yet I suppose that’s ... what’s going to be original vision in my head possibly [but] yeah, yeah, but I am totally happy with it [being different from those expectations]. They need to run it with money... I think they are affected by the need to comply with DfE guidelines/rules for funding.”

(Family case study)

These tensions reflect the difficulty of trying to operate a democratic school in an educational climate and environment which has expectations of schools which are inconsistent with democratic models of education. It is also a reflection on the progress of the school in its development. In interviews staff spoke about this being “a steep learning curve” and “having to play catch up [in understanding their role as democratic educators]” (Both comments in staff interviews).

This does not mean that the school is failing in its educational mission. Where this variability was commented on by parents it was combined with an acknowledgement that the school was doing a good job. But, at this stage of the school’s evolution, there is a need to build on work already undertaken to further establish shared norms and expectations, and to establish common practices associated with them.

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#### 6.1.5 CARING FOR AND SUPPORTING EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

**The school has created a caring environment to support the emotional wellbeing of learners.** This is a central vision for the school and a large part of its *raison d’être*. Relational practices, and the welcoming environment they create, have provided support for the emotional wellbeing of learners:

“[The New School is a] nurturing environment where my children have agency over their learning. A good variety of subjects and classes [are] offered to inspire and spark curiosity. The teachers develop real, meaningful relationships with the children and communicate in a respectful way. My children feel heard and valued.” (Family survey)

This means children do not feel that they have to conform to one single student archetype, and this provides them with freedom to be themselves:

“They [young people] are able to be themselves, to voice their opinions and to, most importantly, have fun. I want them to be exploring their interests, learning through their environment, and to be happy and fulfilled.” (Family survey)

Parents contrasted this experience with mainstream schooling. They felt that The New School had been much more successful at creating an environment which supports the emotional and wellbeing needs of learners:

“I used to help in a mainstream school. They would be participating in an English session or a Maths session, or whatever, and ... I could see kids having so many emotional events... that were just completely overlooked. So, I think their emotional wellbeing is just ignored almost [at mainstream school], whereas it seems to be the other way round [at The New School]. Here it's more like the opposite. It is the first thing they consider.” (Family case study)

This was an aspiration shared and articulated by staff who explained that: “a visitor to The New School would see immediately that young people are cared for – better than in most schools.” (Teacher interview).

Participants were, almost universally, complimentary about the ways in which The New School is providing for children’s wellbeing. It is, however, important to acknowledge that this was not a universal view. One participant in the family survey believed that “the school hasn’t got the resources to go into everyone’s wellbeing when they can barely look after a few very disruptive students” (Family survey), whilst another mentioned that their son was worried about going to school and now feels “anxious” and “excluded” by peers (Family survey). These are important issues to resolve, of course, but The New School has successfully implemented caring practices which support the wellbeing of almost all young people.

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#### 6.1.6 THE EXPERIENCES OF STAFF AND THE LEADERSHIP OF THE NEW SCHOOL

**The New School has applied democratic methods of leadership which has created a collegial atmosphere, although staff have felt pressured by the rate of change over the first year.** The New School was established with the aim of providing children with a rewarding and supportive environment in which they could develop and flourish. This was intended to be achieved through the use of democratic methods of education. The staff who have chosen to work in the school have given up stable jobs and careers to take a risk. The teachers are an experienced group, most have taught for at least four years, some for more than ten, and one for seventeen years. Nine have completed initial teacher education and five have additional masters qualifications. Six have had experience of working in educational settings outside of the UK. They have taken a risk in joining a school trying to offer a very different approach to others in the education sector, but they have done so because of a commitment to democratic education to the aims and vision of the school.

The democratic aims of the school were extended to how the school was led and managed. This included making use of sociocracy circles with staff which has produced a trusting environment allowing for innovation and experimentation:

“They (the school leadership) have given us trust and trusted us as the professionals we are. They have been amazing and brave and have given us room to experiment.” (Staff interview)

The freedom to experiment exists because practices were not imposed or dictated, but instead achieved through permission and consent:

“You never feel that something is being imposed upon you and there’s no dictating about how you are going to do things. This is not to say that there are not compromises, but everything is done with consent and permission.” (Staff interview)

This approach to leadership was described as being ‘empowering’ and in sharp contrast to the approaches to leadership sometimes found in mainstream schools.

“Why do they think that intimidating staff members and team members is the way to make them work better? This (The New School) is empowering. People come here because they want to work here.” (Staff focus group)

The use of sociocracy circles were seen as central to this empowering approach as they presented a consultative means to resolve any difficulties: “If something is not right then we discuss it in a circle. It is a complete gamechanger” (Staff focus group). Taken together these leadership strategies were believed to impact positively on the wellbeing of the staff.

Although many staff were very positive about their experiences at The New School there were some tensions, notably a feeling that the rate of change of the first year had put everyone under pressure with some staff describing how they had struggled:

“I feel that I have been playing catch-up and have found it difficult at times. I have just about managed to hold it together.” (Teacher interview)

Another participant echoed this view saying that “everyone at TNS is carrying a ‘burden’ and almost everyone, amongst the staff, is talking about having a ‘hard time’” (Staff interview). There was a feeling that this had resulted, in part, from the rapid rate of change:

“It can be overwhelming in having or trying to do things now when there is a value at times in moving more slowly.” (Teacher interview)

Whilst the environment for staff has been pressured and challenging, there were also comments that the lines of communication between staff were not effective, despite the investment in sociocracy circles. One staff member commented that they “didn’t get to know what was going on” (Staff focus group), another that “there are too many meetings which can take up too much time which could be more profitably used in other school-related activities” (Teacher interview) and a third felt that they had not been consulted in decision making and that their expertise had not been recognised.

There has clearly been some success in introducing democratic models of management in the school. There is also evidence that staff wellbeing has been threatened by the rate of change and the associated pressures of the first year. As a result there remains work to do to ensure all staff are supported and listened to, and that they are supported to manage the pressures of working in a rapidly changing and evolving environment.

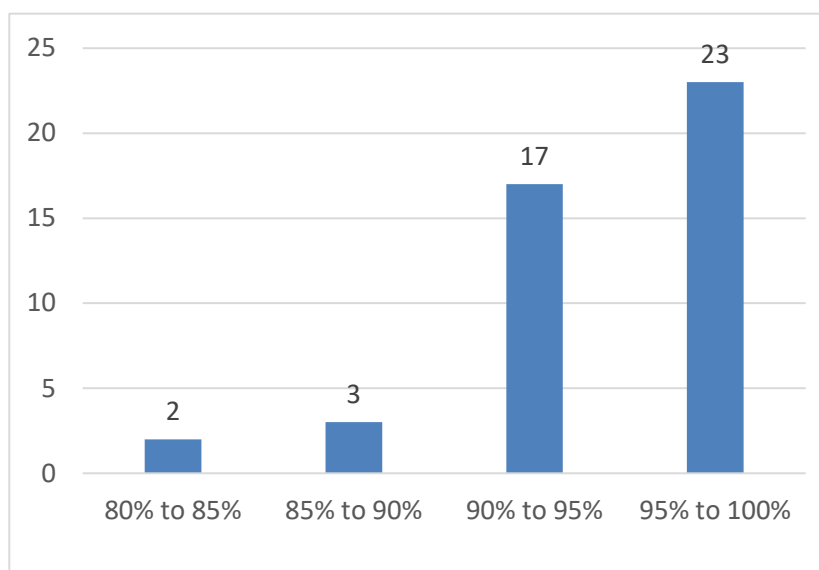
## 6.2 STUDENT OUTCOMES OVER THE COURSE OF THE FIRST YEAR OF OPERATION

This section reports on how the application of democratic education, as described in section 6.1, has impacted the children in the school.

### 6.2.1 YOUNG PEOPLE'S ATTENDANCE

**The New School has created an environment in which learners, most of whom were previously home educated, feel welcome and so happy to attend.** This is most notable for children who were previously 'school refusers'. The overall average attendance for 2020-21 was 94%, with 89% (40/45) of students having an attendance over 90%. However, it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions from this attendance as it covers a year of interruptions resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. The spread of attendance is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: spread of pupil attendance data for the 2020-21 academic year (45 children).



The vast majority (75%) of children who attend The New School were previously home schooled, often because parents felt forced into withdrawing them from their previous schools. One compared her daughter's experiences of mainstream schools with the more supportive environment in The New School.

"My daughter came out of regular school at the start of year 3 due to the pressure to read and write, which she struggled with... [After a period of home schooling she] was not initially interested to return to school, [but] starting at The New School has been very different to returning to a regular school. It has given her a very special opportunity to find new friends and peers to meet with more regularly than once a week... She now wants and enjoys coming to school, and understands that there is some work to do, but she is doing it with friends and without pressure to be at a certain level by a certain time, etc... she is discovering her love of learning and collaborating with others again, and feeling like a central part of her group of friends... This doesn't exist at home; school is where she finds this now." Family survey

For this child, attending The New School has both academic and social benefits, and this is echoed by other parents. One spoke about how their daughter "wasn't interested in going to school previously" but now "loves school" (Family survey). Another said that her daughter's confidence and love of education was declining until she moved to The New School:

"My daughter was really losing confidence in mainstream education; it was only a matter of time before she lost her love of learning. She cried every morning before school. She said to me last night, 'Oh I can't wait for tomorrow'. When asked why she said, 'School, of course.'" (Family survey)

Parents also felt that giving children greater “autonomy” improved pupil attendance (Family case study) because children feel they have an active role in their education and so feel that they belong at school.

The success with which The New School has created a welcoming environment for children is evidenced in the experiences of two children who had formerly been school refusers. Both have attendance of 93% at The New School. As one of their parents explained, “my child who refused mainstream school from Year 5, attends TNS every day and misses it in the holidays!” (Family survey).

Given their previously negative experience of schooling, providing a school environment which previously Electively Home Educated (EHE) children feel comfortable and happy to attend, is a significant achievement. It also demonstrates that parents of Electively Home Educated children were not opposed to schooling per se and constitutes a marked contribution to the local population and wider education sector.

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## 6.2.2 YOUNG PEOPLE’S SELF EFFICACY

**Children’s self-efficacy, their belief in their abilities as learners, has improved through effective relationships with teachers, engaging lessons, and support for self-directed learning.** Respondents in the family survey felt that children were being helped to realise their potential because they were valued and encouraged to work collaboratively.

“The school’s different approach is much more likely to help my children realise their potential. This is for so many reasons, especially because they feel valued as citizens in education, as individuals who learn through collaboration with peers, elders and also with the young ones, as well as from the TNS team of course.” (Family survey)

Others commented more generally on how their children could become active learners because the school had created an environment characterised by strong relationships, described as being “nurturing”, “respectful” and “meaningful” (Family survey).

This is creating an environment where “children are encouraged to take ownership of their learning [both] social and personal” (Family survey). Through this, children are becoming more “conscious of themselves as the main actors in the process of education they are going through” (Family survey). Some parents reported seeing evidence of this after a short period of time, “even after a few weeks they were thriving. It is so beneficial to them. They are becoming more independent” (Family case study). One of the ways this is being achieved is through My Learning Plan meetings. These entail discussions in which young people “get to decide what topics they wish to include in their plan” (Family case study) and the strength of discussions with staff and parents. The success of The New School in establishing a supportive and constructive environment has been transformational for young people who are now able to take charge of their own learning.

“The last year has seen [the] transformation [of one of our children] from a socially anxious child to a far more confident one. An effect of this in turn has been a new focus on learning what he needs to in order to get where he wants to be.” (Family survey)

Staff identified the use of restorative justice as another way in which students have become self-managing as “young people [are] doing these restorative justice circles as part of their own initiatives” (Staff focus group). Parent’s views of their children’s self-efficacy was addressed in three items on the Family Survey. The results are shown in Figure 2.

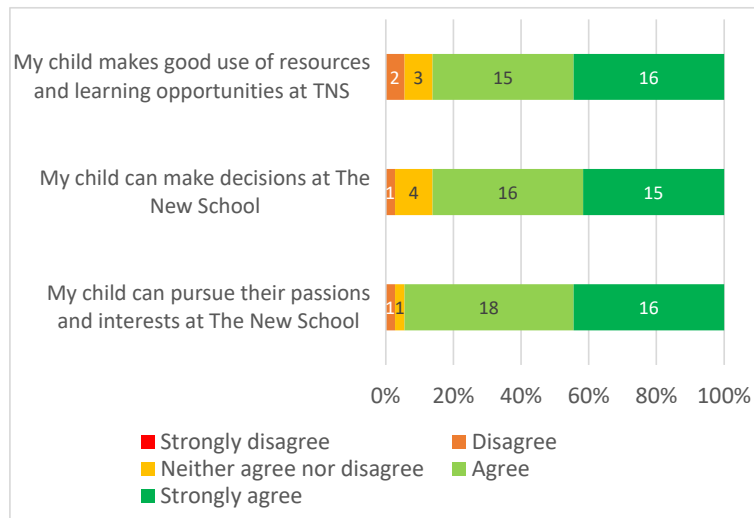


Figure 2: family survey items concerning self-efficacy (36 responses).

At least 86% (31/36) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with statements relating to child self-efficacy. Very few disagreed with any of these questions, with none of them strongly disagreeing, with the idea that children can pursue their passions and interests being especially strongly supported. Taken together, these show that almost all the parents in the school can see improvements in their children’s self-efficacy.

The Boxall Profile is a tool for assessing child capabilities and is completed by teachers. It also includes items relating to self-efficacy, and the results of these are shown in Figure 3.

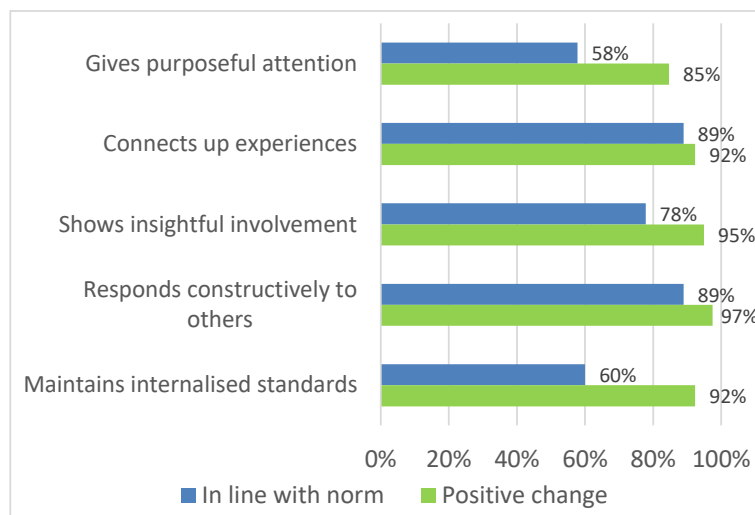


Figure 3: items from Boxall referring to self-efficacy.

These also show considerable positive change in relation to self-efficacy across the student cohort. The proportions of learners who are in line with the norm for their age groups is low for the items on purposeful attention and internalised standards, but the vast majority of learners have shown positive change in all items.

However, while much of the data suggests that learner self-efficacy has improved over the first year, evidence from the Pupil Attitudes to Self and School (PASS) survey, which is completed by students, suggests that they may not see this change within themselves. The results of items on self-efficacy are shown in Figure 4.

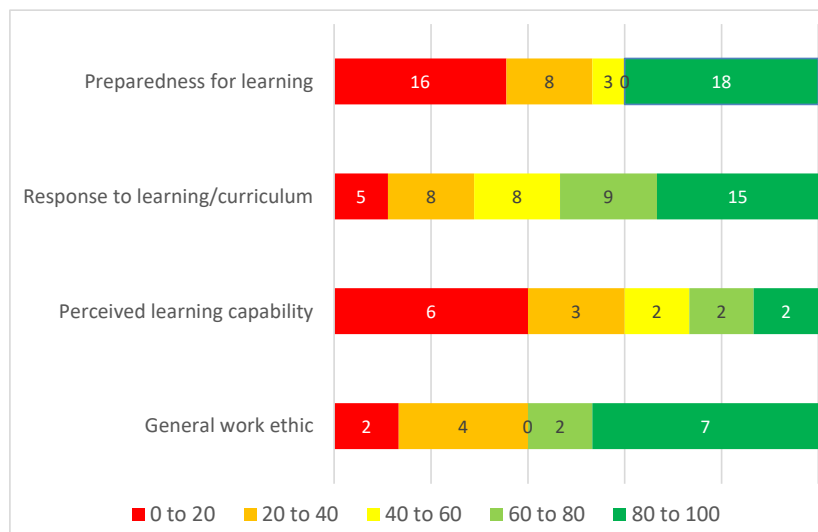


Figure 4: PASS items referring to self-efficacy (45/15 students).

Responses to questions about children’s perceptions of their learning capability and their preparedness for learning show the most negative attitudes. The spread of responses to the preparedness for learning item shows a student population whose self-image is split, with peaks at either end. Attitudes to learning curriculum and work ethics were stronger, but overall this indicates that learners’ views of their own self-efficacy are not as strong as evidence elsewhere would suggest. Helping them to better understand themselves as learner should, therefore, be a priority for development.

### 6.2.3 YOUNG PEOPLE’S BEHAVIOUR

**Young people’s behaviour has improved during the first year of operation.** Figure 5 shows monthly records of the numbers of behaviour incidents and the numbers of children who had at least one recorded behaviour incident. 217 negative behaviour incidents were recorded during the year, involving 28 (of 45) students. The very low figures in January and February 2021 coincided with the national lockdown.

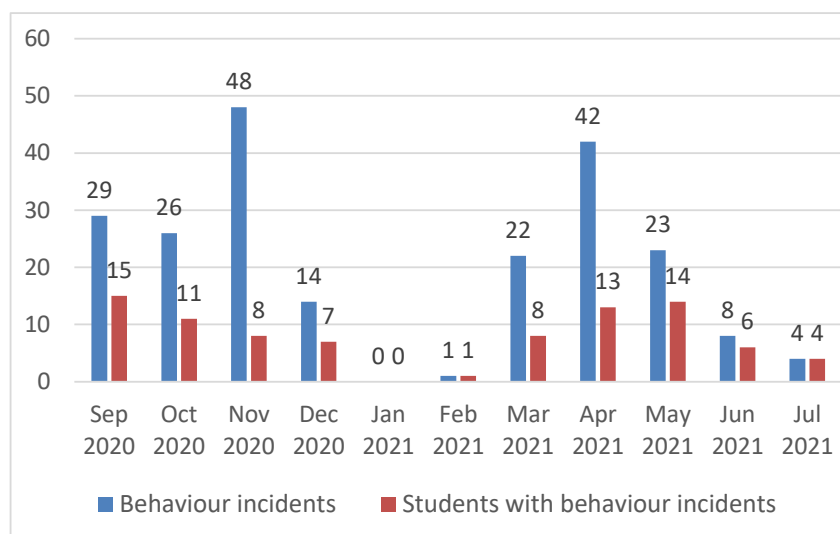


Figure 5: numbers of negative behaviour incidents by month (data for 45 students).

This data shows periods, in November 2020 and April 2021, where recorded incidents were much higher and behaviour much worse than in other months. Staff ascribed this to the disruption caused by the pandemic, describing how during the first term (i.e. Sept-Dec 2020) “progress was visible, and then we had a lockdown (Jan-March 2021) and it felt like we lost that momentum... coming back into the second half of Spring Term it was almost like we had to go through the same process all over again” (Staff focus group).

The impacts of lockdown notwithstanding, the overall picture is one of improving student behaviour, seen in declining numbers of incidents and a decline in the numbers of students recording incidents. This was ascribed to restorative justice approach, mentioned in vignette 2, where Alex explained:

“We have a thing called a restorative circle. It is this thing where you get the two people, one who is annoyed about what the other person did and the other one who did it and one person says their side of the story and the other person says their side. So yes, it is a bit like that. One person listens to what the other person says, and the other person listens to what the other person says. Then we find a way to make a solution from that. [if you can’t find a solution then] you keep working at it.” (Family case study)

His mother, in that Family case study, also spoke about the difference this approach had made to him:

“And for him its [restorative justice] definitely allowed him to develop his emotional intelligence. His empathy because he can lash out and he can be mean. But he can now look into some of the triggers as to what made him feel that way or led him to do certain things. [Understanding this gives him] the chance to forgive himself. You know what I mean? ‘I made a mistake. I screwed that. I’m not a bad person’, you know, and ‘it’s my duty to now make amends in the way that I’m reaching out to a classmate or to my teacher and say, you know, I’m not a bad person. I’m sorry I did that’.” (Family case study)

Restorative circles are believed to be “key to better relationships between pupils” because the “individual needs of pupils are understood and met. [My child is being] given help with managing relationships by using restorative circles” (family case study).

A member of staff explained the importance of this approach at The New School.

“There is a moratorium on punitive responses at The New School. The aim is to look towards an alternative outcome to unacceptable behaviour which allows for growth and change in each individual.” (Staff focus group)

This was compared favourably to the discipline strategies in some mainstream schools:

“[My daughter] told me about a boy who would be aggressive. Even though she is only four she remembers that they sat down to talk about it. In the school there is no reward, no punishment [but restorative circles] I am indescribably happy about it. What I was witnessing in the mainstream primary school was that the teachers were overwhelmed, there is not enough time to relate to children as individuals.” (Family case study)

Children have also helped their parents to be a part of restorative circles to resolve disagreements with other parents. One mother explained “we hadn’t done it before, but the [children] had... we were able to talk about it and got to the heart of the tension. And unpick it... I was really proud of us, me and the other mum” (Family case study). In this instance the children were using their knowledge of restorative circles to help their mothers participate in a process of reconciliation.



## 6.2.4 YOUNG PEOPLE’S ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

**Young people at The New School are making progress but academic attainment was not yet as marked as other benefits they have received from being at the school.** Academic achievement refers to both children’s academic attainment and student progress. It is important to acknowledge that this is being judged over an unprecedented period of disruption to children’s education. There are significant concerns nationally about the impact that lockdowns have had on pupil progress and a recognition of the need to help them catch up. This came at a particularly sensitive moment as The New School had only been open for four months.

Children are making progress in their attainment at The New School, but the extent to which they are meeting age-related expectations and the extent of progress across the year are varied. To some extent this constitutes the next agenda for the development of the school. As one parent put it:

“I think my child is generally happy at The New School. I didn’t see much evidence of their work or progress in literacy/maths or any other subject (No books were shown, and no other documentation was shared with us to show what he had been up to at school). This wasn’t our priority at this stage, but it would be nice if in future, more of his work was shared so we could get an idea of what he gets up to at school and how he is progressing academically as well as emotionally.” (Family survey)

Children’s achievement in each of the core areas (reading, writing and mathematics) is discussed below. Progress and attainment are measured via teacher assessments, using Early Years Foundation Stage judgements (‘emerging’, ‘expected’, or ‘exceeded’) for children in Reception, and National Curriculum (NC) attainment targets (‘working towards’, ‘working at’, ‘secure’, or ‘going deeper’) for older children.

### Reading

At the end of the academic year 60% (27/45) of children at The New School were working at or above age-related expectations in reading. One previously home educated child was two years above the expected level, and two pupils with recognised SEND needs were working at least two years below (see: Figure 6).

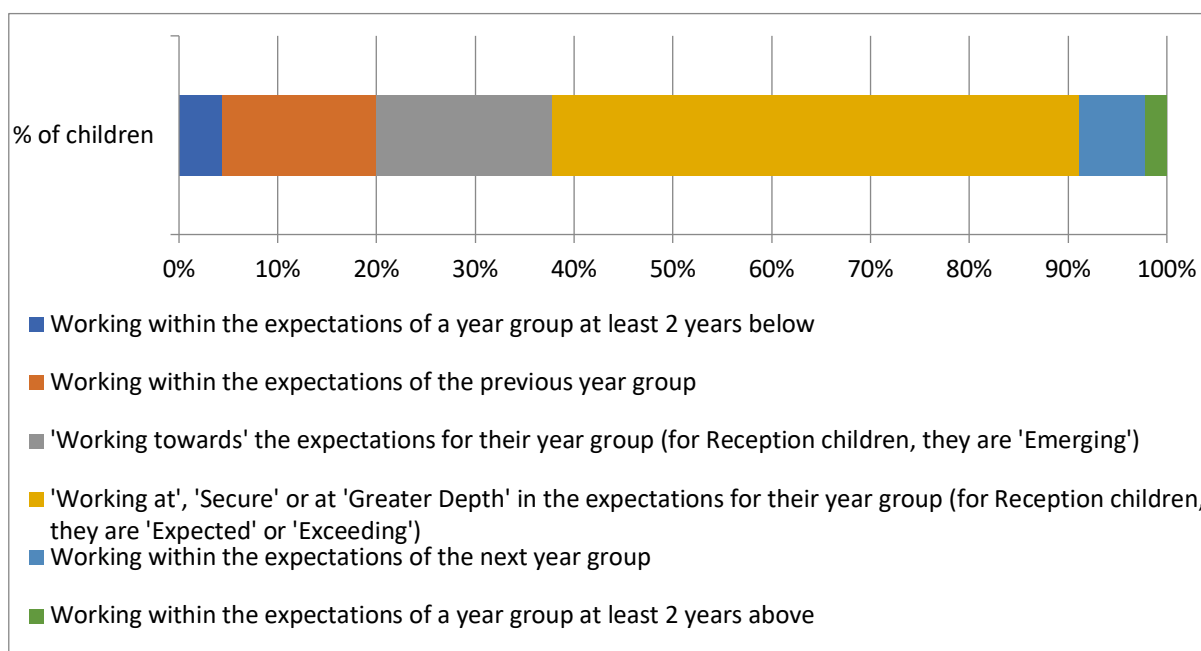


Figure 6: children’s attainment in reading (data for 45 children).

Almost all students have made progress in reading since starting at The New School, and Figure 7 shows the number of progress stages achieved. 78% (32/41) of students have progressed two or more stages further since joining the school, and 39% students (16/41) have made the expected four stages of progress (or more).

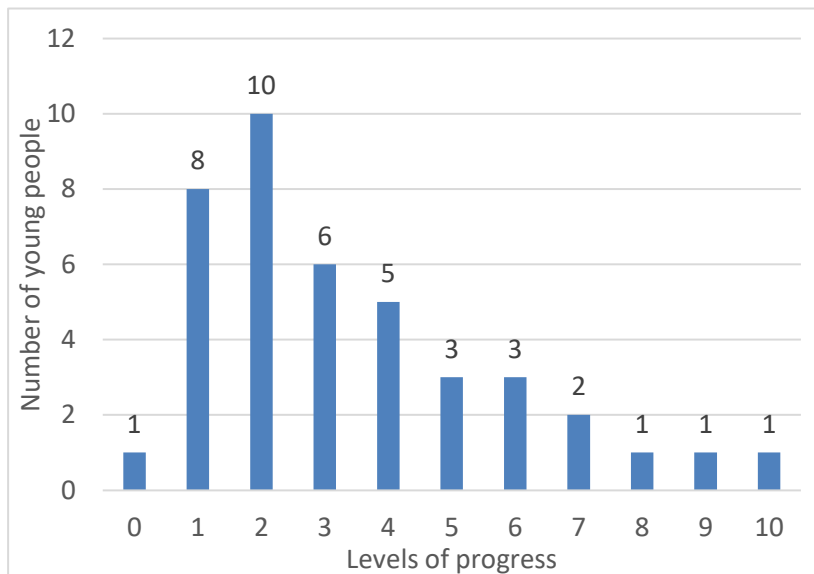


Figure 7: children's progress in reading (data for 41 children).

### Writing

Student attainment in writing is less positive than in reading (see Figure 8). By the end of the academic year 24% (11/45) of children were working at age-related expectations in writing, but none were working at a level above their year group. 20% (9/45) of pupils – six of whom receive support for SEND – were working two years or more below the expected level for writing.

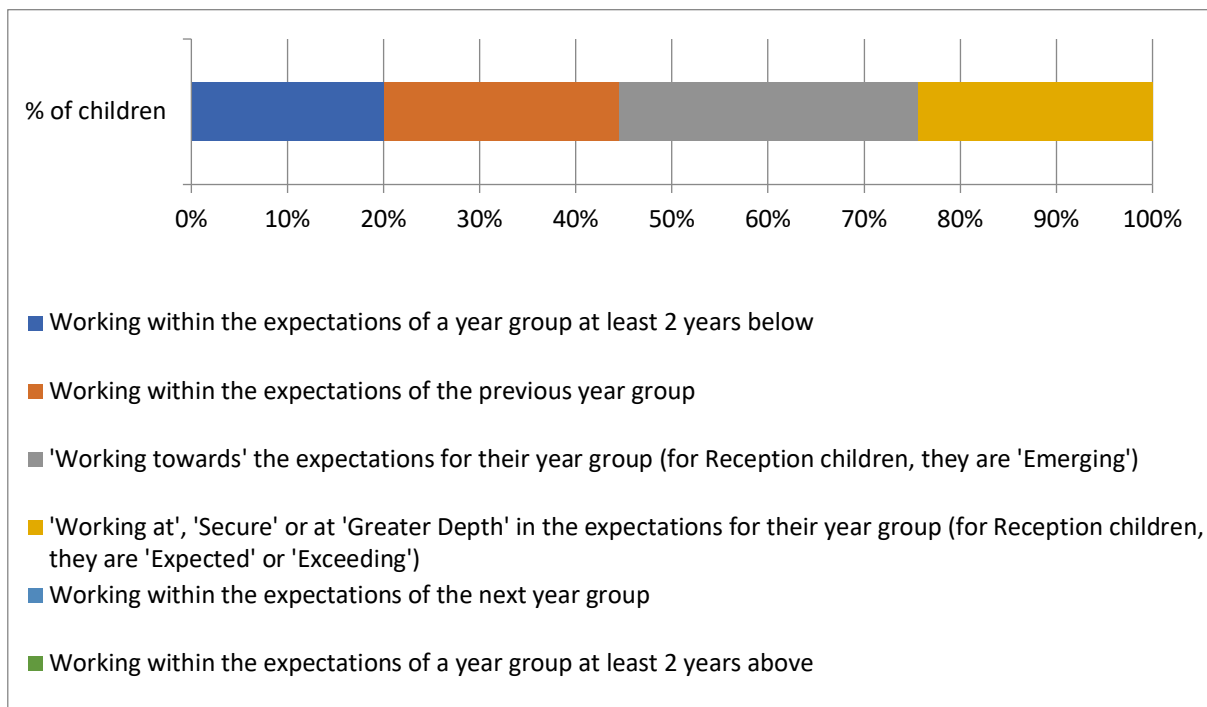


Figure 8: children's attainment in writing (data for 45 children).

Student progress in writing is shown in Figure 9. Despite attainment being lower, student progress is similar to that in reading as 37% (15/ 41) have made the expected four stages of progress and 63% (26/41) have moved two or more stages. All but five have made some progress in writing since starting at the school; two of these students have identified SEND needs.

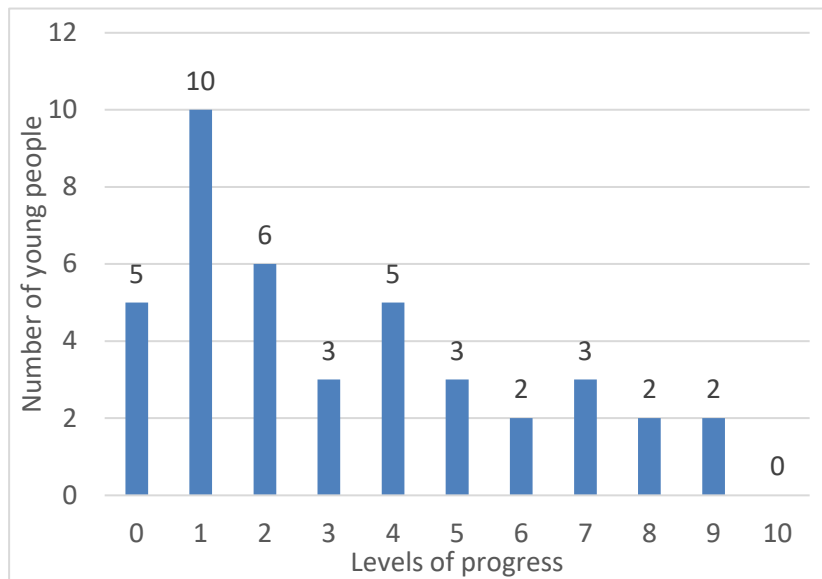


Figure 9: children’s progress in writing (data for 41 students)

Children in Reception have made the most progress in writing. Of the children in KS1 and KS2, the four pupils making the most progress (five steps or more) were previously home educated.

### Mathematics

49% (22/45) of students were working at or above age-related expectations in mathematics by the end of the year, one of whom (a previously home educated student) was working a year above expectations (see Figure 10). However, at the end of the year, 13% of pupils (6/45) were working two years or more below expectations. Five of these pupils receive support for SEND.

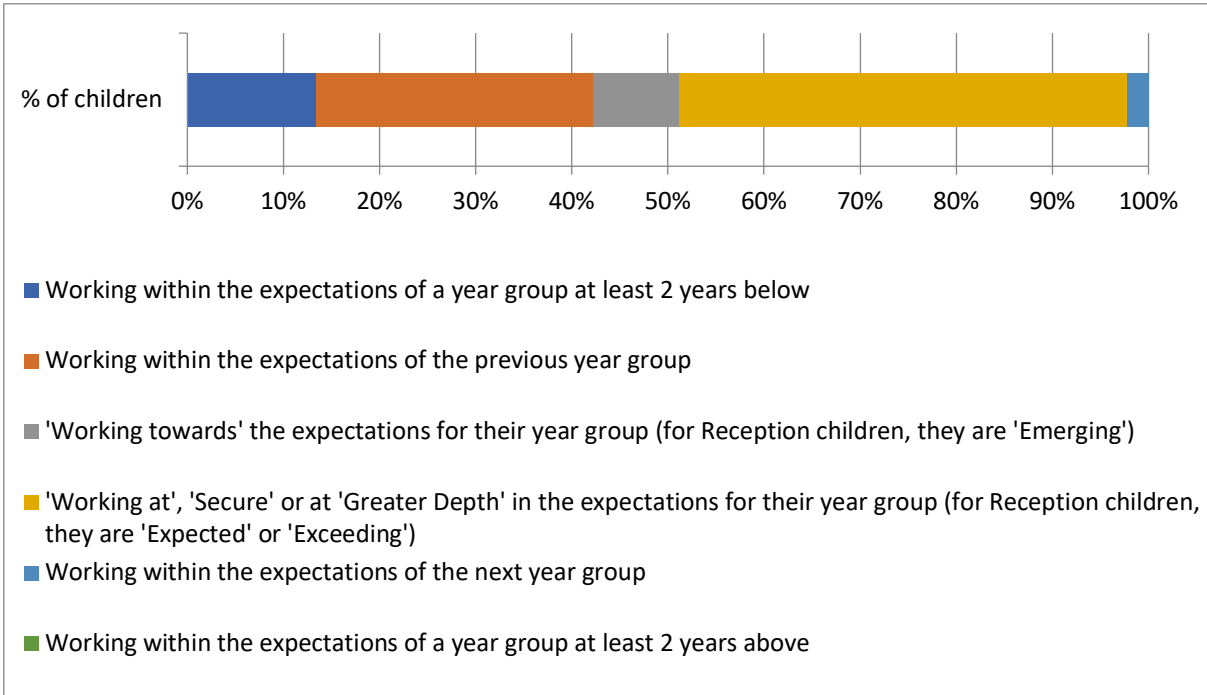


Figure 10: children's attainment in mathematics (data for 45 students).

Progress in mathematics is stronger than in other subjects. 43% (18/42) of students have made the expected four or more stages progress (see Figure 11). This is more than in either reading (37%, 16/42) or writing (26%, 15/42). Reception children have also made the most progress in mathematics. Five children in KS1 and KS2 have made more than four stages of progress, which is higher than in either reading (3) or writing (4). Of the students who have made most progress in mathematics, four were previously home educated for ideological reasons.

The proportion of pupils achieving two or more stages of progress in mathematics is 57% (24/42), lower than either reading or writing (see Figure 11). All but six students in KS1 and KS2 have made some progress, five of whom ended the year working below age-related expectations.

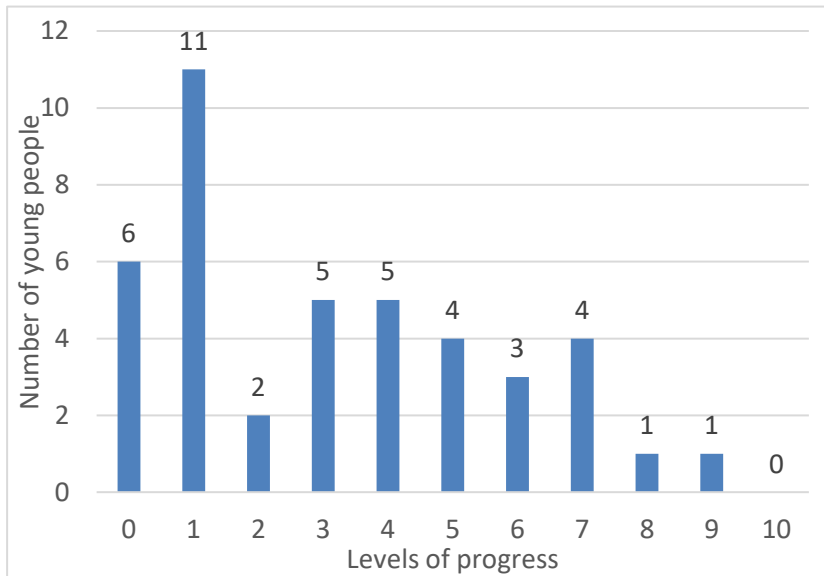


Figure 11: children's progress in mathematics (data for 42 children).

## Overall

Given the disruption caused by the pandemic, it would be wrong to assume that this year will be representative of student learning and progress in other years; however, in summary:

- All children in Reception made excellent progress across reading, writing and mathematics (an average of 7.2 stages of progress per subject). At the end of the year, 50% of these children were working at an 'expected' or 'exceeding' level in all three subjects
- Children in KS1 made on average 1.85 stages of progress per subject across the year, and 25% (3/12) were 'working at' or above the age-related expectation in all three subjects at the end of the year
- Children in KS2 made on average 2.57 stages of progress per subject across the year, and 12% (3/25) were 'working at' or above the age-related expectation in all three subjects at the end of the year

Despite pupils in KS2 making more progress, on average, than their KS1 counterparts, fewer were working at or above age-related expectations in all three subjects at the end of the year. This suggests that the previous experiences of many KS2 children over three or more years (home education, struggling to fit in a mainstream setting or refusing to attend) has more obviously impacted on their attainment in reading, writing and mathematics than other year groups. By contrast pupils who were previously home educated for ideological reasons are making above average progress. Ten of the eleven pupils receiving support for SEND are also in KS2. Table 3 compares the progress made by different groups of KS2 pupils.

KS2 pupils	Average progress per subject
All pupils	2.57
Children who receive SEND support	2.17
Children whose parents have said that they didn't fit in at mainstream schools or refused to attend school	2.25
Children who were home educated for ideological reasons	2.91

Table 3: comparison of progress made by different groups of children (42 children).

The data gathered for this evaluation indicates that most parents are pleased with the progress of their children. One commented:

“They have really progressed in reading and writing, and they're finding these things enjoyable, which they weren't at home with me!” (Family survey)

This is also evidence in responses to the Family survey. 75% (27/36) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with statements relating to student progress, with very few participants disagreeing that their child/children had made good progress. The most positive responses were for children making progress in arts and creativity (see Figure 12).

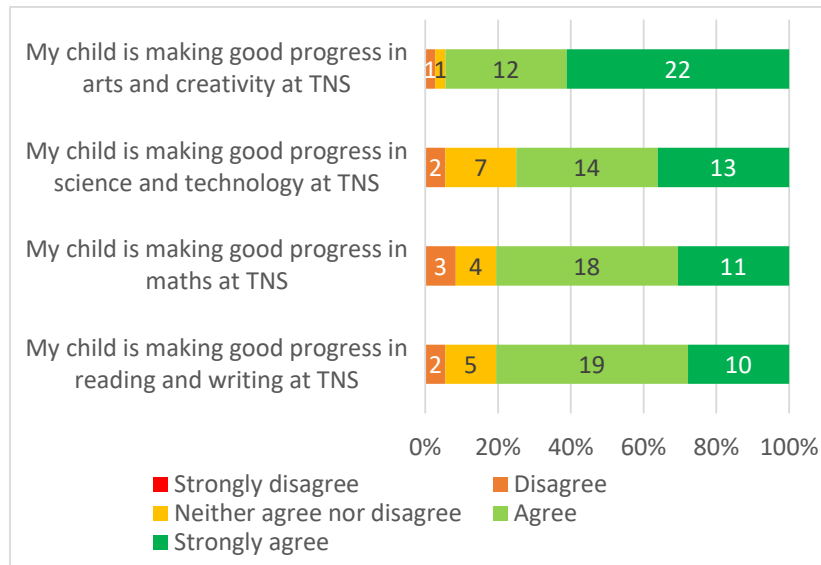


Figure 12: responses for items concerning learner progress from the family survey (36 responses)

Academic attainment and progression are a high priority for any school, and The New School is no exception. Whilst performance here is perhaps less strong than in other parts of the evaluation, there have still been significant achievements over the first year of its operation. The critical comparison is how this data compares with students’ educational experiences prior to attending The New School, and in that regard most, if not all, families believe there has been improvement. Having successfully implemented many of the underpinning values of a democratic school, building on successes in student progress to ensure even better achievement and progression must now be a priority.

#### 6.2.5 YOUNG PEOPLE’S SELF ESTEEM AND ENGAGEMENT

**The self-esteem and engagement of most children have improved over the first year.** Data concerning learner self-esteem and engagement was gathered from several sources, including the Pupil Attitudes to Self and School survey (PASS), a self-report instrument where children record their own attitudes, Family case studies, the Family survey, and the Boxall profile, a termly student assessment conducted by teachers. While evidence from families and staff members suggest that learner self-esteem and engagement have improved, results from PASS present a more complex picture. These are shown in Figure 13 and suggests that learner attitudes are at best mixed, with attitudes to teachers appearing especially negative. Items concerning learner self-worth, confidence in learning and attitudes to attendance also show a wide range of responses. In all of these items there are children who score highly but many more who do not.

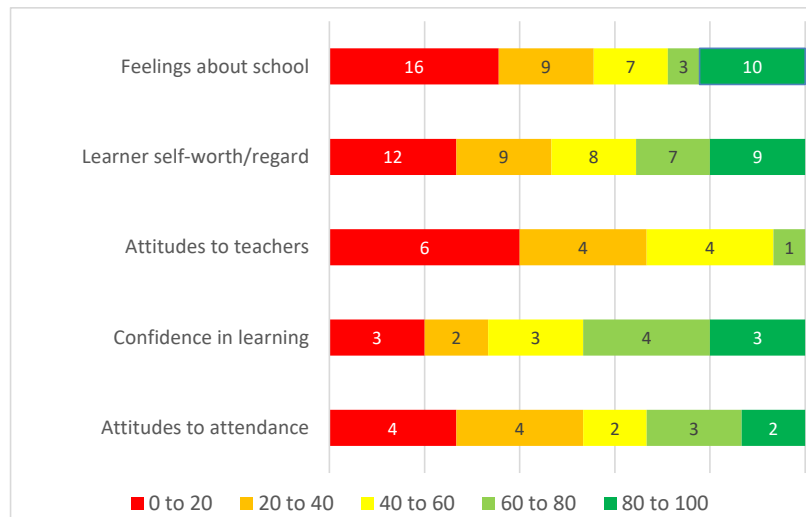


Figure 13: PASS items concerning learner self-esteem and engagement

By contrast, other data sources show that learner self-esteem and engagement have improved. This is attributed to the creation of a supportive environment which allows children “to be themselves, to voice their opinions and to most importantly have fun” and ultimately to “be happy and fulfilled.” (Family survey). This has also improved children’s confidence.

“[The]relationship with teachers is different here. He has grown in confidence, he can ask questions he... can speak up. [At The New School children] can disagree with [their] teacher... I am not saying to be rude but [previously] he was too frightened to [speak or want even] to go to the toilet. [At his previous school he was] constantly living under a cloud in case [he was criticised].” (Family case study)

This is a view shared by teachers. The following quote refers to the same child described above.

“[They have] made a huge amount of progress at school across many areas, particularly his academic confidence. This year he engages in almost every lesson and asks teachers for help more readily than he did when he first arrived. He can now write a page of text and is engaged in storytelling and writing. I think as a school we have been able to give him what he needs and as a result he has progressed academically across all areas.” (Teacher feedback on case study child)

The relational approach of the school is helping children develop empathy which is further enhancing relationships and attitudes to school.

“She is happy and looks forward to school everyday. She often says 'school is too good'. We feel she is also happier and more confident in herself and is developing empathy which, from what she tells us is actively encouraged and practiced in school.” (Family survey)

The relational approach of The New School is resulting in improvements to children’s wellbeing and self-esteem and, as a result, also their ability to communicate with adults.

“[My child has benefitted showing] a clear increase in self-esteem! This has improved emotional health, and approach to learning. Developing an amazing ability to communicate positively with adults.” (Family survey)

Improvements in self-esteem and confidence are resulting in reduced anxiety, and improved engagement in lessons. This is helping children find their ‘voice’, thereby achieving one of the school aims:

“He has found his voice to express himself; more verbally and less physically. His self-esteem has grown and his sense of self & individuality, creative expression through the way he dresses, styles his hair, more confident and self-assured. Anxiety has hugely lessened, participation in lessons has increased.” (Family survey)

Children’s self-esteem and their engagement with learning was also examined in the quantitative sections of the family survey. The results can be seen in Figure 14.

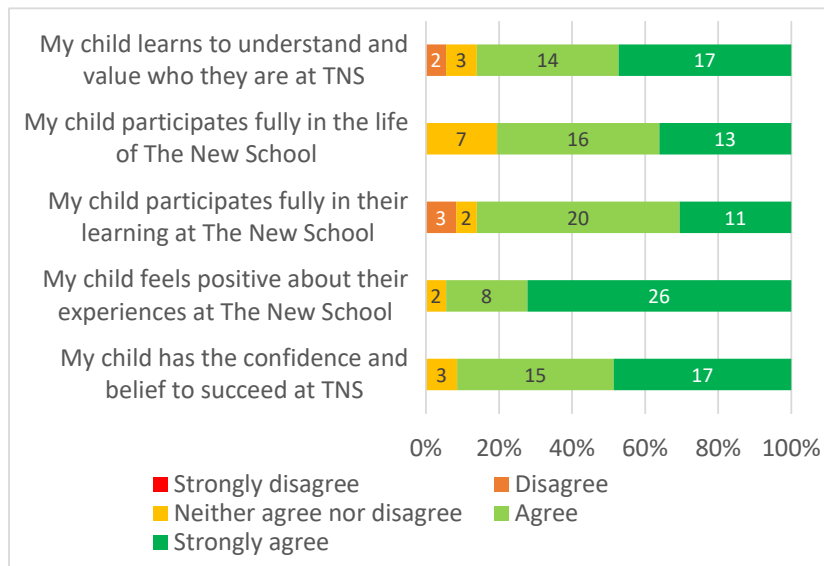


Figure 14: family survey items concerning self-esteem and engagement

Parents were almost universal in their belief that children feel positive about their experiences, have the confidence and belief to succeed, and participate fully in the life of the school (no respondents selected disagree or disagree strongly for any of these items). A small number of parents believe their children are not fully participating in their learning or understanding and valuing who they are, and these should constitute a priority for the school. However, overall, this data indicates that the overwhelming majority of parents believe that their children’s self-esteem and engagement have benefitted from their experiences at The New School. This is a significant achievement given the high proportion of children who were previously home educated, many because of negative experiences of schooling.

The Boxall profile, a student assessment completed by staff, also examines self-esteem and engagement. Data from these assessments are provided in Figure 15. These show how children compare to ‘norms’ for their year group and whether they have made positive change. The proportion of children who are emotionally secure is the lowest, possibly reflecting the high proportion of children who have struggled with schooling in the past; however, the data indicates that almost all children are making progress in all self-esteem and engagement items. Progress in relation to how children interact with each other is particularly strong, reflecting the evolution of the school as a supportive community. This accords with most other data, and, taken together, paints a picture of improving self-esteem and engagement for almost all children.



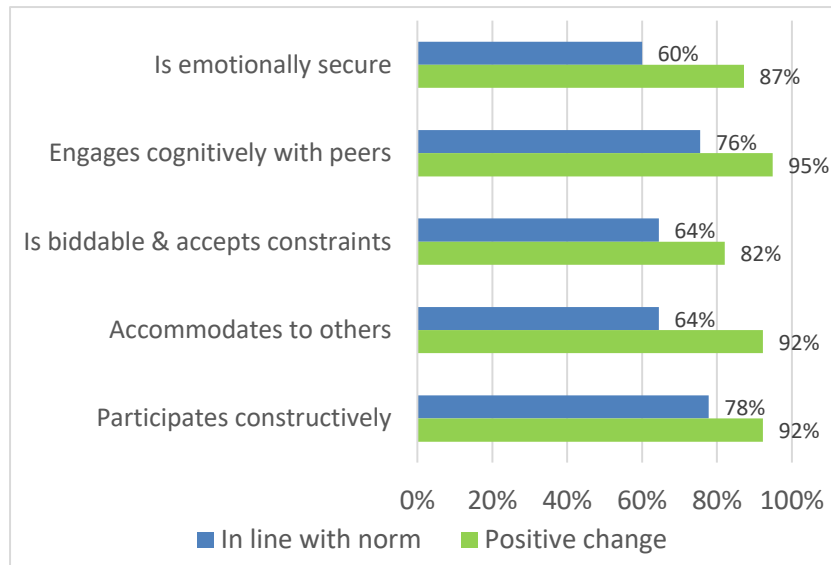


Figure 15: items from Boxall concerning learner self esteem and engagement.

The ways in which The New School has helped one child, Martin, to develop his self-esteem and as a result become more engaged in learning is presented in the third vignette of the family case studies.

#### Vignette 3: how an active curriculum builds self-esteem and engagement.

This case study concerns Martin (10). He had previously attended a local primary school, but he left and was home-schooled immediately prior to joining The New School. His attendance is 92.4%, slightly lower than the school average. He joined The New School in the spring term and now travels 5.1 miles to school.

In the family case study, Martin's mother says that she wanted a school that gave children a "voice" and didn't assess them (or judge their worth) "only on SATs" but rather "listened to them". His father explained, "right from reception he was - I'm going to say 'behind', but I don't want to use that word - he was not in the same place of writing development as others. Martin was one of those children that were always being taken out because they were behind, and I know how aware those children are of the hierarchy. They are lost, they just stay in that deep freeze of special needs".

Martin has mixed outcomes in terms of his academic progress. He has very low attainment for writing, but reading is in line with expectations. In his maths attainment he is a year behind. However, in his Boxall assessment, he scores in the top half of pupils in his year group in nine out of ten areas. His rich, enthusiastic descriptions of lessons in science, art and in forest skills, where teachers actively engage pupils in projects, show a pupil who is engaged, learning and growing in confidence.

In his family case study interview, Martin shared his pleasure in the varied curriculum. In science, "you could [extract] DNA [from a strawberry] ... you see for the experiment it has washing up liquid in it and salt and alcohol, so because of that, it wouldn't be good to eat", and in art "This is actually a pot, a cup which you can drink out of – Yes! I made a cup. It is round but it works," and in the forest, "so first time we just got to explore a lot and disappear - and - what do you know? I made a spear!"

In the one area of Boxall where he performs less well – 'engages cognitively with peers' – Martin has the insight to know that he might need to engage more. "You sometimes work together, but I don't. I don't think I'm one of the best people to answer that question [about working collaboratively]."

Martin is one of only three pupils across the whole school who score themselves less than 25 on each of 'feelings about school', 'preparedness for learning', 'learner self-worth/regard' and 'response to learning/curriculum' in PASS, the self-assessment tool that captures pupils' feelings about school and

themselves as learners. Overall, he is in the bottom ten of the whole school for all criteria. This, and his comments on the My Outcomes report, would indicate a pupil who is a reluctant learner who lacks self-regard.

But he has, nonetheless, been given experiences about which he is enthusiastic, and he is encouraged by teachers to participate actively in his learning. For example, during the school visit Martin was observed being gently and successfully integrated into activities by his class teacher during circle time. His anxiety was visibly reduced by this.

Martin only joined the school in the spring of 2021, but he is already beginning to show the benefits of his attendance in his pleasure in curriculum activities and in his response to the support he is receiving from staff.

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### 6.2.6 YOUNG PEOPLE'S WELLBEING

**The New School has improved the wellbeing of many children and their families.** The provision of education which supports student self-direction, establishes productive working relationships, encourages learners to be involved in decision making, and makes use of restorative justice has had a marked effect on the wellbeing of both children and their parents. 'Wellbeing' is used here to refer to a range of things, such as being happy, not being ill, feeling fulfilled and being financially secure, a definition of wellbeing based on the work of the Wellbeing Centre and the Office for National Statistics (ONS). It is also used by The Children's Society in their 2021 Good Childhood Report which identifies three categories of wellbeing:

1. Affective well-being (emotional well-being): which includes positive and negative emotions or how happy people feel.
2. Cognitive well-being: the quality of people's lives overall or certain aspects of their lives, including measures of life satisfaction.
3. Psychological wellbeing: which looks at whether people are functioning well, and their personal development and growth. This relates to the meaning and purpose people feel in their lives.

Caring for children's wellbeing is one of the core values of The New School. This is something in which the school is excelling.

"Outside can criticise TNS for its academic performance perhaps but not its approach to wellbeing. The school makes up for 'perceived' weaker academic achievement by its outstanding success in supporting the emotional and psychological well-being of the young people." (Teacher interview)

This was something which emerged strongly from the family case studies. Responses showed how the democratic methods of the school were improving the wellbeing of young people and correcting harm resulting from previous experiences of schooling.

"I had a child whose wellbeing was seriously threatened by the way things were done [in their mainstream school]. When he went to the democratic school I think his whole wellbeing was [enhanced] by more autonomy, mutual respect and having 'rights'". (Family case study)

Wellbeing was also examined in the family survey. In qualitative questions 32 of 36 responses explicitly mentioned improvements in children's wellbeing from attending the school. One respondent did not complete the item, and three more suggested there was no change. Of these only one felt that their child's wellbeing needed to be improved. One parent explained that The New School was enhancing wellbeing by supporting neurodiverse children who struggled to fit in at a mainstream school.

"My child is dyslexic and dyspraxic and potentially has other neurodiversity present. She has an extremely high I.Q. These two things together have caused a multitude of problems. At her old school (which was not a bad school) she was going from bad to worse emotionally, let alone educationally

and as a family we were drowning. Now at The New School, I feel that her basic emotional needs are being met and will continue to be met and addressed, leaving space to really grow, learn and develop. You cannot learn a thing if you are stressed.” (Family survey)

The ability of the school to create a welcoming atmosphere, characterised by productive and positive relationships, has changed children’s attitudes to school. This has taken time, especially as progress has been interrupted by lockdown, but for children who were previously home schooled, notably those who had been withdrawn from mainstream schools, the results have been transformative:

“My daughter’s well-being has gone from strength to strength. She was not very keen to return to any school, but we persuaded her to try it and although the first year was a little bumpy with school being at home during January and February, and it taking time to establish new friendships, she is in a very good place now. She has grown in confidence and is now keen to be up on time and in school early most days. She is very chatty about what she has been doing at school and talking about different friends and teachers and what discussions she has had with them or what she has found out about them, etc. I feel she has the confidence to know that if she doesn’t like something, she can talk about it with friends and make a proposal to change things or do things differently, rather than suffering in silence or putting up with something, as it’s the rules. I think the setting of personal goals in the My Learning Plan meetings are a fantastic tool to show the child that they are really the ones in charge of their education, and I hope in time these goals will grow get more and more ambitious!” (Family survey)

Children have also benefitted from physical aspects of the school environment. Some spoke about the forested area, whilst one reported that “my favourite place in the school is the stage. In the hall. I like being there because I get to travel down ... it makes me happy because I get to be someone who I am not. You get to experience how to be someone else.” (Family case study).

The distinct features of the school, the adoption of democratic pedagogies which provide choice and encourage self-direction, and the creation of productive and welcoming relationships, have enhanced student confidence, giving them the ability to be comfortable with uncertainty and removing much of their anxiety about attending school.

Parents also spoke about how they wanted wellbeing for their child so that it would extend into adulthood.

“We thought The New School would help him with building relationships. We felt that in TNS he would have a chance of developing into a happy adult and for me that trumps everything.” (Family case study)

There was also evidence that the improvements to the children’s wellbeing was having wider positive effects, notably impacting on family life. One parent reported:

“There has been a holistic change in every part of my daughter’s life since the start of The New School. Once she became happy at school and felt listened to and a valued member of the school the rest of life became so much happier. Many of my friends and family commented that she seemed a different child.” (Family survey)

Another described the impact their daughter’s transformation has had on their family.

“My child is now actually at a school that she is engaging in and is happy to go to. As a family our whole life has changed because we are not dealing with a child who has school refusal. The benefit to all of our mental health is phenomenal.” (Family survey)

The pressures on parents arising from children’s anxiety had been removed through the more positive experiences of attending The New School. This suggests that the benefits of enhanced wellbeing are not limited to the children themselves but also benefits their family members.

Quantitative data from the family survey also showed high levels of agreement with items concerning children’s wellbeing. These are shown in Figure 16.

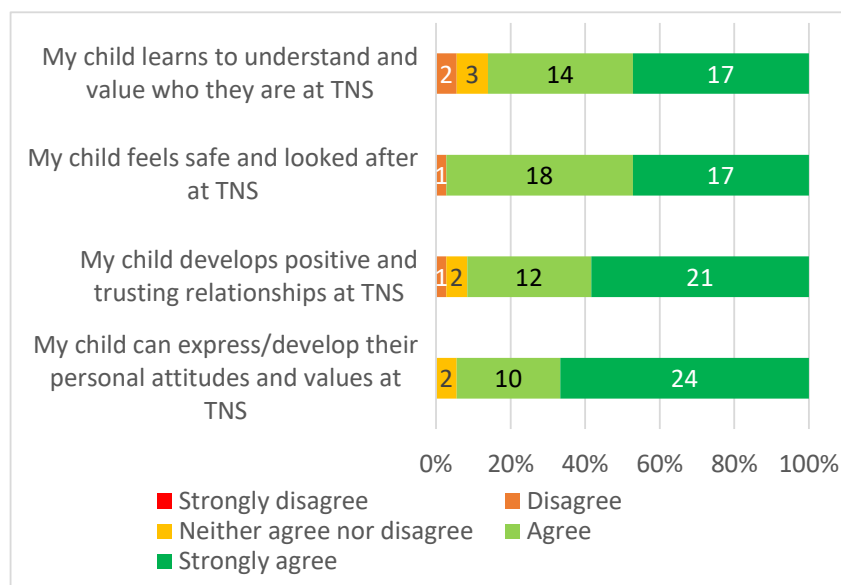


Figure 16: family survey responses for items concerning student wellbeing (36 responses).

Only two participants disagreed with any of these statements, showing a great deal of satisfaction with the effects of The New School on children’s wellbeing. This is especially the case for the item concerning the abilities of children to express and develop their personal attitudes and values. Taken together this demonstrates that the view of families is that children’s wellbeing is being enhanced through The New School Model of education which allows children to study in a safe environment, to build rewarding relationships and to develop their independence and self-direction.

The impact democratic education is having on children’s wellbeing can also be seen in the ‘My Outcomes’ survey. This is completed by children in years 3 to 6 as part of the school’s monitoring and evaluation process and includes the Student Resilience Survey and Student Wellbeing Survey (see Figure 17). Responses here show that most children have positive views of their life. However, these are less positive than the results of the family survey or interview data in that there are a greater number of ‘negative’ responses. It should be noted that the fourth and fifth questions in this list ask students if they wish they had a different kind of life and whether they would like to change things in their life. In these questions responses which ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ are therefore positive. It should also be noted that a little under half of the children completed this survey.

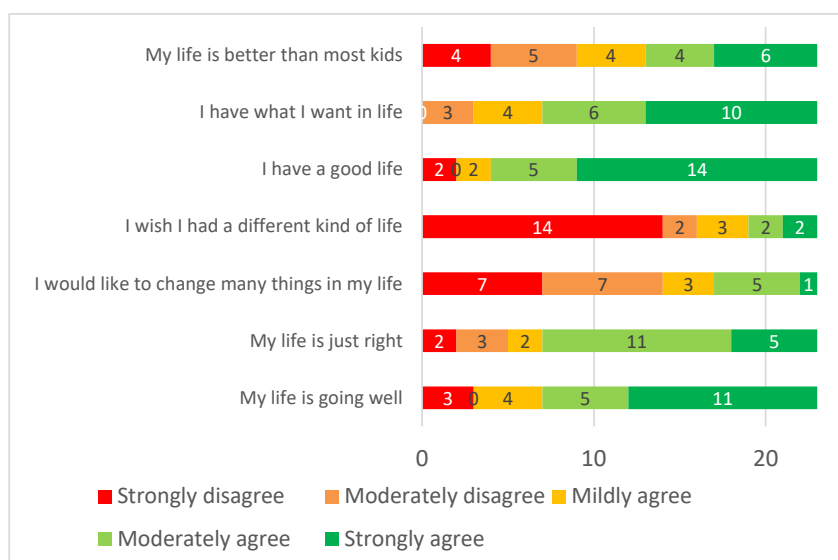


Figure 17: results of the My Outcomes survey completed in Summer 2021 (22 students).

Even though the responses here suggest lower levels of satisfaction than other data, they indicate that, for most children, their experience of life is positive. It should also be noted that questions in ‘My Outcomes’ concern all of life, not just life at school, which might explain some of the difference to data sets focussed solely on experiences at school. Even so, the consistent message for most pupils is that The New School has established a healthy environment which supports children’s wellbeing, and this is helping to repair the damage resulting from previously traumatic experiences. In more extreme cases, the stresses associated with schooling prior to joining The New School led to physical illness and suicidal thoughts:

“My child sometimes expressed suicidal thoughts before joining The New School. He has become calmer and more at peace with himself and is often happy. He often comes home excited about what he has learned. Quite literally, The New School may have saved his life.” (Family survey)

This is exemplified in Cathy’s story, presented in the fourth vignette. This provides an account of the difference made to one pupil of through attending The New School, notably her mental and physical health.

#### Vignette 4: Democratic Learning and its effect on health and happiness

Cathy previously attended a local primary school and has not been home-schooled at any point. However, her mother explained that she had many absences at her previous school due to constantly occurring minor illnesses: “She is not a sickly child, but she began to have headaches, then she got a terrible ‘flu’ and she was in bed for six days. She had no energy - she was miserable.” In contrast, since joining The New School, her attendance is 97.8%, well above the school average.

Overall, Cathy is working at the nationally expected level for a Year 1 pupil in maths, reading and writing and her phonics score is the second highest in Year 1 (41 against an average of 39.3). She is not a disruptive child; there are no negative behaviour incidents on her reports although there is mention of her positive skills in managing behaviour. She says that in The New School, “if we are confused, we can say we are confused, but in *that other one* [her previous mainstream school] it was *harder* to get the teacher’s attention”.

At The New School, Cathy scores 100 (out of 100) for both ‘feelings about school’ and ‘preparedness for learning’ in her PASS (Pupil Attitudes to Self and School) survey. In both of these areas she is well above the Y1 average (of 65.7 and 84.1 respectively), and she has made a huge improvement of 89.3 points in ‘preparedness for learning’. This is in sharp contrast to her previous experience of school, and her father feels that one reason is the effect of having mixed age group classes, which he can see are “making her more socially independent and confident” because “the groups are based on need not age”.

However, Cathy only scored herself 8.7 for 'learner self-worth/regard' (Y1 average is 40.7) in her most recent PASS assessment, 2 points lower than at the start of the year. Analysis following the completion of PASS, highlights her as a potentially vulnerable pupil with a positive attitude towards school but very low regard for herself as a learner.

Nonetheless, in the case study interview, Cathy talked enthusiastically about her experience at the school. For example, she spoke about extending her skills in parkour: "sometimes it can be like climb, stand on your knees and then jump, and there is something further away for you to try to jump for so you try" and by "going to the computer room".

On the teacher assessed Boxall assessment, Cathy scores in line with her Y1 classmates, with the exception of 'engages cognitively with peers' where she is the lowest in Y1. Her mother comments that "in her past school she used to get a little sad at playtimes when she had no-one to play with".

Two examples of the targeted support given to this child by The New School are the positive shaping of commentary in circle time, where "all the other pupils said nice things about me", and by the provision of a therapy dog. As her mother comments: "She often talks very fondly about Herbie [the school dog] and how she can play with him in the playground".

She often comes home and says "Mummy, I love my school!". A marked contrast to her experiences of being at a mainstream school.

## 7 A COST BENEFIT ANALYSIS OF THE FINANCIAL VALUE OF THE NEW SCHOOL.

The calculation of the cost benefit analysis for The New School is based on the findings of the evaluation and on the makeup of the student population. It is being undertaken to achieve the following three aims:

Aims of the cost benefit analysis	How this was achieved
<p>Aim 1: To provide a financial impact metric that can be used to assign financial value to the social impact of this model of education.</p>	<p>The benefits of The New School have been associated with a financial value. This draws from the findings of the evaluation outlined in section 6. The financial value of each identified benefit has been derived from published policy and research literature. The financial estimates of benefits are contrasted with the cost of running the school through the calculation of a benefit cost ratio. This shows how much financial benefit the school provides per unit cost.</p>
<p>Aim 2: To assess the relative costs of outcomes in making a case for scaling this model as a sustainable alternative to mainstream education and/or provision for excluded or SEND young people.</p>	<p>The data on the costs of running The New School during its first year of operation have been compared with other local education providers. This has also provided the basis for an estimate of future cost based on the growth plans of the school.</p>
<p>Aim 3: To support a future social investment model or social outcome contract income stream for the school.</p>	<p>The outcome benefit-cost ratio is presented across three time periods.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The academic year 2020-21, which makes use of data to show what benefits the school provided in its first year of operation.</li> <li>2. Projections for the 2021-22 academic year which makes use of data on student recruitment and costs to project the potential benefit-cost ratio for the forthcoming year.</li> <li>3. Projections for full occupancy (120 students), to be reached in 2025-26.</li> </ol>

**Table 4: aims of the cost benefit analysis**

### 7.1 COMPARISONS WITH OTHER SCHOOLS.

One element of this cost benefit analysis concerns comparing the costs of running The New School with other local education providers. The comparison is presented for multiple elements of each school and draws on publicly available information about the schools involved. Table 5 shows the outcome of this comparison for The New School in the first year of its operation with 45 students, and the projected comparisons when it reaches full occupancy of 120 students (forecast to be in the 2025-26 academic year).

Local AP schools – special schools (average of 3 closest)	Local AP schools – PRUs (average of 3 closest)	The New School Y1 (45 students)	The New School Y6 (120 students)	Local mainstream schools – primary (average of 3 closest)	Local mainstream schools – secondary (average of 2 closest)
One educator for every... <b>1.9 students</b>	One educator for every... <b>2.4 students</b>	One educator for every... <b>4.1 students</b>	One educator for every... <b>5.8 students</b>	One educator for every... <b>12 students</b>	One educator for every... <b>13 students</b>
<b>32%</b> of educators are teachers	<b>54%</b> of educators are teachers	<b>100%</b> of educators are teachers	<b>79%</b> of educators are teachers	<b>56%</b> of educators are teachers	<b>85%</b> of educators are teachers
<b>£54,900</b> is spent per FTE teacher	<b>£89,433</b> is spent per FTE teacher	<b>£38,642</b> is spent per FTE teacher	<b>£41,794</b> is spent per FTE teacher	<b>£59,700</b> is spent per FTE teacher	<b>£63,050</b> is spent per FTE teacher
The per student cost of teachers... <b>£9,697</b>	The per student cost of teachers... <b>£17,167</b>	The per student cost of teachers... <b>£9,446</b>	The per student cost of teachers... <b>£5,712</b>	The per student cost of teachers... <b>£2,847</b>	The per student cost of teachers... <b>£4,152</b>

Table 5: comparison with other schools local to The New School.

## 7.2 COMPONENTS OF THE COST BENEFIT ANALYSIS

The cost benefit analysis conducted in this evaluation is expressed as a benefit-cost ratio. This draws from evaluation data which provides the basis for estimating financial benefits to children, their parents and the state. This is then contrasted with the running costs of the school.

### 7.2.1 COSTS OF RUNNING THE NEW SCHOOL

The costs of running the school were calculated as follows:

- The costs for 2020-21, based on school budget documentation, were £847,959. This figure has been adjusted slightly to take account of start-up consultancy costs.
- The school served 45 students during 2020-21. This means that the average cost per student was £18,844 (N.B. this is overall cost per student and not cost per teacher as above).
- Projected costs were used for the 2021-22 and 2025-26 academic years.
- The student body is projected to grow to 72 over the 2021-22 academic years and to 120 (full occupancy) by the 2025-26 academic year.

### 7.2.2 ANNUALISED ESTIMATES OF BENEFITS

The annualised estimates of benefits afforded by The New School are summarised in Table 6. More detail about the sources used to arrive at these benefit calculations is provided in Appendix 4. These figures show the projected benefits per year and are derived from national statistics and published research. Each value has been uprated from the year they were first published to arrive at an equivalent value for 2020-21. Each figure shows the benefit per child.



<b>Monetised benefits</b> <i>(adjusted to 2021)</i>	<b>Students</b>		<b>Parents/families</b>		<b>State</b>	
Academic success (GCSE or equivalent-L2)	£4,464	Additional average annual earnings.	-		£1,387	Additional Income Tax and National Insurance payments.
Academic success (A level or equivalent-L3)	£3,130	Additional average annual earnings.	-		£972	Additional Income Tax and National Insurance payments.
Academic success (Higher Education)	£4,811	Additional average annual earnings. <sup>16</sup>	-		£ 1,496	Additional Income Tax and National Insurance payments.
Preventing exclusion	-		-		£6,675	Estimated cost to the state of exclusion.
Home schooling	-		£29,668	Average annual income for a woman working full-time + pension contributions <sup>17</sup> .	£5,396	Additional Income Tax and National Insurance payments.
Preventing NEET	£17,422	Average annual earnings with no quals.	-		£3,605	Estimated costs to the state for 16-18 year-olds. For 18-24 year olds this more than doubles.
Student mental health & well-being	£13,525	A robust (gov't Green book) monetised estimate of a change in life satisfaction (WELLBY).	-		£1,242	Additional Income Tax and National Insurance payments.
Parent mental health & well-being	-		£13,525	A robust (gov't Green book) monetised estimate of a change in life satisfaction (WELLBY).	£1,242	Additional Income Tax and National Insurance payments.

**Table 6: Monetised benefits adjusted to 2021.**

The figures in this table are not exhaustive and it should be acknowledged that The New School has other benefits that are not so readily monetised. The above are therefore likely to be cautious estimates of the benefits provided by The New School. It should also be noted that these are not exclusive to The New School. Other schools could, and do, provide these benefits, however, the high proportion of children in the school who were previously home schooled (75%) suggests that other schools were unable to provide them for the particular cohort of children now studying at The New School. Where future estimates of benefit have been made these have been adjusted for inflation and are based on the assumption that the school population has roughly the same proportion of children in each category.

<sup>16</sup> N.B. the figures of the financial benefits of academic success are cumulative.

<sup>17</sup> This includes savings from the difference between home-schooling costs and the costs of sending a child to school.

From Table 6 the total annualised benefits per student for the 2020-21 academic year are estimated to be:

<b>Monetised benefits (present value, 2021)</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Parents/families</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Total per student</b>
	<b>£43,353</b>	<b>£43,193</b>	<b>£22,014</b>	<b>£108,560</b>

Table 7: Summary of monetised benefits per pupil.

Based on Tables 6 and 7, the benefits for the entire population of students in the school are shown in Table 8. This estimates the proportion of the school population who would receive any given benefit. This is shown both as a percentage of the total population and the actual number of students in each category.

<b>Impacts of The New School</b>	<b>% of students</b>	<b>Number of students</b>	<b>Annual benefits</b>
Students attaining academic success (L2)	70%	32	£184,292
Students attaining academic success (L3)	60%	27	£ 110,765
Students attaining academic success (HE)	50%	23	£141,915
Students prevented from exclusion	5%	2	£15,020
Parents working as students no longer home-schooled	35%	16	£552,248
Students prevented from becoming NEET	25%	11	£236,550
Students with better mental health & well-being	80%	36	£531,614
Parents with better mental health & well-being	40%	18	£265,807
			<b>£2,038,212</b>

Table 8: estimates of monetisable benefits of The New School 2020-21

These percentages have been derived from evidence collected for the evaluation and from published sources. They are, therefore, considered to be realistic. However, in order to recognise that these are predications, and so to some degree, speculative, two further values have been calculated for each category. These suggest lower and upper limits for each of the impacts, again expressed both in terms of percentages and actual numbers of students likely to benefit. These are shown in Table 9.

<b>Impacts of The New School</b>	<b>% of students</b>		<b>Number of students</b>	
	<b>Lower</b>	<b>Upper</b>	<b>Lower</b>	<b>Upper</b>
Students attaining academic success (L2)	30%	90%	14	41
Students attaining academic success (L3)	20%	75%	9	34
Students attaining academic success (HE)	10%	60%	5	27
Students prevented from exclusion	0%	10%	0	5
Parents working as students no longer home-schooled	10%	50%	5	23
Students prevented from becoming NEET	10%	50%	5	23
Students with better mental health & well-being	50%	90%	23	41
Parents with better mental health & well-being	25%	75%	11	23
			<b>£895,081</b>	<b>£2,934,221</b>

Table 9: modelling for a range of school population benefitting from each impact

### 7.3 BENEFIT-COST RATIO ESTIMATES

The figures in the tables above, along with projections provided by the school for future budgets and student cohort numbers, have been used to produce benefit/cost ratios for three different scenarios over three time periods (2020-21, 2021-22, 2025-26 when the school is projected to reach full occupancy).

#### Benefit/Cost Ratio for 2020-21

Based on the annualised costs of the school, the estimates of benefits, and estimates of the school's contribution to them (as above), the benefit/cost ratio for 2020-21 is:

Best fit benefit / Cost ratio = £2,038,212 / £847,959 = **2.40:1**

Range from 1.06:1 (low) to 3.46:1 (high)

#### Benefit/Cost Ratio for 2021-22

The New School is projecting costs for 2021-2022 of £1,164,690, based on increased student numbers of 72. This leads to an average cost per student of £16,176. Based on this, and the same estimates of monetised benefits (updated to 2022) and contributions made by the school, the benefit/cost ratio is:

Best fit benefit / Cost ratio = £3,326,361 / £1,164,690 = **2.86:1**

Range from 1.25:1 (low) to 4.11:1 (high)

#### Benefit/Cost Ratio for 2025-26 (projected full occupancy)

The New School is projecting costs for 2025-2026 of £1,547,338, based on increased student numbers to full occupancy of 120. This leads to an average cost per student of £12,894. Based on this, and the same estimates of monetised benefits (updated to 2026) and contributions made by the school, the benefit/cost ratio is:

Best fit benefit / Cost ratio = £6,000,934 / £1,547,338 = **3.88:1**

Range from 1.70:1 (low) to 5.58:1 (high)

The calculations of the projected benefit cost ratio for the full occupancy of the school are based on the assumption that the population of young people at the school will have roughly the same make up as it did in the first year of operation. For example, at present 75% of pupils were previously home schooled. The projected benefit cost ratio for 2025-26 makes the assumption that the proportion of previously home educated children in the 120 children predicted to be in the school at that point is also 75%. Changes to the demographic makeup of the school will have a similar effect on the benefits achieved. This is reflected in the range of benefit-cost ratios presented for 21-22 and 25-26.

In summary these calculations suggest that even at this early stage the benefits associated with The New School exceed its running costs. This is true even for the most cautious estimates.

### 8.1 SUMMARY OF EVALUATION FINDINGS.

#### **Core question 1: what does this evaluation say about how well the school is responding to its social context and specifically to the needs of children?**

The New School has successfully developed an approach based on democratic education, relational practices, sociocracy, and restorative justice. This has provided an environment in which most children feel able to participate in the life of the school and in which they, and their parents, feel that they are valued members of the school community.

Most children feel able to be themselves and to follow their own interests. This has enabled them to become self-directed learners who are able to make decisions about their own learning. As a consequence, most children feel that they are able to exercise their freedoms, and this underpins how they view themselves and their place at school. In focus groups and interviews, teachers and other staff spoke about the ways in which democratic approaches to teaching, and to school life in general, were enabling children to make informed decisions on their own learning and, in doing so, maturing and developing greater independence.

Most of the children who attend The New School were Electively Home Educated prior to joining the school (34 of 45 children, 75%). In some cases, children had been withdrawn from mainstream schools because they were suffering with wellbeing and mental health problems caused by negative educational experiences. In extreme cases this had manifested itself in suicidal thoughts or referral to wellbeing support services.

Many of the previously home educated children and their parents spoke about the success of The New School in providing them with an environment where they could learn without the pressures and problems associated with their previous experiences of schooling. This is a significant service to a community of parents and children who had felt 'forced out' of mainstream education, thereby losing access to the resources, delineated in the national funding formula, which would otherwise have been allocated to their education.

Being able to provide an environment in which these children can flourish shows that this group of families are not opposed to schooling per se. It provides the children with an experience of schooling which is more commensurate with their wellbeing and allows them to benefit, personally and socially, from being in a school environment. It gives their parents peace of mind, often improving their own mental health and wellbeing, enabling them to find employment and start, or restart, careers that were paused because of the need to home-school their children.

The positive effects on mental health and wellbeing are almost universal across the school population and so this benefit is not limited to previously home educated children and their families. The statistics on the costs of failing to provide for children's wellbeing means that providing a healthy environment in which children can learn and achieve, whilst simultaneously providing for their wellbeing and mental health needs, has potential lifelong benefits.

The New School is also providing a wider service to society. Increasing numbers of children across the UK are being home educated and there are concerns that neither local nor national government have accurate data on who those children are or what their educational experiences are like. There are responsibilities for local councils to monitor and assess home education and to provide alternatives where required, but because of the paucity of data this is difficult to enact. As The New School model has proved to be successful in creating an educational experience which provides for the needs of previously electively home educated children and their

families, this could constitute a service to local councils in fulfilling their statutory roles as well as to society in providing an alternative form of education which allows more children to remain in school.

The calculation of a cost benefit analysis shows that the school is delivering benefits which exceed running costs. The most cautious estimate shows the ratio of difference between benefit and cost in 2020-21 is 1.05:1. A more realistic benefit cost ratio, drawing on data from other parts of the evaluation, suggest that this is more likely to be in the ratio of 2.41:1, with the potential that this might even be as much as 3.47:1. Assuming that the backgrounds of children in the school remains roughly the same as the population increases, the difference between benefit and cost is predicted to widen further.

**Core question 2: What are the strengths and weaknesses of the democratic model used by The New School and how well is it being applied?**

The New School has successfully implemented many processes associated with democratic education. These include: self-directed time, the use of flexi-schooling, and the use of teaching approaches which empower children to collaborate with teachers to decide how, and, sometimes, what they learn. These practices have evolved over the first year of operation, but some staff are still uncertain about the best ways to implement them, and this leads to some inconsistency in their application. The development of these approaches over the first year is a significant achievement and resolving the remaining areas of uncertainty and inconsistency remains a priority.

The democratic approaches to education and the use of sociocracy circles has enabled many students to become independent, self-directed learners, and, in many cases, this has led to students showing greater engagement in learning. There remain some children who have not yet developed as much as they, their parents, or the staff of the school, would hope, but in most cases the development of young people's learning independence is a marked finding of this evaluation. Where children are able to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by democratic education, they develop a sense of belonging in the school, and this, in turn, leads to positive changes in student self-perception and attitudes to learning. The areas of the theory of change for which there was little evidence concerned young people being inspired by peers and knowing more about life's opportunities. This may be something which emerges from other successes over time but could also constitute a point for reflection and planning by the staff at The New School to consider how this can be achieved.

The small size of both individual classes and the school itself was often linked to the feeling of community which developed over the first year. This, and the methods used to encourage student self-direction and consultation, were frequently commented on as particular strengths of the school, especially when compared with mainstream schools which were seen as lacking the means to achieve this community feel and the benefits associated with it.

**Core question 3: What outcomes do young people achieve and how do these outcomes relate to the democratic model used by the school?**

Data on student engagement and discipline shows that both have improved over the first year of operation. The school has achieved this despite the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdowns which interrupted the progress made in the first term in 2020. Data gathered via the family case studies and the family survey show that many learners were now more engaged than they had been in mainstream schools. This arises from the democratic pedagogy practised in the school and the sociocracy methods used to develop community decision making. The improvements in student engagement resulting from these are evident across multiple data sets.

Children are benefitting from an approach to teaching which employs democratic methods, including collective discussion and decision making (sociocracy circles), self-directed learning and relational justice. They are

showing improvements in both self-esteem and self-efficacy and as a consequence also in engagement in their learning. They are also forming strong relationships with peers and teachers and together this is providing them with satisfaction in their learning and educational experiences. One illustration of this is that two children who had previously been school-refusers when at other schools, now have attendance of over 94%. There is less evidence of children being inspired by their peers or of real-world learning, but these, especially the first, should emerge from the successful establishment of a supportive community. There is now a need to build on young people's progress in developing self-efficacy and self-esteem to develop greater self-knowledge among young people about themselves as learners. This can enhance self-efficacy as young people are able to better understand how they learn and can respond appropriately.

Students made progress in academic learning over the course of the very challenging period of the pandemic. Student achievement was not always at target levels, and progress was not always as rapid as students, parents, and the school would hope. However, levels of achievement were comparable with those seen in mainstream schools over the equivalent period. It should also be acknowledged that the majority of students in the school (over 75%) had been home schooled immediately prior to joining The New School, and some of them had never attended school before. All of them needed to acclimatise to, or back to, the social and educational climate of a school. This takes time and can be an unnerving experience for children, especially if it is interrupted, as was the case with the lockdown in early 2021. Student progress and achievement should therefore be seen in this light. Whilst learner progress remains a priority for the school, there have been successes in the first year, especially when the nature of the student body and the interrupted nature of that year is taken into account. Performance in mathematics is the weakest across the reports on assessed student progress. This and Science were the areas where parents felt that student progress could be improved, and which could benefit from further development. Parents were more positive about student progress in arts and creativity.

The main finding of this report is the improvements in wellbeing of both children and parents. In the family case studies many parents spoke about how they had been forced into home schooling their children as they had suffered from poor wellbeing and in some cases, poor mental health. This was seen as resulting from the pressures of education in their mainstream schools. The same participants then spoke in some depth how dramatic the improvements to their children (and also to them) had been since joining The New School. The majority of parents completing the family survey (92%) also stated that their children's wellbeing had improved since joining The New School.

The wellbeing of children in the UK has been shown to be worse than in many equivalent countries and appears to be deteriorating even further over time. Given contemporary concerns for poor wellbeing in children and the resulting effects of this on their future mental health and life chances investment in The New School provides an opportunity for early intervention for children and young people that can have lifelong affects. This evaluation shows this would also bring significant benefits for parents as well, and as parental mental health and wellbeing is one of the strongest predictors of child mental health and wellbeing this would only magnify the potential benefits of the school.

#### **Core question 4: What are teacher experiences of working at the school and specifically of supporting young people and creating meaningful learning experiences**

Teachers expressed their belief that the democratic approaches to learning had enabled their students to develop as self-directed learners and cited strategies which encouraged co-creation and gave students choices over their learning, including student self-directed time and the use of sociocracy circles. Many teachers spoke of their appreciation of the community feel of the school, and some were especially positive about the sociocracy circles which helped to build constructive relationships between children and teachers. There was a shared commitment to democratic models of education and leadership, which some described as a "gamechanger", and favourable comparisons were made with previous experiences of punitive and

unrewarding environments in other schools. Staff also said they felt trusted and were given a great deal of freedom to decide on their own pedagogic approaches and to innovate.

However, whilst staff acknowledged the benefits for themselves and for learners, they also described the challenges they had experienced during the first year of the school. For some staff it had been a “steep learning curve”, and some had found working in the school extremely challenging or had felt that their expertise had not been fully recognised. It also became clear that there were inconsistencies in the application of democratic approaches to teaching and how teachers felt they could best support students. Staff said these practices had evolved over the year but they felt more consistency was needed and a clearer understanding of the role they should play.

## 8.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 1: build on the work already undertaken to establish a consistent and shared set of theories, language, and practices for democratic education.** The work of developing teaching approaches consistent with democratic principles and values is in progress but there is still work to be done. Refining these approaches will achieve what one staff member described as “trying to make operational lots of theory and ideas” (Staff focus group). This should be especially concerned with understanding where there are inconsistencies in approach, why these occur, and whether they are acceptable or desirable. This should help resolve some of the uncertainty about the role of the teachers in supporting self-directed learning. This will provide support for the staff who have found the first year to be a challenging one and remain uncertain of how best to implement their roles and to help new staff integrate into the school. As a starting point, the school could distinguish between democratic processes to arrive at agreed educational priorities and practices, and democratic education as an end in itself to promote agency and choice.

**Recommendation 2: engage in a dialogue with staff about the theory of change.** The theory of change provides the intellectual underpinning for the approach of the school. Many members of the community subscribe to the elements of this conceptual underpinning, but without specific reference to the theory of change itself. Allowing for community ownership over this document would enable further negotiation over the practical implications for meeting these aspirations. This would help staff to consider their role in realising the ambitions of the school. This would provide a basis on which to achieve greater consistency noted in recommendation 1 and support staff new to the school. For many staff the first year has been a challenging period. Using the theory of change as a shared reflection and planning instrument can establish it as a hub of staff dialogue and mutual support.

In the first instance this discussion and associated planning could be targeted at two of the areas of the theory of change which were less evident in evaluation data. These referred to children being inspired by peers and understanding life’s opportunities. There is also scope to refer to academic sources to support this work. For example, Bandura and others have written about the characteristics of relationships which enhance (or limit) self-efficacy. There is plenty of evidence in this evaluation that enhancing child self-efficacy is a success of the school but reviewing these sources would allow staff to build on successes and create even more explicit links between aims and practices.

**Recommendation 3: establish a focus on improving student attainment and progress which builds on the successful establishment of the school community, and which is communicated with parents.** The New School has achieved a great deal in a short and turbulent period. There is a need now to build on these achievements to further improve young people’s attainment and progress. Data on young people’s achievement showed that they had made progress, but not always as much as would be hoped. This is an issue mentioned by parents. Many felt that the school had successfully provided a welcoming environment, allowing their children to feel at home at the school and enhancing their self-esteem, engagement, and self-efficacy. But there was also a feeling that these successes in the social development of the school should now be

balanced with a more detailed dialogue between staff and parents about children's learning, including their achievement and the curricula being employed by the school. Wellbeing and academic achievement (attainment and progress) are connected. Enhanced wellbeing can lead to better engagement, in turn leading to improved achievement. Improved achievement also contributes to child wellbeing. There is a need, therefore, to consider these as complementary.

There is also evidence that the school has had some success in developing young people's self-efficacy. Improving young people's academic attainment could build these on these by developing children's metacognitive abilities. This would not only provide a means for improving academic attainment and progress for existing learner but would also be a means for supporting older learners (recommendation 4).

**Recommendation 4: develop plans for democratic education with older children.** The plans for the school to expand and grow will mean that the demographic of children at the school will change. Current students will progress through age groups and new children, from older year groups, will join the school. There is a need to consider how the needs and competencies of older students differ from the current age groups and how the approaches of the school should be adapted as a consequence. This includes a need to develop children's metacognitive abilities (to understand themselves as learners, recommendation 3).

Part of this might entail providing older students with careers guidance and advice, opportunities to consider their future pathways beyond the school, and choosing qualifications that will enable them to reach their goals and aspirations, and link learning to real world experiences (thus achieving one of the goals espoused in the theory of change). This would also ensure that children are able to gain the projected benefits of level 2 (GCSE equivalent) qualification and of studying post 16. This form of achievement is not necessarily consistent with democratic pedagogy but there are lessons from how others, including Summerhill, have managed this which could help the school to develop their own approach. The Vaughn et al (2006) text, 'Summerhill and A.S. Neill' provides examples of how this can be managed in a democratic school. This could also include consideration of well-established and progressive curricula such as RSA Opening Minds and International Baccalaureate programmes.

**Recommendation 5: be more explicit about the contribution of the school to pupil, parent and staff wellbeing with current, new and potential families, and with funding and commissioning bodies.** Enhancing learner wellbeing is one priority of the school but such was the strength of data on the improvements to both child and parent wellbeing from young people attending the school that there is scope to make this aspiration even more of an explicitly emphasised benefit and priority for practice than it currently is. This is especially important when considering the community which the school aspires to, and is currently, serving. Establishing an environment where Electively Home Educated children feel supported and happy to attend provides them and their parents with a significant service. But given the concerns about poor and deteriorating mental health and wellbeing of children, the ability of the school to improve learner and parent wellbeing could be considered as the major benefit of the school over the first year of its operation.

**Recommendation 6: review and rationalise the use of data in the school.** The New School collects a wide range of data. Reviewing this in the light of this evaluation, and to be clear on the purpose of that data collection, would allow for an even more robust monitoring and evaluation system. This need in part arises from the planned development of the school and the resulting older year groups referred to in recommendation 4. As the contribution of the school to child and parent wellbeing is such a significant finding the use of the student life satisfaction scale could also be enhanced through data collected from parents and teachers about their own and young people's wellbeing. This could be achieved through the instruments already being used or equivalents such as the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire or others intended to be used with older children (for example the Warwick-Edinburgh scale). Data about parent and teacher wellbeing would also provide an enhanced understanding of the impact of the school on the wellbeing of the wider community. This is especially important as the calculation of the benefit cost ratio relies in part on benefits for



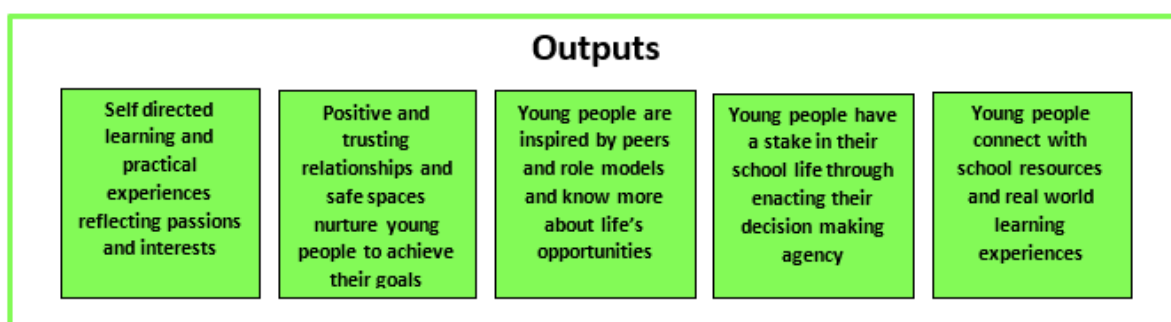
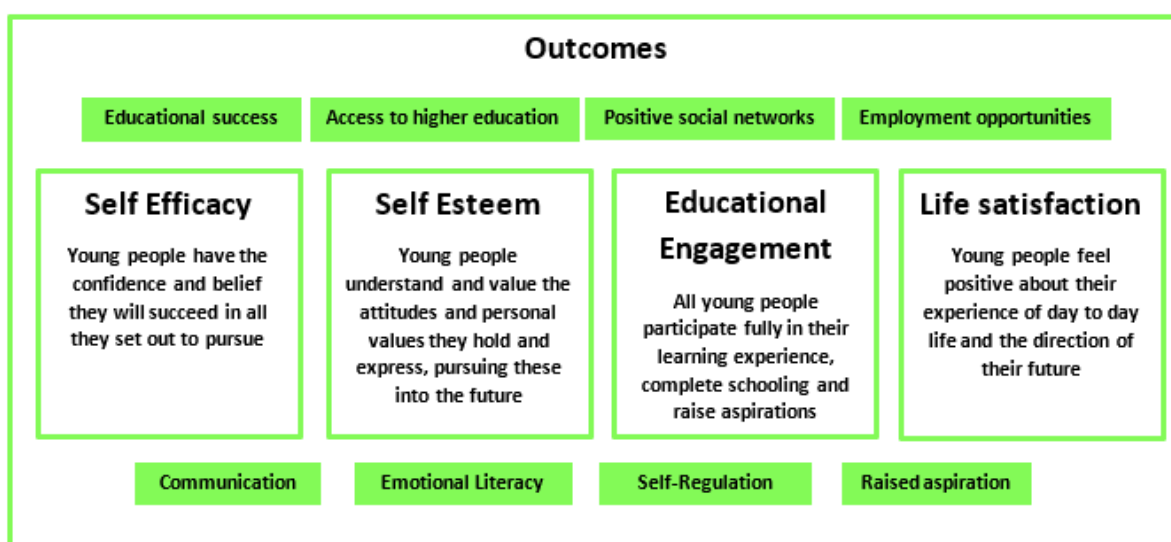
parents and carers. This data, taken together, would provide the basis for a longitudinal analysis of the benefits to children, staff and parents of democratic pedagogy and leadership and as a result a means for calculating benefits which have been achieved in comparison to those predicted in this report.

**Recommendation 7: build on the Cost Benefit Analysis undertaken for this evaluation to better understand the benefits of the school to children, parents and to the local area.** The benefit cost ratio calculated for this evaluation shows that The New School is already delivering annualised benefits in excess of its costs, with projections that benefits will exceed costs by an even larger margin as the school grows in size and ultimately reaches full occupancy. The suggestions for additional data collection in recommendation 6 can help to inform the next version of the cost benefit model. An updated cost-benefit analysis can provide the basis for ongoing dialogue with other education providers, and local councils, to present the potential for The New School to form a part of the local landscape of educational settings, one which is able to offer benefits which other schools, mainstream and alternative provision, struggle to achieve.

**Recommendation 8: disseminate the lessons learned over the first year and the findings of the evaluation to allow others, including those in mainstream education, to learn from them.** The New School has already managed to communicate its vision to many in the education sector. Of particular importance is being able to communicate how the wellbeing problems experienced by some young people and their parents were resolved at The New School. This can draw from the narrative literature review conducted for this evaluation to provide a scholarly context for this work. This can be enhanced through a more extensive dissemination of what has been learnt about the application of democratic education, sociocracy community formation and restorative justice, and the effects that these have had on parents, children and staff. The existing lines of communication provide a means for achieving this but could be extended through other approaches to dissemination including at conferences and through other forms of print publication (academic, policy etc).

**The New School Mission:** To positively change the way we educate our children in the UK.

**The New School Aim:** To promote social justice, positive wellbeing and superior outcomes for young people by giving them a powerful sense of agency and enabling them to flourish through inclusive self-directed learning and participation in a democratic school community.



## 9.2 APPENDIX 2: AN ACTION RESEARCH NARRATIVE

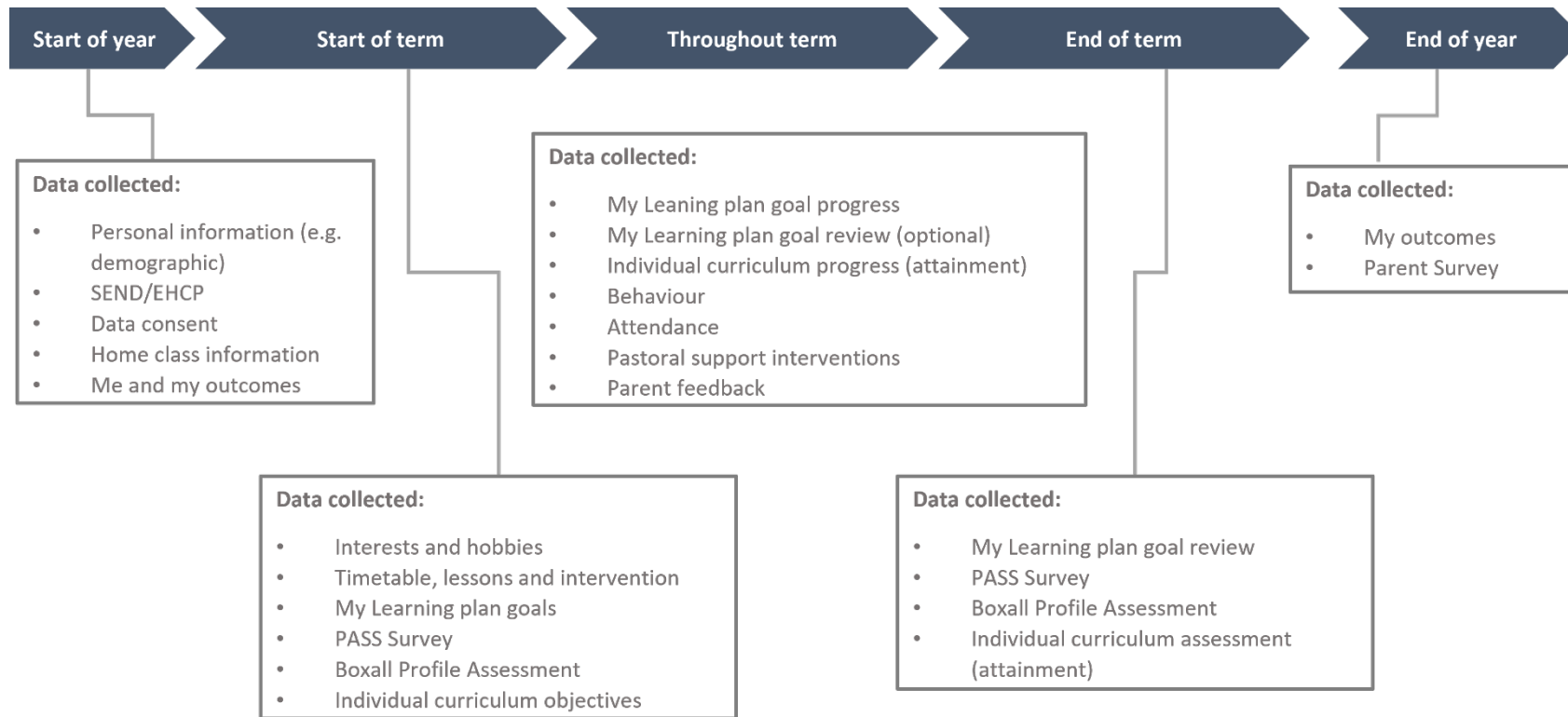
This appendix provides an outline of an action research study to examine children’s engagement and develop strategies for supporting children with choice and self-directed learning. This covers the early, fact finding, stage of the project (sometimes referred to as reconnaissance). This information will provide a better idea of what is currently happening and will provide the basis for the development of specific strategies for supporting learner choice and self-direction, which will be implemented and evaluated.

### **Clara Abbott action research narrative.**

My action research is focused on the link between accessibility and engagement in a democratic setting. I currently work as a class teacher for years one through four and will be transitioning to a new role in January as Teaching and Learning Coordinator. In that role, my objective will be to work individually or in small groups with young people with additional learning needs, young people who have difficulties accessing lessons, young people who intend to deepen their reading and writing skills, and any combination of these. To assess the impact of my interventions, I am recording baseline observations on young people with whom I will be working, then subsequently tracking their level of engagement in classroom learning as I provide various tools. Whereas my research began as an exploration of the underlying causes of non-participation in the classroom as a classroom teacher, I am now using this action research project to track which methods and strategies most inspire learner agency at The New School.

At present, collecting baseline observations from teachers on young people in their classes serves to inform the planning of purposeful and impactful interventions as Teaching and Learning Coordinator. In the coming months, the collection of observations and reflections from young people will allow these interventions to adapt and respond to their needs more accurately. The stakes of this project more broadly concern the role of accessibility in a democratic classroom setting. In what ways can educators support the learning needs of young people so as to maximise their sense of agency in the classroom? Piecing together narratives of each child’s experiences of the classroom before and over the course of my reading, writing, and handwriting interventions will explore this question.

### 9.3 APPENDIX 3: THE NEW SCHOOL MONITORING AND EVALUATION SYSTEM



The school M&E approach is supported by the following systems and tools:



Arbor MIS system



Pupil Attitudes to Self and School by GL Assessment



Boxall Profile



Bespoke Social & emotional skill learning plan



The student resilience survey and the student life satisfaction scale (SLSS)

## 9.4 APPENDIX 4: SOURCES USED IN BENEFIT CALCULATIONS

The following provides the sources used to arrive at the figures used for 'benefits' in the Cost Benefit Analysis.

### STUDENTS ATTAINING ACADEMIC SUCCESS (L2/GCSE)

#### CALCULATING BENEFITS TO STUDENTS

Using earnings data from ONS, the average annual salary for someone with no qualifications is £15,808, and this rises to £19,812 for someone with GCSE grades A\*-C, an additional £4,004 per annum.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/labourproductivity/adhocs/008042the-meanandmediangrossweeklyandgrosshourlyearningsmeasuredbyhighesteducationqualification>

Using <https://www.moneyhelper.org.uk/en/pensions-and-retirement/auto-enrolment/use-our-workplace-pension-calculator>, additional income of £4,004 per annum, leads to increased employer pensions contributions (assuming employers pay at the minimum level of 3%) of £120 per annum.

**The total gain to students per annum is £4,004 in salary and £120 in pensions. £4,004 + £120 = £4,124.**

#### CALCULATING BENEFITS TO THE STATE

The state also gains through additional income tax and National Insurance (NI) payments. Using <https://www.tax.service.gov.uk/estimate-pay-take-home-pay>, the additional NI and income tax paid by an individual, based on the difference between the tax paid on the average salary with no qualifications (annual salary of £15,808 and NI/tax of £1,395) and the average salary with GCSEs (annual salary of £19,812 and NI/tax of £2,676), is £2,676 - £1,395 = £1,281.

**The total gain to the state per annum is £1,281 in NI and income tax.**

### STUDENTS ATTAINING ACADEMIC SUCCESS (L3/A-LEVEL)

#### CALCULATING BENEFITS TO STUDENTS

Using earnings data from ONS, the average annual salary for someone with GCSE or equivalent qualifications is £19,812, and this rises to £22,620 for someone with GCE, A-level or equivalent, an additional £2,808 per annum.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/labourproductivity/adhocs/008042the-meanandmediangrossweeklyandgrosshourlyearningsmeasuredbyhighesteducationqualification>

Using <https://www.moneyhelper.org.uk/en/pensions-and-retirement/auto-enrolment/use-our-workplace-pension-calculator>, additional income of £2,808 per annum, leads to increased employer pensions contributions (assuming employers pay at the minimum level of 3%) of £84 per annum.

**The total gain to students per annum is £2,808 in salary and £84 in pensions. £2,808 + £84 = £2,892.**

#### CALCULATING BENEFITS TO THE STATE

The state also gains through additional income tax and National Insurance (NI) payments. Using <https://www.tax.service.gov.uk/estimate-pay-take-home-pay>, the additional NI and income tax paid by an individual, based on the difference between the tax paid on the average salary with GCSE qualifications

(annual salary of £19,812 and NI/tax of £2,676) and the average salary with A-levels (annual salary of £22,620 and NI/tax of £3,574), is £3,574 - £2,676 = £898.

**The total gain to the state per annum is £898 in NI and income tax.**

## STUDENTS ATTAINING ACADEMIC SUCCESS (HIGHER EDUCATION)

### CALCULATING BENEFITS TO STUDENTS

Using earnings data from ONS, the average annual salary for someone with GCE A-level or equivalent qualifications is £22,620, and this rises to £26,936 for someone with a higher education, an additional £4,316 per annum.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/labourproductivity/adhocs/008042themeanandmediangrossweeklyandgrosshourlyearningsmeasuredbyhighesteducationqualification>

Using <https://www.moneyhelper.org.uk/en/pensions-and-retirement/auto-enrolment/use-our-workplace-pension-calculator>, additional income of £4,316 per annum, leads to increased employer pensions contributions (assuming employers pay at the minimum level of 3%) of £129 per annum.

**The total gain to students per annum is £4,316 in salary and £129 in pensions. £4,316 + £129 = £4,445.**

### CALCULATING BENEFITS TO THE STATE

The state also gains through additional income tax and National Insurance (NI) payments. Using <https://www.tax.service.gov.uk/estimate-pay-take-home-pay>, the additional NI and income tax paid by an individual, based on the difference between the tax paid on the average salary with A-level qualifications (annual salary of £22,620 and NI/tax of £3,574) and the average salary with HE qualifications (annual salary of £26,936 and NI/tax of £3,574), is £4,956 - £3,574 = £1,382.

**The total gain to the state per annum is £1,382 in NI and income tax.**

## STUDENTS PREVENTED FROM EXCLUSION

### CALCULATING BENEFITS TO THE STATE

IPPR research estimates that, over the lifetime of an excluded child, the cost to the state of their exclusion is estimated to be £370,000. The report states:

*This calculation reflects the costs of: education in the alternative provision sector; lost taxation from lower future earnings; associated benefits payments (excluding housing); higher likelihood of entry into the criminal justice system; higher likelihood of social security involvement; and increased average healthcare costs.*

<https://www.ippr.org/files/2017-10/making-the-difference-report-october-2017.pdf>

**Assuming a lifetime of 60 years, the annual benefit to the state of preventing exclusion is £370,000 ÷ 60 = £6,167.**

## PARENTS WORKING AS STUDENTS NO LONGER HOME-SCHOOLED

### CALCULATING BENEFITS TO PARENTS/FAMILIES

Assuming mothers do the majority of home-schooling, average annual income for a woman working full-time was £27,981: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/802209/full-time-annual-salary-in-the-uk-by-gender/>

Employer pension contributions can be calculated based on this salary (assuming that the employer pays the minimum contribution of 3%) using <https://www.moneyhelper.org.uk/en/pensions-and-retirement/auto-enrolment/use-our-workplace-pension-calculator>. This is £652 per annum.

Employees also receive 'perks' from their employers (for example, eye tests, a company car, memberships, life insurance, subsidised meals - see more examples at <https://www.asinta.com/countries/employee-benefits-in-the-uk/>). These are difficult to put a number on but are estimated here at £250 per annum.

**The benefit to parents of being in work for one year is £27,981 + £652 + £250 = £28,883.**

In addition, parents who are no longer providing home-schooling are spared the costs of this which were estimated as £1,740 per annum in 2019: <https://adventuretravelfamily.co.uk/2019/05/10/how-much-does-it-cost-to-homeschool-in-the-uk-the-ultimate-guide-to-homeschooling-finances/> This includes the cost of materials, trips, tutors, etc...

In addition, parents who home educate, must pay for their children to take examinations. In 2020, NCC Home Learning advised home educators that the cost is *around £100 per exam* for a private candidate: <https://www.ncchomelearning.co.uk/blog/private-candidate-gcses/> Assuming that pupils take five exams, this will be a one-off approximate cost of £500.

The total cost of home educating for 12 years is £20,880 + £500 = £21,380. Averaged across the 12 years of education, this is £21,380 ÷ 12 = £1782 per annum.

The cost of sending a child to school was estimated as being £1,579 in 2016: <https://www.primarytimes.co.uk/news/2016/07/how-much-the-true-cost-of-sending-your-child-to-school> This includes the cost of materials, trips, uniform, travel, child care etc...

**The average annual benefit to parents of sending their child to school rather than home educating them, is £1,782 - £1,579 = £203.**

**In total, parents/families gain £28,883 per annum when a parent returns to work and £203 due to no longer providing home education. £28,883 + £203 = £29,086.**

#### CALCULATING BENEFITS TO THE STATE

The state benefits from parents working through additional National Insurance and income tax contributions. Assuming the salary as above (£27,981), using <https://www.tax.service.gov.uk/estimate-payee-take-home-pay>, the NI and income tax paid by a mother is £5,290 per annum.

**The total gain to the state per annum is £5,290 in NI and income tax.**

#### STUDENTS PREVENTED FROM NEET

##### CALCULATING BENEFITS TO STUDENTS

Using earnings data from ONS, the average annual salary for someone with no qualifications is £15,808.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/labourproductivity/adhocs/008042the-meanandmediangrossweeklyandgrosshourlyearningsmeasuredbyhighesteducationqualification>

Using <https://www.moneyhelper.org.uk/en/pensions-and-retirement/auto-enrolment/use-our-workplace-pension-calculator>, a salary of £15,808, results in employer pensions contributions (assuming employers pay at the minimum level of 3%) of £287 per annum.

**The total gain per annum is £15,808 in salary and £287 in pensions. £15,808 + £287 = £16,095.**

#### CALCULATING BENEFITS TO THE STATE

The homelessness charity, Centre Point, published a report in 2016 to explore the costs of homelessness and NEET (<https://centrepoin.org.uk/media/1702/is-prevention-cheaper-than-cure.pdf>). In their report, Centre Point published estimated average annual costs to the state for each year that a young person is NEET. For 16-17 year olds who are NEET, the cost to the state is calculated as £3,265.12 per annum. These costs take into account the costs to the state of unemployment, educational underachievement, economic inactivity, welfare benefits, crime, health and homelessness.

**The state saves £3,265 per annum if a 16-17 year is prevented from becoming NEET.**

#### STUDENTS WITH BETTER MENTAL HEALTH & WELL-BEING

##### CALCULATING BENEFITS TO STUDENTS

The UK government has recently proposed a monetised value for changes in well-being and life satisfaction, which is widely applicable: the WELLBY.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1005388/Wellbeing\\_guidance\\_for\\_appraisal\\_-\\_supplementary\\_Green\\_Book\\_guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1005388/Wellbeing_guidance_for_appraisal_-_supplementary_Green_Book_guidance.pdf)

The WELLBY is described here:

*On the basis of the options and these criteria, in particular consistency, this guide proposes that a robust estimate of a change in life satisfaction can be converted to a monetary value by multiplying by £13,000 [Low: £10,000, High £16,000]. This is the recommended standard value of one wellbeing adjusted life year - a 'WELLBY' - in 2019 prices and values.*

*The value of WELLBY derived in this way can then be applied linearly to any change in life satisfaction. For example, reducing life satisfaction by 0.4 for 1 year would have a value of  $0.4 \times £13,000 = £5,200$ , with a range of £4,000 - £6,400. The same WELLBY value should be applied to all individuals regardless of income and represents a population average willingness to pay. This is justified on equity grounds, as per the approach taken for valuing life and health impacts in the Green Book. As the WELLBY is a constant unit value, losses and gains are valued equally.*

**The annual gain to students of having good mental health and well-being is £13,000.**

##### CALCULATING BENEFITS TO THE STATE

Using data from The Kings Fund, on average, an adult accessing mental health services has £3,000 of lost earnings per annum: [https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/Paying-the-Price-the-cost-of-mental-health-care-England-2026-McCrone-Dhanasiri-Patel-Knapp-Lawton-Smith-Kings-Fund-May-2008\\_0.pdf](https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/Paying-the-Price-the-cost-of-mental-health-care-England-2026-McCrone-Dhanasiri-Patel-Knapp-Lawton-Smith-Kings-Fund-May-2008_0.pdf)

Using <https://www.tax.service.gov.uk/estimate-pay-take-home-pay>, the annual cost to the state in reduced NI and income tax on reduced earnings (of £3,000) due to mental health is £960.

**The total gain to the state per annum is £960 in NI and income tax.**

#### PARENTS WITH BETTER MENTAL HEALTH & WELL-BEING

##### CALCULATING BENEFITS TO PARENTS/FAMILIES

Using the WELLBY as described above for students.



**The annual gain to parents of better mental health and well-being is £13,000.**

#### CALCULATING BENEFITS TO THE STATE

Using the calculations as described above for students.

**The total gain to the state per annum is £960 in NI and income tax.**

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