

## **An evaluation of emotional literacy support assistant (ELSA) training and impact upon pupils' progress.**

The East Hampshire School Partnership invested in bespoke training for 39 emotional literacy support assistants (ELSAs) during the academic year '09/'10. The initial five day training course is followed up by half-termly supervision sessions both provided by Educational Psychologists in Hampshire Educational Psychology Service.

ELSAs provide support to emotionally vulnerable pupils in schools. Their work is often carried out in a one to one session with a pupil for approximately an hour once a week. However, the length and frequency of the sessions depends upon the pupil's age and individual circumstances. ELSAs assess the pupil's needs and develop specific targets for intervention. The achievement of the set targets allow ELSAs to know when a specific intervention can draw to a close.

HEPS has carried out an evaluation to assess the impact ELSAs have had upon pupils' emotional literacy skills over a 6 week period. This has included an analysis of the types of targets ELSAs have identified and worked on with pupils and feedback from SENCOs regarding the competency of the ELSA and the level of impact the work has had within the school.

### **Targets set by ELSAs**

ELSAs recorded the specific targets set for individual pupils. For the purposes of analysis similar targets were grouped into codes. Codes included targets such as *self belief*, *own emotions* and *talking*. The codes were then grouped by the area of emotional literacy that had been targeted namely, empathy, motivation, self awareness and self regulation. See Appendix 1. for the coding manual.

### **ELSA impact upon pupils' emotional literacy skills**

ELSAs completed an Emotional Literacy Checklist (Faupel, 2003a, 2003b) before and after 6 weeks of ELSA sessions. The checklist was also completed for pupils with similar needs but who were not receiving ELSA support during this time.

Analysis found that the group receiving ELSA support significantly increased in their score of emotional literacy; 77% of the sample made progress. Furthermore, this group also significantly increased in their score on the subscale of empathy; over one third of the sample made an empathy score improvement of 50% or more.

The group of emotionally vulnerable pupils who had not received ELSA support did not make any significant progress on their emotional literacy skills. In fact scores of 66% of the sample actually regressed over the 6 weeks.

### **Progress on targets set by ELSAs**

ELSAs were asked to rate how much progress pupils had made on specific targets within the sessions after 6 weeks. Pupils' progress on 61% of the targets were rated as *better*, *a lot better* or *not a problem now* (on a scale ranging from *no change*, *a bit better*, *better*, *a lot better* and *no problem now*). ELSAs thought the sessions were either *helpful* or *very helpful* (on a scale ranging from *a waste of time*, *not helpful*, *a bit helpful*, *helpful*, *very helpful*).

Using the same rating scales Class Teachers were asked to rate how much progress the pupil had made on specific targets within the classroom after 6 weeks of ELSA support.

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Pupils' progress on 50% of the targets were rated as *better* and *a lot better*. The ratings from the Class Teachers were expected to be slightly lower than the ELSA as pupils will take a longer period of time to generalise the skills learnt within the sessions to the 'real world' classroom. 57% felt ELSA sessions had been *helpful* or *very helpful* with the remainder of teachers rating them as *a bit helpful*.

Two thirds of pupils rated the ELSA sessions as *very helpful* and felt that the areas of need focussed on by their targets were *not a problem now*. One third of pupils rated ELSA sessions as *a bit helpful* and felt they had become *a bit better* at their targets.

### **SENCOs' perspectives on ELSAs competency and whole school impact**

SENCOs were invited to freely respond to the question, 'Has the ELSA shown increased competency in supporting pupils' emotional development' and any additional comments. Responses were very positive and recognised increased competency and the wide range of impact of ELSA work. Responses were analysed and similar responses were grouped into codes such as *skills across contexts*, *planning*, *strategies* and *parent feedback*. Similar codes were subsequently grouped under themes which included *professional development*, *capacity building* and *community partnership*. See Table 2. for themes, codes and examples of SENCOs' responses.

### **Conclusion**

ELSAs have been targeting and teaching emotional literacy skills such as empathy, motivation and self awareness. This has resulted in significant gains in emotional literacy skills for emotionally vulnerable pupils over a relatively short period of time. ELSA support is recognised to be helpful by ELSAs, Class Teachers and pupils alike. SENCOs recognise the training improves the ELSAs competency in being able to support emotionally vulnerable pupils. SENCOs also value the wider impact of ELSA support through communication with teachers and senior staff to pass on skills and knowledge to support pupils in class and on the playground. Finally SENCOs highlighted the beneficial opportunity for ELSAs to work across the school partnership to support pupils' transitions.

**Appendix 1. ELSA targets – Coding Manual**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Codes</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Empathy	Helping	Helping others
Motivation	Self belief	To build confidence. To start work independently
	Perseverance	To continue with tasks even when they are challenging
Self Awareness	Own emotions	Be able to understand happy and sad. To recognise what triggers angry feelings
	Strengths	To be able to say ‘things I am good at’
	Expression	Chatting about problems
Self Regulation	Strategies	Walk away from difficult situations
	Talking	Not bottle things up – talk to an adult

**Appendix 2. SENCo response to competency of ELSAs and whole school impact**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Codes</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Professional Development	Confidence	The ELSA has developed in confidence to discuss issues with senior members of staff
	Competency	The ELSA has become more competent in supporting children with emotional needs
	Supervision	Follow up supervision provides a supportive environment. Supervision has supported the ELSA in advising teachers.
	Training	The training has given greater insight into resources and helped the ELSA to plan and record effectively

ELSA Skills	Resources	The ELSA is proactive in seeking resources
	Planning	The ELSA plans sessions thoroughly
	Evaluating	The ELSA evaluates the effectiveness of sessions
	Strategies and approaches	The training has given the ELSA more strategies to use
	Language	The ELSA uses the language of 'choice'
ELSA Qualities	Fun	The children enjoy coming out to a fun and relaxed atmosphere
	Motivation	The children want to talk with the ELSA
	Trust	They like someone special to talk to
	Calm	The ELSA is very calm
	Engaging Pupils	She used visual aid this enabled the pupil to express how his anger affects his behaviour.
Capacity Building	Communicating information	The ELSA discusses issues with senior staff and advises teachers and the learning support team
	Skills across contexts	The ELSA supports all children who sometimes find playtimes difficult and need help resolving situations
	Modelling	Pupils who have received ELSA model skills to other children such as making good choices.
	Time	We need sufficient time to carry out the work and liaise with the SENCo
Value of ELSA	Parent feedback	She has already received very positive feedback from parents
Value of ELSA cntd	Recognition	Our ELSA is valued by the school. The qualification has given the ELSA greater recognition for her skills. ELSA work needs to be continued.
	Employment	This is the second ELSA we have had trained in 2 years
Community Partnership	Transition	ELSAs from a feeder school came to a morning of CPD at our school to aid transitions.
	Partnership	The course has provided key opportunities to extend links with feeder schools.

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