

# **The scope and nature of Emotional Literacy Support Assistant work**

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**Disclaimer**

The Research & Evaluation Unit conducted this evaluation on behalf of Hampshire Educational Psychology Service. The original data are available should anyone wish to check, question or challenge the information reported. Any opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of either Hampshire Educational Psychology Service or Hampshire Children's Services Department.

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## **Executive summary**

Questionnaires were sent to 525 Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) and 243 were returned (46.3% response rate). The aim was to determine how many children had received support during the academic year 2009-2010, the scope of that work and issues relating to the work of ELSAs.

The feedback indicated that, on average, ELSAs worked with 13 children on an individual basis, providing 14 sessions each lasting approximately 30 minutes. There was, however, wide variation in the number of sessions provided, presumably depending on the needs of the child. The focus of sessions also varied considerably, but the most common areas were in respect to self-esteem (involving 794 children), social skills (639 children) and anger management (392 children). However, these data constitute averages and at least twelve of the ELSAs who responded did not work with any children on an individual basis.

On average ELSAs also worked with 3 groups of children. However, 32 % of ELSAs (77 of the 243) did not work with any groups. The number of sessions offered ranged widely from a single session to sessions every day throughout a school year, but the average was 12 sessions. The length of group sessions tended to be consistent at 40 minutes, presumably because sessions had to fit into the school curriculum. Groups varied in size from 4–15 children but the most common size (mode) was a group of 6 children. The three most common areas of group activity were social skills (154 groups), friendship (150 groups) and self-esteem (73 groups).

On average, 5.44 children per school were given ongoing maintenance support following the completion of an ELSA programme. However, the number of children who actually received ongoing support ranged from one child to 70 children. Some answers, such as 'loads', were excluded from this figure as they could not be categorised.

The feedback indicated that 152 of the children receiving ELSA support were looked after by the Local Authority, and a further 52 were adopted children. The modal number of looked after children in each school was two.

On average, ELSAs were allocated 5.83 hours per week by their school to undertake their support work. However, there was wide variation and the time ranged from 30 minutes per week to ELSAs working full time in this role (37.5 hours per week). Additionally, the picture was more complicated than this as some indicated that they could take extra time if and when it was required. Some were also anticipating that their hours would be increased during the next academic year.

Approximately half the ELSAs had additional roles within their school. Such duties included running extracurricular clubs, home school liaison and lunchtime roles. Some ELSAs had as many as five additional roles within the school.

Overall, 54% of ELSAs indicated that they would welcome further training and support for their role, particularly in respect to different types of intervention. Some also indicated that they would welcome more information about resources they could use with children. They valued meeting with other ELSAs and wanted the current supervision sessions to continue as they were addressing many concerns that arose from their work.

The vast majority of ELSAs (78.19%) had some form of contact with the parents of children they were supporting. Many used more than one method of contact depending on the circumstances and how much contact was requested. Some methods of contact were formal, with written reports and meetings, whereas others preferred to have informal chats with parents when the parents wanted to talk. Others kept regularly in touch by telephone and letter.

There were various responses to an open-ended question asking for any other comments. Many commented that they enjoyed the ELSA role and found the work rewarding, although some mentioned that it could be challenging at times. ELSAs also found supervision sessions helpful, although some made constructive criticisms. Many ELSAs indicated that their school did not provide them with enough time to carry out this work. Some ELSAs did not feel that they were well supported in this role by their school, whereas others reported that the support was good. Encouragingly, the positive effect the work had on children was also mentioned.

## **The scope and nature of Emotional Literacy Support Assistant work.**

### **1 Introduction**

Questionnaires were sent to 525 Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) in Hampshire in order to determine how many children and young people had received support during the academic year 2009 - 2010, and the extent and nature of that support. A total of 243 questionnaires were returned, a high response rate (46.3%) for a survey of this type. There were some difficulties in analysing the data returned. These generally related to:

- Questions being left blank
- Respondents misinterpreting questions
- Ambiguous answers.

In some cases, these difficulties could be overcome. However, where questions were omitted, or ambiguous answers were provided, it was not possible to include that data in this report.

### **2 Main focus and scope of individual ELSA support**

The first part of the questionnaire asked about the work undertaken with individual children. ELSAs were asked to indicate how many sessions were delivered to each child over the course of the academic year, the length of a session and the main focus of the work undertaken. The feedback indicated that, on average, ELSAs worked with 13 children on an individual basis, providing 14 sessions each, lasting approximately 30 minutes. There was, however, wide variation in the number of sessions provided, presumably depending on the needs of the child. Twelve ELSAs indicated that they had provided no support to individual children and one response could not be analysed. Table 1 provides a summary of these data. The three most common areas of support were in respect to:

- Self-esteem (794 children were reported to have received this type of support). This category included work on self-confidence, self-respect and positive thinking. On average, children attended 15 sessions over the academic year, each lasting 30 minutes. The number of sessions reported to have been provided ranged from a single meeting to 120 sessions across the year.
- Social skills (639 children were reported to have received this type of support). This category consisted of a diverse range of issues, which are outlined in Table 2. On average, children in this category attended 15 sessions across the academic year, each lasting 30 minutes. Again, there was wide variation in the number of sessions reported, ranging from one to 200 sessions.
- Anger management (392 children were reported to have received this type of support). On average, children attended 14 sessions, each lasting approximately thirty minutes. The total number of sessions again ranged from one to 120 sessions.

**Table 1:** Summary of individual ELSA sessions; focus, number of children, average number and length of sessions ( $n = 231$ )

<b>Area of focus</b>	<b>No. children</b>	<b>Average session length (mins)</b>	<b>Average number of sessions</b>	<b>Range in No of sessions</b>
Self Esteem	794	30	14.59	1-120
Social Skills	639	31	15.41	1-200
Anger Management	392	31	13.53	1-120
Friendship	374	28	13.88	1-200
Emotions	249	27	15.49	1-200
Behaviour	185	31	14.69	1-200
Home Life	132	29	17.42	1-200
Anxiety and Fear	87	26	10.15	1-40
Bereavement	80	30	14.08	1-52
Learning	56	33	16.86	1-80
Transition	44	25	17.77	1-200
General ELSA	30	30	14.07	1-40
Safety	12	28	16.50	1-40
Bullying	11	53	5.64	2-9
ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder)	7	37	19.86	3-40
Hygiene	7	22	13.43	1-60
Attendance	7	23	8.86	1-20
Self Harm	5	33	9.20	4-16
Selective Mutism	4	30	21.00	6-40
Life Skills	3	30	33.33	6-76
Sleep Problems	3	20	3.00	1-6
Body Image	2	20	1.50	1-2
Gender	1	20	20.00	20
	Sum =3124	Mode = 30 mins	Mode = 14	

To elaborate on the content of some of these categories:

- ‘Emotions’ included support for depression, understanding emotions and awareness of emotions.
- ‘Behaviour’ related both to school and home-based behaviour issues, and included sub categories such as attitude and self-control.
- ‘Home life’ constituted a broad and heterogeneous category. One of the main areas in which children required support was dealing with parental divorce. However, this category also included issues relating to family health, being a young carer, parental illness, the effects of abuse, having a new baby in the family and sibling rivalry, problems relating to being a looked after child and a programme regarding the watching of adult (certificate 18) films.

- 'Anxiety and fear' included general anxiety, fears and worries, as well as specific concerns such as school phobia, phobia of flying (aerophobia) and phobia of balloons (globophobia).

**Table 2:** Sub-categories of Social Skills derived from ELSA responses.

<b>Social Skills</b>	<b>Sub-categories</b>	
	Social skills	Making choices
	Empathy	Play
	Asking for help	Consequences
	Interactions	Jealousy
	Maturity	Peer pressure
	Honesty	Sexism
	Separation anxiety	Relationships
	Trust	Communication
	Rejection	Assertiveness
	Turn taking	Sharing
	Self awareness	Attachment
	Independence	Thinking before acting
	Security	Responsibility
	Negotiation	Coping strategies
Co-operation		

- 'Learning' was also a broad category and the sub-categories are given in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Sub-categories of Learning

<b>Learning</b>	<b>Sub-categories</b>	
	General learning	Motivation
	Achievement	Vocabulary
	Memory	Dyslexia
	Exam support	Following instructions
	English Language	Concentration
	Organisation	Focusing
	Problem solving	Attention
	Sex education	Perseverance
	Self management	Listening

- 'Transition' related either to transition into a new school or new year group.
- 'General ELSA' included social stories, time to talk and solution-focused therapy.
- 'Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)' included general support, social skills and friendship skills for children with autism.

In summary, ELSA activity addressed many issues. The largest proportion of children received help for self-esteem, social skills and anger management. However, as well as these very familiar areas, some work was more bespoke. Twelve schools reported that they were running no

individual ELSA programmes. The number of sessions provided also varied greatly. Some children had a one-off single session with an ELSA, whereas others had a session each day lasting most of the school year. The length of the sessions tended to be approximately 30 minutes.

### 3 Main focus and scope of group ELSA support

The second question related to support provided to groups of children. ELSAs were again asked to indicate the main focus of the sessions, how many children were in the group, how much time was spent working with the group per session, and how many sessions of the programme were delivered to each group over the course of the academic year. Table 4 contains a summary of the information provided.

**Table 4:** Summary of group ELSA sessions; focus, number of children, number of groups, children per group, average length and number of sessions.

Area of ELSA group focus	No. children	No. Groups	Average no. children per group	Average session length (mins)	Average no. of sessions	Range in No of sessions
Anger Management	169	39	4.30	43	8.54	2-40
Anxiety and Fear	8	2	4.00	25	4.00	3-5
ASD	4	1	4.00	50	15.00	15
Attendance	6	1	6.00	60	6.00	6
Behaviour	14	5	2.80	42	13.60	1-40
Bereavement	7	3	2.33	23	1.33	1-2
Bullying	20	4	5.00	37	7.50	6-9
Emotions	135	26	5.19	35	10.08	3-40
Friendship	773	150	5.15	35	10.67	1-40
General ELSA	74	10	7.40	51	8.40	3-10
Home life	16	1	3.20	28	18.00	2-40
Nurture group	11	5	5.50	77	62.00	4-120
Learning	44	8	5.50	37	6.13	2-8
Preparation for a Residential	15	77	15.00	20	6.00	6
Self Esteem	316	2	4.54	37	12.41	3-40
Social Skills	713	1	4.63	34	12.21	1-200
Transition	160	27	5.93	45	4.89	1-30
	Sum = 2485	Sum = 362	Mean = 5.32	Mean = 39.94	Mean = 12.22	

On average, each ELSA worked with 3 groups of children. However, 32% of ELSAs (77 of the 243) did not work with any groups at all. The number of sessions ranged widely, from a single session to sessions every day throughout a school year, but averaged 12 sessions. The length of group sessions tended to be consistent at 40 minutes, presumably because sessions had to fit into the school curriculum. Groups varied in size from 4–15 children but the most common size (mode) was a group of 6 children.

Social skills were the main focus of group activity (involving 154 groups). Such work included programmes on listening, turn taking, communication, sharing and relationships. On average, there were 5 children in such groups, attending sessions lasting 35 minutes. The number of sessions ranged from one to 200 group sessions over the year.

The second most common area of focus related to Friendship skills (150 groups), whilst the third most common area related to Self Esteem (73 groups). The subject content here included self-confidence and positive thinking. To clarify some of the other categories:

- Transition. Groups related to children who had recently changed schools (in years 3 and 7) or who were looking to do so (years 2 and 6). In addition to the data reported here, some ELSAs reported running transition groups but provided no details about the length of time, how many children took part etc. Thus, the extent of such work was greater than the figures reported here would suggest.
- General ELSA. A summary of the types of activity included in this category can be seen in Table 5.

**Table 5:** A summary of groups categorised into ‘General ELSA’.

General ELSA	Sub-categories	
	Therapeutic Story writing	Bubble Time
	Time to Talk	Circle Time
	Helping Hand	

- Learning. Activity in this category included listening, organisation, problem solving and motivation.
- Home life. These groups helped children with issues surrounding divorce, family break ups and family health issues. One group specifically gave support to a small group of children whose parents were receiving treatment for cancer.

The focus for some groups was bespoke to the school. Examples included some addressing pupils’ attendance and one which focussed on preparing children for a residential trip. This covered matters such as coping with missing parents emotionally and being away from home.

In conclusion, group ELSA programmes addressed a wide variety of issues. The largest proportion of groups received support for social skills, friendship and self-esteem. Nearly one third of ELSAs (77 of 243) reported that they were running no group programmes. Some groups had a one-off session with an ELSA; others had more regular contact and some had sessions every day throughout the school year.

#### **4 Ongoing support following ELSA**

A further question related to whether pupils were given ongoing contact after receiving ELSA support. Overall, 76.13% ( $n = 185$ ) of respondents completed

this question. However, not all of these responses could be used as the answers were insufficiently precise (examples included 'all to varying degrees', 'loads' and 'pupils can come and find me'). A further 8 respondents did not answer the question. Of those answers that could be used ( $n = 166$ ), on average 5.44 children per ELSA were given ongoing support ( $SD = 7.16$ ) on completing their programme. However, the number of children who received ongoing support ranged from one to 70 across schools.

### **5 ELSA support for children looked after and adopted**

Another question concerned how many children receiving ELSA support were either looked after by the Local Authority or adopted (where this was known). This question was completed by the majority of respondents (94%) hence we can be reasonably sure that these figures offer an accurate picture of the extent of such work. A total of 152 children who were receiving ELSA support could be defined as Looked After Children and a further 52 were known to have been adopted. The average number of looked after or adopted children per ELSA was 0.64 and 0.22 respectively.

### **6 Extent of ELSA work in school**

ELSAs were asked how many hours per week they had been allocated by their school to carry out their work with children. Overall, 93.82% of ELSAs gave a response to this question, however, seven of these responses could not be categorised into an amount of time. Examples of responses that could not be categorised included 'flexible', 'irregular pattern' and 'depends on number of children'. There were also 15 null responses to this question.

On average, ELSAs were allocated 5.83 hours per week ( $SD = 5.68$ ). There was, however, a large range of allocated hours, ranging from 30 minutes per week to a full-time role (37.5 hours per week). There were also comments about the time they were given. Many indicated that they were anticipating having their hours increased in the coming academic year. Some ELSAs also said that they could take extra time if necessary, especially if situations arose that needed addressing. There were also schools that had more than one ELSA with different amounts of time, so the total designated hours for the school was reported. The issue of time was, however, complicated as some ELSAs also had other roles within the school, such as providing FEIPS (Framework for Enhanced and Individual Pastoral Support) support, and had to divide their time between various different activities as they felt appropriate. Thus, in these cases, it was not possible to provide an exact indication of how much time was spent on ELSA alone.

### **7 Additional work as an extension of ELSA**

ELSAs were asked whether they were involved in any additional work within their school that constituted an extension of their ELSA role. In total, 65.43% of ELSAs completed this question, with 84 giving no response. In addition to this, 37 ELSAs indicated that they did not have any other role. Table 6 provides a summary of the other areas of work undertaken by ELSAs. Many ELSAs carried out more than one additional role within the school, with some ELSAs having up to five additional roles.

The largest proportion of such work involved running of extracurricular clubs. Thirty eight ELSAs ran clubs both at lunchtimes, break times or after school. The frequency of these clubs ranged from once a week to daily sessions. Table 7 lists the examples of extracurricular clubs run by ELSAs.

**Table 6.** A summary of extended work carried out by ELSAs

<b>Areas of Extended Work</b>	<b>No. of ELSAs doing extended work</b>
Extra Curricular Clubs	38
Home School Liaison	31
Lunch/ Break Roles	29
Education Groups	21
Parent support	16
Classroom Support Roles	14
On Call	12
Nurture Group	10
Multi Agency	7
ELSA Supervision	3
Child Protection	2
Inclusion Manager	1
Healthy School	1

**Table 7:** Extracurricular clubs run by ELSAs

<b>Extra Curricular Clubs</b>	<b>Specific Clubs</b>	
	Homework Club	Lunchtime Club
	Play Club	Gardening Club
	Break time Club	Study Skills After School
	Young Carers' Club	Mixed Lunch Club
	Girls' Lunch Club	Breakfast Club
	Cook and Eat	Fun Club
	RDA – Riding Stables	Friendship group

Another area involving ELSAs was home-school liaison. Overall, 31 ELSAs had home-school roles of some sort. Examples included home-school link worker, home school liaison, Jigsaw worker, and School Home Integrated Programmes (SHIP). Not all respondents indicated how often they carried out these extra roles.

Overall, 29 ELSAs were involved in various lunch and break time positions. These roles included playground and lunch duties, dinner ladies, supervising selected children, lunch with pupils and supervising children who had been excluded from playtime. The frequency with which these roles were undertaken varied, ranging from two or three days per week to every day.

Another extension of the ELSA role was in running educational groups. In total, 21 ELSAs were involved with such groups. Table 8 provides examples of the work categorised as 'educational'.

**Table 8.** Examples of sessions categorised under 'Educational Groups'.

<b>Educational Groups</b>	<b>Examples in Category</b>	
	FEIPS	Play Therapy
	Social Skills Group	School transition
	EAL group	Confident Parents Confident Kids
	Assertiveness group	SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning)
	Bubble Time	Induction Report
	Disability work with Sports	

The frequency of this kind of work varied. For example, the school transition group was run once a year when pupils were preparing to go on to their next school, whereas other groups such as FEIPs and a Social Skills group were run once per week (some during lunchtimes).

Fourteen ELSAs also performed other roles within the classroom (see Table 9). Some of these positions constituted the ELSA's main role in the school.

**Table 9:** Examples of roles categorised under 'Classroom Support'.

<b>Classroom Support Roles</b>	<b>Examples in Category</b>	
	Special Needs Assistant	Teaching Assistant
	Higher Level Teaching Assistant	Learning Support Assistant
	Behaviour Management	Support Statemented Child
	Behaviour Support	Classroom Support
	Attendance Monitoring	Toe by Toe Reading Scheme

In addition to delivering structured ELSA programmes, twelve ELSAs reported that they also had an 'On-Call' role. Examples include drop-in sessions for pupils at lunchtimes, being available for 'TLC' and helping with friendship issues in the playground. There were some extended roles that involved only a small number of ELSAs. For example, ten ELSAs ran Nurture groups. One ELSA was also the child protection officer for their school.

In summary, there was a wide range of additional roles undertaken by ELSAs as an extension of their ELSA role. Of the questionnaires received, 50.20% of the ELSAs had additional roles within the school, 15.22% did not take on

additional positions, and the remaining 34.56% of questionnaires gave no indication. Some ELSAs took on as many as five additional roles.

## 8 Further training and support

An additional question addressed whether ELSAs perceived that they needed further training or support, and if so what these needs were. Overall, 54% offered suggestions, 37% did not answer the question and 9% had no suggestions to make. Overall, 47 ELSAs suggested that further training was needed for dealing with specific issues they had come across whilst delivering support to children. A summary of those suggestions can be seen in Table 10. However, these comments were occasionally qualified by comments related to budget constraints, e.g. *“school not prepared to pay”*.

**Table 10:** Suggestions for further training regarding specific areas of ELSA programme focus.

Specific Programme Focus	Suggestions	
	ADHD	Domestic Violence
	Adoption	Divorce
	Anger	Eating Disorders
	Anxiety Disorders	Emotional Changes
	Attachment	Puberty
	Autism	Self Esteem
	Behaviour management	Self Esteem for KS1
	Bereavement	Self Harm
	Bullying	Sexual Health
	Drug/ Alcohol Dependent Parents	Therapeutic Story Writing

The most frequent suggestions for training were in relation to bereavement, attachment and divorce (e.g. *“more ideas to support children going through a divorce”*). Some suggestions were specific to certain age groups, such as puberty and sexual health and some suggestions, such as domestic violence and anxiety disorders, were made by only small numbers of people.

The second type of response was for general training, indirectly related to the ELSA role. In total, 34 ELSAs responded with other areas in which they would like further training of this type. A summary of these responses can be seen in Table 11. Some of the responses did not concern specific topics; for example, seven indicated that they would be interested in any further training. Some wanted updates, a refresher course or extended training to supplement that which they had already received. One explained it in the following way:

- *“The initial training was good but there should be some continuation of training as there are complex needs, every child and situation is different. Initial sessions may not have dealt with particular issues that we have to deal with”*

**Table 11:** Suggestions from ELSAs for other areas of training

Training	Suggestions	
	Speaking and Listening	Training Updates
	Buddy training	Language and communication
	CAHMS	Nurture Groups
	CAF (Common Assessment Framework)	PDA (Pathological Demand Avoidance)
	Child Psychology	Refresher course
	Children transferring positive effects to class	Special Needs Training
	DAAT (Drug and Alcohol) training	Understanding Outside Agencies

In addition to training updates, many ELSAs indicated an interest in being trained in other areas. The most frequent suggestions were in relation to counselling, Special Educational Needs, and nurture groups. Of this group, 24 requested training in counselling skills (FEIPS) - was frequently cited). Various comments were made about why counselling skills would be useful. Additionally, some people were already attending counselling skills training, were booked to attend a course, or were looking for counselling courses to study in their own time. It was suggested that running a nurture group might *“address the social skills needs of a larger group of children - preventing ‘waiting lists’”*. Others suggested that it would be helpful to have a better understanding of the role of other agencies. One expressed it in the following way *“dealing with outside agencies can be confusing and training on this could be helpful”*. However, they also suggested that some information could be put on an ELSA website. Another issue for training was support for their role within their school (17 responses).

A further area in which they felt they needed more support was with resources. One indicated that the many of the resources available were not suitable for secondary school-aged pupils, and said that it was: *“tricky to find resources/come up with ideas that are suitable for the types of students I work with”*. Another commented that they could do with help on: *“how to deliver things in a more adult way.”* Others felt it would be useful to have a directory of resources and a reminder of the resources available. One suggested that sharing knowledge of resources and games might be helpful:

- *“Resources are very expensive, sharing knowledge of useful games etc is helpful before committing to purchase. Please could we have a list of recommended resources that other ELSAs have enjoyed using perhaps via the newsletter? Also, ideas for resources that can be made. I find the children respond well to visual games and ‘talk’ seems to come much easier.”*
- *“A resource bank or library would be beneficial, as resources are costly and sometimes only required for a short period of time.”*

Nine people made suggestions to do with supervision. Most ELSAs who commented on supervision wanted the current level of supervision to be maintained, describing these sessions as *'helpful'*, *'useful'* and *'essential'*. One suggested that there should be more emotional support as they are often dealing with very sensitive issues for which they needed support. Another suggested that smaller groups or even 1:1 supervision would be better:

- *"ELSA meetings are invaluable - sometimes you can feel very isolated and question whether you are handling problems as well as you could"*

Networking between ELSAs was also suggested by seven people. Meeting with other ELSAs enabled shared issues to be discussed, allowing supportive ideas to arise: *"more contact with other ELSAs in same position would be interesting"*. One also suggested an annual conference:

- *"Annual conference with guest speakers delivering focused sessions with examples of / representatives for equipment & resources"*

Some suggestions were made by only a few respondents. One example was support with record keeping and notes. Specific suggestions ranged from help with paperwork (e.g. somebody to look over to make sure it is done correctly), protection of private notes on children they work with, and advice on planning sessions. Similarly, some requested help in working with parents, especially if the parents were themselves 'vulnerable'.

Nine respondents stated that they had no improvement suggestions to make; they indicated that the support available should continue, and perceived the current level of support to be good: *"ongoing ELSA meetings with [educational psychologist] cover all training and support so far."*

In summary, the 54% of ELSAs who answered this question felt further training and support would be beneficial to their role. The majority felt that support in relation to specific interventions and further enhancement of their skills would be helpful. A smaller number indicated they would welcome more information about resources, and others suggested that more ELSA networks would be useful. There were also numerous, positive, comments about the quality of supervision already provided.

## **9 Contact with parents**

A question relating to work with parents was divided into two parts. The first part identified whether ELSAs had regular contact with parents: the second part was concerned with what form that contact took.

In total, 76.31% of respondents indicated that they had contact with parents; 21.29% did not have regular contact with parents, and 2.00% ( $n = 6$ ) failed to respond to this question. For those who had regular contact with parents, there were a variety of methods. Table 12 provides a summary of the methods of communication with parents. Many ELSAs used more than one approach, depending on the reason for the contact.

**Table 12:** The methods used by ELSAs to contact parents.

<b>Methods of Contact with Parents</b>	Checklist	Letter
	Child's diary	Notes
	ELSA booklet	Meeting
	E-mail	Parents Evening
	Evaluation	Parent group
	Home school book	Phone
	Home school link work	Written report
	Home Visit	Routine chart
	Homework	Telephone Calls
	Informal chat	

Ninety two ELSAs kept in contact with parents through regular meetings, whilst 62 kept in contact via telephone calls. Others ( $n = 49$ ) relied on informal chats, preferring to talk to parents as and when this was needed; often in the playground or at the end of the school day. Thirty three ELSAs reported sending letters home, although some letters were sent out at the start of an intervention in order to inform parents about what was happening. Other ELSAs conducted home visits as part of their Home school link work.

Meetings constituted a range of activity. Some of these meetings were 1:1 (ELSA and parent) to discuss the child's needs and subsequent progress. There were also meetings involving head teachers and SENCOs (e.g. Education Plan meetings) and contact in other multi-agency meetings (Common Assessment Framework and Team Around the Child meetings). A more specific approach where the ELSA and the parents worked together to reinforce pupil progress was also reported:

- *“to encourage the child to follow it by earning a pom pom from their parent to bring to me every morning to fill a jar and earn a prize. This provides both myself and the parent with a chance to praise the child and reward good behaviour and an opportunity to discuss what went wrong and why.”*

Some ELSAs kept in contact with parents via notes whenever they needed to discuss something, and from this they then decided what further contact was required. This was often in addition to informal chats and more formal meetings.

In summary, the majority of ELSAs had some form of contact with the parents of children for whom they were providing support. Many used more than one method of contact depending on the circumstances and how much contact was requested by parents. Some contact with parents was formal, with written reports and meetings, whereas others preferred to have informal chats with parents when they needed to do so. Others kept in touch by telephone or letter, and some used home school visits.

## 10 Other comments

The final question constituted an open-ended section where ELSAs were able to add any further comments they wished to make. Fifty one per cent added further comments which fell into the following categories.

- **ELSA Role.** In total, 56 ELSAs made comments about the ELSA role. There was a mixture of positive and negative observations. Positive comments included how rewarding and valuable the role was. Many ELSAs indicated how much they enjoyed their role, and how it was a privilege to be able to support children in this way. There were also comments that described the work as tough, demanding, at times frustrating and often emotionally difficult, but overall the role was rewarding. Some ELSAs even reported that they had felt better themselves as a result of taking on this role:
  - *“I have thoroughly enjoyed my role as an ELSA this year, and eagerly look forward to next year.”*
  - *“I thoroughly enjoy my role as our school ELSA. I just wish there were more hours in the day so I could work with more children.”*
  - *“I enjoy my ELSA work and would like to do this full time”*
  - *“At times ELSA is frustrating (lack of skills on my part) at other times hugely rewarding”*
  - *“I feel passionate about my ELSA work and the constant flurry of children and their needs. I feel more confident in myself which helps I'm sure to get them back on track.”*

Some also felt that the role had improved their position in school. One felt the role was having an impact and their school was coming to recognise the importance of ELSA work:

- *“Over time, other members of staff are now recognising the importance of this role and I feel I am supporting ALL the staff and now being appreciated for what I do. With an increase in my ELSA hours, to include planning and preparation time, it can only get better!”*
- **Supervision.** Overall, 30 ELSAs made comments about supervision. Many responses were positive, concentrating on how helpful the supervision sessions were, and how well ELSAs were supported. Supervision sessions were also described as *‘invaluable’*, *‘crucial’* and *‘essential’*:
  - *“ELSA support meetings are vital as they give one of the only opportunities to discuss different approaches to any particular problems and issues”*
  - *“The supervision support is invaluable. Meeting with our EP for problem solving/further targeted training (e.g. IDP for Autism/ reflective learning is particularly useful). Meeting with other ELSAs to problem solve, share strategies, resource swapping etc also absolutely priceless!”*

- *“I would just like to add how much I appreciate [Educational Psychologist’s] support during the supervision sessions. She always provides me with good, practical advice.”*

In addition, there were recommendations for improving the way supervision sessions were arranged. Some ELSAs felt they did not need as many sessions:

- *“Although half termly supervision sessions are useful, I do not feel they are necessary. A termly meeting with an EP with a focus topic would be sufficient. The ELSA groups could still meet for a ‘self help’ session without EP.”*

Some acknowledged that the sessions were relevant but were disappointed about plans to charge for sessions:

- *“Why charge when we have to attend?”*
- *“If supervision is to be charged for, I feel that I will no longer be able to have access to it”*

- **Time Constraints.** Another area of comment regarded the time they had been given by their school for their role. In general, most comments related to the fact that there was not enough time, and some ELSAs had not been allocated any time at all. However, some ELSAs indicated that their hours may be increased in the coming academic year.

- *“I find it hard to fit it all in with the limit on time. It is very easy for a session to run over time if the child wants to talk”*
- *“Sadly have no time allocated and never have really since training in 2007. However, revised class organisation Sept 2010 could allow weekly sessions (I hope)”*

- **Impact.** An area frequently cited was the effect that interventions were perceived to have had on pupils. Many reported that there had been a noticeable impact on the children that they worked with.

- *“In our first year of ELSA we have seen a remarkable improvement in our children’s social skills.”*
- *“Pupils continue to make progress and feel they have someone to turn to who is prepared to help with ‘not education problems’.”*

They frequently mentioned that pupils often just needed somebody they could talk to and, as ELSAs, they felt empowered to do so by the training they had received. Some ELSAs had also received positive feedback from parents about the change that had been noticed:

- *“You know it’s successful when a parent tells you ‘he talks a lot about being happy these days”*
- *“The feedback from parents has been really positive about the ELSA work within our school.”*

Many ELSAs also reported that parents were supportive of their work and they received a lot of positive feedback. They also mentioned that parents also took the opportunity to talk to the ELSA about concerns they had:

- *“I feel most of parents like the time to talk, and find support as well as the children. If parents are worried they will pop in to see me, first thing.”*
- **School support.** The last category frequently mentioned was school support. This generated a mixture of positive and negative responses, with some ELSAs feeling well-supported by their school, and others having a difficult time in establishing the ELSA role in their school. One had successfully introduced the ELSA role to staff collectively so that they were able to gain an understanding of the role from the start. Others felt their school was aware of the importance of ELSA work and had support and encouraged them from training to implementation:
  - *“I feel [school] has embraced the importance of emotional literacy to students. All Head of Years [HOYs] are aware of emotional literacy and refer students to ELSAs. ELSAs have close communications with HOYs.”*
  - *“I have full cooperation & encouragement for my role as ELSA from my school. They understand the role, due to my giving an information to a staff meeting and them being interested in how we help the children.”*
  - *“The whole school is very supportive and very aware of the ELSA role.”*
  - *“Great school support from day one.”*

However, there were also instances of poor support from staff members in some schools. One stated that their ELSA time had been taken away. She went on to say that teachers did not like children going out of lessons for support. Another indicated that they felt under pressure and were also not able to attend supervision sessions:

- *“My ELSA hours were taken away and I was asked to support back in the classroom.”*
- *“There is not enough support for ELSAs during training - you are expected to start working with children but are not allowed to attend supervision meetings.”*

The level of support from schools varied greatly. Some schools embraced ELSA work, whereas others appeared not to appreciate the role and did not offer ELSAs a great deal of support.

In summary, many ELSAs indicated that they found their role rewarding and thought that the work was valuable to children. However, at times the role was perceived to be challenging. ELSAs thought that supervision sessions were helpful, and addressed many of the issues that arose. Some ELSAs suggested alterations to arrangements and a few were critical of the plans to

charge for this service. In terms of the time available to conduct their ELSA duties, most felt they were given insufficient time in which to plan and deliver sessions. ELSAs commented on the positive effect of the intervention on the children they worked with: they also suggested that parents and teachers had noticed this difference. Parents were perceived to be supportive of the ELSA work being undertaken with their children. There were mixed reports about the level of support within the school, with some schools embracing ELSA work, and others appearing not to recognise its importance.

## **11 Conclusion**

Previous research has attempted to document ELSAs' perceptions of the training they have received or the impact of ELSAs' work on children (HEPS, 2009 - An evaluation of the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) programme). What has been lacking, however, is an overview of the work ELSAs are actually doing across the county. This report fulfils that function and provides a basis by which schools can make comparisons.

Questionnaire surveys are deemed to have been successful if they reach a response rate of 25%. Thus, the response rate of 46.3% for the current study is good and can consequently be deemed to provide a reasonably accurate picture of what was happening during the academic year 2009-2010.

Whilst an 'average ELSA' does not actually exist, the data from the current study indicate that they would work with 13 children on an individual basis, providing each child with about 14 sessions, each lasting approximately 30 minutes. However, there was wide variation across ELSAs, presumably depending on the individual needs of a child. The most common areas being worked on were self-esteem, social skills and anger management. Group sessions were also carried out. On average, they worked with 3 groups of children for about 12 sessions each lasting 40 minutes. The group size tended to be 6 children and the most common areas of focus were social skills, friendship skills and self-esteem. On completing a programme with a child, contact was not terminated; many ELSAs reported that they provided ongoing maintenance support, either on a planned basis or informally, as and when required.

The average ELSA was allocated approximately 5.83 hours per week to undertake ELSA work, but there was huge variation in this. Some worked in this capacity on a full-time basis. The picture was further complicated by the fact that at least half of ELSAs also fulfilled additional roles within their school and time was fairly fluid between these roles. Such duties included running extracurricular clubs, home school liaison and lunchtime roles.

Of the 5,609 children we know were receiving ELSA support during 2009-10, about 2.7% were Looked After Children. A further 0.9% of the children were adopted, although ELSAs were not always aware of who was actually adopted as this information tends not to be documented. The vast majority of ELSAs (78.19%) maintained some form of regular contact with the parents of the children they were supporting. Many commented that they enjoyed the ELSA role and found the work rewarding, but challenging at times. They also

referenced the positive effect of their work on children as perceived by parents, teachers and through their own observation.

Over half of the ELSAs indicated they would welcome further training to support for their role. In addition many indicated they would like to receive more information about the sorts of resources they could use with children. They valued meeting with other ELSAs and supervision sessions were considered helpful.

In summary, this report provides a synopsis of the scope and nature of the work undertaken by ELSAs across Hampshire. There were some common themes in the type of work undertaken by ELSAs, with support given to pupils for difficulties with Social Skills, Anger Management, Self Esteem and Friendship. In addition to this, there was also considerable variation across individual ELSAs in terms of the amount of work carried out, and the nature and focus of their work, as this was dependent on the needs of the individual children that received support.