

Developing a Sheffield Report Card

What have we learned that could be useful when considering a national report card approach?



Learn Sheffield
has been part of the
LocalEd 2025 pilot project

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Learn
Sheffield
.By Sheffield
.For Sheffield
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Executive Summary

The purpose of this document is to share the content and learning from Learn Sheffield's work on report cards since September 2022. Our participation in the Local Ed 2025 pilot project has led to us developing and testing two versions of a report card. We are one of the only groups nationally to have spent significant time thinking about the challenges and opportunities around this, and the learning from this should be shared in the context of the development of a national report card.

In this report, we describe what we have done and shared the most recent version of our report card. We share our key learning, including the perspectives of key stakeholders, possible risks and opportunities, and the potential role of voice and experience. Our work provides insights that are not easily accessed and has been influenced by feedback from parents and carers.

Our learning can be condensed into seven key findings:

1. Audience

We believe that the report card should be in service of parents and carers.

2. Sector perspective

Colleagues believe that there is value in contributing to a report card which provides a more holistic, rounded and up-to-date picture of each setting.

3. Parent/carer perspective

Parents and carer feedback is consistent and clear on the value of both quality assured external information about settings alongside up-to-date contextual information that provides a 'feel for the school'.

4. Accessibility

The report must be accessible and utilise technologies that are routinely used by parents and carers.

5. Content

The principles above could be achieved through a collaboration between the DfE, Ofsted, local areas, settings and their partners. Developing the report card in this way would be a powerful statement.

6. System Development

We believe that the report card can contribute to an improved accountability system. For this to happen, its development must be connected to wider review of the way that high-stakes accountability impacts on improvement.

7. Report Card Development

This work provides an opportunity to develop new and better ways to capture how children, young people and their families experience settings. Emphasis on this could support improvement in a more fundamental and authentic way.

If we were to add an additional message it would relate to the name. We probably wouldn't call it a report card! If it is doing all of the above, and developing alongside a new approach to accountability, then the name should reflect this.

To be effective the report card needs to be as accessible as possible, both in terms of the languages in which it is available and the language choices within it. For it to be truly accessible, we will need to go beyond existing practice to promote equity. The report card needs to be able to be accessed on the range of devices that parents and carers routinely use, including a mobile phone.

We conclude that the report card does not require overall judgement or summative 'scores' or rankings, beyond those contained in specific sources (for example Ofsted judgements or DfE data). It should provide the information from each source and enable parents and carers to determine which information is useful to them.

A national report card has the potential to negatively contribute to high-stakes accountability and create a wealth of unintended consequences. It could, instead, be part of a significant positive shift towards a more effective model of accountability. We hope that our observations and conclusions are helpful, support the latter, and make the case for new ways of working.



What we did

Learn Sheffield began working on school report cards in 2022 as part of our involvement in the [LocalEd 2025](#) pilot, which is supported by AEC (see Appendix A).

The [Sheffield pilot](#) was part of the third strand of the project, which was focussed on new models of accountability and led by Dame Christine Gilbert. We set out to test how different reported information about a setting could provide a more rounded perspective, and enhance both the culture of professional accountability and the quality of information for parents, carers and the wider community.

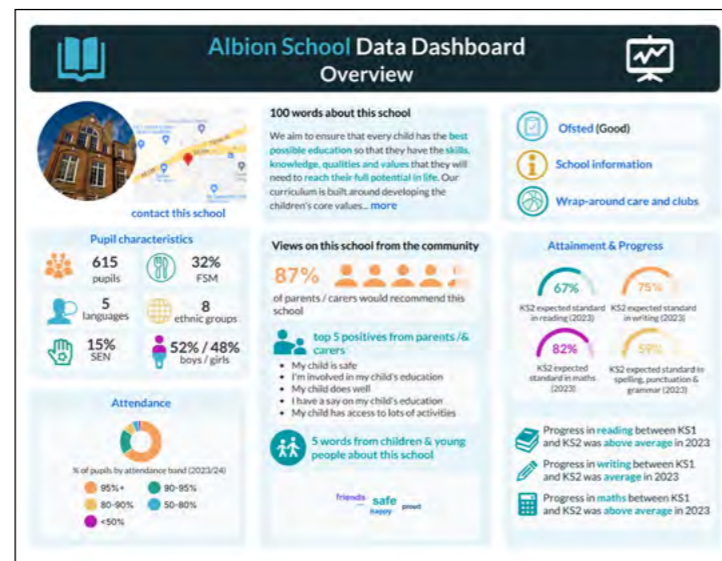
A working group was established to guide and inform this work. It has been informed by the views of more than 30 colleagues representing almost 70 settings over the course of the project. This group has worked with Learn Sheffield and received support from Dame Christine to explore approaches internationally.

The working group met for the first time in September 2022. It developed the content for a local report card model through a series of eight half-day workshops, generally half-termly, through to the spring term of 2024.

The first version (the first screen of which is on the right) was tested with parents, carers and stakeholders between April and June 2024. Colleagues from the working group undertook testing sessions within their own school communities and fed back the learning.

This feedback was discussed in June 2024 and a second version was developed and tested. This version is outlined over the following pages and was shared for the first time at the Local Ed 2025 Conference on 25 June 2024.

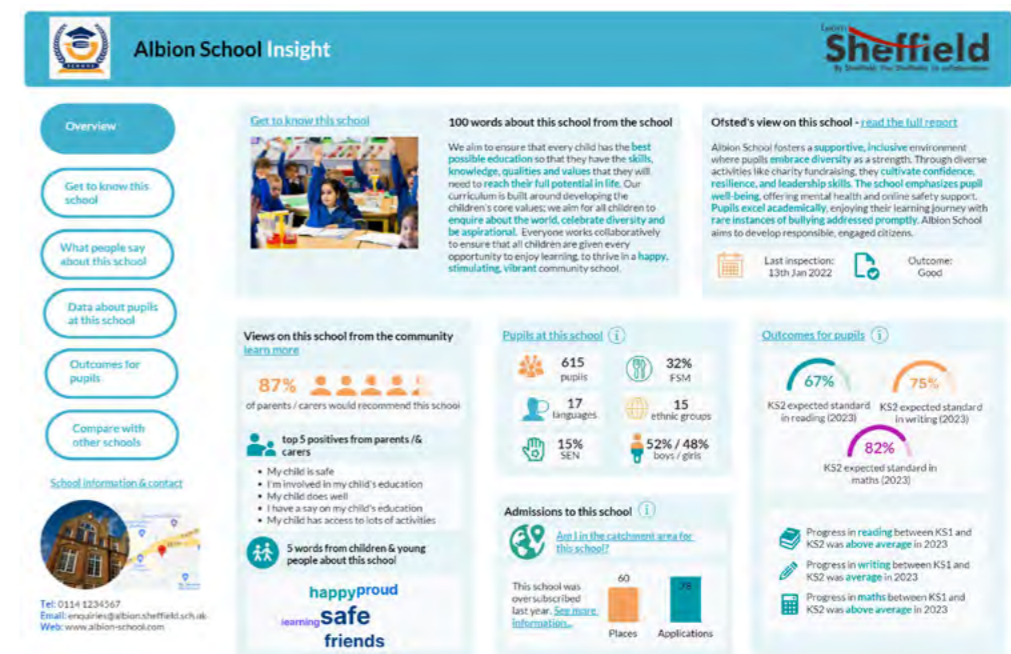
At the time of producing the first version we had not considered the name of the tool. One of the changes that we made in the second version was to start to use the term 'insight' rather than dashboard or report card. Given the government's use of the term 'report card' we have used this throughout this report, so that our learning connects to the national discussion. We would, however, encourage the government to consider this terminology and its potential downsides in the final development of the new approach.



Sheffield Insight: A report card model

The images below are a 'mocked-up' version for an imaginary primary setting. We have also developed and tested versions for secondary and special settings. PDF versions of each can be accessed here: [primary](#) / [secondary](#) / [special](#)

The homepage or first screen includes a number of 'tiles' which, like the navigation on the left-hand side, enable the user to click through to more content. The content of these inputs is drawn from different sources. This includes both local and national external inputs (most recent Ofsted inspection, data from the DfE and admissions information from the local authority) and perspectives from the setting itself in addition to the views of pupils, parents and carers.



The current Sheffield report card model includes:

- '100 words about the school by the school' which links through to a section called 'Get to know this school'.
- Summary Ofsted inspection information which links to the most recent report.
- Pupil outcome headline data which links through to an 'Outcomes for pupils' section which contains more detailed information.
- Contextual information about pupils at the school which links through to a section called 'Data about pupils at this school' with more information.
- Information about places and applications which link through to admissions information at the local authority.
- Headline views from parents, carers and pupils which link through to a section called 'What people say about this school'.
- A section which enables users to 'Compare with other schools'.

The key to the decisions about what we have included in our approach is clarity about the audience. This report card is explicitly in service of parents and carers. The deciding factor on what is included is the value of the information for this audience.

The inputs from Ofsted and the DfE are based on the content that was being reported at the time of designing the model. As this develops over time we would expect the content to evolve to reflect new approaches. As an example, it may be necessary to add a section for additional Ofsted content in the next version to reflect the move away from an overall judgement.

The **'Get to know this school'** section was added into the latest version based on very clear feedback from parents and carers. It provides an opportunity for the setting to upload eight images or videos to give pupils and their families an insight into the experience of attending the setting.



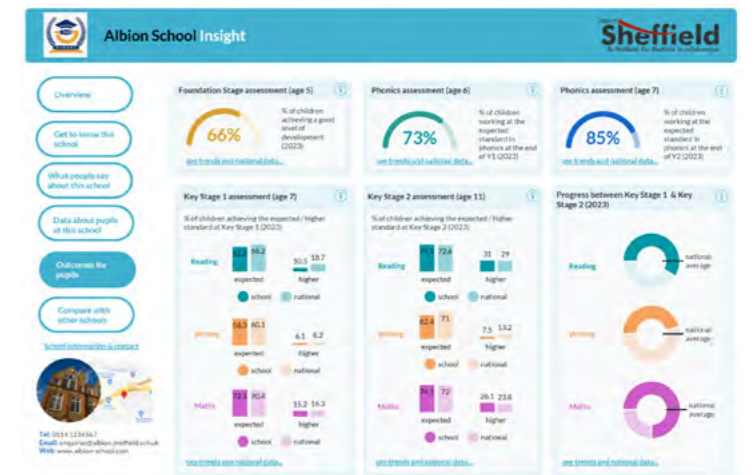
This section also currently has four tiles (relating to curriculum, SEND, behaviour and safeguarding, and personal development) which will be completed by the settings. The content of these sections would be reviewed in partnership with parents and carers, and would reflect national areas of focus. They direct attention to the chosen areas and provide the setting with the opportunity to set out their approach.

The **'Data about pupils at this school'** section includes more detailed information about the setting cohort.



This includes data relating to SEND, FSM, EAL, ethnicity and languages. The attendance data is presented in bands of attendance, which can be linked to attainment outcomes.

The **'Outcomes for pupils'** section contains headline attainment data for the relevant key stage statutory outcomes. Naturally the information presented will evolve to reflect the latest measures.



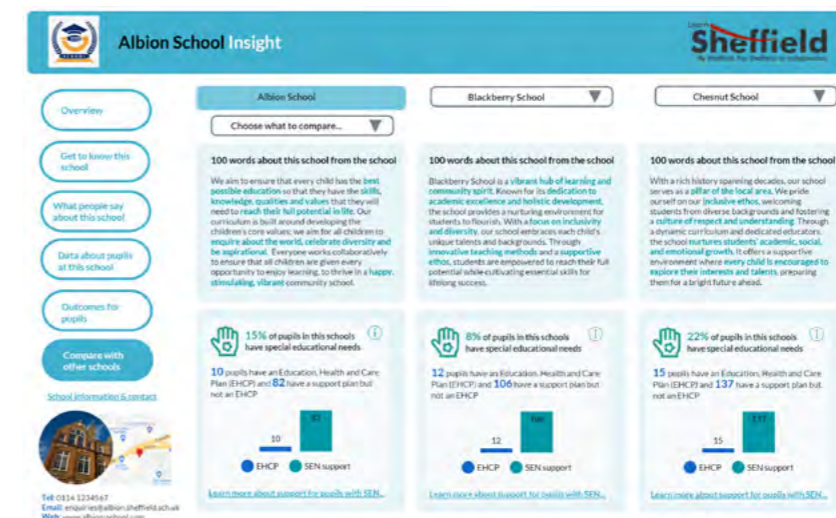
The data is presented as accessibly as possible and there are links to both further explanations of the content and additional data for those who are interested in seeing more.

The section called **'What people say about this school'** is currently the least well-developed section. Headline views from parents, carers and pupils could be captured from existing sources and approaches, but we feel that there is the potential to do this using some new and more sophisticated techniques. More information about capturing these voices can be found on page 14 in this report, but existing questionnaire based approaches could be utilised in the first instance.

The final section, which enables users to **'Compare with other schools'**, was added following the testing with parents and carers.

This section enables the user to select any tile from the report card and choose up to three settings. They can then see information side by side to compare.

Families felt that this would be especially beneficial when they were looking at different settings at points of transition.



Key learning: The perspective of parents & carers

The working group carried out two rounds of testing with parents and carers in their own settings. Both rounds also included a session with the Sheffield Parent Carer Forum.

“
Parents and carers want a combination of well sourced independent information, alongside the chance to get a feel for the school.”

More than 250 families, from a range of Sheffield settings in different contexts, have contributed to this process. These sessions provided meaningful feedback and influenced the direction and development of the Sheffield model.

The first key thing to note, which should not be overlooked, is that parents and carers valued both the idea and the model. Feedback was constructive and almost always framed as ‘even better if’ in nature.

The second key piece of learning was also almost universal. Parents and carers want a combination of well sourced independent information alongside the chance to get a feel for the school. The value of key information from the setting alongside the validated information was perhaps the single clearest and most valuable piece of learning.

This implies that a proportion of the content (source clearly labelled) must come from the setting and this drove the increased proportion of this in the second version and the addition of the ‘get to know the school’ section.

It is clear that families also value access to content that has not been produced by the setting itself. Several parents and carers made the point that this is the same approach that they would take to inform any choice or decision. This perspective also informed their view on the positive value of capturing the thoughts of pupils, parents and carers.

The Sheffield model has built in quality assurance through the sources that we have used (for example a proportion of the content has come from national data and Ofsted reports). We are interested in the potential for external quality assurance of specific information but are very aware of the cost implications of activities that require visits or desktop analysis, beyond those already part of the landscape.

The strongest perceived purpose for this tool amongst families was when parents and carers are ‘choosing’ a setting and this also resonates with the sector and LA. This influenced the decision to add both admissions information and the facility to compare between settings to the second version.

Key learning: The school leader perspective

The project used four established Sheffield partnership groups as reference groups (to provide feedback) for this work, in addition to the working group:

- Primary Partnership Group
- Secondary Partnership Group
- Special & IR Partnership Group
- Sheffield Association of School Governing Bodies

This provided meaningful and ongoing feedback for the work and influenced the direction and development of the Sheffield model.

The discussion with school leaders and those involved in the governance of settings was characterised by two overriding perspectives, regardless of sector or setting type. Both of these views were typically held simultaneously by colleagues.

Firstly, there is a widespread appetite from professionals to provide a more holistic and timely range of information about a setting than currently exists in any one place. School leaders regularly came back to the importance of giving a more rounded description of a setting.

Secondly, colleagues recognise the risks and potential for unintended consequences when information is publicly shared. This includes the potential impact on high-stakes accountability, the workload implications and also the risk that information or processes being misused by those who wish to cause disruption or advance a campaign.

This balance of risks and opportunities was present in almost all developmental discussions about the report card. The implication of this is that decisions about the report card should not be made in isolation from other changes to the education system.

“
There is a widespread appetite from professionals to provide a more holistic and timely range of information about a setting”

At various stages, colleagues new to the report card noted that it provided a range of information without indicating the relative importance of each element. It is worth considering that this assumes users can correctly discern and prioritise the information.

Key learning: Risks and unintended consequences

Colleagues are clear that the report card could either contribute to high-stakes accountability or mitigate against it, depending on the choices that are made about the content and approach. If the report card simply adds a number of new pieces of information about the setting and sets them within the existing accountability framework, then it will add value but increase unintended consequences. If instead a report card provides a more holistic picture of the setting within a modified accountability framework, then this could have a significant impact on the relationships between settings and their communities. It could also change the relationship between settings and the wider framework of the DfE and Ofsted.

There are risks associated with most of the data shared and our group felt this was particularly true in relation to inclusion, where specific data could be used which would become a proxy measure for the inclusivity of the setting. In our model we decided not to include inclusion data because none of the current national data set (for example number of exclusions or suspensions) provides an adequate reflection of the inclusivity of the school. A national model could seek to provide a fuller answer if it considered the current data alongside contextual information, including a more comprehensive analysis of the cohort, levels of disadvantage, SEND and mobility. Ultimately, it may be that this can only be done effectively by an evaluation process involving an independent person or body.

There was also a significant discussion about the potential for 'negative' information to be included in the report card. The first risk to a local model, that colleagues decide not to engage because of this risk, is naturally mitigated in a nationally mandated report card. The fundamental insight here, beyond this, is that if you want to be critical of an aspect of provision (and this has to be part of any meaningful approach) then you need an evidence base which holds up to scrutiny. This is very likely to involve people and visits. This would be costly and resource-intensive, and also warps the process that delivers it, so is probably best to be a specific identified process, such as Ofsted inspection. For this reason we do not propose to provide local quality assurance of the information provided by settings to our report card, although this could be both desirable and achievable if national resource was commissioned to make it possible.



Colleagues also noted the risk of 'mission creep' in any model that is developed. If the report card is to remain concise and mindful of workload, content additions must be balanced by removing existing content.

Key learning: Opportunities

Whilst our working group has been concerned by risks and unintended consequences, they have consistently continued to return to the potential value of the report card in providing a wider and more current perspective on each setting.

Stakeholder feedback (for both versions but particularly for the latest version) has been very positive indeed. There is an appetite from parents and carers for something that 'supplements inspection'. Stakeholders value the objectivity provided by official external sources but also want to get a 'feel for the school'. They were consistently of the view that a report card that achieved this would be genuinely useful.

All stakeholders, including parents, carers and professionals, see benefits in relation to points of transition and our report card incorporates admissions information and a comparison tool to respond to this. As a working group, we believe that the report card could also have a wider value in supporting or reframing the relationship between families and settings.

Parents and carers frequently come back to simple questions when they reflect on what they are interested to know about a setting. They are curious about safety, happiness, wellbeing and achievement. They are interested in what the setting says about itself, the perspectives of external 'experts' and the views of those who currently experience the setting (i.e. pupils, parents and carers).

Any report card will have a greater impact if it provides a means to understand 'what it feels like' to attend a particular setting. The relationship between this information and the accountability system will be crucial to the scale of this impact. If it is developed in a way that does not magnify a culture of high-stakes accountability then it could have the effect of building trust, between parents and the education system and between school leaders and central government.

The working group also considered how tools like the report card might have the effect of directing attention to those things that are a focus. The most obvious example of this is how the current Ofsted framework has led to settings focussing on their curriculum. The content of the report card will direct attention, and this could be an opportunity to bring focus to the 'right things' and establish a culture which is characterised by curiosity and ambition. This could also include building civic trust and more explicitly connecting settings and their communities.

Key learning: Capturing voice

Both versions of our report card included a section which provided the views on the setting from its community. This included three examples in order to stimulate a discussion with parents, carers and stakeholders in the testing process.

For this, we included an existing Ofsted question (the percentage of parents/carers who would recommend this school), five positives from parent/carers and five words from children and young people. We have also assumed that this would link to a section called 'What people say about this school' with more information.

Whilst this is perhaps the least developed aspect of our report card, we have been exploring alternative approaches to capturing stakeholder voice. We are keen to gather meaningful feedback to inform this section. In another project, we have Public Health funding to work with the Cynefin Company to use their SenseMaker tool. Early progress in this work, where the user tells a story about their experience and then answers questions to analyse themselves, suggests that it is possible to use different approaches to provide a better understanding of experiences.

If we were to develop the report card now, we would suggest using a combination of approaches initially and then iterate this aspect of the model as new approaches were better tested and understood.

We believe that the report card should be in service of parents and carers. If this is accompanied by the perspectives of stakeholders being more prominent in school improvement processes, then this clearly supports and reinforces that direction. As we have discussed elsewhere, the relationship between this new information and the accountability system will be crucial in determining its impact.



Next steps

Prior to the general election in July 2024, our intention had been to develop a working model of the report card to pilot in Sheffield this academic year. Discussions with senior colleagues at Sheffield City Council (SCC) had concluded that a Sheffield approach has potential value, not least in relation to admissions and transition locally.

Following the general election and Ofsted's Big Listen, the working group agreed to refocus our work in the first part of 2024/25 on the development of this document. We discussed the announcements at the start of the year, from both Ofsted and the DfE, about the implementation of report cards and decided to turn our attention instead to sharing our learning in order to support this discussion.

We understand that national consultations will follow imminently, on report cards and other potential changes to the school improvement landscape. We hope that this document makes a useful contribution to this conversation and would welcome any opportunities to discuss its contents with others. Our work could also be quickly developed to provide a pilot if required.

The national decisions, which we are seeking to influence by sharing our learning, will ultimately have an impact on any next steps locally. The seven key findings that we outlined in the executive summary of this document remain relevant, whatever is decided nationally. This will be a starting point for discussion in Sheffield in 2025.



Key findings

Audience	We believe that the report card should be in service of parents and carers.
Sector Perspective	Colleagues believe that there is value in contributing to a report card which provides a more holistic, rounded and up-to-date picture of each setting
Parent/Carer Perspective	Parent and carer feedback is consistent and clear on the value of both quality assured external information about settings alongside up-to-date contextual information that provides a 'feel for the school'.
Accessibility	The report card must be accessible and utilise technologies that are routinely used by parents and carers.
Content	The principles above could be achieved through a collaboration between the DfE, Ofsted, local areas, settings and their partners. Developing the report card in this way would be a powerful statement.
System Development	We believe that the report card can contribute to an improved accountability system. For this to happen, its development must be connected to wider review of the way that high-stakes accountability impacts on improvement.
Report Card Development	This work provides an opportunity to develop new and better ways to capture how children, young people and their families experience settings. Emphasis on this could support improvement in a more fundamental and authentic way.

Appendix A: AEC Locality Pilot – LocalEd 2025

'Developing New Locality Models for English Schools' began life as a [report](#) published in March 2021, following research sponsored by the Association of Education Committees (AEC) Trust and BELMAS, the British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Society.

A key finding of the research, which explored four leading international systems, was that – to borrow a phrase from educational researcher Michael Fullan – 'Leadership from the Middle' through locality-based governance and partnership working is key to building school systems that can deliver excellence and equity.

The final report made several recommendations to strengthen the role played by locality-based partnerships. The AEC Trust wanted to explore piloting three approaches drawn from the recommendations which have received the most interest and support.

More information about the project and the three pilots below can be found on the [Educating for the Future](#) website.

Pilot 1 – [Support for vulnerable young people](#)

Pilot 2 – [Combined Authorities as the base for supporting school improvement](#)

Pilot 3 – [Towards a new model of accountability](#)

Learn Sheffield was one of the four organisations involved in Pilot 3. The learning from the work that has been carried out as part of this pilot is contained in this report and more information about the Sheffield pilot can be [found here](#) on the Learn Sheffield website.

WHY LOCALITY-BASED APPROACHES BUILD STRONG SCHOOL SYSTEMS AND SUPPORT FOR VULNERABLE PUPILS

Local solutions are often more cost effective

Each locality's challenges and opportunities are different

Relationships and collaboration are as important as data

Identity and place matter

Collaboration at local level provides the glue and can bring different agencies together

Locality-based approaches can generate sustainable local capacity

Locality-based approaches are crucial because...

LOCAL ED 2025

local2025.org.uk (2022) – Developing New Locality Models for English Schools

Appendix B: Sheffield AEC Pilot Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all of the colleagues that we have had the opportunity to work with through the LocalEd 2025 project, in particular Dame Christine Gilbert, Jonathan Crossley-Holland and Simon Rea (ISOS).

The Sheffield pilot would not have been possible without the commitment and expertise of the school leaders who have contributed to the working group (listed below). We would like to thank, in particular, Evelyn Abram (Sharrow Primary School), Scott Burnside (Tapton School Academy Trust) and Steve Davies (St Clare Catholic Multi Academy Trust) for their contribution to the group and also to steering the later stages of this work.

The Sheffield Pilot Working Group included: Simon Barber (Minerva Learning Trust), Michael Barnes (Hunters Bar Infant School), Helen Best (Abbeyfield Primary Academy), Joanne Bradshaw (Sheffield South East Trust), Sue Bridges (Cascade Multi Academy Trust), Pat Butterell (Sheffield City Council), Bob Cuff (Manor Lodge Primary School), Martin Finch (Tapton Schools Academy Trust), Christopher Heggs (Meadowhead School), Chris Jennings (Greystones Primary School), Bev Matthews (Minerva Learning Trust), Steve Middleton (Sheffield City Council), Helen Nichols (Sheffield City Council), Ian Read (Watercliffe Meadow), Kat Rhodes (Tapton School), Carla Ribeiro (Rowan School), Fiona Rigby (St Catherine's Catholic Primary School), Sandra Roberts (Sheffield City Council), Cathy Rowland (Dobcroft Nursery Infant), Nicola Shipman (Steel City Schools Partnership), Dave Smith (Woodthorpe Primary School), Will Smith (Mundella Primary School), Paul Stockley (Bradway Primary School), Claire Tasker (High Storrs School), Andrew Walton McBain (High Storrs School), Michael Watson (Hunters Bar Junior School).

In addition to those who have been part of the working group above, we would also like to thank Meredith Dixon-Teasdale (Director of Children's Services) and Kate Josephs (Chief Executive) from Sheffield City Council for their input.

From a Learn Sheffield perspective, we would like to acknowledge the work of everyone who has supported the project. The project lead was Stephen Betts (CEO) and thanks also go to Ruth Powell (Research and Development Manager), Jean Watt (Improvement Partner), Kate Wilkinson (Data Lead), Nick Whittaker (Improvement Partner) and our colleagues at Pixel Fusion.



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