

Law Family Research Programme



Interim summary of research findings 2022-2024

Key points at a glance

- Place2Be's whole school service has become increasingly embedded over the first 2 years of the programme. 4 in 10 pupils have made use of the provision that is accessible to them in school to support their mental health and wellbeing, and Senior Leaders, school staff and the parent community all rated their school more highly as a 'mentally healthy school' after 2 years.
- Having a mental health and family practitioner located in the school as part of the school community, 2 full days a week, has enabled:
 - more than 2,000 pupils to self-refer to Place2Talk in their school to share their worries and concerns;
 - school staff to benefit from the insight of a mental health expert on site through more than 2,000 Place2Think sessions
 - parents/carers to gain accessible advice, signposting and care with their parenting concerns through parent partnership – which 9/10 found helpful – and the Parenting Smart online course.
- Being based in the child's school also ensures that those that need more help can get it easily:
 - more than 400 children (around 20 per school) have had 1:1 counselling in their school setting, after which 77% had improved mental health;
 - parents / carers of nearly 40 children had help with their parenting through the PIPT programme and had improved in their parenting skills after with 86% stating that in most situations they know what they should do to ensure their child behaves
 - more than 250 children had group counselling through Journey of Hope and half had improved mental health afterwards.
- The school-based service has been effective in reaching these pupils, families and the staff around them and making a difference to the school community:



Pupil wellbeing has been maintained and there has been a reduction in pupils with high levels of worry and sadness and falling asleep. 9/10 pupils felt listened to and ¾ felt less worried and calmer after talking with the mental health practitioner.



Nearly 3 out of 4 parents felt that the school is really helping their child since Place2Be had joined the school and 4 in 10 said the school felt calmer. 3 in 5 parents who had consulted the mental health practitioner had done something different in their parenting as a result.



Just under 3 in 4 school staff had gained new strategies to help children they work with as a result of access to a school-based mental health practitioner, more (79%) felt confident to support children's mental health and wellbeing in the second year and 7 in 10 said they felt more supported at work.

Place2Be has worked across the school community over the 2 years – working effectively with teachers and wider school staff, parents and carers and with the children themselves at the heart of the work. This has enhanced the ability of the children, and the community around them, to improve their mental health and wellbeing and help to build a mentally healthy school.

What is Place2Be?

For 30 years Place2Be has been working in partnership with communities to build understanding of children's mental health so that children do not have to face mental health problems alone. Every year thousands of children in schools across the UK are provided with direct support from Place2Be.

Place2Be operates a Clinical Delivery Model that provides a whole school approach with the children and young people at its heart. This approach includes universal and targeted support for children, as well as a wide range of input for members of the school community who are part of the system around the children. This means that alongside targeted interventions, Place2Be offers a range of different mental health services to meet schools' needs. Our services are led by a dedicated on-site Place2Be mental health professional (MHP) together with a Family Practitioner who focuses on working with the families. Referrals for targeted support can be made by parents or staff and children can also refer themselves. After a referral has been made, the MHP follows a thorough assessment process and clinical formulation of the child's needs and then makes a recommendation for the child for an appropriate targeted intervention. As an embedded service in the school, when targeted interventions end, children and their families can continue to be supported by the ongoing universal mechanisms, as illustrated in the diagram:



What are the aims of the research?

In 2022, The Law Family Foundation provided funding to Place2Be to undertake a three-year research programme that will evaluate the impact of the service. The research aims to examine and provide evidence of the effectiveness of a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing. At its core, the project was designed to be a proof of concept approach testing implementation as well as impact. We believe our data driven findings should be able to influence how good mental health services are delivered. Furthermore, we hope findings will inform and influence the debate for all stakeholders.

What were the schools like before Place2Be?

20 primary schools in Salford were recruited to take part in the programme. Prior to the programme, all schools had some level of provision in place to assist with mental health and wellbeing. Although the amount and type of provision varied across schools, none had previously accessed Place2Be services, which meant the schools represented a true baseline.

Altogether, the schools had a higher proportion of pupils who were eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) and children with Special Educational Needs (SEN). On average, 30% of pupils in the 20 Salford schools were eligible for FSM, and 16% had SEN, compared to the national averages of 22.5% and 12.6%, respectively. The Good Childhood Report

(2023) indicates that children from financially struggling families are more likely to feel unhappy at school, and this is also associated with lower academic attainment (Social Mobility Commission, 2024). Some of the schools were also experiencing these issues at the start of the programme:

“The context of our school is that we, we’ve got a higher percentage of children with free school meals than nationally. So, that indicates sort of some level of deprivation...in [school’s area]...is one of the highest areas of Manchester for reported incidents of domestic violence and drug abuse, so I suppose for us, we know that some of our children come to school with a lot of baggage”
Headteacher, spring 2023

Prior to the project, pupil wellbeing in the programme schools was similar to the wellbeing of other samples in the UK population. There was however, a minority of pupils who had lower levels of wellbeing and pupils who were experiencing feelings of sadness and worry. In addition, 1 in 5 pupils were struggling to fall asleep at night and over 1 in 3 reported they were feeling tired.



These pupils were more likely to have lower levels of wellbeing. Headteachers reported that children who were struggling with their wellbeing were coming into school “very

distracted”, “withdrawn” or “not very co-operative” and this impacted their ability to engage with learning.

To assist pupil wellbeing, most schools drew on external expertise from agencies. However, headteachers reported that there was scope for improvement with building schools’ relationships with CAMHS and improving their experience of making referrals to CAMHS.

In addition, staff wellbeing was slightly lower than that of the general UK population¹ (Ng Fat, Scholes, Boniface, Mindell & Stewart-Brown, 2017) and over 1 in 3 staff members were experiencing high levels of anxiety. Although staff generally had a positive view on the culture and ethos of their school, many teachers felt like they spent a lot of time managing behaviour and the school environments were quite disruptive and noisy.

What’s happened so far?

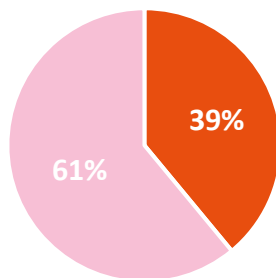
Since the project began in September 2022, Place2Be’s services have become fully embedded into the 20 schools. Throughout the past 2 years, many pupils, parents and staff in these schools have accessed support as part of Place2Be’s whole school service:

- 2372 pupils have self-referred to Place2Talk
- 413 pupils have accessed 1:1 counselling
- 278 pupils have participated in Journey Of Hope group counselling
- 39 pupils and their parents have accessed PIPT (since September 2023)
- 384 whole class work sessions have been delivered to pupils
- 1515 parent partnership sessions have been used by parents/carers
- 2278 Place2Think sessions have been accessed by school staff
- 67 school staff have signed up to Place2Be’s Mental Health Champions Foundation Programme.

¹ Place2Be: mean =22, SD=3.41

UK sample mean = 23.5, SD=3.9

Overall, nearly 4 in 10 (39%) of pupils in the schools have made use of Place2Be services.



In total, 37% of pupils have been to one or more Place2Talk sessions, 6% have accessed 1:1 counselling, 4% have participated in Journey Of Hope group work and 1% have taken part in PIPT with their parent / carer. Although, engagement in services has varied slightly between schools, with 13 schools accessing six or more services and 7 schools accessing up to five services, each school has been able to adapt and access from the flexible range of services to meet the needs they had identified as a priority in their school community.

What difference has adopting a whole school approach made to the school community to date?

Supporting Pupils

Improved access for support in school: Since adopting a whole school approach, pupils have had direct accessible help in their schools to which they can self-refer. Common issues that pupils wanted to discuss at Place2Talk, were around friendships (62%) and to help pupils manage emotions such as worry (48%) and sadness (47%). For some pupils it has also provided them with assistance around bereavement/loss (16%), their sleep (7%) and exam stress (7%).

Pupils have expressed that having this accessible support has allowed them to seek help when they felt they needed it. This was especially the case for children who did not

have an adult in school that they felt comfortable to talk to, or when other school staff were too busy. Pupils valued having on-going support in school for their mental health and wellbeing. This was further highlighted by some children being concerned about where they would get help when they went to secondary school or when the project finished.

Pupils have a safe space to disclose: The MHP has provided a confidential and non-judgmental approach that has been important to pupils when seeking help. This approach has helped to create a safe environment, whereby over 80% of pupils felt like they could trust their MHP. In circumstances where some pupils did not feel they could trust the MHP to begin with, recommendations from peers provided reassurance to seek help. 85% of pupils surveyed in 23/24 said they would recommend Place2Talk to a friend and 53% came to Place2Talk to support a friend, which demonstrates that the pupils value the service as a place to share.

“ [friend] finally had someone to, like, talk, that she trusted” Pupil spring 2024

Pupils are more open talking about their mental health and wellbeing indicating reduced stigma: Staff who responded to the survey perceived pupils to be significantly more open talking about their mental health. Moreover, as noted above, in focus groups, pupils have found that Place2Be has provided them a place to seek help, talk and be heard and it has created opportunities to talk to someone when pupils did not have anyone else to talk to. These results indicate that, as the project continues into the third year, these findings may translate to a measurable change in pupils help-seeking behaviour in the pupil quantitative survey.

Pupils felt listened to/heard: During Place2Talk sessions, 92% of pupils said they felt listened to and pupils in the focus groups

commented that they liked how the MHPs took their time to try and understand them.

"If I like had a worry right now, like about SATS or something, if I told my teacher now, she would, she would probably just say this... "You'll be alright, you've done mocks before. You're smart." Then if I went to Place2Be, the difference is they would properly ask me, "Why? What's up? Why are you worried? Is there anything I can do to help you?" Pupil, spring 2024

Where this wasn't the experience of the pupils in Place2Talk, they found the sessions less helpful. Overall, the majority of the pupils found sessions with the MHP to be helpful (81%). Pupils expressed that they valued how the MHPs offered them guidance and approaches to effectively manage difficult issues, such as advice on what to say/do in particular situations.

Helped to reduce difficult feelings for children and improve mood: Overall wellbeing was maintained. In addition, there is now (in the second year) a smaller proportion of pupils who were experiencing high levels of worry and sadness and fewer pupils who were struggling to fall asleep at night. Specifically, 3 in 4 pupils have said they were less worried and felt calmer after attending Place2Talk.



3 in 4 pupils were less worried and felt calmer after Place2Talk

Pupils have felt that talking to the MHP has not only helped to improve their mood and feel more calm, it has also reduced any difficult feelings they were experiencing such as worry.

"Because I think like when I started my 1:1 sessions with [MHP], like I worried about every little thing. But now like, like, I don't, like, do that as often anymore." Pupil, spring 2024

Targeted interventions have also had a positive effect on pupils' wellbeing. According to teachers and parents, 77% of pupils who took part in 1:1 counselling had improved mental health afterwards (by one or more points on one or more measure) and over half of pupils who took part in Journey of Hope had improved mental health afterwards (by at least one point on the teacher SDQ). Nearly 3 in 4 parents who have had a child who has accessed 1:1 counselling said it has helped their child with their mental health and wellbeing. The clinical delivery team continue to closely review the progress and outcomes for children through their ongoing clinical supervision, with the aim of ensuring that every child who accesses support receives an intervention that works for them.

"It would normally help me be calm, because sometimes I'll go in like hyper or like mad. But then when I would come out, I'd feel calm and nice" Pupil, spring 2024

Some pupils have been more engaged in school: For some pupils, Place2Be has directly helped them worry less about work and tests, and one pupil who took part in the focus groups said they were able to focus better in lessons.

"it helps me, like, focus better, cause I used to never focus" Pupil, spring 2024

Targeted interventions have also had a positive impact on pupils' engagement at school. 58% of children who accessed 1:1

counselling and 64% of children who accessed Journey Of Hope, improved in their classroom learning after taking part, where their mental health was impacting their ability to engage in class before.

It was interesting to note that after one year, the survey findings suggested that pupils were enjoying school less. Yet 55% of parents perceived that their child was happier going into school. This may reflect differences in perceptions for parents and children or that the parents who responded to the survey, have children who are happy attending school. There may also be wider contextual or environmental factors at play.

There was also a mixed picture for children who had accessed 1:1 counselling and their school attendance. Overall, 1 in 3 pupils improved their attendance at school, 20% stayed the same and 45% had more sessions of absence in the term in which they had counselling. This is an area for further exploration in the data and specific cases.

Empowering Parents and Carers

Improved access for support for their children: Since having Place2Be in school, 42% of parents have found it easier to get the help they need for their child's mental health and wellbeing. Parents found it helpful that this was available in school because they didn't have "to arrange it" themselves.

Parents felt heard and listened to: Place2Be has provided a space for parents to feel heard, with 91% of parents who met with the MHP reporting that they felt they had been listened to. Parents have found the MHP to be "approachable" and 89% liked how the MHP spoke to them. Building positive relationships with the school community is an important part of working in partnership with the schools and the value of feeling heard should contribute to generating a positive and constructive relationship.

"She'll listen and she'll always put her input in things as well. So obviously there's no wrong answer to whatever that I've said to her or the question wise, she'll always tell me, yeah, I understand your part" Parent

Provided parents with useful support and advice:

The most common reason parents sought help through Parent Partnership sessions, was for general advice and guidance on their child's wellbeing. Most parents felt that their experience of Place2Be was helpful (92%) and had given them new advice they had not had before (65%) which many had used to do something different as a parent (61%).

Parent partnership sessions had also been useful for parents to learn about additional help they could use. 57% of parents found out about Place2Be's Parenting Smart online tool, which is part of the package of blended support offered to the school community. It offers practical advice and insights on parenting and children's behaviour. 83% of parents who had used Parenting Smart would recommend it to another parent. Alongside, accessing additional assistance from Place2Be, 67% of parents learned about where else they could get help which 61% said they had made use of. For example, parents were usually signposted to Early Help, the GP, a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC), SEN support and bereavement services.

"Place2Be has given us a life-line and has given me the tools I need to manage and be a better parent." Parent, summer 24

Improved relationships with school: From the self-selected sample of 475 parents across the 20 schools that took part in the survey, 1 in 3 said their relationship with the school had improved since Place2Be had started working in the school.



1 in 3 parents felt their relationship with their child's school had improved

In particular, some parents felt more comfortable talking to staff at school (53%) and some felt more supported by the school (48%). Similarly, half of school staff who had used Place2Think in 23/24 felt that it had helped their working relationships with parents and carers. Since Place2Be had started in the school, 73% of parents felt that the school is really helping their child.

Improved homelife: Parents also reported positive impacts on their homelife. 52% of parents surveyed whose children had accessed 1:1 counselling said it had helped with their homelife. One parent fed back that “family life is more at ease.”

Some parents reported a positive change in their environment at home:

“Home is much more calming, we can now communicate without any shouting or arguing” Parent, summer 2024

Some have noticed how it has had a positive impact on their child's routines who now “sleeps and transitions much better”.

Building school staff capacity

Staff have access to specialised expertise that has helped with their job roles: Staff have shared that having a mental health expert in schools has been a valuable resource for them, as it has enabled them to better support children's mental health and well-being. By consulting regularly with the MHP through Place2Think sessions, staff members have gained insights into how they can understand the communication and drivers behind children's behaviours (32% of

sessions) and accessed strategies to support children receiving Place2Be interventions (46% of sessions). These conversations through Place2Think have empowered school staff to make meaningful changes in their roles by, for example, providing 73% of those who responded to the survey with new strategies to help children they work with. As a result, 70% of staff have also felt more supported at work. Alongside Place2Think, some staff have also accessed training via Place2Be's Mental Health Champions Foundation Programme. 93% of school staff who had accessed this programme had either adopted a new approach as a result, or intended to do so.

More staff felt confident supporting children:

Input from a mental health professional in school has also helped more staff feel confident in supporting children's mental health. 64% of staff stated that Place2Think helped with their working relationships with pupils in 23/24 and 79% of staff felt confident to support children in the second year of the project compared to 68% who felt confident in the first year. This change has also been noticed by parents, as half of parents felt that school staff were more understanding of their child's needs since Place2Be had been in the school.

Place2Be has eased the burden for school

staff: Although Place2Be's service is not primarily focused on staff mental health and wellbeing, 9% of Place2Think sessions were on self-care for school staff and 70% of staff felt more supported at work. Since the start of the project, staff wellbeing has remained stable, despite a challenging environment in education. There is some indication from headteachers that having Place2Be's Mental Health Practitioner in school has been beneficial for staff:

“I know, quite a few of our staff really benefited from [MHP] being here and even just as somebody to check in with sometimes and for their own personal well-being” Headteacher, spring 2024

Having Place2Think has indirectly had a positive impact for school staff wellbeing, as it has provided headteachers with a “massive relief”, as children now have someone else they can go to for help. Subsequently, this has provided headteachers “more opportunities to do other things or help another child”.

In addition, one staff member felt that having Place2Be in school has been beneficial for them because they are able to offer parents immediate assistance:

“I think [Place2Be has] impacted my well-being knowing that I'm not banging my head. Because I'm not saying to a family, we need to make a referral to CAMHS knowing that it's going to be rejected, you know, it's immediate impact that can be had on that family there and then” School staff, spring 2023

Transforming schools' environments

Calmer school environment: In focus groups, pupils commented that they felt that Place2Be has helped reduce the amount of conflict they have with their peers and some have noticed how this has led to the playgrounds being calmer. Similarly, 42% of parents have also reported that the school has felt calmer since Place2Be has been in school. Although there has been no change in teachers' perceptions of classroom atmosphere or in how much time staff spent managing children's behaviour, there is some evidence to indicate Place2Be is making a difference in the school environment.

Improvement in school culture and ethos:

Schools were asked to rate how mentally healthy their school was on a rating scale from 1 to 7, where a higher score represents a more mentally healthy school. The result showed the schools have perceived that their schools are more mentally healthy since Place2Be was introduced- after year one the mean score increased from 4.47 to 5.05 and

then increased in the second year to 5.75. While the surveys of school staff have not revealed a perceived change in school culture and ethos in the second year, this may reflect the challenge of measuring these concepts through a survey. Therefore, to supplement the measures in the surveys, the interviews with school staff, parents and pupils will provide further insight into the extent to which this might have changed. There is a sense that Place2Be is therefore freeing up capacity in the schools.

External mental health agencies: The Place2Be practitioners support school staff and parents with engagement with external agencies including through attending Team Around the Child (TAC) meetings, liaising with the Early Help team and with CAMHS. In some cases, Place2Be is supporting children who are waiting for a CAMHS assessment and advising on referral and re-referrals to the GP.

There is some indication that relationships between the schools and CAMHS have improved over the two years. At the start of the project, 7 headteachers reported the school did not have a very good relationship with CAMHS. This reduced to 1 school in 2024. The improvement of schools' self-reported understanding of CAMHS thresholds and criteria increased from 9 schools in 2022 to 16 schools reporting a good understanding in 2024. Moreover, where the schools had support from their MHP or Family Practitioner with referrals to CAMHS, the majority (8 schools) said this had been helpful.

“The service provides an excellent outreach to children, parents and staff. Having a practitioner on site means that anyone at crisis can reach out without having to wait or go through a referral process. This reduces stress and quite often resolves issues before they spiral. Our practitioner has made excellent relationships with the whole staff and children and is viewed as a member of staff. She is proactive and recognises the pressures within a school environment and adapts her plans to suit the children and school’s needs. She joins in with whole school celebrations and events and is a good role model for staff and children. She is a massive asset and has makes a huge contribution to our school.”

Headteacher, summer 2024

What do these findings mean?

Overall, the findings from the first two years of the Law Family Research Programme suggest that there is some evidence of the value of having an embedded practitioner and service enabling the school to adopt a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing:

Children: Place2Be has provided children with the opportunity to easily access a safe space to get support for their mental health and wellbeing. For some children who have directly accessed Place2Be services, it has helped them to feel heard, reduce difficult feelings, improve mood and improve their engagement at school.

Parents: Place2Be has provided parents a safe space to be able to easily access help for their children. Overall, parents have had a positive experience with Place2Be, whereby they have

felt safe to share and seek advice/support in a confidential environment. For some parents, it has had a positive effect on their homelife.

School staff: Having a mental health expert in school has helped school staff learn new strategies to use in relation to children’s mental health and wellbeing and subsequently more staff are feeling confident in their ability to support children. Place2Be has also helped staff by reducing the burden they have felt in trying to help children who are struggling. A minority of staff have also found Place2Be has provided them with a place to talk to someone about their role in school and impact on their wellbeing.

School: There is some evidence to suggest that a whole school approach has a positive effect on some aspects of the school environment (e.g. calmer playgrounds) and the school’s culture and ethos.

What are the next steps?

With the project entering its third year, the research programme will focus on assessing the effect of the whole school service including:

- exploring the impact of Place2Be on pupil and staff wellbeing, now that services are more fully embedded.
- examining the extent of change in school-level indicators such as attendance, behaviour, exclusions, engagement in learning and attainment following the introduction of the Place2Be service.
- developing a deeper understanding of the experiences and outcomes that Place2Be services have had on the school community.

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