



The Linking Network

Evaluation Report 2022



BRADFORD
Stronger Communities
Partnership



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities



City of
BRADFORD
METROPOLITAN DISTRICT COUNCIL

SECTION 1

Introduction

Working in partnership with Bradford for Everyone and Bradford Council from December 2018 to March 2022 has been transformational for the reach and impact of The Linking Network's work in Bradford.

The funding and wider partnership has unlocked greater capacity. With this capacity we have been able to innovate, connecting to school and district priorities and scaling up the impact of our established programme. We kept the programme flexible and locally-led which meant TLN's core team were able to work with local partners and schools to respond to the challenges of Covid. In response to the challenges presented by Covid, we created new virtual pathways for our primary and secondary Schools Linking programmes. We have also developed a range of new resources to support teachers and school leaders in an unprecedented time including: Digital Linking, Classroom and Assembly Home Learning and Remote Teaching Resources.

The Linking Network's story began 21 years ago with two Bradford primary schools, Eldwick and Girlington. We are so delighted they continue to link and we value their continued support and engagement with the programme.

6 I believe the experience of schools linking expands children's horizons, builds confidence and self esteem, interest in and respect for 'the other' and strengthens delivery of key aspects of the curriculum. Schools linking will remain an important part of our work on not just community cohesion but on developing the next generation of proud Bradfordians. 9

Kersten England,
Chief Executive,
Bradford Council



The Linking Network in a nutshell

Since 2001, The Linking Network has created opportunities for young people to explore their identity and build belonging with people around them and in their neighbourhoods. We are a Bradford-based charity and our network reaches across England (eg. Luton, Newcastle, Rotherham, London, Kirklees, Bristol and Burnley)

At the heart of our work is the unique process of 'linking' which we've developed over the past 2 decades. Linking enables the sharing of time and experiences with others from different backgrounds, classes, nationalities, ages or other differentiating characteristics.





The process of linking offers young people the opportunity to experience connection, contribute to the thriving of their communities and become champions of diversity and inclusion.

Framework

Our work offers a carefully designed, well-evidenced and practical framework to support schools and communities to bolster the emotional and relational confidence of young people. We deliver:

- 1. Schools Linking:** We forge links between schools in an area and offer young people the chance to connect with others of different backgrounds. Together they share time and take action to build belonging.
- 2. Intergenerational Linking:** We bring young people and older people in care homes and living in the community together to share experiences and build connections.
- 3. Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development (SMSC) Training and Support:** We offer training to school leaders, teachers and trainee teachers on SMSC in schools.
- 4. Resources for the Classroom:** We offer a large library of classroom resources designed by teachers for Schools Linking, Intergenerational Linking, SMSC, Social Action, PSHE and Citizenship.

Our model is rooted in listening to and amplifying the voices of young people. All our work is rooted in 4 key questions:

- 1. Who am I?**
- 2. Who are you?**
- 3. Who are we?**
- 4. How do we all live well together?**

Each year thousands of children across the UK explore these questions in classrooms and in their communities through The Linking Network's work. Together they share their views, support one another to understand different perspectives and find their shared voice and all the things they have in common.

Every year our schools linking work connects 30,000 young people in 29 local authority areas across England, our intergenerational linking work connects over 3000 young people with their older neighbours in 11 local authority areas and our SMSC training and classroom resources reaches 200,000 young people a year.

Our 12 Key Achievements



This section summarises 12 achievements from the duration of the partnership. Each achievement is explored in detail and is accompanied by data to illustrate reach and impact as well as quotes to bring the work to life.

1. Linking programmes reached more young people across Bradford thanks to the partnership between Bradford for Everyone, Bradford Council, The Linking Network and local schools.

The Bradford Primary Schools Linking programme brings pairs of classes from different schools across the district together in a year-long programme designed to build connection, understanding and sense of belonging. Museums, art galleries, Bradford Cathedral, Nell Bank Outdoor Centre and Bradford City Hall all partnered with us in 2019-2020 so that first linking meetings between classes were hosted by skilled education teams in wonderful local spaces.

Substantial and crucial support and commitment to the programme and outcomes from headteachers and teachers, Bradford Council, the Primary Headteacher Partnership across the district meant that participation in the programme grew dramatically.



Numbers grew from a strong baseline of

68 primary classes

linking in September 2018
(2,040 children from 41 schools)

to **185 classes**
in September 2019

(5,550 children from 94 schools)

“ I feel like linking has helped me go and speak to new people. At the start of the year I would have been too scared to do that. ”

Year 4 Child

“ ... a lot of [children] haven't got that opportunity to mix with children from different backgrounds or different religions, so it just opened up for a wealth of different conversation... it's invaluable. ”

L. Cameron

“ It's been quite a while since we've actually done a project such as this and just the chance for our year 4s to get outside the four walls of school into the wider community and meet so many different children from lots of different backgrounds has been amazing! ”

Linda Hanson, Headteacher of Nessfield Primary School

“ This is the reason I got into teaching, I'm at a great school but it's a bubble and my children need this. ”

Bradford primary Linking Teacher

This meant the programme exceeded the ambition we agreed with Bradford Council to reach 50% of the cohort of 268 classes of children across the district taking part in linking during their time in Primary School- and participation grew from reaching 25% to 69% of classes.



2. The Bradford Primary Schools Linking programme adapted to the challenges of Covid and supported young people to virtually connect with meaningful results at a time of growing enforced isolation and disconnection.

In 2020-2021 Covid meant it was impossible for classes to meet face to face. Exchanging ideas from within the classroom has always been an important part of the programme and in late 2019 we were testing new ideas for digital linking to enhance the programme. Based on this learning, we developed Virtual Primary Schools Linking for the 2020-2021 academic year. We wrote a new, fully resourced, virtual primary programme to enable children to connect from within their classrooms through the school year. It included live on-line interactive training for Linking teachers to attend and plan together and carefully sequenced, creative lessons that supported Linking classes to connect and enjoy learning from and with one another.

“ We are very happy at Home Farm Primary school, to go ahead again with Bradford Schools Linking for 2020-2021. We have thoroughly loved being a part of this dynamic, vibrant, and enriching community experience. We will be able to adapt our links to virtual visits for our pupils. Thank you so very much for giving us this wonderful and positive learning and life experience ”

Iryna Bojczuk, Teacher - Home Farm Primary

“ Linking opened the children’s eyes to other classes and differences. ”

Bradford Primary Linking teachers
on Virtual Linking



3,600 pupils in 120 classes from 67 schools in Bradford are taking part in Virtual Schools Linking 2021-2022.

100% of teachers stated the programme helps improve pupils’ respect for others

93% of teachers surveyed felt it was beneficial for pupil confidence in meeting with others in the future

98% felt it helped deliver the PSHE, Citizenship, SMSC curriculum

98% felt it helps build a sense of community between the two classes (Linking Teacher Mid Year Survey)

Innovation and development of support for Digital Schools Linking has been a key focus over the funding period and we worked with IT Education specialists at the Innovation Centre, Bradford Council, to create digital support resources and online training tailored for schools linking. We had already been working with the Innovation Centre Team in winter 2019, to develop our approach, which meant that when classes were unable to meet, we had a body of knowledge to build upon. Exchange from within the classroom has always been a crucial part of the programme; we created Video Call Structures and resources for digital linking, including games for Linking classes to play together on live video calls.

3. We developed Shuttle Dialogue for Secondary Schools Linking

When the pandemic started, we listened to teachers and heard that many young people were at greater risk of isolation, exposure to misinformation and narratives of hate, fear and division. Our usual models of linking and classroom support needed to be adapted for social distancing and home learning. At the heart of this work was the need to continue linking without face-to-face meetings.

One way of meeting the need identified was to create 'Shuttle dialogue linking'. Our hope was to equip young people with the skills and understanding needed to maintain an open mind and a willingness to connect with others who are different. We also wanted to give our young people more chances to reflect and engage in dialogue about issues that are relevant to their lives.

Ultimately, our overarching goal was that our programme would support young people to resist the twin traps of fear and hate and help them play a part in building a kinder and more connected society together.

At the heart of the Shuttle Dialogue programme are five interactive sessions that allow students from two classes to exchange thoughts and ideas with each other. The teacher facilitates the process of identifying what has been shared and shares the information with the link class. The teacher will then send feedback from the students to the link teacher via email at the end of each session. Over the course of these five sessions, the dialogue is shuttled between classes, facilitating the exchange of thoughts and ideas and unlocking a better picture of the link group. Shuttle Dialogue has proved an effective way of supporting classes to explore who they are, what are their aspirations, their values and what are the things that they have in common as well as any differences.

The programme has been enthusiastically received by teachers; some schools chose to use the process to connect students within their school and others to connect with other schools; 27 groups from 9 Bradford secondary schools have taken part so far this year.



“... good to reflect on the importance of connecting with different people.

I think it is so hard to challenge others' views.

Students

“ Shuttle dialogue works on so many levels. It helps an individual student step out of their comfort zone and mix with new people and explore diverse viewpoints. It provokes lively discussions around meaningful topics that make you think, like the African philosophy of Ubuntu which expresses that all of humanity shares connections. It challenges students of all abilities and backgrounds around the concepts of identity and equality. ”

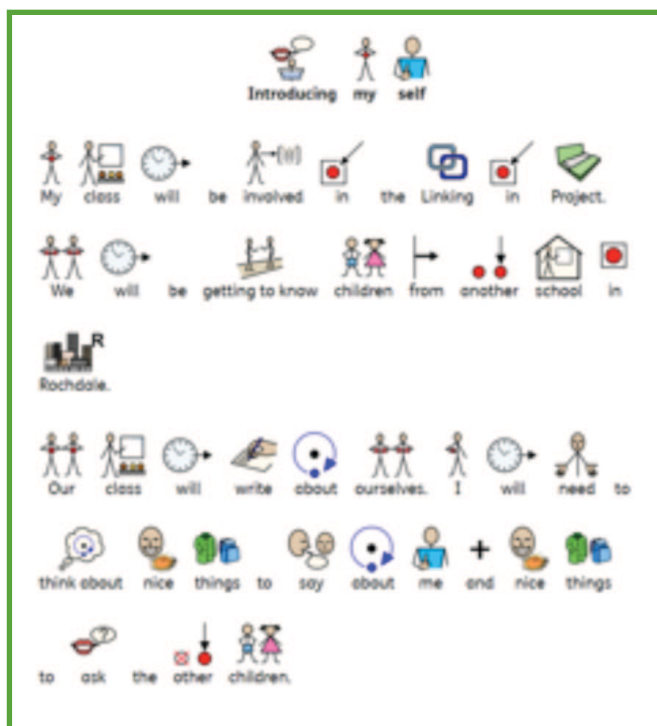
Teacher

“ It also helped my students to realise that have more in common with people from another school, another place, than they thought they had which helps a new better understanding of what a community is and how a community can start to grow. ”

Bradford Secondary Linking Teacher

4. Our work developed to create vital links between mainstream and special schools.

Special School – Mainstream Linking is an important part of our work. In 2019-2020 the connections between special and mainstream schools across the District were flourishing with 4 partnerships being established with Mencap providing funding. One highlight was a shared concert between co-located schools, Hazelbeck and Beckfoot Schools.



“ You could just feel sense of support for every student taking part and the sense of pride in all families so see their children taking part and their understanding that it mattered.

Audience member

“ I was so proud to see them on stage. It was overwhelming to see my child in this. We were all just there as families in the audience and willing all the students on.

Parents from both schools

“ Since this time three Bradford teachers who led Special-Mainstream Linking helped us write guidance and as part of this we also produced some autism friendly resources to support linking.

Teacher



5. We continued to collaborate with 10 secondary schools across Bradford to support their work on integration and cohesion and many more schools engaged.

The response and enthusiasm to work together on this has been heartwarming and inspirational - teachers have gone the extra mile - and we have worked with 31 of the 37 secondary schools, and 4 independent schools, in the district during the funding period. The work has included Secondary Schools Linking, assemblies, tutorials, direct

delivery of workshops and focus groups. Schools also sought reviews of their curriculum and practice and a termly sharing network meeting for SMSC Secondary leaders across the Bradford district continued, even through Covid. The backing of Bradford for Everyone and our increased capacity supported a strong and growing programme to accelerate its impact.

Face-to-face Secondary Schools Linking grew dramatically from a strong base with linking in 14 groups in 10 schools in 2018-2019 to 29 groups in 16 schools in 2019-2020 with all kinds of events, ranging from students bonding over high ropes to human rights workshops.

Two Secondary schools that were geographically close, but with little pupil contact and very different pupil demographics took part in activities focussed on exploring which Human Rights mattered most to them all.

“ Socialise before you criticise.

I liked that I met new people. I learnt that it is important to socialise and to keep my mind open. ”

Linking pupils



“ The Linking Network has supported our school to develop and maintain a positive relationship with a local school within our community with students from different ethnic groups. Our schools together were able to explore Human Rights - this was very powerful - all students enjoyed the experience and respected their differences and more importantly discovered similarities. I remember one student saying “miss they are just like us” after disclosing she was feeling anxious before meeting the other school. ”

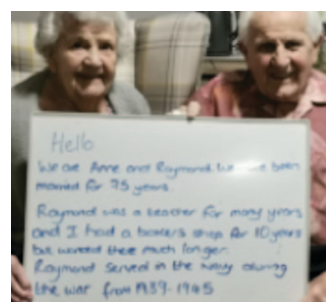
Linking Teacher

“ She’s the Grange version of me! ”

Linking pupil with uncontained excitement during the first face to face meeting of the linking schools.

6. Intergenerational linking has successfully been established across the city connecting young people and their older neighbours to share time, experiences and build connections

Alongside this work we have been able to rapidly establish Intergenerational linking between schools and older people in the district. We have worked in partnership with My Home Life England to test and learn what effective class based linking could look like. We have been able to establish 11 Bradford primary and 10 secondary Intergenerational Links. One Secondary link was between a Sixth Form Philosophy Club and Global Justice Now, a group of older people in their 80s who have been campaigners all their lives and had organised the Bradford COP26 Walk. One notable link between a primary school and care home has been developing over the last year where children and older people have exchanged letters and cards about themselves, met outside and shared stories and songs on a video call.



“ Thank you so much for a wonderful afternoon. It’s moments like this in teaching that remind you why you do the job! ”

Teacher

“ The children absolutely loved it and are already discussing ideas for another afternoon zoom session.” ”

Teacher

7. Linking had a positive impact on parents and families

We set out to intentionally share the programme with families and school communities, building on research which shows the bidirectional impact between families and children. We created resources for teachers to help primary schools engage parents in their children's linking experience. Teacher evaluation shows that 76% of teachers chose to share the programme with their families despite the challenges schools are facing due to Covid. We are planning a Schools Linking Celebration week in June 2022 to support schools to share the work with their communities and across the district continuing to take the story beyond the school gate.

“Many years later my children still talk about link and have kept the key rings they made on a linking visit.”

Linking Parent

“We knew about the linking project my child was doing and we went to look at the school she would visit at the weekend. Later that year we were out shopping in another part of town and my child recognised another child she had met through linking. I realised then how important it was.”

Linking Parent

“Billy loved linking schools - he said it was one of his 2 best things about Yr4 (the other being football). I think he was aware that he was meeting people he wouldn't otherwise meet, and really enjoyed hosting them in his school and being 'guests' at their school. I think forging positive relationships across geographical and cultural boundaries is a really important thing to do.”

Linking Parent

8. We created new resources to embed social action into the virtual primary linking year

Taking part in social action together was part of the face to face linking programme helping children recognise the values they shared with their link and creating collaborative. This built in the #iwill principles for high quality meaningful youth social action. We were generously supported by storytellers, authors and actors so we could provide exciting materials for the classroom. which led to thoughtful work in classrooms.

Some classes chose to learn Sign Supported English to teach their families, others opted to work on

environmental issues building a wormery, putting water out for the birds, others focused on well being with one class creating mini fitness challenges. Another Bradford class created bunting with encouragement to their community to be kind.

We were supported in this work by additional funding from the **Pears #iwill fund**.

“People can make the world a better place if they look after the environment around us... the next generation of children can change the world and make it a better place.”

Student at Lapage Primary School



9. We have expanded our library of curriculum and assembly resources to foster integration, creating a pathway to support the needs schools are expressing

Provision has included new assemblies and workshops on Human Rights, Kindness, #RememberTogether assemblies, Holocaust Memorial Day assembly, These have been widely used across the district with highly positive feedback about their impact.

Remote Learning Resources were developed and updated in order to effectively support teachers to deliver PSHE, Citizenship and SMSC during the pressures of Covid.

During lockdown in 2020 we also provided a library of free Primary and Secondary Home Learning resources, for teachers and families at home, focussed on developing well-being, hope, curiosity and resilience and finding ways for pupils to connect with others.



“ We are massively supported by your wide range of resources. Very grateful to you for sharing such a timely resource on Ukraine. ”

Teacher

“ The Linking Network has been a crucial avenue through which to explore personal development. I think schools will be crying out for guidance on re-centring PSHE and tools that inspire develop empathy and resilience in children and whole school strategies for achieving this. ”

Peter Timms, Deputy Head, Ben Rhydding Primary School.



10. We created new resources to embed social action into the virtual primary linking year

We redeveloped our previously face to face SMSC Training Courses as live online interactive sessions, for which we have had highly positive feedback. Different training packages for each of school leaders, teachers and initial teacher trainees, enable them to place work that fosters integration, identity, diversity, community and equality into the curriculum and across school. 45 leaders have attended Leading SMSC training sessions, we have conducted 3 whole school reviews and delivered four whole school staff meetings over the funding period.

Words delegates used to describe the course include:- 'informative, thought provoking, powerful, focused, practical, poignant, eye-opener, friendly.'

“ I valued the insight and information on how to assess where my school currently is, ...thinking about next steps and the amazing amount of resources that we can use to support the development of SMSC. ”

Teacher

“ Knowledgeable course leaders with lots of experience of real life application in school. ”

Student

“ I will go back into school ensuring I and other teachers are not 'telling a single story' promoting and including more diversity in literature. ”

Teacher

“ The training has been joyful – it's very highly valued as an antidote to the last couple of years. ”

Leading SMSC Delegates

“ The Linking Network has been a major support for our school community to develop SMSC both within our school as well as support our community to establish links with other schools and services within Bradford. ”

SMSC Network Members

“ The network keeps me grounded in my priorities. ”

Teacher

“ A massive thank you for your help and advice yesterday, Ofsted were in today and the guidance really made a difference. ”

Teacher

11. The Linking Network has continued to coordinate the Secondary SMSC Leaders network (established in 2015) which has been an invaluable peer support network for leaders during a challenging time.

Themes have included Hate Crime with an input from the Bradford Hate Crime Alliance, school responses to the challenge of Sexual Harassment highlighted, we have heard from Bradford Council Youth workers about the lived experience of Roma pupils in communities, shared thinking during covid on well being and explored potential strategies for supporting contact within schools with an input from Kent University on research insights.

12. Evaluation and learning have continued at pace and the shift to virtual and digital linking has revealed new and renewed lessons for linking's work more broadly

Dr Lindsey Cameron, Psychology Department, Kent University has been Researcher in Residence to The Linking Network since Autumn 2018. Dr Cameron has created a range of webinars sharing research insights into effective social contact in schools, which she has delivered to the network of linking facilitators across England, she has also led a session for teachers in Bradford. Modules include: Building Confidence in Contact, Indirect Contact impact, Intergenerational Linking, Intergroup Contact: The Role Of Families which outlined the bidirectional impact of children and families on each others attitudes; Negative Contact Theory, Building Common Ground through Linking outlining the ways Social action can help children recognise Shared Values; Five Ways to Help Young People resist racial stereotypes; Why Cross Group Interactions are important and steps schools can take.



SECTION 3

Outcomes evaluation

Area	Target set	Achievements from Dec 2018- March 2022
Primary Linking	134 classes across Year 3,4,5 (50% of primary children link at some point in primary school)	538 classes over the funding period Approx 16,140 7-10 year old pupils Reached 50% target each year, reached 69% in 2019-2020
Secondary Engagement in integration and cohesion delivery	10 schools	Over the three years we have worked with a total of 31 secondary schools across the district. This has included: resources, Schools Linking workshops, Intergenerational Linking, linking, direct delivery of Assemblies and Workshops, provision of assemblies and resources, reviews of provision and staff training.
Secondary Linking		56 classes from 16 schools: 1680 pupils
Special Mainstream Linking	4 links	10 links: 300 pupils, New Guidance written by teachers
Digital Linking	1 strategy Digital Linking Test and	Learn Programme December 2019 with 2 schools, Wrote 25 digital guides and resources with Bradford Council Innovation Centre, Digital Linking now embedded in all our linking programmes.
Parental Engagement in Linking Journey	1 resource pack	Written 104 home learning resources including Bilingual voiceover resources for primary and secondary pupils learning at home; Family Facebook page created for lockdowns, 15 new family learning resources to engage families in their children's experience of Schools Linking including a film for linking children created by M6 Theatre called 'When we started singing' Sign Supported English videos, Planning Schools Linking Celebration Week
Curriculum work that builds Integration and Cohesion		Remote Learning development including recorded assemblies egs The Hill We Climb, Human Rights; Assemblies – Remember Together (British Future), HMD, Refugees/ Ukraine
Leading SMSC CPD	Offered to all schools	Delivered 8 training sessions (2 face to face and 6 live online) with 45 Bradford schools attending over the funding period
Schools Staff Training		4 full staff meetings
School Reviews and SMSC		Supported 7 school to review their SMSC provision Leading SMSC CPD
Support		
SMSC Network	Offered to all secondaries	9 Termly network sessions held and 24 secondary schools engaged over the funding period
Intergenerational Linking		11 Primary classes in 8 schools with 8 care homes. This includes 1 club, 1 school council and reaches 330 children 10 Secondary links underway reaching 1300 11-24 year olds; 195 55+ involved Note on Intergenerational Linking funding: This project is part of Care Home Friends and Neighbours: Intergenerational Linking – a national initiative from My Home Life England and The Linking Network, linking young people from schools and youth organisations with older people living in care homes across England. The project is funded through the #iwill Fund. The National Lottery Community Fund and the Department of Digital, Culture, Media & Sport are each investing £25 million seed funding to create the #iwill Fund. The Dunhill Medical Trust is acting as a match funder and awarding grants on behalf of the #iwill Fund. We also received some funding for Secondary Intergenerational Linking from Bradford Council in partnership with Public Health.

To contact a member of team regarding this report,
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or visit our website

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