



Intervention Report: SEN Summer Activities Programme

Orion Academy in partnership with Thames Valley Violence Prevention Partnership

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Introduction

The Summer Activities Programme at Orion Academy was implemented as a four-week project aimed at providing students with a range of engaging, enjoyable and inclusive activity days. These activities were designed to foster positive social interactions, support the development of key skills and offer opportunities for enriching experiences that promote well-being. The programme catered to the individual needs and interests of students with special educational needs (SEND), ensuring accessibility and enjoyment for all participants

Location: Orion Academy

Duration: Four Weeks

Dates:

Week 1: Monday 29th July- Thursday 1st August

Week 2: Monday 5th August- Thursday 8th August

Week 3: Monday 12th August- Thursday 15th August

Week 4: Monday 19th August- Thursday 22nd August

Programme Objectives

The key objectives of the Summer Activities Programme were:

- To create a fun and engaging environment where students can participate in a variety of activities
- To promote positive social interactions between students and staff through group-based activities and cooperative games
- To offer enriching experiences that enhance students' overall well-being, confidence and build cultural capital
- To develop students' skills in communication, teamwork, and independence
- To provide respite for families and carers during the summer holidays

Overview of Activities

Throughout the four weeks, a variety of activities were planned to appeal to the diverse abilities and interests of the students. Each activity was carefully adapted to ensure accessibility for all students. Below is a summary of the key activities

Week 1: Skills and Adventure Week

The first week of the programme focused on introducing students to the structure and expectations of the project, while also offering a variety of exciting activities that encouraged physical engagement, teamwork, and exploration

- **Sports Activities:** The week started off with sports activities, providing students with opportunities to engage in friendly competition and physical exercise. Additionally, students participated in a cooking session, where they developed their cooking skills in a supportive environment. During the day, staff also facilitated discussions around behaviour expectations for the project, setting a positive tone for the rest of the programme
- **Rest of the Week:**
 - **Fishing Activity:** Students enjoyed a peaceful and engaging fishing experience, encouraging patience and focus in a calm outdoor environment
 - **Inflatable Obstacle Course:** A fun and energetic session where students navigated an inflatable obstacle course, promoting physical activity, coordination, and teamwork
 - **Bowling Trip:** Students took part in a bowling outing, which allowed them to practice their coordination skills in a fun, social setting
 - **Arcade Visit:** The arcade visit offered students the chance to engage in sensory-rich experiences, encouraging social interaction and skill-building through games
 - **Trampoline Park:** To end the week, students visited a trampoline park, which provided a fun and safe space for them to explore movement, build physical confidence, and interact with their peers
 - **Gardening project**

Week 2: Sports Week

Week 2 of the Summer Activities Programme offered a range of exciting and physically engaging activities, providing students with new experiences both on and off-site. The focus this week was on outdoor adventures, sports, and fitness, allowing students to challenge themselves and build new skills in a supportive environment

- **Paddle Boarding at Port Meadow:** The week began with an adventurous paddle boarding session at Port Meadow. This activity encouraged students to develop their confidence while enjoying the natural surroundings. It was a great opportunity for students to engage with a water-based activity, fostering both fun and personal growth.
- **Trip to Wembley Football Stadium in London:** A highlight of the week was the trip to Wembley Stadium, where students had the chance to explore one of the most iconic football venues in the world. The visit included a tour of the stadium, providing insight into professional sports and the history of the venue. For many students, this was an inspiring and memorable experience that combined their love of football with learning opportunities about teamwork, discipline, and determination.
- **Sports Activities at School:** Back on campus, students participated in a variety of sports activities, including football, basketball, and non-competitive team games. These activities promoted physical fitness, teamwork, and sportsmanship while providing opportunities for students to interact and bond with their peers in a structured, fun environment.
- **Training Session at Didcot Boxing Club:** The week concluded with an exciting training session at Didcot Boxing Club, where students were introduced to basic boxing techniques in a safe and controlled environment. The session was focused on discipline, coordination, and fitness, with the instructor guiding students through exercises that promoted both physical and mental resilience.

Throughout Week 2, students found the activities highly engaging and beneficial, both in terms of physical development and social interaction. The variety of sports and outdoor experiences was designed to help enhance their confidence, teamwork skills, and overall well-being.

Week 3: Exploration and Discovery Week

Week 3 of the Summer Activities Programme was a blend of adventure, creativity, and learning, offering students the chance to explore new environments, engage in hands-on creative experiences, and continue their participation in sports activities. This week focused on stimulating both the mind and body, encouraging students to challenge themselves in unique ways.

- **Milton Keynes Ninja Warrior Activity Centre:** The week started with a trip to the Ninja Warrior Activity Centre in Milton Keynes. Inspired by the famous obstacle course challenge, this activity allowed students to test their strength, agility, and perseverance as they navigated various obstacles. The experience was not only fun

and physically demanding but also helped to build confidence and encourage students to push beyond their comfort zones

- **Oxford New Theatre – Learning Special Effects Makeup:** Midweek, students attended a special session at Oxford's New Theatre, where they learned the art of special effects makeup. This creative workshop introduced students to the world of stage makeup, teaching them techniques used in theatre and film. The hands-on experience allowed students to experiment with makeup, prosthetics, sparking their creativity and providing an outlet for self-expression. The workshop was an engaging opportunity for students
- **Trip to London Science Museum:** Another exciting off site trip this week was the trip to the London Science Museum. Students explored interactive exhibits, discovering fascinating concepts in science and technology. The museum provided a stimulating environment where students could engage with hands-on learning experiences, broadening their understanding of the world around them. This trip combined education with entertainment, making science both accessible and fun for all
- **Sports Activities at School:** Throughout the week, students continued to participate in a variety of sports activities on-site at school. These sessions focused on promoting physical fitness, teamwork, and inclusive participation. Students had the chance to practice new skills, engage with their peers, and maintain physical activity in a structured, supportive setting

Week 3 offered a diverse mix of exploration, creativity, and discovery, allowing students to enjoy both physically active and mentally stimulating experiences. The activities were designed to help foster their curiosity, self-confidence, and ability to work together in different contexts

Week 4: Social Engagement and Community Week

The final week of the Summer Activities Programme focused on social interactions, physical activity, and building meaningful connections between students, their families, and the school community. This week combined exciting off-site trips, engaging on-site activities, and concluded with a celebratory family fun day, ensuring a positive and memorable end to the project

- **Social and Sports Activities in School:** The week began with social and sports activities on-site at school, providing students with an opportunity to bond with their peers and engage in teamwork through fun, non-competitive games. These activities supported physical fitness, encouraged interaction, and helped foster a sense of connection among the students as the programme neared its conclusion
- **Bowling, Arcade, and Jump Trampoline Park in Bicester:** Midweek, students enjoyed an exciting off-site trip, starting with a visit to a bowling alley and arcade,

where they participated in friendly competition, and engaged in some bowling games. This was followed by a trip to the Jump trampoline park in Bicester, where students had the chance to experience active, high-energy fun, building physical confidence and having a great time bouncing around with their peers

- **Activity Day in School, Including Cooking:** Later in the week, students participated in an activity day at school, which included another cooking session. This allowed them to further develop their cooking skills, work on following instructions, and enjoy the sense of achievement that comes with creating a meal. The activity day also provided time for social interaction, creativity, and teamwork, keeping the students engaged in a relaxed and supportive environment
- **Family Fun Day:** The week and the entire project concluded with a Family Fun Day at the school, where students were able to invite their families to participate in a variety of interactive activities. Families and students enjoyed a day filled with games, creative stations, and fun challenges designed to foster positive connections. The event provided a unique opportunity for students and their families to connect with the school in a meaningful and supportive way, giving family members a chance to experience the nurturing environment first hand. For many, it was an important opportunity to view the school as a positive and supportive space for their children's growth and development

Week 4 successfully wrapped up the programme by focusing on social bonding, fun activities, and family engagement. The Family Fun Day was a highlight, offering a valuable opportunity for families to interact with the school in a relaxed and celebratory atmosphere, reinforcing the programme's goals of promoting positive experiences and strong relationships within the school community

The Summer Activities Programme also offered numerous opportunities for young people to engage in meaningful conversations with staff, allowing them to reflect on their experiences and develop a more responsible and confident perspective on their lives. Through these discussions, students were able to share their thoughts, receive guidance, and build trust with staff members, contributing to their emotional growth and self-awareness

Food was provided throughout the programme, but a key focus was on promoting independence. Students were encouraged to prepare their own meals, learning basic cooking skills while gaining confidence in the kitchen. This hands-on approach to meal preparation not only helped them develop practical life skills but also reinforced the importance of self-reliance and responsibility. By the end of the project, many students expressed pride in their ability to cook for themselves, highlighting the programme's role in fostering independence and personal growth

Alignment with Orion Academy Values

The delivery of the Summer Activities Programme strongly aligns with the core values of Orion Academy, including self-awareness, teamwork, resilience, commitment, problem-solving, and empathy. Throughout the project, these values were fostered and demonstrated in various ways, supporting the holistic development of students

- **Self-Awareness:** The programme encouraged young people to reflect on their actions, make responsible choices, and develop a deeper understanding of themselves. Through meaningful conversations with staff, students were able to resolve conflicts. It is hoped that this will improve their behaviour both in school and in public settings. These interactions aimed to help them recognize their strengths and areas for growth, contributing to a stronger sense of self-awareness
- **Teamwork:** Group-based activities, such as sports and collaborative games, provided numerous opportunities for students to work together, support one another, and celebrate each other's successes. Whether it was navigating a trampoline park or participating in a group cooking session, students learned the value of cooperation and shared goals, reinforcing the importance of teamwork
- **Resilience:** The project presented students with new and sometimes challenging experiences, such as trying paddle boarding or completing an inflatable obstacle course. By encouraging them to step out of their comfort zones and persevere, the programme was designed to help students build resilience; they learned to face obstacles with determination and to continue trying even when faced with difficulties
- **Commitment:** Participating in a four-week programme required students to stay engaged and motivated over an extended period. The activities were designed to promote a sense of commitment, with students showing dedication to participating fully, learning new skills, and sticking with tasks until they were completed. This commitment was also evident in how they supported each other, ensuring that everyone had a positive experience
- **Problem-Solving:** Many activities within the project required problem-solving skills, such as working through a complex obstacle course or tackling the logistics of preparing a meal. Students were encouraged to think critically and creatively to find solutions, whether individually or as part of a group. These activities aimed to help them develop their ability to approach challenges with confidence and determination
- **Empathy:** Empathy was fostered throughout the programme as students were encouraged to support each other in new activities, celebrate one another's successes, and provide encouragement during challenging moments. The family fun day, where students invited family members to share in their experiences, further highlighted the importance of connecting with others in a positive and supportive way. Students learned to understand and appreciate the perspectives of their peers, creating a nurturing and inclusive environment

Overall, the Summer Activities Programme was designed to directly support the development of the values central to Orion Academy. By creating a space where students could learn to manage their behaviour, work with others, and build confidence, the programme not only aligned with but also actively promoted the school's ethos of self-awareness, teamwork, resilience, commitment, problem-solving, and empathy

Evaluation of the programme

The programme was successfully delivered to 36 students, aged 11 to 16, who all engaged in the summer activities and took part in a range of in-school activities, cultural, sports and outdoor trips. Approximately 58 attendees attended the family fun day at the end of summer. School staff believed that students who were involved in the summer activities had developed new skills and improved on existing skills.

Unfortunately, given financial and time constraints, it was not possible to develop a controlled trial of this intervention, and a weaker methodology was used; before-after testing was used. Use of before-after testing does not control for other eventualities that might have caused any changes that might be seen, and so do not allow for a strong examination of whether a programme works. In addition, where there are known effects that may have changed between the period before the intervention and the period after the intervention, the lack of a control may make an intervention that works look like it did not. We are aware of two confounding factors which may have impacted in this way; firstly, the children are a year older in the follow up cohort, and as can be seen from the usual relationship between age and crime or antisocial behaviour, identified behavioural problems may increase with age within this cohort. Secondly, Orion Academy upgraded their behaviour monitoring system in 2024 which made it easier to capture behaviour data. In addition, their behaviour policy was updated and staff were trained on completing behaviour data sheets. It is expected that this may have resulted in an increase in low level behaviours being recorded. Additionally, missed learning was changed on the behaviour tracker to reflect on student's attitude toward their learning.

When examining behaviour change, the school uses a system where they record incidents in terms of both the number of negative behaviours that have been recorded, and a weighting of severity of the behaviours; for example, swearing in general is 1 weighting point while directly swearing at a staff member would be 5 weighting points.

Number of behaviour incidents, the total weighting, average weighting per incident, and percentage attendance were measured for 34 out of 36 children both in Term 1 of the 2023/24 school year (the before period), and in Term 1 of the 2024/25 school year (the after period). Two children could not be included in analysis, as one had moved to the school for 2024/25, so no before data was available, and the other moved away from the school after the summer holidays, so no after information was available.

The following graphs and tables are included for completeness. However, it is important to note that none of the differences that can be seen are statistically significant when compared using a before-after t-test, and so mathematically there is no difference between the levels of incidents, weighting points, mean weighting per incident or attendance before the intervention as compared to after the intervention.

Overall direction change

Total weighting score increased for 50% of students, and incident count increased for 59% of students, whilst mean weighting score per incident decreased for 53% of students. Attendance rate decreased for 56% of students. The numbers of children whose incidents, weighting points, mean weighting per incident or attendance changed in each direction can be seen in table 1 below.

Description	Increased	Same	Reduced
Total Weighting Change	17	2	15
Incident Count Change	20	3	11
Mean Weighting Change	14	2	18
Attendance Change	15	0	19

Table 1. Counts of students whose weighting, count of incidents, mean weighting and attendance increased, stayed the same, and decreased

Total Weighting

While mean total weighting was higher in the follow-up period, it was not a significant difference; $t(33)=0.758$, $p=0.453$. This can be examined in figure 1 below.

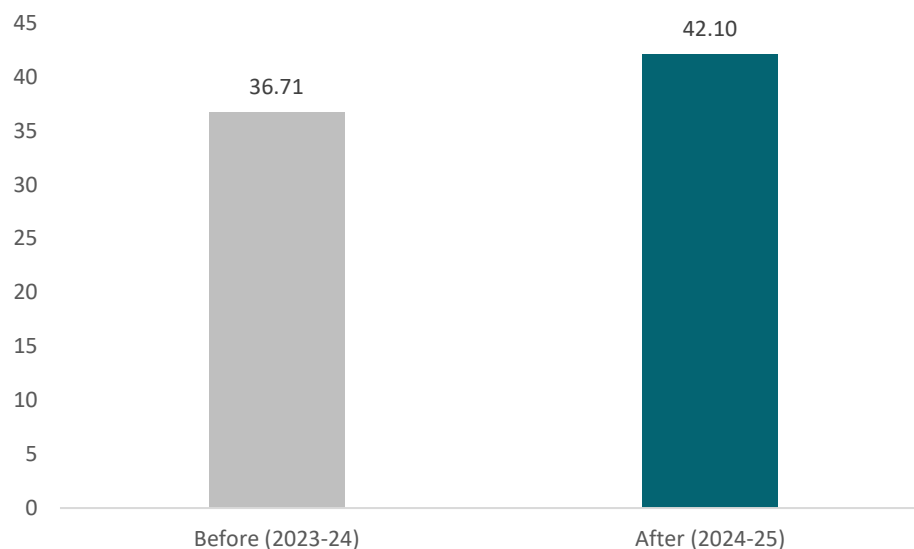


Figure 1. Mean total weighting in the before and after periods

Incident Count

While mean incident count was higher in the follow-up period, it was not a significant difference; $t(34)=2.015$, $p=0.052$. However, this difference was nearly significant, but was confounded by the observation that the recording mechanism has changed and staff state that they are recording more incidents. This can be examined in figure 2 below.

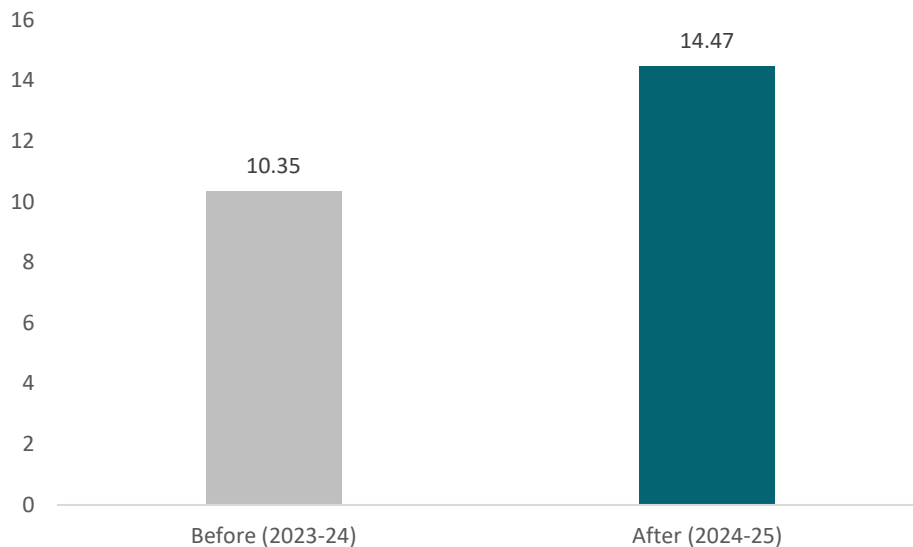


Figure 2. Mean incident count in the before and after periods

Mean Weighting per incident

While the mean weighting per incidence was on average lower in the follow-up period, it was not a significant difference; $p(34)=-0.301$, $p=0.765$. This can be examined in figure 3 below.

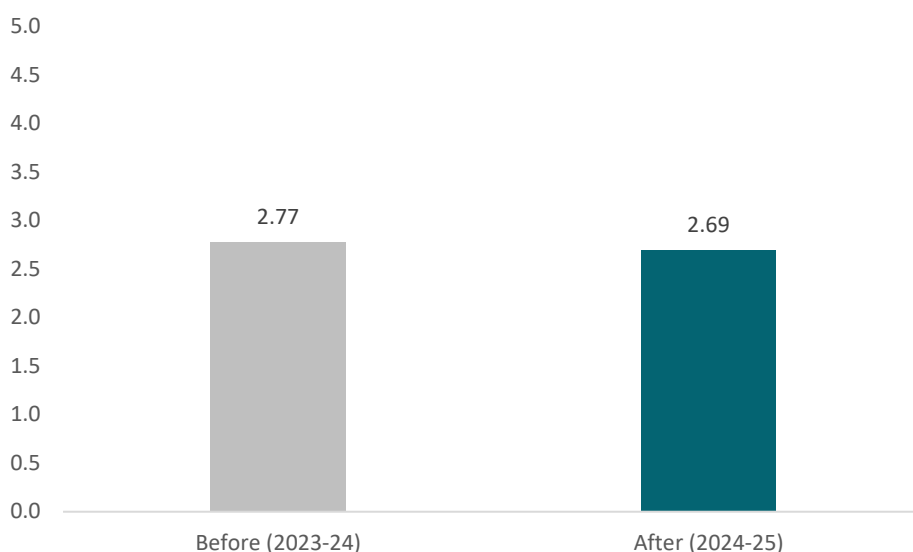


Figure 3. Mean weighting per incident in the before and after periods

Attendance

While mean attendance was higher in the follow-up period, it was not a significant difference; $t(34)=-0.735$, $p=0.467$. This can be examined in figure 4 below.

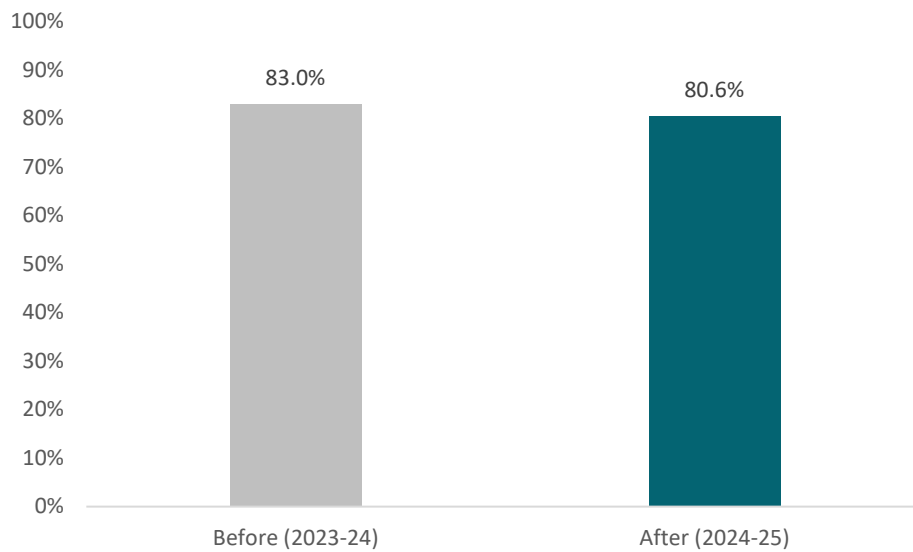


Figure 4. Mean attendance in the before and after periods

Qualitative Feedback

Comments from Children:

"I look forward to coming in every day"

"If it wasn't for these activities I would be at home not doing anything, getting into trouble"

Comment from a Parent:

"We're looking forward to the next activity program. My child has benefited so much from attending this and we really appreciate it"

Photo Gallery



Hypothesised benefits of such a programme that were not able to be evidenced in this evaluation

Staff at Orion Academy have identified a number of different areas where they believe this kind of approach will have benefits to the children, their families and the school. Whilst it was not possible to evidence any of these being present in this pilot trial, these are represented here as documentation of what should be tested for if a wider trial is conducted. It is hypothesised that this style of intervention will foster an engaging, supportive environment, and lay the groundwork for continued success when students return to school. These hypothesised benefits could be built upon to develop a theory of change for this type of intervention which could be developed into a larger test of impact.

1. Improved School Attendance

- **Building Positive Relationships with Staff:** Throughout the programme, students had regular opportunities to interact with staff in a relaxed, supportive environment. This may help students to develop trusting relationships with school staff, and may make them feel more comfortable and connected to the school. As a result, students might be more likely to attend school regularly, as they feel that staff understand and support their needs
- **Creating Positive Associations with School:** By offering fun and engaging activities, the programme might help to shift students' perspectives on school from a place of academic pressure to one of enjoyment and support. This might in turn increase their motivation to attend school, if they begin to associate it with exciting opportunities and a supportive community

2. Improved Behaviour

- **Teaching Responsibility and Self-Regulation:** The programme provided opportunities for students to practise responsible behaviour and self-regulation, both through structured activities and in unstructured social settings. By reinforcing positive behaviour and providing guidance on how to manage conflicts and emotions, the project might help students develop better self regulation and decision making skills, which may lead to improved behaviour in school
- **Reducing Negative Behaviours:** Through ongoing discussions about behaviour expectations and the focus on teamwork and empathy, students may learn to resolve conflicts peacefully, and to behave responsibly in public and school environments. This might in turn reduce the likelihood of disruptive or anti-social behaviour, as students became more aware of how their actions impact others

- **Reduced Antisocial Behaviour:** Providing activities that are run by school staff may prevent antisocial or other unwanted behaviour that might have occurred if the children were not involved in the intervention and instead were left to their own devices during the school holidays. However, it is not known whether any of this cohort have been involved in antisocial behaviour, so this would need examining as part of any further development of a trial

3. Enhanced Inclusion

- **Promoting Social Bonds:** The programme actively encouraged students to work together in team-based activities, such as sports and group projects, fostering a sense of belonging and inclusion. By forming positive peer relationships, students may feel more accepted and valued, which might improve their sense of community within the school.
- **Inclusive Participation:** Activities were designed to be inclusive and accessible to all students, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds. This ensured that every young person had the chance to participate and feel a sense of achievement. The celebration of each other's successes promoted a positive, inclusive environment where students were encouraged to support one another, hopefully reinforcing the importance of inclusion both during the programme and in their future school experiences

4. Positive Attitude Towards Education

- **Making Learning Fun:** By incorporating educational components, such as visits to the Science Museum and special effects makeup workshops, in a fun and engaging way, the programme is likely to help students view learning as exciting and meaningful. This shift in perspective may lead to greater engagement with education, if students realise that learning can extend beyond the traditional classroom and be both enjoyable and relevant to their interests
- **Building Confidence in New Experiences:** The programme exposes students to new activities and challenges, which may help them overcome fears and build confidence in their abilities. This confidence may translate into their academic life, through willingness to try new things and engage with schoolwork, developing their knowledge that they have the resilience and problem-solving skills to succeed
- **Fostering a Growth Mindset:** By emphasising perseverance, teamwork, and self-awareness, the project aims to encourage students to develop a growth mindset, the belief that effort and persistence can lead to improvement and success. This mindset may go on to help students approach their education with a positive attitude, viewing challenges as opportunities for growth rather than obstacles

5. Support for parents during the holiday weeks

- This has the potential to also reduce stress and strain in the home that may in turn reduce situations where trauma could potentially be increased. Providing this support to parents is likely to be found valuable, and provision of this programme through central funding also means that the provision is received more fairly, and without people being discriminated against due to low income. This would not have been the case if families had to pay for the programme

Conclusions

This project aimed to support, and offer a range of activities to, students within Orion Academy with a focus on supporting reintegration in school following the holidays. It focused on helping the students to have experiences which would challenge them and help to develop their academic skills, promote social interaction, provide structured routines, and offer personalised learning experience tailored to the student's individual needs.

The project was delivered successfully, demonstrating that it is possible to undertake this style of intervention. Attendance by students on the programme was consistent, which likely demonstrates that it was a desirable programme to be on. Whilst there was no change seen in behaviour, frequency of incidents, or attendance, following the programme, this was not a controlled trial, and was able to demonstrate that it is possible to deliver this style of intervention, and it would be possible to test it more rigorously in future.

This paper presents a description of what was delivered, alongside hypotheses about what impacts this might have on the young people who are part of the programme. This provides a great base upon which to develop a trial which would allow us to establish whether there is an impact on behaviour, and what the benefit might be for these young people, for the school environment, and for the community if money is spent delivering projects such as this one in future.