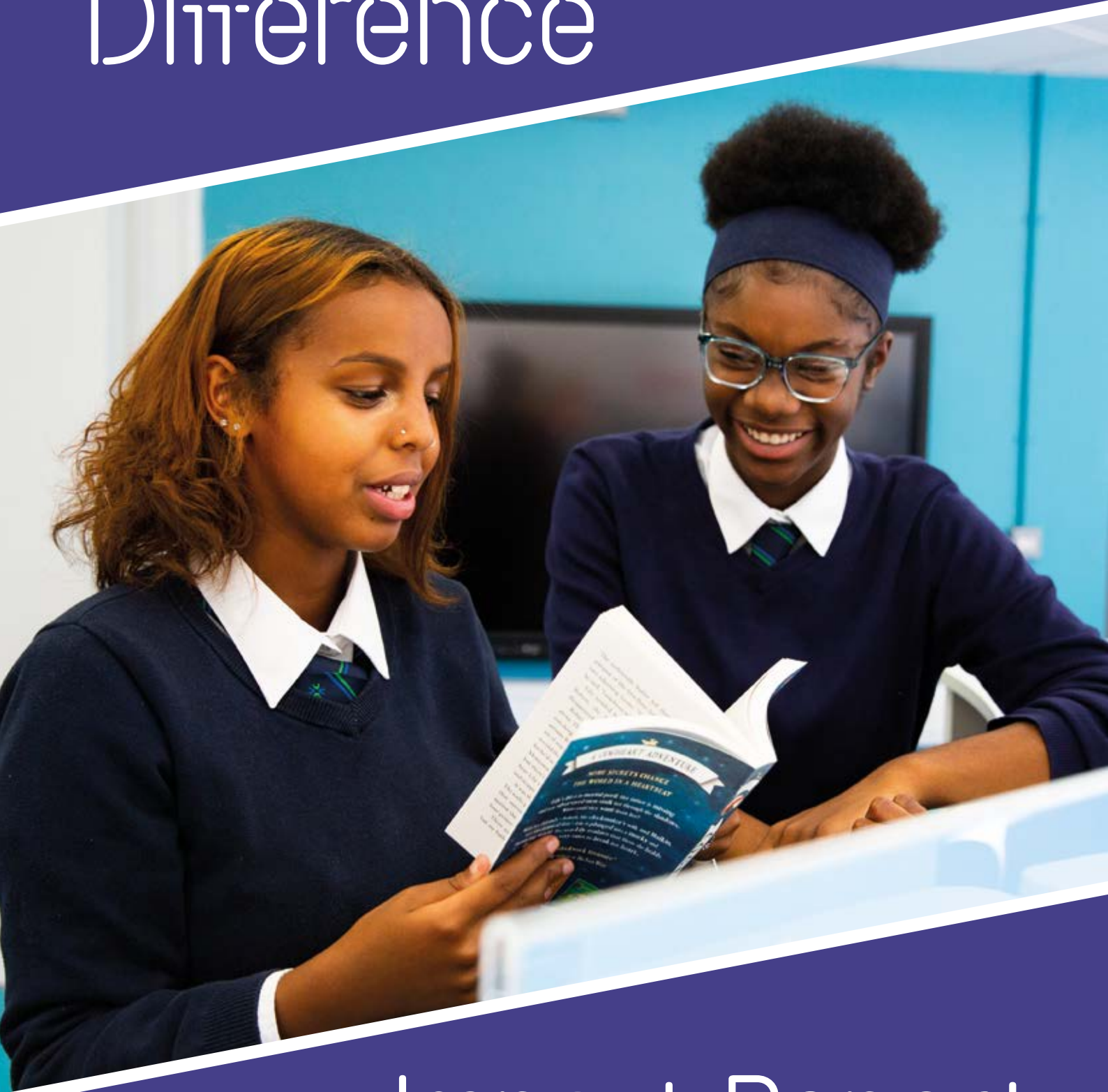


# The Difference



Impact Report  
2020-21



# The Difference

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# INTRODUCTION

## From Difference Leader Vicky Shires

I applied to the pioneer cohort of Difference Leaders back in 2019. I was working as a Deputy Head for a primary with quite a high exclusion rate and was saddened every time a child was excluded. They were often the most vulnerable. School was their last safety net, yet we weren't meeting their needs, despite best intentions. I wanted to be part of changing this familiar story.

“The Difference helped me build my skills, resilience, and ability to work with those resistant to new ideas. I want to give my staff that same confidence when it comes to supporting every child.”

Teaching excluded children was humbling. Until that point, I felt confident I was a strong practitioner with good behaviour management. But in the Difference Programme, suddenly I was in a class where the majority – not the minority – had histories of trauma and very challenging behaviour. Sometimes I felt de-skilled and daunted by the leadership challenge I was facing.

But those two years were also massively eye-opening. I gained a huge amount of understanding, particularly from my pupils. I made changes in my school – starting a daily reading routine to boost pupil literacy and rewriting the behaviour policy for the entire trust. The Difference helped me build my skills, resilience, and ability to work with those resistant to new ideas. I've now returned to mainstream, this time as a Headteacher. I want to give my staff that same confidence when it comes to supporting every child.

Exclusions will increase in the wake of Covid-19. We are seeing a real increase in children showing distress. They have dealt with bereavement, isolation, mental health issues and increased poverty – yet were expected to snap back to normal in September! For many, this distress will play out in behaviour. In schools ill-prepared to respond, this could easily spiral towards exclusion.

Like many members of The Difference community, I got involved in inclusive education before Covid-19 was on the radar. Now, two years on, it is clear this work is more important than ever. I am grateful that I am not facing it alone. The work ahead of us is substantial. But for the young people whose life-chances will be changed for the better, it is *worth it*.

**Vicky Shires** (as told to Kiran Gill)

2019 Difference Leader & Headteacher of Crawford Primary School

# Our problem, purpose and work

## Our problem

Thousands of children in England experience invisible and unknown disadvantages. The country's most vulnerable children have overwhelmingly poor educational and life outcomes. Many of these children will be excluded from school. Over 40 children are permanently excluded in England during every school day – nearly 8,000 across the school year.

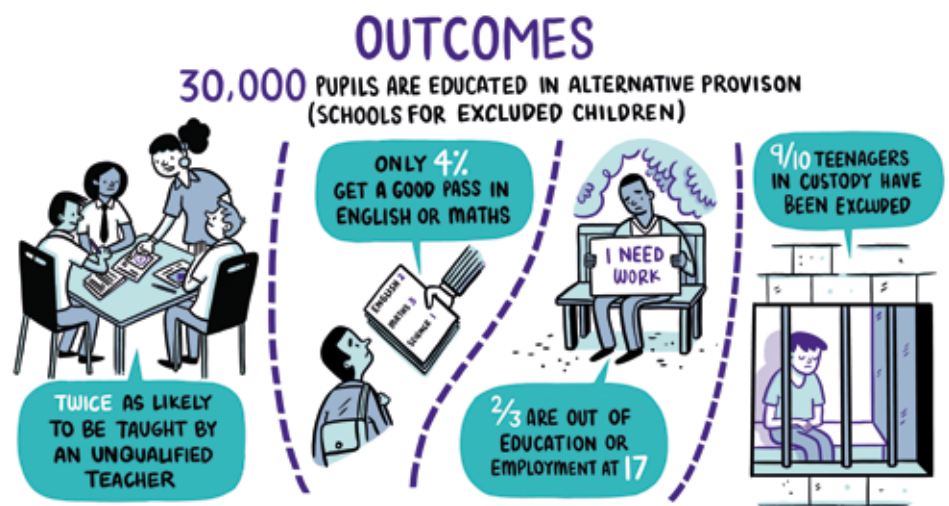


## Our purpose

The Difference exists to improve the life outcomes of the most vulnerable children, by raising the status and expertise of those who educate them.

## Our work

The Difference is finding and growing the **People** who will become tomorrow's inclusive school leaders.



Our two-year Difference Leadership Programme develops teachers with the will and skill to lead improved outcomes for vulnerable children.

The Difference identifies best **Practice** in Inclusion, sharing this with both AP and mainstream school leaders, as well as across the whole education sector.

We share our research on inclusive **Policy** with key stakeholders in education, while celebrating leaders and groups of schools who are changing the story on school exclusion.

### Clarifying Terms

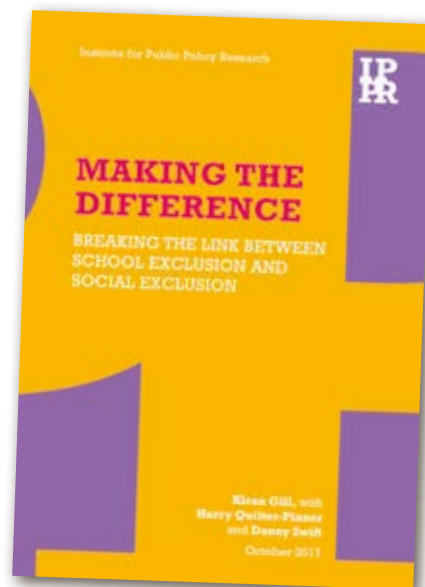
Excluded students attend one of **349** Pupil Referral Units, Alternative Provision Academies or Alternative Provision Free Schools across the country. Throughout this report, we refer to these schools as **Alternative Provision (AP) schools**. There has been little national consensus on what makes a quality AP education.

## Past: Where have we come from?

The Difference has grown from an idea to a thriving charity in the past four years. In 2017, CEO and founder Kiran Gill published a [groundbreaking report](#) with think-tank IPPR, shedding light on exclusions as a social justice issue and its disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable children.

This report was the catalyst to launch a Viability Pilot of the **Difference Leadership Programme – an intensive career development course for aspiring school leaders**. Starting in 2019, the Pilot has had surprising success, re-branding a previously low-status area of teaching into a sought-after career path and producing school leaders who are now experts in inclusion.

Alongside, The Difference developed an **Inclusive Leadership Course to upskill current mainstream leaders**; ran the IncludEd conference series to spark conversations on exclusions; and began an active online community to share best practice to a wider audience. **The Difference's Policy work – press and sector influencing** – saw the issue of exclusions move from marginalised topic to national concern, in partnership with a growing coalition.



## Present: This year at a glance

The number of Difference Leaders working in AP schools more than doubled. The Inclusive Leadership Course supported increasing numbers of mainstream school leaders and Multi-Academy Trusts towards more inclusive practice.

The charity's growing reach coincided with a growing need for inclusion in schools. With Covid-19, rising numbers of children have experienced trauma, mental health problems, and isolation. Meanwhile, national conversations were sparked by the murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement; the Everyone's Invited campaign; and increasing awareness of discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ children. More schools are recognising that promoting inclusion and tackling injustice are essential and interconnected projects.

Against this backdrop, Difference programmes continued to deliver improved outcomes for England's most vulnerable learners. In AP schools, Difference Leaders shaped development across learning, wellbeing and safeguarding. The first Difference Leaders secured promotions to mainstream roles, ready to shape practice and policy upstream.

## Future: Moving towards our goal

The Difference is turning its attention from the now-completed task of creating a new charity, career route, and sector brand. Looking ahead, the charity will be increasing its impact, scale and organisational strength to meet a newly explicit goal: falling exclusions across England by 2030.

The charity's new strategy – to be shared with key stakeholders this year – sets out the path towards this ambitious goal. To tackle exclusions nationally and respond to the greater need post-pandemic, The Difference will be investing more resources into the Practice and Policy work as well as further collaboration with schools and third-sector partners. Additional work will include growing – and better understanding – the impact of The Difference's training programmes, and developing the resilience of this young and growing charity.

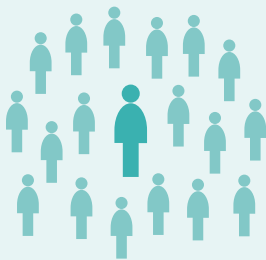
# Key headlines from 2020/21



The Difference Leadership Programme grew from **10** to **26** Difference Leaders across the first two cohorts. They worked in **17** local authorities, supporting **1,520** of England's most vulnerable children.



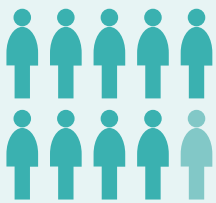
**53** mainstream leaders have completed the Inclusive Leadership Course, tripling participation from last year. They lead schools for **36,000** pupils across **25** local authorities.



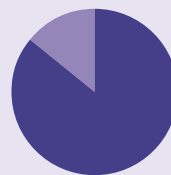
There were more than **20** applicants for every place on the 2021 Cohort of Difference Leaders.



**100%** of Inclusive Leadership Course participants used course content to develop other staff.



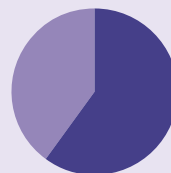
**90%** of the pioneer Cohort of Difference Leaders graduated the Programme in promoted positions. In 2021/22, they will impact the education of over **6,800** pupils.



**86%** saw improved de-escalation of challenging behaviour.



**100%** of the Headteachers of the pioneer Cohort said their Difference Leader had a positive whole-school impact.



**60%** reported a fall in exclusions, before the end of the the one-year course.



**4** Difference Leaders have become Headteachers.



The Difference delivered training for **6** of the **10** largest Multi-Academy Trusts in the country.

# People



The heart of our work is developing people who will be tomorrow's inclusive school leaders, through the **Difference Leadership Programme**



# People: Problems and Solutions



**Too few mainstream school leaders are experienced in working with vulnerable learners**

– meaning the career route of agenda-setting leaders hasn't often had AP insight that might help them to tackle rising exclusions.



**The Difference Leadership Programme**

prepares participants to secure senior positions in influential mainstream schools where they can turn the tide on exclusions.



**There is a lack of teacher training opportunities on supporting vulnerable learners.** Our 2017 IPPR report revealed limited sector understanding about what works best.<sup>1</sup>



Training provides intensive skills development for Difference Leaders during two years in AP schools. We monitor their progression and impact, adding to the evidence for what works in inclusive practice.



**Alternative Provision schools struggle to recruit teachers.** A child in an AP school is twice as likely to have an unqualified teacher. Only 4% of excluded learners pass English and Maths GCSEs.

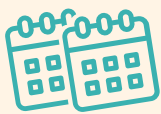


The Programme raises the profile of working in Alternative Provision schools, establishing it as an aspirational career route that attracts the best teachers.

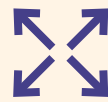
## The Difference Leadership Programme

The Difference Leadership Programme is an intensive training course designed to raise the status and expertise of teachers who work with vulnerable learners. It involves a two-year placement as a senior leader in an AP school, plus 290 hours of teacher development delivered by The Difference. We then support Difference Leaders to find promotions in mainstream schools where they start preventative work upstream to reduce exclusions.

1. IPPR (2017) Making The Difference: Breaking the link between school exclusion and social exclusion.



2020/21 was the second year of delivering the Difference Leadership Programme



The Difference expanded outside of London to work in AP schools in the North West and East Midlands.



We worked with more than double the number of Difference Leaders and partner schools



Ten 2019 Difference Leaders completed their second year in Alternative Provision.



Sixteen 2020 Difference Leaders began their journey.

## Results for Difference Leaders

- 90% of the 2019 Cohort are leaving the Programme in promoted roles – with 60% moving back to mainstream schools.
- 38% of the 2020 Cohort have been promoted to a more senior role within their AP school, during their first year.
- 88% of all Difference Leaders are satisfied (or very satisfied) with the Programme.<sup>2</sup>

“[The Difference Leadership Programme] has given me the ability to demonstrate my skill set in a new environment, proving my worth and ensuring I believe in my own abilities again.”

**2020 Difference Leader**

## Results for Alternative Provision Partners

- 100% of Headteachers of the 2019 Cohort said their Difference Leader had a positive impact on whole-school systems and practice.<sup>3</sup>
- 85% of Headteachers of the 2019 Cohort said the impact of their Difference Leader will continue to benefit the school after the end of their 2-year placement.
- 89% of Headteachers would recommend the programme to a colleague.

“Great way to stay abreast of developments in AP, great opportunities to recruit excellent teachers with the right attitude and disposition for our students.”

**AP Head Teacher**

2. We surveyed all Difference Leaders at the end of the 2020/21 school year. These statistics are based on the 23 responses (out of a possible 26) which we have received so far.
3. We surveyed all Headteachers of a Difference Leader at the end of the 2020/21 school year. These statistics are based on the 18 responses (out of a possible 21) received so far. Some questions were only asked to Headteachers of the 2019 Cohort.

# Alumni: Tomorrow's Inclusive Headteachers

## Career progression

The Difference Leadership Programme exists to create senior leaders with expertise and experience working with vulnerable pupils, who go on to reduce exclusions in mainstream.

### The challenge

Experience as an AP Leader has previously been undervalued by mainstream Headteachers. Due to Covid-19, the pioneering Difference Leader cohort is graduating into an extremely challenging job market. 2021 saw reduced teacher turnover, and some leadership roles received literally hundreds of applications.

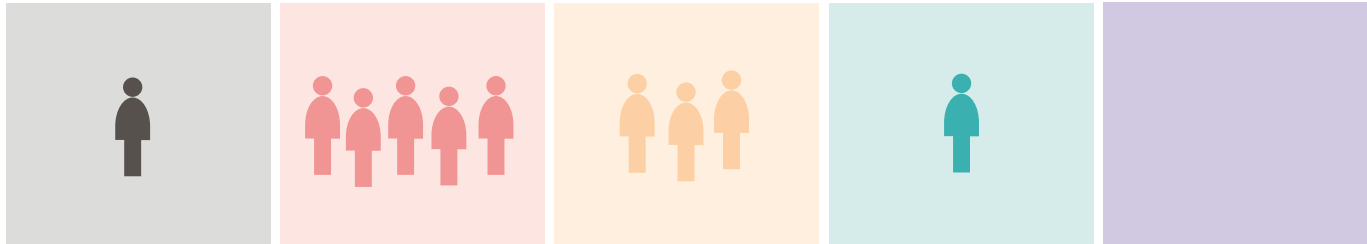
### The test

Can 60% of Difference Leaders secure mainstream promotion after their time in AP schools and take on leadership roles with an impact on inclusion?

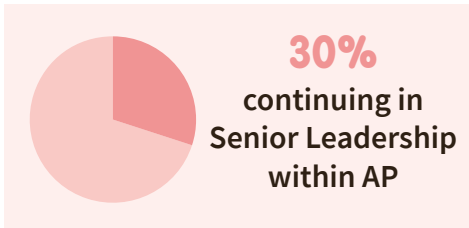
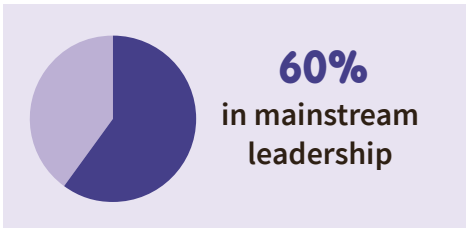
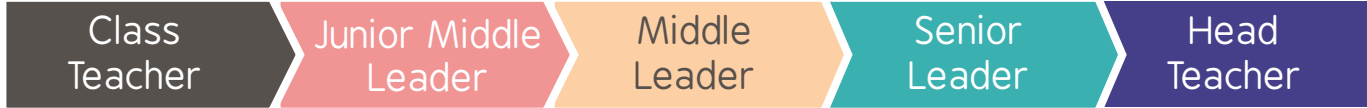
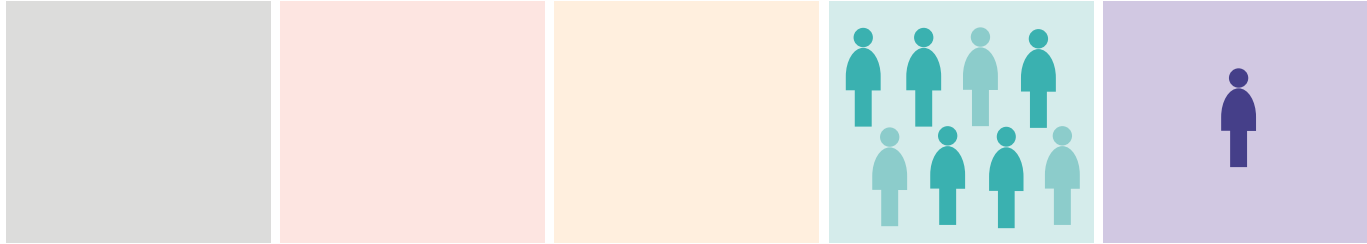
### The outcome

90% of the 2019 Cohort are leaving the Programme in a promoted role – 60% secured a mainstream leadership role, with 30% continuing in Senior Leadership within AP schools.

### Before the Programme



### After the Programme





Our IPPR Research estimates the cost of exclusion is around **£370,000 per young person** in lifetime education, benefits, healthcare and criminal justice costs.

If each 2019 Difference Leader Alumni working in mainstream schools prevents just one pupil from being permanently excluded, they could save **£2.2 million**.



## Difference Leader Alumni: Irene

Irene came to The Difference as an Assistant Department Head (a junior middle leader) and took on the Assistant Principal role at Harris Aspire AP. In September 2021, she will be starting as Assistant Principal (a senior leader) at AIM North London, a mainstream secondary serving 600 pupils.

“My favourite part of working in Alternative Provision has been learning from the young people here. They will always test and question you – so you have to develop a certain strength of character. This year, a big focus was making sure my students had post-16 destinations. So far, 13 out of 15 pupils will be going onto

further education, employment or training. [Note: the national average for AP pupils is 50% becoming NEET at 16].

I’m also proud that we’ve managed to reduce exclusions by 60% in my AP school this year. I think the induction process I introduced really helped. Rather than going straight to assessment, we now take the time to get to know new students. It’s all about starting with kindness. Assume they might have something else going on – a court case or a row with a parent. Try to understand where challenging behaviour is coming from, their perspective, and their needs.

In my new role, I want to translate these learnings for mainstream. It’s a matter of scaling up. I can already see how bringing an understanding of trauma, which can inhibit memory and storage, will be valuable. The frameworks and language I’ve learnt are going to be really important in getting buy-in to make change.

“What you do for the child that struggles the most can only benefit everyone”

I spoke with one student before I left Aspire – someone who had never made it easy for me as a teacher – and asked what I should take to my new school. He said ‘You’ve got it. Some teachers come in making threats and threatening to exclude. But you gave us choices and told us what the outcome would be.’ I think that certain guiding principles will work anywhere – what you do for the child that struggles the most can only benefit everyone.”



Difference Leader Alumni:  
**Vicky**

Already a Senior Leader, Vicky was the most experienced teacher to join our Programme, eager to develop her ability to lead improvement for higher-needs pupils. Vicky has now been promoted to Headteacher of a mainstream primary. As well as directly influencing the education of the 500 pupils in this school, Vicky was asked to rewrite the behaviour policy for her entire school trust – comprising six London primaries. Her expertise is being used to create a safer, more inclusive education for ~3,000 pupils aged 3-11.



Difference Leader Alumni:  
**Terry**

Though The Difference's ultimate aim is to create mainstream inclusive leaders, we understand that some Difference Leaders may choose to remain in AP roles for longer. Terry will remain as Assistant Principal (senior leader) in Tunmarsh PRU for a further year.

**“It’s important to me to stay another year in AP because my experience during Covid was so far removed from the norm. My role at Tunmarsh is leading curriculum and assessment. But the pandemic meant the immediate needs of the school and community took priority - such as maintaining contact, pastoral support, and providing Teacher Assessed Grades. We had to ensure students**

**achieved the grades they deserved, whilst balancing staff and student wellbeing. While some elements of this were familiar, the backdrop of Covid was new. So many unknowns caused anxiety for staff and students at all levels. I learnt a huge amount about crisis management but the strategic school development plan had to fit around these new priorities.**

**In 2021/22, I’ll work with the team to apply my learning and implement this development plan. This year, 73% of our pupils achieved GCSE grades 9-4 in English and 62% in Maths (compared to the PRU national average of 9%). We are committed to using the learning from the past year to continue this upward trend. Learnings from Covid put us in an even stronger position to align wellbeing practice with young people’s academic needs.**

**I plan to go back to mainstream in September 2022. We are already seeing exclusions return to pre-pandemic levels. In 2020, there was a huge amount of conversation about recovery curriculum and mental health needs - but for all manner of reasons, it’s fallen away. Over the next few years, pupils coming through will have been really impacted by Covid. I know there’s a role to be played with everything I’ve learnt with The Difference and at Tunmarsh - like relational pedagogy and trauma-informed practice. It’s important that I go back into the mainstream and help develop this understanding there too..”**



## Next year

In their third and final year, the 2019 Cohort will progress to The Difference Alumni Programme.

The purpose of this year is to provide ongoing support with new leadership roles, to begin to track impact within mainstream schools, and to drive further engagement with The Difference's practice-sharing and sector-influencing work.

The Alumni Programme includes:

- **Community Learning and Networking events** such as the IncludEd conference and Inclusive Leadership conference, cohort socials, and Difference seminars.
- **Half-termly Check-ins from the Programme Team** who will provide personalised guidance as Difference Leader Alumni develop and implement a Leadership Plan.
- **An Online Library** (containing course frameworks, literature, and The Difference research) and social messaging platform.

- **Media and speaking opportunities** including our own blog and podcast; features in The Difference press hits; and presenting slots at education conferences which allow Alumni to document and share their learning process – and impact – with those beyond the course.

The Difference is excited to start tracking the effects of our Alumni to prevent exclusions upstream. We will monitor changes within Difference Leaders' mainstream schools through the metrics which act as key predictors of permanent exclusion – including persistent absenteeism<sup>4</sup>, attendance, and fixed term exclusions<sup>5</sup>.

We know creating significant culture change within schools is a gradual process. We will keep tracking transformation by following the data across a number of years. In the meantime, we'll continue with wider impact measurement such as Headteacher feedback, qualitative case studies and surveys.

4. Social Finance & Cheshire West and Chester Council (2021) It's time to ACT: Countering the impact of Covid-19 on pupils and schools.

5. Department for Education (2019) Timpson Review of School Exclusion.

# Delivery: Capturing Leadership Growth

## Programme Elements

The Difference Leadership Programme is designed to prepare participants for mainstream senior roles that will have a significant impact on inclusion. The curriculum was developed using existing best practice research and refined over the past two years of delivery.

Each Programme Element is geared towards progression in four key Practice areas: **Learning, Wellbeing, Safeguarding** and **Leadership**.

Within each Programme Element, Difference Leaders are empowered to:



**Grow their own individual practice with students**



**Positively influence the practice of other staff members**



**Develop whole-school systems to reinforce good practice**

### Summer Training

A two-week intensive training which introduces the context around exclusions and fundamentals of leading in AP schools. Difference Leaders start building strong personal connections with their cohort.

### AP Placement

A two-year role on the Senior Leadership Team of an AP school. As well as teaching responsibilities, Difference Leaders are expected to lead a whole-school improvement project while developing other staff members.

### Assignments and Twilights

Short, directed activities support Difference Leaders to investigate and reflect on an area of their practice. Assignments are reviewed during Twilight sessions, where Cohorts come together to learn from specialist speakers, Difference staff, and each other.

### Inclusive Leadership Course

Six full-day training sessions across one year, covering topics including contextual safeguarding, asset-based approaches, and

restorative practice. Further assignments are set, to translate this formal learning into practice.

### Practice Portfolios and Tutor Visits

Every Difference Leader keeps a portfolio to evidence their personal development and school impact. Difference Leaders are visited in school every half-term by their tutor to discuss progress, their portfolio, and receive formative feedback.

### Compassion Focused Coaching

Fortnightly coaching in groups with a trained psychologist or psychotherapist. The goal is to facilitate peer-reflection, protect wellbeing, and create familiarity with a model of support that Difference Leaders can then use with other teaching staff.

### Career Progression Support

Activities to prepare for job applications and interviews throughout the second year of the Programme. Includes CV workshops, 'Dragons' Den'-style presentations, and mentorship from education leaders.



## Tracking progress

With a two-year gap between starting as Difference Leaders and returning to mainstream, how can we know that the Programme is preparing future leaders?

Their progression is tracked through the use of a Practice Portfolio. Each term, every Difference Leader scores their development in Key Practice areas from:

1. No experience
2. Some experience in my own practice
3. Some experience leading the practice of others
4. Confident leading and developing whole-school practice

Difference Leaders evidence their scores by providing qualitative and quantitative data on their work and impact. Scores and evidence are reviewed and moderated by their Difference Tutor and AP school line manager. This “triangulation” of perspectives is best practice when it comes to assessing teaching – the same method is used to assess teacher qualification.

## Are Difference Leaders progressing?

Halfway through the Programme, the 2020 Cohort are evidencing significant development in Learning, Wellbeing, Safeguarding and Leadership.

- **100%** have improved in at least two of the four key Practice areas.
- **93%** have demonstrated they are leading the development of other AP school staff in at least one Practice.

As well as understanding individual development, the Practice Portfolio helps us identify where the Programme is working well and where it can improve.

### **We ask Difference Leaders: What do you feel has been your most significant learning?**

“Definitely the compassion-focused coaching and approach to line management. It has transformed my relationships with staff (and students). It has made me a better leader as I feel now that I have challenge / support in the right balance.”

“Having to learn a variety of skills in shifting mindsets and challenging practices in behaviour management and pastoral support”

“I learnt how to manage adults mainly and to have difficult conversations with colleagues and those I line manage. I learnt about trauma and how it is impossible to know who has suffered trauma and how we must be trauma-aware at all times, including with our colleagues.”

“A trauma-informed approach to what happens outside the classroom as well as inside”



# Impact in Alternative Provision

AP schools and their pupils' backgrounds are hugely varied. Each Difference Leader also holds a unique leadership role depending on teaching specialism, school needs, and previous experience. Their impact is similarly diverse.

## Supporting Students

Though Difference Leaders have distinctive roles, they develop certain common leadership skills through the Programme, including problem diagnosis and solution design. Each Difference Leader identifies the organisational challenges which are affecting outcomes for young people in their AP. They create whole-school projects to tackle these challenges.

"[Our Difference Leader] has proved herself to be an outstanding practitioner... her relentless pursuit of ensuring that the pastoral provision of the students under her care has been of a high quality has led to improved outcomes in both results and attendance"

**AP Headteacher**



### Student Impact: Deep Dive Examples

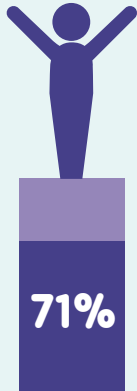
**MARIE** 2020 Difference Leader Marie leads the English department at her AP school. She saw that pupils arriving at her school midway through the year were in need of extra learning support. She set up individual interventions and personalised targets, assigning staff to work with them 1 on 1. Differentiated lessons, seating plans, and word mats created a calmer classroom space for every pupil. 100% of pupils passed their GCSE English this year – and the percentage of pupils receiving Grades 9-4 rose from 35% to 62%



Working in **19** Alternative Provision schools, Difference Leaders have directly influenced the education of more than **1,500** excluded young people this year



**100%** of Headteachers of our pioneering Cohort reported their Difference Leader created a positive impact on safeguarding and student safety



**71%** reported a positive impact on student attainment and academic progress

**ELLIE** At 2019 Difference Leader Ellie's AP school, 23% of pupils were not in education or employment (NEET) after leaving at 16. Though lower than the national average for AP pupils (where roughly 50% become NEET), it was still much higher than the mainstream average of 4.5%. Ellie created a framework to identify pupils at risk of becoming NEET, coordinated a school-wide careers programme, and brought in external agencies to help with college applications. The percentage of pupils becoming NEET in her AP has more than halved, to just 10%.

**ALICIA and DAVID** 2019 Difference Leaders Alicia and David worked in different AP schools in London. AP schools are often unable to offer a broad range of subjects, meaning less choice for excluded pupils and even more barriers to engagement and motivation. Alicia and David arranged a subject 'swap' between their schools so pupils could take a vocational qualification which interested them. Through The Difference network, they helped pupils to gain crucial vocational skills, and started to tackle the issue of AP schools being isolated from one another.



## Corinne

2020 Difference Leader at Orchardside PRU in Enfield

"I lead on Orchardside School's Turnaround Project. We work for 6 weeks with pupils from mainstream school who are at risk of exclusion. We provide much-needed positive encouragement while identifying learning, mental health, and other needs. It provides an opportunity to 'reset' before pupils go back to mainstream. The project has been hugely successful. Throughout all of our cohorts, no one has gone on to be permanently excluded. I'm proud of the positive impact that I've had on Turnaround.

Staff at Orchardside have commented on how much behaviour has improved and how it's a much better environment for teaching and learning under my leadership.

The pandemic did bring some challenges to my first term in AP. The schools remained open when the country went into lockdown. So, I was teaching in a new environment without my usual support network. When I opened up to staff at my school and The Difference, they became my support system. It turned a difficult situation into something really manageable.

"My whole practice is different now. If students' wellbeing is not being looked after, then how are they going to learn?"

Lockdown was tough on the pupils who couldn't come into school – they need that structure. For lots of them, school is like their family. So much of the Difference Leadership Programme has been valuable for supporting our pupils after they returned – especially the training on trauma-informed practice. All teacher training should include this! It completely opened my eyes to how I could support pupils during the pandemic and beyond. My whole practice is different now. If students' wellbeing is not being looked after, then how are they going to learn?"



## Influencing staff

Though there is a great deal of expertise in AP schools, it is difficult for new ideas to flow in or out. AP schools find it challenging to recruit teachers from mainstream and often have limited funding for networking or training. This risks great techniques for working with vulnerable learners being siloed and teaching practice becoming outdated. Difference Leaders are able to add lasting value, passing on new learning to staff, as well as picking up new learning themselves from their placements.

“It’s great to have teachers coming into [our school] who have a mainstream perspective and approach – to keep a mainstream way of thinking, which is still necessary in AP”

**AP Headteacher**

**86%** of AP Headteachers think their Difference Leader has had a positive impact on the whole leadership of their school.



## Influencing staff: Deep dive examples

**HANNAH** 2020 Difference Leader Hannah was working in an AP school where behaviour incidents sometimes became physical. When staff did not feel confident de-escalating situations, pupils became more distressed. This would also affect staff mental health. Hannah created ‘crisis scripts’ for staff to use in difficult moments, employing a proactive, trauma-informed approach. The number of physical incidents started to decrease, with positive feedback from both students and staff. Hannah is now working in another AP school. She has started to roll out crisis scripts here too, modifying them for this school’s behaviour policy.

**ADA** Originally line-managing Maths, 2019 Difference Leader Ada was asked by her AP Headteacher to also take on English and Citizenship after they saw the positive change she was creating. Before Ada’s leadership, there were no regular team meetings or supervision, meaning little opportunity for practice sharing or development. Ada put in a structured timetable of meetings, organised Continuing Professional Development, and encouraged staff to do ‘learning walks’ and lesson drop-ins. Staff gained new qualifications (e.g. functional skills for teaching assistants) and are confident to run a more diverse range of teaching activities. Student engagement improved and grades rose across the board. 49% of pupils gained a good grade in Maths (compared to just 15% of pupils before Ada joined this school), and 52% in English (up from 28%).





**Gillian**

2020 Difference Leader at  
The Limes College in Sutton

“When I started in AP, I was pleasantly surprised by the lack of hierarchy. It isn’t only ‘teacher knows best’. It might be the teaching assistant, or the family outreach worker, who has the best understanding of a pupil. We share knowledge as a team.

I think my own practice has benefited most from the Compassion-Focused Coaching. When I started the Difference Leadership Programme, I was still on the mainstream treadmill. I am more consciously

compassionate now and can take a step back if a pupil is having difficulties. The Limes (my AP school) has a clear focus on academic progress and our pupils get good GCSEs. But we understand they cannot learn unless they are calm and regulated.

“Senior leaders are coming to us for advice and guidance. I am hopeful that we can create a better model, with fewer young people going through the trauma of exclusion.”

So many elements of AP practice would be beneficial in mainstream. The thing I’m most proud of this year has been helping to create these links between schools. Alongside a colleague, I delivered workshops on trauma-informed practice to a local mainstream school. The staff were so appreciative and told us this training should be in all schools. Sharing strategies has helped some of our excluded pupils to successfully reintegrate.

I’ve now been promoted to Deputy Head at The Limes and am eager to lead more outreach. We are challenging the notion of only one-way traffic between mainstream and AP. Senior leaders are coming to us for advice and guidance. I am hopeful that we can create a better model, with fewer young people going through the trauma of exclusion.”

## Changing school systems

Creating lasting change in schools, whether mainstream or AP, requires Difference Leaders to go beyond improving the practice of an individual teacher or teachers. By improving and implementing inclusive policies and processes in their school, they can remove organisational barriers for all pupils and create a route to better outcomes.

**86%** of AP Headteachers believe that the impact created by their Difference Leader will continue to benefit their school beyond the 2 years of the programme.

“[Our Difference Leader] has done an amazing job of connecting with our students and of developing systems and practices which will have a long-lasting benefit to the college”

**AP Headteacher**



## Changing school systems: Deep dive example

**ELIZABETH** 2019 Difference Leader Elizabeth recognised that staff within her AP would benefit from more exposure to inclusive practice. She saw how attachment theory and trauma-informed practice could be really key in developing better understanding of behaviour, improving staff wellbeing, and reducing the number of behaviour incidents happening in school. To tackle this, Elizabeth introduced a fortnightly reflection group. This acted as a safe space for staff to discuss their needs and strategies and also as a valuable training resource. Elizabeth included bite-sized training

throughout the year, on the theme of “Behaviour as Communication”. 100% of staff said they found the sessions valuable. They were better able to engage students and improved relationships meant behaviour incidents also reduced.

Elizabeth also established cross-departmental teams to run better interventions for pupil mental health and wellbeing. This included developing the school’s counselling service. By introducing a three-tiered response to need, 97% of their pupils are now engaging with counselling, compared to just 15% before. With approval gained from her Head, these projects will continue to be run (or expand) next year by the teams that Elizabeth has established.



**Jack**

2020 Difference Leader at  
Springwell Mablethorpe

“Working in Alternative Provision has completely changed my education philosophy. I’ve moved away from the notion of schools as mainly for passing exams. If we meet young people with compassion, then we will also reignite their interest in learning – for now and for the future. I think that Springwell Mablethorpe was already doing this but our results are getting even better now.

Coming from mainstream, I had never worked with pupils with such deep-rooted trauma. I had to be completely honest with other staff and open to learning from them. This approach really helped when I was promoted to Head of School and started to introduce new strategies.

One new addition is Compassion-Focused Coaching within line-management. By providing space and compassion to staff, they are passing this onto our pupils. We are already seeing the impact. My school has Individual Learning Rooms that pupils can use if they need time out from class. This year we saw an 87% reduction in their use. Pupils are better able to communicate their needs and are choosing to remain in lessons. Our young people are taking these strategies back to mainstream as well, and our successful reintegration rate has been steadily rising. It was 90% in 2018 and this year we had 100%.

“By providing space and compassion to staff, they are passing this onto our pupils. We are already seeing the impact”

I’m also passionate about AP school academic excellence – breaking the glass ceiling which can exist for excluded pupils. This year I brought in new external qualifications such our Level 2 Employability Award. 100% of our secondary pupils took this and passed – gaining not just a qualification but really transferable skills. I want to keep developing our curriculum further so that AP pupils can continue to have the same choices for high-quality learning as they would in mainstream.”

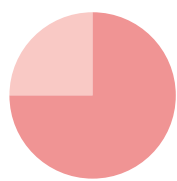
# Recruiting the Next Generation

## Attraction

In our IPPR report, The Difference team found Alternative Provision was experiencing a recruitment crisis. Ambitious teachers were not considering a career focused on working with vulnerable pupils. There was little awareness of the skills or expertise involved in teaching in a PRU.

**Work by The Difference is starting to turn this tide – so far we’ve inspired more than 1,500 teachers across the country to consider a career in Alternative Provision.**

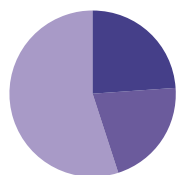
For the first time, we surveyed our wider pool of registrants to find out if, and how, their attitude towards Alternative Provision had shifted. From the 69 responses we received, we discovered our efforts were having an effect on teachers **beyond those selected for the Programme.**



**75%** of respondents said connecting with The Difference has increased their interest and the time they invest in inclusive practice



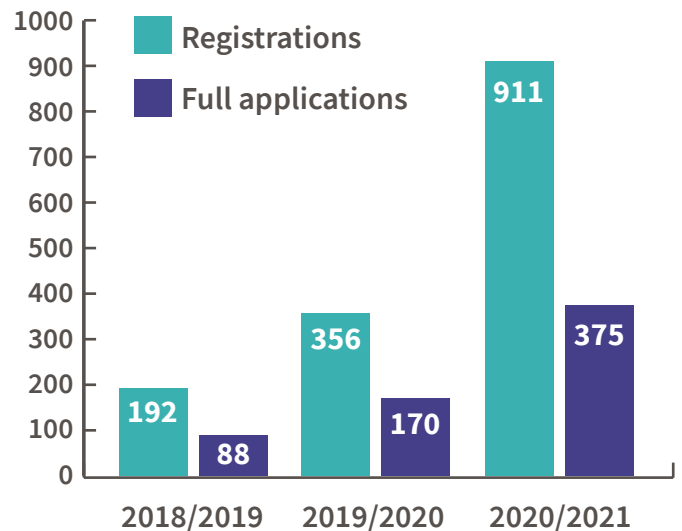
**45%** were inspired to apply for a new role in education (beyond the Difference Leadership Programme)



**24%** went on to apply to work in AP and a further **21%** applied for a mainstream role more focused on vulnerable learners



**34%** have already undertaken some form of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to better support vulnerable learners in mainstream schools.



Other action taken by applicants included:

- Becoming the AP liaison officer at their mainstream school
- Creating a catch-up programme to tackle post-Covid attainment gaps
- Starting a project with their Multi Academy Trust to re-engage pupils at risk of exclusion.

With **55% of respondents** stating that they were likely (or very likely) to reapply to The Difference in the future, we are excited to re-engage with so many educators showing passion and commitment around inclusive education.





## Selection

The intensive nature of the Difference Leadership Programme means we are highly selective – creating an aspirational, competitive and high-status career route. **We had more than 20 applicants for every place on the 2021 Cohort of the Difference Leadership Programme.**

Our biggest challenge was adapting to lockdown. In-person Selection Centres were replaced by online interviews and teaching assessments, conducted over Zoom. Later, we carried out lesson observations in APs with shortlisted candidates. We are proud of the huge efforts by our recruitment team in running our largest selection process under such unique circumstances.

“Although the process was intense it was pitched in a way that was pertinent to the vision”

**Difference Leadership Programme Applicant**

“Great opportunities to recruit excellent teachers with the right attitude and disposition for our students”

**AP Head Teacher who has hired a Difference Leader**

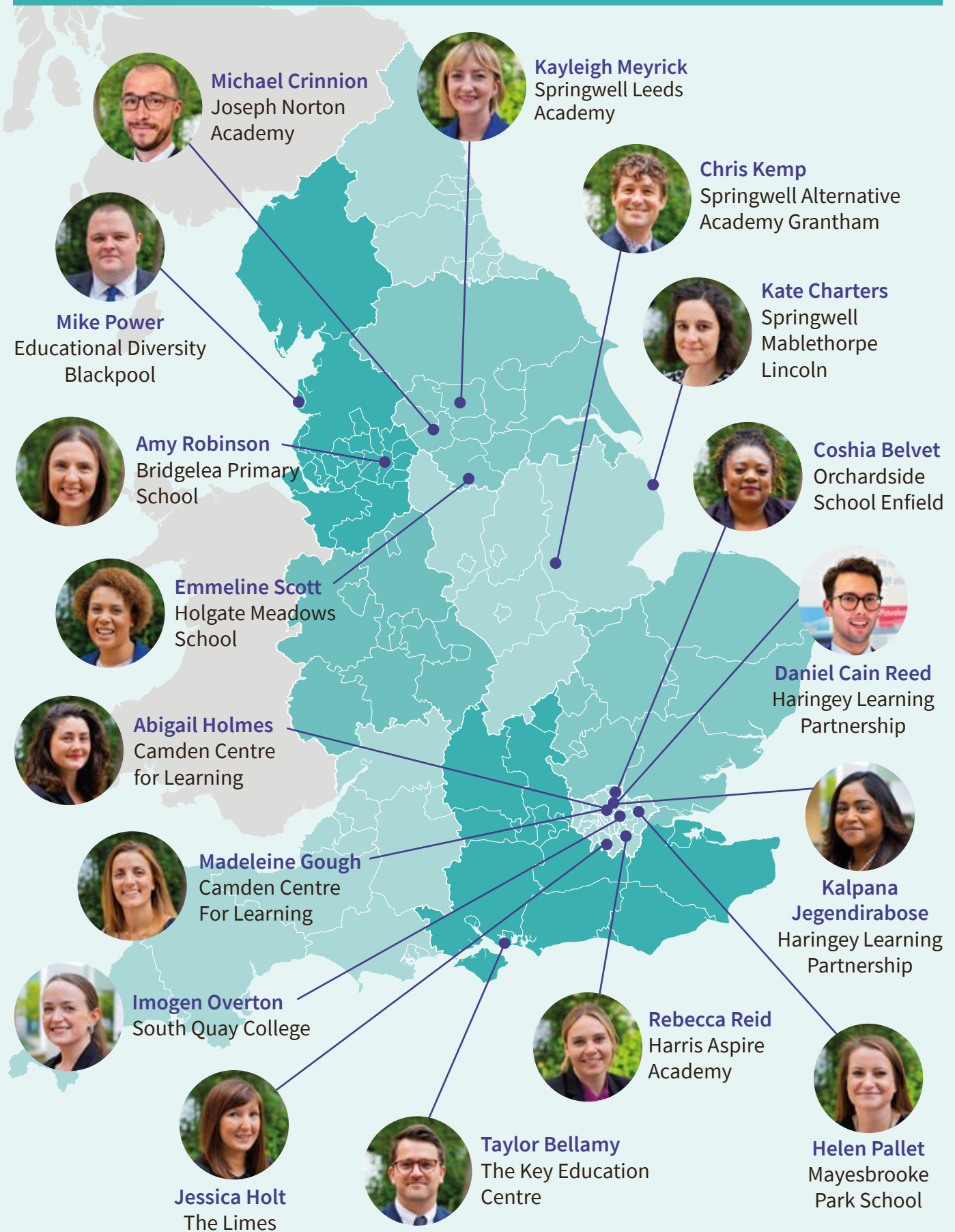
Successful candidates are matched into leadership roles with AP Partner schools. Matching the 2021 Cohort was one of the hardest challenges we’ve faced this year. Last year’s school closures meant exclusion rates fell temporarily. With fewer referrals, many APs saw their budgets slashed. Though they are now receiving an influx of new exclusions, the lag before additional funding arrives means many APs face significant financial difficulties and have imposed hiring freezes.

“It was brilliantly organised, the applicants were all great in their own way and I especially enjoyed working alongside everyone involved this week”

**External Assessor for online interviews and role play**

With fewer jobs available, it has been harder to match candidates to the right locations and roles. Realising it would not be possible to grow our Cohort size as planned, we have instead focused on finding high quality placements, creating new school partnerships and expanding into new regions of England.

The 2021 Cohort is made up of 17 Difference Leaders, placed in schools across 14 local authorities in England – including 11 new AP partner schools.





# Driving diverse recruitment

## Why does it matter?

Currently, school leadership across England is not representative of the young people being taught. For example, only 7% of Headteachers are black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME), compared to 33% of pupils.<sup>6</sup> The Difference wants to tackle, rather than contribute to, these disparities.

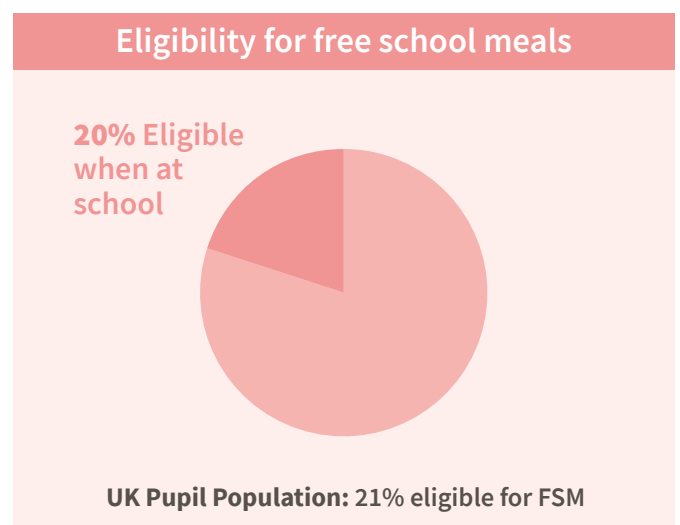
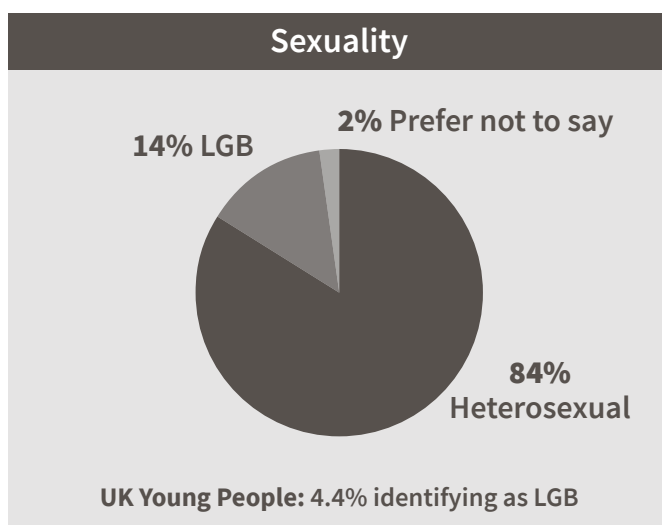
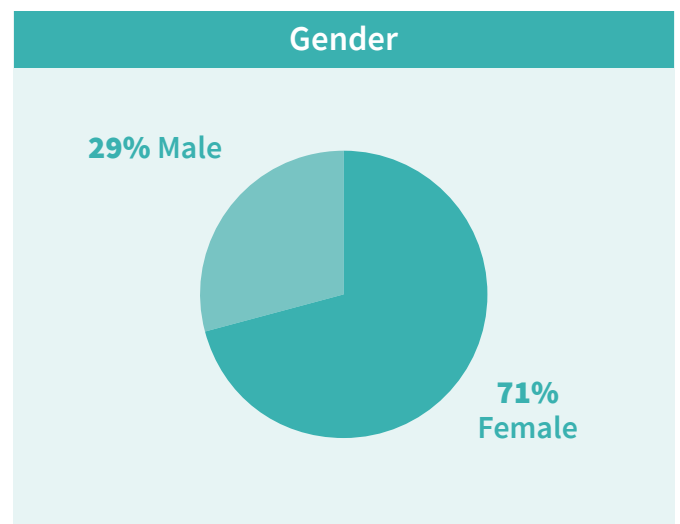
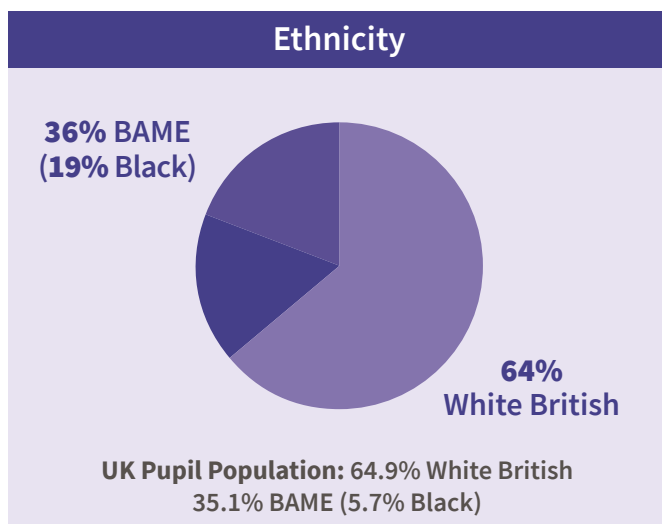
## What do we do?

We attract candidates from a wide spectrum of backgrounds by being conscious about where and how we advertise the programme. We find assessors who are from diverse backgrounds and train them to avoid bias and stereotypes around leadership. We select Difference Leaders according to how well they fit our core competencies and nothing else.

## Our results

Have been recognised as sector-leading. We have been asked to share best practice with several organisations, including TeachFirst, the BAMEed network and Credit Suisse. We will continue to passionately champion the need for unbiased recruitment and for greater diversity of leadership, especially in those educating the next generations.

## Difference Leader Representation



6. Department For Education (2021) School Teacher Workforce.

# Practice



The Difference works to identify **effective inclusive school Practice** and to share it across the whole education sector

# Practice: Problems and Solutions

! For too long, there has been a popular **belief that reducing exclusions is not desirable**. This narrative said exclusion was a foregone conclusion for “naughty” children, with little viable alternative.

✓ The Difference collects and shares the knowledge which will **change beliefs surrounding vulnerable pupils and exclusions**. The Inclusive School Leadership Course delivers to mainstream leaders who can spread these beliefs to staff and create meaningful change at scale.

! Though some educators do believe in reducing exclusions, many teachers are **not confident in taking action** in their schools. Limited training means exclusions can feel intractable and a distraction from academic priorities.

✓ Through a supportive community and quality training, The Difference **inspires action** in a growing number of mainstream schools. We help schools and trusts to measure the impact of their inclusive action on academic achievement as well as pupil wellbeing and safety.

! When successful action is taken, **too little is done to amplify it**. Inclusion work remains uncelebrated and often invisible to teachers, limiting the spread of positive practice through schools.

✓ We **amplify results of inclusive action**, both online and in the press, reaching some of the most dominant forces in UK education.



# Changing beliefs

## New knowledge

Key to changing our beliefs about what is desirable and possible is knowledge. The Difference uses the Inclusive Leadership Course to pass key insights and evidence-based practice to school leaders who have the power to tackle exclusions. Reducing exclusions tells us that schools are getting better at recognising vulnerability and meeting children's needs.

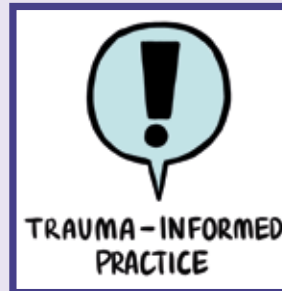
## What is the Inclusive School Leadership Course?

Originally designed for the Difference Leadership Programme, this course is now delivered to a wide network of high-status senior leaders in mainstream schools.

It draws on the experience of Difference Programme Director, Shaun Brown, and Head of the Inclusive Leadership Course, Mohamed Abdallah – both of whom have decades of experience in implementing measurable whole-school change.

Through a greater understanding of neurobiology and the impact of relationships, participants learn:

### 1 Where challenging behaviour can arise from



### 2 How teacher awareness and deliberate practice can de-escalate pupil behaviour challenges



### 3 How teachers can address the root causes of behaviour challenges to help pupils become happier, healthier, and higher-achieving



## FORMAT

**DELIVERY & LEARNING**  
6 FULL DAYS ACROSS THE YEAR

**REFLECTION & DEVELOPMENT**  
6 PRACTICAL ASSIGNMENTS TO BE DONE WITH SLT

“Learning and exploring Restorative Practice with like-minded educators with The Difference has given kudos to my thoughts, ideas and ambitions for the school and there is now a real momentum for change.”

**2020/21 Inclusive Leadership Participant**

“We have a greater understanding of individual student situations and can more effectively assign appropriate interventions. This has impacted positively on our exclusion figures (particularly internal) as we use a more informed contextual safeguarding approach to support our vulnerable young people.”

**Mainstream Senior Leader**

## Growing investment

The social injustice of exclusions is being recognised by more schools and more leaders. As well as The Difference’s IPPR report, work by other think-tanks, charities, parliamentarians and journalists has made clear the inequalities in who gets excluded, and the subsequent impact on their life-chances.

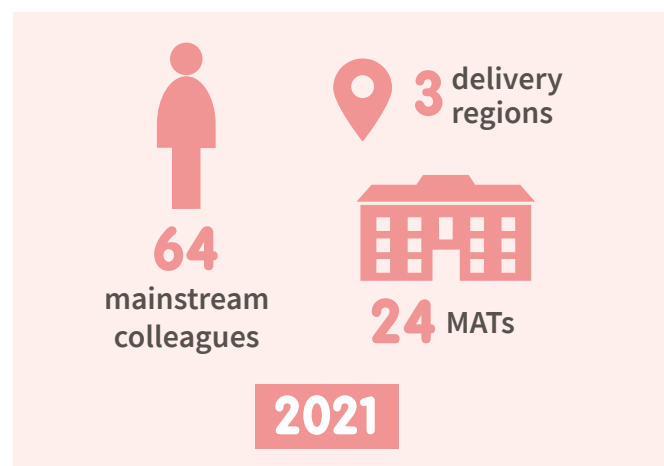
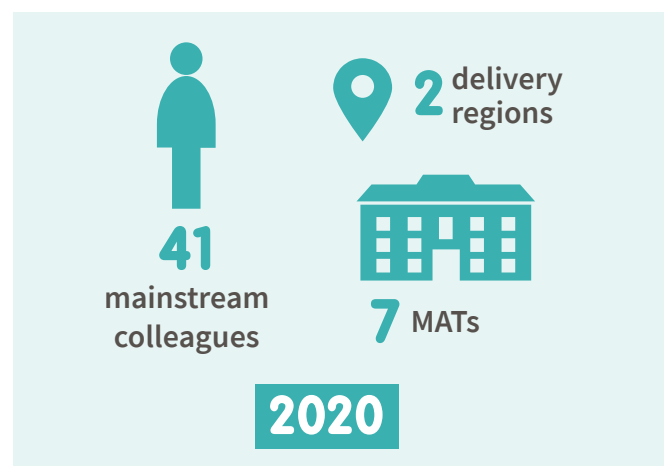
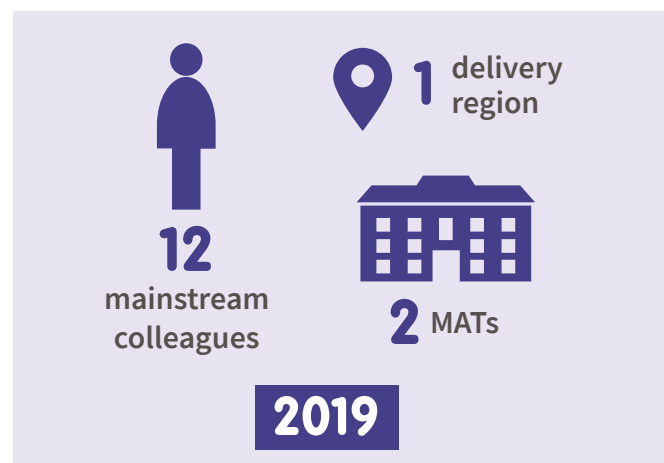
As awareness of the issue of school exclusions increases, so does the willingness to invest in measurable change in schools, and see vulnerable children thrive. This is confirmed by increasing numbers of mainstream schools and Multi-Academy Trusts enrolling on the Inclusive Leadership Course.

Engagement and feedback from participants speaks to the value they are now seeing in training on inclusion. Despite huge demands on the time of school leaders this year, **there was 96% attendance across the 1 year course** and **95% were satisfied (or very satisfied)**<sup>7</sup> with their experience.

“This is an exceptional course. The most useful CPD I have done. When I become a Headteacher, I will be ensuring staff in the school are identified to take part.”

**Mainstream senior leader**

## Growth of the Inclusive Leadership Course



The **64** mainstream school leaders attending this year will influence the education of over **57,500** pupils.

7. All Inclusive Leadership Course participants were surveyed at the end of the course. Statistics are based on the 44 responses received (out of a possible 55).



## Hannah

### Assistant Vice Principal at Dixons Unity Leeds

Hannah Boyd is the Assistant Vice Principal at Dixons Unity Leeds, a non-selective Secondary serving over 800 pupils, 45% of whom are eligible for Free School Meals. Previously rated as 'Requires Improvement' by Ofsted, the school was taken over in 2018 by Dixons Academies Trust. Hannah was determined to ensure that a rapid improvement plan didn't leave behind pupils who had higher needs.

"The desire to be more inclusive was shared by our leadership team. But for middle leaders and other staff, inclusive practice was something that they were quite worried about.

They were wondering, does that mean a move away from high expectations and standards?"

The research and frameworks which Hannah learnt on the Inclusive Leadership Course helped her to get these staff members onboard – "it provided the rationale for why we were doing it – but also the how."

This year, Dixons Unity relaunched an internal provision service for high-needs pupils at risk of exclusion. They invested in a specialist teacher, support staff, and training in trauma-informed practice and restorative practice. Some teachers were cautious but enthusiasm grew as they started to see results. The fixed term exclusion rate for these pupils has dropped from an average of 8 days per year, to just 1.6. Attendance has risen by 12%.

Hannah is also seeing growing acceptance of the wellbeing needs of all pupils, not just the most vulnerable. To provide for this, her school is launching another inclusion space where a wider group can access lighter-touch support.

"We are making sure that inclusion is everyone's responsibility, not just the pastoral team. Most importantly, the students are happier and making progress emotionally and academically."

# Inspiring action

## School development

The Difference wants to support teachers to translate their new beliefs into measurable action.



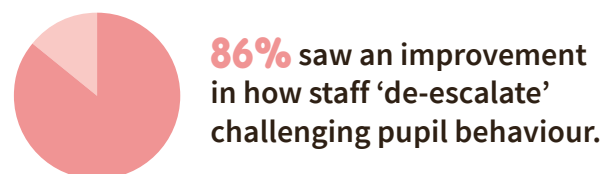
## What kind of action are Inclusive Leadership participants taking?

- Rewriting school behaviour policy to integrate a trauma-informed approach.
- Creating a designated school space for pupil mental health support, staffed by specially-trained teachers and counsellors.
- Rolling out restorative practice sessions between staff and pupils to better deal with conflict.
- Implementing a new internal provision unit that provides focused support to pupils at risk of exclusion, without sending them out of school.



## Measuring Inclusion

This year, The Difference asked course participants to report on changes they saw in their school as a result of the Inclusive Leadership Course.



Seeing positive change so quickly is particularly surprising during a year where the capacity of school leaders was stretched to an unprecedented extent. It suggests a deep commitment to improving outcomes for vulnerable learners

"Conversations with the other delegates have given me a space to process what is happening in my school... It has moved me away from 'fire fighting' and towards thinking about how to create real change."

### Mainstream School Leader

For 2021/22, The Difference will ask school leaders to baseline key indicators of inclusion in schools, such as attendance. Tracking changes in this data will help us to better understand impact.



**Tom**

Vice Principal of Great Yarmouth Primary

Tom Burt is the Vice Principal of Great Yarmouth Primary, part of Inspiration Multi-Academy Trust. In 2019 the former Inspiration CEO talked about “putting right” trust-wide issues around off-rolling, exclusions and insufficient support for special needs students.<sup>8</sup> The trust’s fixed-term exclusion rate [sat] at 17.2%, compared with...a national rate of 1.4%.<sup>9</sup> In the same year, before Tom worked there, Great Yarmouth was placed in Special Measures by Ofsted who reported “fixed-term exclusions [were] high and not reducing”. Hiring Tom and partnering with The Difference was part of “putting things right” in Great Yarmouth Primary.

Just over two years later, the school is a different place. In their recent visit, Ofsted rated it Good or Outstanding in all areas. Tom credits this improvement in part to changes implemented from the Inclusive Leadership Course.

“From the first session I knew this training would change everything. The simple, seemingly obvious, point that having an inclusive culture relates to every pupil at the school, not just those who require targeted support or specific interventions, became a cornerstone of our new ethos.”

Comments from the recent Ofsted report include:

- “Staff go the extra mile to work with families to ensure that pupils quickly receive the support they need.”
- “Pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are accessing the same ambitious curriculum. Leaders support teachers to skilfully consider pupils’ needs and adapt resources or teaching methods to make sure that pupils do not fall behind.”
- “When there are incidents of poor behaviour, the use of the nurture provision quickly remedies this. Staff ensure that pupils’ learning time is not affected.”

Tom explained that improvements stemmed from having “a clear understanding of why our pupils have barriers to learning, and providing staff with the compassion and tools to combat these situations.” The school has seen an 80% reduction in Fixed Term Exclusions and the highest recorded attendance in the school’s history. Tom will now be delivering a National Professional Qualification on Behaviour to other staff across Inspiration Trust. New CEO Gareth Stevens has committed that every school will train a leader through the Inclusive Leadership Course by 2025.

8. Hansard (2020) Oral evidence: Appointment of the Children’s Commissioner for England, HC 1030

9. Diamond (2019) Turnaround MATs must look beyond short-term gains, Schools Week.



# Amplifying results

## Sector Press and Events

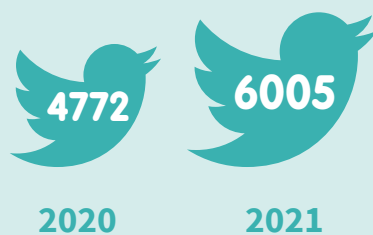
The Difference helps our community to share their inclusive action, celebrate their successes, and publicise their learnings - thereby spreading inclusive practice to thousands more educators.

This year, Difference Leaders - along with our AP and mainstream partners - have been featured in news outlets, conferences, podcasts, webinars and blogs.

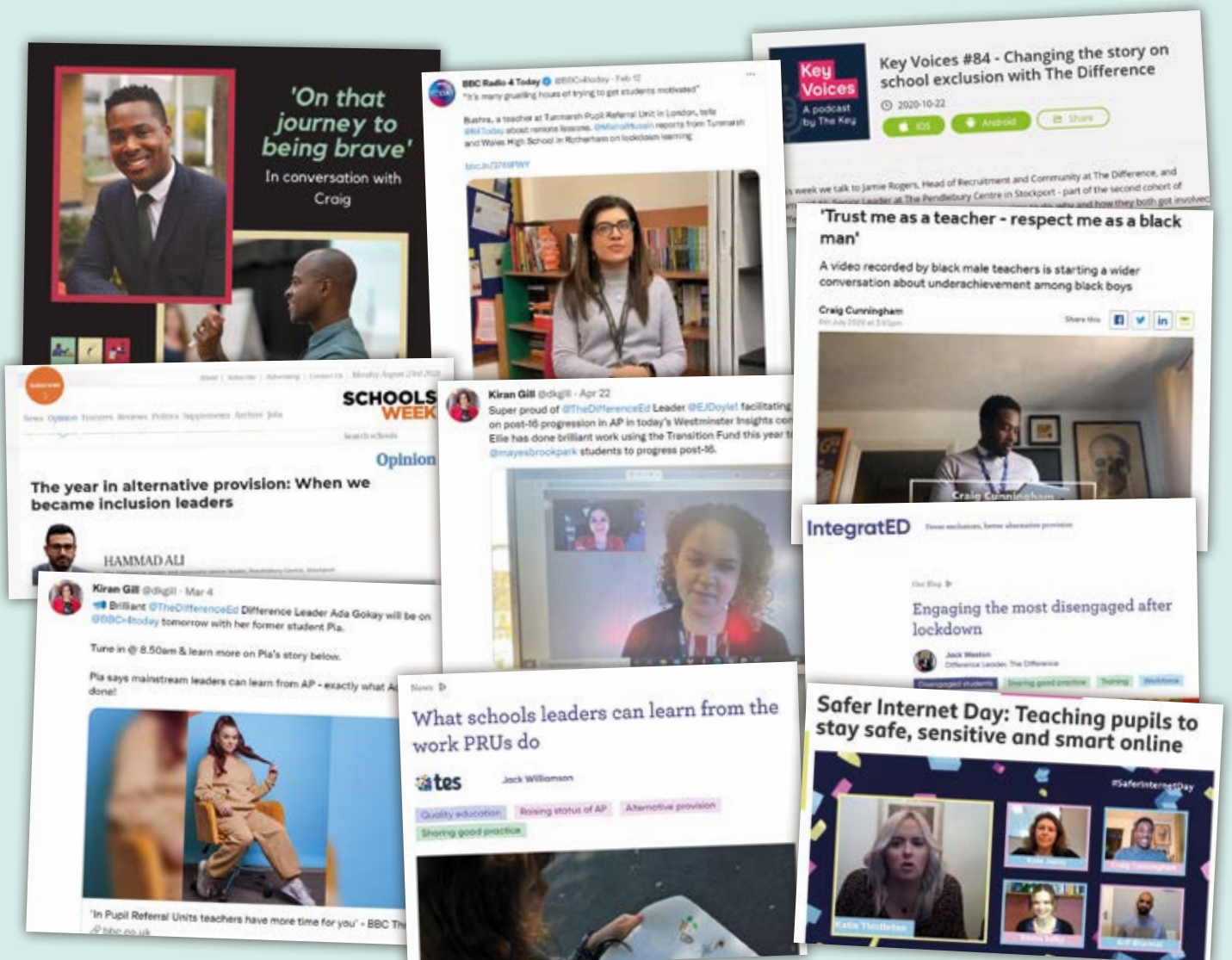
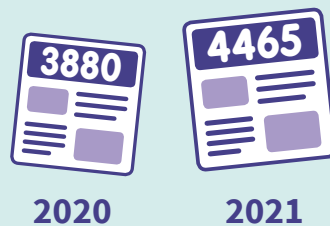
"In a post-Covid education landscape, the skill of AP practitioners in getting children back on to learning after moments of disruption or periods of absence has become a necessity for all. There is a dawning realisation that there might just be more than a little to learn from alternative provision."

Hammad, 2020 Difference Leader Schools Week December 2020

## Twitter followers:



## Four Bullet Friday subscribers:



# Policy



The Difference identifies and promotes policies that produce better outcomes for vulnerable learners and supports influential education stakeholders to implement them

# Policy: Problems and Solutions



In 2017, at the start of The Difference, exclusion was not a hot topic in the press, or amongst politicians.



**Keep exclusions in the spotlight** by continuing to draw public attention to the needs of vulnerable pupils through national press and engagement with key policymakers.



In debates around education policy, the **needs of the most vulnerable pupils** were often not high on the agenda and school exclusions were not frequently discussed.



**Support education's 'middle-tier' of policymakers** by partnering with Multi-Academy Trusts and Local Authorities on inclusive education.



# A Shifting National Context

With such a huge disruption to education due to Covid-19, rhetoric around school exclusions has become more polarised than ever.



The Difference aims to forge a new path in this debate. We support schools to keep healthy and safe boundaries. We are not a “zero exclusions” charity. However, we encourage and celebrate school leaders who are using new approaches to respond to the needs of vulnerable children. The Difference believes effective inclusive action is possible and pressing.

“What I want to really understand is, apart from Covid, what is it that is holding back the ability to make real and meaningful progress?”

**Edward Timpson, Schools Week Article May 2021**

With Covid-19, many children and young people experienced hardships which make them more vulnerable and at much greater risk of exclusion.

- **Mental health issues:** in 2020, one in six children (aged 5-16) were experiencing probable mental disorders – up from one in nine in 2017.<sup>10</sup>
- **Exposure to domestic violence:** helplines such as Refuge have reported a 60% increase in calls since the beginning of the first lockdown.<sup>11</sup>
- **Child poverty:** 8 out of 10 low income families reported being in a worse financial position than before the pandemic.<sup>12</sup>
- **Inadequate provision for learning needs:** there was a significant variation in the quality and quantity of online learning between schools, and SEN pupils particularly struggled.<sup>13</sup>
- **New criminal activity:** research suggests recruitment of young people for county lines drug activity continued, with increased targeting of certain groups.<sup>14</sup>

Clearly the need for support for pupils with escalating vulnerability is greater now than ever.

Despite exclusions being an acute symptom of this challenge, government policy-making has slowed.

**!** The 2019 Timpson Review made **30 recommendations** to tackle unfair exclusions

The government has implemented **only 6**

10. Health and Social Care Information Centre (2020), Mental Health of Children and Young People in England.

11. Refuge (2021) A Year of Lockdown.

12. CPAG (2020) Poverty in the Pandemic.

13. Daniels et al. (2020) School Exclusion Risks after COVID-19. University of Oxford.

14. UKRI (2021) Policing County Lines: Impact of Covid-19.

# Keeping Exclusions in the Spotlight

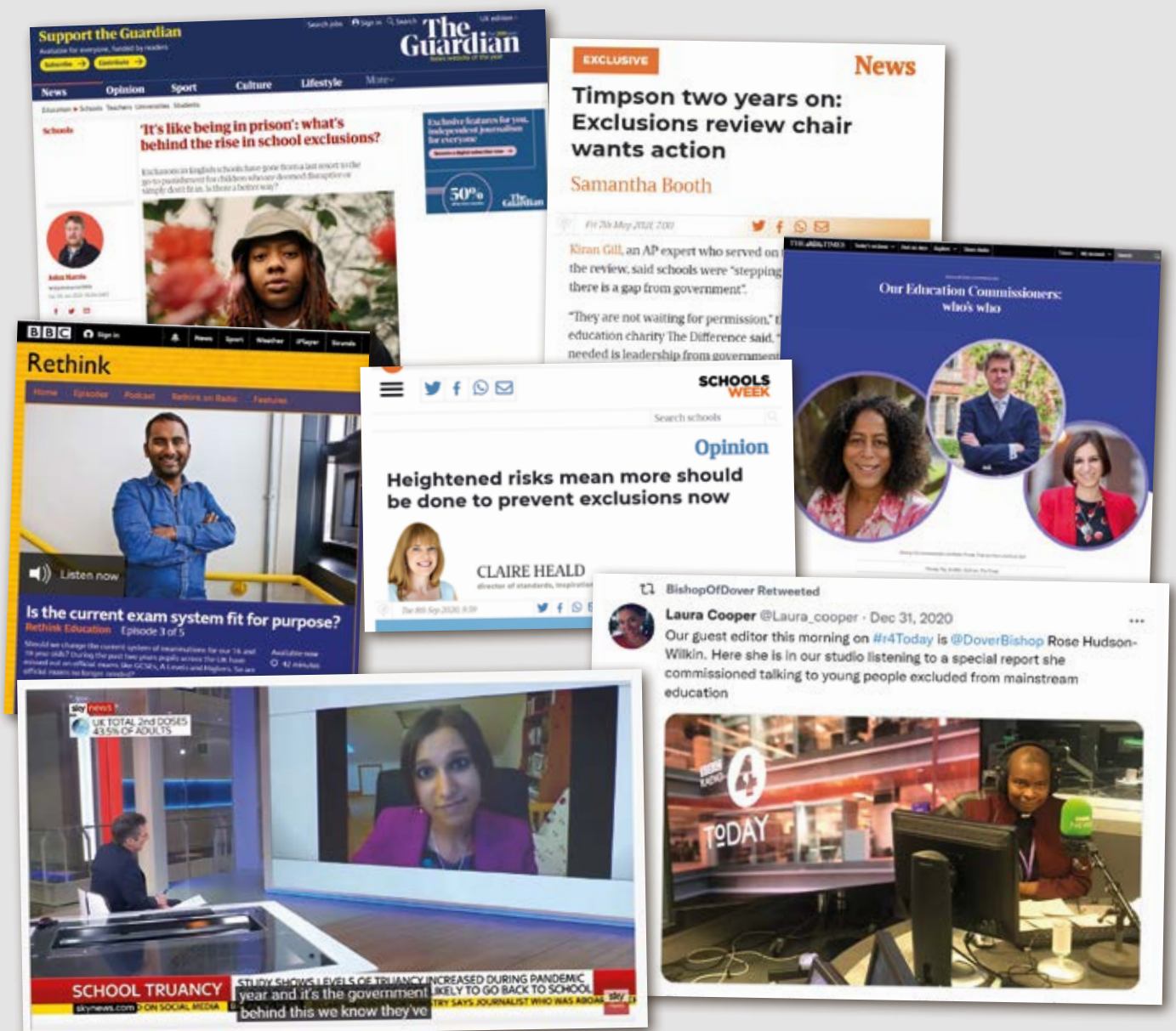
The Difference is determined that the needs of excluded children stay in the public eye and in the minds of schools, politicians and other policy-makers.

## Press Highlights from 2020/21

- CEO and Founder Kiran Gill speaking on Sky News and BBC Radio 4.
- AP Partners featured in The Guardian and BBC's Today Programme.
- Kiran appointed to the Times Education Commission alongside other leading voices in education such as Sir Anthony Seldon.

## Political Highlights from 2020/21

- Kiran Gill and AP Leader Seamus Oates presenting to the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Exclusions and Alternative Provision.
- Kiran, Samira Caterina-Monteleone (Difference Young Supporter) and Dave Whitaker (Difference Trustee) presenting to Shadow Education Secretary Kate Green.
- Kiran speaking at Labour and Liberal Democrat Party Conferences.



# Reaching Education's 'Middle-Tier'

As well as raising awareness, The Difference wants to prompt policy action.

Though there has been less capacity for action from central government this year, there has been significant interest in tackling exclusions from organisations closer to the frontline. These are the so-called 'middle tier' of policymaking. This includes large Multi Academy Trusts (MATs), local authorities (LAs), and school's inspectorate Ofsted.

Positive changes at this level would benefit the education of thousands of pupils. The Difference believes this is the most rapid route to more inclusive education at scale. This belief forms the backbone of our 2021-2025 strategy to shape national policy.

## Engage

The Difference is mapping mainstream Multi-Academy Trusts to help guide our ambitions for national partnership and reach in the next four years. There are 14 MATs in England who each run more than 10 secondary schools nationwide. The Difference is already working with 6 of these 14. We plan to keep engaging more influential MATs, as well as expanding our current partnerships.



**28** Mainstream MATs already engaged with The Difference

**62** Local Authorities with at least one Difference School Partner



## Understand

In partnership with MATs and other stakeholders, The Difference conducts targeted research to identify which schools are successfully supporting vulnerable learners and how. This research will be a much-needed contribution to the evidence base for inclusive practice – used to improve our own training and to support all school leaders taking action on exclusions.

### The Inclusive Schools Metric

In partnership with FFT Education DataLab, The Difference is developing a new metric to score how successful mainstream schools are in promoting inclusion. The tool uses data on exclusions, attendance, progress and roll-changes, and contextualises this for different school intakes. This will allow schools achieving positive outcomes in challenging contexts to be celebrated – and practice underpinning these outcomes to be shared. The Inclusive Schools Metric will be the most comprehensive attempt to evaluate mainstream inclusion in UK schools to date. Eventually, it will form the basis of a longer-term evaluation of our own programmes – such as the impact of Difference Leader Alumni in mainstream roles.



To expand on this and similar work, The Difference is hiring a Head of Research and Policy. This staff member will lead on the design and implementation of external research with a growing network of school partners.

## Influence

Proving that inclusive practice and systems can benefit all students will be key in motivating more MATs and local authorities to contribute to this culture shift. In future years, we plan to use our tools to compare progress of different schools and feed this into a national, high-profile award that celebrates schools which are becoming more inclusive.



### Constructing a MAT-wide strategy

One of the largest MATs in England has recruited The Difference to help them understand drivers of exclusion across their different schools. The findings will be used to formulate a trust-wide plan to implement inclusive best practice. Originally scheduled for 2020 and delayed due to the pandemic, we are now beginning with a comprehensive review of current practice and outcomes – including data analysis, survey, and school visits.

# Who's behind The Difference?





# The Difference Team

As part of this year's strategy development, we identified the need for additional capacity to deliver on our objectives around research, policy, and sector-influencing. This led to the establishment of the **Impact and Research Directorate** – sitting alongside the **Programme and Partnerships Directorate** and the **Operations and Finance Directorate**. With incoming new staff members, The Difference is growing to 14 full-time employees.

## Programme and Partnerships Directorate



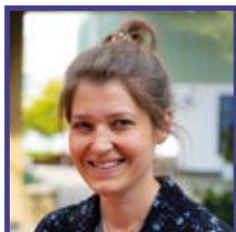
**Shaun**  
Programme Director



**Will**  
Head of Difference Leaders Programme



**Mohamed**  
Head of Inclusive Leadership Course



**Jess**  
Programme Lead



**Jane**  
Programme & Comms Officer

## Recruitment



**Jamie**  
Head of Recruitment & Community



**Sarah**  
Recruitment & Cohort Manager

## Impact and Research Directorate



**Danny**  
Impact & Research Director



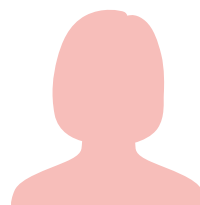
**Hiring**  
Head of Research & Policy

## Kiran



## Chief Executive Officer

## Operations and Finance Directorate



**Hiring**  
Operations & Finance Director



**Tessa**  
Operations & Programme Manager



**Mariam**  
Executive Assistant

# The Difference Coalition

Our work would not be possible without the generous support of the individuals, trusts, foundations and businesses who make up our investment coalition. The Difference benefits not only from their financial aid but also from the huge amounts of shared expertise, partnership brokerage, and networking opportunities that are offered.

We would like to extend a warm welcome and heartfelt thanks to our newest members of the coalition:



Henry Oldfield  
Trust



We are equally grateful to our other investors who continue to commit to The Difference vision, many having done so since the inception of the charity.



THE ELLIS CAMPBELL  
FOUNDATION

THE GARCIA FAMILY FOUNDATION



Garfield Weston  
FOUNDATION



RichmondGroup



# The Difference School Partners

## **Difference Leader Alumni School**

AIM North London  
Crawford Primary School  
Haberdashers' Aske's  
Hatcham College  
Leigh Academy Blackheath  
London Academy  
Woodside High School

## **Difference Leader AP Placement**

Bridgelea Primary School  
Camden Centre For Learning  
Educational Diversity Blackpool  
EKO Pathways  
Five Rivers Spires School  
Francis Barber PRU  
Haringey Learning Partnership  
Harris Aspire Academy  
Holgate Meadows School  
Joseph Norton Academy  
London East AP  
Mayesbrook Park School  
New Horizons  
New River College  
Olive AP Academy  
Orchardside School  
Pendlebury Centre  
South Quay College  
Southwark Inclusive  
Learning Service  
Springwell Grantham  
Springwell Leeds  
Springwell Lincolnshire  
Springwell Mablethorpe  
TBAP Beachcroft  
TBAP Courtyard  
The Key Education Centre  
The Limes  
The Rowans AP  
Tunmarsh Centre  
WAC Arts College  
Wey Valley College

## **Inclusive Leadership Course School**

AIM North London  
Archbishop Holgate's  
Archbishop Sentamu  
Ark Academy  
Ark Acton Academy

Ark Alexandra  
Ark All Saints Academy  
Ark Blacklands Primary  
Ark Blake Academy  
Ark Burlington  
ARK John Keats Academy  
Ark Kings Academy  
Aspire Academy  
Barlby High School  
Bay House School  
Baysgarth School  
Beacon High  
Bishop Challoner School  
Bishop Heber High School  
Bolingbroke Academy  
Bradford AP Academy  
Brune Park School  
Buile Hill Academy  
Camrose Primary  
Cardinal Pole RC School  
Clapton Girls' Academy  
Co-op Academy Manchester  
Co-op Academy Walkden  
Cottenham Village College  
Cowes Enterprise College  
Cromer Academy  
Dixons Cottingley Academy  
Dixons McMillan Academy  
Dixons Unity Academy  
Dunraven School  
East Point Academy  
Ellesmere Port Catholic High  
Ernulf Academy  
Evelyn Grace Academy  
Everton Free School  
Firth Park Academy  
Great Yarmouth Charter Academy  
Great Yarmouth Primary  
Harris Academy Riverside  
Hatcham College  
Haverstock School  
Hethersett Academy  
Highlands Primary School  
Holme Valley Primary School  
Hope Sentamu Aspire Trust  
King Edward VI School Lichfield  
Leyton Sixth Form College  
London Enterprise Academy  
Longsands Academy

Malet Lambert School  
Meadowhead School  
Merstham Park School  
Montpelier High School  
Morpeth School  
Mulberry School for Girls  
New Bewerley Community Primary  
Newman RC College  
North Leamington School  
Oasis Academy Brightstowe  
Oasis Academy Isle of Sheppey  
Oasis Academy Leesbrook  
Oasis Academy Silvertown  
Ormiston Horizon Academy  
Ormiston Six Villages  
Our Lady's Catholic High School  
Passmores Academy  
Poppleton Road Primary School  
Randal Cremer Primary School  
Reach Academy  
Riverside School  
Rowner Junior School  
Ryburn Valley High School  
Sarah Bonnell School  
Sir Isaac Newton Sixth Form  
Sir John Deane's Sixth Form  
Solihull Academy  
South Quay College  
St Mary's College  
St Nicholas Catholic High School  
Stoke Newington School  
Stormont House School  
The Catholic High School  
The County High School Leftwich  
The Gipsy Hill Federation  
The Hewett Academy  
The Kassia Academy  
The Marvell College  
The Totteridge Academy  
The Whitby High School  
The Whitley AP Academy  
Towers School and Sixth Form  
Upton-by-Chester High School  
Victoria Drive PRU  
Waterhead Academy  
Wayland Academy  
Weaverham High School  
Woodside High School  
Wybourn Community Primary

# Staff Profiles



**Kiran Gill**  
Chief Executive Officer

Kiran runs the organisation, leading the team, the strategy for impact at scale and the external partnerships The Difference holds with policymakers, philanthropists and press. She also still delivers on elements of The Difference Leaders Programme, works as an assessor in our recruitment process and staffs our consultancy and research work with external organisations like Ark and the Violence Reduction Unit. In 2019/20, Kiran led the teacher attraction work at The Difference, which is now being taken on by new hire Jamie.

Kiran began her career in inner-city London, as an English teacher in schools serving the most deprived postcodes in the country. After five years on the frontline, Kiran left to work in education policy, searching for solutions to the rising numbers of vulnerable children falling out of schools. Kiran was working at the Social Mobility Commission when she conceived the idea for *The Difference*. She has led its work full-time since January 2017.



**Shaun Brown**  
Programme Director

Shaun leads the strategy and growth of our programmes, and derives the learning from this delivery into practice to be shared across the sector, along with policy implications. Shaun builds relationships with schools for excluded pupils across the country, delivers significantly on our programmes and staffs The Difference's consultancy, research and external affairs work.

Shaun's innovative safeguarding work has achieved national recognition from Ofsted. He is a specialist in whole-school inclusion, trauma-aware practice, multi-agency working and contextual safeguarding. After working as a Head of Geography for several years, Shaun became more interested in the pupils who were falling through the gaps. This inspired Shaun to spend a decade teaching and leading in pupil referral units, before returning to mainstream to apply that knowledge to strategically reduce exclusion as a Deputy Head. Shaun's career route and impact was a case study in The Difference's IPPR research and has formed a blueprint for the Difference Leaders Programme.



**Will Moss**  
Head of Difference  
Leadership Programme

Will leads the Difference Leaders Programme, coordinating and delivering training inputs, managing Difference Leaders' wellbeing and effectiveness in their posts, and developing the systems within delivery for scale post-pilot.

Will is a specialist in teaching and learning, and school improvement. Will has led initial teacher training courses and in-school professional development, recognised as Gold standard by the Institute for Education. His experience in school turnaround has led to him providing consultancy leadership support to failing schools and transforming teaching and learning capacity, as recognised by improved Ofsted judgements.



**Mohamed Abdallah**  
Head of the Inclusive  
Leadership Course

Mohamed joined the Difference in 2020 and was brought into the team to grow our relationships with mainstream schools. He leads on The Difference's Inclusive Leadership Course, helping to refine its content and delivery, as well as to understand its impact on reducing mainstream exclusions. Mohamed will also support The Difference's growth in research and consultancy work to shape policy in multi-academy trusts and local authorities.

Mohamed's career began in youth work and pupil referral units, before spending over a decade leading pioneering inclusive practice at the 'Outstanding' all-through mainstream, Dunraven School. Mohamed's use of an Asset-Based Community Development approach – empowering young people and families – alongside a multi-disciplinary approach to safeguarding and inclusion drove down both fixed term and permanent exclusions across the school.



Jess Hughes  
Programme Lead

Jess has just joined The Difference in September 2021 for the start of the school year. As part of our Programme Directorate, she will be supporting our growing numbers of Difference Leaders, particularly in their efforts to improve literacy and attainment for pupils in AP and mainstream schools.

Jess brings a wealth of education experience, most recently from her seven years at School21 – a pioneering all-through school in Stratford, East London. As their Head of Professional Development, Jess has played a key role in implementing the innovative pedagogical approaches which has seen School21 rated ‘Outstanding’ in all categories by Ofsted.



Jane Stevenson  
Programme &  
Communications Officer

Originally joining The Difference to support in Operations, Jane was promoted in 2021 to a new role within the Programme team. Jane now plays a key role in the building of The Difference community, working on on event management, communications .and social media. She also continues to provide logistical support to other members of the Programme team.

Jane trained as a mental health nurse and brings her problem-solving, organisational skills and strong emotional sensitivity to a role which ensures the charity works!



**Jamie Rogers**  
Head of Recruitment & Community

Jamie joined The Difference in 2020 to help grow our ability to reach increasing numbers of teachers beyond our programmes through our communications and sector-influencing work. He also leads the recruitment process for Difference Leaders, and participants on our mainstream Inclusive Leadership Course.

Jamie was one of the youngest headteachers in the country, where he transformed an 'inadequate' school, with low levels of safety and wellbeing for children and staff, into a thriving school with strong community and attainment. Jamie brought new funding into his school, re-branded its perception within its local community, and inspired staff to achieve previously unimagined success with children who needed their support.



**Sarah Worth**  
Recruitment & Cohort Manager

Sarah is a founding member of The Difference, joining the team in 2018. In her current post, she manages the selection process for our Difference Leaders, pastoral support to underpin their retention on the programme, and develops the cohort events which build their potential to have impact as a community beyond their impact as individuals.

Sarah started working with excluded pupils as a teaching assistant, but found herself doing less assisting and more teaching. Without many qualified teachers around, Sarah experienced first-hand the injustices that brought her to The Difference. Sarah previously worked as Chief of Staff at The Difference, managing the office, partnership relationships with schools, supporters and The Difference Leaders.



**Danny Swift**  
Impact & Research Director

Danny's leadership at The Difference covers Finance and Operations, Programme Evaluation, Research, Business Planning and Strategy. Danny joined The Difference in 2017, and led the establishment of The Difference as an independent charity, ready to deliver the Difference Leaders Programme. In 2019/20, Danny led the Recruitment process for Difference Leaders and Placement process for matching teachers to partner schools. He now line-manages the growth of this work, whilst developing The Difference's ability to research and learn from its programmes.

Danny joined the Teach First programme after his Masters in Physics & Philosophy, wanting to improve university access for disadvantaged children in challenging schools. He was successful in this ambition, teaching and leading maths in Manchester's Moss Side, and later in inner-city London. Danny started to become curious about the pupils who disappeared from his school register and where they went, and began to focus his energy away from Oxbridge applications, and towards the students for whom getting into, and staying in, school each day was an achievement.

Danny was eventually drawn to a research project into school exclusions at IPPR, eventually co-authoring the *Making the Difference* report. He has been developing and delivering the strategy for the charity ever since.



**Anna Ritchie**  
Development & Impact Manager

A new joiner in 2021, Anna came onto the team to support with fundraising and impact measurement. She splits her time between liaising with our growing investment coalition and helping the wider Difference team to capture and evaluate all of their hard work.

At her previous role in the homelessness sector, Anna worked as a frontline caseworker as well as on fundraising. Supporting adults who often had very challenging experiences in early life, she was motivated to look for organisations who were tackling root causes of disadvantage – which brought her to The Difference.





**Tessa Jennett**  
Operations & Programme Manager

Tessa has worked in Operations at The Difference since the 2018 Recruitment season. Tessa's role now encompasses finance, HR, operational and administrative support, as well as managing events.

An alumna of the Year Here programme, it was through working in a pastoral role in an inner city London special school that Tessa realised her ambition to improve support for vulnerable young people. She also leads her own enterprise, Lemonade, supporting children's mental health, two days a week.



**Mariam Olusunmade**  
Executive Assistant

A new team member in October 2021, Mariam has joined the team to help assist our directors and CEO in their diary management. Mariam will be ensuring that the Directors can carry out their important roles by facilitating smooth communication between them and external stakeholders, as well as coordinating their meetings.

Mariam graduated from her law degree earlier in the year. With her experience in the educational sector, she is able to transfer her understanding of the importance of childhood development and education to the role. Her previous admin role means that she also has a solid skillset when it comes to organisation and balancing competing priorities.

# The Difference Trustees



**Christine Megson** (Chair)  
Independent consultant



**Darren Xiberras**  
University of South Wales



**James Benamor**  
Richmond Group



**Carly Mitchell**  
Aim Academies Trust



**Jo Hutchinson**  
Education Policy Institute



**Claire Heald**  
Inspiration Trust



**Dave Whitaker**  
Wellspring Academy Trust

## Christine Megson MBE Chair

Christine's career includes roles as Principal of Stafford Further Education College, leading on establishing the first academies at the Department for Education; public service redesign in the Cabinet Office; systemic change to tackling childhood obesity in the Department of Health including starting up the new charity the School Food Trust; developing place-based approaches to vulnerable families in Sheffield. Christine's current leadership work ranges from Sheffield Hallam University, The Key for School Leaders, coaching co-headteachers and running the Fabian Women's Mentoring Programme for women aspiring to a greater role in politics and public life. In governance, Christine has been a non-executive on a hospital trust, a charity trustee and is currently a founding adviser developing King's Cross Academy.

## Darren Xiberras Finance

Darren is currently Chief Finance Officer at the University of South Wales, and immediately before that held the same role for the education charity Teach First. Darren is a fully qualified accountant

with over fifteen years' experience at Board level in many for profit and not-for-profit organisations delivering services to the general public and public sector institutions. As well as acting as The Difference trustee, Darren is also a co-opted member of the Audit & Risk Committee of the National Citizen Service and a trustee at Solent Student Union where he also chairs the Finance Committee. He also chairs the Welsh Higher Education Finance Directors' Group and represents Wales on the British Universities Finance Directors' Group (BUFDG) Executive Committee.

## Dave Whitaker Safeguarding

Dave Whitaker is Director of Learning at Wellspring Trust, with responsibility for the 11 alternative provision and special schools within it, across Yorkshire and the Humber. As well as running 22 schools, the Trust has supported 80 more mainstream schools across the country and, since it was set up, has never permanently excluded a pupil. Dave is a founding member of grassroots think-tank the Headteachers' Roundtable; and leads a teaching school from within the Wellspring

Trust. Dave brings insight into AP policy and funding, alongside excellent practice. He supports The Difference's Executive in building partnerships with schools for excluded pupils, listening to the policy insights from this group, and continuously improving our training to support AP school improvement.

## **James Benamor HR**

James founded The Richmond Group in 1991. Since then, it has gone on to make the Sunday Times Fast Track list as one of the fastest growing UK companies, and is rated as one of the 100 best companies to work for. In recent years, James has split his time between the Richmond Group and investment in education technology/philanthropy benefitting marginalised young people. James' support for The Difference is partially driven by the relationships he built with excluded pupils in Moss Side, through the BBC's 'Secret Millionaire' show, where James worked in a school for excluded pupils. James brings to The Difference's governance not only experience in growing start-up organisations and teams, but from his own life brings an insight into the lives and potential of some of those young people we serve who are currently on the wrong path, but have the capacity to build positive things for society.

## **Carly Mitchell**

Carly Mitchell is Director of Academies at AIM Academies Trust, a small multi-academy trust in North London. Carly's work focuses on school improvement; developing pedagogy, curriculum and behaviour and culture across the small family of schools within both secondary and primary phase. Previously Carly led school improvement within Oasis Community Learning and was the Founding Principal of Oasis Academy South Bank, a secondary free school in Waterloo. The foundation of love, nurture and a rigorous academic focus at the Academy saw disadvantaged students out-performing their national counterparts. Carly's commitment to inclusion also saw Oasis Southbank take many children on roll who had been excluded from other schools – giving vulnerable young people a second chance. Carly is a 2004 Ambassador of Teach First and a 2007 alumnus of Future Leaders: two pioneering leadership programmes for teachers.

## **Claire Heald**

Claire Heald is Standards Director at Inspiration Trust (a multi-academy trust in the East of England), leading on school improvement, curriculum development, teacher and leader development and inclusion. She is also the Executive Principal of Jane Austen College. Claire founded Jane Austen College in 2014, a free school specialising in English. She is an experienced educational leader and speaker and a National Leader of Education (NLE). Claire applies her expertise as a Difference Trustee to our work building our relationships with mainstream schools to share practice across the sector, and continuously improving our training and consultancy services to support mainstream schools in improving school inclusion.

## **Jo Hutchinson**

Jo is Director for Social Mobility and Vulnerable Learners at the think-tank Education Policy Institute (EPI). After graduating from the London School of Economics with a Masters (MPA) in Public and Economic Policy, Jo spent ten years as a statistician at the Department for Education, specialising in analysis and research of school outcomes to support policies including behaviour and attendance, floor standards and accountability, and attainment gaps. Major projects Jo led on included the development and launch of the Disadvantage Attainment Gap Index, a world-first application of mean rank difference methodology to deliver standardised tracking of educational inequality across changing assessment measures; evidence for the London Mayor's Education Inquiry; and international evidence for the National Curriculum Review.

Since joining EPI in 2016, Jo's published research includes EPI's annual report series on disadvantage gaps, and reports on grammar schools and social mobility, the attainment of pupils with English as an additional language, access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, and the growing prevalence of unexplained pupil exits from schools. Current research includes patterns of access to support for special educational needs and disabilities, investigating Ofsted's intractable schools, and the educational experiences of refugee and asylum-seeking children. Jo brings this knowledge of education policy and research to The Difference, and supports The Difference executive in planning our research, influencing and evaluation work.

# The Difference

**The Difference** is an education charity that tackles the social justice issue of school exclusions. Our purpose is to improve the life outcomes of vulnerable learners by raising the status and expertise of those who educate them.

 [www.the-difference.com](http://www.the-difference.com)  [info@the-difference.com](mailto:info@the-difference.com)  
 [@TheDifferenceEd](https://twitter.com/TheDifferenceEd)  [TheDifferenceEd](https://www.facebook.com/TheDifferenceEd)  [the-differenceuk](https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-differenceuk)

The Difference is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. Charity number: 1184843