


The Difference



IMPACT
REPORT
2021-22



The Difference exists
to change the story
on school exclusions.

Our mission is to
improve the lives of
vulnerable children by
raising the status and
expertise of those
who educate them.

The
Difference

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Charity number: 1184843

Design & layout: www.causeeffectdesign.co.uk

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GLOSSARY

School Leaders are responsible for the management and strategic direction of their schools. Senior leaders include headteachers, deputy or assistant headteachers. Middle leaders include Heads of Year or Subject.

Multi-Academy Trusts or MATs are groups of schools that come together to form a charitable trust. Each trust has overarching responsibility for the governance of its schools and their performance. The government aims for every school to be part of a MAT by 2030.

Alternative Provision or AP schools (including Pupil Referral Units) provide education for children who cannot attend mainstream schools. This can be due to exclusion, behaviour, or illness. There is little consensus on what constitutes a quality AP education.

Managed Moves are voluntary arrangements between two schools to move a student as an alternative to exclusion, with agreement of parents/caregivers and the student. Moves can be to mainstream or AP schools. They do not show up in official exclusions data.

Our Purpose

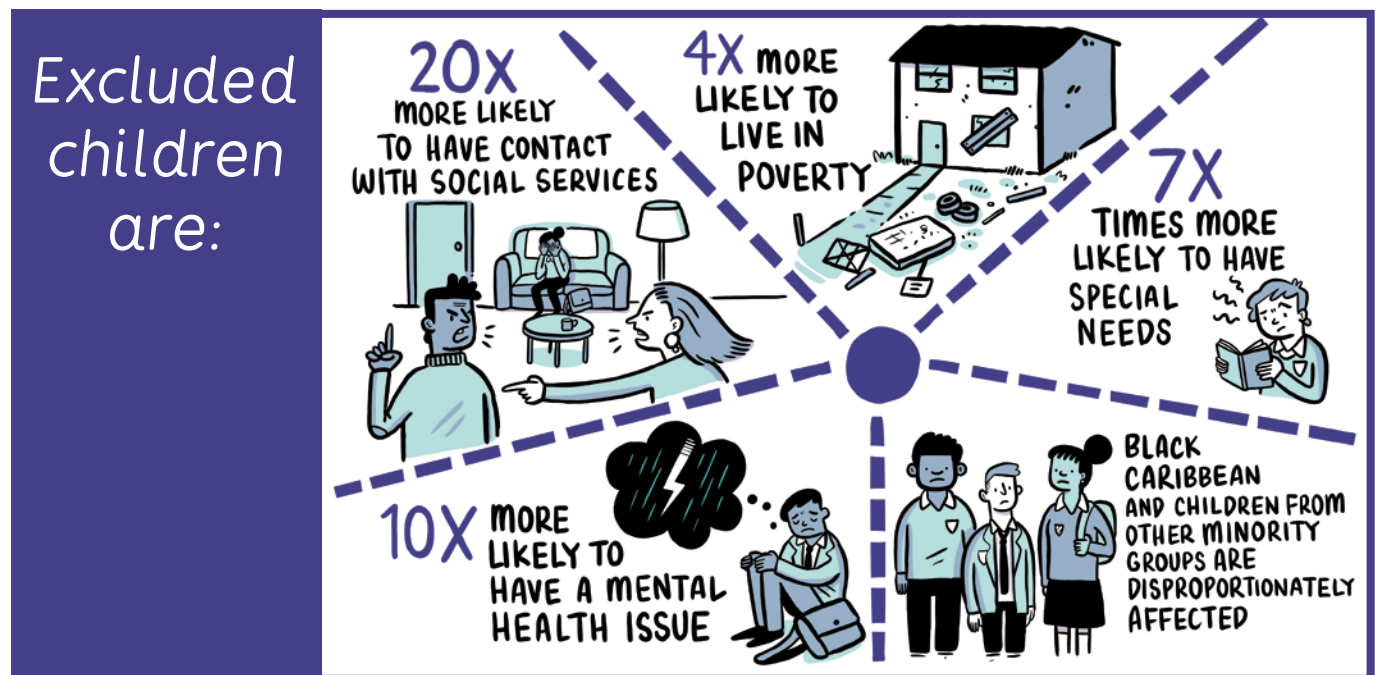
In 2017, Difference founder Kiran Gill published a groundbreaking report with think-tank IPPR that shed light on school exclusions as a social justice issue. The report showed that England's most vulnerable children are disproportionately affected by exclusions.

While thousands of children are permanently excluded each year, the true scale of the problem is even larger. Hundreds of thousands experience less visible forms of exclusion – internal exclusions, repeat suspensions, managed moves and unexplained school exits.¹

All too often, these children miss out on a quality education. The resulting outcomes are disastrous for them and for society.

The Difference was founded to change this story.

The Difference finds and develops transformational school leaders through two unique programmes – the Difference Leadership Programme and the Inclusive Leadership Course. These leaders go on to improve practice and systems in their schools to better meet the needs of all children. To help scale their impact, The Difference influences the education sector as a whole to engage with and invest in evidence-led inclusion.



A note on reporting impact: Having launched in 2019, The Difference is still a young charity. **Our ultimate goal is to reduce school exclusions across England by 2030.** While this goal remains years off, we are committed to tracking and sharing other indicators of our progress.

Measuring impact on school exclusions is complex, even more so after Covid. We therefore seek a variety of ways to track our impact, collecting data from the school leaders we train, partner school, excluded young people and other educators. We identify trends, collect case-studies and assess our performance relative to annual targets.

In this report, we share key impact, main challenges, and core learnings from 2021-22. We hope that you, like us, are inspired by the meaningful changes made by teachers, schools, and young people across the country.

1. Centre for Social Justice (2021) IntegratEd Annual Report

The Difference Model

ISSUES

- ! Vulnerable children are often failed by the education system
- ! Societal belief that reducing exclusions is neither desirable nor feasible
- ! Lack of inclusion expertise in mainstream schools
- ! AP schools struggle to hire experienced leaders and qualified teachers

ACTIVITIES

- ★ **Difference Leadership Programme**
An intensive training programme for high-potential existing or aspiring inclusive school leaders. Involves two years as an AP senior leader, plus 290 hours of teacher development delivered by The Difference.
- ★ **Inclusive Leadership Course**
One-year of professional development for existing mainstream senior leaders. Six training days plus practical assignments and specialist Difference support.
- ★ **Community Communications**
Spreading understanding of inclusion and best practice to a wider education audience through bulletins, blogs, social media, podcasts and conferences.
- ★ **Research & Consultancy**
Investigating what works to support vulnerable students and feeding this into publications, our programmes, and MAT-commissioned consultancy projects.
- ★ **Policy Influencing**
Work to influence national and local policy-makers, as well as influential MATs, to create inclusive policies and systems.

OUTPUTS

-  **Transformational school leaders with inclusion expertise**
-  **Clear commitment to inclusion from teachers, schools, MATs and government**

OUTCOMES

- ✓ Positive change in inclusion beliefs and practice across all schools
- ✓ Reduction in school exclusions across England
- ✓ Better education and life outcomes for vulnerable students

Tyson's Story

“The thought of getting permanently excluded... it's very scary. If you do, college or university might not accept you and you might not have a proper job. And if you don't have a job, you might get homeless. You know what I mean?”



Tyson* was in Year 7 when we spoke to him. Smiley and energetic, his favourite subjects are PE and science. His dream job is to be a professional boxer.

Tyson was also at risk of permanent exclusion from school.

To try to avoid this, he was on short-term placement at an Alternative Provision school partnered with The Difference. Staff and leaders at this school provided intensive support to help Tyson better manage his learning, emotions and behaviour.

“When I first came in I was kind of angry and kind of nervous at the same time. So then I would get agitated or just annoyed with anything. But I got more comfortable. I got to know teachers better and they got to know me better.

If you're bad in your normal school and then you come here, you just kind of reflect. You get better in your behaviour. Fighting less or doing bad stuff less. They help you to think, you shouldn't do this because it's not worth it.

I like it here. But I prefer to go to my normal school, I miss it there. I don't wanna get kicked out fully.”

Tyson's worries about his prospects were he to be permanently excluded were not unfounded.

Just **12%** of students in AP schools gained a basic pass in GCSE English and Maths in 2021, compared to 72% of students in all state-funded schools.²

1 in 3 students who attend AP schools will drop out of education, employment or training at 16, compared to 1 in 17 students from all state-funded schools.³

£370,000 The estimated cost of excluding just one young person in lifetime education, benefits, healthcare and criminal justice costs.⁴

Over **47,000** students were educated in the alternative provision sector in 2021/22.⁵

The majority of excluded students face a difficult journey. Apart from the effects of the exclusion itself, they go on to attend Alternative Provision schools with significant funding and staffing challenges, often limiting academic and broader opportunities. Education and life outcomes are, too often, shockingly poor.

Happily, Tyson – with the support of leaders and staff at his Alternative Provision school – managed to achieve his goal and has returned to mainstream school for Year 8.

The Difference believes Tyson's success should be the norm, not the exception.

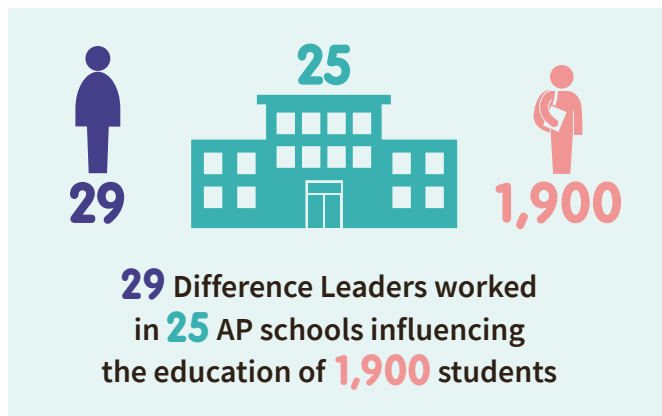
*Tyson is a pseudonym chosen by the student. The photo is not of Tyson.

2. Department for Education (2022) Key Stage 4 Performance, Academic Year 2020/21
3. Department for Education (2021) Key Stage 4 Destination Measures
4. Gill et al (2017) *Making The Difference* IPPR
5. Department for Education (2022) Schools, pupils and their Characteristics

This Year: Transformational Leaders

School leaders with inclusion expertise drive positive change in their schools and across the sector. As more schools recognise and respond to the needs of all students, we reduce the need to exclude.

The Difference Leadership Programme:



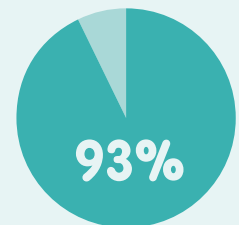
"This has been a wonderful experience for me. I would go so far as to say transformational in my development as a leader... my faith in the possibilities for education as a whole has been restored."

Gillian La Rocque, 2020 Difference Leader

10 out of 12 Difference Leader graduates achieved promotions to more senior leadership roles

93% of Difference Leaders agree or strongly agree that they are satisfied with the Difference Leadership Programme

According to their Headteachers, 93% of Difference Leaders had evidenced positive impact on their AP school



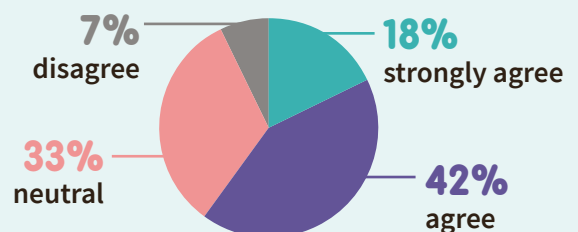
The Inclusive Leadership Course:

66 mainstream leaders, working across schools spanning 25 MATs, 32 local authorities and over 60,000 students

"Working with The Difference has had, and will have, the single biggest impact on the way we work with young people and how we shape ourselves as a truly inclusive school community."

Jemima Reilly, Headteacher of Morpeth Secondary School with three ILC-trained Senior Leaders

60% reported that Inclusive Leadership Course (ILC) learnings have already supported reduced exclusions



98% would recommend the course to a colleague

This Year:

Clear Commitment to Inclusion

Commitment of time and resources to inclusion - from teachers, MATs, and government – creates a fairer, more effective education system. The Difference inspires such commitment by expanding and sharing the evidence-base for inclusion.

Inspiring educators

664 educators registered interest in applying for the Difference Leadership Programme and moving to work in AP

75% of surveyed applicants⁶ agreed or strongly agreed that ‘Connecting with The Difference has made me more likely to consider working in Alternative Provision in the future.’

Over **350** educators came together for our IncludEd conference in November 2021 to share and learn about inclusive best practice

Motivating MATs and government

44 Multi-Academy-Trusts across England now employ a Difference-trained Senior Leader.

The Difference completed its first MAT-commissioned consultancy on inclusion.

“The Difference’s consultancy gave us valuable new insights and helped us identify achievable objectives, as well as highlighting our strengths. We’re excited to take this work forward and improve outcomes for all our students.”

Venessa Willms OBE, Director of Education at Ark

The Difference hosted a roundtable discussion for the Department of Education regarding the recent Green Paper on improving the AP and SEND system.

Our Research Directorate was awarded funding by Youth Endowment Fund and Education Endowment Foundation to conduct research into internal AP, in partnership with NFER.



“I attended [IncludEd] and feel totally inspired. A life-changing encounter”
From a Tweet by an IncludEd 21 delegate

6. We received responses from 104 (16%) of the 664 educators who registered interest in joining the Difference Leadership Programme this year.

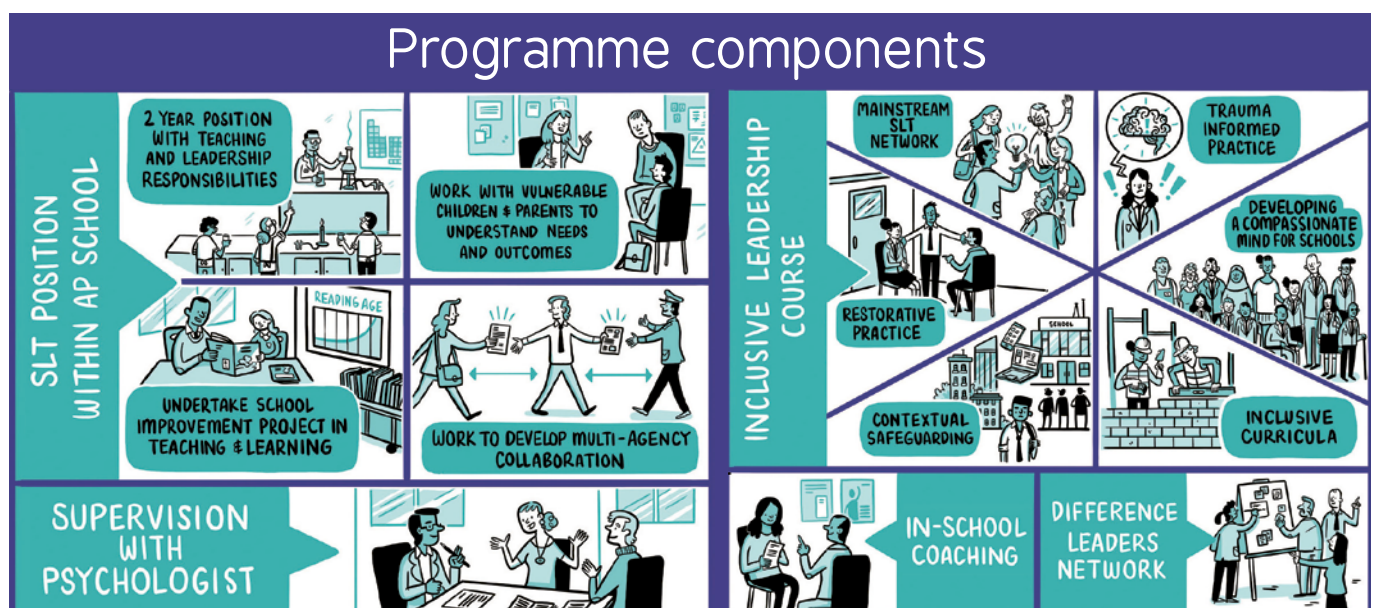


Developing Transformational Leaders

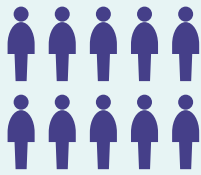
The Difference works to raise the status and expertise of educators working with vulnerable children. This, of course, includes those children who have already experienced exclusion and are educated in AP.

But most children experiencing vulnerability are still in mainstream schools. Inclusive leaders must reach them there, supporting them to achieve better outcomes and avoid future exclusion.

The **Difference Leadership Programme** finds exceptional educators and equips them with inclusion expertise through 290 hours of teacher development. Alongside this training, they spend two years as a senior leader in an AP school – immersed in a setting that supports the highest needs students. After completing the programme, Difference Leaders progress onto new leadership roles where they use their skills and experience to develop more inclusive schools.



This year, we worked with:



10 Difference Leader Alumni from the 2019 Cohort



29 current Difference Leaders across the 2020 and 2021 Cohorts



19 Difference Leaders recruited for the 2022 Cohort

“Though challenging, I value my time on the Difference Leadership Programme so much. It added another element to my leadership and helped me land my dream job. My headteacher is keen for me to take Difference learning and use it to shape my role.”

Neena, 2020 Difference Leader, now Head of Year and Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead at Ark Soane school



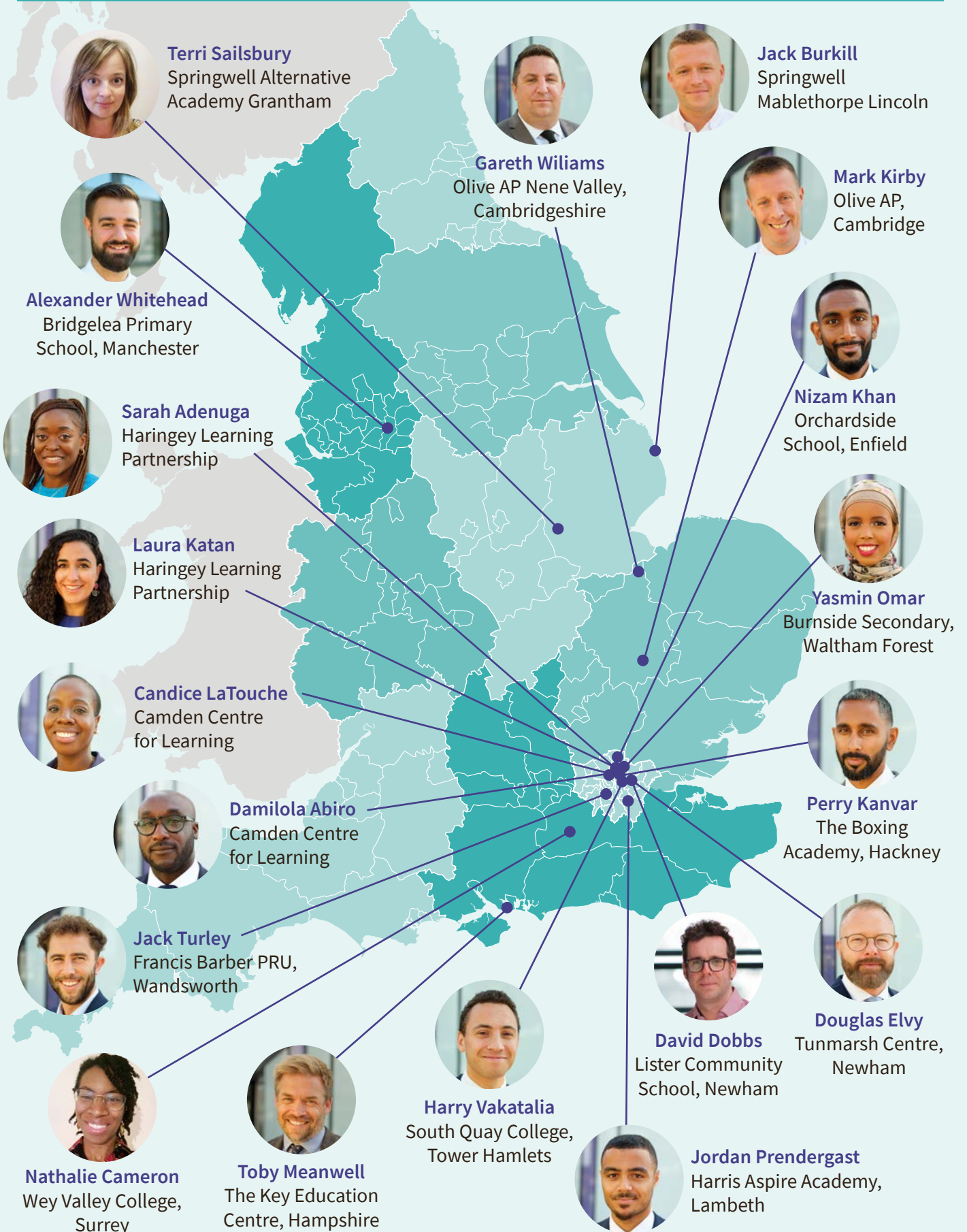
Challenge

For our 2022 Cohort, we recruited and placed 19 leaders, falling slightly short of our target of 20. Key barriers include ongoing budget difficulties for AP schools post-pandemic and the challenge of finding the right vacancies to match the strongest Difference Leader candidates.

Learning

While the majority of Difference Leaders will continue to be placed in AP schools, next year we may pilot a number of test & learn placements in other settings - though still those that work primarily with children who have been excluded, or are at risk of exclusion. In doing so, we would test the suitability of a broader range of placements for developing inclusion expertise.

The 2022 Cohort is made up of 19 Difference Leaders, placed in schools across 15 local authorities in England – including 5 new partner schools.



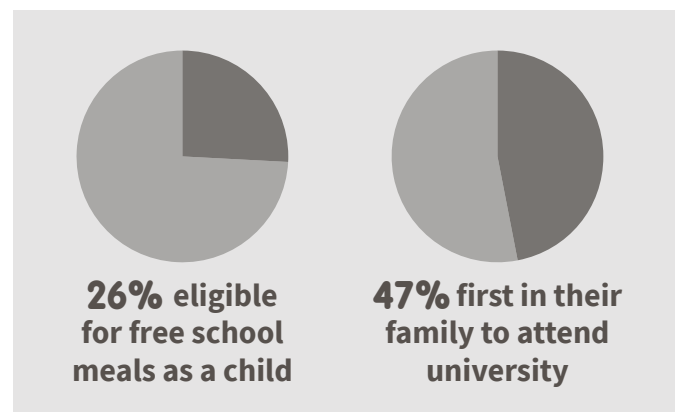
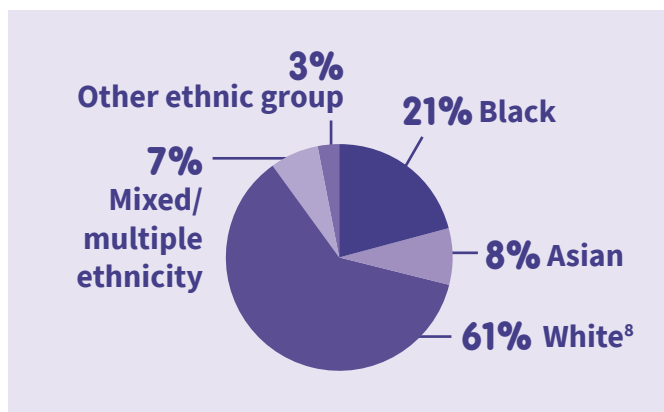
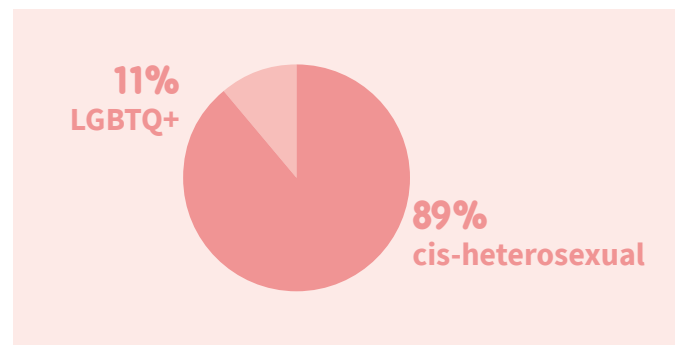
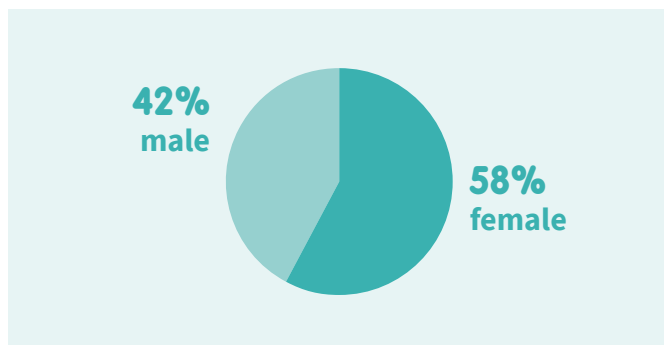
Diversity at The Difference

Challenging inequality is central to the work of The Difference. Children with certain marginalised identities – such as Black Caribbean, Gypsy Roma Traveller or diagnosed with a special educational need – are disproportionately likely to be excluded.

Teachers from minoritised ethnic groups and female teachers are significantly less likely to become senior leaders or headteachers.⁷

We are proud to be bucking these trends through our recruitment and career development of a diverse cohort of school leaders. Diverse leadership can improve cultural sensitivity in schools, disrupt harmful stereotyping, and lead to a more equitable education system overall.

Out of the 62 Difference Leaders recruited so far:



The Difference also recognises the work to be done within our own organisation to fully reflect our commitment to diversity and equity. This year, we have:

- **Established an EDI Working Group** of staff and trustees to improve course content and support for staff and programme participants – especially for those who may face discrimination in schools.
- **Appointed Difference Leader Diversity and Inclusion Reps** who will act as spokespeople for their cohorts, feeding back on their experiences and challenging the team.
- **Implemented proactive hiring plans** to ensure gender and racial diversity, particularly for senior leadership and trustee appointments.
- **Launched recruitment for our Youth Engagement Board** to create space for the voices of young people with experience of exclusion to feed into our work.

7. NFER (2022) ‘Racial equality in the teacher workforce’; TES (2022) ‘Female teachers significantly less likely to become heads’

8. In England, 91% of all teachers and 94.6% of Senior Leaders & Headteachers are White – compared to 85.1% of the working-age population and 65.5% of pupils.

Tracking Alumni Impact

Our first Difference Leader Cohort graduated in July 2021. Nine out of ten Difference Leaders progressed to senior leadership roles – six of them back to mainstream. All six have continued as mainstream senior leaders in September 2022.

Challenge

Tracking impact on exclusions is complex: it can take years not months to see the impact of work at a whole school level. This is exacerbated by the fact that government data on exclusions is available only 12 months after the school year ends. Additionally, schools are not required to collect data on all forms of exclusion, such as managed moves.

Learning

Coaching conversations with Alumni this year helped us gain a better understanding of barriers and enablers for inclusion impact. We gathered details and data around their early achievements, contextualised these for specific school contexts, and wrote up a number of case studies (a selection featured here). As Alumni numbers grow, we'll continue to conduct qualitative interviews with a sample of leaders to supplement our data tracking.



Vicky is the Headteacher of a London primary school and has rewritten the behaviour policy now used by all six schools across her trust.

This policy incorporates inclusive strategies such as zones of regulation, restorative practice, and attachment-aware responses. It provides clear examples of language and actions that can be used by staff to de-escalate incidents, and signposts when to seek support from external agencies. Teachers are starting to use behaviour analysis to track improvement – and student surveys are already showing that children feel calm and happy at school.



Alicia is the Assistant Headteacher for Inclusion and Behaviour at a school within one of England's largest MATs. This year, she has focused on students with

Special Educational Needs (SEN) – the children most often displaying challenging behaviour, receiving detentions, and being sent out of class. With support from other leaders, Alicia was able to introduce new inclusive practice and systems to her school – including a graduated system of behaviour interventions and whole-school training on quality-first teaching strategies. Before this work, there were 53 detentions per week on average. This has now reduced to fewer than 15.

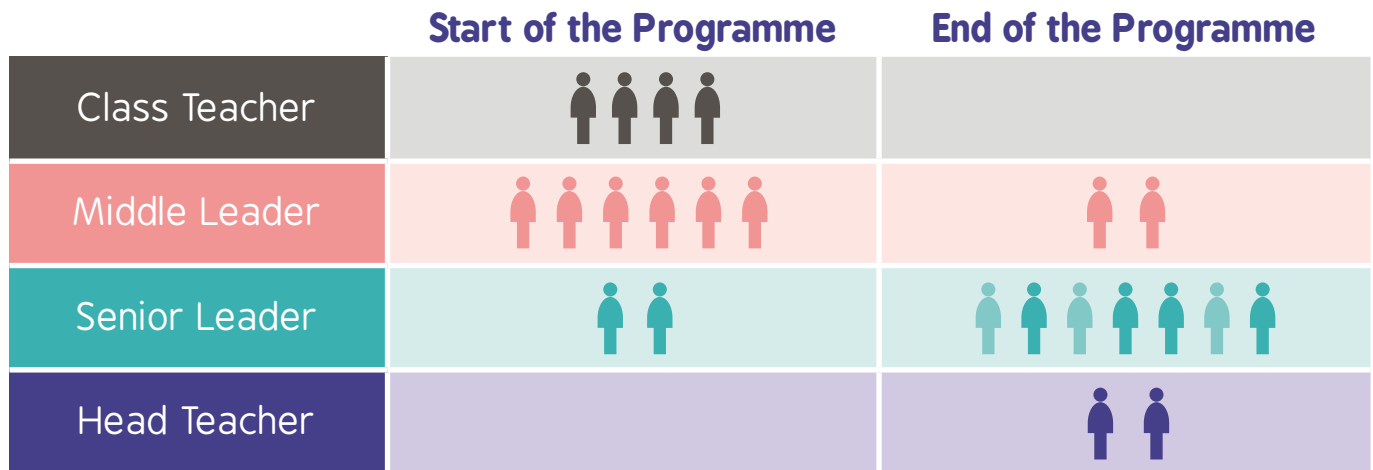


As Assistant Headteacher for Inclusion, **Ada** has formalised and improved her school's offer for SEN students.

This has included the creation of key-worker logs, establishing fortnightly calls with parents, and upskilling teaching assistants to lead interventions for students with specific needs. Increasingly staff and parents are seeking out the Inclusion team for support, while the number of students sent out of class for disruptive behaviour is gradually decreasing. Ada is now working to improve the school's early identification of SEN students. This will facilitate school to make earlier links between behaviour and needs and help further reduce exclusions.

Growing the Alumni Network

Can participating in a leadership programme that focuses on inclusion expertise and experience in AP schools really fast-track the careers of school leaders? YES! Our second Cohort has now graduated, in July 2022. **10** out of **12** Difference Leaders have progressed to more senior leadership roles.⁹



Challenge

Half of this year's graduating Difference Leaders chose to remain in AP. Five have been promoted to Deputy Head or Headteacher and feel another year is needed to maximise positive impact and their own leadership development. Though the rate of leadership progression was high, we have not reached our target for 60% mainstream progression.

Learning

The Difference is developing a strong Alumni network that will continue to link Leaders to each other and to The Difference. Support and progression opportunities can be shared across this network, facilitating future mainstream moves. It will help The Difference to track long-term career development and understand ongoing AP impact.



Jack Williamson
2020 Difference Leader,
promoted to Head of
Springwell Alternative
Academy Mablethorpe

I absolutely will be returning to mainstream in the future. Difference Leaders in mainstream schools are key to showing that all children benefit from inclusive education. But actually, I'm already having this kind of impact at Mablethorpe through my work with mainstream headteachers. I invite them to visit our school and challenge them to think about whether they actually need to exclude as many students as they do. We ask them to work with us more closely and inspire them to take inclusive practice back to their school.

I want to stay longer in AP because I feel Covid impacted my first year so significantly – we only had 8 students. In my second year, we had 48. I have also been promoted twice while on the programme – there is still a lot of learning and impact which I can have.

9. One leader is working in a role at an equivalent seniority level to when they started the programme. Another is taking a year out of teaching due to personal circumstances.

Impact In Alternative Provision

While ultimately The Difference wants to see mainstream change that prevents avoidable exclusion, we are also passionate about supporting, amplifying and spreading good practice in AP schools.

The Difference does not hold a zero-exclusions stance. There will always be students who need to be educated in alternative provision and the quality of education that these students receive is of critical importance. We ask Difference Leaders to identify areas of challenge in their AP schools and plan whole-school projects to tackle them. Tracking the positive impact of this work has three key benefits:

1. Demonstrates the potential returns of inclusive best practice
2. Challenges (still prevalent) beliefs about what excluded young people can achieve, by showing what is possible when given the right support.
3. Evidences the professional development of Difference Leaders and efficacy of the Programme

Challenge

Different AP schools cater to different student populations and need levels. Some focus on reintegration back to mainstream, whilst others work to secure qualifications at the AP. Their intake also fluctuates throughout the year, and many students are not officially 'on-roll'. This variation in purpose and desired outcomes – alongside high pupil turnover – make it difficult to compare data with previous years or other schools.

Learning

In addition to the data collected by Difference Leaders on their projects, we survey partner AP headteachers to understand and evidence impact. We also interview and survey Difference Leaders to collect detailed case studies about their impact in AP.

We asked AP Headteachers 'What was your Difference Leader's biggest impact to date?'

"She has the **highest expectations** of staff and is unwavering in her commitment to ensure the safety and wellbeing of students and staff. She has **embedded fundamental systems, procedures and protocols** around attendance, behaviour and safeguarding."

"[He has] **improved our SEND provision significantly**. This has had a **huge impact** on both the students who attend AP and those we support in local mainstream schools."

"The continual focus on high expectations regarding teaching and learning – **ensuring that pupils get the very best teaching** to meet their individual needs."

Case study: Whole-school impact



This year, The Difference piloted the use of research-action projects. These projects focus on shared issues for AP schools that could be significant levers for whole-school change. The pilot involved seven Difference Leaders who designed and implemented literacy projects. Literacy was chosen because AP students' reading ages are generally far below average, with a substantial effect on education and life outcomes.¹⁰

Research-action project model

1. Specialist topic training provided by The Difference
2. Difference Leaders conduct whole-school audits
3. Audit findings used to design and implement tailored projects
4. Impact is tracked through ongoing data collection

Pilot results

Of seven participants, four have already collected reading age data at least twice.¹¹ All four have seen consistent gains – student reading ages improving faster than chronological ages.

For example, Difference Leader **Maddie Gough** (pictured) works in a SEMH school – supporting students with Social Emotional and Mental Health needs. Her initial audit found low levels of student vocabulary and comprehension, and a lack of staff confidence in supporting students with literacy barriers. They launched a cross-curriculum approach – training staff in comprehension and vocabulary instruction, mapping daily reading opportunities into the curriculum, and running interventions supported by an educational psychologist and speech therapist. By the second reading age test, 71% of students had made progress of 12 months or more over a 6 month period. This year, Maddie's school has also achieved their highest Year 11 outcomes to date, with every student gaining a qualification in English and Maths.

Next year, all 2022 Difference Leaders will run a research-action project. As well as literacy, projects will focus on safeguarding and student induction.

10. National Literacy Trust (2014) 'Literacy Changes Lives'

11. Due to budget limitations at their school, one Difference Leader has been unable to resource reading age tests. Two other Difference Leaders are yet to run tests a second time.



Case study: System-level impact

Difference Leaders spread impact beyond their school by sharing inclusion expertise with other agencies.

2021 Difference Leader **Coshia** (pictured) worked with a speech and language therapist to develop training on 'Blank Levels', a framework that professionals can use to improve communication with young people with speech and language needs.

Coshia was asked to deliver this training to police officers within her school. It was so well received that the police commissioned a similar session for every frontline officer in Haringey and Enfield. Along with two colleagues, she has already trained over 300 officers.

Coshia told us:

"We want to bridge the communication gap between vulnerable young people and the adults who work with them – helping them navigate different, often complex, communication needs. And to realise that behaviour which could be seen as aggressive or rude can be driven by a young person struggling to understand."

Young people in AP are both more likely to have a speech and language need and more likely to have contact with the criminal justice system. After taking part, one senior police officer said such sessions should be incorporated in initial police training given their clear relevance and impact.

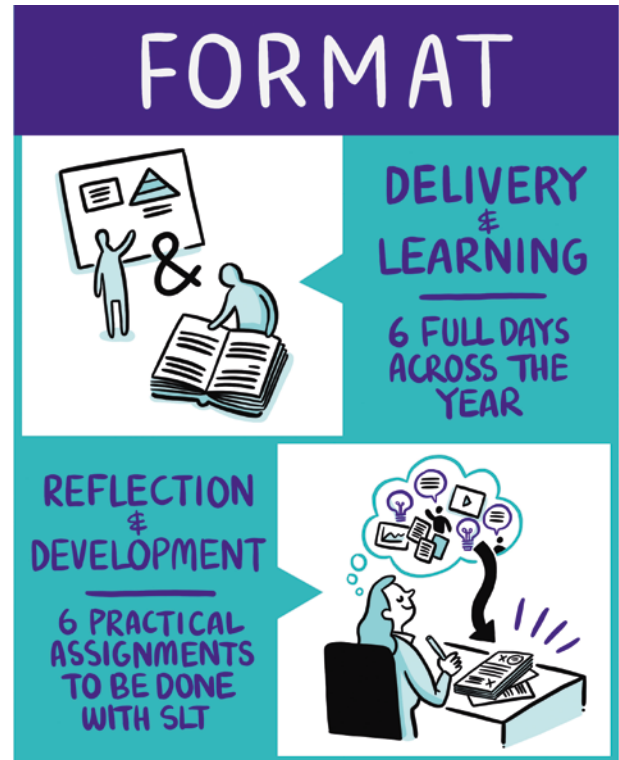
Engaging Mainstream Leaders

The Inclusive Leadership Course is supporting a rapidly growing network of current mainstream leaders to understand and apply inclusive practice.

While the Difference Leadership Programme – an intensive, highly selective and career-defining course – was the catalyst for launching the charity, it was clear that the learnings and resources generated could benefit a much wider audience. The Inclusive Leadership Course was created to engage hundreds more school leaders with our mission to transform education.

“I think what the course does so well is show that inclusion is for every single pupil, not just the pupils with a diagnosed special need. There’s definitely a willingness for change. It just needs someone to communicate how we can go about creating that change.”

ILC Participant, 2021/22



Inclusive Leadership Course Impact

Within the first year of applying course learning, participants are already reducing the need to exclude across their schools. They're also being recognised as skilled and aspirational leaders.



IMPACT

LEAD IMPROVED INCLUSION

- REDUCE EXCLUSION
- IMPROVE ATTENDANCE
- REDUCE CONFLICT ESCALATION

BUILD INCLUSIVE SYSTEMS

LEARN WITH OTHER SCHOOL LEADERS

“My school now has an action plan and interventions for students with poor engagement in education. Restorative practice is our major focus for 2022/23 – which it would not have been if it wasn't for attending this course.”

ILC Participant, 2021/22



12. We surveyed 2021/22 ILC participants during final session delivery and received 46 responses (63% of the total cohort).

A Movement of Inclusive Educators

The Difference scales the impact of our core programmes through our practice-sharing and communications work. We influence the beliefs and careers of a much wider group of educators – inspiring them to work towards improving outcomes for the most vulnerable learners.

Bringing the inclusion community together

In November 2021, The Difference ran its third **IncludEd conference**. This year's 350+ delegates attended workshops delivered by education experts and influential school leaders – all designed to promote and inspire inclusion best practice.



Increasing the flow of talent to Alternative Provision

Focusing on vulnerable learners has often been seen as a less ambitious career pathway in teaching – particularly in AP. The Difference and Difference Leaders are challenging this story by putting a spotlight on AP expertise and career opportunities.

“AP roles are highly specialised but often seen as lower stakes. To communicate with a child in crisis, to de-escalate a potentially dangerous situation, or form a positive relationship with a parent with generations of negative school experiences – that isn’t... cushy, it’s really skilled work.”

Hannah Rigg, 2020 Difference Leader, now Assistant Headteacher at Leverhulme Primary School

This year, 664 educators registered interest in joining the Difference Leadership Programme and moving to AP. Since connecting with The Difference, an estimated 73% have already taken further steps to pursue their interest in inclusion.¹³

- 38% are seeking new responsibilities within their current role to focus on vulnerable learners
- 30% have completed professional development focused on supporting vulnerable learners
- 16% have applied to work in an AP or Special school (outside of The Difference)

13. We conducted a survey with the 664 educators who registered interest in joining the Difference Leadership Programme this year and received 104 responses.



Spreading the Word

The Difference and our Difference Leaders continue to draw attention to the topic of exclusions and the urgent need for action.

**Difference
Twitter
Followers:**

6800

**Subscribers to
our Inclusion
News Bulletin:**

4700

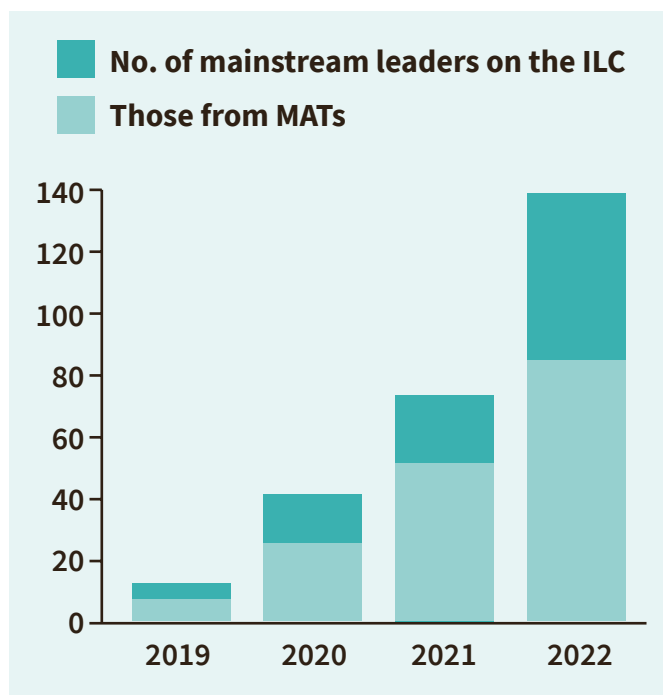
- The Difference featured in an [Economist](#) film focusing on the Black Lives Matter movement, which received nearly 50,000 views. It explored why school exclusions are a racial justice issue and championed the work being done by Difference Leaders.
- Difference Leader Hannah Rigg spoke on BBC Radio 4's Today programme about inclusive leadership and the specialist work of AP schools.

- Shaun Brown, Difference Director of Programmes, has spoken to over a thousand educators on the topic of inclusion through conference appearances this year. These included the ASCL Headteachers' Union, London's Violence Reduction Unit, Challenge Partners, The Pathfinder Teaching School Hub, PRUsAP, and Whole Education.
- The growing problem of exclusions – and the solution posed by the Difference Leadership Programme – was highlighted by a [Sky News piece](#) filmed at a Difference partner school, Haringey Learning Partnership.



Growing Investment from MATs

The government has set a target for every school in England to be part of a Multi-Academy-Trust (MAT) by 2030. As part of our goal to positively influence the sector, The Difference continues to engage more mainstream schools, and especially more MATs, to commit time and resources to inclusion.



This year, The Difference is widening our offer for mainstream MATs. As well as scaling the Inclusive Leadership Course, we are offering expert inclusion consultancy, involving them in external research projects, and highlighting trusts who champion inclusion best practice.

Challenge

The ongoing effects of the pandemic, plus the cost-of-living crisis, mean that a rapidly growing number of children and young people are experiencing new vulnerabilities. There is greater demand from schools for professional development that can help them better meet student safeguarding and wellbeing needs. But both schools and senior leaders are also experiencing rising demands on their time and resources – making it harder to enact meaningful whole-school inclusion plans.

CASE STUDY: Consultancy for Ark Schools, a Multi-Academy Trust running 39 schools

An Ark senior leader first attended the Inclusive Leadership Course in 2019. Since then, 13 more Ark colleagues have completed the course. Learning of our work, trustees on the Ark board reached out to The Difference for help in understanding why Ark schools were excluding at different rates – resulting in our first piece of MAT-commissioned research. The Difference analysed exclusions and attendance data, conducted a trust-wide survey of Ark senior leaders and conducted case study interviews. Our findings and recommendations are being used by Ark to reduce the numbers of vulnerable students missing education. From September 2022, there will also be three Difference Leader Alumni leading in Ark schools, working towards this same goal.

Learning

To provide a way for schools to deepen their engagement with inclusive practice, without putting unrealistic demands on senior leadership teams, The Difference has launched the Inclusive Leadership Course for Middle Leaders. The original programme (six full days of training, designed for senior leaders) will continue to run. Middle leaders engage in a parallel programme of six virtual ‘Twilight’ sessions and collaborate with senior leaders to amplify inclusive practice across their schools.

A New Difference Directorate

For the first time, The Difference has hired dedicated expertise and capacity in the area of research and policy. This directorate will build on the work that The Difference began back in 2017 with our IPPR report – formalising our approach to identifying and advocating for inclusive change in education.



Jenny Graham Head of Research & Evaluation

Jenny brings 20 years of experience in applied policy research having worked at NatCen Social Research before

co-founding ResearchAbility, a consultancy specialising in qualitative research for the non-profit and public sector. Her research has recently focused on children’s education, wellbeing, safeguarding and school exclusion. Major projects included research into safeguarding practice in residential schools for the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse and research of school exclusion and exploitation for the Tackling Child Exploitation project.



Tom Gunter Head of Policy

Tom was one of the founding teachers of Reach Academy, a new school in 2012 in a deprived area of London. The school

aimed to tackle the local area’s poor GCSE results and low rates of progression to higher education. During Tom’s time there – first as Head of Year, then Assistant Head – Reach Academy became the first all-through ‘free’ school to be rated Outstanding by Ofsted. Tom then became Education Policy Advisor for the Royal Academy of Engineering, where he worked to increase representation from disadvantaged groups.

The Difference Executive Team – Kiran Gill, Danny Swift and Shaun Brown – will also continue to contribute to our Research and Policy aims.

Research & Policy Activities

Detailed evaluation of Difference programme delivery and outcomes

Practice-focused research into key inclusion topics

Creation of a policy and communications strategy

Research & Policy Insights

Feed into The Difference’s programme design and improvement

Publish in sector-press and research journals

Inform our policy recommendations



Achievements, Current Work and Future Plans

Input on the SEND and AP review

In March, Difference CEO Kiran Gill met with Secretary of State for Education, Nadhim Zahawi, to share The Difference's thoughts on the upcoming SEND review. The Difference also submitted a response to the Department for Education's Green Paper consultation and was asked to host the AP Roundtable discussion on this paper. Recognised as experts in exclusion policy, The Difference has been invited to host a future event focusing on the implementation of the SEND and AP strategy.

Keeping Children Safe in Education; Behaviour and Exclusion Guidance

The Difference submitted written responses to these key policy documents and was invited to meet with DfE officials to share our feedback and recommendations. We were pleased to see some important changes adopted after being advocated for by The Difference, with more still to be done in coming years.

Contribution to The Times Education Commission

Kiran Gill, Difference CEO, was one of 22 experts invited to join this Commission, set up to examine

the future of education in the wake of Covid-19. The Commission published [a report which examines Britain's whole education system](#) and offers a 12-point plan for improving the outcomes and opportunities available to children and young people.

Investigating how inclusion is defined and practised in England's secondaries

The Difference is partnering on a study into this topic, led by Professors Toby Greany and Pat Thomson at the University of Nottingham and funded by Teach First. Findings will be published in the upcoming academic year.

Embarking on research into internal Alternative Provision

This year, The Difference begins a project in partnership with the National Foundation for Education Research. An increasing number of MATs are launching their own internal AP spaces, often as part of a strategy to reduce exclusions. But there is, so far, an evidence deficit in this area. This work is funded by the Youth Endowment Fund and the Education Endowment Foundation.



A big thank you to the Difference Coalition from our team

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.



The Difference School Partners

Difference Alumni Schools (Mainstream)

Ark Globe Academy
Ark Soane
Crawford Primary School
Haberdashers' Aske's
Hatcham College
Leverhulme Primary School
London Academy
Northolt Secondary School
Woodmansterne School
Woodside High School

Difference Leader Schools (AP)

Bridgelea Primary School
Burnside Secondary PRU
Camden Centre For Learning (CCFL)
Educational Diversity Blackpool
Francis Barber PRU
Haringey Learning Partnership
Harris Aspire Academy
Joseph Norton Academy
Olive AP Academy Cambridge
Olive AP Academy Nene Valley
Orchardside
South Quay College
Springwell Alternative Academy Grantham
Springwell Lincolnshire Lincoln
Springwell Mablethorpe Lincoln
The Boxing Academy
The Key Education Centre
The Limes
Tunmarsh Centre
Wey Valley College

Inclusive Leadership Course Schools

AIM North London
Archbishop Holgate's School
Archbishop Sentamu Academy
Ark Academy
Ark Acton Academy
Ark Alexandra
Ark All Saints Academy
Ark Blacklands Primary Academy
Ark Blake Academy
Ark Burlington Danes Academy
Ark Evelyn Grace Academy
Ark John Keats Academy
Ark Kings Academy
Ark Victoria Academy

Aspire Academy
Aylward Academy
Barlby High School
Barnsley Academy
Barnwell School
Baysgarth School
Beacon High
Bexley Heath Academy
Bishop Heber High School
Blessed John Henry Newman RC College
Bolingbroke Academy
Bradford AP Academy
Bridgelea Primary PRU
Brinsworth Academy
Brune Park Community School
Buile Hill Academy
Camrose Primary
Cardinal Pole RC School
Central Foundation Boys' School
Chaucer School
Clacton Coastal Academy
Clapton Girls' Academy
Co-op Academy Failsworth
Co-op Academy Manchester
Co-op Academy Oakwood
Co-op Academy Walkden
Cottenham Village College
Cowes Enterprise College
Cromer Academy
Delce Academy
Dixons Broadgreen Academy
Dixons Brooklands Academy
Dixons Cottingley Academy
Dixons Fazakerley Academy
Dixons McMillan Academy
Dixons Unity Academy
Dunraven School
East Point Academy
Elaine Primary School
Ellesmere Port Catholic High School
Eltham Hill School
Ernulf Academy
Everton Free School
Firth Park Academy
Four Dwellings Primary Academy
Friesland School
George Green's School
Great Academy Ashton
Great Yarmouth Primary Academy
Handsworth Grange Community Sports College
Harris Academy Riverside
Harris Academy Wimbledon

Hartsdown Academy
Haverstock School
Heritage High
Hethersett Academy
Highgate Wood School
Highlands Primary School
Holme Valley Primary School
Hope Sentamu Learning Trust
Inspire Partnership Academy Trust
Invicta Primary School
Kensington Aldridge Academy
King Edward VI School
Lichfield
Kingsley Academy
Kingsthorpe College
Lansdowne Park
Laurence Jackson School
Leyton Sixth Form College
LIPA Sixth Form College
London Enterprise Academy
Longsands Academy
Malet Lambert School
Marches Academy Trust
Meadowhead School Academy Trust
Meridian High School
Merstham Park School
Montpelier High School
Morpeth School
Mulberry School for Girls
Myton School
New Bewerley Community Primary School
Newman RC College
North Leamington School
North Ormesby Primary Academy
Oakmeadow Church of England Primary
Oasis Academy Brightstowe
Oasis Academy Don Valley
Oasis Academy Hadley
Oasis Academy Isle of Sheppey
Oasis Academy Leesbrook
Oasis Academy Silvertown
Oasis Academy South Bank
Oasis Academy Warndon
Ormiston Horizon Academy
Ormiston Six Villages
Our Lady's Catholic High School
Palm Bay Primary School
Passmores Academy
Plumstead Manor
Poppleton Road Primary School
Randal Cremer Primary School

Reach Academy
Riverside School
Rowner Junior School
Royal Greenwich Trust School
Ryburn Valley High School
Sarah Bonnell School
School 21
Simon Balle All through School
Sir Isaac Newton Sixth Form
Sir John Deane's Sixth Form College
Skinners' Academy
Solihull Academy
South Quay College
St Mary's College
St Nicholas Catholic High School
Stocksbridge High School
Stoke High School
Stoke Newington School
Stormont House School
Tendring Technology College
The Appleton School
The Catholic High School
The County High School
Leftwich
The Gipsy Hill Federation
The Hewett Academy
The John Roan School
The Kassia Academy and Support Services
The Kingsbrook School
The Marvell College
The Thomas Aveling School
The Totteridge Academy
The Two Counties Trust
The Whitby High School
The Whitley AP Academy
Thomas Tallis
Thomas Tallis School
Towers School and Sixth Form Centre
Upton-by-Chester High School
Walthamstow School For Girls
Waterhead Academy
Wayland Academy
Weaverham High School
Welling School
Wellington School
Whitefield Primary
Wilsthorpe School
Woodhill Primary School
Woodside High School
Woodside Primary School
Woolwich Poly Boys
Woolwich Poly Girls
Wybourn Community Primary School

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.

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