

**Impact Evaluation of the Parent Support Adviser  
Project in Plymouth**

**as at July 12<sup>th</sup> 2010**

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## **1.0 Introduction**

The Parent Support Adviser Project began as a government funded pilot initiative, which supported 20 Local Authorities to introduce Parent Support Advisers into their workforce from September 2006 to August 2008. The pilot implemented a range of models. In Plymouth, a unique model was developed by Plymouth Parent Partnership to ensure that the Parent Support Adviser role became embedded as universal, non-targeted provision available for all parents/carers to access. This model was implemented through shared governance arrangements with participating schools. Following the success of the pilot Plymouth has extended the Parent Support Adviser project to all local authority schools, as an integral part of the local authorities' strategic impetus<sup>1</sup>. This phase of the project started in September 2008 and will run to the end of March 2011.

## **2.0 Evaluation**

This impact evaluation is in three parts. Part one examines the contribution made by PSAs to the core business of schools and it goes on to consider the likely impact for schools should the PSA role cease. Part two explores the contribution made by PSAs to the core business of key partner agencies and then considers the likely impact for these should the PSA role cease. Part three assesses the impact to date of the PSA role on parental engagement and involvement. It also explores the potential impact for Plymouth parents if the PSA role ceases.

This evaluation, and others of the Plymouth PSA project, will be informed by quantitative, qualitative and secondary data currently available. Sources used to date include the following:

### 2.1 Quantitative

1. PSA Database which records the number of parents/carers PSAs work with for 15 minutes or more.
2. PSAs weekly tally sheets and group work logs which record the number of parents/carers PSAs work with for less than 15 minutes.
3. Findings from the Family Support Survey 2009.
4. A survey of parents/carers of pupils attending various school and community events across Plymouth. (February - July 2010)
5. A survey of 90 PSAs working across Plymouth. (May - July 2010)

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<sup>1</sup> 2.Ref. 'Plymouth Children and Young Peoples' Trust Plan 2008-2011

## 2.2 Qualitative

1. Interviews with 77 head teachers or their representatives in order to provide an insight into their perceptions of the PSA role, the contribution made by PSAs and the impact this has had on their school. (September 2009 - July 2010)
2. PSA records and case studies.
3. PSA Celebration Event 18.09.09: Group work.
4. A survey of 91 representatives of key partner agencies to provide an insight into their perceptions of the PSA role, the contribution made by PSAs and the impact this has had on their organisation. (March - June 2010)

## 2.3 Secondary data

1. Analysis of Ofsted Reports for schools inspected between September 2009 and June 2010.
2. Analysis of parent surveys undertaken by 3 PSAs who moved into a Parent Champion role when their school was judged by Ofsted as 'inadequate'.
3. Analysis of letters of thanks/compliments received by PSAs and PSACOs
4. Analysis of Parent Pages on school websites
5. Analysis of PSA involvement in delivering evidenced based parenting programmes

### **3.0 Current impact of the PSA role on Schools and the potential impact for Schools if the PSA role ceases**

#### Introduction

This section examines the contribution made by PSAs to the core business of schools since their introduction. It goes on to consider the likely impact for schools should the PSA role cease.

### **3.1 Current impact of the PSA in Schools**

#### (i) Survey Analysis

Interviews with head teachers revealed that the majority (93.4%) considered that the PSA had made a difference to their school; whilst around 1 in 20 (6.5%) were unsure.

*“PSA is an absolute gem and as asset to our school community. She has the drive, professionalism, sense of humour and ability to connect with a range of parents in a trusting, supportive manner. Just brilliant!” (Primary head teacher)*

*“This role more than any other has done what it says on the packet full on to meet parents on their terms for their needs to help their family be successful in learning” (Secondary head teacher)*

*“If I was going to look at any LA initiative that has impacted on my school the PSA has been the most effective according to our priorities” (Special school head teacher)*

### **3.2 Leadership and teaching workloads**

#### 3.2.1 Current impact on leadership and teaching workloads

#### (i) Survey Analysis

##### 1. Primary Head teachers

Around 1 in 5 (20.5%) Primary Head teachers commented that having a PSA in their school had enabled them to concentrate on their management and leadership role rather than being involved in sorting out various parents issues.

*“Head teachers are skilled in running establishments and have too many*

*demands from this to give the time and attention needed to support a family. PSA role is beneficial and available permanently to respond to families crisis, groups, preventative work and her role is unique within the school"*

Around 1 in 10 Primary Head teachers commented that having a PSA in their school had also freed up time for their teaching and support staff to concentrate on the education of students.

*"PSA picking up things that otherwise staff would have picked up – would not have dealt with so well due to time and knowledge of services"*

## 2. Secondary Head teachers

One Head teacher interviewed indicated that having a PSA in their school had freed them up to concentrate on their management and leadership role.

*"The role saves time for other people. Whereas before parents may be going to Head they can now access help before they get to that point"*

1 in 5 Secondary Head teachers indicated that having a PSA in their school had freed up time for teaching and support staff to concentrate on the education of students.

*"Has made enormous difference to key stage leaders, Heads and now tutors as speeds up process"*

## 3. Special school Head teachers

One Head teacher indicated that having a PSA in their school had freed them up to concentrate on their management and leadership role as well as freeing up time for their teaching and support staff to concentrate on the education of students.

*"I've just found it a real bonus. Saving me from doing a lot of support that would otherwise fall to me – I could do with more really – so it's been really useful – she's visited families at home – advised on benefits, support with children, e.g. ASD, parenting skills advice"*

## 4. PSAs

Around 1 in 3 (34.2%) PSAs indicated that if their role did not exist it was possible that this may lead to parents placing more demands on head teachers and other senior leaders, giving them less time for leadership and management.

*"It may possibly result in the head teacher becoming overwhelmed with queries, complaints and concerns. The level of referrals that are processed by PSAs would also become their/SMTs responsibility, which would detract from*

*the 'business' of running a school"*

PSAs were asked what difference it would make to schools if the PSA role did not exist and around 2 in 3 (68.4%) considered that this may result in parents placing more demands on teaching staff, giving them less time for teaching.

*"Teachers will have to deal with 'Parenting Issues' directly which could have a knock on effect with teaching. If the teachers are having to deal with issues themselves it is giving them less quality time in the classroom"*

#### 5. Representatives of Key Partner Agencies

Representatives of key partner agencies expressed concern that if PSA posts no longer existed in schools then they would have to make contact with Head teachers or teachers. The following comments were made:

*"If the role did not exist the schools would become more involved in general family support taking away valuable time from learning. It is sometimes much easier for parents to approach someone other than the head/teacher to discuss issues or concerns"*(Strategic Locality Manager)

*"We'd have to find new contacts in schools e.g. teachers, head teachers - but they are busy - this would take time - we'd cope but it wouldn't be efficient"*  
(Social Care representative)

*"Teachers and head teachers not available whilst PSAs are and get back to you"* (Community/Voluntary Sector representative)

#### 3.2.2 Potential Impact on Leadership and Teaching Workloads if the PSA role ceases

It is evident from the survey analysis that PSAs have released Head teachers and other members of their leadership teams from having to deal with the many issues that parents previously would have taken to them, thereby enabling them to concentrate on their management and leadership roles. Similarly, teaching and learning support staff have been freed up since the advent of the PSA role allowing them to concentrate on the education of students. If PSAs posts are discontinued it is clear that both leadership and teaching staff will have to absorb elements of the PSA role, which will detract from their respective roles.

### 3.3 Parental Engagement

#### 3.3.1 Current impact on Parental Engagement

##### (i) Survey Analysis

##### 1. Head teachers

Interviews with head teachers indicated that the majority (96.0%) considered that parental engagement had increased since the PSA had been in post, whilst three head teachers said that this needed to be further developed.

*“PSA engages with so many parents who previously wouldn’t engage. Hard to reach families with bad experiences of school themselves can now engage with the school - wouldn’t come to me but would go to PSA” (Primary head teacher)*

*“Without PSA parents wouldn’t engage with the school. The PSA helps build parental confidence and trust in the school” (Secondary head teacher)*

*“PSA role has made a difference in engaging parents who would not talk with the teachers especially hard to reach parents” (Special school head teacher)*

Several Head teachers of schools recently inspected by Ofsted also commented that Ofsted Inspectors had been impressed by the PSA role and the contribution it had made to parental engagement.

*“Engagement with parents ‘outstanding’ and PSA instrumental in that - it wouldn’t have been the case before PSA” (Primary head teacher)*

*“Parental engagement came out as a 1 in Ofsted- some of descriptions were about the work of the PSA and how we have been reaching the unreachable, being able to dip into a wider network of support for young people has been invaluable” (Secondary head teacher)*

*“Ofsted felt that the PSA role was a benefit to the school” (Special School head teacher)*

##### 2. PSAs

All PSAs considered that parental engagement would diminish if their role did not exist.

*“PSAs are a vital link for parents. Without PSAs to help parents with*

*information on services etc, they wouldn't get the help they need. This could have an impact on the child's learning at school, as we currently help with attendance issues, housing, funding, behaviour and much more. If we weren't there to signpost parents to services it would have an effect on home and school life"*

The majority (92.1%) of PSAs suggested that two way communication between school and parents would be less effective if their role did not exist.

*"Overall standards of communication will decline as staff and parents/carers go back to 'them and us' culture"*

### 3. Representatives of Key Partner Agencies

Several representatives from key agencies indicated that there would be a reduction in parental engagement if the PSA role did not exist.

*"PSAs help parents who can be overwhelmed by the number of agencies involved with their family... by explaining the different services and by going to meetings with parents" (CAMHS Representative)*

*"The PSA role enables the parents to be more involved with their children's learning by a separate person organising and encouraging parents to attend workshops etc" (Strategic Locality Manager)*

#### 3.3.2 Potential Impact on Parental Engagement if the PSA role ceases

The survey analysis demonstrate that PSAs have been a catalyst for securing and increasing parental engagement with schools. If PSA posts were to cease, schools may well struggle to sustain their current levels of parental engagement. Schools would also have to decide who would champion this area of work in the absence of the PSA.

### **3.4 Pupils**

#### 3.4.1 Current Impact on Pupils

##### (i) Survey Analysis

##### 1. Head teachers

Interviews with head teachers revealed that around 2 in 3 (68.4%) felt that the PSA role had contributed to an improvement in their school's attendance figures; whilst around 1 in 10 (9.2%) said this was not the case. Around 1 in 10 (11.8%) said this was difficult to measure and a similar proportion (10.5%) indicated that attendance did not need improving at their school.

*“Has had a significant impact on attendance working with parent and Head teacher- moved from very poor attendance to 95% with support- significantly hanged their lives, parent wrote an amazing letter of thanks” (Primary head teacher)*

*“We have witnessed a significant improvement in attendance, particularly with specific pupils who were previously affected by parental issues.”  
(Secondary head teacher)*

*“PSAs support is critical for these children and parents. She enables them to attend school at challenging times, improving their attendance and thus life chances” (Special school head teacher)*

Interviews with head teachers showed that around 3 in 4 (73.6%) considered that the PSA role had contributed to an improvement in pupils' behaviour; whilst around 1 in 20 (5.2%) said this was not the case. Around 1 in 5 (18.4%) said this was difficult to measure and two head teachers indicated that behaviour did not need improving at their school.

*“PSA liaises with Head teacher, SENCO, BST, COASTS and parents to organise targeted support for individual children. This has led to significant improvement in attitude and behaviour in a number of cases” (Primary head teacher)*

*“Whilst it is difficult to accurately measure improvements to behaviour we are confident that many children's lives have been enhance, particularly at home as a result of the PSA working and supporting the needs of some of our parents” (Secondary head teacher)*

*“Involved in supporting parents whose child has behavioural difficulties at home” (Special school head teacher)*

Interviews with head teachers revealed that just under half (47.3%) felt that the PSA role had contributed to an improvement in their school's attainment; whilst just under 1 in 10 (7.8%) said this was not the case. Around 2 in 5 (43.4%) said this was difficult to measure and one indicated that attainment did not need improving at their school.

*“Parents who trust and are in tune with the school engage with their child's learning and they achieve” (Primary head teacher)*

*“PSAs prevent children falling back as a result of issues in the family - measurable in GCSE outcomes” (Secondary head teacher)*

*“Supporting parents and pupils when there have been health issues/injuries, this support impacts on attainment” (Special school head teacher)*

## 2. PSAs

Around 1 in 4 (26.3%) PSAs thought that pupils' attendance, behaviour and attainment might decline if their role did not exist because parents would not receive support with their issues at home, which might impact negatively on their children.

*“They may find that attendance may decrease and pupils education will suffer and that they do not achieve their potential”*

### 3.4.2 Potential Impact on Pupils if the PSA role ceases

It is apparent that PSAs have made a significant contribution to improving pupils' attendance at school, their behaviour and their attainment. If PSA posts are discontinued, schools may well struggle to sustain their current levels of pupil attendance and attainment. Maintaining current levels of good behaviour may also be at risk.

## **3.5 Conclusion**

If PSA posts no longer exist there are likely to be:

1. Workload and logistical implications for head teachers, teaching and support staff and the associated financial implications arising from this.
2. Challenges for schools in sustaining current levels of parental engagement.
3. Challenges for schools in sustaining current levels of pupil attendance and attainment and in maintaining current levels of good behaviour.

## **4.0 Current impact of the PSA role on Key Partner Agencies and the potential impact for Key Partner Agencies if the PSA role ceases**

### Introduction

This section explores the contribution made by PSAs to the core business of key partner agencies and then considers the likely impact for these should the PSA role cease

### 4.1 Current impact of the PSA role on Key Partner Agencies

The majority (95.6%) of representatives from key agencies considered that the PSA role made a difference to their service, whilst just under 1 in 20 (4.3%) indicated that they were either unsure or did not comment.

*“The ability to be able to refer a parent to a service that is impartial, informed and supportive has been a real help. The PSAs have been able to spend some quality time with parents and have established some close relationships with some isolated families that may have otherwise continued to be estranged from the schools” (EWS Representative)*

*“The PSA role has been a life saver during the last year. Without the support of the PSAs, I do not feel I would have had the knowledge and time to effectively provide a comprehensive service to the community members most in need” (Police Representative)*

*“Some of the best CAF assessments that have been completed have been completed by PSAs. This has meant that families have had swift access to multi agency support” (CAF Coordinator)*

### 4.2. Potential impact on Service if the PSA role ceases to exist

Around 3 in 4 (78.0%) representatives from key agencies indicated that if the PSA role did not exist it would make a difference to their service, whilst around 1 in 20 (4.3%) said this would make a small difference and a further 1 in 20 (4.3%) indicated that it would not make a difference to their service/locality.

Around 1 in 3 (35.1%) representatives from key agencies indicated that there would be a reduction in communication channels if the PSA role did not exist.

*“During the recent Op Hopton event ... without the help of the PSAs we would never have been able to engage and contain the information flow as quickly as we did and I believe the system is now being highlighted as a template for future community issues” (Police Representative)*

#### 4.2.1 Impact on Plymouth City Council Services/Teams

Representatives from ten Plymouth City Council services/teams commented as follows about the impact on their service/team if the PSA role ceased to exist:

Service	Comment
Locality Managers	<i>"It would impact severely in the development of the locality agenda. The parents voice is crucial to service/locality work and particularly in regard to the new government thinking"</i>
Education Psychology	<i>"Without them many of the interventions that families agree to would not be put into place. I wish I could clone the PSAs in my locality. They would leave an enormous hole if they were not there"</i>
Education Welfare Service	<i>"As an EWO, I do not have the time to devote much time to providing dedicated advice and support to parents on a regular basis. The PSA is able to meet regularly and plan support over an extended period of time and this has enabled many parents to explore what is happening in their families and be actively involved in dealing with problems and issues .I do not see that there is any other agency in the city that would be able to resource this valuable service if the PSA were not available"</i>
	<i>"We'd be back to how it was 3 years ago and their would be an increase in court work"</i>
Behaviour Support Team	<i>"I believe it would make a huge difference as parents are much easier to work with when a PSA is involved. It would meet the 'Every Child Matters' agenda because in working with parents our work with children is more productive. It also has a better long term outcome because parents who feel that they are involved and listened to are more supportive of education. I feel the PSA role is vital to bring this about"</i>
	<i>"We have only made such effective changes because of the dedication of the PSAs and PSACO"</i>
Youth Offending Team	<i>"The PSA being in post allows other agencies to be able to communicate with the school, having one point of contact. Also to allow parents someone who can support them and sign post them on to other agencies. Something teachers are not always available for or aware of the relevant agencies"</i>
	<i>"Lots of valuable information sharing, and appropriate signposting would probably not happen or be"</i>

	<i>received”</i>
Housing	<i>“PSAs are proving to be a fundamental referring source for my housing advice outreach surgery project”</i> <i>“Would lose key point of contact in schools”</i>
MAST	<i>“PSAs make our work with children and families easier to arrange, start and progress – thank you!”</i>
Development	<i>“PSA is someone we can speak to regarding initiatives what parents want, promotion, using the school etc”</i>
Extended Schools	<i>“Schools would be stretched to meet the parenting part of the Core Offer”</i>
PACLS	<i>“This would make a huge difference as we would lose the link within the school setting to actively engage with the parents”</i>

It is apparent that many representatives from Plymouth City Council services/teams considered that PSAs had made an important difference to their service, enabling them to work more efficiently and effectively in pursuit of their core business. The majority were concerned that there would be logistical and workload implications for their service if the PSA role did not exist.

#### 4.2.2 Key Partner Agencies

Representatives from fourteen key partner agencies commented as follows about the impact on their service/team if the PSA role ceased to exist.

Service	Comment
Community Nursing	<i>“It would make it harder because the PSA helps to incorporate the links and trusting relationships with parents”</i>
Devon and Cornwall Police	<i>“If the role did not exist I would not be aware of as many problems in the area and I would not be able to engage as well with my community such as being invited to participate in multi agency events”</i> <i>“Yes all agencies have got very good at identifying safeguarding issues, however I feel we lack the services to sign post individuals and families to. The role of the PSA allows us to discuss and sign post families to get the much need support or even encourage the schools to call CAFs and deal with the higher level the child protection level”.</i>
Peninsula Medical School	<i>“Without most of the PSAs we would have encountered great difficulties in accessing schools and parents - they’ve been a great point of contact”</i>

Community/Voluntary Sector	<i>"We would lose key referrers and have to establish new players within schools - consequently we would waste time and be less efficient"</i>
	<i>"It would make a huge difference as they are my point of contact and have a good understanding of how I work and the importance of a quiet room, confidentiality etc. They organize parents coming into see me to talk about the child's issues; this would not be an easy task without them!"</i>
	<i>"Our aim is to reach families at an early intervention stage following separation, without the contact with PSAs and appropriate action, the situation for many of these families may get progressively worse"</i>
	<i>"Lose key points of contact"</i>
	<i>"Role is crucial because of the level of support PSAs provide and the opportunities for cost effective preventative work"</i>
	<i>"Reduction in referrals to our project - PSAs major source of referrals"</i>
	<i>"We get 35% of our referrals through PSAs at the moment – so it would make a big impact"</i>
	<i>"Increased difficulties in engaging with parents of pupils at various schools"</i>

It is apparent that many agencies considered that PSAs had made an important difference to their service, enabling them to work more efficiently and effectively in pursuit of their core business. The majority were concerned that there would be ramifications of one kind or another for their service if the PSA role did not exist.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

If PSA posts no longer exist there are workload and logistical implications for other services within Plymouth City Council and for many partner agencies. There would also be financial implications arising from this for both.

## **5.0 Current impact of the PSA role on Plymouth Parents and the potential impact for Parents if the role ceases**

### Introduction

This section assesses the impact to date of the PSA role on parental engagement and involvement. It also explores the potential impact for Plymouth parents if the PSA role ceases

## **5.1 Parental Engagement with schools and other organisations**

### 5.1.1 Current impact of the PSAs on Parental Engagement

#### (i) PSA Database

The PSA Database records the number of parents/carers that PSAs work with for 15 minutes or more. Figures for the period September 2008 - August 2009 indicate that PSAs were involved in 8922 such pieces of work. Figures for such pieces of work undertaken in the current academic year (up until the end of May 2010) stand at 14,344. See Appendices 1 and 2 for further analysis of database records by Locality and primary reason for contact.

Dates	Number
Individual contacts for September 2008 - August 2009	8922
Individual contacts for September 2009 – August 2010 (pro rata)	17267
Unique parent contacts for September 2009 – August 2010 (pro rata)	5048

#### (ii) PSA Tally Chart Analysis

A tally chart system records the number of parents/carers that PSAs work with for less than 15 minutes. Figures for March 2010 show that PSAs were involved in 7,205 such pieces of work. See Appendix 3 for further analysis of tally charts by Locality and primary reason for contact

### (iii) PSA Celebration Event (18.09.09) Group Work

Analysis of the PSA Celebration Event (18.09.09) group work indicated that PSAs regularly engage with parents to help them in 8 key ways:

#### 1. Finding and passing on information about services available

*“Investigate websites to find information on Young Minds, Ask Frank and on child psychotherapy”*

*“Finding out what benefits parents are entitled to”*

*“Helped a pregnant mum find out what she is entitled to i.e. maternity grant”*

*“Produce a Newsletter that has a ‘Did you know section’ which informs parents of free services available e.g. Food Bank”*

#### 2. Listening to parents and signposting them to services

*“ Explained CAMHS assessment process to parents”*

*“Encouraged a mum to talk to Women’s Aid about her housing/health etc”*

*“Signposted parents to the “Little Ted’s Support group”*

*“Helped a parent to access substance misuse services”*

#### 3. Making referrals and liaising with other agencies

*“Have made referrals to CAMHS”*

*“Nominated families to parenting programmes like Incredible Years and Strengthening Families”*

*“Worked with a family who were given a low allocation band for house transfer so I helped them with providing letters from myself, school and MAST which then gave them more points for higher housing “need”*

*“Referred Young Carer to the Zone - he now has something of his own”*

*“Liaised with PCSO to help support families experiencing crime on their estate”*

#### 4. Contacting/speaking with other professionals on parents behalf

*"Contact/speak with GP's on parents behalf"*

*"Made contact with DIAC on behalf of a parent for advice"*

*"Making phone calls to housing office to sort out misunderstandings on arrears"*

*"Speak with teachers on behalf of parent"*

*"Sat in on meeting with head teacher to help parents communicate effectively"*

#### 5. Supporting parents at meetings

*"Support parent at meetings as parent feels very vulnerable in 'official situations'"*

*"Go to doctors and hospital with parents"*

*"Support parent attending Erme House, taking them to and fro, staying in sessions and liaising"*

*"Support parents at housing appointments"*

#### 6. Providing early intervention

*"Supporting families before it reaches child in need or child protection"*

*"Hold weekly individual sessions for parents who need help to cope with their depression (listening ear)"*

*"Support parents to build their confidence"*

*"Talking to a dad who won't go to counselling"*

#### 7. Providing help with claiming benefits

*"Did an application to the Family Fund - parents didn't know about it - child with additional needs wetting bed and going to school smelling - applied for funding for new bed"*

*"Helped with DLA Form"*

*"Supported mum who had her benefits stopped with an appeal which she won - she had previously pawned lots of her belongings"*

## 8. Accessing employment and training opportunities

*“During informal meeting an EAL parent wanted to work but had little confidence - I signposted her to RITE Associates and supported her in meeting - she is now in full time employment”*

*“ Made links with all training agencies in Plymouth and arranged for two parents to do courses and acting as their Assessor within the school”*

### (iv) Survey Analysis

#### 1. Head teachers

Interviews with head teachers indicated that the majority (96.0%) considered that parental engagement had increased since the PSA had been in post, whilst three head teachers said that this needs to be further developed. Comments included the following:

#### Primary Schools

*“PSA engages with so many parents who previously wouldn’t engage. Hard to reach families with bad experiences of school themselves can now engage with the school - wouldn’t come to me but would go to PSA”*

*“Parental engagement improved by communicating school development and progress. Feedback from parents stated that they are well informed and in the loop”*

*“I wanted parents to be less afraid to come in and to raise issues - without a doubt the role of the PSA has significantly accelerated this improvement”*

*“PSA is on the playground every morning and some evenings where she meets parents informally- five parents now come into school who previously would have stewed rather than come in and address issues”*

#### Secondary Schools

*“Managing to reach those parents who might traditionally find school hard to access - PSA gets out there and engages with all families by listening, not judging, adapting to their needs and being creative”*

*“Without PSA parents wouldn’t engage with the school. The PSA helps build parental confidence and trust in the school”*

## Special Schools

*"PSA role has made a difference in engaging parents who would not talk with the teachers especially hard to reach parents"*

*"A lot of one to one complex cases with parents"*

*"40 parents came to the two school BBQs - the best events of the year which were also attended by other service providers like Harbour Centre"*

## 2. Key Agency Representatives

Interviews with representatives from key agencies indicated that there would be a reduction in parental engagement if the PSA role didn't exist and the following comments are illustrative of those made:

*"PSAs help parents who can be overwhelmed by the number of agencies involved with their family... by explaining the different services and by going to meetings with parents"* (CAMHS Representative)

*"The PSA role enables the parents to be more involved with their children's learning by a separate person organising and encouraging parents to attend workshops etc"* (Strategic Locality Manager)

A number also commented on the importance of the impartial and confidential nature of the PSA role:

*"The ability to be able to refer a parent to a service that is impartial, informed and supportive has been a real help. The PSAs have been able to spend some quality time with parents and have established some close relationships with some isolated families that may have otherwise continued to be estranged from the schools"* (EWS Representative)

*"Many parents need to talk through issues or concerns and with the best will, schools do not have the time to give or meet this need. PSAs can provide this non judgmental, confidential service"* (Children's Centre Representative)

### 3. PSAs

All PSAs surveyed considered that parental engagement would diminish if their role did not exist.

*“PSAs are a vital link for parents. Without PSAs to help parents with information on services etc, they wouldn’t get the help they need. This could have an impact on the child’s learning at school, as we currently help with attendance issues, housing, funding, behaviour and much more. If we weren’t there to signpost parents to services it would have an effect on home and school life”*

Several expressed concerned about the potential impact on parents who they had worked with should their role should cease:

*“It almost seems cruel to parents if our role was abandoned - to give that support and then take it all away”*

*“It would put lives in danger if we weren’t here to help some of our most vulnerable families”*

*“PSAs have spent two years reassuring parents that we are here to help - to take that away would be devastating for lots of families”*

*“Parents would feel let down - how could we have the level of support and experience that we now have and then just remove it?”*

### 4. Parents

Almost half the parents interviewed in the Family Support Survey who indicated that they would go their child’s school for support specified that they would go to the Parent Support Adviser (47.1%), whilst around 1 in 5 of them mentioned their child’s teacher (18.1%) and just under 1 in 10 of them specified their child’s Head teacher (9.6%).

*“I would just like to say I haven’t been in a position yet of needing a lots support with any issues, but any fears or concerns I have had I have gone straight to our PSA who is always happy to help and is always happy and polite. She will do whatever she can to help and I think it is a wonderful scheme!”*

Almost 3 in 4 parents whose views were surveyed at school events indicated that they would not use the PSA if the role was not impartial.

### 5.1.2 Potential Impact on Parental Engagement if the PSA role ceases

It is evident that PSAs have been a catalyst for securing and increasing parental engagement with schools. Many parents are likely to lose the only contact they have in school who is impartial and confidential and who they trust and much of the preventative work undertaken by PSAs is unlikely to take place.

If PSA posts cease it is likely that there will be more parents who are:

- not involved in their children's learning
- isolated
- not accessing information/support/services
- having problems/unresolved issues
- experiencing stress/mental health issues
- having children subject to child protection plans

Problems encountered by many vulnerable parents may well intensify if they do not have access to a PSA and the preventative services to which they can signpost parents. An increased demand for other more specialist and expensive interventions may also result.

*"Parents would not be so well supported. Problems would escalate. We would have more demands on specialist services. PSAs are an effective resource because they are integral to the preventative, early intervention agenda".*  
(Strategic Locality Manager)

## **5.2 Parent Participation – improving services**

### 5.2.1 Current impact of the PSAs on Parental Participation

#### (i) Survey Analysis

##### 1. Head teachers

Interviews with head teachers revealed that around 2 in 3 (64.4%) believed that parental participation in school had increased since the PSA had been in post, whilst around 1 in 20 (5.2%) did not think this was the case and around 1 in 3 (30.2%) felt that this needed to be developed further.

##### Primary Schools

*"Re-structured PTFA and established a parent forum with a rep parent from each class. Parent Council reps have stood outside classrooms and communicated with all parents about their views"*

*"PSA has played a central role in setting up and running our Parents Focus*

*group (Parent Forum) which has had a marked impact on our engagement with parents and development of consultation and a dialogue with these stakeholders. This has been a significant positive impact on the schools provision in this area”*

*“Participation is up in terms of Maths and English (keeping up with the kids)”*

*“Allsortz funding and parents now participating”*

*“PSA has encouraged parents into wider learning and volunteering roles”*

*“Parents beginning to come into school via jewellery and craft making sessions”*

### Secondary Schools

*“Enhanced engagement and participation with PSAs in the school especially with parents/carers who are frightened of coming into school”*

*“More parents actively participating in school, the PSA is the oil to this mechanism of parent participation”*

### Special Schools

*“Before PSA monthly parent group with 2 - 3 parents. Now 2 monthly groups one primary and one secondary with 8-10 parents per group”*

*“Parent participation training organised and ran in school for parents”*

*“PSA has revolutionised parents engaging with learning - parents have more self esteem and developed a social network”*

*“PSA able to help revitalise the PTA”*

### (ii) Key Agency Representatives

Interviews with representatives from key agencies indicated that there would be a reduction in parental participation in schools if the PSA role didn't exist and that this might create other difficulties.

*“It would impact severely in the development of the locality agenda. The parents voice is crucial to service/locality work and particularly in regard to the new government thinking” (Locality Consultant)*

## 2. PSAs

Around 1 in 3 (34.2%) PSAs surveyed considered that parental participation in the school would diminish if their role did not exist and around 1 in 4 (26.3%) were concerned that this would result in a reduced 'parent voice'.

*"I really encourage parents to let me know their ideas for improving the school and I feed them back to SLT and help them to implement them. If parents are unhappy about certain issues regarding school or do not feel confident in raising them then they will text/call me and I can raise them anonymously"*

### 5.2.2 Potential impact on Parental Participation in schools if the PSA role ceases

It is evident that PSAs have been a catalyst for securing and increasing parental participation in schools. Schools will have to decide who will champion this area of work in the absence of the PSA. Other partner agencies may also encounter reduced opportunities for engaging with parent representatives and securing an effective 'parent voice' to inform their service planning and development.

## **5.3 Schools Communication with parents**

### 5.3.1 Current impact of the PSAs on communication with parents by schools

#### (i) Survey Analysis

##### 1. Head teachers

Interviews with head teachers showed around 3 in 4 (72.3%) felt that communication with parents had increased since the PSA had been in post, whilst around 1 in 20 (6.5%) did not think this was the case and around 1 in 5 (21.0%) did not mention communication with parents in their interviews.

##### Primary Schools

*"PSA rings, talks to, catches in playground, gives information to parents - which they need! PSA feeds info back into school from the parents to head to enable school to prepare for support"*

*"PSA is continually striving to engage a variety of parental groups in the school e.g. Forces Families, and other hard to reach individuals, through leafleting, notice board, newsletter and coffee afternoons.*

*"Produces newsletters - keeping parents informed and up to date"*

*"PSA is making communication processes more obvious through parent language via newsletters/website"*

## Secondary Schools

*“Running text messaging service for parents- the immediacy of response for parents is key”*

*“Communication has improved - Newsletters, website and posters”*

## Special Schools

*“PSA knocks down the barriers of communication and acronyms to allow the parent to understand”*

*“PSA does Home Visits, produces leaflets and newsletters, emails and phones parents”*

## 2. PSAs

Around 2 in 5 (44.5%) PSAs surveyed suggested that two way communications between school and parents would be less effective if their role did not exist.

*“Overall standards of communication will decline as staff and parents/carers go back to ‘them and us’ culture”*

The majority of PSAs also stated that they produce and disseminate information for parents via parents’ newsletters, websites and events. One commented:

*“My termly newsletter about activities in the holidays in the local community and surrounding area wouldn’t be done”*

### 5.3.2 Potential Impact on communication with parents by schools if the PSA role ceases

It is clear that PSAs have played a pivotal role in improving communication with parents. They have provided information using many different methods to reflect the needs of their respective parent populations which has been welcomed by parents across Plymouth. Schools will have to decide who will lead on this area of work in the absence of the PSA. Other partner agencies that have also used PSA networks for communicating with parents will have to explore alternative ways of doing this.

## 5.4 Community Cohesion

### 5.4.1 Current impact of the PSAs on Community Cohesion

#### (i) Survey Analysis

##### 1. Head teachers

Interviews with head teachers showed that the majority (94.7%) thought their PSA had played a pivotal role in enhancing community cohesion, whilst three said this was difficult to measure and 1 considered this to be difficult for the PSA given that the post is only funded for 20 hours a week.

##### Primary Schools

*“PSA has tried to set up clubs, adult learning and does sign post parents on - recognises need - goes to meetings and makes sure that link is made between school and other agencies - she has a wealth of knowledge on services”*

*“PSA held coffee morning for BME parents to ensure BME parents met as a group feel part of community excellent feedback from the parents re this.*

*“Local elderly people come in for lunch once a month to gain community cohesion”*

##### Secondary Schools

*“PSA is working with PCSOs and other members of the wider community and has made a difference with families where there are learning difficulties and substance misuse issues”*

*“PSA also supports parents at loggerheads with one another which helps the community”*

*“The PSA has been proactive in signposting parents and has got them going to places in the community and doing things they wouldn't have done otherwise”*

##### Special Schools

*“PSA support parents on the CHIDS reference group to shape services for the future”*

*“PSA is looking to form a working group for ASD and ADHD awareness day”*

## 2. Key Agency Representatives

Several representatives from key agencies indicated that there would be a reduction in locality/community knowledge if the PSA role didn't exist. The following comments are illustrative of those made:

*"Information about local resources would be weaker"* (Strategic Locality Manager)

*"The PSA role has been a life saver during the last year. Without the support of the PSAs, I do not feel I would have had the knowledge and time to effectively provide a comprehensive service to the community members most in need"* (Police Representative)

*"Their micro-community knowledge is brilliant"* (Children's Social Care representative)

## 3. PSAs

Several PSAs surveyed suggested that community cohesion may decline if their role does not exist.

*"Likely to be an increase in community issues/problems - worsening community cohesion"*

### 5.4.2 Potential Impact on community cohesion if the PSA role ceases

It is clear that PSAs have played a vital role in enhancing community cohesion across the school communities and localities within which they operate. It is likely that community cohesion may weaken in the future in the absence of PSAs. This in turn may well impact on future demands placed on schools and other key partner agencies.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

If PSA posts cease it is likely that there will be many parents who do not know where to go for support and who are unlikely to receive support of a primarily preventative nature from a universal service. It is likely that there will be a marked decrease in:

1. Parental engagement
2. Parent participation
3. Communication with parents by schools
4. Community cohesion

## **6.0 Overall Conclusion**

This evaluation suggests that if the PSA role ceases to exist from April 2011 Schools and Key Partner Agencies are likely to encounter a number of multifaceted problems. There are likely to be workload and logistical implications for schools (in terms of head teachers, teaching and support staff) and many partner agencies. There would also be financial implications arising from this for both. If PSA posts no longer exist there are also likely to be challenges for schools in sustaining current levels of parental engagement, pupil attendance and attainment as well as in maintaining current levels of good behaviour.

If PSA posts no longer exist numerous parents will struggle to secure the support they are receiving at the present time. These parents may not know where to turn and many might be unable to cope with the issues and problems they face. It appears likely that if PSA posts cease then so will much of the preventative work with parents that has taken place in Plymouth over the last three years. It is very possible that this will lead to greater demands on expensive specialist services as parents present with problems that have not been resolved, have escalated or have reached crisis point. If PSA posts are to cease, then careful consideration will need to be given to developing an exit strategy which ensures that parents in Plymouth know where parental support may be available in future and how they can access it.

**Appendix 1: Primary Reason for parents contacting PSA for an issue concerning themselves (September 2009 – May 2010)**

Count of Parent Code	Locality							
	C & NE	City Wide	NW	Plympton	Plymstock	SE	SW	Grand Total
Main reason for parent contacting PSA PARENT								
Anti-social Behaviour / Crime	4		4	2	5	7	10	32
Benefits	84		141	46	22	35	122	450
Childcare	27		40	9	23	17	38	154
Community Issues	29		62	8	14	33	44	190
Domestic Abuse	27	1	71	20	13	27	48	207
Family Relationships	666	2	421	173	193	218	357	2030
Financial Concerns	221		120	18	42	100	109	610
Friendships	24		14	10	25	11	51	135
Grief / Loss	6		46	20	37	13	38	160
Health	94		106	17	59	45	82	403
Housing	49	2	134	13	14	99	80	391
Maternity Services	2		4	2	2		3	13
Mental Health Concerns	50		64	34	27	23	90	288
Own Learning	79		270	19	23	11	97	499
Refugee / Asylum	1						12	13
Request support to meeting / appointment regarding parent	215	7	221	66	72	83	140	804
School Issues	275	5	276	139	117	99	251	1162
Self Esteem	24		34	10	13	7	36	124
Sexuality					1			1
Substance / Alcohol Misuse	3		32	5		14	14	68
Support for parent in CAF	19		47	13	2	23	50	154
Support for parent in CAF (FORM)	7		9	3	13	12	6	50
Support for parent in CAF (MEETING)	22		13	1	10	21	34	101
Grand Total	1928	17	2129	628	727	898	1712	8039

**Appendix 2: Primary Reason for parents contacting PSA for an issue concerning their child/ren (September 2009 – May 2010)**

Count of Parent Code	Locality							
	C & NE	City Wide	NW	Plympton	Plymstock	SE	SW	Grand Total
Main Reason for parent contacting PSA CHILD								
Achievement	45		21	11	9	12	35	133
Additional needs / Disability	147	2	220	86	77	63	173	768
Anti-social Behaviour / Crime			2	3	7	4	13	29
Attendance / punctuality	147	4	96	16	34	30	188	515
Behaviour	413	1	479	126	151	193	453	1816
Bullying	57		45	26	4	13	50	195
Child Protection	107		62	10	23	72	111	385
Child's education at home	8		11	6	9	3	13	50
Exclusions / Seclusions	9	5	27	4		23	17	85
Friendships	30		15	13	29	7	29	123
Grief / Loss	13		45	10	28	11	26	133
Health	133		71	18	48	13	112	395
Homework	10		2	2	6	3	9	32
Mental health concerns	69		38	14	42	22	60	245
Request support at meeting regarding child	103	1	94	33	33	26	113	403
Self Esteem	6		19	5	13	5	16	64
Sexual Health / Teen Pregnancy	1		2	1		10	5	19
Sexuality	6					2		8
Substance / Alcohol Misuse	13		1		3	6	2	25
Transitions	103	12	60	77	33	28	113	426
Unhappy with school or home	135		100	50	51	25	95	456
Grand Total	1555	25	1410	511	600	571	1633	6305

**Appendix 3: PSA Database contacts under 15 minutes duration  
(March 2010)**

Sum of March	Locality						
	C&NE	NW	Plympton	Plymstock	SE	SW	Grand Total
Discussion Topic							
Asylum / Refugee / BME	1	4	7	0	5	45	62
Benefits	27	57	16	35	16	53	204
Childcare	19	42	12	33	8	46	160
Community Issues	23	56	25	28	28	70	230
Domestic Abuse	3	13	7	7	6	20	56
Family Relationships	87	112	38	53	38	165	493
Financial Concerns	14	43	14	9	13	62	155
Greetings & Introductions	586	895	29	200	223	871	2804
Grief / loss	2	25	15	1	8	3	54
Health	41	116	10	27	7	71	272
Housing	12	64	10	15	53	42	196
Maternity Services	0	3	2	0	1	14	20
Meeting / Appointment Support	35	115	23	30	9	115	327
Mental Health Concerns	11	22	14	42	7	50	146
Other	164	242	24	60	9	172	671
Own Learning	39	166	28	26	6	86	351
School Issues	100	245	53	107	56	214	775
Self Esteem & Friendships	11	33	9	19	5	80	157
Sexuality	0	5	0	1	1	10	17
Substance misuse	8	31	2	1	6	7	55
Grand Total	1183	2289	338	694	505	2196	7205