



## Sheila Coates Foundation Report on Grant Giving 2020-21 Executive summary

Sheila Coates Foundation (SCF) was established to enhance the education and mental health of autistic young people. This report evaluates its first year.

In 2020/21 SCF set up processes and systems to run two grant-making programmes, funding a range of creative, practical activities.

- **The pilot** - six schools in four geographical areas were awarded grants to run year-long projects of up to £50,000. A total of £204,900 was awarded.
- **The COVID-19 response fund** - set up in response to the pandemic. Across two rounds of funding in two geographic regions, 89 schools and colleges received awards of either £1,000 or £5,000. A total of £313,000 was awarded.

**This evaluation** investigated the impact of SCF funding on autistic young people's learning and/or mental health, taking a service evaluation approach: collecting and analysing data both during and after grant-making.

### What we found

- ***Impact on autistic students***

SCF funding reached 3,147 autistic students. 96.6% of schools and colleges reported an impact after as little as five months. Relationships were strengthened and transitions into (or back into) school were smoother. Improvements in emotional regulation, attendance and confidence helped autistic students to learn and socialise. Importantly, staff understanding of autism grew - not just within projects but right across funded schools.

Key to these impacts was student involvement in designing and developing activities, and the flexibility to use funding creatively in response to changing needs. SCF funding can also act as a catalyst for more activity, thereby having a much bigger longer-term impact.

- ***SCF grant-making***

SCF has operated successfully and efficiently to plan, deliver and administer grant-making on the small scale undertaken. Learning from the first year will inform future programmes and initiatives.

### Conclusions and recommendations

Working flexibly and responding to the needs of schools, SCF helped a significant number of autistic students to engage with school, learn successfully and to manage the anxiety associated with the pandemic.

A flexible and responsive approach to grant-making from SCF has been key to these achievements.

## Contents

	Page
<a href="#">Executive summary</a>	
<a href="#">Background and context</a>	2
<a href="#">Grant giving 2020-21</a>	3
<a href="#">Evaluation Plan</a>	6
<a href="#">Results: impact on students</a>	7
<a href="#">Evidence of impact - reflections</a>	12
<a href="#">Key factors affecting impact</a>	12
<a href="#">Unexpected impacts</a>	13
<a href="#">Conclusions</a>	14
- <a href="#">Table summarising conclusions</a>	15
- <a href="#">Conclusions - more detail</a>	16
<a href="#">Case studies from COVID response fund round #1</a>	19

## 1. Background

Sheila Coates Foundation gained registration as a charity in February 2020. The primary aim of the charity is to enhance the education and mental health of autistic young people, helping them to access mainstream secondary school or college. SCF meets this aim by awarding grants to qualifying secondary schools and colleges.

This report evaluates the impact of the first year of the SCF grant-making programme.

### 1.1 Context

The first operating year of SCF is set against a background of changes due both to a major review of the special educational needs and disability (SEND) system as well as upheaval caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. While the first of these has resulted in uncertainty for schools, the second directly caused disruption to education for all pupils and an associated increase in anxiety for those with autism.

As well as this, both individual schools and recent [research](#) report a rise in the numbers of autistic students in the education system.

This context, together with our own conversations with both school staff and students highlighted a huge need for additional funding.

## 2. Grant Giving 2020/2021

In 2020/21 SCF ran two grant-making programmes.

- In March 2020 SCF trustees decided to run the first grant-making programme on a small scale as a **pilot** during the academic year 2020-21.
- In January 2021, trustees decided to award smaller amounts of funding to schools in response to the COVID-19 pandemic: **the COVID-19 response fund**.

### 2.1 The pilot

#### **What happened:**

Following research we developed an online grant-management system which would automate many of the processes, communications and decision-making.

The SCF pilot grant-making programme was launched, and selected schools and colleges in four geographic areas: Southampton, Oxfordshire, Brighton/Hove and East Sussex were approached. Schools and colleges were invited to apply for grants of up to £50,000.

The pilot aim was:

- for schools to show a measurable impact on autistic young people's learning and/or mental health

A number of schools applied from across the four areas. Applications were reviewed against agreed criteria by the SCF professional adviser, some criteria being weighted as more important. The reviews were confirmed by second reviewers (SCF trustees). Six schools were successful in receiving funding totaling £204,900. Grants ranged from £10,000 to £50,000.

Funded activity varied and is summarised here:

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Outdoor classroom</b></p> <p>For ASC students who found it hard to be in school, to manage their anxiety.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A brand new physical building for lessons inside and outside.</li> <li>• Specialist sensory equipment.</li> <li>• IT equipment and games</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Amazing with Autism</b></p> <p>Creating an autism-friendly school</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All staff trained, knowledgeable about autism</li> <li>• Space in school to calm down</li> <li>• After school activities, breakfast club</li> <li>• TAs trained as mentors</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Autism Garden Zone</b></p> <p>Garden learning space for autistic students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Earth pod classroom</li> <li>• Forest zone for lessons</li> <li>• Dens/shelters/hammock for social time</li> <li>• Sensory and growing garden</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Gardens for calming and learning</b></p> <p>Gardens on 2 sites for learning and calming</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scented, textured plants</li> <li>• Lessons about the environment</li> <li>• Tables and benches for meeting</li> <li>• Canopies and shelters</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Sensory quiet room</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Sensigrate</b></p>

<p>A dedicated place in school, designed by students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● For students to regulate and learn</li> <li>● Helping transition for Year 7</li> <li>● Disseminate what works to the rest of the school</li> </ul>	<p>A room where students can go when they need to calm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Soft, textured furnishings</li> <li>● Calming lighting, music, noises</li> <li>● Special equipment to move on: swings, hammocks</li> </ul>
--	--

Each project was planned to start in September 2020 and to last for one academic year. Depending on the size of the grant, schools were required to report either once or twice during the year. In their progress reports, we asked schools to report against each of up to 3 outcomes which they had identified, and to provide an updated project budget summary showing spending.

All pilot schools were aware that by accepting a grant from SCF, they were agreeing to be part of the overall evaluation.

## 2.2 COVID-19 Response Fund

### ***What happened:***

The SCF pilot was launched during the coronavirus pandemic, and this had a significant impact. In January 2021 when trustees were considering a second round of grant-making, it was clear that schools were struggling to implement large projects at a time of nation-wide disruption to education. This is summarised on page 7.

Instead of a second major grants round, schools were offered smaller amounts of funding which they could swiftly put in place to support activity responding to the impact of COVID-19. This also tied in well with SCF's financial operation at the time.

Schools and colleges in identified geographic regions were offered awards of £1,000 or £5,000 which addressed identified impacts.

- Mental health and well-being
- Remote teaching and learning
- Transition
- Working with families

A simple application process was designed, making it quicker and easier for schools to apply and straightforward for SCF to process. Applications were reviewed by the SCF professional adviser against four key criteria, and then confirmed by second reviewers.

Website copy was updated, and key contacts within the regions were identified. A relationship with the National Association for Special Educational Needs (nasen) was developed meaning that regional coordinators from Whole School SEND (a consortium hosted by nasen) disseminated information about the SCF awards locally.

During the period 2020-2021, two rounds of the COVID-19 response fund were launched.

- January 2021 (East Midlands region) when 115 applications for funding were received. £107,000 was awarded to 35 schools and colleges
- May 2021 (South West region) when 104 applications were received. £206,000 was awarded to 54 schools and colleges.

SCF required the funds to be used either for implementing activity (such as additional staff time, transport costs or specialist advice), or for resources (such as equipment, technology or production costs).

Funded activity varied and is summarised here

<p><b>Sensory spaces and resources</b> 45% of awards (n=40) equipped spaces in school which students could access when feeling overwhelmed, anxious or when they needed to feel calmer. Funds were used to buy furniture and specialist equipment such as mood lighting, weighted blankets, wobble cushions, bubble lamps.</p>	<p><b>Additional support staff time</b> This was used for a range of purposes: to support unstructured times, to meet and greet students and settle them, for emotional coaching sessions, to work with parents, to run interventions. Some schools used funding to release their experienced assistants for COVID specific work.</p>
<p><b>Specialist interventions</b> Schools bought in specialists: art therapists, speech and language therapists, educational psychologists and other bespoke support for students and to train other school staff.</p>	<p><b>Personalised ‘packs’ for students</b> SCF funded schools to think creatively to produce practical hands-on support: back to school packs, personal sensory boxes, activity packs. These helped students return to school and gave other school staff practical ideas.</p>
<p><b>Transition support</b> Supporting students to move into or on from school or college has been a challenge during the pandemic. SCF funded additional trips to college, the production of virtual tours and information videos.</p>	<p><b>IT equipment</b> Many schools purchased additional laptops, tablets or ChromeBooks. Two schools rented AV robots to link home learning with school.</p>
<p><b>Interventions</b> SCF awards gave schools the chance to build their range of interventions to help students positively manage COVID restrictions: lego therapy, well-being Apps, social story software, Zones of Regulation.</p>	<p><b>Staff training</b> Either separately or as part of other activity, many schools chose to upskill staff. This could be general ASC training for the whole school or more specific such as mental health first aid training, mentoring skills, tic disorders</p>
<p><b>Other initiatives</b> Many creative ideas were funded including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• transport costs to support return to school</li> <li>• young people creating a film about their experience of the pandemic</li> <li>• running parent courses, parent drop ins, liaising with families</li> <li>• commissioning companies to run activities: farm days, outdoor team building</li> </ul>	

### 3. Evaluation plan

To address the aims of pilot evaluation and of the COVID-19 response fund, quantitative and qualitative data was collected in a range of forms, from a range of sources.

<b>Evaluation aim</b>	<b>Measures</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>By whom</b>
For schools to show a measurable impact on autistic young people's learning and/or mental health	Progress reports	2 or 3 times during the project life span	Project leads in schools
	Evaluation interviews	Summer term 2021	Trustee with project lead
	Case studies	Summer term 2021	Mary with project leads
	COVID-19 impact statement/survey via Google Forms	Summer Term 2021	Mary

The schedule of data collection reflects amendments made during the year in response to disruption caused by COVID-19 pandemic. Less information was collected than planned as additional demands on schools were kept to a minimum, but data was rich and informative.

Quantitative data, collected from surveys, was analysed using the table function in Google Forms. Informal thematic analysis was used to interrogate qualitative data from interviews, reflection, progress reports and impact statements.

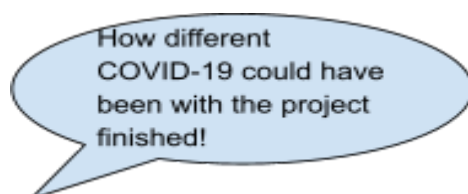
## 4. Results

The COVID-19 pandemic caused significant disruption to schools across the UK. All of the schools involved in the national pilot reported impact, and in some it interfered with the planned timescale by stalling progress.

- Three of the six pilot schools kept to the original timescale
- Two schools delayed the start of their project until April 2021
- One school postponed the start until September 2021

Reasons for this varied and included:

- changes to staffing in the schools including significant staff absence
- schools physically changed, space being reduced for social distancing
- changes to planned activities - for example in one school, after school activities were replaced by visits to a local farm enterprise aimed at developing social skills and independence
- increased anxiety because of uncertainty, reorganisation, frequent changes
- remote learning interfering with student consultation.



This report reflects data collected at the time of writing:

- national pilot: three projects complete, two in progress and one yet to start
- COVID-19 response fund: 29 impact statements from the first round. Impact statements from the second round are due in December 2021.

### 4.1 Aim

**For schools to show a measurable impact on autistic young people's learning and/or mental health.**

SCF funding impacted on 3,147 autistic students, 357 through the national pilot, 612 through the first round of the COVID-19 response fund and 2,178 via the second.

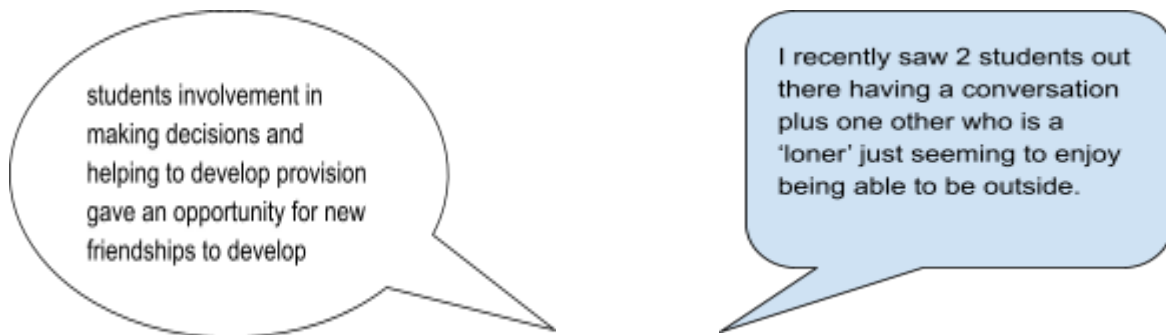
In 96.6% (n=28) of the COVID-19 response fund schools who submitted an impact statement reported that the funding had made a difference. 55% (n=16) reported that the funding had made a substantial impact.



In both the pilot and the COVID-19 response fund, schools and colleges reported impacts in the following areas:

#### 4.1.1 *Relationships have strengthened*

Improved relationships between ASC students, and between them and their peers were frequently reported as impacts. Schools talked about improved group cohesion by working together in a shared initiative, or having a safe space to meet and chat. In one school, by designing and developing an outdoor learning space, students came across others they wouldn't have previously met, they formed friendships and even met up out of school.



#### 4.1.2 *Staff understand more about autism*

Schools have seen a dramatic improvement in awareness of ASC, and as a result increased use of strategies and approaches across schools. This has been through:

- staff or students disseminating information about the project
- including successful strategies in students' passports and plans
- formal staff training either generally about autism, or about specific aspects such as mental health or tic disorders.

#### 4.1.3 *Improved emotional regulation*

Many schools used funding to develop quiet, 'safe spaces' which are equipped with comfortable furniture, sensory mood lighting, defined areas for chat or work. Spaces were designed so that students can either 'drop in' when they feel they need to, or some schools have timetabled 'regulation sessions' which help to give structure to the day.

Parents reported children being calmer and therefore less anxious about going to school. School staff have noted that ASC students rely on the safe space less and less frequently as they are more able to manage their feelings themselves. These spaces have helped ASC students to talk about their thoughts and feelings - crucial during the pandemic when anxiety has been high.

*We have found that this new space has been invaluable in supporting students with autism in such a challenging year. The room has provided stability and a bespoke approach to their needs.*

#### 4.1.4 Improved attendance

A particular issue this year has been autistic students returning to school after a period of home learning due to the pandemic. Many schools have had to work really hard to make the transition back successful when there was additional anxiety, when routine had been disrupted, when students were returning to a very different environment: different spaces, different interactions, different sensory challenges. SCF funding has supported students to return to school through a range of activities: personalised packs or boxes, having a safe space to act as a bridge between home and school, time for support staff to work with parents, ensuring there is time to support students at the beginning and end of each day.

Increased staffing has allowed enough time to identify and address barriers to coming back to school

*a student who had not previously attended for a year had reintegration sessions in the room and attended full time in the last week of term.*

One school recorded student attendance before and after SCF funding:

	Attendance	
	Before SCF	After SCF
Student A	74%	85%
Student B	81%	93%

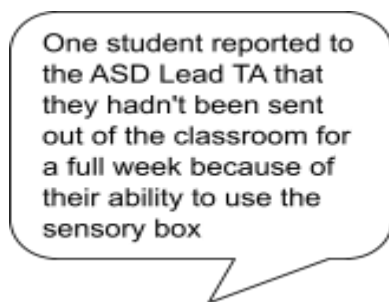
#### 4.1.4 Increased engagement

SCF funding has helped students not just return to school, but also return to learning. Many schools felt this was a result of improved emotional regulation. For example, in one school, mentoring sessions from teaching assistants helped two of the younger ASC students, who are accessing all of their lessons again.

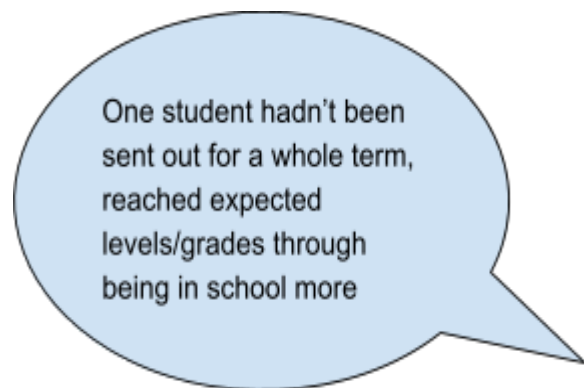
Another school who developed a quiet safe space for students looked at the engagement of ASC students compared with other students in school. Their data showed that the gap

between ASC students and their neurotypical peers was closing, particularly in Years 8, 10 and 11 where ASC students were significantly more engaged.

The impact of this improved engagement in learning has been measured in different ways: fewer students missing out on learning leading to improved academic attainment, a reduction in reported behaviour incidents and, for one school, no fixed-term exclusions.



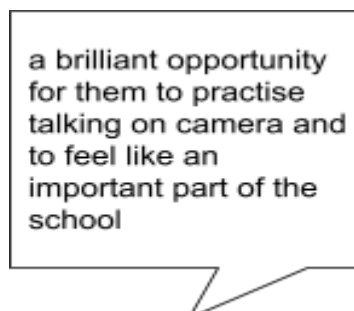
One student reported to the ASD Lead TA that they hadn't been sent out of the classroom for a full week because of their ability to use the sensory box



One student hadn't been sent out for a whole term, reached expected levels/grades through being in school more

#### 4.1.5 *Increased confidence*

A number of schools reported improvements in the confidence of ASC students through having opportunities to shine. For example, in one school a student shared his successes with school staff after a week-long residential trip. In another school a student (following mentoring) stood up on stage in front of his own year group and pitched his business idea during the school's enterprise day: something he would never have managed before. For some students, having the opportunity to be involved with funded activities has really built up confidence.



a brilliant opportunity for them to practise talking on camera and to feel like an important part of the school

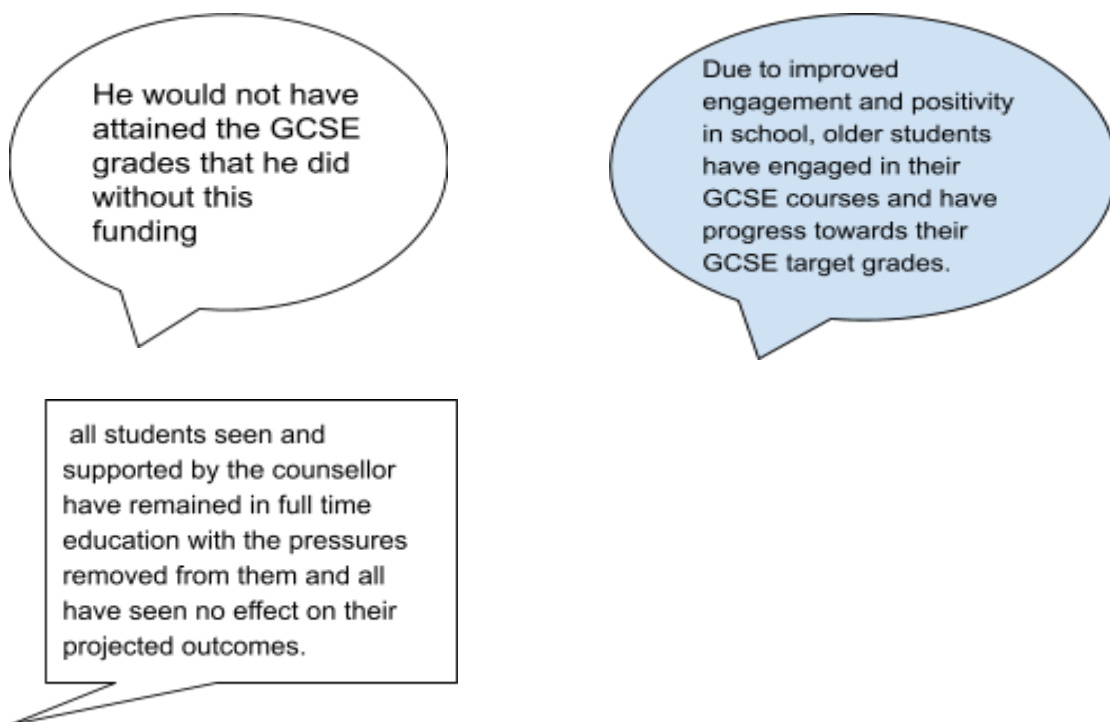
#### 4.1.6 *Smoother transition*

Many funded projects focused on supporting the transition from primary to secondary school which can be challenging for ASC students, particularly when the opportunity for real-time physical visits has been limited. Having an identified, safe space in school supported

students to make a successful move to secondary school. Impactful 'virtual tours' of secondary school or college, funded by SCF, meant that ASC students could still have their transition visit, resulting in them settling much more quickly into their new school. One pilot school trained Y10 ASC students as mentors for Y7 students which was very effective.

#### 4.1.7 *Improved academic attainment*

Several schools reported improved performance in school, staff felt this could be for a range of reasons: reduced anxiety leading to better attendance, more flexible timetabling due to funding for more support staff, improved relationships between autistic students and staff, or more staff knowing positive learning approaches for students.



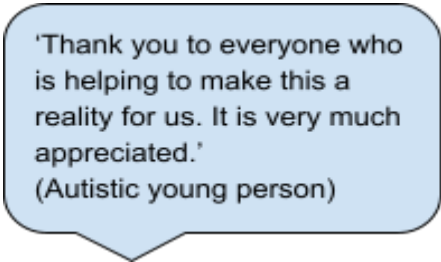
#### 4.1.8 *Improved chances:*

The activities funded by SCF have, in some cases, had an impact beyond the project period. One student at risk of exclusion led on a main pilot project which involved developing outdoor space and a garden club. The student is now being invited to apply for an apprenticeship at a local farm enterprise.


## 4.2 Evidence of impact - reflections

The breakdown of projects on pages 3-5 shows the wide range of activities that SCF funded. 45% of funds awarded aimed to develop sensory provision. The majority of schools felt this would help students regulate themselves in order to boost their attendance and ability to engage in lessons. Those schools and colleges awarded funds via the COVID-19 response fund aimed to use the sensory provision to help ASC students to return to school, supporting the transition from home to school.

In our main application process we ask schools and colleges to provide a clear rationale for the activity they propose to use funding for. Where possible, we ask them to cite relevant evidence. However, the evidence underpinning the impact of sensory rooms in schools on regulation and engagement is scarce. Despite this, SCF's first year of grant-giving has yielded rich informal evidence, described above. The evidence illustrates how sensory rooms (used in a range of ways) have helped autistic students to form relationships, feel safe, calm, self-regulate emotions, engage with school, and make the transition back from home to school. Many schools have gone on to make the link between this and increased attendance in lessons, and even to improve academic performance.



'Thank you to everyone who is helping to make this a reality for us. It is very much appreciated.'  
(Autistic young person)



I will do anything to help to say thank you for this amazing project (Parent)

## 4.3 Key factors affecting impact

Analysis of the data showed the following to be important in the changes seen.

- Being able to make changes to plans, flexibility, in expanding the original scope in response to COVID. For example, in one pilot school, a safe space - originally planned for emotional regulation in students - has also been used for parent sessions, for mentoring and for supporting the Y7 transition.
- Having a safe (sensory) space for ASC pupils to regulate, calm down.
- Creative use of sensory space. Schools who saw the most impact were those who regularly reviewed and changed the way the space was used in response to changing students' and staff needs.
- Working closely with the local services, e.g. the local authority ASC team.
- Building in structure, for example starting with timetabled sessions in sensory rooms and then gradually reducing them.

- Measuring the impact of funded activity, for example one school noted the number of lessons attended following mentoring, so they could showcase the impact. As a result they have built this into their approach in the future.
- Using additional support staff time in a focused way to support flexibility in the school timetable e.g. at transition times, for focused study, to facilitate contact outside of 'bubbles' (students kept in 'safe' numbers to restrict potential spread of the coronavirus).
- Involving students in planning and designing projects right from the outset.
- Thinking of effective ways of talking about projects to a wider group of school or college staff. This helped the funding have a much wider impact.

#### 4.4 Unexpected impacts:

- ★ The local authority team has asked one school to be a leading school for a new foundation within the local authority for ASC students.
- ★ One school learned more about the neurodiverse brain and this has helped them understand a wider range of students within tutor groups.
- ★ SCF funding has been the catalyst for more activity, for example one school has planned further training next term: learning about ASC in girls specifically, and noticing early warning signs.
- ★ One pupil really benefited from mentoring and has started to share insights into how he experiences school - making him a neurodiverse ambassador.
- ★ Because one project stalled due to COVID-19, two ASC students entered a remote Year 10 peer mentoring scheme to support transition for Year 7 ASC students which has been incredibly positive. The school decided to extend this and use the SCF funded sensory room as base for further mentoring.
- ★ SCF funding has allowed schools to trial initiatives and then present a 'business case' to the school leadership team. For example, SCF funded enhanced responsibility for selected support staff, which led to it being extended beyond the funded period.
- ★ Staff improved skill and knowledge. Many schools chose to spend funds on training and/or development activities which have really helped boost expertise right across schools and colleges.

## **5. Conclusions and recommendations**

The academic year 2020-2021 has been a busy and impactful first year of grant-making for SCF. Through implementing three rounds of grants (one main pilot and two COVID-19 response rounds) SCF reached a significant number of ASC students helping them to manage anxiety associated with pandemic, and to learn successfully. We have also trialled different software approaches to grant applications and their management.

In addition, there have been impacts that couldn't have been foreseen, and much learning.

Reports from and interviews with pilot schools, together with impact statements from those benefiting from the two COVID-19 response fund rounds demonstrate a huge need for support for autistic students in secondary schools and colleges. Our analysis shows that there are ways that SCF can effectively meet this need. This year, this has been done most effectively by awarding modest sums that are easy to apply for, and quick to receive and use.

This final section of the report draws out main conclusions. It summarises them first in table-format on page 14, and then with more detail on pages 15-21.

	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>Comment</b>
1	<b>The need for a flexible approach to grant-giving in secondary schools and colleges</b>	➤ This has been vital in a year where there has been so much disruption to schools and colleges.
2	<b>A responsive but clear grants framework helps effective working</b>	➤ Schools and colleges are busy, dynamic places, and the need for a responsive approach will continue to be important.
3	<b>SCF can help to grow the evidence-base</b>	➤ Our projects have demonstrated impact, sometimes in area where there is limited robust evidence. A focus on impact is crucial.
4	<b>The involvement of autistic young people adds value</b>	➤ Projects with active involvement is autistic students made a more sustained impact.
5	<b>Working with partners strengthens the impact</b>	➤ SCF encourages collaboration between schools and local businesses or services.
6	<b>Small funded projects can be a trial ground for innovation or a catalyst for change</b>	➤ An unexpected outcome was the way some schools and colleges used SCF funding to pilot different approaches. We will seek to encourage this in the future.
7	<b>A standard measure (for example of engagement or emotional-regulation) will clearly show the total impact of SCF</b>	➤ This will help SCF to report on our impact in a meaningful way, on factors which are important for autistic young people.
8	<b>Disseminating the project raises whole school awareness</b>	➤ In some schools/colleges staff and autistic students presented to the wide school. This enhanced the impact of SCF funding.



On the following pages, each of these conclusions is expanded.

### **5.1 The need for a flexible approach to grant-giving in secondary schools**

1. Schools are dynamic places, with multiple pressures - never more so than those caused by a pandemic. Schools have to react quickly to external pressures such as this, and internal pressures such as staffing issues. Because of this, our systems and decision-making have needed to be responsive; plans change.

In a year of disruption schools have not been in a position to plan and implement complex projects. However schools have shown that they can put in place more contained, time-limited activity - and to see an impact. Although it is uncertain how lasting the impact of this type of grant is, nature of schools and colleges more generally means no two years are the same. It will continue to be important that SCF grant-making responds swiftly to changing needs.

### **5.2 A responsive but clear grants framework helps everyone to work effectively**

This year, because of very particular circumstances, SCF has had to be nimble and responsive. However, too much flexibility can lead to plans going awry and projects drifting. SCF grant-making will always reflect its values (responsive, responsible and listening). There is also the needs for a framework in which it is possible to manage the diverse and sometimes chaotic nature of schools.

### **5.3 SCF can help to grow the evidence-base**

In the last year, SCF funded many schools and colleges to develop sensory spaces. Despite the dearth of evidence for these spaces, SCF funding has shown just how impactful they can be. How sensory rooms are used seems to be critical, not merely putting them in place. In our funded activity, sensory rooms were used creatively in a range of ways: as spaces for mentoring, for other professionals to work in, as timetabled spaces and also for drop-ins, places with defined areas for different activities, for students to chill and to carry out more focused interventions.

A focus on impact has ensured emerging evidence has been collected. There is scope for more in-depth rigorous evaluation of approaches. SCF will communicate the impact of practical projects through its website.

### **5.4 A standard measure (for example of engagement or emotional-regulation) will clearly show the total impact of SCF**

Many schools reported on improved engagement and regulation in young people, but few use any measures to show this. It would be useful to be able to show the combined impact of SCF funding. We plan to develop SCF measures which can be used across projects.

## **5.5 The involvement of autistic young people adds value**

A key factor across many of the most impactful projects was the active and authentic involvement of autistic students, in every stage of projects: concept/consultation, design, development, evaluation. SCF consultation with young people was also valuable in supporting decision-making.

## **5.6 Working with partners strengthens the impact: stronger together**

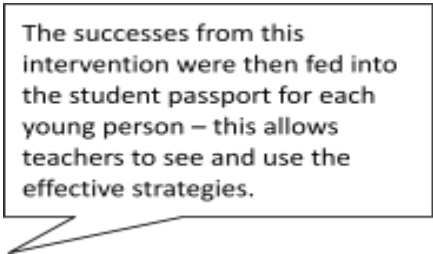
Many grantees worked with local partners to design and develop their activities. These included the local ASC team, Governors, local companies (e.g. a local landscaping initiative to help build an outdoor learning space), other local specialist provisions. Where this happened, it added value.

## **5.7 Small funded projects can be a trial ground for innovation or a catalyst for change**

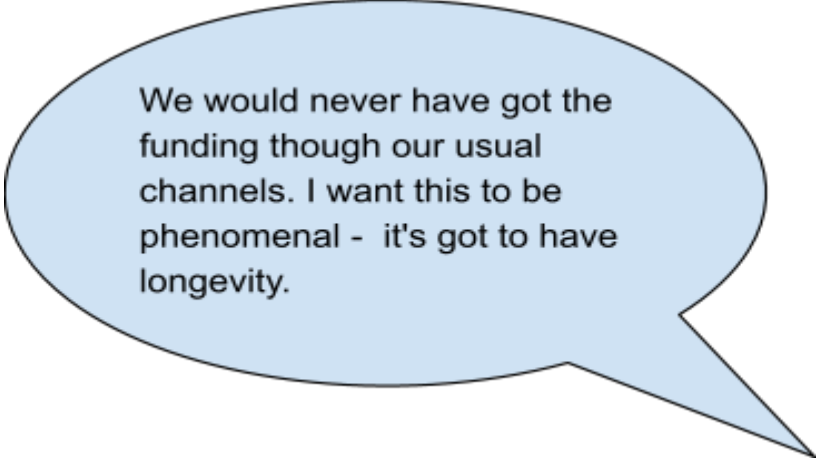
Some of the most exciting findings from this evaluation have been the fact that SCF funding has stimulated more activity, learning or reflection. Many of these have been unexpected and in response to the unusually challenging year. For example a school planning to develop a safe scape began using it for mentoring, another school initiated peer mentoring as a way of supporting the transition back to school, in another school teaching assistants who had been funded to deliver interventions had their job descriptions changed and upgraded. SCF supports the use of its funding to stimulate innovation and change. We are exploring the possibility of 'next-steps' grants to encourage this.

## **5.8 Disseminating the project raises whole school awareness**

When pilot schools have talked about the project to colleagues, it has raised awareness of ASC, as well as prompted the use of effective strategies more widely. This considerably extended the impact that funding had.



The successes from this intervention were then fed into the student passport for each young person – this allows teachers to see and use the effective strategies.



We would never have got the funding through our usual channels. I want this to be phenomenal - it's got to have longevity.

## **SCF evaluation**

### **Case studies from COVID-19 Response Round #1**

#### **Communication and sensory boxes**

In one school, each member of staff has their own 'communication and sensory box'. Each box contains several tools to help the sensory or emotional communication needs of autistic students. There is also clear guidance on who they are appropriate for and suggestions for how to use them. This empowers staff to effectively support some of our most challenging students.

#### **Returning to school: step-by-step**

Using SCF funding to fund staff to go to students' homes and work with families has really made a difference in one school. It meant they could dig deeper and identify barriers to learning and then plan a step-by-step approach for a return to education. The school has seen astounding progress for some young people - they are out of their bedrooms, leaving the house, putting on their uniform, coming to the carpark and then gradually coming back into school, back into lessons and entering the learning environment once more.

#### **Training for college staff to help students access learning**

One college funded their local Learner Services team to produce training materials for teachers. These helped them to identify autistic behaviours, to understand them and then plan strategies and techniques which differentiated teaching and learning. Alongside this, resources have been shared on the college intranet to help reinforce the training, answer questions and practically work through ideas. This has meant learners with ASC have been able to fully access learning.

#### **A virtual tour to help Y6 pupils make the transition to secondary school**

Creating a virtual tour of the school has enabled autistic pupils in one school to process abstract 2D plans so they have a clearer picture of the school layout. Each area of the school is shown clearly and pupils can watch the segments as many times as they need. Previously, the school held open evenings, and then usually had requests for an additional tour. This year, no such requests have been made.

#### ***“He would not have attained the GCSE grades that he did without this funding”***

One school used additional teaching assistant time to support two students who were not able to access school due to anxiety and feelings of isolation, exacerbated by COVID. Through this, they attended part time each day and gradually built up time in school.

One of these pupils was Year 11. Through SCF funding, he had a room away from others, a flexible timetable and teaching assistants who were able to get his work ready and supported him. In five GCSEs, grades improved. Another year 10 student was also a school-refuser because of her anxiety. With SCF-funded additional support she has been into school nearly every day for at least one hour and has started to go out at break with peers - a huge step forward from not being able to cross the threshold.

### **Safe spaces at break and lunch: reduced anxiety, better relationships**

Organising students into COVID-19 'bubbles' has impacted on the flexibility autistic students often need. In one school, it meant that students had to go out at break times rather than accessing their usual safe space. SCF funding enabled the school to have a separate indoor safe space for each year group. The additional funding meant that students were supported to socialise in the safe space resulting in new relationships with peers and staff. The autistic students feel more connected both with peers and staff, and have been able to communicate more openly. There's been a knock on effect on academic achievements and their interactions in lesson time. There has also been positive feedback from parents who report students are calmer when coming home and seem happier about being back to school.

### **Building skilled staff**

One school used SCF funding to give two Teaching Assistants a temporary promotion. They improved their skills, built relationships and showed they were ready for more responsibility when helping students. This has led to them being offered this promotion for a further 12 months. This will help inclusion in our school as a whole.

### **Extra staff time to meet and greet, reducing anxiety**

Three students had extremely high levels of anxiety and were struggling with getting into school. SCF funded a learning support assistant to meet and greet students, go through their day and ensure they had everything needed for the day. They also liaised with parents, reminded students of support available: someone to talk to and a safe place to come throughout the day when needed. All three are now attending school on time and regularly. They are smiling, more relaxed and better able to access their lessons.

SCF funded learning support assistants to attend training for Anxiety and Friendship groups and then to deliver this training in school time - the impact has been huge. One autistic student was anxious about starting in Y7. He started attending friendship and now comes into school with ease; he knows he will be met and has developed a group of friends who he can play games with and chat with at break and lunch.

Without the funding we would not have had the flexibility to be able to put this extra level of support in place for our autistic young people.

### **Sensory boxes, helping students to regulate emotions**

One school used SCF funding to make sensory boxes - personalised with equipment to help regulate autistic students' emotions and help them manage returning to school after lockdown. One Y7 student previously regularly had detentions or missed lessons because of outbursts. The student proudly reported that they hadn't been sent out of the classroom for a full week because of their ability to use the sensory box.

Case studies from schools and colleges in the East Midlands.

*For more information about Sheila Coates Foundation, or about SCF grant-making please visit the SCF website [www.sheilacoates.foundation](http://www.sheilacoates.foundation)*