

Lifespace DSL And Pastoral Supervision Package Project Independent Evaluation



Executive Summary And Response

Lifespace Trust commissioned an independent evaluation of the Lifespace DSL and Pastoral Supervision Package Project to assess the impact, quality and future development of its pilot supervision offer to school safeguarding and pastoral staff.

The evaluation, conducted by Dr Tristan Middleton and Dr Jonathan Reid, draws on interviews with supervisees, supervisors, commissioning school leaders, and Lifespace strategic leaders, alongside survey data from group supervision participants.

This paper consolidates the findings of the independent evaluation alongside Lifespace Trust's learning and response.

Research was conducted during Summer and Autumn 2025, concluding with the publication of findings in Spring 2026.



This evaluation finds that due to the positive outcomes of the Supervision Pilot Project to date and the continued interest from an increasing number of the schools, Lifespace is well positioned to continue to offer the Lifespace DSL and Pastoral Supervision Package to schools.

Dr Tristan Middleton and
Dr Jonathan Reid
(Independent Evaluation, pg. 4)

A Shared Interest In School Inclusion

Lifespace were first introduced to Tristan and Jon through Nurture UK's Inclusive and Relational Approaches Working Group.

The group brings together education and charity specialists to share best practice around a "Whole School Approach to Mental Health and Wellbeing." This group is evolving into an All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on School Inclusion. Through this forum, Lifespace's CEO advocated for school staff wellbeing, prompting a conversation which resulted in this project.

We are grateful to Tristan and Jon for their support in evaluating our pilot, enabling Lifespace to strengthen our offer and share learning to help shape a blueprint for school staff wellbeing more widely.

By creating a space for DSL and Pastoral staff to 'wring out the sponge' Lifespace have developed a 'systemic cycle of hope'. Income raised has supported Transition Workshops in Primary; enabling us to build 'tools in the toolkit' as early as possible and reduce future distress.

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About Lifespace

Lifespace Trust is a registered UK charity (Charity number: 1122170) which operates with seven Trustees. The Charity Commission For England And Wales states: *Lifespace is a youth charity that supports the wellbeing of young people (7 to 19) so that they have the self-esteem, resilience and confidence to thrive. Our committed team of staff and volunteers support young people in one of three ways: 1: Mentoring 2: Group activities 3: And leadership opportunities. We run these programmes in schools, online and in the community.*

Lifespace Trust has a team of 30 including 15 employed or contracted staff and 15 volunteers, who are led by the Chief Executive Officer.

In the academic year 2024/2025 Lifespace began a new venture, the Lifespace Supervision Pilot Project. In response to requests from school settings with whom the charity already worked, the charity began to offer a supervision service for school staff, with a particular focus on Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) and Pastoral Staff.

“now I see you every so often, I plan what I want to tell you about the positives. So actually it stays in my head, whereas in a day at school all you see is the negativity.

One-to-One Supervisee
(Independent Evaluation, pg.33)

This project is delivered by Lifespace members of staff, alongside additional contracted staff members. In the context of growing demand from its existing clients, Lifespace is keen to expand the supervision service if this initial project is successful.

Evaluator Biographies

Dr Tristan Middleton

Tristan is a Senior Lecturer in Inclusive Education at the University of Gloucestershire, with expertise in Special Educational Needs, Nurture Groups, education of young people in conflict with the law and practitioner wellbeing. He is Academic Course Leader for the MA Education Suite.

Prior to becoming a university lecturer, Tristan was a primary school teacher for 18 years. He is closely involved with the national charities, nasen and Nurtureuk, working to develop inclusive education practices.

Tristan has written numerous academic papers and books about inclusive education and his latest book, “The SEN Practitioner: Status, skills and support” is due for publication in the Routledge/nasen Spotlight series in Spring 2026.

Dr Jonathan Reid

Jon is an Associate Professor of Education. He is Chief Scientific Advisor for the Local Policy Lab, Co-Lead of the Children and Young People Research Network and Vice-Chair of the Institute of Recovery from Childhood Trauma.

Jon’s research interests include the role of education in supporting the right to recovery from childhood trauma, support for teacher wellbeing and the impact of teacher’s emotional work when supporting children who may exhibit distress.

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Supervision In Education: National Context

The Evaluation highlighted that Lifespace's supervision model sits firmly within a rapidly evolving national context, shaped by increasing professional pressure on education staff and growing recognition of supervision as a protective and preventative intervention.

The Role Of Educational Professionals In Contemporary Classrooms

Education is recognised as being a stressful occupation in England (Mc Brearty, 2025). Indeed, the Health and Safety Executive recently found that workers in the education sector experienced self-reported work-related stress, depression and anxiety at significantly higher rates than for workers across all other industries (HSE, 2024). Teachers have a wide variety of responsibilities associated with curriculum development and delivery and supporting access to learning, while also having to respond to systemic issues including a narrowed curriculum, performative assessment cultures, external pressures and limited funding.

Teaching is also widely recognised as one of the most emotionally demanding professions (Rae, Cowell, and Field (2017). Beyond the responsibilities of teaching, teachers frequently navigate complex relationships with pupils, parents/carers, and colleagues.

Many educators enter the profession motivated by a desire to make a positive

“ 86% of senior leaders and 76% of all staff are stressed. 77% of staff have experienced physical, psychological or behavioural symptoms due to their work and 34% have experienced a mental health issue in the past academic year.

(Education Support Partnership Teacher Wellbeing Index 2025)

difference in children's lives (Carroll et al., 2020), yet the reality of daily practice can be emotionally intense and, at times, overwhelming. From supporting pupils with complex social and emotional needs to responding to safeguarding concerns, teachers regularly encounter situations that require their engagement in intense emotional work (Reid, 2023a).

In settings that support children with more complex needs, teaching can, therefore, be emotionally demanding. While educators are often deeply committed to their students' learning and wellbeing, they may have limited opportunities to reflect on the emotional impact of their work or to receive structured support. According to Middleton, Rae, and Walshe it is essential that the emotional work of educators is recognised and that they have “access to the relevant support systems including supervision” (2020 n.p)

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Rising Need

National research highlights the scale of challenge facing education professionals

- The Health and Safety Executive (2024) reports that education workers experience significantly higher rates of work-related stress, depression and anxiety than the national workforce average.
- 86% of senior leaders and 76% of all school staff report being stressed, with overall wellbeing at its lowest level since 2019 (Education Support Partnership, Teacher Wellbeing Index 2025).
- Nearly 1 in 5 children and young people aged 8–25 now have a probable mental health condition, rising to 23.3% among 17-19-year-olds (NHS Digital).

Schools are also responding to increasingly complex pupil needs

- 1.7 million children in England are identified as having SEND (DfE, 2025a).
- 43% of children are identified as having social and emotional developmental needs, with NurtureUK reporting a 60% increase since 2018.
- Persistent absence has almost doubled since 2018/19, and permanent exclusions are at their highest level on record, disproportionately affecting pupils with SEND (DfE, 2025b).
- Alongside rising identification of additional learning needs, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation reports that 4.3 million children - almost three in ten - are now living in poverty in the UK, with many families facing increasing financial pressure, food insecurity and housing precarity (JRF, 2024).
- The Centre for Young Lives State of Childhood Vulnerability report (2025) identifies a deepening crisis of childhood vulnerability, with COVID continuing to affect children's wellbeing, access to education and trust in systems of support.

Policy Alignment

Although supervision has historically been rare in education, this is changing:

- Working Together to Safeguard Children (HM Government, 2023) explicitly recognises the role of effective supervision in supporting safeguarding decision-making.
- The DfE Education Staff Wellbeing Charter (2024) recommends supervision for roles with a significant emotional burden.
- In 2025, the DfE-funded Supervision in Education Quality Standards Framework defined supervision as: ***“A reflective space for a safe, non-judgemental, collaborative and learning dialogue with a trained supervisor that supports the supervisee’s practice, development and wellbeing.”***

This positions supervision as a core mechanism for workforce sustainability, safeguarding quality and staff wellbeing.



[Supervision is about]

having a space that's not their line manager to talk to about how they're feeling, how they're carrying the weight of it all because it's heavier than I think it's ever been for DSLs.”

Commissioning school leader
(Independent Evaluation, pg.40)

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Emotional Support For The Emotional Supporters

In addition to providing one-to-one and group supervision for its own mentoring team, Lifespace Trust delivers three distinct but related supervision offers. These offers have different audiences and purposes and should be understood separately to avoid confusion.

1. One-to-One Reflective Supervision For School Staff

Core school offer: a safe, confidential, non-managerial reflective space for staff in safeguarding and pastoral roles (e.g., DSLs and Deputies, pastoral/wellbeing leads, mental health leads, and senior leaders holding safeguarding responsibility).

2. Group Reflective Supervision

Alternatively, or as an optional extension commissioned by schools: structured group facilitation for safeguarding and pastoral teams, supporting shared sense-making, improved communication and reduced professional isolation.

3. External Supervision For Lifespace Supervisors

A quality and wellbeing offer for Lifespace supervisors (not schools): supervision-of-supervision through external group and one-to-one supervision, supporting ethical practice, role boundaries and sustainability.

Evaluation Approach

The evaluators adopted an applied inquiry approach, allowing the evaluation to function in two complementary ways:

- as a summative evaluation, assessing whether the pilot achieved its intended aims and outcomes; and
- as a formative evaluation, identifying learning to inform future development, sustainability and potential scaling of the supervision offer.

This approach ensured the evaluation captured both what is working well and areas for further consideration, rather than presenting supervision as a finished model.

Data was gathered across multiple phases to capture a range of perspectives, including:

- Semi-structured interviews with senior Lifespace leaders, trustees, supervisors, supervisees and school commissioners
- An online questionnaire exploring group supervision
- Contextual and documentary analysis situating the pilot within the wider supervision in education landscape

This multi-method design enabled findings to be triangulated across roles and settings, strengthening the credibility of conclusions. The evaluation followed the British Educational Research Association (BERA) Ethical Guidelines (2024), with informed consent, confidentiality and transparency throughout, and careful consideration given to anonymity and safeguarding within a small pilot.



My family and friends don't get it. If I sit for an hour and say this is how bad it is, my friends would be like, why do you even work there? Get a different job. I'm like, that's not an answer I want."

One-to-One Supervisee, (Independent Evaluation, pg.33)

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Key Findings

This evaluation has identified the following successes of the Lifespace DSL and Pastoral Supervision Pilot Project:

- Successful delivery of the agreed support to schools enrolled in the Supervision Pilot Project.
- The overwhelming majority of supervisees have had a positive experience of supervision.
- Both one-to-one and group supervision received positive feedback.
- The Supervision Pilot Project provided positive professional development opportunities for the Lifespace associates.
- Demand from schools to access the Supervision Pilot Project has grown.

Further Findings Include:

- There is a unique 'Lifespace approach' taken to supervision within the Supervision Pilot Project. This is based upon a relational approach spreading across all layers of the charity and resulting in some informal management approaches alongside formal processes within the Supervision Pilot Project.
- The booking of supervision sessions with practitioners and maintaining attendance for these sessions was experienced as a challenge for supervisors.

“ We know these children, we work with the[m] day in, day out. If they're having a bad day, if they've got difficult times at home, that feeds into school. We are then taking on all of that emotional baggage. One-to-One Supervisee (Independent Evaluation, pg.31)

“ something had happened with one of my high profile pupils... I just cried for the entire hour. But actually it was then really productive... I would have been stressed about that for two weeks... Then I went back to a member of staff and thought, right, how do I do this rationally? And then we got it sorted.

One-to-One Supervisee,
(Independent Evaluation, pg. 33)

- The frequency and duration of individual sessions planned for within the Supervision Pilot Project was not perceived as optimal by all supervisees.
- Many practitioners and potential commissioners do not have a clear understanding of what supervision is.
- The Supervision Pilot Project training for supervisors was positively received; however, it may not have equipped all supervisors with a strong theoretical underpinning or a clear model of supervision to take forward with supervisees.
- There was a mixed experience of the external supervision received by the Lifespace supervisors.
- There is scope to increase the use of group supervision within the Supervision Pilot Project.

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Overall Findings

The evaluation finds that the supervision pilot has been highly successful. Across all stakeholder groups, supervision is experienced as valuable, supportive and distinctive, providing a safe, non-judgemental space for reflection in roles characterised by high emotional load, isolation and complex decision making.

Feedback is overwhelmingly positive, demand from schools is growing, and Lifespace has established a strong reputation for delivering supervision that is relational, humane and grounded in educational reality.

At the same time, the evaluation identifies a number of practical and developmental challenges that are typical of a growing pilot and which, if addressed thoughtfully, will strengthen sustainability, clarity and consistency as the offer evolves.

Overall Verdict

In order to build on the successes of the early stages of this Supervision Pilot Project, the evaluation team make the following recommendations:

- Lifespace should consider ways of working with commissioning schools to facilitate supervision session bookings and ensure that booked sessions are prioritised for attendance.
- Lifespace should consider expanding the significance of group supervision sessions as part of the Supervision Pilot Project.
- Lifespace should review the nature and outcomes of the training for supervisors.
- Lifespace should work with the Supervision Pilot Project team to develop a clear and concise description of the Lifespace approach to supervision.

- Lifespace should review the arrangements made for external supervision of supervisors.
- Lifespace should plan for the implications of an expansion of the Supervision Pilot Project. In particular, concern should be focussed on implications for the informal and personalised approach taken within the charity and the potential flow of Lifespace mentors into the supervisor pool.



The teachers that I meet have no idea what supervision is. That, I think... needs to be recognised... I've got to sit in front of a group and dispel myths.

Lifespace Supervisor
(Independent Evaluation, pg.30)

In response, Lifespace is strengthening our introduction to supervision including a new eBook so that schools and practitioners clearly understand it as a reflective, non-judgemental space focused on wellbeing, learning and support rather than oversight or performance.

- Lifespace should consider the implications of the key developments in the field of supervision in education and plan for adaptations to the Supervision Pilot Project should potential guidance documents be nationally adopted.
- Lifespace should take the opportunity to influence the development of key government policy direction as a result of their experience through the Supervision Pilot Project.
- Lifespace should plan for a structured evaluation of outcomes of individual supervision relationships.

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Lifespace Trust Evaluation Response

The following section sets out Lifespace Trust's considered response to the evaluation recommendations highlighted above, outlining what we have learned from the pilot and how we will strengthen, refine and sustain the supervision offer as it develops.

1. Strengthen Session Organisation

Work with schools to protect time and embed supervision into culture/timetables. Consider clearer contractual terms for missed or unbooked sessions.

Reflection

- Session booking and protected time were the most significant operational challenges. Cancellations were typically due to competing safeguarding demands rather than lack of engagement; where senior leaders protected time, supervision was delivered more consistently and experienced as highly impactful.
- Effective supervision in education settings requires shared responsibility between the provider, commissioning leadership and the supervisee.
- Supervision works best where it is planned in advance, recognised as legitimate professional time, and embedded within wider wellbeing and safeguarding culture.
- Session organisation is a systemic issue, not just an administrative one.

Commitment

- Clarify shared responsibility at commissioning stage (including escalation routes where scheduling attempts are unsuccessful).
- Encourage advance scheduling (termly or annual diarising where possible) and consideration of session locations and timing to ensure they are conducive to reflective practice.
- Offer indicative supervision packages based on anticipated hours, with flexibility to adjust length/frequency responsively within agreed parameters.
- Review contractual language to balance flexibility with sustainability and fairness (including missed or cancelled sessions).
- Clearly set out boundaries around Supervisor-Supervisee roles and boundaries including escalation where necessary and contact outside of supervision sessions.
- Retain a relational, flexible approach that reflects school realities while protecting the integrity of the offer.

“ I get lovely emails... after seeing them... They've thought about it and emailed me to say... I feel so much lighter... these busy people, exceptionally busy people, took that time. That was the most powerful thing to me.”

Lifespace Supervisor
(Independent Evaluation, pg.29)

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2. Develop The Offer Of Group Supervision

Expand and formalise group supervision to widen impact across staff teams where appropriate.

Reflection

- Where group supervision has taken place, feedback was very positive.
- Take-up varied and was more dependent on leadership support, team readiness and the practicalities of releasing multiple staff simultaneously.
- Group supervision is not a replacement for one-to-one supervision, offering a different but complimentary experience.
- Group supervision works best where purpose is clear, facilitation is skilled and psychological safety is actively supported.
- Intentional commissioning and planning are key to success.

Commitment

- Keep group supervision as an optional, intentionally commissioned offer, used where it clearly fits the setting and team.
- Strengthen supervisor capability in group facilitation (group dynamics, power, inclusion and psychological safety).
- Provide planning guidance to schools (including annual diarising of sessions within school calendars where feasible).
- Avoid one-size-fits-all implementation; where group supervision is not practical, prioritise one-to-one support.

“The structure of the sessions is really good and has a positive result at the end of each session. I enjoy just taking some time as a team to discuss things’.

Group Supervisee, (Independent Evaluation, pg.37)

3. Increase Flexibility In Duration And Timing

Consider longer sessions, more frequent meetings, and ad-hoc support during periods of heightened safeguarding pressure.

Reflection

- Supervisees described differing needs around session length and frequency, reflecting fluctuating intensity across the academic year and differing role demands.
- Flexibility is most effective when agreed, transparent and bounded.
- Predictability and routine matter, but so does responsiveness during peak pressure. Sustainability and equity must be protected for both schools and supervisors.

Commitment

- Adopt a flexible-within-framework approach, maintaining a core supervision rhythm while allowing agreed adjustments.
- Where commissioned and appropriate, offer longer sessions or temporary increases in frequency during high pressure periods.
- Align supervision timing with known pressure points (e.g., end of term) where practical.
- Use the six-monthly review (Recommendation 1) to refine patterns of support within each setting.

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4. Enhance Supervisor Training

Include clearer theoretical models and shared frameworks. Develop a concise description of the “Lifespace approach” for consistency.

Reflection

- Supervisors were experienced as highly relational and effective. The evaluation identified an opportunity to strengthen shared theoretical language and confidence in articulating models and frameworks, supporting consistency as the service develops.
- Relational skill is a core strength; shared frameworks will strengthen consistency as provision grows.
- Commissioners benefit from clear articulation of approach and boundaries (non-managerial, reflective, safeguarding aware).



so I found with Lifespace training it's really useful because they give you... the frameworks and sort of the technical side of things, but yet there's a lot of discussion and it's very open.

Lifespace Supervisor
(Independent Evaluation, pg.26)

Commitment

- Commit to annual Supervisor CPD, with shared learning and reflection spaces.
- Train all supervisors to Level 3 Safeguarding and on Early Support (WCC), alongside in-house “Lifespace Way” supervision training.
- Commission annual further CPD supervision training as an extension of Lifespace’s 4-year training plan. (to include leading sector thinkers i.e. Anna Freud, Tavistock, Mulberry Bush etc)
- Develop a concise description of the Lifespace supervision approach, including theoretical underpinnings and distinctions from managerial/pedagogical supervision.
- Produce a Supervision Theory of Change, complimenting the existing Theory of Change for mentoring and youth provision.

5. Review External Supervision Arrangements

Ensure Lifespace Supervisors receive consistent, high-quality external supervision.

Reflection

- Internal supervision was consistently experienced as positive, while external supervision experiences were variable.
- The evaluation highlights the importance of supervision-of-supervision while suggesting a need to ensure consistency and fit.
- Supervision-of-supervision supports ethical practice, boundaries and sustainability.
- External supervision should complement group supervision and remain proportionate and purposeful.

Commitment

- Review Supervision Policy to clarify expectations.
- Make external supervision optional on the proviso of termly, externally facilitated, group supervision attendance.
- Be transparent in marketing/ commissioning materials about how Lifespace supervisors are supported.
- Explore recruiting an additional external supervisor to add a further perspective and improve fit/choice.

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6. Prepare For Anticipated National Policy Shifts

Engage with DfE and policy influencers as supervision in education becomes more widely recommended (e.g., KCSIE, Wellbeing Charter, Supervision In Education Quality Standards Framework).

Reflection

- The evaluation noted growing national attention on supervision in education and the likelihood of further guidance and frameworks influencing practice expectations. Lifespace welcomes this and is well positioned to engage proactively.
- There is a need to stay informed and engaged while avoiding premature alignment that could constrain an effective model.
- A watching brief plus active participation enables learning and influence.

Commitment

- To maintain active involvement in the Supervision in Education forum and relevant sector spaces.
- To use new and existing platforms to influence locally and nationally through memberships and partnerships (e.g., CYP Mental Health Coalition, Youth Access, Nurture UK / APPG on School Inclusion, WCC Education Safeguarding and district Safeguarding Clusters).
- Review implications of any nationally adopted standards and adapt proportionately.
- To use the Supervision In Education Framework as a reference point to strengthen assurance and good practice, while retaining clarity that our offer is reflective supervision for safeguarding/pastoral roles rather than supervision of teachers to be teachers.
- To recognise the competencies (below) as best practice and build CPD and recruitment around this.

Supervision In Education Knowledge And Competencies

Skills of the Supervisor	1	Manages the supervision contract and process
	2	Facilitates the supervisee's development
	3	Provides support for the supervisee's wellbeing
	4	Facilitates group supervision
	5	Enables the supervisee to maintain appropriate professional standards
	6	Facilitates specialist supervision relating to learner mental health and wellbeing (where appropriate)
Attributes of the Supervisor	7	Demonstrates ethical practice in supervision
	9	Demonstrates self-awareness
	9	Demonstrates relationship awareness
Ethical practice in supervision	10	Demonstrates systemic awareness

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7. Plan For Long-Term Evaluation

Implement ongoing monitoring of outcomes over a full academic year.

Reflection

- The evaluation highlights that supervision relationships embed over time and that longer-term monitoring would strengthen evidence of impact and learning.
- Evaluation should be proportionate and combine quantitative and qualitative evidence.
- Monitoring should support learning and improvement without creating undue burden.

Commitment

- Implement structured surveys for supervisees and supervisors across the academic year.
- Embed outcome monitoring through Lifespace's database, including the Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) strengths-based questionnaire which helps us understand positive wellbeing over time (e.g., feeling useful, relaxed, close to others, able to think clearly).
- Continue to gather qualitative feedback from Supervisees, School Commissioners and Supervisors, utilising database surveys.
- Retain the option of further independent academic review as the model matures.



[This service is about] being able to have a safe space to reflect on our practice and decision making. It's about staff feeling that they are valued and we are willing to invest in their wellbeing and by doing so, I think, hopefully show them that we get it and we know how difficult this role is.

Commissioning School Leader, (Independent Evaluation, pg.39)

In Closing

Lifespace are grateful for the insight and challenge this independent evaluation has brought to our supervision work. It affirms what schools and staff tell us: that relational, reflective supervision creates space for people in complex and emotionally demanding roles. We are so thankful to Tristan and Jon for their rigorous evaluation and deep understanding of education and practitioner wellbeing, which has helped us recognise both our strengths and areas for growth. As supervision in education continues to evolve nationally, we remain committed to learning, reflecting and supporting those who support children and young people.

We see supervision not as an added extra, but as a core part of safeguarding practice. This evaluation strengthens our confidence to develop an offer that is clear, ethical and responsive to school life. We will carry this learning forward in partnership with schools. Our commitment remains the same: to protect those who carry the weight, so children are protected well.

This document offers a snapshot of the Lifespace DSL and Pastoral Supervision Package Project Independent Evaluation by Dr Tristan Middleton and Dr Jonathan Reid.

DSL And Pastoral Supervision In Schools: The Lifespace Approach



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