ON THE RIGHT TRACK

On the right track

Learning from investment in Prevention and Early Intervention in Ireland

Children's Learning

Outcomes Report

Acknowledgements

Contents

Executive summary

For more than a decade, The Atlantic Philanthropies, sometimes in conjunction with the Irish Government and other organisations, has invested over €127 million in 20 agencies and community groups running 52 prevention and early intervention programmes throughout the island of Ireland. These include a funding partnership between the Irish Government and The Atlantic Philanthropies to support three large-scale model prevention and early intervention projects in disadvantaged areas of Dublin (Childhood Development Initiative in Tallaght West, youngballymun in Ballymun and Preparing for Life in North Dublin). The Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative supports services using a diverse range of approaches and working in a wide range of areas, such as parenting, children's learning, child health, behaviour and social inclusivity.

All services funded under the initiative were required to rigorously evaluate the effectiveness of their services in improving outcomes for children. These evaluations include randomised controlled trials (RCTs), quasi-experimental studies and qualitative work. The goal was not only to help the communities in which they operate but also to share their learning so that policy-makers and those who design, deliver and fund services for children can benefit from their experience and put it to work for other communities.

This report synthesises the learning that is available from 16 individual approaches to influencing children's learning. It is an update to the *Children's Learning* report, which was first published in 2013, and it incorporates additional evaluations that have become available in the interim.

Summary of key learning points

Poor educational attainment (particularly with respect to literacy) is linked to a number of poorer outcomes through adult life, such as unemployment, lower income, and poorer mental and physical health. Children who grow up in caring and responsive environments that encourage learning from birth arrive at schools with core skills and competencies that schools can build on. 'School unreadiness' is expensive, and children who fall behind their peers at this early stage will find it difficult to catch up later.

The learning from the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative in Ireland, and that is available in the wider research literature, shows that there are methods available that can improve children's learning experiences and outcomes. The evidence base in Ireland of programmes and interventions designed to improve outcomes for children is increasing. We are learning more about what approaches work best for teachers, parents and children, and also how to implement these effectively so that the best outcomes can be achieved.

The local learning shows the importance of improving home-learning environments by working with parents and especially with younger children; how to successfully improve practice and standards in early years settings; support for a school learning environment through capacity building and training with teachers; and support for a community learning environment with a focus on core literacy skills, structured programmes and positive relationships with adults.

Programmes to improve children's learning outcomes were successfully delivered in a broad range of settings and contexts, such as at home; in day care centres, communities and after-school clubs; and in pull-out sessions during the school day or integrated into the school curriculum. They were

delivered by paid programme staff from a variety of backgrounds, including early years, youth work, speech and language therapy, and teaching, as well as by volunteers.

The programmes and interventions delivered as part of the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland have demonstrated that they are able to replicate evidence-based programmes with fidelity and to show positive outcomes consistent with those produced in other regions and jurisdictions internationally. It was also possible to successfully develop new programmes and services that are underpinned by a sound and robust theoretical evidence base and that are showing positive results.

Children's learning begins before birth and has to be supported in different ways depending on the age of the child and their individual needs and circumstances. Learning is not the sole responsibility of schools. Children experience a range of learning environments, including home, day care, pre-school and junior/primary school. Children thrive when they experience consistency in how people interact with and care for them. This can be improved by ensuring that the caregivers in each setting understand what happens elsewhere and ensure that their approach complements the others. Transition points between the different learning environments experienced by children at different stages are important and need to be prepared for in advance. Good communication between settings and continuity in the approaches used between settings are important.

Often when we think about successful learning outcomes, we highlight specific competencies or skills, such as literacy and numeracy. These are useful indicators of learning, but we also need to encourage children's ability to engage meaningfully in the world around them in ways appropriate to their stage of development, particularly in their early years. Placing a focus on giving children a love of learning, as well as on what skills they gain, would help to improve outcomes and support lifelong learning.

Engaging parents to improve child outcomes

Parents are a key influence on their children's learning. Parents need to provide healthy, stimulating environments for children during their early years and support their more formal learning experiences when they start school. While many are engaged with their children's learning, some parents may need encouragement and help with how best to do this. They may not know what approaches are being used in schools, or they may have negative attitudes towards school, or poor personal experiences with education that influence their children's outcomes. The Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative showed that it can be challenging to engage some parents. Beneficial strategies include showing parents developmentally appropriate and fun activities to do with their children, and designing services to be accessible to parents. For example, playing with children, reading stories, taking them to the library and talking to them about what they are doing in school can all be beneficial.

Improving practice in early years settings

Existing evidence shows that integrating childcare and education (as well as high-quality pre-school provision) can positively influence children's cognitive and behavioural outcomes. Outcomes can also be improved by having well-qualified staff who work with both children

and family members. Children's learning can be supported by experiencing quality day care. This can be improved by offering professional development to staff to improve their skills and interactions with children. The Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative highlighted the importance of providing ongoing support to create and sustain change in early years settings, particularly when implementing quality frameworks. Offering quality training and providing opportunities for staff to share their learning and experiences of best practice were seen to be helpful.

Delivering interventions in schools

Many of the programmes in the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative were delivered in the school setting, either during normal class time or in after-school classes. Integrating new approaches into schools takes time and sustained effort. Important enablers for success include active involvement of the school in the selection or design of the programme, specialised implementation teams to provide ongoing support, focused approaches that fit with the curriculum, professional development for teachers, and leadership buy-in. There was also a need to balance having clear, developmentally appropriate lesson plans with some flexibility, so that teachers could use their professional judgement in tailoring delivery to their particular class.

Programmes to be delivered in school settings need to specify how they link to other work being done in the school environment. If the programme is to be mainstreamed, there should be clear links made to the existing curriculum. After-school programmes should complement the work done in school by using a range of interactive, fun activities rather than repeating the activities of the school day.

Evaluating the work

Interventions should be explicit as to which outcomes they aim to improve in the short, medium and long term, and how these can be meaningfully measured. Sometimes parents and practitioners perceived that the programme had positive effects on children's outcomes that were not always found by the evaluations. This highlights the importance of comparison with children not taking part in a programme to show its true impact, as well as ensuring that the right outcomes are being meaningfully measured. The local learning has also shown the importance of undertaking outcomes evaluations on programmes that have had a chance to 'bed-down' and become established. Some organisations have used the learning from the evaluations to further improve the delivery of the programmes (such as changing the frequency of sessions, refining training for practitioners and focusing programme content). Working with teachers and early years professionals can improve outcomes for the first group of children who experience the changes. If changes are sustained, subsequent cohorts of children may also benefit, which may yield a greater return on initial investment. Collecting information about possible cost benefits over time would be useful for interventions delivered in an education setting, where the initial costs for delivery may be incurred by the Department of Education, but the long-term cost savings are accrued by another Department, such as those responsible for employment or justice.

Section 1: Overview

Introduction to Capturing the Learning

For more than a decade, The Atlantic Philanthropies has been funding an initiative to promote prevention and early intervention for children and youth in Ireland and Northern Ireland. This has involved investing, sometimes jointly with the Government, in a cluster of organisations that have developed and delivered services based on evidence of what works. The Atlantic Philanthropies has invested some €127 million in 20 agencies and community groups running 52 programmes delivered through the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. This initiative includes a funding partnership between the Irish Government and The Atlantic Philanthropies to support three large-scale model prevention and early intervention projects in disadvantaged areas of Dublin (Childhood Development Initiative in Tallaght, youngballymun in Ballymun and Preparing for Life in North Dublin). The initiative supports services using a diverse range of approaches and working in a wide range of areas, such as parenting, children's learning, child health and development, behaviour and social inclusivity.

A condition of funding required the organisations to rigorously evaluate the effectiveness of their services in improving outcomes for children. The goal was not only to help the communities in which they operate but also to share their learning so that policy-makers and those who design, deliver and fund services for children can benefit from their experience and put it to work for other communities.

The Capturing the Learning project, led by the Centre for Effective Services (CES), involves a process of synthesising the collective learning from many of the projects in the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative, collating data and information from multiple sources and perspectives, and distilling overarching messages about 'what works'. It is not a meta-analysis of the evaluation results; rather, it is a best-evidence synthesis which places the learning from the initiative alongside what is known broadly about influences on children's learning. The CES website, www.effectiveservices.org, gives further details on each of the innovations, planning reports, implementation reports and evaluation reports, as well as other useful resources.

The present report is the final update to the previous report, published in 2013, synthesising what we have learned so far from the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative about influencing children's learning, specifically in relation to evaluation findings from 10 programmes. It provides additional longitudinal or follow-up evaluation findings for three of these programmes. It also provides information on new learning from evaluations of six additional programmes.

Other reports from the Capturing the Learning project focus on what we have learned from the initiative about influencing parenting;[1] child behaviour and conduct;[2] social inclusivity;[3] and children's health and development.[4] A report is also available examining what the organisations learned about choosing, developing and implementing innovations and evaluating their outcomes.[5]

---

[1] Sneddon and Owens, 2013
[2] Statham, 2013
[3] McGuirk and Kehoe, 2013
[4] McAvoy et al, 2013
[5] Sneddon and Harris, 2012

Structure of report

Following this Overview, the present report is structured as follows:

Section 2 contains an overview of the policy context for implementing strategies to improve outcomes for children. An outline is provided of the rationale for why prevention and early intervention work to support children's learning is important now and in the future, and the evidence base for effective strategies/programmes to influence children's learning is reviewed.

In **Section 3**, a brief description is given of the 16 programmes that currently have evaluation findings in the public domain. The approach of each is outlined, key components are described, and the main evaluation findings currently available are summarised.

The 16 programmes that support children's learning are as follows:

- **Preparing for Life (PFL)** (Northside Partnership) is a home-based early intervention/prevention programme designed to support families from pregnancy until their child starts school. PFL focuses on child development and parenting. Child development supports relate to the stage of development of each child.
- **Growing Child Parenting Programme** (Lifestart) is a parent-directed, child-centred learning programme on child development delivered to parents of children aged from birth to five years. It is a structured, month-by-month curriculum of information, knowledge and practical learning activity for parents, consisting of age-specific information on child development supported by art, story, music, and movement resources tailored to suit each individual child and family. The programme is delivered by trained family visitors in the parents' own home.
- **Eager and Able to Learn** (Early Years) is a comprehensive, centre- and home-based early care and education programme for children aged 2–3 years. The targeted outcomes include that children are motivated to learn; that they are socially and emotionally able to enter into relationships with adults and other children, so that learning can be promoted; and that they are cognitively able to take advantage of learning opportunities.
- **3, 4, 5 Learning Years** (youngballymun) provides active support and coaching for the implementation of the *Síolta* National Quality Framework and the HighScope curriculum in early years services, supporting children's social and emotional development and their language and literacy skills.
- **CDI Early Years** (Childhood Development Initiative) is an early childhood care and education programme for children aged two-and-a-half to four years. It is designed to develop and enhance all domains of children's physical, psychological and social well-being, including their cognitive skills and language development, their social and emotional development, and their capacity for learning. It also seeks to support the child's family by focusing on parents' psychological health, building on their parenting strategies and encouraging a positive parent-child relationship.
- **Incredible Years Programmes** are delivered by two different service providers in the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative. youngballymun takes a whole-school approach to supporting the social and emotional development of primary school-aged children through building their capacity, as well as that of their parents and teachers, and building community-based family support services. Archways has undertaken separate evaluations of the teacher,

parent, and child strands of the Incredible Years Programme. In this report, the findings of the Teacher Classroom Management Programme are reported; this programme trains and supports teachers in classroom management techniques.

- **Promoting Alternative THinking Strategies (PATHS)** (Barnardo's, Northern Ireland) is a universal whole-school social and emotional learning programme that seeks to change/build upon a school's ethos and culture. It involves scripted lessons delivered by teachers during normal class time.

- **Write Minded** (youngballymun) is an area-based literacy strategy that works across schools and the community to build children's literacy and language competency through the following elements: the implementation of a balanced literacy framework; tailored capacity building activities and coaching; an integrated family and school transition programme; rigorous data capturing and review; training and capacity building of parents and community-based practitioners; and the integration of literacy across multiple community-based services and supports.

- **Doodle Den** (Childhood Development Initiative) is an after-school programme for children aged 5–6 years. It aims to improve children's literacy, contribute to more frequent school attendance, encourage more learning outside of school, and increase parental involvement in out-of-school time education. It also aims to enhance children's relationships with their parents and peers.

- **Time to Read** (Business in the Community) is an in-school volunteer mentoring programme for children at the primary school level. It focuses on supporting literacy, and aims to make a positive impact on children's self-esteem, reading ability, aspirations and expectations for the future, and enjoyment of education.

- **Wizards of Words** (Barnardos) is an in-school volunteer literacy programme developed for children at the primary school level who are experiencing difficulties reading but do not require specialist learning supports. It aims to make improvements in children's literacy skills and promote confidence in and enjoyment of reading.

- **Tús Maith** (Barnardos) is an early years, centre-based programme that aims to improve school readiness skills using a combination of curricula, and is guided by the Barnardos Quality Framework.

- **Ready to Learn** (Barnardo's Northern Ireland) is a voluntary after-school programme for children at the primary school level that also works with parents. It aims to enhance children's literacy skills and, as a secondary outcome, children's social, emotional and behavioural regulation skills.

- **Big Brothers Big Sisters (peer support)** (Foróige) is a school-based peer support programme that facilitates a 'match' between junior and senior post-primary students. The programme aims to support students making the transition from primary to post-primary school and encourages senior students to adopt a voluntary leadership role in their school.

- **The Out of School Time Project** (Rialto Learning Community) is an after-school programme that aims to help young people making the transition from primary to secondary school through the provision of various supports, including homework clubs, sports and performing arts activities.

- **The National Early Years Access Initiative (NEYAI)** was a three-year initiative (2011–2014) comprising 11 projects that were generally focused on improving quality and outcomes in early years settings.

All of these programmes operate from a 'prevention and early intervention' perspective in that they work to effect change in children's learning – supporting them in their engagement and attainment in their current stage of learning and recognising the long-term potential benefits throughout their lives. Some of the programmes focus on improving children's engagement and interest in learning, whereas others focus on specific skills such as improving children's literacy.

In **Section 4**, discussion of the findings from the evaluations of these prevention and early intervention programmes are presented, drawing out the commonalities among and differences between the approaches and the effects of these. This is followed by the key learning gained from the evaluations and a summary of the implications for improving outcomes for children.

The report concludes with a list of **References** that informed the report.

This is the final updated report from the CES in relation to the Children's Learning outcome. In order to ensure that the outcomes reports in this series provide a central resource of evaluations conducted as part of the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative, this report includes the findings from the 2013 report in addition to including updates to interim evaluations and some new programme findings.

Section 2: Improving children's learning from a prevention and early intervention perspective

Poor educational attainment is linked to a number of poorer outcomes throughout adult life and can even influence outcomes for the next generation. Often when we think about successful learning outcomes, we highlight specific competencies or skills such as literacy or numeracy. These are useful indicators of learning, but there is also an increasing recognition of the importance of encouraging children to engage meaningfully in the world around them in ways appropriate to their stage of development. This section includes a review of how to best to support children's love of learning as well as the development of specific skills such as literacy. It begins with a brief overview of why children's learning is an important area to invest in from a prevention and early intervention point of view. Levels of educational attainment in Ireland are outlined, as well as some of the recent policy initiatives in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland that aim to improve children's learning experiences and outcomes. Some of the problems associated with poor learning outcomes are described.

There is a substantial body of international and local evidence on ways to successfully influence children's learning and attainment. The brief review of evidence presented here relates particularly to the approaches undertaken by the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative in Ireland. It reviews evidence of the effectiveness of these types of approaches to improving children's literacy outcomes and to their wider engagement in learning and attainment. This includes the importance of working with parents, early years settings, and locating interventions in schools, such as after-school clubs, one-to-one tutoring and programmes that have been mainstreamed into the curriculum.

Why children's learning is an important area for investment
Many of the problems that adults experience and that are the focus of a range of social policies have their origins in early childhood. It is no coincidence that health services (particularly mental health, criminal justice systems and social welfare systems) are largely populated by people who have experienced multiple problems and disadvantage stemming from their early experiences. Prevention and early intervention polices and initiatives aim to 'nip in the bud' the early indicators of these problems and to support a trajectory to more positive outcomes, particularly for those in areas of social and economic disadvantage. Prevention and early intervention initiatives support today's children to become healthy, socially and economically engaged adults in the future. The interventions, programmes and practices employed today by schools, parents and community services can have far-reaching effects throughout the course of children's lives, and are beneficial not only to those children and families but also to their communities and the wider societal and political systems in which we live.

One of the building blocks for positive adult outcomes is a good education. Success in school sets children on a road to learning that can carry them through life. The social and economic costs of school failure are very high and can take diverse forms, including increased criminality, lower rates of economic growth, lower intergenerational effects on children and parents, higher public health spending, higher unemployment, lower social cohesion and even lower participation in political and civic activities.[6] For children to succeed in school, they need to be engaged in the learning process

---

[6] Northern Ireland Audit Office, 2013

and attain a good foundation in both literacy and numeracy. Both the school environment and home environment need to be supportive. Parental engagement and support is a key element in successful child outcomes.

Children who do not learn to read, write and communicate effectively at the primary level will struggle in other academic areas[7] and are more likely to leave school at a younger age.[8] Literacy difficulties are linked to costly special educational needs provision, truancy and exclusion from school. This, in turn, has negative consequences for individuals in the longer term in terms of their choice of employment.

What are the long-term problems associated with poor educational outcomes?
Poor educational attainment (particularly with respect to literacy) is linked to a number of poorer outcomes throughout adult life. Adults with poor literacy and numeracy skills are:

- four times more likely to be unemployed;

- if employed, more likely to be in a low-paying, low-skill job;

- more likely to suffer from ill health or depression;

- more likely to be dependent on State benefits; and

- more likely to be in poor housing.[9]

Both men and women with very poor literacy skills are two to three times more likely than those with good literacy skills to smoke heavily, drink alcohol more than once a week and be obese according to a body mass index calculation, regardless of social disadvantage. They are also more likely to suffer poorer mental health throughout their lives; for example, women with low literacy skills are five times more likely to be classified as depressed than those with good literacy skills. Adults with low levels of literacy are also more likely to end up in the criminal justice system.[10]

A recent UK study estimated how much these problems cost over time.[11] The total resulting costs to the public purse by age 37 in the UK arising from a failure to learn to read in the primary school years are estimated at between £44,797 and £53,098 for each individual. These conservative estimates take into account educational costs such as special needs support, behaviour, exclusions and truancy, the cost of unemployment and low wages, health costs, and estimated costs of crime.

Providing effective early intervention literacy support is shown to reap financial benefits over time. One review put the average economic benefits of early education programmes for low-income three- and four-year-olds at close to two and a half times the initial investment.[12] The Reading Recovery Intervention Programme, which is listed as an effective intervention for struggling readers by the National Educational Psychological Service in the Republic of Ireland[13] and is used as part of Every Child a Reader in the UK, is aimed at struggling six-year-olds. The return on investment for every pound sterling spent on this programme is estimated to be in the range of £14.81 to £17.56

---

[7] Torgesen et al, 1997
[8] KPMG Foundation, 2006
[9] Northern Ireland Audit Office, 2009
[10] Bynner and Parsons, 1997a and 1997b; KPMG Foundation, 2006; French, 2012
[11] KPMG Foundation, 2006
[12] Public Health Agency, 2011
[13] National Educational Psychological Service, 2012

between the time of intervention at age six years and when the participants reach the age of 37 years.[14]

Within education, the costs of literacy failure are greater in the secondary phase (age 11 years onwards) than in the primary phase (ages 4–11 years). In purely economic terms, the costs to primary schools of providing intervention outweigh the immediate economic benefits. The KPMG Foundation (2006), in its economic analysis of the benefits of literacy support, suggested that in economic terms it may be difficult to persuade primary schools to shoulder the full costs of intervention without targeted top-up funding. KPMG concluded that when a long-term view is undertaken of the benefits of literacy support, employment-related costs form the largest category of savings. Costs to the education system and the costs of crime provide the next largest categories where the return on investment is likely to be shown over time.

What is the current situation?

In both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, there have been several policy initiatives developed to tackle the issues of poor literacy and attainment. Although both jurisdictions have high standards of education, there have been serious concerns about the gaps in educational engagement and attainment, and subsequent poor outcomes, for children living in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage and the long-term adverse impacts.

In Northern Ireland, in 2010–2011, about 9,000 pupils left full-time education without having achieved the required standard in literacy and numeracy. A report from the Northern Ireland Audit Office (2013) indicated that the situation is slowly improving, but the wide gap between the highest- and lowest-achieving children continues to be challenging. There are strong links between low attainment and social deprivation, as well as further disparities in pupil achievement according to gender, residence and religion. As pupils progress from primary to secondary school, performance declines:

- At the end of primary school (around age 11 years), more than one in six children does not achieve the expected standard in literacy and numeracy.
- By Key Stage 3 (around age 14 years), more than one in five children does not achieve the required standards.
- By GCSE (age 16 years), two in five children fail to achieve standards necessary to continue to 6th Form studies at school, further education or training, or to begin employment.

A report by the Chief Inspector (2012) in Northern Ireland found poor-quality teaching in just under one-fifth of primary schools and one-quarter of post-primary schools. The Northern Ireland Audit Office highlighted that while there are good practice mechanisms in many schools, these are not being consistently and systematically applied. It recommended that schools and teachers be encouraged to continually evaluate the learning needs of their pupils; they should expand the repertoire of strategies to personalise literacy and numeracy learning, improve school leadership by sharing best practice, and boost the home-learning environment through partnerships between communities and education services. It highlighted that ongoing organisational learning is needed not only at the individual school level but also at the system level.

---

14 KPMG Foundation, 2006

Findings from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2009, in which literacy was the major domain of assessment, estimated that one in six students in the Republic of Ireland had poor reading skills and almost one-quarter (23%) of adolescent boys achieved a score below the expected level of literacy for their age.[15] Equally, the PISA results from 2012, in which mathematics was the major domain of assessment, reported that just fewer than one in five 15-year-olds were performing below the baseline level of mathematical proficiency required for daily living.[16]

There are many common threads across both jurisdictions in terms of the recognition that there is a serious need to improve outcomes in children's learning, attainment and engagement, and there is a commitment within the Governments in both jurisdictions to act to improve the current situation.

Policy in Northern Ireland

The *Every School a Good School* improvement policy was launched by the Department of Education. Its overall aim was to 'produce well-rounded learners, confident and mature socially, able to contribute positively to society and with, at the very least, the basic skills in literacy and numeracy'. It planned to achieve this through whole-school improvement and by raising levels of attainment for all children.

This policy sits alongside and is implemented in conjunction with a range of other relevant policies and strategies, such as the 2011 Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, *Count, Read, Succeed*, which encompasses a number of the work strands known to contribute to improved literacy and numeracy. These include early intervention; training and support to teachers and recognition of their centrality in pupil attainment; engagement with families and communities; providing the revised curriculum (which has a strong literacy and numeracy focus); emphasis on assessment to support the curriculum; and identifying and disseminating best practice. In 2012, another literacy and numeracy programme was launched under the Delivering Social Change (DSC) framework. Delivering Social Change seeks to coordinate key activities across Government Departments to advance work in priority social policy areas such as poverty, children and young people's health and well-being and life opportunities. Twelve million pounds was made available over two years for the employment of teachers to provide additional tuition in English and maths to primary and post-primary pupils. Interim report findings published in 2015 indicate that 76% of primary schools and 68% of post-primary schools believed the programme had been implemented successfully. Further analysis suggested that schools with strong leadership and an ethos of intervention prior to the programme were more successful in implementing the programme.[17]

In 2013, a framework for early years education and learning, *Learning to Learn*, was published by the Department of Education in Northern Ireland.[18] The core aim of the framework is that all children have equal opportunities to achieve their potential through high-quality education and learning experiences. The framework is underpinned by the following principles:

- **The early years education and learning needs of all children is the key focus of provision:**
  The individual characteristics and needs of each child are recognised and respected, and early

---

[15] Perkins et al, 2009
[16] Perkins et al, 2013
[17] Burns, 2015
[18] Department of Education, 2013

years education and learning provision helps them develop cognitively, emotionally, physically and socially.

- **Education and learning begins at birth:** The importance of the home-learning environment, and children's overall experiences from birth, in improving educational outcomes is recognised and supported through working in partnership with parents and carers as the child's first and ongoing educators.

- **Children and their families are entitled to high-quality, age-appropriate early years education and learning services and opportunities**, delivered in safe and inclusive environments, led by a skilled workforce and evaluated against quality standards, where the importance of play in its own right and as a pedagogical tool is recognised.

- **The rights of children and their families are respected:** Early childhood is a significant and distinct time in life and as such it should be nurtured, respected, valued and supported for the significant foundation it provides for future and lifelong learning.

- **Equity and inclusion are essential characteristics of quality early years education and learning:** All children, regardless of their special educational needs, disabilities, gender, or cultural, religious, socioeconomic or linguistic backgrounds are provided with practical, challenging activities in a stimulating environment that help them achieve their potential.

- **Collaborative working among the statutory, voluntary and other relevant sectors and professional bodies will play an important part in securing improved outcomes for young children in their early years**, recognising that children are provided with other opportunities to learn and develop outside funded and formal education provision (such as child-minding and day care).

The *Learning to Learn* framework complements wider executive policies and early years education and learning services that assist in the delivery of a range of outcomes for children and families, such as those set out in the *Programme for Government 2011-2015*, the *Draft Programme for Government Framework 2016-2021*, the Children and Young People's 10-Year Plan, the Play and Leisure Policy, Child Poverty, Cohesion Sharing and Integration, and shared education, as well as the Delivering Social Change framework. Trying to engage parents to support their children's learning is also a key principle of the Department of Education's school improvement policy, *Every School a Good School*. The Department of Education supports a number of programmes to engage with parents through the extended and full-service schools and best practice in pre-school, as well as through Sure Start programmes. The Department of Education's campaign entitled 'Get Involved because education works', launched in 2011, continues to encourage more parents to become involved in their children's education and provides practical examples to help parents read, count, play and talk with their children.

Policy in the Republic of Ireland

In the Republic of Ireland, the importance of children's literacy and numeracy skills has been most recently reflected in the Department of Education and Skills' *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy Among Children and Young People 2011–2020*. This national strategy sets out a number of recommendations in relation to the curriculum, including building the capacity of school leaders, enhancing teaching skills through the provision of continuing professional development, strengthening and extending the duration of initial teacher education, and promoting greater awareness among parents and the community of the importance of literacy and numeracy and their own roles in relation to literacy and numeracy.

In 2009, the Republic of Ireland introduced a free universal year of early childhood education, which was extended to two years in 2015. In addition to this, many schools in the Republic of Ireland in areas of social and economic disadvantage have been designated as part of the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) initiative. This was established in 2005 by the Department of Education and Science and brought together a range of national programmes to address educational disadvantage throughout the school system. Included in the initiative is an action plan for educational inclusion of three- to 18-year-olds, which includes the provision of additional teaching resources and other supports for primary and post-primary schools, with a focus on improving literacy.

In 2014, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* was launched by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs as the first national, cross-government policy framework for children and young people.[19] The policy framework covers the period from 2014 to 2020 and applies to all children and young people up to age 24 years. The framework is focused on the five national outcomes which aim for children and young people to:

- be active and healthy;
- be achieving their full potential in all areas of learning and development;
- be safe and protected from harm;
- have economic security and opportunity; and
- be connected, respected and contributing to their world.

In relation to children's learning, the framework places emphasis on the role of prevention and early intervention to improve outcomes for children, particularly in relation to early years services and interventions. One of the key commitments in the framework is to continue to raise the quality of early years care and education and introduce a second year of free pre-school. The policy framework emphasises the role of the home environment in school achievement and the role of early years settings in promoting well-being and resilience. The framework also highlights the importance of educational transitions for children and young people and the need to strengthen transitions throughout the education system through methods such as consistency in curricular approaches and the use of peer mentoring initiatives.

There have also been developments in the Republic of Ireland in relation to post-primary curricula. In 2012, the Department of Education and Skills introduced the new *Framework for Junior Cycle*,[20] which proposes a number of reforms to the curriculum for young people in junior post-primary education. The new framework outlines a cross-curricular approach to improving literacy and numeracy, with intended reforms including that students study a greater mixture of subjects and short courses, with Irish, English and mathematics maintained as core subjects. The new framework also intends that more school-based assessment is utilised, in addition to the traditional State-administered Junior Certificate examination.

The *National Youth Strategy 2015–2020* was published by the Irish Government in 2015 and has its basis in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, with a focus on cross-sectoral policy commitments for

---

[19] Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014
[20] Department of Education and Skills, 2012

young people aged 10–24 years.[21] The Strategy makes a number of commitments related to children's learning. It promotes the development of an integrated approach to support all young people through accessible, responsive formal and informal education and learning opportunities so that they may develop core skills, competencies and attributes. Emphasis is placed on strengthening cooperation between formal and informal learning sectors, supporting young people at risk of educational disadvantage and early school leaving, and enhancing employability and entrepreneurship. The Strategy also reinforces the importance of strengthening transitions throughout the education system.

The Department of Education and Skills has also recently commenced a public consultation process for the development of the Departmental strategy over the period 2016–2018, in line with the new Programme for Government published in May 2016. *A Programme for a Partnership Government*[22] prioritises a number of key areas in education that are important from a prevention and early intervention perspective, including prioritising early years, tackling educational disadvantage, special educational needs, and making better use of educational assets within communities.

What factors are associated with poor learning outcomes?

There is a growing body of international and local evidence on issues that are associated with poor learning and attainment. Understanding of the wider influences on children's development, such as family, socioeconomic background and the impact of barriers to learning, is increasing.[23] A brief outline of some of these influences is given below.

Disadvantage

Children and young people living in disadvantaged areas are known to be at risk of poorer performance in school.[24] Children being brought up in poverty are more likely to have less spoken language skills than children living in more affluent conditions.[25] The attainment gap between children from rich and poor backgrounds can be seen before a child reaches two years of age and widens throughout the education system. For example, children from the lowest-income homes are half as likely to get five good GCSEs (General Certificates in Secondary Education) at age 16 years and go on to higher education.[26]

The gap in reading performance between socially disadvantaged children and those who are not is arguably one of the most salient issues in education policy. The literacy performance of students designated as disadvantaged continues to fall behind that of other students.[27] In 2012 and 2013 in Northern Ireland, 80% of school leavers achieved at least five GCSEs at grades A–C, including Maths and English; only 34% of children entitled to free school meals achieved these grades.[28] Similarly, in the Republic of Ireland one study found that over one quarter (27%–30%) of children in schools in disadvantaged areas had serious literacy difficulties.[29] Another study of 12 disadvantaged schools in Ireland identified nearly half of the children in those schools as having very low reading scores.[30]

---

[21] Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2015
[22] Government of Ireland, 2016
[23] Department of Education and Skills, 2012; Hanlon and Hayes, 2006
[24] Roulstone et al, 2011
[25] French, 2012
[26] Sharples et al, 2011
[27] Weir and Archer, 2005; Slavin et al, 2005
[28] Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (2014)
[29] Eivers et al, 2005
[30] Department of Education and Science, 2005

This link with disadvantage may reflect several risk factors. For example, socially disadvantaged children are more likely to have poor communication skills and significant language delays, difficulties that become more pronounced as children progress through the educational system. Health and academic achievement are also closely linked, with failure to maintain at least a reasonable level of health very often a barrier to achievement, and low achievement being an indicator of poor health in later life.[31] *The Growing Up in Ireland* study[32] also showed that nine-year-old children from less advantaged backgrounds are less likely to engage in the kinds of out-of-school activities that appear to enhance academic performance. The authors suggested that in the longer term, children's recreation patterns may serve to widen the social class gap in achievement. This is supported by further findings from the study when children were 13 years old that indicated that children from households with higher income and higher educational attainment levels were more likely to report positive interactions with their teachers, lower rates of difficult behaviour and more positive attitudes towards school.[33]

Gender

In the UK, most children with very poor literacy skills are boys. Attainment data show that the gap between boys and girls persists, with 59% of boys attaining grades A* to C in GCSE English compared with 73% of girls.[34] Northern Irish Protestant boys who are in receipt of Free School Meals consistently demonstrate the lowest levels of achievement, with only 19.7% achieving five GCSEs at grades A* to C. Comparatively, 76% of Northern Irish Catholic girls from more affluent backgrounds achieve five GCSEs at grades A* to C.[35] The Effective Pre-school Provision in Northern Ireland (EPPNI) study highlighted that pre-school and school staff should be aware that boys may be at increased 'risk' of developing special educational needs for cognitive development and aspects of social development. It suggested that increased focus on the needs of boys as learners, linked with appropriate staff development, may have long-term benefits and help reduce the gender gap.[36]

Ethnic groups

Research conducted in the UK indicates that children with poor reading skills are more likely to be learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) than the population as a whole (15% compared with 10%) and slightly less likely to be of white UK origin (72% compared with 77%).[37] Poverty, however, appears to be more influential than either EAL status or ethnicity.

Looked-after children

Looked-after children are more likely to experience speech and language issues and to have higher levels of disabilities and statements of special educational needs. They are five times more likely to be suspended from school than children from the general school population.[38]

---

[31] Public Health Agency, 2011
[32] McCoy, Quail and Smyth, 2012
[33] McCoy, Quail and Smyth, 2012
[34] National Literacy Trust, 2012
[35] Nolan, 2014
[36] Melhuish et al, 2006
[37] KPMG Foundation, 2006
[38] Meltzer et al, 2003

Children with social and emotional behavioural problems

A child's emotional well-being impacts on his or her ability to concentrate and therefore to learn.[39]
Children with behavioural problems or anti-social behaviour are also likely to show reading
difficulties, and this link remains even when home background and general cognitive ability are
taken into account.[40]

What does successful learning mean?

Often when we think about successful learning outcomes, we focus on specific competencies or
skills, such as literacy and numeracy. How well can a child read compared with his or her peers? Can
the child count and successfully solve mathematical problems? Progress through our educational
systems is demarcated by tests and examinations that assess how well we have acquired various
skills. For many, two of the key indicators for successful learning are literacy and numeracy, and
these are key skills throughout life both for daily living and for employment. Literacy development
includes oral language, reading and writing. The beginning of literacy and numeracy development is
embedded in the everyday actions, drawings, thoughts and communications of babies, toddlers and
young children. Reading and writing begin with learning language and looking at books in infancy.
Numeracy begins with hearing the language of mathematics in play by singing number rhymes (e.g.
'One, two, buckle my shoe'); judging whether items are the same or different, bigger or smaller;
developing spatial awareness; and understanding patterns and sequences. Early childhood literacy
skills that have been identified as strong predictors of later achievement include having a large
vocabulary, being capable of explanatory talk, demonstrating some letter identification before the
age of five, understanding narrative and story, understanding writing functions, knowing nursery
rhymes and showing some phonological awareness of how language sounds.[41]

There is growing recognition that while specific skills such as literacy and numeracy are important
indicators of learning, we also need to actively encourage children's ability to engage meaningfully
with the world around them in ways appropriate to their stage of development, particularly in the
early years. There is a need to focus on giving children a love of learning, as well as on what skills
they gain, in order to improve outcomes and support lifelong learning.

When do problems start to manifest themselves?

For many children, underachievement begins in primary school, when they fail to grasp the basic
concepts of reading and writing. Children who fall behind on reading in earlier grades struggle to
become fluent readers unless they receive support in the right environment. Longitudinal studies
have shown that children who fail to gain adequate basic literacy skills at an early stage are unlikely
to catch up later.

As children grow, they experience several key transitions during their school years. These include
the transition from home life to possibly day care, pre-school or nursery school, then to primary or
junior school, secondary school, college and possibly to further education. Some of these transitions
may be a consequence of the child reaching a certain age, whereas others, such as continuing with
formal education after compulsory school attendance, are contingent on achieving a certain level of
attainment in examinations. These transitions mark not only a change in location, often from small-
scale to large-scale interactions, but also potentially a change from highly personalised to less

---

[39] French, 2012
[40] KPMG Foundation, 2006
[41] French, 2012

personalised relationships and from environments with a limited range of ages to an institution with pupils of many ages. There may also be important changes to different learning, education and care paradigms.[42]

The child's readiness when they first begin at school is a crucial milestone and the impact of 'unreadiness' can be long term, extending into adulthood.[43] This is partly because skills develop cumulatively, so those that are acquired early form a sound foundation for those developed later. The transition to school is particularly problematic for vulnerable children.[44]

Summary
Poor educational outcomes are often associated with poorer experiences throughout life. Even though there are high standards of education in Ireland, there have been concerns that children are not reaching their full potential in terms of educational outcomes. Several policy initiatives address these issues. The next section outlines the key components of evidence-based strategies, similar to those funded under the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative in Ireland, that have been shown to improve children's learning outcomes.

Strategies to support learning and engagement
There is a substantial body of international and local evidence on ways to successfully influence children's learning and attainment. In this section, a summary is given of evidence-based approaches that have been shown to successfully influence children's educational outcomes and engagement in learning. It is not an exhaustive review, but relies on systematic reviews or quality synthesis of the evidence where possible. It focuses on approaches similar to those used in the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative. The aim is to highlight the key components of each approach that are appear to increase the likelihood of successful outcomes. These components may be useful to consider when selecting or planning an approach in each of these areas.

Approaches include working with parents, improving provision in early years settings, and locating interventions in schools, such as after-school clubs, one-to-one tutoring and programmes that have been mainstreamed into the curriculum. A small number of case studies are included as illustrative examples of how some approaches are being used in Ireland, although the selection of these as examples is not meant to imply that these approaches are any more successful or better than the numerous other examples of similar work underway all over Ireland.

Helping children to learn from birth
Children benefit from school most if they have been supported to learn and engage with the world around them from birth. The family environment and early childcare settings are critical. What and how children learn depends on the quality and nature of the relationships they have with their parents and caregivers. It also hinges on the richness and variety of the experiences they are provided with and how they are encouraged to interact with the world around them and to learn. Children who grow up from birth in a caring, responsive environment that has given them supported learning opportunities arrive at school with a history of learning behind them and a readiness to learn more.[45] They are more likely to have the core skills and competencies that schools are able to

---

[42] Royal Children's Hospital, 2008
[43] Brooks-Gunn and Markman, 2005
[44] Feinstein and Bynner, 2004; Sylva et al, 2004
[45] Royal Children's Hospital, 2008

build on, and the effects of this 'school readiness' can be seen beyond the initial years of school. School 'unreadiness' is expensive; later attempts to compensate are less effective and may be more expensive than providing the resources, programmes and supports needed to ensure that children start school ready to continue learning.[46]

A child's readiness to attend school can be defined as having five dimensions: physical health and well-being; socio-emotional development; approaches to learning; language development and emergent literacy; and cognition and general knowledge. Language development at the age of two years has been shown to predict children's performance on entry to primary school in the UK.[47] The concept of school readiness is broader than just a case of individual maturation in the child. Readiness also reflects the environments in which children find themselves: with their families, in early childhood settings, in neighbourhoods and in communities.[48] This broader concept of school readiness is now seen as having four interrelated components: children's readiness for school, schools' readiness for children, and the capacities of families and of communities to provide developmental opportunities for young children.

The importance of parents in supporting children's learning
Parents play a critical role in supporting their children's learning. It is what they do with their children that makes a difference to children's learning outcomes, more so than socio-economic status per se.[49] What a mother does during pregnancy (for example, substance misuse) can influence her baby's development at birth. [50] A key enabler is how the parent engages with their child and takes responsibility for their child's learning from birth. A warm, loving and reciprocal family relationship with fewer life stresses in the home can facilitate children's pro-social behaviour and ability to concentrate. A parent who takes part in child-centred activities such as play can influence their child's social and emotional development and the behaviour that their child exhibits in the classroom. Play allows children to use their creativity while developing their imagination, dexterity, and physical, cognitive and emotional strength.[51] A parent who reads with their child, provides a place in the home for educational activities, talks to their child about what they do in school and provides complementary learning experiences (such as trips to the zoo, library visits or sporting activities) can change the influence of poverty on their child's language and literacy development and improve learning outcomes. This type of active support and encouragement can influence children's motivation to learn, their attention, task persistence, and receptive vocabulary, with the outcome that they are more likely to succeed in school. All parents, including those with low income and/or few qualifications, can improve their children's progress and give them a better start at school by engaging in activities that engage and stretch their children's minds.[52] Additionally, the child's home life should show stability rather than be chaotic, and toddlers should experience regular routines. These factors are important for all children, but especially for disadvantaged children.

---

[46] Royal Children's Hospital, 2008
[47] Roulstone et al, 2011
[48] Royal Children's Hospital, 2008; Emig et al, 2001
[49] Sylva et al, 2010
[50] Kelly et al, 2009; Thapar et al, 2003
[51] Ginsburg, 2007
[52] Melhuish et al, 2006; Fantuzzo et al, 2004; Christian et al, 1998; Sénéchal and LeFevre, 2002; Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003

How parents engage with the child's school is also important, for example, taking part in activities and being in regular communication with teachers. The home-school relationship can help buffer against the negative effects of poverty and is linked to children's language, self-help, social, motor, adaptive, and basic school skills, according to a study by the Harvard Family Research Project.[53]

However, the degree to which parents are able (or feel able) to provide active support for their child's literacy development varies. Families are not always aware of the literacy practices and skills valued by schools, and there may be variations in the involvement and practice within families. Parents with very low levels of literacy tend to have children who also score exceptionally low in reading. Parental attitudes to school also contribute to literacy levels among their children.[54] The importance of raising the self-confidence of parents and carers in relation to their children's literacy development has been stressed in the literature.[55]

Effective practice in early years settings
Pre-school education has been shown to be an effective means of improving outcomes in children. High-quality pre-school provision has been shown to positively influence children's intellectual and social behavioural development. The type of pre-school centre that children attend is important, and research indicates that better outcomes are associated with certain types of provision. The EPPNI study in Northern Ireland found that children benefit more from nursery school, nursery classes or playgroups than from other types of pre-school provision. Private day nurseries in Northern Ireland did not provide as much measurable benefit for children's development as nursery schools, nursery classes or playgroups.[56] Quality of setting has been shown to influence outcomes, as well as staff training and qualifications. In addition, duration of pre-school has also been shown to be an important predictor of positive child developmental outcomes, with children who experienced high-quality pre-school for a longer duration, starting under the age of three years, reaping the most benefits.[57]

The following best practice approaches, which improve practice in early years settings, have been identified:[58]

- Integrating childcare and education (as well as high-quality pre-school provision) may have a long-term beneficial impact on cognitive and behavioural outcomes, at least up to the age of 11 years.
- Combined approaches to intervention that focus on both children and their family members seem to be effective, but it may be the quality rather than the type of integration that matters in terms of improving outcomes. What is expected in terms of 'quality' needs to be clearly understood by all personnel, and a common terminology used. To ensure success, there also needs to be an emphasis on planning for individual needs, promotion of cultural understanding and good leadership.
- The quality of the workforce is an important determinant of successful outcomes. For example, the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) study in the UK found that

[53] Caspe and Lopez, 2006
[54] Brooker, 2002; Nutbrown et al, 2005; KPMG Foundation, 2006; Evans et al, 2000; Sonnenschein and Munsterman, 2002; Sénéchal and LeFevre, 2002
[55] Close, 2001
[56] Melhuish et al, 2006
[57] Sylva et al, 2004
[58] Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford, 2009

settings with staff having higher levels of qualifications have higher quality scores and their children make more progress.[59] A survey on the educational attainment of the childcare workforce in Ireland indicated that, in 2007–2008, 41% of the workforce had attained a FETAC Level 5 qualification in childcare, whereas 12% of the childcare workforce held no formal childcare qualifications. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs recognised this lack of a fully qualified workforce in childcare settings as affecting the rate at which issues of child development (as opposed to child protection) could be addressed and moved forward.[60]

One example of an approach that can be implemented in day-care settings to improve children's learning outcomes is HighScope (see Box 1).

Box 1: HighScope approach

The HighScope Curriculum is based on active participatory learning, with children benefiting from direct hands-on experiences with people, objects, events and ideas (see www.highscope.org). The HighScope Curriculum is broken down into a number of key areas: approaches to learning; language literacy and communication; social and emotional development; physical development, health and well-being; and maths, arts, sciences and social studies. There is a predictable sequence of events with activities that are included every day. There is a set of 58 key development indicators against which a child's progress is recorded over time. Pre-school settings implementing the HighScope Curriculum are also evaluated in order to check whether they are delivering it with sufficient fidelity. The USA-based HighScope Perry Preschool Project evaluated participants for over 40 years and found that adults who had been through the programme in childhood were less likely to be benefit recipients or to have been arrested, and more likely to have graduated from High School and have higher monthly earnings. The evidence from the research suggests that for every $1 invested, $13 is saved by the taxpayer.[61] The HighScope Curriculum is used in many settings across Ireland.

Interventions in school settings

Schools provide a major focus for children's learning. Sharples and colleagues (2011) summarised the best available evidence on strategies known to be effective in closing the gap in educational achievement for children and young people, particularly for those living in poverty. They highlighted emerging research that suggested outcomes for children living in poverty could be improved by rigorous monitoring and use of data; raising pupil aspirations using engagement/aspiration programmes; engaging parents and raising parental aspirations; developing social and emotional competencies; supporting school transitions; and providing strong and visionary leadership. International research evidence based on experimental trials identifies some common classroom strategies that have been shown to work across different subjects and educational phases to improve outcomes for children:

- In general, adopting new curricula does not produce significant improvements in learning outcomes.

- Whole-school reform models that tackle multiple elements of provision within a school can produce substantial improvements in academic outcomes.

---

[59] Melhuish et al, 2006
[60] SQW, 2012
[61] SQW, 2012

- Using well-specified, well-supported and well-implemented programmes and incorporating extensive professional development can result in powerful improvements in achievement.
- Children from deprived areas respond positively to opportunities that raise their aspirations for learning and future success.
- The quality of teaching makes the biggest difference to learning outcomes.
- Coaching teachers/teaching assistants in specific teaching strategies significantly improves outcomes. Successful evidence-based approaches include cooperative learning (structured groupwork), frequent assessment and 'learning to learn' strategies.
- Many successful interventions use proven classroom management strategies, such as a rapid pace of instruction, using all-pupil responses and developing a common language for discipline.
- Whole-class approaches for information and communication technology (ICT), such as the use of interactive whiteboards and embedded multimedia, show greater promise than traditional ICT, such as individualised, self-instructional programmes.

Individual children will vary in terms of how easily and quickly they develop literacy skills. A number of evaluations have been undertaken to explore what is the best way to support children to acquire and use these skills and how to help those who are struggling. Some of these involve changes to the curriculum or teaching practices of the teacher during class time. Others involve additional support to specific groups of children, such as those who are encountering difficulties, and these may be provided in pull-out or booster sessions during the school day or, alternatively, outside of school hours, such as in after-school clubs or homework clubs. Support may be given one-to-one with a child or provided in a group setting, and can be delivered by trained professionals or volunteers. Sharples et al (2011) concluded that the best ways to support struggling readers living in poverty included:

- Generally, structured, phonics-based approaches are more successful than non-phonics approaches.
- One-to-one tutoring by qualified teachers is very effective in improving literacy, but the cost may be prohibitive. An alternative may be tutoring by teaching assistants and volunteers who can produce successful results if they are well trained and use structured phonics materials.
- Intervening immediately is most effective for primary reading, where preventive whole-class strategies are adopted first, followed by tutoring for the small number of pupils who still need it.

An example of a school-based approach to changing how literacy is taught is given in Box 2.

> **Box 2:**
>
> **The Enriched Curriculum Project**
>
> The Enriched Curriculum Project in Northern Ireland is an example of a strategy to change how literacy is taught and supported by teachers during class within the first few years of primary school.[62] It was devised jointly by the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) and the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) to address perceived problems in the formal traditional curriculum for school entry, particularly in disadvantaged areas. This is a preventive approach aimed at avoiding literacy problems. It was characterised as

---

[62] Sproule et al, 2005

a developmentally appropriate curriculum and was more play-based and activity-led than the pre-existing curriculum. In Primary Years 1 and 2 (ages five to six), it involved postponing the introduction of formal reading schemes to concentrate on oral language and emergent literacy activities, and postponing formal recorded arithmetic in favour of activities that laid the foundations for understanding basic mathematical concepts. This approach has now been included in the revised curriculum in Northern Ireland.

There are a number of established literacy programmes demonstrating proven effectiveness. These may be delivered during class time in addition to normal activities or as substitutes for other activities. An example of one curriculum-based programme delivered in class time is given in Box 3.

Box 3: Reading Recovery

Reading Recovery is one of the best-known literacy improvement programmes internationally, supplementing classroom teaching with one-to-one tutoring and mostly delivered through pull-out sessions during the normal school day. The programme involves a range of the core components of reading instruction, including recognising sounds in words, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, writing motivation, oral language and reading independence. It has been shown to improve general reading achievement and alphabetic recognition, with potential positive effects for fluency and comprehension. Research suggests that the Reading Recovery intervention will lift 79% of children who receive it out of literacy failure. A cost-benefit analysis in the UK estimated the return on investment for the programme to be between £14.81 and £17.56 from the time participants receive the intervention at age six to when they reach the age of 37.[63]

Common components in literacy interventions

The common components identified in literacy interventions shown to be successful for struggling readers are shown in Figure 1. Slavin et al (2011) compared four categories of interventions aimed at struggling readers and concluded that instructional process programmes (a mixed-method approach that provides teachers with an additional curriculum and professional training on how to use it) had the most positive impact, with some of these programmes showing better effects than others; cooperative learning and phonics-focused professional development programmes showed particular promise. Combined curriculum and instructional process programmes also indicated promising results. Reading curricula and instructional technology programmes appeared to be less effective, but still resulted in some improvements.

---

[63] KPMG Foundation, 2006

The figure shows overlapping green circles. The central circle reads:

COMMON ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMMES FOR STRUGGLING READERS

Professional development & follow-up for teachers

Coooperative learning at their core, with children working together on structured activities

Strong focus on teaching phonics and phonemic awareness

Well-developed programmes that integrate curriculum, pedagogy and extensive professional development

The top circle reads:

READING CURRICULA

The use of alternative textbooks and manuals by teachers. These often prescribe specific activities for teachers to undertake with children to promote literacy, eg *Open Court Reading* and *Reading Street*

The left circle reads:

INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY

Reading programmes that use computers, video or individual assessments, eg *Waterford, Phonics based Reading* and *Writing to Read*

The right circle reads:

INSTRUCTIONAL PROCESS PROGRAMMES

These are designed to provide teachers with professional development training on delivering a specific instructional method, eg *cooperative learning* and *phonological awareness training*

The bottom circle reads:

COMBINED CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTIONAL PROCESS PROGRAMMES

These are a mixed-method programme that provide teachers with an additional curriculum and professional training on how to deliver it, eg. *Success for All* and *Direct Instruction*

Figure 1: Factors shown to be common to successful literacy interventions for struggling readers

After-school programmes

An after-school programme is an organised programme that invites children and young people to participate in groups outside of the traditional school day. Some programmes are run by the school and some by externally funded non-profit or commercial organisations. Not all after-school groups focus on supporting literacy; however, those that do have several common elements, including access to writing tools and reading material; a lending library for children and their families; 'enriching language environments' with snack menus, thematic bulletin boards, posters and signs; separate areas for reading, with books displayed; and homework time on a daily basis.[64]

The following advantages of after-school programmes as a vehicle for improving children's literacy have been identified by Speilberger and Halpern (2002):

- They present a more relaxed environment for the child (who therefore feels safe and not under pressure).
- They offer good adult support for the child's learning.
- They provide input in a social context that involves discussion, the sharing of ideas, collaboration, helping each other and problem-solving.

---

[64] Speilberger and Halpern, 2002

- Drama, art and crafts can create informal learning settings that engage children and their parents by focusing on creativity and the visual evidence of what can be accomplished, all of which can have a knock-on effect on reading and writing.

One of the defining characteristics of the after-school field is the sheer diversity of programme goals, activities and components.[65] Children and young people who participate in after-school programmes can reap a host of positive benefits in a number of interrelated outcome areas, including academic, social/emotional, prevention, and health and wellness.[66] Some of the benefits associated with participation in quality after-school programmes are shown in Figure 2 (although not all programmes show all of these outcomes, and benefits depend on the focus of the after-school programme and its effectiveness). Key components of successful after-school programmes include the need to support a range of positive learning outcomes through hands-on experiential learning. Other common factors contributing to success are shown in Figure 3.

Academic outcomes
- better attitudes towards school
- higher educational aspirations
- higher school attendance rates and less tardiness
- less disciplinary actions (eg suspension)
- lower drop out rates
- better performance in school as measured by achievement test scores and grates
- greater on-time promotion
- improved homework completion and engagement in learning

Social/emotional outcomes
- decreased behavioural problems
- improved social and communication skills and/or relationships with others such as peers, parents and teachers
- increased self-confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy
- lower levels of depression and anxiety
- development of initiative and improved feelings and atttitudes toward self and school

Prevention
- avoidance of drug and alcohol use
- decreases in deliquency and violent behaviour
- increased knowledge of safe sex
- avoidance of sexual activity
- reduction in juvenile crime

Health and wellness
- better food choices
- increased physical activity
- increased knolwedge of nutrition and health practicse
- reduction in Body Mass Index (BMI)
- improved blood pressure
- improved body image

Figure 2: Range of outcomes associated with various after-school programmes

---

[65] Caspe and Lopez, 2006
[66] Harvard Family Research Project, 2008

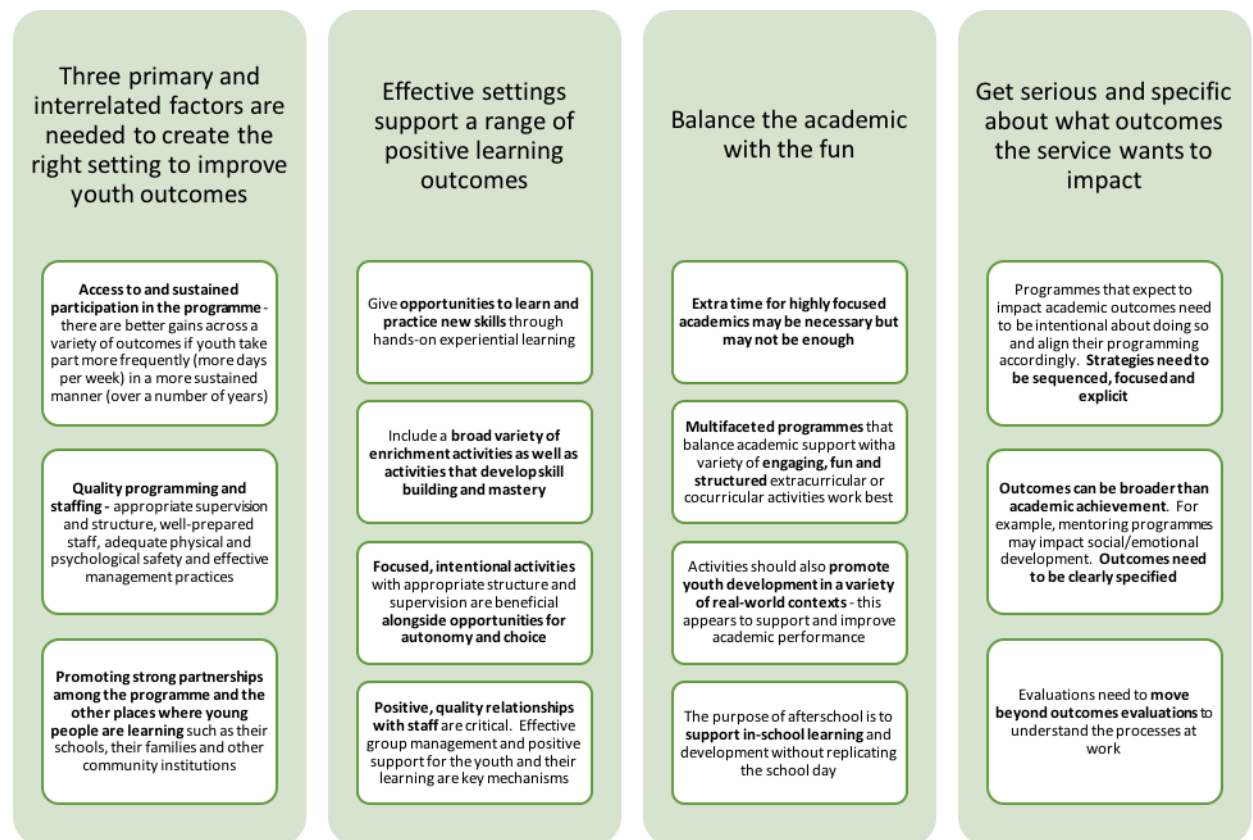| Three primary and interrelated factors are needed to create the right setting to improve youth outcomes	Effective settings support a range of positive learning outcomes	Balance the academic with the fun	Get serious and specific about what outcomes the service wants to impact
Access to and sustained participation in the programme - there are better gains across a variety of outcomes if youth take part more frequently (more days per week) in a more sustained manner (over a number of years)	Give **opportunities to learn and practice new skills** through hands-on experiential learning	**Extra time for highly focused academics may be necessary but may not be enough**	Programmes that expect to impact academic outcomes need to be intentional about doing so and align their programming accordingly. **Strategies need to be sequenced, focused and explicit**
Quality programming and staffing - appropriate supervision and structure, well-prepared staff, adequate physical and psychological safety and effective management practices	Include a **broad variety of enrichment activities as well as activities that develop skill building and mastery**	**Multifaceted programmes** that balance academic support with a variety of **engaging, fun and structured** extracurricular or cocurricular activities work best	**Outcomes can be broader than academic achievement**. For example, mentoring programmes may impact social/emotional development. **Outcomes need to be clearly specified**
Promoting strong partnerships among the programme and the other places where young people are learning such as their schools, their families and other community institutions	**Focused, intentional activities** with appropriate structure and supervision are beneficial **alongside opportunities for autonomy and choice**	Activities should also **promote youth development in a variety of real-world contexts** - this appears to support and improve academic performance	Evaluations need to **move beyond outcomes evaluations** to understand the processes at work
	Positive, quality relationships with staff are critical. Effective group management and positive support for the youth and their learning are key mechanisms	The purpose of afterschool is to **support in-school learning** and development without replicating the school day	

Figure 3: Common components of successful after-school programmes

Some research has noted that different groups of children use after-school programmes in different ways. Children whose families have higher incomes and more education are more likely to participate in after-school activities more frequently during an average week and take up a broader range of experiences. They are also more likely to participate in enrichment programmes, whereas their disadvantaged peers are more likely to take part in tutoring programmes, thus not getting the benefits associated with enrichment experiences.[67]

Research suggests that children and young people are likely to show greater improvements across a wide variety of outcomes if they take part in after-school programmes more frequently (more days per week) and in a more sustained way over a number of years. However, a review of after-school programmes in the USA suggested that outcomes may be poorer if the service operates as a drop-in facility and attendance is sporadic. Literacy may also be slower to respond to interventions because it is so strongly influenced by family background. These caveats point to the value of concerted efforts to engage children and parents, and making the sessions longer than one hour, as well as highlighting why it is important to have modest expectations and to measure intermediate outcomes as well as literacy. Furthermore, care should be taken to ensure that the selected approach to enhancing literacy dovetails with the school curriculum.

Factors that may influence the results of after-school programmes for struggling readers include:[68]
- **age** – it may be most effective to target younger children in primary school;

---

[67] Harvard Family Research Project, 2008
[68] Baker and Witt, 1996

- **number of participants** – there are benefits of one-to-one tutoring over group tutoring;
- **programme duration** – programmes with a duration of 44–84 hours and 85–210 hours are more likely to be effective than longer or shorter programmes; and
- **frequency of participation** – there is evidence that the level of participation results in a greater impact on those who take part more often.

After-school programmes may be new territory for providers. Despite this, funders are increasingly turning to the strategy to improve literacy outcomes, particularly for children from low- and moderate-income backgrounds. Some of the common implementation challenges are given below.[69]

- The **quality of the staff** in the programme is a key issue and training may be needed. After-school staff may typically be on a low income, and many will have had mixed experiences with literacy themselves.
- There may also be a need for **teacher training and support**.
- The **relationship between the school and the after-school programme** needs to be considered, including issues such as shared space, aligning the after-school programme curriculum to the school curriculum, and communication to build mutual trust between school and after-school personnel.
- There can be **challenges in programme complexity and in delivering it consistently** (i.e. with fidelity). It is important to develop systems, structures and practices whereby the implementation of the programme can be monitored and reviewed on an ongoing basis.
- **Implementation takes time to embed** and positive changes may not be immediately apparent.
- There may be **transportation issues** if the programme is not delivered on the school site.

One-to-one tutoring

Another approach to supporting children and young people's learning and development is the use of one-to-one tutoring programmes. These may include tutoring that focuses on a specific area or task (such as reading support) or focuses on the building of a supportive relationship with the young person. The tutoring may happen during the school day, with the young person being 'pulled out' of normal class activities, or outside of school hours in a variety of informal settings. Tutoring may be undertaken by paid professionals, although, given the expense, volunteer tutoring programmes have become popular (for example, in the USA during the 1990s, one million volunteers were placed in schools to tutor children in reading). Volunteer tutoring programmes are intended to improve student performance, provide mentorship and improve student self-esteem and behaviour.[70]

Interventions using trained volunteers or college students have been shown to be highly effective with elementary students at risk of reading failure. Students who work with volunteer tutors may be more likely to earn higher scores on assessments related to letters and words, oral fluency and writing when compared with their peers who are not tutored. It appears to be important for success that volunteers are trained and follow specific guidelines. Highly structured tutoring programmes have also been found to have a significantly greater effect on global reading outcomes than programmes with low structure.[71]

---

[69] Halpern, 2003; Halfors and Godette, 2002; Domitrovich et al, 2008; Adelman and Taylor, 2003
[70] Wasik, 1998; Ritter et al, 2006
[71] Elbaum et al, 2000; Ritter et al, 2006

Providing a positive role model for young people may improve their engagement with school and their aspirations for the future. It may also encourage them to think about the relationship between education and future opportunities in life. An improvement in attitudes towards school is a precursor to better school performance.

Linking school and home
Research shows that creating links between children's different learning environments and care settings can improve outcomes. Complementary learning occurs when two or more institutions (including families, schools and communities) intentionally work together to encourage consistent learning and developmental outcomes for children and young people.[72] These linkages are continuously in place from birth through adolescence, but the composition and functions of this network change over time as children mature. These learning supports can include families, early childhood programmes, schools, out-of-school programmes and activities, higher education, health and social service agencies, businesses, libraries, museums, and other community-based institutions.

As noted above, the family learning environment and parental support are huge influences on children's literacy and learning. Creating links between what is done at home and what happens in school can be very beneficial. Research suggests that family engagement is a critical intervention strategy that maximises return on investments in education. Early childhood education programmes that have demonstrated significant short- and long-term benefits for children often have family involvement components.[73] Many interventions aim to involve parents in supporting what is being done directly with the child during school, after school, or in mentoring programmes. Parental participation may include sitting in on sessions, reading with the child, doing supplementary activities with them to practise what has been learned in a programme, and encouraging the parent to be actively involved in their child's learning and to provide stimulating learning experiences, such as visits to the library or zoo.

Research suggests that the core district-level components necessary for systemic family engagement are:
• fostering district-wide strategies;
• building school capacity; and
• reaching out to and engaging families.

Promising practices include:
• having a shared vision of family engagement by districts, schools and families;
• purposeful connections to learning;
• investments in high-quality programming and staff;
• robust communication systems to help stakeholders reach out to one another and share information in reciprocal and meaningful ways; and
• evaluation for accountability and continuous learning.

An example of a project operating in the Republic of Ireland that links pre-school, primary school and home is given in Box 4.

---

[72] Caspe and Lopez, 2006
[73] Westmoreland et al, 2009

**Section 2: Improving children's learning from a prevention
and early intervention perspective**
                                                                    Page 33 of 92

> **Box 4: Early Start Pre-school project**
> The Early Start Programme is a pre-school project that was established in 1994 in selected
> primary schools in designated areas of urban disadvantage in the Republic of Ireland. The
> programme is a one-year intervention scheme to meet the needs of children aged between
> three years and two months, and four years and seven months who are at risk of not
> reaching their potential within the school system.
>
> The project involves an educational programme to enhance overall development, help
> prevent school failure and offset the effects of social disadvantage. The strengths and needs
> of each child are assessed in relation to language, cognition and social/emotional
> development. Young children experience a structured curriculum of play experiences
> designed to meet these identified needs and with an emphasis on high-quality adult-child
> +interaction. Parental involvement is one of the core elements of the programme, in
> recognition of the parent/guardian as the prime educator of the child. Parents are
> encouraged to become involved in the planning, organisation and implementation of the
> work in each Early Start centre, and this is intended to build their own capacity to influence
> and become involved in their children's education.
>
> The Early Start Units are pre-school projects located within primary schools. The teachers
> and childcare workers in Early Start are members of school staff, and Early Start is regarded
> as an integral part of the primary school. Evaluations of the project[74] suggest that it can be
> successfully incorporated into the Irish primary school system and that parents are happy
> and engage with the provision. Although no effect has been shown on children's cognitive
> and scholastic development, teachers reported that children who had been part of the Early
> Start Programme showed a better transition to primary school than those who were not part
> of the programme.

Summary

Early childhood is a critical period for the development of skills that enable children to actively
participate and succeed in learning, engagement and attainment. It is when the basic literacy skills
are learned – those that equip children to communicate orally and in writing and to understand the
written and spoken word, skills that will carry children into adulthood. The absence of these skills is
a strong predictor of poor outcomes, not only in education but also in health, economic success and
social relationships. Poor development in literacy and other learning skills are experienced across a
number of sectors, including education, health, social care, social welfare, justice, and many others.
The cost to individuals and also to the wider community is considerable. Governments, both in the
Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland, recognise the need to act to address the issue of literacy
failure and are implementing strategies to improve the situation. We can identify children at risk of
poor learning outcomes and we know that children growing up with poverty and disadvantage are
at particular risk. In a climate of financial austerity, it is crucial that any new interventions to support
children's learning are based on the best evidence of what is most likely to improve outcomes.

---

[74] Educational Research Centre, 1998; Kelly and Kellaghan, 1999; Lewis and Archer, 2002

There have been many international evaluations of beneficial approaches to improving learning, and some of the key learnings from these were summarised in this section. The next section summarises the findings from the evaluations currently available from the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative in Ireland.

Section 3: The programmes in the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative

In this section, a summary is provided relating to each of the 16 programmes that have been evaluated so far as part of the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative, covering the approach used (Table 1) and the main evaluation findings (Tables 2, 3 and 4). One of these programmes, Incredible Years, has been delivered and evaluated by two service providers in this initiative.

Prior to implementation, and, in many instances, a number of years before a child or family received a service, organisations engaged in a lengthy process involving conducting epidemiological studies, comprehensive needs analyses, literature and evidence reviews, preparation of logic models and programme exploration. All of the organisations engaged in extensive consultations with key stakeholders in the community. Three of the organisations selected evidence-based programmes (**Incredible Years** and **PATHS**), which they replicated with fidelity, with only minor adaptations primarily related to cultural context. **Preparing for Life** is a new programme developed in Ireland which has drawn heavily on the principles and theoretical components of evidence-based home-visiting programmes. Similarly, the **Growing Child Parenting Programme**, **Wizards of Words, Tús Maith** and the school-based **Big Brothers Big Sisters** are based on evidence-based programmes originally developed in the USA. The **Doodle Den** literacy programme, **CDI Early Years, Eager and Able to Learn, 3, 4, 5 Learning Years, Ready to Learn, Out of School Time** and **Time to Read** were locally developed to address specific issues in children's lives. Others, such as **Write Minded** and the **National Early Years Access Initiative (NEYAI)** involved a number of different initiatives and supports. Many of the programmes under discussion are delivered in areas of social disadvantage.

It is important to remember that the evaluations listed below did not all use the same evaluation methods to investigate learning. An overview of the different approaches to measuring outcomes, and some general points to consider when interpreting findings based on the methodological approach used, are outlined below.

Measuring outcomes

When evaluating the impact of particular interventions on child outcomes, some research methods and study designs provide better evidence than others. The randomised controlled trial (RCT) design is generally considered to provide the most valid and reliable evidence. This is because the design of an RCT minimises the risk of variables other than the intervention influencing the results. In an RCT, one group of children or parents is randomly allocated to participate in the programme and another is allocated to act as a control (often a 'waiting list control', who receive the service later, once comparisons with the original participants have been made). The findings generated by RCT studies are seen as better reflecting the effect of an intervention than the findings generated by other research designs.

It should be noted that an RCT design is not appropriate for all research questions: it may not be practical to implement (for example, due to a lack of appropriate measures) or there may be ethical issues (for example, denying children a service that they may need, in order to have a control group). When it is not practical or appropriate to use a RCT design, researchers may use other research designs to estimate the impact of an intervention, such as quasi-experimental designs or retrospective designs. In a quasi-experimental design, participants are typically not randomly allocated to either the intervention or control group; instead, the researcher usually decides which

participants receive the intervention and which do not. In a retrospective study, the intervention under investigation has already occurred. Researchers do not follow participants over time; rather, they collect the available relevant data (through archival data and/or interviews with participants) and estimate the impact of the intervention after the fact. Depending on the data available, it may be possible to compare a control group with an intervention group.

Even when evidence is available from high-quality RCTs, evidence from other study types can still be relevant. For example, while RCTs can tell us something about *whether* an intervention worked to improve outcomes among children, they cannot tell us *how* or *why* it worked. Other research methods and designs, including qualitative research, may be better placed to answer such questions. Qualitative research encompasses a range of methods and designs typically focused on perceptions and meanings. Typical qualitative research methods include the use of focus groups, individual interviews, and observations. Many of the RCTs conducted as part of the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative also included primarily qualitative process evaluations to provide additional information on implementation of the programmes and how this was experienced by staff and service users alike.

Ten out of the 17 programmes listed below used RCTs as part of their evaluation (Preparing for Life, Lifestart's Growing Child, Archways' Incredible Years, Doodle Den, CDI Early Years, Eager and Able to Learn, Ready to Learn, PATHS, Time to Read, and Wizards of Words). All of these 10 programmes were mixed-methods experimental approaches, in that they also incorporated a primarily qualitative process evaluation into their methodology. Three of the programmes used a quasi-experimental approach to evaluation (Out of School Time, NEYAI, and Tús Maith). Three of the programmes used a non-experimental mixed-methods approach, incorporating quantitative data and qualitative data (3, 4, 5 Learning Years, Write Minded, and Incredible Years, which used a whole-school approach), and one programme (Big Brothers Big Sisters) used a solely qualitative approach.

The impacts of the programmes were measured in several different ways, sometimes with respect to how they influenced children's outcomes (such as reading behaviour) or how they changed the behaviour of key individuals, such as parents, early years professionals, teachers and volunteers. Details are given for each programme, followed by a summary of the main outcomes found in the evaluations. More detail about each programme and how it was assessed can be found in the original evaluation reports.

The costs reported for delivering each programme and cost-benefit information is given where available. It is important to note that these costs have not all been calculated in the same way, so comparison of the costs for different programmes is difficult.

Table 1: Overview of programmes in the report

Organisation	Service/ programme	Target group(s)	Duration/ intensity	Objectives
Northside Partnership	**Preparing for Life (PFL)**	Prenatal parents and parents with	Monthly home visits and a range of other support for five years	A home-based early intervention/ prevention programme that supports families from pregnancy until their child starts school. PFL focuses on child development and parenting.

Organisation	Service/ programme	Target group(s)	Duration/ intensity	Objectives
		children aged 0–5 years		
Lifestart	**Growing Child Parenting Programme**	Parents of children aged 0–5 years	Monthly home visits of between 30 and 60 minutes for five years	To help parents to support their child's physical, intellectual, emotional and social development and to promote school readiness.
Early Years, NI	**Eager and Able to Learn**	Children aged 2–3 years	Delivered over 8–9 months to children and three home visits to parents	A comprehensive centre-based and home-based early care and education programme. Aims to motivate children to learn.
youngballymun	**3, 4, 5 Learning Years**	Pre-school children, parents and early childhood service providers	During the course of a pre-school year	Provides active support and coaching for the implementation of the *Síolta* National Quality Standards and HighScope Curriculum in early years services supporting children's social and emotional development and language and literacy skills.
	Write Minded	All school-aged children	Ongoing area-based literacy strategy	Area-based literacy strategy that works across school and community to build children's literacy and language competency using multiple approaches.
	Incredible Years	Children aged 3–12 years, their parents and teachers	60 Incredible Years lessons delivered over two years. Parents and teachers had 12 and 5 sessions, respectively	Implementation of the evidence-based Incredible Years school and family programmes, by taking a whole-school approach.
Childhood Development Initiative (CDI)	**Doodle Den**	Children aged 5–6 years	4.5 hours per week for 36 weeks, and three family and six parent sessions	An in-school and after-school literacy programme, including child, parent and family components.

Organisation	Service/ programme	Target group(s)	Duration/ intensity	Objectives
	CDI Early Years	Programme starts when children are two-and-a-half to three years old.	Pre-school and other types of support for two years	Service for pre-school children, providing integrated healthcare, wrap-around supports and professional development elements. The programme also works with the child's family.
Archways	**Teacher Classroom Management (Incredible Years Programme)**	Children aged 4–7 years	Teacher training was one day per month over five months	Trains and supports teachers in classroom management techniques.
Barnardo's Northern Ireland	Promoting Alternative THinking Strategies (PATHS)	Children aged 5–11 years	Delivered over three academic years	Universal whole-school social and emotional learning (SEL) programme that seeks to change/build upon a school's ethos and culture. It involves scripted lessons delivered by teachers during normal class time.
	Ready to Learn	Children aged 4–8 years	Three one-hour sessions weekly delivered after school over three academic years	Universal, voluntary after-school programme for children at the primary school level that also works with parents. It aims to enhance children's literacy skills and, as a secondary outcome, children's social, emotional and behavioural regulation skills.
Business in the Community (BITC)	**Time to Read**	Children aged 9–10 years	Two half-hour sessions every week during school time	An in-school voluntary mentoring programme for children at the primary school level, focused on supporting literacy.
Barnardos	Wizards of Words (WoW)	Children aged 7–10 years	Three half-hour sessions every week	Targeted in-school intergenerational volunteering literacy programme for children in 1st and 2nd class who are experiencing difficulties/delays in reading but do not require formal reading interventions.
Barnardos	Tús Maith	Children aged 3–5 years	During the course of a pre-school year	A targeted early years centre-based programme that aims to improve children's school readiness using HighScope, PATHS and REDI curricula and guided by the Barnardos Quality Framework.

Organisation	Service/programme	Target group(s)	Duration/intensity	Objectives
National Early Years Access Initiative (NEYAI) (Pobal)	NEYAI – 11 projects throughout Ireland	Infants and children from birth to 6 years	Various – depending on programme	NEYAI is a three-year initiative (2011–2014) that consisted of 11 projects which were generally focused on improving quality and outcomes in early years settings.
Rialto Learning Community	Out of School Time Initiative (OST)	Young people aged 11–14 years	After-school sessions of varying durations during the academic year	An after-school programme that aims to help young people making the transition from primary to secondary school through the provision of various supports, including homework clubs, sports and performing arts activities.
Foróige	Big Brothers Big Sisters Ireland (Peer Support)	Young people aged 12–14 years	One 45-minute session every week throughout the academic year	A school-based peer-support programme that facilitates a 'match' between a junior and senior post-primary student. The aim is to support students making the transition from primary to post-primary and encourage senior students to adopt a voluntary leadership role in their school.

Preparing for Life (Northside Partnership)

The Preparing for Life (PFL) programme was developed over a five-year period between 2003 and 2008 by a group involving 28 local agencies and community groups. It is operated by Northside Partnership in several designated disadvantaged areas of North Dublin.

The PFL programme is a home-visiting programme which aims to improve the school readiness of children living in disadvantage by intervening during pregnancy and continuing to work with families until their children start school. It is a manualised programme, similar in approach to the Nurse-Family Partnership. It is delivered by trained, paid mentors in the home.

Two levels of the programme have been evaluated in a randomised controlled trial (RCT): a high-support group and a low-support group. The progress of these families was compared to a matched comparison group from a different community who received no intervention. Both the high- and low-support groups received facilitated access to enhanced pre-school, public health information, access to a support worker and €100 worth of child developmental materials annually. The first developmental pack included a number of safety items, such as corner guards, angle latches and heat-sensitive spoons, plus a baby gym/play mat. Both groups were encouraged to attend two public health workshops or programmes in the community – the Stress Control Programme (which involves six one-hour weekly sessions) and the Healthy Food Made Easy programme (which involves six two-hour sessions).

In addition to this, the high-support group received mentoring via regular home visits, during which they were provided with high-quality information about parenting and child development. The frequency of the visits depended on the needs of the families, with the majority of families receiving fortnightly visits and some monthly visits (of between 30 minutes and two hours). The mentors focused on five general areas related to child development: pre-birth; nutrition; rest and routine; cognitive and social development; and the mother and her supports. Tip sheets were used to facilitate the home-visiting sessions; parents also kept copies of these sheets in the home. They were designed to be delivered based on the age of the child and the needs of the family; and participants received the full set of tip sheets by the end of the programme. Participants in the high-support group also participated in the Triple P – Positive Parenting Programme.

Findings
The impact of the PFL programme was assessed in 6-, 12-, 18-, 24-, 36- and 48-month-old children as part of a longitudinal RCT and process evaluation. Similar to other programmes of this type, after six months limited significant effects were observed, although most of the outcomes were starting to improve in the anticipated direction. In relation to children's learning outcomes, the home environments of families in the high-support group were of a higher quality, with more appropriate learning materials and childcare. There were no significant effects at six months on children's development, but by 12 months of age children in the high-support group were showing a higher level of fine motor skills and were less likely to be at risk for social and emotional difficulties than those in the low-support group. Children in the high-support group were much less likely to have parents who restricted their independence. Both the high- and low-support groups showed better child cognitive functioning than the comparison group, suggesting that at an early stage in the PFL programme some of the common components, such as the developmental and reading packs, may have had a beneficial impact on all of those participating.

When children were aged 18 months, many of the findings were showing progress in children's learning outcomes. Children in the high-support group showed better gross motor skills, and were also at less risk of developmental delay in this domain. Children in the high-support group were also at less risk of developmental delay in relation to personal/social development and were showing signs of more advanced cognitive development than those in the low-support group. Mothers in the high-support group scored higher on measures of interaction with their children, were more responsive and reported being more concerned about their children's language development. In relation to the aspects of the home environment conducive to supporting children's learning, participants in the high-support group were more likely to have appropriate learning materials available for their children. There were no significant differences between children in the high- and low-support groups in the learning domains of problem-solving, communication and social and emotional well-being.

Consistent with the literature on similar home visiting programmes, by the time children were aged 24 months there were more significant results across the outcome areas evaluated than at previous time points. In relation to learning outcomes, children in the high-support group continued to show more advanced cognitive development than children in the low-support group. In addition, children in the high-support group displayed better problem-solving skills and were at less risk of developmental delay in this area. There were no significant differences between children in the two treatment groups in the domains of communicative development or social and emotional

development; however, children in the high-support group were less likely to display problems in the latter, such as displaying anxious and withdrawn behaviours.

When children were aged 36 months, parents were also offered the Triple P – Positive Parenting Programme in addition to the home visiting service. A number of significant differences were reported between the two treatment groups in the learning outcome areas assessed. Children in the high-support group were more likely to show developmentally appropriate problem-solving skills. Likewise, they were at less risk of developmental delay. There was no significant difference observed between the two groups in relation to social and emotional behaviour.

There were also a number of significant positive results reported concerning the home-learning environment. Homes in the high-support group were more likely to have an established and organised family schedule and greater regularity and predictability in their physical environment, and to make greater use of community services. Parents in the high-support group were also more likely to be involved in their children's learning and development, and mothers were more likely to feel positively towards their own educational experiences. Children in the high-support group also spent significantly less time watching TV, videos or DVDs than children in the low-support group. They also spent less time watching TV alone, they were permitted less maximum TV time per day, and their households generally had the TV on for a significantly less amount of time.

The final time point of the trial took place when children were 48 months old. Results indicated that many of the significant positive impacts of the PFL programme on child development were sustained at this stage. Children in the high-support group were more likely to have developmentally appropriate fine motor skills than children in the low-support group. They were also less at risk of developmental delay and were displaying more advanced cognitive abilities.

In relation to the home-learning environment, one of the significant positive findings observed in relation to screen-time habits was sustained: children in the high-support group spent significantly less time watching TV alone. However, the other significant findings reported at 36 months of age concerning the amount of time children spent watching TV per day, the maximum TV time allowed per day, and the overall amount of time the TV was on in the home were not sustained. There was also no significant difference observed between the two groups in the quality of the home-learning environment at 36 months.

A qualitative strand to the evaluation provided information on parents' and mentors' experiences of the programme. Parents indicated that they greatly valued the practical information and support provided through home visits from programme mentors. Mothers reported having positive relationships with their mentors and felt that the programme helped improve their parenting skills. Interviews with mentors focused on the skills required to mentor programme participants effectively, which included skills in developing a good rapport with families and striking a balance between tailoring the delivery approach to suit individual families while maintaining fidelity to the PFL manual. Concerns for mentors included maintaining family involvement in the programme and delivering the programme within the confines of a longitudinal experimental evaluation.

Further details of the evaluation to date are summarised in Doyle et al (2009a, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b, 2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2014, 2015). For additional information on the findings in relation to

parenting, child behaviour, and child health and development, see the other reports in the *Capturing the Learning* series.

Children's Profile at School Entry (CPSE)
Additionally, a study was conducted to determine the Children's Profile at School Entry (CPSE), which assessed the level of school readiness of the children in the PFL catchment area between 2008 and 2015. The aims of this annual representative survey were to indicate the level of school readiness of children in the PFL catchment area; to indicate whether the PFL programme was generating positive externalities in the catchment area, even to families who were not receiving the programme; and to serve as a baseline measure of school readiness for the PFL cohort.

Both caregivers and teachers took part in the study, which divided school readiness into five main domains (physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, and communication and general knowledge). A representative Canadian sample was used as a baseline for comparison, since there is no Irish baseline available to compare levels of school readiness.

The most recent wave of data from the CPSE study (2008–2015) reported that, according to teachers, 62% of children in the PFL catchment area were 'ready for school' upon starting in September, 34% were 'somewhat ready', and just 4% were rated as 'definitely not ready'. Teachers also reported that children in the most recent cohort (wave 7) of the study scored lower than Canadian norms on the measure of school readiness used in the domains of language and cognitive development, and communication and general knowledge. However, children scored higher than Canadian norms in the domain of social competence, with no significant difference reported in terms of physical health and well-being or emotional maturity.

Reports from caregivers indicated similar patterns. Caregivers rated children as being more school ready than the Canadian norm in the domains of physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, and communication and general knowledge. However, they rated children as significantly lower than the Canadian norm in the domain of language and cognitive development.

Cross-wave analysis of children who participated in the study from 2008–2015 indicated that children in the most recent wave of the study were rated more favourably in the domains of school readiness than children in the most previous waves. Specifically, children in the most recent CPSE cohort had significantly higher levels of social competence,[75] emotional maturity,[76] language and cognitive development, and communication and general knowledge than children in previous waves of the study.[77]

The CPSE study also investigated differences in school readiness across a range of factors (socio-demographic, gender, health, and environmental). Children whose caregivers were in paid work were rated higher in all five domains of school readiness than children whose caregivers were not in paid work. A higher level of education of caregivers was associated with higher ratings for children in the domains of physical health and well-being, emotional maturity, and language and cognitive development. Girls were also rated higher than boys across all five domains of school readiness.

---

[75] All waves of the study except children in wave 4 (2012)
[76] With the exception of wave 6 (2014)
[77] Significantly higher than wave 1 of the study only

Thus, being a boy and having an unemployed parent were associated with lower levels of school readiness.

The final wave of data collection took place in 2015 and the final report from the CPSE study will be available in 2016. This report will also compare outcomes of the PFL children with other children in the CPSE study who did not receive the PFL programme, and will provide further information on the potential external benefits generated by the programme for children in the PFL catchment area.

Growing Child Parenting Programme (Lifestart)

Growing Child Parenting Programme is a parent-directed, child-centred learning programme on child development delivered to parents of children from birth to five years of age. It aims to help parents support their children's physical, intellectual, emotional and social development and to promote school readiness. It is a structured month-by-month curriculum of information, knowledge and practical learning activity for parents, consisting of age-specific information on child development supported by art, story, music and movement resources tailored to suit each individual child and family. The programme is delivered by trained, paid family visitors in the parents' own home. It is a universal programme offered to parents in the relevant catchment area, regardless of social, economic or other circumstances.

Every parent who joins the Growing Child Parenting programme receives a monthly issue based on the Growing Child curriculum (www.growingchild.com) and a 30–60-minute home visit from a Lifestart family visitor. Together, the issues of *Growing Child* and the visit provide age-specific information on what parents can do with their children and what developmentally appropriate materials they might use. The home visit also offers the opportunity to discuss progress during the previous month and focus attention according to the family's needs.

Findings

A multi-site RCT evaluation of the Growing Child Parenting Programme was undertaken. Early stage findings after 10 months' participation in the programme (when families had received on average 10 out of 60 visits) suggested that the programme demonstrated impacts which were consistent with the literature on home visiting programmes at that particular stage. Positive trends were observed in seven of the nine outcomes tested. Although, as expected, there were no statistically significant effects on child outcomes at this early stage, there were positive effects on cognitive development, fine motor development, language development and socio-emotional development. This finding is consistent with the Lifestart logic model[78] that suggests that the initial goal of the Growing Child Parenting programme is to improve parental outcomes, which includes significant improvements in confidence and efficacy.

The progress of these children was assessed again at three years (before pre-school or formal education) and at five years (following completion of the programme). Results indicated positive but non-significant improvements in children's learning outcomes, including cognitive development, pro-social behaviour, decreased difficult behaviour, and fewer referrals to speech and language

---

[78] A logic model is a pictorial representation that summarises the key components of a strategy or programme in terms of the outcomes it is trying to achieve and what resources and activities are required to do this.

therapy services. In addition, exploratory analysis revealed that the programme produced similar effects for all parents and children who participated, regardless of the gender of the child, level of maternal education and anxiety, marital status, or whether they were a first time parent or not. However, it should be noted that the control group in this evaluation did not receive the programme or any additional parenting information or resources. As the authors highlighted, this may be a potential indicator of a more intrinsically motivated or engaged group of parents than would normally participate in the Growing Child Parenting Programme.

The qualitative strand to this evaluation indicated that the majority of parents enjoyed the programme and found participation helpful for both their children and themselves. Positive feedback from parents in particular referred to their positive relationship with the Family Visitor, who parents referred to as friendly, supportive and knowledgeable. Parents also reported that the materials and information received as part of the programme helped expand their child's learning and prepare their child for the transition to primary school.

Most parents enjoyed taking part in the Growing Child Parenting Programme evaluation, although some perceived the data collection process as lengthy. However, all parents in the study received feedback on child development assessments undertaken, and the importance of this was highlighted in terms of promoting participant retention.

For information on the significant positive impacts reported on parenting as part of this evaluation, further details are available in Miller et al (2015) and in the *Supporting Parents and Improving Child Behaviour* report in the CES series.

Eager and Able to Learn (Early Years, NI)
Eager and Able to Learn is a comprehensive, centre- and home-based early care and education programme for children aged two to three years. It aims to improve the learning environment in the early years setting and further children's physical, social, emotional, linguistic and cognitive development.

The Eager and Able to Learn Programme was designed by Early Years in Northern Ireland in 2007–2008. It was piloted in 14 settings across Northern Ireland, comprising private day-care nurseries and Sure Start programmes, between September 2008 and June 2009. The programme lasted eight to nine months. An early years specialist provided training to setting practitioners in addition to providing workshops for parents and children.

The four key components of the Eager and Able to Learn Programme are:
- developmental movement experiences for children, delivered in a group setting;
- a home learning package (including parent workshops, home learning manual, resource pack and home visits);
- comprehensive training for the practitioners who deliver the programme; and
- support from an early years specialist, including five on-site support visits and resource packs for the settings.

Findings
Child outcomes
This evaluation of Eager and Able to Learn was a cluster trial with a partial cross-over design. In this evaluative approach, the children in the intervention group received the intervention when they were aged between two and three years; findings for this group were compared with those from a previous cohort of children in each setting participating in the evaluation who did not receive the intervention when they were aged two to three years. In this way, each setting acted as its own control, with the intervention group being compared with a control group from the previous year. Children from the 'control group' received the intervention the following year. Results indicated that children who took part in Eager and Able to Learn had significantly improved social emotional development, although not all children showed the same improvements. Those who started with higher scores in social and emotional development and play-related behaviours tended to show the largest improvements in these areas, whereas children who began the programme with lower scores on receptive communication, fine motor behaviour and social-emotional behaviour showed positive effects in these areas. There was a negative effect on cognitive development, with the strongest effect being on emergent literacy skills such as recognising and naming shapes and colours and counting objects such as using fingers. There were no significant effects on the children's gross motor development.

Parent outcomes
Eager and Able to Learn significantly affected parental behaviour in relation to their children's learning. Parents who participated were more sensitive to how to support their children's play, and they also learned to play with their children in different ways, such as with song and dance or using different materials. They showed more understanding of how play could be relevant to their children's learning. They also seemed to be more engaged and much more satisfied with their interactions with staff in early years settings.

Practitioner and settings outcomes
Practitioners showed improvements in how they interacted and played with the children. They were also more open to and positive about working with the children's parents. Participating in Eager and Able to Learn improved the average quality for settings, and improvements were most clearly shown in interactions between children and staff, interactions among the children, interactions between parents and staff, and interactions among the staff themselves. Although settings were already scoring highly in these areas, Eager and Able to Learn provided an additional boost, with 20% of the settings moving into the 'excellence' range. Further details of the evaluation are summarised in Molyneaux et al (2012), McGuinness et al (2012a and 2012b) and Geraghty et al (2012).

3, 4, 5 Learning Years (youngballymun)
The 3, 4, 5 Learning Years programme is designed to improve early childhood learning and well-being outcomes for children through the enhancement of existing pre-school services operating in the community. The 3, 4, 5 Learning Years programme provides active support and coaching for the implementation of *Síolta* National Quality Standards and the HighScope Curriculum in early years services supporting children's social and emotional development and language and literacy skills.

The 3, 4, 5 Learning Years service is provided by youngballymun in eight pre-schools in Ballymun, a socially disadvantaged area of Dublin. Specially trained staff (an Early Years quality coordinator and

a HighScope coordinator) work with pre-school practitioners and settings to support the implementation of *Síolta* and HighScope, including coaching, mentoring, and providing information, training and resources.

A recent value for money study reported that for the economic year 2011, the running cost was €387,693. The cost per beneficiary was €697.

Findings
The mixed-methods evaluation showed that 3, 4, 5 Learning Years resulted in the following improvements to day-care settings:

- Quality ratings for child daily routines in the settings almost doubled post-programme.
- There were significant improvements in quality ratings for adult-child interactions and curriculum planning and assessment.
- There were reported improvements in interprofessional relations, working more closely with fellow staff in settings, networking across pre-schools and taking responsibility for implementation of new practice.
- There was increased staff understanding of child development and quality early childhood care and education.
- There was increased staff confidence in giving feedback to parents and in identifying children who may benefit from additional support.

Settings that had engaged with both *Síolta* and HighScope found the two approaches to be complementary. As one practitioner said, '*Síolta* is about ensuring the quality of the service. HighScope helps you deliver that quality.'

The early years quality coordinator was seen as helping organisations cope with what otherwise would have been a complicated and daunting process and also in maintaining momentum. The coordinator helped to make the complex guidance for *Síolta* usable. Some settings reported that they would not have engaged with the process at all without the support of the coordinator.

Pre-school setting managers were enthusiastic about engaging with HighScope because they saw it as a positive opportunity to engage in curriculum development with dedicated resources, training and funding to help them develop their settings (e.g. physical improvements and new equipment). Both the HighScope coordinator and the HighScope trainer/assessor were seen as accessible and supportive, and their experience and expertise were valued.

A setting's stage of development was seen to be important in terms of the type of support most beneficial to it. In a sector that has limited capacity and is in need of development (whether this be at a whole-setting level or among groups of staff), one may need the coordinator to perform a coaching role (rather than a mentoring role), which focuses on supporting practitioners to understand the concepts and theories that underpin models of early education and childcare services, and to help them develop a concrete understanding of the characteristics of a quality service. Settings may need to build capacity first, for example by engaging with the HighScope process (or another recognised curriculum) before engaging in a quality assurance process.

The 3, 4, 5 Learning Years service appears to have been successful in terms of helping pre-school settings:

- develop a common language of development, improvement and assessment, which is particularly evidenced in HighScope settings but also supports the implementation of *Síolta*;
- deepen their understanding of the concepts and theories underpinning high-quality early education and care; and
- become more reflective in their practice and more committed to continuing professional development.

The role of the 3, 4, 5 Learning Years team was seen to be important. Staff felt that the training had given them a deeper understanding of children's development needs and increased confidence in their roles as practitioners. They felt that their observation skills had improved, as well as their ability to identify when children need additional support and when to respond appropriately. Interprofessional practice was seen to have improved in terms of working more closely with other staff in settings, taking responsibility for implementing new practices and networking across pre-schools. Further details of the evaluation are summarised in SQW (2012).

CDI Early Years (Childhood Development Initiative)
CDI Early Years is an early childhood care and education programme, starting when children are aged two-and-a-half to three years. (Prior to 2012, it was called the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme.) This two-year programme is designed to develop and enhance all domains of children's physical, psychological and social well-being, including their cognitive skills and language development, social and emotional development and capacity for learning. It also seeks to support parents' psychological health, build on their parenting strategies and encourage a positive parent-child relationship.

The Early Years Programme was designed to support and target all families living in an area of social disadvantage in Dublin (Tallaght West). It is operated by CDI, and delivered through a combination of specialised staff located within existing services. The programme consists of the following components:

- Support within pre-school settings:
  - direct provision, over the course of two years, of a flexible and broad-based curriculum operating within the principles of HighScope;
  - observation of children's learning to enable practitioners to develop child-centred follow-up work plans in collaboration with parents during home visits;
  - provision of nutritious food and physical play and recreation opportunities;
  - specialist primary healthcare support in the areas of dental hygiene and psychological assessment; and
  - access to a dedicated speech and language therapist to support children in their language development.
- Parenting support by a dedicated parent/carer facilitator (who focuses on the self-identified needs of parents/carers and their educational interests), participation in the Parents Plus community course and provision of quality childcare and activities for parents based on their specific needs. Home visits are also undertaken by the parent/carer facilitator and key childcare workers.

Findings

Children and parents

As part of the RCT evaluation of the programme, children were assessed at baseline, after one year and again after two years. The CDI Early Years Programme did not influence children's cognitive and language outcomes, although there was a significant improvement in rhyme and lowercase recognition scores among the intervention group. Fewer children who took part in the programme were classified as having abnormal behavioural problems compared with children in the control group at the end of the intervention, but these differences were not significant. The more sessions of the Parents Plus community course parents attended, the more improvements were seen in their children's home-learning environment. Indeed, this parenting course was identified as a key component in improving the home-learning environment, even two years after the course was attended.

Settings

All the pre-school settings were seen to be of 'good' to 'excellent' environmental quality. The intervention resulted in significantly better curricular and planning quality. The quality of the literacy environment also showed signs of improvement with intervention services moving from 'minimal' to 'good', whereas control services remained at 'minimal'. Settings that took part in the programme were more likely to engage children in music-movement, nature/science and mathematics activities than settings that did not take part. Intervention services had a significantly better range of topics that were targeted at promoting children's learning and development, and intervention staff tended to plan more than control staff. Further details of the evaluation are summarised in Hayes et al (2013).

Incredible Years (youngballymun)

Incredible Years is being implemented in the Ballymun area of Dublin as one component of a complex community change initiative called youngballymun. This involves a number of services and strategies embedded in existing systems and delivered across the lifespan of a child. They aim to improve child outcomes and to create learning opportunities, as well as creating an impetus for services and institutions to change and enhance their own efficacy.

The Incredible Years service takes a whole-school approach to supporting primary school-aged children's social and emotional development through building the capacity of children, parents, teachers and community-based family support services. The three interlocking components of Incredible Years comprise the Child Programme, the Teacher Programme and the Parent Programme. All of these can be delivered as standalone programmes, but youngballymun views the programmes as a multi-component, multi-level, multi-year set of interventions linked to the culture and ethos of the school. The school's policies, systems and structures are used as vehicles to create an ethos (learning, social and physical environment) that promotes the principles of Incredible Years and supports the implementation of the programmes on a whole-school level.

Incredible Years is an evidence-based programme shown to consistently have positive effects on children's outcomes and on parenting and teaching behaviour. It has been extensively evaluated in other countries. youngballymun undertook an action research study to discover how the implementation of Incredible Years could be undertaken on a 'whole-school' level. The aim was to promote social-emotional learning within school as well as to foster strong home-school

partnerships by supporting and extending classroom learning, bridging home and school, and creating consistent expectations around social and emotional behaviour.

A recent value for money study reported that the running cost for the economic year 2011 was €349,295. The cost per beneficiary was €437. The total present value savings for the Incredible Years intervention is €3.1 million. For conduct disorders alone, this is a savings-per-affected-child of almost €69,000.

Findings
The core implementation team of the Incredible Years programme comprises a Parent Programme Coordinator, Parent Group leaders and a School Coordinator, all of whom were seen as vital components for the successful development of the programme. This involved a tailored and coordinated approach to building capacity within schools; providing ongoing implementation support (consultation, mentoring, peer support); fostering a supportive school environment and culture that encourages partnerships between school and community; establishing a structure to engage parents in the Parent Programme to integrate delivery across the school, community and family spheres; and building the profile of Incredible Years in the area through networking across agencies to both expand and embed Incredible Years in Ballymun.

The action research study showed that local and national partnerships were seen as fundamental to supporting Incredible Years in its capacity building activities. These included collaboration between schools, educational support services, the Ballymun-based Community and Family Training Agency (CAFTA), Archways (the national promoter of Incredible Years in Ireland), and other relevant stakeholders.

youngballymun actively established structures and processes to assist planning and preparedness for change. A flexible, responsive, independently facilitated planning and service design process involving key stakeholders provided a structure to respond to the needs of the school communities; assess the fit between the programme (the Incredible Years training series) and community needs; and assess the resources and capacity required to effect change. Close attention was also paid to the professional development of teachers and their engagement throughout the process. Further details of the evaluation are summarised in Morgan and Espey (2012).

Incredible Years (Archways)
As noted above, the Incredible Years series comprises a suite of comprehensive, specially designed programmes that target children from birth to 12 years of age, and their parents and teachers, with a view to improving social and emotional functioning and reducing or preventing emotional and behavioural problems. It is one of the few 'model' programmes designed to directly tackle the issue of emotional and behavioural difficulties in children. (Model programmes are those that have been subject to rigorous independent evaluation, which has produced scientific evidence of their long-term effectiveness.) The *Incredible Years Ireland Study* involved a comprehensive and methodologically rigorous community-based evaluation of the effectiveness of different elements of the Incredible Years suite of programmes, including the Incredible Years BASIC Preschool/Early School Years Parent Training Programme and the Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management programme.

The Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management Programme is a classroom-based intervention designed to strengthen teachers' classroom management strategies, promote the successful management of classroom environments and improve children's pro-social behaviour. It is a brief, group-based intervention guided by the principles of behavioural and social learning theory. It consists of five monthly sessions. Two group facilitators help deliver the programme and about 12 teachers participate in each group. The programme uses techniques such as group discussion, videos, role play and modelling to help teachers adopt positive classroom management strategies.

Findings
The short-term outcomes (six months) of a RCT of the Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management Programme supported the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of the programme. It was shown to benefit teacher practices and reduce behavioural difficulties among young children.

A longer-term follow-up was undertaken at 12 months, including a quantitative follow-up with the intervention group teachers who had participated in the RCT and a qualitative study of a subsample of teachers, to explore their views and experiences. The longer-term outcomes at 12 months showed positive effects maintained over time for both children and teachers. Teachers' classroom management skills were significantly improved at the 12-month follow-up, with teachers using more positive classroom management strategies and fewer negative classroom management strategies. Teachers found that they were able to easily transfer the skills learned to a new class and reported that the programme continued to be of use 12 months post-intervention. They described their classes as being calmer, more pleasant places in which to work and learn. Post-intervention, the teachers were also more confident in their ability to manage their classrooms effectively and deal with disruptive behaviour. Although teachers generally regarded the strategies as useful, they noted that for a minority of children (e.g. children with special needs in mainstream classrooms), some techniques were ineffective.

Further information on the evaluations is provided in McGilloway et al (2009, 2010, 2012a and 2012b) and O'Neill et al (2013).

Promoting Alternative THinking Strategies (PATHS) (Barnardo's Northern Ireland)
The Promoting Alternative THinking Strategies (PATHS®) programme is a universal whole-school social and emotional learning (SEL) programme that seeks to change/build upon a school's ethos and culture. PATHS aims to support the pro-social skills, emotional understanding, social problem-solving and self-control of five- to 11-year-old children.

It was delivered to children in Craigavon, an area of social and economic disadvantage in Northern Ireland. It is a whole-school approach, consisting of scripted lessons delivered by teachers over three academic years. These lessons were age-appropriate and dealt with recognising emotions, expressing feelings, coping with negative feelings (e.g. anger) and reacting to social problem-solving situations. PATHS (which was originally developed in the USA) was adapted by Together 4 All (which was the original grantee for the programme) to make it culturally appropriate for Northern Ireland, and it developed an additional mutual respect and understanding component, which deals with accepting people who are different and becoming part of a local and global community. The programme moved to Barnardo's Northern Ireland in 2011. The PATHS NI Programme was used by participating schools to replace the corresponding strand of the statutory primary curriculum in six

schools. The idea was to create changes first in teachers' behaviours, next in pupils' attitudes, and finally in pupils' behaviours towards peers and adults.

Findings

A RCT indicated that PATHS significantly improved younger children's empathy, coping cooperation, actively helping others and decreases in showing negative affect. Teachers reported significant improvements in older children's empathy and cooperation, reflectivity and perseverance, fighting and aggression. The teacher ratings of the younger cohort found significant advantages for the PATHS NI pupils over the control pupils in empathy, coping cooperation; actively helping others; and not exhibiting negative affect. Most school principals reported that the programme was associated with improved attendance at school, resulting in fewer referrals to the Education Welfare Officer than prior to the programme's implementation, as well as a decline in the general level of vandalism in the school community and a decline in the incidence of bullying. While they generally found it difficult to identify the specific impact of any one factor on improvements in children's attainment, they linked improved behaviour and attendance to a greater disposition for learning.

Improvements were also seen in children's ability to recognise and talk about emotions. Observations of classroom teaching and pupil behaviours showed only isolated and limited differences.

Principals, teachers, coordinators and parents all felt positively about PATHS NI and wanted it to continue in future years. All groups of respondents observed improvements in pupils' behaviour, self-esteem, interactions with adults and other children, awareness of feelings, and ability to deal with anger, frustration and social conflicts. Further details of the evaluation are summarised in Ross et al (2011).

Write Minded (youngballymun)

Write Minded is one of six integrated services operating under the youngballymun Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative. It operates in the Ballymun area of North Dublin, which experiences extremely high levels of deprivation. It integrates the Department of Education's DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) Strategy.

Write Minded is an area-based literacy strategy that works across schools and the community to build children's literacy and language competency through:

- the implementation of a balanced literacy framework (including development of DVDs on reading fluency, reading comprehension, writing and word knowledge; development of whole-school literacy plans; in-classroom modelling; support for guided reading sessions; and paired and peer reading);
- oral language support (including assessments undertaken by specialised staff; development of whole-school literacy plans; and delivery of the Language Towards Literacy Programme, which is a 20-week programme for teachers of junior infants to help them develop children's language skills through topic-based activities that can be developed in the home, also involving parents); and
- an integrated family and school transition programme (including a resource pack for teachers and children, work with community projects and families, a Summer Slide Programme to enhance children's literacy ability over the school summer holiday period, and support to

community organisations to enhance their capacity to better integrate literacy into their services).

Write Minded works with children and young people aged four to 18 years in both schools and community settings. It operates with a core team of three staff (a Literacy Coordinator, an Oral Language Development Officer and a Family and Community Literacy Development Officer).

A recent value for money study reported that for the economic year 2011, the running cost was €183,896. The cost per beneficiary was €324.

Findings
Children's literacy skills
A mixed-methods evaluation of Write Minded was undertaken, which involved quantitative assessments of children's literacy and qualitative research in participating schools and the community. Results showed possible benefits to children's literacy. Schools reported that the programme had been very important in bringing a greater focus on literacy into schools and felt that through the support provided to them from the service, there had been a positive impact on children's literacy.

Skills for families
Parents were very enthusiastic about their experience of the Write Minded programme and, as a result, there was more reading being done in the home, reading was more interactive than before, and it was more fun for the family. Parents had increased confidence in supporting their children to develop their literacy skills. They also valued the networks in which parents came together to support each other.

Outcomes for teachers
Teachers who participated in Write Minded adapted their styles of teaching and used new techniques in their practice. This included implementing a cross-curricular approach to teaching literacy, more frequent and improved assessment and pupil progress reviews, a greater focus on writing, and more interactive teaching approaches. Teachers also felt more confident in teaching literacy and had an increased enjoyment in their teaching. They valued the training and opportunities for professional development offered by participating in the programme. In addition, there was some evidence that teachers' expectations of children's achievements increased.

Planning and transition outcomes for schools
Primary schools in Ballymun engaged very positively with the Write Minded programme, although engagement at the post-primary level was more challenging. Schools experienced much support from Write Minded in implementing whole-school plans for literacy (which they are required to do as a condition of DEIS funding). Each school in the area now has a refined plan in place and teachers reported that this is now a central point of discussion in staff meetings. They believed Write Minded helped to bring increased clarity, continuity and consistency to the planning process and has strengthened schools' focus on literacy.

The Ballymun Transitions Programme was set up to support the transition from primary to post-primary schools. Teachers were very positive about its impact, reporting greater confidence in delivering the programme to children and increased awareness of the issues faced by children at

this transition stage. They also stated that children were better able to manage the transition since their worries and concerns were now being addressed.

Development outcomes for the wider community
Community organisations have welcomed the support offered by Write Minded to enhance their existing services. They now have an increased understanding of literacy issues and the role they can play in promoting literacy skills in the wider community. There is evidence that the Write Minded programme has had a positive impact on building the capacity and skills in the community sector around literacy support, and the Write Minded programme has led to new approaches being implemented in community organisations.

Overall, the Write Minded programme has been positively received in Ballymun by teachers, parents, community organisations, children and young people, and is showing promising improvements in children's literacy. Further details of the evaluation are summarised in SQW (2012).

Doodle Den (Tallaght West Childhood Development Initiative)
Doodle Den operates as part of CDI in an area of Dublin (Tallaght West) with high levels of social and economic disadvantage and unemployment. The programme is currently being rolled out in other sites in Tallaght West, inner-city Dublin, and Limerick, mostly under the School Completion Programme.

Doodle Den is an after-school programme for groups of 15 children aged five to six years . It aims to improve children's literacy by implementing a literacy framework in schools, homes and community settings; contribute to more frequent school attendance; encourage more learning outside of school; increase parental involvement in out-of-school time education; and enhance children's relationships with their parents and peers. The cost of this programme is €1,656 per child per annum.

The core components of the Doodle Den Programme include literacy development, letter identification, writing skills, phonics awareness and text comprehension. It aims to target the factors that influence children's literacy, such as school attendance, nutrition, the learning and home environments, the training and experience of teachers, and parental involvement in children's literacy. The evidence-based curriculum features a balanced literacy framework with child, parent and family components:

- The child programme is intensive. Children attend three 90-minute after-school sessions a week throughout the school year. These sessions involve them in a range of fun activities aimed at enhancing their literacy skills, such as games, drama, music, art and physical activities. At each session, children are given a healthy snack.
- Doodle Den also offers three family sessions and six parent sessions. During these sessions, parents are encouraged to take part in such activities as sitting in on children's sessions and sharing reading activities with them.

Doodle Den was operated by two service providers, Citywise Education and An Cosán, until 2012. The School Completion Programme took over this role in September 2012. The sessions are co-facilitated by a teacher and a youth/childcare worker. The cost of delivering the programme for 15 children for one year is €25,262.

Findings

The RCT evaluation found strong evidence that Doodle Den achieved moderate improvements in children's literacy. This was supported by the data gathered from teacher assessments. The children had particularly improved in relation to the comprehension items: word choice, sentence structure and word recognition. They also showed significant improvement in concentration, reading at home, family library activity and a reduction in problem behaviours in school. There were promising indicators of success in other outcome areas too, such as school attendance.

The Doodle Den programme worked just as well for children from different economic backgrounds or ethnic groups and just as well for boys and girls, although there did appear to be some additional benefits for boys in relation to improved concentration and behaviour in school. Children who participated in the programme more often showed greater improvements in their literacy ability; therefore, it would appear that increased participation may lead to further improvements.

A wide range of stakeholders (including the programme's facilitators, school principals, parents and, indeed, the children) believed that Doodle Den had a positive impact. They cited improvements in literacy skills, as well as in children's enjoyment, social skills and confidence. There were notable differences in these areas between the children who had participated in Doodle Den (intervention group) and those who had not (control group). Further details of the evaluation are summarised in Biggart et al (2012).

A follow-up evaluation of Doodle Den was conducted at two and three years after the cessation of the programme. At follow-up, children participating in the evaluation were aged between eight and 11 years. Findings in relation to overall children's literacy and two subscales (vocabulary and comprehension) indicate that while some of the positive impacts of the programme were sustained after two to three years, they were no longer statistically significant. In addition, the number of Doodle Den sessions attended did not appear to be predictive of outcomes after two to three years. Likewise, the statistically significant results observed in the initial evaluation on teacher-reported measures of concentration and behaviour in class and literacy ability were not sustained. However, it should be noted that there was notable attrition (drop-out of participants) in the evaluation in the follow-up period, and caution is advised in interpreting these findings. Further information on this evaluation can be found in Biggart et al (2014).

Time to Read (Business in the Community)

Business in the Community is an organisation with a membership of 250 companies in Northern Ireland. Its purpose is to 'mobilise business as a force for good in society'. It supports a number of initiatives where businesses can contribute to the well-being of those in the community. It recognises that in Northern Ireland there are high levels of social and economic disadvantage and that many young people leave school without attaining formal qualifications or with the necessary levels of literacy and numeracy skills.

Business in the Community also supports the view that developing these skills at an early age increases the likelihood of longer-term benefits, both socially and economically. To this end, the organisation launched its first educational programme, Time to Read, in 1999 in five primary schools in Northern Ireland supported by one company. The programme now operates in 130 primary schools with the support of almost 120 companies, and involves over 1,000 children.

Time to Read is an in-school volunteer mentoring programme for children at the primary school level that is focused on supporting literacy. The overall aim of the programme is to improve reading outcomes for the children involved by making a positive impact on self-esteem, reading ability, aspirations and expectations for the future, and enjoyment of education. This is particularly in relation to improving the core foundational skills of reading, decoding, reading rate, reading accuracy, reading fluency and reading comprehension.

The programme involves over 500 adult volunteers acting as mentors and spending one hour per week in company time working with primary school children with the aim of improving their reading skills. Pupils in Key Stage 2 classes (Primary 5, about age 9) with below-average reading ability are invited to participate, with permission from their parents, on the recommendations of the child's teacher. The mentoring support aims to complement the work of the teacher, with the emphasis being on the children discovering the enjoyment of reading and improving their reading fluency. The volunteer meets weekly with each of 2 children, reading from resource materials selected by the Education and Library Boards Literacy Advisors. Each child participating in the programme receives two 30-minute mentoring sessions per week. In addition, volunteers are encouraged to invite the children to visit their company. There are two reviews with volunteer and Business in the Community staff each year.

Findings
The Time to Read Programme has been subject to a series of evaluations since 2003, all of which concluded that the programme has had a positive impact on the children in terms of their reading confidence, their enjoyment of reading, their skills in reading and their appreciation of the world of work.

A RCT evaluation has provided clear evidence that the Time to Read programme is effective in improving reading outcomes for children, particularly in relation to the core foundational reading skills of decoding, reading rate and reading fluency. It also encourages improved aspirations for the future. The number of sessions provided impacted on outcomes, with children who received more mentoring sessions reporting greater enjoyment of reading and better reading fluency than those who received fewer mentoring sessions. The programme worked equally well for girls as for boys, for those from different socio-economic backgrounds, and for those with varying initial reading abilities. There were no significant effects shown on children's higher reading skills, such as comprehension or reading confidence.

The findings suggest that Time to Read is comparable with leading international literacy interventions as an effective way of improving literacy skills among children who are currently struggling as readers. Further details of the evaluation are summarised in Miller et al (2009 and 2011).

Wizards of Words (Barnardos)
Wizards of Words (WoW) is a literacy programme adapted from the evidence-based Experience Corps programme, which was developed in the USA. WoW is an intergenerational, one-to-one literacy programme which is delivered in schools by volunteers aged 55 years or over. The programme has three core objectives:

- to make improvements in children's reading, specifically in the areas of reading comprehension, reading fluency, vocabulary and phonemic awareness;
- to encourage and promote children's interest in, and enjoyment of, reading; and
- to improve children's confidence in their reading ability.

WoW is a targeted literacy intervention for children in 1st and 2nd class in primary school. It was delivered in nine schools in disadvantaged areas of Limerick and Dublin. WoW involves three weekly sessions, each lasting approximately 30 minutes. The programme has clear inclusion criteria which include the following:

- Children's reading level should be between 4-18 months (1st class students) and 4-24 months (2nd class students) behind what is expected for their age group.
- Children should not meet requirements for formal learning supports, i.e. they must not have a diagnosis of general or specific learning disability or behavioural difficulties and they must not be in the Reading Recovery programme or availing of support from a Learning Support teacher.
- Children should not have foreseeable extended absences from school.

The WoW programme implements a 'Balanced Literacy Approach' that utilises elements from both whole-language and phonics approaches. Volunteers receive training in the programme before they begin sessional work with children. Children are removed from class for the sessions, which are divided into three parts: pre-reading, reading, and follow-up activities. The three stages are distinct yet complementary, involving, for example, cueing children to upcoming new words, reading together and follow-up reinforcement of one or more key reading areas.

Findings
The WoW programme was subject to a mixed-method, multi-site evaluation, which involved a RCT to assess impact on outcomes, and a process evaluation to investigate implementation of the programme.

The RCT provided evidence that the WoW programme was effective in improving some aspects of children's literacy. Data were collected on children's literacy outcomes at three time points in the study – pre-programme, an eight-month follow-up, and a 12- or 16-month follow-up. Children participating in the WoW programme, relative to the control group, showed statistically significant improvements in word recognition and phonemic awareness (i.e. being able to break words down into the smallest units of sound) and positive trends approaching significance on phonic knowledge, enjoyment of reading and confidence in their reading ability.

Children with 'below average' reading levels who participated in the programme made greater improvements than children with 'average' reading levels, particularly boys. In addition, younger children (1st Class) showed greater improvements in some reading sub-skills than older children (2nd class). Surveys with school staff and volunteers also showed statistically significant gains in a number of outcome areas for children: self-esteem and willingness to read aloud (volunteer report), and willingness to help classmates read (teacher report).

Results of the process evaluation indicated that the programme was valued by schools, children, and volunteers alike. Schools in particular valued the fact that the programme targeted children who were in the 'middle range' of experiencing delays, but were not eligible for other formal reading

interventions and that it complemented the primary curriculum. Schools also valued the professionalism of volunteers and project leaders. Children were likewise positive about their participation in the programme and their relationships with volunteers. School teachers reported that children participating in the programme were more confident in their reading ability and showed more enjoyment in reading. In addition, volunteers indicated that involvement with the WoW programme was rewarding, was putting their free time to good use, and had additional social benefits for them.

Further information on the WoW programme and evaluation is available from Fives et al (2013).

Tús Maith (Barnardos)

Tús Maith is an early years centre-based programme aimed at children who are aged between three and five years. The programme is delivered over the course of a pre-school year in eight early years centres which target children experiencing disadvantage. The core objective of the programme is to improve school readiness in order to help children make the transition to primary school. School readiness is a holistic term which encompasses social and emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and language development. There are three strands to the Tús Maith programme, which are the HighScope Curriculum, the Barnardos Quality Framework, and the Research-based, Developmentally Informed (REDI) programme. The HighScope Curriculum is based on active participatory learning, with children benefiting from direct hands-on experiences with people, objects, events and ideas (more information on HighScope can be found in Section 2 of this report). The Barnardos Quality Framework underpins elements of the Tús Maith programme by incorporating the Barnardos Assessment Framework, which includes a child development tracker, a family file and record-keeping system, a case management system, training, technical assistance, and auditing and monitoring of the quality of practice. These connected systems aim to improve the overall quality of service that children and their families receive. The REDI programme incorporates the early years PATHS programme with dialogic reading, phonics-based games and an alphabet centre.

Findings

The evaluation of Tús Maith was a mixed-methods, quasi-experimental approach that was carried out between 2011 and 2013. The quasi-experimental impact strand of the evaluation involved assessment before children took part in the programme, post-programme, and follow-up one year later to assess the degree to which outcomes were sustained. A process evaluation of the implementation of the programme was also conducted.

The impact evaluation indicated two statistically significant positive impacts of the Tús Maith programme. Children who took part in the programme had better phonological awareness and perceptual motor ability. Positive findings in relation to letter recognition were approaching significance. There was no overall significant effect of the programme on other cognitive and language development outcomes assessed, as both children who received the programme and those who did not (the control group) improved in these areas over the course of the evaluation. In terms of particular subgroups, the programme had a significant positive effect on the vocabulary of girls and on children from lone-parent families. However, the programme had a significant negative effect on the non-verbal reasoning of children from non-Irish backgrounds.

There were also statistically significant improvements reported in the quality of the learning environment of centres that took part in the programme in comparison with centres that did not.

Centres that took part in the programme had highly significantly better learning environments for children, which included things such as the types of activities in place to support learning, personal care routines for children, and having appropriate space and furnishings. Staff who took part in the programme also had highly significantly better interactions with children, which were more sensitive and involved fewer instances of negative interactions or non-involvement of staff with children.

Findings from the process evaluation indicated that programme fidelity was high across the eight settings, with the programme generally implemented as intended. Some general challenges to implementation were highlighted by staff, such as tailoring the programme to a child's developmental level, challenges posed by behavioural and cognitive difficulties (such as lack of concentration), and the accompanying monitoring and reporting requirements. However, feedback from staff indicated that they were generally very satisfied with the programme and the support they received from Barnardos.

Further information on this evaluation can be found in Hayes and Doyle (2014).

Ready to Learn (Barnardo's NI)

Ready to Learn is a school-based after-school programme that is open to all children from Foundation Stage (junior infants) in participating schools. The programme has both a child and a parent element, with the child element focusing on enhancing literacy and promoting a love of learning and the parent element offering a range of activities to support parental engagement in their child's learning. The child component also has a secondary focus on improving children's social, emotional and behavioural regulation skills.

The content of the Ready to Learn programme centres on the following skills: attention and listening skills, phonological awareness, concepts of print, oral language and extended vocabulary. The programme involves three hour-long sessions weekly, which are staffed by at least one teacher and two early years professionals. The parental component of the programme provides practical advice and support to parents through parent groups held in the school, generally during school hours.

Findings

Ready to Learn was subject to a three-year RCT and a process evaluation investigating implementation and experiences of the programme.

The RCT provided mixed findings in relation to child outcomes; however, overall it indicated a positive impact of the programme on reading achievement. Statistically significant improvements were reported for children's reading comprehension and word recognition and phonics skills (linguistic phonics). The latter improvement is particularly notable since children in the intervention group scored lower than the control group on a measure of linguistic phonics before the programme commenced. Additional measures of receptive vocabulary and decoding (or non-word reading) reported no statistically significant difference in child performance. On a measure of reading attitudes, results showed that children who took part in the programme did less well than children in the control group; however, this result was insignificant.

In relation to social and emotional learning, which was a secondary outcome of the programme, findings were again mixed. There was no statistically significant difference in children's emotional

skills,[79] and children in the control group performed better on a measure of social skills than children who participated in the programme.

The qualitative aspect of the evaluation indicated that, overall, parents, children and school staff valued and enjoyed the programme. Parents who attended groups reported that they had improved their understanding of their child's learning and how they could reinforce it at home. However, maintaining parental engagement throughout the programme was challenging. Children reported that they enjoyed participating in the programme and the variety of activities it involved. School staff also spoke positively about the programme, indicating that they would recommend it to other schools; that it was a fun programme that enhanced literacy and social skills; and that it supported and reinforced teaching in the classroom.

For further information on the Ready to Learn evaluation, see Macdonald et al (2014).

Big Brothers Big Sisters Ireland – School based peer support programme (Foróige)
The Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) programme, which is delivered by Foróige, has both a community-based and a school-based strand. The school-based strand of the programme aims to mobilise peer support in schools. The programme involves a student in the first year of secondary school being 'matched with' and mentored by a senior student (fifth or sixth year) in their school. The programme is designed to help junior student mentees to integrate into their new school environment, and to help senior student mentors to adopt a voluntary leadership role in their school as well as support their personal development.

The school-based BBBS programme is manualised, and schools are required to implement some core features of the programme: matches must be one-to-one and of the same gender; the programme should run from September/October to April/May of a school year; a member of school staff should be nominated to coordinate implementation with programme staff; and matches should be supported to meet at least one class/lunchtime period per week and in a supervised group setting.

Findings
BBBS was subject to a formative qualitative evaluation investigating student, school staff and project staff experiences of the programme. The purpose of adopting this research design was to inform future development of the programme and a potential outcomes evaluation in the future.

Findings from interviews with student mentors and mentees, school staff and Foróige/BBBS staff indicated that the programme was well received and resulted in positive experiences for junior and senior students alike. Focus groups with student mentors and mentees signalled that senior students valued the opportunity to help a younger student and make a positive contribution to their school. Senior student mentors also reported that it helped them develop confidence and listening and communication skills. Junior student mentees were likewise positive in their feedback on the programme, reporting that it provided them with a fun opportunity to meet other students and become familiar with their new school environment. Mentees also valued knowing that an older student was 'looking out for them'.

---

[79] On a standardised measure which assessed children's ability to interpret affective arousal (i.e. arousal in moods, feelings) and distinguish between emotions/feelings

Interviews with school staff identified a number of benefits of the BBBS programme, including providing an opportunity for mentees to make new friends and to feel safer, secure and more settled in their school environment, and it was also seen as helping to address bullying. School staff also reported benefits for mentors, including being given greater responsibility and respect within the school, and providing personal and professional development opportunities. Interviews with programme staff indicated that they viewed the programme as successful in helping first year students to manage the transition to post-primary school and gives senior students an opportunity to volunteer and develop personally and professionally.

For more information on the school-based Big Brothers Big Sisters evaluation, see Brady et al (2012).

Out of School Time Initiative (Rialto Learning Community)
The Out of School Time (OST) Initiative is an after-school project for children and young people aged 11–14 years who reside in the regenerated areas of Dolphin's Barn, Fatima and the wider Rialto area of Dublin City. OST aims to help young people making the transition from primary to secondary school, and involves a range of after-school programmes, including:
- homework support (emphasis on literacy and numeracy);
- sport activities; and
- arts programmes including dance, music, visual arts, drama and street performance.

A wider aim of this after-school provision programme is to enhance coordination and collaboration between schools and the local community (including project workers and local parents) and build capacity in these areas. As a part of this programme, there was organisational integration of three local projects: the Rialto Youth Project, the Dolphin House Homework Club and the Fatima Homework Club.

Findings
The Out of School Time (OST) Initiative was evaluated using a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Data collection for outcomes evaluation, which was quasi-experimental in nature, took place over three years. Findings from this element of the evaluation provided mixed findings regarding the impact of the OST programme. Children who took part in the programme were significantly less likely to report enjoyment of school than children in the control group. In addition, they were significantly less likely to believe that they could master new learning or that their work would pay off over time. On the other hand, positive effects were reported for children in the intervention group in relation to their attitudes to work, which were more internally motivated than children in the control group. In other words, children who took part in the OST programme were significantly more likely to report that their reasons for working hard were not dependent on external assessments and rewards, and they were also significantly less likely to avoid difficult work. There were no significant findings reported on measures of child behaviour or social and emotional well-being.

However, in light of these findings, it is important to note that at the baseline measurement for the study, more than one-third of young people in the control group reported that they had already been participating in another after-school programme for more than one year.

As part of the process evaluation of the work of the Rialto Learning Community (RLC), interviews were conducted with RLC team leaders and staff and with school principals, teachers and librarians. Findings from these interviews indicated that the after-school programme led to positive outcomes for young people. Interviewees reported that the work of the RLC had improved relationships between the schools, RLC and local families, and was an embedded service in the local area. The implementation of the programme was also reported to have improved the sharing of good practice between RLC staff and the teachers in local schools, and had successfully implemented an outcomes focus to its everyday work. For further information on this evaluation, see Miller, Eakin and Cownie (2014).

National Early Years Access Initiative (NEYAI – Pobal)
The National Early Years Access Initiative (NEYAI) was a three-year programme (2011–2014) which consisted of 11 projects (see Appendix) located mainly in disadvantaged areas of Dublin, Cork and Limerick, as well as in Donegal and Longford/Westmeath. The aim of the projects, generally, was to improve quality in early years settings and improve outcomes for young children attending the settings. Activities across the NEYAI projects varied, and included staff training and mentoring, family support, interagency working, and delivery of parenting programmes and family support services. Projects worked with infants/children from birth to six years and with their parents.

Findings
As part of the overall evaluation of the NEYAI, there have been separate evaluations of local NEYAI projects, an evaluation of the NEYAI Learning Community, and a main outcomes report that summarises findings from the initiative as a whole, which will be the focus of this section. As there was considerable diversity in the nature of the 11 NEYAI projects, the outcomes evaluation compared outcomes of one age group of children: those availing of the 2012/2013 free pre-school year. The evaluation was quasi-experimental in nature and compared outcomes of children attending NEYAI early years services and those attending early years services that were part of the *Síolta* Quality Assurance Programme (QAP).

The sample of the outcomes evaluation represented almost 2% of all early years centres in Ireland, 4% of staff, and less than 1% of children. Analysis showed that children in both settings improved on a standardised measure of early global development. The developmental domains on this measure were physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, and communication skills and general knowledge. The results also indicated that children with better social and emotional skills at the start of the study had better skills at the end of the study, and children with weaker skills at the start were weaker at the end of the study.

In terms of influences on development across children attending both NEYAI and *Síolta* QAP early years services, results indicated that age, gender, and a non-English-speaking background (NESB)[80] were significant factors. Boys were significantly behind girls in terms of social emotional skills and cognitive and language skills, and older children had an advantage in relation to cognitive and language skills. In addition, at the beginning of the study, NESB children had poorer social and emotional skills and cognitive and language skills than other children. However, by the end of the study, the difference had reduced, signalling a positive influence of pre-school attendance in both settings.

---

[80] NESB refers to a child whose mother does not have English as a first language (excluding Irish).

The outcomes evaluation also analysed the influence of latent factors at the family and social systems level and the pre-school system level. Results showed that within the family and social system,[81] social class accounted for the most variance in children's language, cognitive and social and emotional skills. There was a complex interplay in relation to the influence of parent-child relationships on child learning outcomes – with the quality of the parent-child relationship being a significant influence, and that relationship, in turn, being influenced by maternal well-being, social class, NESB status and level of social support.

In relation to the influence of the pre-school system on child learning outcomes, results suggest that the length of time a child spent in a pre-school environment before taking part in the free pre-school year had a positive influence on child developmental outcomes over the course of the study. The evaluation also indicated that whether a child attended either a NEYAI or *Síolta* QAP centre made no difference to child learning outcomes when other factors were taken into account. Similarly, no significant difference was observed between self-reports from staff in the two groups on their practices and workplace environment and the impact this had on child development throughout the study.

In interpreting these findings, it is important to note that children in NEYAI were being compared with children receiving a service (*Síolta* QAP) that is a validated quality standard, as opposed to children not attending any early years services.[82] In other words, even though there was no significant difference in child outcomes in the two groups, this may be because NEYAI is of a comparable standard to the *Síolta* QAP quality benchmark.

For further information on NEYAI, see McKeown, Haase and Pratschke (2014).

Summary of main findings from the Initiative so far

A summary of the programmes' main outcomes is given in Table 2. As noted above, it is important to remember that not all of the evaluations used the same methods to investigate learning. Ten out of the 16 programmes used RCTs, and different measures were used across the evaluations to assess outcomes.

A summary of the effects on children's learning environments is set out in Table 3 and a summary of children's learning outcomes is set out in Table 4. Table 3 attempts to summarise the overall impact on children's learning environments (early years setting, home, and school) in terms of categorisation as 'significant improvement' (which is a statistically significant effect shown on one or more measures of the learning environment) or 'positive trend' (which is a positive change shown in qualitative measures). Table 4 summarises the overall impact on children's learning outcomes in terms of 'significant improvement' (statistically significant improvement in one or more measures), 'positive trend' (positive effects shown but not reaching statistical significance), 'mixed findings' (some positive and some negative effects shown) 'no difference' (no statistically significant effect shown) and negative impact (a statistically significant negative effect shown on one or more measures). .

---

[81] In this evaluation, the 'family and social system' was based on three variables: mother's well-being, social class and the parent-child relationship.
[82] A control group for this evaluation would not have been feasible since the free pre-school year is a universal service available to all eligible children in Ireland and has a 95% uptake rate.

Table 2: Impact of the programmes on measures of children's learning outcomes and environments

Programme	Impact on measures associated with child learning
Preparing for Life	*A randomised controlled trial study showed:* • Higher-quality home environment with more appropriate learning materials and childcare. • Mothers were more concerned about their child's language development. • No significant effects seen at 6 months of age on child development. • By 12 months of age, children had better fine motor skills and were less likely to be at risk for social and emotional difficulties. • By 18 months of age, children had better gross motor skills and were at less risk of developmental delay in this area, and by 48 months children in this group had appropriate fine motor skills. • By 18 months of age children were at less risk of developmental delay in social skills. • By 18 and 24 months of age, children were showing better cognitive development. • By 24 months and 36 months of age, children had better problem-solving skills and were at less risk of developmental delay in this area. • By 36 months of age, parents were more likely to be involved in their child's learning and development. • By 36 and 48 months of age, children spent less time watching TV unattended. • By 48 months of age, children in the higher-treatment group were at less risk of developmental delay and had more advanced cognitive abilities.
Growing Child Parenting Programme	*A randomised controlled trial study showed:* • Improvement in child cognitive development. • Improvement in child social-emotional development. • Increased pro-social child behaviour. • Decreased problematic child behaviour. • Fewer referrals to speech and language therapy services.
Eager and Able to Learn (Early Years, NI)	*A partial cross-over design study showed:* • Significantly improved social emotional development. • A negative effect on cognitive development, particularly emergent literacy skills (such as recognising and naming shapes and colours and counting objects). • No significant effect on child gross motor development. • Improvement in how parents used play to support their children's learning. • Improvement in levels of engagement between parents and child-care settings. • Improvement in how the day-care staff interacted and played with the children. • Average quality of settings improved, with 20% of settings moving into the 'excellent' range.
3, 4, 5 Learning Years	*A mixed-methods study showed:* • Objective improvements to day-care settings in terms of quality ratings for routines, carer-child interactions, curriculum planning and assessment. • Staff had better self-reported understanding of child development and quality early childhood care and education. • Self-reported improvements in interprofessional relations and networking.

Programme	Impact on measures associated with child learning
	• Staff felt more confident in giving feedback to parents and identifying children who needed additional support.
CDI Early Years	*A randomised controlled trial study showed:* • No significant influence on child cognitive and language outcomes. • No significant effect on behaviour problems, but a trend towards improvement. • Parents Plus Community Course was shown to improve the children's home-learning environment, even two years after the course was attended. • Significant improvements in curricular and planning quality. • Some improvement in the quality of the literacy environment in the pre-school settings. • Better range of activities targeted at promoting children's learning and development.
Incredible Years whole-school approach Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management	*A mixed-methods, action research study showed:* • The evaluation was a piece of action research rather than an outcomes evaluation. • Qualitative feedback suggested that taking a whole-school approach to implementing Incredible Years was beneficial. *A randomised controlled trial study showed:* • Significant improvement in teacher practices at six months. • Significant reduction in children behaviour problems at six months. • Positive effects for children and teachers maintained 12 months later, including teachers' classroom management skills. • Teachers reported being able to easily transfer skills learned to a new class.
Promoting Alternative THinking Strategies (PATHS)	*A randomised controlled trial study showed:* • Principals reported improved attendance at school, with fewer referrals to the Educational Welfare Officer than prior to programme implementation, as well as a decline in general level of vandalism, coupled with reduced bullying. • Significant improvement in children's pro-social behaviour. • Few differences seen in direct observations of classroom teaching and pupil behaviours, although principals, teachers, coordinators and parents all felt positively about the programme and want it to continue.
Write Minded	*A mixed-methods study showed:* • Promising benefits to children's literacy experiences. • Schools felt it had brought a greater focus on literacy, cross-curricular approach. • Teachers reported feeling more confidence and enjoyment in teaching literacy. • Ballymun Transition Programme perceived as helpful in supporting students' transition from primary to post-primary schools.
Doodle Den	*A randomised controlled trial study showed:* • Strong evidence that the programme improved literacy. Children showed better comprehension, concentration, reading at home and family library activity and a reduction in problem behaviours in school. • Promising effect on school attendance. • Some additional benefits for boys in relation to improved concentration and behaviour in school.

Programme	Impact on measures associated with child learning
	• Increased participation led to greater improvements. • A follow-up evaluation found that some of the positive impacts of the programme were sustained after 2–3 years, but were no longer statistically significant.
Time to Read	*A randomised controlled trial study showed:* • Strong evidence of improved reading outcomes for children, particularly with core foundational reading skills of decoding, reading rate and fluency. • Increased participation led to greater improvements. • No significant effects shown on higher reading skills, such as comprehension, enjoyment of reading or reading confidence. • Programme is comparable with leading interactional literacy programmes for children currently struggling as readers.
Wizards of Words	*A randomised controlled trial study showed:* • Significant improvement in children's literacy sub-skills of word recognition and phonemic awareness. • Positive trends approaching statistical significance on phonic knowledge and enjoyment of and perceived confidence in reading. • Programme was especially beneficial for children (particularly boys) with 'below average' reading levels. • Children in 1st class showed greater improvements than children in 2nd class in the areas of word recognition and phonemic awareness.
Tús Maith	*A quasi-experimental study showed:* • Significant improvement in aspects of children's phonological awareness and their perceptual motor ability. • No difference in children's other cognitive and language outcomes. • Significant positive effect on the vocabulary of girls and on children from lone parent families. • Significant negative effect on the non-verbal reasoning of children from non-Irish backgrounds. • Significant improvement in the quality of the learning environment of centres that took part in the programme.
Ready to Learn	*A randomised controlled trial study showed:* • Significant improvement in children's reading comprehension. • Significant improvement in children's word recognition and phonics skills. • No difference in children's decoding skills (non-word or pseudo-word reading using phonological skills) as improvements were observed in both control and intervention schools. • No difference in children's receptive vocabulary. • No difference in children's emotional skills. • Children in the control group performed significantly better than children who participated in the programme in relation to social skills (teacher report).
Big Brothers Big Sisters (school-based)	*A qualitative study showed:* • Senior student mentees reported that it helped them develop confidence and listening and communication skills. • Junior student mentees reported that it helped them adapt to their new school

Programme	Impact on measures associated with child learning
	environment and develop social connections. • Staff reported that the programme provided positive development opportunities for both mentors and mentees and helped address bullying in the school.
Out of School Time Initiative	*A quasi-experimental study showed:* • Children were significantly more likely to have an internally motivated approach to work, i.e. less dependence on external assessments and rewards. • Children were significantly less likely to report avoiding difficult work. • Children were significantly less likely to report enjoyment of school. • Children were significantly less likely to believe that they could master new learning or that their work would pay off over time.
National Early Years Access Initiative (NEYAI)	*A quasi-experimental study showed:* • Improvements observed in general child development for children in both early years settings (NEYAI and *Síolta* QAP). • The programme has an added benefit for children with better social-emotional skills. • Length of time spent in a pre-school environment in advance of the free pre-school year had a positive influence on general child development outcomes. • No significant difference observed in child learning outcomes across both early years settings (NEYAI and *Síolta* QAP) as both groups improved.

Table 3: Summary of programme impact on learning environment (early years setting, home, school)

Significant improvement *(statistically significant effect shown on one or more measures of learning environment)*	Positive trend *(positive changes shown in qualitative measures/methods)*
Preparing for Life	Promoting Alternative THinking Strategies (PATHS)
Eager and Able to Learn	Incredible Years (whole-school approach)
3, 4, 5 Learning Years	Growing Child Parenting Programme
CDI Early Years	Ready to Learn
Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management	Big Brothers Big Sisters (school-based)
Write Minded	Out of School Time Initiative
Doodle Den	
Time to Read	
Tús Maith	

Table 4: Summary of programme impact on children's learning outcomes

Significant improvement *(statistically significant on one or more measures)*	Positive trend *(positive effects shown, but not reaching statistical significance)*	Mixed findings *(some significant positive and negative effects shown)*	No difference *(no statistically significant effects shown)*	Negative impact *(significant negative result on one or more measures)*
Preparing for Life	Promoting Alternative THinking Strategies (PATHS)	Eager and Able to Learn	CDI Early Years	
Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management		Ready to Learn	NEYAI[84]	
Doodle Den[83]	Write Minded	Out of School Time Initiative		
Time to Read	Growing Child Parenting Programme	Tús Maith		
Wizards of Words (WoW)				

---

[83] A smaller-scale follow-up evaluation found that significant improvements to positive trends were reduced after 2–3 years. However, participant attrition means that these findings should be interpreted with caution, and this classification is based on findings in the original RCT.

[84] Children in both NEYAI and another early years setting improved over the course of the evaluation.

Section 4: Discussion, key messages and implications

Discussion

There is a growing international literature and a local evidence base in Ireland and Northern Ireland for programmes and interventions aimed at supporting parents and improving outcomes for their children.

In Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland, a number of approaches and programmes are used to improve children's learning experiences and outcomes. This report has examined the learning from 16 programmes and services evaluated as part of the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative. These varied according to whether they worked with the child, the parent, or both. There is a range of programmes delivered from the early years through to adolescence, and services were delivered at home, in school and in the community (*see Table 1*).

Eleven of the programmes/initiatives were delivered in the Republic of Ireland (Preparing for Life; Doodle Den; CDI Early Years; Incredible Years; 3, 4, 5 Learning Years; Write Minded; Big Brothers Big Sisters; NEYAI; Out of School Time Initiative; Wizards of Words and Tús Maith) and four in Northern Ireland (Eager and Able to Learn; Time to Read; PATHS; Ready to Learn). The Growing Child Parenting Programme is delivered in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Programmes could be targeted or universal. The level of need and the way in which services were targeted varied. Some programmes were delivered on a universal basis in both socially advantaged and disadvantaged areas (Growing Child Parenting Programme; Eager and Able to Learn; Time to Read). Some were delivered on a locality basis, where the catchment area was decided on the basis of levels of disadvantage (CDI Early Years; Doodle Den; Write Minded; 3, 4, 5 Learning Years; youngballymun Incredible Years; Preparing for Life). PATHS was delivered in an area considered to be broadly representative of the Northern Ireland population. Some services were delivered on a settings basis. These settings were all chosen according to their readiness to implement the service (Eager and Able to Learn; Time to Read; 3, 4, 5 Learning Years; PATHS) and sometimes additionally according to social disadvantage (youngballymun Incredible Years; Doodle Den; Write Minded; Ready to Learn; Tús maith). Within these settings, some services were offered on a whole-school basis, so entire year groups received the programme (Incredible Years, PATHS, Ready to Learn). Alternatively, individual children could be selected by their teachers or parents on the basis of struggling with reading (Wizards of Words, Time to Read, Doodle Den, Write Minded).

The type of support offered was tailored to the children's ages and specific needs. The programmes in the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative spanned a wide age range of children, including programmes delivered before children start school to improve learning dispositions and school readiness (Preparing for Life, Growing Child Parenting Programme, Eager and Able to Learn, CDI Early Years, 3, 4, 5 Learning Years, NEYAI, Tús Maith), programmes focusing on skill acquisition or improvement during the first few years at school (Write Minded; Doodle Den; Ready to Learn) and services aiming to improve older children's skills, aspirations, engagement (PATHS, Time to Read and Wizards of Words) and transition to post-primary school (Write-Minded; Big Brothers Big Sisters; Out of School Time Initiative).

The approach was chosen on the basis of what would make the programme accessible and appealing to participants. Some programmes were delivered in the home (Preparing for Life,

Growing Child Parenting Programme), in early years centres (NEYAI; Tús Maith) or in early years centres with additional home visitation (Eager and Able to Learn; CDI Early Years). Others were delivered in school settings, either as after-school programmes (Doodle Den; Write Minded; Ready to Learn), pull-out sessions during the normal school day (Time to Read; Wizards of Words) or integrated within the school curriculum to be delivered as part of daily classes (PATHS; youngballymun Incredible Years). Others were delivered in community settings (Out of School Time).

It was important to engage parents. Some of these programmes also included additional components to engage parents to support the work being done with the children and to improve the connectedness between children's different learning environments (youngballymun Incredible Years; PATHS; Doodle Den; Write Minded; Eager and Able to Learn; Ready to Learn). Often a key feature of these was the delivery of parent training sessions within school buildings, thus improving accessibility and connectedness between school and home (Incredible Years; Doodle Den; Write Minded). Other services sent materials home to parents (PATHS).

Using international programmes with minor adaptations yielded successful results. There were evidence-based programmes developed elsewhere and delivered locally, with fidelity to the original programme (Incredible Years; PATHS; CDI Early Years). The Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative has shown that it is possible to replicate evidence-based programmes in Ireland that have been developed elsewhere and achieve successful results. Results were consistent with those found in other countries or regions where these programmes have been extensively used. It was not as simple as just taking programmes shown be effective elsewhere 'off the shelf' and rolling them out; it took time and effort to recruit and train staff and there were issues of organisational readiness that had to be addressed even after the programme had been selected. Some adaptations had to be made to language and content, in order to ensure cultural appropriateness, so that the programmes could be delivered in the local context. This appears to have been facilitated by active consultation with communities and key stakeholders, paying close attention to organisational readiness for implementation, recruiting, training and supporting staff, and monitoring service delivery (see Sneddon et al, 2012, for detailed discussion of these factors).

It was possible to develop programmes to meet local need. Other providers either developed programmes 'from scratch' (Eager and Able to Learn; Doodle Den; Write Minded; Time to Read; 3, 4, 5 Learning Years; Ready to Learn; Out of School Time Initiative) or heavily adapted (Preparing for Life; Growing Child Parenting Programme; Wizards of Words; Big Brothers Big Sisters) or integrated (Tús Maith) existing evidence-based programmes. Organisations used innovative methods to develop home-grown programmes and services based on assessed need and identified gaps, but, importantly, underpinned by a robust evidence base. These providers based the design of their new programmes on a clear understanding of local need and what the existing evidence base suggested would be effective. Engagement with users and other stakeholders was important, so as to ensure that the programme's approach would be feasible and appropriate for the local context, especially for programmes that involved delivery in educational settings or using indirect service providers. It took time and effort to get these new programmes up and running. The role of specialised implementation support teams was seen as crucial to this, particularly when working with indirect service providers such as teachers or day care staff to deliver the programme. Many of these services have used the findings from the first RCTs and process evaluations to develop their approaches further. Examining the quantitative and qualitative information together has provided

rich information for the service providers about how the programmes can be improved in the future.

Programmes benefited from having clear structures, curriculum and resources. Most of the programmes have a developmentally appropriate curriculum that builds cumulatively on what has been done before. Programmes delivered by indirect service providers, such as teachers or early years professionals, benefited from having clear lesson or session plans, resources and dedicated implementation support teams. Programmes that engaged with parents found it useful to provide tip sheets and resources that the parents could refer back to, as well as building a respectful and supportive relationship with the provider. Approaches involving mentoring or tutoring (rather than the delivery of a formal curriculum) benefited from having structure to the interactions between the practitioner and child, staff training and monitoring over time.

What outcomes changed? The outcomes that the programmes have aimed to change have also been diverse, including improving the home as a learning environment; changing parental behaviour, children's learning dispositions, school readiness and engagement; improving reading skills; improving connectivity between the home, school and community; and changing the practice of childcare professionals and teachers. For programmes aimed at infants and young children, changes were most frequently seen in the learning environments experienced by children; such changes included improvements in the home-learning environment, the quality of interactions in day care settings and learning environments in schools. Programmes working with older primary school children indicated improvements in specific literacy skills, and programmes working with youngsters beginning post-primary school appeared to help the transition process and provide positive development opportunities.

Improvements in outcomes were also seen at an individual level. Many of the programmes were shown to have positive impacts on children's literacy, particularly those working with primary school age children who were already experiencing some difficulties. Successful approaches included structured after-school activity-based support, in-school individual support provided by staff or trained volunteers, and a greater focus on literacy in the school curriculum. Across the initiative, dosage emerged as being significant: overall, it was found that children who participated more frequently and regularly in the programmes did better. Improvements were also shown in children's attitudes to learning, learning dispositions, motivations and engagement, as well as their social-emotional learning. As the evaluations in this Initiative have shown, it is crucial that the assessment of outcomes uses developmentally appropriate measures that are catered to the age of the child, the different domains of learning and administered properly.

It will also be important to examine whether any improvements observed are sustained over time. As one follow-up evaluation suggested, the positive impacts observed on literacy outcomes may dissipate over time, which may indicate the need for longer-term programmes or initial programme 'boosters' received shortly after programme cessation. In addition, for some programmes working with very young children or infants, the impact on learning outcomes may become more apparent as they grow and develop. Each child has a unique pace of development, and one-off assessments, while helpful and informative, capture a young, developing child at a particular point in time. Follow-up evaluations of children who participated in these programmes will be valuable in determining the longer-term impact of programmes that did not adopt a longitudinal approach to the initial evaluation.

Sometimes, there were differences between the amount of difference that teachers and parents believed the programmes were making to children's outcomes, compared with the differences demonstrated by the independent evaluations. It is not necessarily that the parents and professionals are wrong about the changes they can see in the children; rather, these changes may not be due solely to the programme, and comparison with control children (with whom they would not necessarily be in such close contact) can create this disjuncture. It is also important to ensure that the evaluation focuses on outcomes that the intervention can reasonably be expected to influence in the timescale under study. For example, it may be more appropriate to measure greater levels of interest and engagement in learning before an increase can be measured in levels of literacy or numeracy. It is also important to assess the appropriate outcomes in the short, medium and long term in order to examine how any effects change over time.

The following sections summarise what we have learned from the initiative about how to support capacity building in early years settings, locating services in schools, engaging schools to support programme delivery, engaging families in services and creating links between children's different learning and care environments.

Capacity building in early years settings
The importance of learning in early years settings, such as day care, is being increasingly recognised in both jurisdictions of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The learning from the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative highlights ways of improving standards in day care settings and encouraging the provision of stimulating learning experiences for young children. Key learning from the initiative showed that:

- Programmes offered should be developmentally appropriate for the age of the child.
- Implementation support teams are important for creating and sustaining change in early years settings. This involves assessing organisational readiness for implementing programmes, support in training and coaching staff, providing ongoing constructive feedback on progress, and support in monitoring fidelity of implementation and changes in practice. The professional knowledge and credibility of the implementation team, their practical understanding of the challenges faced by the settings, flexibility and availability are all important enablers for success.
- Each early years setting may require a different type of support from the implementation team at different stages, depending on its stage of organisational readiness to implement changes to practice. For example, coaching support may be needed to improve practice before assessment against quality standards is undertaken. Mentoring support may be needed once an appropriate standard of service provision is attained.
- It is essential to have management buy-in from early years settings as well as from individual practitioners, in order to ensure successful implementation of programmes and practice change. This can be facilitated by the provision of implementation support, clear documentation, quality training, providing cover for staff during training and provision of additional resources, such as equipment or materials required for a programme.
- Peer networks can be useful for encouraging implementation. During the initial stages when settings are deciding whether or not to use a programme, managers may find it beneficial to speak with other setting providers who are already using the programme about its costs and benefits. Once they have decided to engage with a programme, it can also be useful to bring together setting managers regularly and/or bring together individual staff from different

settings, so that they can share their professional learning and expertise about using the programme.

Working with schools

Many of the programmes were delivered in the school setting, either during normal class time, in pull-out sessions for individual children or in after-school classes. There were several challenges experienced in running programmes within school settings and some of the key learning is summarised below:

- It often took a long time to negotiate delivery of the programmes in the schools but, once engaged, schools reported very positive experiences and initiatives, and teachers in particular welcomed the increased emphasis on literacy and opportunities provided to them for enhanced professional development. They welcomed the supports provided by the initiative and reported increased enjoyment in teaching, and in some cases reported that participation in the initiative encouraged increased expectations of children's performance.

- Programmes operating after school were also welcomed by teachers, who reported positive changes in children's behaviour, confidence and literacy as a result of the programmes.

- The teacher training and ongoing professional development opportunities offered by the programmes were viewed positively by school principals and teachers. Teachers highlighted such benefits from the programmes as increased confidence in teaching specific topics (such as literacy and improving social-emotional skills), increased enjoyment in teaching in general, developing new techniques in teaching, enhanced capacity of children to concentrate in class, better transitions planning and children better able to manage transitions, increased skills for children, and positive changes in children's behaviour.

- In terms of locating services successfully within schools, gaining the support of different levels of management (including Board of Governors, Principal, individual teachers and assistants) was seen as crucial to success.

Programmes adopting a whole-school approach to change found that full programme implementation required not just change of individual teachers (regardless of how many) but also a change in the norms, values and interactions of the staff (a change of school ethos). This was shown when programme elements were integrated into school policies and codes of conduct. Understanding school procedures and ways of working, as well as dedicated implementation support, were important enablers for success, and changes often took time to negotiate and implement.

The learning from the initiative shows that gaining the support of schools is critical to the success of any programme delivered in after-school settings or during school time. The programmes varied as to whether they provided specialised implementation support teams or additional staff to support this, or whether they endeavoured to change the behaviour of the teachers already employed in the schools. For example, Doodle Den was delivered in an after-school setting using staff employed by CDI; Time to Read and Wizards of Words used volunteer mentors; and youngballymun Incredible Years and PATHS both offered training and support to existing teachers, so that they could deliver the programme.

Challenges to delivering a programme within a school environment include an already packed curriculum, which means that time is at a premium. It can be difficult to regularly fit in discrete programme-focused lessons with the addition of other curriculum priorities. Staff turnover also

needs to be considered in order to plan for when key personnel leave. In addition, it can be challenging to keep programmes fresh in the light of educational changes and the constraints of the timetable.

Key learning from the implementation of the school-based programmes in the initiative suggests that the following factors supported the integration or 'mainstreaming' of the programmes into the school environment and changing teacher practice:

- Negotiating access to deliver the programme within a school can be a lengthy and time-consuming process. It is vital to consult with the school before training is introduced; it is also vital to tailor training to teachers' needs (e.g. location, scheduling and duration of the training). Professional development for teachers is an important focus to support successful implementation. This can be made more effective by using feedback about training to improve future training in terms of scheduling, content, relevance to recipients, and cohesion with school policies.

- It is important to ensure that programmes can be slotted into the structure and routine of the existing curriculum. Making available lessons that had specific objectives and methodology was seen as beneficial, as was a Resource File with appropriate and well-structured content. Teachers may need to be reassured that the materials match the curricular requirements and are age-appropriate. There can be challenges in presenting year-specific content to composite classes which comprise more than one year group.

- Time needs to be allocated for training and resource preparation.

- Programmes were found to support a common vocabulary between the entire school community, which was beneficial to transitions for children between different learning environments, as well as for interaction between different professional groups.

- School leadership needs to be engaged to take ownership of the programme. This could be encouraged by asking staff to contribute to service design, to have an ongoing involvement in monitoring implementation, or to making the programme visible throughout the school (such as by providing designated rooms, putting pictures of the programme on the walls and including features of the programme in school policies such as codes of discipline).

- Teachers may need to be supported to make professional decisions about flexibility in implementation, so that they can adapt a programme to fit with their own classroom environment without taking away from the structure of the programme. Teachers also need to be confident in the programme terminology, programme goals and associated learning outcomes – this was seen to allow for more consistent implementation throughout schools.

- Putting monitoring strategies in place to support implementation is essential for ensuring the quality and consistency of programme delivery over time, as well as maintaining momentum.

- Coaches, training, coordinators, forum meetings, resources and school support were all seen as enabling factors for successful programme implementation in school settings. There needs to be effective communication between programme delivery organisations, schools and coaches.

Factors seen to contribute to the successful delivery of sessions for parents in school settings included:

- Support of school personnel (e.g. school staff dropping in during the parenting programme's coffee breaks to have a conversation with the parents; assisting with practical matters; the

school offering dedicated room space to the programme which, in turn, assisted with the logistics of organisation and provided a consistent and stable base).

- Staff delivering the parenting programme understanding and being aware of school systems (such as appreciating the length of time it takes to build relationships with schools, designating one person in each school to facilitate this, being mindful of the many commitments and pressures of school staff as well as the rules and practices of schools).

- Consistent consultation of programme staff, communication and coordination of activities with other events in the school. This included actively establishing structures and processes to assist planning and preparedness for change. A flexible, responsive, independently facilitated planning and service design process involving key stakeholders can provide a structure to assess the fit between the programme and community needs, as well as assess the resources and capacity required to effect change. Engaging with teachers during the service design process to identify what kind of programme might be best suited to the challenges they were facing and the earlier piloting of programmes locally can all influence how well teachers commit to a whole-school implementation process and the change process involved.

- It is crucial to understand the culture of the school and its constraints, and to assess the suitability of any programme against these, as well as gauging how organisationally ready the school is to implement the programme.

- Programme staff need to be flexible about times of attendance at meetings and have an understanding of other school commitments.

- Technical support offered by the implementation team to support, guide and organise the implementation process and maintain focus is an important enabler for success. Specific coordinator roles help to facilitate capacity building activities tailored to the needs of the individual implementation sites; liaise with the outside training agency and implementers; provide ongoing support and encouragement for implementers, and maintain open channels of communication between schools and programme providers.

- The implementation team can provide an infrastructure to facilitate efforts to integrate the programme at the community, agency and practitioner level. This can be helped by involving some of those from the service design stage within the implementation team so as to ensure consistent use of the knowledge accumulated during the service design process.

Engaging families to support children's learning

For many years, children's learning was predominantly seen as the preserve of the formal education services, such as schools. It is now recognised that a child's learning begins much earlier than this, and the environments they experience from birth in their homes and communities have a great influence on their learning dispositions and outcomes.

Several of the programmes recognised the importance of parents and families as 'first educators' and the need to support an active learning environment in children's homes. Some of these preventive programmes began during pregnancy or soon after birth, to work over several years with parents to improve their children's learning (Preparing for Life, Growing Child Parenting Programme). Others availed of the opportunities offered in day care settings to work directly with the children as well as with their parents (Eager and Able to Learn, CDI Early Years). Three of the after-school programmes that worked directly with children to improve their learning outcomes (Write Minded, Doodle Den, Ready to Learn) also worked with parents to encourage them to provide complementary learning experiences. This was done by offering a range of activities to parents to increase their confidence and skills in supporting the children's learning. There was a

combination of sessions offered to parents, as well as family sessions where both the parents and children were involved.

Key learning from the initiative showed that:

- Programmes that featured elements of parental engagement and support reported positive findings. Participating parents gained increased confidence and skills and were availing of the services offered. Parents reported a number of positive outcomes, including that more reading was done at home, reading was more interactive, there was better use of library services, and parents appreciated the added benefits of friendship with other parents during the programmes.
- It was sometimes challenging to engage parents with the programmes, especially when their own educational histories may not predispose them to finding such engagement easy. As a result, multiple strategies often had to be used.
- Staff training was needed in order to improve confidence and skills in engaging parents, particularly if this was something the organisation had not been involved with before.
- Holding parenting sessions in the school (Doodle Den, Write Minded, youngballymun Incredible Years, Ready to Learn) was seen as very beneficial by both school personnel, practitioners and parents. By encouraging parents to physically spend time in the school, they became more visible to the children there and the programmes also became a useful focus for changing the culture of a school to be more family-inclusive. Running parenting programmes within the school environment was seen as providing a message to parents that they are valued in the school and as a method for maintaining parent involvement. Locating services within schools was seen as an important way to improve accessibility and ensure that parents could get information about how to support their children more quickly and efficiently than through traditional referral pathways.
- It was also beneficial to offer support to parents in family-friendly ways, such as through home visits or providing crèche services so that parents could attend training sessions.
- Parents valued being given specific information on activities that would help their children's learning, as well as resources such as tip sheets that they could refer back to over time.
- It may be beneficial to form local and national partnerships to support capacity building activities, such as collaboration between schools, educational support services, family support and training agencies, service providers and other relevant stakeholders.
- For parents taking part in longitudinal evaluations who were not receiving an intervention, as in some control groups, providing parents with feedback on developmental assessments used as part of the evaluation process was seen as helpful in reducing drop-out.

Further detail on the learning from the initiative about working with parents to improve children's outcomes is provided in the 'Capturing the Learning' report on *Parenting*.[85]

Supporting transitions
Transitions between services and the different learning and care environments experienced by children is a key issue. As noted in Section 2, these transitions often mark not only a change for children in physical location, often from small-scale to large scale interactions, potentially from highly personalised to less personalised relationships, and from environments with a small range of ages to settings with children and youngsters of many ages. It can also represent a disruption to

---

[85] Sneddon and Owens, 2013

their established peer relationships. There can be important changes to a different learning, education and care paradigm. Often children, particularly those experiencing social disadvantage, may show problems during transitions or may demonstrate a decline in performance.

One of the anticipated outcomes of improvements in early years settings is a positive transition for children from pre-schools to primary schools. One concern is that adopting an approach that is beneficial in the early years settings may be at odds with the more pedagogical approaches adopted in primary schools where the curriculum is often more teacher led and desk based. A discontinuity in approach between settings may make the transition for some children from pre-school to junior/primary school more difficult than in the past. Similar concerns have been expressed in other countries when similar changes have been introduced, for example, in relation to transition from the play-based Foundation Phase (ages 3 to 7 years) to the subject-centred Key Stage 2 curriculum (ages 8–11 years) in Wales. In reality, the children in Wales seemed to adjust well but this most likely to occur where Key Stage 2 teachers fully understood the philosophy and approach of the Foundation Phase.[86] It is important therefore to liaise with pre-schools and primary schools to support this transition, and supporting contact between professionals and the development of a common vocabulary may facilitate this.

Likewise, supporting the transition of young people from primary to post-primary was a core focus of a number of programmes in the Initiative. Both peer and community support models were used to assist young people in adapting to the post-primary educational environment, which illustrated some positive results, particularly in feelings of support and attitudes to the new school environment.

Some of the programmes were part of community-wide initiatives with a strong emphasis on community engagement. Involvement with the community – whether to promote a focus on children's literacy and learning or to promote positive relationships with adults – was seen as important in the evaluations. Promoting a community understanding of literacy support enhanced the capacity and skills of individuals and organisations beyond the home and school environment around literacy support. The use of local adult volunteers to support young people's reading abilities showed positive results, and also indicated positive outcomes for the volunteers themselves.

The notion of 'complementary learning' that goes beyond school settings, but which supports the skills acquisition and the school-based work on literacy, runs through several of the approaches in this initiative. The delivery of programmes in community settings and by other professionals in addition to teaching professionals has shown positive results. There is a strong body of literature which supports the effectiveness of after-school programmes in improving children's literacy and encouraging engagement in learning.

Summary
The learning from the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative shows the importance of improving home-learning environments by working with parents, especially with younger children; how to successfully improve practice and standards in early years settings; support for a school learning environment through capacity building and training with teachers; and support for a community learning environment with a focus on core literacy skills, community and school-based

---

[86] SQW, 2012

supports for educational transitions, structured programmes and positive relationships with adults. The learning from this initiative in Ireland, and that available in the wider research literature, shows that there are methods available that can improve children's learning experiences and outcomes.

The evidence base in Ireland of programmes and interventions designed to improve outcomes for children is increasing. We are learning more about what approaches work best for teachers, parents and children, and also how to implement these effectively so that the best outcomes can be achieved.

Programmes to improve children's learning outcomes are being successfully delivered in a broad range of settings and contexts, such as at home, in early years centres, communities and after-school clubs, in pull-out sessions during the school day or integrated into the school curriculum. They are being delivered by paid programme staff from a variety of backgrounds, including early years, youth work, speech and language therapists and teachers, as well as volunteers.

The programmes and interventions delivered as part of the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland have demonstrated that they are able to replicate evidence-based programmes with fidelity and to show positive outcomes consistent with those produced in other regions and jurisdictions internationally. It was also possible to successfully develop new programmes and services that are underpinned by a sound and robust theoretical evidence base, and that are showing positive results. It will be important to follow up and examine whether any improvements observed can be sustained over time.

Conclusions

In this section, key messages are highlighted and some of the possible implications outlined.

Key messages

- **Children's learning begins from birth** and has to be supported in different ways depending on the age of the child, their individual needs and circumstances.
- Often when we think about successful learning outcomes, we highlight specific skills, such as literacy and numeracy. These are useful indicators of learning, but we also need to encourage children to engage meaningfully in the world around them. **Placing a focus on giving children a love of learning, as well as on what skills they gain, would help to improve outcomes and support lifelong learning.**
- **Interventions should be explicit as to which outcomes they aim to improve in the short, medium and long term, and how these can be meaningfully measured.** There can sometimes be a difference in how much improvement parents and teachers perceive to occur in children's learning compared with what is shown by independent evaluations. It can be useful to combine information from quantitative and qualitative evaluations.
- Learning is not the sole responsibility of schools. Children experience a range of learning environments, including home, day care, pre-school and junior/primary school. **Children thrive when they experience consistency in how people interact with and care for them**. This can be improved by ensuring that each setting understands what happens elsewhere and ensures that their approach complements the others.
- **Transition points between the different learning environments experienced by children and young people at different stages are important** and need to be prepared for in advance. Good communication between settings, continuity in the approaches and sources of social and peer support in and between settings are important.
- **Parents are a key influence on their children's learning**. Parents need to provide healthy, stimulating environments for children during their early years, as well as support their more formal learning experiences when they start school.
- **Children's learning can be supported by experiencing quality day care.** This can be improved by offering professional development to staff to improve their skills and interactions with children.
- **Trained volunteers can be a helpful resource in school settings where structured literacy programmes are being delivered to struggling readers who do not meet requirements for more intensive, formal learning supports.** It can also be beneficial for volunteers themselves in terms of their own skill development and personal fulfilment. However, ongoing monitoring and support is required in order to ensure that approaches are being implemented with fidelity.
- **Integrating new approaches into schools takes time and sustained effort**. Important enablers for success include specialised implementation teams to provide ongoing support, focused approaches that fit with the curriculum, professional development for teachers and leadership buy-in.
- **Programmes to be delivered in school settings need to specify how they link to other work being done in the school environment**. If the programme is to be mainstreamed, there should be clear links made to the existing curriculum. After-school programmes should complement the work done in school by using a range of interactive, fun activities rather than repeat the activities of the school day.

> - **Working with teachers and early years professionals can improve outcomes for the first group of children who experience the changes**. If changes are sustained, subsequent cohorts of children may also benefit, which may yield a greater return on initial investment.
> - **Collecting information about possible cost benefits over time would be useful for interventions delivered in an education setting**, where the initial costs for delivery may be incurred by the Department of Education, but the long-term cost savings are accrued by another Department such as those responsible for employment or justice.

Implications

Learning is not the sole responsibility of schools. From birth, children experience a range of learning environments, including home, day care, pre-school and junior/primary school, as well as their experiences in the wider community. Children benefit from school most if they have been supported to learn and engage with the world around them from birth. Children who grow up from birth in a caring and responsive environment that has given them supported learning opportunities arrive at school with a history of learning behind them and core skills and competencies that schools can build on. This 'school readiness' can be seen as having four interrelated components: children's readiness for school, schools' readiness for children, and the capacities of families and of communities to provide developmental opportunities for their young children. Longitudinal studies have shown these factors to be crucial since children who fail to gain adequate skills at an early stage will find it difficult to catch up later.

Children also experience several key transitions during their lives. These can include the transition from home life to day care, pre-school or nursery school, to primary or junior school, and then later to secondary school, college and possibly further education. All these changes can include different learning, education and care paradigms, and are key stages when performance can deteriorate and problems can occur.

The need to engage parents

Parents play a critical role in supporting their children's learning. It is what parents *do* with their children that makes the difference to children's learning outcomes, more so than socio-economic status per se. Parents may not always be aware of how best to provide active support to their children's learning. They may not know what approaches are being used in schools or they may have negative attitudes towards school, which influence their children's outcomes.

The Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative showed that it is challenging to engage parents in supporting the work being done with their children. Beneficial strategies include using creative and innovative methods, supporting parents to do developmentally appropriate activities with their children, and making services accessible. Some of the key implications for engaging parents in their children's learning include:

Implications

- Work should be done to engage with parents to encourage them to support any work being done directly with children. A variety of strategies will need to be used depending on individual needs and circumstances.
- Locating services for parents within school settings can help to improve the connections between the school, home and community. It can also help in providing parents with negative educational histories with a positive school-based experience. Locating health-related services for children in school premises can also make them more accessible for families.
- Local and national partnerships should support capacity building activities to improve children's learning, including collaboration between schools, educational support services, family support and training agencies, service providers and other relevant stakeholders.

Capacity building in early years settings

Best practice approaches to improving practice in early years settings show that integrating childcare and education (as well as high-quality pre-school provision) can positively influence children's cognitive and behavioural outcomes, at least up to the age of 11 years. Having a well-qualified workforce improves children's progress. Outcomes can also be improved by working with both children and family members.

The Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative highlighted ways of improving standards in early years settings and encouraging the provision of stimulating learning experiences for young children. These include the importance of tailoring activities to be appropriate to the developmental stage of the child and being flexible in approach for delivery. Day care settings needed ongoing support to implement changes. This was facilitated by assessing organisational readiness at the start of the process (including current service provision and fit against the programme, staffing skills and experience, and available resources), by using specialised implementation teams, by getting buy-in at all levels from senior management through to individual practitioners, by offering quality training and by creating learning networks of practitioners to share experiences and good practice. Some of the key implications for improving children's learning in early years settings include:

Implications

- Learning programmes and services should be appropriate for the age and stage of the child.
- Ongoing support, such as specialised implementation teams, is important for creating and sustaining change in early years settings.
- Capacity building should be undertaken to support the professional development of the early years workforce. This should include quality training as well as opportunities to share examples of best practice peer learning communities.

Delivering interventions in schools

Many of the programmes in the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative were delivered in the school setting, either during normal class time or in after-school classes. Programmes included supporting skills such as reading and building healthy relationships. They varied as to whether they employed their own staff to deliver the programmes, used trained volunteers, or operated by changing teacher practice. Challenges included fitting discrete programme-focused lessons into an

already packed curriculum, managing classroom schedules when the interventions were delivered to individual children outside the classroom but during class time, staff turnover and issues in keeping the programme fresh in light of educational changes and constraints of the timetable.

Local learning showed that integrating new approaches into schools takes time and sustained effort. Negotiating the support of schools was critical to success. Specialised implementation teams were useful for ongoing coaching and support. Organisations had to understand the culture and procedures within schools and tailor their approaches accordingly. Consultation with the school and actively involving staff in the selection or design of the programme was useful. Time had to be allocated for training and resource preparation. Programmes offered a good opportunity to change practice within a whole school and not just in individual classes. Programmes that supported the use of a common vocabulary within the different learning environments experienced by children, by the professionals operating in each, and by parents, were seen to help support transitions. Some of the key implications for delivering interventions in schools to improve children's learning include:

Implications

- To implement a programme or intervention successfully, it is crucial to understand the culture of a school and its constraints, and to assess the suitability of any programme against these, as well as gauging how organisationally ready the school is to implement the programme. An implementation plan should be developed, and specialised implementation teams can be useful in supporting change.
- Programmes aiming to be delivered in school settings should clarify how the programme links to the national curriculum, provide a sequential and integrated skills curriculum, and establish learning goals and monitoring procedures. It can help to use programmes that have clear, developmentally appropriate lesson plans, but that also allow for some flexibility for the teacher to use their professional judgement in tailoring delivery to their particular class.
- There should be a planned and integrated approach to changing practice with schools – one that takes account of future sustainability, as well as how to retain and further build on improved outcomes.
- The professional development of teachers and staff within schools should be supported through coordinated quality training pathways, ongoing coaching and support, and setting up peer learning networks.
- The use of trained volunteers in school-based programmes can be a helpful approach to supporting children's literacy which can be mutually beneficial for both student and volunteer. However, ongoing quality training, development and monitoring of fidelity to the programme, curriculum or manual is important.

Evaluating the work

Although many policy initiatives and national monitoring procedures focus on improving specific skills such as literacy and numeracy, promoting a love of learning from an early age is also important. Several programmes showed a positive impact on the children's learning environments as well as improvements in children's abilities. It will be important to measure whether these short-term benefits can be sustained over time.

Some programmes were perceived by parents and practitioners to have positive effects on children's outcomes that were not always found by the evaluations. This highlights the importance of comparisons with children not taking part in a programme to show its true impact, as well as ensuring that the right outcomes are being meaningfully measured. Qualitative information about a programme's effectiveness can be useful alongside the quantitative evaluations.

The local learning also showed the importance of undertaking outcomes evaluations on programmes that have had a chance to 'bed in' and become established. As practitioners became more experienced and confident in delivering the programme over time, they expected outcomes to improve. Some of the organisations were also able to use the learning from the evaluations to further improve the delivery of the programmes, such as changing the frequency of sessions, refining the training offered to practitioners and focusing the content of the programme.

Working with teachers and early years professionals to develop skills can improve outcomes for the first group of children who experience the changes. Many of the teachers taking part in the programmes reported that they would find it relatively easy to transfer the new methods to the next year of children. If changes to practice are sustained, subsequent cohorts of children may also benefit, which may yield a greater return on initial investment.

Any study undertaken should incorporate a cost-effective element. This should include the true costs for setting up and delivering the service, including training, resources and the costs of ongoing delivery. From a prevention and early intervention viewpoint, collecting information about possible cost benefits over time would be useful, particularly for interventions delivered in an education setting where the initial costs for delivery may be incurred by the Department of Education, but the long-term cost savings are accrued by another Department, such as those responsible for employment or justice.

Implications
- Programmes should clearly specify the outcomes they expect to change and when these changes will occur; evaluations should assess these at the appropriate time using meaningful measures.
- There may be additional longer-term financial benefits from programmes that are able to improve teachers' and early years professionals' practice. They may be able to apply their new skills to subsequent cohorts of children as well as those involved in the original intervention.
- Primary schools may need support to shoulder the full costs of interventions given that in purely economic terms the costs may outweigh the immediate financial benefits. There may need to be targeted top-up funding from other Departments.

Appendix

List of programmes in the National Early Years Access Initiative (NEYAI)[87]

Name	Location	Lead agency	Intervention for evaluation
Early Years Language and Learning Initiative	Ballyfermot/ Chapelizod	The Ballyfermot/ Chapelizod Partnership Company Ltd	Train and mentor early years staff in the *Hanen* Programme to: improve child's language development; support parents to encourage child's language development.
Canal Communities Family Welfare Initiative – Bringing it All Back Home	Canal Communities	Daughters of Charity Child and Family Services	Train and mentor early years staff in the *Marte Meo* and *Incredible Years* programmes to: improve child and parent outcomes; intensive outreach with children and their parents.
Happy Talk	Cork	Cork City Partnership Ltd	Improve the language skills of children aged 0–6 years in the Glen and Mayfield areas of Cork city through parent training programmes and working with teachers and early years providers.
Addressing Gaps Between Training and Practice	Clondalkin	South Dublin County Partnership Ltd	Mentor early years staff to improve outcomes for children and their parents.
Early Learning Initiative	Dublin Docklands	National College of Ireland	Train and mentor early years staff in numeracy skills to: improve the child's numeracy skills; support parents to encourage the child's numeracy development.
The Professional Pedagogy Project (PPP)	Donegal	Donegal County Childcare Committee	Train and mentor early years staff to improve outcomes for children.
Fingal Parents Initiative	Fingal	The Fingal County Childcare Committee	Train early years staff to deliver: *Parents Plus* (6-week parenting training course) and *Parents Plus Early Years* (12-week parenting course).
Tús Nua Project	Longford	Longford County Childcare Committee	Facilitate transitions from home to early years services; train and mentor early years staff to improve outcomes for children.
Start Right Limerick	Limerick	PAUL Partnership Ltd	Train and support early years staff to: meet *Síolta* standards; do intensive outreach with children and their parents.
Dublin South West Inner City Integration of Services and Continuum of Care Demonstration Model for Children 0–6 Years	Rialto	Barnardos Rialto Family Centre	Train and mentor early years staff in the *Hanen* programme to: improve children's language development; support parents to encourage children's language development.
Quality Through Professionalisation (An Cosán/Fledglings Early Years)	Tallaght	The Shanty Educational Project	Deliver training based on the Fledglings early years manual which integrates the two national early years frameworks – *Síolta* (Quality) and Aistear (Learning) – through the pedagogical approach and curriculum of HighScope.

---

[87] McKeown et al, 2014

References

Adams, C. and Lloyd, J. (2007) 'Effects of speech and language therapy intervention in mainstream school for children with pragmatic language impairments', *British Journal of Special Education*, Vol. 34, No. 4, pp. 226-33.

Adelman, H.S. and Taylor, L. (2003) 'On Sustainability of Project Innovations as Systemic Change', *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, Vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 1-25.

Allen, G. (2011) *Early intervention: The next steps. An independent report to Her Majesty's Government*. London: The Stationery Office.

Baker, D. and Witt, P.A. (1996) 'Evaluation of the impact of two after-school programs', *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, Vol. 14, No.3, pp. 60-81.

Bal, S., Crombez, G., Oost, P. and Debourdeaudhuij, I. (2003) 'The role of social support in well-being and coping with self-reported stressful events in adolescents', *Child Abuse & Neglect*, Vol. 27, No. 12, pp. 1377-95.

Barrera, M. and Bonds, D.D. (2005) 'Mentoring and Social Support'. In: D.L. DuBois and M.J. Archer (eds.), *Handbook of Youth Mentoring*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 133-42.

Biggart, A., Sloan, S. and O'Hare, L. (2014) *A Longitudinal Follow-up Study of the Doodle Den After-school Programme.* Dublin: Childhood Development Initiative.

Biggart, A., Kerr, K., O'Hare, L. and Connolly, P. (2012) *Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the Childhood Development Initiative's Doodle Den Literacy Programme*. Dublin: Childhood Development Initiative (CDI).

Bishop, D. and Adams, C. (1990) 'A prospective study of the relationship between specific language impairment, phonological disorders and reading retardation', *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, Vol. 31, No. 7, pp. 1027-50.

Brady, B., Canavan, J., Cassidy, A., Garrity, S. and O'Regan, C. (2012) *Big Brothers Big Sisters. Mobilising Peer Support in Schools: An evaluation of the BBBS school based mentoring programme.* Galway: UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre.

Brooker, L. (2002) '"Five on the first of December!": What can we learn from case studies of early childhood literacy?', *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, Vol. 2, No. 3, pp. 291-313.

Brooks-Gunn, J. and Markman, L.B. (2005) 'The contribution of parenting to ethnic and racial gaps in school readiness', *The Future of Children*, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 139-68.

Burns, M. (2015) Delivering Social Change – Literacy and Numeracy Signature Programme: Year 1 Interim Report. Belfast: Northern Ireland Executive.

Bynner, J. (2004) 'Literacy, numeracy and employability: Evidence from the British cohort studies', *Literacy and Numeracy Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 31-48.

Bynner, J. and Parsons, S. (1997a) *It Doesn't Get Any Better: The impact of poor basic skills on the lives of 37-year-olds*. London: Basic Skills Agency.

Bynner, J. and Parsons, S. (1997b) *Does Numeracy Matter?* London: Basic Skills Agency.

Caspe, M. and Lopez, E. (2006) *Lessons from family-strengthening interventions: Learning from evidence-based practice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project. Available at: www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/lessonsfrom-family-strengthening-interventions-learning-fromevidence-based-practice

Chief Inspector (2012) *Chief Inspector's Report (2010-12)*. Belfast: Education and Training Inspectorate. Available at: www.etini.gov.uk/index/support-material/support-material-general-documents-non-phase-related/the-chief-inspectors-report/ci-report-2012.pdf

CSO (2006) *Census 2006. Volume 3: Household structure*. Cork: Central Statistics Office. Available at: http://beyond2020.cso.ie/Census/TableViewer/tableView.aspx?ReportId=76442

Chrisler, A. and Ling, T. (2011) *What Works for Early Language and Literacy Development: Lessons from experimental evaluations of programs and intervention strategies*, Child Trends Fact Sheet #2011-18. Washington, DC: Child Trends. Available at: www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-2011_06_10_FS_WWLanguage.pdf

Christian, K., Morrison, F.J., and Bryant, F.B. (1998) 'Predicting kindergarten academic skills: Interactions among child care, maternal education, and family literacy environments', *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 3, pp. 501-21.

Clegg, J., Hollis, C. and Rutter, M. (1999) 'Life sentence: What happens to children with developmental language disorders in later life?', *RCSLT Bulletin,* Vol. 571, pp. 16-18.

Close, R. (2001) *Parental Involvement and Literacy Achievement: The research evidence and the way forward*. London: National Literacy Trust.

Conti-Ramsden, G., Botting, N., Simkin, Z. and Knox, E. (2001) 'Follow-up of children attending infant language units: Outcomes at 11 years of age', *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, Vol. 36, No. 2, pp. 207-19.

Coulombe, S., Tremblay, J.F. and Marchand, S. (2004) *International Adult Literacy Survey: Literacy scores, human capital and growth across 44 OECD countries*. Ottawa: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2015) *National Youth Strategy 2015-2020.* Dublin: The Stationary Office.

Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2014) *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People.* Dublin: The Stationary Office.

Department of Education (2013) *Learning to Learn: A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning*. Belfast: Department of Education, Northern Ireland.

Department of Education and Skills (2012) *A Framework for Junior Cycle.* Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.

Department of Education and Science (2005) *Moving Beyond Educational Disadvantage: Report of the Educational Disadvantage Committee.* Dublin: Department of Education and Science.

Department of Education and Skills (2011) *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy among children and young people, 2011-2020*. Dublin: Government Publications.

Department for Education and Skills (2003) *Skills for Life Survey: A national needs and impact survey of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills*, DfES Research Brief RB490. London: Department for Education and Skills.

Desforges, C. and Abouchaar, A. (2003) *The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievements and Adjustment: A Literature Review*, DfES Research Report 433. London: Department for Education and Skills.

Domitrovich, C.E., Bradshaw, C.P., Greenberg, M.T., Embry, D., Poduska, J.M. and Ialongo, N.S. (2008) 'Integrated models of school-based prevention: Logic and theory', *Psychology in the Schools*, Vol. 47, No. 1, pp. 71-88.

Doyle, O. and PFL Evaluation Team (2009a) *Evaluation of the 'Preparing for Life' Early Childhood Intervention Programme: A process evaluation on the development of the 'Preparing for Life' Programme*. Dublin: Geary Institute, University College Dublin. Available at: http://geary.ucd.ie/preparingforlife/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/New_PE_Development_Report-Final.pdf

Doyle, O., McNamara, K.A. and Logue, C. (2009b) *Readiness for change: Baseline data on readiness to implement the Síolta Framework. Report to 'Preparing for Life' Early Childhood Intervention Programme*. Dublin: Geary Institute, University College Dublin.

Doyle, O. and PFL Evaluation Team (2010a) *Process Evaluation 2: Focus Groups with Programme Participants. Evaluation of the 'Preparing for Life' Early Childhood Intervention Programme*. Dublin: Geary Institute, University College Dublin.

Doyle, O., McNamara, K.A., Cheevers, C., Finnegan, S., Logue, C. and McEntee, L. (2010b) *Preparing for Life Early Childhood Intervention. Impact Evaluation Report 1: Recruitment and Baseline Characteristics*, UCD Geary Institute Discussion Paper Series WP 2010/50. Dublin: Geary Institute, University College Dublin. Available at: www.ucd.ie/geary/static/publications/workingpapers/gearywp201050.pdf

Doyle, O. and PFL Evaluation Team (2012) *Assessing the Early Impact of Preparing for Life at Six Months*, Report to Preparing for Life Programme (The Atlantic Philanthropies and Office of the Minister for Children). Dublin: UCD Geary Institute.

Doyle, O. and PFL Evaluation Team (2013a) *Assessing the Impact of Preparing for Life at Twelve Months*, Report to Preparing for Life Programme (The Atlantic Philanthropies and Office of the Minister for Children). Dublin: UCD Geary Institute.

Doyle, O. and the PFL Evaluation Team (2013b) *Assessing the Impact of Preparing for Life at Eighteen Months.* Report to Preparing for Life Programme (The Atlantic Philanthropies and Department of Children and Youth Affairs). Dublin: UCD Geary Institute.

Doyle, O. and the PFL Evaluation Team (2013c) *Assessing the Impact of Preparing for Life at Twenty-Four Months.* Report to Preparing for Life Programme (The Atlantic Philanthropies and Department of Children and Youth Affairs). Dublin: UCD Geary Institute.

Doyle, O. and the PFL Evaluation Team (2014) *Assessing the Impact of Preparing for Life at Thirty-Six Months.* Report to Preparing for Life Programme (The Atlantic Philanthropies and Department of Children and Youth Affairs). Dublin: UCD Geary Institute.

Doyle, O. and the PFL Evaluation Team (2015) *Assessing the Impact of Preparing for Life at Forty-Eight Months.* Report to Preparing for Life Programme (The Atlantic Philanthropies and Department of Children and Youth Affairs). Dublin: UCD Geary Institute.

Durlak, J.A., Weissberg, R.P., Dymnicki, A.B., Taylor, R.D. and Schellinger, K.B. (2011) 'The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions', *Child Development*, Vol. 82, No. 1, pp. 405-32.

Educational Research Centre (1998) *Early Start Preschool Programme: Final evaluation report.* Dublin: Educational Research Centre.

Eivers, E., Shiel, G., Perkins, R. and Cosgrove, J. (2005) *Succeeding in Reading? Reading standards in Irish primary schools*. Dublin: Educational Research Centre.

Eivers, E., Shiel, G. and Shortt, F. (2004) *Reading Literacy in Disadvantaged Primary Schools*. Dublin: Educational Research Centre.

Elbaum, B., Vaughn, S., Hughes, M.T., and Moody, S.W. (2000) 'How effective are one-to-one tutoring programs in reading for elementary students at risk for reading failure? A meta-analysis of the intervention research', *Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. 92, No. 4, pp. 605-19.

Emig, C., Moore, A. and Scarupa, H.J. (2001) *School readiness: Helping communities get children ready for school and schools ready for children*, Child Trends Research Brief, October 2011. Washington, DC: Child Trends. Available at: www.childtrends.org/files/schoolreadiness.pdf

Evans, M.A., Shaw, D. and Bell, M. (2000) 'Home literacy activities and their influence on early literacy skills', *Canadian Journal of Experimental Psychology*, Vol. 54, pp. 65-75.

Fantuzzo, J., McWayne, C. and Perry, M. (2004) 'Multiple dimensions of family involvement and their relations to behavioral and learning competencies for urban, low-income children', *The School Psychology Review*, Vol. 33, No. 4, pp. 467-80.

Feinstein, L. and Bynner, J. (2004) 'The importance of cognitive development in middle childhood for adulthood socioeconomic status, mental health, and problem behaviour', *Child Development*, Vol. 75, No. 5, pp. 1329-39.

Fives, A., Kearns, N., Devaney, C., Canavan, J., Lyons, R., Eaton, P., O'Brien, A. and Russell, D.W. (2013) *Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the Barnardos' Wizards of Words Reading Programme.* Dublin: Barnardos.

Gallagher, A., Frith, U. and Snowling, M.J. (2000) 'Precursors of literacy delay among children of genetic risk of dyslexia', *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, Vol. 41, No. 2, pp. 203-13.

Geraghty, T., Molyneaux, F. and Dunne, C. (2012) *A Fidelity and Implementation Study of the Eager and Able to Learn Programme*. Belfast: National Children's Bureau.

Ginsburg, K.R. (2007) 'The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bonds', *Paediatrics,* 119: 182 -191.

Government of Ireland (2016) *Programme for a Partnership Government.* Available at: http://www.merrionstreet.ie/MerrionStreet/en/ImageLibrary/Programme_for_Partnership_Government.pdf

Gray, S. (2004) 'Word learning by pre-schoolers with specific language impairment: Predictors and poor learners', *Journal of Speech, Language and Hearing Research*, Vol. 47, pp. 1117-32.

Halfors, D. and Godette, D. (2002) 'Will the "Principles of Effectiveness" improve prevention practice?', *Health Education Review*, Vol. 17, pp. 461-70.

Halpern, R. (2003) *Supporting the literacy development of low-income children in afterschool programs: Afterschool matters, challenges and exemplary practices*. New York: The Robert Bowne Foundation.

Hanlon, L. and Hayes, N. (2006) *Early Assessment and Intervention in Educational Disadvantage: Executive Summary*, CECDE Research Series 2006. Dublin: Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education.

Harvard Family Research Project (2008) *What is Complementary Learning?*, Research Brief. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project. Available at: www.hfrp.org/complementary-learning/publications-resources/what-is-complementary-learning

Hayes, N. and Doyle, O. (2014) *Evaluation of the National Early Years Services (Tús Maith).* Report submitted to Barnardos by the Centre for Social and Educational Research (Dublin Institute of Technology), in partnership with the UCD Geary Institute.

Hayes, N., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Keegan, S. and Goulding, E. (2013) *Evaluation of the Early Years Programme of the Childhood Development Initiative*. Dublin: Childhood Development Initiative (CDI).

Jones, M., Onslow, M., Packman, A., Williams, S., Ormond, T., Schwarz, I. and Gebski, V. (2005) 'Randomised controlled trial of the Lidcombe programme of early stuttering intervention', *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 331, No. 7518, pp. 659-61.

Kelly, D. and Kellaghan, T. (1999) *The literacy and numeracy achievements of the first cohort of Early Start children (1994/95) when they were in second class.* Dublin: Educational Research Centre.

Kelly, Y., Sacker, A., Gray, R., Kelly, J., Wolke, D. and Quigley, M.A. (2009) 'Light drinking in pregnancy: A risk for behavioural problems and cognitive deficits at 3 years of age?', *Journal of International Epidemiology*, Vol. 38, No. 1, pp. 129-40.

KPMG Foundation (2006) *The Long-term Costs of Literacy Difficulties*. London: KPMG Foundation.

Law, J., Lindsay, G., Peacey, N., Gascoigne, M., Soloff, N. and Band, S. (2002) 'Consultation as a model for providing speech and language therapy in schools: A panacea or one step too far?', *Child Language Teaching and Therapy,* Vol. 18, No. 2, pp. 145-63.

Leitao, S. and Fletcher, J. (2004) 'Literacy outcomes for students with speech impairment: Long-term follow-up', *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, Vol. 39, No. 2, pp. 245-49.

Lewis, M. and Archer, P. (2002) *Further Evaluation of Early Start*. Dublin: Educational Research Centre.

Locke, A., Ginsborg, J. and Peers, I. (2002) 'Development and disadvantage: Implications for the early years and beyond', *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, Vol. 37, No. 1, pp. 3-15.

Lonigan, C.J. and Shanahan, T. (2008) *Developing Early Literacy. Report of the National Early Literacy Panel: Executive Summary. A Scientific Synthesis of Early Literacy Development and Implications for Intervention*. Available at: http://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/NELPReport09.pdf

Lyons, R., O'Malley, M.P., O'Connor, P. and Monaghan, U. (2010) '"It's just so lovely to hear him talking": Exploring the early-intervention expectations and experiences of parents', *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, Vol. 26, No. 1, pp. 61-76.

Macdonald, G., Perra, O., Neeson, L. and O'Neill, N. (2014) *Findings from the Barnardo's Ready to Learn Programme.* Belfast: Barnardo's NI.

McAvoy, H., Purdy, J., Sneddon, H. and Mac Evilly, C. (2013) *Prevention and Early Intervention in Children and Young People's Services: Child Health and Development*. Dublin: Centre for Effective Services.

McCoy, S., Quail, A. and Smyth, E. (2012) *Growing Up In Ireland: Influences on 9-Year-Olds' Learning: Home, School and Community.* Dublin: Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

McGilloway, S., Bywater, T., Ni Mhaille, G., Furlong, M., O'Neill, D., Comisky, C., Leckey, Y., Kelly, P. and Donnelly, M. (2009) *Proving the power of positive parenting: A randomised controlled trial to investigate the effectiveness of the Incredible Years BASIC Parenting Training Programme in an Irish context (short term outcomes)*. Dublin: Archways.

McGilloway, S., Hyland, L., Ni Mhaille, G., Lodge, A., O'Neill, D., Kelly, P., Leckey, Y., Bywater, T., Comisky, C. and Donnelly, M. (2010) *Positive classrooms, positive children: A randomised controlled trial to investigate the effectiveness of the Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management Programme in an Irish context*. Dublin: Archways

McGilloway, S., Ni Mhaille, G., Bywater, T., Leckey, Y., Kelly, P., Furlong, M., Comisky, C. and Donnelly, M. (2012a) 'A parenting intervention for childhood behavioural problems: A randomised controlled trial in disadvantaged community-based settings', *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 80, No. 1, pp. 116-27.

McGilloway, S., Ni Mhaille, G., Furlong, M., Hyland, L., Leckey, Y., Kelly, P., Bywater, T., Comisky, C., Lodge, A., O'Neill, D. and Donnelly, M. (2012b) *The Incredible Years Ireland Study: 12 month follow-up*. Dublin: Archways.

McGuinness, C., Connolly, P., Eakin, A. and Miller. S. (2012a) *The Developmental Status of 2-3 Year Old Children entering Group-based Settings in Northern Ireland: Survey Findings*. Belfast: Queen's University Belfast.

McGuinness, C., Eakin, A. and Connolly, P. (2012b) *An Evaluation of the Effects of the Eager and Able to Learn Programme on Outcomes for 2-3 Year Olds*. Belfast: Queen's University Belfast.

McKeown, K., Haase, T., Pratschke, J. (2014) *Evaluation of National Early Years Access Initiative & Síolta Quality Assurance Programme – A Study of Child Outcomes in Pre-School.* Dublin: Pobal.

Melhuish, E., Quinn, L., Hanna, K., Sylva, K., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2006) *Effective Pre-School Provision in Northern Ireland (EPPNI): Summary Report*. Belfast: Department of Education.

Melhuish, E., Sylva, K., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Taggart, B., Phan, M.B. and Malin, A. (2008) 'The Early Years: Pre-school influences on mathematics achievement', *Science*, Vol. 321, No. 5893, pp. 1161–62.

Meltzer, H., Gatward, R., Corbin, T., Goodman, R. and Ford, T. (2003) *The mental health of young people looked after by local authorities in England*. London: The Stationery Office.

Miller, S., Connolly, P., Odena, O. and Styles, B. (2009) *A Randomised Control Trial Evaluation of Business in the Community's Time to Read Programme*. Belfast: Centre for Effective Education, Queen's University Belfast.

Miller, S., Connolly, P. and Maguire, L.K. (2011) *A Follow-up Randomised Control Trial Evaluation of the Effects of Business in the Community's Time to Read Mentoring Programme*. Belfast: Centre for Effective Education, Queen's University Belfast.

Miller, S., Sneddon, H., Dunne, L., Adams, H., Millen, S. and McLaughlin, A. (2010) *A randomised controlled trial evaluation of the Lifestart parenting programme: Interim report.* L'Derry: Lifestart.

Miller, S., Eakin, A. and Cownie, E. (2014) *The Rialto Learning Community Out of School Time (OST) Project: An Evaluation of Process and Outcomes.* Belfast: Centre for Effective Education, Queen's University Belfast.

Miller, S., Dunne, L., Millen, S. and McGeady, C. (2015) *A Randomised Controlled Trial Evaluation of the Lifestart Parenting Programme: Technical Report.* L'Derry: Lifestart.

Miron, C. (2012) 'The parent experience when a child is diagnosed with childhood apraxia of speech', *Communications Disorders Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 2, pp. 96-110.

Molyneaux, F., Walsh, G., McConnell, B. and McGuinness, C. (2012) *The Eager and Able to Learn Pilot Year: Lessons learned – Implementation and evaluation of the pilot programme*. Belfast: Early Years.

Morgan, M. and Espey, K. (2012) *Whole School Implementation of Incredible Years: An Action Research Study*. Dublin: youngballymun.

National Educational Psychological Service (2012) *Effective Interventions for Struggling Readers: Resource Pack.* Available at: http://www.education.ie/en/Education-Staff/Information/NEPS-Literacy-Resource/neps_literacy_resource_pack.pdf

National Literacy Trust (2012) *Boys' Literacy Commission: The report of the All-Party Parliamentary Literacy Group Commission.* London: Literacy Trust.

NESF and Kennedy, E. (2009) 'Improving literacy in a disadvantaged school: A research-based approach'. In: *Child literacy and social inclusion: Policy and implementation issues*, Research Report No. 39. Dublin: National Economic and Social Forum.

Nolan, P. (2014) *Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report. Number Three*. Belfast: NI Community Relations Council.

Northern Ireland Audit Office (2009) *Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy*. Belfast: Northern Ireland Audit Office.

Northern Ireland Audit Office (2013) *Improving literacy and numeracy achievement in schools*. Belfast: Northern Ireland Audit Office.

Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) (2014) *Statistical Press Release: Year 12 and Year 14 Examination Performance at Post Primary Schools in Northern Ireland, 2012-2013.* Statistics and Research Team, Bangor: Northern Ireland.

Nutbrown, C., Hannon, P. and Morgan, A. (2005) 'Children's perspectives on family literacy: Methodological issues, findings and implications for practice', *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 115-45.

OMC (2007) *The Agenda for Children's Services: A Policy Handbook*, Office of the Minister for Children. Dublin: Government Publications. Available at: www.dcya.gov.ie/documents/publications/CS_handbook[ENGLISH]lowres.pdf

O'Neill, D., McGilloway, S., Donnelly, M., Bywater, T. and Kelly, P. (2013) 'A cost-benefit analysis of early childhood intervention: Evidence from a randomised controlled trial of the incredible Years Parenting Programme', *European Journal of Health Economics*, Vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 85-94.

Perkins, R., Cosgrove, J., Moran, G. and Shiel, G. (2009) *PISA 2009: Results for Ireland and Changes Since 2000*. Dublin: Educational Research Centre. Available at: www.erc.ie/documents/pisa2009main_nationalreport.pdf

Perkins, R., Shiel, G., Merriman, B., Cosgrove, J. and Moran, G. (2013) *Learning for Life: The Achievements of 15-year-olds in Ireland on Mathematics, Reading Literacy and Science in PISA 2012.* Dublin: Educational Research Centre. Available at: http://www.erc.ie/documents/p12main_report.pdf

Public Health Agency (2011) *Director of Public Health Annual Report 2011.* Belfast: HSC Public Health Agency.

Ritter, G., Denny, G., Albin, G., Barnett, J. and Blankenship, V. (2006) *The effectiveness of volunteer tutoring programs: A systematic review*, The Campbell Collaboration Reviews of Intervention and Policy Evaluations (C2-RIPE). Philadelphia: Campbell Collaboration.

Roulstone, S., Law, J., Rush, R., Clegg, J. and Peters, T. (2011) *Investigating the role of language in children's early educational outcomes*, Research Report DFE-RR134. London: Department for Education. Available at: https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DFE-RR134.pdf

Ross, S., Sheard, M., Cheung, A., Slavin, R., Elliot, L., Tracey, L. and Hanley, P. (2011) *Together 4 All Evaluation: Final Report*. York: Institute for Effective Education, University of York.

Royal Children's Hospital (2008) *Translating early childhood research evidence to inform policy and practice: Rethinking School Readiness*, Policy Brief 10 2008. Victoria, Australia: Centre for Community Child Health, Royal Children's Hospital. Available at: www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/ccch/PB10_SchoolReadiness.pdf

Sammons, P., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Taggart, B. and Hunt, S. (2003) *Effective Pre-school and Primary Education 3-11 Project (EPPE 3-11). Influences on Children's Attainment and Progress in Key Stage 2: Cognitive Outcomes in Year 6*. London: Department for Children, Schools and Families.

Schweinhart, L.J., Montie, J., Xiang, Z., Barnett, W.S., Belfield, C.R. and Nores, M. (2005) *Lifetime effects: The High/Scope Perry Pre-school study through age 40*, Monographs of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation. Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press.

Sénéchal, M. and LeFevre, J. (2002) 'Parental involvement in the development of children's reading skill: A five-year longitudinal study', *Child Development*, Vol. 73, pp. 445-60.

Shanahan, T. (1998) 'On the effectiveness and limitations of tutoring in reading', *Review of Research in Education*, Vol. 23, pp. 217-34.

Shanahan, T. and Lonigan, C.J. (2010) 'The National Early Literacy Panel: A summary of the process and the report', *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 39, No. 4, pp. 279-85.

Sharples, J., Slavin, R., Chambers, B. and Sharp, C. (2011) *Effective classroom strategies for closing the gap in Educational Achievement for Children and Young People Living in Poverty, including White*

Working-class boys, C4EO Schools and Communities Research Review 4. London: Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO).

Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Siraj-Blatchford, J. (2009) *Improving development outcomes for children through effective practice in integrating Early Years services: Knowledge review 3*. London: Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO). Available at: www.c4eo.org.uk/themes/earlyyears/effectivepractice/files/c4eo_effective_practice_kr_1.pdf on 3-1-13

Slavin, R.E., and Lake, C. (2008) 'Effective programs in elementary mathematics: A best-evidence synthesis', *Review of Educational Research*, Vol. 78, No. 3, pp. 427-515.

Slavin, R.E., Lake, C., Davis, S. and Madden, N. (2011) 'Effective programs for struggling readers: A best-evidence synthesis', *Educational Research Review*, Vol. 6, pp. 1-26.

Slavin, R.E., Lake, C., Chambers, B., Cheung, A. and Davis, S. (2005) 'Effective reading programs for the elementary grades: A best-evidence synthesis', *Review of Educational Research*, Vol. 79, No. 4, pp. 1391-1466.

Sneddon, H. and Owens, S. (2013) *Prevention and Early Intervention in Children and Young People's Services: Parenting.* Dublin: Centre for Effective Services.

Sneddon, H., Kehoe, S., Harris, M., Owens, S., Sheehan, A. and MacEvilly, C. (2012) *Prevention and Early Intervention in Children and Young People's Services: Organisational Learning.* Dublin: Centre for Effective Services.

Sonnenschein, S. and Munsterman, K. (2002) 'The influence of home-based reading interactions on 5-year-olds' reading motivations and early literacy development', *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, Vol. 17, pp. 318-37.

Speilberger, J. and Halpern, R. (2002) 'Exemplary approaches to literacy activity in after-school Programs'. In: *The Role of After-School Programs in Children's Literacy Development*. Chicago: Center for Children at the University of Chicago, pp.35-56.

Sproule, L., Rafferty, H., Trew, K., Walsh, G., Sheehy, N. and McGuinness, C. (2005) *The Early Years Enriched Curriculum Evaluation Project: Final Key Stage 1 Report*. Belfast: Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA).

SQW (2012) *Evaluation of Write Minded: A shared area-based literacy strategy*. Dublin: youngballymun.

SQW (2013) *Evaluation of the 3, 4, 5 Learning Years Service*. Dublin: youngballymun.

Statham, J. (2013) *Prevention and Early Intervention in Children and Young People's Services: Improving Child Behaviour.* Dublin: Centre for Effective Services.

Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2010) *Early Childhood Matters: Evidence from the Effective Pre-school and Primary Education Project*. Oxford: Routledge.

Sylva, K., Melhuish, E.C., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2004) *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Final Report*. London: Department for Education and Skills/Institute of Education, University of London.

Thapar, A., Fowler, T., Rice, F., Scourfield, J., van den Bree, M., Thomas, H., Harold, H. and Dale Hay, D. (2003) 'Maternal smoking during pregnancy and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder symptoms in offspring', *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 160, pp. 1985-89.

Torgesen, J.K., Wagner, R.K., and Rashotte, C.A. (1997) 'The prevention and remediation of severe reading disabilities: Keeping the end in mind', *Scientific Studies of Reading*, Vol. 1, No. 3, pp. 217-34.

Wasik, B.A. (1998) 'Volunteer tutoring programs in reading: A review', *Reading Research Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 3, pp. 266-91.

Wasik, B.A. and Slavin, R.E. (1993) 'Preventing early reading failure with one-to-one tutoring: A review of five programs', *Reading Research Quarterly*, Vol. 28, pp. 178-200.

Weir, S. and Archer, P. (2005) *A review of school-based measures aimed at addressing educational disadvantage in Ireland. Report to the Educational Disadvantage Committee*. Dublin: Educational Research Centre.

Weir, S. and Archer, P. (2011) *A report on the first phase of the evaluation of DEIS*. Dublin: Educational Research Centre.

Weiss, H.B., Caspe, M. and Lopez, M.E. (2006) *Family Involvement in Early Childhood Education*, Research Brief No. 1. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project. Available at: www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/family-involvement-in-early-childhood-education

Westmoreland, H., Rosenberg, H.M., Lopez, M.E. and Weiss, H. (2009) *Seeing is Believing: Promising practices for how school districts promote family engagement*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project. Available at: www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/publications-resources/seeing-is-believing-promising-practices-for-how-school-districts-promote-family-engagement