



NATIONAL EDUCATION TRUST



Securing Standards, Sustaining Success

Report on Early Intervention

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■ Introduction

The National Education Trust is funded by the Department for Education to develop Early Years Networks of Children’s Centre Leaders. We have worked with groups in London, Preston, Birmingham and Bristol and the project has now been extended to include any professional working across early years including headteachers, family support workers, childminders and preschool leaders. Through NET’s discussion, debate and development training programme we have gathered the views of professionals from 91 centres and can provide an overview of early intervention delivered to children under five and their families. This report summarises the learning from the first phase of the project and explores the options for securing standards and sustaining success in the future.

“Children’s Centres have a key role in empowering communities to meet their own needs”

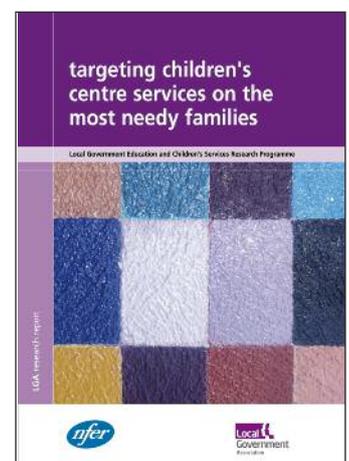
■ Accessibility

In 2011 NET carried out some research to establish what makes a successful children’s centre, and what role a centre can have in rebuilding communities and strengthening families (Celebrating Children’s Centres, NET 2011). We concluded that children’s centres have a key role in empowering communities to meet their own needs. They provide a ‘space’ in areas of social deprivation (SOAs) for children, young people and their families to reflect on their own mental health and well being without judgement. All children’s centres are located in areas of 30% + deprivation and are well placed to meet the needs of those communities where children are living in poverty.

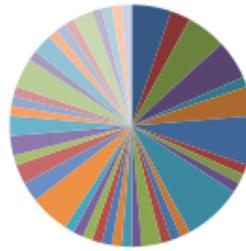
Children’s Centres provide a place of ‘containment’ in chaotic communities. Families in crisis will often seek help or can be signposted to the local centre for advice and support. During the 2011 riots many young people and their parents sought help from their local children’s centre – they saw it as a place of refuge with people they could trust. A young mother in crisis made her way to the centre because she knew there would be people there who would take care of her children, she regarded it as a place of safety. The ‘containment’ of a family in crisis is an evidence based intervention – Solihull Approach <http://www.solihull.nhs.uk/>

Building relationships and knowledge of the local community were identified as key elements of successful children’s centres. All the networks emphasised the importance of universal services which allowed them to get to know families and build relationships before a parent/carer would ask for help, or share their needs. Early intervention programmes delivered in isolation cannot be effective unless there is a relationship and an understanding of the context for the family. If the programme is delivered by familiar people, in a familiar place there will be more opportunities to offer ongoing support, follow up on individual needs and to measure the long term impact. The importance of relationships in targeting services and interventions on the neediest families is reinforced by a recent research report Targeting Children’s Centre Services at the Most Needy Families.

Early interventions for children under five are most effective when delivered locally. The investment in early years during the past few years has ensured that there are sites (often purpose built buildings) which are located in areas of need. Instead of wasting this valuable resource, there is an opportunity to use existing resources to ensure that early interventions can be delivered locally by people who understand the needs and context for the families.



Early Intervention Programmes delivered by London NETWORKS



- Webster Stratton
- Language Explorers
- Team Parenting
- Triple P
- Mabel Monsters
- Baby Massage
- Solihull Approach
- Ecat
- Movement Play
- Family Fun with Food
- Incredible Years
- Creative Learning
- CAHMS
- HV Programme
- Play and Learn
- Baby and Me
- Begin with Books
- Sensory Time
- Breastfeeding support
- Precious babies
- Tiny Talk
- Story Explorers
- Music Group
- Sunbeams
- Home Learning Project
- Music Therapy
- Taming Tantrums
- Mellow Baby
- Counselling
- Family Support
- Fathers Group
- Stay and Play
- Speech Therapy
- Volunteers Programme
- English Classes
- Messy Play

“When interviewed, parents/carers had strong views about the use of, and delivery of early intervention programmes”

■ Early Intervention Teams

The staff team working in children’s centres represent different areas of expertise from education, social care, health and the voluntary sector. They are well placed and able to draw upon their experience of different specialisms to support children and families with a wide range of needs. They use their knowledge of the community and local families to identify those in need of more specialised support and signpost to partner agencies. All children’s centres are engaged in the delivery of early intervention programmes which impact on children under five and their families.

Our survey of centres in the London Early Years Networks highlighted the wide range of early intervention programmes offered, and the fact that many of these programmes are devised/ adapted by the staff in the children’s centres and only 13% were evidence based.

The main barrier to effective delivery of evidence based interventions was the cost of training staff and the need for flexibility for families. Children’s Centre staff prefer to access from a ‘menu’ of intervention programmes and want the flexibility and knowledge to be able to tailor programmes to local needs.

When interviewed, parents/carers had strong views about the use of, and delivery of early intervention programmes.

- To access programmes locally (in their own community)
- They value childcare on site (crèche facilities)
- Programmes delivered by trained/qualified individuals
- Attend at convenient times (this will vary depending on the group)
- Low cost/No cost

They do not want a ‘one size fits all’ approach.

One parent complained to us that an intervention programme was delivered by untrained individuals – his child had been selected without his permission and had been damaged because the programme was unsuitable and the adults had not understood the background. Given the diversity of the early years



workforce, and the increasing use of volunteers there is a serious risk of this happening. A coordinated programme of training, early identification (standard universal assessments) and intervention (evidence based programmes) across the early years sector would prevent these kind of mistakes.

The National Education Trust believes that any professional involved in the delivery of this kind of early intervention must have an underpinning knowledge of the importance of early attachment, attunement and interaction to ensure that the programmes are 'evidence based'. They must also understand child development. Many centre staff were concerned about the increasing use of unqualified staff and volunteers to deliver programmes of intervention and the inevitable risks to children and vulnerable families.

“The quality of early years provision and practice impacts on attainment in English and Maths and a child’s ability to self regulate”

■ High Quality Early Education

Professor Kathy Sylva’s research has shown that the quality of early years provision and practice impacts on attainment in English and Maths and a child’s ability to self regulate. Those children who attended high quality early education led by qualified leaders (QTS/level 5+) achieve better outcomes than those children who attend poor quality settings. She also emphasises the importance of the home learning environment and family factors in supporting children’s learning and healthy development. <http://eippe.ioe.ac.uk/> This longitudinal study should influence and shape educational policy and practice, and must be included when considering effective evidence based early intervention.

The quality of early years provision is measured by Ofsted with Nursery Schools receiving the highest % of good/outstanding grades than any other sector of the education system. Nursery Schools differ from other early years provision because they are led by a Headteacher and include qualified teachers on the staff team.

Many Nursery Schools in England are under threat of closure because Local Authorities choose to spend the early intervention grant in other ways. Low/middle quality early years provision is cheaper and more sustainable in the current economic climate. Transferring funding away from high quality nursery schools to lower cost provision combined with a reduction in the advice, training and support from local authorities poses a very real threat to children under five. The universal high quality early intervention delivered by specialist trained staff in high quality nursery schools cannot be replaced by volunteers and parents who are ‘well meaning’ but don’t have the expertise.

Overall Effectiveness Judgement (percentage of schools)

Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary	14	38	40	8
Special	28	48	20	4
PRU	15	50	29	5
All	11	47	38	6

Those making these crucial financial decisions are choosing to close good/outstanding nursery provision and are then looking for new ways to improve standards (in literacy) close the achievement gap for the most disadvantaged, and develop new child poverty strategies. The compartmentalism of early education from primary and secondary phases will prevent the effective use of pupil premium and the education endowment fund. The policies put in place to address deprivation and under achievement for under fives and for five – nineteen must be joined up to make the best use of the available funding.



“It is clear that any early intervention programme must be delivered by trained staff who are able to offer a values-based approach”

Where the nursery school is located on the same site as a children’s centre, then a child and his family living in 30%+ area of disadvantage can have access to high quality early education provision alongside family support services. This is effective universal early intervention delivered in areas where it is needed most. Headteachers who are experienced in leadership and management oversee the work of these centres/hubs working alongside children’s centre professionals, providing support, advice and training opportunities to other early years settings in the local area. A joint strategy which utilises the expertise already within the sector and creates a robust system for quality improvement which will benefit children and close the gap for the most disadvantaged. There is an opportunity to move the sector away from a set of fragmented early intervention programmes, devised and delivered independently across a range of different early years provision, and empower experienced headteachers to lead the change.

Under current legislation, maintained nursery schools are not permitted to become academies. In view of the threats to budgets and funding streams from local authorities, many leaders of nursery school provision would be keen to convert their schools into academies. They would have the leadership skills to manage the change, and would have the knowledge of the local community to collaborate with staff and parents. The National Education Trust encourages Government to reconsider the options for Nursery Schools so that we do not lose the experience, expertise and successful leadership from within the early years sector.

■ Options for the Future

The Government has recently allocated 3.5 million to create the Early Intervention Foundation. A national focus on early intervention delivered by experienced staff in high quality early years settings would shift the emphasis from low cost ‘childcare’ to a low cost intervention strategy that will close the gap for all children. Funding could be used to encourage clustering/federations of nursery schools with children’s centres to run as model ‘Early Education and Family Resource Centres’ in areas of greatest need. Each resource centre would be based on the evidence collected and presented in the EPPE/EPPSE reports and would provide a model for early intervention for the local community. The centres would be led by experienced Headteachers who already have a proven track record in successful leadership and management.

The National Education Trust has used DFE funding to pilot a training programme through the Networks project and has developed a set of materials and resources that could be published and delivered universally across the early years sector. The training should be delivered free of charge/low cost so that it is accessible to all types of provision and professionals, including volunteers and parents. The training programme could be developed to include online resources, accreditation or be given recognition by regulatory bodies (Ofsted) and would set the minimum standards for the sector.

NET are currently working on a ‘Framework for Early Intervention’ based on feedback from professionals in our Early Years Networks. The framework can be used across the education sector and identifies the key elements which must underpin effective early intervention programmes. Through our work with primary and secondary schools on the use of the Pupil Premium, and our work with children’s centres it is clear that

■ Accessible, Effective Early Intervention

The National Education Trust recognises the importance of retaining the best leaders (Heads) and teachers in early years and promotes a model of practice where high quality early education (nursery schools) must be combined with targeted services in the children’s centres to create the best opportunities for all children. We promote partnership working, buddy visits and sharing good practice events to promote the excellent early intervention offered in schools such as Chelsea Open Air Nursery, Redcliffe Nursery School in Bristol and at Allens Croft in Birmingham. All of these centres offer outstanding early education alongside children’s centre services. The impact on children and their families is evident as soon as you walk through the door.

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any early intervention programme must be delivered by trained staff who are able to offer a values-based approach, and who will be well supervised and supported. The current focus on early intervention programmes will be futile unless there is a common framework to underpin the work and ensure the quality.

A set of common assessment tools covering the three prime areas of EYFS will be needed to compare and contrast data nationally. These tools are already available and commonly used in children’s centres and nursery schools (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, Early Language Assessment and the Schedule of Growing Skills) Instead of each centre developing their own set of assessment tools, there is a need for a coordinated approach to ensure early identification of needs, driven by national indicators and/or statutory guidance which would then provide a common basis for measuring impact, payment by results and evaluation.

The data would also provide a baseline for primary schools who must show impact and account for their use of the Pupil Premium, it would ensure that they target the most needy groups and not just those on free school meals. Plans are already in place for early assessment at 24 – 36 months and early years staff are already using ‘Development Matters’ to track progress and measure impact. Through the networks and early intervention training, we can ensure that we collect ‘useful’ and

accurate data and make better use of it to shape the education and services offered to children and families.

The National Education Trust is already bringing professionals from across the early years sector together in the networks. Effective early intervention in the future will depend on professionals sharing expertise, using a shared language and pooling budgets. Networking and collaboration between nursery schools and children’s centres is a low cost early intervention strategy that will shape and influence the whole early years sector.

■ Recommendations

1. Offer maintained Nursery Schools working with children’s centres a range of options including academy status, cluster models and/or federations to lead the change and embed high quality provision across their locality.
2. Commission a report on accessible, affordable early education (Nursery Schools) and family resource centres. Collect the data to assess the impact of a model of practice in which high quality early education is offered alongside health and family support services.
3. Create a framework for early intervention which is used across the education sector which draws together the early intervention programmes offered in early years, primary and secondary schools.
4. Identify common early assessment tools which relate to the three prime areas of EYFS and which will provide a valuable baseline for measuring the impact of early years and school interventions.
5. Identify national indicators for early intervention to maintain the focus of provision on securing standards, sustaining success and to ensure that LA budgets and resources are retained.
6. Commission an independent body (such as the National Education Trust) to publish and deliver foundation training across the sector on early intervention.

■ Costs

We estimate the costs of implementing the recommendations are minimal. The National Education Trust is funded by the Department for Education until March 2013 to deliver the Early Years Network Project. Much of the research could be carried out, and funded through the project.

Our aim is to use the project to encourage collaboration and demonstrate a model for future early intervention that is both accessible and sustainable. Whilst we cannot ensure future funding beyond March 2013, we can create a lasting legacy building on outstanding early years practice, securing the highest standards and sustaining success for every child.