EARLY YEARS
KNOWLEDGE REVIEW **2**

Improving children's attainment through a better quality of family-based support for early learning

Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services

The Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO) identifies and coordinates local, regional and national evidence of 'what works', to create a single and comprehensive picture of effective practice in delivering children's services. Using this information, C4EO offers support to local authorities and their children's trust partners, working with them to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families.

It is focusing its work on eight themes:

- Early Years
- Disability
- Vulnerable Children (particularly looked-after children)
- Child Poverty
- Safeguarding
- Schools and Communities.
- Youth
- Families, Parents and Carers.

In addition to the above themes, C4EO is also undertaking a piece of work looking at early intervention, prevention and integrated delivery.

C4EO works with a consortium of leading national organisations: the National Children's Bureau, the National Foundation for Educational Research, Research in Practice and the Social Care Institute for Excellence.

The Centre is also supported by a number of strategic partners, including the Improvement and Development Agency, the Family and Parenting Institute, the National Youth Agency and the Institute of Education.

There is close and ongoing cooperation with the Association of Directors of Children's Services, the Local Government Association, the NHS Confederation, the Children's Services Network, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives, Ofsted and the regional Government Offices.

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Acknowledgements

Summary

This knowledge review tells us what works in improving family-based support for children's learning. It is based on a rapid review of the research literature involving systematic searching, analysis of key data, validated local practice examples and views from both people using services and providers. It summarises the best available evidence that will help service service providers to improve services and ultimately outcomes for children, young people and their families.

The Institute of Education carried out this review on behalf of the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO). The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) conducted the data analysis.

What did we find out?

Key messages from our knowledge review

- Families want services that are accessible, of good quality, non-stigmatising, and flexible enough to fit their lifestyles. They value emotional and social support, and want their children to be safe. They want services to be run by people they trust and to feel involved and valued (Chapter 5).

- Service providers need to reach, retain and engage families. Successful strategies include special initatives (including programmes such as the Incredible Years, PEEP, Enhanced Triple-P, and SPOKES), and effective use of existing resources (such as health visitors and parenting or 'help-your-child-learn' sessions). Inviting and acting on feedback helps to ensure that provision is relevant and supportive (Chapters 5 and 6).

- Programmes that target two or more outcomes (that is, for parents and children) can be cost-effective (Chapter 6).

- Young children's education can be supported directly through helping parents understand the importance of learning at home, and through developing strategies to support children's learning (Chapter 6).

- Factors that can affect children's attainment indirectly are also important. These include pre-natal and post-natal care, maternal education, guidance on breastfeeding and nutrition, and supporting the family's role in the child's development of self-esteem and resilience (Chapter 7).

- Some families have particular needs. Providers should base practice on local evidence, avoiding assumptions about different groups' needs (Chapter 5).

- Service providers need appropriate training and development, to enable them to engage with and feel confident in providing for different needs. This applies to a wide range of providers, including teachers, child minders, and other carers and early years staff (Chapters 6 and 8).

Who are the key stakeholders?

- Children under five years old, and especially those under three
- Families and home-based carers, such as childminders
- Local authority staff, including early years and childcare service providers, and health and social care professionals
- Specialist front-line professionals, including adult learning, family and minority ethnic service providers
- Policy-makers.

Their contributions are valuable in the process of improvement

- **Children under five years old** deserve care that stimulates and educates while ensuring safety and security. They need carers who can engage with them to meet their needs. They report enjoying settings where they feel loved and have friends to play with.

- **Families and home-based carers** may need support in responding confidently to children's social, emotional and educational needs. Families need to know what services and support exists, to know how to access these, and to feel confident in doing so. Teenage parents may need to know what constitutes a 'good' service.

- **Local authority teams** have a key role in providing and monitoring a wide range of appropriate services and in supporting access among families from a range of backgrounds. Local authorities can make effective use of existing services and networks to reach relevant family groups. They can devise strategies to encourage engagement. These strategies might include, for example, providing taster sessions and free activities, or providing additional useful facilities (such as access to washing machines and driers) alongside the target provision. By working together, local authority teams can maximise the effectiveness of their interventions.

- **Specialist front-line professionals** can provide educational support and, where appropriate, accreditation to meet specific developmental or training needs of family members and carers. They can contribute to the knowledge base about local needs for particular groups of families, and help to audit provision and assess its impact.

- **Policy-makers** have shown commitment to supporting the developmental needs of young children, through a legislative framework that encourages multi-agency working, and through funding for early years and family initiatives. Since affordability is a key factor for disadvantaged families in accessing support, this funding is vital.

What data is available to inform the way forward?

Some publicly available datasets (such as data from DCSF Statistical First Releases on Foundation Stage profiles) provide information on the extent to which gaps in outcomes may (or may not) have narrowed for children in what might be deemed the most excluded families. Only NESS (the National Evaluation of Sure Start) and EPPE (Effective Pre-School and Primary Education) provide insights into the possible relationship that there may be between any narrowing of the gap and any changes in provision in early years settings.

Making the link between practice and outcomes is not straightforward, however, partly because of the lack of continuity in comprehensive data at all levels.

The data which was identified for this review is based on information drawn primarily from:

- DCSF Statistical First Releases

- ddata from the Department of Health and the National Health Service (including information from the Health Survey of England and the Health Statistics Quarterly and the Childcare and Early Years Providers' Survey)

- data from the Home Office

- information obtained from research published in relation to NESS (National Evaluation of Sure Start).

Other relevant surveys, such as the MCS (Millennium Cohort Study), ALSPAC (the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children) and FACS (the Families and Children Study) have been identified as potential sources of relevant data for future analysis.

The evidence base

The evidence base relating to effects on children's learning and development is strong. However, more research is needed to strengthen the evidence base in the following areas:

- the specific educational practices applied in effective early home learning environments

- identification of key levers and variables associated with particular approaches

- identification of relevant family groups and their needs

- intergenerational research on socioeconomic status, maternal education, and other family characteristics for different target groups

- identification of the current thresholds applied in the implementation of the Common Assessment Framework.

Centralised knowledge-sharing (perhaps through C4EO) would facilitate the process of strengthening the evidence base, by aiding dissemination of locally-collected evidence.

Knowledge review methods

This knowledge review is the culmination of an extensive knowledge-gathering process. It builds on a scoping study and research review, which are available on the C4EO website.

Research literature was identified through systematic searches of relevant databases and websites, recommendations from our Thematic Advisory Group, and considering studies cited in identified literature ('reference harvesting'). The review team used a 'best evidence' approach to systematically select literature of the greatest relevance and quality to include in the review. This approach attempts to eliminate bias in the selection of literature, to ensure that the review's findings are as objective as possible.

Data contained within the data annexe was obtained by a combination of search methods, but primarily by obtaining online access to known Government publications and access to data published by the Office of National Statistics.

The review also contains examples of local practice sent in from the sector, which have been assessed and validated by early years specialists. Evidence has also been gathered from service providers during discussion groups at C4EO knowledge workshops. Evidence from people using services was collected from C4EO's parents and carers' and children; young people's panels; interviews with parents, young children and staff at a nursery school; and young parents in the Young People's Project.

1. Introduction

This review aims to draw out the key 'what works?' messages on family support for early learning. It addresses three questions, which were set by the C4EO Theme Advisory Group (TAG), a group of experts in early years policy, research and practice. These questions are:

1. What evidence is there for the effectiveness of family-based support of early learning in improving children's outcomes?

2. What evidence is there on approaches that support the engagement of family members (especially parents and carers) in young children's learning?

3. How might support needs differ for different groups of parents/carers, such as:

- low-income families

- fathers, mothers, and other family members or carers

- parents and carers from black or other minority ethnic groups?

The review is based on:

- the best research evidence from the UK – and where relevant from abroad – on what works in improving services and outcomes for children and young people;

- the best quantitative data with which to establish baselines and assess progress in improving outcomes;

- the best validated local experience and practice on the strategies and interventions that have already proved to be the most powerful in helping services improve outcomes, and why this is so; and

- service user and provider views on 'what works?' in terms of improving services and outcomes.

C4EO will use this review to underpin the support it provides to children's trusts to help them improve service delivery, and ultimately outcomes, for children and young people.

Definitions of key terms

- The following definitions were agreed by the Theme Advisory Group:

- For the purposes of this review, 'family-based support' has been defined as support provided by the family and/or in a home environment. This includes childminders, but we wish to acknowledge that childminding service providers also have a wider role to play alongside more formal institutional settings.

- Children between birth and five years of age are considered, with a particular focus on children less than three years of age (including some evidence on pre-natal influences). Some longitudinal studies extending beyond the age of five were included by the review team.

- As specified by the Theme Advisory Group, the geographical areas covered in the review are: England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, USA and Canada. The main focus, however, was on studies carried out in the UK, especially England.

- Where possible the cross-cutting issues of child poverty, equality and diversity and leadership are considered.

- Literature published from 2000 was included in the searches, although the review team also included some additional texts dating back to 1997 where they were of particular significance to current policy, and provided a strong evidential base. One of the key objectives of the review is to provide a common language and a framework for engaging research with practice.

Types of evidence used

The research included in this review was identified through systematic searching of key databases, reference harvesting or recommendations from TAG. All research included has been appraised to ensure that the evidence presented is the most robust available.

The review also contains examples of local practice that have been gathered from the sector and assessed as having a positive impact on outcomes by specialists in the early years (See Appendix 3 for C4EO's validated local practice assessment criteria).

Evidence has also been gathered from service providers during discussion groups at C4EO knowledge workshops (events at which the authors presented findings from the Early Years research reviews). Meanwhile, evidence from parents and carers has been collected via the C4EO panel run by the Family and Parenting Institute and from children and young people through the panel run by the National Children's Bureau (NCB). The NCB also carried out interviews with parents, staff and children at one nursery school and with young parents involved in the Young People's Project (see www.youngpeoplesproject.com/home.html for more details of this intiative).

Data contained in the data annexe was obtained by a combination of search methods but primarily by obtaining online access to known Government publications and access to data published by the Office of National Statistics (ONS).

Strengths and limitations of the review

The review identified both strengths and limitations in the studies currently available:

- The research is strong in terms of the evidence of effects on children's learning and development.

- It is weaker in its identification of the key levers and variables associated with particular approaches, and with the various family groups and needs that were targeted. There is a need for more studies that investigate these aspects further.

C4EO may support this process by providing a platform for sharing data collected locally and for more collective analysis and meta-analysis nationally.

- There is also a need to provide more intergenerational research on socio-economic status (SES), maternal education and other family characteristics for different regional and minority ethnic groups.

- Local and national studies are required to identify the current thresholds applied in the implementation of the Common Assessment Framework. The review has identified the most significant factors predicting children's under-attainment. These should now be applied to review the extent to which children at risk of disadvantage are being recognised as having 'additional needs'.

- More rigorously designed studies are also required to identify the specific informal educational practices that are applied in more effective early home learning and childminding environments.

2. Policy context

This section provides a brief overview of some of the main policy initiatives affecting family support for young children that have been introduced in recent years.[1]

Every Child Matters (ECM) (HM Treasury 2003) and later ECM: Change for Children, (HM Government 2004) have had important consequences for services supporting families of young children. ECM introduced new procedures and systems to enhance information-sharing and multi-agency working, with a strong emphasis on intervention in the early years. This was initially rolled out through Sure Start, which was intended to minimise the link between childhood poverty, and later life chances. However, according to the Family and Parenting Institute (James 2009) there remain many challenges, including: 'Integrating adult and children's services to meet families' needs; ensuring families have access to both good universal services and specialist ones; achieving child poverty targets; and creating real choice for parents in how they balance paid work and family responsibilities.' (p 2).

A key aim has been to create a unified and seamless set of services for children and families delivered through a new, integrated structure at the local authority level under Directors of Children's services, working in collaboration with Children's Trusts, Primary Care Trusts and Safeguarding Children Boards. Another important initiative has been to set up children's databases, applying the Common Assessment Framework (for children with additional needs), ContactPoint (for information on every children) and the Integrated Children's System (for children and families 'in need' and for child protection).

The Government has targeted poorer families for increased tax credits and benefits in an attempt to eradicate child poverty by 2020. Sure Start children's centres (now over 3,000 centres) and other measures involving job centres are aimed at raising employment among parents. Single parent families have also been targeted for social and welfare reform. There has been an increase in early childhood care and education, funding for additional hours if parents need more childcare. Further changes to increase maternity leave are aimed at making it easier for parents to work and enjoy family life.

The Government has invested in early intervention, in particular through Sure Start Local Programmes and later Sure Start children's centres (SSCC). SSCC provide early education, care and family support for education, health and employment with specific outreach to disadvantaged families and children. They have a particular focus on supporting fathers.

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[1] For a more complete overview of family policy between 1999 and 2009, please see James (2009).

In 2004 the Department for Health published the *National Service Framework For Children, Young People and Maternity Services* guidance documents (DFES and DH 2004) setting out a more child-focused approach to health. This also, like ECM, supported the need to work closely with parents.

There have been further attempts to tackle key areas of social policy through parenting and family interventions. These include initiatives aimed at reducing anti-social behaviour and social exclusion and improving home learning environments for children, especially those under five. As we explain further in chapter five, these all have significant implications for children's learning.

Most of this work has been achieved by requiring local authorities/children's trusts to employ a commissioner of parenting support services and through local authorities writing their own parent support strategies. The important point here is that the strategy has aimed to operate across health, education and social services to safeguard the welfare and well-being of children and families and thereby improve outcomes in these areas.

In 2007 the Government created the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). This is indicative of a much stronger government focus on families than ever before. The DCSF has already funded a number of projects to support early interventions in health, education and family life and learning, and many of these are delivered through SSCC such as parenting support, child development classes, Job Centre Plus, health visitors, breast-feeding support and early education from birth to five. However there have also been major initiatives such as the Early Learning Partnership project (ELPP) and Parents, Early Years and Learning (PEAL) which have produced evaluations, books and training materials to support early years staff in enhancing their capability to work with and influence parents' child development skills.

Research context

For the purposes of this review we considered it important to identify the key constructs related to family support that were applied by both the user and research communities in defining 'positive outcomes for children'. Our findings in this respect are consistent with the National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS) (Melhuish *et al* 2008), which identified the following four variables:

1. supportive parenting
2. negative parenting
3. child social competence
4. child emotion–behaviour difficulties.

In addition to these four, three other outcomes researched by NESS were:

- child verbal and non-verbal ability
- parental acceptance
- home learning environment.

Each of these has been identified as related to specific child learning outcomes in several significant studies in this review. The research also shows that despite the fact that many children remain vulnerable and at risk of underachievement, a range of family-based intervention strategies have been shown to be effective in developing resilience and improving outcomes for children.

3.   The evidence base

The evidence base for this review consists of:

- two hundred and ninety-five relevant research and policy papers
- five validated practice examples
- notes from nine regional workshops attended by early years specialists
- views from young people, parents and carers.

The review team has been alert to the need to identify any new research sources published after the research review was published in early 2009. A number of studies were identified throughout the year by the Thematic Advisory Group. In the process of preparing the review, relevant publications identified at major conferences and courses, in the DCSF *Schools Research News* and the National Children's Bureau *Early Childhood Unit Bulletin* were also reviewed. New studies have been included where these were considered to have met the standards for relevance and quality set out in the original stages, and where they offered significant new evidence to inform the review. Six new research studies met these criteria.

The initial searches generated 129 titles published since 2000, and the scoping team considered that 80 titles were relevant to the research questions (see Waldman *et al* 2008). In response to feedback from the Theme Advisory Group, the scoping team undertook further searches of three health and psychology databases, which yielded a further 11 relevant items. Further reference harvesting from these sources by the main review team identified a total of 159 additional items. The total number of relevant titles considered in this review was 295, comprising 288 from the initial searches and reference harvesting, plus six new research studies and one new policy paper included after the initial report (Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford 2009).

Well over half of the items identified in the searches were research reports and conference papers; these included large-scale longitudinal, mixed method, and quasi-experimental studies, as well as randomised control trials (RCTs).

The studies that were identified as providing evidence related to each of the research questions required, and demonstrated a range of different methodological approaches. In conducting the review we have taken care to distinguish between those research findings that have a stronger or weaker evidential basis. A major consideration has been the logical and persuasive links that have been provided by studies to link their evidence with their conclusions, and where there are alternative explanations we have attempted to identify these.

The review identified both strengths and limitations in the studies currently available:

- The research is strong in terms of the evidence of effects on children's learning and development.

- It is weaker in its identification of the key levers and variables associated with particular approaches, and with the various family groups and needs that were targeted. There is a need for more studies that investigate these aspects further. C4EO may support this process by providing a platform for sharing data collected locally and for more collective analysis and meta-analysis nationally.

- There is also a need to provide more intergenerational research on socioeconomic status (SES), maternal education and other family characteristics for different regional and minority ethnic groups.

- Local and national studies are required to identify the current thresholds applied in the implementation of the Common Assessment Framework, and to identify (applying the knowledge that we now have regarding the most significant predictive factors) the potential needs that these may be applied to address in each community.

- More rigorously designed studies are also required, to identify the specific informal educational practices that are applied in more effective early home learning and childminding environments.

4.   What do people using services and service providers tell us about what works?

Views from people using services

The experiences of parents and carers and those providing services to children and their families have much to add to our knowledge of 'what works' to improve family-based support for young children's learning. However, it is important to remember that this section is drawn from group discussions with parents, carers and children and, separately, with local service providers to discuss key issues affecting children's learning in the early years. It is therefore based on their experiences and opinions rather than on the research evidence on which the rest of the review is based.

The review team was provided with a range of comments from the C4EO Parents' and Carers' Panel. The National Children's Bureau provided transcripts from conversations with children and parents at Northfleet nursery school in Gravesend, and young parents involved in the Young People's Project in Ilford. The C4EO Parents' and Carers' Panel comprises 40 parents and carers, from across the nine English regions, who advise on the centre's activities and outputs across its themes.

The C4EO Parents' and Carers' Panel strongly endorsed the findings of the review of family-based support. Many parents commented on the need for a safe, loving and secure environment as a basis for developing a strong and secure upbringing for young children. Most parents also strongly emphasised the importance of the early home learning environment as crucial to setting children on a positive learning trajectory. Many implied that it also taught children the basics of self-regulatory behaviour which was essential for later school success:

Being interested in what your child does and showing them that their likes and dislikes matter helps develop their confidence. By showing your child the importance of reading and learning it encourages them to be hungry for more.

(Mother, South East).

The modelling behaviour of the parents and the way they value education was seen to influence children in the same way as modelling and valuing healthy living. Unsurprisingly, many parents mentioned the importance of children being emotionally and physically strong, as well as educationally supported to fulfil their potential.

Sure Start children's centres were specifically identified as a positive service. But a number of parents were concerned that much of the current provision was not of high quality:

They [pre-school centres] are good but very variable. We need to invest in facilities and training of staff involved in child care. *(Father, Yorkshire).*

Some parents felt that the private sector was often the focus of attention with regard to raising funding, but that funding was a key issue for all providers. Some commented on the lack of resources or security of long-term funding in both the voluntary and children's centres sectors.

Many parents had things to say about what they thought might improve parental support for their children's learning. Parents spoke about a range of needs, from promoting parent confidence, parenting classes, getting good information and advice for their child to do better and more regular health checks for their child. Suggestions also included putting a greater emphasis on how to support interactions with your child and with other parents.

The importance of health visitors in early years was highlighted but parents noted some regional variability in health visiting services, with some visits seen as largely 'routine' and parents in some areas reporting that developmental checks at 18 months and two years had been phased out. Nevertheless, parents pointed out that health visitors were key to early support, because they provided a first point of contact in the home setting, enabled access to other services, and offered continuity of support in the crucial early years.

Finally, parents reflected on what services impacted on them. They mentioned a very wide variety of services, including: parenting classes, creating a parents' forum, advice on healthy eating and managing debt, and general help and support with additional services for special interests and special needs. The form of parental support that was reported as valued most highly was emotional and social support from peers, and specialist services such as HomeStart.

The comments that we have received suggest that teenage parents have the same concerns of other parents but also face some specific challenges such as how they were seen as a young person and a parent:

I would never go to a normal parent and toddlers' group because you don't know how they will react to you because I am young; I was fifteen when I had my daughter and you just don't know how people are going to react.

Their feedback tells us that they often find it difficult to get access to good information on what to do and where to go for help during and after pregnancy and how to monitor what their child gets in terms of quality of care and education. The following quote exemplifies this and implicitly suggests that the provision of better information might be helpful:

I did not know what was a good school, anything about Ofsted, what they are required to do. I didn't know what to do. I would love to know what is a good nursery, what is a good standard? To know what is right and wrong, what they should be doing.

Most of the views from children concern their personal likes and dislikes. These 'service users' are by their very nature extremely young, and their concerns centre around what they like about their current provisions, about friendships and how adults treat them. Young children value the company of their peers:

I have friends here and they play with me all the time and they love me...

They also describe good adults as those who play with them and provide loving care:

If they did not want to play with me. That would be a bad adult. If they didn't listen to me that would be bad too.

In addition to the views of people using services collected specifically for this knowledge review, there are several surveys of parents and carers available which capture additional information from the perspective of people using services.

Views from service providers

Following publication of the main review, senior managers and others with strategic responsibility for children's trust's were invited to a series of C4EO Knowledge Workshops that were organised in each of the nine English regions. The workshops served to disseminate the research findings and also provided a means of collecting the views of service-received and also identified as valuable additional resources to be employed in local lobbying and campaign work. In group discussions the delegates were asked directly what examples of effective practice they could share that had resulted in better family-based support for early learning in their local area.

A wide range of different local activities were identified, including initiatives involving the work of individual children's centres, clinical psychological services and baby massage. The most commonly cited initiatives were:

- focused on hard-to-reach families
- aiming to increase parent engagement in children's learning
- home visits and extensions to the role of health visitors
- specific literacy activities, such as Bookstart.

These were underpinned by strategic service development, including:

- the development of a shared strategic vision
- effective service coordination
- training at every level and across services
- the development of quality assurance schemes and resources.

These echo and re-enforce the main messages from the research literature and in the examples of validated local practice.

5. What does research tell us about parents' needs?

This section contains evidence from recent published research. It provides useful information on the factors influencing take-up and on parents' satisfaction with the services they use.

The 2007 Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents (Kazimirski *et al* 2008) published data collected from 2,808 parents with pre-school-aged children in England. The study showed that the cost of childcare remains a barrier to take-up for some parents, particularly low-income families and lone parents. Significant barriers included an inadequate number of childcare places and insufficient services during school holidays, or outside standard hours (42 per cent of parents whose main provider did not open in the school holidays said they would like it to).

- There was a great deal of reliance on 'word of mouth' for childcare information and low use of official information sources (35 per cent of parents felt that they would like more information about childcare services in their local area).

- The proportion of parents who thought that childcare affordability in their local area was very good or fairly good in 2007 was 38 per cent and the proportion who thought the right number of childcare places were available locally was 44 per cent.

- When asked whether they would work if they could arrange 'good quality childcare which was convenient, reliable and affordable', 51 per cent of non-working parents said that they would.

- Views on the quality of childcare were more positive, with 63 per cent of parents rating the quality of local childcare services as very or fairly good. The most frequently cited aspects in need of improvement were buildings and premises, and outdoor play and activities.

Another survey of 1,496 parents, expectant parents and carers was carried out for the DCSF by market research consultants (TNS Social 2009). It was designed to quantify the reach of 120 randomly selected Sure Start children's centres. The study found that:

- 78 per cent of parents and carers were aware of their local centre and 45 per cent had used it. 92 per cent of users said they were satisfied and 68 per cent were very satisfied with the services offered.

- Those who were aware of their local centre tended to find out about it through word of mouth (33 per cent of those who were aware), through a health visitor (26 per cent) or by just seeing the centre in their local area (20 per cent).

- Childcare and nursery education were the most heavily used services at the centres and at the time of the survey one quarter (24 per cent) of respondents said they were currently using these.

- Use of health services, and family and parenting services was found to be less widespread with 13 per cent having used the health services in the three months prior to the survey and nine per cent having used family and parenting services.

- Parents were less aware of health, and family and parenting services and said they would like the centres to communicate more with them about the types of services offered.

Speight *et al* (2009) reported no change since 2007 in the use of the free entitlement to early years education by eligible three- and four-year-olds and the take-up of formal childcare and early years education remained lower among non-working and low-income families, some minority ethnic groups, and families living in more deprived areas. Also almost one in five families, and especially the lone parents, those on low income and living in deprived areas, reported they were struggling to meet childcare costs.

There are some signs that improvements put in place by previous policies have begun to take effect, but also indications that there is still more to do in ensuring that all parents, particularly those from more disadvantaged social groups, are encouraged and enabled to access the information that they need to make decisions about childcare (p 6).

The same study found few additional services being offered by formal group-based providers, with 64 per cent of parents of pre-school-age children saying that no additional services were available at their providers. But the take-up of services at providers where other services were available was also found to be low:

When asked about which additional services they would use if available, parents mentioned most frequently health services, courses or training, and advice and support for parents (p 6).

How might support needs differ for different groups of parents and carers?

The most significant ways in which support needs differ for different groups relate to the scale of support that they require, and in the disproportionate access of certain groups to services. The National Evaluation of Sure Start identified its disappointing early findings as the result of poor reach, particularly for those seen to be in the greatest need for support (Belsky *et al* 2007, p 109). Evidence suggests that a variety of groups experienced barriers to accessing Sure Start Local Programmes, so effective strategies for reaching such groups are particularly important (Coghlan *et al* 2009).

Low-income families

Since the 2004 Spending Review, the DCSF and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) have been jointly responsible for Public Service Agreement targets to increase the take-up of childcare among disadvantaged groups. One example of the sort of initiative being implemented by local authorities is reported in Chapter 7.

Research suggests that financial incentives are not as effective as convenience, accessibility and intrinsic rewards (such as videotapes of parents interacting with their child) and the perceived trustworthiness of the recruiter (Gross *et al* 2001; Harachi *et al* 1997).

The research evidence suggests that greater provision should be made to support families affected by barriers such as lack of time, above-average distance and costs of travel, and lack of access to high-quality, respectful, and non-stigmatising early childhood support services (Ghate and Hazel 2002; Kahn 2006; Page *et al* 2008). This could particularly affect low-income and/or minority ethnic parents. These issues are increasingly being addressed at a local level and many authorities are gaining significant expertise as the following local practice example shows:

At Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, the experience of the Early Years and Childcare service indicates that:

- Both mothers and fathers are more likely to respond to information about a service or an activity if it is suggested by a trusted source (family, friend or known agent).

- Free local activities for adults and children to do together (including activities for older children) are attractive to both mothers and fathers and encourage them to get involved. Access to quality, free, local childcare enables mothers and fathers to either focus on their own learning needs or to do activities with their older children.

- Taster activities in subjects that they are interested in helps parents to develop their confidence and build relationships with workers and other parents.

- Experience of success and achievement helps to build mothers' and fathers' confidence and raise their expectations of what they and their children can achieve.

Fathers, other family members and carers

Encouraging fathers' engagement in early years and family services is a considerable challenge. Improvements can be made by:

- raising awareness of the issue, encouraging staff to be proactive in engaging fathers and providing staff training

- developing provision and devising activities that appeal to fathers' interests

- addressing fathers directly using positive language and images

- employing male staff in parent contact roles.

Successful strategies to encourage fathers' involvement in early childcare and education include the provision of desk-top computer materials and optional customised reading lists (Lloyd *et al* 2003; Goldman 2005). Family support services should encourage involvement from grandparents and other family members.

Childminders have the potential to make a real difference to children's outcomes. Although research on childminding is lacking, the available evidence suggests that the quality of childminding can be enhanced through:

- accredited networks for childminders and links with pre-school centres

- providing training and support aimed at helping childminders to provide secure, sensitive care and a high-quality learning environment

- encouraging more experienced childminders to continue to provide the service.

There is a need for more accredited training and support for childminders (Clarke-Stewart *et al* 2002).

Improving access to children's centres for excluded groups

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council has improved access to and participation in services from fathers, young parents and women from Asian backgrounds. The project involved the appointment of dedicated 'Community Inclusion Workers' who were successful in increasing the number of families from excluded groups registered at the children's centres by 10 per cent in 2008 (nearly 30 per cent increase in registrations from families living in the 30 per cent lowest Super Output Areas, compared to a 20 per cent increase for centres without a worker). These posts were based in Sure Start children's centres.

In terms of their contribution, the ECM agenda: 52 per cent of service user contacts contributed to 'Making a Positive Contribution' through such events as a Community Art Day and the establishment of an Asian Ladies group; 23 per cent of service user contacts contributed to 'Being Healthy' by providing activities such as 'Seated aerobics' and a 'Weaning Party'; 20 per cent of contacts contributed to 'Enjoy and Achieve' through activities such as 'Playshops' and 'Treasure Baskets'; and 5 per cent of the service user contacts contributed to 'Achieving Economic Wellbeing' through Basic Skills classes, ICT and volunteer support.

Parents from black or other minority ethnic groups

Black and minority ethnic (BME) families have been identified as taking up less childcare and education for their under-fives and they are also more likely to come from low-income groups (Coghlan *et al* 2009).

In their survey of parents in Sure Start areas, TNS Social (2009) checked whether opinions and experiences differed among people with different characteristics (socio-economic status, white and BME background). Their study found no evidence to suggest

that any sub-groups were being excluded from or failing to access the centres. The finding that poorer families and those from BME groups were accessing Sure Start centres to the same extent as other groups contrasts with the findings of previous research. One possible explanation for this is that improvements in targeting are beginning to show their effects in practice: such efforts should therefore be continued.

Other evidence reinforces the importance of focusing on the needs of individual parents and families, including taking poverty and cultural factors into account.
A recent survey by the Daycare Trust (2007) focused on BME families' use of, views on, and needs for childcare. The research was conducted through focus groups and questionnaires and suggests that for many BME families who have not used childcare before, services such as 'playbuses' are crucial in helping them make their first step into childcare.

Salway *et al* (2009) conducted a series of focus group discussions and interviews with Bangladeshi Muslim, Pakistani Muslim, Gujarati Hindu and Punjabi Sikh fathers and mothers. The study found many BME parents perceived group care to be safer, of higher quality, and more education-based than childminders. There was considerable diversity in fathering within and between religion or ethnic group. However, many fathers had poor knowledge of statutory family support services and perceived them as unattractive and intended for mothers.

The authors made the following recommendations:

- Having consistent staff that parents can communicate with, trust and get to know over time is essential if they are to confidently use childcare.

- Practitioners and services should avoid stereotyping the needs or preferences of minority ethnic individuals.

- Efforts to increase the time fathers have in direct contact with their children must recognise the varied working conditions of Asian men, and the pressures they face to accumulate wealth.

In the previous research review (Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford 2009) we referred to the importance of listening to BME parents and to those parents living in poverty and under stressful circumstances. The conclusions from this additional information are important because they emphasise the need for more authentic collaborations with groups of parents not only to engage with them, but to sustain that engagement whilst delivering a service the parents would respect and value.

Attracting BME parents may be helped by:

- improving flexibility of service provision, including evenings, nights, weekends, and when children are sick

- encouraging parents to view pre-school provision as promoting educational achievement.

There is also a need to improve ethnic monitoring at a local level, to gather more precise data on the uptake of services among BME families (Page *et al* 2007).

The key factors inhibiting take-up among BME groups are generally the same as those affecting other groups such as cost, lack of information, the nature of provision and issues of trust. Oppenheim's (2007) report also identifies further barriers: the complexity of the benefits and tax credit system, high levels of unemployment and economic inactivity among some groups, shift working which makes it difficult to access appropriate childcare, patchy working between Job Centre Plus and children's centres in some areas, and a workforce that doesn't reflect the diversity of the community.

Responding to different needs

Some independent research has been carried out to find how different practitioner groups assess parenting support needs and how this process is influenced by both family and practitioner diversity. A qualitative study conducted for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Kellett and Apps 2009) presented the findings from interviews with practitioners drawn from four professional groups in two areas of England. The groups represented were health visitors, family support workers, paediatricians and nursery/infant teachers. The study found that:

- Teachers lack confidence in their assessment and support of families and express anxieties about 'damaging' their relationships with parents.

- Paediatricians and teachers had received the least training in parenting styles and assessment and the majority expressed an interest in learning more about parenting support and assessment in general.

- Some practitioners also expressed a lack of confidence with regard to cultural and ethnic differences, in particular in relation to physical punishment and discipline. The importance of adequate supervision and peer support was emphasised.

The research found a broad consensus among different practitioner groups about what constituted 'good enough' parenting – basic care and safety, love and affection, putting children's needs first, providing routine and consistent care, and, when there were difficulties experienced, acknowledgement and engagement with support services. Perceptions of risky parenting centred around: putting themselves before the child, a lack of parental control and responsibility, and a lack of routine and order.

The authors suggest that more could be done (for example through training and guidance materials) to help professionals to:

- assess the relevance of diversity to parenting and the family, and incorporate this into their assessments and interventions

- pick up more subtle messages from families who may be in need of support.

6. What evidence is there on approaches that support the engagement of family members (especially parents and carers) in young children's learning?

There is no consensus on how best to classify different approaches to interventions promoting family engagement in children's learning. But the evidence suggests that programmes that target two or more child/family outcomes (such as behaviour and literacy) may be particularly cost-effective (Sanders *et al* 2000; Egeland and Bosquet 2002; Hannon *et al* 2006). One review of early interventions has also concluded that, to gain the most impact, interventions should include both parent and child together with a focus on enhancing interactions (Barnes and Freude-Lagevardi 2003). Such work indicates that parenting behaviours are learnable, and changes in parenting are associated with improved child development. Similar conclusions derive from the study by Nutbrown *et al* (2005), where children showed better literacy progress when parents received a programme on ways to improve child literacy during the pre-school period.

While the evidential basis of other research findings are weaker, the research literature also suggests that:

- The role of pre-school provisions should be extended to accept a parent partnership role that includes the provision of parenting support in development of the early HLE (Siraj-Blatchford *et al* 2002; Kirk 2003).

- The evidence supports the practice of auditing local needs, and targeting socioeconomically disadvantaged groups (Melhuish *et al* 2007).

- There is a need for further training of staff in all services to work with families on supporting their children's learning. This could be built into existing courses for teachers, health visitors, social workers and other early years' staff.

- The evidence supports the early identification and targeting of children at risk, and the provision of additional training for multi-agency teamwork and for managers and leaders in budget and project management (Anning *et al* 2007; Daniels *et al* 2008; Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford 2009).

- Home visiting, when well-focused and of appropriate intensity and quality, provides a useful tool for improving child outcomes, especially for younger children or where parents do not seek support from centre-based provision (Raikes *et al* 2006).

Stages in parental engagement

Ghate and Hazel (2002) identify three key stages in the process of engaging parents; these are detailed below.

1. Getting parents

This is basically getting parents to make an initial contact with a service, by:

- advertising, persistent outreach over time, making a home visit
- paying attention to the practical features such as childcare, distance and transport
- not stigmatising and offering convenient timing
- providing useful facilities for poor parents such as washing machines and driers.

2. Keeping parents

This is about keeping the parents long enough to experience the service by, for example:

- providing 'multi-modal' services which involve contact in groups, individually or by telephone, with enough flexibility to respond to individuals around (and beyond) a consistent 'core' service
- matching duration and intensity to level of need
- delivery that takes account of the different learning styles of carers and parents, for example interactive (rather than 'telling'), using multimedia and providing translations.

3. Engaging parents

Services need to convince parents and carers to stay involved long enough for the service to have an impact. Creating good relationships is paramount:

- Services need to use professionals who are trusted, well-trained and who know how to ensure user feedback to improve their service and feed this back to the users.
- Services need to pay attention to contextual and cultural factors. For example, stressed parents will find it difficult to benefit fully from a service unless staff are aware of personal circumstances and engaged with interagency support and working practices to the benefit of users.
- Diversity issues include special provision for fathers and the cultural sensitivity of staff to parents and carers from black and minority ethnic groups.

Approaches directly affecting children's learning

Parental involvement in their child's education has been shown to be positively related to academic achievement, and children from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit from attending pre-schools with children from more advantaged backgrounds. Parent support and training programmes which have been shown to be effective for children's behaviour and social outcomes include:

Incredible Years programme (Webster-Stratton)

The Webster-Stratton Incredible Years parenting programme has been shown to be particularly cost-effective in reducing antisocial and hyperactive behaviour and increasing self-control (Sampers *et al* 2001; Richardson and Joughin 2002). This approach involves group-based discussion and 'video-modelling'. An evaluation by Hutchings *et al* (2007) involved 153 parents from socially disadvantaged areas, with children aged from three to five years, in a 12-week Incredible Years programme. Most of the measures of parenting and children's problem behaviour showed significant improvement in comparison to the non-intervention group.

Sylva *et al*'s (2008b) evaluation demonstrated that when the basic 'Incredible Years' videotape package was backed up by home visits, this maximised its effectiveness. The programme was delivered over three school terms. The first term comprised a basic 12-week parenting course addressing parent–child relationships and explaining how to handle difficult child behaviour. The second term comprised a
10-week reading workshop for parents which included two home visits, and the final term comprised a six-week course on child behaviour and reading.

Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP)

PEEP provided support for children and their families from birth to school, offering educational materials and the opportunity to attend groups or receive home visits. The programme was adopted by a number of pre- and primary schools in the area. An evaluation involved 604 children (Evangelou *et al* 2005). The study compared the effects of the intervention on families that attended weekly PEEP sessions with matched comparison groups and found the intervention to have a significant impact on children's social behaviour at age four in terms of three key areas: compliance and conformity; pro-social behaviour; and confidence and independence.

Enhanced Triple P–Positive Parenting Programme

Interventions addressing multiple family issues such as marital conflict and parental depression in addition to children's behaviour problems have also been shown to be effective in evaluations of the Enhanced Triple P–Positive Parenting programme (Sanders *et al* 2000; Bor *et al* 2002). The Triple P programme may be applied at a series of levels, ranging from the use of the media and brief messages, to intensive family interventions for more extreme parenting problems and family difficulties (Sanders *et al* 2003).

Home visiting

Home visits have also been found successful in targeting high-risk families. Again, most have applied a multi-dimensional approach. In the Elmira Prenatal/Early Infancy Project, nurses provided two years of regular parent education and family support. The outcomes included reduced neglect and abuse, and fewer arrests of children up to the age of 15 years (Olds *et al* 1997). Both the above PEEP Programmes and Supporting Parents On Kids Education (SPOKES) have been shown to be effective in promoting early literacy among disadvantaged families.

Supporting Parents On Kids Education (SPOKES)

The SPOKES intervention (Sylva *et al* 2008b) was found to be successful in enhancing children's reading achievement (with an effect size of 0.4). SPOKES covered more than just letter–sound relationships. It included parents enjoying environmental print with their child, using rhyme and songs, orienting the child to the story in a book, relating to the pictures, and drawing on the child's own experience of the situation described in a story. The instructions given to the parents on how to read with their children were detailed in terms of the need for pausing, prompting and praising. The parents had to rehearse this live in groups and receive feedback until they had it right. They also recorded themselves reading with their child and brought the tape to the group for sharing and discussion. The research team identified two general reasons why each aspect of the intervention might have been successful. First was the skill of the delivery team – group leaders had many years of experience in either behavioural parenting programmes and/or literacy programmes. Secondly, they were supervised for one and a half hours every week, whereby they had to show video clips of the groups that they were running, and practise how they might do it better, in a supportive atmosphere with skilled tutors.

Indirect effects on children's learning

A range of indirect factors have been identified that put children at greater risk of underachievement. These environmental and health and safety issues are identified earlier in the chapter. One specific example of this is obesity. Obese children suffer stigmatisation and discrimination from an early age. These children tend to be taller than their peers and they are therefore often expected to be more mature (Dietz 1998). Low self-esteem as a result of obesity may also lead to academic underachievement and ill health. There is growing evidence to suggest that breastfeeding provides resilience against obesity (Owen *et al* 2005; Harder *et al* 2005). One successful local initiative has produced important improvements in breastfeeding practice:

Improving breastfeeding rates

In Blackpool, the local authority and the Primary Care Trust worked together to improve their breastfeeding initiation rates from 42 per cent in 2006/07 to 49.4 per cent in 2007/08 and 56 per cent during 2008/09. This far exceeded the key performance indicator target of a two per cent rise in breastfeeding rates per year. Staff identified a wide range of features that acted as the 'golden threads' leading to effective practice:

- Having a named breastfeeding champion at each children's centre, together with supportive leadership and dedicated staff

- Developing children's centre breastfeeding policies.

- Having an action group to coordinate work across children's centres and ensure consistency.

- Ensuring that all children's centre staff receive breastfeeding training and developing a training log to ensure that new staff receive information and training on the breastfeeding policy as part of their induction.

- Having a Children's Centre Baby Friendly Accreditation Checklist to ensure that each centre provides consistent information, advice and guidance.

- Providing each children's centre with a breastfeeding resource book including copies of all the relevant literature, leaflets and posters to support breastfeeding within their centre. This information was impartial, evidence -based and free from commercial influence.

The local evaluation also argued strongly that to achieve such success, they needed to ensure continuity in the services offered by breastfeeding champions between children's centres. They also felt that the peer support provision must have national recognised standards, with ongoing supervision and learning for volunteers and paid staff.

Targeting specific needs

While programmes often measure how much 'use' is made of a programme, it is much rarer to evaluate the efforts to make contact and to maximise access through the identification of target families, and through tackling the barriers to take-up.

For the financial year 2009/10, DCSF allocated additional funding for all local authorities/children's trusts to target work between children's centres and Job Centre Plus to help lift lone parents out of poverty by supporting them back into work. While it clearly remains too early to provide evidence of its effectiveness a promising report was submitted from one local authority concerning the development of a new referral system to improve outreach to lone parents and link children's centres with Job Centre Plus.

Encouraging lone parents to access services and tailored support

In Blackburn with Darwen local authority, a simple electronic referral form has been devised for lone parents. An advisor completes the form with the parent to give permission for an initial contact. Parents are invited into an informal session at the children's centres or within their home, to discuss the services on offer and plan next steps. Senior family information service officers (sFIS) work through the children's centres and within the local communities providing intensive one-to-one support to encourage lone parents to consider training, providing advice and support through a multi-agency approach.

The sFIS provide regular contact with the parent, accompanying them to training sessions, helping them to complete forms and addressing any other issues they may have. They build up trust and a rapport with the individuals, encouraging them to use all available provision. This reduces the likelihood of the parent disengaging with the training through a problem arising which would have been resolvable through the assistance of the advisor.

Hannon *et al* (2008) argue that the reach of an intervention should always be expressed as the proportion of a target population that it involves. In this definition, the lower the reach, the less likely the intervention will achieve its goals. The Webb *et al* (2007) report also provides an example of how health outcome data can be presented as an 'equity ratio'. In the wider field of child support, most of the data relevant to the adequate monitoring of reach is difficult to obtain in terms of publicly available national datasets. We know that children's health can be monitored from birth using their unique National Health Service number, but there is no such number for educational and care services until children reach school age, or are in the maintained sector. The identification of children using this number would also be helpful when children enter pre-school, to monitor when and where children take up provision, what type of provision they receive and its duration, and to help monitor the impact of the provision on the life course of the child from birth to five.

7. What evidence is there for the effectiveness of family-based support of early learning in improving children's outcomes?

The processes that are involved in the provision of family-based support for early learning are best described by applying an ecological perspective. This emphasises the multiplicity of positive and negative factors that combine in complex ways to determine each child's unique developmental history. It suggests the need to focus attention directly on the progress being made by individual children and to respond with whatever tools and strategies that we find to be effective to secure their future success and well-being.

The extant research shows that children's risk of underachievement can be improved directly through:

- reducing foetal and post-natal injury (Schwebel *et al* 2004; Carman *et al* 2006)
- reducing child neglect and abuse (Sidebotham *et al* 2002)
- reducing disease and infection (Belsky *et al* 2007)
- lowering the incidence of poor bonding and poor attachment (Cicchetti *et al* 1999; Heinicke *et al* 2001; Egeland and Bosquet 2002)
- lowering the incidence of children experiencing a lack of stimulation (Molfese *et al* 2001; Connell and Prinz 2002; Neitzel and Stright 2003; Fantuzzo *et al* 2004; Evangelou *et al* 2007; Sylva *et al* 2008a and b).

An example of work in one local authority to improve children's communication and language skills is given below. In this case, the local authority employed a dedicated communication officer to manage the project.

Improving young children's communication and language skills

Leicester City's initiative has contributed to improvements from 27 per cent of children at a good level of achievement in 2006 to 44 per cent in 2009.

The strategy operated at three levels:

1. Developing community awareness of the importance of early communication and language development.
2. Providing families with information and guidance during pregnancy and early childhood on how they can promote their child's communication.
3. Providing children with early interventions when needed and, for all those attending LA childcare or early education settings, positive daily interactions with a caregiver.

As a result of a presentation by a speech and language therapist, a mother added a 'quiet time' into her day's routine specifically to talk to her baby. Another mother began to see meal times as an opportunity for conversation with her baby and a third mother was prompted to turn off the TV so her child could listen to other sounds (such as birdsong or a passing train).

Another example of an intitiative to improve children's communication and language skills was provided by Tower Hamlets.

Using a new assessment system to monitor communication and language development

Tower Hamlets developed a new assessment and record-keeping system to support parent and children as partners in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The Early Learning Development Record provides:

- A Learning Diary held in the setting but sent home regularly- including observations, photos, drawings, children's parent and practitioner comments.

- A booklet, *All About My Unique Child*, held by the parent and intended to support transitions (as it is shared with practitioners in any new setting).

- A learning and development record, which includes regular assessment notes and observations graded using Leuven scales (the child's well-being and involvement), and class recording sheets or eProfile records of EYFSP judgments.

- The Setting Story, including self-evaluation materials and planning forms based on the four EYFS themes, areas of learning and development, and the school or setting's improvement plan.

A range of benefits are reported including improved relationships with parents, greater parental involvement, and improvements in parent's awareness of their children's learning. These are considered to have contributed significantly towards an overall 2.5 per cent increase in children scoring 6+ points in Communication, Language and Literacy (CLL) and in Personal, Social, Emotional Development (PSED) and achieving 78 points overall in 2008/09.

Research also shows that there are indirect means of reducing the risk of underachievement. These include:

- improving maternal (or primary care-giver) education (Belsky *et al* 2007; Suizzo and Stapleton 2007; Sylva *et al* 2008a)

- reducing maternal (or primary care-giver) anxiety and depression (Sanders *et al* 2000; Bor *et al* 2002; Spence *et al* 2002)

- improving employment opportunities and reducing poverty (Katz *et al* 2007; Bhattacharjee 2008)

- increased mixing with those of different socioeconomic status (for example of children and parents in nursery settings (Sylva *et al* 2004).

Children may also be supported in overcoming these disadvantages through:

- improving the quality of children's stimulation, and early home learning environment (HLE), especially for boys (Molfese *et al* 2001; Connell and Prinz 2002; Neitzel and Stright 2003; Fantuzzo *et al* 2004; Evangelou *et al* 2007; Sylva *et al* 2008a)

- encouraging parents to interact and problem-solve with their children (Neitzel and Stricht 2003; Sylva *et al* 2004, 2008a)

- promoting parents' involvement and interest in education (Siraj-Blatchford *et al* 2002; Blanden *et al* 2005)

- alerting parents to the full implications of the differences in home learning environments that they currently provide for girls and boys (Siraj-Blatchford and Sammons 2004).

- attending high-quality pre-schools (Sylva *et al* 2004, 2008a)

- supporting and educating the parents of children with behaviour problems (Love *et al* 2005; Blair and Razza 2007; Melhuish *et al* 2008; Sylva *et al* 2008b).

Positive relationships between parents and children are fundamental to good outcomes for children. Parents can affect their children's outcomes in relation to social abilities, self-esteem, behaviour, academic achievement, health and safety.

Parents can help their children to make a positive contribution by:

- giving clear instructions and setting consistent limits on children's behaviour (Denham *et al* 2000).

- Parental involvement in their child's education has also been found to be positively related to academic achievement (Harvard Family Research Project 2006; Siraj-Blatchford *et al* 2007).

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8. Conclusions and main messages

The processes that are involved in the provision of family-based support for early learning are best described by applying an ecological perspective. This emphasises the multiplicity of positive and negative factors that combine in complex ways to determine each child's unique developmental history. It suggests the need to focus attention directly on the progress being made by individual children and to respond with whatever tools and strategies that we find to be effective to secure their future success and well-being.

Some early childhood disadvantages (or risk factors) have the potential to lead either directly or indirectly to underachievement, whereas other resilience factors provide a child with the resources to overcome these risks. Parents can pass on risks and resilience to their children, thus emphasising the need to support families, not just children, and for the integration of adult and child interventions.

The research reviewed indicates that children's risk of underachievement can be improved directly by services working with families in:

- reducing foetal and post-natal injury

- reducing child neglect and abuse

- reducing disease and infection

- lowering the incidence of poor bonding and poor attachment, improving parent–child relationships and relationships with siblings and other children

- improving children's self-regulation and self-esteem, and instilling in them positive behaviours

- improving the incidence of children experiencing a high-quality early home learning environment (HLE) (factors include frequency of being read to; going to the library; painting and drawing; playing with letters and numbers; singing songs; and reciting poems and rhymes).

Indirect means of reducing the risk of underachievement include:

- improving maternal (or primary care-giver) education and qualifications, especially to degree level

- reducing maternal anxiety and depression, and providing support focused on the relationship between care-giver and child

- improving parental employment opportunities and reducing poverty

- increasing SES mixing for example of children and parents in early years settings).

Children may be supported in overcoming risks through:

- improving the quality of stimulation and early home learning environment, especially for boys

- promoting parents' involvement and interest in education

- children attending higher-quality pre-schools

- supporting and educating the parents of children with behaviour problems

- programmes that target two or more child/family outcomes (such as behaviour and literacy), as these may be particularly cost-effective

- home visiting, when well-focused, of appropriate intensity and quality, provides a useful tool to improve child outcomes – especially for younger children, or where parents do not seek support from centre-based provision.

The evidence base is weaker for specific approaches taken to engage family members and to support the needs of different groups. But it suggests that:

- the role of pre-school provision should be extended to parent partnerships that support the development of the early HLE.

- the practice of auditing local needs, and the targeting of socioeconomically disadvantaged groups should be adopted more routinely.

- there is a need for further training of staff in all services to work with families in supporting their children's learning. This could be built into existing training for teachers, health visitors, social workers and other early year's staff.

- attention should be focused on the early identification and targeting of children at risk, and the provision of additional training for multi-agency teamwork, and for managers and leaders in budget and project management.

- practical measures should be used to encourage fathers' involvement in early child care and education, including developing targeted provision that appeals to fathers' interests (such as computer materials and customised reading lists).

- greater provision should be made to support low-income and/or minority ethnic parents affected by barriers such as lack of time, above-average distance and costs of travel, and to provide access to high-quality, respectful, and non-stigmatising early childhood support services.

- there is a need for more accredited training and support for childminders, for example through quality-assured networks, and a case may be made for introducing requirements for accredited training.

Many of the findings have significant implications for the ongoing management and auditing of existing programmes, and for the development of new programmes providing family support. A specific need has been identified for the further extension and development of the Common Assessment Framework to cover the full range of risk factors identified above.

There is a need for local authorities to carry out monitoring of people using childcare services (to help understand who takes up childcare and education places and who does not, and so improve uptake, especially amongst BME families). Local authorities should also monitor the childcare workforce within their area, to establish the ethnic profile of those providing early childhood services.

Data annexe

Introduction

The main focus of this priority is on how support programmes for parents and the wider family can help improve children's cognitive development and attainment. There is evidence in the research literature (for example, from the EPPE study) that high levels of parental support and engagement in their child's education are particularly important in raising children's attainment. The impact of early intervention on community outcomes was demonstrated by the Birth to School Study (BTSS), which evaluated the impact of PEEP over a period from 1998 to 2004. It identified a significant impact of early intervention in the development both of cognitive skills (particularly readiness for reading) and self-esteem in children living in the PEEP catchment area (one economically disadvantaged area of Oxford), 'whether or not their families were inclined to participate in an education or parenting-based intervention'. As yet, however, few national or regional datasets provide insights into the wider impact of this support on measurable outcomes for young children.

This data annexe provides an outline of currently available information on the cognitive development and attainment of young children. It provides a brief commentary on the availability of data and any gaps that have been identified and an overview of the nature and scope of the data that was found.

 A summary table of the data sources of readily accessible, published and comparable data for early years at national, regional and/or local authority level is included in Appendix 4. These data sources have been set against the relevant national indicators for each priority and have been split by the five ECM outcomes.

Search strategy

There are a number of archival databases in the UK, such as the National Digital Archive of Datasets (NDAD) and the UK data archive, some of which have services that facilitate searching or access to macro- and micro-datasets (including ESDS International). Even so, searching for current and recently published data cannot yet be conducted in the same way as searching for published research findings. Access to newly published data is not supported by comprehensive searchable databases in the same way that literature searches are supported. The strategy that was used to obtain data for the Data Annex used a combination of methods, including online access to known government publications (such as the Statistical First Releases from the Department for Children and Families (DCSF) and the Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills (DIUS)); access to data published by the Office of National Statistics, the Home Office and other government departments; data published by the National Health Service and other national, regional and local bodies; and online searches following leads emerging from these publications, research funding council summaries and other literature searches. It should be noted that links to statistical sources that were live at the time of searching may not be live by the time of publication.

Availability of data

Assessments of the cognitive and personal, emotional and social development of young children have traditionally been made when they enter nursery education and primary school. Such assessments include the Assessment Profile on Entry for Children and Toddlers (ASPECT) and Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS) on entry-baseline assessments. Traditionally, this data has been used by teachers primarily to monitor the progress of individual children and was not aggregated and published at local, regional or national level.

From 2006/07, however, schools and early years settings have been under a statutory obligation to provide full data for every individual child in respect of the 13 Foundation Stage summary scales. This has meant that data on young children's progress and development (at the end of the Foundation Stage) in all government-funded early years settings is now available annually at a local authority, regional and national level (the Foundation Stage Profile).

Even so, no information is currently available that explores the link between the attainment data on the Foundation Stage Profile and family-based support programmes. Analysis of the impact of such programmes on early learning could be undertaken at a school level, local level or regional level, as appropriate, but is not currently available.

Nature and scope of the data

Datasets at both national and regional level were explored in order to provide insights into this priority. The focus of the existing analyses (or in some cases, the age of the datasets) meant, however, that few hard conclusions could be drawn as to the role played by support programmes for parents and the wider family in improving children's cognitive development and attainment. For example:

- The National Child Development Study gathered information on the link between parental interest and the attainment of children, but was based on a sample of children born in 1958. It did not provide data on attainment in the early years.

- The Millennium Cohort Study provides information on the impact of parental and family characteristics (such as family structure, parental education and employment) on children's development, but does not provide clear insights into the impact of parental support on development.

- The EPPE study assessed more than 3,000 children at the start of pre-school (around the age of three), but this assessment took place in 1997, before most of the current intervention strategies were introduced.

- BTSS, which took place between 1997 and 2003, was a long-term evaluation of targeted early intervention strategies for PEEP in one disadvantaged area of Oxford, but the extent to which the findings may give an insight into other non-urban areas is not clear.

- The Foundation Stage Profile, published as a Statistical First Release by the DCSF on an annual basis, provides the first comprehensive dataset that, matched to local information on family-based support programmes, could be used to provide some insights into this priority area.

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Glossary of research terms

Meta-analysis The statistical data from a group of studies is pooled and reanalysed as one large dataset. This enables conclusions to be drawn when each individual dataset is too small to provide reliable evidence.

Quasi-experimental A research design which contains some of the controls and manipulations of experimental design but uses nonrandomised groups. This type of design is often used in the social sciences, where randomisation may not be possible nor morally desirable. A study which assesses a group before and after they take part in an initiative is an example of a quasi-experimental design.

Appendix 1: Searching results and search strategy

The first stage in the scoping study process was for the Theme Lead to set the key review questions and search parameters and agree them with the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) scoping team. The list of databases and sources to be searched was also agreed with the Theme Lead. Sets of keywords were selected from the British Education Index (BEI) and were supplemented with free text phrases. The sets comprised an early years set covering a range of concepts equating to the early years 'stage'; and a set of terms covering concepts relating to parental support of early learning.

The keywords were adhered to as far as possible for all bibliographic databases, with closest alternatives selected where necessary. Web-based databases were searched using a more limited number of terms enabling a simultaneous search across the three priority areas within the early years theme.

A list of websites considered relevant to the search was compiled by the NFER team and supplemented by key organisations identified in the National Children's Bureau (NCB) organisations database, the British Education Internet Resource Catalogue (BEIRC) and by others identified in the course of the bibliographic database searches.

Current research was specifically searched for in the CERUK Plus (education and children's services research) database, in the Research Register for Social Care and on the websites of key organisations. Members of the Theme Advisory Group were invited to suggest relevant documents, networks and websites.

The next stage in the process was to carry out searching across the specified databases. Information specialists conducted the database and web searches. Initial screening was done at this stage to ensure the results conformed to the search parameters.

The records selected from the searches were then loaded into a Reference Manager database and the data cleaned. This included removing duplicates, checking citations and sourcing missing abstracts. The data was then transferred to an Excel spreadsheet provided to the researchers on the scoping team.

The scoping team members used information from the abstract and/or the full document to assess the relevance of each piece of literature in addressing the key questions for the review. They also noted the characteristics of the text, such as the type of literature, country of origin and relevance to the research question. A 10 per cent sample was selected at random and checked for accuracy by another member of staff.

The numbers of items found by the initial search, and subsequently selected, can be found in the following table. The three columns represent: items found in the initial searches; items selected for further consideration (i.e. those complying with the search parameters after the removal of duplicates); and items considered relevant to the study by a researcher who had read the abstract and/or accessed the full document.

Table 1. Overview of searches

	Items found	Items selected for consideration	Items identified as relevant to this study
Databases			
Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA)	120	4	0
Australian Education Index (AEI)	245	24	10
British Education Index (BEI)	189	25	16
ChildData	73	27	6
Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)	1,153	31	22
Social Policy and Practice	128	26	6
Internet databases/portals			
British Education Internet Resource Catalogue (BEIRC)	118	3	1
CERUK Plus	183	3	0
Making Research Count	n/a	1	0
Research in Practice	n/a	1	1
Research Register for Social Care	27	1	1
Social Care Online	370	4	2
Organisations	48	26	27

Search strategy

The following section provides information on the keywords and search strategy for each database and web source searched as part of the scoping study. All searches were conducted by information specialists at NFER, with the exception of ChildData, which was searched by an information specialist at the NCB. The keywords used in the searches, together with a brief description of each of the databases searched, are outlined below. Keywords were not exploded due to time limitations, although narrower terms were used wherever possible and have been listed in the search strategy. The following conventions have been used: (ft) denotes that free-text search terms were used and * denotes a truncation of terms. Further searching of health and psychological databases will be carried out for the main review. Author searches and reference harvesting (i.e. following up references cited in text) were not undertaken due to time limitations. These will also be carried out for the main review.

Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA)

(searched via CSA 21/07/08)

ASSIA is an index of articles from over 500 international English-language social science journals.

#1	early years (ft)	#13	#1 or #2 or #3 or #4 or #5 or #6 or #7 or #8 or #9 or #10 or #11 or #12
#2	under fives (ft)		
#3	children's cent* (ft)	#14	parent child relationships
#4	foundation stage (ft)	#15	parental participation
#5	day nurseries	#16	parental support
#6	early childhood education	#17	family support
#7	kindergartens	#18	family involvement
#8	nurseries	#19	home school relationship
#9	nursery schools	#20	learning
#10	playgroups	#21	#14 or #15 or #16 or #17 or #18 or #19 or #20
#11	preschool children		
#12	preschools	#22	#13 and #21

Australian Education Index (AEI)

(searched via Dialog 21/07/08)

AEI is Australia's largest source of education information covering reports, books, journal articles, online resources, conference papers and book chapters.

#1	early years (ft)	#12	parental support (ft)
#2	under fives (ft)	#13	parent-child-relationship or parent-influence or parent-participation or parent-school-relationship
#3	young children		
#4	playgroups		
#5	preschools or preschool-children or preschool-curriculum or preschool-education		
		#14	family-involvement or family-school-relationship
#6	kindergarten or kindergarten children	#15	family support
		#16	learning
#7	nursery schools	#17	learning strategies or learning processes or learning activities
#8	play groups (ft)		
#9	childcare	#18	#12 or #13 or #14 or #15 or #16 or #17
#10	children's centres (ft)		
#11	#1 or #2 or #3 or #4 or #5 or #6 or #7 or #8 or #9 or #10	#19	# 11 and #18

NB. A reasonably large number of the AEI hits were blank records with the message: information withdrawn by the provider.

British Education Index (BEI)

(searched via Dialog 21/07/08)

BEI provides information on research, policy and practice in education and training in the UK. Sources include over 300 journals, mostly published in the UK, plus other material including reports, series and conference papers.

#1	early childhood education	
#2	early years (ft)	
#3	under fives (ft)	
#4	young children	
#5	preschool education	
#6	preschool children	
#7	preschool playgroups (ft)	
#8	nursery schools	
#9	nursery school curriculum	
#10	nursery school education	
#11	nursery classes	
#12	kindergarten	
#13	kindergarten children	
#14	childcare	
#15	playgroups	
#16	day care centres	
#17	foundation stage (ft)	
#18	#1 or #2 or #3 or #4 or #5 or #6 or #7 or #8 or #9 or #10 or #11 or	

#12 or #13 or #14 or #15 or #16 or #17
#19 parental support (ft)
#20 parent participation
#21 parent school relationship
#22 parent pupil relationship
#23 parent child relationship
#24 parent influence
#25 home school relationship
#26 family support (ft)
#27 family involvement
#28 learning
#29 learning activities
#30 learning processes
#31 learning strategies
#32 #19 or #20 or #21 or #22 or #23 or #24 or #25 or #26 or #27 or #28 or #29 or #30 or #31
#33 #18 and #32

British Education Internet Resource Catalogue (BEIRC)

(searched 09/07/08)

The British Education Internet Resource catalogue is a freely accessible database of information about professionally evaluated and described internet sites that support educational research, policy and practice.

#1 early childhood education or preschool education or daycare centres or kindergarten or nursery schools or nursery school curriculum or play groups or primary education or young children

CERUK Plus

(searched 22/07/08)

The CERUK Plus database provides access to information about current and recently completed research, PhD level work and practitioner research in the field of education and children's services.

> #1 early childhood education or early childhood education and care or preschool education or preschool children

ChildData

(search completed 31/07/08)

ChildData is the NCB database, containing details of around 35,000 books, reports and journal articles about children and young people.

#1	preschool children	#13	family support
#2	preschool education	#14	parental involvement (ft)
#3	day care	#15	parental participation (ft)
#4	early childhood care and education	#16	family learning
		#17	family literacy (ft)
#5	early childhood services	#18	home school relations
#6	early primary school age	#19	fathers
#7	children's centres	#20	grandparents
#8	nursery schools	#21	poverty
#9	nursery classes	#22	disadvantage
#10	educare (ft)	#23	#12 or #13 or #14 or #15 or #16 or #17 or #18 or #19 or #20 or #21 or #22
#11	#1 or #2 or #3 or #4 or #5 or #6 or #7 or #8 or #9 or #10		
#12	parental support (ft)	#24	#23 and #11

Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)

(searched via Dialog 21/07/08)

ERIC is sponsored by the United States Department of Education and is the largest education database in the world. Coverage includes research documents, journal articles, technical reports, programme descriptions and evaluations and curricula material.

#1	early childhood education	#11	child-care-centers
#2	early years (ft)	#12	#1 or #2 or #3 or #4 or #5 or #6 or #7 or #8 or #9 or #10 or#11
#3	under fives (ft)		
#4	young children	#13	parental support (ft)
#5	preschool education	#14	parent influence
#6	preschool children	#15	parent participation
#7	preschool playgroups (ft)	#16	parent-child relationship
#8	nursery schools	#17	parent-school relationship
#9	kindergarten	#18	family-school relationship
#10	child-care	#19	family involvement (ft)

#20 family programs	#25 #13 or #14 or #15 or #16 or #17
#21 learning	or #18 or #19 or #20 or #21 or
#22 learning activities	#22 or #23 or #24
#23 learning strategies	#26 #12 and #25
#24 learning processes	

Educational Evidence Portal (EEP)

(searched 13/07/08)

EEP enables users to search for educational evidence from a range of reputable sources via a single search.

#1   early years

Making Research Count

(browsed 13/07/08)

Making Research Count is a collaborative national research dissemination network based regionally in the social work departments of nine UK universities. RESEARCH NEWS, a newsletter that highlights recent or current research undertaken in the Making Research Count network, was browsed.

Research in Practice

(browsed 13/07/08)

Research in Practice is the largest children and families research implementation project in England and Wales. It is a department of the Dartington Hall Trust run in collaboration with the Association of Directors of Children's Services, the University of Sheffield and a network of over 100 participating agencies in the UK. The EvidenceBank and publications section were browsed.

Research Register for Social Care (RRSC)

(searched 13/07/08)

The RRSC provides access to information about ongoing and completed social care research that has been subject to independent ethical and scientific review.

#1 pre-school children or early years (ft)	#2 children's centres
	#3 childcare (ft)

NB. Student research excluded.
Social Care Online

(searched 13/07/08)

Social Care Online is the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) database covering an extensive range of information and research on all aspects of social care. Content is drawn from a range of sources including journal articles, websites, research reviews, legislation and government documents and user knowledge.

#1   pre-school children

#2   integrated services and early years (ft)

#3   early years (ft) and health

#4   parenting and early years (ft)

Social Policy and Practice

(searched via Silverplatter 21/07/08)

Social Policy and Practice is a bibliographic database with abstracts covering evidence-based social policy, public health, social services, and mental and community health. Content is from the UK with some material from the USA and Europe.

#1   early years
#2   preschool education
#3   early childhood education
#4   kindergarten
#5   nursery
#6   childcare
#7   children's centres
#8   #1 or #2 or #3 or #4 or #5 or #6 or #7
#9   parental support
#10   parental involvement
#11   parental participation
#12   #9 or #10 or #11
#13   #8 and #12

Organisations

The following websites were browsed for additional sources not already found in the database searches. This entailed browsing through the publications and/or research and policy sections.

Table 2. Additional information sources

Organisation	URL	Records selected
Alliance for Childhood	www.allianceforchildhood.org	0 (1 lead)
Australian Council for Educational Research	www.acer.edu.au	0
Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations	www.dest.gov.au	0
Bernard van Leer Foundation (found via DECET)	www.bernardvanleer.org	0
British Association for Early Childhood Education	www.early-education.org.uk	0
British Educational Research Association (BERA)	www.bera.ac.uk/	0
Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE) at LSE	http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/case	0
Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion (CESI)	www.cesi.org.uk/	0
Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood www.edfac.unimelb.edu.au/ceiec(found via Alliance for Childhood)	www.edfac.unimelb.edu.au/ceiec	1
Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC)	www.crec.co.uk	0
Centre for Research in Social Policy (Loughborough)	www.crsp.ac.uk	0
Children in Scotland	www.childreninscotland.org.uk	1
Children in Wales	www.childreninwales.org.uk	1
Daycare Trust	www.daycaretrust.org.uk	0
Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) research pages	www.dcsf.gov.uk/research	2
Department of Education NI	www.deni.gov.uk	1
DOH research pages (for health in early years settings)	www.dh.gov.uk/en/Researchanddevelopment/Researchanddevelopmentpublications/index.htm	0
Diversity in Early Childhood Education and Training (DECET)	www.decet.org/	0
Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) research pages	www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5	0
Effective Provision of Pre-School	http://k1.ioe.ac.uk/schools/ecpe/eppe/index.htm	0

Education (EPPE) Project		
EPPI Centre Early Years Review Group	http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms	2
Evidence Network	http://evidencenetwork.org	0
Families, Children and Childcare Study	www.familieschildrenchildcare.org/fccc_frames_home.html	0
Families, early learning and literacy research group (FELL)	www.education.ox.ac.uk/research/resgroup/fell/index.php	2
Family and Parenting Institute	www.familyandparenting.org.uk	5
Joseph Rowntree Foundation	www.jrf.org.uk	1
Learning and Teaching Scotland link pages to early years research	www.ltscotland.org.uk/earlyyears/resources/publications/resourcesresearch/index.asp	0
Literacy Trust	www.literacytrust.org.uk	3
National Association for Primary Education	www.nape.org.uk	0
National Academy of Parenting Practitioners	www.parentingacademy.org	0
National Campaign for Real Nursery Education	www.ncne.co.uk	0
National Centre for Social Research	www.natcen.ac.uk	0
National Children's Bureau. Early Childhood Forum	www.ncb.org.uk/ecf	0
New Zealand Council for Educational Research	www.nzcer.org.nz	3
New Zealand Ministry of Education	www.minedu.govt.nz	1
National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)	www.nfer.ac.uk	0
NSPCC	www.nspcc.org.uk	0
Peers Early Education Partnership	www.peep.org.uk	3
Preschool Learning Alliance	www.pre-school.org.uk	2
Scottish Educational Research Association – Early Years Network	www.sera.ac.uk/sitepages/earlyyearsnetwork.htm	0
Scottish Government	www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Research	0
Social Exclusion Task Force	www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/social_exclusion_task_force	0
Social Policy Research Unit (York)	www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru	0
Surestart Research	www.surestart.gov.uk/research	0
Welsh Assembly	www.wales.gov.uk	0

Appendix 2: Review parameters

This appendix contains the parameters for the review, set by the Theme Advisory Group.

Brief description of priority

Rationale: Family-based support for early learning is now recognised as a central feature of successful outcomes for young children and as one of the most significant contributors to children's continued success in the education system. A specific emphasis on early learning within outreach and family-based support programmes can also be a key to improved relationships between practitioners and family members and between family members and children, leading to both achievement and enjoyment for children and families. Families may need greater support during periods of educational transition.

A number of successful initiatives have been put in place recently to support this understanding and it is timely to pull together and disseminate evidence and practice on the specific theme of support for learning, extending this beyond parents to look at practice developed for the wider family and for informal childcare. Strands of current policy and practice development which relate directly to this priority include the aim to train and qualify the children's workforce in skills and knowledge related to family-based support and the support for outreach workers within children's centres.

Main (research) questions to be answered and issues to be covered

1. What evidence is there for the effectiveness of family-based support of early learning in improving children's outcomes?

2. What evidence is there on approaches that support the engagement of family members (especially parents and carers) in young children's learning?

3. How might support-needs differ for different groups of parents/carers, such as low-income families; fathers, mothers, other family members/carers; parents/carers from black or other minority ethnic groups?

Are there any cross-cutting issues to be included?

- Child poverty
- Equality and diversity
- Leadership

What is the likely geographical scope of the searches?

☒	**England**	☒	**Wales**
☒	**Scotland**	☒	**N Ireland**
☒	**Republic of Ireland**	☒	**Australia/New Zealand**
☒	**USA/Canada**	☐	**Other countries (*please specify*)**

Any comments Main focus to be on studies carried out/including UK, especially England.

Age range

Birth to five years, with a particular focus on under-threes.

Literature search dates

Start year: 2000.

What type of literature do you wish to include?

☒ **Published research studies (books and journal articles)**

☒ **Conference reports; committee papers; unpublished reports**
 ('grey literature')

☒ **Policy documents**

☐ **Practice descriptions and guides**

☒ **Other types of literature -**

please name Information on current research

Which key words should be used for searching the literature?

Parental support set: parental support; parental involvement; parent participation; parent school relationship; parent child relationship; parent influence; home school relationship; family support; family involvement.

Learning set: learning; learning activities; learning processes; learning strategies.

Early childhood set: early childhood education; early years; under fives; young children; preschool education; preschool children; preschool playgroups; nurseries; nursery schools; nursery school curriculum; nursery school education; nursery classes;

kindergarten; kindergarten children; young children; childcare; playgroups; day nurseries; children's centres; foundation stage; primary schools; primary education.

Suggestions for websites, databases and networks to be searched or included as key sources

National Academy for Parenting Practitioners.

Key texts/books/seminal works suggested by the Theme Advisory Group

Blanden, J. (2006) *'Bucking the trend': what enables those who are disadvantaged in childhood to succeed later in life?* (working paper No. 31), London: Department for Work and Pensions.

Brooker, L. (2002) *Starting school: young children's learning cultures*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Davis, H., Day, C. and Bidmead, C. (2002) *Working in partnership with parents: the Parent Adviser Model*, London: The Psychological Corporation.

Desforges, C. with 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: DfES (available at www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR433.pdf, accessed 15 July 2008).

Draper, L. and Duffy, B. (2006) 'Working with parents', in Pugh, G and Duffy, B (eds) *Contemporary issues in the early years*, fourth edn, London: Sage Publications, pp 151–162.

Goldman, R. (2005) *Fathers' involvement in their children's education*, London: NFPI.

Harris, D. and Spencer, J. (2002) *Barriers to parental involvement in nursery, playgroup and school in early years. Trainers anti-racist network partnership with parents: an anti-discriminatory approach*, Walleseye: EYTARN.

Moran, P., Ghate, D. and van der Merwe, A. (2004) *What works in parenting support? A review of the international evidence* (DfES research report 574), London: DfES (available at www.prb.org.uk/wwiparenting/RR574.pdf, accessed 15 July 2008).

National Evaluation of Sure Start (2006) *Outreach and home visiting services in Sure Start Local Programmes*, London: DfES (available at www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/NESS2006FR017.pdf, accessed 15 July 2008).

National Literacy Trust (2001) *Parental involvement and literacy achievement: the research evidence and the way forward* (consultation paper), London: National Literacy Trust (available at www.literacytrust.org.uk/research/consultation.pdf, accessed 15 July 2008).

Nutbrown, C., Hannon, P. and Morgan, A. (2008) *Early literacy work with families: policy, practice and research*, London: Sage.

Page, J., Whitting, G. and McLean, C. (2008) *Engaging effectively with black and minority ethnic parents in children's and parental services* (DCSF research report 013), London: DCSF (available at www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RR013.pdf, accessed 15 July)

The Pen Green Centre for Under Fives and Families (2004) 'All about … working with parents', *Nursery world*, 3919, 3 June, pp 15–22.

Peters, M., Seeds. K., Goldstein, A. and Coleman, N. (2008) *Parental involvement in Children's Education Survey 2007* (DCFS research brief 034), London: DCSF.

Pre-School Learning Alliance (2005a) *Fathers matter* (Leaflet), London: Pre-School Learning Alliance (PSLA).

Pre-School Learning Alliance (2005b) *Fathers matter: ideas and practical tips for involving fathers in your setting*, London: PSLA (available at www.pre-school.org.uk/documents/238, accessed 15 July 2008).

Quinton, D. (2004) *Supporting parents: messages from research*, London: Jessica Kingsley.

Sammons, P., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Taggart, B., Barreau, S. and Grabbe, Y. (2007) *Effective Pre-School and Primary Education 3–11 Project (EPPE 3–11) influences on children's development and progress in key stage 2: social/behavioural outcomes in year 5* (DCSF research report 007), London: DCSF.

Sammons, P., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Taggart, B., Barreau, S. and Grabbe, Y. (2008a) *The influence of school and teaching quality on children's progress in primary school* (DCSF research report 028), London: DCSF (available at www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RR028.pdf, accessed 15 July).

Sammons, P., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Taggart, B., Grabbe, Y. and Barreau, S. (2008b) *Influences on children's attainment and progress in key stage 2: cognitive outcomes in year 5*, London: DCFS (available at www.ioe.ac.uk/schools/ecpe/eppe/eppe3-11/eppe3-11%20pdfs/eppepapers/Tier%202%20full%20report%20-%20Final.pdf, accessed 15 July).

Seaman, P., Turner, K., Hill, M., Stafford, A. and Walker, M. (2006) *Parenting and children's resilience in disadvantaged communities*, London: National Children's Bureau for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2004) 'Educational disadvantage in the early years: how do we overcome it? Some lessons from research', *European early childhood education research journal*, vol 12, p 2.

Siraj-Blatchford, I. and McCallum, B. (2005) *An evaluation of* Share *at the foundation stage, final evaluation report*, London: University of London, Institute of Education.

Siraj-Blatchford, I., Sylva, K., Muttock, S., Gilden, R. and Bell, D. (2002) *Researching effective pedagogy in the early years* (DfES Research Report 356), London: DfES (available at www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR356.pdf, accessed 15 July 2008).

Siraj-Blatchford, I., Sylva, K., Taggart, B., Sammons, P., Melhuish, E. and Elliot, K. (2003) *Intensive case studies of practice across the foundation stage* (technical paper 10), London: DfES.

Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2004) *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project: final report. A longitudinal study funded by the DfES 1997–2004*, London: DfES (available at www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/SSU_FR_2004_01.pdf, accessed 15 July 2008).

Tunstill, J., Meadows, P., Allnock, D., Akhurst, S., Chrysanthou, J., Garbers, C., Morley, A. and van de Velde, T. (2005) *Implementing Sure Start Local Programmes: an in-depth study*, London: DfES (available at www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/NESS2005FR007%20.pdf, accessed 15 July 2008).

Tunstill, J., Meadows, P., Allnock, D., Akhurst, S. and Garbers, C. (2005) *Implementing Sure Start Local Programmes: an integrated overview of the first four years* (NESS Summary SF010), London: DfES.

Whalley, M. (2007) *Involving parents in their children's learning*, second edn, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Williams, B., Williams, J. and Ullman, A. (2002) *Parental involvement in education* (DFES research brief 332), London: DfES.

Appendix 3: Validated local practice process and assessment criteria

What is validated local practice?

Validated local practice examples describe how local authorities and their partners have successfully tackled key challenges and improved outcomes for children and young people. Their success in achieving improved outcomes has been assessed as being sufficiently well-evidenced to merit inclusion within the review.

Collection methods

C4EO collected practice examples by sending invitations to local authorities and trusts to submit promising or proven practice examples to C4EO relevant to each theme after the knowledge workshops. A call for practice examples was also placed on the C4EO website and publicised through various publications. Members of the Thematic Advisory Groups were also asked to use their own contacts and networks to publicise the call for practice examples. Respondents submitted examples in hard copy or via email.

Validation process

Local authorities and their partners were asked to submit their practice examples in a form that was designed to encourage them to fully describe their practice and to provide evidence of how it had improved outcomes. The forms were then assessed by a validation panel made up of a small group of sector specialists: professionals drawn from across the children's sector who have an expertise and a track record of achievement in [theme]. Two sector specialists assessed each example against the following validation criteria:

Adequacy of the information supplied Is there enough to apply the validation process? If not, and if the practice has potential, NFER will request more information; we will try to do this at screening stage.

Strength of the rationale Was the intervention/practice fit for purpose and based upon a clear and sound rationale? Was it based on prior and good quality evidence of need and what works in similar contexts?

Sufficiency of impact and outcome evidence Is there sufficient external and/or internal evaluation evidence that the practice/intervention has made a difference and led to improved outcomes? Are there good practitioner, service user and other stakeholder views? Do others implementing the same or similar practice or strategy changes or interventions report similar findings?

Evidence of what has/has not worked and why Is there some good guidance here which will be useful to others? What are the golden threads for what works? What barriers and ways of overcoming these have been documented?

Actual or potential for replication or transfer to other contexts and settings What evidence is there that the practice has already been successfully transferred to different settings, or has the potential for replication? Which elements are especially transferable? What elements are non-negotiable, and which are open to adaptation to suit other contexts? What do people need to put in place to transfer the practice, without substantial loss of effect?

Where two sector specialists assessed an example as being strongly supported by practice experience and evidence or describing promising practice along with a good rationale for the intervention and some evidence of success and potential to be replicated, the Theme Lead was asked to review the assessment. Only examples which were endorsed by the Theme Lead were validated.

This review has only drawn on validated practice examples.

Appendix 4: NI Indicators and key data sources

Relevant National Indicators and data sources for Early Years Theme, Family-based Support for Early Learning

ECM outcome	National Indicator (NI)	NI Detail	Data source (published information)	Scale (published information)	Links to data source
Be Healthy	NI50	Emotional health of children	Millennium Cohort Study	National (UK and country level)	http://www.cls.ioe.ac.uk/studies.asp?section=0001000200010011
		% of 5-16 year olds with mental health problem	Mental Health of Children and Young People in Great Britain, 2004, ONS	National data only – five years plus, age groups are amalgamated and not presented separately.	http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_health/GB2004.pdf
	NI51	Effectiveness of child and adolescent mental health services	Nothing identified for early years as yet		
	NI53	Prevalence of breast-feeding at 6-8 weeks from birth	National Evaluation of Sure Start (using data collected from the Infant Feeding Survey, 2005)	Comparison of 310 Sure Start Local Programme areas with data for England	http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/publications/0/1908/

			Infant Feeding Survey, 2005	Sample survey of 9,416 mothers	http://www.ic.nhs.uk/statistics-and-data-collections/health-and-lifestyles-related-surveys/infant-feeding-survey/infant-feeding-survey-2005
	NI126	Early access for women to maternity services	Nothing identified for early years as yet		
	N154	Services for disabled children	NFER/RNIB survey of local authority VI services	National (100 English local authorities and/or consortia)	http://www.rnib.org.uk/aboutus/Research/reports/edemp/Pages/edemp.aspx
	NI55	Obesity among primary school age children in Reception Year	Health Profile of England	National and regional	http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsStatistics/DH_093465
				National and local authority	http://www.apho.org.uk/default.aspx?QN=P_HEALTH_PROFILES
	NI57	Children and young people's participation in high quality PE and sport	Health Profile of England	National and regional	http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsStatistics/DH_093465
			PE and Sport Survey 2008/09	National and local authority	http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/_doc/14380/DCSF-RR168.pdf

			Statistics on Obesity, Physical Activity and Diet: England, 2008	National and regional	http://www.ic.nhs.uk/webfiles/publications/opan08/OPAD%20Jan%202008%20final%20v7%20with%20links%20and%20buttons%20-%20NS%20logo%20removed%202%200112008.pdf
	NI58	Emotional and behavioural health of children in care	DCSF: Children Looked After in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31 March 2009	National, regional and LA	http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000878/index.shtml
	Additional indicators	Children's tooth decay	Health Profile of England	National and regional	http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsStatistics/DH_093465
				Local authority	http://www.apho.org.uk/default.aspx?QN=P_HEALTH_PROFILES
		Infant mortality	Health Profile of England	National and regional	http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsStatistics/DH_093465

			Office for National Statistics	National and regional	http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/ipm0909.pdf
			Gestation-specific infant mortality by social and biological factors 2006, Office for National Statistics	National	http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/hsqsb0509.pdf
		Social inequalities – birthweight	The Health of Children and Young People	England and Wales, plus most deprived/least deprived areas	http://www.statistics.gov.uk/children/downloads/inequalities.pdf
			National Evaluation of Sure Start	Comparison of 310 Sure Start Local Programme areas with data for England	http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/publications/0/1908/
			Office for National Statistics	England and Wales, regional	http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_population/FM1-37/FM1-37.pdf

Stay safe	NI64	Child protection plans lasting 2 years or more	National Evaluation of Sure Start	Comparison of Sure Start Local Programme areas with data for England	http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/publications/0/1908/
	NI65	Children becoming the subject of a Child Protection Plan for a second or subsequent time	Nothing identified yet for early years		
	NI69	Children who experience bullying	Nothing identified yet for early years		

	NI70	Hospital admissions caused by unintentional and deliberate injuries to children and young people	National Evaluation of Sure Start	Comparison of 310 Sure Start Local Programme areas with data for England	http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/publications/0/1908/
	NI71	Children who have run away from home/care overnight	Nothing identified yet for early years		
	Additional indicators	Child homicides	Home Office Statistics Bulletin: Homicides, Firearm Offences and Intimate Violence	National	http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs09/hosb0209.pdf
Enjoy and achieve	NI72	Achievement of at least 72 points across the Early Years FS with at least 6 in each of the scales in PSED and CLL	DCSF: Foundation Stage Profile	National, Regional and Local Authority level	http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000879/index.shtml
	NI92	Narrowing the gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years FS Profile and the rest	DCSF: Foundation Stage Profile	National, Regional and Local Authority level	http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000879/index.shtml

	NI103	Special educational needs - statements issued within 26 weeks	Nothing identified yet for early years		
Economic well-being	NI116	Proportion of children in poverty	English House Condition Survey (EHCS)	National	http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/housingresearch/housingsurveys/englishhousecondition/ehcsdatasupporting/ehcsstandardtables/disadvantageliving/
	NI188	Take-up of formal childcare by low-income working families	National Evaluation of Sure Start	Comparison of 310 Sure Start Local Programme areas with data for England	http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/publications/0/1908/
	Additional indicators	Early years provision	Childcare and early years providers survey	Sample survey: 109,700 childcare providers. National and regional.	http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RR164(R).pdf
			Childcare and early years survey of parents	Sample survey: just under 7,100 parents. National and regional.	http://www.natcen.ac.uk/pzMedia/uploads/Downloadable/d96d563b-c083-428d-93ed-402fa4c44bdb.pdf
			Millennium Cohort Study	Sample survey. National (UK and country level)	http://www.cls.ioe.ac.uk/studies.asp?section=0001000200010011

			DCSF: Provision for Children Under Five Years of Age in England: First Statistical Release	National, Regional and Local Authority level	http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000848/index.shtml

MARCH 2010

Improving children's attainment through a better quality of family-based support for early learning

This knowledge review tells us what works in improving family-based support for children's learning. It is based on a rapid review of the research literature involving systematic searching, analysis of key data, validated local practice examples and views from both people using services and providers. It summarises the best available evidence that will help service service providers to improve services and ultimately outcomes for children, young people and their families.