

The Coaching Early Conversation Interaction and Language (CECIL) project included two Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) led interventions which were launched in Nottinghamshire and Hackney to help practitioners in private, voluntary and independent (PVI) settings to improve their practice to support the language and communication development of 2-year-olds.

The Nottinghamshire Healthcare’s Children’s Centre SLT Team’s CECIL programme included group training sessions, individual coaching sessions where practitioners would video their practice and receive feedback from a SLT, as well as KIT phone calls, a handbook and coaching reflection tools and networks sessions.

The Children's Integrated SLT Service for Hackney and the City adapted their Launchpad for Language programme. Each PVI setting was allocated a link SLT for half a day per week. Settings chose a range of activities, parent workshops and coaching sessions to take part in and were supported by their SLT to implement them.

The impact evaluation was conducted by a research team at the University of Oxford. This feasibility study focused on research methods to test whether the interventions in Nottinghamshire and Hackney had effects on children’s language or on practitioners’ confidence and skill at supporting children’s language development.

A research team at IES led the implementation and process evaluation to explore the following 5 areas:

Perceived impacts on practitioner behaviour and the nursery environment

- Practitioners reported that they have increased knowledge and awareness of individual children’s language, which allows them to identify gaps and tailor strategies.
- Practitioners reported that they have increased skills, confidence, and motivation to support children’s language and communication development.

Perceived impacts on children’s language and communication skills

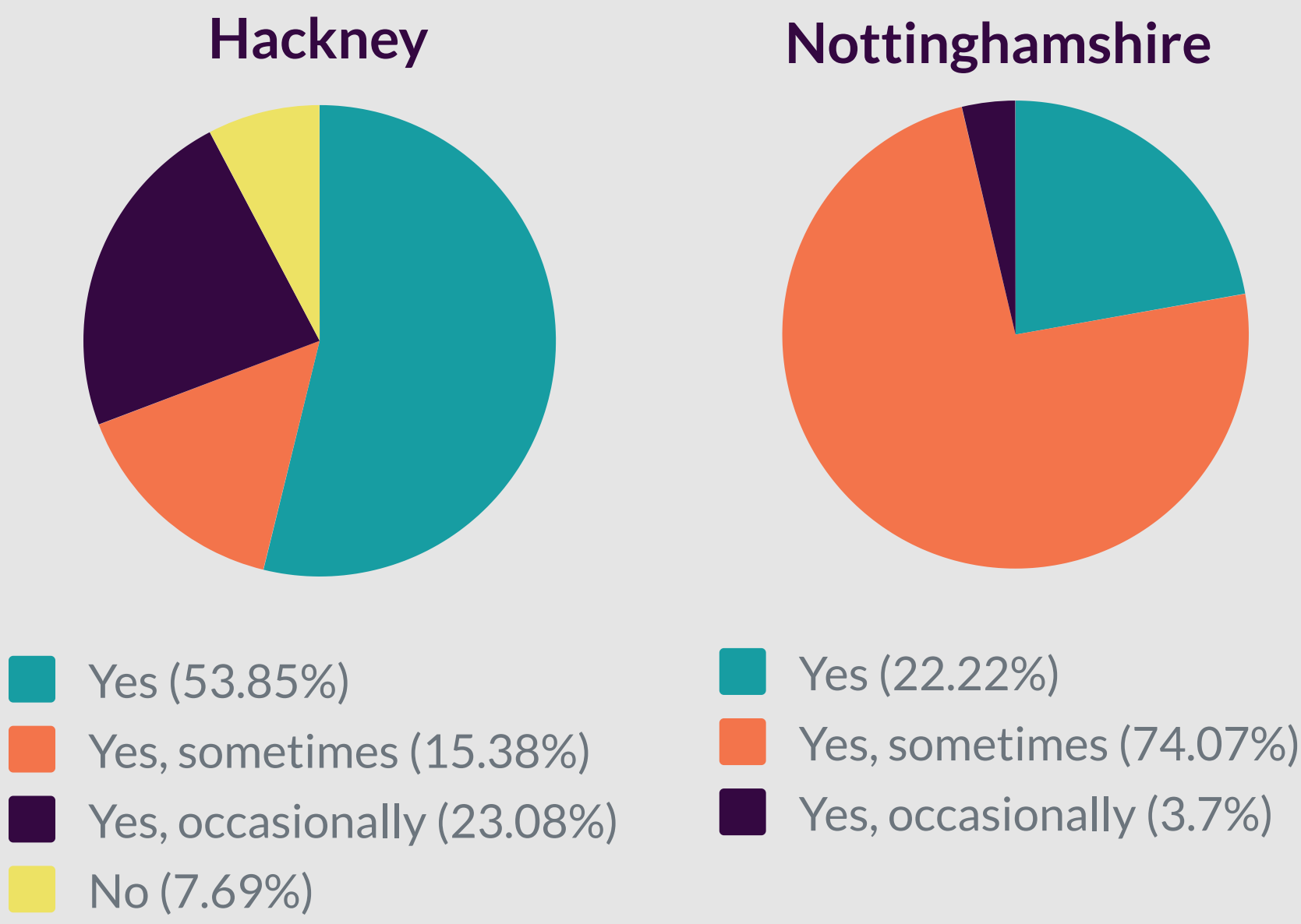
- Both programmes appeared to support the language of all children but were particularly beneficial for targeted approaches with children who were shyer or had additional support needs, eg EAL.
- Practitioners observed knock-on benefits for personal, social and emotional development, eg increased verbal negotiation among children.

- Strategies used by practitioners enable interactions to be child led e.g. balancing comments and questions, and OWLing, (a strategy where practitioners are encouraged to Observe, Wait and Listen in order to allow the child to lead the interaction).



Are interventions useful, easy to implement and sustainable?

- The strategies and/ or activities learned by practitioners on the programmes were widely applicable and sustainable, suitable for universal and targeted approaches.
- The majority of practitioners were able to put their learning into practice. Our survey asked practitioners ‘have you been able to put your learning from the programme into practice?’ The responses were:



Barriers and enablers for nurseries to participating in the interventions

- **Barriers:** Staffing shortages – this was extra challenging in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic as staff could not be transferred between rooms or bubbles.
- Technical issues – with accessing training, coaching or learning materials, including filming videos. There was a strong preference for face-to-face learning.
- **Enablers:** SLT support – the SLT were highly valued by settings for their expertise and facilitating practitioners to benefit from the programmes.
- Manager support – including allowing practitioners space and time for participating in the programme and helping disseminate learning.

Key considerations for delivering training within the PVI sector

- Printing or otherwise preparing/providing materials and resources helps to reduce costs and facilitate dissemination of learning at settings.
- Settings may not have the technology or skills necessary to engage with online learning and video recording, so this could be provided or support given.
- Liaising with settings is important to agree timing for visits or coaching sessions to fit around setting timetables and to avoid disruption, given strict staff:child ratios. Training/ coaching could be delivered at an alternative local venue if there is not room in the settings.

Children’s language



borderline statistically significant)* This suggests there may be an effect of the intervention, despite the challenges caused by the pandemic to both the intervention itself and the evaluation.

- In Hackney, no such difference was found but this may have been caused by the low parent response rate.

Practitioners’ confidence and skills

- Practitioners were given the same survey in autumn 2020 and again in summer 2021, asking about their confidence, skills and interactions with supporting children's language development, and could respond either online or on paper.
- The sample of practitioners matched across autumn 2020 and summer 2021 was quite small.
- 41 responded in autumn and only 19 in summer in Nottinghamshire.
- 56 responded in autumn and 20 in summer in Hackney.
- No significant differences were found, but this may be due at least in part to the pandemic and its consequences for settings and for the evaluation. Any effect found is treated only as indicative.

**Because the sample size was low and there was a drop in response rates in summer 2021, results must be interpreted cautiously. Importantly, the evaluation found that an RCT trial was feasible and acceptable and there was evidence of the validity, reliability and practical utility of child and practitioner measures.*

Effect of interventions on child language

