

Coaching Early Conversation Interaction and Language (CECIL) Nottinghamshire sustainability evaluation

Implementation and process evaluation

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Institute for Employment Studies

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Executive summary

Introduction

Successful development of early language skills, such as vocabulary, is important for a variety of outcomes later in life, including academic achievement, the ability to get a job, and mental health (Kerr & Franklin, 2021; Bleses et al., 2016; Law et al., 2009; Law et al., 2017; Stewart and Waldfogel, 2017). Indeed, poor early skill development tends to negatively impact social mobility in the long term (Stewart & Waldfogel, 2017).

For the Coaching Early Conversation Interaction and Language (CECIL) project phase 1, the Nottinghamshire Healthcare's Children's Speech and Language Therapy Team (henceforth known as Nottinghamshire) built upon their existing programme to incorporate further coaching elements and focused on supporting early years practitioners in private, voluntary and independent (PVI) settings with the aim of improving staff practice and child outcomes around language and communication for two-year-olds. The phase 1 implementation and process evaluation (IPE) was led by IES and a phase 1 report published (Dawson, Huxley and Garner, 2022). Phase 2 of the project added further sustainability work provided to the settings to help embed the CECIL project and this is evaluated in this report under the title Nottinghamshire CECIL sustainability programme.

CECIL Nottinghamshire sustainability intervention

The Nottinghamshire Team developed the 'Let's Interact' programme by adapting '*Learning Language and Loving It*'™ - *The Hanen Program for Early Childhood Educators/Teachers*, under licence agreement by The Hanen Early Language Program. The Speech and Language Therapy Team had previously delivered the 'Let's Interact' training programme to early years practitioners in early years settings including schools and PVI nurseries.

The content and format of the Let's Interact training that the team had been delivering previously included opportunities to observe high quality practice, to use and refine new skills in practice, to receive individualised feedback and time and support for self-reflection. For the CECIL project, the Speech and Language Therapy Team added a coaching and mentoring element to Let's Interact to create an 'enhanced' version of the programme which aims to facilitate and embed longer term skills gains.

The CECIL programme includes: an initial information session for staff, group training sessions, three individual coaching sessions with video and feedback to settings, two keep in touch (KIT) phone calls, language lead network meeting, text messaging and a pool of extra coaching sessions for practitioners needing extra support. Let's Interact training materials and the *Learning Language and Loving It*™ guidebook were also provided to each practitioner.

The additional support provided to the settings in the 21/22 school year to embed the CECIL project (the sustainability aspect) included two additional review observation sessions after the end of the training in March 2022 and providing a pack of resources 'Let's keep interacting' which they called a sustainability menu.

During the first phase of the project in 2020, 20 settings were randomised (using minimisation techniques) to take part across the early starter group (11 settings would receive the enhanced intervention in the 2020/21 academic year) and late starter group (nine settings would receive the CECIL intervention in the 2021/22 academic year). This evaluation focuses on the late starter practitioner group, many of which were still actively involved and in contact with the Nottinghamshire team because they had been less disrupted in their delivery due to Covid-19.

Theory of change

Following on from the series of three Intervention Delivery and Evaluation Analysis (IDEA) workshops (Humphreys et al., 2016) that Nottinghamshire had in the previous phase 1 project, we carried out a further IDEA workshop in July 2022 to review the sustainability work and update the Theory of Change (TOC). The TOC model was updated by IES with input from Nottinghamshire following the final workshop.

Methodology

The IES IPE team worked closely with Nottinghamshire in a 'critical friend' model throughout the period of September 2021- September 2022, following on from phase 1. This including supporting the Speech and Language Therapy (SaLT) team who carried out some of their own evaluation work during this phase as part of the development of the additional support sessions and resources. The SaLT team ran two workshops (one with practitioners and one with managers in spring 2022), a one-on-one session with a further manager and sent out questionnaires to those who could not attend. IES contributed advice about the materials for the workshops and questionnaires that were sent out to practitioners and managers. The SaLT team summarised the findings into a short report which was shared with the internal 'critical friend' team (made up of IES, The Sutton Trust and Janet Grauberg, Scale-up consultant) and then was used to develop the additional coaching and sustainability menu resources. The IPE then explored how the intervention sustainability work was delivered, and identified moderating/contextual factors influencing potential impact and which may explain quantitative findings. It also sought to identify evidence of effectiveness and issues which need to be considered for a wider roll-out of the intervention. The IPE included 6 semi-structured case studies, which included telephone or video interviews with 11 practitioners and managers. Please note that overall sample numbers are relatively small as the study itself is quite small with less than 10 settings receiving the intervention. Although IES heard a range of views on the programme, it is possible that those who engaged positively with the programme may have been more motivated to engage with interviews.

Findings

Our findings are grouped around five Implementation and Process Evaluation research questions as follows:

What evidence is there of change in practitioner behaviour and/or perceived impacts on the nursery environment with regards to language and communication support due to taking part in the Nottinghamshire CECIL sustainability programme?

Overall, the key findings from managers and practitioners suggest:

- Most practitioners reported increased skills, confidence and motivation to support children's language and communication development and make referrals for children who needed additional support.
- Most practitioners reported increased knowledge and awareness of individual children's language, which allows them to identify gaps and tailor strategies to support their language and communication development.
- Changes to the environment included sharing learning and resources with other parts of the setting.
- Increased professionalisation of practitioners and opportunities for them to progress within their roles.

What, if any, are the perceived impacts on language and communication skills among children supported by practitioners who have received the Nottinghamshire CECIL sustainability support?

The key findings regarding perceived impacts on children's language and communication skills were:

- The programme appeared to be a universal intervention that practitioners felt supported the language of all children at their settings but were particularly beneficial for targeted approaches with children who were struggling or had speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) (eg. children with English as an Additional Language (EAL) or shy or reluctant children).
- Practitioners reported that improved language and communication skills also had benefits for personal, social and emotional development with increased turn-taking and verbal negotiation between children instead of just taking toys or objects from each other which could lead to conflict and fights. Practitioners also reported children displayed greater confidence talking to adults and improvements in attention.

Do settings find the Nottinghamshire CECIL sustainability support useful and are they able to incorporate it into their practice? Do they feel able to sustain this in the longer term?

The key findings regarding how useful the programme was and if settings were able to incorporate their learnings sustainably were:

- The training and coaching sessions were useful for practitioners to incorporate learning into practice. The strategies and activities learned by practitioners on the programmes were widely applicable, suitable for universal and targeted approaches.
- Practitioners reported using more strategies which enable interactions to be child led (eg slowing down, balancing comments and questions, and OWLing).¹
- Additional support such as additional coaching had helped practitioners to improve their practice, embed learning and refresh their knowledge.
- Practitioners and managers felt able to continue to use all the strategies they had learned in the longer term as a result but would also benefit from continued support from the SaLT team in some form.

What are the barriers or enablers for nurseries to participating in the Nottinghamshire CECIL sustainability support?

The following summarises the main barriers and enablers for nurseries to participate in the programme:

Barriers

- **Staff time and resource challenges** – Many settings experienced staff shortages (due to ratios and recruitment issues) and limited time to devote to CPD in general.
- **Technical issues** – with accessing training, coaching or learning materials. In Nottinghamshire especially, the videos were not always the ideal setup in terms of quality and framing. There was a strong preference for face-to-face learning.

Enablers

- **Manager support** – including assisting practitioners with videos and resolving tech issues, helping disseminate learning from the programme and allowing practitioners space and time for participating in the programme.
- **Support** – the SaLT was highly valued at each setting for their expertise in supporting children's language and communication skills and facilitating practitioners to benefit from the programme, as well as being an approachable source of support with specific queries or needs at the setting.

¹ A strategy where practitioners are encouraged to Observe, Wait and Listen in order to allow the child to lead the interaction.

- **Face-to-face delivery** – Managers and practitioners preferred face-to-face delivery over remote delivery because it meant they did not need to rely on a stable Wi-Fi connection and it allowed for greater opportunities for interactive learning.

What factors may need to be considered in scaling up the Nottinghamshire CECIL sustainability support to deliver it in more nurseries?

Some factors to consider when scaling up the Nottinghamshire CECIL sustainability programme are:

- As the Nottinghamshire CECIL sustainability programme includes coaching sessions with individual practitioners focused around their bespoke needs in the context of their individual setting, any new members recruited to the delivery team as part of scale-up will need to be quite experienced and understand the Early years curriculum and Ofsted inspection framework, the needs of nurseries, Early years practitioners and the PVI sector, and the local context in terms of levels of need, and services and resources for signposting.
- As settings did not always have the technology or a stable internet connection to facilitate virtual delivery or video examples of practice, it may be necessary to allocate a budget for providing some/ all settings with technology, such as tablets, as either a loan or permanent resource.
- Practitioners at some settings created posters or PowerPoint presentations to share learning and remind themselves and other staff of key strategies. When scaling up delivery to a larger number of settings, a budget could be allocated for printing and distributing resources that could be shared or displayed at settings.
- Most practitioners reported being able to engage with the programme wholly within their working hours, but some reported doing reading or other activities in their personal time. It would be good to be mindful of this and to keep practitioner time needed as manageable as possible so that this is not off-putting to settings when scaling up the intervention.

The future of Nottinghamshire CECIL sustainability programme

Considerations for future versions of the Nottinghamshire CECIL sustainability programme included the following:

- Consideration 1: If a manager or practitioner leaves the setting or moves room within the setting, the momentum from the programme and focus on language may be diminished. High quality resources should be accessible to all members of the setting (printed out if possible), and additional support should be offered to practitioners who did not take part in the programme or new managers when they start at a setting.
- Consideration 2: The sustainability programme enables settings to have more time with the SaLT which provides a good opportunity to focus on further dissemination and retention of knowledge within the setting. SaLTs should consider with managers how the programme could be used to help retain staff and knowledge, for example by creating new roles.

-
- Consideration 3: ensure all training and coaching sessions specifically relate back to the LLLI book/ Let's Interact booklet to maximise the benefits of these resources and to keep them in the front of practitioners' minds.
 - Consideration 4: Additional coaching was useful as practitioners change roles. For example, if they move to a different room, they could learn to adapt their practice to the new room. SaLTs should consider how to help these practitioners and how the strategies used with two-year-olds could be adapted for use with older children.
 - Consideration 5: Offer additional coaching on a termly basis to keep learning fresh and embedded. The needs of the setting should be taken into account. Where practitioners have left the setting, other support is needed to ensure the learning is not lost. Further emphasis and support on cascading learning for practitioners and managers would help with this.
 - Consideration 6: The SaLT team could aid dissemination by asking settings if they would like more hard copies of resources. This would save on time and printing costs for settings. Some settings preferred online resources, so not all settings will need this. For online resources, compile a folder with all the links that can be added to as the programme progresses, as this also saves settings from having to do this themselves.
 - Consideration 7: Managers and practitioners suggested contact with other settings would be appreciated to support learning, for example KIT calls with all practitioners who had been on the programme or network meetings. This suggests that in-person delivery would be more beneficial than remote delivery to enable peer networks to develop.
 - Consideration 8: SaLTs could help practitioners to compile information/outline what strategies to use with a particular child in their individual support plan – this could involve providing a template for practitioners to fill out on their own or with the SaLT. The plan (or something similar) could be shared with parents too, as tailoring the resources to each child/parent may encourage the parents engage more.
 - Consideration 9: SaLTs could host sessions with parents at the settings to train them in the strategies. Even if this attracts parents who are already engaged, it would be useful to ensure parents are using the strategies correctly.
 - Consideration 10: Wider integration of the CECIL programme into networks and other support offers, especially by coordinating with the Local Authority SaLT teams would ensure wider dissemination and use of the CECIL resources as well as avoid repetition of training and resources.

Working with Early years settings in the PVI sector

Several of the barriers and enablers identified during the evaluation were not just specific to the Nottinghamshire CECIL sustainability programme but would be relevant to any programme or organisation planning to deliver training to early years practitioners in PVI settings.

Key considerations, which fit with previous CECIL phase findings, for working with the PVI sector were:

- Consideration 1: Early years settings have strict staff-child ratios, which influence staff ability and pace limits to the time they can devote to training. To minimise disruption, SaLTs should communicate with settings to arrange time for in-person visits to fit with the schedules of the settings. If possible, budget for staff cover would be useful.
- Consideration 2: Some PVI settings may not have access to the technology (eg laptops, tablets, stable Wi-Fi) needed to participate in remote delivery of the programme. Thus, providing technology as needed would be a helpful approach, if possible.

1 Introduction

This chapter will outline the original impetus for exploring language development programmes for private, voluntary and independent (PVI) nursery staff supported by speech and language therapists (SaLTs) and a brief description of the updated intervention – Nottinghamshire CECIL sustainability programme.

1.1 Background

Successful development of early language skills, such as vocabulary, is important for a variety of outcomes later in life, including academic achievement, the ability to get a job, and mental health (Kerr & Franklin, 2021; Bleses et al., 2016; Law et al., 2009; Law et al., 2017; Stewart and Waldfogel, 2017). Indeed, poor early skill development tends to negatively impact social mobility in the long term (Stewart & Waldfogel, 2017).

Private, Voluntary and Independent nurseries are less researched than the maintained sector (school-based nurseries or maintained nursery schools) and are less well-resourced, tend to have less qualified staff and also have less continuing professional development (CPD), (Bonetti, 2019; Pascal, Bertram and Cole-Albäck, 2020). Barriers to CPD include lack of budget to pay for the courses and paying for cover to release staff. Enablers included PVIs working directly with learning providers and practitioners having supportive managers (Bury et al, 2020). However, in England in 2021, 68 per cent of 0–4-year-olds were enrolled in childcare settings (DfE, 2022), and of those there were 707,000 children in private, 265,200 in voluntary, 313,900 in school nursery, and 38,400 in the maintained nursery settings throughout the country (DfE, 2021). This demonstrates that PVIs are a crucial part of this stage and their practitioners need CPD to provide an environment where children’s language can flourish.

For the Coaching Early Conversation Interaction and Language (CECIL) project phase 1, the Nottinghamshire Healthcare’s Children’s Speech and Language Therapy Team (henceforth known as Nottinghamshire) and the Children’s Integrated Speech and Language Therapy Service for Hackney and the City (henceforth known as Hackney) built upon their existing programmes to incorporate further coaching elements and focused on supporting early years practitioners in Private, Voluntary, Independent (PVI) settings with the aim of improving staff practice and child outcomes around language and communication for two-year-olds. The phase 1 implementation and process evaluation (IPE) was led by IES and a phase 1 report published earlier this year (Dawson, Huxley, and Garner, 2022). As there is evidence that short term professional development programmes can face problems with sustainability and that embedding change in the setting is vital (Collin and Smith, 2021) the second phase of this work looked in more detail at how additional sustainability work could continue to support the practitioners and settings that took part in Phase 1 and embed the learning into the setting in

Nottinghamshire. This is the focus of the Phase 2 report that we refer to as the Nottinghamshire CECIL sustainability programme.

The government investment in the early years continues to mainly focus on speech and language development with an announcement in October 2022² outlining £180million of support over the next three years containing the following features:

- Professional development training (PDP) in language (as well as maths and social development) which will be available for up to 10,000 practitioners
- Further support of the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) programme over 22/23 school year supporting speech and language skills in Reception classes
- Online child development training which covers language and how to engage parents
- Early years experts and mentors programme (focused on leadership supporting the online training above and some face-to-face work)
- Stronger practice hub network to build local networks and share practice across areas including language
- Further qualification support (special educational needs coordinators, graduate training and National Professional Qualification in Early Years Leadership)

This builds on the previous pandemic catch-up approach over the last two years in NELI and the PDP due to research showing that language and communication had been badly affected by the pandemic and that interventions in the early years could help (Bowyer-Crane et al, 2021; Fox et al 2021). Finally, embedding learning is particularly critical in the early years sector because annual turnover of this group of staff is considerably higher at 24 per cent than other professions (National Day Nurseries Association, NDNA, 2019) and the pandemic has only exacerbated this issue further. This demonstrates the importance of continuing to work to find ways to ensure that CPD for early years practitioners in supporting language and communication skills can be sustained long term.

1.2 Interventions

Building on Phase 1 of the CECIL project, we wanted to explore how the two teams could embed the work they had been doing with early practitioners within the settings and ensure that the learning was not lost. Unfortunately, because of a staffing recruitment crisis for SaLTs due to the lasting impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic within the area for Hackney, they were unable to take part in this subsequent project. However, Nottinghamshire were able to continue.

² https://www.gov.uk/government/news/180-million-to-improve-childrens-development-in-the-early-years?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications-topic&utm_source=e72c41c5-5471-45cb-b716-809a4ca69577&utm_content=weekly

For the CECIL sustainability project, Nottinghamshire delivered the CECIL training as planned to the late starter settings (see Section 1.2.1 Recruitment and feasibility for details of the different groups) in autumn 2021. They followed this up with additional support in spring and summer 2022 for both early and late starter practitioners as described below.

1.2.1 Nottinghamshire CECIL sustainability programme

As described in the Phase 1 report of this project (Dawson, Huxley and Garner, 2022), the Nottinghamshire Healthcare's Children's Speech and Language Therapy Team developed the Let's Interact programme by adapting *Learning Language and Loving It™ – the Hanen Program® for Early Childhood Educators/Teachers*, under licence agreement by The Hanen Early Language Program. The Speech and Language Therapy Team had previously delivered the Let's Interact training programme to early years practitioners in early years settings, including schools and PVI nurseries. Randomised controlled trials have demonstrated impact on children's outcomes from the *Learning Language and Loving It™* programme (Piasta and colleagues, 2012; Girolametto, Weitzman and Greenberg, 2003; Cabell et al., 2011), and a preliminary study of Let's Interact (an adaptation of *Learning Language and Loving It™*) showed training was associated with increased use of some effective interaction strategies (McDonald and colleagues, 2015a, McDonald and colleagues, 2015b).

The content and format of the Let's Interact training that the team had been delivering previously included opportunities to observe high quality practice, to use and refine new skills and strategies in practice, to receive individualised feedback, and time and support for self-reflection. For the first phase of the CECIL project, the Speech and Language Therapy Team added a coaching and mentoring element to Let's Interact to create an 'enhanced' version of the programme, which aims to facilitate and embed longer-term skills gains. This coaching element developed over the course of the project and additional materials were produced, such as the coaching protocol, which describes how the sessions should be conducted and how to decide whether practitioners need additional coaching.

The delivery of CECIL included: an initial information session for staff, group training sessions (some with group video feedback sessions), three individual coaching sessions with video feedback, feedback to settings and a pool of extra coaching sessions for practitioners needing extra support, text messaging, two keep in touch (KIT) phone calls, and language lead network meetings. Let's Interact training materials and the *Learning Language and Loving It™* (LLLI) guidebook were also provided to each practitioner. The team developed a coaching protocol for Speech and Language Therapists to follow, including the background to the coaching programme; instructions on what to include in each of the three main coaching sessions; how to use the planning tool, reflection tool and action plans with the practitioners; how to decide if practitioners need additional coaching; and a record of coaching for them to fill out after every session. The record of coaching noted where the practitioners were scoring on the strategies, areas of strength, areas of support, actions agreed and additional information. These fed into the coaching

summary, an excel spreadsheet that the coaches filled out and then used to monitor progress over the sessions.

The initial plan for the work for 21/22 included interviews with practitioners and managers about a range of sustainability options to get feedback and discussion before developing the offer. This ended up being a couple of workshops instead to enable some group discussion. These are described in the Section 3 Methodology section in more detail.

The sustainability support provided to the settings in the 21/22 school year to embed the CECIL project included two additional review coaching sessions and a pack of resources, Let's Keep Interacting, which they called a sustainability menu. The first review coaching session took place approximately three months after the last coaching session for the late starter group in March 2022, and the second review coaching session was approximately four to eight weeks later in May 2022. The review coaching sessions had a protocol developed so that SaLTs carry them out in a consistent way. The protocol for the first review coaching session included the SaLT videotaping the practitioner interacting with a child or children. They would review which strategies had been used in the video, discuss what they had observed with the practitioner and obtain the practitioners' reflections on their interactions. The SaLT would then develop an action plan for next steps for use of the strategies, share the sustainability menu with the practitioner and the manager, and help support them in how best they could use it to build on the work they are already doing with the strategies. The second review coaching session took place online and followed a very similar plan but advised the practitioner and manager in how to work together with the language lead for the setting on continued practice within their setting and links to the local language lead programme of support.

The sustainability menu includes sections on key parts of the LLLI handbook with signposts to particular pages to read, videos to watch, activities for shared learning, reflective practice questions, and resources for parents. It also covers children's language development, key strategies (observe, wait and listen; face to face; respond with interest; adjust your language; label, expand and extend), sharing learning activities for practitioners to try with others in their settings, and a guide for practitioners in how to record interactions and use them to improve practice, so they can continue their learning within their settings after the support had finished. The sustainability menu also included templates for planning their video interactions, reflecting on the interactions, and an action plan.

The SaLT team developed a large database for this phase of the project where they recorded progress of all practitioners in one place from their attendance at training and coaching sessions and the information from the coaching summaries about how they were demonstrating the different strategies. The SaLT team did some internal evaluation work looking at how practitioners had developed over time using this large database.

Recruitment and feasibility

Twenty settings were recruited by the Nottinghamshire team using targeted emails to settings during the first phase of the project in 2020. Inclusion criteria were settings with at least eight to ten children who were two years old and who were in areas of high

deprivation (categorised by the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) rank and decile, IDACI rank, decile and score and number of pupils on pupil premium). Settings with less exposure to Let's Interact were prioritised and managers were asked to select practitioners that had not already had Let's Interact training. These settings were randomly assigned by the University of Oxford team equally to the early starter group (11 settings received the intervention in the 2020/21 school year) and late starter group (9 settings received the four sessions of training in the 21/22 school year). Over the course of the year, three settings dropped out from the early starter group, two before delivery had begun (and so were not included in the evaluation at all) and one in March 2021, as they had missed two of the training sessions.

In respect to practitioner numbers, 18 started in the early starter group, of which two dropped out early on in the original project, and three more left the early years sector completely, and one changed setting within the sector. An additional four of the early starters did not take part in the 21/22 year, with three not responding to requests for further support and one cancelling the visit.

The late starter group had 20 practitioners initially. Four of those left the sector by the end of the project. This evaluation focuses on the late starter practitioner group, as there were more of them still actively involved and in contact with the Nottinghamshire team and had experienced less disruption in their delivery due to Covid-19.

2 Theory of Change

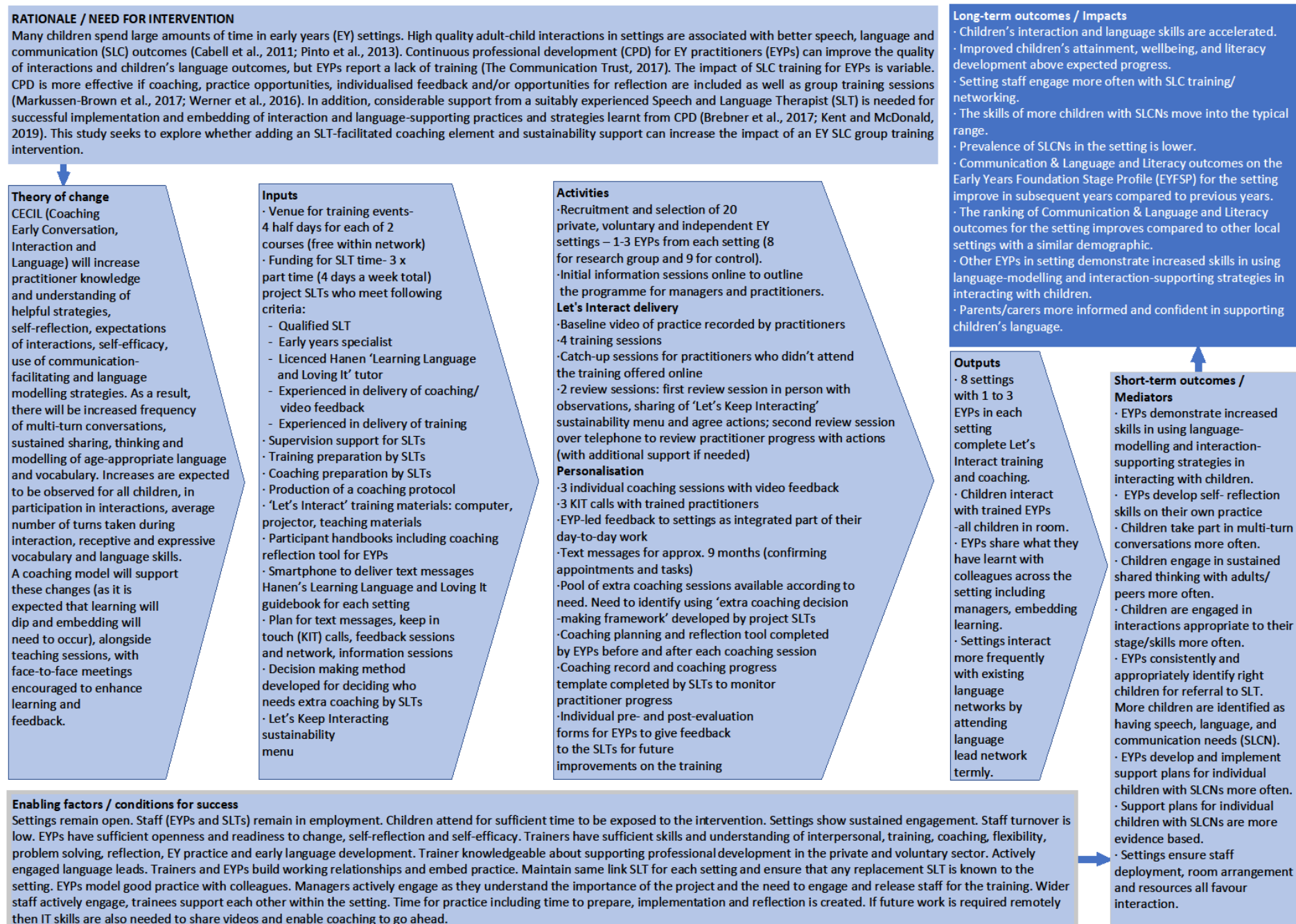
Following on from the series of three Intervention Delivery and Evaluation Analysis (IDEA) workshops (Humphreys et al., 2016) that Nottinghamshire had in the previous phase 1 project, we carried out a further IDEA workshop in July 2022. This was to review the sustainability work and update the Theory of Change (TOC) to also include this sustainability work and in light of the EEF Effective Professional Development report (Smith and Collins, 2021). This meeting was via Microsoft Teams and included IES, Sutton Trust, Nottinghamshire, and Janet Grauberg (Scale-up consultant). During the project, there was also discussion about the TOC model at the regular 'critical friend' meetings for the team, which happened about every four to six weeks, when changes to the models arose or were emerging as possibilities. The TOC model was updated by IES with input from Nottinghamshire following the final workshop to cover the whole of the Nottinghamshire CECIL model from the training to the sustainability and embedding work (so the phase 1 and sustainability work combined).

The main changes to the TOC model over the course of this sustainability phase of the project are as follows:

- In the **Theory of Change** section, we added the expectation that learning would dip over time and there is a need to embed the learning. In addition, given practitioner feedback about wanting face-to-face sessions (as opposed to virtual), the benefits of these were added.
- The **Inputs** section has been extended to include the sustainability menu Let's Keep Interacting, which was a new resource developed for this phase. The resource included a variety of links to videos, leaflets and websites, and templates to help practitioners reflect on their own practice and take part in peer coaching.
- The **Activities** section was updated to include the two new review sessions to embed the learning and the SLTs completing the coaching record and coaching progress templates to monitor practitioner progress. The training section was also updated as the team decided that asking practitioners to complete individual baseline videos before any training would work best, which were reviewed in the first session. The group video feedback element and the project network meeting were also removed as the team felt that the individual coaching sessions provided the opportunity to tailor support to the individual needs of each practitioner which was the model the Nottinghamshire team felt worked best. The number of practitioners per setting was updated throughout the model as some settings had one practitioner involved, most had two, and some had three.
- The **Enabling factors/Conditions for success** were developed extensively in the previous phase, but we decided that there were three important elements that were still missing. These were added as follows:

- Recognition of the trainer having knowledge specific to the PVI sector and not just EY experience, as the context is different, and this needed to be recognised.
 - A specific reference to embedding learning was added.
 - The importance of language leads being actively engaged was also included.
- Finally, the **Long term outcomes/impacts** section added a parent/carer outcome, which looks at how parents/carers have become more confident and informed in supporting children's language, resulting from the focus in the review sessions and the Let's Keep Interacting resource, which encouraged practitioners to engage parents/carers in the learning and show them how to enhance this at home.

Figure 1 Final Nottinghamshire CECIL Sustainability programme TOC after the last IDEA workshop July 2022



An online version of Figure 1, with the ability to zoom in on the text, is also available: [Nottinghamshire CECIL Sustainability programme TOC](#)
[.vsdx](#)

3 Methodology

The IES implementation and process evaluation team worked closely with the intervention organisations in a ‘critical friend’ model throughout the period of September 2021 to September 2022, following on from phase 1. This included supporting the SaLT team, who carried out some of their own evaluation work during this phase as part of the development of the additional support sessions and resources. The SaLT team ran two workshops (one with practitioners and one with managers in spring 2022), a one-on-one session with a further manager, and sent out questionnaires to those who could not attend. They asked practitioners and managers about how and why they had become involved with CECIL; what strategies they had been using with children and which they found most useful; what challenges they faced with the CECIL programme delivery; which parts of the CECIL project overall they found most useful; what their experiences of the video coaching were and any improvements that could be made; how they shared resources with others in their settings; and finally, anything that could help them continue video coaching and using strategies in the future. IES contributed advice about the materials for the workshops and questionnaires. The SaLT team summarised the findings into a short report, which was shared with the internal ‘critical friend’ team (made up of IES, The Sutton Trust and Janet Grauberg, Scale-up consultant), and then was used to develop the additional coaching and sustainability menu resources. The workshops and report would not be repeated as part of the intervention in future.

The implementation and process evaluation (IPE) involved case studies and telephone interviews to explore how the intervention sustainability work was delivered and identify moderating/contextual factors influencing potential impact, which may explain quantitative findings. It also sought to identify evidence of effectiveness and issues that need to be considered for a wider roll-out of the interventions. More detail on these is given in the following sections.

Finally, a steering group (referred to as the board) was set up for the original CECIL project. It met five times over the course of the project to advise and interrogate the ongoing research alongside University of Oxford, who were running the impact evaluation. This continued into the second phase of work, with a meeting in November 2021 to track progress. Sutton Trust also decided to bring the board together with other early years experts across the sector for a special CECIL dissemination day in July 2022, where the current project was discussed alongside the findings of the first phase. The board comprised: Laura Barbour and Emma Legg (The Sutton Trust), Catherine Hillis (Esmée Fairbairn Foundation), Naomi Eisenstadt (early years consultant), Sarah Tillotson (Programme Manager, EEF), Janet Grauberg (scale-up consultant), and Derek Munn (Director of Policy and Public Affairs, Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists). The Nottinghamshire and Hackney teams were also invited to the event to present their

experience of taking part in CECIL, alongside Caroline Coyne from Communicate, discussing their Better Start Blackpool programme (the team delivering the Hanen EEF trial), and Rob Newton from Early Talk York, to explain their programmes, which are also aiming to support early years practitioners with their language and communication. A representative from DfE also introduced the work they have been doing to plan the Early Years Stronger Practice hubs, and how that came to be developed.

The timeline for the evaluation is described in Table 3.1:

Table 3.1 Timeline for implementation and process evaluation

Date	Activity
Dec 21–Aug 22	Regular ‘critical friend’ meetings to support teams.
Dec 21–Mar 22	Update data sharing agreements and agreements with nurseries.
Feb–Mar 22	Design research materials for case studies
Apr–June 22	Undertake case studies.
Jul–Aug 22	Early years dissemination event
Jul 22	ToC workshop
Sep–Nov 22	Writing summary report.

3.1 Implementation and process evaluation questions

The process evaluation investigated the following questions:

1. What evidence is there of change in practitioner behaviour and/or perceived impacts on the nursery environment with regards to language and communication support due to taking part in the Nottinghamshire CECIL sustainability programme?
2. What, if any, are the perceived impacts on language and communication skills among children supported by practitioners who have received the Nottinghamshire CECIL sustainability support?
3. Do settings find the Nottinghamshire CECIL sustainability support useful and are they able to incorporate it into their practice? Do they feel able to sustain this in the longer term?
4. What are the barriers or enablers for nurseries to participating in the Nottinghamshire CECIL sustainability support?
5. What factors may need to be considered in scaling up the Nottinghamshire CECIL sustainability support to deliver it in more nurseries?

All of these questions were investigated using interviews with practitioner and managers as described in detail in the remainder of this chapter. The main training was also covered in the interviews, as all the practitioners had participated in the training at the start of that academic year, so it comprised part of the support they received that year.

3.2 Case studies and interviews

IES completed six semi-structured case studies, which included telephone or video interviews with 11 practitioners and managers. Case studies were selected to cover a

spread of areas and setting characteristics, such as nursery size and level of deprivation, disadvantage or privilege.

As the case studies were not in-person, we aimed to achieve two interviews per case study setting, which included at least one practitioner and at least one manager, where possible. Separate interview discussion guides were developed for practitioners and managers³. These explored their engagement (if any) with the intervention, views on training or coaching, perceived impacts on practitioner behaviour and the setting, any perceived impacts on children, parental engagement with children, and parental engagement with them and the nursery. We also asked the nursery staff about staff time and resources needed to participate in the intervention. Nursery manager interviews additionally covered reasons for the setting's involvement and staff chosen for the programme, resource requirements and challenges, including additional support for staff, how useful the programme was to the setting, and suggested improvements. Practitioner interviews additionally covered the frequency of sessions and agreed priorities with the SaLT; their experiences with the sessions and how they could be improved; the level of support received from the SaLT team; their capacity to engage; and what strategies/activities they would continue using.

Please note, although the training and first three coaching sessions were not part of the new material for the Nottinghamshire CECIL sustainability programme, we asked briefly about views on the training and coaching. The practitioners had received the training and coaching during the same academic year as the sustainability support, and it had not been as disrupted by Covid-19 as the previous cohort had been in 2020/21, so it was a good opportunity to get views on the programme delivery as a whole.

Some settings, which were originally selected as case studies, were unable to give more than one interview due to staff shortages or other time constraints. At one setting (Setting 2), where we could only interview a manager, we included another setting (Setting 6) to achieve another practitioner interview. This meant we spoke to a manager at five settings and a practitioner at five settings. Overall, we were able to interview staff at six of the nine late starter settings. Although we heard a range of views on the programme, it is possible that those who engaged positively with the programme may have been more motivated to engage with interviews.

The following tables show the interviews carried out at each setting and the setting's relevant characteristics for each of the programmes.

³ Please contact the authors for copies of the interview discussion guides via askIES@employment-studies.co.uk

Table 3.2 Nottinghamshire CECIL settings interviewed

Setting	IDACI decile*	Number of two-year olds*	Number of children on Pupil Premium*	Private, voluntary or independent	Practitioner interviews	Nursery manager interviews	Total interviews at setting
1	3	16	3	Private	2	1	3
2	8	22	0	Private/independent	0	1	1
3	8	37	14	Private	1	1	2
4	8	21	0	Private	1	1	2
5	4	42	4	Private	1	1	2
6	1	11	10	Private	1	0	1
TOTAL					6	5	11

**Please note this information was collected in 2020 and may be different now but gives an indication of the type of setting.*

3.3 Ethics

IES submitted an application to the IES internal Ethics Panel, outlining the key features of the study and setting out the ethical issues involved and mitigations in March 2022. As the project was an extension of the work already done under phase 1 of CECIL and IES would not be working with children or children's data, it was agreed that the prior ethics approval could be extended for this project.

Settings were provided with an updated Memorandum of Understanding, explaining in more detail what the continuation of the project entailed and the responsibilities of the evaluators, the Speech and Language Therapy Team and participating settings. This MOU linked to a privacy notice, which detailed how the data from the study would be used, stored, and shared. Informed consent was sought from nursery staff verbally before taking part in interviews⁴.

3.4 Data protection

IES recognises that data protection is of the utmost importance and is fully committed to complying with the Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR legislation. The Institute for Employment Studies' basis for processing personal data for this project was legitimate interests and a legitimate interest assessment was conducted in March 2022.

Practitioners interviewed for the research were asked to agree to the interview being recorded and transcribed. They were given written assurance of anonymity and confidentiality for themselves and their nursery. Contact details of nurseries and staff taking part in the research were kept on password protected files in secure folders

⁴ For copies of the MOU, information sheet or privacy notice please contact the authors.

accessible only by the research team. No nurseries or individuals are identified in the report or any other outputs of the evaluation.

A detailed data sharing agreement was developed between the evaluation team and the delivery team, stating which data would be shared by whom, how and why, to ensure full data security throughout the project.

4 Perceived impacts

This chapter discusses findings on the perceived impacts on practitioners and children who continued to participate in the Nottinghamshire CECIL sustainability programme, drawing upon information from interviews with practitioners and managers (Research Questions 1 and 2). In interviews, managers acknowledged the speech and language deficit in Nottinghamshire and their particular settings, having lots of two- to three-year-olds who had delays or needed support. They were interested in accessing extra training and support in order to have a positive impact on practitioner behaviour, the nursery environment and children's language and communication skills. These outcome areas are explored, in turn, across this chapter.

4.1 Practitioner behaviour and nursery environment

This first section explores the evidence for any changes in practitioner behaviour, as well as any perceived impacts on the nursery environment with regard to language and communication support, and how this learning was shared more widely with colleagues and parents.

Managers were interested in the Nottinghamshire CECIL sustainability programme in particular because they had knowledge and experience with language and communication themselves and wanted their practitioners with less experience to have the same knowledge. Some recognised elements of the training, such as Makaton, and wanted to develop their settings' existing knowledge in this area. Managers chose practitioners for the programme who had not had prior language and communication training⁵, which enabled a discernible impact on their practice. Managers mentioned the high quality of the training and expertise of the SaLTs as motivations to join the programme. Practitioners reported being interested in developing their knowledge of language and in becoming language leads.

You always hear or see things through other nurseries and think it sounds good but don't have the training behind it.

Manager, Setting 1

4.1.1 Changes in practitioner understanding and behaviour

Managers reported that the practitioners who had been on the programme were overall more knowledgeable and confident in using different techniques. Not only did the training and coaching increase their understanding, but having an expert SaLT acknowledge that the practitioners and setting were on the right path led to increased practitioner

⁵ This was requested of all the settings that took part in the CECIL evaluation, but many of the practitioners who were in the early starter group (the focus of the previous evaluation Phase 1 Nottinghamshire CECIL) had already received very similar training.

confidence. For example, one manager said their practitioners now had the confidence to slow a child's language down and repeat back to them, whereas previously they may have felt 'silly' and more reluctant. Similarly, another manager reported that their practitioner was now more confident to pause rather than constantly fill silence. Another manager said that practitioners were now taking things more slowly to help with children's understanding, such as giving the children more time to speak and listening to what they have to say, eg by OWLing⁶. They said practitioners were also more patient and not expecting speech all the time. They were also commenting more and using more vocabulary around the children. One manager said that as a result it now appeared more possible for practitioners to slow speech delay or teach children how to use their language.

Several managers added that by increasing their understanding and confidence, the practitioners were now more skilled at putting in referrals: they were quicker and more able to recognise where there was a need for intervention as well as being more efficient and effective at filling out the forms. Some practitioners also mentioned having more understanding of and more ability to recognise when a child needs support, and to tailor their interactions with each child based on their needs.

Managers noticed the practitioners were implementing the strategies they had learned. One manager reported their practitioner was commenting more but saying fewer words rather than constantly speaking. The manager felt that by allowing the children time to think and respond, the practitioner was not putting pressure on children to speak but giving them vocabulary to apply to their play and extend their language.

Practitioners reported that participating in the programme had changed how they interacted with children and supported their language and communication development as well as helping them develop their own skills and practice. They reported using more of the strategies covered in the training part of Nottinghamshire CECIL and questioning regular elements of their practice, such as the length of the time they would give children to answer a question.

One practitioner said that before the training and coaching, they did not know which strategies to use. Since the intervention, they were now paying more attention to how the children interacted with each other and staff, as well as giving more consideration to how to implement strategies and include more in each interaction.

Practitioners reported being more reflective in their practice:

It's helped me no end with how I think about talking to the children and what sort of things to say to them... The other day we had a mock Ofsted inspection at the nursery, and I did an activity in front of the lady that was doing it and she said to the manager afterwards that she could tell I'd done language training.

⁶ A strategy where practitioners are encouraged to Observe, Wait and Listen in order to allow the child to lead the interaction.

All practitioners reported they would continue to use the strategies they had learned and did not see any barriers to this. They reported using resources, such as the books, to keep their learning refreshed. One practitioner said they had plans to embed their learning further in the future.

4.1.2 Sharing learning with colleagues

Dissemination of knowledge was considered an important element of the programme at many settings, and all staff were keen to share learning. Managers and practitioners referred to practitioners sharing strategies formally and informally. Most practitioners and managers mentioned formal knowledge sharing had either taken place or was planned, for example sharing ideas and strategies in staff meetings, printing off strategies for display and sharing strategies in a Slack channel⁷. One practitioner said that although they had shared ideas in staff meetings, most of their sharing is more informal and ad hoc, including modelling strategies to colleagues in their room and *“having a general chat with them in the morning”*. Practitioners were reportedly able to pick up on where colleagues could improve, for example, where they were using too many questions rather than commenting, and then explaining a strategy to them. One practitioner noticed that after sharing their knowledge with colleagues, their colleagues had changed their behaviour, including OWLing, getting down face-to-face with the children, and making more effort to interact with the quieter children. Another practitioner found it helpful that with the other practitioner in the room, they could bounce ideas off each other and keep improving their practice.

Practitioners reported proactively thinking of ways to extend their learning and change practice throughout the setting. One practitioner who was on the programme had recently moved from the two- to three-year-olds room into the three- to four-year-olds room. They found through experimentation with extending and labelling strategies, that some of these older children would benefit from the strategies as well, but were unsure how to extend the learning to this age group. As a result of the sustainability work, the practitioner had received additional support from the SaLT to establish what strategies to use with them and if she was using them correctly. Another practitioner used the review session with the SaLT to develop a plan of how to communicate more strategies to other staff. A practitioner who was the language lead for their setting decided to add some of the strategies into the individual children's support plans, so practitioners would know what to use to support those children.

Many practitioners and managers reported facing barriers to wider setting training and dissemination at the present and wanting to do more of it in the future. One practitioner explained that there had not been enough time for them to train their colleagues as they all had other responsibilities (eg. SENCO, language lead) and a lot of children needed additional support, which took up a lot of time. The practitioner suggested instead it would be helpful if the Nottinghamshire CECIL sustainability programme had included all staff at

⁷ Slack is an online messaging app for organisations where teams communicate and share information in different 'channels' or threads

the setting, to remove the burden on them as an individual to disseminate. However, they still intended to pass on their learning from the CECIL training to new employees who were due to start.

One manager was disappointed that their setting had not had a chance to share their learning yet and expressed feeling bad when the SaLT visited, because they had not implemented their learning setting-wide. Strategy sharing was reportedly a main priority for the setting and the manager was planning to give practitioners who went on the programme the responsibility of being mentors to the other practitioners at the setting, for which they would be paid.

4.1.3 Parent engagement and feedback

Feedback on changes to parent engagement since the programme started was mixed. Some managers and practitioners mentioned parents asking for resources and tips on strategies (in response to the programme or otherwise), which staff felt confident responding to. For example, one practitioner mentioned sharing simple strategies with parents, such as OWLing and being face-to-face. A practitioner said that their manager had been emailing parents copies of the Let's Keep Interacting booklet. One manager said that parents were good at taking information on board and sometimes asking for extra information.

Practitioners and managers referred to practitioners having multiple resources which they could use to signpost to parents, as well as having guidance from the SaLTs in what to share with them. One practitioner said they would like to add information they had learned from the programme to their transition book for parents, so that parents could see information about communication and have access to more support, if they thought their child was delayed in speech. One manager reported they had been able to share the CECIL resources with a parent whose child was at risk of delay and the child's speech had since improved:

One parent I shared a lot of the resources with, resources I wouldn't have had otherwise. The child is at risk of delay, so I spoke to the parent about what they can do. They said they've been looking on Google to find more information, so I said rather than that, I will send you some links and it was links I'd got from [the SaLT] that were most useful - very clear and concise. So, the parent has had the right information, they were pleased... they've watched the video and the child's speech is coming along.

Manager, Setting 4

However, several managers and practitioners reported that it was hard to tell if there was a difference in parental engagement or if parents had used the materials/information they had been given since the programme started, with a manager mentioning contact with parents being disjointed. A couple of interviewees said there was no change in engagement, and others mentioned that parents were aware of and enthusiastic about the programme initially but had not remained engaged.

4.1.4 Other impacts on the setting/nursery environment

Managers suggested there may be a positive impact on practitioner retention as a result of the CPD, with reports of practitioners being interested in becoming language leads. However, managers were quick to caveat that retention issues in the setting were wider than that (see Section 6.2 Barriers and enablers). They reported that training was high quality and SaLTs had strong expertise, and managers welcomed training after the Covid-19 pandemic, when training had been sidelined to deal with the crisis. Practitioners seemed to appreciate having training to help them progress and learn (as reported by managers and practitioners). They also felt it provided a focus on language within settings.

Another positive impact noted by one manager was that the practitioners had now learned professionalism (including through being encouraged to cascade information) and seen a demonstration of good training, which would be helpful going forward.

4.2 Language and communication skills among children

In general, practitioners and managers reported that children had become more confident and comfortable with their speech and language skills. Indeed, many children began speaking more and engaging in more play with others, including children who did not speak much at all prior to the implementation of the Nottinghamshire CECIL sustainability programme. For example, a child who was almost non-verbal at the beginning of the programme was able to speak in simple sentences by the end of the programme. One manager posited that one possible explanation for increased child engagement in speech as a result of the programme was that practitioners began commenting more often with the children, instead of simply asking the children questions. Even though two-year-olds learned more verbs (eg rolling, pushing), one manager mentioned that the programme seemed to have more impact on three-year-olds than two-year-olds, because it was easier to build on the three-year-olds' existing language knowledge and skills (eg knowing the meaning behind more words). After the programme, three-year-olds also appeared to be more capable of slowing down their speech to successfully get their point across, as well as repeating what they said, if needed, to make sure who they were speaking to understood what they were saying.

However, one practitioner noted that even though they witnessed improvements in children's speech and language, it was unclear as to whether this improvement was completely due to the Nottinghamshire CECIL sustainability programme or if external support (eg home talk, support workers, SaLT visits following a referral) also played a role. For children who required extra support but did not receive it (ie no help at home), CECIL provided a needed avenue of speech and language support. Overall, neither practitioners nor managers reported any unexpected or negative effects of the programme.

5 Implementation and feasibility

While the previous chapter on findings focused on immediate outcomes from the programme, this chapter explores whether managers and practitioners found the programme and sustainability work useful, practicable and sustainable in the longer term.

The following sections in this chapter draw upon interviews with practitioners and managers to explore views on usefulness, incorporating strategies and approaches into everyday practice, sustainability of these practices, and barriers or enablers to participating in the training (research questions 3 and 4).

5.1 Incorporating learning into practice and sustainability

5.1.1 Usefulness of the programme

Managers and practitioners reported finding the programme useful and were grateful for the opportunity to take part. All managers and practitioners said they would recommend it to other PVI settings. The structure of the programme, additional support and SaLT expertise were highlighted as being beneficial. Through the training, coaching and additional support, all the practitioners were able to incorporate their learning into practice.

It's an amazing programme. There is nothing like this around at the moment. It is great to have this support and recognition.

Manager, Setting 2

To have some high-quality training for the staff was really good because a lot of training was offered as part of the project, so it's something really useful to get involved in. It's also just interesting to know the outcomes and I think if you are involved in it, you are more likely to know what comes of it. I think it's a nice project to be involved in, mainly because of the expertise that is involved in it.

Manager, Setting 4

We really appreciate being selected. It's one of the best things [the practitioner] could have done. It's really built her confidence. So, it's a really great course overall.

Manager, Setting 1

5.1.2 Training sessions

Practitioners reported finding the training sessions to be in-depth, informative, and well put together. The structure of the sessions was appropriate, as they were the right length (with a break) and had interactive elements that kept practitioners engaged. Several practitioners highlighted that the videos they were shown of how to use strategies were particularly useful. One practitioner suggested it would have been beneficial for the training sessions to refer directly back to the *Learning Language and Loving It™* (LLLI) book more.

As such, practitioners reported finding the training sessions helpful for learning new strategies, which they were now using in their everyday practice, highlighting in particular:

- **Commenting** and making statements more and asking fewer questions.
- **Letting a child lead** the interaction.
- Being **face-to-face** with the child by getting down on to their level.
- **OWLing** (Observe, Wait and Listen), where practitioners were encouraged to observe the children to see what they are interested in, wait silently and expectantly for the child to respond or lead the interaction, and then listen attentively without interruption.

Other strategies mentioned by managers and practitioners included: waiting for children to request things by putting them out of reach; labelling objects they could see; and with older children, making up nonsense words for the children to correct/respond to.

Practitioners said the new strategies included ones which were helpful for implementing with children with EAL and other speech and language needs. One practitioner claimed that a lot of the children at their setting had similar language issues requiring support, so had been able to use the strategies universally. Some practitioners said that they had known about some of the strategies already and were using them before the training (eg OWLing and labelling). Where practitioners were already aware of strategies, they reflected that it was still useful to have their learning refreshed and to keep building on the practice. One practitioner reported that they were already taking a child's lead but were now better at it. Another said that although they already knew being face-to-face was an effective strategy, they began to use it a lot more after participating in the training and coaching. Others said it was useful to be able to put a name to a strategy and have the correct language and knowledge to explain the strategies to colleagues.

I feel like I can put a name to something, for example, OWLing. Little things I learned like waiting 10 seconds for a child to talk. Little things with big impact.

Practitioner 2, Setting 9

When I was doing the exercises, it really got you to think. [Especially] the Play-Doh role play. Think about strategies and how you can implement them and the effects on each child.

Practitioner, Setting 6

5.1.3 Coaching sessions and support from a SaLT

Feedback indicated that coaching sessions were very helpful in explaining strategies and good practice, and helped practitioners extend their knowledge from the training sessions. Practitioners described the benefits of the coaching sessions over the training, including that the one-to-one approach was more personalised and that practicing strategies made them easier to remember. Practitioners said the coaching sessions were a useful opportunity to reflect on their own practice and where they could improve. They could focus on their specific strengths and weaknesses and set targets. One practitioner who considered the commenting strategy to be particularly helpful, found it was through the coaching sessions that they realised they were asking too many questions and needed to comment more. The SaLT's expertise was also invaluable for pointing out to practitioners where they could improve or change their practice.

Practitioners reflected that the coaching sessions enabled them to see a noticeable improvement in their practice.

Normally, I get nervous doing recordings. In my own head [I am] thinking am I doing everything right? But doing the videos and watching back, it got me to reflect on my own practice. I realised I am doing what I should be doing and using the strategies.

Practitioner 1, Setting 1

One practitioner when talking about the appropriate number of coaching sessions said that they had noticed a change in their practice by the third session.

Managers were impressed with the format of the coaching and the unique opportunity for their practitioners to be able to study the videos with a knowledgeable SaLT. One manager said they liked the approach taken by the SaLT of focussing on a couple of strategies at a time in the coaching sessions. One manager said it was a good opportunity, because it was not possible for them to replicate this themselves.

Ad hoc SaLT support

Managers and practitioners were confident that they had access to ad hoc support and described the SaLTs as approachable and forthcoming with advice to anyone in the setting. They were reassured by the SaLTs that there was an 'open door' and felt they could email or call for support at any point and get a quick response.

I think the communication is absolutely fantastic... [The practitioner] finished her last evaluation session with [the SaLT] yesterday and she said although this is the end,

I'm always here if you need me, so it's effectively not the end. There is an open door.

Manager, Setting 5

5.1.4 Additional sustainability coaching

All managers and practitioners were satisfied with the level of contact and support they had been offered and received from the SaLT team, with some saying it was more than expected. All of the settings reported having some form of additional support. For many, this additional support included practitioners taking part in one or two additional observation/coaching sessions after the end of the initial training and coaching sessions. The total number of additional coaching sessions were determined by practitioner need and availability.

One manager said they were able to input into the additional coaching themselves, which was useful. A practitioner reported finding it useful to have a refresher and to check whether she was still using the strategies, as some time had passed since their last session. Since she had recently moved to the preschool room, the SaLT also gave her advice on how to extend the strategies to older groups.

Practitioners reported recording a video of themselves (or having the SaLT record them) interacting with a child, prior to the session. In the initial review observation, they then reflected on the video. One practitioner reported that it was useful to see their starting point and how the strategies had helped. One practitioner reported that the SaLT had told them they did not need to watch the video because they had done so well, but they spoke about what the practitioner had done, what strategies they had used and how they were talking to the children. They reported the session was useful, as it cemented that they had made progress.

Initial review observations sometimes included completing an action plan and setting targets to be reviewed in the next session. One practitioner said they had agreed with their SaLT in a video call that they would give themselves 10 minutes a day to practice a new strategy, ie labelling.

We created an action plan outlining what I wanted to achieve for the next session and how I would do it, as well as anything that would stop me from doing it – then checked next session to see if I did it.

Practitioner 1, Setting 1

Practitioners were offered a further review, which also involved observation. Some practitioners did not recall these but said that extra sessions would be useful as regular refreshers and be an opportunity to talk to someone about their progress.

Some practitioners and managers seemed to be unable to distinguish between the initial programme and the additional support. One was unsure if they had additional coaching and one was under the impression that coaching may have stopped due to a lack of funding. One practitioner said they did not have additional coaching, because the SaLT had agreed they had improved a lot and did not need it. However, the manager seemed to think the practitioner did have extra coaching. Another practitioner reported that they

did not have additional coaching, as they were confident enough to continue with what they had learned. One manager said their practitioner was given additional coaching, because they were the only practitioner left at the setting who was on the programme. Even where practitioners claimed they had not had additional coaching, or if they were unsure whether they had had it or it had ended, practitioners and managers still mentioned the SaLT visiting the setting to check in. These visits were likely part of the additional coaching or review sessions, so this indicates there was some confusion on what these sessions were called.

The majority of managers and practitioners said that going forward, sustained support, such as coaching once a term, would be useful to keep the knowledge fresh in practitioners' minds and help embed the learning. A couple of managers reported that having the coaching spaced out over a longer time period meant practitioners had more time to put the strategies into practice, reach their targets, and fully embed the learning. They also determined that if coaching was more frequent, it would become more difficult to dedicate the time to it. However, others felt there was little more to get out of coaching.

Resources

Managers and practitioners were satisfied with the length and format of resources overall, which were received at the beginning of the programme and when additional support began. Resources included the *Learning Language and Loving It*[™] (LLLI) book, emailed leaflets, and PowerPoint summaries containing links to articles and videos of strategies. At the start of the sustainability work, settings were also given the Let's Keep Interacting booklet and sustainability menu. One practitioner described how the resources were easy to understand and navigate. One practitioner found the one-line sentence summaries particularly helpful. The LLLI book went into more detail from what was covered in the training sessions and, therefore, helped to extend the practitioners' knowledge.

One manager preferred to use the online resources (Let's Keep Interacting), as they could easily share links. Another manager said that additional hard copies of resources would be useful, as they did not have enough laptops for all practitioners, and four members of staff were sharing one copy of the LLLI book. The manager at this setting said they were compiling a folder that included the links from the menu interventions (eg. posters on OWLing), but if they had a folder with all those resources in it already, it would save them time from printing. Some practitioners also mentioned photocopying/printing resources which they had found useful.

Practitioners planned to continue to review the resources to refresh their practice as well as use them for dissemination, ie presenting them to and sharing them with colleagues.

It [the sustainability menu] got you to think about what you wanted to do, how you were going to implement that within your setting.

5.1.5 Sustained and continued support

The majority of practitioners reported wanting sustained support to enable them to continue to implement strategies as part of their practice. Overall, practitioners and managers appeared to share the outlook that any extra learning and support would be useful, especially given the success of the training and coaching. However, some practitioners felt that there was not a need for continued language and communication support beyond some ad hoc support, if and when they needed it. A couple of practitioners mentioned they had access to external support/training from another SaLT team or the Local Authority, so would not necessarily need more support. One manager said that practitioners did not need more support yet, as they were still taking on board what they had learned so far.

In some cases, managers were already implementing sustainability plans and carrying out additional activities with their practitioners. One manager had an ongoing training plan, which included sending two members of staff on a Makaton course, and they were also introducing a language team to take the pressure off the language lead. Others reported agreeing to continue to work with colleagues to implement the learning from the programme and giving their practitioners targets as part of an action plan. One manager said they would like the SaLT to come again to confirm that the setting had fully embedded the menu of interventions into their practice.

In addition to receiving more of the same support (see Section 5.1.4 Additional sustainability coaching), managers and practitioners highlighted other ways they could be supported to sustain what they had gained from participation in the CECIL project. Several managers and practitioners reported that training/coaching from the SaLT team involving parents would be useful and that this was not easy to find elsewhere. One manager suggested this could involve an evening session at the setting with staff present too. However, some managers raised concerns that it would be challenging to engage busy parents and uptake would be low, and a practitioner suggested that parents received support elsewhere. One manager posited that training/coaching for parents would be ineffective, since the parents who would choose to attend would be those who were already engaged and actively supporting their child's language and communication development. However, another manager said that even parents who were engaged in their child's language and communication development may be using strategies which are poor or outdated. One manager suggested that the SaLT's passion and knowledge would attract and engage parents.

Managers and practitioners expressed interest in hearing about experiences of other settings (who had participated in the CECIL project or had similar needs). A couple of managers said receiving support via networks would be useful, as settings reported having experience and familiarity with networks, such as SENCO and language networks. Some practitioners reported that network meetings or KIT calls with other practitioners on a half-termly basis would be useful to discuss their experiences and learn how others had implemented strategies. Some practitioners and managers also reported KIT calls with the SaLT once every half term would be useful, but others suggested ad hoc support and reminders of techniques would be more convenient and effective.

Other support practitioners mentioned would be useful included support with extending the strategies to use with older children and to use with SEN children, in particular. When asked, several managers said they would appreciate more support to identify practitioners' professional development needs, as they are keen to maximise opportunities for them.

One manager that had access to training from the Local Authority suggested that there was an opportunity for more coordination between the Local Authority and the CECIL SaLT team, because their Local Authority specialist teacher who sends over training was unaware of CECIL. The manager reflected that the CECIL resources, such as the menu of interventions, were very useful and could be more widely shared through the Local Authority to increase their impact.

The following summarises managers' and practitioners' feedback on how support could be continued to sustain practice:

- Additional coaching sessions on a regular but infrequent basis
- Training/coaching sessions with parents
- Support to help managers identify practitioners' professional development needs
- Set up networks for CECIL participants, or integrate into existing networks
- KIT calls with the SaLT and/or other practitioners on a half-termly basis
- Ad hoc support and regular reminders of techniques from the SaLT team (eg text messages)
- Support with extending the strategies to use with older children and SEN children, in particular
- Integration/coordination with Local Authority training

5.2 Barriers and enablers

Three themes emerged as barriers and enablers for success: staff time, resource challenges and face-to face delivery. COVID-19 was not viewed as a barrier during this academic year. Instead, the Nottinghamshire CECIL sustainability programme helped to welcome children back into settings with a positive impact following the height of the pandemic when children were not attending nurseries regularly.

5.2.1 Staff time and resource challenges

Overall, the central barrier that both managers and practitioners commented on was time; nursery settings are generally busy places, and many may have staff shortages (due to ratios and recruitment issues that have become worse over the pandemic) that affect how staff allocate tasks. However, managers accepted that this was a part of the job and understood the importance of fitting training into staff schedules. Managers helped practitioners put their learning into practice, including pointing them to resources. In

general, the time managers spent to support practitioners involved in CECIL was regarded as helpful, especially if managers were able to engage in any extra meetings to help reinforce practitioners' skills. Manager support is, therefore, a key enabler.

Even though many managers and practitioners commented on having limited time to devote to training activities, most practitioners were able to fit in CECIL training within working hours. One practitioner mentioned that she did some reading after work, which she was happy to do, as she did not anticipate being able to do the reading during working hours in the first place.

Managers reported challenges with retaining staff at the setting, as well as in the sector. A number of practitioners who had been on the programme had since left their role, taking their knowledge with them. Some had, therefore, not been able to engage with additional support to embed learning in the setting.

5.2.2 Face-to-face delivery

Face-to-face delivery was strongly preferred by managers and practitioners. Practitioners were more engaged with face-to-face delivery due to greater opportunities for interactive learning compared to remote delivery. Face-to-face also provided a better format than remote delivery for observing children's facial expressions as they spoke. Additionally, the face-to-face format allowed SaLTs to more accurately assess participants' progress and enabled more focus to be placed on personal strengths and weaknesses. Indeed, one manager mentioned:

[We had] reached a sticking point where [a SaLT] was feeling some of the observations were a bit staged and explained [but] you should be able to apply this to your everyday practice. She wouldn't have picked up on that, if not in person.

Manager, Setting 2

The compassion and understanding demonstrated by the SaLT, which was facilitated by in-person visits to the setting, was also appreciated.

Furthermore, some practitioners found face-to-face delivery to be easier than remote delivery due to available technology (ie reliable Wi-Fi access). One practitioner mentioned the following:

I have quite a bit of technology problems, but there aren't any technology problems when it's face-to-face; it runs more smoothly.

Practitioner, Setting 5

6 Factors for scale up

The following chapter incorporates themes and findings from the previous two chapters on perceived impacts and implementation and feasibility, as well as drawing upon interviews with practitioners and managers to explore factors to consider for future delivery and scale up of the programmes (research question 5). Three main factors arose concerning scaling up the programme: delivery method, parent involvement, and tailored support for settings.

6.1 Delivery method

In general, face-to-face delivery was preferable to remote delivery as discussed in the previous chapter. Practitioners mentioned that the availability of technology was not consistent (ie unreliable Wi-Fi connections), which made online delivery difficult at times. Face-to-face delivery allowed for more emphasis on cascading knowledge than remote delivery (ie establishing and practising examples); facilitated the coordination of network meetings (ie communicating with other practitioners in the local area to organise network meetings on child language development); and enabled parent coaching/training (ie demonstrating how to use the strategies at home). Indeed, a couple of practitioners mentioned that they preferred the coaching sessions than the training sessions because they were in person. Therefore, future delivery should be given face-to-face wherever possible, but this may become more challenging on a large scale. Even though it appears to be easier to implement language training and coaching in person (ie easier to see facial expressions and body language in person than online), it will be important to consider staff ratios when planning face-to-face sessions in the future, as those impact how much time settings are able to allocate. Having all the training in person could also enable peer group networks to form, which some practitioners were keen to develop.

6.2 Parent involvement

There were mixed perceptions regarding the usefulness of getting parents involved in CECIL. On the one hand, feedback indicated that training or coaching involving parents would not be useful (eg a one-off evening session); on the other hand, feedback indicated that training or coaching involving parents would be useful (such as longer term ways of improving parental engagement). Some practitioners mentioned sharing resources with parents, which may have had an additional positive impact on children's language development. However, it is difficult to tell the extent to which this affected child outcomes, because practitioner contact with parents tended to be minimal and disjointed.

One manager, who mentioned that training and/or coaching involving parents would be useful, said that she found, in her experience, that parents are typically willing to engage with their children, but the strategies parents tend to use with their children are often outdated or ineffective. Additionally, worries about the uptake were stated (ie parents who would need the training the most would probably be the least likely to engage). Parents also tend to lead busy lives and finding a time to meet with them can be a challenge. Instead of arranging a meeting with parents, a practitioner suggested that information from the programme could be compiled in a handout for parents to provide them with more information about communication, and give them a way to access more support, if they think their child is delayed in speech. Future delivery could develop specific resource packs for parents either in hardcopy or online, depending on local requirements. If sessions for parents are held in person, this should be piloted, and demand considered before scaling up.

6.3 Tailored support

Overall, the majority of managers and practitioners said that there was nothing about CECIL to improve. However, if possible, feedback indicated that more tailored support for different settings (eg additional training for teaching children with autism spectrum disorder; more focus on identifying practitioner professional development needs) and extending the training for working with older children would potentially be useful. The resources already provided could be extended in the future to cater more for specific needs, such as helping managers identify practitioners' needs through a tool developed to facilitate this. Ideally, these resources could be given in hardcopy or online, so that managers could choose what they need.

7 Discussion

This final chapter brings together the key findings that have led to considerations for teams working with language interventions in the PVI sector. Next steps for future research are also covered.

7.1 Study research questions

In order to understand and evaluate CECIL, the intended outcomes of the work were reframed as a set of main, overarching research questions. Key findings for each research question are summarised below.

1. Were there any perceived impacts of the sustainability work on practitioners?

To summarise, the key findings regarding any changes in practitioner behaviour and any perceived impacts on the nursery environment around language and communication support suggest:

- Through the CECIL programme, practitioners increased their understanding, knowledge, and confidence with supporting children in their language and communication development. The programme changed how practitioners interacted with children (ie using more strategies, paying more attention to how children interact). As a result, their practice improved and children's communication and language improved.
- Practitioners were more effective at making referrals for children who needed extra support.
- Practitioners and managers were able to or planned to disseminate the learning from the programme to other staff in the setting, including modelling strategies in staff meetings and sharing resources, such as the menu of interventions.
- Parents engaged with the programme to varied extents. Staff shared resources and strategies with parents, but it was difficult to tell if they had used them.
- The programme has led to increased professionalisation of practitioners, and opportunities to progress, which could potentially have a positive impact on retention and the nursery environment.

From interviews with managers and practitioners, it was reported that the programme had helped settings where children were disadvantaged and at risk of speech delay. Practitioners were overall more knowledgeable and confident in using different techniques and benefitted from access to a highly trained SaLT. Practitioners reported that participating in the programme had changed how they interacted with children and

supported their language and communication development as well as helped them develop their own skills and practice. Thus, the programme appears to have positive impacts on both practitioners' understanding of early language development and their practice, which ultimately improves children's communication and language skills.

Practitioners had changed their behaviour to be more reflective and considered in their approach to interacting with children. They were more effective at supporting children with complex language and communication needs (eg EAL, SEN), as they could more easily recognise when a child needed support, use a toolbox of strategies to tailor their interactions towards each child based on their needs, as well as more effectively refer the child to additional support. Due to natural variations in children's language development, it can be challenging to identify when an intervention is needed. The expertise of practitioners is, therefore, the key factor in this process, so their ability to identify and refer children who need support is important to children's development (Law et al., 2020). Practitioners tailoring their interactions also supports learning and development considerations outlined in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework (DfE, 2021).

Practitioners reportedly shared resources and learning with wider colleagues, formally and informally, which was facilitated by managers and the SaLT. Dissemination of knowledge was a feature explored by many managers and practitioners through the additional support offered. Compared to findings from the last report, more sharing of learning has been possible as there have been fewer restrictions from Covid-19, although time is still a barrier to wider dissemination. Findings from this report suggest dissemination is more of a priority and has been aided/encouraged by the SaLT, yet has been difficult due to staff retention issues within the sector (see Section 6 Factors for scale up). Ensuring that as many staff as possible are trained within a setting will help protect from staff retention issues⁸.

Consideration 1: If a manager or practitioner leaves the setting or moves room within the setting, the momentum from the programme and focus on language may be diminished. High quality resources should be accessible to all members of the setting (printed out if possible), and additional support should be offered to practitioners who did not take part in the programme or new managers when they start at a setting.

Managers and practitioners reported sharing resources and strategies with parents, but engagement was varied. There were some indications that parents who had used the resources had a positive impact on their child's language and communication skills. Although staff were satisfied with the level of resources to send/signpost to parents, mixed success with engaging parents suggests a more proactive approach may be needed to boost opportunities for parents to engage (see Additional and sustained support section later in this chapter for suggestions).

When referring to wider changes, managers highlighted that practitioners had become more focussed on the benefits of language and CPD. Managers are determined to continue giving practitioners more CPD opportunities following on from the programme,

⁸ Hanen require 50-75% of staff in their programmes for example.

including creating new roles for them as language leads and mentors. The creation of new roles is a new finding since the last report. This could be due to more emphasis on dissemination and retention, issues which are explored through the additional sessions and the focus on sustainability. The opportunities to progress should be formalised and taken advantage of.

Consideration 2: The sustainability programme enables settings to have more time with the SaLT which provides a good opportunity to focus on further dissemination and retention of knowledge within the setting. SaLTs should consider with managers how the programme could be used to help retain staff and knowledge, for example by creating new roles.

Since the last report was published, SaLTs have run manager workshops to get manager insight into how to establish the programme long term. Managers had found the discussion and advice from these sessions useful for embedding the learning and support.

2. Were there any perceived impacts of the sustainability work on children?

Summary of findings around children's language and communication skills:

- Children at the settings had improved language and communication skills, including speaking more and speaking more comprehensibly.
- Two-year-olds learned more verbs, but the programme had a greater impact on three-year-olds, because it was easier to build on their prior language skills.
- It is difficult to pinpoint the cause of children's improvements in speech and language. In addition to the programme, outside factors could have played a role (such as parents talking with children at home, support worker influence, and SaLT visits after referrals).

Overall, managers and practitioners perceived the programme as having a positive impact on children's communication and language skills. They thought the programme was especially helpful for children who previously did not interact with others very much or at all. The OWLing strategy seemed to be one of the most used methods by practitioners when working with children on their language skills following the programme.

3. Do practitioners and setting managers find the sustainability work useful and are they able to incorporate it into their practice? Do they feel able to continue this in the longer term?

To summarise, the key findings regarding how useful the programme was and if settings were able to incorporate their learnings sustainably suggest:

Incorporating into and impact on practice

- The training and coaching sessions were useful for practitioners to incorporate learning into practice. They were able to incorporate strategies into their daily practice and used them for targeting children with language and communication needs.

- They were using more strategies, such as commenting more, OWLing and letting children lead the interaction.

Continuing to use in longer term

- Practitioners and managers were satisfied with the level of contact from the SaLT and additional support. Additional support, such as additional coaching, had helped practitioners to improve their practice, embed learning and refresh their knowledge.
- Practitioners and managers felt able to continue to use all the strategies they had learned in the longer term but would also benefit from continued support from the SaLT team in some form.
- All practitioners and managers would recommend the programme to other settings.

Overall, staff were able to incorporate the strategies they had learned into their daily practice, as well as use the strategies to target children with particular needs. The strategies were helpful to use both universally and with children who had speech and language needs. Even practitioners who knew the strategies already found it useful to have their learning refreshed.

The unique one-to-one approach and SaLT support was particularly valued and useful for influencing practitioner behaviour and improving their practice. The structure and frequency of the coaching sessions and review observations meant practitioners could see their improvements over time. This allowed them to see the benefit of the programme and motivated them to continue to use the strategies.

One practitioner suggested the training sessions could be more closely linked to the LLLI book. Considering how important the book and online resources are to sustained practice and dissemination, increased reference to the resources in these sessions, and aligning their structures, may be useful to encourage continued use of the book.

Consideration 3: ensure all training and coaching sessions specifically relate back to the LLLI book/ Let's Interact booklet to maximise the benefits of these resources and to keep them in the front of practitioners' minds.

Additional and sustained support

Additional coaching was useful to many practitioners as it served to embed and refresh their learning, especially in response to new issues and changing circumstances (such as changing rooms within a setting) and for them to continue to reflect on and monitor their progress.

Consideration 4: Additional coaching was useful as practitioners change roles. For example, if they move to a different room, they could learn to adapt their practice to the new room. SaLTs should consider how to help these practitioners and how the strategies used with two-year-olds could be adapted for use with older children.

Consideration 5: Offer additional coaching on a termly basis to keep learning fresh and embedded. The needs of the setting should be taken into account. Where practitioners have

left the setting, other support is needed to ensure the learning is not lost. Further emphasis and support on cascading learning for practitioners and managers would help with this.

Practitioners and managers gave varied feedback/suggestions on how they could be supported to make the learning and outcomes from the programme sustainable. This suggests different approaches would be appropriate for different settings, and therefore options for extra support should be discussed with each setting.

Extra support and resources were useful for embedding and refreshing learning—for practitioners on the programme and at the wider setting. While ad hoc support may be sufficient, it may be appropriate for the SaLT to check in with settings on an ongoing basis, to see if any more support could be useful (termly support is suggested in the consideration above to embed learning and to ensure that practitioners had time to practice their skills in between).

Consideration 6: The SaLT team could aid dissemination by asking settings if they would like more hard copies of resources. This would save on time and printing costs for settings. Some settings preferred online resources, so not all settings will need this. For online resources, compile a folder with all the links that can be added to as the programme progresses, as this also saves settings from having to do this themselves.

Consideration 7: Managers and practitioners suggested contact with other settings would be appreciated to support learning, for example KIT calls with all practitioners who had been on the programme or network meetings. This suggests that in-person delivery would be more beneficial than remote delivery to enable peer networks to develop.

One practitioner said they had written up which strategies would be helpful for each child in their individual support plan, which would then be useful to other practitioners working with the child.

Consideration 8: SaLTs could help practitioners to compile information/outline what strategies to use with a particular child in their individual support plan – this could involve providing a template for practitioners to fill out on their own or with the SaLT. The plan (or something similar) could be shared with parents too, as tailoring the resources to each child/parent may encourage the parents engage more.

Consideration 9: SaLTs could host sessions with parents at the settings to train them in the strategies. Even if this attracts parents who are already engaged, it would be useful to ensure parents are using the strategies correctly.

Some staff highlighted the lack of integration with the Local Authority as being a missed opportunity.

Consideration 10: Wider integration of the CECIL programme into networks and other support offers, especially by coordinating with the Local Authority SaLT teams would ensure wider dissemination and use of the CECIL resources as well as avoid repetition of training and resources.

4. What are the barriers or enablers for nurseries to participating in the sustainability work?

The following summarises the main barriers and enablers for nurseries to participating in the programme:

Barriers

- Time: nurseries tend to keep staff busy every day.
- Retention: practitioners who were on the programme leaving the setting/sector meant the learning was often lost.

Enablers

- Manager support.
- During the pandemic, there was limited child attendance in settings. The support provided by the CECIL programme helped to welcome children back into settings after the COVID-19 pandemic with a positive impact on communication and language.

Overall, the main barriers to the programme were external to the programme itself and endemic within settings in general: limited staff time and resources. However, when managers were able to find time to support practitioners, it was found to be valuable for ingraining practitioner learning and skills. Ensuring that managers are engaged with the programme from the start and continue this support throughout should be a priority for teams working to support the early years sector.

5. What factors may need to be considered in scaling up the intervention and sustainability work to deliver it in more nurseries?

Some factors to be considered when scaling up the programme were:

- Face-to-face delivery was preferred over remote delivery
- Tailored support for different settings, eg for older children
- Potential for parent training/coaching sessions and expanding networks, especially if SaLTs' enthusiasm and knowledge can be disseminated to these individuals outside of the settings
- CPD was important to many managers and practitioners and the programme had led to new roles being created for practitioners who had taken part (eg mentors, language leads). Some kind of qualification may help to acknowledge the benefit of the programme to professional development.

If face-to-face delivery is to continue, consideration of possible locations will be important as settings may have difficulty finding available/suitable space within the settings themselves. However, providing practitioners with the necessary technology to participate in remote sessions may enable more practitioners to participate remotely.

7.2 Working with early years settings in the PVI sector

Several of the barriers and enablers identified during the evaluation were not just specific to the Nottinghamshire CECIL sustainability programme but would be relevant to any programme or organisation planning to deliver training to early years practitioners in PVI settings.

Key considerations, which fit with previous CECIL phase findings, for working with the PVI sector were:

Consideration 1: Early years settings have strict **staff-child ratios**, which influence staff ability and pace limits to the time they can devote to training. To minimise disruption, SaLTS should communicate with settings to arrange time for in-person visits to fit with the schedules of the settings. If possible, budget for staff cover would be useful.

Consideration 2: Some PVI settings may not have access to the **technology** (eg laptops, tablets, stable Wi-Fi) needed to participate in remote delivery of the programme. Thus, providing technology as needed would be a helpful approach, if possible.

7.3 Future research

The research in this report has explored how experienced and hardworking SaLTs can help support early years practitioners. However, other professionals, such as early years specialist teachers, language development workers and communication workers, also have a range of different qualities that they can bring to help develop practitioners' skills (and are currently being used in programmes across the UK), so there are a variety of further models that could and should be explored. We have two current avenues for this further work:

- Firstly, from September 2022, an early years teacher/mentor led sustainability model is working with a small number of settings (N = 11) in the Liverpool area, trained from February 2022 on the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) *Learning Language and Loving It*[™] (LLLI) Hanen pilot, to examine the best mechanisms to monitor, embed and sustain good practice.
- Secondly, in September 2023, there may be the opportunity to work with a larger number of settings (approximately 150), that participated in the EEF Hanen efficacy trial that is currently underway as of September 2022, to compare at least two models of sustainability support, each working with a group of settings as part of an implementation trial.

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Appendix A Phase 1 Nottinghamshire CECIL TOC

Phase 1 Nottinghamshire CECIL TOC after the IDEA workshop August 2021

RATIONALE / NEED FOR INTERVENTION Many children spend large amounts of time in early years settings. High quality adult-child interactions in settings are associated with better speech, language and communication (SLC) outcomes (Cabell et al., 2011; Pinto et al., 2013). Continuous professional development (CPD) for EY practitioners (EYPs) can improve the quality of interactions and children's language outcomes, but EYPs report a lack of training (The Communication Trust, 2017). The impact of SLC training for EYPs is variable. CPD is more effective if coaching, practice opportunities, individualised feedback and/or opportunities for reflection are included as well as group training sessions (Markussen-Brown et al., 2017; Werner et al., 2016). In addition, considerable support from a suitably experienced Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) is needed for successful implementation of language-supporting practices and strategies learnt from CPD (Brebner et al., 2017; Kent and McDonald, 2019). This study seeks to explore whether adding an SLT-facilitated coaching element can increase the impact of an EY SLC group training intervention.

