

Coaching Early Conversations Interaction and Language (CECIL) Merseyside Evaluation

Alexandra Nancarrow, Olivia Garner and Anneka Dawson



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Institute for Employment Studies
City Gate
185 Dyke Road
Brighton BN3 1TL
UK

Telephone: +44 (0)1273 763400
Email: askIES@employment-studies.co.uk
Website: www.employment-studies.co.uk

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Contents

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	1
The CECIL Approach	1
Findings	1
Implementation and process evaluation methodology	2
Reflections	3
1 Introduction	4
1.1 Background	4
<i>Early language development</i>	4
<i>National context</i>	5
<i>Previous CECIL phases</i>	6
2 The CECIL Merseyside approach – embedding and sustaining learning	8
2.1 The CECIL Merseyside project	8
2.2 Theory of Change for CECIL Merseyside	9
3 Evaluation methodology	11
3.1 Implementation and process evaluation questions	11
3.2 Recruitment and feasibility	11
3.3 Observations	12
3.4 Case studies and interviews	12
<i>Opt-out interviews</i>	13
3.5 Practitioner surveys	13
<i>Survey respondents</i>	14
3.6 Data protection	14
4 Findings: implementation and feasibility	16
4.1 Embedding learning into practice and sustainability	16
<i>Managers</i>	16
<i>Practitioners</i>	16
<i>Practitioner use of the Hanen LLLI book</i>	18
<i>Coaches</i>	19
4.2 Interactions with CECIL coach	19
<i>Managers</i>	19
<i>Practitioners</i>	20
<i>Ad-hoc support</i>	21
<i>Level of coach contact/support</i>	21
<i>CECIL coaches – practitioner feedback</i>	21
4.3 Barriers and enablers	21
5 Findings: perceived impacts of the CECIL sustainability support	23
5.1 Impact on practitioner and nursery environment	23
<i>Managers</i>	23
<i>Practitioners</i>	25
<i>Coaches</i>	26
5.2 Impact on language and communication among children	27
<i>Managers</i>	27
<i>Practitioners</i>	28
<i>Coaches</i>	28

6	Findings: factors for scale-up	29
6.1	Staff cover	29
6.2	Face-to-face meetings	29
6.3	Visiting other settings	29
7	Discussion	31
7.1	Working with early years settings in the PVI sector	32
7.2	Future research	32
8	References	34
Appendix A: CECIL 2A report		39
1	Introduction	43
1.1	Background	43
1.2	Current project	44
1.3	The Language Leaders model	46
	<i>Model content: Language Leaders</i>	46
2	Method	48
3	Theory of Change	49
4	Discussion	51
4.1	Features of the Language Leader Model	51
4.2	Future research	52
5	References	53
Appendix B: practitioner survey questions		56
	Confidence in supporting language development	56
	Interaction with individual children	57
Appendix C: TROLL		59
Appendix D: note of visit form		62
Appendix E: CECIL Merseyside MOU		63
1.	The project team and their roles	64
2.	The CECIL programme - what how and when?	64
3.	The parallel evaluation	65
	Responsibilities	65
a.	<i>IES will:</i>	65
b.	<i>Everton will:</i>	66
c.	<i>The settings will:</i>	66
d.	<i>All parties will:</i>	66
4.	Data sharing and data protection	67
5.	Agreement	67
Appendix F: original CECIL Merseyside Theory of Change		69
Appendix G: overarching CECIL Theory of Change		73
Appendix H: CECIL Merseyside timeline		76

Executive Summary

Introduction

The goal of the Coaching Early Conversation Interaction and Language (CECIL) programme is to tackle early gaps in children's communication and language skills by providing support for high-quality practice in early years settings, with a focus on settings in areas marked by disadvantage. The ongoing support provided by the CECIL approach aims to embed practitioner learning and knowledge gained, in this instance, from the Hanen Learning Language and Loving It (LLLI) training. During this phase of the CECIL programme, the emphasis is on embedding and sustaining good practice, with staff working in early years settings in disadvantaged areas of Merseyside.

The CECIL Approach

The aim of the CECIL Merseyside project was to develop and explore a sustainability model to embed initial training which, in this case was Hanen LLLI. Everton nursery school led a team of experienced early years teachers who provided coaching support between September 2022 and July 2023 to settings that had taken part in the Education Endowment Fund's Hanen LLLI outcomes trial the previous year. A team of five coaches provided the sustainability support to a total of 11 settings in Merseyside, with each setting receiving one to six in-person coaching visits.

This project investigated how the Hanen training was embedded with early years practitioners in Merseyside and how their practice developed in their second year with additional support following the initial training. This provided an opportunity to observe how settings continued to deliver good practice following staff changes, including where staff who participated in the initial Hanen training had left the setting.

Findings

Our research questions helped to delineate our findings into five groups as follows.

1. 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?
 - Successful sharing of knowledge and strategies to setting staff and overall improved practitioner understanding of how to support children's developing communication and language skills.

- Effective embedding of learning was demonstrated in practice, and there was successful sharing of knowledge.
 - The Coach visits were viewed as useful.
2. What are the barriers or enablers for nurseries to participating in the sustainability work?
- Lack of staff cover was viewed as a key barrier.
 - The general complexity of early years settings was also viewed as a barrier.
 - A key enabler was the presence of effective leadership and management.
 - Allowing for practitioners to visit other settings.
3. What are the perceived impacts of the CECIL Merseyside project on practitioners' skills, knowledge and confidence?
- Increased practitioner confidence and improved practitioner interactions with children. Practitioners not only demonstrated improved knowledge of which strategies they were using with children but also used new strategies with children (e.g. commenting) or tweaked strategies they already knew.
 - Managers generally made more effort to engage parents, and there were some increases in parental engagement.
4. What are the perceived impacts of the CECIL Merseyside project on children's language and communication skills?
- Positive impact of the programme on children's language and communication skills (e.g. providing more words in responses).
5. What factors may need to be considered in scaling up the CECIL Merseyside project and sustainability work to deliver it in more nurseries in the future?
- The provision of staff cover.
 - Face-to-face meetings preferred over virtual meetings.

Implementation and process evaluation methodology

The implementation and process evaluation team at IES and the Everton management team formed a 'critical friend' model to work closely with each other, and this allowed the evaluation team to support the Everton management team via regular meetings every six weeks from September 2022 to July 2023. Previously, the Everton team had delivered the URLEY / Language Leader model and developed a Theory of Change (TOC) for that approach. During these CECIL meetings, the TOC model was developed and refined to more closely reflect practice related to the CECIL programme, and to support the possibility of scaling up the programme in the future.

Case studies were selected to cover a variety of setting characteristics, including setting size and status (for example, Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) settings compared to maintained settings). The case study interviews took place remotely over telephone or

video conferencing, according to the interviewees' preferences. The aim was to include at least one practitioner interview and an interview with a member of the senior leadership team, which usually involved the setting manager, at each setting.

The aim of the practitioner and senior leadership team interviews was to examine the feasibility of the CECIL sustainability activities, particularly taking note of any features that the staff and settings found beneficial. Additionally, the interviews explored the practicality of participating in the intervention sustainability activities, including examining fidelity to the activities that were planned, and the barriers and enablers for participation that could be helpful when planning sustainability work for future scale-up. Perceived impacts on setting staff and children at the setting environment level, as well as staff time and resources needed to participate, were also examined.

In addition to the interviews, practitioners completed an online survey at the baseline and endline of the project's sustainability activities. The purpose of this survey was to explore change over time in the practitioners' confidence and skills at supporting children's communication and language development.

To gain a more robust understanding of the CECIL Merseyside sustainability activities in practice, one in-person observation was also conducted. This allowed the evaluation team to directly observe practitioner engagement and participation in the activities.

Reflections

Many of the barriers and enablers reported by the CECIL Merseyside programme were also reported in previous phases of the CECIL project and have been reported by other programmes and/or organisations working with early years professionals in the PVI sector. A key consideration is the provision of staff cover. Staff in PVI settings often have busy schedules and work in classrooms full of noise and distractions. Thus, programme planning should include staff cover to ease the timing and scheduling of in-person programme activities.

In terms of future research, this report has demonstrated how coaches can help support the sustainability of early years practitioner knowledge and the embedding of effective strategies following the implementation of an early language programme. There are opportunities for future research to explore different models of this provision, including the role of setting networks and the use of other professionals as coaches (such as communication workers, language development workers and early years specialist teachers).

It would also be valuable to assess the impact of the sustainability input by comparing settings that have received the initial Hanen training and the sustainability follow-up to settings that have received the initial Hanen training but do not receive the sustainability follow-up.

1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the original impetus for exploring the value of coaching in the effective implementation of evidence-based language development CPD programmes for early years practitioners, particularly including those working in private, voluntary and independent (PVI) and maintained nursery settings. In this next phase of CECIL the emphasis is on a stand-alone phase of embedding and sustaining good practice, supported by a team of coaches who are experienced early years teachers in Merseyside.

1.1 Background

Early language development

Early communication and language skill development, including vocabulary, is crucial for a range of outcomes later in life, such as academic achievement, the ability to access 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 skill development early in life often leads to long-term negative impacts on social mobility (Stewart & Waldfogel, 2017). There is an importance to including private, voluntary and independent (PVI) nurseries because there is less extant research on PVIs than the maintained sector (school-based nurseries or maintained nursery schools), and PVIs tend to be less well resourced, tend to have less qualified staff and also have less continuing professional development (CPD) than their maintained sector counterparts (Bonetti, 2019; Pascal, Bertram and Cole-Albäck, 2020). Barriers to CPD in PVIs include not having enough budget to pay for the courses and paying for cover to release staff. Enablers of CPD in PVIs include PVIs working directly with learning providers as well as the presence of supportive managers (Bury et al, 2020). However, in England in 2022, 71% of 0–4-year-olds were enrolled in childcare settings (DfE, 2022a), and of those there were 757,200 children in private, 231,400 in voluntary, 292,300 in school nursery, and 35,600 in the maintained nursery settings throughout the country (DfE, 2022b). Thus, PVIs are a central part of the early years sector, and PVI practitioners require CPD opportunities to be able to provide environments that effectively support and encourage children's communication and language development.

There is an importance to embedding learning because in the early years sector the annual turnover rate of early years staff is considerably higher than the annual turnover rate in other fields (24%; National Day Nurseries Association, NDNA, 2019); the pandemic has intensified this issue. Furthermore, the average turnover in PVIs is higher than the average turnover in maintained settings (House of Commons Education Committee, 2023). Therefore, continuing work to ensure that CPD for early years practitioners in

supporting children's communication and language skills can be sustained long term is vital.

National context

In October 2022, the government announced¹ an investment in the early years sector focussing on speech and language development, with £180 million of support over the next three years containing the following features:

- Early years experts and mentors programme (with a focus on leadership supporting the online training above and some in-person work).
- Language professional development training (PDP; and also in maths and social development), available for up to 10,000 practitioners.
- Extension of the support for the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) programme during the 2022 to 2023 school year, supporting speech and language skills in Reception.
- Online child development training, including language and guidance on how to engage parents.
- Stronger practice hub network to develop local networks and share practice across areas, including language, with Everton Nursery and Family Centre becoming a Stronger Practice Hub in Merseyside
- More qualification support, including special educational needs coordinators, graduate training and national professional qualification in early years leadership.

This investment extends upon previous pandemic-related catch-up approaches in NELI and the PDP, based on research demonstrating that the pandemic negatively impacted communication and language but that early years interventions can provide support (Bowyer-Crane et al, 2021; Fox et al 2021). Notably, children from disadvantaged backgrounds were particularly negatively affected by the pandemic (La Valle et al, 2022). The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF, 2023) published an early years professional development guide and have, along with the Sutton Trust (Brown et al., 2023; Melhuish & Gardiner, 2023), highlighted the need for high-quality practice to help children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The EEF guide notes that professional development is effective when it covers four central themes: building knowledge, motivating educators, developing teaching techniques and embedding practice.

Early years was at the forefront of the government's 2023 spring budget, with a proposed £4.1bn investment by 2027 to 2028 to extend the 30 hours' free childcare from nine

¹ 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

months to three years (DfE, 2023). However, this support is limited to (eligible) working parents, which risks increasing inequalities through the adverse impact this may have on disadvantaged children. It is also crucial that the expansion of subsidised childcare places, which places further demands on the sector, does not compromise on quality of care and opportunities for professional development (House of Commons Education Committee, 2023).

Previous CECIL phases

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). As a result after the initial training and coaching in Nottinghamshire, they looked in more detail at how additional sustainability work could continue to support the practitioners and settings that took part in the first stage of Phase 1 and embed the learning into the setting. A report was published in January 2023 evaluating the CECIL Nottinghamshire sustainability programme (Dawson, Garner, and Nancarrow, 2023). The findings from this report suggest that Speech and Language Therapist (SALT) support in continuing professional development may have a positive impact in helping early years practitioners to embed their learning and develop children's language and communication skills.

Throughout the phases of CECIL, the Sutton Trust has organised a series of CECIL steering groups, in which feedback and discussion was provided by a group of leaders in the early years field, including academics, researchers, early years nursery senior leadership team staff and speech and language therapists.

The current report explores an early years expert teacher-led sustainability model working with a small number of settings as coaches (N = 11) in the Merseyside area. The model was developed during March to September 2022 through a preparatory phase (referred to as CECIL 2A) which used Intervention Delivery and Evaluation (IDEA) Theory of Change workshops to explore the team's previous work and construct a sustainability model to embed learning (see CECIL Merseyside TOC report in Appendix A). Practitioners from 15 settings were trained from February 2022 on the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) *Learning Language and Loving It*[™] (LLLI) Hanen pilot and then 11 opted to have the sustainability support in September 2022 to July 2023, to examine the best mechanisms to monitor, embed and sustain good practice. The intervention and evaluation are detailed further in the section below. The table below presents the various CECIL Phase 2 activities in detail.

Table 1 CECIL Phase 2 Activities

Activity	Dates
CECIL 2A (exploring a new support model led by early years teachers in Merseyside, including IDEA workshops)	March to September 2022
Practitioner Hanen <i>Learning Language and Loving It</i> TM (LLLI) training EEF pilot trial evaluated by Natcen	February to July 2022
CECIL 2B (sustainability support)	September 2022 to July 2023

The three-year-olds who began attending early years settings in the Merseyside area in September of 2022 were born in 2019, and thus, have most likely experienced negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, including detriments to their communication and language skills. According to Ofsted (April 2022), ‘the pandemic has continued to affect young children’s communication and language development, with many providers noticing delays in speech and language. Others said babies have struggled to respond to basic facial expressions, which may be due to reduced social interaction during the pandemic’. These circumstances have brought new challenges for staff in early years settings who themselves have faced a particularly difficult few years. Therefore, it is imperative that they have the strategies and knowledge to support and build children’s communication and language skills.

2 The CECIL Merseyside approach – embedding and sustaining learning

2.1 The CECIL Merseyside project

The Sutton Trust and the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) worked in partnership to explore the impact of continuing professional development (CPD) for early years practitioners following implementation of the [Hanen Learning Language and Loving It™ - The Hanen Program®](#) for Early Childhood Educators/Teachers in the Merseyside area. Randomised controlled trials of the Hanen programme, including an efficacy trial to be published in summer 2024, have demonstrated an impact on children's outcomes from the Learning Language and Loving It™ programme (Piasta et al, 2012; Girolametto, Weitzman and Greenberg, 2003; Cabell et al., 2011).

Timeline

February – July 2022: 15 settings, including a mix of private, voluntary and independent as well as maintained nursery settings, received training in the Hanen programme as part of the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) pilot.

September 2022: 15 nursery settings were then invited to participate in the CECIL Merseyside programme, which aimed to build on the Hanen Program to support practitioner's interaction skills with young children, through sustained continuing professional development and embed their learning from the programme.

September 2022 to July 2023: 11 settings opted to take part in the CECIL Merseyside programme. Two practitioners per setting were invited to participate, ideally those that took part in the Hanen training, but if one or more of those practitioners were not available or no longer at the setting, settings were able to nominate an alternative practitioner. This support work was funded by the Sutton Trust, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and Shine Trust. A more detailed timeline specifically for the CECIL Merseyside project is available in Appendix H.

The aim of the CECIL Merseyside sustainability programme was for Everton Nursery School to lead a team of experienced early years teachers to support practitioners within their settings, building on their previous Hanen training and to share good practice. The CECIL Everton Programme Lead recruited five early years teachers who were experienced coaches for the programme. They had previously participated in the Hanen

training. The five coaches were responsible for the 11 overall settings, with one to three settings each.

The Everton Nursery School Programme Lead provided ongoing supervision and support for the coaches. Coaches provided support to practitioners for implementing the Hanen training.

The CECIL Merseyside sustainability support provided to the settings included 4–8 face-to-face coaching sessions depending on setting requirements, approximately two per term, to support ongoing implementation of the Hanen approach and strategic planning for language support within the setting (the EEF pilot had introduced the concept of a more formal cascading approach but the [Natcen evaluation](#) suggested that this had not been implemented).

Coaches completed a note of visit form, for the coach visits (provided in Appendix D) and were also expected to keep in touch with settings outside of meetings via email/phone, responding to any ad hoc queries. All practitioners were expected to complete Professional Growth Records termly (which includes records of self-efficacy, openness to change, knowledge of early language, and pedagogy), as well as encouraged to use the Teacher Rating of Oral Language and Literacy (TROLL) record (provided in Appendix C) for assessing children's learning outcomes. Details of the activities and resources are provided in the second chapter of this report.

2.2 Theory of Change for CECIL Merseyside

Following on from the work to develop the TOC for CECIL Merseyside in spring to autumn 2022 (described in the Appendix A report), there were a series of three Intervention Delivery and Evaluation Analysis (IDEA) workshops (Humphreys et al., 2016) in the academic year 2022 to 2023. There were virtual meetings in September 2022 and July 2022 and an in-person meeting at Everton nursery school and children's centre in January 2023. These were used to review the ongoing pilot work and update the Theory of Change (TOC) accordingly, as the project developed. These meetings included IES, Sutton Trust, the CECIL Merseyside project lead and the coaches, and Janet Grauberg (Scale-up consultant). During the project, there was also discussion about the CECIL Merseyside 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 Merseyside following the final workshop to finalise all the learning from the project. Details of the changes made to the TOC are provided in Appendix F, along with the original TOC from the beginning of the CECIL Merseyside project. The final CECIL Merseyside TOC is provided in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 CECIL Merseyside Theory of Change Model



3 Evaluation methodology

A multi-strand triangulation approach was planned to explore setting managers/practitioners and coaches' views on the intervention as well as using direct observation and surveys to gather information on practitioners' skills, confidence and knowledge in line with the TOC. A central challenge to this research was difficulty engaging with settings for the evaluation activities. In general, staff in the early years sector are often engaged with setting-related matters and have limited time to engage in research, especially without the provision of cover.

3.1 Implementation and process evaluation questions

The implementation and process evaluation builds on the CECIL 2A findings and explores new issues for the CECIL Merseyside sustainability work, which cover the following:

1. Do practitioners and setting managers find CECIL Merseyside useful and are they able to incorporate it into their practice? Do they feel able to continue this in the longer term?
2. What are the barriers or enablers for nurseries to participating in CECIL Merseyside?
3. What are the perceived impacts of CECIL Merseyside on practitioners' skills, knowledge and confidence?
4. What are the perceived impacts of CECIL Merseyside on children's language and communication skills?
5. What factors may need to be considered in scaling up CECIL Merseyside to deliver it in more nurseries in the future?

All of these questions were investigated using observation, interviews with practitioners who had taken part in the sustainability work, managers and coaches, and practitioner surveys, as described in detail in the remainder of this chapter.

3.2 Recruitment and feasibility

Communicate CIC who were delivering the pilot and efficacy trial Hanen LLLI trials with settings for EEF, contacted the settings involved in the pilot by email to ask if they would be prepared to be involved in the CECIL programme with the additional support over the 2022 to 2023 academic year. Setting managers/headteachers were asked to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and provide contact details of the practitioners taking part (see Appendix E for MOU details). The MOU outlined the requirements of

taking part and how their data was to be shared with a link to the evaluation privacy notice (<https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/privacy-notice-cecil>).

3.3 Observations

IES aimed to observe three occasions of early years practitioners working with their assigned coaches in person at the setting, to achieve an in-depth understanding of the activities in practice and get a picture of the practitioners' engagement and participation in the activities.

The five coaches were contacted in May 2023 with a request to observe a coaching session in the summer term (June/July). However, this was not possible to achieve the intended number of observations as three coaches did not have sessions scheduled for the summer term with their settings. A coach for one setting had reportedly moved their last session to be earlier, due to both parties having extensive schedules. One coach was expecting to book more sessions with their three settings and was waiting to hear back from settings when contacted, but it is unclear whether these sessions materialised.

A coaching session for a practitioner at one setting was observed in July 2023. An observation framework was used to record data on the level of coach and practitioner engagement, main topics of discussion, feedback from the coach, next steps discussed for the practitioner, any issues that arose and the structure of the sessions, as well as other general themes and impressions. The use of observational data was deprioritised in the analysis due to the fact that there was only one.

3.4 Case studies and interviews

IES completed telephone or video interviews with six practitioners, five managers and three coaches across a total of eight settings. Included among these interviews were two complete semi-structured case studies (i.e. interviews with at least one practitioner and one member of the senior leadership team at the same setting). Settings were selected to cover a range of areas and setting characteristics, such as nursery size and level of deprivation, disadvantage or privilege. The aim of the interviews was to understand how the project was implemented at settings, experiences of and views on taking part in the programme and working with the assigned coach to support staff around language and communication.

Separate interview discussion guides were developed for practitioners and managers. These explored their engagement (if any) with the initial training and CECIL activities, embedding learning from the initial training in the setting, perceived impacts on practitioner behaviour and the setting, any perceived impacts on children and parental engagement, and views on potential further language and communication support from the coach or otherwise. Nursery staff were also asked about staff time and resources needed to participate in the intervention. Additionally, nursery manager interviews covered reasons for the setting's involvement, resource requirements and challenges, how useful the programme was to the setting, and suggested improvements. Practitioner interviews

additionally covered their interactions with the coach; views on the observation feedback from their coach; the level of support received from the coach and how this could be improved and their capacity to engage.

Due to difficulties obtaining interviews in the summer period, the fieldwork period was extended into September 2023, and additional interviews were undertaken with coaches to gain further insight into the delivery and impacts of the support. Coach interviews covered similar topics to practitioner and manager interviews, asking coaches to consider how settings engaged with and experienced the programme and the impact this may have had.

Opt-out interviews

Short opt-out interviews were undertaken with settings which had been part of the initial Hanen training, but then not taken up the offer of continued support through the CECIL programme. This was to ascertain their reasons for not engaging with the programme (including their appetite for language and communication programmes), and the impact this may have had on the setting. This further facilitated understanding of the barriers and enablers to participation. Two interviews were undertaken in November 2022, with one PVI and one maintained setting. Interviewees were offered a £20 Amazon voucher as an incentive to take part.

3.5 Practitioner surveys

Online surveys were sent to all nominated practitioners at baseline, September 2022, and endline, June 2023. Surveys stayed open for an extended period to increase response rates (approximately six weeks in total for the baseline survey and approximately eight weeks in total for the endline survey).

Baseline and endline surveys enabled the evaluation team to establish change over time in practitioners' confidence and skills at supporting language development in children. In partnership with colleagues at Oxford University (Mathers & Siraj, 2021), the evaluation team developed questions for practitioners that asked them to reflect on strategies for supporting children's oral development by responding to two videos (and transcripts) of an adult interacting with a child, identifying which aspects of the interaction they thought were most important for supporting oral language in this context. They were asked to record in an open text box distinct strategies or reflections, giving examples from the video. The same videos were shown at baseline and endline.

In addition, at baseline and endline, practitioners were asked about their role and setting, and to rate their confidence around supporting children in the language skills and their regular practice when interacting with children. These questions were based on the survey developed for CECIL phase 1 by the University of Oxford and IES. At endline, they were also asked questions to capture their own opinion on their professional growth during the CECIL programme e.g. how much their confidence, knowledge and motivation in supporting children's language skills had improved since taking part in the programme.

Survey respondents

To provide some background information about their statuses as early years professionals, practitioners responded to an online survey at the beginning of the evaluation, which included questions about their highest professional qualifications and how many years they had been working as an early years professional. Of the eight practitioners who responded, five reported having Qualified Teacher Status, two reported having Level 3 Childcare qualifications and one reported having a Level 4 childcare qualification. Additionally, five practitioners reported having been working as early years professionals for more than 10 years, two reported having been working as early years professionals for 6–10 years and one reported 1–5 years. All eight of these practitioners also reported that their settings assessed children's language skills using the WellComm Screen, indicating that measuring children's early communication and language skills were high on their settings' agendas. Other child language skills measures the practitioners reported that their setting used included Talk Boost, the TROLL (Teacher Rating of Oral Language and Literacy), the EYFS Development Matters, Tuning In, PLODS, Sign Along and chatty words. Analysis

Interviews were digitally recorded with the agreement of participants and the interviewer also took notes. We analysed the data using a 'Framework' approach, drawing themes and messages from an analysis of interview notes/recordings and observations at nursery settings. Framework is an Excel-based qualitative analysis tool that ensures that the analytical process and interpretations from the tool are grounded in the data and tailored to the research questions. Framework allows full within-case analysis (exploring in detail at each individual case) and between-case analysis (comparing individual cases and groups of cases).

Responses to the videos and transcripts in the practitioner surveys were coded by colleagues at Oxford University (Mathers & Siraj, 2021). These responses were separated into scores for three areas of knowledge: strategy, interpretation and naming. The strategy score examines practitioners' ability to recognise and identify any use of strategies to help children with language in the videos. The interpretation score explores whether practitioners are able to explain or analyse the strategies they identified in the videos. The naming score examines whether practitioners use key terms identified in the sector to describe the strategies they recognise in the videos (e.g. extending, modelling, scaffolding).

3.6 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 August 2022.

Practitioners, managers and coaches interviewed for the research were asked to consent to taking part in the research and also 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 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 Findings: implementation and feasibility

This chapter discusses how practitioners, managers and coaches found the CECIL approach and sustainability work to be useful and sustainable. Although interviewees were asked specifically about the impact of the CECIL approach, it is generally difficult to separate the impact of the CECIL support, the original Hanen training and practice as usual. The following sections in this chapter integrate findings from interviews with practitioners, managers and coaches as well as the practitioner surveys to examine perceptions on the incorporation and usefulness of strategies and various approaches to day-to-day practice, sustainability of those practices, and barriers or enablers to participating in the programme.

4.1 Embedding learning into practice and sustainability

Managers

Overall, managers noted that the Hanen-trained staff have been sharing knowledge to non-Hanen trained staff (e.g. when to extend, model, use more questions) and in general, all staff have a greater understanding of how to support children in communication and language and are more effective at recognising which strategies they tend to use. For example, one manager mentioned that they have embedded the “Observe, Wait, Listen” (OWL) strategy and the use of small groups the most.

Prior to the CECIL support, one manager noted that there were moments during snack time that staff members did not recognise they could use as an opportunity to talk with the children. The CECIL coach noticed this during her first visit to this setting, and it is an area of professional development that the staff have worked on since.

The less experienced practitioners now engage with children during snack time and to model conversation and time to talk.

Manager

Practitioners

All of the practitioners interviewed mentioned that they have been embedding learning into their practice and sharing knowledge with other staff. All of the practitioners interviewed also said that they were able to fit in the CECIL support during their normal working hours. In terms of feeding back strategies and ideas, practitioners tended to share formally and informally with other staff members, including new staff SEN teachers and even reception teachers in some cases, during team meetings. For example, one practitioner mentioned

that her setting met with staff, including TAs in reception, in the mornings. Another practitioner mentioned sharing knowledge with teachers of younger children (e.g. playing peek-a-boo with the babies).

In one setting, the speech and language area lead expressed interest in the [ShREC](#)²(Share attention, respond, expand, conversation) approach, and the Hanen-trained practitioner interviewed there said that she has been able to combine her Hanen knowledge with ShREC, with an overall aim of improving children's communication and language skills through play.

The most common useful strategies that practitioners mentioned using in their own practice as well as sharing with other staff included OWLing, being at children's eye lines, and using small groups. One setting even extended the use of small groups to reception classes.

Another practitioner noted that they have emphasised the importance of getting down to the level of the children while using OWLing, commenting and letting the children lead the conversations. She said that she had struggled with these in the past but has improved over time. This practitioner also mentioned that they have been working on modelling language back to the children and to make sure they are sharing how to say words the children have mispronounced in an appropriate way.

One practitioner mentioned that when she was first qualified in childcare in 2000, she was encouraged to ask children lots of questions (for example, during story time) to determine children's knowledge. However, after Hanen, she realised that this is not always the best strategy as children might not know the answer or understand what they are being asked. Now, this practitioner comments and then waits to see what the children show interest in. For example, during a playdough activity, one child asked what they were doing with the playdough, and the practitioner realised that they were leading the children too much. Instead of directly telling the child what to do, they asked the child, 'What do you think you can make?' This practitioner has also found this strategy is useful during story time. For example, there is a little home bird book that talks about the bird's favourite view but not all of the four-year-olds understand what a view is. The opportunity to provide the children with background knowledge on views helped them to understand the story.

So the way I did things, I mean, back when I first qualified in 2000, it was we were encouraged to ask a lot of questions for the for the children who, like during story time, we were encouraged to always have questions to basically to see what the children's knowledge was. Whereas the Hanen course taught me that that's not always going to be possible really or it's not going to be the outcome you want. The children might not understand the questions ... So it's best to comment and make

² More details on the ShREC approach are located here:
<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/eef-blog-the-shrec-approach-4-evidence-informed-strategies-to-promote-high-quality-interactions-with-young-children>

comments so or wait for the children and to just watch what they're doing and wait for their cues. So rather than kind of asking questions and expecting them to answer a bit more, just wait to see what they're interested in ... And might they might have completely different ideas [about the activity], and you're not going to get the language from them if it's not something that they're interested in. So yeah, it was an eye opener, really, and in that respect, going back to one of the videos I actually took, I remember doing a playdough activity with the children, and the children sat there, and one of the children turns to me and said, 'So what are we doing with the play doh?' And I and I just thought it made really made me stop and think how we direct the children's play too much.

Practitioner

Further insight regarding practitioner knowledge of strategies used to support children's early language development was provided by their responses to the two videos in the practitioner surveys distributed during baseline and endline. A total of six practitioners responded to the video questions at both timepoints, three of which demonstrated increase in strategy scores, one demonstrated an increase in interpretation scores and two demonstrated increases in naming scores. It is important to note, however, that the baseline responses to these survey items were longer and more detailed than the endline responses. It was clear that careful consideration was made in the practitioner responses at baseline. In contrast, at endline, the practitioner responses were often composed of a few words. Even though these survey questions were administered and answered before and after the delivery of the CECIL support, it is difficult to isolate whether these outcomes are solely tied to the CECIL programme itself.

Practitioner use of the Hanen LLLI book

When asked, most of the practitioners mentioned that their setting was using the Hanen LLLI book and sharing the book with all early years staff. One practitioner mentioned that they were focusing on using the Hanen LLLI book to improve stories and story time. Another practitioner said that they use the Hanen LLLI book if they need support with specific things. Hanen also provided practitioners with posters that include prompts, which a couple of practitioners mentioned were on display in their settings.

The different interactions with the children and giving them time to process the question, observe and waiting for the responses. And going through the Hanen posters we have on display around the setting which give prompts to staff.

Practitioner

One practitioner mentioned that new staff have a Hanen buddy who explains the strategies and how to use them with different children (e.g. how to use them for reluctant communicators). Their CECIL coach is a teacher in the same classroom, so she has also helped to cascade information to new staff as well.

One practitioner mentioned that their CECIL coach made sure that they still had access to the online resources (e.g. clips, slides) so those could be shared with others.

Coaches

All of the CECIL coaches interviewed said that their mentees had positive feedback about the programme, found their coach visits to be useful and did not have any difficulties accessing learning materials. One coach noted that their coachee said that the most useful activity was the video review to reflect on the strategies they were using or not using.

. . . the feedback that I'd had from the mentees [was] about . . . ma[king] some changes to the routine around some of the high quality books they were able to select for children to read and [that] they were reflecting on the engagement and you know, that kind of increased vocabulary from the children who were reading these specific texts because obviously there's some really amazing texts for, you know, kinds of pre-verbal children with lots of repetitive phrases in.

Coach

We really were cascading that as well and I think that's a big push that we have of now. I'm making sure that all that knowledge was cascaded down and not just the one or two members of staff using those strategies or implementing that kind of strategies into the project. It was to ensure that it was cascaded throughout.

Coach

4.2 Interactions with CECIL coach

Managers

In general, managers found the half termly visits to work well, fitting around staff workload and day-to-day management of settings. One manager at a setting with approximately 90% nonverbal children said that the support was tailored to the setting's needs.

Managers noted that the coaches helped to support non-Hanen trained staff and provided reminders for everyone to continue to be reflective.

One manager mentioned that their coach introduced the idea of communication boards, and now the settings uses communication cards.

At one setting, the coach also worked there as the head of nursery on the 2-year-old provision. In addition to the planned CECIL coach visits, they would informally talk and the coach would share information.

Thinking about the future, one manager mentioned that they would likely continue the coach visits in an unofficial capacity, and another manager said that they would possibly be interested in more coach visits every term, given that there was a clearly defined purpose behind them. This manager added that more coach visits would be particularly

helpful if there are staff changes in the future, to help cascade knowledge and understanding to new staff members.

Practitioners

Interviewed practitioners found the coaching visits to be useful, were satisfied with the level of coach support/contact and did not have any suggestions for improvement. The number of visits varied from setting to setting, ranging from one to six coaching visits per setting. One practitioner noted that having a coach who is not a part of their setting was helpful for validating what they were doing.

One practitioner mentioned that at the beginning of the CECIL programme, the coach took time to familiarise herself with the setting by looking around and asking questions. The coach then observed the practitioner and the lead practitioner interacting with children, and this was fed back to all members of staff so they knew what the coach would be looking for when she observed them. The coach then observed other nursery and reception practitioners who were not Hanen trained but were familiar with the strategies, because they were shared with them by the Hanen-trained practitioner. The coach then gave feedback to the practitioners she observed, including what she found to be positive aspects of their practice and a couple of next steps for them to complete. The staff members were happy to be observed and receive feedback. The coach asked the practitioners what they would get the most benefit from and was open to different ideas.

A couple of practitioners mentioned that it was useful to have their coaches not only to discuss the strategies they were using and how they were interacting with the children but also about how they were using the space in their classrooms. The text below highlights examples from practitioners.

- One practitioner noted that since their coach was also an experienced teacher, she was able to give them ideas on how to arrange the classroom in a better way to stimulate better conversations with the children.
- Another practitioner said that their coach suggested that there should be an adult in any space that was not being used so that the adult could lead activities in those areas (otherwise, it is not a useful space for the children). This coach also suggested opening up the construction area in the classroom as this was a popular area of learning but had limited space, which caused the children to be side-to-side instead of face-to-face.

It wasn't just about the interactions, she also looked at the space.

Practitioner

- One practitioner found that reflecting on and implementing the sharing of the OWLing strategy with all members of staff was one of the most impactful features of the coaching visits. She also found that discussing the Hanen small groups with her coach was helpful, as she viewed them to be better than having large groups of children together; this can sometimes be difficult with large numbers of children, but the staff members now try to help each other out so that they can form smaller groups of children.

Ad-hoc support

In terms of ad-hoc support from CECIL coaches, two practitioners mentioned that they did not receive any. One practitioner said they had been provided ad-hoc support and that the SEN teacher was also provided with guidance about understanding the needs of SEN children. Another practitioner mentioned that they emailed quite frequently with their CECIL coach, asking for advice for specific children with different needs, and strategies to use with them.

Level of coach contact/support

All of the practitioners who were asked about the level of coach contact/support were satisfied, and the majority of these practitioners indicated that they felt that they would benefit from continued sustained support from their coaches. Only one practitioner mentioned that they would like another kind of communication and language support, suggesting that training/coaching involving parents would be useful; however, this practitioner added that asking parents to participate is difficult in general (i.e. some parents are apprehensive of getting involved if activities seem to be too academic or require them to write information down).

CECIL coaches – practitioner feedback

When asked about staff feedback about the CECIL programme, coaches mentioned that all of the staff feedback they received was positive. The only negative feedback from practitioners referred to when Hanen-trained staff left the setting. One coach noted that all of their coachees communicated to her during the coaching visits that they viewed the visits as useful, and that the most useful activity had been the video review exercise to reflect on the strategies that they were or were not using.

Another coach mentioned that along with the positive feedback from coachees, she emphasised that there was a general notion that knowledge should be shared with all members of staff, not to just a couple of people.

We really were cascading that as well and I think that's a big push that we have of now. I'm making sure that all that knowledge was cascaded down and not just the one or two members of staff using those strategies or implementing that kind of strategies into the project. It was to ensure that it was cascaded throughout.

CECIL Coach

4.3 Barriers and enablers

In general, timing and the lack of cover were viewed as central challenges. In particular, managers noted that it was sometimes difficult to find the time required to complete the TROLL (Teacher Rating of Oral Language and Literacy). Across the board, managers,

practitioners and coaches suggested that providing cover would have been useful (i.e. to provide a quieter space with fewer distractions for the coaching visits). However, it was also noted that the complexity of early years settings makes this difficult in general to find cover for 20–30 minutes.

The general format of early years settings was also viewed as a temporary barrier, as staff schedules sometimes made it difficult to find a suitable time for the coaching visits. In one setting, the manager participated in the Hanen training because it was easier for the setting to release her time. However, in hindsight, the other Hanen-trained practitioner at this setting mentioned it might have made things easier in the long run if another practitioner participated in the Hanen training instead of the manager; the manager is also the assistant head, making her busy from day to day.

Coaches helping with scaffolding and sharing information with other staff was seen as beneficial, as some managers and practitioners found it difficult for the one to two Hanen-trained practitioners to share with other staff members. The coaches were also seen as a useful outlet of support; people who staff could go to with questions.

One coach mentioned that effective leadership and management at settings acted as an enabler for the project. Settings without effective leadership and management required more coach visits than settings that did have effective leadership and management.

These findings generally support the barriers and enablers discussed in the CECIL Phase 1 report (Dawson, Huxley, and Garner, 2022), most notably difficulty with finding space with limited distractions in settings serving as a barrier and the presence of manager support / effective management serving as an enabler.

5 Findings: perceived impacts of the CECIL sustainability support

Practitioners completed an online survey at baseline before CECIL support and endline, which included questions about their confidence in supporting language development as well as their interactions with individual children. Eight practitioners were able to complete the survey at both timepoints. Comparing responses between endline and baseline, it appears that practitioners generally became more confident in supporting language development (e.g. seven responding 'very much' at endline versus four responding 'very much' at baseline when asked about helping typically developing children make good progress in their language skills). They also had improvements in their interactions with children (e.g. eight responding 'very much' at endline versus four responding 'very much' at baseline when asked about waiting for child to start the talking – with words, sounds, gestures or looks). More details about the survey questions are provided in Appendix B.

This chapter explores the perceived impacts of the programme, as reported in interviews by setting managers, practitioners who took part in the programme, and coaches. This section covers the perceived impact of the programme on practitioners' interactions with children and the wider nursery environment, including parent engagement, as well as the perceived impact on children's language and communication skills. There were no unexpected or negative effects reported, although where settings did not have staff cover (explored in 4.3 Barriers and enablers) this may have had a negative impact on the rest of the setting.

5.1 Impact on practitioner and nursery environment

Managers

Managers reported that the CECIL programme had led to changes in practitioners' interactions with children and in some cases influenced practice across the setting.

One manager reported that staff had more understanding about how to support children to reach the next step in terms of their communication and language skills. They reported that staff were better at recognising which strategies they were using.

There's a lot more understanding around where the children are within that communication development and what to do to support them to the next step . . . sometimes you can do things without knowing why you're doing it or what you're

doing, but they are understanding of what they're doing and why they're doing it as well from it.

Manager

They further reported that the practitioners were more confident, which meant the children were getting higher quality communication and language support.

Another manager also reported changes across the setting. They reported that the biggest change from the programme was that all the staff were now on the same page and understand what the setting wants to achieve. There was less benefit to the setting initially when they were having internal issues with consistency of staff, but since staffing had become more consistent, the programme been more beneficial.

It's highlighted what we already do, given us a stronger purpose for it. It makes things that come naturally just make sense.

Manager

The same manager, who had taken part in the training as well, also reported an impact on their own personal development and practice, since they were fairly new to the role and to early years. This included, for example, being able to pass knowledge on to practitioners, and how to plan development groups considering Hanen strategy.

It made me evaluate my practice and with planning and things like that I am definitely considering Hanen strategy when planning, for example with the group side, which then impacts all staff because I plan for all other staff.

Manager

One manager reported that the whole school had adopted key vocabulary. They also reported that practitioners were now using smaller groups, which their coach confirmed. They said that as a setting they had embedded OWLing the most.

Managers' views on parent engagement

Managers reported some increases in parental engagement. At one setting parent engagement had increased among parents who were on the Hanen parent training, which constituted about 40% of the parents. Managers had also made more effort to engage parents. One manager reported they had been more intentional about sending activities to parents at their setting, where there are a total of 11 different languages being spoken by families. They started a book swap for parents to read books to their children at home. Another manager reported that they have used Hanen strategies in parent-partnership, which they do three times a year, where they provide different strategies that they have been doing at the setting for different parents. They reported however that parent engagement with Hanen strategies is low.

Practitioners

Practitioners reported that their interactions with children had changed for the better since taking part in the CECIL programme. Several practitioners mentioned using new, different strategies they had learned from the programme, such as commenting, or tweaking strategies they already knew. One practitioner reported adapting strategies to engage nonverbal children.

One practitioner reported that their interactions with children had improved, as they were giving more consideration to their interactions. Another practitioner reported successfully taking more time to wait and listen prior to commenting and let the child lead, which they found to be a difficult habit to break. The practitioners reported that children gave more words in their responses as a result.

Prior to this [programme] I would ask lots of questions. But now I sit back and see what's happening, take it all in and then comment, rather than straight away asking questions.

Practitioner

The practitioner also took part in additional ShREC training after the programme, describing that Hanen laid the foundation and ShREC built on it. The practitioner reported that Hanen and ShREC training had significant overlap, so they would be in a similar position without the ShREC training.

One practitioner who was using many different strategies reported that OWLing was the most helpful for them, and they had printed out an owl and placed this image around the setting as a visual reminder to use the strategy. Other changes they made included placing the least interactive child across the room from them so that this would be easy to observe from a distance. The practitioner also reported that they now provide appropriate materials to children based on which stage they are at with language and communication.

I always now make sure to place the least interactive child across the room from me, so that I can be face-to-face with them . . . and then making sure it's more of a small group . . . and just apply different appropriate materials for the different stages of development for each individual child.

Practitioner

All practitioners who were asked commented that they would continue to use the strategies they had learned and continue to share knowledge with other staff. One reported how the strategies had become embedded in their practice.

The strategies . . . come more naturally now. It's not like I revert back to the handbook on a daily basis . . . It's nice to see that the strategies are embedded and I don't need to kind of go back and thinking, oh, I need to incorporate this, this, this because kind of it is all just embedded now in the practise that I do.

A manager who took part in the training also reported that staffing levels were a barrier to continued use of strategies and sharing of knowledge.

Practitioner Professional Growth Records

Eleven practitioners provided responses to the Professional Growth Record at the beginning (early autumn 2022) and end (summer 2023) of the CECIL Merseyside project. Results indicated that the majority of practitioners (i.e. 10 out of 11) perceived improvements in both their growth as professionals as well as their team and their practice.

Practitioners' views on parent engagement

Practitioners did not report any changes in parental engagement or in their interactions with parents as a result of taking part in the programme. Practitioners' involvement with parents varied, with some reporting that they regularly talked to parents and others saying they did not have many opportunities to talk to parents.

One practitioner reported that some parents did not know nursery rhymes, so they encouraged parents to learn some. They also reported using the app 'Evidence Me' to help parents extend children's vocabulary.

Coaches

A couple of coaches reported seeing positive changes in practitioners' interactions with children from the start to end of the programme. Although one setting was reportedly already using a variety of vocabulary and strategies from the first visit, for another the coach did not observe a significant change in practice until the fifth visit.

One coach reported that staff became more conscious of using strategies, and more confident in communicating with children. They reported that at the start of the programme staff were open about lacking confidence, including in what strategies to use, and that this had improved by the end of year. The coach also reported that staff from one setting who had visited another setting as part of the programme had reportedly made changes to their nursery environment as a result. The coach appreciated being able to go back to visit the setting to see the changes he visit had made.

Another reported benefit from one coach was that the programme was likely to have a positive impact on staff retention as practitioners would value the programme for its intended positive impact on children and feel valued themselves.

I always think that if you know your manager, leadership team are investing time in you as an employee then you will feel valued and you'll feel important. . . I would expect that you would want to commit to an organisation that values professional development.

Coaches' views on parent engagement

Coaches reported helping settings to engage parents in some cases, but they did not report the impact of this. One coach had a conversation with a setting about how they were communicating with parents.

Another coach spoke to their setting about a model they used at their own setting to focus on a text. This approach involved sending a bank of vocabulary home with parents (e.g. pinecone vs acorn) and explaining to parents what they are talking to children about, so they can help explain those words to their children.

One coach gave advice to a setting that had a lot of English as an additional language (EAL) families about how to communicate with and support those parents. They reported that other settings did not need support in this area.

5.2 Impact on language and communication among children

Managers

A couple of managers reported that the CECIL programme had a significant positive impact on children's language and communication. One of them reported that when using the TROLL to track children's progress, they had seen examples of small steps as well as some bigger jumps in children's processing and use of language. They partly attributed this to giving the children time to process what had been said to them.

Giving them that time to process what you've just said, we're getting more responses because we're giving that time to them to fully understand what's being asked of them or what whatever it is in that situation without jumping in and restarting that processing time all the time... we're obviously getting more out of the children cause they're understanding more about what they should be doing.

Manager

The manager at this setting also reported seeing higher parent engagement from parents who attended the Hanen parent training (which was about 40% of parents), but they did not comment on whether this contributed to children's progress.

The other manager attributed progress to practitioners using more comments than questions which meant that children were more willing to respond with an idea and made it more like a conversation. They reported progress with children with EAL in particular, who had started to repeat words back, and gave an example of one child with EAL who brought over a fire engine when they were talking about fire engines.

A couple of managers reported that the children had made good progress but were unsure if this progress was significant compared to usual. One of them reported that development was still slow as the setting is predominantly EAL, but some children had moved up to higher groups and were using longer sentences.

One manager was also unsure if the CECIL programme had an impact on children's language and communication skills, as practitioners used a combination of strategies that were not all from the Hanen training.

Practitioners

Practitioners reported seeing positive improvements in children's language and communication skills. One practitioner reported that the children they had targeted had made good progress.

We targeted specific children we wanted to interact more with and include. The children we picked made quite good progress against our school assessment criteria. Without those quality interactions they would not have made as much progress as they did.

Practitioner

Another practitioner who had reported using different strategies to engage nonverbal children said that some children who were nonverbal at the start of the year, now had language skills. A practitioner from another setting reported that a lot of the children in the SEN room were nonverbal at the beginning of the year, but by the end of the year, 4 of 10 nonverbal children were using single words.

Practitioner TROLL findings

As an optional assessment for practitioners to complete as a part of the CECIL Merseyside project, a total of three TROLL forms were completed in the autumn. Thus, it was not possible to track children's progress over time using this tool. However, the three TROLL forms that were completed in the autumn demonstrated low scores on children's independent reading and the use of small groups to stimulate talking.

Coaches

A couple of coaches mentioned that settings had used the TROLL to analyse and reflect changes. One reported that progress was evident through the TROLL, and that some children who were more reluctant at the beginning of the year became more sociable at the end of the year. They attributed this to increased confidence of staff to use strategies and communicate with the children.

One coach reported that at one setting which started to use smaller groups rather than larger ones towards the end of the programme, as discussed with the coach, the children were noticeably more attentive in the smaller groups. In the larger groups they had been distracted.

6 Findings: factors for scale-up

Drawing upon the discussions earlier on perceived impacts and implementation and feasibility as well as interviews with practitioners, managers and coaches, this chapter considers aspects for delivering and scaling up the CECIL? programme in the future. Three central themes arose in terms of scale-up, including the provision of staff cover, the preference of face-to-face over virtual meetings and the suggestion of practitioner visits to other settings.

6.1 Staff cover

A central theme throughout the interviews with practitioners, managers and coaches was that providing staff cover would have been helpful, as staff cover could allow for practitioners and coaches to be able to conduct coaching visits in quieter areas but would also ease the scheduling of face-to-face visits. Therefore, staff cover will be important to consider providing staff cover when planning a scaled-up version of the programme in the future.

6.2 Face-to-face meetings

Overall, there was a preference for face-to-face meetings over virtual meetings. This preference echoed across all three types of interviewees, practitioners, managers and coaches. Markedly, the face-to-face format of the meetings allowed for coaches to observe the classroom environment and space, which provided meaningful context for tailoring the support they provided from setting to setting. In the future, coaching meetings should be planned to be in person as much as possible. However, given the general nature of early years settings (they are complex with statutory staff-to-child ratios), engaging in face-to-face meetings may become difficult on a larger scale. Thus, it will be critical to take staff ratios and staff schedules into account when planning in-person coaching meetings in the future.

6.3 Visiting other settings

Although only one practitioner had the opportunity to visit another setting during the implementation of this programme, multiple interviewees noted that setting visits would be a useful addition to the CECIL programme. However, it is important to note that matching practitioners based on setting types would be beneficial, as the practitioner who visited another setting mentioned that the setting she visited had a lot of EAL children, unlike her own setting, and therefore, the environment was different.

One manager had a discussion with their coach about potentially sending practitioners to visit other settings informally next year, and potentially using their setting network called the 'Liverpool Family Hub' to facilitate this. One coach mentioned that a change she would like to see in the programme is for the mentees to be able to view high-quality interactions in person, in other settings. According to this coach, visiting other settings would give practitioners the opportunities to see other classroom environments, interactions and resources. She mentioned that practitioners can end up working at one early years setting for a long time without ever having the opportunity to visit another setting and to see how they might run undertake activities differently. Therefore, planning for future scale-up should involve thinking about including room in the budget and timeline to allow for these visits, perhaps taking advantage of setting networks if already in place, such as Triads.

7 Discussion

The following final chapter includes the main findings that have generated ideas to consider for language interventions in the early years sector, including maintained and PVI settings. This final chapter also includes next steps for future research.

To help address the intended outcomes of this work, a set of central research questions have been used to organise key findings below.

1. 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?

In general, practitioners, managers and coaches indicated the following about the sustainability work:

- Managers reported that practitioners who participated in initial Hanen Learning Language and Loving It training were able to successfully share knowledge and strategies to other staff and said, in general, with coaching support, all staff gained an improved understanding of how to support children's developing communication and language skills.
- The practitioners who were interviewed mentioned that they have been able to embed learning into their practice and have been sharing knowledge with other staff.
- Coaches said their coachees all had positive feedback about the CECIL Merseyside programme and that they found the coach visits useful.

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

Overall, central findings on the barriers and enablers included:

- Lack of staff cover, which was viewed as a barrier across practitioners, managers and coaches. This was difficult for multiple? coaches and practitioners to find a quiet place for their meetings.
- The general complex nature of early years settings was also viewed as a barrier, as this sometimes made scheduling the coach meetings difficult.
- A key enabler was the presence of effective leadership and management at settings, with setting managers providing a supportive environment for the practitioners.

3. What are the perceived impacts of the CECIL Merseyside project on practitioners' knowledge skills, and confidence?

Key findings included:

- Overall, managers and practitioners mentioned that the CECIL Merseyside project led to increased practitioner confidence, and managers noted improved practitioner interactions with children.
- Managers reported that there were some increases in parental engagement, with managers generally making more effort to engage parents.

4. What are the perceived impacts of the CECIL Merseyside project on children's language and communication skills?

- Managers and practitioners also reported that the programme positively impacted children's language and communication skills.

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

- A few aspects to consider when scaling up the intervention and sustainability work in the future included:
- The provision of staff cover was viewed by practitioners, managers and coaches as an important factor to consider when providing this type of support in the future, as this would allow for practitioners and coaches to find quieter, less distracting spaces to meet within settings.
- In general, there was a preference for face-to-face meetings over virtual meetings. The face-to-face format allowed coaches to ascertain a better understanding of the setting environment than if meetings were held virtually.
- Plans for future scale-up should consider the possibility of providing budget and time for practitioners to visit other settings so that they can see first-hand how other settings are organised and other examples of good practice.

7.1 Working with early years settings in the PVI sector

When considering the various barrier and enablers that were reported for the CECIL Merseyside programme, many of them could also be applied to other programmes and/or organisations working with early years professionals in the PVI sector.

A key consideration, which also fits with previous phases of the overall CECIL project, for working with PVI settings is the provision of staff cover. Staff in PVI settings often have complex schedules and work in classrooms with noise and distractions. Thus, programme planning should include staff cover to ease the timing and scheduling of in-person programme activities.

7.2 Future research

This report includes research regarding how coaches can help support the sustainability of early years practitioner knowledge and the embedding of effective strategies following the

implementation of an early language programme. There are opportunities for future research to explore different models of this provision, including the addition of setting networks that can be utilised to organise further learning across early years settings (e.g. practitioner observations of staff in other settings) and/or the use of other professionals as coaches (such as communication workers, language development workers and early years specialist teachers). Additionally, there is potential scope for combining this approach within the Stronger Practice Hub delivery of the Hanen Learning Language and Loving It programme. Specifically, the ideal next step in this line of research would be to assess the impact of the sustainability input by comparing settings that have received the initial Hanen training and the sustainability follow-up to settings that have received the initial Hanen training but do not receive the sustainability follow-up.

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Appendix A: CECIL 2A report



Coaching Early Conversations Interaction and Language (CECIL) Evaluation

Theory of Change process with CECIL Merseyside

Dawson, A., & Nancarrow, A.



Esmée
Fairbairn
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December 2022

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Institute for Employment Studies
City Gate
185 Dyke Road
Brighton BN3 1TL
UK

Telephone: +44 (0)1273 763400
Email: askIES@employment-studies.co.uk
Website: www.employment-studies.co.uk

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Contents

- 1 [Introduction](#)
- 2 [Method](#)
- 3 [Theory of Change](#)
- 4 [Discussion](#)
- 5 [References](#)

1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the original impetus for exploring language development programmes for private, voluntary and independent (PVI) and maintained nursery staff supported by mentors working within the maintained sector, and a brief description of the original Everton intervention.

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 (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). In the UK, a large socioeconomic achievement gap currently highlights the difference in academic achievement between children from low-income backgrounds and their more advantaged peers (Stewart & Waldfogel, 2017) and research this year has shown that inequality in early childhood has not improved since the early 2000's, despite investment (Cattan et al, 2022).

In England in 2021, 68% of 0–4-year-olds were enrolled in childcare settings (DfE, 2022), and there were 707,000 private, 265,200 voluntary, 313,900 school nursery, and 38,400 maintained nursery settings throughout the country (DfE, 2021) showing that childcare settings are crucial for developing these early skills. In the early years foundation stage (EYFS), the DfE (n.d.), has declared communication and language to be a 'prime area' and in 2021, the DfE published a press release outlining early years staff training for supporting language and numeracy skills of 2–4-year-olds as a part of the second phase of the Early Years Professional Development programme (Morton, 2021). This phase is currently underway and is the biggest investment in the early years at present, highlighting the funding) the government have acknowledged on language professional development for this non-statutory phase of education.

Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) commissioned a review of effective professional development which was published in 2021 (Collin and Smith, 2021) and this research builds on the first two recommendations³ from that review:

³ The third recommendation is about implementation and will be relevant during the times interventions are being tested.

1. **When designing and selecting professional development, focus on the mechanisms.** We believe that establishing the mechanisms of an intervention through a detailed theory of change process is key to beginning to understand how the intervention could lead to stakeholder outcomes.
2. **Ensure that professional development effectively builds knowledge, motivates staff, develops teaching techniques, and embeds practice.** The Coaching Early Conversations Interaction and Language (CECIL) overarching model covers all these aspects and seeks interventions which we suspect could also effectively demonstrate these areas. Of particular importance to the CECIL model is embedding practice.

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). Exploring what long-term support and sustainability could and should look like, including ways to mitigate barriers to improvement, is crucial in discussions around Theory of Change. This is particularly critical in the early years sector because annual turnover of this group of staff is considerably higher at 24%, than other professions (National Day Nurseries Association, NDNA, 2019) and the pandemic has only exacerbated this issue further.

1.2 Current project

This project builds on the original Coaching Early Conversations Interaction and Language (CECIL) project (Barbour, 2022) which explored the impact of two speech and language therapy-led interventions on PVI nursery practitioners supporting early childhood language and communication skills using the Hackney Speech and Language Therapy Team's 'Launchpad for Language' programme (Hackney CECIL) and the Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust Speech and Language Therapy team's 'Let's Interact' programme (Nottinghamshire CECIL). IES carried out an implementation and process evaluation (Dawson, Huxley and Garner, 2022) which found that practitioners felt that both interventions were feasible for practitioners and were showing potential perceived impacts on practitioners and children's language and communication skills, but there were barriers to the programmes including digital access and digital literacy for early years practitioners. The University of Oxford undertook an associated impact evaluation exploring the impact of the programmes on children's language and communication skills, using a small, randomised design. The research found that the Nottinghamshire CECIL programme was associated with a difference between the intervention and control groups over time, but no differences in group was found in the Hackney CECIL programme (Lindorff, et al. 2022). However, both included small samples and had some attrition in the endpoint assessment measures, so the results need to be interpreted with some caution.

The Sutton Trust had been exploring other possible models for supporting early years practitioners' ability to improve language and communication skills in children, and particularly how this learning can be sustained over time. The Using Research Tools to Improve Language in the Early Years (URLEY) model involves training early years

practitioners in how to use environment rating scales to measure language and communication in an early years setting. This also provided practitioners with mentoring, to set goals and improve the environment of their settings, and was based on effective evidence of professional development. Goals of the URLEY programme were to enact sustained change within settings and cascade learning among staff (Rawstrone, 2020). The URLEY model has been subject to two previous evaluations: the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) funded 2016-2018 evaluation (Wright et al 2018) and the subsequent Strategic School Improvement Fund Department for Education (SSIF) Language Leader model. This adapted some of the content from the initial programme (on the basis of some of the learning from the EEF project) including having local early years leaders as mentors (rather than part of the URLEY development team), making the training more frequent half day sessions rather than all day sessions to improve attendance, making the mentoring more structured including the 'gap' tasks between training sessions, and mentors identifying the support that practitioners needed and providing 'core' content and then additional choices rather than just asking what the nurseries wanted (Vaughan, 2020). The EEF evaluation found that the programme had positive impacts on practitioners but did not find impact on child outcomes. The mentors were rated very highly by early years practitioners taking part in the project, 95% of practitioners said that the in-person mentoring was very or quite helpful in the survey used in the report (68% found distance mentoring by phone, email or Skype very or quite helpful). The subsequent SSIF evaluation found that, that early years practitioners (EYPs) who participated in the project perceived the programme to be helpful, for not only improving confidence and vocabulary skills of reluctant communicators in their classrooms, but also improving their own skills as practitioners to support communication and language (Rawstrone, 2020). Data on children achieving a Good Level of Development⁴ from 37 settings that took part in the Language Leaders project also showed promising results in respect to reducing the gap for disadvantaged children, and a reduction in the gender gap and SEND gap compared to national and local figures (Vaughan, 2020).

The Sutton Trust became aware of the URLEY model during the EEF evaluation and followed the development into the Language Leaders programme. The evidence of promise found in these two project evaluations encouraged Sutton Trust to commission the current research. The Sutton Trust are committed to supporting the PVI sector and the approach this project used with a mixture of the PVI sector/ maintained sector as recipients and using the experience of the maintained sector 'jewel in the crown of the early years sector' (Cass and Barbour, 2019), to share best practice and expertise which helps to sustain and develop the sector as a whole was a convincing package. This

⁴ This is a description of children's performance at the end of Reception year as measured by specific progress on the early learning goals as part of the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile. More details can be found here

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1109972/Early_Years_Foundation_Stage_profile_2023_handbook.pdf

matching approach is now also being recognised by the DfE through the Stronger Practice Hubs approach⁵.

The current research sought to capture the Theory of Change (TOC) for the Language Leader mentor support, as part of the wider CECIL project, which is exploring different methods to support the sustainability of early years practitioner training. Once this original TOC model is established, the idea is that the support element alone could be applied to different models of training in the future, as a model of sustainability. This support programme alone is called CECIL Merseyside. The model of support is now being explored to support training from the Hanen 'Learning Language and Loving It'™, *The Hanen Programme® for Early Childhood Educators/Teachers* in an evaluation currently underway (as of autumn 2022) due to previous evidence on the Hanen programme.

The 2017 Education Endowment Foundation review of early language development (Law et. al., 2017) made recommendations on the areas where future research could focus its efforts, to help improve language from birth to five years of age. The report identified the Hanen training, 'Learning, Language and Loving It'™, as a promising intervention from its review of previous research. An efficacy randomised controlled trial (RCT) was commissioned in 2019 but was subject to huge disruption by the COVID-19 pandemic and therefore the impact evaluation was cancelled. Only the implementation and process evaluation continued, which was reported in 2022 (Bury et al, 2022b). A pilot project was commissioned in spring this year to examine how the project would work in PVI settings. The project is currently undergoing an EEF efficacy RCT which started in September 2022 (see Bury et al, 2022a for the protocol of both projects). The pilot settings from this project are the same settings that are now involved in the examination of the CECIL Merseyside described above.

1.3 The Language Leaders model

This section provides a description of the Language Leaders model; especially focusing on the support elements around the training aspects.

Model content: Language Leaders

The Language Leaders model built on the URLEY model, tested during the EEF evaluation, and this was also rolled out beyond the SSIF evaluation with an additional seven nursery schools in 2018- 2020 who acted as Environment Rating Scales hubs working with schools and PVI's in the area to share outcomes.

A summary of the Language Leaders main model is given below:

Selecting and training mentors from local early years settings was the first stage of development and this was crucial so that settings trusted and built good relationships with

⁵ See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/early-years-stronger-practice-hubs>

the mentors. Mentors were all qualified experienced teachers. Training involved specific focus on language development and the URLEY training, environmental rating scales and materials provided on the course. The mentors received ongoing group and individual supervision.

The programme then had an enhanced signing up period for settings, including a briefing event and discussion of the partnership agreement form, which outlined the responsibilities of the partner schools and the schools/PVI settings receiving the intervention. A discussion of who would be chosen as language leads is crucial to this signing up process, and a follow-up in-person visit by the project manager to the setting after the event helped complete this process and secure engagement with the project.

Baseline and endpoint assessments of the following were crucial to tracking progress during the project:

- Environment rating scales, Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale Third Edition, Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale extension and the Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing scale (ECERS 3, ECERS E and SSTEWS) carried out by external specialist observers of practice, which were discussed with the settings during feedback sessions.
- Practitioner surveys which covered self-efficacy, openness to change, knowledge of early language, pedagogy and assessed skills at identifying language strategies.
- Child language assessments completed by the practitioners - the Teacher Rating of Oral Language and Literacy (TROLL, Dickinson, Sprague and McCabe, 2003) and Hanen conversational styles assessment tool (Hanen, 2004). This helped practitioners assess those children who needed extra support and in particular reluctant communicators.

The main training element involved 10 half day sessions which covered language and communication background and how to complete the environment rating scales. Professional growth records were completed by practitioners each term to reflect and monitor their own progress. Gap tasks between sessions focused on implementation of the training principles and practising using the environment rating scales. This training was supported by mentor visits to the schools of four half days. Then an additional four half days of mentor time was provided by phone, email or producing and providing resources.

New staff induction processes, staff cascading sessions and parent sessions were all key to ensure that the work was embedded within the setting.

Finally, a ring binder folder with hard copy training materials as well as the training manuals for ECERS 3, ECERS E and SSTEWS were given to all participants.

2 Method

The IES implementation and process evaluation team worked closely with the Everton team in a ‘critical friend’ model throughout the period of March 2022–September 2022. Initially we supported them to clarify their Theory of Change of the project, as this had been used in the previous URLEY/Language Leader projects. Then we moved to a discussion on what would be kept for the forthcoming project, supporting settings that had received the Hanen Learning Language and Loving It TM training⁶.

The timeline for the TOC work was as described in Table 2.1:

Table 2.1 Timeline for Theory of change development and critical friend support

Date	Activity
Mar 22	Initial meeting and first TOC workshop
Apr 22	Everton work on TOC
May 22	Second TOC workshop
May-Jun 22	Updates to TOC
Jul 22	Final TOC workshop (including exploring how things might look with Hanen LLLI)
Aug- Oct 22	Writing summary report

⁶ This work developing the TOC for the new model of support has continued in the new project in autumn 2022.

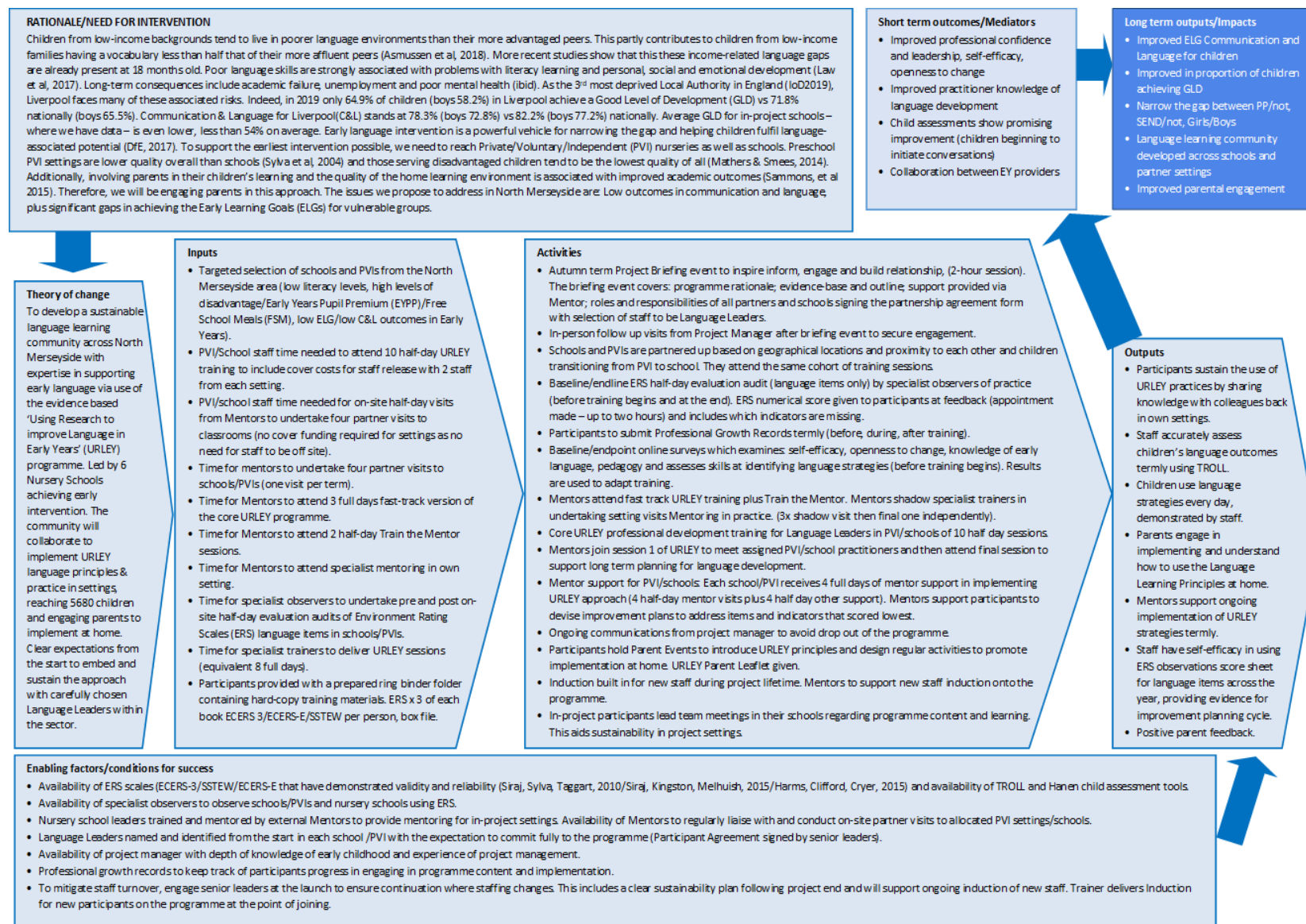
3 Theory of Change

The Everton team had a series of three Intervention Delivery and Evaluation Analysis (IDEA) TOC workshops (Humphreys et al., 2016) in a development package to help construct and test TOC models for the intervention⁷. All of these workshops were on Microsoft Teams due to the lasting impact of COVID-19 disruption. The workshops explored the history of the intervention and how this had changed over time between the URLEY and Language Leaders stages, and the background to how the intervention was put together and why. The TOC model was developed by the delivery team following the first workshop and went through various iterations. Between the workshops, there was also discussion about the TOC models, via email, to help further develop the model. During the last workshop, particular focus was given to which aspects of the support parts of the model were core to their approach and would be taken forward to the package being tested in autumn 2022 as CECIL Merseyside. Separate TOC workshops have taken place in autumn 2022, to develop that model and will be reported on next year, as part of the evaluation of that intervention.

The final TOC Language Leaders model produced is shown in Figure 1.

⁷ In this context, a Theory of Change (TOC) model sets out the aims and objectives of an intervention and identifies the mechanisms and resources used in the intervention to achieve this. A step-by-step explanation of the process of creating a TOC model can be found here: <https://www.thinknpc.org/resource-hub/ten-steps/>

Figure 1 Final URLEY Language Leaders TOC after the last IDEA workshop August 2022



4 Discussion

The final chapter will bring together the findings from the TOC development process with Everton. Next steps for future research with the team is also covered.

4.1 Features of the Language Leader Model

The Language Leader model described in this report brings together learning from the URLEY and SSIF evaluations, as well as building on the professional development literature. The project aims to build a sustainable model that can be embedded within settings, and help the sector continue to maintain learning and improve skills in language and communication. The next step of this project will take forward the key features of the mentor support of this model and findings to the Hanen Learning Language and Loving It™ training package. Therefore, we have identified aspects of the most critical elements of this model and where this overlaps with the CECIL Nottinghamshire model below.

Overlapping features of the Language Leaders model that were also found in the previous evaluation of the CECIL Nottinghamshire model include:

- delivery by expert professionals;
- the importance of training and coaching/mentoring combined;
- self-reflection as critical to continued progress (through reflection diaries in Nottinghamshire and professional growth records for the Everton model);
- discussions with setting managers to decide where the focus of the improvement work will be; and
- encouragement of sharing learning with other practitioners within the setting.

These features will be explored in more depth in the ongoing CECIL project work.

Additionally, learning from the Language Leaders project suggested some further refinements to the model would help future implementation which can be taken forward to the CECIL Merseyside model. These included:

1. providing extra support for cascading learning in the setting, as about a third of participants found this challenging.
2. Ensuring the local mentors are involved from the start of the project.
3. Ensuring managers/ headteachers are committed to releasing staff for the time needed as this proved difficult in some settings.

4. Improving manager/ headteacher engagement by involving them in sessions and briefing sessions.

4.2 Future research

Building on research for the EEF by Collin and Smith (2021) about the implementation of professional development programmes, it will be important to focus on the mechanisms that underpin the programme to ensure change to the programme is evidence based and that the programme can be carefully defined and replicated. IES are examining the feasibility and effectiveness of the additional support in a second phase of this project over the 2022 to 2023 academic year. We will be carrying out interviews with the settings in spring/summer 2023 to find out their views about how practice has been sustained in the second year, and what has helped or hindered that process. In addition, we will also be carrying out further Theory of Change work in autumn 2022 and summer 2023 to cover sustainability of practice. Finally we will also be interviewing those settings who have opted out of having the continued support this year.

We continue to be interested in different models of support for early years practitioners and look to establish the strengths and weaknesses of different styles of support in the next two years; by exploring the Nottinghamshire CECIL model examined in CECIL Phase 1, and the CECIL Merseyside model developed in Phase 2; with the settings that have received Hanen training as part of Hanen 'Learning Language and Loving It' current RCT in the academic year 2023 to 2024.

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Appendix B: practitioner survey questions

Confidence in supporting language development

The first set of questions are designed to find out **how confident you feel as an early years practitioner aiming to support children's language development**. Most of the statements use wording like this: "**How confident are you that ...?**" We want to find out the extent to which you feel you have the knowledge/skills needed to produce a specific outcome (e.g. increased children's vocabulary).

There are no right or wrong answers and practitioners vary a great deal in their confidence. Please be as honest as you can, because we are keen to learn about staff confidence across a broad range of skills.

1. How confident are you in your knowledge and skill at each of the following:

[list a grid question and respondents can specify frequency for each option]

- a. Very much
- b. Fairly
- c. Somewhat
- d. Slightly
- e. Not at all

Helping typically developing children make good progress in their language skills
Helping children with language delay make good progress in their language skills
Helping children with EAL make good progress in their language skills
Crafting good questions for your children
Enabling children to ask their own questions
Supporting children to be good listeners
Suggesting activities that families can do to support children's language development
Supporting children to be confident in communicating their wishes and ideas

Motivate children to want to communicate more with peers and adults
Assessing children's language to identify their need for support
Engaging other early years staff in changes to language practice
Making referrals for extra support for a child with language difficulties

Interaction with individual children

This next section asks about **how you interact with individual children**. Please rate the extent to which you do the following things, answering as honestly as you can.

2. What do you normally do when interacting with a child or group?

[list a grid question and respondents can specify frequency for each option]

- a. Frequently
- b. Fairly often
- c. Sometimes
- d. Occasionally
- e. Not at all

Wait for child to start the talking – with words, sounds, gestures or looks
Follow child's lead in play
Join in with child play
Position yourself to be face-to-face with child
Use a wide range of questions
Encourage child in turn-taking
Imitate what child has said or done
Comment on what child is doing
Repeat what child has said, using the correct form of speech
Extend what child has said, e.g. by linking to a previous event or providing another example

Model a wide variety of words, e.g. adjectives and connectives such as 'because'
Praise child
Talk slowly enough for child to understand

[illegible]

[illegible]

NOTE OF VISIT

SETTING:			
Mentor:		Date of visit:	
Staff seen:	Purpose of visit:		
	Observation Time –		

Nursery Class

Improvements since Hanen training:

Observation of practice:

Nursery class next steps:

Appendix E: CECIL Merseyside MOU

Coaching Early Conversations, Interactions and Language (CECIL) Memorandum of Agreement

Thank you for applying to participate in the CECIL speech, language and communication project. The information below sets out the aims of the project and the responsibilities of all parties. When signed it becomes an agreement between us. Please sign both copies and return immediately to Everton Nursery School and Family Centre or you can email instead at evertonnsfc@evertoncentre.liverpool.sch.uk.

Setting name:

Setting address:

Lead contact name and

role: _____

Lead contact e-mail address:

Lead contact phone

number: _____

Practitioner 1 contact name and role:

Practitioner 1 contact email address:

Practitioner 1 phone number:

Practitioner 2 contact name and role:

Practitioner 2 contact email address:

Practitioner 2 phone number:

1. The project team and their roles

The settings received training in the Hanen Learning Language and Loving It™ - The Hanen Program® for Early Childhood Educators/Teachers from February to July 2022. A total of 15 private, voluntary and independent as well as maintained nursery settings are now invited to participate in a project which aims to support practitioner's interaction skills with young children. This support work continues until summer 2023.

An evaluation project will be linked to the support work. The Sutton Trust and the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) are working in partnership to explore the impact of continuing professional development for early years practitioners to create a sustainable Language Learning Community.

2. The CECIL programme - what how and when?

From September 2022, our aim is to develop a sustainable Language Learning Community across Liverpool with expertise in supporting early language development. Led by 6 nursery school Mentors, the project brings together 15 early years provider settings to create a community that will collaborate to implement evidence-based language principles and practice. Mentors will provide support to practitioners for implementing the approach in their rooms as well as support for preparing future project mentors. Settings will receive 4-8 mentor sessions depending on setting requirements. If you would like your setting to take part in this study, practitioners (2 per setting) will be invited to participate (ideally those that took part in the Hanen training, but if one or more of those practitioners are at

your setting or available you can nominate an alternative practitioner). Each practitioner can decide whether they consent to do so.

What will it cost my setting?

Participation continues to be free. Costs are covered by the Sutton Trust.

3. The parallel evaluation

The evaluation of the programme is being conducted by IES, and this will be an opportunity for your setting to work with them to learn about how staff can support language development in early years settings.

What would the evaluation involve?

Some practitioners and setting managers may be asked to take part in an interview about their experiences of the project. The aim of this is to understand what practitioners think and feel about the follow-up support and any impacts it has had on them, the children or the setting. Some of these interviews will be by telephone or via video conferencing (Microsoft Teams) if you prefer.

- All practitioners will also be asked to complete an online survey at the start of the project and at the end of the project about their confidence and skills in supporting children's language development.

Responsibilities

The funder The Sutton Trust is funding the CECIL programme. The Liverpool settings received training in the [Hanan Learning Language](#) and Loving it programme (Feb-July 22) as part of the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) funded pilot. The CECIL programme will be exploring the best methods to monitor, embed and sustain good practice developed as part of the initial training.

The delivery team Everton Nursery School and Family Centre: Everton will be leading the project delivery and providing the mentor support.

The evaluation team The Institute for Employment Studies (IES): IES is an independent, international centre of research and consultancy in education, public employment policy and organisational human resource management and will be carrying out the evaluation.

a. IES will:

- Carry out telephone interviews with staff from a sample of settings in spring 2023 (consent requested at the beginning of the interview).
- Send out online surveys in September 22 and June 23 to all nominated practitioners.

- Observe a small number of mentor sessions.
- Facilitate secure data sharing with other members of the project team as necessary for the implementation and evaluation of the project.
- Collect and analyse the data from the project and write up the findings.
- Disseminate findings from the study - the final summary report for this project will be shared with all participating settings and will be available online on the IES and Sutton Trust websites.

b. Everton will:

- Collect practitioner contact details.
- Everton Project managers will provide ongoing supervision and support to the mentors.
- Develop and refine the Theory of Change (TOC) model to reflect practice (with guidance from IES).
- Manage a team of six experienced early years teachers (mentors) from the maintained nursery sector.

c. The settings will:

- Name a 'Project lead' to serve as the main point of contact for the setting with the project team and add their details to the front of this agreement.
- Nominate two practitioners to receive the 4-8 mentor sessions and provide practitioner details to the front of this agreement.
- All practitioners will be asked to complete Professional Growth Records termly as a means of charting progress. This will include a record of self-efficacy, openness to change, knowledge of early language, and pedagogy.
- All practitioners will be asked to complete short assessments of children's language at the start and end of the project.
- Support practitioners to develop and share their skills and knowledge with the larger staff group.
- Liaise with the IES evaluation team and assist in the arrangement of telephone interviews and surveys if selected to take part, enabling short interviews with relevant staff.
- Ensure the shared understanding and support of all staff for the project and personnel involved.

d. All parties will:

- Provide such assistance to each other as is reasonably required to enable all parties to comply with requests from parents and children who are involved in the project to exercise their rights under data protection legislation.

- Comply with EU data protection laws including the General Data Protection Regulation and the data protection laws of the UK including the Data Protection Act 2018
- Use all reasonable endeavours to work together collaboratively and productively.

4. Data sharing and data protection

- For the purposes of conducting the evaluation to assess the impact of CECIL, Everton and IES will become data controllers of personal data of practitioners. They may share personal data with trusted processors such as academics and others inside the research team solely for the purposes of proper delivery, management and evaluation of the project.
- The legal basis for processing data for this project is legitimate interests (IES and Everton).
- IES and Everton will securely delete all personal data within six months of the project finishing.
- The IES Privacy Notice for this project is available to download at <https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/privacy-notice-cecil>
- Your setting's data will be treated with the strictest confidence and will be transferred securely and saved in secure locations only accessible by the project team in line with GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.
- We will not use child names, setting manager/ practitioner names or the name of your setting, nor any similarly identifiable information, in any report arising from this project.

5. Agreement

If you are interested in participating, please sign the agreement below.

We look forward to hearing from you soon!

Nothing in this document will constitute or evidence a legally binding contract to create legal relations between the Parties.

We commit to participating in the CECIL study as detailed above.

Signature of authorised officer of the Setting:

Date: _____

Full name: _____

Position: _____

Contact email: _____

Appendix F: original CECIL Merseyside Theory of Change

This report is part of the phase 2 of research into the CECIL programme, specifically phase 2B, and was led by Everton Nursery School, Merseyside. Phase 1 of the Coaching Early Conversation Interaction and Language (CECIL) project was delivered by Nottinghamshire Healthcare’s Children’s Speech and Language Therapy Team and the Children’s Integrated Speech and Language Therapy Service for Hackney and the City. In phase 1, the two teams 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 leading to positive outcomes for two year olds’ language and communication. The phase 1 implementation and process evaluation (IPE) was led by IES and a phase 1 report published in early 2022 (Dawson, Huxley, and Garner, 2022), and a phase 1.5 report was published in 2023 (Dawson, Garner, and Nancarrow, 2023). The phase 1.5 report included Nottinghamshire only. Phase 2 expanded the CECIL project into the Merseyside area, with phase 2A comprising Theory of Change work (included in Appendix A) and phase 2B exploring the sustained and embed support model (the focus of this report). Concurrently, phase 3A explored a Language Development worker model in Preston (Dawson and Huxley, 2024). Table 1 describes the phases of CECIL in more detail. An overarching CECIL TOC has been developed to summarise details corresponding to the project as a whole. More information about the overarching TOC, including the overarching TOC model, are provided in Appendix G.

Table 1 CECIL Phases

CECIL Phase	Dates	Description
1	September 2020 – July 2021	Explored a speech and language therapist-led coaching model and included Theory of Change development work in Nottinghamshire and Hackney
1.5	September 2021 – July 2022	Explored a sustain and embed model in Nottinghamshire
2A	April 2022 – July 2022	Explored a new support model via Theory of Change development led by early years practitioners in Merseyside

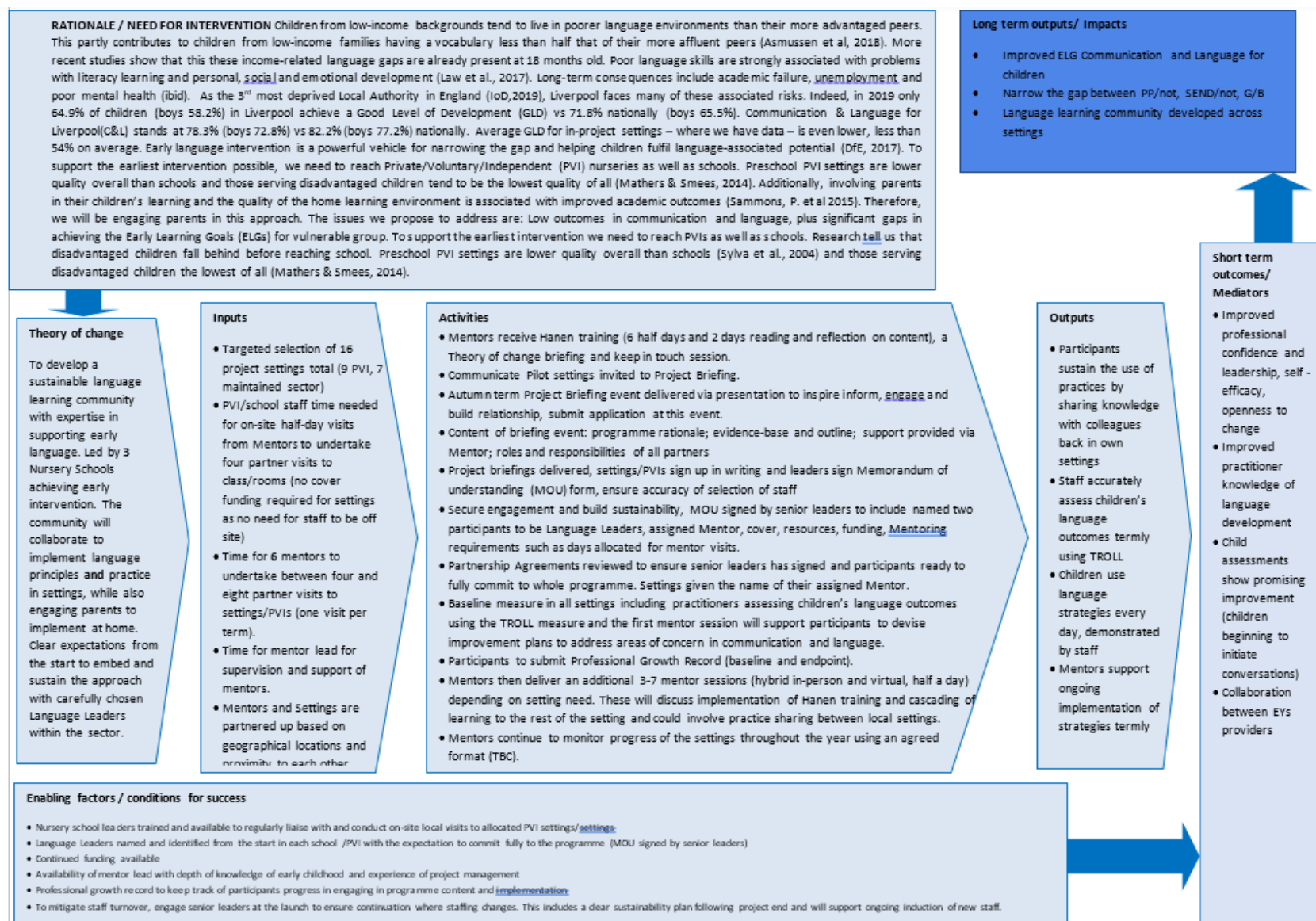
2B	September 2022 – December 2023	Explored a sustain and embed support model for the EEF Hanen pilot trial settings in Merseyside
3A	March 2023 – October 2023	Explored the Language Development Worker model (including Theory of Change development) in Preston

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

- The **Rationale** section was extensively edited to have a stronger focus on continuing professional development research and the research on coaching (including the EEF professional development guidance and EY professional development guidance, Collin and Smith, 2021, EEF, 2023 as well as reviews of coaching from Elek and Page, 2019 and Yang et al. 2022).
- In the **Theory of Change** section, mention of the URLEY programme has been removed as the previous model is now very distinct from the revised model. Reference to parental engagement has also been removed as this is not something the model has focused on, as this model has been refined. The number of schools involved in the support has been updated to the final numbers. Finally the mention of language leaders has been removed from this section and throughout; we refer to mentees instead now as recipients of the support because they do not have the language leader role that was used in previous models, and this terminology was therefore confusing.
- The **Inputs** section has been updated to clarify that the number of sessions will be between 4–8 (not 4) as this was what was delivered in practice. The mention of URLEY and train the coaching training sessions have been removed as this was no longer used. Environmental rating scales were now made optional, so this was clarified as the rating scales were not a priority in all settings. Coach supervision and group time has been added as this was a key part of the coaches' support in the revised model. The resources provided were also updated from the ring binder folder resources of the environmental measures, to now include a variety of links to Hanen videos, leaflets and websites, the LLLI book, and for the coaches' templates to help practitioners reflect on their own practice and take part in peer coaching (professional growth records, note of visit summaries and staff observation sheets).
- The **Activities** section was updated to include the Hanen training that all the coaches received now, as well as their support from the coach lead. Baseline measures of TROLL and ERS are now optional. The URLEY sessions/materials have all been removed. Visits by practitioners to coaches' settings have been added as a live template as this worked very well for settings in the pilot. Finally, the concept of a Hanen buddy was introduced in some settings to help introduce new staff to the support and would be recommended going forward.

- The **Outputs** section was updated to remove the ERS/URLEY measures. The parent engagement measure has been removed as this was not part of the updated model. A focus on embedding the learning has been added as a crucial part of the model to share knowledge with colleagues.
- The **Enabling factors/Conditions for success** section was updated to remove mention of the ERS. Specific skills and experience of the coaches and the coach lead have been highlighted as this was felt to be key to the success of the programme. the coaches considered that working with more than one setting was important for comparison, so this would be ideal going forward (two of the coaches only had two settings this time round). Senior lead engagement from the start and continued support of the time needed for practitioners to take part was seen as crucial by the coaches, so this has been added. Finally, there was consideration of the importance that at least one practitioner who had received the initial Hanen training, remained in the setting so there was some continuity, and that the training was not starting from scratch with a setting.
- The **Short-term outcomes** section has been extended to include not only practitioner knowledge but also confidence and skills based on the work by Mathers & Siraj (2021).
- Finally, the **Long- term outcomes/impacts** section has removed the mention of parental engagement and the language leader community and instead focuses on close relationships between coaches and mentees.

Figure 1 Original CECIL Merseyside TOC



Appendix G: overarching CECIL Theory of Change

The Sutton Trust, IES team and Janet Grauberg have worked together to develop the overarching Theory of Change model for the CECIL project since the start of phase 1 of the project. CECIL Phase 1 contained both the Nottinghamshire CECIL and Hackney CECIL (Launchpad for Language) approaches, which focused on supporting early years practitioners working with two-year-olds in PVI settings. The aim of CECIL Phase 1 was to improve staff practice with CPD that included coaching and as a result positively impact on child language and communication outcomes. The first Theory of Change was developed in June to July 2020 in a workshop and was revisited in October 2020 and August to October 2021 to create a version for the phase 1 report. The overarching TO C has been updated further in 2022 to consider the CECIL Merseyside model and has been further refined in 2023 to include CECIL Preston and the updated CECIL Nottinghamshire models. In 2023, there was an in-person IDEA workshop in January and virtual sessions in June and August with communication by email between these sessions to refine the models. A decision was made to make the model less specific about particular features of the individual programmes and look at overarching features that are considered core to what CECIL as an approach can offer. The final model presented below covers all the learning from the three phases of CECIL and all five CECIL delivery area models (Hackney, the two stages in Nottinghamshire, Merseyside and Preston). The overarching Theory of Change model is provided in Figure G1.

The changes from October 2021 to August 2023 are summarised as follows:

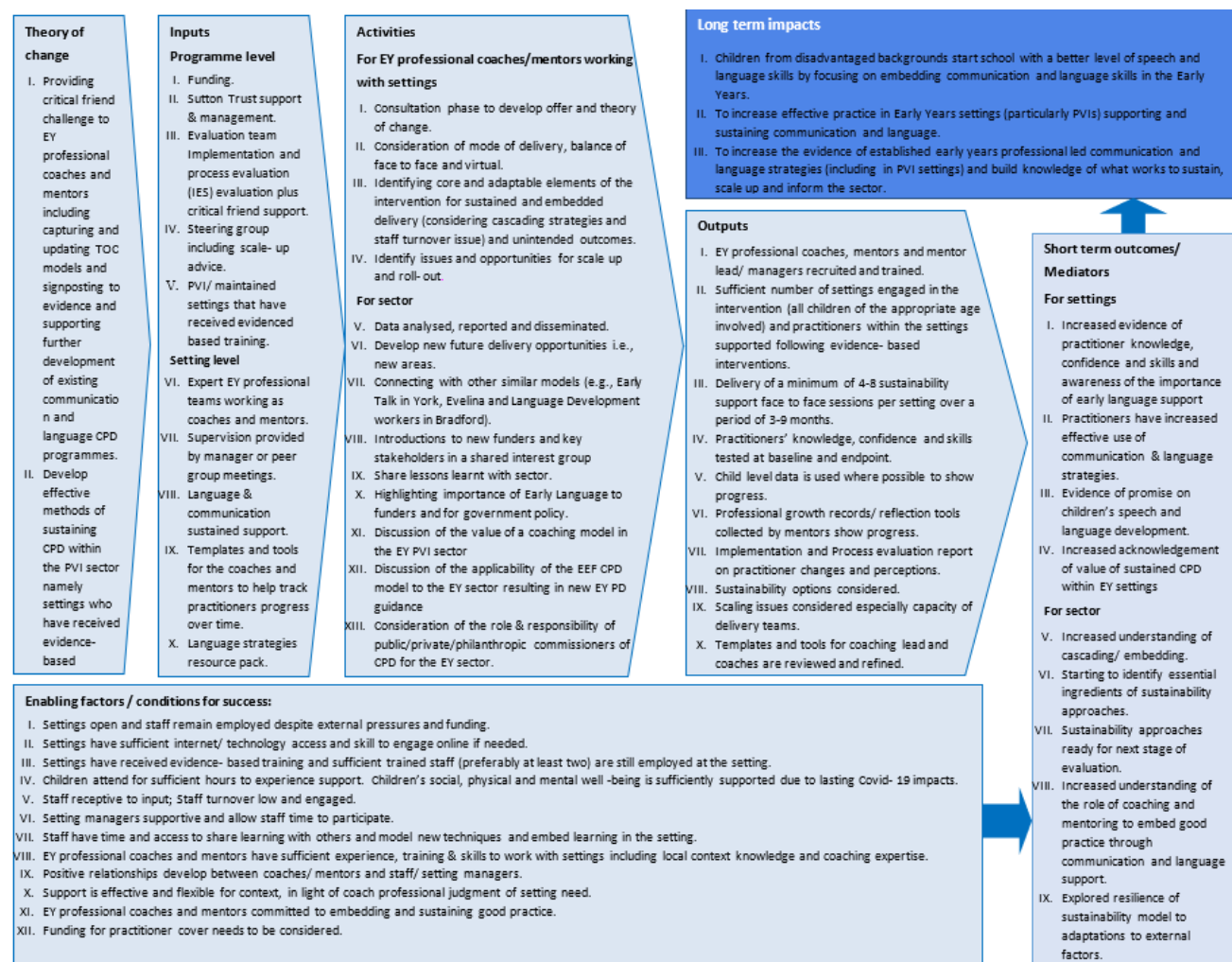
- The **Rationale** section is now a separate more extensive document as the research developed.
- The **Theory of change** section has removed mention of the RCT and now covers all models.
- The **Inputs** section has been split into programme level and setting level inputs and given more detail about the type of support that has been provided to settings, e.g. that experts are working as coaches or mentors (so across different professions), supervision of the mentors/coaches has been added. The language strategies resource pack and templates/tools for coaches has also been added.
- There were fairly substantial changes to the **Activities** section because the description covers all the different models of support. The activities have been split into 'for EY professional coaches/mentors working with settings' and 'for the sector'. For the former, issues such as sharing knowledge and staff turnover are now considered, as they have been important features of the development of CECIL work. For the latter, the discussion of the value of the coaching model for the sector has now

been included, as this is a key part of the CECIL findings. The part that CECIL played in encouraging the EEF EY professional development guide is also recognised.

- The main changes to the **Outputs** section are going from a model focused on the specific needed for Hackney/Nottinghamshire models, to looking at the core features across models (including practitioners involved after an evidence based intervention, delivery of 4–8 sessions of support over 3–9 months, an exploration of practitioners knowledge, confidence and skills based on the Mathers and Siraj (2021) work, the use of reflection tools to monitor practitioner progress and ensure they are reflecting on their development and templates and tools used for coaches/mentors being used).
- The **Short term outcomes/mediators** have been split into ‘for settings’ and ‘for the sector’ and they were also updated to include confidence and skills as above as well as effective use of the strategies learned in the support. They also include an increased understanding of sharing and embedding knowledge - this is a feature still under development.
- The **Enabling factors/conditions for success** section has removed specific mention of COVID-19 altering practice as this is no longer as relevant as in 2020-2021 aside from mention of the long-term impacts. Expansion of the points on skills and knowledge required from the mentors/coaches has been added and the positive relationships they develop. Support is flexible and using professional judgment to adapt when needed. Funding for practitioner cover given all the demands on practitioners is also considered.

Finally, the **Long term impacts** section no longer references narrowing the gap specifically as this is a very difficult target, and has been replaced with improvements for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Figure G1 Overarching CECIL Theory of Change



Appendix H: CECIL Merseyside timeline

Date	Activity
September 2022	Initial project set-up meetings. Initial virtual IDEA TOC meeting with coaches. Baseline practitioner survey.
October 2022 to July 2023	Pilot delivery of CECIL Merseyside. Regular meetings with the critical friend team, coaches and Merseyside project lead.
November 2022	Opt-out interviews. CECIL Steering Group Meeting.
January 2023	In- person IDEA TOC meeting with coaches. In-person overarching TOC for CECIL meeting with IES, Sutton Trust and Janet Grauberg.
February 2023	CECIL Steering Group Meeting.
February to March 2023	Team edits their TOC model.
June to July 2023	Interviews with practitioners and managers. Post intervention survey with practitioners. Observation of coaching sessions. Virtual overarching TOC for CECIL meeting with IES, Sutton Trust and Janet Grauberg. Early years discussion day (in-person) with all CECIL teams and other organisations working to support early years practitioners with speech and language training.
August 2023	Overarching CECIL IDEA workshop with IES, Sutton Trust and Janet Grauberg.
September 2023	Final interviews with practitioners, managers and additional interviews with coaches.
October to November 2023	Analysis of survey and interview data.
August to December 2023	Writing summary report.
December 2023	CECIL Steering Group Meeting.
January 2024	Infographic produced.
February to March 2024	Report and infographic published.