

Ipswich Champions for Children evaluation report

**A professional development programme for early years practitioners using
the HELLO+ improvement framework**

July 2019

In 2018-2019, the National Literacy Trust and EasyPeasy developed and delivered a professional development programme for the Department for Education in the Ipswich Opportunity Area to strengthen professional competency in supporting children to develop early language, social and emotional skills.

Working together with the early education sector and West Ipswich Teaching School, the training programme was developed for practitioners from early years settings in the Opportunity Area (including PVI's, children's centres, playgroups, nurseries and schools) with a particular focus on supporting children aged two to five develop early language and communication, resilience and emotional regulation.

This training programme, Champions for Children, uses the Helping Early Language and Literacy Outcomes (HELLO) improvement framework as a base – a proven approach for early years settings who want to improve their language and communication provision. HELLO+ includes additional elements that support improvements to social and emotional provision and makes links between these two prime areas of learning. Practitioners received support to cascade the training and approaches to other practitioners in their settings, building sustainability through a network of Child Development Champions.

This report indicates that the programme has had a significant impact on a range of outcomes.

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Summary of key findings

	Key finding	Key statistic
1	Practitioners are more likely to engage and involve parents with supporting their child's language and communication development	Almost three times as many practitioners asked parents how they shared books or nursery rhymes with their child at home after participating in the programme compared with before (60% vs 23%)
2	Practitioners are more likely to engage with parents to discuss their child's social and emotional development	We found a 63% increase in practitioners now making time to discuss resilience and self-regulation with children's parents
3	Practitioners engage more frequently in behaviours that demonstrate knowledge and skills in supporting children's communication and language	After participating in the programme: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 in 10 (30%) practitioners "repeat what the child says and add one or two words" more frequently • 1 in 4 (26%) practitioners "give children opportunities to engage in structured conversations with peers" and "imitate and repeat what the child says more or less exactly" more often
4	Practitioners support social and emotional development in children through language and communication more frequently	Almost 1 in 4 (23%) practitioners now acknowledge children's feelings and give those feelings a name more regularly
5	Practitioners are more likely to implement actions to create an enabling environment in the setting that stimulates communication and language	More than 1 in 4 (26%) practitioners now ensure that "the setting has good quality toys available" more often, including pretend, sensory, small world objects, musical instruments, and real/natural resources
6	Practitioners are more likely to take actions to create an enabling environment in the setting to support social and emotional development	Nearly 3 in 10 (28%) practitioners now ensure that transition objects are made available for children to help them self-soothe (e.g. mum's old purse or a blanket or toy from home)

Background

About Champions for Children

Ipswich is one of 12 areas in England identified by the government as an opportunity area (OA), receiving targeted funding to unlock the potential of its children and young people through education.

The first priority of the Ipswich OA is to ensure all children in the town are prepared to learn for life by developing key behaviours such as resilience and self-regulation. School leaders and other educational professionals in Ipswich report that, too often, pupils are starting their school journey with lower than expected levels of communication, social and emotional skills, such as language, agency, resilience and self-regulation.

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds in Ipswich consistently achieve lower levels of development than their non-disadvantaged peers. Disadvantaged children in Ipswich are also less likely to achieve an exceeded level in many of the individual early learning goals (ELGs). Indeed, one quarter of disadvantaged pupils in Ipswich do not meet the expected level in the speaking ELG and one fifth do not meet the expected level in the understanding ELG¹.

In response, Champions for Children was developed by the National Literacy Trust and EasyPeasy to help improve the language, social and emotional development of children under five in the town. The project is funded by the Ipswich OA and is further aligned with the government's social mobility action plan, which aims to halve the number of children who start school without the early literacy, language and communication skills they need to learn and flourish by 2028².

The partners

National Literacy Trust

The National Literacy Trust designs, develops and delivers training, continuing professional development (CPD), programmes and resources to support children in the early years with the greatest literacy, language and communication needs.

The charity delivers its early years projects in communities and settings where more than 50% of children are from disadvantaged backgrounds. By the age of five, children from disadvantaged backgrounds can be up to 19 months behind their more affluent peers in terms of vocabulary³, with lasting consequences. Children who have poor language skills at age five are six times more likely to fail to reach the expected standard in English aged 11⁴, three times

¹ Department for Education (2017) [Ipswich opportunity area: delivery plan](#)

² Department for Education (2017) [Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential](#)

³ Waldfogel, J. (2012) [Social Mobility Summit](#), The Sutton Trust

⁴ University College London, Institute of Education, on behalf of Save the Children (2016) [EARLY LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT AND CHILDREN'S PRIMARY SCHOOL ATTAINMENT IN ENGLISH AND MATHS](#)

more likely to have behavioural and mental health problems as adults⁵, and more than twice as likely to be unemployed at age 34⁶.

The charity's training, programmes and resources draw on evidence from Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), the ESRC International Centre for Language and Communicative Development (LuCiD) and the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) about the most effective ways to improve children's early language skills and later life chances.

EasyPeasy

EasyPeasy uses technology to help families discover, create, play and share learning games. EasyPeasy sends game ideas to parents of pre-school children to encourage play-based learning at home. Parents receive a weekly text message directly from EasyPeasy which links to videos of example games that they can play with their child, plus tips and advice about learning through play. The games target skills within the Early Years Foundation Stage areas of learning.

The programme is a proven and effective method backed by independent research from The University of Oxford and The Sutton Trust, carried out in partnership with Newham and Bournemouth Councils. The research shows that the three most effective elements of parental engagement programmes, as outlined below, are core to EasyPeasy's approach:

1. involve parents of younger children
2. provide an approach that is flexible and that can fit around the parent's schedule
3. provide simple and practical ways that parents can support their children that do not require high levels of ability

About the training

Training model: HELLO+

The Champions for Children training programme was built around the HELLO self-evaluation improvement framework, which was initially developed in 2015 by the National Literacy Trust for early years settings who wanted to improve their communication, language and literacy provision.

Funded by the Department for Education, HELLO was tested with 74 early years settings in England between April 2015 and March 2016, with positive results.

The National Literacy Trust worked with EasyPeasy and the West Ipswich Teaching School to re-design the HELLO framework to include evidence-based strategies to support children's social and emotional development, particularly in the areas of resilience and self-regulation, in addition to language and communication development. This is now called HELLO+.

HELLO+ comprises eight hours of training (six hours of face-to-face training and two hours of webinar training) followed by time and support for practitioners to cascade their training to

⁵ Law et al. (2009) [Modeling developmental language difficulties from school entry into adulthood: literacy, mental health, and employment outcomes](#)

⁶ The Sutton Trust (2019) [APPG on Social Mobility Inquiry: Closing the regional attainment gap](#)

colleagues to help them audit and evaluate their provision and create action plans in one of three key areas: partnerships with parents, skilled practitioners or enabling environments.

The self-evaluation framework provides prompts, critical questions and resources to help settings identify their strengths and areas for development. Further supporting resources were available online through National Literacy Trust membership and the EasyPeasy app.

Throughout this process, settings were supported by Senior Leaders in Education from the West Ipswich Teaching School. Network meetings brought practitioners together to share ideas and actions and to support further reflection, and the training programme was completed by the submission of a case study from each setting which clearly evaluates the impact of their actions. The whole process took between 12–24 weeks.

Training content

Practitioners took part in eight hours of face-to-face training, which included:

- Stages of language and social and emotional development for typically developing two- to five-year-olds
- Communication and social and emotional difficulties in the early years and risk factors to consider
- Strategies for identifying communication and language delay
- Strategies for improving speech, language and emotional development through high quality adult-child interactions

Specifically, through the HELLO+ improvement framework, practitioners learnt:

- How to support parents to improve their home learning environment through family activity sessions and signposting to resources
- How to create an enabling classroom environment for speech, language and social emotional development
- How to observe, track, support and monitor children’s development along with their parents

Practitioners also took part in two hours of webinar training, focussed on supporting children’s emotional self-regulation and resilience, and the use of play and interaction to nurture behaviour. The webinar also introduced practitioners to the EasyPeasy app and explained how they can access EasyPeasy’s parenting programme resources.

The overall training equipped practitioners to disseminate the learning and approaches throughout their settings to support other early education practitioners.

Following an audit of their provision, practitioners were asked to focus on one of three key areas (partnerships with parents, skilled practitioners, and enabling environments) to improve and create an action plan. Every setting was then asked to submit a case study evaluating the impact of their action plan on children, families, practitioners and the overall setting.

Training delivery

The Ipswich OA provided backfill cover costs to enable early years practitioners and teachers to be released for training, action plan completion and network meetings.

The National Literacy Trust and EasyPeasy delivered the Champions for Children training to at least one practitioner from all 66 early years settings in the Ipswich OA. In total, 116 practitioners received training over thirteen face-to-face training days and thirteen webinars.

The face-to-face training was delivered at a variety of times and at two different locations across the autumn, spring and summer terms of the academic year 2018-19. Webinars were delivered two weeks after the initial training date and were mostly accessed by practitioners on laptops in a quiet area of their settings.

Following the training, practitioners were supported to complete their action plans by National Literacy Trust Programme Managers and Senior Leaders in Education from the West Ipswich Teaching School who phoned, emailed and visited the settings.

Five network meetings were scheduled in the spring and summer terms, facilitated by the National Literacy Trust. 50 settings (75 practitioners) attended the network meetings and received additional advice and guidance on completing a case study to demonstrate the impact of their actions on children's early language, social and emotional skills.

31 settings set up EasyPeasy for their parents, reaching a total of 1,751 families through the app.

About the project evaluation

A rigorous evaluation strategy was developed to monitor the impact of the project and understand how it was employed by different settings (please see Appendix A for more information).

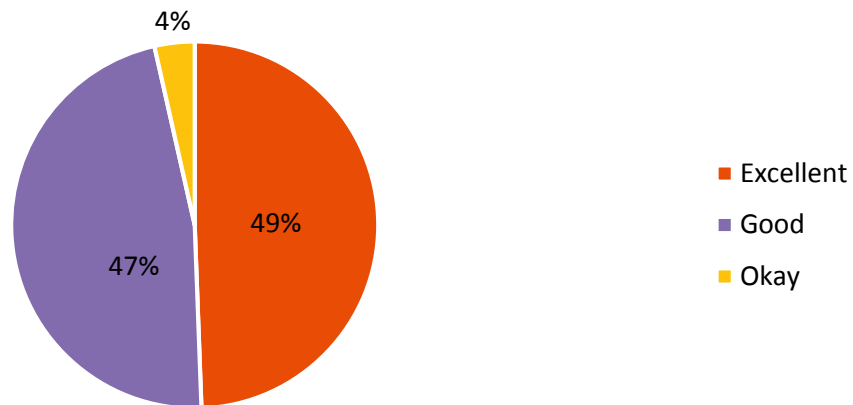
The following findings are mostly based on feedback from 43 practitioners whose responses at the end of the evaluation period could be matched to their pre-evaluation responses. We also had data from 98 practitioners who gave us feedback on our training and we had access to a wealth of case studies and data from focus groups to help us better understand the detail of the impact of the CPD and the use of the HELLO+ framework.

Training feedback

Face-to-face training

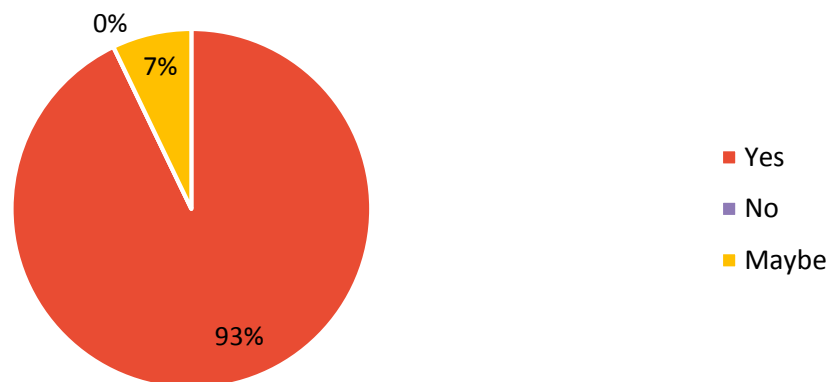
The training was highly rated by practitioners. As Figure 1 shows, 96% of practitioners rated the training as either excellent (49%) or good (47%).

Figure 1: Overall rating of training



The vast majority of practitioners would also recommend the training to other schools or settings, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Practitioners who would recommend training to another school or setting



Feedback from the practitioners about specific aspects of the training was equally positive (see Figure 3). Over 9 in 10 (94%) practitioners “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the training enhanced their understanding of social and emotional development. Indeed, one participant told us that learning about the *“emotional needs of children and how to support those”* was the most useful part of the training.

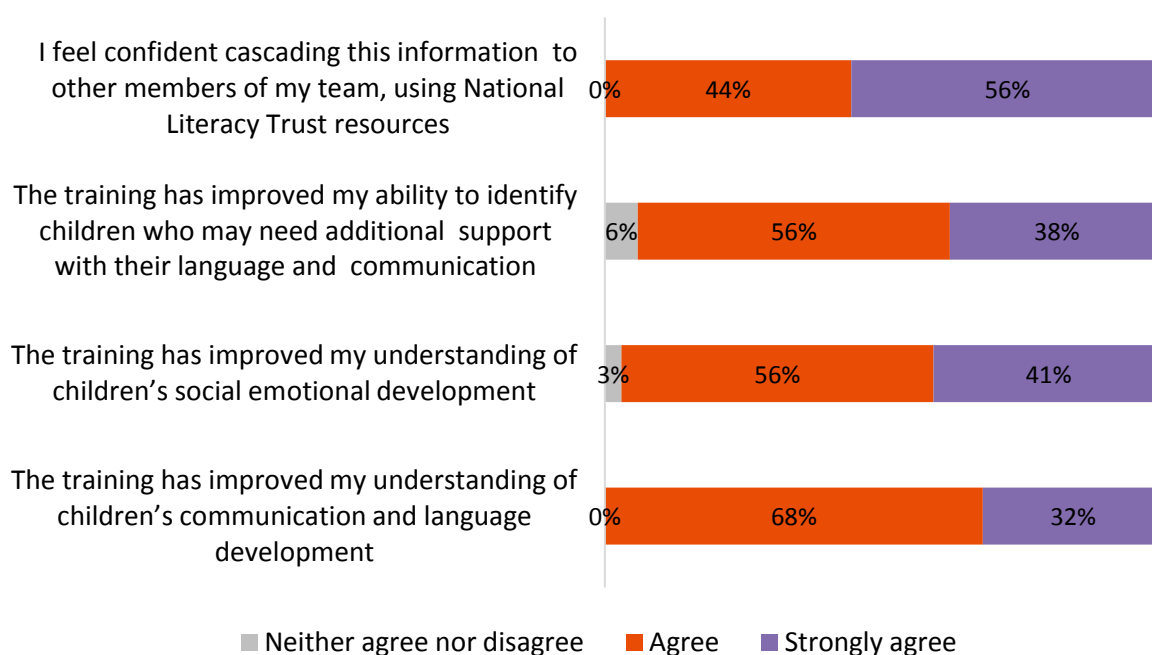
In addition, all practitioners “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the training improved their understanding of communication and language development. This finding goes hand in hand

with the fact that 9 in 10 (94%) practitioners also “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they now feel more confident identifying children who may need additional support.

This is corroborated by the open ended responses. When asked what practitioners found most useful from the training day, several respondents gave answers relating to language and communication resources from the training, for instance one participant wrote:

“The key communication milestones was useful as it's a good way to look at children's stages of communication development.”

Figure 3: Practitioners reporting the training was effective in achieving a range of outcomes



Webinar training

All of the practitioners who attended the face-to-face training booked on to the follow-up webinar session and 95% attended, with 5% not attending due to technical difficulties.

Most practitioners had not completed a webinar before (87.9%).

On average, practitioners rated the accessibility of the training as 5.7 out of 7 and the value of the training to be 8.08 out of 10. Practitioners found the most useful parts of the webinar to be finding out about the EasyPeasy app and how to support parents to use and access the 20 week activity journey, and seeing an example of the videos which show how parents can support their child's learning through play.

Cascading the training

Figure 3 also shows that practitioners felt confident to share their acquired skills with other staff in their setting and were motivated to do so. All respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they felt confident cascading the information to other members of their team using the resources provided by the National Literacy Trust through their free membership,

which included training PowerPoints and videos, as well as guides, posters, top tips sheets, quizzes and action-planning frameworks available through the digital HELLO+ tool.

Several settings made specific reference to how they went on to hold formal training sessions within their setting to share their newly acquired knowledge, tools and skills.

There was a particular interest in the *Communication Pyramid*, a model showing the building blocks for language used in many speech and language therapy services. For instance, one setting wrote:

“We trained all our staff following the Champions for Children’s training as we felt it was important that we all understood where the interaction originally starts from. The staff felt that the triangle of communication was a good visual tool to use in day to day practice and they have since used this when completing IEPs [Individual Education Plans], etc.”

Another setting wrote:

“In order to give the team additional understanding and a tool for focusing on each child’s communication and language development we introduced the Communication Triangle...”

By analysing how the settings discussed cascading the training, it is clear that they valued the flexibility and adaptability of the training, HELLO+ tool and accompanying National Literacy Trust resources. Many practitioners reported in their case studies that they adapted their training to meet the specific needs of the setting when cascading the training. For example:

“We invited the practitioners to attend a training session on social, emotional and language development. The training was based around the training received as part of this project and was catered so that it was specific to our setting. It also included training on how to use Tapestry [the setting’s online learning journal] and make good observations.”

A focus group meeting provided additional data on how the training was cascaded within the settings. The main methods for cascading training included:

- Staff meetings and follow-up sessions
- Internal discussions where staff was asked to contribute ideas (e.g. some settings used a WhatsApp group)
- Weekly early years team meetings
- Having personalised 1-2-1 conversations
- Creating a summary to update Teaching Assistants and/or management
- Asking Teaching Assistants to help make new resources for the setting
- Introducing the EasyPeasy app by showing some example videos to colleague

Outcomes

As part of the evaluation process, practitioners were asked how often they had engaged in specific behaviours before and after they took part in the training. These behaviours were all focused on promoting early language and social emotional development and could be categorised into three main themes:

1. Practitioners' behaviours to engage and involve parents
2. Practitioners' knowledge and skills
3. Actions to create an enabling environment

Data from the pre- and post- practitioner surveys suggests that the programme has been effective in stimulating changes and improvements in practitioner behaviour.

Finding 1: Practitioners are more likely to engage and involve parents in supporting their child's language and communication development at home

As a result of the Champions for Children programme, practitioners are more likely to engage in positive behaviours with parents to promote a stimulating home learning environment. However, this can mainly be attributed to the fact that it was the area with most room for improvement. In fact the pre-surveys show that practitioners did not engage in activities to involve parents on a regular basis.

Figure 4 features an analysis of the data for five behaviours relating to the theme of parental engagement. By looking at the pre- and post-surveys, it was possible to see what proportion of practitioners told us that they engage in these behaviours "most of the time" or "quite often". For the purpose of this analysis, these categories have been merged to "frequently".

Figure 4: Change in percentage of practitioners engaging in these behaviours frequently

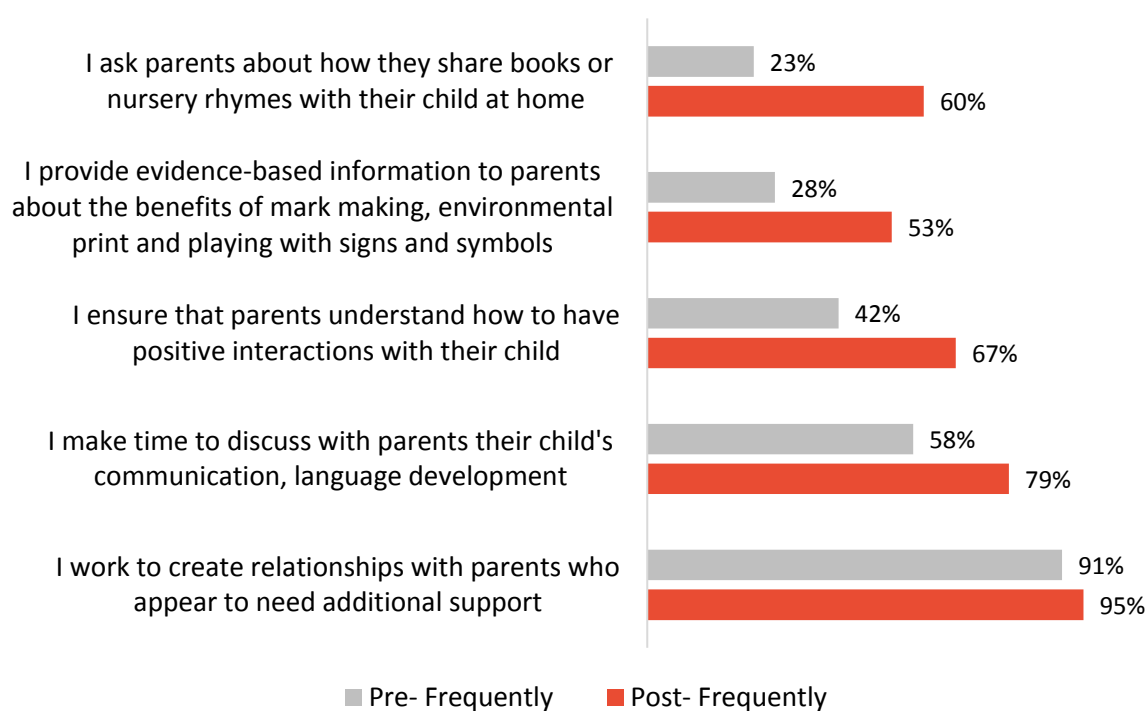


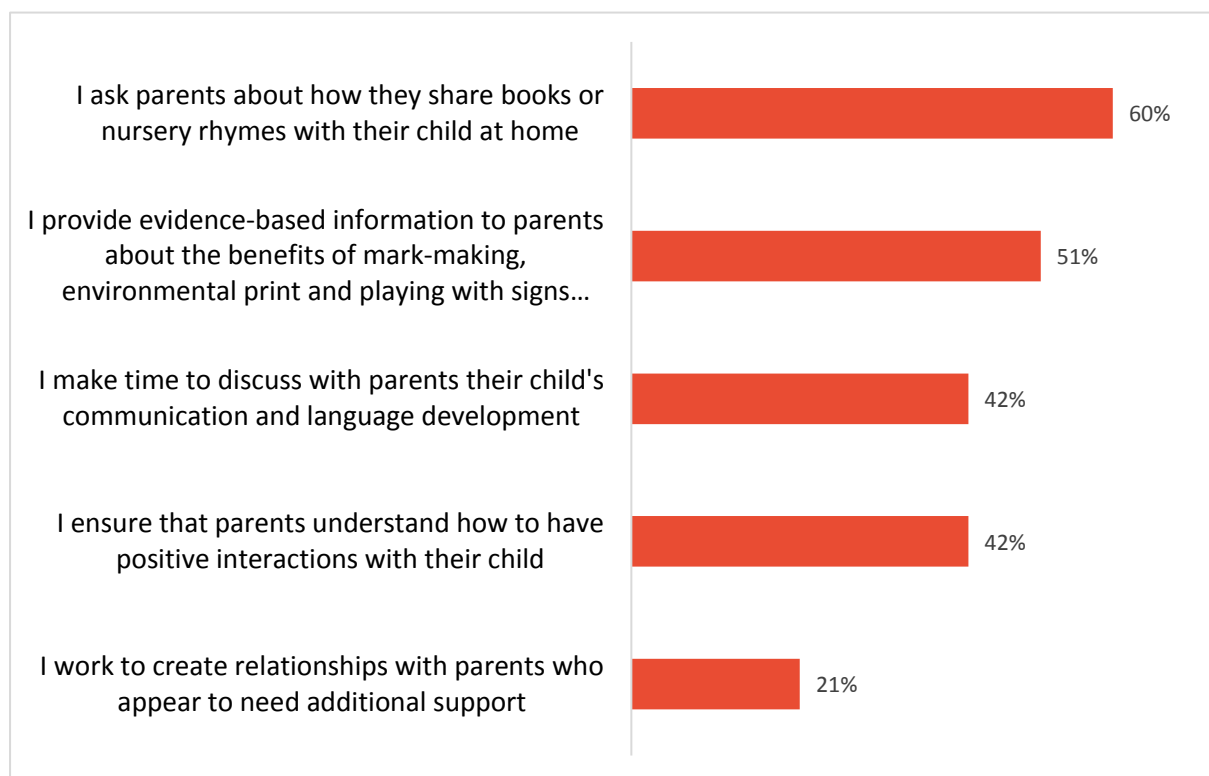
Figure 4 shows that only 23% of respondents asked parents about how they shared books or nursery rhymes with their child at home before they started the programme. This figure increased nearly threefold to 60% following the implementation of HELLO+ actions.

Similarly, before the programme, only 3 in 10 (28%) practitioners provided evidence-based information on the benefits of mark-making, environmental print and playing with signs and symbols, while nearly double (53%) said that they now do so on a regular basis.

Figure 5 shows what percentage of practitioners engage in these behaviours *more* frequently than before. For instance, some practitioners may have carried out these actions “rarely or never” before using the HELLO+ tool and now do so “occasionally”. These figures also suggest that taking part in the programme has supported practitioners to engage more frequently with parents in a positive way.

It is important to note that the reason why fewer practitioners reported that they now work to create relationships with parents who appear to need extra support is because many of the practitioners reported that they already did so often in the pre- survey. Thus, it was not possible for these high scoring practitioners to improve.

Figure 5. Percentage of practitioners engaging in these behaviours *more* frequently



A closer look at themes surrounding parental engagement

There were some key themes that emerged from the case studies and the focus groups. Settings found parents who spoke **English as an additional language** needed extra help to

engage with the setting and support their child's language and communication at home. This recurring theme was also accompanied by discussion some parents' lack of confidence.

One case study illustrates these two themes very explicitly:

“Some reasons parents gave were lack of time, a lack of access to books in their spoken home language (as they personally are not able to read English print), feeling children's books were boring and feeling silly reading them...therefore lacking confidence.”

This theme was also widely discussed within the focus groups, where several of the practitioners told us that language barriers were one of the main challenges for them. Strategies used to overcome these barriers included using technology to translate key messages, bilingual quick tips from the National Literacy Trust website, and perseverance with a smile.

Another recurring theme was the **modelling and encouragement of positive home learning environments** in the key moments where the parents interact with the setting. By analysing the case studies, it is clear that the training enabled settings to see how they could encourage parents to engage in behaviours that support language and communication in certain key moments. For example, one really powerful case study discussed how the HELLO+ audit made them realise that some of the hard-to-engage families were arriving early to the setting, but were not using the time to have meaningful interaction with the child:

“Our nursery noticed that we were having difficulty engaging parents in activities and events as most of our parents work full-time and aren't able to get time off work.

We also noticed that a lot of our funded families were arriving at nursery 10-20 minutes early and when asked to wait with the child until funded hours start, most families would wait by the door rather than play with their child.”

Another emerging theme was the concept that **some parents needed a lot of support initially but then started engaging in these positive behaviours independently**. This may suggest that the specific actions taken as part of the HELLO+ improvement planning might have a long-lasting impact on some parents. For instance, one setting said:

“Since starting the story-share sessions we have noticed that the parents are reading with their children at the start of the session rather than just waiting for the group story to start so are becoming more confident and proactive in sharing stories with their children”

Many settings mentioned that they administered internal surveys which demonstrated a **rise in parental confidence**. In addition, setting noted particular progress in parents' behaviour change, such as increased frequency in using the library.

Numerous case studies highlighted how efforts to engage with parents following the training have already translated into increased language and communication attainment. Many used GL Assessment's WellComm Early Years toolkit to demonstrate improvements in attainment; the toolkit contains a screening tool that enables practitioners to identify children needing speech and language support through an easy to understand traffic light scoring format⁷.

These case study extracts make a very clear link between parents having an increased involvement in supporting their child's language skills at home and improvements in the child's language and communication skills.

Before taking part in Champions for Children:

On the parent questionnaire completed by 26 of our 45 families, fewer than 15% said they were playing games or sharing stories with their child. Over half were left on devices such as I-pads or parents' phones as a main source of entertainment.

From an initial Wellcomm assessment 77% of the cohort scored Red or Amber, indicating a significant lack of communication and understanding skills.

After taking part in the project, implementing changes from the HELLO+ training, and introducing parents to the EasyPeasy app, the setting reported:

Current data shows 51% of children are now Green or Amber within the Wellcomm scheme.

EasyPeasy had a big impact with 30 of 45 parents regularly engaging. This typically shows that regular use of the games had a positive impact on individual children, reflected in WellComm final data, with them no longer needing intervention.

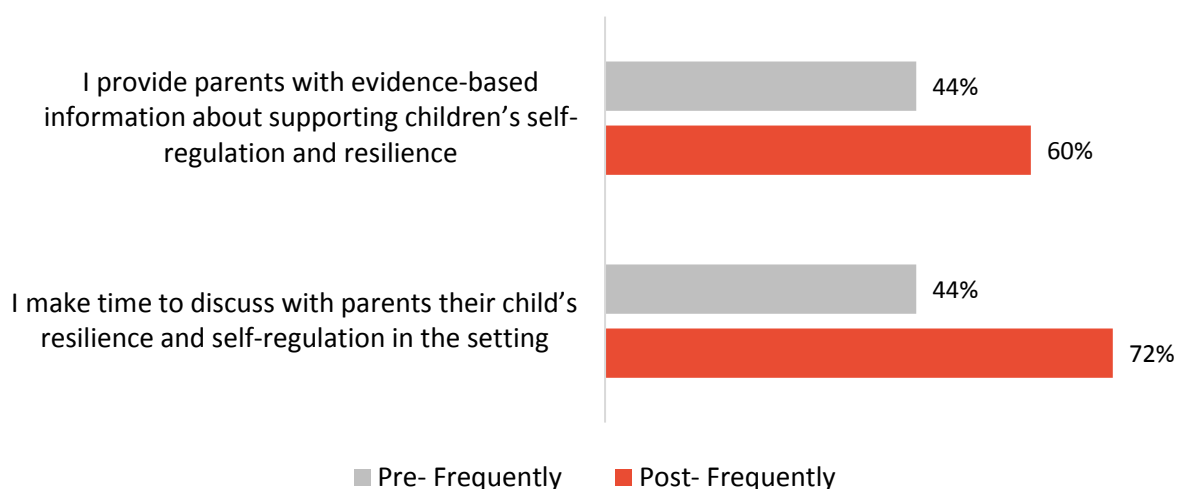
Key Finding 2: Practitioners are more likely to engage with parents to discuss children's social and emotional development

Within the theme of parental engagement, the survey asked practitioners how frequently they discussed children's social and emotional development their parents. Figure 6 shows that the programme was effective in motivating practitioners to provide parents with evidence-based information about this topic, and discuss their child's resilience and self-regulation more frequently.

Prior to the HELLO+ audit, only 44% of practitioners provided evidence-based information to parents frequently; following participation in the programme, this rose to 60%. In addition, there was a 63% increase (from 44% to 72%) in practitioners who now make time to discuss resilience and self-regulation with children's parents.

⁷ GL Assessment: <https://www.gl-assessment.co.uk/products/wellcomm/>

Figure 6: Change in percentage of practitioners engaging in these behaviours frequently



Finding 3: Practitioners engage more frequently in behaviours that demonstrate knowledge and skills in supporting children's communication and language

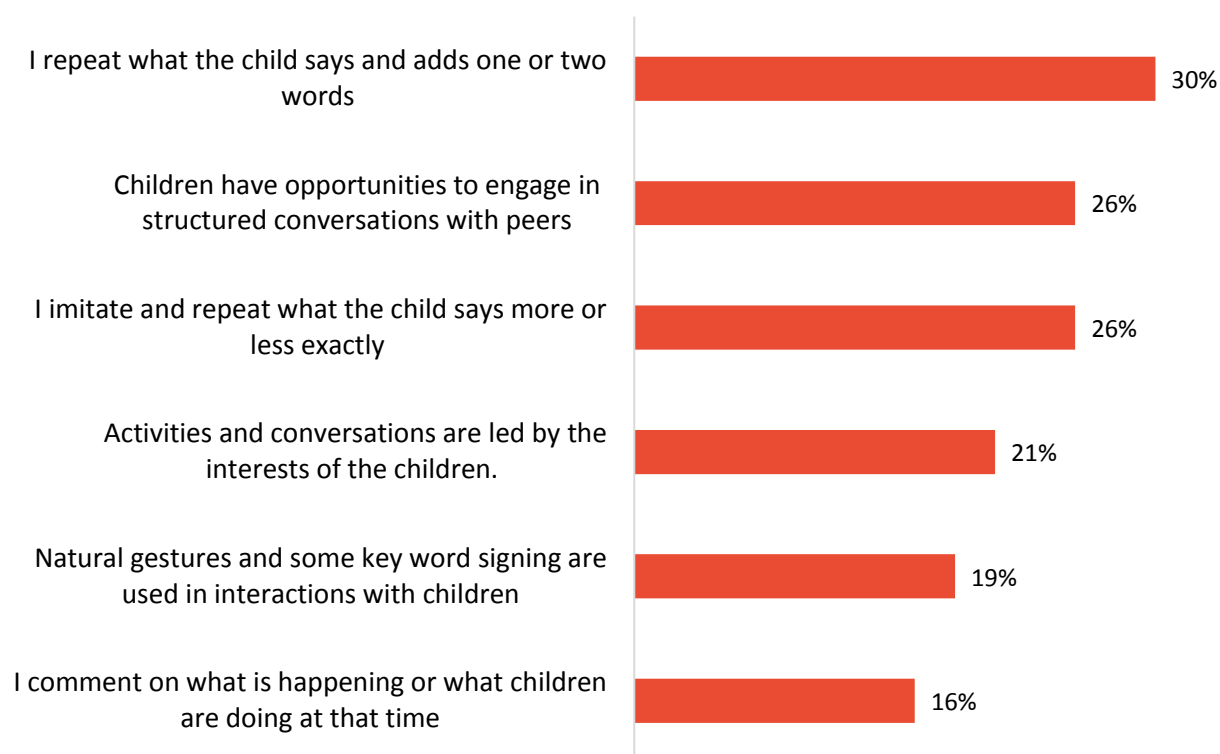
The data also indicates that the Champions for Children programme has helped practitioners develop their knowledge and skills in supporting the development of language and communication of children in their settings.

It is worth noting that the improvements in this area are not as striking as those in the area of “engaging parents”, mainly because the majority of practitioners reported that they were already carrying out these actions most of the time or quite often in the pre-survey. For instance, before taking part in the programme, 98% of practitioners reported that they get down to the child's level and make eye contact when talking to them “quite often” or “most of the time”. Because the practitioners were already scoring highly on language and communication skills, there was less room for improvement.

Figure 7 shows the data for practitioners engagement with nine activities that relate to their knowledge and skills in supporting children's development in language and communication.

The data suggests that 3 in 10 (30%) practitioners now “repeat what the child says and add one or two words” more frequently than before, while more than 1 in 4 (26%) practitioners now “give children opportunities to engage in structured conversations with peers” and “imitate and repeat what the child says more or less exactly” more often.

Figure 7: Percentage of practitioners engaging in these behaviours *more* frequently



One of the main themes from the case studies on practitioner skills and knowledge was **the need for more quality adult-to-child interactions**. One setting described their findings after an initial scoping survey:

“...at times the results showed that there was either only adult to adult or no interaction at all with children; this was deemed to be unsatisfactory”

The case study then discusses how the training has enabled the setting to encourage more quality interaction between staff and the children:

“We have become more aware of the importance of positive interactions with children and are more confident in their practice. This includes new team members. Our processes such as peer observations and one to ones have been adapted to focus more on positive interaction and this helps maintain improvements. A new tool (Communication Triangle) is now in place and further supports practitioners in supporting children's language development.”

One case study discussed how practitioner confidence was a main barrier to supporting children's language and communication development. Knowledge and awareness of specific skills has led to an increase in valuable and quality interactions between practitioners and children:

“The practitioner pre-questionnaire identified that 33% of practitioners felt confident with their knowledge of social and emotional development and

language development. 50% of practitioners did not feel completely confident in their interactions with the children to support these areas.

We administered the practitioner questionnaire at the end of the action plan. 83% of practitioners' felt confident in their knowledge of social and emotional development and language development and also their interactions.

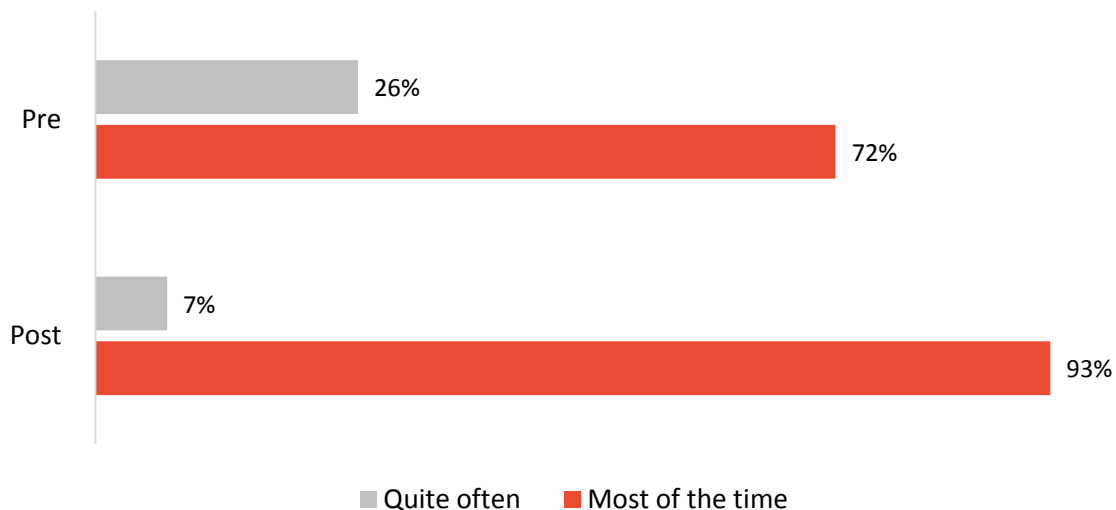
Recent learning walks have shown that the interactions taking place between practitioners and children are of a high quality."

Finding 4: Practitioners engage more frequently in behaviours demonstrating knowledge and skills to support social and emotional development

To explore whether practitioners were more likely to demonstrate a greater understanding of social and emotional wellbeing as a result of their HELLO+ training, the pre- and post-surveys asked practitioners if they acknowledged children's feelings and gave those feelings a name.

Figure 8 shows a 29% increase in the number of practitioners who are now doing this "most of the time", indicating that the employment of the HELLO+ tool had a considerable effect on how practitioners support social and emotional development through language.

Figure 8: Percentage of practitioners acknowledging children's feelings and giving those feelings a name pre- and post- participation in Champions for Children



Barriers to practitioners engaging in behaviours that demonstrate knowledge and skills to support social and emotional development

From the case studies provided by settings upon completing the programme, it is clear that **confidence and lack of awareness** were barriers for why practitioners did not engage more in behaviours to promote social and emotional development. One case study illustrates how HELLO+ aided the setting in identifying these confidence issues and cascading training to address it, resulting in more quality interactions between the staff and children:

“The EYFS team now consistently support the children to recognise, verbalise and deal with their own emotions. We administered the parent survey... 69% of parents had noticed an improvement in their child’s resilience and ability to verbalise their feelings.”

In the focus groups, practitioners also identified two major barriers relating to up-skilling staff within their setting. The practitioners had an insightful discussion about how they overcame these barriers within their settings:

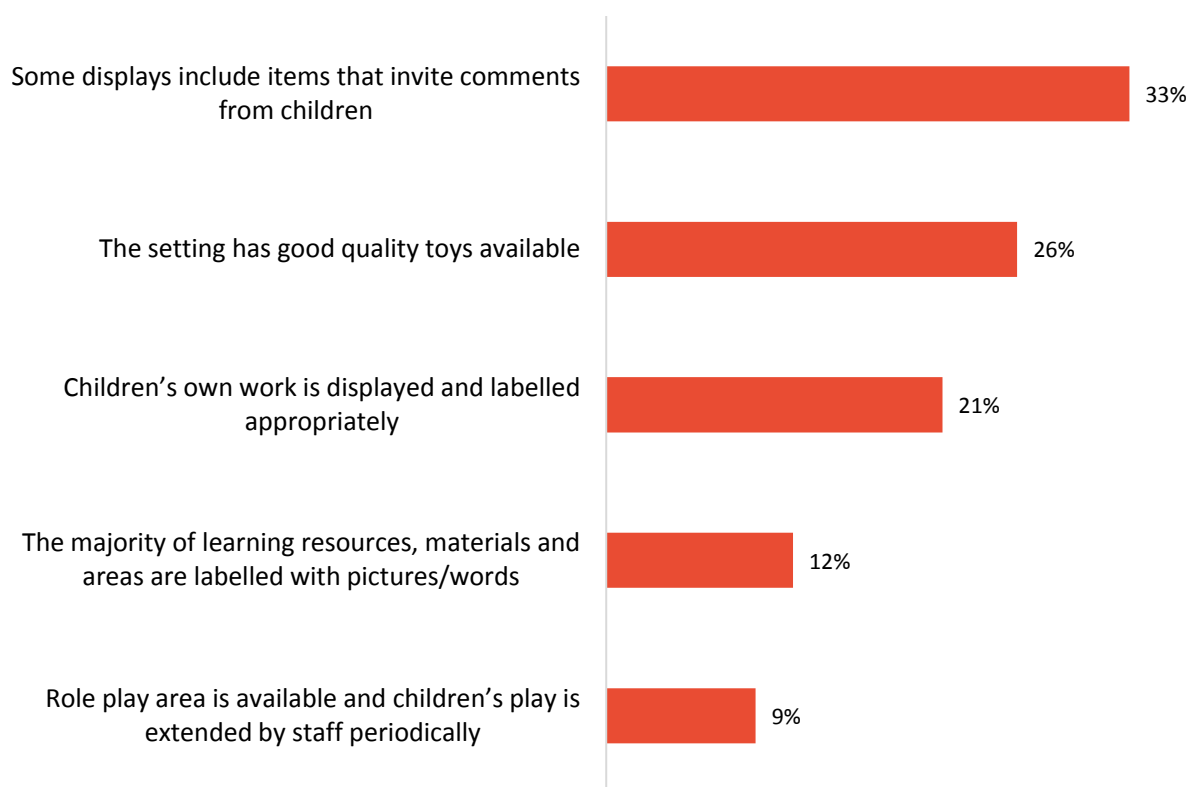
1. **Staffing issues:** Practitioners spoke about the challenges of staff ratios, high staff turnover, new staff and general staff availability. They discussed different ways of managing these challenges, which included: re-educating staff, cascading training effectively, trying to recruit additional staff, rewarding the commitment of staff and more effective forward planning.
2. **Reluctant/resistant staff and co-workers:** Practitioners also spoke about how, in some settings, there was resistance from colleagues to implement the programme. Suggestions to overcome these challenges included: letting staff take ownership of the programme, approaching it as a team, implementing peer observations, increasing support from the setting’s manager and involving children in deciding which activities they would rather do.

Finding 5: Practitioners are more likely to implement actions to create an enabling environment that stimulates communication and language

The practitioner survey also suggests that, following the programme, staff in settings do more to ensure that the children are stimulated by the classroom environment. For instance, before the HELLO+ audit, one in three practitioners only put up displays to include items that invited comments from children “occasionally” (e.g. two or three times a month); after the audit, this has halved to one in six.

Figure 9 shows the increase in practitioners implementing positive changes to the setting environment after having taken part in the Champions for Children programme. For instance, more than 1 in 4 (26%) practitioners now ensure more frequently that “the setting has good quality toys available”, such as pretend, sensory, small world objects, musical instruments, and real/natural resources.

Figure 9: Percentage of practitioners that engage in these behaviours *more* frequently



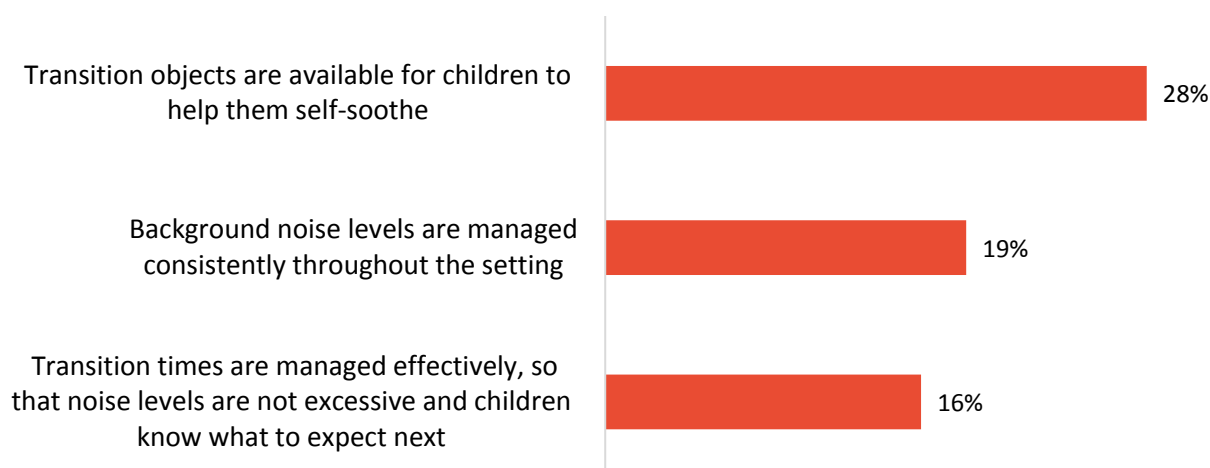
Finding 6: Practitioners take actions more often to create an enabling environment that supports social and emotional development

Practitioners were also more likely to implement environmental changes to support the social and emotional wellbeing of children after taking part in Champions for Children.

Figure 10 shows that almost 3 in 10 (28%) practitioners are now more likely to make transition objects available for children to help them self-soothe (e.g. mum's old purse or a blanket or toy from home). There was also a 63% decrease in the number of practitioners who would rarely or never do this.

Moreover, 1 in 5 (19%) practitioners now manage background noise levels consistently throughout their setting and, as a result, children and adults are able to hear one another with ease.

Figure 10: Percentage of practitioners engaging in these behaviours *more frequently*



All of the case studies that focused on developing an enabling environment discussed the need for creating a classroom environment that aided the social and emotional development of children. For instance, one case study explicitly stated the need to create a more calming environment to counteract children’s behavioural issues, which they believed were as a result of an unengaging setting:

“We felt the lack of engagement in the environment was leading to BEHAVIOURAL issues. The children were at times not listening and not engaging with the resources around them.

We wanted to change the environment and make it more natural and calming for the children.”

Whilst it is positive that settings sought to improve children’s social and emotional development by creating an enabling environment, the lack of case studies focusing on supporting language and communication through the environment is slightly concerning. It could be worth further investigating why the changes to the environment were heavily framed in the light of calming the children.

Furthermore, the theme of creating an enabling environment was present in numerous case studies from settings that were not strictly focused on this issue. For instance, in several case studies from settings who were trying to engage parents, a change of environment was used as a common means to stimulate behavioural change and invite parents and children to interact in positive ways within the setting. Many case studies featured the creation of a ‘stay and play’ area for the purpose of engaging parents.

For example, this case study discussed the refurbishment of the ‘stay and play’ area to encourage parents to have meaningful interactions with the children:

“We made a plan to change the family room in our setting which was used for meetings into a fun room for families to play together in. We replenished

the resources in the room and put lots of focus activities in there covering literacy and expressive arts under the Early Years Foundation Stage. We then added information about how each activity would help their child develop/what they get out of it and useful questions they could ask their children to extend their learning.”

Conclusion

In summary, the implementation of Champions for Children in Ipswich was effective in achieving a range of positive outcomes. This report has presented the data to support this, which was collected through a range of methods, including training feedback, pre- and post-surveys, in-depth case studies and focus groups. Through this rigorous evaluation strategy, it can be concluded that Champions for Children has been successful in enabling settings to better support children’s communication, language and social and emotional development.

The HELLO+ training has been successful in upskilling practitioners and increasing their confidence, as well as being effectively cascaded to other practitioners within settings. On the whole, settings have successfully identified gaps in their provision, implemented action plans and reflected on their learning. This has also been made possible through the use and implementation of EasyPeasy. The data shows that this approach has successfully involved parents, strengthened practitioners’ skills and knowledge, and created enabling environments within participating settings.

Many settings chose to focus on either parental engagement or environmental change, with far fewer concentrating on strengthening practitioner behaviours around supporting high quality interactions between adults and children. Even within case studies that discussed actions to promote parental engagement, quite often the solution was to send a specific resource home or to create an inviting area for families to interact, rather than specifically modelling interactions to encourage behaviour change.

This may be due to the fact that making changes to a physical space or the creation of a resource are easily implementable solutions, which yield visible results; while encouraging behaviour changes in practitioners, settings and amongst parents could be more laborious and harder to monitor and achieve.

However, this area of professional development is vitally important. It is apparent that practitioners embarking on their HELLO+ journey through this programme needed to become confident with the tool by implementing these more tangible solutions, before moving on to addressing deeper changes within their practice. In fact, many case studies discuss the intention of the setting to use the HELLO+ tool again to make further improvements in a different area of their provision.

Now that settings have become more confident in using evidence to identify gaps in provision, develop and implement actions to address these, and share ideas and good practice with other practitioners through the network of Child Development Champions, the HELLO+ tool

should be used again to dive deeper into changes in practice in order to provide the very best support for the early language, social and emotional development of children under five in Ipswich.

Appendix A

A mixed methods approach was developed which included both quantitative data and qualitative data. Data was collected through three main tools:

Tool	What is it measuring?	Responses
Training feedback	Collecting a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data on the quality of the HELLO+ training.	98 completed
Pre- and post-surveys	Assessing whether practitioners' behaviour changed after taking part in the project. The survey asks practitioners to report how frequently they engaged in certain positive behaviours. The same survey was administered before and after the practitioners took part in the HELLO+ training to see if it lead to behaviour change within settings.	43 pre- and post-surveys were matched
Case studies	The case studies asked practitioners to thoroughly reflect on the impact of the HELLO+ tool. The case studies yielded a range of rich qualitative data which was very specific to each setting. The case studies also included setting-specific data such as survey results and WellComm Early Years scores.	45 submitted
Focus groups	Focus groups were held at network meetings in order to gain a deeper understanding of the common barriers to implementing the programme and how different settings overcame those.	2 focus groups Total of 43 practitioners in attendance

Value of the case studies

As part of the evaluation process, all settings were asked to complete a case study detailing the barriers they had identified, the goals they had chosen, the actions they had taken and

the impact of their intervention, alongside some final reflections. These case studies provided rich, qualitative data which has been thematically analysed.

Using this methodology, as opposed to a questionnaire, is particularly valuable because practitioners are only loosely prompted and guided about what to include, and thus we have a valid insight into the individual perception of each respondent.

The most insightful section from a project evaluation perspective are the responses where practitioners are asked to describe the perceived impact of the programme and reflect on it. Thus, this analysis concentrates on a thematic analysis of this section of the case studies.