An evaluation of the Special Educational Needs Capacity Building Pilot A: Early Years Settings

April 2015

Quantitative terms

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75%-90%
A majority	-	50%-74%
A significant minority	-	30%-49%
A minority	-	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

Performance levels

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) use the following performance levels in reports:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

Contents

SECTION A: INTRODUCTION

1.   Context

1.1   The Department of Education (DE) initiated *Pilot A: Early Years Settings* (Pilot A) to build the capacity of practitioners in the participating settings to be able to more effectively identify and support children with special educational needs (SEN) and/or a disability earlier in their pre-school year. The pilot included 170 voluntary/private, nursery school and nursery unit pre-school settings across the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs) with representation from both rural and urban communities.

Education and Library Board	Number of Early Years Settings	Number of Children
BELB	30	933
NEELB	31	1382
SEELB	44	1576
SELB	30	994
WELB	35	943
TOTAL	**170**	**5828**

The pilot was initially funded for a two year period from 2011/12 to 2012/13 but the DE subsequently secured additional funding to enable Pilot A to operate until December 2014[1].

1.2   The high level aims of the pilot were to:

- improve the identification, assessment and interventions provided by mainstream schools and early years settings for children facing barriers to learning;

- test strategic recommendations from the Review of SEN and Inclusion; and

- leave a legacy of increased skills and knowledge capacity in schools and early years settings following the pilot period.

1.3   The pilot was funded by the DE, managed by the five ELBs in collaboration with the Inter-Board Regional Strategy Group (IRSG) and supported by a regional project manager working with the five local ELB project co-ordinators, who had responsibility for managing the pilots in each of their ELBs. Each ELB project co-ordinator led a team of specialists who worked closely with the staff in the pre-school settings participating in the pilot.

1.4   All of the staff in the participating pre-school settings completed the compulsory core training modules[2] that included: child development; infant mental health and wellbeing; parent conversations; and the SEN code of practice. A range of additional training modules[3] was offered to the participating settings within the Belfast, North Eastern and South Eastern ELBs on topics such as: autistic spectrum disorder (ASD); speech, language and communication; and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). In the Southern and Western ELBs one area of SEN training and support was addressed in each of the participating settings with some settings receiving training and support in language and communication and others receiving training in SEBD. In each of the ELBs, joint training

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[1]   Support within the pre-school settings ended in September 2014 but the evaluation phase continued until December 2014

[2]   See Appendix 2 for list of generic core modules

[3]   See Appendix 3 for list of additional modules

was provided for staff from both the statutory nursery and non-statutory[4] settings. The pilot made funding available to each of the ELB local project groups to provide additional resources for the centres. Each ELB project co-ordinator had flexibility in the use of this funding to resource their centres appropriately.

2.   Aims and objectives of the survey

2.1   The key objectives of this Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) survey are to evaluate how effectively Pilot A supports participating pre-school settings to:

a)   improve the early identification and assessment of children with SEN;

b)   provide appropriate follow-on interventions, for all children in statutory nursery settings and in their immediate pre-school year in Pre-school Education Advisory Group (PEAG) funded settings;

c)   enhance the readiness of these children for transition to formal education;

d)   improve the skills of practitioners to identify, assess and meet the needs of children with SEN and/or a disability; and

e)   provide more consistently high quality SEN provision.

3.   Methodology

3.1   A core team consisting of four ETI inspectors, supported by three associate assessors (AAs), visited a representative sample of participating settings across two years of Pilot A (2012/13 and 2013/14). The evaluation visits were planned by the ETI to ensure there was a representative sample of settings included in the evaluation across all of the five ELBs, and a balance maintained between statutory and voluntary/private settings. The evaluation included 48 visits to participating setting in 2012/13 and further 16 visits in 2013/14. During the visits, the ETI observed the staff in the setting work with the children who had been identified as requiring support with aspects of their learning; scrutinised documentation; held meetings with key personnel; and provided oral feedback to the staff. The ETI met with individual or groups of parents, of the children supported through the pilot, to seek their views. In addition, the ETI observed a sample of nine training sessions across each of the ELBs. Evidence to inform the evaluation was also collated from the scheduled inspections[5] of settings that were participating in the pilot.

3.2   During the 2012/13 phase of the pilot, the evaluation included an opportunity for representatives from each participating setting to provide feedback on their early experiences through an ETI administered questionnaire[6]. Seventy one percent of settings (121) responded to the questionnaire; of these 54% of responses were from settings in the statutory sector, with the remainder coming from private/voluntary settings. Overall, the responses to the questionnaires indicated very high levels of satisfaction with the pilot. In particular, almost all the staff appreciated the high quality of the training and resources

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[4]   A pre-school setting refers to private, voluntary and statutory providers of DE's funded pre-school education programme. Non-statutory refers to voluntary and private settings that include playgroups and nurseries. Statutory refers to nursery schools and nursery units within primary schools.

[5]   Pre-school inspection reports are available on the ETI website; http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/inspection-reports/inspection-reports-pre-school-centre-and-nursery-school.htm

[6]   A copy of the questionnaire is included in Appendix 5

available and the ongoing advice and support provided for the staff in the pilot settings; most commented on how the particular strategies and approaches recommended were beginning to have a positive impact on the staff in relation to their practice and the outcomes for the children. The majority of the shortcomings identified related to the intensity of some of the training sessions, the additional paperwork generated by the pilot, the lack of involvement of the parents in the pilot, and concerns about what levels of support would be available when the pilot ended. The responses from the questionnaires later informed ETI discussions with the key staff in the settings visited.

3.3   Visits were carried out in 2013/14 to a selection of the participating settings receiving primary schools to evaluate transition arrangements and to track the progress of the children who had been involved in year 1 of Pilot A. The ETI met with a group of primary principals, teachers and pre-school practitioners in year 2 of the evaluation to discuss current transition arrangements and consider how best to build on the work of Pilot A. Throughout the pilot, the ETI met regularly with the regional project manager and the five ELB project co-ordinators. Evidence was collated, analysed and used to inform emerging findings of Pilot A which were then shared with the DE and key stakeholders in September 2013 and again in September 2014. This interim feedback was used by the DE and the regional project manager to adjust aspects of the pilot mid-stream, to meet the needs of the children more effectively.

SECTION B: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

4.   Key findings

4.1   There is evidence, from across almost all of the settings visited, that an increased number of children with special educational needs and/or disability are being identified earlier and that these children are then supported very well by most of the pilot pre-school setting staff and external support agencies. During ongoing inspection activity, and in discussions with the staff in the pilot setting, it is evident that nearly all staff involved in the pilot are now more confident in gathering and recording reliable evidence and applying a range of appropriate strategies to match and address children's individual needs. The staff report that the Pilot A training provided them with the skills to liaise more effectively with a range of support agencies and to engage with the parents in a more constructive way about their children's progress and development.

4.2   The quality of most of the Pilot A SEN training sessions, delivered across the ELBs to up-skill staff from the participating settings, was consistently of a very high standard and almost all were evaluated as very good or outstanding. The specialist training has increased significantly: the participating staff's knowledge and understanding of the complex range of children's additional needs; their competence and confidence in dealing with early SEN identification and intervention, and the quality of their day-to-day interactions with the children and their parents. In addition, the other children in the settings, those without special educational needs, are also benefitting from the various strategies and approaches being implemented by staff. These include: the use of a variety of visual aids; the introduction of ordered routines, workstations, class rules including a 'noise-ometer', a 'thinking mat' and social stories, all of which have led to an improvement in behaviour management and the development of a range of social, thinking, listening, communication and language skills.

4.3   The quality of the pre-school staff's practice in supporting children with SEN, observed by the ETI, ranged from outstanding to satisfactory but was mostly very good. In the best practice, the staff applied the knowledge and skills from the training to very good effect, the methods used were clearly understood and applied consistently by all of the staff.

4.4   Participation in the pilot has led to almost all of the pre-school settings implementing improvements in their key internal SEN related processes and planning. For example, whole school development plans and SEN policy documents have been updated to reflect more fully current practice and procedures. In particular, there was evidence of a significant improvement in the quality of the staffs' observations, record keeping and planning recorded in the children's individual education plans (IEPs).

4.5   Across the two years of the pilot, the participating settings received a range of good quality resources to enable the staff to plan and provide a more tailored programme of support matched initially to the individual needs of the children with SEN, but also in the wider context, to benefit all of the children in the group. During the visits, the ETI observed the effective use of the additional specialist resources provided through the pilot. The positive impact of the resources was particularly evident in the voluntary and private sector, as they had had fewer specialist resources at the outset.

4.6   The work of the ELB link officer was particularly valued across the sector. The staff reported that the link officer was a very good role model for them, and a key facilitator, supporting them well as they developed their capacity in identifying and supporting children with SEN. Almost all of the settings highlighted the excellent working relationships between

their link officer and the ELB SEN support staff. For example, the staff in the pilot setting appreciated the regular contact and ongoing support in dealing with any issues arising, the expert advice and useful guidance they provided on-site for both the children and the staff. They particularly valued advice on gathering appropriate evidence, drafting IEPs, and implementing the new strategies.

4.7   The Regional Project Manager provided clear, strategic leadership and vision for the direction and development of Pilot A; she worked tirelessly to raise awareness about the importance of the work and to improve the provision and life chances for children with SEN and /or disability. Through a process of reflection, self-evaluation and creative thinking, she worked closely with the five capacity building co-ordinators to bring about the high level aims and objectives of the pilot.

5.   Recommendations for further development

5.1   Based on the evidence and findings, the ETI recommends that a network of SEN support be established to sustain and build upon the good work of the pilot. This should be extended to provide all early years practitioners in pre-school settings and primary schools with access to appropriate advice, guidance and support for the children in their care identified with SEN and /or disability. In addition, regional support hubs should be established to provide staff in pre-school settings with local access to SEN advisory groups of appropriately qualified and experienced health and education specialists.

5.2   Further high quality capacity building training should be provided for early years practitioners and be delivered by highly skilled specialist teams similar to those established under Pilot A. This should be managed at an inter-regional level to ensure a consistent approach that will deliver high quality relevant training using a common approach across all regions, and should be supplemented by targeted support provided by the regional support hubs.

5.3   Regional cluster groups or partnerships of early years practitioners that include statutory, voluntary, and private pre-school settings and primary school foundation stage staff should be established to disseminate and share best practice in relation to SEN practice. Ideally, these should align with the cluster groups proposed in the Learning to Learn framework[7]. An online platform could also be established to host discussions, provide current information, resources and research related to SEN, and to facilitate the wider sharing of best practice.

5.4   There should be a review of the current practice of prioritising referrals within the primary sector to ensure that the needs of all the children, identified on the SEN register, are fully met. This should include subsequent access to specialist services, to ensure that they are provided within an agreed and acceptable time-frame to facilitate and build upon the early intervention.

5.5   Consideration should be given to the provision of appropriate staffing levels in settings where the behaviour of a child with extensive additional support needs is impacting negatively on the learning experiences of the other children in the class.

5.6   Action is required to enhance and develop further the links and communication between education professionals and the various other health and care agencies involved with supporting the child.

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[7]   Learning to Learn, A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning, DENI, October 2013, http://www.deni.gov.uk/learning-to-learn.htm

5.7   The existing system for recording and sharing transition information between pre-school settings and primary schools needs to be reviewed and developed further, to make more effective use of all the information collated by the pre-school setting and external support staff, to build a personal pupil profile that will remain with the child throughout their educational journey. This should extend to preparing foundation stage teachers, leaders and pre-school staff more effectively in the use of transition information through their initial training and education programmes.

SECTION C: MAIN FINDINGS

6. Baseline position

6.1   The Education and Training Inspectorate carried out a survey of SEN provision in the pre-school sector in 2006[8]. This report identified a number of key priorities for action including the need to:

- implement a comprehensive DE policy, and funded strategy, that demonstrates a clear commitment to early intervention and support for pre-school children with additional support needs;

- build the capacity of staff and provide them with access to specialist advice and support to improve the quality of provision for children with SEN;

- improve the effectiveness of inter-agency collaboration;

- develop more effective early interventions for children whose needs are less severe;

- make more effective use of data to inform early intervention planning; and

- to implement more consistent strategies across the ELBs to support children with SEN.

6.2   The 2006 ETI survey report was subsequently followed-up with a further published report in 2009. This report confirmed that the ongoing areas identified for improvement in 2006 including: training and development; access to external specialist advice and assessment; and joined-up working, still require further development. There had been a slight improvement in the quality of the provision made for SEN but much remained to be done.

6.3   The high level aims of Pilot A takes cognisance of the main findings within these ETI reports and other external evaluations and seek to address the key priorities for action.

7. Quality of training and support

7.1   A key strength of the pilot is the high quality SEN training provided for the staff from the participating settings. The quality of the training sessions observed by the ETI was consistently of a very high standard and almost all were evaluated as very good or outstanding. A common feature of the sessions was the professionalism, knowledge and expertise of the presenters and the use of high quality presentations and resources. Most of the sessions had a good balance between theory and practice and incorporated practical sessions which afforded the staff time to engage in discussions about real-life scenarios. Staff who attended the sessions reported to ETI that they felt the training was very worthwhile and that the strategies could be applied and incorporated into their work. While the staff in the pilot settings spoke favourably about the quality of almost all of the training, they highlighted particularly the sessions specific to language development, behaviour management, working with parents, promoting an inclusive environment and Autism

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8   An ETI survey of SEN provision in the pre-school sector, *The Best For All Our Children*, 2006, http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/surveys-evaluations/surveys-evaluations-pre-school-centre-and-nursery-school/surveys-evaluations-pre-school-centre-and-nursery-school-2007/special-education-needs-in-the-pre-school-sector.pdf

Spectrum Disorders. The Regional Project Manager and the five ELB project co-ordinators also evaluated each of the training sessions and continually sought feedback on different aspects of the work and resources made available during the pilot. Evidence scrutinised by ETI shows that the feedback from the training evaluations was used very well by the pilot team to inform future sessions and to modify and aid practice on the ground; for example, additional sessions were provided for working with Newcomer children, developing individual education plans and promoting an inclusive environment.

7.2   While almost all of the nursery school and unit teachers had received some form of SEN training prior to their participation in the pilot, it was evident that most of the staff from the voluntary and private settings had not. Initially, a small number of concerns were raised about aspects of the training; for example, a minority of the teachers felt the training was, for them, repetitive and not appropriately differentiated. By contrast, a small number of the staff from the voluntary and private sector felt overwhelmed by the content, terminology, pace and timing of the training.   However, as the pilot and training progressed, these issues were largely resolved.

7.3   Almost all of the staff of the pilot settings visited by the ETI in year two of the pilot, highlighted the very good quality of the training as a key strength. They reported that the training was increasing their knowledge and understanding of the complex range of children's additional needs, their competence and confidence in dealing with early SEN identification and intervention, and their day-to-day work with the children and their parents. Several staff highlighted the value of the whole staff attending the same training which led to a consistency of approach in their practice. An additional strength of the joint training across the entire pre-school sector was the opportunity for staff in pilot settings to share knowledge, expertise, personal experiences and to disseminate best practice.

7.4   To develop and sustain the work of the pilot, a minority of ELBs have subsequently established follow-on support network groups consisting of a range of practitioners from both the statutory and non-statutory sectors in order to maintain links and build upon the existing best practice[9].

8.   Quality of the SEN provision in the settings visited

8.1   The quality of the practice observed by the ETI ranged from outstanding to satisfactory but was mostly very good. In the best practice, the staff put their training into practice very effectively by ensuring staff had a common understanding of the approaches and strategies to be used and by implementing them in a consistent way. Comprehensive records of the children's responses were compiled and used by the staff to set appropriate targets in the IEPs and to plan for future learning and teaching. All of the children in the setting benefitted from the approaches and strategies used by the staff. For example, in one setting a visual display indicating the toilet, hand washing and return to play routine was enabling all the children to develop their independence by following the pictorial sequence. In the less effective practice, the staff were inconsistent in implementing their training, particularly regarding behaviour management, or they misinterpreted the implementation of a particular strategy. For example, time spent by a child on the 'thinking mat' was used as a 'consequence' of an action rather than an opportunity for them to reflect on their inappropriate behaviour.

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[9] For an example, refer to the Larne Early Education Partnership case study at the end of the report.

8.2   The scrutiny of relevant documentation in each of the settings by the ETI provided further evidence of improvements to key processes informed by the staff's learning from the pilot. These included, for example, revisions to school development plans and SEN policy documents which incorporated their revised practice and procedures.   A marked improvement was also noted in the quality of the observations made by staff in the settings and also in their record keeping and in the children's IEPs; the most significant improvements were noted in the voluntary and private sector.

8.3   Overall, towards the end of the pilot, the staff in the pilot settings were very focused in addressing the needs of particular children and were more confident in recording significant aspects of the children's learning and development; the information was then used effectively to develop well targeted, measurable and time-bound IEPs.   The staff reported that they were now more confident in recording children's needs, working with the parents and liaising with a range of outside support agencies. A minority of settings need to further develop the IEPs to ensure all information, including that from external support agencies is considered and, if appropriate, that it is used to inform planning.

9.   Evidence from parents

9.1   All of the twenty parents of children being supported through the pilot, who met with the ETI, spoke highly about the impact of the pilot. Almost all of them felt that the early identification of need and the new strategies being used by the staff were having a very positive impact on their child's progress and development to date. Almost all of the parents reported that the staff in the settings had provided good advice on how they could support their child in their home environment and, as a result, the parents felt more confident in applying many of the strategies themselves. Several of the parents reported that they could see a marked improvement in their child's behaviour, speech and language and their relationship with siblings and other family members.

9.2   A small number of the parents, while positive, felt it was still too early to see a considerable improvement as a result of the pilot; they held the view that the good work to date would need to be continued and built upon, beyond the pre-school year into the foundation stage of primary school, if it was to have a lasting effect. A small number said they would like to do more to support their child and felt they would have benefited from specific training, for example, in the signing used by the staff with their child in the pre-school setting.

10.   Resources and support

10.1   Across the two years of the pilot, the participating settings received a range of good quality resources to enable the staff to plan and provide a more tailored programme of support matched initially to the individual needs of the children with SEN, but also in the wider context, to benefit all of the children in the group. In almost all of the pilot nursery units, and across the voluntary and private settings, the staff welcomed the full range of additional resources to enhance the provision for the children.

10.2   During the visits, the ETI observed effective use of the resources that were provided; in particular, the voluntary and private sector made very good use of the additional resources. A small number of statutory providers reported that there was duplication of resources and that they had little or no say in the resources provided.

10.3   The provision of an ELB link officer was welcomed across the sector; the staff reported that the guidance, support and involvement they offered in the setting was a particular strength of Pilot A. The staff also highlighted that the link officer was a very good role model for them, and a key element in building their capacity in the area of SEN. Almost all of the settings highlighted the excellent working relationships with their link officer and the ELB SEN support staff. In particular, the staff in the settings appreciated: the regular contact in relation to any issues arising; the advice and guidance provided, particularly regarding the gathering of evidence, the drawing up of the IEPs, the implementation of strategies and the on-site support for both the children and the staff. In discussions with the ETI, a small number of staff made reference to the link officers' support in speeding up the referral process for some individual children. In nursery schools, where the adult to child ratio is normally 1:13, the link officer's role was particularly welcomed in cases where there were a high number of children with additional support needs.

11.   Transition from pre-school to primary school

11.1   Almost all of the staff in the pre-school settings indicated that they use the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) transition form[10] to record and transfer information about a child between the pre-school and primary school foundation stage. While the form is very useful, the feedback from the setting staff was that it needs to be reviewed. In discussions with ETI inspectors, the primary school staff reported that too often valuable information is not appropriately recorded at the pre-school stage. Similarly, in discussions with the pre-school staff they indicated that not enough account is taken of the information by the staff in the primary school foundation stage. As a result, valuable opportunities to identify and address areas of need are either delayed or missed. The ETI recommends that the transition between pre-school and primary school is formalised to ensure that adequate time is given to this important stage and that an appropriate standard pupil profile format is designed to aid transition and meet the needs of the children in both the pre-school and primary school. The child's transition profile information should be passed to the feeder primary school in advance of them starting their statutory education to allow appropriate planning for their individual needs to take place. The information should be used as part of an overall baseline assessment and be included as part of the primary school profile record for each child.

11.2   From an early stage in the pilot, concerns were raised by both the pre-school staff and the ETI that the lack of information in the primary sector about the pilot could result in the valuable work in the pilot pre-school settings not being acknowledged or built upon when a child entered primary school. The ETI evidence from district visits and inspection activity endorsed this concern and resulted in a recommendation being made to the DE, in the ETI interim findings mid-way through the pilot, which highlighted the need for more formal communication with the primary school sector to raise awareness of the pilot.   As a result, measures were put in place to address the communication issue during the second year of the pilot. While this has led to increased awareness of the work of Pilot A in the primary sector, more work still needs to be done to ensure that the work in participating pre-school settings is built upon appropriately to take more account of the information provided about individual children and to ensure continuity in the SEN support programme.

11.3 The findings from this evaluation, and other ETI inspection evidence, identify a wide variation in the settling-in arrangements implemented across pre-school settings and in the foundation stage in primary schools. In the settings and schools where the settling-in process was too long, the children had a reduced period of learning and, in some cases, this

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[10]   Pre-school transition form, CCEA,
    http://www.rewardinglearning.org.uk/docs/curriculum/foundation_stage/pre_school_transition_form.doc

delayed their access to early intervention strategies or specialist support in the first term of their statutory education. The ETI endorse the DE's action in the Learning to Learn[11], A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning, that identifies the need for primary schools and pre-school settings to take more account of the child's previous learning experiences and reduce the settling-in times in both pre-school and year one of primary school.

12.   Outcomes for the children

12.1   Pilot A was designed to build the capacity of the staff and to develop their skills in the early identification and assessment of children facing barriers to learning, to address individual needs in order to bring about improvement and to enhance the children's readiness for formal education. It also set out to improve consistency of SEN provision across the participating settings and the services available. Almost all of the pilot setting staff were aware from the outset of the commitment required and were willing participants in the pilot. Although many of these staff were at different starting points in relation to their knowledge and expertise, over time it became evident that the joint training sessions provided valuable opportunities for staff from a variety of pre-school settings to learn from each other and build firm professional working relationships. The evidence indicates that this positive climate combined with high quality training, has had a positive impact on the quality of the provision for the children in their settings. All of the participating staff have either refreshed their knowledge, or have been up-skilled in their roles and responsibilities in relation to supporting children with SEN and/ or disability. As a result, they have improved their practice, in supporting the children, developed stronger partnerships with the parents of the children with SEN and/or a disability, improved the sharing of information with primary schools, and improved partnership working with all participating early years practitioners in the education and health sectors. The data reviewed by ETI, both in the settings and at management level, indicates that, as a result of the intervention strategies applied, almost all of the children involved the pilot have either made or are making good or very good progress in line with their ability.

13.   Management of Pilot A

13.1   The Regional Project Manager provided clear, strategic leadership for the direction and development of Pilot A and worked tirelessly to raise awareness about the importance of the work and to improve the provision and life chances for children with SEN. Through a process of reflection, self-evaluation and creative thinking the Regional Project Manager worked closely with the five capacity-building co-ordinators to realise the high level aims and objectives of the pilot.

13.2   Throughout the pilot, the ETI met regularly with the Regional Project Manager and were provided with robust evidence, based on measurable data, to indicate the growing capacity of the staff in the settings to deal with SEN issues and were made aware also of the significant progress made by most of the children in overcoming potential barriers to their learning[12].

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[11]   Learning to Learn, - A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning, DE, October 2013, section 1.8c and key Action 1.2

[12] Examples of improved outcomes for children are captured in the case studies in Section E.

SECTION D: CONCLUSION

14.   Conclusion

14.1   After many years of unacceptably slow progress, many of the areas for improvement identified in the 2006 and 2009 ETI survey and follow-up reports, on the quality of SEN provision in pre-school settings, are now being addressed effectively in the settings participating in Pilot A. While this is a positive achievement, the advancements made could easily be reversed if the momentum is not sustained. The ETI findings support the need for a mainstream programme of SEN support for all early years settings, with a clear strategy for implementation.

14.2   The evidence from the evaluation of Pilot A shows that early identification, aligned with appropriate intervention and support, helps young children make better progress and lays firm foundations for their future learning and life-chances beyond their pre-school years. The Pilot A, Early Years SEN teams in each of the ELBs used their considerable professional knowledge and expertise to support staff in the implementation of a range of effective strategies, on a daily basis, to address the needs of the increasing numbers of children presenting with a wide range of complex needs in pre-school centres.   The practitioners in the participating settings have consistently praised and valued the work of the pilot team for the high quality training and support that they have received. Almost all of the staff have produced clear evidence to show that the training and the strategies used have had a very positive impact on the quality of the provision at all levels within their centre.

14.3   To build upon the success of Pilot A, more account will need to be taken of the wider and longer term issues which need to be addressed such as long-term funding, employing suitably qualified staff, access to continuing professional development and the provision of appropriate resources to meet the differing needs of all the children. Consideration of these issues will need to be taken into account to inform decisions on how best to address more effectively, the needs of the increasing numbers of children who are presenting with SEN and where the role of the Capacity Building Team sits within this framework.

SECTION E: CASE STUDIES OF BEST PRACTICE

NURSERY SCHOOL 1

1.   Setting Background and baseline position

The main areas of SEN identified by the staff were speech and language; communication and interaction; and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. There has been a steady increase in the numbers of children presenting with speech difficulties over the last 10 years. Some of these pupils have been newcomer children. There has also been a more recent increase in the numbers of children presenting with sensory issues. Before participating in Pilot A, the school staff (qualified teachers and assistants) all had many years' experience. For example, two of the nursery assistants have worked in the school for over 20 years. There was an existing school policy on behaviour which, although embedded in practice, was implemented by the staff in each class in their own way. Parents were given a copy of the policy before their child started the nursery school. The school did use and adapt existing resources to help support children with SEN.

2.   Action as a result of our participation in this project

2.1   Staff Training

All of the school staff attended a range of the capacity-building training across the two years of the pilot; this was only possible because funding was available for sub-cover. A key strength was that all of the staff attended the same training, were treated equally and received the same information and explanations. This made all of the staff feel valued, as their views and participation in sessions was valued, and they felt respected. The whole staff could then discuss and agree on the approaches to be used within the school to help all pupils improve their behaviour and develop their communication, not just those children with SEN. An agreed method of classroom management and positive discipline was designed and implemented consistently by all staff and became embedded in all 3 classes. Staff could then support each other in implementing the strategies.

2.2   Whole school programmes/interventions/strategies put in place to meet the individual needs of each child.

A whole school approach was planned and implemented including:

- behaviour management such as rules, rewards, and consequences;

- assertive discipline; e.g. visual prompts, focus on and highlighting good behaviour (individual specific praise, proximal praise, rewards in the jar - individual and whole class rewards, staff use of positive reinforcement (and the avoidance of negative reinforcement/comments), behaviour action plans, behaviour recording sheet;

- classroom equipment and layout rearranged to incorporate 'Cosy Nook' and 'Dark Den' areas; and

- use of visuals displayed around classroom:

  - Pupils - daily timetable, visual sequences for routines e.g. snack, hand washing, aprons at paint and water, helping hands, choice board, calming cards, emotions recognition board, storage areas and play areas are visually labelled, self registration by pupils for attendance and snack etc, self management for turn taking at play areas;

  - Staff - visuals of script prompts, key fob visuals, timers, noise-o-meter, stop/go visual for transitions, pre-warning of end time/change, etc;

  - For specific pupils - calming cards, sensory cushions, balance chair, hard and soft fiddle toys, weighted cushions, individualised schedules and choice boards, work stations, motivator boxes, visual feet on the floor, sensory breaks, ear defenders, modo, cosy nook and the emotions mirror, social stories, what happened board, communication passport (for EAL pupils); and

  - Parents - copies of the behaviour management plan, social stories plus visual cue cards sent home for individual pupils, parent information evening (year 1).

2.3   Changes in regard to:

- Practice - staff now take a more positive approach to classroom management. They are now comfortable using the strategies and resources to implement and promote positive behaviour. They are more aware of children's individual needs and how they can use different approaches to support them.

- Engagement with the wider community - several cluster training days have been held and good practice shared. The school link officer has supported staff with both whole class strategies and individual pupil support.

- Staff viewpoint/attitude - staff now feel better equipped and more confident in their daily management of the children and have adopted a more assertive approach to using strategies.

- Knowledge and skills of staff - as all staff have received the same training, all are more up-skilled and are working in harmony with each other to promote positive behaviour.

- School Behaviour policy – this has been reviewed in consultation with all stakeholders (staff, parents, pupils, governors). Once it was ratified, it was distributed to parents.

- **New and revised documentation** - communication passports and behaviour action plans are implemented for specific children, and behaviour monitoring sheets are used weekly to record and collate repeated inappropriate behaviours for evidence.

- **A language baseline** – was introduced in the academic year 2014-15.

3.   Positive outcomes and benefits from participating in Pilot A include:

- Individual staff - feel more empowered by using a consistent approach to classroom management. They have an increased knowledge of children's development and areas of special needs that can be supported.

- Whole setting - more positive language is used by all staff both with pupils and amongst each other. Staff now support each other and can identify when this is needed. Staff have used Boardmaker[13] to create visuals and social stories. This resource has been invaluable.

- Children - have a better understanding of the boundaries and expectations; also, they have greater awareness of the daily timetable and transitions and are more aware of different ways to communicate with staff and each other (eg by using visuals when they don't have the language skills).

- As a result of the training, the staff designed and produced a photographic booklet to be given to new pupils before they start in September. This aims to help young children with the transition from home to Nursery school.

- Wider pre-school community:

  ➢ Parents - relevant information, strategies, social stories, visuals, etc are shared with parents.

  ➢ Governors - are kept informed of the programme implementation and the results achieved; this has been recorded in the Annual Report.

  ➢ External agencies - e.g. staff can inform other professionals of the strategies already put in place to meet the needs of individual pupils.

  ➢ External evaluation - staff were observed implementing the positive discipline programme during an ETI inspection in May 2013.

- Staff and parents were included in both of the Annual Celebration Days held by the Capacity Team and participated in presentations. Staff were included in a DVD produced to share good practice with other schools and settings.

A PLAYGROUP

The playgroup is registered with the local Social Services Trust for 26 children and cares for children aged 3-4 years of age. During each of the two years of Pilot A, the playgroup had 5 children identified with SEN. The support needs of the children included; communication and interaction, social development, speech and language difficulties. During year one, three of the children were newcomers and a referral to Educational Psychology was made for one of the children while he was attending Playgroup. During the second year of the

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[13] Boardmaker Software, Mayer-Johnson, used to create visuals for children such as communication boards, sequences and schedules.

pilot, four of the children had English as an additional language, which resulted in very limited communication with staff/peers, and they found it difficult to socialise with children in their class. Three other children had difficulty with speech and language; this was affecting their socialising skills and they were finding it difficult to communicate their needs with staff and peers

Before participating in the pilot, the leader had weekly meetings with the setting's Early Years Specialist who provided ongoing support. The playgroup also had regular support from the adjoining primary school, including liaising with the principal, and the designated teacher and other related services, for example, the educational psychologist. Regular training provided for the staff in the primary school was also offered to the staff in the playgroup. Children had the use of laptops/tablet computers before joining the programme.

The playgroup valued all the support and resources provided through the pilot and a number of improvements were implemented. These included training from the ELB behaviour intervention staff for a member of the playgroup staff on how to create 'Good Quality Circle Time'. This is used daily and it is linked into the curriculum planning. The ELB support officer provided the setting with circle time resources such as puppets, treasure boxes, rewards and incentives which made the sessions a lot more enjoyable for the children. Staff attended 'Quality Circle Time' training and had the opportunity to meet a well respected expert in this field. A picture exchange communication system (PECS) board and lanyards are used daily with children who have limited communication skills. The staff work closely, in partnership with the child's parent, to ensure they create an exact copy for the parents to use at home. The 'Pre-School Toolkit for Diversity' and 'Good Practice Guidelines' is used daily with children from different cultural backgrounds and children who have additional needs. These have proved successful when writing IEPs and targets for individual children. Boardmaker has been used a lot around the room to help display rules and routines with the help of visuals.

Staff confidence, in supporting children who have SEN, has really improved due to the 'Incredible Years Training' which was offered. The staff are also more confident in writing IEPs and making referrals. The staff attended 'Makaton' training and they are able to use this with children who have limited communication skills. Parent workshops were provided for the setting's parents in a cluster along with other local pre-school settings. This consisted of the Incredible Years Parenting Programme, Stepping Stones to Success, Policy into practice, Preparing for Inspections and Paediatric First Aid.

The programme was very beneficial for the children in the playgroup. Lanyards were a great help for the children who had limited communication, the staff wear them daily with picture cards attached and the children are able to communicate their needs through the cards. Home visits were great for everyone involved; it was very beneficial for the child to meet the leader and support staff in their own home environment. It meant that when the child started playgroup, the staff who visited were already familiar to them, and this helped during the settling in process. Boardmaker was a great tool and very helpful for the children; it really helped the children with limited communication to follow the rules and routines of the day through the use of visuals. The playgroup had support and visits from the speech and language team and educational psychology. This was a great opportunity for the children to work with other professionals in the playgroup environment. The children love the resources at circle time and they participate much more freely, now that the playgroup has appropriate resources, for example, 'Susie' the circle time puppet, and treasure boxes. Staff can now use Makaton with children who have limited communication.

NURSERY UNIT 1

The first year participating in the pilot, was a fairly typical one, the nursery unit had a number of children who were experiencing significant difficulties. One child had a diagnosis of autism and one was in the process of being assessed for ASD. Both children had significant social interaction difficulties and auditory processing difficulties. One of these children also engaged in a lot of repetitive play at the same activities and was very easily distracted. Three children had attention and listening and concentration difficulties. These children constantly "flitted" around the nursery room without playing productively. They spent very short periods at each area of play often as little as 1-2 minutes, and all of them demanded a lot of staff attention. The unit had one child with fairly significant behaviour issues who hit out at staff and peers and had tantrums almost daily. There were also 15 children with speech and language difficulties, ranging from mild to moderate. These children were supported in the nursery by a speech and language therapist employed by Sure Start. The therapist initially assessed the children concerned, worked with them twice a month in the nursery and drew up speech and language programmes which were subsequently implemented by nursery staff and worked on at home by parents.

Before participating in Pilot A, most of the nursery staff had completed a range of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) training and had also completed courses on speech and language and behaviour management. Following attendance at various ASD training courses, the staff became confident at making and at using visual schedules, work stations and work systems with autistic children. Again these proved very effective.

While participating in Pilot A, the staff realised that a big focus of the project was on the classroom management plan. The staff initially revised and improved their existing plan, taught it to the children and this time, also shared it with parents. This resulted in the improved support and involvement of parents. The staff have found that parents are now reinforcing the nursery rules at home and are more willing to ask for ideas and strategies to help improve their child's behaviour in the home environment. Following the pilot, the staff also introduced more visuals into the nursery. For example, good listening rules were presented visually and a visual daily timetable was introduced. The classrooms had visually defined areas; resources had specific storage areas which were pictorially labelled and various visual cues were used to indicate indicating when an area of the room was available or unavailable (e.g. the number of chairs at a table, number of aprons at the creative table and water tray and pictorial signs indicating how many children could play in a specific area). The staff found that using more visuals in the nursery greatly helped our children who had auditory processing difficulties. The pictorial timetables and schedules gave the children with ASD, in particular, a sense of structure for their day. It made them feel more secure and it reduced their anxiety about making choices.

To further assist the children diagnosed with ASD, the staff introduced social stories which had never been used before. These stories helped the children understand social situations and described expected behaviour. They were also excellent for preparing children with ASD for change. For example, going on a trip, experiencing a fire drill, and leaving nursery. With these children, the staff also introduced "First/Then" boards. These helped encourage the children to complete less favoured tasks and to follow up with a preferred activity. Following the Pilot A training, the staff have continued to use visual schedules and workstations. The work station was particularly effective with one of the children with ASD who was also very easily distracted. It provided an environment that minimised distractions and was free of clutter. This helped the child attend to relevant information and helped develop his perseverance and concentration. It helped him practise skills and perform independently.

To assist children with attention and listening and concentration difficulties, the staff introduced schedules or choice boards and timers. As they moved from one area to another, the children used their timers as a visual aid to help them realise how long they would spend at each activity. This worked extremely well and, as the year went on, two children progressed from using a 5 minute to a 10 minute timer and in the third term, one child no longer needed to use a choice board or timer.

For those children who demonstrated challenging behaviour, their behaviour was analysed, thanks to the ABC tracking sheet introduced by the Pilot A capacity building team. The staff discovered that the majority of inappropriate behaviours stemmed from a difficulty with sharing. The staff therefore introduced a timer at those activities which sparked most conflict, a turn-taking wheel and a social story, "Taking turns". The staff also worked on emotional development with all of the children, exploring a different emotion each month through 'Circle Time' activities, puppets, posters, pictures, stories, drama, jigsaws, songs and creative activities. The staff introduced a "Behaviour Think Sheet" to enable children who had behaved inappropriately to handle their feelings and emotions better on subsequent occasions.

In conclusion, the staff's involvement in Pilot A has been an extremely worthwhile experience. The classroom management plan is invaluable and has helped create an environment where staff are consistent, where there is a reduction in disruptive behaviours, where the focus is on the acknowledgement of the positive and where effective teaching and learning takes place. The staff now have a more positive school ethos and improved support and involvement of parents. The children are learning from modelling, they are more frequently on task and are learning to choose responsible behaviour. Thanks to Pilot A, the staff are more assertive in their communication with the children. They use less "you" and more "I" statements e.g. "I would like you to….", "I need you to…". The staff find that these statements are non-judgemental and they protect children's self esteem. The children now receive and respond effectively to labelled praise and they receive lots of reinforcement for good behaviour. This year in particular, the nursery unit has received numerous compliments on how settled and calm our children are. These comments have come from visitors, from the principal and from the SENCO who has arranged for primary staff to come and visit us and observe the how staff in the nursery unit use visual schedules, choice boards and timers.

A PRIVATE DAY NURSERY

The main additional support needs that were supported through Pilot A included; speech, behaviour, language and social interaction. There were two children with SEN in the nursery that received support from Pilot A; however, there were three other children that the staff identified themselves who also needed support and this was provided this in-house. The staff were able to identify the children's needs from the training that they received from the Pilot A capacity building team. The challenges for the setting, going forward, will be to meet the SEN needs of children in the future.

Before participating in Pilot A, the staff relied on their own prior experience and knowledge of supporting children with SEN and managed to meet these children's demands to the best of their ability. The resources the staff used were the standard nursery materials, which were adapted to suit the child's particular needs. For example, one-to-one teaching in an effort to improve their participation, the use of clear simple instruction to complete tasks, and the setting of realistic goals for each child.

Of particular value was the Comet Communication which provided the staff with an in-depth analysis, broadening their understanding of communication difficulties and ways in which they could improve a child's development. The Makaton training enabled the staff to implement an additional way of communicating with the children. This benefitted the group as a whole, but especially children with speech, language and communication difficulties. The early years inclusion team (EYIT) intervention plans were very useful to the staff; they outlined strategies and resources we could use to help a child achieve their goals. Having the children's inter-disciplinary schools team (CIDS) input meant that the staff were learning on the job with new materials and getting the opportunity to be shown how to use the materials from the speech and language therapist. Being shown how to write an IEP properly has given the staff the confidence to identify the targets needed for the child and the different stages a child should be moved onto.

Taking part in the Inclusive Environment training helped the staff to improve the visual ways the setting could be more inclusive to children with SEN. The Pilot A capacity building team were always willing to give of their time and share their expertise. The staff have now adopted the techniques and strategies demonstrated throughout the two years of the pilot and cannot emphasise enough how invaluable it has been for them to have been part of this scheme. From what the staff have learnt both in training and practice through the pilot, they are now able to implement their knowledge and skills into their daily running of the nursery.

AN IRISH MEDIUM SETTING

The Irish medium morning nursery had one child with SEN in 2013/14. The child was experiencing some attachment issues leaving mum and dad in the morning. This resulted in behaviour and emotional difficulty during the session.

Before attending the Pilot A capacity building training, the setting staff had some prior experience of supporting children with SEN. For example, they used emotion bats/cards if a child was experiencing emotional difficulty. They also allowed the child time to settle down and talked to them about their feelings. The staff used a rule board in the room and children were reminded to follow the rules. Other techniques employed by the staff included the use of sand timers and thinking time.

After attending the Pilot A training, the staff gained a lot of useful information. The staff and children together made a new management plan using the children's photos and then translated the management plan from English to Irish (pictured), and added balloons to the board to make it more fun. The staff used the "catch them being good" phrase and once the children/child got a thumbs up and a 'high five' they were allowed to pick

something special from the box "bosca speisialta". Children in the setting have thrived on this "catch them being good" rather than reminding them of the consequences of behaving badly.

The staff have now received new emotion bats and an emotion thermometer to support the identified child's needs; these are located by the entrance door. This has worked really well because it allows the staff and the other children to know how the child was feeling before he came into the room. The child is able to come into the room and go into the dark den and sit with torches for a while until he feels calm and ready to learn.

NURSERY SCHOOL 2

Over the past ten years, the nursery school has noticed increasing numbers of children presenting who find it difficult to interact, attend and listen, communicate, behave appropriately and generally adapt to the rules and routines of the nursery environment.

The nursery school operates a dual day system and as a result of falling birth-rate in the locality there would tend to be a number of 'penultimate children' in both morning and afternoon classes. The positive aspect to this is that the staff catch the children early, and if there are difficulties identified, they can address these issues at an earlier stage. Over the course of the pilot within the nursery school, there have been children at stages 1-5 on the Code of Practice with a wide range of difficulties or impairments including: moderate to severe learning difficulties; Social emotional and behavioural difficulties; physical difficulties; hearing difficulties and speech and language difficulties.

The staff are always keen to discover more about specific learning difficulties and strategies or approaches to improve the quality of the education being provided for the children. They were coming from a background where they had been involved a few years ago in the Language and Learning project which involved regular school-based sessions with a speech and language therapist, occupational therapist and a specialist teacher. Activities were modelled, staff observed and they were later able to continue to carry out these activities or experiences with the children. Some staff had attended Makaton and Elklan training and the Wellcomm Speech and Language toolkit was being used to identify children who would benefit from a specific focus on an aspect of their language and communication skills or through additional input at small group activities. Any interventions were being carried out within the nursery routine and also via withdrawal groups; many children were benefitting from this approach.

The team were excited to be involved in Pilot A and SEN was a focus of its school development plan. The staff attended almost all training and cluster meetings as a whole staff; this was so helpful as it meant that each staff member could interpret the information, discuss it and iron out any misconceptions as a team back in school. Learning and ideas that were discussed as a staff were put into practice in school.

There were sessions of 'in school support' from team members focusing on:

- assessing and planning for the needs of one individual child;

- receptive and expressive language activities training for individual staff;

- language development session in school;

- Parent evening on the topic of behaviour issues and how to address these positively;

- clarifying the specific role of the principal/SENCO and the inclusive nature of all staff working with all children; and

- support in reviewing our SEN policy and writing SMART IEPs

The SEN pilot has made a difference for children in the nursery by:

- deepening the staff's knowledge of the SEN resource file, and encouraging them to take time and to read widely;

- affirming the good practice that already exists within the school;

- offering new strategies such as Teaching talking, OWL (Hanen) Positive Behaviour strategies;

- allowing the staff to understand that behavioural mistakes are learning opportunities and prevention is the key, so that it is important to have strategies to call upon;

- raising awareness of planning around resources and equipment – getting to know what to do and how to introduce specific items and areas, such as the calming corner;

- raising awareness of sources of support through the ELB handbook – local special schools;

- clarifying everyone's roles and responsibilities;

- enabling the staff to review strategies to use in engaging with parents – the structured conversation IEPs; and

- providing Boardmaker to create resources to use with all children and which can be adapted for individual use.

The use of assessment through a problem solving framework, in identifying and assessing the needs of children within a self-reflective journal, is a tool that the staff will continue to use. *"Made me rethink and challenge myself to be clearer and more precise when giving instructions and talking to children so that they can achieve"* Nursery Assistant. *"Made me focus on positive mental health aspect reminded me of Maslow's theory and importance of self-regulation and attachment theory - Emotional wellbeing is key"* Teacher.

What has the pilot changed in the school?

1. **Review** of the SEN register and its content. Review of the IEPs and bringing them into line with recommendations – More focus on sharing IEPs as a working document and something each staff member could contribute to and maintain awareness of SMART targets.

2. **Partnership** More focus on working alongside colleagues in other settings with a common focus to share good practice and collaborate more.

3. **Transitions** and how important it is to plan for transitions between settings and from home to school as outlined in the Learning To Learn framework. Establishing stronger links at all transition points. It has also led to the fine-tuning of strategies used such as, more visual aids and structured routines to support the progress and achievement of children with SEN and most children benefit as a result.

What benefits have there been for the children?

All staff are more aware of the value and importance of being there for all the children. The children are more aware of staff expectations as a result of the pictorial resources and clearer boundaries. Focused interventions now happen more frequently within the class – withdrawal for support is not the only option. Choice of the right person to work with a child/children. All staff working together, using appropriate, relevant strategies to support speech language and communication and behaviour. The pilot gave a focused approach to the staff's working relationship with the parents which has, in turn, impacted on our relationships with the children

NURSERY UNIT 2

The nursery unit is in an inner city school, with children attending from a very unique blend of families from different cultures and socio-economic backgrounds. Within the nursery unit, there are 26 full time places. Around fifty per cent of these children have English as an additional language. It is staffed by one full-time teacher and one nursery assistant. The unit was selected to participate in the pilot due to the high numbers of referrals placed with the behaviour support team in previous years. In the period September 2012 until June 2014, the unit identified twelve children with additional needs whom the staff thought could benefit from additional support and specialist knowledge in relation to SEN.

There were a range of special needs within the nursery unit during the two years of the pilot including: global delay; anxiety; sensory issues; social, emotional and behaviour; speech and language (expressive, receptive, refusal to speak, attention and listening); gross motor delay; and autistic spectrum disorder.

The nursery unit staff had completed Level 1 and Level 2 ASD training. The teacher also had training in Makaton and British Sign Language. Both staff had experience of working with a wide range of abilities, including gifted and talented, special educational needs and those pupils who had English as an additional language. Staff had access to training from the Inclusion and Diversity Service. Individual education plans alongside differentiated planning incorporated a range of activities (of varying complexity) to service the needs of individuals. For example, SEN resources such as wiggle cushions, weighted blankets, ear defenders and a visual timetable. Due to our ASD training, the staff had also built up resources for individual schedules and work stations.

The staff greatly valued the training that was provided through the pilot. Staff attended courses on COMET, Inclusive Environment, Makaton, Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, SEBD and Sensory Integration, Music in the Early Years and Supporting Children with SLCN. In addition, the CIDS team completed a six week workshop in school where they worked with small groups of children, modelling different strategies for the nursery unit staff. As a result of this training, the staff had an enhanced understanding of the

more complex needs of many individual children. In particular, they found themelves in a more informed position to be able to identify the needs of individual children more effectively and had developed additional skills that assisted them in supporting these children more effectively. In addition, the training also provided the staff with a greater theoretical knowledge of SEN and a wider practical knowledge of strategies used to support children with speech and language, SEBD, sensory needs and ASD.

The staff already had a lot of resources in place that, although being used effectively, were perhaps not being utilised as efficiently as they might have been. Involvement in the pilot highlighted the importance of using such resources to their maximum potential. As a direct result of being involved in the pilot, the staff further developed their resource base to ensure they procured additional resources that had been identified as useful / effective in meeting the range of needs of children attending. In addition, individual children were provided with specialised resources over the summer period to provide opportunity for their parents to promote continuity and additional development. For the children and staff however, the most beneficial resource was the presence of an extra, well-trained member of staff. This impacted not only on the early identification of individual children's support needs, but also on the class as a whole, in a manner that can only be described as significant.

The parents of children identified through the pilot also greatly benefited. They knowledge that a team of professionals were involved in their child's education and development was, for them, reassuring. All parents were offered a one-to-one meeting with the link person from the EYIT, giving them an opportunity to ask questions and fully discuss the system in place - allaying fears. Parents were also effectively guided through the SEN Code of Practice, thus alleviating stress and making the process seem a lot less daunting. A parenting package called, 'Bright Start' was also offered through the EYIT. This package aimed to increase parental involvement through providing information and strategies to help parents support their children. All parents were able to access this and much positive feedback was received from parents.

The school was assigned a link person who guided them and provided support and expertise throughout the pilot. The staff found this invaluable, in particular when writing and evaluating action plans and talking to parents.

Compared to previous years, the children received greater individual support, they met more targets on their IEPs and were better able to access the curriculum. Anxiety and stress levels for individual children were reduced. The needs of children were identified much more quickly and support was put in place almost immediately. In addition, the staff felt children with SEN formed more and better friendships and, consequently, were able to enjoy being part of the whole class.

Transition to year one of primary school for these children was much smoother, resulting in less anxiety. The link person met with the year 1 foundation stage teacher and explained the needs of individual children and strategies that could be used to continue to support them. In addition, the teaching assistant transitioned with the children for the first month, ensuring continuity and providing extra support. The process of accessing outside help, had already commenced, ensuring additional support in place almost immediately.

Larne Early Education Partnership (LEEP)

Eleven nursery units and primary schools have united to form Larne Early Educational Programme (LEEP) which shares staff expertise in dealing with children with special educational needs. The principal of Corran Integrated Primary School and Nursery explains that they joined year one of Pilot A already having an understanding of young children's SEN

based on personal experience, but with little specific training in certain key areas, particularly ASD and SEBD. The staff's awareness of resources available for supporting children with SEN was limited and they had had little experience of working together with professionals from other agencies.

An audit of staff skills at the end of the first year of the pilot showed a clear increase in confidence and in their awareness of the specific needs of SEN children. Environmental audits carried out through the year also led to small yet effective changes being made to the nursery classroom which created a more structured layout and helped promote positive behaviour. The recommended structured approach to observations and identification of specific areas of need had a significant impact on the SEN children in the class; clearer, meaningful strategies were introduced to support the children, both SEN pupils and the rest of the class.

As the school moved towards the second year of the pilot, the staff identified a need to build on the good working relationships which had developed as a result of the training programme. The staff were keen to continue to share good practice and learn from the experiences of colleagues in statutory and non-statutory settings within the local area. From this desire to develop the fledgling network formed through Pilot A, the Larne Early Education Partnership (LEEP) grew.

The original partners involved a special school (Roddensvale Nursery), nursery schools (St Anthony's), nursery units (Linn PS Nursery Unit, Corran IPS Nursery Unit), feeder primary schools (St Anthony's PS, St MacNissi's PS) and non-statutory settings (Little Robins Playgroup, Harbour Bears Playgroup). The local Sure Start team was also involved from the beginning. The partnership has gone from strength to strength and additional non-statutory settings have also joined during the year (Hansel and Gretel Playgroup, Rainbow Day Nursery).

The partnership provides further opportunities for capacity building and staff development and establishes new links with settings within the local community. Sharing good practice has been a main feature of partnership meetings. Work continues between meetings as settings share resources and facilitate staff swaps and job-shadowing opportunities. An in-service training day was also facilitated by a visiting consultant, with costs shared by the partners.

During the series of cluster meetings to date, there has been a clear increase in confidence amongst staff, demonstrated through lively debate and discussion. Members of staff from the wide variety of settings are becoming more comfortable about discussing any changes in practice that they have introduced and are more willing to contribute examples of their own good practice. All members are particularly interested in the input of Roddensvale staff who are very willing to share their expertise. The opportunity to visit other settings as professionals is much appreciated by statutory and non-statutory settings alike and a valuable support network is developing as new relationships are forged.

The main beneficiaries of LEEP, however, are the pre-school children of Larne and particularly those with SEN and their respective families. Pilot A and the subsequent emerging partnership have raised staff awareness of specific SEN intervention strategies which make the nursery setting a more welcoming environment for SEN children which in turn impacts positively on their ability to learn, as well as that of their peers.

APPENDICES

Glossary of terms and abbreviations used in the report

Associate Assessors - current early years practitioners who support ETI on inspections and evaluations (AA)

Area partnership or cluster groups – groups consisting of staff from the statutory , voluntary and private sectors who come together to share knowledge, expertise and experience in pre-school and early years.

Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB)

Boardmaker, Mayer-Johnson, commercial software used to produce visuals

Children's inter -disciplinary Schools team (CIDS)

CCEA transition profile – an end of year report on the children's progress in pre-school whic is shared with parents and feeder primary schools

Department of Education (DE)

District visits – visits carried out by the ETI in certain areas

Early years or pre-school settings – all early years providers funded by DE

Early years inclusion team (EYIT)

Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI)

Education and Library Boards (ELBs)

Feeder primary school – the primary school to which children in the pre-school will transfer

Foundation stage (FS) of primary school – years 1 & 2 in primary school

Hubs – centres to be located in key areas and staffed by a range of qualified professionals who can provide appropriate and high quality SEN advice, guidance and support to staff who require it.

Individual education plans (IEPs)

Inter Regional Strategy Group (IRSG)

Link officer – a professional advisor who supported the staff in the development of their work

North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB)

Pilot settings – those early years / pre-school settings involved in the pilot Pre-school education advisory groups (PEAGs)

Primary sector – primary schools

South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB)

Southern Education and Library Board (SELB)

Special educational needs (SEN)

Statutory nursery – nursery schools or units with qualified teachers

Voluntary and private sector – centres other than schools or units receiving pre-school education funding from DE

Western Education and Library Board (WELB)

Generic Core Training Modules

1.   SEN Framework, legislation & statutory requirements, access & inclusion.

2.   Child Development training, normal milestones, personal & social development.

3.   Mental Health and Well being.

4.   Parent Conversations.

Additional Training modules

Organising Multi-Disciplinary Meetings

Sensory Integration

Challenging Behaviour/Assessing Behaviour

Language & Communication

Promoting an Inclusive Environment

Social Play Skills

Developing Meaningful & Effective IEPs

Pre-School Curriculum

Record Keeping and Consent

Supporting Newcomer Children

Developing Risk Assessments

Effective Observation and Planning

Pre-school settings and schools participating in Pilot A visited by ETI

1. Botanic Primary School and Nursery Unit
2. Ballykeel Primary School and Nursery Unit
3. Buick Memorial Primary School and Nursery Unit
4. St Malachy's Primary School and Nursery Unit
5. Loughview Integrated Primary School and Nursery Unit
6. St Lawrence's Primary School and Nursery Unit
7. Portstewart Primary School and Nursery Unit
8. Harpers Hill Primary School and Nursery Unit
9. Christ the Redeemer Primary School and Nursery Unit
10. Banbridge Primary School and Nursery Unit
11. Sion Mills Primary School and Nursery Unit
12. Mossgrove Primary School and Nursery Unit
13. Ballybeen Women's Centre Pre-School
14. Wishing Well Family Centre Pre-School
15. Knockbreda Nursery School
16. Convent of Mercy Nursery School
17. College Farm Nursery School
18. Railway Street Nursery School
19. St Bernadette's Nursery School
20. Trinity Nursery School
21. Tandragee Nursery School
22. Sr. Joseph's Nursery School
23. Steeple Nursery School
24. Kircubbin Community Nursery School
25. Seymore Hill Pre-school Playgroup
26. St Colmcilles Playgroup
27. Dromore Community Playgroup
28. Little Ducks Pre-school
29. Jack and Jill Community Playgroup
30. Puddleducks Playgroup
31. Laurencetown Pre-school Playgroup
32. Naiscoil Na Fuiseoige
33. Gaelscoil na gCrann
34. St Mary's Pre-School Centre
35. Rainbows Playgroup
36. Ballykinlar Community Playgroup
37. Ballyronan CommunityPlaygroup
38. Toddle-In Playgroup
39. Portrush Community Playgroup
40. St John's Playgroup
41. Rasharkin Community Playgroup
42. Little Friends Playgroup
43. Christ the Redeemer Primary School
44. Cavehill Primary School
45. Avoniel Primary School
46. Corran Integrated Primary School
47. Moira Primary School
48. Millennium Integrated Primary School
49. Irvinestown Primary School
50. Tandragee Primary School

51.   Ballydown Primary School
52.   St Oliver Plunkett Primary School
53.   St Patrick's Primary School
54.   St Mary's Primary School
55.   St Peters Primary School
56.   Belmont Primary School
57.   All Saints Primary School
58.   Dundela Infants & Nursery Unit
59.   Elmgrove Primary School
60.   Harberton Special School
61.   Jean Paul11 Primary School
62.   St Anthony's Primary School
63.   St Kevin's Primary School
64.   St Kieran's Primary School
65.   Saints and Scholars Primary School and Nursery Unit
66.   Hardy Memorial Primary School

Questionnaire

EARLY YEARS CAPACITY BUILDING STAFF QUESTIONNAIRE (PILOT A)

NAME OF CENTRE:

NAME/S OF STAFF UNDERTAKING TRAINING:

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- ---

- ---

TITLE AND DATE OF TRAINING SESSION /S ATTENDED:

- ---   ------------------

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NUMBER OF CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL EDUCATIONAL NEED:

PLEASE LIST THE RANGE OF NEED IDENTIFIED:

1. **Has the training and support to date met your expectations and the needs of your staff?**

2. **Do you feel your knowledge, skills and practice with regards to SEN has improved following the capacity building training?**

3. **How have you used the training in your centre to improve the record keeping and assessment practices?**

4. **What impact has the training and additional resources had on outcomes for….**

   a. **the children**

   b. **the staff**

c. the parents

5. What shortcomings remain?

6. Any additional comments?