

A PROCESS EVALUATION OF READY STEADY STOKE

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FOREWORD BY AIDA CABLE

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At Thrive at Five, we want to help more children growing up in neighbourhoods with high levels of social disadvantage to reach a good level of development at age five as a strong foundation for their future wellbeing and success. We aim to achieve this by supporting local collaboration, so that public, private and voluntary organisations, and parents and grandparents and the wider community, all join forces as part of a shared, coordinated drive to give children a better start.

In every neighbourhood where we work, Thrive at Five will partner with local stakeholders to help establish a clearer, better joined-up pathway of services and support for families with very young children. This pathway needs to start early, well before the child is born, and should continue right up until the end of reception year at school. It should strengthen all the environments in which young children learn and develop, including the home, childcare and pre-school settings, and the community. It needs to encompass specialist professional services alongside peer support provided by neighbours and friends. We put parents and communities at the heart of our work, to inform, shape and implement long-lasting change.

Stoke-on-Trent is Thrive at Five's first pathfinder area, and Ready Steady Stoke represents one small part of the broader pathway of better services and support that we seek to create. As we began to understand the local challenges and opportunities it became clear that we needed to act fast for the benefit of children whose early lives had been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In September 2021 early communications screening highlighted that many more children were arriving in nursery and school without expected levels of communication and language compared to pre-pandemic figures. Teachers told us about significant numbers of children who were well behind in all aspects of their development. This is a long way from the best start in life that we want for all children.

Ready Steady Stoke is our first response and has its origins in a desire by local early years practitioners and teachers to better support children and families as they transition to primary school. By working in collaboration with a diverse group of stakeholders, including parents, nurseries, schools, local and national voluntary organisations and charities, and the Local Authority, we established a staggered schedule of activities over a period of several months that gave children and parents support and reassurance before children started in nursery and school in September 2022¹.

The process evaluation contained herein covers the pilot version of Ready Steady Stoke delivered this summer. We believe it provides a clear summary of what worked well and what needs to be strengthened next year so that Ready Steady Stoke can help deliver our desired outcomes. The evaluation provides a set of recommendations that will be incorporated into future delivery, and the process has generated a bank of data around children's early language scores on nursery and reception entry, which will serve as a useful baseline for the coming years.

As the evaluation makes clear, RSS has shown a good level of promise. The strands of activity were feasible in terms of delivery and acceptable to parents. The early years teachers and the parents we interviewed gave examples of where the project had significantly benefited children's school transition. By strengthening RSS next year, we believe it is likely that we will see even larger benefits for many more children and families.

¹ To facilitate this, we have worked with the local authority to agree an improved process that enables the earlier release of new pupil data, so that schools can engage with children and parents earlier and have increased time for outreach and early intervention .

A process evaluation of Ready Steady Stoke

Ready Steady Stoke represents the collective effort of many, and we look forward to building on the positive relationships that it has fostered in Stoke-on-Trent and beyond. Finally, none of this work would have been possible without our donors and supporters and we thank all our supporters for their expertise and enthusiasm as we continue on this exciting journey.

Aida Cable

Chief Executive - Thrive at Five



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ready Steady Stoke (RSS) is a multi-strand project designed to improve children's transition into primary school and school readiness. The project was piloted in two Stoke-on-Trent neighbourhoods with high levels of social disadvantage - Abbey Hulton and Bentilee - during July and August 2022. The process evaluation was conducted over September and October 2022. The purpose of the evaluation was threefold: to explore the feasibility and acceptability of RSS and its constituent strands; to explore whether RSS seems capable of helping to bring about the desired positive outcomes; and to make a set of recommendations about how RSS could be strengthened.

RSS was implemented broadly as intended, which for a pilot year is very positive. Six out of seven partner schools participated at least to some degree, and summer term and summer holiday Stay and Plays, and Big Play events, were all successfully delivered. As ever, there were some caveats, most notably patchy school-level engagement in Abbey Hulton. Implementation enablers included the enthusiasm of school staff, multi-sectoral membership of the Core Project Team supported by Thrive at Five as a backbone team, and additional resource and capacity provided by Thrive at Five. Implementation barriers were tight timelines, logistical challenges, and need for a differentiated Abbey Hulton strategy.

Based on the returned data, 46% of target children and their families engaged with Ready Steady Stoke from the summer holiday onwards including over 20% of children who engaged in a sustained way. In four out of the five schools for which we have data, between 64% and 80% of the overall target intake (with returned data) engaged with at least one event from within the three RSS strands. At a more granular level, attendance was higher at school term Stay and Plays than at summer holiday Stay and Plays, but the latter were used by a number of children and families. Over 120 children and their families attended the Big Play events. The level of sustained engagement was encouraging for Year One, but this sustained engagement number will need to increase significantly in future years, given that isolated attendance at individual events is unlikely to help bring about meaningful positive change. Children from more disadvantaged backgrounds as identified through eligibility for the Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) were a significant presence at all activities, but we also know that many did not attend, and that we need to do more to reach the most vulnerable. It was also clear from the quantitative data, and the interviews, that we must do more to focus on the specific needs and dynamics of Abbey Hulton.

We received overwhelmingly positive feedback from parents who attended the Big Play events. This included 86 out of 96 respondents confirming they would recommend the events to a friend or colleague, 84 out of 96 respondents strongly agreeing they had learnt about activities they could do at home with their child, and 77 out of 96 respondents strongly agreeing they had learnt about other local early years sessions they could attend with their child.

RSS was perceived by interviewed early years teachers and parents to have had a significant positive impact on the school transition. The early years teachers we interviewed, and the parents we interviewed who had all engaged heavily with different project strands, were very positive about RSS as a whole. Early years teachers emphasised benefits for participants around parent-school relationships, enhanced child-and-parent familiarisation with school environments, and opportunities for children to learn key school readiness skills. Parents spoke about improved parent-school relationships, giving them new ideas for things to do at home with their child, putting them at ease with regards to the transition, and building children's confidence and skills.

In broad terms, the higher the Early Communication Screen (ECS) score, the more sessions were attended by the groups of children who received that score (see Appendix 1 and charts 37 and 38). Of course, it is not possible, based on this data, to infer that the sessions caused the higher ECS scores. There are likely to be confounding variables at play. For instance, it is possible that children who attended the most sessions also benefit from the highest quality home learning environments

and the most engaged parents and that this broader support (rather than the RSS sessions) helps explain why these children have higher scores. Nevertheless, this is useful data for us to track in future years, not least as we take steps to broaden engagement with RSS, including increasing engagement amongst those children who are most at risk of not reaching a good level of development at age five.

There is also evidence that RSS had broader local benefits, by helping to forge new local connections, providing regular free meals over the summer for families with very young children, and helping raise the local profile of primary school readiness. As a result of RSS, a wide range of stakeholders worked well together and felt they could achieve more by working in this collaborative way. This is good early evidence that a backbone team, supporting a broader collaborative effort, can bring significant local benefits.

For a first year pilot project, RSS has shown a good level of promise. The strands of activity are feasible in terms of delivery and acceptable to parents. For the interviewed families, who did all engage heavily, and for the interviewed early years teachers, there was evidence to suggest that the project did make a difference and reason to believe that it could play an important role for many more children. To drive impact at the desired scale, the project in future years will need to reach more families, including more of the children most at risk of not reaching a good level of development at age five, and it will need to engage these children in a sustained journey throughout the summer months.

We close the report by making a series of recommendations to strengthen the design and delivery of RSS next year. The recommendations cover aims, governance, the timetable, the strands of activity, the need for targeting, collaboration between schools, and our communications.

Section One

Evaluating Ready Steady Stoke



This report presents findings from a process evaluation² of Thrive at Five's Ready Steady Stoke (RSS) project. The project was piloted in two Stoke-on-Trent neighbourhoods - Abbey Hulton and Bentilee - during July and August 2022. The evaluation was conducted over September and October 2022.

About the project

RSS is a multi-strand project designed to improve children's transition into primary school and school readiness. The project in its entirety covers transitions into nursery and reception through three principal delivery strands. First, there is a series of summer term Stay and Plays within schools. Second, there is a flagship community event. Third, there is a second wave of school-based Stay and Plays during the summer holidays. To underpin all this activity, schools are supported to introduce Mouse Club³ - a Parental Engagement Network initiative - that enables the development of positive partnerships for learning between families and early years professionals. Additionally, a coordinated communications campaign targets families with tips and advice on the child-level skills necessary for a successful transition.

RSS was originally conceived by a nascent schools partnership, incubated by Thrive at Five. It comprised early years teachers and practitioners from several local schools. An inter-agency Core Project Team, bringing together representatives from Thrive at Five, the local authority, schools, Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) childcare settings, and local voluntary and community organisations was responsible for overseeing this summer's delivery. In addition to chairing Core Project Team meetings, Thrive at Five provided ideas and resources to support Stay and Plays and helped to organise the community events in both neighbourhoods.

As to be expected, the project was informed by the existing literature on effective primary school transitions in conjunction with practitioners often extensive local experience. For example, Sharp et al (2005), Blaisdell & Mountney (2014), Donkin (2014), and Patel (2022) all emphasise the importance of approaching transition as a process that requires gradual change rather than a singular event. In line with this, RSS adopts a staggered design with a continuous schedule of activities spanning a period of two months. Evans et al (2010), Thomas (2019), and Moir & Johnson (2021) draw attention to the critical influence of parents on children's transition. Unsurprisingly, parent participation is strongly hardwired into the RSS model. Oxfordshire County Council's smooth transitions Good Practice Guide (2017) refers to the pool of knowledge that parents have about their child's likes and dislikes, which can prove vital to practitioners overseeing transitions. Again, this exchange of information between parents and teachers is a cornerstone of RSS.

Theory of Change

The aim of RSS is to improve children's transition into primary school and school readiness as a stepping-stone to helping more children reach a good level of development at age five. Poor levels of school readiness are a problem in both Abbey Hulton and Bentilee. In 2019, a third of children across the two wards had not reached their developmental milestones by the end of reception, and

² A process evaluation determines whether project activities have been implemented as intended and resulted in expected outputs. It also explores whether activities have demonstrated early promise and could feasibly (with modifications and under the right conditions) help bring about the desired outcomes.

³ Under Mouse Club, each child receives a toy mouse as a transitional object. The Mouse helps early years teachers, parents, and children to model behaviours that maximise experiences and opportunities for learning.

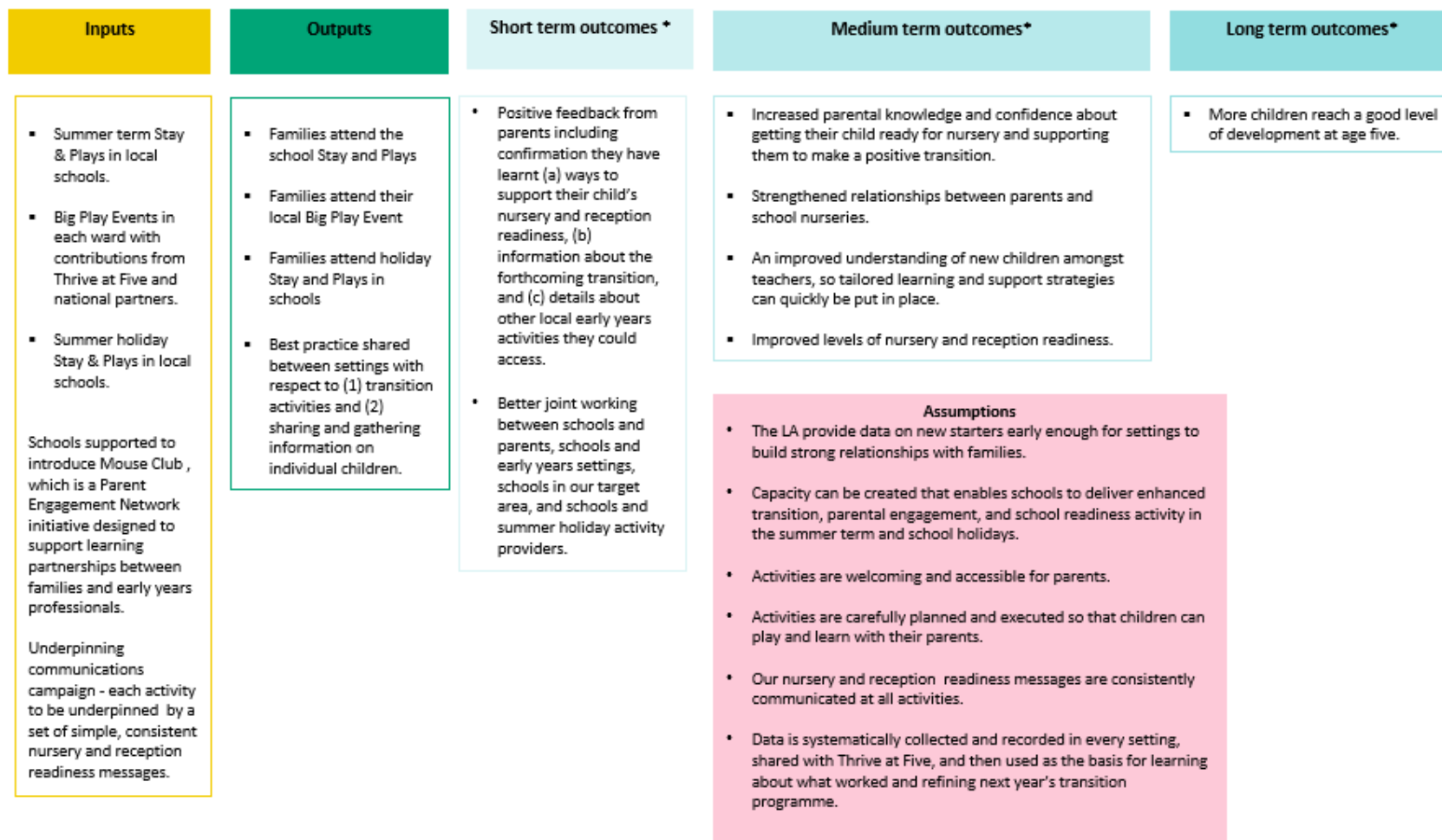
in 2021, over 40% of children starting reception were not on track⁴. The issue predates, but has likely been exacerbated by, the pandemic. The project's theory of change, which is shown as a diagram on page seven, outlines the intended process for bringing about positive outcomes.

Under inputs, on the left-hand side, we have the three principal delivery strands, the cross-cutting adoption of Mouse Club, and the coordinated communications campaign. Outputs focus on family attendance, and the diffusion of transition-related best practice across settings. Short-term outcomes take the shape of positive post-activity feedback from parents including confirmation that they obtained new information (from the activities) about the forthcoming transition, ways to support their child's nursery or reception readiness, and other local early years activities they could access. Medium-term outcomes consist of increases in parental knowledge and confidence, strengthened relationships between parents and schools, a more detailed understanding of new children amongst teachers, and improved general levels of nursery and school readiness. As previously stated, the intended long-term outcome is for more children to reach a good level of development at age five. The steps are supported by a set of assumptions, which range from the local authority releasing prospective pupil data at the earliest point, to the careful planning and execution of activities.



⁴ Thrive at Five Discovery Phase data mapping.

Chart 1 - Project Theory of Change



Evaluation Purpose

The purpose of this process evaluation is threefold.

- i. To explore the feasibility and acceptability of RSS and its constituent strands.
- ii. To explore whether RSS seems capable of helping bring about the desired positive outcomes.
- iii. To make a set of recommendations about how the design and delivery of RSS could be strengthened next summer.

The Evaluation Questions are:

1. Was RSS implemented as intended? What were the enablers and barriers to successful implementation?
2. Did families engage with RSS? Who engaged with RSS and who did not engage? How many families engaged heavily across the different strands of activity?
3. What did early years teachers and parents think about RSS? Did they value the activities? Did early years teachers and parents perceive the activities to be beneficial with regard to the transition and school readiness?
4. Were there any broader local benefits that were associated with RSS?
5. What can be learnt to strengthen the design and delivery of RSS next year?

Evaluation Approach

This evaluation is a mixed methods design, consisting of:

- Documentary analysis of project planning briefings, the project budget, post-event (The Big Play) Thrive at Five reflection notes, Thrive at Five's Ready Steady Stoke Board Paper (15/09/2022), and headline monitoring data relating to delivery.
- Individual and Group interviews with members of the Core Project Team.
- Descriptive analysis of quantitative attendance and family feedback data.
- Individual and Group interviews with early years teachers from our partner schools.
- Individual and Group interviews with parents who engaged heavily with the project.

To facilitate the collection of quantitative child-level data, Thrive at Five developed data sharing agreements with partner schools⁵. Thrive at Five also created data return templates to help ensure data submissions were consistent and (as far as possible) ready for analysis.

⁵ Five of our seven local schools entered into data sharing agreements with Thrive at Five.

Partner schools collected Stay and Play attendance data and Early Communication Screen⁶ (ECS) scores. This data was linked with demographic data through a pseudonymised code. Linked non-identifiable child-level data was subsequently shared with Thrive at Five. Attendance at Big Play events was recorded using the same pseudonymised child-level code, so that Thrive at Five could piece together an overall picture of engagement across the project’s three principal strands and across school and community settings. Early Communication Screen scores have been used to develop a baseline for comparison with future years and for exploratory analysis of the relationship between project engagement and speech and language proficiency at the point of nursery or reception entry. This analysis can be found in Appendix One.

Parents were asked to complete a Family Feedback Form as they left the Big Play events. The template for this form can be found at Appendix Two.

Interviews were carried out in September and October 2022. Participants were identified using a purposive sampling approach⁷, based on membership of four participant groups (Core Project Team, Early Years Teachers, Parents, or Big Play Event providers). The parent category was restricted to those who had engaged in a sustained way across the project’s strands. Interviews were carried out either in-person or via a web-platform (MS Teams). All interviews followed topic guides which set out the key themes to be explored (the topic guides are available in Appendix three) and were then transcribed verbatim. There were a total of 25 interview participants and three people who could not make the interview but provided a short written submission. Table 1 below shows the interviews carried out and the written submissions received in greater detail.

Table 1 - Qualitative research

PARTICIPANT GROUP	INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP INTERVIEW	WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS	TOTAL PARTICIPANTS
Core Project Team	<i>One group interview with 2 participants, one group interview with 3 participants, and three individual interviews</i>	N/A	8
Early Years Teachers	<i>One group interview with 3 early years teachers, one group interview with 2 early years teachers, and one individual interview</i>	<i>Two written submissions from early years teachers</i>	8
Parents	<i>Two individual interviews and one group interview with 3 parents</i>	N/A	5

⁶ The Early Communication Screen was designed by the Speech and Language Therapy team from Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Partnership NHS Trust. It is a measure to indicate the level of need for speech and language intervention. The Screen has been validated against the New Reynell Developmental Language Scale 3 to ensure its accuracy.

⁷ Purposive sampling refers to a group of non-probability sampling techniques in which units are selected because they have characteristics that you need in your sample.

Big Play Event Providers	Two individual interviews and two group interviews	One written submission	7
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Interview data was analysed using the Framework Method (Ritchie et al, 2014), which is an approach to thematic analysis. This method uses a matrix approach to organise and analyse qualitative data, with columns representing themes and rows representing interviewees. Matrix cells contain summary findings and enable researchers to compare and contrast data whilst acknowledging context.

The Remainder of this Report

In the following sections, we address each evaluation question in turn. Section Two explores whether RSS was implemented as intended and identifies enablers and barriers to successful implementation. Section Three assesses whether families engaged with RSS, and if so, how they engaged and exactly who engaged. Section Four looks specifically at how parents found the Big Play events, drawing on data from Family Feedback Forms. Section Five addresses what early years teachers and parents thought about RSS and its role in improving the primary school transition and school readiness. Section Six explores any broader local benefits that were associated with RSS. Section Seven includes concluding remarks, and recommendations about how the design and delivery of RSS could be strengthened in future years. Finally, Appendix A provides a breakdown of nursery and reception ECS scores⁸, Appendix B has the Family Feedback Form template, and Appendix C presents the topic guides used for interviews with key stakeholders.



⁸ We have deliberately presented this data in Appendix A as opposed to in the body of the main evaluation report. This is because it is not possible, at this early stage of RSS project development and implementation, to draw meaningful conclusions about the impact of RSS on ECS scores. Instead, the scores (and the descriptive analysis of them) should be viewed as a baseline for Thrive at Five’s work in the coming years.

Section Two

*Was Ready Steady Stoke implemented as intended?
What were the enablers and barriers to successful implementation?*



In Section Two, we start by summarising RSS implementation and we then home in on specific implementation enablers and barriers. We end the section with two wider reflections on project implementation that emerged from stakeholder interviews.

Implementation summary

Headline project monitoring suggests that RSS was largely implemented as intended. Six of seven partner schools participated in the project⁹, representing a combined nursery and reception intake of 442 children. Over 98% of these children (434 children) received their own cuddly toy mouse through Mouse Club as a basis for modelling positive transition behaviours. Every participating school ran a series of transition-focused Stay & Plays for new nursery and reception children. Community events were well-attended and widely praised. All these points contribute to a favourable picture. On closer inspection however, it is possible to discern some caveats that sit alongside these positives. One of the six participating schools only joined the project just before summer term ended. Together with the non-participating school, this meant that half the partner schools in Abbey Hulton (two out of four) were either not represented or partially represented. Whereas all participating schools used Mouse Club, few implemented the full recommended model. Finally, shared learning between practitioners, and the dissemination of key school readiness messages, which were both envisaged in the theory of change as important components of RSS, were fairly limited in practice.

When we zoom in on the Big Play, a similar story emerges of implementation broadly - but not exactly - following plans. The Abbey Hulton Big Play was held on Tuesday 26 July with some activities at St John’s Church on Greasley Road and some activities at Betty Rushton Gardens. The Bentilee Big Play took place on Wednesday 27 July at Treehouse Children’s Centre. Activities included Duplo, Creative Storytelling, Rhythm Time¹⁰, the Little Library Van¹¹, and Rent-a-beast¹². There were also activities overseen by BBC Tiny Happy People¹³, Stoke City Football Club¹⁴, and the National Literacy Trust. LEGO donated several sizeable boxes of Duplo, the BBC gave out 600+ tote bags, and the National Literacy Trust gifted hundreds of books to families. However, these clear successes should be qualified by the general consensus amongst organisers that the event landed better in Bentilee than in Abbey Hulton.

Now focusing in on Stay & Plays, over 25 sessions were held during the summer holidays for children transitioning into nursery and reception across the six participating primary schools. Each session ranged from 2-and-a-half hours to 3-and-a-half hours in length. Table 2 below sets out the extensive scope of the offer. Again, this was a significant achievement, though there was some reflective discussion about whether sessions may have been even stronger with a sharper collective focus on content and schools sharing best practice.

Table 2 - Summer holiday Stay ad Play sessions

SCHOOL	SUMMER HOLIDAY STAY AND PLAY SESSIONS HELD	LENGTH OF SESSIONS
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⁹ The headteacher and early years lead at the seventh school have expressed their desire to work with Thrive at Five going forwards.

¹⁰ Rhythm Time uses music and singing to help support young children’s speech and general development.

¹¹ The Little Library Van is a mobile storytelling space which travels around the city of Stoke.

¹² Rent-a-beast provide a large range of minibeasts as a basis for talking with and inspiring young children.

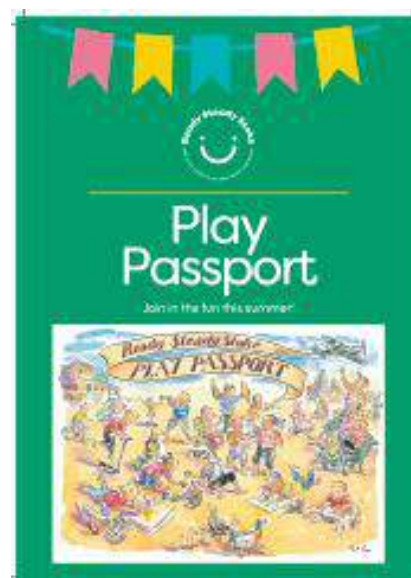
¹³ BBC Tiny Happy People aims to help children develop their language skills, through providing simple activities and play ideas that parents can do with their babies and toddlers at home.

¹⁴ Stoke City Community Trust provide a range of healthy living and learning activities, facilitated by the club mascot Pottermus.

Maple Court	Five sessions every Tuesday morning	2-and-a-half hours per session
Eaton Park	Five sessions every Wednesday morning	2-and-a-half hours per session
St Maria Goretti	Three sessions every Wednesday morning	3 hours per session
Kingsland	Five sessions every Wednesday morning	3-and-a-half hours per session
Carmountside	Four sessions (two in wk 2, one in wk 4, one in wk 5)	3 hours per session
Our Lady	Three sessions (two in wk 4, one in wk 5)	3 hours per session

Finally, on communications, Thrive at Five produced a suite of assets. These included posters, banners, stickers, and activity cards. Every child received a beautiful Play Passport, granting them access to events and inviting them to record their experiences. Five building blocks of school readiness (Social skills, Independence, Communication, Confidence, and Listening and concentrating) were agreed in consultation with local parents and early years professionals and featured throughout the communications materials. A Ready Steady Stoke facebook page was established to promote key messages locally, which was visited by 579 people. The general view amongst key stakeholders was that the quality and design of materials was excellent. However, there was also broad acknowledgement that the core messages had not been disseminated widely enough and had not been prominent enough during events and sessions, to stand a realistic chance of driving behaviour change.

Chart 2 - Communications assets



Enablers to successful implementation

One key enabler of the project's implementation successes was the enthusiasm displayed by many staff within schools. As described in Section 1, schools were a catalyst for RSS and lead designers of the broad approach. Given this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that - as confirmed by interviewees from the Core Project Team - most schools embraced RSS, the idea of Mouse Club, the Big Play events, and the opportunity to run summer holiday Stay and Plays for children transitioning into nursery and reception.

Another enabling factor was the multi-sectoral membership and subsequent versatility of the Core Project Team. As members of the team commented, this created a broad and effective skills-mix.

'...it worked really well because you had lots of people who had lots of experience we could draw on. It takes more than just wanting to meet the early learning goals. You need people with specialisms in accessing parents, catering, in lots and lots of different areas.....so I thought it worked really well.'

'...The Core Project Team was very supportive. The vision [for the project] was growing with the Core Team.'

This importance of having access to 'the right contacts' and the need to know people 'who could get things done' across multiple organisational jurisdictions was perceived to be a key ingredient of the project's success. In fact, the need to build on this strength in future iterations of RSS was also emphasised by several interviewees, with suggestions to include health visitors and social workers and parents as full members of the Core Project Team.

A final enabler was the additional resource and capacity that Thrive at Five was able to bring to RSS. The project budget shows that Thrive at Five spent £6,468 on Mouse Club resources, £12,584 on summer holiday activity costs, £15,320 on the Big Play events, and £965 towards the National Literacy Trust's *Tales in the Park* event. We also invested £9,624 on communications assets and £3,802 on information governance support (to ensure we were collecting and holding data securely). Also, a three-person team from Thrive at Five coordinated the Big Play events, which were widely seen as well-organised and populated by 'purposeful activities' that engaged both parent and child. As one of our activity providers at the event said:

'...there was a real professional feel to the event. I think it felt like every element of the event was thought through quite thoroughly and that is a compliment to your work.....and that gives confidence to the people taking part and the people attending as well.'

'...there were often moments of triangulation, in which you had both child and the parent and the facilitator present and in dialogue, which I suppose is the ultimate objective.'

A Core Project Team member echoed this general point:

'...couldn't fault itrun professionally....that part of it was great.'

Enablers at a glance

1. Enthusiasm of school staff
2. Multi-sectoral membership of the Core Project Team
3. Additional resource and capacity from Thrive at Five

This provides some early support for the notion that third sector backbone teams can add value and help enhance local early years practice.

Barriers to successful implementation

A major implementation barrier was the considerable amount of preparatory work that needed to be delivered with a very short lead-in time. This was largely caused by schools being unable to engage with parents until after school allocations have been announced in April¹⁵. As a result, promotional materials (i.e., the Play Passport, posters, stickers, activity cards) did not reach schools until late in the summer term, limiting opportunities to embed new practice, disseminate communications messages, and follow-up with parents to drive-up engagement. As one member of school staff noted:

'...I think we handed out the information a bit last minute. We needed that sooner.'

This short lead-in time made it especially difficult for schools to make the most of Mouse Club. As a result, one school only used Mouse Club with their nursery, and another school started it very late and 'did not have any preparation time'. In practice, most schools 'did their own variation' drawing on the core Mouse Club concepts, but most did not manage to do the initial one-to-one meeting with parents¹⁶ or to systematically work through the provided activities. A member of the Core Project Team said:

'...I think the challenge was around time. Not enough time to get that [the detailed Mouse Club delivery plan] to schools. Not enough time to train the schools.'

The general view from school staff was that if we get the process underway sooner next year, so that the sequencing is 'more spaced out and leaves a bit more time', they may well be able to achieve even more with the project.

A second implementation barrier came in the form of logistical challenges in Abbey Hulton with regard to the Big Play event. First, the Core Project Team struggled to identify a 'single, suitable community venue' for the Abbey Hulton Big Play. The result was that this event was carried out across two sites (St John's Church on Greasley Road and Betty Rushton Gardens). In the words of one stakeholder, this meant the event lacked a 'continuity of flow'. Another member of the Core Project Team reflected:

'...Not sure the split-site worked. Came up in our feedback. I think there were some families who just did not go to the second site.'

Barriers at a glance

1. Short lead-in time
2. Abbey Hulton split-site venue and Big Play timetabling clash
3. Need for a differentiated Abbey Hulton strategy

¹⁵ As referenced in the foreword to this document, we have worked with the local authority to agree an improved process that enables the earlier release of new pupil data, so that schools have a much longer period for engagement.

¹⁶ The Parent Engagement Network - who introduced the Mouse Club scheme - specifically emphasise the importance of this initial meeting to explain the approach to parents.

Second, we also experienced a Big Play timetabling clash, with a different event aimed at the area's youngest children and their families held in another local church at the same time.

'...But we did also have an event that was going on at the Breathe Church on the same day...so it makes you wonder how much that impacted it.'

Indeed, one member of school staff confirmed that several parents they had invited to the Big Play had ended up going to the other event.

A final implementation barrier went deeper than the logistical issues outlined above and related to the need for a strategy that was customised to the specific dynamics and needs of Abbey Hulton. On this point, one Core Project Team Member said:

'Bentilee has always been the one that gets the investment and involvement. The community in Abbey is not in the same place. There are a lot of needs.'

'The message has not permeated yet in Abbey. It has started to permeate in Bentilee, but not yet in Abbey.'

Abbey Hulton was perceived, by several of our interviewees, to have greater social challenges than Bentilee including high numbers of open early help cases, with one Core Project Team Member saying that to make progress Thrive at Five needs 'a better presence in Abbey'. A possible implication here is that to help create strong engagement and impact, Thrive at Five should view Abbey Hulton and Bentilee as largely separate entities rather than a single geographically connected area.

Further stakeholder reflections on implementation

To end this section, we briefly make two further points that came up in the interviews relating to implementation. First, there was a sense from some interviewees that Core Project Team meetings tended to 'focus on the actual Big Play event and how that was going to go' rather than on the full project with all its constituent strands. Given short lead-in times, it is easy to see why focus may narrow in this manner, but for future reference it is worth considering how project governance could most effectively encompass both event organisation and wider strategic delivery. Second, several Core Project Team members retrospectively articulated a tighter - more precise - overall aim for the project than simply improving the transition and school readiness. This tighter definition homes in on familiarisation with school environments and building children's softer skills (i.e., to settle quickly, sit and listen, hold a pencil, put their coats on etc.) that provide solid foundations for teaching and learning once the September term commences. As one member of the Core Project Team commented:

'This project is not really about the academics.'

'It is about becoming familiar with your setting, your school, and your teacher. It's about being more confident with routines and more settled. When all these foundations are in place, it will support learning.'

Speaking on the importance of getting children settled early in September, another member of the Core Project Team commented:

'When I worked in schools ... we wouldn't get some kids settled until Christmas ...so if we can get those kids settled earlier... that means they can engage with the environment earlier ... and learn earlier.'

For future years, it will be essential to agree an aim for the project that is sufficiently precise so that inputs and intended outcomes are aligned and plausible. There are, in all likelihood, limits to what - in child development terms - can plausibly be achieved through a project focused on the summer months immediately preceding September, and accordingly, a redefined sharper project aim is probably desirable.

In summary, RSS was implemented broadly as intended, which for a pilot year is very positive. Six out of seven of our partner schools participated, and summer term and summer holiday Stay and Plays, and Big Play events, were all delivered. The project organisers deserve much credit for these achievements. As ever, there were some important caveats. These included patchy school-level engagement in Abbey Hulton, lack of fidelity to some key implementation features of Mouse Club, poorer overall engagement in Abbey Hulton, and the absence of widespread cut-through for core messages. Enablers included the enthusiasm of school staff, multi-sectoral membership of the Core Project Team, and additional resource and capacity provided by Thrive at Five. Barriers were the short lead-in times, logistical challenges, and need for a differentiated Abbey Hulton strategy. Furthermore, some wider reflections were raised in the interviews about the narrow focus of governance arrangements on the Big Play and about the high-level (lacking in specificity) nature of the overall project aims. Essentially, the project has created some excellent foundation on which to build, and there are clear steps that can be taken to further strengthen practice next year.

Section Three

*Did families engage with Ready Steady Stoke?
How many families engaged heavily across the different strands of activity?
Who engaged and who did not engage?*



In this section, we present a range of data on family engagement. This includes engagement with summer term and summer holiday Stay & Plays, engagement with the Big Play events, minimum engagement, sustained versus intermittent engagement, and data on the engagement of those most likely to benefit.

Engagement with summer term and summer holiday Stay & Plays

The series of charts below show levels of engagement with summer term and summer holiday Stay & Plays at five¹⁷ of our participating schools. At Eaton Park, we only have data for summer holiday Stay & Plays as the school joined the project slightly after the initial tranche of schools. However, at this school summer holiday engagement was very strong across both reception and nursery years. The trend for the other schools was broadly similar, with fairly high engagement with school term Stay & Plays and more limited attendance at summer holiday sessions.

Chart 3 - Eaton Park Stay & Plays

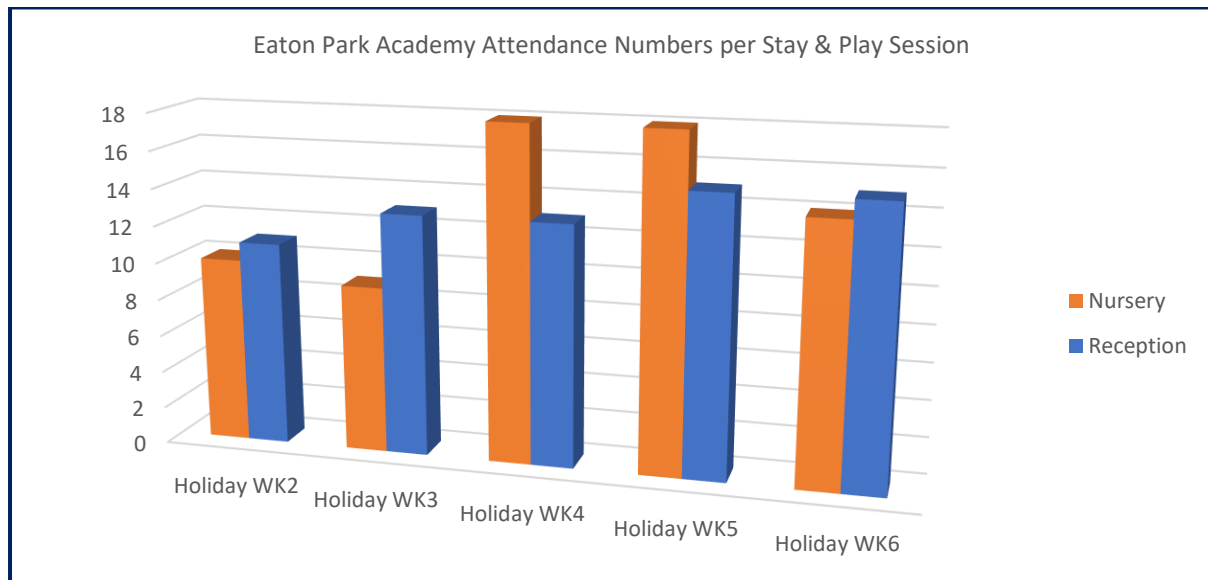
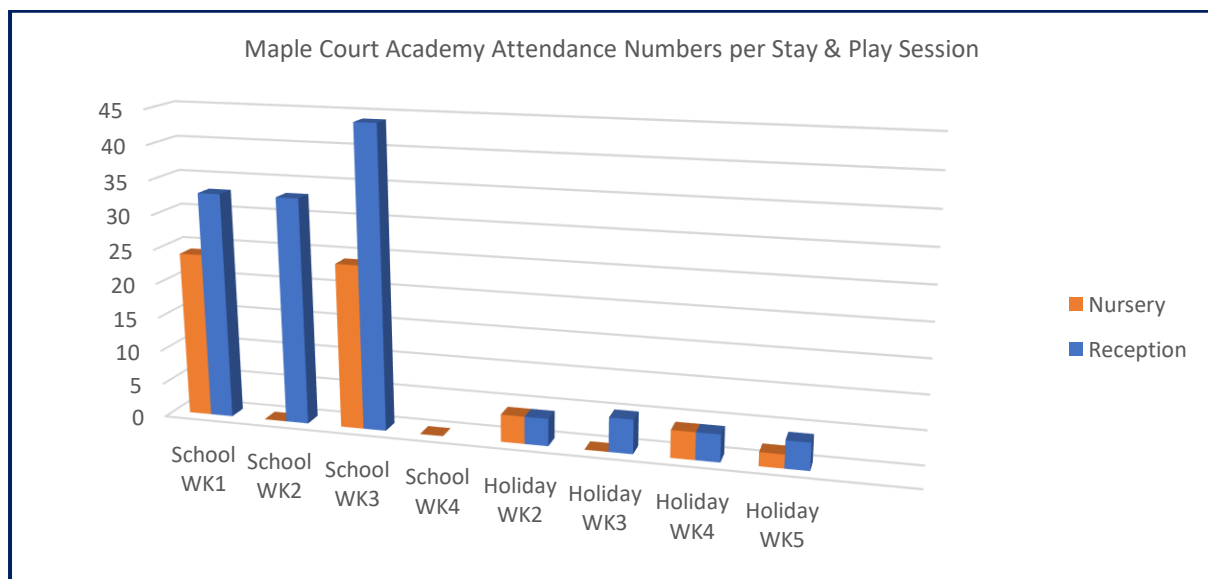


Chart 4 - Maple Court Stay & Plays



¹⁷ Our Lady St Benedict joined the project too late to collect data permissions.

Chart 5 - St Maria Goretti Stay & Plays

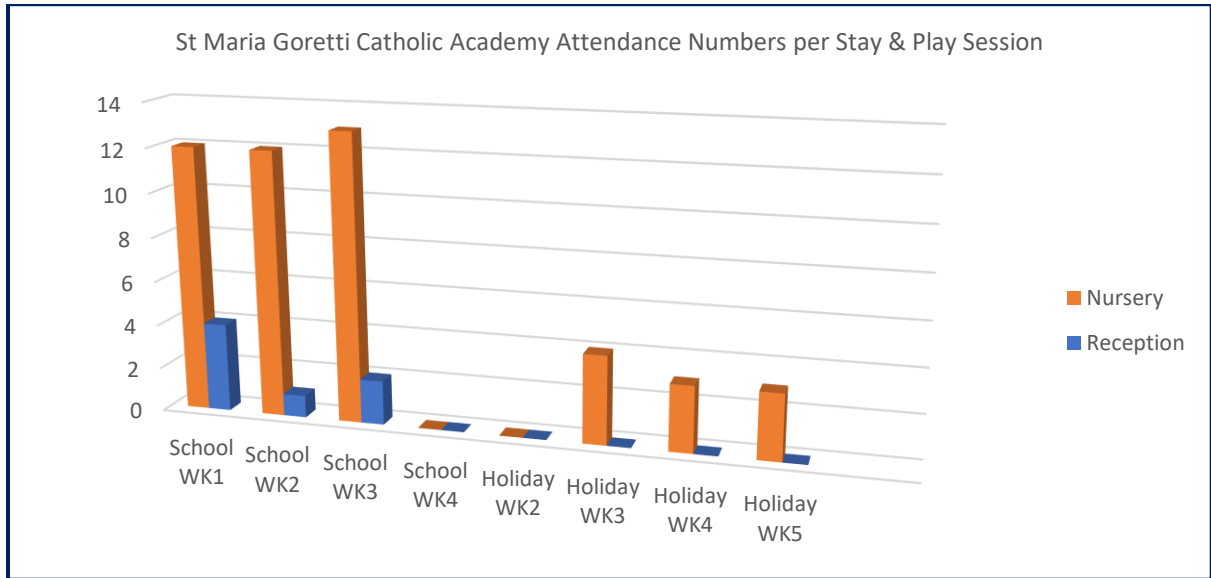


Chart 6 - Carmountside Stay & Plays

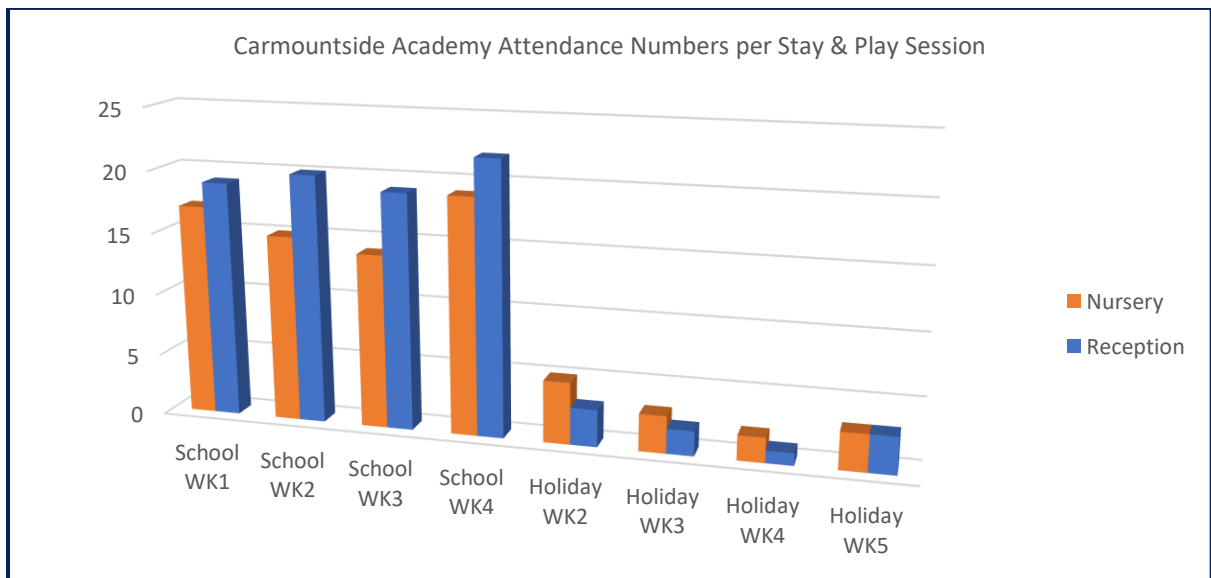
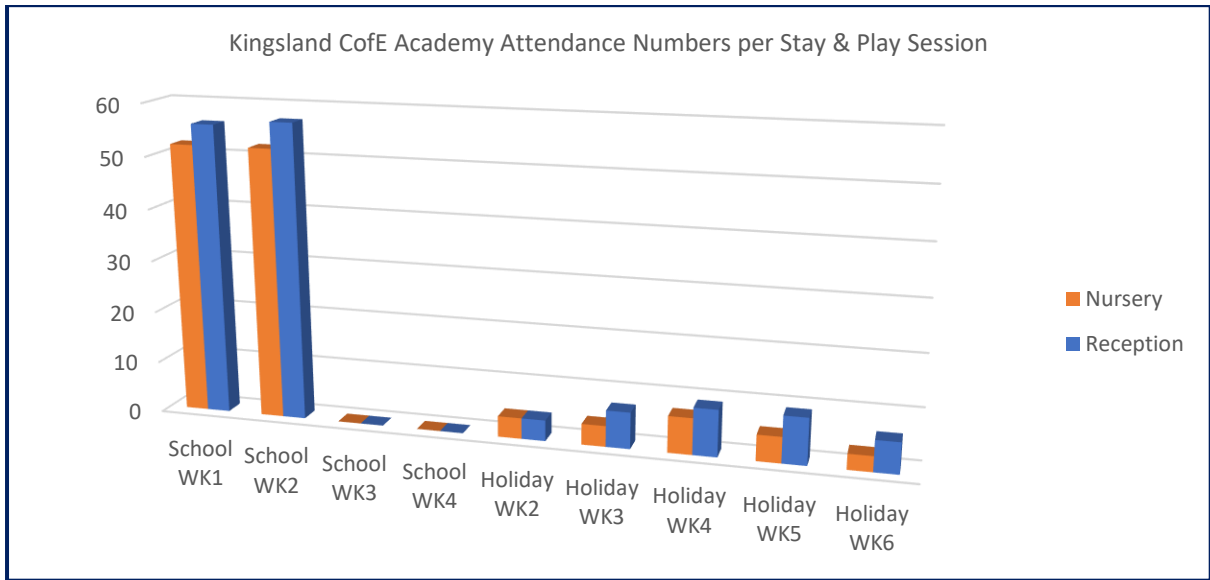


Chart 7 - Kingsland Stay & Plays



Engagement with the Big Play events

Charts 8 and 9 below show Bentilee and Abbey Hulton Big Play attendance from Thrive at Five’s target group (i.e., soon-to-be nursery and reception children from partner schools). In total, 75 children from the target group and their families attended the Bentilee Big Play. There were a further 14 children in attendance on the day (not including siblings of target children), who were mostly either younger children or those from other schools, giving an overall attendance number of 89 children and their families. At the Abbey Hulton Big Play, we welcomed 28 children from the target group and their families. Five further children (again either younger children or those from other schools but not including the siblings of target children) were also present on the day, giving a total of 33 children and their families in attendance. Over the two days, 122 children and their families attended the events. From the target group, 103 children and their families attended (out of 422), representing 23%.

Chart 8 - Bentilee Big Play

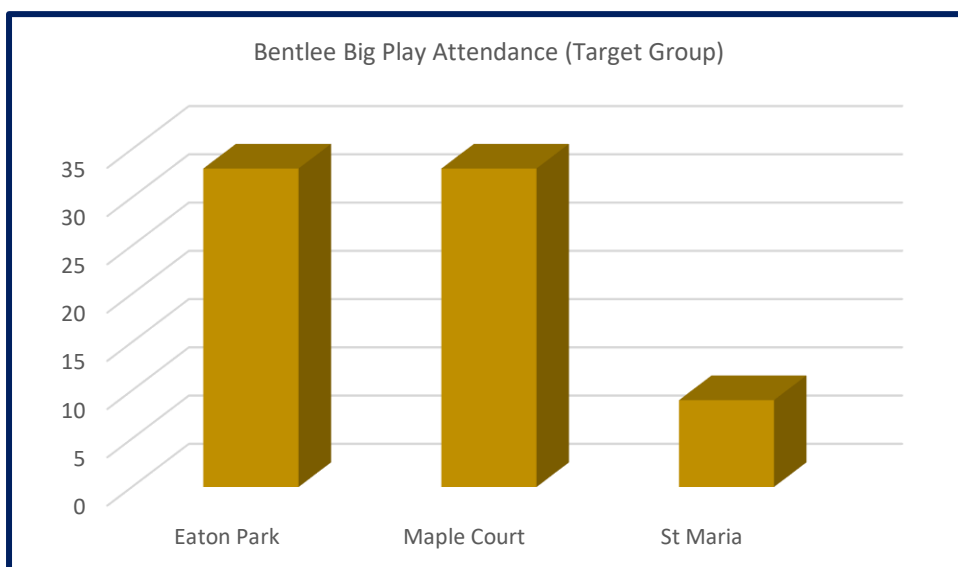
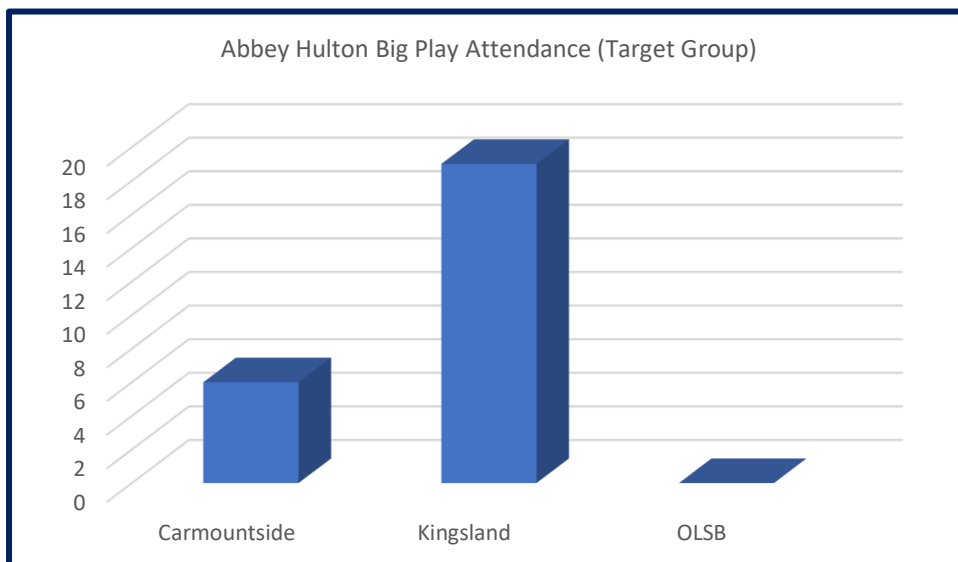


Chart 9 – Abbey Hulton Big Play



Minimum engagement

In the charts below, we explore minimum levels of engagement (i.e., engagement with summer term Stay & Plays, or the Big Play events, or the summer holiday Stay & Plays). The purpose is to ascertain the proportion of total nursery and reception intake at each school who engaged with any of the three RSS strands. Under this measure, three schools had minimum engagement levels above 70% (Carmountside, Kingsland, and Maple Court). At Eaton Park, 64% of engaged in at least one of the three RSS strands. At St Maia Goretti, 19% engaged at this level.

Chart 10 - Carmountside attendance at any event

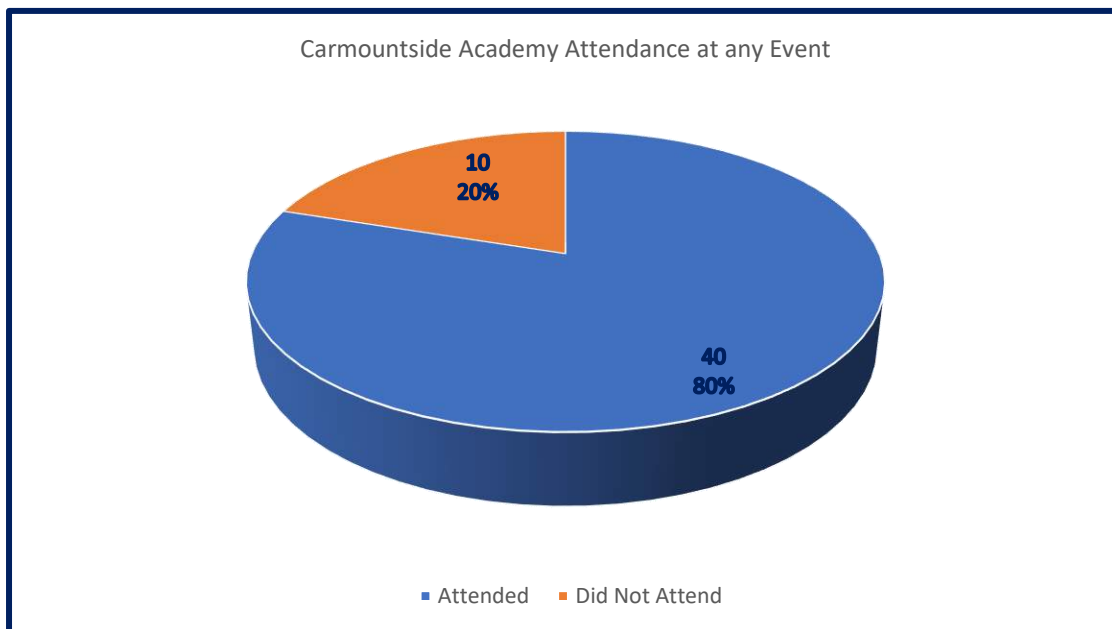


Chart 11 - Eaton Park attendance at any event

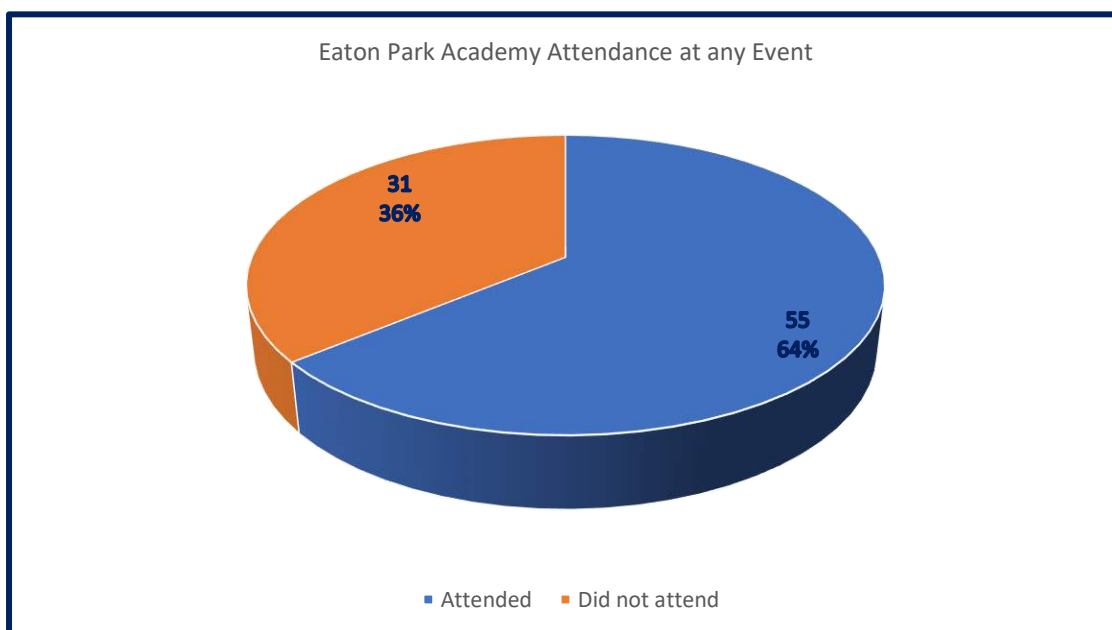


Chart 12 - Kingsland attendance at any event

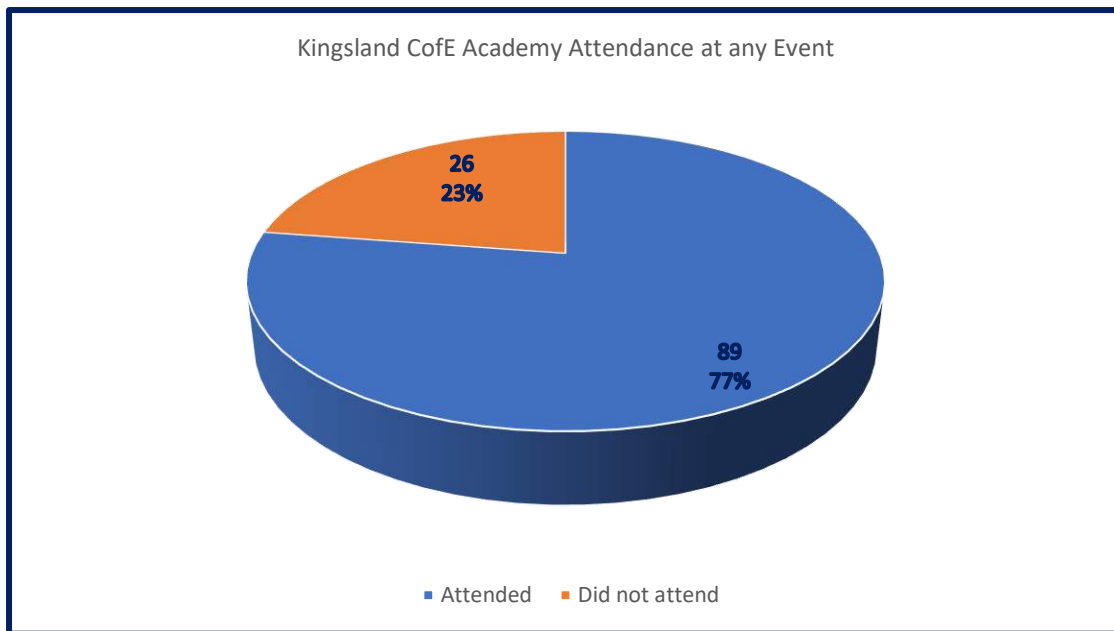


Chart 13 - Maple Court attendance at any event

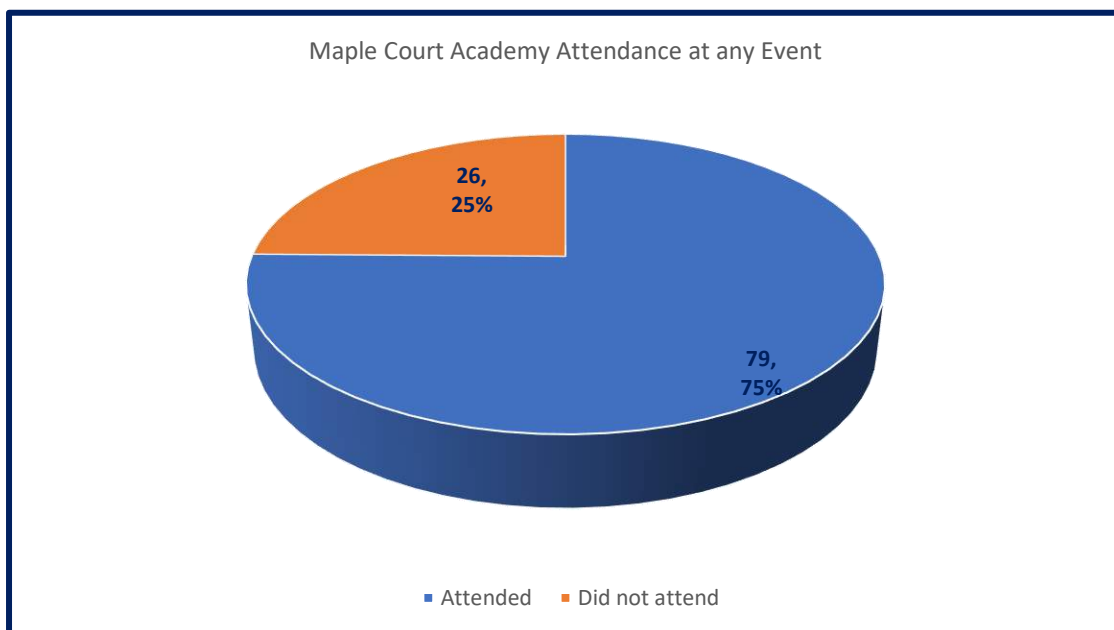
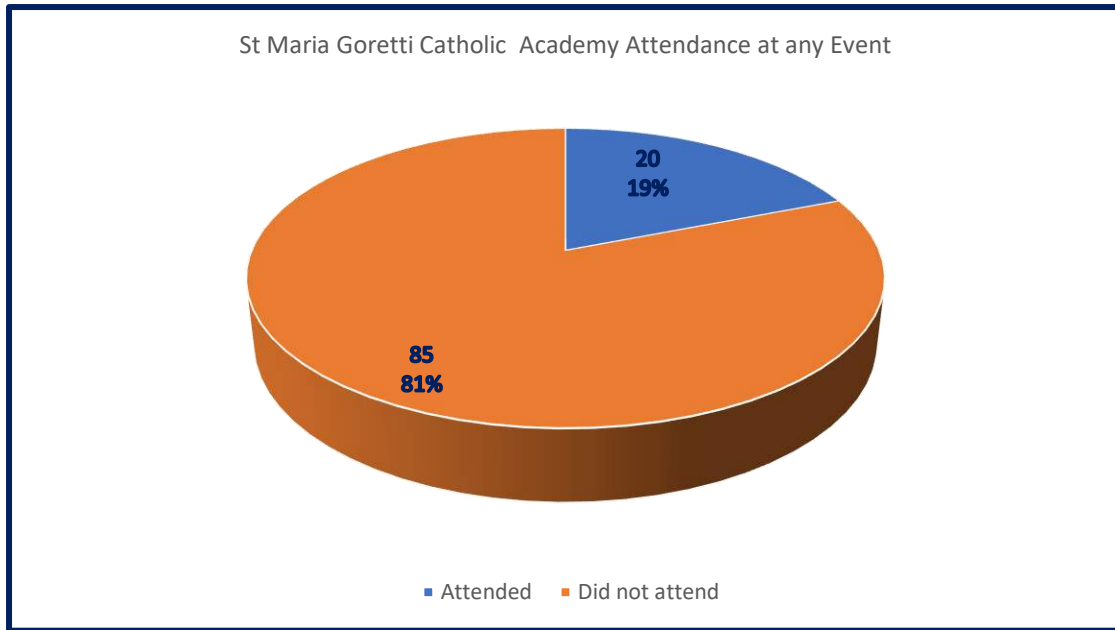


Chart 14 - St Maria Goretti attendance at any event



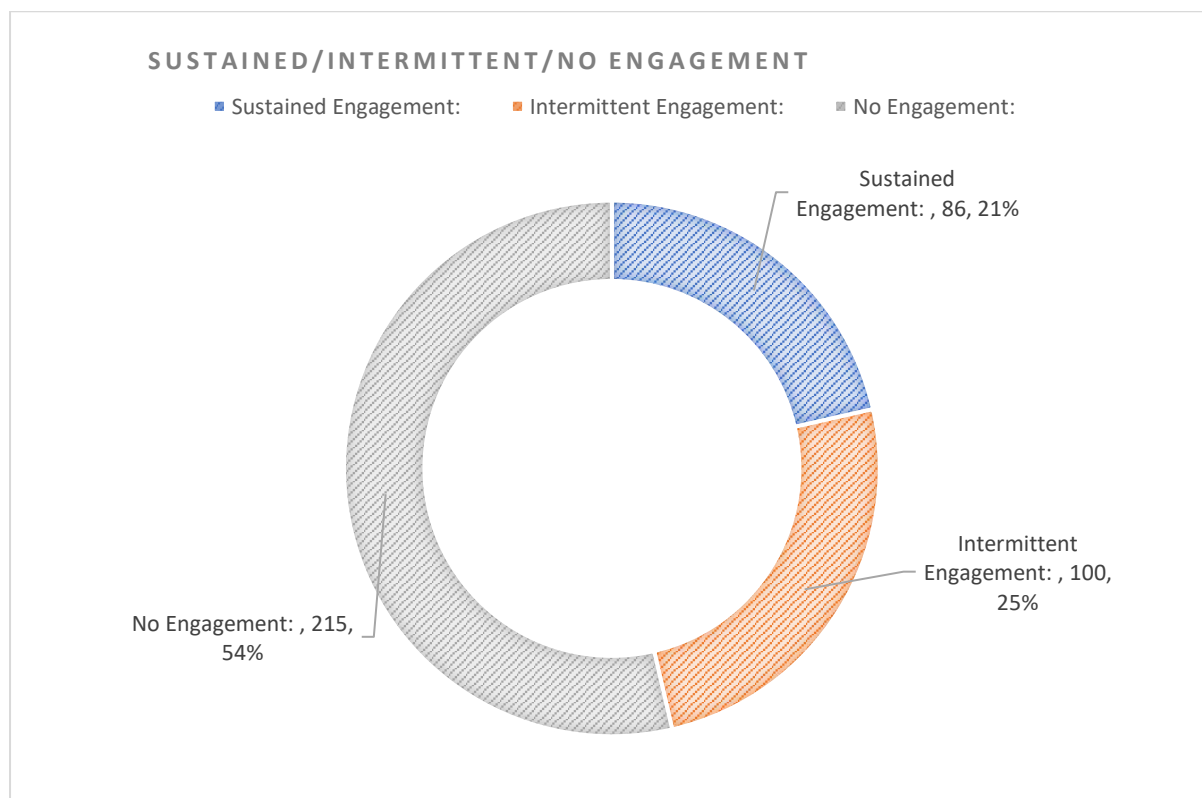
Sustained engagement

Here, we explore children’s level of engagement with RSS. Given we do not have Summer Term Stay and Play data for every participating school (as some schools joined the project later than others), we focused instead on Big Play and Summer Holiday Stay and Play data. To be placed in the sustained engagement category, children needed to have attended the Big Play and at least two summer holiday Stay and Play sessions. To be placed in the intermittent engagement category, children needed to have attended at least one session (either the Big Play or summer holiday Stay & Plays).

As can be seen from data presented in Chart 15¹⁸ below, 46% of children, from the five partner schools who returned data, had either sustained or intermittent engagement from the summer holidays onwards. Of these, 21% (86 children) had sustained engagement and 25% (100 children) had intermittent engagement. In total, 54% (215 children) did not engage with either the Big Play or the summer holiday Stay and Plays.

Charts 16 and 17 show this data when broken down at a Bentilee and Abbey Hulton level. For Bentilee, 56% of children from the three partner schools who returned data (Maple Court, Eaton Park, and St Maria Goretti) had either sustained or intermittent engagement from the summer holiday onwards. Of these, 28% (73 children) had sustained engagement. For Abbey Hulton, 27% of children from the two partner schools who returned data (Kingsland and Carmountside) had either sustained or intermittent engagement from the summer holiday onwards. This includes 9% (13 children) who had sustained engagement.

Chart 15 - Levels of Engagement



¹⁸ There is a discrepancy between the total number of children shown in this chart (401) and the total target population (422). This is because we were not able to gain data permissions from all families.

Chart 16 - Levels of Engagement (Bentilee)

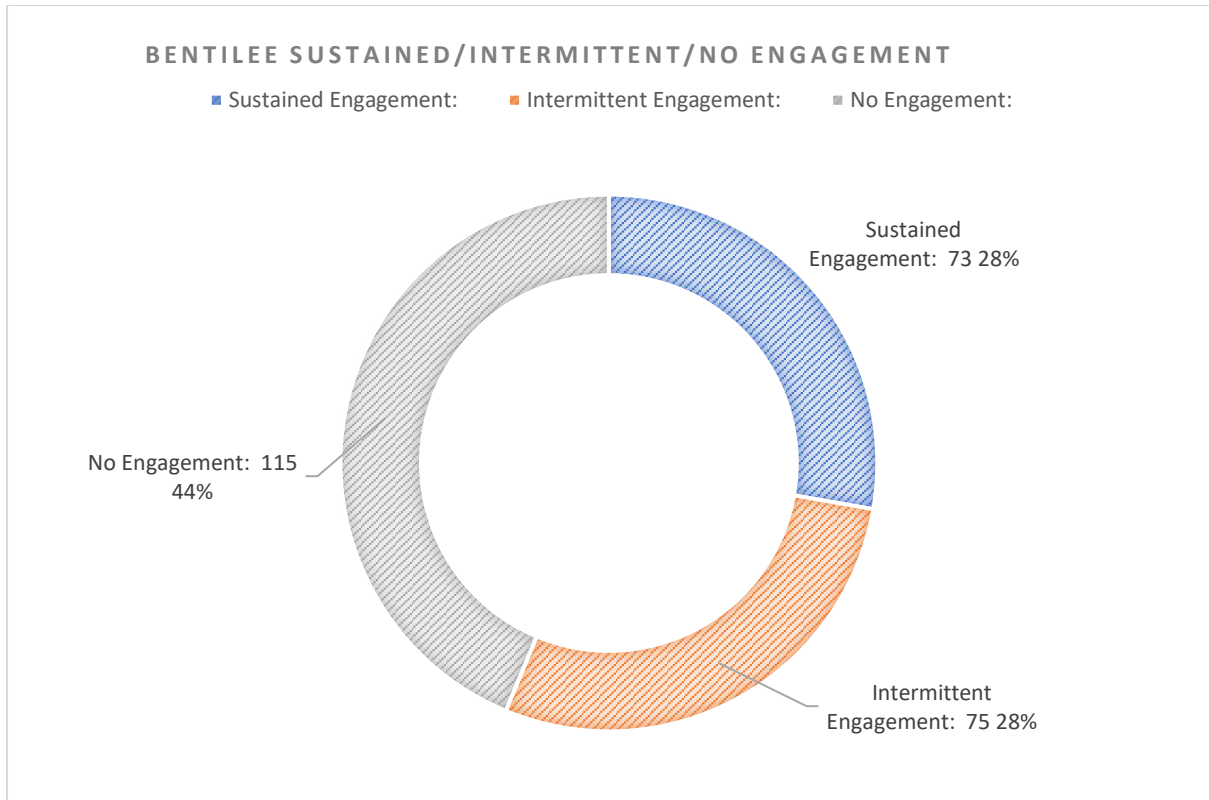
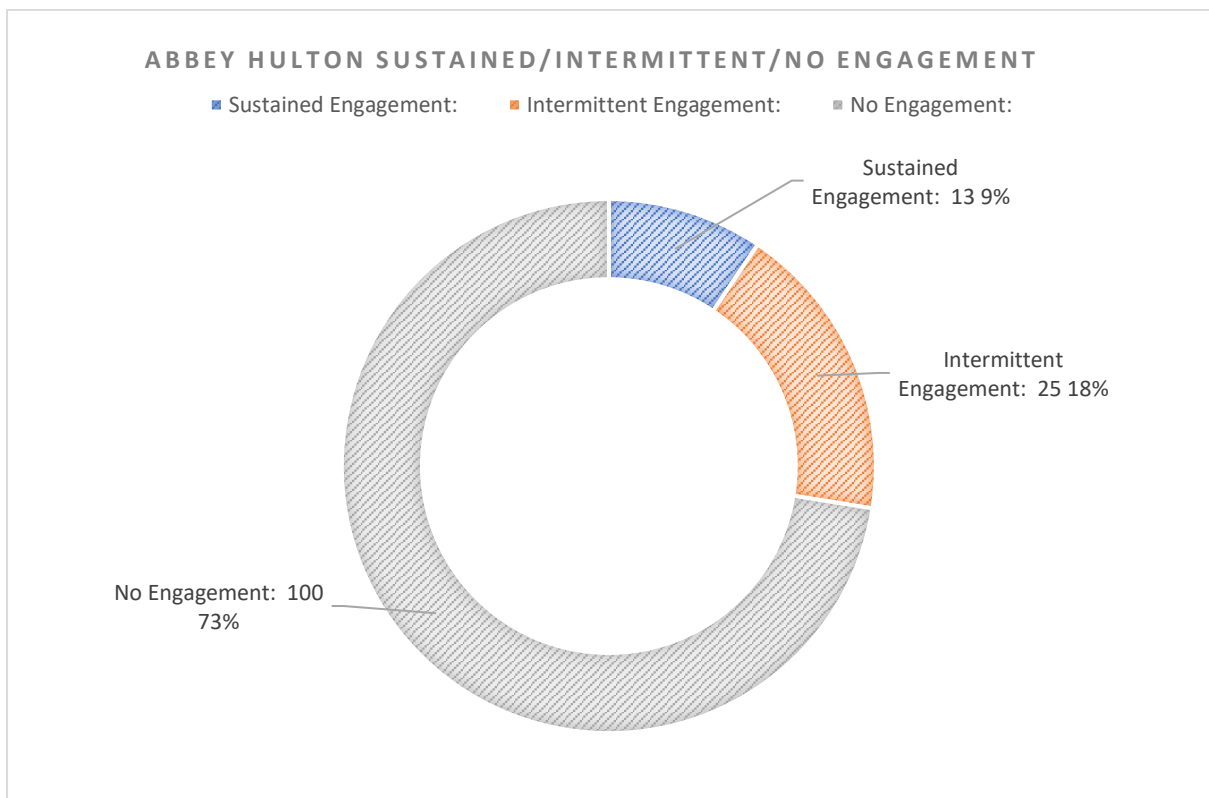


Chart 17 - Levels of Engagement (Abbey Hulton)



Engaging with those most likely to benefit

The series of charts below provide some insight into the extent to which RSS reached the most disadvantaged families, by drawing on eligibility for the Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP)¹⁹ as a proxy indicator. As can be seen from Charts 18-21, children eligible for the EYPP were a significant presence at Stay and Plays in schools for which we have data (ranging from 17% of those who attended at Eaton Park to 46% of those who attended at Maple Court). For the Big Play events, 36% of target children attending in Bentilee were eligible for the EYPP and 24% of target children attending in Abbey Hulton were eligible for the EYPP. This mix of attendees was acknowledged in the qualitative interviews undertaken. As one early years teacher put it, there ‘were some very very vulnerable families who attended’.

Despite this, there was a broad consensus from the qualitative interviews that we still had further to go to make sure we were reaching a high proportion of the most vulnerable families. As a member of the Core Project team said, with ‘some families we were pushing at an open door, but for others engagement is a much harder task’. Similarly, an early years teacher said, reporting on summer term Stay and Plays at her school, ‘it was not the most disadvantaged who came’.

Chart 18 - Carmountside EYPP

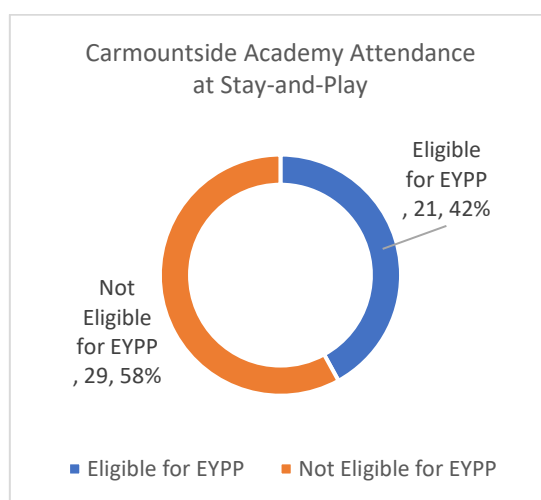
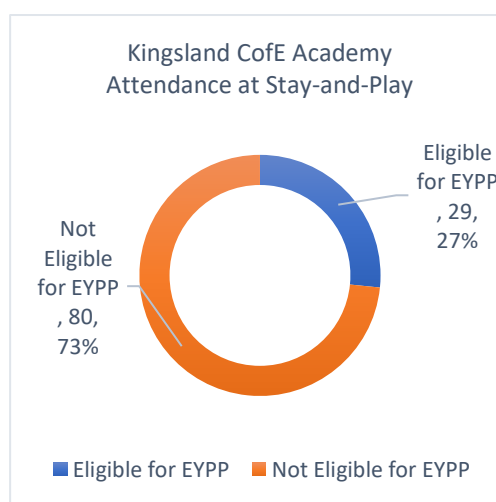


Chart 19 - Eaton Park EYPP



Chart 20 - Kingsland EYPP



¹⁹ The Early Years Pupil Premium is allocated to children with parents who are eligible for means-tested benefits.

Chart 21 - Maple Court EYPP

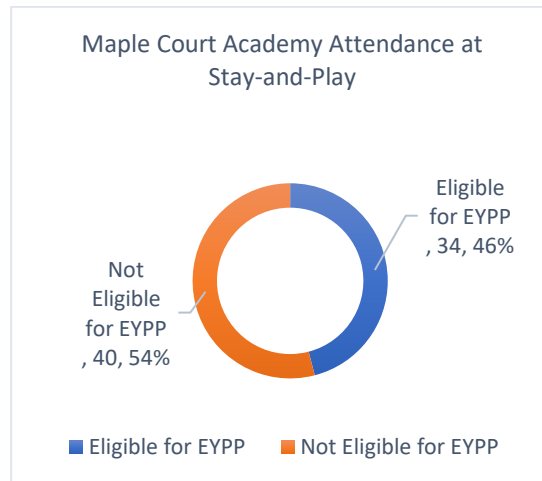


Chart 22 - Bentilee Big Play EYPP

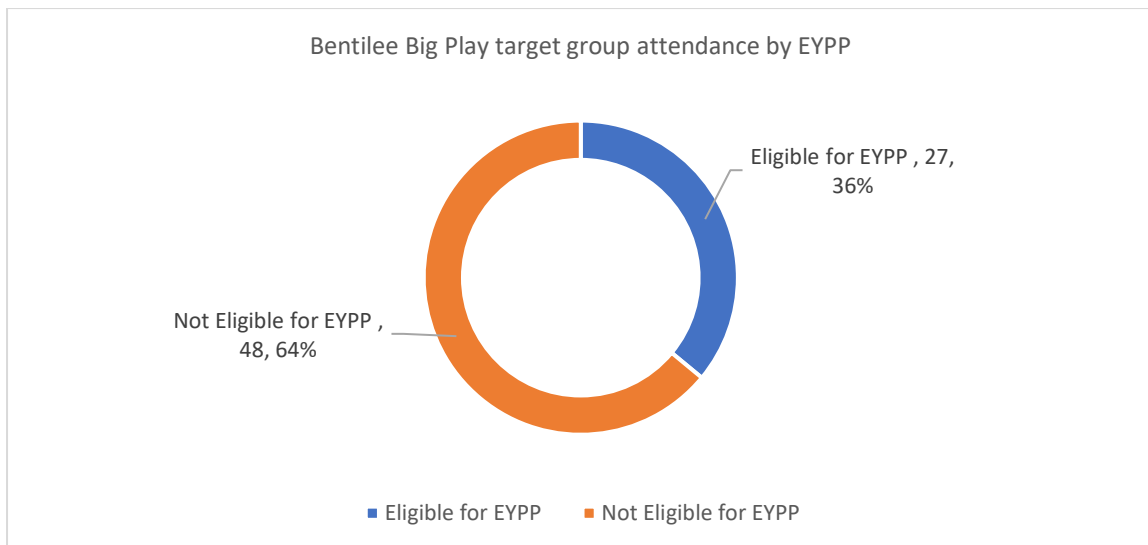
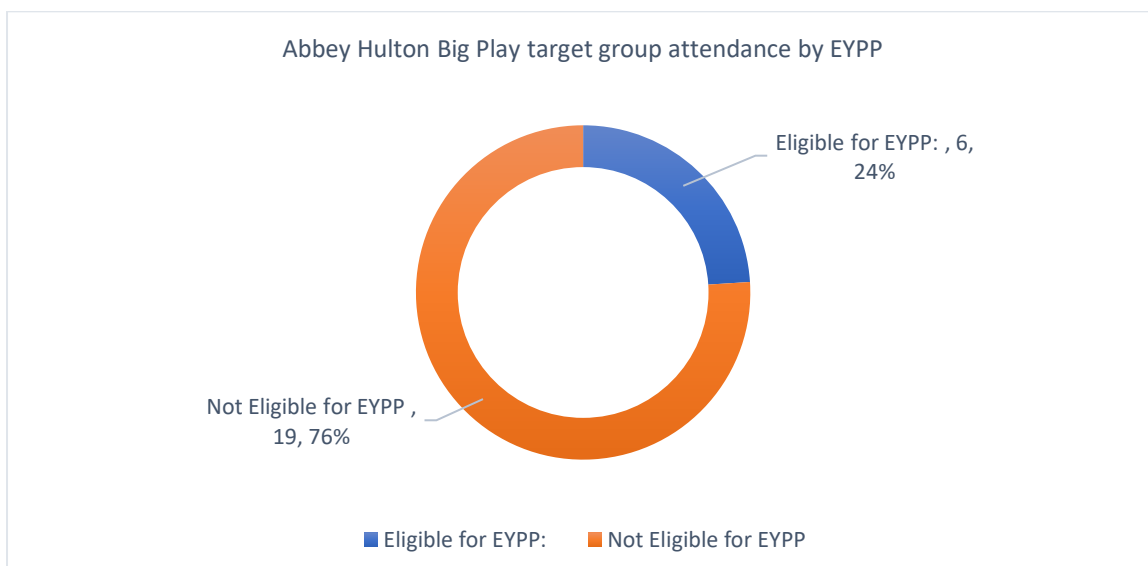


Chart 23 - Abbey Hulton Big Play EYPP



To conclude this section, we summarise the information presented above. Drawing on the data returned by schools, 46% of our target children and their families had either sustained or intermittent engagement with RSS from the summer holiday onwards. In four out of five schools for which we have data, between 64% and 80% of the overall target intake engaged with at least one event from within the three RSS strands.

At a more granular level, attendance was higher at school term Stay and Plays than at summer holiday Stay and Plays, but the latter were used by a number of children and families. Over 120 children and their families attended the Big Play events. From the data we had available, more than 20% of children engaged in a sustained way, across RSS strands, from the summer holidays onwards. Equally, based on the data returned, children eligible for the EYPP were a significant presence at all activities, but we also know that many did not attend. To drive greater impact, future iterations of RSS will need to drive higher levels of engagement and encourage sustained engagement from those children who are most likely to not reach a good level of development at age five.

Section Four

What did families think about the Big Play events?



In Section Four, we present family feedback data on the Big Play events. This includes quantitative and qualitative feedback data, gathered on the day of each event.

Family Feedback

At the Abbey Hulton and Bentilee Big Play events, designated members of staff asked families to complete Family Feedback Forms (the Family Feedback Form template is in Appendix three) as they were leaving the venues. In total, 96 out of 131 families (73%) completed the forms.

As can be seen from the Charts below, feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Chart 24 shows that 86 out of 96 respondents said they would be very likely to recommend the Big Play to a friend or colleague. Chart 25 highlights that 84 out of 96 respondents strongly agreed their child had fun and a further 12 respondents agreed with the statement. Through Chart 26, we see that 89 respondents strongly agreed they felt welcome at the events with seven more respondents agreeing. Chart 27 confirms that 84 respondents strongly agreed they had learnt about activities they could do at home with their child. Under Chart 28, we see that 77 respondents strongly agreed they had learnt about other local early years sessions that they could attend with their child.

Overall, 53 families left positive comments on the forms. The key themes were that the events provided space for quality family time, that parents and children appreciated the wide range of activities on offer, that staff were very engaged, and that the whole event was well-organised. In terms of improvements that could be made next year, one comment suggested that more should be done to advertise the events and another comment requested clearer information on the layout of activities at the events.

Chart 24 - Recommend to a friend or colleague

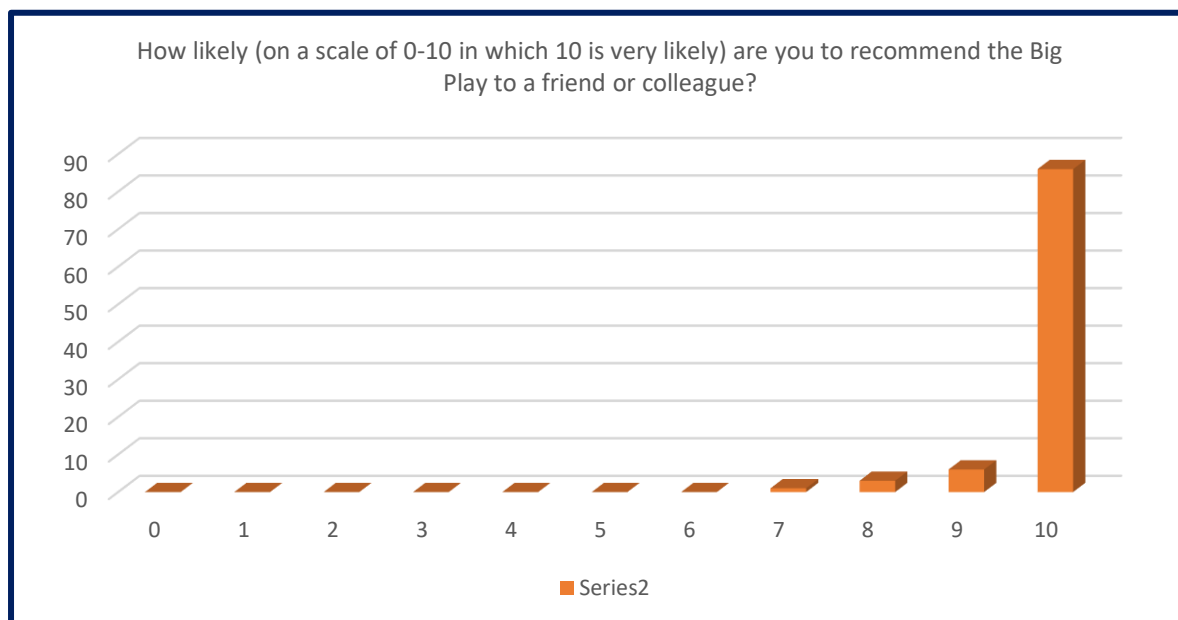


Chart 25 - My child has had fun

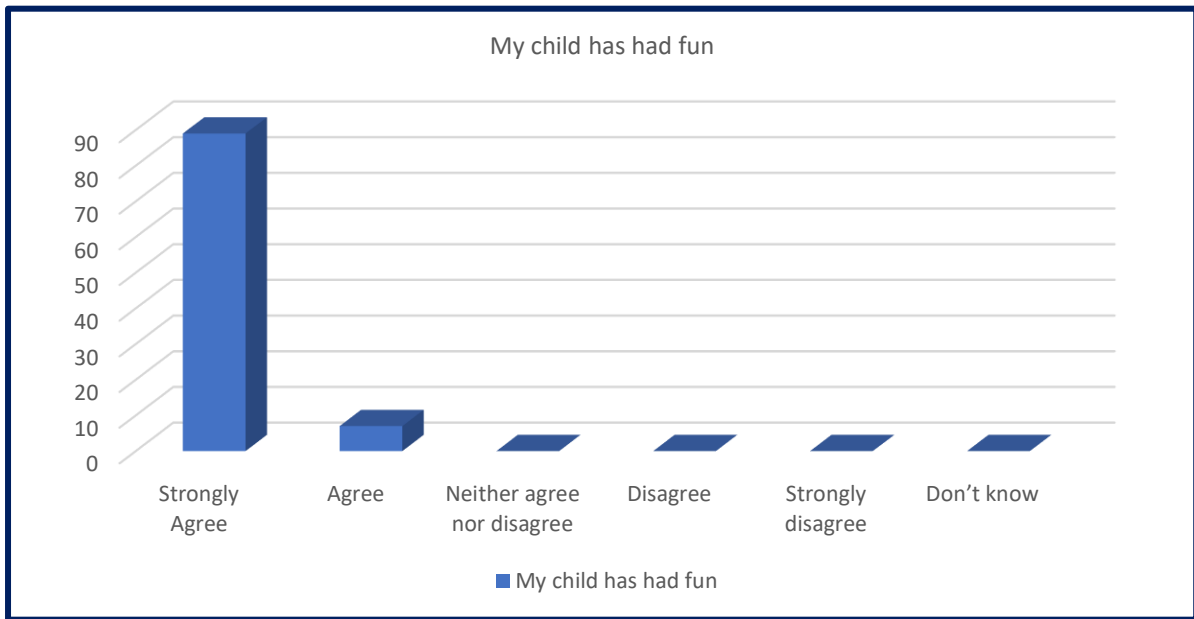


Chart 26 - I felt welcome

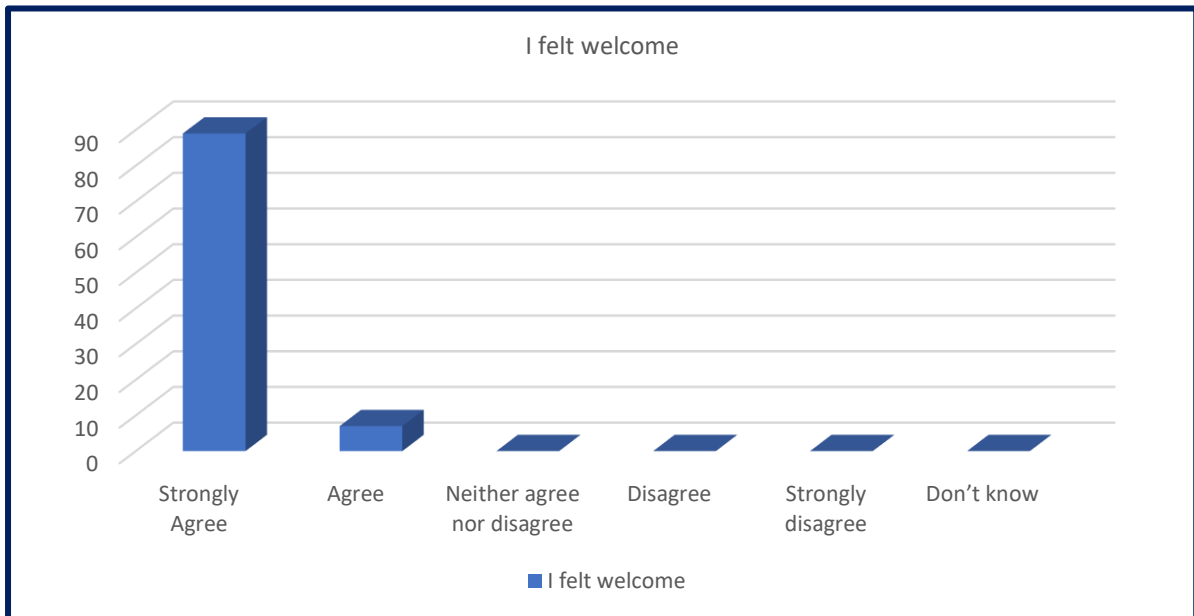


Chart 27 - I learnt about activities that I can do at home with my child

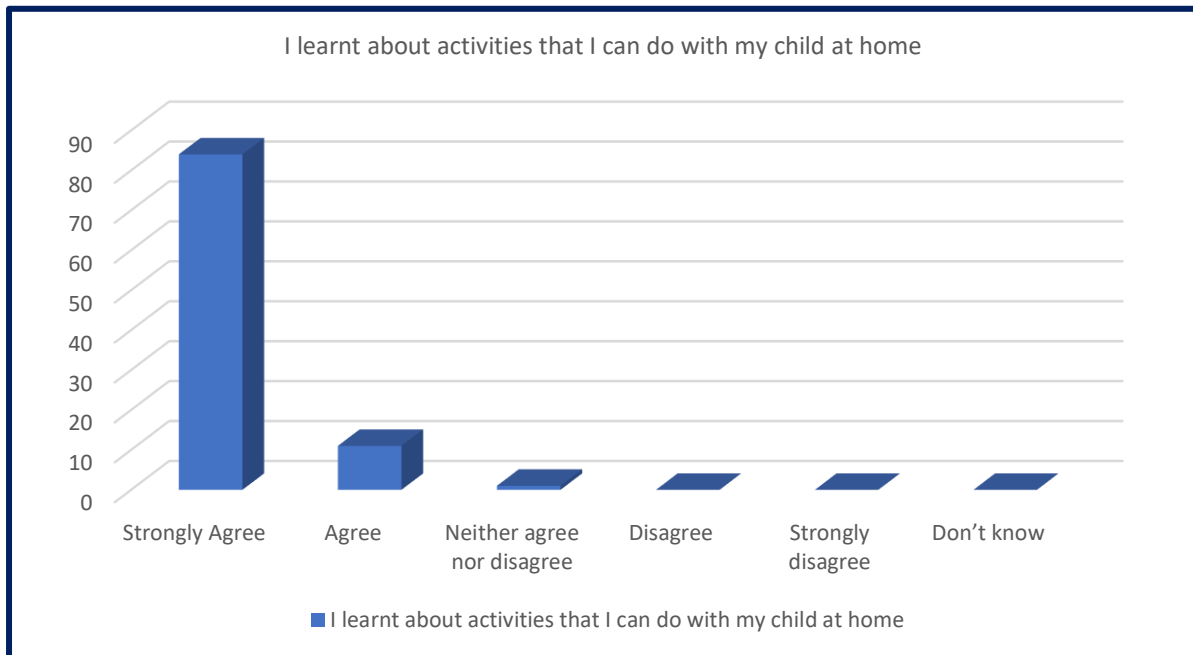
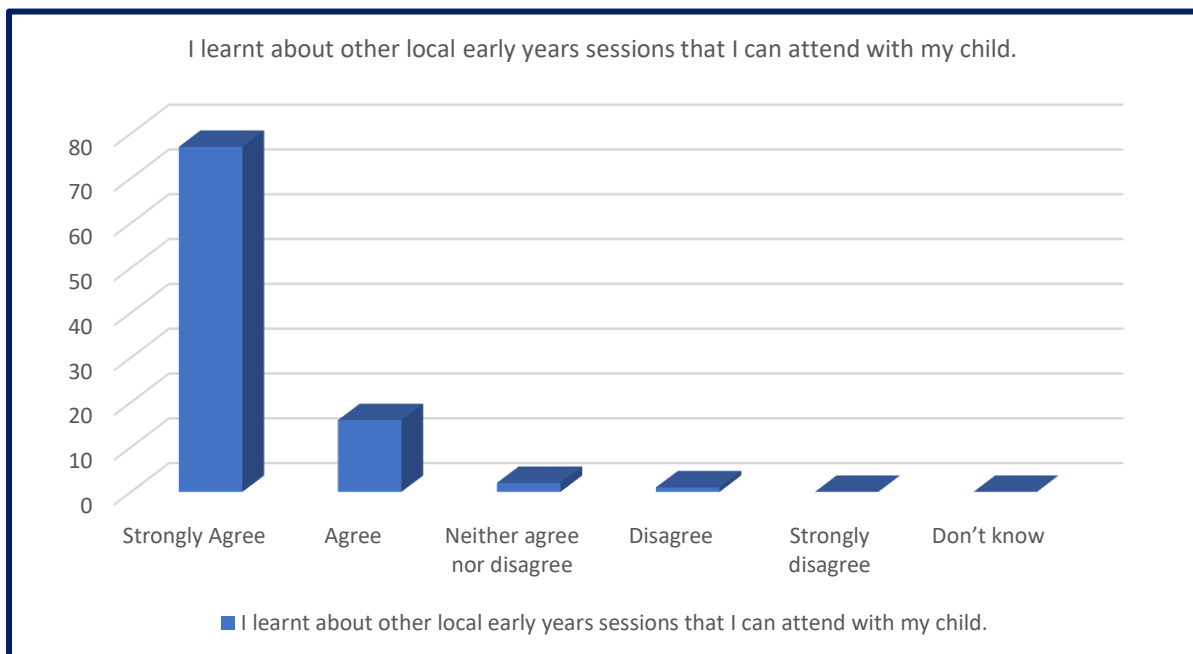


Chart 28 - I learnt about other local early years sessions



In summary, we received overwhelmingly positive feedback from parents about the Big Play events. To quote some examples, the vast majority of parents felt their child had enjoyed the event, said they had learnt new activities they could do at home with their child, and confirmed they would recommend the Big Play to a friend or a colleague.

Section Five

*What did early years teachers and parents think about RSS as a whole?
Did early years teachers and parents perceive the activities to be beneficial with regard to the transition into primary school and school readiness?*



Section Five explores the views of early years teachers on RSS as a whole. It also explores the views of parents who engaged with their children in a sustained way across the different RSS strands. We close the section by briefly summarising the views gathered from these two distinct perspectives.

The views of early years teachers

Perceptions of the activities

The early years teachers we interviewed within schools were universally positive about the delivered activities. They reported that parents enjoyed the Big Play and were ‘excited for the children’. Similarly, they agreed that families who attended the Stay & Play sessions, which included role play, making up stories, cake decorating, outdoor play, and even the Animal Man, engaged enthusiastically. As one early years teacher said:

‘...they supported the children well...and they were obviously interested in the children’s learning and helping them get ready for school.’

Furthermore, several teachers said they received good feedback relating to the summer holiday Stay and Plays, with one teacher commenting that the ones who ‘did come were really engaged and loved it’.

Early years teachers also highlighted several perceived benefits (for those who engaged with RSS) that were associated with the different strands of project activity. The three most commonly cited benefits were improved home-school relationships, enhanced child and parent familiarisation with school and the new classroom environment (which was related, but subtly different to the previous point), and opportunities to learn about and practice key school readiness skills. The first two benefits were seen as particularly important for new parents who did not have a prior relationship with schools through siblings or via nursery and/or pre-school.

On home-school relationships, teachers felt that RSS facilitated a process whereby they could get to know parents at an earlier stage.

‘We thought it helped us get a good smooth transition process...it helped us get to parents and build those relationships before we started.’

‘It really gave us the chance to highlight and pinpoint any parents who might need a bit of support...those vulnerable families.’

Early years teachers concurred that this early action had helped them support parents with advice on a range of issues relating to their children, including toilet training, behaviour management, and nutrition. They also felt that seeing some of the new cohort of children and families at a community event (i.e., the Big Play) was useful, as it allowed children and parents to see them in a different

Benefits at a glance according to early years teachers

1. Improved parent-school relationships
2. Enhanced child and parent familiarisation with school and the new classroom environment
3. Opportunities to learn about and practice key school readiness skills

context, and as 'more human'. Additionally, it presented an opportunity to make stronger links with some parents who may be more hesitant to engage and less open within a school setting.

Enhanced child and parent familiarisation with school and the new classroom environment was another key benefit (of RSS) referenced by school teachers. Specifically, the summer holiday Stay and Play sessions, when the school was less busy, enabled teachers to spend more time talking with parents and to give more extensive tours.

'...It helped them get to know staff members and the school...because nobody else was in, we were showing them the reception classroom...the playground...the hall...the dinner hall. They got to see things they would not normally see on transition sessions.'

In one example given, this familiarisation was seen to have played a crucial role in improving the school transition.

'We had one parent where the child had never been away from mum before ...you could just tell straightaway how nervous she [the parent] was about it and that rubbed off a little bit on the child. But having that time...and seeing us...and the provision and things...really helped. From day one, she was straight in the classroom door, which I think would not have been the case had she not been able to come to those events.'

There was agreement amongst teachers that giving children opportunities, over the summer holiday, to continue seeing or indeed to meet some of the children they are going to share a class with is valuable. Giving children, and their parents, the chance to develop a strong relationship with their new teacher was also seen as useful. As one member of school staff noted:

'This will make that September transition far easier for the child, and the school, and the parent.'

Teachers reinforced this point by acknowledging that six weeks is a long time in the life of a three or four year old and that the RSS approach (in providing stepping stones throughout the school holidays) represents a strong model.

Finally, early years teachers emphasised that a further benefit of RSS were the opportunities for parents and children to learn about and practice key school readiness skills. As one early years teacher noted:

'Everything we did, we did to help them prepare to come to school...speaking to the parents about developing the finger muscles ready for writing...encouraging the parents to let the children put their own coats on...getting the children to tidy up.'

CASE STUDY: MOUSE CLUB AT ST MARIA GORETTI

The whole school community has embraced Mouse Club at St Maria Goretti.

Parents were asked to sign a Home School Agreement, confirming that they would look after the Mouse and that their child would bring the Mouse to school as required. The purpose was to embed Mouse Club as a core part of the curriculum.

The school has Mouse Club sessions every Monday, and they have Mouse Club after-school sessions and Mouse Club sessions during the school day when parents come into the classroom and join in with activities. One early years teacher at the school commented:

'The parents have really engaged with it [Mouse Club] and I think it was because we had time to talk to them during the transition...to talk to them about the whole process...and the parents are putting on Tapestry [an online learning platform that can be seen by parents and teachers] the work they are doing at home. It is something that has made an impact on our school.'

The RSS building block stickers were seen as useful tools to help explain key skills to children and their parents and to help explain why these skills were valued. Equally, by ensuring the Big Play and the Stay and Play sessions were comprised of purposeful activities, where possible aligned around the early learning goals, teachers felt that families were being gradually introduced to the types of skills children would need at school in September.

Improving RSS for future years

On the question of how RSS could be improved for future years, four themes emerged from the early years teacher interviews. The themes were (1) longer lead-in times, and better spaced-out timing, (2) removing obstacles to attendance, (3) combining child and parent support with fun, and (4) encouraging early and sustained engagement from families with most to benefit.

As already described in Section 1, the implementation of RSS was negatively affected by a tight timeline with a great deal of preparatory work squeezed into the final months. Teachers were in agreement that this work needed a longer lead-in period. There was also a general view that with this additional time, it should be possible to properly explain the project to parents and, subsequently, to significantly increase engagement.

'Not enough buy-in because we had not got to grips with it [Mouse Club], and I think that was a downside in terms of how much engagement we got over the summer.'

'...If I had said to my parents, what's going to happen...give them a bit more information...small groups of parents...talk to them really gently...I genuinely think I could have got more there.'

This notion of taking time to walk parents through the process - making sure they know what will happen, who will be there to meet them, what they need to do - came up several times during the interviews.

The second theme was concerned with removing obstacles to attendance. For instance, some teachers reported they knew of parents who had not attended because they also had siblings who were not invited. The suggestion was that future activities and events need to consider the needs of older and younger brothers and sisters. Early years teachers also noted that the usual mechanism for communicating with parents (in most of our schools, Class DoJo) was less effective during the summer holidays as parents understandably did not check the platform. This issue would need to be resolved in future so that lines of communication between families and schools remain open. Finally, teachers emphasised that it was important not to overburden parents with paperwork or at least to disseminate paperwork in a staggered fashion. Some parents were 'panicking' about the Play Passports and whether or not they would be allowed into events if these had been misplaced.

Another theme raised by school staff was around the need to strike an appropriate balance between supporting school readiness and fun.

'They associate school with we are going to have them in and we are going to be teaching.'

There was a general view that the summer holiday Stay and Plays in schools could incorporate exciting, externally-facilitated activities alongside time getting to know parents and getting children used to the environment and routines. As one early years teacher said:

'But I think a way to get more parents is to have the ...Animal Man at the start or at every other session...or a storyteller...something to really get them out of their house and come to us...get them here...there is lots we can do with them...it's just getting them to come.'

Some school staff also recognised the benefits of having a mix of activities in both school and community settings. On this point, one member of school staff said:

'...some of the parents do not respond to things in school because they are embarrassed that they do not know...a teacher is going to find out that they do not know what to do.'

Adoption of this approach would therefore lead to a combination of fun and more serious activities, all delivered in a mix of school and community settings.

The final theme from the interviews with early years teachers focused on the need to target families with the most to benefit and to support their sustained engagement across the project's different strands. One staff member spoke about why this early and sustained support was so essential:

'Once a child has learnt a bad routine or a bad habit...it takes a very long time to undo. By the six week holiday...you are undoing things...these habits and routines that are not good...and six weeks is not long enough to undo that. We need to really get them as early as we can.'

There was also broad agreement that attendance limited to single events or sessions was unlikely to result in 'significant meaningful change'. To optimise effectiveness, the project should proactively identify children and families in need of additional support, and it should encourage and facilitate their sustained engagement throughout the summer, across project strands. This may well introduce an additional layer of organisation and planning, possibly requiring a lead teacher to coordinate small transition working groups of staff at each individual school.

The views of parents

The parents we interviewed were very positive about RSS and its benefits for their families. During the interviews, four main benefits were consistently raised. These were improved parent-school relationships, giving parents ideas for things to do at home with their child, putting parents at ease about the transition, and building children's confidence and skills. As you can see, there was considerable overlap with the benefits raised by early years teachers.

The role of RSS in improving parent-school relationships came out strongly in the interviews. Specifically, parents highlighted the informal and relaxed atmosphere at summer term Stay & Plays, which helped to facilitate more open conversations and to breakdown parent-teacher barriers. As one parent commented:

'It was particularly good in the summer because you interact with teachers on a different level...you can talk differently...just chat about your kids...them...yourself...and it's just nice to have that...you get more of a feeling of what the teacher is like.'

This continued 'interaction with the school' over the summer was widely viewed as a powerful tool for establishing positive parent-school relationships.

RSS was also viewed by parents as a good way of getting ideas about things to do at home with their child. After seeing the Rent-a-beast lady, one child now likes to look up minibeasts on her IPAD and to ask questions about them. Several children particularly enjoyed storytelling through the Little Library Van and have since been asking to read books.

'It was really good that day at Treehouse...really good to have different activities that you could take home.'

This is an important benefit, because it suggests that for some children RSS activities were not just enjoyable in-the-moment experiences but also a positive influence on their home environment.

Benefits at a glance according to parents

1. Improved parent-school relationships
2. Giving parents ideas for things to do at home
3. Putting parents at ease about the imminent transition
4. Building children's confidence and skills

CASE STUDY: RICK'S TRANSITION TO NURSERY

During the pandemic, Rick lost a lot of confidence. He didn't want to communicate with anyone outside the family home. Sandra, Rick's mum, was really worried about him starting at nursery school.

Sandra took Rick to all the summer RSS activities so that he could get used to being outside the home and with other children. She was really pleased with how RSS helped Rick.

'It definitely has helped him...being able to go within the school he is going to be attending...and then being able to see the classroom...meet the people he is going to be with...do activities at well.'

'He keeps on telling all of the family about his nursery...and teachers' names...friends...he had learnt all those things before actually starting...so it's not the whole daunting experience...'

Since September, Rick has made a strong start to nursery school. He is enjoying nursery and spending time with other children.

The third benefit related to putting parents at ease about the transition. A number of parents described how tense they felt at the prospect of their child starting nursery or reception.

'It was just so worrying...him going into an environment and being with all strangers...for such a long period of time...Monday to Friday, 9 until 3.'

There was broad agreement that RSS activities - including summer term Stay & Plays, the Big Play, and summer holiday Stay & Plays - had helped parents to feel more relaxed about leaving their child in September and more comfortable that they were ready for school. The gradual build-up (enabled by the activities and increasing familiarity) was useful and much preferable to being 'bombarded all on one day'.

The final benefit was about building children's confidence and skills. This confidence was enhanced by children having additional time to get to know their classmates, including getting to know new children they had not previously met, and additional time to meet their teachers. RSS events and sessions also helped children to maintain routines and skills that are vital for school, or as one parent put it, to 'keep in with the learning side because six weeks is a long time'. Another parent reflected on the positive changes seen in her child after attending RSS activities:

'Over the summer holidays, I have noticed a huge difference [in his social and language skills] what a difference even within the last few weeks.'

For many parents, RSS was seen to have helped their children feel settled at school and ready to hit-the-ground-running with their learning.

In summary, both early years teachers and parents were very positive about RSS. Early years teachers emphasised benefits for participants around improved parent-school relationships, enhanced child and parent familiarisation with school environments, and opportunities for children to learn and practice key school readiness skills. These benefits were broadly similar to the points raised by parents. Specifically, parents spoke about improved parent-school relationships, giving them new ideas for things to do at home with their child, putting them at ease with regards to the transition, and building children's confidence and skills. For parents, the opportunity to be in schools over the summer holidays had presented a unique opportunity to get to know teachers better and on a different level. This is important and welcome, though clearly, we should acknowledge that some of the advantages here could be diluted if these sessions became better attended. On the whole, RSS was seen to have been a success, something that benefited early years teachers and parents alike, and something that should be available every year.

Section Six

Were there any broader local benefits that were associated with Ready Steady Stoke?



Through documentary analysis and interviews, it has been possible to identify three broader local benefits²⁰ associated with RSS. In this section, we highlight and then unpack each point in turn.

First, RSS played a positive role in helping forge new connections between local organisations and families, between different local organisations, and between local and national organisations. Second, the project meant families with very young children could access regular free meals as part of attending sessions in schools and in the community. Third, RSS raised the profile of primary school readiness and early childhood development (and also of local community assets in Abbey Hulton and Bentilee) with senior local decision-makers.

Forging new local connections

There is evidence that RSS helped forge new connections between (1) local organisations and families, (2) different local organisations, and (3) local organisations and national organisations. For instance, 40 families registered with Stoke Libraries at the Big Play events. The Bentilee Big Play itself proved a strong vehicle for promoting (and accelerating vital maintenance works to improve accessibility at) Treehouse Children's Centre. Moreover, a wide range of new local partnership initiatives have been facilitated by connections made through RSS. The Alice charity²¹ has requested that Stoke Council's Little Library Van attend one of their events later in the year. A new collaboration between Carmountside Primary and Betty Rushton Gardens will run 'planting and growing' sessions with nursery and reception children. Senior health visitors, senior managers from the Early Help team, and local police officers all attended RSS events. Staff from different schools were able to network with one another and with other local professionals. Also, Stoke City FC and the Little Library Van are now in contact with BBC Tiny Happy People and the National Literacy Trust, and community leaders responsible for Betty Rushton Gardens are in contact with the National Lottery Community Fund.

Providing regular free meals for families with very young children

Families attending RSS events were typically given a free meal alongside access to early years activities. Free meals were available at both Big Play events, and at every summer holiday Stay and Play within five of our six participating schools²². We also distributed 250 surplus meals across Abbey Hulton and Bentilee on the days of the Big Plays. Given high rates of poverty locally²³, and the well-documented increasing cost of living pressures, these free meals may - for some families - have helped ameliorate the effects of financial hardship.

Raising the profile of primary school readiness and early childhood development

Finally, several senior local stakeholders and decision makers attended RSS events. These included Stoke's Lead Member for Children's Services Councillor David Evans, the Lord Mayor of Stoke Councillor Faisal Hussain, and the Member of Parliament for Stoke-on-Trent Central Jo Gideon who attended on both Big Play days. These attendances, and the publicity generated, are good examples of raising the profile of primary school readiness and early childhood.

²⁰ Beyond directly improving the transition into primary school and school readiness.

²¹ The Alice Charity supports families in their homes and their communities, providing emotional and practical support.

²² Free meals at the summer holiday Stay and plays were provided by The Hubb Foundation through the Department for Education's Holiday Activities and Food Programme.

²³ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/data/child-poverty-rates-local-authority>

These local benefits are important to take into account when assessing the overall promise of RSS. They enrich the local early years system, and they contribute to Thrive at Five's broader goals around area-level improvements in children's early years outcomes.

Section Seven

Conclusion



Evaluation limitations

Before we make concluding remarks, it is important to acknowledge the limitations associated with this evaluation. First, we have tried to complete the work in a relatively short timespan, to build on momentum from this summer's RSS activity. In practice, this means the report has largely been pulled together over a few busy weeks, which is probably quicker than would be ideal. Second, the datasets used as the basis for the evaluation report are incomplete. As outlined earlier, one key partner school was unable to participate in the project and another school joined very late, so they could not collect data permissions from families. Third, the interviews we conducted were pragmatic in their approach rather than purist. For instance, though we set out to hold individual interviews for many stakeholders, it soon became apparent that our best chance of speaking with busy practitioners was in groups, sometimes with interviewees joining and leaving conversations as their commitments dictated.

Having said this, we have - for a pilot project in its first year of operation - collected a considerable body of data on the project's implementation. We have also spoken with nearly all the key stakeholders and collected rich data which we believe provides important insights and some solid foundations for the project's delivery next year.

Summary remarks

In conclusion, RSS was implemented broadly as intended, which for a pilot year is very positive. Six out of seven partner schools participated to at least some degree, and summer term and summer holiday Stay and Plays, and Big Play events, were all successfully delivered. As ever, there were some caveats, probably most notably patchy school-level engagement in Abbey Hulton.

Families did engage with every strand of RSS to varying degrees. Moreover, over 20% of children for whom we had data engaged in a sustained way across project strands. This is encouraging for Year One, but this sustained engagement number will need to increase significantly in future years, given that isolated attendance at individual events is unlikely to help bring about meaningful positive change. Children from more disadvantaged backgrounds - as identified through eligibility for the Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) - were a significant presence at all activities, but we also know that many did not attend, and that we need to do more to reach the most vulnerable.

We received overwhelmingly positive feedback from parents about the Big Play events. To quote some examples, the vast majority of parents felt their child had enjoyed the event, said they had learnt new activities they could do at home with their child, and confirmed they would recommend the Big Play to a friend or a colleague.

Similarly, the early years teachers we interviewed, and parents we interviewed who had all engaged heavily with different project strands, were very positive about RSS as a whole. Early years teachers emphasised benefits for participants around parent-school relationships, enhanced child-and-parent familiarisation with school environments, and opportunities for children to learn and practice key school readiness skills. Parents spoke about improved parent-school relationships, giving them new ideas for things to do at home with their child, putting them at ease with regards to the transition, and building children's confidence and skills.

There is also evidence that RSS had broader local benefits beyond those associated with direct project delivery. For example, RSS helped forge new local connections, provided regular free meals over the summer for families with very young children, and helped raise the local profile of primary school readiness and early childhood development.

For a first year pilot project, RSS has shown a good level of promise. The strands of activity are both feasible in terms of delivery and acceptable to parents. For the interviewed families, who did all engage heavily, there was evidence to suggest that the project did make a difference and reason to believe that it could play an important role for many more families. To drive impact at the desired scale, the project in future years will need to reach more families, including more of the most disadvantaged families, and it will need to engage these families in a sustained journey throughout the summer months.

Recommendations for the future

We end the report by setting out some recommendations for next year's delivery of RSS. The recommendations cover aims, governance, the timetable, the strands of activity, the need for targeting, collaboration between schools, and our communications.

Aims

Future iterations of RSS should start with more precise project aims. Of course, improving the primary school transition and school readiness is laudable and captures the desired direction of travel, but it lacks specificity. There is only so much that can plausibly be achieved by a project focused on the summer months and so it is important to define, with a good degree of precision, the exact contribution that this work will make to the achievement of high-level goals. Based on the interviews conducted as part of this evaluation, those aims could be more explicitly framed as ensuring children settle quickly when they start nursery or reception. This could encompass being familiar and comfortable with the school and classroom environment, having a good relationship with teaching staff and other children, having a parent who has a good relationship with the school, being used to the routines that comprise a typical school day, and demonstrating skills, confidence, and behaviours that are conducive to learning.

- ***Recommendation 1 - RSS project aims should be redefined, so they are sharp and specific, perhaps with a focus on ensuring more children settle quickly when they start nursery or reception.***

Governance

To account for differences between the neighbourhoods (i.e., Abbey Hulton and Bentilee), there should be two Core Project Teams and two distinct RSS projects. Each Core Project Team should include parent membership and - where possible - representation from health visitors and social workers. Furthermore, Core Project Teams (CPTs) should have oversight of all three strands of the project, plus the workstreams on Mouse Club and the communications campaign. Each strand and workstream should have a standing agenda item at CPT meetings. Moreover, every participating school should be encouraged to form a small RSS transitions working group comprised of teaching and pastoral staff and each working group should be represented on their respective CPT.

- ***Recommendation 2 - RSS project governance should be reconfigured so there is a separate Core Project Team for Abbey Hulton and Bentilee, each with an expanded membership. Each school should be encouraged to form a small RSS working group and should be represented on their CPT.***

Timetable

RSS was an unknown quantity this year and so it was especially difficult to get timing right. For future years, the project needs a longer lead in time. To support implementation, organisers should

establish a series of spaced-out delivery milestones with interdependencies (such as gathering consent and securing parent buy-in), and realistic timeframes for partner actions, all factored in.

- ***Recommendation 3 - More time should be allowed for planning and preparation and implementation should be organised against a series of spaced-out delivery milestones.***

Strands

In future years, the three RSS strands should be retained but also re-ordered. The Big Plays, in both Abbey Hulton and Bentilee, should be repositioned as opening events and brought forward to June. They should occur in the community, preferably in single-site venues, and they should include stalls for local schools so that children and parents can meet with staff, and children can try on school uniforms. Under this arrangement, the Big Play can be used to promote the forthcoming weekly summer term and summer holiday Stay and Plays. During the summer holidays, there should be an appropriate mix of structured and fun (but still purposeful) activities, with some external activity-leads (i.e., the Animal Man, a Storyteller etc.) to incentivise attendance. In both the organisation and promotion of these Stay and Plays, organisers should think carefully about what is available for the target (transitioning) child but also what is available for any siblings.

- ***Recommendation 4 - The three RSS strands should be retained but re-ordered, with the Big Play events coming first and used as a platform to promote the weekly summer term and summer holiday Stay & Plays.***

Targeting

RSS should remain open for all local children making the transition into nursery and reception, but we must ensure that children most at risk of not reaching a good level of development receive additional support and encouragement to engage heavily across the different strands. The inclusion, and sustained engagement, of these families is absolutely critical to the ultimate success of RSS. Access to and support for these families will be partly enhanced by the involvement of health visitors and social workers on our Core Project Team (see Governance). However, the most important role is likely to be played by schools and school staff. By giving the schools a clearer and better spaced-out delivery timetable, and by encouraging them to form small school-level RSS working groups comprised of teaching and pastoral staff, we will create the conditions for schools to carry out the type of personalised outreach and encouragement at which they are so skilled.

- ***Recommendation 5 - An absolute top priority should be to ensure children most at risk of not reaching a good level of development are supported and encouraged to engage heavily across the three strands.***

Collaboration between schools

Schools Networks, in both Abbey Hulton and Bentilee, could be further developed and used to disseminate best practice regarding the transition across local schools. This could include sharing intelligence on how to increase the effectiveness of Mouse Club by obtaining strong parent buy-in.

- ***Recommendation 6 - The Schools Networks should be used to share and spread best practice regarding primary school transitions.***

Learning from and adapting our communications with families

This year, RSS communications (and the building blocks of school readiness that they describe) did not reach a sufficient point of saturation to drive behaviour change. One reason for this was because of the rushed timetable, and the lack of opportunities to properly brief schools and event providers about how these key communications messages complemented the broader project. However, we should also remain open to the possibility that the messages as currently crafted are too abstract and high-level for families, and that there should be a greater focus on tangible actions i.e., putting their coats on independently, holding a pencil) that children should practice.

- ***Recommendation 7 - Organisers should use the opportunity presented by RSS to test which types of messages resonate most with local families.***

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Appendix A

A breakdown of Early Communication Scores (ECS) on nursery and reception entry; September and October 2022

Chart 29 below presents ECS scores from nursery schools and Chart 30 presents ECS scores from reception schools. ECS scores range from zero to ten, with ten being the highest score available. Scores between zero and three have been placed in the red category, four or five in the Dark Amber category, six or seven in the Light Amber category, and eight or above in the Green category. In terms of nursery data, five schools returned ECS scores (Eaton Park, Maple Court, St Maria Goretti, Kingsland, and Carmountside). Across these schools, 61 out of 141 children (43% of children) scored Green and 80 children (57%) scored in the lower three categories. In terms of reception data, three schools returned ECS scores (Eaton Park, Maple Court, and Carmountside). Across these schools, 48 out of 139 children (34%) scored green, with 91 out of 139 children (65%) scoring in the lower three categories.

Chart 29 - ECS scores (nursery)

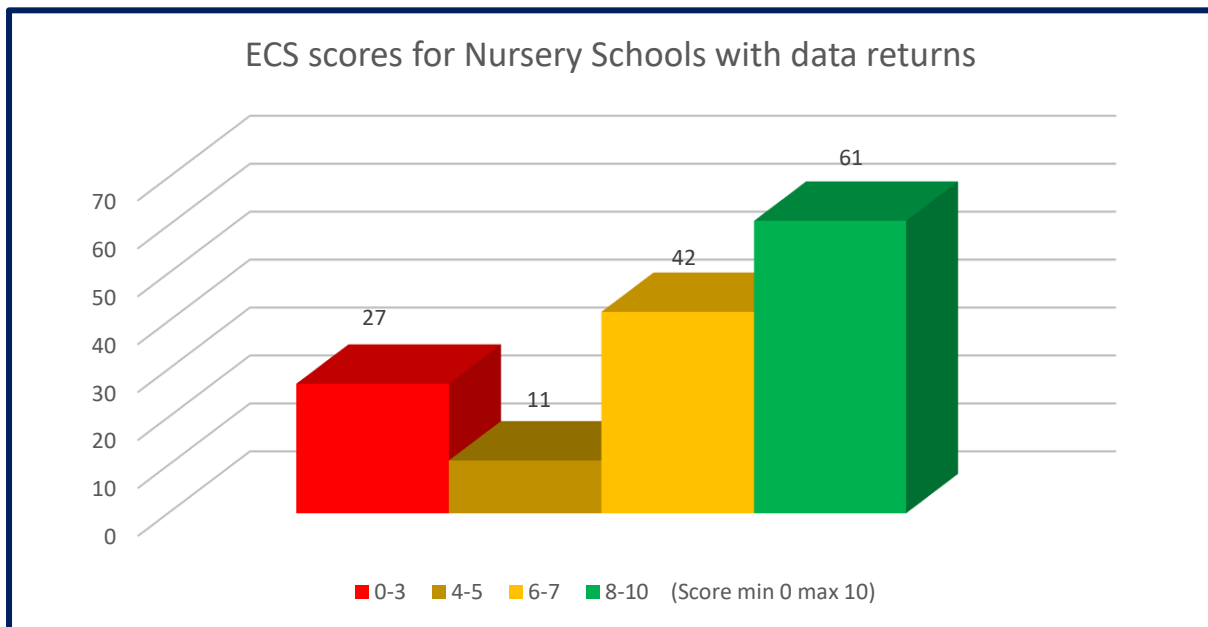
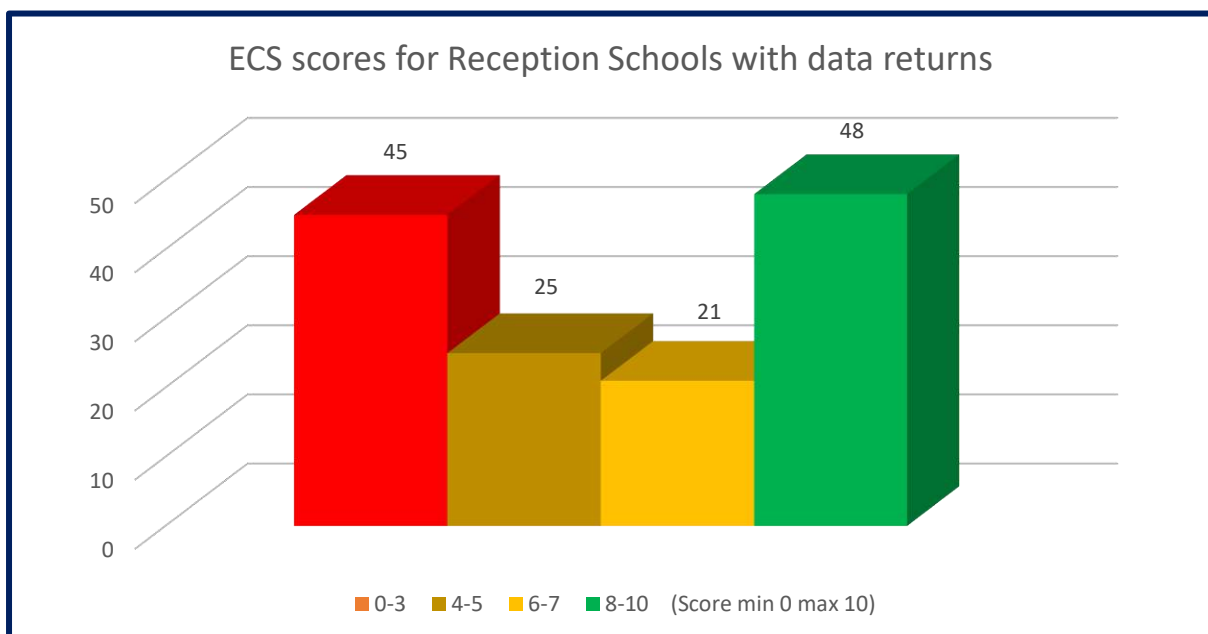


Chart 30 - ECS scores (reception)



Charts 31 and 32 below provide further description of nursery and reception scores across the schools who returned ECS data (see above). For each year group, they give the mean²⁴, median²⁵, and mode²⁶ scores plus the standard deviation (ST Dev)²⁷. Notably, there appears to be a greater level of need in the reception year than in the nursery year, which may reflect the impact of the pandemic on the latter group²⁸.

Chart 31 - Further description of available nursery data

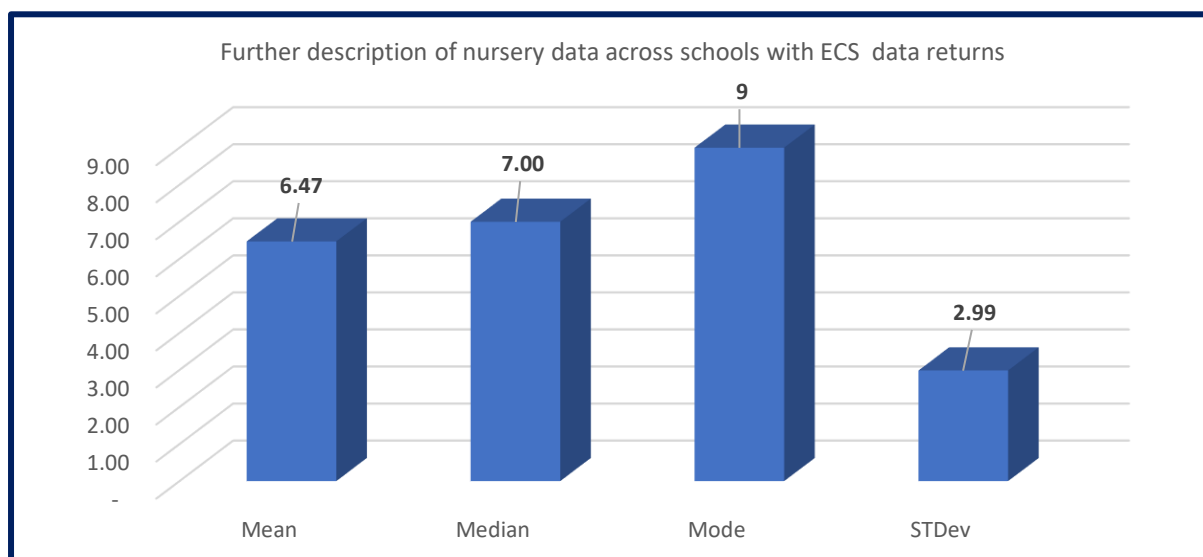
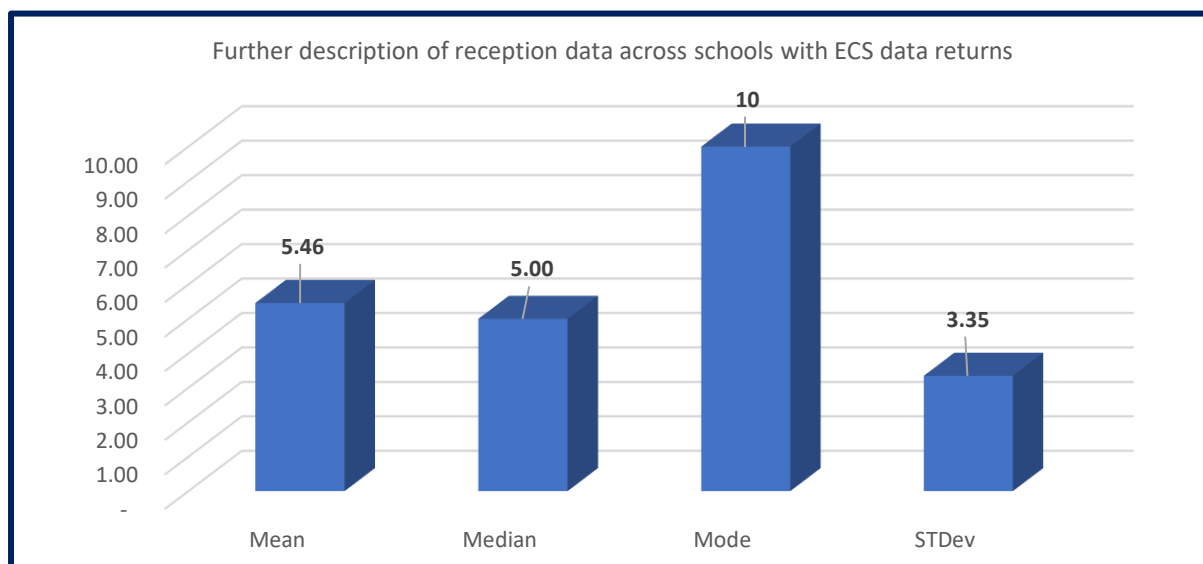


Chart 32 - Further description of available reception data



²⁴ The mean (average) is found by adding all numbers in the dataset and then dividing by the number of values.

²⁵ The median is the middle value when a dataset is ordered from least to greatest.

²⁶ The mode is the number that appears most often in the dataset.

²⁷ The standard deviation is a measure of how dispersed the data is in relation to the mean. Low standard deviation means data are clustered around the mean, and high standard deviation indicates data are more spread out.

²⁸ It is also worth emphasising that the dataset we are working with (the data returned by schools) is incomplete. In fact, one of our non-participating schools (Abbey Hulton Primary) has found extremely high levels of need in their nursery year, contradicting the pattern that is apparent in our data.

The following four charts provide a gender breakdown of ECS scores across the schools with data returns. For nursery boys, 52 out of 83 children (62%) fell in the lower three categories whereas for nursery girls the figure was 30 out of 66 (45%). For reception boys, 49 out of 64 children (76%) fell in the lower three categories whereas for reception girls the figure was 39 out of 65 (60%).

Chart 33 - Available nursery data for boys

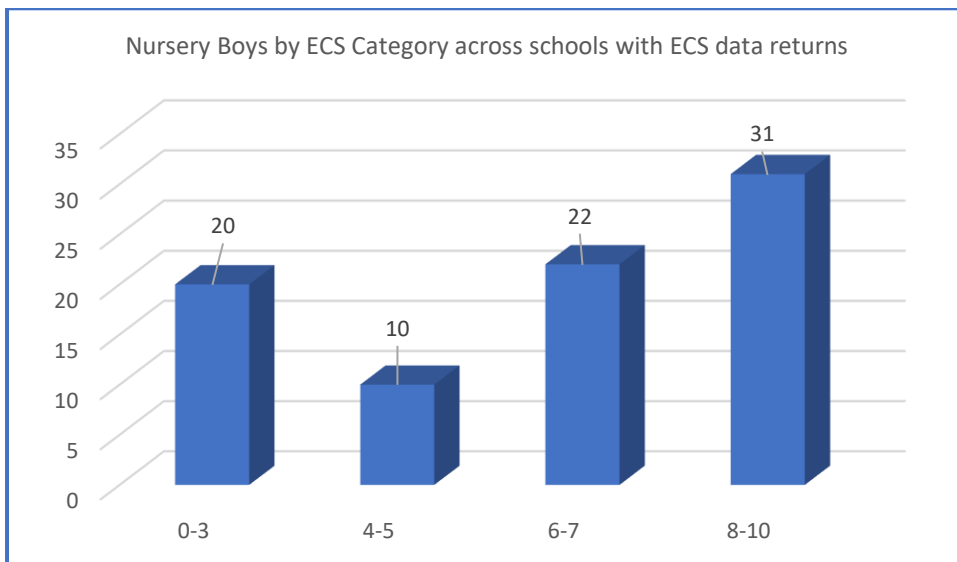


Chart 34 - Available nursery data for girls

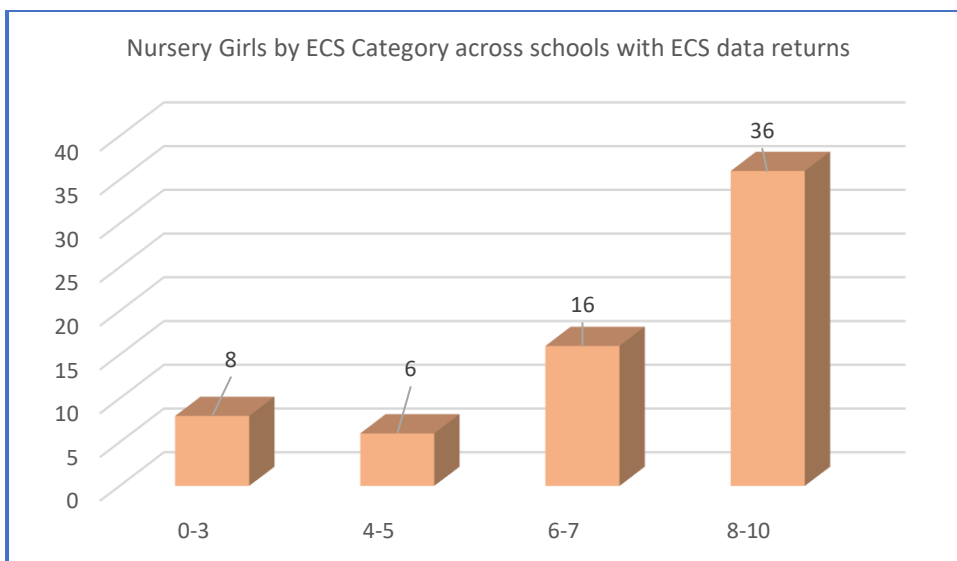


Chart 35 - Available reception data for boys

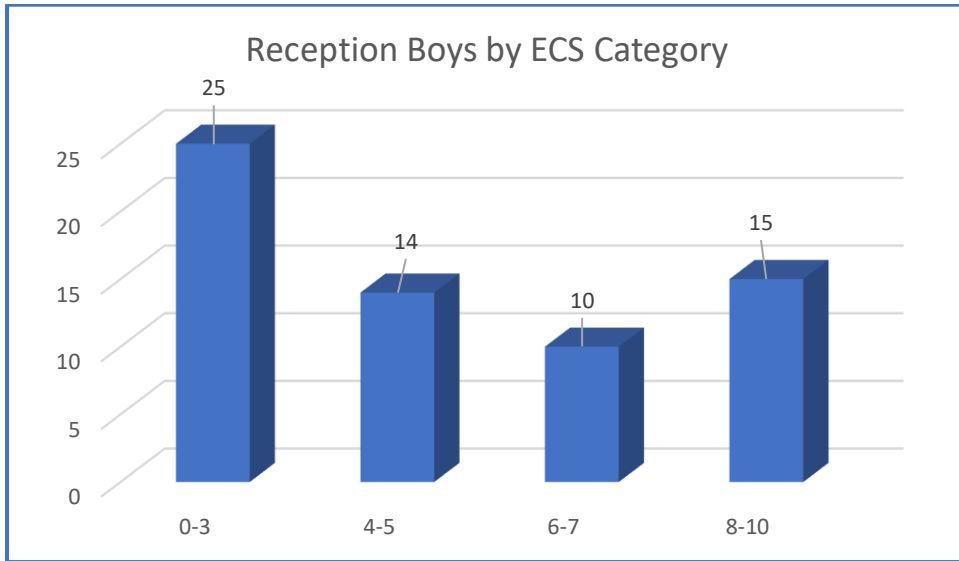
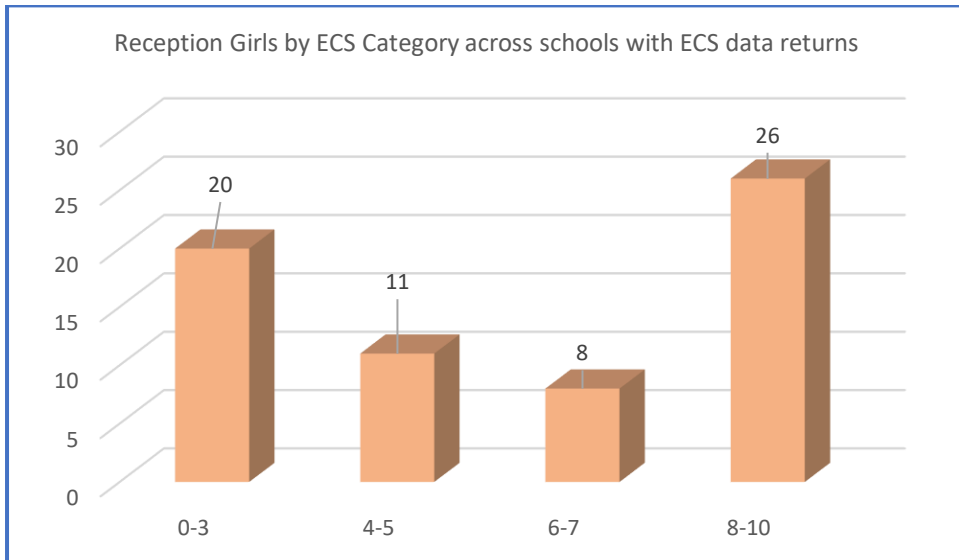


Chart 36 - Available reception data for girls



Charts 37 and 38 explore the number of sessions from the summer holiday onwards (including the Big Play events and the summer holiday Stay and Play sessions) attended by groups of reception children with different ECS scores²⁹. In broad terms, the higher the ECS score, the more sessions were attended by the groups of children who received that score. Of course, it is not possible, based on this data, to infer that the sessions caused higher ECS scores. There are likely to be confounding variables at play. For instance, it is possible that children who attended the most sessions also benefit from the highest-quality home learning environments and the most engaged parents, and that this broader support (rather than the RSS sessions) helps explain why these children have higher scores.

Chart 37 - Number of sessions for each ECS score (bar chart)

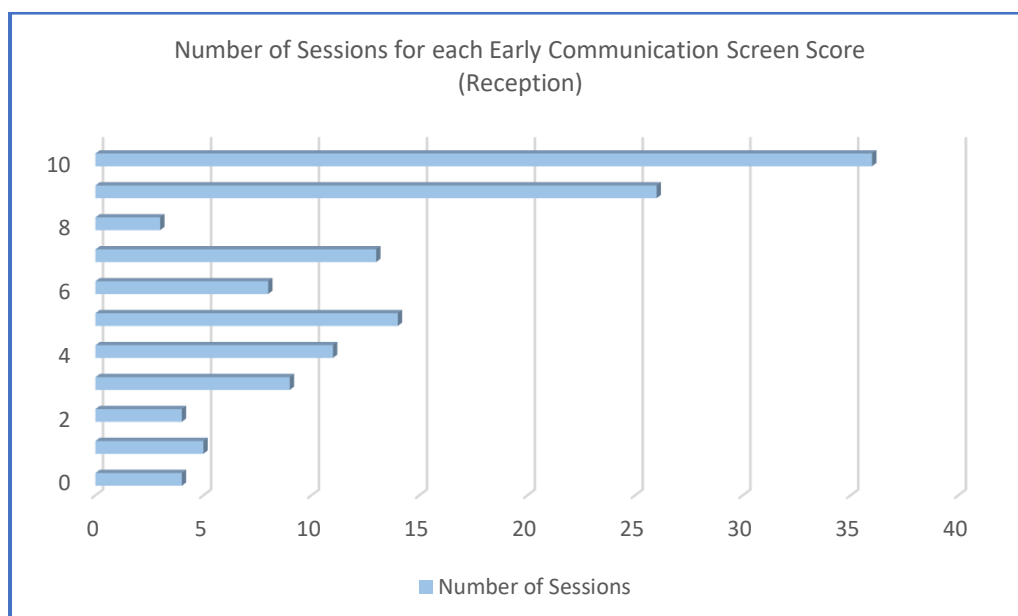
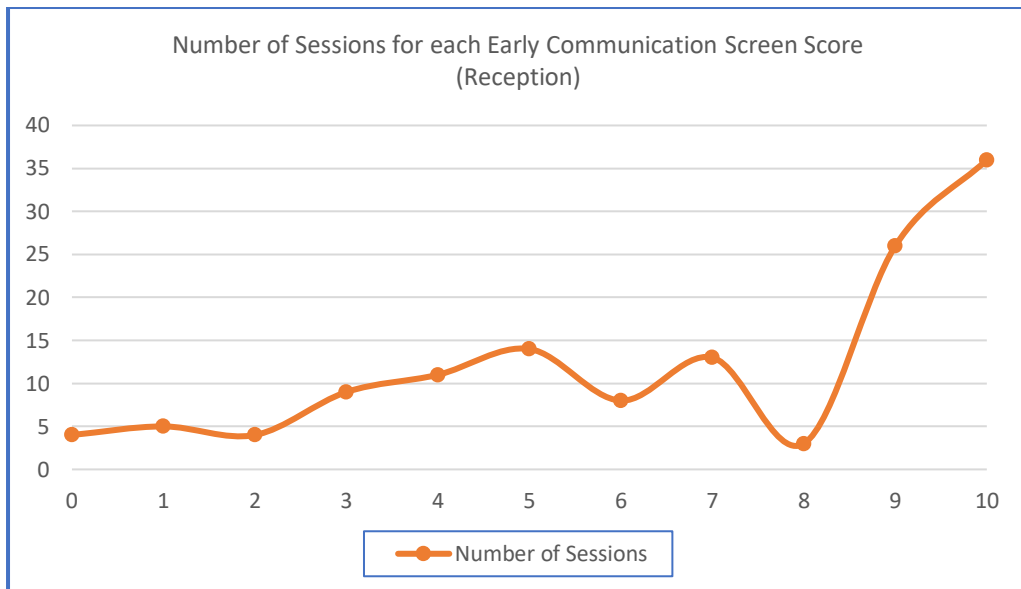


Chart 38 - Number of sessions for each ECS scores (line graph)

²⁹ Essentially, children are grouped according to their ECS score. The number of sessions attended from the summer holiday onwards is also recorded for each child. For each ECS score, the total number of sessions attended by children who achieved this particular score is calculated.



Appendix B

The RSS Big Play Family Feedback Form template



Family Feedback Form - The Big Play



Thrive at Five is constantly trying to improve the activities we provide to local families. To help us in doing this, we would be grateful if you could answer a few questions about the event today. There are no right or wrong answers.

The information that you provide will be used to help us improve future events for you and other local families.

Once you have completed your questionnaire, please place it in the box provided.

1. On a scale of zero to ten, how likely are you to recommend the Big Play to a friend or colleague?

Zero represents the least likely to recommend to a friend or a colleague and ten represents the most likely.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

A process evaluation of Ready Steady Stoke

2. For each line, please tick the box that best describes your experience of today's event.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My experience of today's event has been positive	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I felt welcome	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I felt those running the activities were helpful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I felt those running the activities were knowledgeable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I learnt about activities that I can do with my child at home	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I learnt about other local early years sessions that I can attend with my child	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you would like us to contact you about future Thrive at Five activities, please write your email here _____

Appendix C

Topic Guides for interviews with key stakeholders

Early years teacher interviews

TOPIC GUIDE - EARLY YEARS TEACHERS (BENTILEE)

As you know, this summer Thrive at Five and local schools came together to run a set of activities focused on children transitioning into nursery and reception. The project as a whole was called Ready Steady Stoke.

Ready Steady Stoke comprised three principal strands -

- *Summer term Stay and Plays at each school, sometimes incorporating materials from Mouse Club.*
- *A couple of Big Play events, with the Bentilee event held at Treehouse.*
- *And summer holiday Stay and Plays, which were again held at the schools.*

Underpinning all this, we had posters and leaflets with the Ready Steady Stoke branding; Play Passports for children; and key messages based around five building blocks of school readiness.

The aim was to test the feasibility of delivering a package of transition support in this way, with the ultimate ambition of improving levels of school readiness and helping more children make a positive school transition.

The purpose of this short interview is to help us get a better understanding of what worked well, what did not work so well, and how Ready Steady Stoke could be improved in the future. I will record

the interview so that I can concentrate on what you are saying rather than scribbling everything down. When I write this up, I will describe you as Early Years teachers rather than using your name. I will also share a copy with you, to check you are happy before anything is finalised.

- ***Do you think the three strands of activity - summer holiday Stay and Plays, a large community event, and holiday club Stay & Plays - worked well in practice?***

How do these strands of activity connect with some of the other transition activities you do as a school? I am thinking of things like letters out to transitioning parents; Parent Open Evenings; conversations with current practitioners about individual children. Could the different bits of work link better together?

Theme: Implementation

- ***You have looked at the engagement data. Can you talk a little about who engaged with the three strands of activity and why you think this was the case?***

Were there any particular groups who you feel did not engage?

Were the engaged families new to you or were they families you already had a relationship with through - for example - Parent & Toddler Groups or 2-Year-Old Provision?

Theme: Reaching our target audience

- ***Which activities do you think were most useful for children and families?***

Why was that activity so useful?

Was there an activity that you thought was not particularly useful?

Theme: Perceived effectiveness and impact

- ***Do you think Ready Steady Stoke helped children get ready to start school?***

How do you think the activities helped children to get school ready?

Do you think Ready Steady Stoke helped parents get their child ready to start school? How do you think the activities helped achieve this?

Do you think we need more sustained engagement to make a greater difference?

Theme: Perceived effectiveness and impact

- ***How did you use the core building block messages?***

Would it be possible to embed these more fully? What would need to happen to be able to do this?

Theme: Perceived effectiveness and impact

- *One distinguishing feature of Ready Steady Stoke was that it was a collective approach, bringing schools together with other schools across the area and also bringing schools together with other local partners. Do you think this collective approach added value to Ready Steady Stoke better?*

What value do think was added by local schools working together?

What value do you think was added by schools working with other local partners

Theme: The Core Messages

- *Are children in your class more or less ready for school this year compared with your class last year?*
- *How do you think we could - working together - improve the local transition offer for children and families next year?*

Why do you think this might be?

What are the biggest school readiness challenges this year?

What are the most important things we can do to help local children get ready for school?

Theme: Perceived effectiveness and Improvement in future year

Parent Interviews

TOPIC GUIDE - INTERVIEWS WITH PARENTS

Thank you for agreeing to have this short conversation with me.

As you know, this summer Thrive at Five and Maple Court Academy came together to run a set of activities focused on helping families with children who were moving into nursery and reception. The project as a whole was called Ready Steady Stoke.

Ready Steady Stoke included a number of things.

- *Summer term Mouse Club Stay and Plays at Maple Court.*
- *Our Big Play event, at Treehouse Children's Centre.*
- *And summer holiday Stay and Plays at Maple Court.*

We also had Ready Steady Stoke posters and leaflets and Play Passports for all the children.

The aim was to see whether we could work together to deliver a package of activities that would help children get off to the best possible start.

The purpose of this conversation is to learn about how you and x [child name] found the Ready Steady Stoke activities this summer, so we can find ways to improve them in future years. I am also speaking to several other local parents from across the different schools.

When I write this up, I will describe you as a Local Parent rather than using your name. I will send you a copy before anything is finalised, to make sure you are happy with it.

- *So, x [child name] started nursery at y [school name] in September. How are they settling in?*

Any early problems?

Theme: Introduction

- *I know you attended lots of activities over the summer - for example, Stay and Plays in the summer term at y [school name], the Big Play event at z [venue name], and the Holiday Club Stay and Plays at y [school name]. Did the activities help x [child name] get ready to start school?*

Which bits of the activities do you think were particularly helpful and why?

Theme: Perceived effectiveness and impact

- *It's a big step when your child starts school. It can be quite daunting for parents. Did the activities increase your understanding of what x [child name] needed to be able to do by the time they started school?*

Did you do anything differently as a result of the activities?

Any activities at home?

Theme: Perceived effectiveness and impact

- *Did the activities help you to get to know the new school better?*

Did you talk to the school before x [child name] started?

Was this important to you? If so, why?

Theme: Perceived effectiveness and impact

- *Was there anything about Ready Steady Stoke that you wish had been different?*

Was there anything about x [child name] starting school that you were unsure or worried about?

Was there any aspect of helping x [child name] get ready for school where you would have liked more support?

Theme: Improving future practice

- *What do you think are the most important things we can do to help children make the best possible start at school?*

Theme: Improving future practice

- *Thank you again for having this conversation with me. All the information we are gathering will be really important in helping us improve the support families are able to access in the future. Do you have any final questions for me? Anything you would like to say that you have not yet covered.*

Core Project Team Interviews

TOPIC GUIDE - CORE PROJECT TEAM

As a member of the Core Project Team, you helped organise and deliver Ready Steady Stoke.

As you know, we had three principal strands -

- *Summer term Stay and Plays at each school, sometimes incorporating materials from Mouse Club.*
- *A couple of Big Play events.*
- *And summer holiday Stay and Plays, which were again held at the schools.*

Underpinning all this, we had posters and leaflets with the Ready Steady Stoke branding; Play Passports for children; and key messages based around five building blocks of school readiness.

The aim was to test the feasibility of delivering a package of transition support in this way, with the ultimate ambition of improving levels of school readiness and helping more children make a positive school transition.

The purpose of this short interview is to help us get a better understanding of what worked well, what did not work so well, and how Ready Steady Stoke could be improved in the future. I will record the interview so that I can concentrate on what you are saying rather than scribbling everything down. When I write this up, I will describe you as members of the Core Project Team rather than using your name. I will also share a copy of the write-up with you, to check you are happy before anything is finalised.

- ***As a member of the Core Project Team, you helped organise and deliver the overall Ready Steady Stoke project. To what extent did implementation go as intended and why?***

With reference to summer term Stay & Plays? With reference to the Big Play? With reference to summer holiday activities? With reference to the overall project? Did we need all three strands of the project?

Theme: Implementation

- ***What do you think we achieved through running Ready Steady Stoke?***

Theme: Perceived effectiveness and impact

- ***What do you think we did not achieve?***

Theme: Perceived effectiveness and impact

- ***What changes would you make to strengthen Ready Steady Stoke in future years?***

Our ultimate aim was to help more children get off to a good start in nursery or reception. This was always a bold aim for a project focused on the summer months. What adjustments do you think we should make to put ourselves in a stronger position to achieve this really bold aim?

Do we need more sustained engagement with children and families? Do we need to do more targeted work with families? Do we need to integrate the strands more closely with the underlying transition work that occurs in each individual school?

*How aligned was Ready Steady Stoke with the objectives of our key partner organisations?
How might we have improved this?*

Theme: Improving Future Practice

- ***The Core Project Team brought together representatives from the local authority, local schools, Thrive at Five, and a representative from a PVI childcare setting. What value was added by organising the project through this broad, collaborative team?***

To what extent was there a shared understanding around what you were aiming to achieve? Did you discuss the plausibility of achieving improvements in school readiness given the fairly short-term nature of the work?

Largely, each individual school runs their own transition arrangements. How did the Core Project Team work with individual schools?

Were the right people and organisations round the table?

What about the frequency and pace of meetings?

What do you think is added by doing this work at a community rather than an individual school-level?

Theme: Collective Planning