

Getting the Best of Boys



Improving Boys Readiness for Learning through Early Support

South Ribble Children's Centres In Partnership with

St Mary and St Benedict's RC Primary School

Leyland St Andrew's C of E Primary School

Leyland St James's C of E Primary school

St Aidan's C of E Primary School

St Anne's RC Primary School

Seven Stars Primary School

Northbrook Primary School

Moss Side Primary School

St Marys Primary School



Improving boys Readiness For Learning through Early Support

Evaluation of "Getting it right for Boys" Project – South Ribble Children's Centres

Introduction:

This project has been funded from money allocated from the Early Intervention Grant. South Ribble Children's Centres chose to use the funding to raise the attainment of summer born boys and boys from disadvantaged areas in reception classes. The project will build on a project carried out last year in one of the feeder schools and aims to strengthen partnerships between South Ribble Children's Centres and nine feeder schools located in disadvantaged areas across the reach area.

This project was based on the following principles and philosophy:

Meeting the individual needs of all children lies at the heart of the EYFS curriculum. Every child deserves the best possible start and support to fulfil their potential

A child's experiences in the early years have a major impact on future life chances

Unmet needs are the main driver for inappropriate behaviour

Research on Boys learning

"Getting it right from the start" Linda Tallent & Gary Wilson Osiris Educational 2008

Research shows many practitioners find girls easier to teach because of following attributes; many are motivated, organised, clean, neat and stay on task. They are able to sit, listen and concentrate and follow instructions. But what about the attributes of boys? They can be lively, enthusiastic, adventurous and energetic. They get stuck in, have a wonderful sense of humour and banter, wonderful ideas and offer fantastic questions. How can we adapt teaching to tune into boys attributes? If early years practitioners view energetic, action orientated play as immature and disruptive, are we sowing the seeds of male underachievement by asking boys to conform, listen and sit still?

Why are they underachieving?

Most boys use up to 30 times less language in their play. Play, language and learning go hand in hand. A main feature of our project is that the practitioners will be given time to play alongside the boys to extend their social skills and language by commenting, explaining and expanding. This will be supported by enhanced Speech and Language training using elements of the "Elklan's training package."

Testosterone in boys makes them more energetic and results in a preference to learn through movement. This project will enable practitioners to gain an understanding of active learning and proficiency in a hands on approach to engage boys in active "creative learning" opportunities.

Boys are more sensitive to stress and being told off. During the project practitioners will explore how best to support boys emotional development, the benefits of reinforcing positive behaviour and innovative strategies for dealing with challenging behaviour.

Boys have less dopamine giving them a shorter attention span while girls have more which means they hear better, listen more attentively and need less stimulation. Attention and listening skills are vital in a busy

Reception classroom yet pre-intervention assessments showed only one in forty four boys had two channelled attention, which enables them to shift their attention independently in whole class activities.

Aims and Intended Outcomes:

In May 2011 funding became available to improve readiness for learning and transitions into school through early support and focus on certain groups of children. South Ribble Children's Centres chose to focus on summer born boys and boys from disadvantaged areas. This decision was based on a number of things. Firstly the knowledge that girls continue to achieve at a higher level in all assessment scales compared to boys (***Statistical Release DFE EYFSP results in England 2010/2011***) Secondly because it was an opportunity to build on an earlier project carried out in partnership with Leyland St Andrews Primary School which had identified a delay in attention and listening skills, poor vocabulary and verbal reasoning skills as contributing to a lack of readiness for learning in twelve boys in their foundation unit.

The following aims were identified at the beginning of the project:

- To strengthen existing partnerships between South Ribble Children's Centre and nine feeder schools.
- To build capacity and resilience amongst families and children.

Through in house training, peer support and reflective practice we hoped to:

- Build the independent capacity of schools by helping practitioners to develop the skills needed for early identification and support of children with speech, language and communication needs and personal and social needs.
- Train a practitioner in each school who could become the schools communication champion, who would have the skills to be able to offer support to other practitioners with continued support from the children's centres speech and language therapist.
- Increase practitioners understanding of the benefits of active, creative learning opportunities and meeting the needs of individual learners.
- Increase practitioners understanding of how to adapt teaching to tune into boys attributes.

Through the use of Elklan assessments and elements of its practitioner training course (***Lets talk with under fives Elklan Liz Elks & Henrietta McLachlan 2005***) we also hoped to:

- Improve the school readiness of boys taking part in the project by increasing; attention and listening skills, "blank levels" of questioning (verbal reasoning), auditory memory and improving behaviour through positive behaviour strategies.

Methodology:

Schools invited to take part in the project were firstly consulted regarding its aims and intended outcomes. All head teachers fully supported the projects outline plans for delivery specified in the funding bid. Each school was then asked to choose an existing member of their foundation stage team in order to make the project sustainable in the future.

The delivery plans stipulated that each school would be given funding so they could replace the existing practitioner for 15 hrs each week. This would allow the practitioner time to support the boys for four days in the classroom and attend the children's centre on the other day for training, peer support and reflective practice.

Support for the boys in the classroom was to be in the form of regular small group activities, daily time to play alongside boys during continuous activities in order to focus on social skills and language development and support during whole class carpet sessions to help boys with their attention, listening and concentration skills.

Practitioners were asked to choose six boys that fitted one or more of three criteria. Firstly if they were a summer born boy, secondly if they lived in a disadvantaged area i.e. top thirty percent in index of multiple deprivation and finally if their family was seen as having an additional need e.g. parent with learning disability, parent in prison, loan parent etc.

Each training session practitioners were also given a free resource to support them in delivering the sessions objectives with the boys

Results and Outcomes:

"Getting the Best of Boys" was delivered in nine primary schools. All of which were in the reach area of either the phase one or one of the two phase two children's centres in South Ribble. The programme was evaluated using both quantitative and qualitative data. Pre intervention assessments were completed on 54 boys. Post intervention assessments were completed on 44 boys. Five of which were year one children and therefore their scores have not been used. This leaves 39 children's scores being used in the final evaluation.

Quantitative Data Results:

Raw Data results See Appendix I

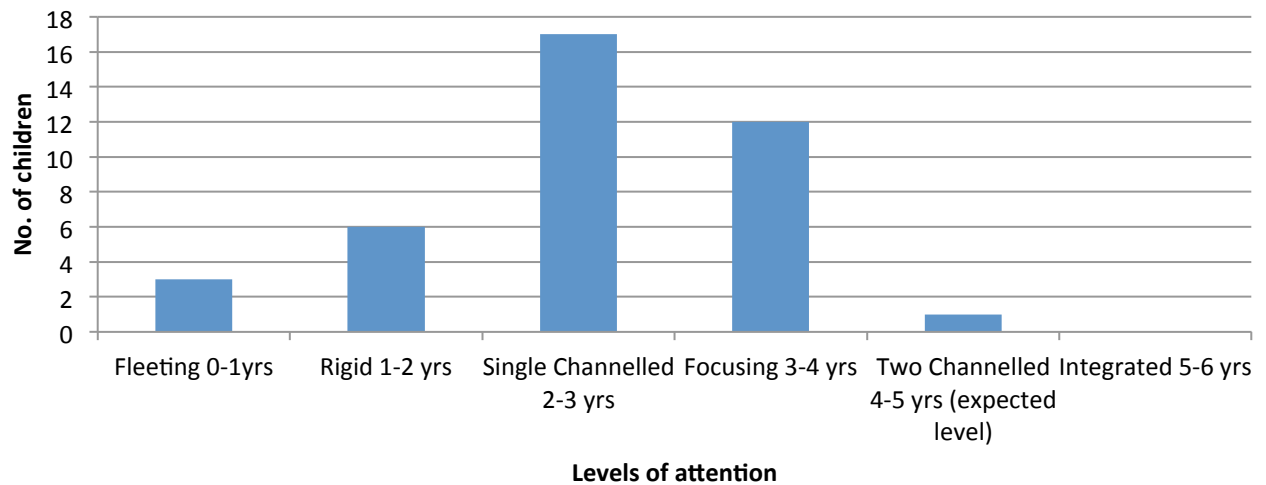
Elklan "Assessing levels of Attention Development" Liz Elks and Henrietta McLachlen 2009

Attention develops in recognisable stages. An understanding of these stages can improve our understanding and management of children with attention problems. A child in a reception classroom's expected level would be two channelled attention. This would enable them to shift their attention and be able to listen without you having to first call his name.

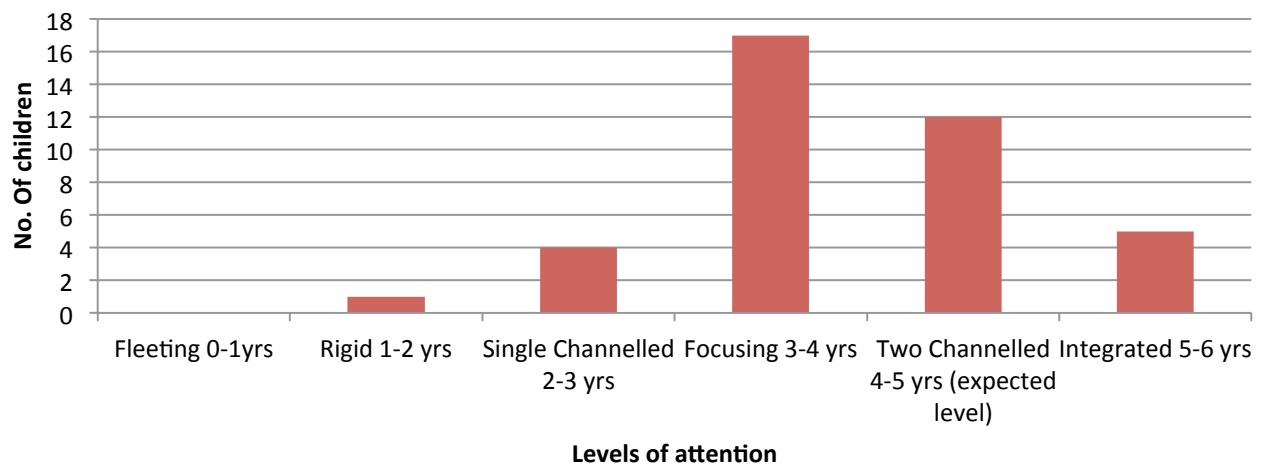
Assessment Example See Appendix II

	Expected level Two Channelled (4-5yrs)	One year delay Focusing attention (3-4yrs)	Two or more year delay (2-3yrs and below)
Pre-intervention assessment	1 child = 2.6%	12 children = 30.8%	26 children = 66.6% (9 of these children showed more than a 2 year delay)
Post-intervention assessment	17 children = 43.6% (5 of these children are now working above expected level)	17 children = 43.6%	5 children = 12.8%

Pre-Intervention Assessment of Attention and Listening Skills



Post-Intervention Assessment of Attention and Listening Skills



The pre-intervention assessment showed only one out of the 39 boys had the expected levels of attention needed to attend and listen in a busy reception classroom. More worryingly 26 children had a significant delay of two or more years. These children struggle to focus on activities of your choosing and struggle to carry out directions or respond when you talk to them if they are focused on something of their own choosing. Post intervention assessment shows children have made good progress in their attention and listening skills. Seventeen are now working at the expected level or above. Seventeen other children are showing only a one year delay. Only five children are now showing a significant delay and all of these have shown to have still made good progress.

Elklan "Assessing levels of Auditory Memory" Liz Elks and Henrietta McLachlen 2009

Some children find it very difficult to make progress in learning because they have problems remembering auditory information. Auditory memory skills are vital if a child is going to be able to follow a series of instructions given out by a class teacher. With practice these skills can be significantly improved.

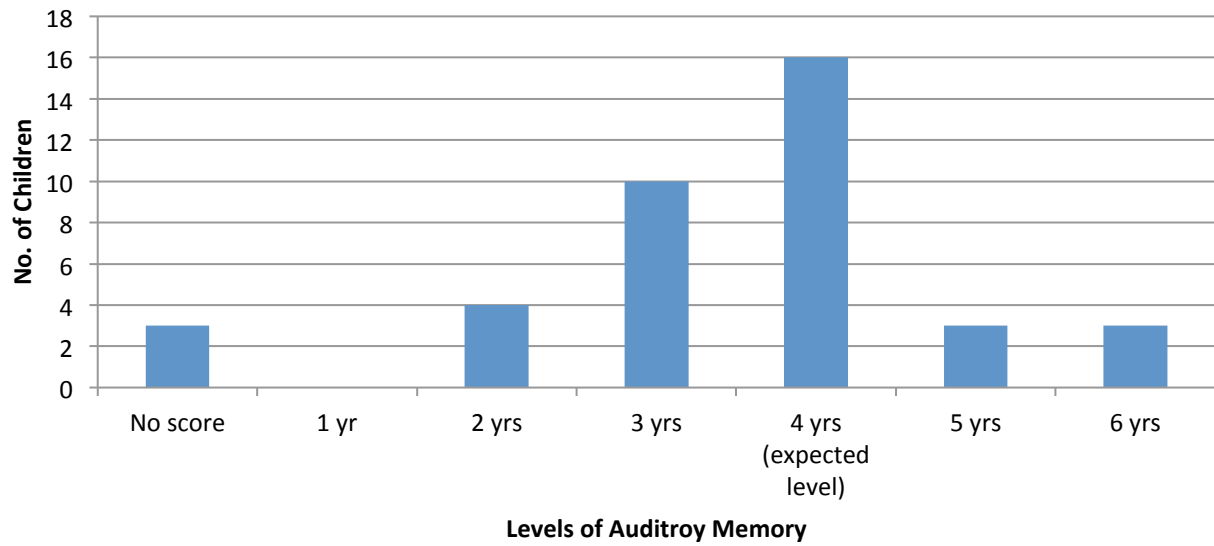
Assessment Example See appendix III

	No Score	2yrs	3yrs	4yrs (expected)	5yrs (levels)	6yrs
Pre-intervention assessment	3 children 7.7%	4 children 10.3%	10 children 25.6%	16 children 41%	3 children 7.7%	3 children 7.7%
Post-intervention assessment			3 children 7.7%	12 children 30.7%	18 children 46.2%	6 children 15.1%

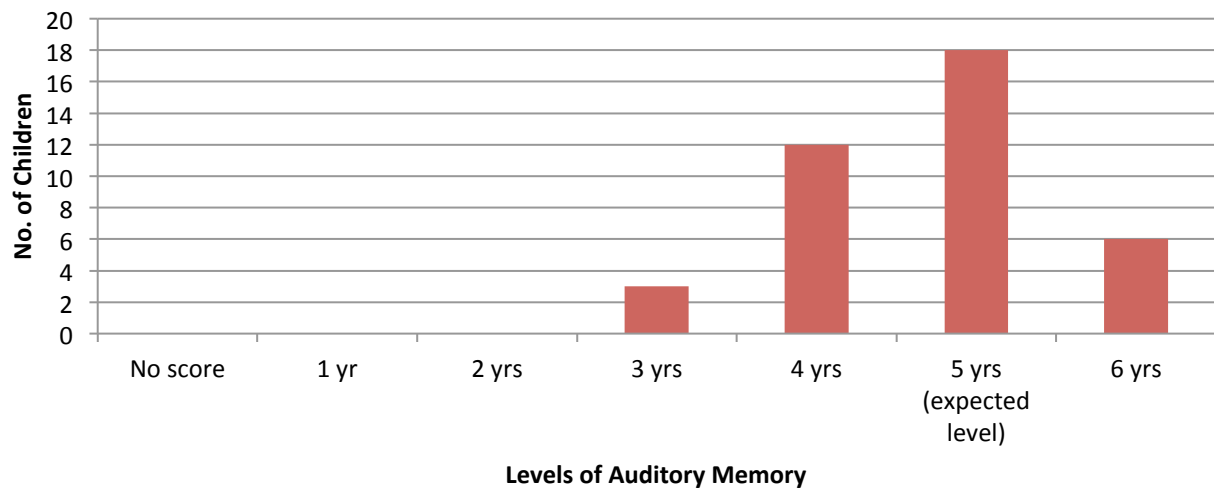
Pre-intervention assessments showed seventeen of the boys had a delay of their auditory memory skills.

Post intervention results show this had reduced to only three.

Pre-Intervention Assessment of Auditory Memory



Post-Intervention Assessment of Auditory Memory



Elklan "Assessing Questioning skills using "Blank levels" Liz Elks and Henrietta McLachlen 2009

Blank, Rose and Berlin 1978 looked at the language of teachers and graded it according to complexity. They broke this language down into four levels which reflected the development of the understanding of question types and the development of verbal reasoning. Table below shows expected level and age of understanding.

Level I	Naming things	60% of 3 year olds understand at level I and level II
Level II	Describing things Who? What? Where?	
Level III	Talking about stories and events	65% of 5 year olds understand at level III and level IV
Level IV	Solving problems and answering Why?	

For the purpose of this project, children scoring two questions right in one level and two questions right in the next level were judged as being between levels.

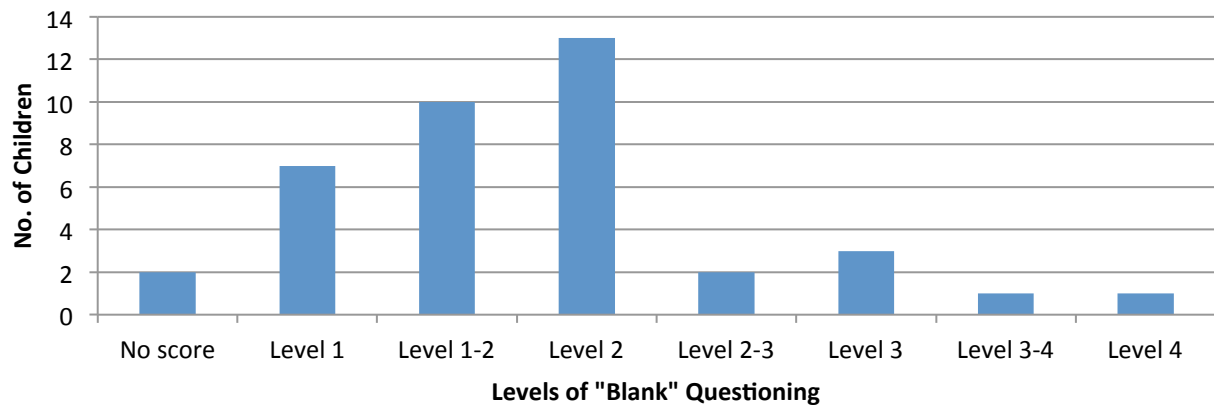
Assessment Example See Appendix IV

	Level 1	Level 1-2	Level 2	Level 2-3	Level 3	Level 3-4	Level 4
Pre-intervention assessment	7 children 17.9%	10 children 25.6%	13 children 33.3%	2 children 5.1%	3 children 7.7%	1 child 2.6%	1 child 2.6%
Post-intervention assessment	1 child 2.6%		1 child 2.6%	5 children 12.8%	5 children 12.8%	12 children 30.7%	15 children 38.5%

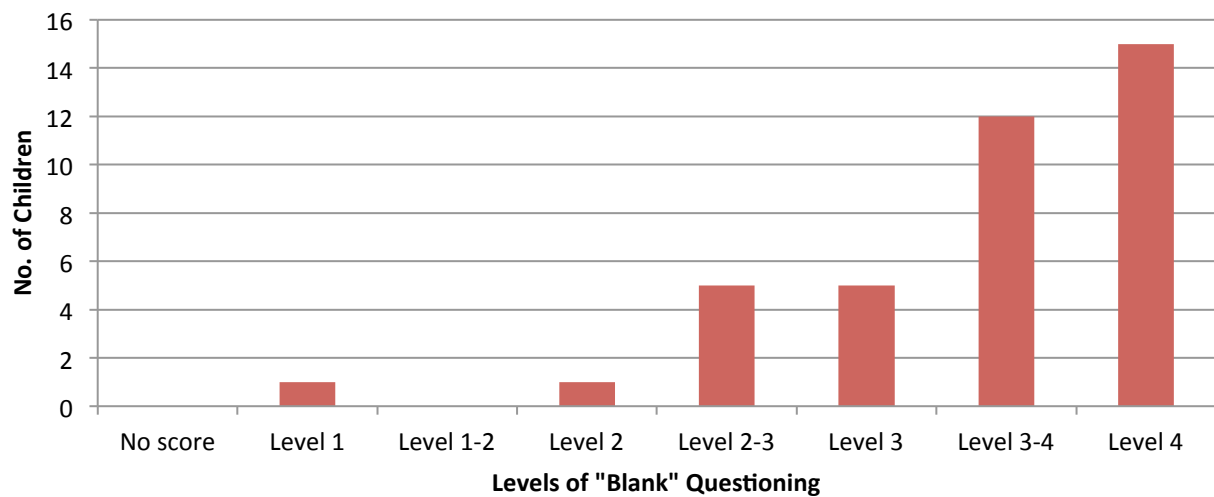
Seven children were able to answer some three and four level questions in the pre intervention assessments. This increased to 37 in the post intervention assessments. Although "Blank assessments" can be used to assess the type of questions a child understands and assess verbal reasoning skills the knowledge gained can be critically important to any adult working with the child can;

- be aware of realistic expectations of what each child can understand.
- modify their language to make sure any question they ask is at an appropriate level.
- encourage and support verbal reasoning skills by working on the next stage with appropriate question
- support learning across different curriculum areas and during continuous provision.

Pre-Intervention Assessment of "Blank Level" Questioning Skills



Post-Intervention Assessment of "Blank Level" Questioning Skills



Practitioner Confidence/Competence Audit*Audit Example See Appendix V*

An audit intended to capture practitioners growing confidence in supporting boys learning was completed at the beginning and end of the project.

Eight out of nine practitioners felt more confident in being able to enhance an area of continuous provision to support boys learning.

Seven out of nine felt more confident and knowledgeable in being able to talk to parents about boys learning and development.

Five out of nine felt more confident in being able to fully support a child's speech language and communication needs. One was already fully confident (having already completed a ten week Elklan training course) whilst the other three didn't realise how little they knew and upon reflection decided that they had scored themselves too highly in the pre training audit. Practitioners were introduced to the "Conscious Competence Ladder" and the idea that their journey may have led them from being unconsciously incompetent in that at the start of the project they didn't know what they didn't know, through conscious incompetence where they were shocked at what they didn't know to being consciously competent where they were aware of their new skills and were working at refining them.

When asked about assessing children's speech and language practitioners were less confident. Only four out of nine were more confident. This will be addressed in a future training session.

Seven out of nine felt more confident in supporting emotional development. One commented "Now, when working with children in the school's nurture room I understand how children's frustration is directly linked to their limited language and how their immature emotional development can be linked to their background and home environment. Seeing the bigger picture has meant I try to be even more nurturing to help their attachments and emotional development.

Qualitative Data Results:

The feedback from the practitioners about the project has been mostly positive. Throughout the project they have been actively encouraged to reflect on each part of the process and record their journey in a reflective journal. It has been hugely rewarding to share this journey with them and celebrate their many successes.

Comments from TA's on how Speech and Language training has helped them support boys communication

"It's made a massive difference in how I speak to children and how much I expect them to understand and respond."

"I am making more statements and not quizzing and questioning as much"

"I am aware that as adults we question children all the time but now understand the value of listening more and commenting.

"I'm now not bombarding the children all the time. The thumb rule has really helped."

"I am so much more confident when a child doesn't know what I have said. I just simplify my comment, pick key words and speak more slowly"

"Definitely communicating more, and less quizzing! I assumed so much before. Now I realise how complicated speaking and listening are! I feel very empowered!

"I've realised how much you can support language during continuous provision. I think I have helped the boys with their vocabulary by commenting on and expanding what they say. "

Comments from TA's on resources

Oral feedback from the practitioners has indicated that the free resources given have been very well received and used creatively both for the children taking part in the project and other children in school. Their comments have also been captured in their own personal reflective journals. For example, several practitioners found Ros Baileys "Lola the Lion" book helpful in supporting attention and listening when children need lots of reinforcement to attend in group situations.

Feedback from teachers and head teachers

Questionnaires have recently been sent to all head teachers involved in the project. We are currently awaiting a response from most schools. One head teacher has responded to date with very positive feedback. In summary the school has benefitted greatly from the resources which are being used by all children in reception classes. The project has "extended boys learning, and given more depth to learning." "Benefit to the boys, school and the rest of the staff." During the recent Ofsted inspection the TA was observed working with the boys group and received very positive feedback.

Summary of evaluation against project criteria

It is evident that the project has positively impacted on boys learning. Attention and listening, auditory memory and verbal reasoning skills of the targeted groups has significantly increased. In order to sustain improvements each school will be offered further support, dependent on individual needs of targeted children, to aid their transition into key stage one.

Observations carried out by centre staff identified that when continuous provision was rich in resources which stimulate and interest boys, levels of well-being and involvement were generally higher. When well-being and involvement are high, deeper level learning is taking place and children's resilience and capacity to learn is increased.

Links between feeder schools and Children's Centre have been significantly strengthened. Plans are already in place for children's centre staff to deliver a transition project. A speech and language project to support reception children at risk of delay is also being planned.

The outcomes of the project have directly contributed to the children's centres centre development plan priorities. The Enjoy and Achieve priorities have been fully met at each centre. The project has contributed to school readiness and may have had a positive impact on the CLL and PSE aspects targeted. If schools are willing to share their EYFSP data we will be able to evidence this. We will be interested to see if EYFSP scores for 6+ and 78+ completed at the end of reception will show a narrowing of the gap in relation to summer born children and boys.

Key Learning and future recommendations

Practitioners report that they have benefited in a number of ways from participating in the project.

1. Enhanced speech and language training
2. Peer support
3. Visiting other settings
4. Reflective practice
5. Understanding the benefits of active creative learning opportunities

Some class teachers followed the recommendation of the project and regularly released the practitioner from adult focussed activities in order to engage in and support child focussed play. These practitioners had opportunities to use learnt strategies such as following children's leads, commenting, modelling and expanding appropriate language. They reported a greater improvement in children's engagement, involvement and use of vocabulary than those who had not had similar opportunities. Research from Ferre Leavers, a Belgium Psychologist, on wellbeing and involvement informs us that when children are focused, interested and motivated, deeper level learning is taking place. This research and our personal experience tells us that optimising the environment for language and learning in this way will also be effectively building children's vocabulary. Practitioners have discovered the teaching and learning opportunities inherent in children's play.

Recommendation - All schools consider providing opportunities where adults play alongside children for extended periods of time using the above strategies.

Some of the teachers followed our recommendation that the Blank questioning strategies be used by all practitioners in the classroom to reinforce learning. Where teachers agreed, by displaying continuous provision Blank Questions, their boys had the greatest improvement in Verbal Reasoning Skills.

Recommendation- Blank continuous provision resources are mainstreamed by all schools and also used in Year One continuous provision areas with those children who still need practice and support in answering level three and four questions.

Given the delay of communication skills in many of the children, enhanced language training was seen as the most useful training the practitioners had received during the project. One TA has gone back to her head and this has been taken on board and all TA's are receiving elements of ELKLAN training package. The children's centre has also responded to this need and is currently designing a package of support to offer schools in the next academic year.

Recommendation- Enhanced speech and language training should be an integral part of all TA's professional development in the future.

<u>Summer</u> <u>born</u>	<u>I.M.D</u>	<u>Pre</u> <u>Attention</u>	<u>Post</u> <u>Attention</u>	<u>Pre</u> <u>Auditory</u>	<u>Post</u> <u>Auditory</u>	<u>Pre</u> <u>Blank</u>	<u>Post</u> <u>Blank</u>
yes	40-50	single	2 chan	4	5	2	3
no	30-40	focus	2 chan	4	4	2	2
no	30-40	single	focus	5	6	1-2	3-4
no	40-50	focus	2 chan	5	6	2	3
no	40-50	focus	2 chan	6	5	2-3	3-4
yes	40-50	focus	focus	0	4	0	3
yes	20-30	focus	2 chan	4	4-5	1	4
yes	20-30	focus	2 chan	4	5-6	2	4
no	40-50	focus	2 chan	4	5-6	2	3
no	20-30	focus	2 chan/int	4	5	4	4
no	20-30	focus	2 chan	5	6	3	4
		-	-	-	-	-	-
yes	20-30	single	2 chan	4	6	3	4
no	20-30	focus	integrated	3	5	2	4
yes	20-30	fleet	focus	2	4	1	2-3
yes	20-30	2 chan	integrated	6	6	2	4
no	50-60	single	focus	5	6	2	4
yes	20-30	single	focus	6	6	2	4
no	40-50	rigid	foc	4	5	2	3-4
no	30-40	rigid/sing	2 chan	4	5	1-2	3-4
no	30-40	rigid	focus	4	4	1-2	3-4
		-	-	-	-	-	-
no	30-40	single	focus	4	5	2-3	4
no	30-40	rigid	single/focus	3	4	1-2	3-4
no	10-20	focus	2 chan	3	4	1-2	3-4
no	10-20	focus	integrated	4	5	1	4
no	10-20	focus	2 chan	3	5	3-4	3-4
no	10-20	single	focus	2	4	1	4
no	10-20	single	focus	0	3	1	3
no	10-20	focus	2 chan	2	3	1-2	3-4
no	40-50	single	focus	4	5	1	2-3
no	10-20	single	2 chan	3	4	1-2	4
yes	70-80	focus	integrated	4	5	2	3
no	10-20	focus	integrated	3	5	2	4
no	40-50	fleeting	single	4	4	1	2-3
yes	0-10	single	focus	4	5	1-2	4
		-	-	-	-	-	-
		-	-	-	-	-	-
yes	90-100	single	single	4	5	2	3-4
yes	30-40	single	focus	4	5	2	4
yes	30-40	focus	2 chan	4	5	3	4
yes	30-40	single	focus	4	5	3	4
yes	90-100	single	single	3	5	2	3-4
no	40-50	rigid	focus	3	4	1	1
yes	30-40	rigid	single	3	4	4	3-4
no	40-50	fleeting	rigid	0	3	1-2	2-3
yes	30-40	single	single	2	5	1-2	2-3
yes	90-100	single	focus	3	4	0	4

Appendix II

Elklan. Speech and Language Support for Under 5s

3.11.0 DVD observation. Assessing the level of attention development

Attention level	Behaviours you may observe	
	Shade the comments which are typical of the child. The box with most shading indicates the level at which the child is functioning but remember attention levels vary and different behaviours may be observed in different situations.	
STAGE 1		
Fleeting attention (0-1 year)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finds it very difficult to focus on one activity.• Flits from one thing to another quickly.• Finds it difficult to understand directions.• May have little awareness of danger.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is easily distracted by things he might see, hear, smell and will move to the new thing that has attracted his attention.
Rigid attention (1-2 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Will focus on an activity that he chooses - 'Follows his own agenda'.• Can maintain interest for long periods of time.• Not interested in your choice of activity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May be interested in a restricted range of activities.• When concentrating, rarely responds to you.• To attract his attention you often have to touch him.
Single channelled attention (2-3 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prefers to focus on an activity that he chooses.• When engaged in an activity he often doesn't carry out directions or respond when you talk to him.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To get him to do something, you have to stop him playing first and then tell him.• You have to call his name before he will do things.
STAGE 2		
Focusing attention (3-4 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Will join in with an activity that you or another child chooses/suggests.• Is interested in what other people are doing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To get him to do something you may have to call his name but he can respond quickly and can easily focus on what you say.
Two channelled attention (4-5 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can do two things at once e.g. play with playdough and talk about going to a friend's house after pre-school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can shift his attention to listen to you without you having to call his name first.
Integrated attention (5-6 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can do two things at once for long periods of time.• Can do this in different places.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can control and focus his attention on what he wants to do or what he is asked to do independently.

Auditory Memory assessment Child _____ Name _____.

Number of Digits	Sequence	Correct/incorrect	Auditory assessment Age
2	6 2		3yrs
2	3 8		3yrs
3	4 5 2		4yrs
3	7 1 9		4yrs
4	3 5 2 7		5yrs
4	1 4 8 3		5yrs
5	9 4 2 6 7		6yrs
5	1 3 5 2 8		6yrs

Auditory memory includes the ability to remember information you have heard.

Children who have language problems also have difficulties with auditory memory tasks.

Appendix IV

Elklan. Speech and Language Support for Under 5s

5.4.0 Blank levels using the very hungry caterpillar story

Determine the Blank levels of these questions.

Make a note as to why you think it is a certain level.

Pages 1 & 2

Find something which is not green.

Where did the egg lie?

What is this? (egg)

How can we tell that it is night time?

Pages 3 & 4

Show me the caterpillar.

Find something that makes us feel warm.

How will he find food?

What will happen next?

Pages 5 & 6

What did the caterpillar eat on Monday?

Why does the caterpillar want more food?

Point to the apple.

How does the caterpillar feel now?

Saturday page

What is this? (ice cream and sausage).

Find something which is not a fruit.

If you had a tummy ache what would you do?

What gave the caterpillar tummy ache?

Tell me about the story.

Pre Intervention**NAME:****SETTING:****T.A.
AUDIT**

	Confident 1	2	Fairly 3	4	Not At All 5
How confident are you at enhancing an area of continuous provision?					
How confident are you to enhance an area of continuous provision to support boys learning?					
How confident are you to read a story to a group of children?					
How confident are you to read a story to a group of parents & children?					
How confident are you at talking to parents?					
How confident are you in supporting a child's speech, language and communication?					
How confident are you in assessing a child's speech, language and communication development?					
How confident are you in supporting emotional development?					
How confident are you in assessing emotional development?					

Please tell us about any relevant training you have undertaken

Please tell us about any special areas of interest or areas you have supported in your classroom