Making it REAL Lewisham

Evaluation Report

August 2024

PREPARED BY

Prof Chris Pascal
Prof Tony Bertram
Sean Delaney
Dr Helen Lyndon

CENTRE FOR RESEARCH IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

Lewisham

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S BUREAU

CREC

CENTRE FOR RESEARCH IN EARLY CHILDHOOD
WWW.CREC.CO.UK @_CREC @CRECBIRM

Table of Contents

Abbreviations used in this report

The following abbreviations are used within this report:

CLL	Communication, Language & Literacy
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CREC	Centre for Research in Early Childhood
ECDP	Early Childhood Development Programme
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
HLE	Home Learning Environment
KMC	Knowledge Makes Change
KPI	Key Priority Indicator
MiR	Making it REAL (Raising Early Achievement in Literacy)
NCB	National Children's Bureau
OBA	Outcomes Based Accountability
REAL	Raising Early Achievement in Literacy
SALT	Speech and Language Therapy
TforT / T4T	Training for Trainers

Foreword

We were delighted to receive funding from The Charity of Sir Richard Whittington, of which the Mercers' Company is trustee, to deliver Making it REAL Lewisham and would like to thank them for the opportunity and for their ongoing commitment to early years' initiatives across London. We would also like to note the ongoing support of Professor Cathy Nutbrown at the University of Sheffield in all of NCB's Making it REAL projects.

Working in partnership with Lewisham local authority, the aim of this ambitious 3-year programme was to deliver Making it REAL through a holistic, borough-wide approach, creating significant and sustainable impact for children, families and practitioners, as well as providing evidence of what can be achieved through this approach. At the start of the programme the extent of the challenges faced by the early years sector was unknown; the impact of COVID-19, the recruitment and retention crisis and stretched capacity within the sector, all of which have had an impact on the programme. Despite these ongoing challenges, we are really proud of what has been achieved in Lewisham.

Partnership working has been a real strength of the programme – between NCB and Lewisham LA, with the library service and across wider services within Lewisham, demonstrating the power of working together to support young children and families. We are really pleased Making it REAL is embedded in Lewisham's strategy, with a strong commitment from the local authority to the sustainability of the programme. We would like to thank Lewisham LA for their ongoing dedication and to thank all practitioners involved in the programme. Making it REAL Lewisham is a dynamic and evolving programme; as such, things have already moved on from what has been captured in this report (see Appendix 1). We would like to thank CREC for all the work undertaken for this evaluation, which has supported and fed into our thinking on sustainability.

Making it REAL Lewisham is a flagship Making it REAL programme, clearly demonstrating what can be achieved through an authority wide approach. Key learning to take forward is that transformative and lasting change is achieved through genuine partnership working, building trusted relationships within the community, taking a flexible, adaptive, responsive approach and strategic planning for sustainability. This programme provides an excellent model for other local authorities interested in a holistic, borough-wide approach to embedding and sustaining Making it REAL to support language and literacy development in the Early Years.

Ellie Suggate-Francis, Assistant Director, Early Childhood Unit, NCB

Sarah Creek, Programme Lead, Early Childhood Unit, NCB

August 2024

Summary of Key Findings

This evaluation sought to gain greater understanding on the impact of the Making it REAL programme on the children, parents and practitioners of Lewisham.

Summary of Key Findings against Hypotheses

The project had five key hypotheses which were explored:

Hypothesis 1. Making it Real project children show improvement in communication, language & early literacy

There is good evidence from this evaluation indicating that MiR children have enhanced development of their communication, language and early literacy skills and also their life skills e.g., independence, agency and confidence. There is also evidence of enhanced HLE in MiR families which has added impetus to these child outcomes through enhanced family language and more stimulating HLE.

Hypothesis 2. Increased number of children in Lewisham achieving a Good Level of Development at the end of reception, with gap narrowing between disadvantaged children and peers

It is not possible to fully respond to this hypothesis about narrowing the gap of GLD achievement at end of Reception due to the incomplete data set (2024 EYFSP data due Nov 2024) and no data for 2020 and 2021 due to COVID. It is also difficult to use any earlier data sets as a point of comparison due to significant EYFS reforms in September 2021 BUT we can note in 2022 and 2023 the proportion of Lewisham children achieving a good level of development (GLD) at the end of their Reception year is above the national average (65% and 67% in those years).

Hypothesis 3. Increased number of disadvantaged children accessing two-year-old early education place

The evidence here is mixed. There is a marked increase the proportion of eligible children taking up their funded hours pre- and post- COVID-19 in 2022 and 2023 suggesting a positive trend coinciding with the implementation of MiR. However, it should also be noted that for 2024 the percentage of children taking up their entitlement in the past 12 months has decreased year-on-year by almost four percentage points which requires some urgent attention.

Hypothesis 4. Early Years workforce has increased knowledge of how to support young children's early literacy development

There is strong evidence of enhanced practitioner confidence and interest in supporting language and early literacy from a wide range of multi-agency practitioners (Librarians, Health Visitors, Family Navigators) who have been trained in MiR. In particular, the evidence indicates increased practitioner confidence in engaging with parents and conducting Home Visits and working with parents to create more positive HLE for language and early literacy development.

Hypothesis 5. Making it REAL project parents have increased knowledge and confidence to support young children's early learning and literacy development

There is good evidence of greater parent awareness of their role in the development of language and literacy in their child. Parents report that MiR engagement has significantly shifted their parenting style and practises to enable more relaxed parenting; more confident parenting, especially noted in multi-lingual families and more knowledgeable parenting with regard to effective practises to support children's language and early literacy. Practitioners affirm these findings, and report increased parent awareness of role in child's development, more confident, informed, relaxed and capable parenting and better family relationships, with more joint family and professional activity to support children's early learning and literacy development.

Summary of Key Findings against 'Areas of Consideration'

Additionally, this evaluation sought to explore seven 'areas of consideration' relating to issues of programme reach, engagement, embedding and sustainability within the local context of Lewisham.

i.   **How successful has the programme been in reaching and engaging key partners and stakeholders?**

Targets for the full 2 day MiR practitioner training have been well exceeded (nearly 50% above target) and more training days were offered than planned. The roll out of introductory training sessions was less successful and less than half the target number of EY settings with a trained MiR practitioner has been achieved to date (47% of settings).

Trained MiR practitioners are very committed and engaged with the programme and report that early years settings are engaged with the MiR approach and programme but suggest that there is still more work required to enable full engagement across all providers and agencies working with early years families across the borough.

ii. **How successful has the programme been in establishing Making it REAL as part of Lewisham's early help strategy to support communication, language and literacy?**

Good progress has been made in mainstreaming MiR skills with all staff more needs to be done to secure MiR as central within the Early Help strategy to support communication language and early literacy.

iii. **How successful has the programme been in increasing the frequency of children and families engaging in early communication, language and literacy activities at home, within settings and the community?**

Parents and practitioners who have engaged in Making it REAL have overwhelmingly reported increased frequency in positive HLE activities and behaviours which support young children's literacy. Practitioners have overwhelmingly reported not just their increased knowledge and confidence in engaging parents to support their child's literacy but have also frequently reported how it has enhanced and developed the quality of their communication language offer within their curriculum. In the community, the library service has been a success story in reaching out and engaging a broader range of parents through a universal offering.

iv. **How has the local context of Lewisham influenced this impact?**

The roll out of MiR across the sector, at a time when siloed working had been identified as an area of weakness within EY services, has been seen as helpful. The recent joining up of core EY services in Lewisham under one service (EYQSS) has helped universalise the MiR approach and gain engagement from across key stakeholder agencies. However, funding cuts and an uncertain and changing EY policy nationally adds to a sense of uncertainty in Lewisham about the ability to commit fully to sustain the MiR programme in its current form, and the exploration of what elements might be maintained and what are seen as unsustainable in the current climate.

v.   **What (if any) have been the key barriers and enablers to the achievement of the programme through each strand? How could any barriers be overcome?**

There were two common barriers to MiR achievements across each programme strand and two enabling factors which were identified by respondents. By far the greatest barrier recognised at all levels was workforce recruitment, retention and ratios. Having sufficient time to embed the programme was also raised.

The two enabling factors for MiR achievement were a strong, positive and motivating leadership of EY Strategic Leads in Lewisham, and a strong and positive partnership with the NCB.

vi.   To what extent has the approach been embedded so as to be sustained beyond the life of the funded programme?

The evidence reveals conflicting views on the degree of embeddedness and sustainability of the MiR approach in Lewisham despite their being overwhelming support for the programme and positivity about its impact and benefits at all levels.

vii.   What might be the next steps for key stakeholders in Lewisham in terms of sustaining Making it REAL beyond the life of the programme?

Suggested next steps include:

- More dissemination and visibility of the MiR programme in LA communications to settings and parents;
- More work to convince leadership/management of the value of MiR and how it works;
- Continued commitment from engaged settings who recognize benefits, and their deployment to create ambassadors for the programme;
- More training and capacity building for the MiR programme;
- Evidencing the impact of MiR programme with 'hard' data;
- Extending the range and reach of the programme in the last funded phase of work;
- Embedding MiR in future funding for Lewisham and identifying and funding a Lewisham MiR programme coordinator;
- Ensuring handover arrangements from NCB to LA is carefully planned for, and smoothly achieved.

Part 1: Making it REAL Lewisham Programme Background and Evaluation Methodology

1.1 Lewisham Making it REAL Programme Background

National Context

The implementation of Making it REAL in Lewisham has coincided with a very challenging time to be working in the ECEC sector in the UK. The last 4 years have seen unprecedented national shocks to our systems and infrastructures with a disproportionate impact on children and the services that support them. The COVID-19 pandemic, increasing levels of child poverty, high levels of inflation and the resultant cost-of-living crisis have affected society significantly during this period. This has played out in the early years sector in the form of a recruitment and retention crisis, a workforce with low levels of mental wellbeing and an increase in early years settings closing down (Pascal & Bertram 2020, Early Years Alliance 2023, Hardy et al 2023). This period has also seen the implementation of a revised EYFS (September 2021) following a new OfSTED education inspection framework (September 2019). At a time when the demand from families has been ever increasing, the early years sector has found its financial and workforce capacity stretched.

It is important to recognise that this demanding national environment has created a very tough context for this programme to work within and has meant that there has been a constant need to adapt and adjust planned activities and targets accordingly.

The early years sector has however seen its profile rise during this period, with all mainstream political parties including reference to 'Early Years' and/or 'childcare' within their manifestos. The British public more generally seems to be giving greater recognition to the importance of early years and the benefit it can have not just on children but society more generally (EECC 2023, 2024), while policies announced by the last Conservative government will lead to 'the largest ever expansion of childcare in England's history' . Whilst these all come with their own challenges it does suggest that the role and status of early years providers is secured for the medium term and that increasing numbers of children will engage with these services before they start school at the age of 5 years old. The opportunity this presents to tackle disadvantage and close attainment gaps is enormous but does rely on local systems ensuring that the Early Years workforce is adequately trained and supported.

Local Context

The Charity of Sir Richard Whittington, of which the Mercers' Company is trustee, generously funded NCB and Lewisham Local Authority to complete a three-year programme (2021-2024) delivering the Making it REAL Programme in Lewisham to improve communication, language and literacy (CLL) outcomes for young children in the borough. Through Start for Life funding, Lewisham Local Authority commissioned further work with NCB to supplement delivery in year 3 and extend delivery into a fourth year – it should be noted that this additional work is not covered in the report but additional information can be found in Appendix 1.

Making It REAL is an established NCB programme comprising different strands targeted at providers, practitioners, and families, which complement each other within a systems wide approach – an approach which the partnership of NCB and Lewisham local authority committed to in order to improve

outcomes for Lewisham's youngest citizens.

The three strands of Making it REAL in Lewisham have been:

> 1. Making it REAL Home Learning programme;
> 2. Sharing REAL with parents; and
> 3. Universal Introductory training in the Making it REAL approach.

Across the three years of the programme, the aims of Making it REAL Lewisham have been to:

i.   Improve the communication, language and literacy of 2-4 year olds;
ii. Increase uptake of disadvantaged children accessing two-year-old funded places;
iii. Upskill EY workforce to support CL&EL skills in settings and through Home Learning Environment (HLE);
iv. Increase parental knowledge, confidence and skills in supporting their children's early learning;
v.   Embed Making it REAL within early education in Lewisham.

1.2   Evaluation Brief

In the final year of the programme, CREC (Centre for Research in Early Childhood) was commissioned to provide an evaluation of the programme assessing its impact over the three years as well as the degree to which it has been embedded across the borough. The findings of this evaluation are set out in this report.

The aims of this **quantitative and qualitative evaluation** have been to:

i.   Assess the impact of Making it REAL on children's CLL outcomes;
ii. Assess how effectively Making it REAL has been embedded across the borough of Lewisham;
iii. Contribute to Making it REAL's existing evidence base and inform future planning for similar programmes.

To structure this evaluation and ensure outcomes and process were both considered, NCB set out 5 hypotheses of how it believed the programme would have positive outcomes, and 7 areas of wider consideration which relate to how the programme has worked at a systems level with reference to the specific context of Lewisham. These are as follows:

> **Hypothesis 1.** Making it Real project children show improvement in communication, language & early literacy;
> **Hypothesis 2.** Increased number of children in Lewisham achieving a Good Level of Development at the end of reception, with gap narrowing between disadvantaged children and peers;
> **Hypothesis 3.** Increased number of disadvantaged children accessing two-year-old early education place;
> **Hypothesis 4.** Early Years workforce has increased knowledge of how to support young children's early literacy development;
> **Hypothesis 5.** Making it REAL project parents have increased knowledge and confidence to support young children's early learning and literacy development

Areas of consideration:

i. How successful has the programme been in reaching and engaging key partners and stakeholders?
ii. How successful has the programme been in establishing Making it REAL as part of Lewisham's early help strategy to support communication, language and literacy?
iii. How successful has the programme been in increasing the frequency of children and families engaging in early communication, language and literacy activities at home, within settings and the community?
iv. How has the local context of Lewisham influenced this impact?
v. What (if any) have been the key barriers and enablers to the achievement of the programme through each strand? How could any barriers be overcome?
vi. To what extent has the approach been embedded so as to be sustained beyond the life of the funded programme?
vii. What might be the next steps for key stakeholders in Lewisham in terms of sustaining Making it REAL beyond the life of the programme?

1.3 Evaluation Approach

CREC's evaluation design and methodology gathered a range of quantitative and qualitative information to address the evaluation brief. To ensure all evaluation aims were met, and all hypotheses and areas of interest were covered, CREC grouped them into the following **four** evaluation workstrands:

Evaluation Workstrand…	…Considering the following hypotheses & areas of interest:	…Addressing the following Evaluation aims:
Evaluation Workstrand 1: **Child Outcomes**	Hypotheses 1, 2, 3	1. Assess the impact of Making it REAL on children's CLL outcomes;
Evaluation Workstrand 2: **Workforce Outcomes**	Hypothesis 4	1. Assess the impact of Making it REAL on children's CLL outcomes; 2. Assess how effectively Making it REAL has been embedded across the borough of Lewisham;
Evaluation Workstrand 3: **Parent Outcomes**	Hypothesis 5	1. Assess the impact of Making it REAL on children's CLL outcomes;
Evaluation Workstrand 4: **Programme Implementation and sustainability**	The 7 areas for wider consideration	2. Assess how effectively Making it REAL has been embedded across the borough of Lewisham; 3. Contribute to Making it REAL's existing evidence base and inform future planning for similar programmes.

Table 1: Evaluation Workstrands

The evaluation considered work done across all three Making it REAL strands as part of the attempt to create and embed a system wide approach.

Data gathering required a multi-method approach by employing three research strategies including:
- Desk based analysis of existing monitoring data sets and reports;

- Focus groups with a purposeful sample of practitioners (children's workforce) and parents/carers;
- Interviews (telephone or Zoom) with representatives of Lewisham LA, NCB core team and Lewisham delivery partners/stakeholders.

A research methods matrix is set out below to show how evidence against the four Evaluation workstrands was gathered using a selection from the three research strategies. Participants for each qualitative method were drawn from a proportionate and purposeful sample, working closely with the NCB to gain access to the required data and key stakeholders. These methods have generated a complex and wide-ranging set of quantitative and qualitative data which has then been rigorously analysed and systematically assessed against a coding framework linked to the Evaluation workstrands.

Evaluation Workstrand: Research strategies:	1: Child Outcomes	2: Workforce Outcomes	3: Parent Outcomes	4: Programme Implementation and sustainability
Documentary and Data Analysis	X	X	X	
4 Focus Groups		X	X	X
8 Interviews			X	X

Table 2: Evaluation Methods

1.4 Evaluation Methodology

To address each of the workstrands the following data has been collected using:

1. **Documentary and Data Analysis:** An analysis of existing NCB data for each strand of work, including monitoring data, children's progress data, data analysis reports and recommendation reports.

2. **Focus Groups:** A series of 4 face-to-face focus groups as follows:
- 1 group of 4 Making it REAL HLE trained practitioners
- 1 group of 5 practitioners who attended universal introductory training in the Making it REAL approach
- 2 groups of 5 parents who participated in Sharing REAL with parents

3. **Interviews:** A series of 9 interviews as follows:
- A series of 6 online interviews with key stakeholder leaders/policy makers from Lewisham LA, Lewisham & Greenwich NHS Trust, and NCB core team held in February and March 2024. These interviews (online)

covered a set of semi-structured questions aimed at gathering perceptions and evidence on performance of the programme against the outcomes and the evaluation questions.

- 3 individual family interviews (parents and children) with those who have attended Making it REAL group sessions and/or received one-to-one Making it Real HLE support. As well as gathering data from parents through sensitive interview techniques the intention was to also to understand the thoughts and perspectives of the children through age-appropriate techniques. Unfortunately, despite best efforts of the NCB team this was not possible and only adults from the three families participated in the conversation. Instead, CREC researchers asked parents to reflect on how their children engaged in the activities and how they might respond if asked about their experiences. The following contexts were provided by the **three families** (names are pseudonyms):

Family one is voiced by mum Susan who shares the story of her son Nathan. Susan has a background in education and speaks three languages including her home language of Tigrinya. The family have decided that the children will use English first and learn their home language later. Susan has sought support from setting regarding Nathan's language development.

Family two is voiced by mum Kate who shares the story of her daughter Sarah. Kate and Sarah live within a large extended family including Kate's parents. Sarah's Dad is an important part of her life but he does not live with her.

Family three is voiced by single grandparent Jodie who shares the story of her foster daughter Daisy. The household is busy and includes older children and teenagers who also influence Daisy's development.

The three methods utilised for gathering data have proven to be efficient and rigorous as they provide rich and illuminative data from a robust, purposeful sample of respondents within a manageable timeframe and budget for such assessments. In addition, our hope was that the process of participation within the data gathering process would be both empowering and developmental for parents, delivery partners and practitioners, involving them in a reflective and developmental process. Feedback received through the data collection process supported this belief as did reporting by NCB of increased engagement from certain settings who participated in focus groups.   We are pleased to have provided participants a sense of voice and inclusion in the research process which influences the recommendations of this report.

1.5   Ethical Protocols

All CREC's work is underpinned by strong ethical principles relating to the dignity and safety of participants and is constructed round the following set of principles to ensure all actions should:

- Be done with, not to, participants;
- Be open and honest, and secure informed consent;
- Be collaborative and inclusive;
- Be empowering and developmental;
- Have utility;
- Be respectful;
- Protect all participants from harm;

- Keep confidentiality and anonymity;
- Provide feedback.

All participants were asked to provide their informed consent which guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. Families undertaking the detailed interviews were asked to select their own pseudonyms to support their anonymity; the names used in this report do not reflect the cultural diversity within the families interviewed. Data has been kept securely for the duration of the project in line with CREC's data protection and security policy. CREC believes that through this ethical approach we have able to achieve high levels of customer satisfaction whilst also ensuring the highest level of quality and integrity in our research and evaluation activity.

Part 2: Evidence and Analysis

2.1 Evaluation Workstrand 1: Child Outcomes

In this section we will consider MiR's effect on child outcomes by considering performance against programme reach and hypotheses 1,2 & 3.

> *The reach target of 460 children (by working with individual families through home visits as part of the Home Learning Programme) has not been met but, through the broader literacy events targeted at families and engagement through libraries, many more children (+1200) have benefited from the programme.*

	Target - end of 3-year programme, July 2024	Actual -end Year 3 cumulative (over/under target)	ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
No of children reached through 1-1 support as part of the home learning programme	460	252 (-208)	*Breakdown of numbers:*
			Number enrolled in home learning programme working 1:1 with practitioners through home visits = 191
			Known number* of siblings involved in the programme = 61
Estimated number* children reached through literacy events	n/a	449	*Recorded as number of families attending the events, therefore estimate at least one child per family attending*
Total number of children reached through involvement in Home Learning Programme (Individual visits and literacy events comb.)	n/a	701	*The number of children who have been reached through wider engagement are estimated to be around 1200+ and so the reach of the programme can be seen as far exceeding its original goals.*
No. of library visits provided (librarian visit to nurseries)	n/a	64	*This covers Year 2 and 3 only as this wasn't recorded during Year 1*
No. of nurseries that have made a visit to a local library	n/a	13	*This covers Year 2 and 3 only as this wasn't recorded during Year 1*
Number of children signed up to the library through Making it REAL programme	n/a	395	*This covers Year 2 and 3 only as this wasn't recorded during Year 1*

Table 3: Child reach data at end of year 3   *not always recorded*

Over the course of the three-year programme MiR sought to reach 460 children through working with individual families through home visits as part of its Home Learning programme. Although this target was not met, with only 252 children in total (191 directly enrolled with 1:1 support from practitioners plus 61 siblings) being reached through this strand of activity, more successful were broader literacy events targeted at families which reached an estimated 449 children (estimated at one child per family). This brings the total number of children reached through involvement in the Home Learning programme to 701. Children were reached in other ways particularly through the engagement of libraries and library staff; with 77 nurseries in the borough either visiting a library or having a librarian visit them. As a result, almost 400 children signed up to a Lewisham library as a result of their involvement with MiR.

NB: It should be noted and recognised that the number of children who have been reached through wider engagement are estimated to be around 1200+ and so the reach of the programme can be seen as far exceeding its original goals.

Hypothesis 1. Making it Real project children show improvement in communication, language & early literacy

What the data says:

A pre- and post- survey is completed by parents, with support from practitioners, which considers the capacity and behaviours of a MiR child in relation to communication and language acquisition (Language; Environmental Print; Songs & Rhymes; Books). Over the three years pre- and post- data was collected from 108 participating families, and across all four domains the vast majority of parents perceived their children had made improvements following involvement in MiR – most strikingly in Year 3, 93% of parents reported improvements in their child's ability to recognise environmental print.
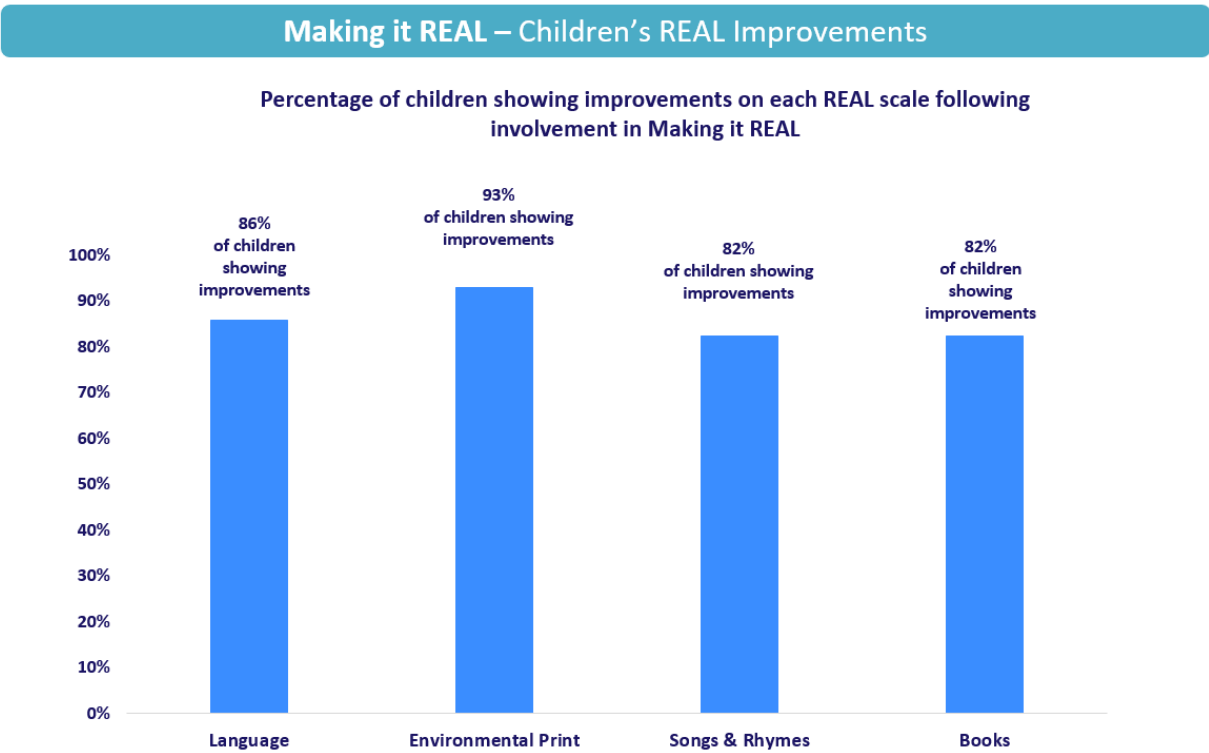
Table 4: Child Outcomes (Years 1, 2 & 3 combined)

The pre- and post- survey also considers the Home Learning Environment (HLE) to understand whether positive family behaviours (which support children's later academic outcomes) are enhanced in frequency as a result of involvement in the programme. Whilst they might not measure immediate changes in child outcomes, increased frequency would suggest a behaviour change that would have a likely positive impact on child outcomes later in life. These behaviours include:

- How often does someone at home read to (child)?
- How often does someone at home take child to the library?

- How often does (child) play with letters at home?
- How often does someone at home help (child) to learn the ABC or alphabet?
- How often does someone at home try to teach (child) numbers or counting?
- How often does someone teach (child) songs, poems or nursery rhymes?
- How often does (child) paint or draw at home?

Making it REAL Year on Year Change – Children's HLE Improvements

Percentage of children who undertake these activities 3 or more times per week, across Year 1, Year 2 and Year 3

Legend:
- Play with letters at home
- Learn the alphabet at home
- Taught numbers/counting at home
- Taught songs, poems or nursery rhymes
- Paints or draws at home
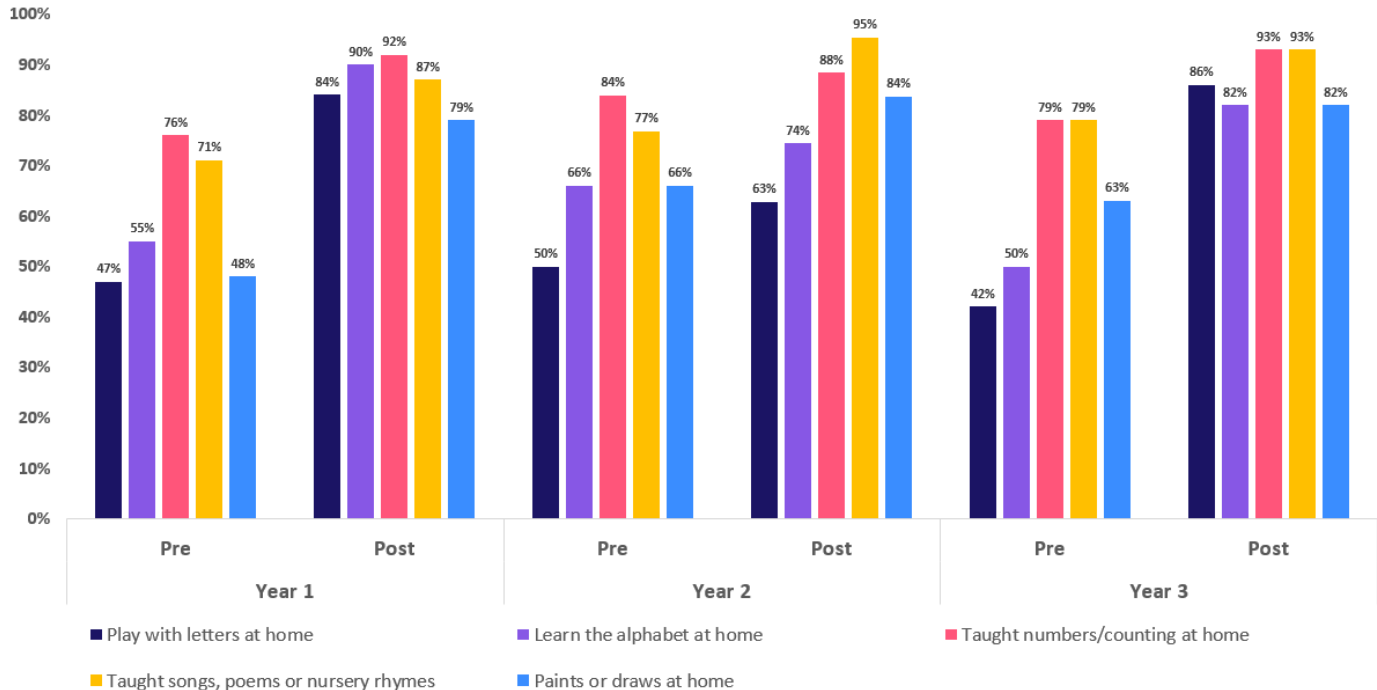
Table 5: Changes in HLE Year on Year

It can be seen in Table 5, that in each year of MiR in Lewisham, parents reported how completing the programme had a direct impact on increasing the frequency of these HLE activities. Whilst baseline changes year to year the trend of increased frequency (to 3 or more times per week) for these activities is clear. In the most recent round (Year 3) of training for example, all activities were more frequently delivered according to the post training data, with 'being taught songs, poems, or nursery rhymes' and 'being taught numbers/counting' being done 3 times or more each week according to 95% of respondents, compared with 79% reporting that frequency before MiR. The most striking increase in frequency can be seen in Table 6 where the percentage of Year 3 parents reporting an increased frequency of reading to their child at home (once per day or more) increased by 39%, from just over half (54%) to almost all (93%).

Percentage of children who are read to at home once per day or more, across Year 1, 2 and 3 of MiR Programme
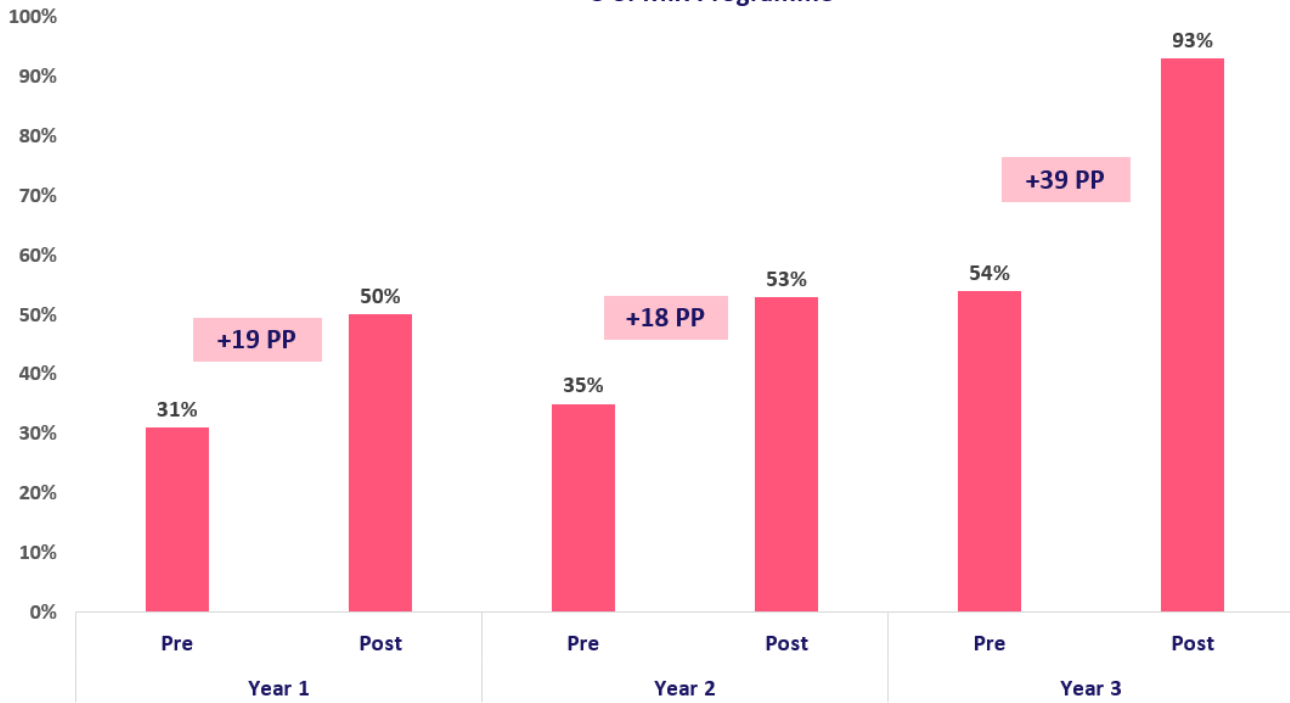
Table 6: HLE Improvements Year on Year

Another key behaviour change recorded was the confidence to visit a library as a result of the programme, with positive impact being recorded each year – in every year of roll out, the percentage of children who had never visited a library reduced as a result of the programme, by at least 14% (Table 7). As a result, by the end of each year the proportion of Lewisham families (engaged with MiR) who had never visited a library reduced from a range of 35-74% to a range of 9-29%.

Percentage of children who have never been to a library, across Year 1, 2 and 3 of MiR Programme
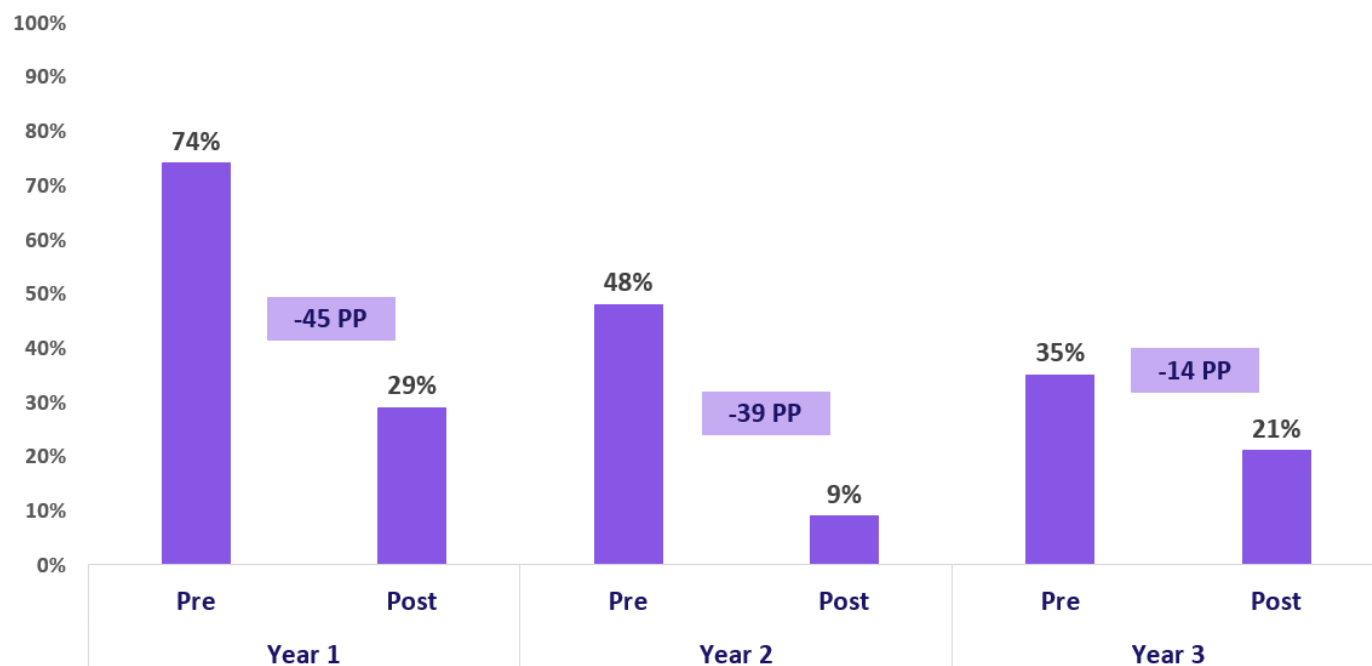
Table 7: HLE Improvements Year on Year – family library visiting

What parents say:

Evidence of enhanced development of children's communication, language and early literacy skills and also their life skills e.g., independence, agency and confidence and enhanced HLE in families added to these benefits.

The three families interviewed in depth revealed that their child(ren) were more confident communicators after participation in MiR. This was evident in both parent-child interactions but equally observed by parents when the children communicated with other family members.

'We can see the difference in how Nathan speaks to others and communicates with his brother. They now like doing things together. His Grandpa is impressed too and can see the difference. He loves books and will always talk in full sentences now.'

'Sarah is now noticing signs and print in the environment; her vocabulary is improved.'

'Daisy has continued with the activities, like the differences in sounds, and she now shows the rest of the family how to do the activity, she explains to her cousins. She's got the knowledge, she's the boss!'

What practitioners say:

Evidence of enhanced development of children's communication, language and early literacy skills and also their life skills e.g., independence, agency and confidence and enhanced HLE in families added to these benefits.

18

All the practitioners we talked to testified that they could see a wide range of improvements in the development of children who had engaged with MiR. The improvements they identified included enhanced conversations, confidence in talk, letter and word recognition, reading, print awareness and storytelling capacity, so meeting the programme goals of enhanced communication, language and early literacy. In addition, they reported that the impact of the programme on child development went wider than that, leading to enhanced independence, agency, confidence and behavioural adjustment for children. As one practitioner testified, they could see:

Big, big changes - they are more independent, some are reading. They show me signs in the environment, labels, directions. Parents share that with me too, go through pages in books, some can identify words. And it's their independence too. We enable them to make decisions and dress themselves. Its life-skills and agency happening in the shopping centre. They know now how to use signals and make sense of visual sequences. (PrFg1)

The impact is visible, the children have an increased level of engagement in literacy activities independently which was barely visible before. The children are more excited to go to nursery than before. (Year 1 setting)

I think parents felt more empowered as educators and the two children's expressive language developed enormously, at the end of the year both children were much more aware of signs & symbols in their home, setting environment and in the community. (PrFg1)

What Senior Leads say:

Positive benefits of MiR programme on family language and HLE leading to benefits for children

Senior Leaders in Lewisham confirmed this positive impact but also added that family language (HLE) was also enhanced, with much higher family and child membership of local libraries, and increased book borrowing which was enabling the child's language and literacy development and quoted assessment evidence to show this impact.

Pre- and post- test scales show children's development. HLE is much more positive. 75% of children show speech and language development and 85% are borrowing more books. We can see children and family language is being enhanced and we have plenty of individual case studies of that. (SLI6)

Hypothesis 2. Increased number of children in Lewisham achieving a Good Level of Development at the end of reception, with gap narrowing between disadvantaged children and peers

	All achieved GLD	FSM eligible achieved GLD
2020	No data – Covid 19	No data – Covid 19
2021	No data – Covid 19	No data – Covid 19
2022	70%	57%
2023	70%	58%
2024	Not yet available	Not yet available

Table 8: Lewisham EYFSP data 2022-2024

At this stage it is not possible to fully respond to this hypothesis due to the incomplete data set; 2024 EYFSP will not be available until November 2024, and EYFSP data was not collected in 2020 or 2021 due to COVID-19. It is not possible to use any earlier data sets as a point of comparison due the significant EYFS reforms brought introduced in September 2021[1]

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[1] https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/early-years-foundation-stage-profile-results accessed 01/08/2024

> *Not possible to fully respond to this hypothesis about narrowing the gap of GLD achievement at end of Reception due to the incomplete data set (2024 EYFSP data due Nov 2024) and no data for 2020 and 2021 due to COVID.*

What can be said at this stage is that in both 2022 and 2023 the proportion of Lewisham children achieving a good level of development (GLD) at the end of their Reception year is above the national average (65% and 67% in those years). It is not possible to attribute any affect to MiR however and realistically, due to the time delay between working with these families and early years settings and the EYFSP data being collected at end of Reception year, it would be several more years before it would be possible to make an informed judgement of how well the system as a whole was supporting children in Lewisham using this outcome measure.

> *Not possible to use any earlier data sets as a point of comparison due to significant EYFS reforms in September 2021 BUT can note in 2022 and 2023 the proportion of Lewisham children achieving a good level of development (GLD) at the end of their Reception year is above the national average (65% and 67% in those years).*

Hypothesis 3. Increased number of disadvantaged children accessing two-year-old early education place

> *There is a marked increase the proportion of eligible children taking up their funded hours pre- and post-COVID-19 in 2022 and 2023 suggesting a positive trend coinciding with the implementation of MiR. However, it should also be noted that for 2024 the percentage of children taking up their entitlement in the past 12 months has decreased year-on-year by almost four percentage points which requires some urgent attention.*

What the data says:

2 Year Old Early Education Entitlement (2EEE) take up Lewisham 2018 - 2024

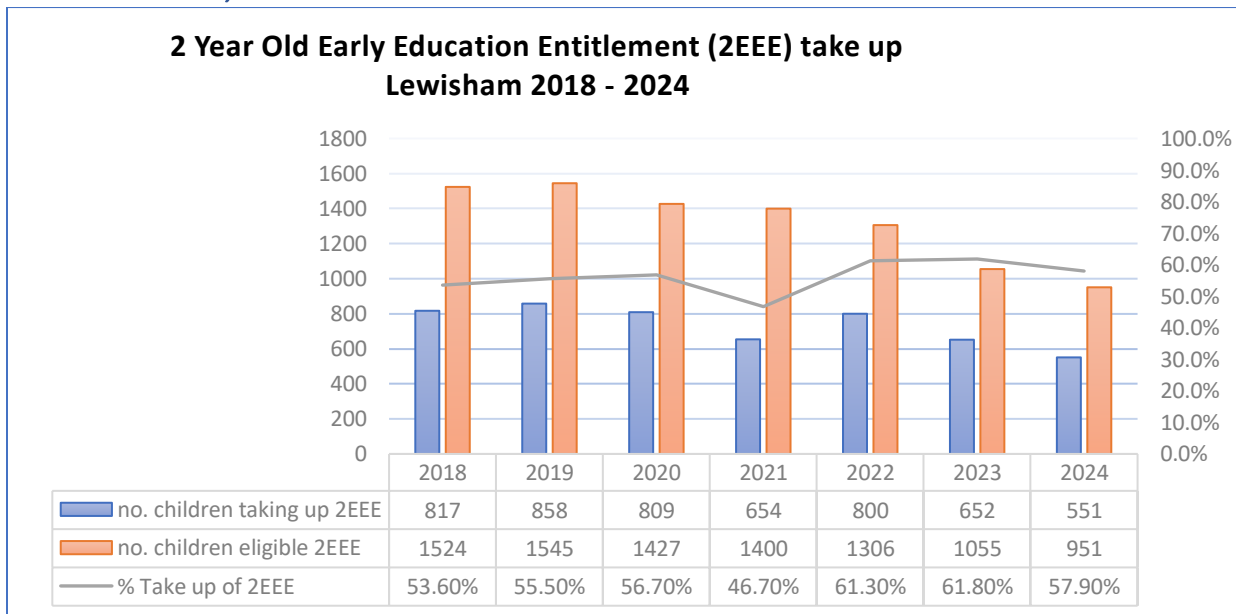|	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
no. children taking up 2EEE	817	858	809	654	800	652	551
no. children eligible 2EEE	1524	1545	1427	1400	1306	1055	951
% Take up of 2EEE	53.60%	55.50%	56.70%	46.70%	61.30%	61.80%	57.90%

Table 9: 2 Year Old Early Education Entitlement (2EEE) take up, Lewisham 2018 – 2024 (source: DfE data)

The two-year-old Early Education Entitlement provides 15 hours per week (38 weeks) of funded early years provision to the 40% most disadvantaged children in England, with the aim of this improving their outcomes. It is important therefore for local authorities to identify and engage those families and encourage them to take up their funded opportunity as early as possible to maximise the potential benefit, and it was hoped that engagement through MiR would support this. The eligible families are identified from Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) data; the exact proportion and number of children eligible within a local authority area will fluctuate based on birth rate but also on levels of deprivation relative to the rest of the country.

Whilst an admirable aim to increase the number of children taking up two-year-old funded places, this hypothesis does not allow for other factors which affect it. As can be seen from Table 8 the number of children eligible has been reducing - in 2022 only 28% of families were eligible. Lewisham Council suggest that this '*may be due to the introduction of Universal Credit.*'[2] From 2024 onwards, take up figures may also be affected by the staggered increase in funded childcare for working families which will likely have an impact on the sufficiency of early years spaces nationwide.

If the proportion of eligible children taking up their funded hours is considered however, there does appear to be a marked increase pre- and post- COVID-19 with figures exceeding 60% in 2022 and 2023 which is broadly in line with inner London figures of 62% for the same periods, compared with figures of 53.6 – 56.7% between 2018 – 2020. This does suggest a positive trend coinciding with the implementation of MiR, however caution needs be taken when suggesting attribution. It should also be noted that for 2024 the percentage of children taking up their entitlement in the past 12 months has decreased year-on-year by almost four percentage points which requires some urgent attention.

2.2 Evaluation Workstrand 2: Workforce Outcomes

In this section we will consider the effect of MiR on Workforce outcomes by considering performance against programme reach and Hypothesis 4.

	Target - end of 3-year programme, July 2024	Actual -end Year 3 cumulative (over/under target)	ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
Full Making it REAL programme			
No. of training days delivered (2-day training)	12	**16 (+4)**	All face-to-face
No. of practitioners trained in full programme	60	**102 (+42)**	*Breakdown by role:* practitioners 64 managers/owners 35 Other 3
No. of settings recruited and trained to deliver the full programme	60	**60 (-)**	*Breakdown of setting by type:* maintained settings 12; PVIs 48;
Introductory Making it REAL training			
No of introductory training sessions delivered	30	**26 (-4)**	In-person and online
No of practitioners attending introductory training	600	**278 (-322)**	Capacity issues have affected sign up and attendance
Training to date (across both strands)			

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[2] Lewisham Borough Council, Lewisham Childcare sufficiency report 2023, Spring 2023, accessed via https://lewisham.gov.uk/myservices/education/earlyyears/childcare-sufficiency-assessment on 01/08/2024

Number of practitioners trained across the programme to date*	660 by end of programme (2024)	**380 (-280)**	-47 further staff trained through Start for Life funding, bringing total to 427
No. of settings with at least 1 practitioner trained in MiR (either full or introductory)	All (100%) settings in Lewisham by end of programme (2024)	**90/193 (47%)**	Final figures equate to 35% of maintained settings (20/57) and 51% of PVI settings (70/136)

Table 10: Workforce reach data up to end year 3

> *Targets for the full two-day MiR practitioner training have been well exceeded (nearly 50% above target) and more training days were offered than planned. The reach of the introductory training sessions was less successful and less than half the target number of EY settings with a trained MiR practitioner has been achieved to date (47% of settings).*

With regard to the full two-day MiR programme for practitioners it is clear that targets were exceeded, with 102 practitioners trained (42 more than targeted) across 16 training days (4 more offered than originally targeted). This suggests an effective recruitment and engagement strategy with those settings where the full programme was most needed.

The reach of the introductory training sessions however, was affected by the workforces crisis in the sector which affected sign up and attendance, making it very difficult for settings to release staff to attend training. It was hoped that 600 practitioners would have experienced this training by the end of year 3 which would have spread knowledge of MiR across much of the borough's early years settings; there was indeed a highly ambitious target of having at least one MiR trained practitioner in every single Lewisham nursery. In actuality, only 278 practitioners attended introductory training, less than half the targeted number - which NCB suggest was due to factors such as COVID-19 and staffing capacity issues affecting the sector – meaning that to date 47% of settings have received training. However, the programme leads did mitigate against this by diversifying the training and offering a range of options e.g. in person and on line; morning/afternoon/evening sessions; some weekend options. Yet it was reported that it was still difficult to get the target numbers and despite greater numbers of people signing up for the training with last minute challenges such as staff sickness, ratio issues, meaning they could not actually attend. This reflects the pressures the sector was and continues to face at this time locally and nationally. In total, 427 practitioners have been trained (including the 47 trained through Start for Life), which in the current context should be acknowledged as a real achievement.
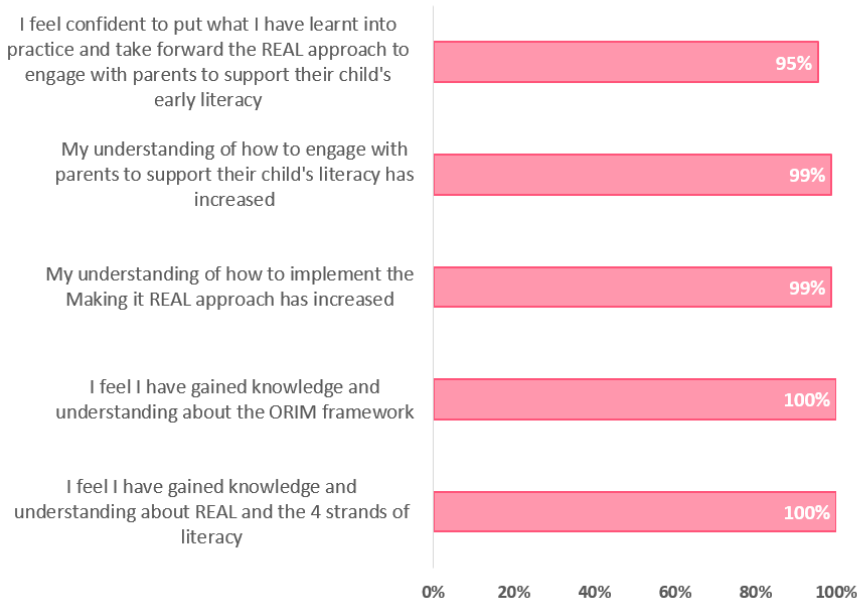
Hypothesis 4. Early Years workforce has increased knowledge of how to support young children's early literacy development

What the data says:
All practitioners who attended MiR training (n=380) were, at the end of their sessions, asked to score their knowledge, understanding and confidence against a number of different domains related to supporting young children's literacy.

Making it REAL – Practitioner Knowledge & Confidence

Confidence, knowledge and skills of practitioners following the MiR training in Year 3

Statement	Percentage
I feel confident to put what I have learnt into practice and take forward the REAL approach to engage with parents to support their child's early literacy	95%
My understanding of how to engage with parents to support their child's literacy has increased	99%
My understanding of how to implement the Making it REAL approach has increased	99%
I feel I have gained knowledge and understanding about the ORIM framework	100%
I feel I have gained knowledge and understanding about REAL and the 4 strands of literacy	100%

Percentage of practitioners who reported increased understanding of how to engage with parents to support their child's literacy across Year 1, 2 and 3

99%
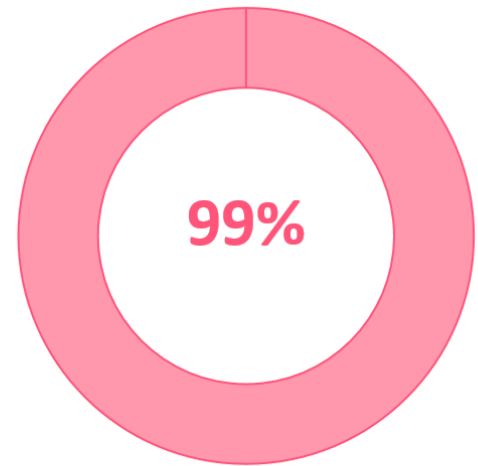
Table 11: Practitioner knowledge and confidence (3 years combined)

The training was reported to be overwhelmingly beneficial across all domains with scores of 95% or above in each; most critically 99% of practitioners reported an increased understanding of how to engage with parents to support their child's literacy.

What practitioners say:

> *Deep change in practitioners' understanding of, and approach to, offering a curriculum and pedagogy to better support children's language and early literacy*

The practitioners we spoke to were overwhelmingly positive about the MiR training and the programme and their role in its implementation. Some indicated that the programme had transformed their whole curriculum and pedagogic approach as stated by these practitioners,

We are going to use MiR to create a new curriculum and change practice (PrFg1).

We have built on our existing knowledge and have reflected on our practice to see where we can improve. In all honesty we haven't previously broken down Literacy into the four strands when planning learning opportunities and activities. We have always placed great importance on story time, reading, books, early mark making, writing and oral language but perhaps didn't always recognise the potential learning opportunities that environmental print can provide. We have included more of this area of Literacy in our planning for the next academic year. (MiR participant feedback)

Practitioners also indicated they had become stronger about what constitutes good practice and the need to adjust their practice for individual children.

23

Indeed, not all mainstream children want to sit down and read. More awareness of the 'developmental age' not just the chronological age. Feeling the pressures – not so much for SEND practitioners as mainstream ones (PrFg1).

Practitioners are planning for wider dissemination of programme and approach to other colleagues

Several practitioners were keen to share their plans for disseminating and extending the programme to both parents and other staff, indicating their commitment and confidence in the MiR programme and approach.

We intend to work on colleagues and staff first and then get the parents involved. We particularly want to increase confidence in those SEND classes who are new to our schools. We'll introduce them to our practices and show them to do it. (PrFg1)

Enhanced practitioner awareness of importance of HLE and greater confidence and organisation in disseminating approach to parents

MiR trained practitioners had greater awareness of the importance of parents' role in creating language enriched HLEs and expressed more confidence and organisation in their partnership work with parents. This positive shift in confidence was expressed by several respondents and increases the potential reach and impact of the programme to the wider family and other siblings.

We've always shared our practice with staff and parents but now we are going to do it in a more organised way. We also want parents to attend courses here at the Centre. We do Home Visits before the children start. Most of our children have sensory needs. We need to explain to the parents that it is not about just doing phonics. We invite parents to come in and share. We are excited about our planned changes for parents and practitioners. We'd like to see more of both here. We also run a parent course and a teacher programme. We invite parents into our training. (PrFg1)

We now have more practical activities that we share with the parents. We put out loads of stuff for the parents to take away so they recognise that 'my child's problematic' isn't a good position. (PrFg1)

REAL has had a really positive impact on my setting. I am more confident in speaking to my parents about the project and I am looking forward to signing parents up. (MiR participant feedback)

Greater practitioner confidence in, and commitment to, undertaking Home Visits but recognition of logistical challenges they pose to settings in making the visits part of their mainstream practice.

The value and benefits of Home Visits in providing a means to shape parenting practices and enhance HLE for young children were well recognised by practitioners who had undertaken them. The MiR training was viewed as an enabler for this valuable practice. Practitioners reported that the visits gave them deeper insights to a child's individual circumstances and capacities which they could then build on in their pedagogic work with that child in the setting.

I'd never done home visits before – I had one wild boy – it really opened up my understanding of him. He'd no toys at home, no spaces to play or run and post Covid I could see his need. I saw the child differently. Of course, you don't know what you're going into when the door opens. It might all be lovely, and it might be the opposite. You need to be non- judgemental – the training gave me confidence. Parent thinks 'tell me what to do' but it isn't like that – it's together we learn. It just gave me more understanding, more confidence. (PrFg2)

Home Visits were great and we also went out to Victoria Bus Station and went shopping with £20 each. The children had to look for fruit and they had a shopping list. We were all so happy with that. And we had a picnic – nothing too complicated – we went to Aldi too and the Big Cat Shopping Centre but you have to make it very specific what the task is or you'll be there for hours. (PrFg2)

However, practitioners were also aware that sustaining the Home Visits was challenging and there were logistical issues in building them into their regular practices. Their success depended on building positive and respectful relationships which was sometimes difficult, but when it worked the successes were visible.

You have to be diplomatic. Parents are sometimes like, 'What's wrong with my child, why you picking on him. Am I a bad parent?' They're defensive and you have to turn it into a positive. There are additional language, dual language issues. (PrFg2)

Two of the children who I chose to work with really didn't show any interest in the mark making tools at pre-school or at home, they began to show interest after my first visit and now are so confident in 'having a go' and sharing their creations they have not stopped mark making in the setting or at home. (MiR practitioner feedback)

What System Leaders say:

> *Enhanced confidence and interest in supporting language and early literacy from multi-agency practitioners (Librarians, Health Visitors, Family Navigators).*

System Leaders confirmed that a range of multi-agency practitioners have found the MiR programme accessible and that it positively improves practice. It is felt that the MiR programme provides, '*good simple techniques and everyone is very positive and the introductory programme, especially, is praised. It breaks down complexities to bite size chunks' (SLI3).* They also reported that the training has led to more confidence in working with the younger age phase for a range of multi-agency practitioners, including Health Visitors, Family Navigators and particularly for local Librarians who are becoming a major element in delivering the MiR programme in Lewisham.

In terms of Health Visitors, who undertake the 2-year development review, with whom they're using the same messages with parents, in their assessments and messages for parents, you see that move towards MiR. And there is considerable transference to the <u>Family Navigators</u> – this training has also improved their understanding and of how to show parents how to access support - through their signposting role (SLI3).

The librarians we spoke to strongly confirmed the value of their involvement with MiR programme delivery.

MiR includes children's library books. I wasn't involved when they started it, but I was drawn to it. Many of my colleagues are interested in Early Years and MiR has contributed to my understanding of Early Years Language and Literature. We are bringing in refresher training for staff following MiR. It's not generally what Librarians do and I'm in a new role, but it sits well with how I want to work. It isn't an explicit goal within my role but I'm always visiting early years settings, nurseries and schools and MiR is so relevant (SLI2).

> *Increased confidence in practitioners engaging with parents and conducting Home Visits*

Local System Leaders were confident that, even though they would like more 'hard' evidence, their first-hand evidence indicated that the MiR programme had significantly enhanced practitioners' confidence in engaging with parents and conducting Home Visits, with a subsequent boost to children's language and early literacy development. The positivity and enjoyment of engaging with the programme expressed by practitioners and parents was particularly noted.

It has shown how to engage with parents. First find where they are at and then bring back joy and excitement – introduce a variety of activities within their reach. They are reassured and empowered – promote the concept of the 'good enough' parent. Many say, 'we used to do this before….'. And network meetings between settings – all making them more confident with and enjoying parents. The literacy in the environment aspects are making the biggest impact on them – Big M of McDonalds and Lego – bringing the outside world into nurseries. (SLI4)

The Strategic Leads reported that after COVID they are working to promote home visits through the MiR programme, and this has led to a renewed focus on supporting HLE for many families in Lewisham.

Coming out of COVID, we've re-instated home visits through the Programme and reignited our focus on Home Learning Environment (HLE) as an issue and a hugely important element of our work (SLI6).

There was also a strong feeling that practitioners involved in the MiR programme are feeling more connected and viewing their work with all parents as a more central part of their work.

So, more Home Visits now embedded and more positive interactions with parents. The impact involves a whole setting approach and its transferring to all levels. You can see the change in settings too and especially in passing on their learning to parents. We are opening it out to all parents, not just a target group and it helps practitioners think of different ways of helping parents and children. Learning together, joined up, peer group community, post-COVID. Practitioners have been isolated. They felt they are becoming part of something, not just a one day training event, it's a network (SLI6).

2.3 Evaluation Workstrand 3: Parent Outcomes

In this section we will consider the effect of MiR on Parent outcomes by considering performance against programme reach and Hypothesis 5.

	Target - end of 3-year programme, July 2024	**Actual -end Year 3 cumulative** **(over/under target)**	ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
Sharing REAL with Parents workshops			
No. of rounds of Sharing REAL delivered	11	11 (-)	all face-to-face (3 x 4 workshops per round) PLUS a further 5 rounds funded by Start for Life
No. of sessions of Sharing REAL workshops delivered	44	44 (-)	
No. of parents attended the sessions	110	89 (-21)	47 parents additionally trained through the Start for Life sessions = 136 parents total
No. of children (across the families)	n/a	122	
Number of parents reached through Making it REAL Lewisham			
Number of parents reached through Making it REAL home learning programme and Sharing REAL with Parents	570	729 (+159)	*Note: this is the number directly reached through working 1:1 as part of the home visiting programme or attending Sharing REAL workshops and parents who have benefited from attending literacy events.*

Table 12: Parent reach data (3 years combined)

The MiR parent strands of work have reached 25% over their target parent goals

MiR has been very successful in reaching parents through its Making it REAL Home Learning Programme and its Sharing REAL with Parents programme. All planned workshops were delivered and, combined, 729 parents were reached, almost 25% above target.

Hypothesis 5. Making it REAL project parents have increased knowledge and confidence to support young children's early learning and literacy development

What the data says:

Parents who attended Sharing REAL workshops are incredibly positive about how it is has increased their knowledge, confidence and preparedness to support their child's early literacy and learning. 136 parents have attended Sharing REAL workshops and every single one reported increased knowledge and confidence in how to support their child's literacy and also that they had been equipped with resources to support them in doing so.

Sharing REAL with Parents

100% of parents reported their knowledge in how to support their child's early literacy had increased

100% of parents reported feeling more confident in supporting their child's early literacy development through everyday activities

100% of parents reported that they had been equipped with resources and ideas to support my child's learning

Table 13: Parent Outcomes Sharing REAL

When asked what they would do differently as a result of the training, the following responses are indicative of the broader cohort, with consistent themes of: paying greater attention and listening (to their child); engaging more with the outdoor environment; following children's interests; and enjoying books together.

> *Take time to pay attention, listen and communicate.*
>
> *I play lots more games with my children.*
>
> *Try to spend more time with my children to support them with activities they are interested in rather than trying to force them to do what I want to do.*
>
> *I will use the outdoor facilities such as trains, buses or other signs from the public environment to support my children.*
>
> *Listen to my children and follow their lead.*
>
> *Not just read a book from start to finish, take time to talk about it.*
>
> *I will increase book time.*

Will look at books more and do more activities outside.

Making it REAL Year on Year Change – Parent's Knowledge & Confidence

Percentage of parents who feel confident or very confident in supporting their child's early learning at home, across Year 1, 2 and 3 of MiR Programme
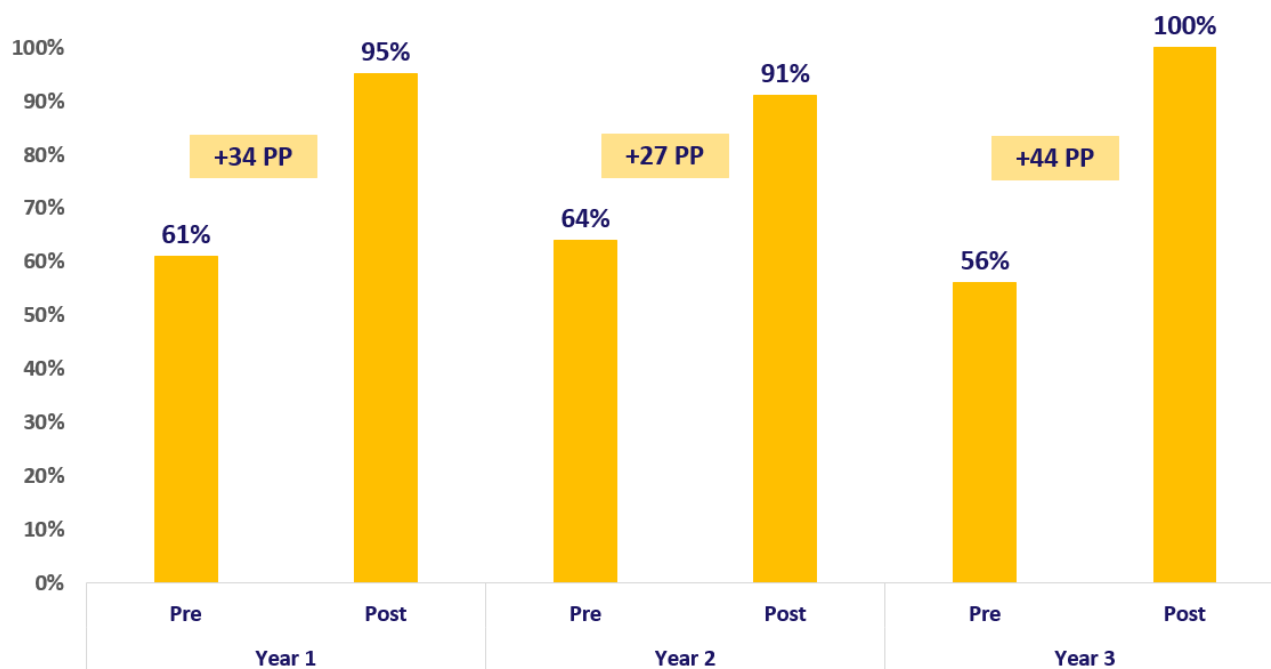
Table 14: Increase in Parent Confidence from Making it REAL (Year on year)

As Table 14 reveals, every year the vast majority of parents (91-100%) who have taken part in the Making it REAL home learning programme, working 1-1 with practitioners through home visits, report feeling 'confident' or 'very confident' in supporting their children's learning was high, and shows a significant uplift in confidence levels from roughly only 6 out of 10 parents (56-64%) feeling the same pre-programme.

What parents say:

Greater parent awareness of parents' role in child's development of language and literacy

Parents reported that the MiR programme had made them more aware of their role in the development of their child's speech, language and literacy and how early this began. For many it had changed the way they interacted with their child both physically and orally as shown by the parents' comments below:

My daughter was only 6 months – is that too young, not an age you start to communicate? But I was wrong she was a very communicative baby in many ways. Now I talk to her as an equal not talk down to her and I allow her own voice and I listen. (PaFg1)

Well, for instance, body language is a form of communication with babies and adults. I now know there are lots of different forms of communication. (PaFg1)

In the family interviews all three families also reported changed interactions with their children as a result of the programme and families recognised how this supported the development of language and literacy.

> Susan now has MiR built into the family's weekly routine and each Friday both children work with her, '*before we didn't do much at home and this was the beginning*.' This has all supported Nathan's communication skills. She also describes how the communication focused activities are now at the forefront of her thinking, '*I'm constantly talking when we're out, we play I Spy a lot and I ask the children what they can see. I talk through instructions, things like crossing over the road.*'
>
> Kate reported that she understands how to extend Sarah's vocabulary during simple home activities like baking as this was modelled to her, '*we had to come up with all of the words that you could use. We do the activities all the time at home now. I don't think I'd have been able to think of the ideas myself.*'
>
> Jodie recognises that more of her time has gone into supporting Daisy's language and communication and reports that '*she has thrived on it. She wrote a letter to Santa, posted it herself and was over excited when she got a reply. She's still talking about it now.*'

More relaxed parenting

Parents also reported that through the programme their parenting has become more relaxed and they were less anxious, more patient and enjoying their children more. Some felt that the MiR programme had resulted in greater transformation in them than in the children.

My child is super advanced she's good at nearly everything. The change is more in me. Before she's 'oh no I've spilt something' and I'm horrified. Now I'm more relaxed but she struggles only with maths and number so we are now counting stairs to bed (PaFg1).

I'm much more patient with him now than I was and I let him make a mess if he's exploring something. (PaFg1)

I'm more patient, more observant- it's changed my parenting. I'm telling them about the environment as we walk through it, I engage more. I told the ladies in the Playgroup 'you need to do more like this', you should do this Programme. (PaFg1)

I didn't see the value at first. He's five and I was always 'no, no don't do that' and now I give him some space or become involved in his play. (PaFg1)

> The transformation in parents was also noted in the family interviews. Susan reported of her group, '*we were different parents start to end of the course.*'

More confident parenting, especially noted in multi-lingual families

Many parents we talked to testified how the MiR programme had encouraged them to see the positives in their parenting and given them confidence in their parenting practices.

I was doing some of this naturally and that was affirming. I thought, I'm not doing terribly. It was affirming of my parenting skills. I use the teaching points now with my friends, passing it on. (PaFg1)

I feel the project has definitely given me more confidence to go to the library on my own and with my children. I thought that my dyslexia would prevent me…but it hasn't. I don't have to read the books, I can get my cookery book and take it home (MiR parent feedback)

The boost to parent confidence was particularly noted by parents in multi-lingual families.

Me as a parent – I see my changes I practice what they do but in my way. I use Somali and English – he's interested in my culture all of a sudden. As new parents you don't always know what to do, so this has been really beneficial. (PaFg1)

I speak three languages and communication just doesn't have to be in English all the time. Somalia has a tradition of storytellers and I like reading books with him. I know now you can learn language from the environment, from signs for instance. I have an Autistic one and he loves doing that. For him I speak only one language and he understands. (PaFg1)

I have many languages – you don't have to be totally assimilated, you can speak your language to the children, your culture. It's also about belonging and identity. You make toys, it's relaxed and enjoyable activity. OK I get what you're doing, I'm learning too. (PaFg1)

More knowledgeable parenting

Parents reported that they had gained valuable knowledge and understanding about parenting approaches and styles which had changed their own parenting practices to become more engaged and supportive of the child's interests and fascinations rather than disciplinary and instructional. They appreciated the professional and informed approach of the tutors.

I've done other courses but I really appreciated the professionalism of the tutors in this one, their explanations and knowledge. They showed me that we should not be shouting stop all the time at your child, it's not about obedience but engagement and involvement and it's the development of the mother as well as the child. And I've become more engaged at a community level. It's made me more secure. (PaFg1)

The course taught me to try and do things together with kids and what we do together, we make it real. (PaFg1)

The family interviews also illustrated more knowledgeable parenting.

Jodie was particularly impressed by the recycling message that the activities supported and as there was no cost '*there was no excuse.*'

MiR taught Kate to share books and stories with Sarah, '*we don't expect them to read and write but it's about starting them off.*'

What practitioners say:
The parents are now more verbally engaging and communicate more which has been noticeable and they are excited to showcase their learning journey books to their families. (PrFG1)

The parents have given us good feedback and feel more confident and positive when doing activities and learning at home. (PrFG1)

Feedback from our families tells us that parents have bought 'work' books to support literacy skills, more importantly the parents are now confident to support their children. Parents have said they now value the conversations they have with their children in relation to Literacy and recognise and acknowledge their children's progress, for example "even the little steps forward". We have seen more engagement from these families as well. (PrFG1)

Greater parent awareness of parents' role in child's development

Practitioners confirmed this positive change in parents' knowledge and understanding of their important role in supporting children's speech, language and literacy development. They believe that their modelling of practice and observing how the child responds enabled the parents to better understand the parenting approach promoted in the programme.

They understood how we went about it – but we said give this to all our children – the opportunities to engage with some kind of 'literature' development'. We've been told often that 'He will never be able to learn anything, when that is simply not true if you accept

our understanding of 'literature'. Parents say, 'I see now he is learning so much – he follows instructions – he's changed so differently and he's happier.' We are doing the right thing and it is affirming. (PrFg1)

More confident, informed and capable parenting

Practitioners affirmed that parents who had engaged in the MiR programme were more confident, informed and engaged with their child's learning and interacted much more actively with their children to support the development of speech, language and early literacy. They felt parents understood the messages and practices modelled and the positive effect this had on their child, and this gave them confidence in their own parenting practices.

Parents didn't understand what pre-writing was and that drawing in the sand helped build fine motor skills and play dough and scissors. Sharing my professional knowledge with them helped. Everything is a learning opportunity, giving parents a little more professional understanding on how to interact with the child (PrFg2).

Parents gained many practical ideas of activities to do with their child at home and also learned how important their own interactions were with their child. It was felt that there was strong transfer of the practices experienced in the sessions to what happens at home and that this work with parents needs to be extended to more families.

Giving parent's different ideas – writing from underneath the table upwards – some parents are amazed at these ideas – don't let them draw on the wall stick some paper up -save your wallpaper! (PrFg2)

Many parents don't display their learning here publicly but when a parent has been here she does it endlessly at home. We know with individual families how many books they borrow. I'm more aware of the need to push and extend contact (SLI3.)

What Senior Leads say:
Senior Leads in Lewisham affirmed the perspectives of practitioners and parents about the impact of the MiR programme on parents' knowledge and confidence in supporting their child's language and early literacy development.

More confident, informed, relaxed and capable parenting

Senior Leads were very focused on improving HLE for families in Lewisham and had seen evidence of more relaxed and informed parenting with more confident parents as a result of engagement in MiR, which had boosted the visibility of this aspect of the MiR programme, at strategic level, as testified below:

Parents are more relaxed, you can choose when you do it- you're doing a good job' they are reassured. Supporting parents is a high priority (HLE). I don't have to try too hard to convince people about the value of the parenting strand at all. (SLI4)

We have some great quotes from parents and comments about impact and the value of working in their own language and with their own children. Going to the Library, a parent with dyslexia had never been. The practitioner took her and her child to the Library and it revolutionised her attitude. She was just not aware of the myriad of opportunities there. (SLI6)

Better family relationships with more joint family and professional activity

There was some evidence of the wider impact of the MiR programme on the extended family of those who engaged, indicating greater reach and impact beyond those who were directly engaged in the programme.

Families were brought together, grandparents, parents and siblings, doing activities together. The impact was on all the child- parent relationships and levels of interaction. And it's the relationship between the parents and the setting too (SLI6).

2.4 Evaluation Workstrand 4: Programme Implementation and sustainability

In this section we will consider the performance of the programme against the seven additional areas of consideration to provide an indication of how well MiR has been implemented in Lewisham and to what degree the programme can be sustained after the initial three-year funded programme. It should be noted that since the evaluation begun, additional 12-months funding has been secured to support the transition process towards sustainable programme delivery (See Appendix 1).

i. *How successful has the programme been in reaching and engaging key partners and stakeholders?*

What practitioners say:

Still work to do, and EY settings best engaged despite staff release issues

Practitioners we interviewed displayed an informed, clear and critical view of the success of the MiR programme in reaching and engaging key partners and stakeholders. In their balanced perspective there was a common view that good progress had been made in engaging the sector, with 35% of EYs in schools (20/57) and 51% of PVI's (70/136) engaged, but that there was more work to do to engage partners from across the sector. They also noted the challenges for all settings due to staffing ratios and shortages in obtaining release for staff to attend training and run the MiR sessions, as reflected in the comment below:

Well it's sometimes difficult to release teachers because of absences and ratios. It's done best in the schools, why not come and visit us. We should definitely make it more open to others – there's still work to do – and especially for those with SEN. We should make a display – Make that Real!! We should have holiday events (PrFG2).

More work needed to ensure all LA strategic leads and setting managers become engaged

There was also the view that more work was needed to engage key LA leads and also leaders and managers of EY settings in Lewisham. They noted the absence of MiR in LA documentation and policy statements which for them indicated a lack of awareness of the programme at this senior and strategic level.

It's not in the LA's documentation or in policy documents. I don't think the leaders know much about it. MiR is not really understood by our senior management. We were sent by them though – I think there's work to do at that level. Follow up sessions would be useful and maybe a WhatsApp group. (PrFg1)

What Strategic Leads say:

Good reach across agencies especially EYs settings, schools and libraries

Strategic Leads in the LA generally had a more positive view about the success in engaging key partners in the MiR programme. Those interviewed felt that the programme had successfully reached across key agencies, including health, education and social care.

I feel like they have reached across health, education and social care. So, for example, they have had health visiting assistant practitioners come along, and take it back to their leads within the health visiting team. And look at how do we support this or signpost our families to it? And actually, I think getting into health is quite an indicator of the fact that they've probably reached out well. (SLI1)

Speech and Language Therapists, Health visitors, Playgroups, Mindful Mums, *etc. It's taken three years to build up this partnership and Children's centres who often hosted us were a key part of this too, delivering, sharing and reaching Creche workers and Childminders. So, a multi-agency approach, building trust both ways, face to face with key people, getting them to buy into it, selling the Programme vision, the free courses, the book pack, show how it it's their agendas, HLE for example, practitioners first, then parents on to the Sharing Wheel. Sell it each partner according to their needs. Stakeholders, community people and the EY team. A holistic buy in was needed (SLI4).*

The Strategic Leads confirmed the success in engaging EYs settings and libraries in the programme.

In terms of education, there's been a lot of settings that have signed up... obviously there've been issues in doing the Home Visits, but actually to get so many settings signed up and coming along to the network meetings. I think they've actually had quite a good reach. (SLI1)

Well I'm fairly new to this but I think it's been successful due to quality of staff on the Programme and those involved who have worked hard in proactively engaging with settings. So, some data: we have 200 settings in Primary and Early Years and we have had 60 of them in the MiR programme in the 3 years. As a newcomer that seems to me a good proportion. Contacting and getting these settings involved. We librarians are expanding those contacts, and it links to our own objectives and approach, and it sits with our own wider agenda (SLI2).

Well the most successful part has to be engaging with the community and multi-agencies together. The core of the MiR was engaging the Library, it gave a quality stamp, but also provided books and much more. The Library accessed all settings we were involved with and brought synergy and loads joined the Library revealing real multi-agency working and the Head of Libraries was happy to see it happen - a win/win and helped fund it (SLI4).

There was acknowledgment that although there had been good reach and engagement, sustaining the engagement of key partners after initial enthusiasm was challenging.

In terms of engagement, I feel like that's where I think it drops off a little bit, because I think practitioners come along, settings come along, and then … when you look at the numbers coming to the network meeting, it definitely tails off and it's been variable. But I would say, my, my feeling is that it's been fairly successful in that it's definitely reached some key teams. (SLI1)

Still more work to do with key partners, such as those in the Health sector

There is a clear awareness that there is still work to do to engage and sustain a wide range of key partners and stakeholders, with Health sector partners a key target group for further work.

I wanted to see more reach with midwifery. Actually, they are quite keen in that initial journey for parents when we're thinking about the sort of a life course approach for a child. So, I feel like there's some health partners that they could have potentially had better engagement with. (SLI1)

ii. *How successful has the programme been in establishing Making it REAL as part of Lewisham's early help strategy to support communication, language and literacy?*

What Senior Leaders say:

Good progress made in mainstreaming skills with all staff, not just specialist, and with older age phases but more needs be done to secure MiR as central within Early Help strategy with increasing demand for early language and literacy support

Senior Leads in Lewisham acknowledge that they have not yet embedded the MiR programme fully enough in Lewisham's Early Help Strategy and with increasing need this should be a priority.

I think there's a lot of need in Lewisham, and particularly the timing of Covid, which meant that we had more [S&L] referrals and greater need than we ever had, so I don't think we are [seeing a change yet], because I think I just don't think it's embedded enough. (SLI1)

Along with an awareness of the need for further work to establish MiR as a secure part of Lewisham's Early Help strategy, Senior Leads were keen to acknowledge that good progress has been made in mainstreaming the MiR approach and associated skills, thus benefiting many more children's language and early literacy development. It is now viewed as a core element in the Communication and Language Pathway and Strategic Leads were optimistic about the progress made but expressed a desire for more 'hard data' about its impact to secure long-term commitment.

The skills are now into mainstream rather than just with specialists/experts. Yes, and the libraries, that's really successful and its really embedded and gone into the other age ranges too. So, there's a lot going on, everyone in Early Years knows about MiR and language, but this develops over time (SLI3).

There are huge amounts of qualitative, positive data but not hard-nosed quantitative data. Lots of dialogue and interaction and a genuine feeling intuitively that it's working (SLI5).

iii.   *How successful has the programme been in increasing the frequency of children and families engaging in early communication, language and literacy activities at home, within settings and the community?*

Parents and practitioners who have experienced MIR report increased frequency of CLL activities

As set out earlier in this report (see section 2.3), there is clear evidence that participation in the MiR programme has increased the frequency of children and families engaging in more early communication, language and literacy activities at home. And the evidence from practitioners (see section 2.2) would suggest that in those settings who have completed the MIR training there is an increased frequency of activity which supports communication and language activity. In terms of the wider community, the most notable examples of the impact of MIR in increasing frequency of activities is its adoption by wider workforce such as Health Visitors, Librarians and Family Navigators (see section 2.2).

I attended the Programme and now I'll talk to her and talk to her. I speak only Greek at home and learnt it was ok to speak Greek to her too. It was very helpful for me to continue this programme and for others too. I think for many parents it is an unknown subject. (PaFg1)

The challenge remains of how to replicate this success with more families, and those who had experienced MIR, and were extremely positive about its benefit, were also very clear about how they felt that information about the programme (aimed at parents) could be confusing and a bit 'haphazard'.

What parents say:

Enjoyable activities for BOTH parent and child motivate participation and engagement but that information for parents is not always clear

In family interviews, Susan articulated that the workshop was 'really amazing' and prompted her to sign up for the full four weeks. She was 'so excited to take part, anything that would help my kids.' She explained that

participation made her happy and provided 'something to look forward to' and described herself as 'really motivated.' But not all parents realised they were part of a programme and for others the labelling of the programme was off-putting. For example, one parent suggested that the terminology of 'Early Literacy' conveyed a sense that the programme was about reading 'English Literature'.

I didn't know anything about REAL. I was just taking my daughter to a place she enjoyed playing at the local Youth Centre - so it was by accident that I came across it. (PaFg1)

They said it's about 'talk and literacy' and I thought 'What!!' but it's about the beginning of communication and interaction. I thought at first it was going to be a university course for me on literature (PaFg1).

> The family interviews revealed that families were not always aware of why they had been signposted to the service. Whilst Susan had sought support for Nathan's socialisation skills, (*he'd never be the leader in a conversation),* Kate and Jodie were unsure why their children had been selected for the home activities programme. Kate articulated that she had no concerns over Sarah's development but was asked to be part of a literacy programme, '*of course anything to help.*'

iv. How has the local context of Lewisham influenced this impact?

What the data says:

Recognised strong need for action in Lewisham after COVID pandemic

Families and services in Lewisham, like most local areas in the UK, had been hit hard by the COVID pandemic and evidence is now emerging that young children were, and still are, highly affected by the restrictions and negative economic conditions that accompanied this period, from 2019 onwards. The MiR programme was introduced during this time of significant disruption and decline in public services and access to public spaces that families and young children have experienced. Young children's communication and language development, and restricted social experiences, with a consequent legacy of poor wellbeing and poorer developmental outcomes have been shown to be a particular challenge as we emerge from this period of social and economic crisis. The impact of this context in Lewisham has been to focus attention on enhancing support for young children and encourage family interaction, communication and wellbeing through a range of early language and literacy programmes, aimed to enhance children's development and also family contexts (HLE).

What Strategic Leads say:

Strategic Leads in Lewisham are well aware of this local and national context and the challenges it brings.

Language and communication in Lewisham was in steady decline since COVID, we recognised it as an issue especially in the last two years. This is really helping HLE and well-being in parents and their relationship with their children, and with school and school readiness. So, the task is helping both child and parent, parent communication is an essential part of their relationship – at the heart of it- and of a lot of things, including Early Years' learning (SLI3).

Joining up all services in Lewisham under one service in post COVID world has helped

The response in Lewisham to the local and national challenges was to join up all early years and childcare services into one cohesive service umbrella, the Early Years Quality and Sufficiency Service (EYQSS). In local documentation it states that the services:

'interlink together to ensure that the seven areas of statutory duty relating to Early Education and Childcare are delivered, supported and maintained in order to deliver a set of 6 key priorities:

1. *Increase achievement for all children at the end of their reception year*
2. *Close the gap in attainment for those children facing disadvantage*
3. *Increase take up of 2-year-old, early entitlement places.*
4. *Increase the percentage of 2-, 3- and 4-year olds who access their early entitlements in providers graded by Ofsted as 'good' or 'outstanding'*
5. *Increase the number of children with SEND to access a high quality early years place*
6. *Collaborate in and support the development and implementation of an early years health and well-being approach that incorporates trauma informed practice and aligns with the PHE and DfE commitments to increasing children's positive mental health*

The EYQSS service sits within the Education Services division of the Children and Young Peoples directorate.' (See https://schoolsservices.lewisham.gov.uk/Page/16136)

The EYQSS is made up of three teams:
- The Quality and Inclusion Team
- The Early Entitlement Team
- The Family Information Service

It is felt that this unified structure ensures coherence and broader, holistic perspectives to develop strategy in Lewisham. The MiR programme was introduced as a strategy across all these teams and aimed to reach wider, to Health and Social Care Teams and also Library Services. It was hoped this would facilitate reach and broader engagement of families and children in the services on offer.

Strategic Leads acknowledged only partial success in achieving this, with more work to be done to take this integrated service culture further. Pressure on services and families has generated demand which the services are finding it hard to meet, with continued funding cuts, and the need for all stakeholders to work together is clearly recognised and being worked on, as shown in the testimonies below.

All sit within one service, and it gives us both coherence and also broader perspectives. We wanted to reach as many settings as possible. The synergy between 2-year-olds and MiR didn't always work out. We targeted at first the wards of greatest need to get the most impact – 20 settings a year of the most vulnerable but in the end, we opened it out. There were capacity issues in targeting especially with settings already under pressure and families really struggling in some disadvantaged wards. We didn't just want one type of setting but to reach as many as possible and we wanted particularly to share it with parents within MiR and other key stakeholders, raised awareness – info sessions- Midwives. Family Support, Domestic Abuse section, Commissioning Colleagues, Family Hubs, really anyone working with families. We saturated it and met anyone for information sharing, including all front facing colleagues and of course the Library. (SLI5)

Well, it's now all under one umbrella, in 2013 all budgets were cut. We tried to focus on what was most important, the links between us is all part of the bigger picture. All settings, a wider view and recognised not just centre based early years settings but also moving away from Children Centres. This certainly helped the strategy of services into Family Hubs and raised consciousness of HLE. We could link into many things and having the MiR coordinator gave a level of support for providers, helped them complete in time for release from settings. We had to make it context relevant. Remember BLM was taking off and it brought diversity into the frame and EAL too (SLI5).

> **Timing of MiR introduction following a post COVID review of EY and Children's services in Lewisham made silo working visible and motivated action in a challenging local context**

Strategic Leads indicated that the introduction of MiR was timely after a post COVID review of EY and Children's Services in Lewisham had shone a light on the fragmented nature of service delivery and recommended that action was taken to change this given the challenges outlined above. It was felt that changing the culture of silo working in Lewisham has been, and remains, a big challenge for the programme leads but that the timing for this programme was good.

As Making it Real, came in we'd just done a massive review of Early Years and Children's Services, and what we recognized was everyone was doing a great job but it was in silos where we're doing our own little bit and turning away and not bringing it all back together. So, I think there is something about potentially the teams not being used to working in a collaborative way, or being that open o something new because it feels like, oh, it's another cycle of something else to try and fit in and take on board. I think that potentially the way that it came in through an education pathway, maybe social care but not health may have contributed to the challenges of reaching across all teams. (SLI1)

We are very pleased with Programme but the context has been difficult. Coming out of COVID, the workforce crisis, cost of living impact, that wider context has been hard. Every Child A Talker – we did that but this is a different world and its not been without challenges. The Advisors are passionate about it and the practitioners very committed, those that did it are very enthusiastic but capacity could have been greater across the Borough. (SLI5)

v. *What (if any) have been the key barriers and enablers to the achievement of the programme through each strand? How could any barriers be overcome?*

Greatest barrier: Staffing and workforce recruitment, retention and ratios

Practitioners and strategic leads recognise that the greatest barrier to achieving the programme goals under each strand is staffing, including workforce recruitment, retention and ratios. This is in line with the national picture, where recruitment and retention in the early years workforce is reported to be 'in crisis'. There are government plans to address this which could help relieve some of these workforce pressures.

Staffing is a big issue and resources, so they can all participate and enjoy these networking meetings. (PrFg2)

The biggest barrier was the current climate around recruitment and retention and that whole workforce capacity and outlook. (SLI4)

Barrier: Time and timing

A further barrier identified by both practitioners and Strategic Leads was the time it takes to achieve change and the timing of the programme during a period of local and national economic and sector change and uncertainty.

As regards difficulties, it's taken me a while to understand this new role. It's got clearer my understanding of what's involved. That could have been made more clear [sic] maybe at the beginning, more support through the transition. (SLI2)

Enabler: Line managers positive and at time of expansion they resourced time

Despite the barriers of workforce and timing, the key role of senior managers in facilitating the change through realistic allocation of time and role to key Early Years programme leads was acknowledged as a positive enabler for programme engagement, delivery and impact. This was particularly appreciated by library practitioners.

My Library Manager and the Early Years Manager are keen for this new role of mine to work out. I'm given some leeway with this and that and it has been helpful in having the space. My predecessor may have struggled a bit but I think I've had more time than them. Both organisations seem more fully staffed on this. The Library Service has been expanded and that's helped (SLI2).

Enabler: The partnership with NCB has enabled local engagement and impact

The partnership with NCB and the deployment of a dedicated Programme Coordinator and local lead is acknowledged as being a key enabling factor in ensuring the delivery, reach and embedding of the Programme in Lewisham. It also provides a welcome, external perspective along with local knowledge. The development of positive relationships has generated good will and a commitment to the MiR programme and a determination to take it forward once the partnership agreement and funding ends (as discussed later in this report).

Well, where we are really, the context nationally. The NCB local team's knowledge of the Programme has really helped us steer it through and avoid pitfalls and the NCB partnership has been really enabling. The external element gives that push and keeps us fresh and robust (SLI5).

vi.   **To what extent has the approach been embedded so as to be sustained beyond the life of the funded programme?**

Setting	Date of OfSTED and grade	Comments/reference in report
Athleney Primary School	July 2022 Good	Leaders provide well planned opportunities for pupils to write for purpose and audience. This emphasis on language and communication starts in the early years.
Five Steps Community Nursery	Feb 2023 Good	The managers have worked hard since the last inspection to make significant changes to the setting. The training and professional development opportunities that practitioners have received has made a positive impact on delivering an effective curriculum. Practitioners build on children's language development. For instance, when learning about the Antarctic, children explore ice and arctic play animals. Practitioners explain that 'the ice is melting because of the temperature', and talk about the different animals. Books and pictures are also used to encourage children to talk together and use their new vocabulary. This helps children to become effective communicators. **Grade has gone from RI (Feb 2022) to good**
Little Stars Preschool	April 2023 Good	Children's language and literacy skills are given a high priority in the pre-school. Staff model language well and engage children in meaningful conversations. Children enjoy sharing stories and join in with the repetitive text. They make marks with paint and chalk and write their names on their work. Children enjoy singing and learn new rhymes with staff during activities which increases their vocabulary Partnerships with parents are strong. Home visits are valued and help staff get to know children well from the start. Parents describe

		communication as 'excellent'. They receive regular updates on their children's progress, next steps and ideas to continue learning at home. Parents state their children have made great improvements since starting pre-school, especially with their language, social skills and independence. The manager forges strong links with other professionals to benefit children and their families. **The manager is delivering a local authority programme with parents called 'Making it REAL' (Raising Early Achievement in Literacy).**
Newstead Road Preschool	*June 2023* *Good*	There is a clear focus on children's communication and language at the preschool. Children enjoy sharing story sacks with staff, parents and the local librarian, who comes to read to them. *Children join in with a familiar book, 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt'. Some children draw characters from the story, while others learn and draw about real bears when looking at non-fiction books. Consequently, all children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress.*
Grove Park Pre-School and Day Nursery	*July 2023* *Good*	They place strong focus on enjoying books and stories. A recent project, undertaken with the local authority, was used to encourage all families to join the local library.
The Ark Children Centre	*February 2024* *Good*	The manager and her team have developed good working relationships with local partners in the area. This helps enhance the curriculum through additional opportunities for all children or targeted interventions for those who need more support. For example, all children visit the local library and enjoy storytelling sessions from a visiting librarian. Some children participate in a project that boosts their speaking confidence and develops their communication skills.
Clyde Nursery School	*February 2024* *Good*	The development of children's communication and language has been prioritised. Children are surrounded by stories and books. The 'book of the week' approach fully immerses children in a range of different books and stories. Staff use every opportunity to model the use of language. They encourage children to speak in full sentences. Staff also sing songs and share rhymes frequently, both during adult-led activities and when children are at play in the classroom.
Oak Hill Community Nursery	*March 2024* *Good*	Staff promote children's communication and language skills effectively. Partnerships with parents are a key strength of this nursery. Staff share ideas with parents to continue their children's learning at home, which helps to promote continuity.

New Cross & Deptford Families First Ltd	March 2024 Good	Staff have very successful partnerships with parents. They offer highly effective ways for parents to support children's learning. ==Parents have access to a communication, language and literacy project that provides ideas and activities to support children's learning.==
Rushey Green Nursery	March 2024 Good	==Staff support children's early literacy skills well.== ==Following a recent literacy project, children and their parents enjoy walks around the community looking for 'logo's' to support children's early reading skills.==

Table 15: OfSTED inspection references to MiR between 2021 – July 2024

22 settings have had Ofsted since joining Making it REAL programme (up to July 2024), and of those it can be seen in Table 15 that:
- ==8 settings have communication and language and literacy mentioned positively==;
- ==5 settings have communication and language and literacy mentioned positively and Making it REAL specifically mentioned.==

These judgements indicate that the MiR programme is making a real tangible difference and can be judged to be well embedded in Lewisham's EY settings.

What Strategic Leaders say:

There are contrasting perspectives from Senior Leads on how far the MiR programme and approach has been embedded at a strategic level and its capacity for being sustained beyond the life of the funded programme, although all those we talked to were committed to the benefits and positive impact of the programme and expressed a wish that the programme would, and should, be sustained and further secured strategically.

> *MiR Programme is well embedded in Lewisham's EYs services and sustainable but there is more work to do to secure its future at a strategic level, especially as a core element in Lewisham's Early Help strategy.*

Service Leads from the sector specialists in Lewisham, including representatives from the Speech and Language team, expressed the view that MiR is an effective programme which has been rolled out well, across multiple sectors including health, and is now well embedded in their services, which is to be commended.

It's embedded in the Speech and Language Pathway across the Borough it's now part of Early Help and it exists in everyday practice now. It's part of the initial offer and universal and is delivered through Sharing Real. We target where needed but it's the whole borough, whole village, across the piece, it's embedded and moving towards the Family Hubs model. And 60 settings for the HLE programme and soon will be 80 will be trained and we are building capacity, and it will sit under the Lewisham EY Team. So, there's lots of Sharing Real – the Family Hub and Library staff are trained to deliver it, embedding our capacity (SLI6)

As set out previously, the evidence indicates that Making it Real is well-established within EYs settings in Lewisham, with nearly 50% of settings having had MiR training, MIR being a core element in the Speech, language and Communication pathway, and a number of other services, especially Library services, fully engaged in the programme activities and approach.

However, some Senior Leads in Lewisham expressed more caution about the programmes sustainability, and felt that despite a good start in embedding the programme in Lewisham policy and practice, and especially within the Early Help strategy, there is more to be done to ensure its sustainability. These Senior Leads felt that

the use of MiR as an Early Help strategy has coincided with the Speech and Language team trying to shift from purely specialist service to supporting a borough wide universal offer but that operationally this hasn't yet fully come together. Leads from the Speech and Language service reported that they believe they are still at a very early stage of looking at how they can work together with other partners at a strategic level as opposed to on the ground and that currently teams have separate funding which creates a sense that there is uncertainty over who should be funding certain bits of work. Funding has been secured to continue the work for a short period but there is a need to look ahead to secure longer term funding.

I think it is embedded already and our Communication and Language Pathway comes out of it. We've engaged really well with the Library and made communication as broad and as wide as possible. It's been a really successful. We are much more strategic in our link ups. DfE evidenced based EFF Strong Practice hubs and Mercer's funding is continuing, we've trained up people. Now we need to coordinate it and have a driver capturing impact but it's endorsed under Family Hubs. And we have funding under Start for Life' up to April – we'll roll it out for another year and we continue to look for other pots, so we're hanging on to MiR. (SLI5)

I think where we're at now looking in terms of how that universal level is going. Yes, there's a lot of good things in Making it Real, with a lot of evidence that we would love to have as part of that universal offer that we take forward but I can't see how it's sustainable. (SLI1)

There is also some anxiety that when the funding for MiR comes to an end, and the people driving it move away, some of the impetus and sustainability of the programme will be lost. They acknowledge that work is needed urgently to ensure the transfer of leadership back to Lewisham personnel goes smoothly and that core elements of the programmes are identified and continued, if not all aspects can be e.g. the viability of Home Visits are questioned.

Once the current people running it go I worry because they are really driving it. And they are really committed. And they are doing a lot of leg work for the programme and so for us, it's almost thinking potentially what we're going to do is take elements of it and make it fit to what we think would work better with families and settings. So, this idea of doing home visits well, actually, it's a really difficult time for early years. So that's just not possible. And so that element of it would probably not be something we're thinking about but holding events for families in the setting and bringing back families into settings, so they feel part of the community. I think a lot of that could be quite easy to do for settings, because they're not sending staff off and having to worry about ratios but also, I think it creates that community for families so they've got that space where they feel it's theirs. They can be listened to, they can be heard. And then we're adding in the sort of Making it Real messages as a sort of opportunistic thing to do with families, whereas I think having that sort of ready to go package is difficult, because you know, how do you put it in place in that way? (SLI1)

When I went on my practitioner training, I felt like everyone came away from the training thinking, this is amazing, you know, this is good practice. We should all be doing this, and then nothing, nothing more. It all kind of dropped away. And so, I think that whilst it's useful, it's not being embedded, it's not then making the impact that I think it could. I think it is not quite right. I don't think it's quite there yet. What I mean by that is, we know that we want to do Making it Real approach as our universal foundation, but it's not assigned to any key teams. There's no ownership. So, who is driving it? Who's carrying it forward? And how do we then sustain it? (SLI1)

vii. *What might be the next steps for key stakeholders in Lewisham in terms of sustaining Making it REAL beyond the life of the programme?*

What Parents say:

> ***Clearer communication about what the MiR programme is and what is on offer to parents***

In support of the practitioners view, parents also expressed the view that there needs to be clearer communication about what the MiR programme is and what it offers to both parents and children.

Explain a bit more what it's about. You don't really know until you get there but it's so much more than Stay and Play. You have to learn from the inside (PaFg1).

If you call it 'Literature' you don't understand that university talk but if you just say getting them talking that would work better. This course was about communication, that's simple and attractive and less fearful. People think 'literature' that's nothing to do with me (PaFg1).

More dissemination and visibility of the MiR programme in LA communications to settings and parents

Practitioners and front-line service staff expressed the view that to sustain the MiR programme in Lewisham there is a need for more dissemination and visibility of the programme in all LA communications to settings and parents. This would enable the programme to be seen as a priority by setting leaders and managers and front-line staff, thus enabling the allocation of staff time and resources to taking the programme forward.

Well it's sometimes difficult to release teachers because of absences and ratios. It's done best in the schools, why not come and visit us. We should definitely make it more open to others, there's still work to do and especially for those with SEN... Follow up sessions would be useful and maybe a WhatsApp group. (PrFg1).

I learnt so much and I've taken on many new ideas, but I want it to be consistent and have everyone on board. I'm by myself now, I'm persevering, and I want it for ALL children not targeted, everyone can learn. We need to embed it, spread it and expand it (PrFg2).

More work needed to convince leadership/management of the value of MiR and how it works

Practitioners and front-line staff reported that their leadership and management were not yet fully aware or convinced of the benefits and impact of the programme and how the sessions and elements, especially Home Visits, worked to secure this impact.

We'd like to do more Home Visits but the higher management is against it. We think it could address some behavioural issues and we could support the home environment learning. We need to look at Home Visits and the benefit for parents understanding about language and communication. (PrFg2)

Continued commitment from engaged settings who recognize benefits could be used to create ambassadors for the programme

There was a positive view from the engaged practitioners that they could act as a resource for taking the MiR programme further and securing its sustainability. They indicated that it was so embedded in their working that they would continue the programme as far as they were able within their own setting or service but that they would be willing and able to disseminate it further if supported to do so.

We'll carry on working with our families – maybe we'll need to target some even if it's just lending books – keep giving them information –it's definitely making a difference (PrFg2).

There is a recognised need for more training and capacity building for the MiR programme

The need to sustain the MiR training to build and extend capacity for the MiR programme was recognised by Senior Leads in Lewisham. Senior leads across EY and the Library service appears to be especially enthusiastic

about building on their current involvement in the MiR programme and extending this much further. This bodes very well for securing the programme sustainability.

Well funding is changing, and I realise my part is still growing. Providing training now for others, developing capacity for those who follow and expand the work. There's a developing 'moving ahead' strategy. I'm surprised Librarians weren't more involved originally in MiR. We've recruited many more users. This is work we want to do. It has facilitated Libraries reach into families. Many of us have done introductory training and that has helped other Library staff. Every Nursery setting in Lewisham has a link to a service Library Assistant. So, you see how MiR is very relevant to our work. Libraries can play a key part in it. And sessions in the Library too. It's more strategic now the links between Library and EY settings. In my joint role I see that line managers on both sides are eager to support that. Book Start links in to that and MiR and it offers a useful consolidation point. (SLI2)

Well we've got an extra year because they like it so much – I think that's an act of confidence. The handover is what we need to focus on. Make sure some people are in place to carry MiR forward for Lewisham – practice the Shared Wheel. It's transferable and they should be able to carry it forward. We need more volunteers, trained Champions, libraries in carrying the Sharing Wheel forward – make sure we understand what works. But we have a platform now to build on and Early Years is on the rise. Resources and funding – part of the training offer and a body of trained practitioners are now in place, already there. We need to get it into policy documents. The Mayor should have it in his policy for parents – with MiR. (SLI4)

Need for evidencing impact of MiR programme with hard data

Several members of the Senior Leadership teams in Lewisham indicated that if the MiR programme had more 'hard' data on impact for children, families and value for money of the programme, securing its sustainability would be easier. This is something that commissioners of services at local and national level look carefully at but it will require investment to obtain such data.

Need to show evidence of cost saving, such as evidencing drop in children using specialist services – that we are investing to save. We have the anecdotal evidence and it's not just a speech and language issue but evidence of improved family relationships. Feedback from parents would help, their understanding and their thoughts on the impact it has had on their child. (SLI3)

Extending the range and reach of the programme

In the last period of funding Senior Leads indicated that a priority should be extending the range and reach of the MiR programme which would build capacity and ensure greater impact can be shown.

This programme compared to others is quite well embedded already despite the challenges of staff turnover and recruitment increasing the danger of losing the impact. And we could increase the range and reach – maybe a third of settings, so we still have two thirds to reach in the next 6 months. This might fit with some grant out there, hopefully (SLI3).

Continuing to develop MiR – carrying on training and delivering the Sharing Real. Deciding who else to include in the Sharing Real Workshop. There are 5 Hubs one for each area. The difficulties include an early years' workforce which is already overstretched – so identifying who and giving them time to do it (SLI6).

Embedding MiR in future funding for Lewisham and identifying and funding a Lewisham MiR programme coordinator

A short term extension of the MiR funding has been secured from the Start for Life programme but longer term funding is needed to sustain and secure the progress that has been made, and then to extend the reach and engagement further. Funding for a local MiR Coordinator was seen as a vital next step to secure sustainability.

Well it's extended to August – the budget – and I think it is sustainable in Nurseries and other settings. We have 60 settings trained and that's had a direct impact on parents

Embedding it from just the Programme, that will need a Programme Coordinator to keep on top of it – that's not a big 'Ask'. A post within the Library or the LA EY team – that would be good value and have a wide reach. We are just about to include Home Start, building across the sector. So, good key personnel and partnership – not a huge investment but prioritise it and don't forget about it – embed it in strategies and plans. So, a Part-time role for the key coordinator – get more quantitative data. Trouble is it's all so tight but we will need to show benefit. (SLI3)

Ensuring handover arrangements from NCB to LA is planned for and smoothly achieved

The extremely positive and productive relationship between the LA and NCB was noted by all Senior Leads who gave evidence. The role of the NCB as external support, advisor and coordinator of the programme is seen to have been vital in the progress that has been made with services, settings and families. The strong and positive relationships that have been forged at every level are commented upon and appreciated as a core element of the success to date. The end of programme funding and the stepping back of NCB will need to be handled carefully and a transitional process agreed in advance of the event.

It's been a very positive and successful partnership. It would be good to keep some element going forward, some link but not as close, being a supportive partner and critical friend maybe but it now needs to become theirs not NCBs. We could be advisory, sit on the Board maybe but less delivery oriented. (SLI6)

Right from the beginning Lewisham Early Years Team have seen MiR as a key part of their development and it has worked very well. We thought very early on about sustainability which was one of the reasons we got the Library involved, real determination from Lewisham about it. Secured, joined up partnerships were the key, joint plan of work, Strategic Board, parents, practitioners, Head of EY, Goldsmiths, etc. The project team is a smaller group but doing it with and together – it's about relationships, joined up thinking and meeting needs of Lewisham families and children and we had to get key people involved. The current coordinator knows the settings individually and at a personal level. It does need a committed person in a defined role to bring everyone together. It's a community of practice but it does need that one person. Trainers are trained now but you need that principal role, the lynch pin. (SLI6)

Funding has shifted the deadline for the ending. We have one colleague now who is our in-house MiR trainer – so that will let us keep going. Family Hub and Family Thriving will keep their groups going for early literacy development. Maybe able to get extension funding to train up more people to take it forward. We've still got the Partnership going but it will need coordinating but it will not need to 'sit' somewhere. We adhere to the core of MiR because of NCB involvement, it's not diluted. And the strong relationship with the Library offers all kinds of possibilities. Over 300 families signed up and they have representation on the Board. So, admin is there and we'll continue to us our Comms to promote it. So, good commitment, good time well spent so far, an aspirational Programme but real, and we've adapted to it and I'm very optimistic about the Legacy.

Part 3: Key Findings

This evaluation sought to gain greater understanding on the impact of the Making it REAL programme on the children, parents and practitioners of Lewisham; It was framed by considering data against five hypotheses and seven 'areas of consideration'. Findings are presented against each of these in turn.

3.1 Key Findings against Hypotheses

The project had five hypotheses which were explored:

Hypothesis 1. Making it Real project children show improvement in communication, language & early literacy
There is good evidence from this evaluation indicating that MiR children have enhanced development of their communication, language and early literacy skills and also their life skills e.g., independence, agency and confidence. There is also evidence of enhanced HLE in MiR families which has added impetus to these child outcomes through enhanced family language and more stimulating HLE.

Hypothesis 2. Increased number of children in Lewisham achieving a Good Level of Development at the end of reception, with gap narrowing between disadvantaged children and peers
It is not possible to fully respond to this hypothesis about narrowing the gap of GLD achievement at end of Reception due to the incomplete data set (2024 EYFSP data due Nov 2024) and no data for 2020 and 2021 due to COVID. It is also difficult to use any earlier data sets as a point of comparison due to significant EYFS reforms in September 2021 BUT we can note in 2022 and 2023 the proportion of Lewisham children achieving a good level of development (GLD) at the end of their Reception year is above the national average (65% and 67% in those years).

Hypothesis 3. Increased number of disadvantaged children accessing two-year-old early education place
The evidence here is mixed. There is a marked increase the proportion of eligible children taking up their funded hours pre- and post- COVID-19 in 2022 and 2023 suggesting a positive trend coinciding with the implementation of MiR. However, it should also be noted that for 2024 the percentage of children taking up their entitlement in the past 12 months has decreased year-on-year by almost four percentage points which requires some urgent attention.

Hypothesis 4. Early Years workforce has increased knowledge of how to support young children's early literacy development
There is strong evidence of enhanced practitioner confidence and interest in supporting language and early literacy from a wide range of multi-agency practitioners (Librarians, Health Visitors, Family Navigators) who have been trained in MiR. In particular, the evidence indicates increased practitioner confidence in engaging with parents and conducting Home Visits and working with parents to create more positive HLE for language and early literacy development.

Hypothesis 5. Making it REAL project parents have increased knowledge and confidence to support young children's early learning and literacy development
There is good evidence of greater parent awareness of their role in the development of language and literacy in their child. Parents report that MiR engagement has significantly shifted their parenting style and practises to

enable more relaxed parenting; more confident parenting, especially noted in multi-lingual families and more knowledgeable parenting with regard to effective practises to support children's language and early literacy. Practitioners affirm these findings, and report increased parent awareness of role in child's development, more confident, informed, relaxed and capable parenting and better family relationships, with more joint family and professional activity to support children's early learning and literacy development.

3.2 Key Findings against 'Areas of Consideration'

Additionally, this evaluation sought to explore seven 'areas of consideration' relating to issues of programme reach, engagement, embedding and sustainability within the local context of Lewisham.

i. How successful has the programme been in reaching and engaging key partners and stakeholders?

Targets for the full 2 day MiR practitioner training have been well exceeded (nearly 50% above target) and more training days were offered than planned. The roll out of introductory training sessions was less successful and less than half the target number of EY settings with a trained MiR practitioner has been achieved to date (47% of settings). This suggests the programme engagement strategy needs to address sector staffing challenges around capacity, recruitment, work load and continue to employ a range of different strategies for delivering training and MiR activities.

Trained MiR practitioners are very committed and engaged with the programme and report that early years settings are engaged with the MiR approach and programme but suggest that the LA still has work to enable full engagement due to staffing issues. They suggest that some LA Strategic Leads and EC setting managers need more work to be convinced of the value of the MiR programme and so become fully engaged. This lack of support from some key partners and stakeholders is felt to be holding back fully embedding the MiR programme in Lewisham's strategic and long term planning. LA Strategic Leads affirm the positive reach across agencies, especially EYs settings and libraries but acknowledge there is still more work to do with key partners, such as those in the Health and social care sectors.

ii. How successful has the programme been in establishing Making it REAL as part of Lewisham's early help strategy to support communication, language and literacy?

LA Senior Leads indicate that good progress has been made in mainstreaming MiR skills with all staff not just specialist staff, and with older age phases, but are fully aware that more needs to be done to secure MiR as central within their Early Help strategy to support communication language and early literacy. With increasing demand on Early Help services in Lewisham this work is a priority if MiR is to be securely established in the borough.

iii. How successful has the programme been in increasing the frequency of children and families engaging in early communication, language and literacy activities at home, within settings and the community?

The answer here is in two parts, related to where the programme has delivered well, and where it needs to improve. Parents and practitioners who have engaged in Making it REAL have overwhelmingly reported increased frequency in positive HLE activities and behaviours which support young children's literacy. Practitioners have overwhelmingly reported not just their increased knowledge and confidence in engaging

parents to support their child's literacy but have also frequently reported how it has enhanced and developed the quality of their communication language offer within their curriculum (further evidenced by recognition from visiting OfSTED inspectors). In the community, the library service has been a success story in reaching out and engaging a broader range of parents through a universal offering.

These successes are limited by reach and there remains work to do to extend MiR to all EY providers as originally planned so that the increased frequencies presented above can be multiplied across a much greater proportion of Lewisham's young children.

There is a clear need to extend the roll out to settings but with regard to engaging more parents, the parent respondents themselves provided insight into how best to attract, engage and involve them in early communication, language and literacy activities at home, in settings and in the wider community. They suggest that information about the MiR approach, activities and programme is not currently easily accessed by many families who have been missed by the programme. It was suggested that information for parents about MiR sessions can be confusing and rather hit and miss. It seems that many parents got information about MiR by word of mouth and through attending library sessions stay and play and other groups. Parents advised that promoting the MiR sessions and activities as enjoyable, fun and educational for BOTH parent and child motivates participation and engagement. This indicates a need for a more strategic and nuanced information campaign for parents.

iv.   How has the local context of Lewisham influenced this impact?

Most respondents recognised the strong need for action in Lewisham after the COVID pandemic, recognising the significant impact this, and the current stringent economic context, has had on young children's development and family engagement with activities and groups in Lewisham and of course nationally. The timing of MiR being introduced in Lewisham following a post COVID Review of EY and Children's Services which made the inadequacies of silo working visible and motivated action in what is seen as a challenging local context is seen as helpful. The subsequent joining up of core EY services in Lewisham under one service (EYQSS) has helped universalise the MiR approach and gain engagement from across key stakeholder agencies. However, funding cuts and an uncertain and changing EY policy nationally adds to a sense of uncertainty in Lewisham about the ability to commit fully to sustain the MiR programme in its current form, and the exploration of what elements might be maintained and what are seen as unsustainable in the current climate.

v.   What (if any) have been the key barriers and enablers to the achievement of the programme through each strand? How could any barriers be overcome?

There were two common barriers to MiR achievements across each programme strand and two enabling factors which were identified by respondents. By far the greatest barrier recognised at all levels was staffing i.e. workforce recruitment, retention and ratios. This is a national issue with many reports indicating an EY workforce crisis at a time when government policy is committed to extending the entitlement for working families to a childcare and early education place from the age of 9 months (15 hours by September 2024, 30 hours by September 2025). There is a national workforce strategy being developed and this may help address some of the workforce issues faced by providers in Lewisham but this will take time to be realised and meanwhile, the LA will need to be careful in what additional burdens they ask of the local sector. The second barrier identified is that of timing and allowing the time needed for culture change to happen and embed. This

is difficult when change is urgently needed and children and families need immediate support during this critical window in children's speech and language development.

The two enabling factors for MiR achievement were widely referred to. The first was the strong, positive and motivating leadership of EY Strategic Leads in Lewisham who it was felt worked tirelessly and with enthusiasm to realise the potential impact of MiR on children and family development and their recognition that the time to deliver this programme needed to be recognised and resourced in practitioner's workload. The second enabling factor was the strong and positive partnership with the NCB who it was felt had also committed serious time and effort to making the MiR programme a success and to become a sustainable and embedded element in Lewisham's early years offer.

vi. To what extent has the approach been embedded so as to be sustained beyond the life of the funded programme?

The evidence reveals conflicting views on the sustainability of the MiR approach in Lewisham despite their being overwhelming support for the programme and positivity about its impact and benefits at all levels. Many voices reported the view that the MiR programme was now *well embedded and sustainable* while others were less sure, acknowledging that MiR in Lewisham has had a good start but was not yet fully embedded or sustainable for the long term and that more work was needed to secure its future. Most respondents had ideas about what the next steps would be to ensure sustainability and wanted this to happen.

vii. What might be the next steps for key stakeholders in Lewisham in terms of sustaining Making it REAL beyond the life of the programme?

Parents, practitioners and Senior Leads in the evaluation were able to identify sensible and pragmatic next steps to build on what has already been achieved to secure their wish that the MiR programme has sustainability and a clear and certain future in Lewisham. These suggested next steps include:

- More dissemination and visibility of the MiR programme in LA communications to settings and parents;
- More work to convince leadership/management of the value of MiR and how it works;
- Continued commitment from engaged settings who recognize benefits, and their deployment to create ambassadors for the programme;
- More training and capacity building for the MiR programme;
- Evidencing the impact of MiR programme with 'hard' data;
- Extending the range and reach of the programme in the last funded phase of work;
- Embedding MiR in future funding for Lewisham and identifying and funding a Lewisham MiR programme coordinator;
- Ensuring handover arrangements from NCB to LA is carefully planned for, and smoothly achieved.

Part 4: Looking Ahead

4.1 Reflections

Successes

1. Respondents were overall very positive about the success of MiR and its impact. A good proportion of EY settings have been engaged and the programme links well with the wider library agenda. The programme is viewed by participants and delivery teams as being most effective when multiple agencies work together with one approach.

2. The number of eligible children taking up their 2 year old funded hours increased in 2022-23 (but has decreased in 2024 and therefore requires additional focus).

3. Practitioners who have accessed the MiR training report very positive benefits and enhanced skills at supporting children's language, communication and early literacy development. Targets for the full 2-day MiR practitioner training have been well exceeded and more training days were offered than planned. The roll out of introductory training sessions was less successful and less than half the target number of EY settings with a trained MiR practitioner has been achieved to date (47% of settings) but many more practitioners and settings were reached through the wider programme of activities.

4. There are many reported benefits for practitioners, parents and children. Practitioners report gaining lots of practical ideas and love the links with libraries. The universal library element helps parents not to feel targeted – *'it's a good way in'*. Parents are now much more confident, with relationships much improved on both sides. Practitioners have reported feeling 'part of a movement' and being more motivated.

5. There is a strong perception from practitioners and parents, and some evidence, that MiR children are more likely to achieve a good level of development (GLD) at end of reception but direct attribution to the MiR programme is not possible at this point.

6. The move to strategically bring Lewisham's EY services under one umbrella has also been successful and suggests the benefits undertaking a wider review with recognised and joined up resources and messages. MiR is in the strategic documentation and in the budget this financial year (2024/25) and the involvement of the local councillor is important in raising the profile of MiR for any future funding bids.

7. Partnership between Early Years and Libraries has been mutually beneficial as each brings strengths and opportunities and the potential to learn together. MiR feeds work in EY settings and libraries and provides some consistency in messaging. Reach into communities has been very positive and a big part of this is the use of MiR in libraries and the gift packs.

8. MiR has made work in libraries more focused on work with parents and how they take ideas home to enhance HLE for children. The secret to this success has been suggested as the positive relationship between Head of Early Years, Head of Library Service and the NCB.

9. The introduction of MiR in Lewisham can be judged to be a successful project despite COVID-19 and crises in the EY sector. Advisors and practitioners are all very passionate and committed to MiR but to be sustained it needs more capacity across the borough. On a very positive note, MiR is now in the

discourse of the borough and across all EY services (which are now within one service) so can be more joined up with messaging.

10. The phased and targeted approach (in the most deprived wards) for the 1st roll out was a key early decision in the first phase. The approach was however quickly broadened out because of capacity issues in those wards and a need to demonstrate broader impact. This move to delivery through a wider range of service providers ('*we saturated it!*') to all who worked with families, especially libraries, has been significant in extending both reach and impact across the borough. Home visits are more embedded, and the focus on HLE is a vital part of the programme and of improving relationships with parents.

11. Having a highly skilled Programme Co-ordinator has been key to the achievements. This has enabled the programme to be context relevant and the NCB, as an external partner, has helped in keeping MiR relevant and fresh.

Levels of Impact

1. There is a lot of positive qualitative and reported data about the positive impact of the MiR programme on staff, parents and children (as set out above) but there has been a need expressed by some strategic leads for more 'hard-nosed' quantitative data. There is a great deal of professional insight and accounts from participants that the programme is working and improving family and practitioner dialogue and interactions, but there is no 'hard' outcomes data yet that could be used to suggest causation. Despite the lack of causal evidence, the view of professionals engaged with families is very positive about the programme and its impact on those involved.

2. The evidence reveals communication and language attainment across Lewisham is improving and it would be realistic to assume, given its reach, that MiR has been a key part of this. The programme has helped improve HLE and parent support for children in engaged families. Parents report being less stressed, more confident and reassured in their parenting.

3. Practitioners have learned how to engage with parents more effectively. Some settings have embedded engagement with HVs in nursery policies and the way they work with families. The skills of the EY workforce have been improved across mainstream, and not just specialist services.

4. The library has recruited many more users and extended reach of libraries into families. Library staff have developed their skills. Every EY setting now has a link library assistant and MiR is now central to their work. There is a lot more joint work between libraries and EY settings.

5. There is evidence that Health Visitors are using MiR in assessments and messaging with parents – the 2-year-old review is a good place for this as they have the ability to signpost parents to access support at a critical time.

6. The LA has committed an additional year to the project (until March 2025) which is evidence of impact in itself.

Embeddedness and sustainability

1. There is now a need to be strategic in link ups with wider sector initiatives such as Stronger Practice Hubs to ensure ongoing and aligned workforce development.

2. MiR is already embedded in the Speech and Language Pathway, and embedded in the work of libraries. The S&L pathway is across the Borough as part of Early Help and daily practice. The Speech and Language perspective is that they are a very early stage of looking at how they can work together at a strategic level as opposed to on the ground. The teams have separate funding and a sense that there is uncertainty over who should be funding certain bits of work. There is a view that the use of MiR as an Early Help strategy has coincided with S&L team trying to shift from being a purely specialist service to supporting a Borough-wide universal offer but that operationally this hasn't yet fully come together. Ongoing funding and clarity of roles and responsibilities is needed, especially with uncertainty over the future of Family Hubs after March 2025.

3. There is also a continued need to capture harder evidence on impact.

4. NCB needs to step back and hand it over but do this carefully. The EY team see MiR as key to their development so it is important that this is carefully handed over to support this ambition. The Co-ordinator role is the lynch pin for the project's success and needs to be considered for ongoing success.

4.2 Next Steps

1. There is a lot of optimism about the future of the MiR programme in Lewisham but funding is changing and securing this future is still 'work in development'. There is an acknowledged need to expand the work further and develop capacity for those who follow. More training to build capacity is needed.

2. The recent drop in eligible children taking up their funded 2-year-old place needs urgent attention.

3. The MiR programme is endorsed under Family Hubs and there is continued funding under 'Start for Life' until April 2025. The plan is to roll it out for another year and continue to seek funding - *"we are hanging on to MiR!"* It was recommended that the programme should sit within the Start for Life work and whatever is put in place from April 2025.

4. The LA has an in-house MiR trainer so it can keep going with MiR roll out. Family Hubs / Family Thrive will also keep groups going but there is a need for more money to train more people and the whole programme needs co-ordination. A post in the library or EY team would offer good value and reach and the strong relationships with libraries and their work offers more possibilities. Key to ongoing success will be personnel and partnership, and a co-ordinated approach is vital – health will be very important to the next phase.

5. There would be benefit in capturing further quantitative data as the programme will need strong evidence of its impact. There is also a need for evidence of cost saving (Invest to Save) to secure the project for the long term.

6. There is a need to develop more Champions, volunteers, and capacity to take the programme further and sustain it. There is a platform for this but there is work to do to build on it.

7. The role of NCB is key during the transition. There is a need for them to ensure a smooth process as they move from a driving role to an increasingly advisory one.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Lewisham Making it REAL - Year 4 plan

(Additional information on Making it REAL Lewisham (provided by NCB)

Extension through Start for Life funding

Additional delivery during 2023-24 through Start for Life Funding

Introductory Making it REAL training

- Bespoke 1-day training adapted to meet needs of Family Hub staff and services working with children under 5 and families
- Developed in conjunction with SALT, covers understanding of how communication and language underpins early literacy and where to signpost parents for further support in Lewisham
- **5 sessions** delivered to date
- **47 staff** trained across a range of services including
    - Family hub navigators
    - Library staff
    - Health visiting assistants
    - Early help coordinators
    - Community outreach workers/family practitioners
    - Parent champions
    - Foster carers
    - Community staff nurses
    - SALT
    - Children's support workers

Sharing REAL with Parents workshops

- **5 rounds** of Sharing REAL delivered (20 workshops)
- **47 parents** attended

Planned delivery during 2024-25 through Start for Life Funding

Introductory Making it REAL training	Further 5 training days planned
Sharing REAL with Parents workshops	Further 10 rounds to be delivered

Making it REAL home learning programme	Further 20 new settings to be trained during 2024-25

Moments that Matter campaign

Through Start for Life funding, Lewisham have developed a Best Start in Speech, Language and Communication pathway. As part of this, a local campaign has been developed with parents to support parents in their communication and early literacy with their children. Making it REAL has been part of this campaign and REAL messages run throughout the ten Moments that matter.

- Moments That Matter - Lewisham and Greenwich NHS (lgt.nhs.uk)
- Lewisham Council - Moments that Matter
- Supercharge your child's language skills - Moments that Matter (youtube.com)

Sustainability plans

During 2024-25, NCB are working with Lewisham LA to ensure all aspects of the programme are embedded and sustained within Lewisham. This includes

- Train the trainer for Making it REAL
- Train the trainer for Sharing REAL facilitators and Sharing REAL Parent Champions
- Support to develop Making it REAL coordinators' role
- Partnership working with libraries continuing
- Joined up working with other services
- Embedding Making it REAL within the Best Start in SLC pathway in Lewisham

Making it REAL

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S BUREAU

Lewisham

Collected Learning Stories

July 2024

Making it REAL

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S BUREAU

Lewisham

5 Steps Community Nursery

New Cross Gate

What difference has Making it REAL made to the knowledge and practice of practitioners?

It has put Literacy to the forefront of our curriculum. Whatever activities and experiences we provide we are incorporating a literacy thread running through.

What difference has Making it REAL made to the children and families you work with?

It has exposed our children to more practical examples. Staff model writing and mark-making and children are naturally creating their own more often now. Environmental print is recognised more during walks and children make their own! Our families now recognise the importance and share their experiences at home more often now.

What are your highlights of Making it REAL?

Seeing my efforts make a difference to my children's development and readiness for school.

What do you plan to do going forwards?

Continue with developing my literacy thread and sharing my knowledge with my new staff, families and their children.

Making it REAL

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S BUREAU

Lewisham

Base Zero Nursery, Bellingham

What difference has Making it REAL made to the knowledge and practice of practitioners?

There are lots – it helped a lot as it highlighted

Opened our eyes to environmental print,

More observant of all children including AEL

We now do home visits

Encouraged us to do more with the library

We have created activities for home visits to leave with parents, following children's interest.

Really enjoy doing REAL

What difference has Making it REAL made to the children and families you work with?

We now invite parents into setting

Parent relationships are stronger, working in partnership

What do you plan to do going forwards?

Will continue with the framework, MIR activities, home visits, creating home packs, using the library supporting individual families as well as a whole setting approach

What are your highlights of Making it REAL?

Going to parents' homes, seeing their environment, seeing family dynamics, really understanding families

Trained in Making it REAL in 2021

Making it REAL

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S BUREAU

Lewisham

Happywoods Nursery

Lewisham

What difference has Making it REAL made to the knowledge and practice of practitioners?

The staff developed a better understanding about the importance of Literacy and started to search for new literacy activities for the children, we also changed the way we read books as we started to do it in smaller groups which became more beneficial for the children. We also introduced books in different languages and made them available for parents to borrow and read for the children at home, we gave the children Christmas and graduation presents as books. We replaced our collection of books and introduced a wide range of books for all age groups including babies where we added more sensory books that helped the children to read more. We had small group sessions with the children to teach them how to handle a book with care. We visit the local library regularly and the library team comes to the nursery to read to the children, we share photos of these visits with parents to encourage them to visit the library with the children and to borrow books.

What difference has Making it REAL made to the children and families you work with?

Parents are coming regularly to read for the children, we helped all our children and their families to apply for and use the library card, and parents started to give special attention to the importance of reading regularly for their children, the children's speech, language, and literacy is improving in all age groups.

What are your highlights of Making it REAL?

We learned several strategies from the program that made the activities more beneficial and fun. The Literacy area was always a very boring area with limited mark-making activities, currently, it has become one of the best areas that the staff are happy to work on and the children spend a longer time carrying out the activities in it.

What do you plan to do going forwards?

To continue with the strategies we are using, encourage parents to get more involved with the reading and mark-making events in the nursery.

Making it REAL

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S BUREAU · Lewisham

Ladywell Preschool, Ladywell

What difference has Making it REAL made to the knowledge and practice of practitioners?

We learnt new skills and incorporated this into practice, e.g. lots more print in the environment, listening games, we printed pictures of sounds and children recorded what they heard with a mark. A lot more listening allowing time to pause to allow for responses.

We've done more environmental print walks – for example one of the children saw no dogs sign and said, 'no to dog poo here'! We looked for Amazon vans, recycling looked at packaging and food labels.

What difference has Making it REAL made to the children and families you work with?

Families loved the new ideas. We encouraged writing for a purpose such as parents putting notes into children's lunchboxes for them, which was lots of fun, encouraged parents to make books out of children's drawings and mark making. We used this for transitioning to Reception.

We informed parents what to focus on recognising it is not the formal stuff we need to push like being able to write name but pre writing skills. We had coffee mornings inviting parents in, parents can come into nursery area early.

We shared lots of listening games, rhyming games, sent home visuals and boxes with things in, sent home playdough recipes and ingredients. Parents loved the ideas.

What are your highlights of Making it REAL?

Self-reflection, encouraged us to look at our practice, are we doing enough?

We improved our practice inside and outside of the setting.

Empowering parents with our home and outside activities.

What do you plan to do going forwards?

Continue to do what we have been in the nursery maybe try to complete some of the project work regardless of grant funding.

Making it REAL

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S BUREAU

Lewisham

Little Cubs Academy Preschool & Nursery

Forest Hill, Honor Oak

What difference has Making it REAL made to the knowledge and practice of practitioners?

Making it REAL has improved practitioners' knowledge about early literacy, it has helped them to build parents' knowledge and confidence in creating a home learning environment that supports and encourages children's reading, writing and oral language and a greater understanding of children's learning and development.

What difference has Making it REAL made to the children and families you work with?

Parental engagement with children's learning has improved. The connection between the home learning environment and events at the nursery was made evident to parents during workshops; this connection has allowed parents to see the big picture. Learning outcomes for children has improved.

What are your highlights of Making it REAL?

Environmental Print Walk

Story Session

Literacy Workshop

What do you plan to do going forwards?

Embed the REAL approach across the setting and have better learning outcomes for all children.

Making it REAL

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S BUREAU

Lewisham

Manor House Day Nursery, Lee

What difference has Making it REAL made to the knowledge and practice of practitioners?

Thinking about home life and we can help, support for parents

Reminds me of all the things used to do so it made everything fresh again.

We now have a travel book to take home, and we are doing lots more environmental print

What difference has Making it REAL made to the children and families you work with?

Building relationships with parents

Parents are more open to share

What are your highlights of Making it REAL?

It has motivated all the staff; it was enlightening going back to basics. Brings it back to why I work in early years.

I enjoyed meeting other people and hearing other people's experiences.

What do you plan to do going forwards?

We will continue to do the REAL activities.

Trained in Making it REAL in 2023

Making it REAL

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S BUREAU

Lewisham

New Cross and Deptford Families First,

New Cross St James

What difference has Making it REAL made to the knowledge and practice of practitioners?

More knowledge about their environment and how they can help children and parents.

Staff are willing and able to listen to children and help parents to understand more of their children needs and how to set up the activities to cater for children needs.

What difference has Making it REAL made to the children and families you work with?

They improved their speaking and observation of different surroundings with their children and meeting their children's needs where they're at.

What are your highlights of Making it REAL?

Being able to help parents meet their children needs without spending a great deal of money.

Parents were very willing to learn and try a new thing.

What do you plan to do going forwards?

I will carry on using what I learnt i.e. encouraging parents to interact with their children more to see their values in certain activities such as rhymes, stories and songs.

Trained in Making it REAL in 2022

Making it REAL

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S BUREAU

Lewisham

Newstead Road Preschool

What difference has Making it REAL made to the knowledge and practice of practitioners?

More focus on early literacy, although we were already doing some of these things it gave us an extra boost, more focus, more priority.

We never had open events for just literacy until MIR, we now share the of the week, we share more info with parents. We have more focus on how we are setting up the room - story of week is extended into all areas of play, will influence our planning.

We have a regular visit from library every half term brings dual language books book start packs, library joining.

What difference has Making it REAL made to the children and families you work with?

Really positive feedback parents said they spent more time their children. More confidence to have fun with their children. Made them realise what they were doing was valid and related to literacy.

What do you plan to do going forwards?

We still have resources and book of ideas, we will continue to use these, MIR will always impact on our practice.

What are your highlights of Making it REAL?

It was the focused quality contacts. The time where it was devoted to just one parent and child without interruption, no distractions. The parents also enjoyed this and would spend time with their children, looking at books, playing less screen time.

Making it REAL

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S BUREAU

Lewisham

Rushey Green Nursery, Catford

What difference has Making it REAL made to the knowledge and practice of practitioners?

I have been around the nursery explaining what Making it REAL is and highlighting it on our display board.

Parents have been bringing more books to share towards our outdoor library.

Opportunity for children to explore their environment more.

More mark-making resources.

Ideas from other settings during the training and meetings.

Children's library cards are ongoing.

What difference has Making it REAL made to the children and families you work with?

MiR has made an impact on them in a way that they are also realising that they were doing it without knowing it. Some even showed me extra resources they are using at home to support their children.

They ask me questions about any help they could provide and how the programme helps their children.

What do you plan to do going forwards?

Keep it going and pass it onto someone else

What are your highlights of Making it REAL?

Doing home visits. Children were really happy showing me their toys and were a bit sad to see me leave.

Doing it for a second year had it's challenges but very rewarding.

I really enjoyed taking part in the project and learning form different settings in terms of ideas and how to enhance them.

Making it REAL

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S BUREAU

Lewisham

St Andrew's Community Nursery, Brockley

What difference has Making it REAL made to the knowledge and practice of practitioners?

Practitioners are more aware of what activities they do and how they can link literacy into them. There are less missed opportunities.

What difference has Making it REAL made to the children and families you work with?

Parents know that very small things can make a big difference, just a bedtime story or singing songs on the way to nursery can increase children's literacy, vocabulary and confidence.

What are your highlights of Making it REAL?

Home visits – seeing children in their home environments and the relationships they have with their families.

Also, the great ideas we have been given.

What do you plan to do going forwards?

To continue to give families information and support around early literacy and encourage them to borrow books and take-home activities from our library.

Continue with termly literacy events.

Making it REAL

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S BUREAU

Lewisham

Sunrise Community Nursery, Brockley

What difference has Making it REAL made to the knowledge and practice of practitioners?

Knowing early literacy is not just about reading and writing, it is so much more. Environmental print improved relationships, highlighted EAL families and now aware of the value of dual language books.

What difference has Making it REAL made to the children and families you work with?

Parents are able to understand more about early literacy and the activities, its more than reading and writing, taking the pressure away.

Parents were more excited to talk about what they are doing with their children and all the different aspects of early literacy.

What are your highlights of Making it REAL?

Impact on parents and difference it has made for them.

Good training highlighting all the different levels of early literacy.

What do you plan to do going forwards?

Ideally would like to have someone else trained to take this forward

I will continue to think about the framework in my practice and use the knowledge I now have.

Trained in Making it REAL in 2022

Making it REAL

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S BUREAU

Lewisham

The Ark Children Centre, Deptford

What difference has Making it REAL made to the knowledge and practice of practitioners?

It has really helped a great deal. All the staff are involved in the MiReal home visit hence they are able to put to practice their knowledge of the training and see the firsthand impact it is making.

The children are more connected to them because they've seen them at home and then in the setting.

What difference has Making it REAL made to the children and families you work with?

This has built a good bond and relationship between the parents/children and the practitioners involved.

Parents are happy to share their home activities with their child with the practitioners.

What do you plan to do going forwards?

We will continue to make MiR home visit and events part of our yearly activity in the setting.

What are your highlights of Making it REAL?

The home visits and the events.

Making it REAL

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S BUREAU

Lewisham

The Nurtury Day Nursery and Pre-school, Catford

What difference has Making it REAL made to the knowledge and practice of practitioners?

It has made a great impact on knowing how to support parents at home but also teaching staff different ways to support children's early literacy skills such as using our environmental print.

What difference has Making it REAL made to the children and families you work with?

Given them a different view on what literacy skills are and the expectations they have on their children.

What are your highlights of Making it REAL?

Working closely alongside parents and children in their own environment. Looking at what they do at home and how the parents support the children.

What do you plan to do going forwards?

More stay and play sessions and workshops to support parents.

Making it REAL

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S BUREAU

Lewisham

Young and Smart Nursery, Lewisham

What difference has Making it REAL made to the knowledge and practice of practitioners?

All about environment – loved the environmental print idea and how letters and numbers are everywhere.

Helped us to communicate better with parents

Knowing there are many ways for parents to teach literacy.

What difference has Making it REAL made to the children and families you work with?

Empowering parents to recognise how children learn and how children are learning from parents.

Talking to children.

What are your highlights of Making it REAL?

The training

The resources

How this impacts on parents and children

What do you plan to do going forwards?

Shared this at staff meeting so all staff are aware of this.

We will continue to use MIREAL.

Trained in Making it REAL in 2023

Making it REAL Settings around the London borough of Lewisham 2024

20 settings trained in Year 1 (2021-22)

20 settings trained in Year 2 (2022-23)

20 settings trained in Year 3 (2023-24)

Making it REAL

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S BUREAU

Lewisham

60 settings trained to date

20 further settings will be trained 2024/25