

Research Briefing N° 22

Supporting learning in literacy and numeracy: the unlocking potential project

This research is an evaluation of a national pilot to improve outcomes in literacy and numeracy for children.

Key words: school-home support; literacy; numeracy; attendance; behaviour

Key findings

- For all pupils involved in the pilot there was a marked improvement in:
 - attendance;
 - punctuality;
 - learning behaviours in class;
 - confidence;
 - social skills;
 - anger management;
 - participation; and
 - response to awards and sanctions.
- Headteachers were pleased with improved attainment at the end of Key Stage 1.
- Many headteachers commented on the value for money of the pilot and emphasised the significant impact of the School-Home Support Practitioners (SHSPs) role across the school.
- ‘Unlocking Potential’ had an impact on the wider school community: parents/carers of targeted children and others became more engaged with schools and developed trusting relationships.
- High levels of one-to-one advice and support from SHSPs were taken up by parents/carers and reduced over the period of the pilot indicating wider cost benefits.
- Important to the success of ‘Unlocking Potential’ was the SHSPs’ focus on:
 - delivering workshops to engage parents;
 - one-to-one casework with families with complex lives;
 - providing high levels of support to parents/carers;



- the high level of face to face regular contact; and
 - understanding of the role of the SHSPs by the headteacher, teachers and practitioners.
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What we did

Unlocking Potential: the 'National Pilot Programme Children, Young People and Families' offered an added dimension to Every Child Counts (ECC) and Every Child a Reader (ECaR) programmes in participating schools by underpinning the work with SHSPs to increase the impact of the interventions. In 2008 in England the national roll-out of ECaR began under the management of National Strategies. The ECC project was a parallel programme to ECaR but with a focus on tackling the difficulties that children have with numeracy. National co-ordination of ECaR is undertaken by the IOE. National co-ordination of ECC is undertaken by Edge Hill University.

Unlocking Potential was targeted at children who were not achieving maximum benefit from these programmes due to poor attendance and/or limited parental support. Over the three year pilot (2009 to 2012), SHSPs worked with children and their families in 20 schools around England and put in place a range of interventions to address parenting skills and children's social development. The research aimed to identify effective models and interventions to increase the impact of programmes that tackle literacy and numeracy difficulties by involving parents/carers in their child's education.

Further information

See School-Home Support website: <http://www.schoolhomesupport.org.uk/>

How we did

- Focus group interviews and individual semi-structured interviews (68 in total) were undertaken with SHSPs, school staff, parents, pupils, and Reading Recovery and Numbers Count staff throughout the three year evaluation.
- Data on the children's attendance, behaviour and parental involvement were provided by the charity School-Home Support.
- In total, parent/ carer feedback forms were received from 300 individuals and teacher feedback forms for 628 pupils.
- The two universities responsible for ECC and ECaR, Edge Hill University and the IOE, shared data to track progress including gains in numeracy and literacy with the research team.
- In Year 1 of the project, all schools involved in the project were visited, in Years 2 and 3, 10 schools were selected for visits to explore examples of good practice.

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