RGTSA

Royal Greenwich Teaching School Alliance

Report on the Early Years ITERS project: 2015/16
A Case Study in Partnership Working

Introduction

The Royal Greenwich Teaching School Alliance includes a collaborative of four good or better RBG Nursery Schools: Pound Park, Robert Owen, Rachel McMillan and Abbey Wood, who act together as a key strategic partner. The RGTSA was awarded funding to enable the collaborative of Nursery schools to take part in a project, aimed at bringing teaching schools and early years providers together to deliver quality improvement in early years provision, and create the infrastructure to support this in a sustainable way. The involvement of private, voluntary and independent (PVI) early years providers was a key requirement of the grant.

Managing the project

The project was steered by a Delivery Group comprising the head teachers of the 4 Nursery Schools, 2 LA EYFS advisory staff and the then Director of the RGTSA. The group met termly to share progress of network groups and agree next steps when issues arose. The Delivery Group reported on progress to the DFE and to the Executive Board of the RGTSA on a regular basis.

Geographical area, local challenge and plan of action

We targeted the most deprived areas in the Borough according to IDACI, where deprivation levels are at 5-10% i.e. East, West, and Central B Children's Centres Areas *(See attached map Appendix 1).* There were 17 settings in these areas which had either not been inspected or were rated Require Improvement /Satisfactory or Inadequate. We invited them all to bid for places in the project and 12 settings were allocated places.

Our challenge was to increase local capacity for two year old entitlement places by firstly improving the quality of the environment and provision in settings, and secondly increasing the number of settings judged good or better - so that disadvantaged children's outcomes improved. The focus of the project was defined as strengthening leadership in 12 settings so that more good settings were available to support disadvantaged children. We decided that two members of staff from each setting would be invited to join the project, to ensure secure implementation of improvements. The four Nursery Schools were tasked with taking a leading role with support from the LA advisory team.

The delivery group selected the Infant and Toddler Environment Rating Scales (ITERS) as a measure of baseline assessment in each of the 12 settings, against which progress could be assessed; with each setting identifying an area rated low to work on and significantly improve. Settings were grouped in four networks, each one linked to a Nursery school and they worked as small partnerships – meeting on a regular basis to share ideas and progress against their baselines.

Programme activity: baseline assessments, training and network meetings

The LA advisory staff ran training on the ITERS rating scales in May 2015 for the all staff involved in the project and Nursery school senior staff. This was very well received (***See Appendix 2 for evaluations.)*** Additional mop up sessions were held to ensure all settings could benefit from the training and were able to use the ITERS scales confidently.

As well as evaluating the course delivery and content we also aimed to evaluate confidence and attitudes before and after the training. (**Appendix 3**) From this we saw that opportunities to share practice between settings was the lowest scoring aspect. We were, therefore, able to feed this evaluation back to the lead Nursery Schools so they could build on this in their networks. it was quite clear from the presentations at the final network meeting in February 2016 that participants' confidence about sharing practice had very much improved - also evidenced by the authoritative presentations given by 2 settings at the annual Royal Greenwich Early Years Conference. (see below)

The initial training on ITERS was followed up with staff from the settings observing good practice in their linked Nursery school before they conducted an audit in their own setting using the ITERS rating scale. This initial audit was the baseline assessment and was validated by the Nursery head teachers.

Following the audit, staff in settings worked on their specific areas for improvement which ranged, for example, from improving children's language skills, improving group activities, to improving the outside area. We also ensured that staff in Nursery Schools involved in leading networks completed the ITERs audit in their own settings, so that there was a clear focus on shared learning and partnership, whilst providing strong models for quality improvement.

Practitioners also attended regular network meetings at their linked Nursery school throughout the Summer, Autumn terms 2015 and the Spring term 2016 to share good practice and discuss developments in their settings; culminating in a final meeting to mark the end of phase 1 of the project in February 2016 – where all the networks came together to present the impact thus far on their settings. This was a highly successful event – with evidence of deep, impactful learning within the settings and confident, quite moving presentations which exceeded Nursery head teachers' expectations. This was a defining moment in the project, as the requirement to show case their learning and to talk openly and publicly to all colleagues in the totality of the project settings about weaknesses in their provision and the efforts made to improve them was a brave, new step for them. It indicated the confidence that PVI colleagues had gained from network meetings – thus addressing the lowest scoring aspect of the baseline assessment carried out at the initial training.

In phase two of the project six settings chose to continue working on newly identified areas scoring low scores on the initial ITERS audit. A new setting also came on board, and took part enthusiastically, with real improvements made in a short time.

The settings which had taken part on phases one and two of the project were invited to the Royal Greenwich Early Years Annual conference in October 2016 -and two of the Nursery head teachers and two of the settings involved in the project, delivered a presentation about the project which was positively received.

Partnerships and Collaboration

Relationships between Nursery staff and PVI practitioners developed from the initial training. The visits to the settings by the Nursery staff for the initial baseline assessment ensured that confidentiality was established, so that honest discussions could be held. A key factor was the reciprocal learning evolving in the project i.e. experienced Nursery staff learning from PVI colleagues – as well as vice versa.

As one Nursery HT stated:

"Relationships built on mutual respect and trust have been formed and have allowed us to become critical friends to each other and to support and nurture change and improvements. There are clear expectations that we are working in collaboration and that we all expect to learn from each other."

In one network group the practitioners suggested that the network meetings take place at their settings so that incremental improvements in their action plans could be readily observed – indicating the high level of trust being formed.

The regular network meetings were crucially important in terms of developing strong partnerships and a culture of collaboration which was not necessarily a feature noted before the project – as settings are understandably in competition with each other and somewhat independent of each other. In the best cases partnership working developed very effectively with staff very enthusiastic about the project and the benefits of being part of a network with peer support, constructive advice and the opportunities to see good practice in their linked Nursery schools.

Practitioners greatly appreciated the opportunities provide by the project and the network meetings, as indicated in their feedback:

> *"The network meetings really focus us on improvement."*

> *"The network meetings are giving us a different perspective and make us think."*

> *"Using the audit encourages us to make positive changes."*

> *"Now we have been paid for time to release us to make changes we know we have to do it!"*

> *"It's good to work as a group – very supportive!"*

> *"It's good having some saying – try it like this - or praising you for something you have done."*

> One Nursery head teacher ensured that all the CPD taking place at the Nursery was also available to their linked PVI staff. She reported *"We are building and nurturing trust between settings and nursery schools through an open door policy, invitations to staff to the visit nursery school in addition to scheduled visit for network meetings - and requests on both sides for mutual support."*

> It is hoped that these relationships will continue.

Challenges and key learning along the way

Inevitably there were challenges, setbacks and some disappointment along the way. We lost some of the original twelve settings – one straight after the initial ITERS training bringing the total to eleven then by the January of 2016 – we were down to ten, when one setting closed unexpectedly. One Nursery head teacher was no longer able to commit to the project after the final network meeting at the end of phase one. However six settings are continued into phase two and a new setting joined the group.

One of resonant themes throughout phase one of the project was the importance of engaging leaders/ owners /managers of the PVI settings. Where they were on board developments and improvements took place - but where they were not engaged it was much more difficult for practitioners to instigate changes. One head teacher has commented on the variation in settings' response - with one very much on board and *"leading their own learning and one which requires additional input as they have deviated from clear guidelines. "* However this was tackled positively and led eventually to good outcomes.

Other constraints on smooth progress in all cases included:

- The fragility of some settings due to financial issues
- The complexities of starting a project from staff level if owners/ managers are not fully involved in the training and therefore not totally conversant with the aims of the project
- Practical issues like arranging dates which all parties could make, given the different working patterns of practitioners in PVI provision compared to nursery schools
- Making sure expectations were realistic – not idealistic

Summary of impact

The project was highly successful in achieving its intended impact with the settings which remained on board throughout phase one and those who continued into phase two.

- ITERS scores against baseline scores improved in identified areas
- capacity to take on increased number of two year olds
- qualitative self-assessments in terms of impact re practitioners' practice/ improvements for children/settings indicated significant learning in all settings and significant change in practice
- (more detail below)
- improved Ofsted ratings, which in some cases cited impact of the project (see detail below)
- better quality leadership of settings, indicated by improved Ofsted grades
- greatly increased levels of practitioner confidence
- proven value of using ITERS training materials, and further use of the training within the local authority training programme, for a wider group of Early Years settings and nursery classes increased levels of trust across the Early Years sector in sharing best practice for mutual gain
- staff trained in ITERS in all 4 Nursery Schools to inform on going self-evaluation

Ofsted Inspections

Impact on the settings thus far has included: one setting being judged good by Ofsted - previously Requires improvement. The report identified 2 strengths linked to the ITERS project: "Children are keen to learn and concentrate for long periods in their play." "Adults provide a good range of carefully chosen resources and well-planned activities to challenge and extend children's learning. " This was a real tribute to the work of the project and agreed as such by the setting.

In another setting judged to be Inadequate the strength identified by the inspection team related to the environment which is on their project improvement plan: "Adults provide an attractively presented and adequately resourced environment for children."

A third setting moved from Satisfactory to Outstanding during phase one of the project. The Ofsted report acknowledged that the work achieved for the project made a significant contribution to CPD at the setting. "The manager recognises individual skills of staff, encourages them to review their work and to access training to benefit children's learning…..Staff share any knowledge gained though training with the rest of the team to enhance teaching practice."

Other inspections outcomes included: a setting which had its: first inspection and was judged: outstanding; another which had its first inspection judged to be good, with positive comments on their ITERS priority area re children's language. One which had previously been deemed RI moved to Good; another judged RI remained RI but Ofsted noted: "They are working closely with the other professional in the local authority using an action plan to identify priorities for improvement" - a clear reference to the project. Two have not yet been inspected. Thus, overall six made significant improvement.

Impact on settings: self-assessment of impact at end of phase 1 (validated by Nursery Headteachers)

As stated the impact on the settings was captured in presentations provided by each network at the final phase one network meeting, indicating significant learning by the practitioners involved and significant impact on children's progress and learning. The summary of these impact assessments is **Appendix 4.** and represents impressive outcomes. The practitioners and Nursery school staff were buzzing with excitement and enthusiasm on the day!

Conclusion

In spite of setbacks – including the closure of some settings, this project was very successful in terms of collaboration between Nursery schools and settings and practitioner learning. it also contributed, we think, to some degree to improved Ofsted grades and the capacity of settings to take on more two year old children.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Map of selected geographical area

Appendix 2 Evaluation of the ITERS training

Appendix 3 Confidence rating form and baseline scores for confidence rates

Appendix 4 Evaluation of the Final Network Meeting

Appendix 5 Impact assessments for phase 1 of the project

Appendix 1

map.pdf

Appendix 2

RGTSA DfE Early
Years Project Training

Appendix 3

DfE EYFS project
participant confidence

RGTSA DfE Early
Years Project Training

Appendix 4

RGTSA Early Years: ITERS Project Final Network Event

10th February 2016

Charlton House

EVALUATION SUMMARY

1. **What did you enjoy about today?**

Feedback from all settings on impact on children
Being able to see the impact that the course has had on each setting involved
Meeting all the ITERS participants. Recognising good improvements across the sector. Best bit was everyone presenting their own success – a great driver and motivation
Have the book surgery idea! Learned lots that was based on 'bottom up' approach to development that motivates the PVI teams
Getting info from other settings, their improvement and impact and seeing the presentations
Sharing experience and knowledge
Sharing ideas and networking
I enjoyed sharing my nursery project with other nurseries and hearing what areas other nurseries have been working on
The different presentations
The opportunity to listen to other settings and feel excited about the difference the project is making
I enjoyed all. Lots of new ideas
Listening to the other settings feedback ideas and sharing what they have done and how it helped the children
We enjoyed seeing all the other settings work/journey through this project

2. **What did you learn today?**

Effectiveness of ITERS
Public speaking is not so bad, it's been beneficial to hear others ideas and recycle
Have the book surgery idea! Learned lots that was based on 'bottom up' approach to development that motivates the PVI teams
Getting ideas from settings that we can take back to ours
Different ideas from different nurseries
Where there's a will, there's a way. How committed people are.
I learnt that there were areas of improvement at my nursery that were similar to other nurseries which have me really good ideas to bring to my setting
That partnerships work effectively well to promote good practice
Lots of lovely ideas, book surgery, children's council and how the project is having a positive impact on the children's learning
Other ways to improve areas we didn't think about previously. Also that there are nurseries with bigger challenges coping well
A lot – learnt a lot of ideas to take back to my setting – including parents i.e. sharing books

It didn't matter what area you worked on, all settings had the same fears and discovery

3. How could you further improve your practice?

Continue with the ITERS rating scales
Using the ITERS rating scale to use for other areas in the nursery to improve
Keep working on ITERS areas – select one a term perhaps with staff
Continually looking at the ITERS and making further improvements
Implementing in our setting
Listen to other settings and practitioners
By continuing to use the ITERS to support our team and encourage us to keep reflecting on our provision and practice
Continue the work by incorporating these ideas and networking
Continue to implement the project within other areas of learning
Expand the areas we focus on and keep on improving
By using the information the other people talked about and also see the ITERS audit to look at other areas
Re-check the audit and select another area to work on. also maintain the work already implemented

4. Overall rating of the project thus far

Very Good   Good   Satisfactory   Unsatisfactory

  11   1

Appendix 5

Impact assessment form for Stage 1

What was the starting point in relation to the ITERS audit and practice at the start of this project?

Tiny Explorers Lola Edeki (Owner and Manager) Rajal Patel, Rossella Bianchi (practitioners)	• Helping children use language. ITERS Audit 5 • Saw EAL as language barrier to using speaking • Lack of awareness of language development • Adults not listening to the children • Resources not being used appropriately to encourage children to use language
Just Twos Ebun Thomas (Owner) Bukki Awolowo (Manager and practitioner)	• Group activities was graded 5 • Activities not meeting the needs of individual children • Activities not stimulating enough • Adults not using positive language • Staff not tuning into children's needs
Cooperative Charlton Connie Cousins (Manager) Michelle Guerier (Practitioner)	• On average our score was 6.7 • We noticed that indoor space, furniture for routine care and play, provision for relaxation and comfort needed improvement. • Staff's interaction needed improvement in the garden
Zeeba Daycare Tian Van Emmenis (Director) Satvinder Bhurji (Manager and practitioner) Danielle Robinson (Practitioner)	• Improve language and communication • Provide resources and opportunities to encourage language and communication • Helping children understand language • Helping children use language • Using books
Smart Kidz Day Nursery Julie Robertson (Manager) Rosie Thomas, Molly James (Practitioners)	• Not enough nature resources for children • No variety of multicultural equipment • Practitioners not engaging appropriately
Springwell Daycare Nursery Ayo Toma (Owner and manager) Heidi Sakifio, Sandra Brooks, Eliana (Practitioners)	• 3 pets (2 guinea pigs and 1 rabbit) • Not many natural materials • Wooden toys mostly packed away • Activities not focused
Ripplings Pre-School Denise (Manager) Sarah Wright, Maria Mayhew (practitioners)	• Outside area • Display boards • Update parents notice board
Smart Teenies Ltd Stephanie Boyce (Owner and manager) Laura Loomes (practitioner)	• No specific quiet zones for children • Staff making improvements within room without specific focus • No outside quiet zone • No ideas as to how we were graded for each area
Zippys Day Nursery Chizzy Chukwukere (Owner and practitioner) Tinuke Aluko (Manager and	• Creating an outdoor environment that reflects the indoor learning opportunities. • Encouraging more positive engagement between the staff and children in the room.

practitioner)	• Having a smooth routine to support the children's learning and development. • Utilising the space in the rooms to create a better learning environment.

What activities, strategies, developments have been put in place to make improvements from this starting point?

Tiny Explorers	• Added more visual prompts to encourage children to communicate • Organised resources – put them in different areas and labelled them eg. Stories outside • Give children more time to answer and speak to staff and share their observations and needs
Just Twos	• Signs and symbols introduced for some group activities • More activities set up around children's interests • Story props used to keep all children's attention • Activities organised to let children freely access them with space and time to explore
Cooperative Charlton	• We did a staff meeting showing and explaining the importance of staff interaction • We set up the children's council and asked them what we should do regarding the walls • Research and purchase suitable adult chairs, rocking chairs, so that staff can sit comfortably and reflect a homely environment • Purchase a variety of soft toys and puppets for all children
Zeeba Daycare	• Improve book area – more inviting • Maintaining the quality/condition of books • Book bags with props and puppets • Now and Next boards – visual routines • Open ended questions • Using language to encourage communication throughout routines and play
Smart Kidz Day Nursery	• Purchase of multicultural resources such as instruments, clothing and puppets • More nature materials, treasure basket made for all rooms • Purchase of animals in nursery • Movement of staff between rooms
Springwell Daycare Nursery	• More activities • More natural materials in nursery rooms • Wooden toys fished out of boxes • Few baskets bought • New collections were made from natural stuff
Ripplings Pre-School	• Garden materials • Activities built into planner • Colour/topics • Regular meeting/planning next steps
Smart Teenies Ltd	• New reading areas for children to access

	• Quiet areas for children to relax • Outdoor specific cosy/book area • Team discussions on area improvements • Time to reflect on areas and practice
Zippys Day Nursery	• Discussing with staff the changes • Getting feedback from parents • Purchasing equipment we may need • Asking and observing the children after the changes have been made to ensure they are happy and comfortable • Trialling the changes

What impact on children have these improvements had?

Tiny Explorers	• Children using more language – especially 2 year olds, to communicate their needs and emotions • Tracking shows monthly improvements in language and communication • Children's' behaviour has improved
Just Twos	• Using signs and symbols – helped two children to enjoy group times more and cope with the routine • Children have more choice – resources clearly labelled • Environment more organised and children can tidy up themselves
Cooperative Charlton	• The children's social and emotional skills have developed • The children's council enjoyed taking part and getting their ideas across • The children enjoy the home from home feeling and enjoy snuggling on the sofa • The children are a lot calmer and more engaged
Zeeba Daycare	• Use of language by children and practitioners are consistent, meaningful and fun • Books/props/puppets being used and enjoyed • Consistent use of books in all areas • Children's use of visual timetables to support use of language
Smart Kidz Day Nursery	• Children are able to experience different cultural practices • With the nature resources, children have more choices and open ended experience • Children have more responsibility, more independence and creative thinking • Children are more settled with staff members
Springwell Daycare Nursery	• Children enjoy playing with wood toys • Children exploring different materials • Children learning to relate and care for pets • They enjoy time spent in different activities
Ripplings Pre-School	• Improved energy levels • Children always want to play outside • Knowledge and understanding of colours • Trying new foods/colours • Talk to parents about what they have done at school
Smart Teenies Ltd	• Use of books has increased

	• Clearer spaces within the room that they can identify and make better choices • Heuristic play has become an everyday feature • Opportunity to be part of the planning of the room • Communication and language with books and puppets
Zippys Day Nursery	• The children are more engaged in purposeful indoor and outdoor play • A clearer routine is being followed within the rooms the children understand and participate in. • The children are exploring areas both indoor and outdoor they previously didn't engage in. • There is a lot more verbal communication amongst the children with each other and practitioners

What impact have these improvements had on practitioners' practice?

Tiny Explorers	• Given staff more confidence, listening to the children and really getting to know them • Practitioners follow children's interests and ideas • Giving children more choices (staff respecting children's' voice and choices) • Involving children in planning
Just Twos	• All staff using positive language at activities • Staff using signs and symbols to encourage positive behaviour at group activities • Staff aware that organised resources better for the children
Cooperative Charlton	• The staff see where they went wrong and have put it in place and are consistent with interaction and joining in with children's play • It's a nice way to bond with children using the rocking chair • The staff can sit comfortably with a small group of children and read stories with puppets and story sacks
Zeeba Daycare	• Positive response to adaptation of environment • Practitioners are using language consistently to communicate effectively with children • Practitioners use activities/props to encourage children to use language • Skills and knowledge to support children in communication
Smart Kidz Day Nursery	• Everyone is more proactive and enjoys coming to work • Practitioners gain greater understanding of children's interests • Practitioners have built better relationships with parents
Springwell Daycare Nursery	• Practitioners are more focused on natural things • Everybody updated their rooms • Changed things around children • More child-friendly nursery
Ripplings Pre-School	• Better planning

	• More focus and interaction • Excited about new projects
Smart Teenies Ltd	• Clearer focus on areas • Clarity in practices • Use of spaces for 1-2-1 sessions
Zippys Day Nursery	• Better engagement between staff and children • Space is being utilised more efficiently within the room and clarity on where things go. • The team have devised a clearer routine that flows better are being followed within the rooms and encourage the children participation. • Staff have a positive attitude to change within the rooms they work in and show more confidence suggesting ideas for change/improvement not just in the rooms they work in but within the setting. • The team are able to identify cold spots within the room/nursery and act on these observations immediately

What impact have these improvements had on the setting?

Tiny Explorers	• Good progress in communication for all children • Children very happy (they feel comfortable and secure) • Children more focussed on activities as they are planned from staff's knowledge of the children • Staff more confident in knowing the children and feeding back to parents
Just Twos	• Children settling quickly to activities • Children happier • Through signs and symbols – children who were unsure/unsettled get involved and feel comfortable and safe • Individual children's needs are being met
Cooperative Charlton	• The setting is calmer and everyone is more engaged • The staff and management now check with the ITERS regularly to see what needs improvement • The parents have commented that is feels more homely
Zeeba Daycare	• Language being used is making a big impact on the development of individual CLL • Books and props are being enjoyed and used effectively to extend children's language • Large variety of books and resources • Observations show children are using more words and complex sentences
Smart Kidz Day Nursery	• Children, staff and parents have better relationships • Everyone is generally happier to be here • Improved OFSTED grade
Springwell Daycare Nursery	• Our rooms look more interesting • We have ways to do activities we didn't dream about • Our minds stretched and keep on stretching

	• All of the nursery is better
Ripplings Pre-School	• Brighter display boards • Children more interested in activities • Better outside area
Smart Teenies Ltd	• Clearer focus • Clarity of practices • Marled changes within children and their play • Parents like the changes and have commented on what a benefit it is
Zippys Day Nursery	• Smoother running of the nursery • Positive working and learning environment for staff and children • Confident team and children • The nursery is more inviting and looks less cluttered • Positive Parents comments and feedback have been made