



Evaluation of the Doodle Families Literacy Programme Pilot



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Contents

Foreword	3
CDI Response	4
Acknowledgements	5
List of Tables	6
Acronyms	6
Executive Summary	7
Section 1 - Introduction	10
Background to the Doodle Families Literacy Programme.....	10
Doodle Families Pilot Aims and Objectives.....	10
Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project.....	11
Overview of the Evaluation Report.....	11
Section 2 – Methodology	13
Aims of the evaluation.....	13
Methodology.....	13
Data collection.....	15
Analytic strategy for data analysis, interpretation and drawing of conclusions.....	16
Ethical considerations.....	18
Section 3 - Findings	19
Theme A: Programme set up and design from the perspectives of schools and external agencies	19
Subtheme 1 – Programme set up.....	19
Subtheme 2 – Feedback from facilitators on the Doodle Families training.....	22
Subtheme 3 – Manual development and adaptation in schools.....	24
Theme B - Experience of programme delivery from the perspective of children, parents and schools	25
Subtheme 1 – Expectations and understanding of the programme.....	26
Subtheme 2 – Organisation of programme delivery.....	28
Subtheme 3 – Attendance and participation.....	29
Subtheme 4 – Programme content feedback.....	30

Subtheme 5 – Delivery and facilitation of the programme.....	34
Subtheme 6 – Community of Practice.....	39
Subtheme 7 – Challenges to programme delivery.....	39
Theme C - Outcomes of the programme from the perspectives of parents, schools, and external agencies.....	41
Subtheme 1 - Outcomes for children, parents and schools.....	41
Subtheme 2 – Enhanced relationships.....	50
Theme D - Future development of the programme from the perspectives of children, parents, schools, and external agencies.....	51
Subtheme 1 – Children’s views on other activities.....	51
Subtheme 2 - Parents’ recommendations about future delivery.....	51
Subtheme 3 –School staff recommendations for future delivery.....	52
Subtheme 4 - External agency recommendations about future delivery.....	52
Section 4 - Discussion.....	54
Aims and objectives of the pilot Doodle Families Programme.....	54
Were the stated programme aims met?.....	54
Were the stated programme objectives met?.....	57
Section 5 - Evaluation Recommendations.....	61
Section 6 - Conclusion.....	68
References.....	70
Appendices.....	71
Appendix 1 – Research questions and embedded questions.....	71
Appendix 2 - Information and consent forms.....	73
Appendix 3 – Observation Schedule.....	86
Appendix 4 – Report Feedback Template.....	88
Appendix 5 - Thematic Map Doodle Families Evaluation.....	89
Appendix 6 – Doodle Families Logic Model.....	91

Foreword

The need for a follow up or booster to the Doodle Den programme was identified by school principals in Tallaght West, and we are delighted that the Area-Based Childhood Programme (ABC) was able to support the development of Doodle Families.

Following a literature review and consultation with key stakeholders both in Tallaght and Limerick, it was agreed that the intervention would be delivered as an after-school service, given the range of in-school approaches already established, and the focus on providing supports for targeted children requiring an additional intervention. The Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick were contracted to conduct a qualitative process evaluation.

The children, parents and facilitators that participated in the pilot enjoyed the Doodle Families programme and spoke positively about their experiences. The pilot and the recommendations from the evaluation have been extremely helpful in highlighting a number of areas for consideration in relation to the future delivery of Doodle Families including the timing of delivery, training for programme facilitators and further development of the programme manual.

The key learning is that after-school delivery in schools which includes parental participation, is extremely challenging for practical reasons. One-to-one meetings in the participating schools subsequent to the conclusion of this evaluation resulted in the CDI Board of Management agreeing that Doodle Families would not be required to be delivered after-school, but rather that the time and setting for delivery would be a local decision, to be made by the school and/or facilitators, based on consideration of those factors which enable maximum participation. This is in keeping with the recommendations of the evaluation.

CDI has obtained additional funding to undertake a quasi-experimental study of Doodle Families, building on the learning and recommendations from the pilot evaluation. This will include assessing outcomes for children and families, as well as further examining implementation issues.

This evaluation report of the initial Doodle Families pilot by the Transforming Education through Dialogue project research team, offers other useful guidance for the next iteration of the programme and the supports which are required to maximise positive outcomes, and this is extremely welcome.

Dr. Suzanne Guerin

Chair

CDI Board of Management

CDI Response

The development, implementation and evaluation of any new intervention is always going to be challenging. The unexpected challenges, hoped for outcomes, and critical learning points are exciting, scary and hugely valuable. CDI is delighted to have once again had the opportunity to undertake a service design process, drawing on national and international evidence; our own evaluations and experiences, current policy developments and consultation with local stakeholders.

Doodle Families was designed to incorporate these many factors, as well as reflect the reality of busy family lives and school communities.

This study provides important lessons in terms of implementation issues such as facilitator training, parental engagement and logistical planning. This will provide an important context for the next phase, which will incorporate both a process and outcomes evaluation.

CDI has always been committed to both utilising and generating evidence, and the pilot of the Doodle Families Programme has illustrated the immense value of this approach.

Dr. Suzanne Guerin

Chair

CDI Board of Management

Acknowledgements

The researchers from the Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project would like to thank the following individuals:

- Fiona O' Connor, member of the research team from February 2015-May 2015, for her generous input to the research design and data collection;
- Suzanne O' Dowd, Doodle Den Quality Specialist, Limerick, for her support in arranging data collection in schools and information on programme participants;
- TED Management Team members, Eucharua McCarthy, Director, Curriculum Development Unit, and Dr. Sandra Ryan, Chair of the TED Project for their ongoing support

We are very appreciative of the level of engagement we met in collecting the data for this research and we particularly acknowledge all the school staff, parents and children who gave their time to contribute to this research.

CDI reiterates the important contributions of the children, parents and schools participating in Doodle Families, and also CDI would like to acknowledge the support of our funders: The Department of Children and Youth Affairs, and The Atlantic Philanthropies, along with Pobal and the Centre for Effective Services. The continued commitment, generosity of time and expertise of our advisors is also very much appreciated, in particular that of Dr. Suzanne Guerin, whose vigilance and integrity have been so central to our work.

List of Tables

Table 1 - Numbers of programme participants and research participants in pilot schools.....	Page 15
Table 2 - Manual variation across pilot schools.....	Page 33
Table 3 - Short-term outcomes and correlation with programme objectives.....	Page 60

Acronyms

CDI	Childhood Development Initiative
COP	Community of Practice
CFLP	Clare Family Learning Programme
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DDQS	Doodle Den Quality Specialist
EWS	Education Welfare Services
EAL	English as an Additional Language
HSCL	Home School Community Liaison
LEC	Limerick Education Centre
LCETB	Limerick Clare Education and Training Board
MIC	Mary Immaculate College
MIREC	Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee
NALA	National Adult Literacy Association
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
SCP	School Completion Programme
TED	Transforming Education through Dialogue
TUSLA	Child and Family Agency

Executive Summary

The Doodle Families Literacy Programme¹ was a pilot programme that was delivered in three DEIS² Band 1 primary schools in Limerick during the period of April to June 2015 for First Class children and their parents.

Doodle Families was originally designed as an afterschool programme, but the pilot schools delivered it during the school day or bridging the school day and afterschool time. Doodle Families was delivered in two four week blocks, with families participating in one session per week.

The pilot programme objectives were:

- To pilot Doodle Families as a follow up to Doodle Den;
- To train a panel of facilitators from three pilot schools and local services to deliver the programme.
- To verify programme content, implementation issues and training needs to support the replication of Doodle Families.

The aim of the evaluation of Doodle Families was to assess the implementation of the programme, how it was delivered and how those involved in the delivery felt about the programme, including school staff, parents, children, school principals and external organisations.

The evaluation was primarily a process or formative evaluation which was concerned with systematic observation of the programme aimed at illuminating and understanding the 'internal dynamics' of how Doodle Families e was delivered (Patton 2014; Robson 2002). Quantitative data comprising attendance records supplemented the qualitative data.

Multiple accounts of how the pilot Doodle Families Programme was implemented collected through different methods facilitated triangulation thereby enhancing the overall validity of the research and reducing research reactivity and bias (Bryman 2008; Miles et al 2014; Robson 2002). Key findings from the evaluation are as follows:

- **Timing of programme delivery.** School staff favoured the delivery of the programme within the school day despite the development of the programme being for after-school delivery. Parents in two schools indicated satisfaction with the timing and in one school they stated a preference for the programme to be delivered earlier in the school day.
- **Releasing staff to deliver the programme.** Delivering the programme during the school day created a difficulty in releasing staff, and principals in two of the three schools decided to facilitate the programme for this reason. This was despite funding from CDI to facilitate staff delivery. The original aim of the pilot was to have a member of school staff and a staff member of a local support service facilitate the programme. This was not the case and all facilitators were school staff members.

¹ Doodle Families Literacy Programme will be referred to as Doodle Families from this point.

² Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) is the Department of Education and Skills policy instrument to address educational disadvantage. DEIS provides a standardised system for identifying levels of disadvantage and an integrated School Support Programme. Primary schools included in the scheme are categorised as Band 1, Band 2 or Rural, with DEIS Band 1 primary schools having a higher concentration of disadvantage.

- **Time of year.** The time of year at which the programme was implemented was identified as an area that needs consideration. The programme was delivered before and after the Easter break and some facilitators felt the break was detrimental to attendance levels. All three schools were of the view that the programme should be delivered earlier in the school year to encourage attendance.
- **Programme duration.** Feedback on the duration of the programme was mixed. Facilitators felt that the programme was too long whereas parental feedback was inconsistent across the three schools. They either felt it was too short, too long or of sufficient length to not lose interest.
- **Balancing the aims of parental engagement and the literacy focus of the activities.** School staff spoke of the tension they encountered in trying to balance the literacy focus of the activities, particularly writing activity, and the objective of engaging parents in the programme and the school.
- **Balancing the needs of parents and children participating in the same group.** This was identified as an implementation issue in two of the schools, with one facilitator specifically commenting on how much of the content as adapted by the school, was focused on the needs of parents.
- **Physical environment.** In one school the physical environment was raised by facilitators and parents as an implementation issue as the room was quite small but unfortunately the school had no other general purpose space available during the school day.
- **Behaviour management.** Behaviour management and how facilitators dealt with children's behaviour when parents were present was raised by parents in two schools. This raises the implementation issue of who is responsible for managing the child's behaviour in such situations and the need for clear understanding between parents and facilitators about the same.

Internal communication between relevant staff in schools interested in participating in Doodle Families and Doodle Den facilitators in the school would also help to create greater awareness of both programmes, most specifically how Doodle Families aims to build on the Doodle Den programme.

The findings indicate that:

- There was a broad diversity of parents participating across the schools in this programme, including parents from non-English speaking backgrounds, as well as parents who may have had literacy difficulties. There was some evidence that facilitators struggled to respond to this diversity at times. Best practice guidance for facilitators and schools on how to engage with such a diverse group of parents would be a crucial aspect of the future development of the programme in terms of both the training programme content and the manual content and guidelines;
- Principals noted that they experienced difficulty in releasing a teacher, other than the HSCL Coordinator, to deliver the programme during the school day. The original after school delivery mechanism would have addressed this issue. Should the programme be offered during the school day in future, the researchers recommend that other possibilities be explored such as recruiting School Completion Programme staff or Youth and Community workers to deliver the programme with the HSCL. If this option was to be explored and piloted, it would entail tailored training programmes in recognition of the diverse skills each would bring. It is also possible that parents might be upskilled in the long term to act as facilitators;
- One of the key benefits of the programme is that it provides a unique opportunity for parents to learn about supporting their children's learning and practice skills with children present;

- The pilot schools cater for very diverse family demographics with children and parents from different social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Responding to and celebrating this diversity in delivering a family learning/literacy programme is essential to promote parental engagement and enhancement of the home learning environment for children.

Key recommendations include the following:

- Conduct a short training needs analysis of facilitators;
- Tailor the length of the training to suit the training needs of the facilitators;
- Allow greater time during the training for facilitators to engage with the programme manual content and discuss each session;
- Involve the programme developer/s in the delivery of training so that facilitators can engage directly with them about the rationale, aims and objectives of the programme;
- The manual should allow for a differentiated approach to meet the needs of diverse literacy skills and English language proficiency of parents with sample sessions and guidelines for facilitators on how to approach same;
- Include best practice guidelines to support facilitators to engage with families from different cultural and social backgrounds, and guidelines on how to encourage participants to engage with each other. It is also recommended that the programme contain a menu of fun activities;
- Ensure clarity regarding about the nature of the relationship between the facilitators and parents;
- Provide guidelines on the scope for flexibility within the programme;
- The format of programme sessions should focus on how parents can support children's learning with greater emphasis on the elements of the English language curriculum i.e., reading, writing and oral language, and less emphasis on writing activity for parents and family and personal circumstances;
- While flexibility and capacity to adapt activities in the programme manual is key, facilitators need a wider range of support materials to draw from in implementing the programme.

Section 1 - Introduction

Background to the Doodle Families Literacy Programme

The Doodle Families Literacy Programme was a pilot programme that was delivered in three DEIS³ Band 1 primary schools in Limerick during the period of April to June 2015 for First Class children and their parents. The programme was designed by the Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) as a booster to the Doodle Den⁴ afterschool programme which is for Senior Infant children aged five to six and that has been proven to improve literacy outcomes for participating children (Biggart et al, 2014). The majority of the eighteen children who participated in Doodle Families across the three pilot schools had previously completed Doodle Den. Doodle Families was originally designed as an afterschool programme, but the pilot schools delivered it during the school day or bridging the school day and afterschool time.

Doodle Families was delivered in two four week blocks, with families participating in one session per week. Training for programme facilitators took place in February 2015 and programme delivery commenced in March 2015. A total of six facilitators, two from each school, participated in the training and delivered the programme for the eighteen children and eighteen parents⁵.

Doodle Families Pilot Aims and Objectives

Building on an existing evidence-based programme (Doodle Den), research both nationally and internationally on family learning and best practice on implementing family literacy programmes, the pilot programme objectives were:

- To pilot Doodle Families as a follow up to Doodle Den;
- To train a panel of facilitators from three pilot schools and local services to deliver the programme;
- To verify programme content, implementation issues and training needs to support the replication of Doodle Families.

The Doodle Families Programme aims are:

- To support the home learning environment by offering projects, tools and confidence for families to engage in literacy enhancing outcomes;
- To equip parents with the skills to carry out literacy activities in the home;
- To support and extend the benefits of Doodle Den. For example to build on children's comprehension skills, enjoyment of school, and levels of reading in the home;
- To encourage family literacy activities and library use;
- To provide a context for families to participate in fun literacy based games and activities.

Three schools delivered the Doodle Families Programme, the first had eight children and parents enrolled,

³ Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) is the Department of Education and Skills policy instrument to address educational disadvantage. DEIS provides a standardised system for identifying levels of disadvantage and an integrated School Support Programme. Primary schools included in the scheme are categorised as Band 1, Band 2 or Rural, with DEIS Band 1 primary schools having a higher concentration of disadvantage.

⁴ Further information about Doodle Den is available at <http://www.twcdi.ie/our-programmes/doodle-den>

⁵ Parents and other relatives brought children to Doodle Families but 'parent' is used throughout the report to avoid identifying individuals.

seven of whom completed the programme and six of whom had participated in Doodle Den. Seven children along with seven parents participated in the second school. All the children had participated in the Doodle Den Programme. Finally, four⁶ children participated in the third school, all of whom had participated in Doodle Den (though one did not complete the year). Three parents participated in this final school.

Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project

The Transforming Education through Dialogue⁷ (TED) Project, Curriculum Development Unit, Mary Immaculate College (MIC), Limerick, was commissioned by CDI to evaluate the pilot of the Doodle Families Programme. The TED project is a strategic partnership between MIC and schools, agencies and organisations of the Limerick region and beyond. TED facilitates a connection between the specific expertise of lecturers and other College staff and the identified needs of schools and voluntary and statutory groups within the local community and at national and international level. Fundamentally, TED aims to identify, develop, research and evaluate educational practices that contribute to greater understanding of the complexities of equity of educational outcomes and to be proactive in the process of educational change and development. This proven record is manifested through a variety of approaches including the development and facilitation of networks of primary and post-primary schools, engagement in partnerships for change, intervention projects (design, delivery and evaluation), research, evaluation and dissemination (publications, seminars, conferences (national and international), after school support (publications, training and networking), workshops and summer schools). The Doodle Den Quality Specialist⁸ (DDQS), Limerick, is seconded to the TED Project by CDI to support the six local DEIS Band 1 primary schools delivering the Doodle Den Programme. The TED Project also creates opportunities for meaningful engagement of children and teachers from local DEIS schools with the MIC campus through the delivery of innovative, cutting edge projects with staff in the Faculty of Education such as MIC Children's Choir, Studio Classroom Art Initiative and LEGO Innovation Studio.

Overview of the Evaluation Report

The aim of the evaluation of the Doodle Families Programme was to assess the implementation of the programme, how it was delivered and how those involved in the delivery felt about the programme, including school staff, parents, children, school principals and external organisations.

The Methodology Section details the approach to the evaluation and outlines the research questions, data collection process, how the data were analysed and ethical considerations. Section Three provides a detailed account of the findings of the evaluation presented under four overarching themes:

- Theme A - Programme set up and design from the perspectives of schools and external agencies;
- Theme B - Experience of programme delivery from the perspective of children, parents and schools;
- Theme C - Outcomes of the programme from the perspectives of children, parents, schools, and external agencies;
- Theme D - Future development of the programme from the perspectives of children, parents, schools, and external agencies.

⁶ Three children and three parents/guardians attended and another child attended because s/he travels with one of the participating parents. This child was not included in the child focus group for that school.

⁷ Further information about the TED Project is available at <http://www.mic.ul.ie/ted/Pages/default.aspx>

⁸ The Doodle Den Quality Specialist, Limerick, is seconded by CDI to the TED project. The DDQS, Limerick role is to deliver training, facilitate and participate in Communities of Practice and conduct site visits with the schools involved in Doodle Den in Limerick. The DDQS, Limerick works closely with CDI's Quality Specialist in Dublin in order to promote the quality of delivery and programme fidelity and develop local capacity to monitor and sustain delivery.

Section Five discusses the findings in relation to the stated aims and objectives of the pilot of the Doodle Families Programme. Recommendations arising from the findings of the evaluation are detailed in Section Six and are categorised under four headings:

- Consultation and programme set up in schools;
- Training for facilitators and Community of Practice (COP) meetings;
- Doodle Families Programme content and implementation;
- Dissemination of the learning from the evaluation to relevant stakeholders and future development of the programme.

The final section concludes the report by highlighting the key learnings from the implementation and evaluation of the Doodle Families pilot.

Section 2 – Methodology

This section outlines the aims of the evaluation, the methodology and data collection process, along with the approach to data analysis and ethical considerations considered in the evaluation.

Aims of the evaluation

The aim of the evaluation of the Doodle Families Programme was to assess the implementation of the programme, how it was delivered and how those involved in the delivery felt about the programme including school staff, parents, children, school principals and external organisations. The specific areas of focus and research questions of the evaluation identified by CDI in the tender document and agreed with the TED team in Mary Immaculate College were as follows:

- **Consultation process** - Were stakeholders (i.e., local stakeholders - schools, School Completion Programmes, Limerick and Clare ETB and national stakeholders – DES, NALA), satisfied with the consultation process about the programme content and delivery? How useful and relevant is the programme manual? Is the programme easy to prepare for and deliver? Was the content relevant and engaging for participants?
- **Training** - Was the training and support provided appropriate, effective and relevant? What was most useful? What was missing? How could training and support be improved?
- **Attendance and participation** - What were attendance and participation levels for parents and children? What helped participation? What got in the way?
- **Experience of Doodle Families** - How was the experience of Doodle Families for:-
 - The children?
 - The parents?
 - The facilitators?
 - The schools?
 - Other agencies e.g. NALA; library; DES.

Methodology

A qualitative, interpretivist approach was adopted to engage a diverse range of stakeholders in discussions about their perceptions of various aspects of the pilot programme including design, implementation and impact.

The evaluation was primarily a process or formative evaluation which was concerned with systematic observation of the programme aimed at illuminating and understanding the 'internal dynamics' of how the Doodle Families Programme was delivered (Patton 2014; Robson 2002). According to Patton (2014), a qualitative approach is 'highly appropriate' for studying process for a number of reasons. Firstly, detailed descriptions are necessary to depict what happens as well as how people engage with each other. Secondly, individual's experiences and perceptions of processes vary and therefore 'need to be captured in their own words' (Patton 2014, p.195). Thirdly, process is 'fluid and dynamic' and cannot be summarised in a rating scale at a single point in time. Finally, the process itself may actually be the outcome of the programme. Additionally, a variety of perspectives can be sought from both internal and external stakeholders in a process evaluation. The approach can also investigate both formal and informal activity as well as anticipated and unanticipated outcomes (Patton 2014). Stakeholders were asked for their feedback on the perceived outcomes or impact of the programme, as well as

their opinions on the future development of the programme. Qualitative methodologies were largely employed in order to generate a rich description of the experiences of the participants. Quantitative data comprising attendance records supplemented the qualitative data.

The methods utilised include:

- Semi-structured interviews with school staff about their experiences and perceptions of pilot programme delivery;
- Focus groups with parents about their experiences and perceptions of the Doodle Families Pilot Programme;
- Focus groups with children about their experiences and perceptions of the Doodle Families Pilot Programme;
- Semi-structured interviews with staff members from external agencies that were involved in the consultation process and/or design of the Doodle Families Pilot Programme;
- Observations of pilot programme delivery in each of the three pilot schools.

Multiple accounts of how the pilot Doodle Families Programme was implemented collected through different methods facilitated triangulation thereby enhancing the overall validity of the research and reducing research reactivity and bias (Bryman 2008; Miles et al 2014; Robson 2002).

The research questions agreed between TED and CDI as part of the tendering process were as follows:

- Have the objectives of the programme as outlined in the Terms of Reference been achieved?
- Has the programme been implemented and delivered successfully?
- What are the stakeholder's perceptions about the delivery of the programme?

A number of embedded questions were identified which related to:

- The consultation and process on programme design and delivery;
- The application process;
- The identification and training of programme facilitators;
- Programme content and delivery;
- Experience of children, parents and school staff of the Doodle Families Programme along with the perceptions of outside agencies;
- The future development of the programme.

A full list of questions is contained in Appendix 1.

As the research was a small scale study of a pilot across three settings, non-probability, purposive sampling was employed to engage programme facilitators and participants in the research. All members of school staff involved in the programme delivery and the majority of programme participants, both parents and children took part in the focus groups. CDI provided a list of relevant external agencies to be interviewed, all of whom agreed to participate in the research.

Data collection

Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC) approval was granted for the Doodle Families Pilot Programme Evaluation on 16th April 2015. A number of data techniques were employed.

Post MIREC approval, the research team visited each pilot school and met with school staff, parents and children to outline the evaluation and invite participation in the research. Written documentation regarding the evaluation was also distributed (Appendix 2). Once signed consent forms had been received the data gathering began. Firstly, an observation schedule (Appendix 3) was developed by the research team and each pilot school was visited once to conduct an observation of programme delivery. The observations were conducted by two members of the research team to enhance the internal reliability of the data collection (Bryman 2008).

Secondly, a semi-structured interview schedule was employed to collect data through a comprehensive interview and focus groups process. These were audio recorded. Interviews took place on site in all three schools. Interviews with external agencies were conducted by phone. Additionally, school staff, children and parents were asked for permission for photos to be taken during the course of the programme and, with consent, these were used in the Child and Parent Focus Groups as a photo-elicitation technique to support the exploration of their experiences of the programme. Children were also asked to draw pictures to help them to describe the activities they engaged in. Quantitative data was gathered on parent and child attendance at programme sessions. This was made available to the TED Project by the programme coordinator in each school and was anonymised.

The table below details the number of research participants, focus groups and interviews conducted across the three pilot schools. The numbers of parents and children who participated in the research in each school will not be matched with school details to retain confidentiality.

Table 1 - Numbers of programme participants and research participants in pilot schools

Programme participants	Interview & Focus Group Participants	Total focus groups and interviews
19 Children⁹ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 16 previously completed Doodle Den 17 completed Doodle Families 	17 research participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 x 3 children 1 x 7 children 1 x 7 children 	3 Child Focus Groups (104.01 minutes)
18 Parents¹⁰ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 17 completed Doodle Families 	18 research participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 x 3 parents 1 x 7 parents 1 x 8 parents 	3 Parent Focus Groups (109.50 minutes)

⁹ In one school an extra child participated in Doodle Families bringing the total to 19. However, this child was not attending with their parent, they were accompanying another parent who cared for the child after school hours. This child did not participate in the research.

¹⁰ A total of one father /male carer and seventeen mothers/female carers participated in the programme and a total of five parents from two of the three participating schools were from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Programme participants	Interview & Focus Group Participants	Total focus groups and interviews
6 School Staff: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 x Principals • 2 x HSCLs • 1 x English as Additional Language Teacher • 1 x DEIS Literacy Initiative Teacher¹¹ 	7 research participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 x 2 facilitators 1 x principal 1 x facilitator 1 x principal/facilitator 1 x facilitator 1 x principal/facilitator 	6 School Staff Interviews (194.68 minutes)
43 programme participants completed Doodle Families	42 research participants	12 focus groups and interviews

In addition, one representative of each of the following external agencies was interviewed by phone regarding their perceptions of the Doodle Families Programme:

- Clare Family Learning Programme, Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board, Ennis, Co. Clare;
- Department of Education and Skills, Limerick;
- Education Welfare Services, Tusla, Limerick;
- NALA, Dublin;
- Childhood Development Initiative, Dublin.

Analytic strategy for data analysis, interpretation and drawing of conclusions

The audio files of the interviews and focus groups were transcribed, coded and analysed thematically using QSR NVivo 10 software. One researcher had responsibility for the transcription and coding of the data, with the second researcher reviewing audio files to identify emerging issues and check the coding framework and thematic map for accuracy. The researchers discussed the emergent findings on a regular basis throughout the process. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns in the form of themes arising from an in depth analysis of data (Braun and Clarke 2006). One of the advantages of the approach is that it can facilitate a rich description of the data set as well as aiding the interpretation of various aspects of research. Themes were identified inductively on the basis of repetition and prevalence i.e., the frequency with which they appeared in the data as well as on the basis of the number of participants who spoke about an item (ibid). In addition, similarities and differences across accounts were considered. A semantic or explicit approach was adopted to denote themes within the data (as opposed to identifying themes on the basis of latent, underlying ideas and assumptions and conceptualisations). The analytic process involved a progression from:

- 1) Description of the data, as organised in patterns based on semantic content;
- 2) Summarisation;
- 3) Interpretation of the themes involved and identification of the significance of the patterns to broader meanings and implications (Patton 1990, cited in Braun and Clarke 2006) and in this case, the evaluation research questions.

¹¹ Under Limerick DEIS Primary Schools Literacy Initiative there are 8 ex-quota teachers who coordinate literacy in the schools involved. It is centred on the enhancement of literacy teaching and learning within the framework of the Department of Education and Skills' National Literacy Strategy "Literacy & Numeracy for Learning and Life " published in 2011. The initiative is focussed on the enhancement of teacher and whole school capacity to implement a comprehensive and coordinated literacy and language instruction approach throughout each school.

Braun and Clarke (2006) outline a six step iterative approach to data analysis and interpretation that was adopted in this evaluation.

1. Firstly, the school-based interviews and focus group data were transcribed and memos were made relating to coding of these along with the observation schedules, as well as any initial emerging issues.
2. The transcripts and observation schedules were systematically analysed for repeated patterns and an initial list of codes were generated.
3. The third step refocused the analysis at the broader level of themes. The codes were sorted into potential themes, collating all the relevant data extracts within the identified themes. At this point, a draft thematic framework for the research findings was presented to CDI (August 2015). An overview of the findings on programme content were also presented to CDI in September 2015.
4. The fourth step in this process was the review and refinement of these themes, which also incorporated the findings of the analysis of the external stakeholder interviews that were conducted at a later stage than school based interviews and focus groups. This involved reviewing the coded data extracts to check if they formed a coherent pattern and reworking or discarding those where data extracts did not fit. Once this process was completed, the thematic map was revised to more adequately reflect the coded data. Following this, the entire data set was re-read to ascertain whether the themes reflected the essence of the data set. The researchers also sought to recode data in themes that were missed at an earlier stage.
5. The fifth step involved further refinement of the themes and analysis of content within them. Themes were then organised into a coherent and internally consistent account with accompanying narrative. As part of the refinement process, themes and subthemes were clarified. Please see Appendix 4 for the final thematic map.
6. The final step in the thematic analysis process was the write up of the analysis as a concise, coherent and logical, non-repetitive account the evaluation of the Doodle Families Programme. This was accomplished by embedding data extracts to demonstrate prevalence of the theme within an analytic narrative.

The findings from the report were subsequently considered in relation to the explicit aims and objectives of the pilot of the Doodle Families Programme to establish whether or to what extent they had been achieved. The recommendations and conclusions made in the report are substantive i.e., based on the accounts presented in the findings that are grounded in the data emerging from a systematic and iterative process of analysis and interpretation as detailed above. The analytic approach undertaken also enabled the research team to check for plausibility of research findings and conclusions through the recursive process of refinement and verification of themes in the data.

Credibility and trustworthiness

A number of steps were taken during the research design, collection, analysis and interpretation and write up to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the research. Data sources and methods were triangulated to reduce bias and enhance validity (Bryman 2008; Miles et al 2014; Robson 2002). The interviews and focus groups were audio recorded and the research team took field notes as part of the interview schedule process and as part of the observations schedule (Robson 2002). The research team debriefed at regular meetings throughout the process to review aspects such as: research design, ethical clearance, the interview process, observations, the coding framework, development and refinement of themes and the analysis and interpretation of the findings.

The credibility of the research findings, conclusions and recommendations was established through multiple accounts of programme delivery. Additionally the researchers undertook a process of respondent validation or 'member checking' to ensure that the analysis and interpretation of their accounts were accurately represented in the report (Bryman 2008; Miles et al 2014; Robson 2002). School staff and external agencies were each presented with a full draft of the report and asked to complete a feedback template (Appendix 5). They were also invited to contact the authors directly via phone or email if they wished. A verbal feedback session for parents was held in each of the three pilot schools to share the main findings of the evaluation from parents' perspectives, as well as to discuss the recommendations made by parents and the research team. Parents were invited to respond to the presentation and to offer any additional information or clarifications they thought should be included in the report. They were also asked to comment on the evaluation recommendations. A total of eight of the eighteen parents participated in these feedback sessions. All feedback and suggestions made in the member checking process have been incorporated into the report. The quality of the data collection, analysis and interpretation is strengthened by these techniques as are the conclusions and recommendations made in the report. Additionally, the research team sought and examined 'negative evidence' (Miles et al 2014) that emerged throughout the analysis and actively sought to present a balanced report respectful of perspectives of all participants in the evaluation.

Ethical considerations

The main ethical considerations to be undertaken included the need to protect participants from harm, maintaining participants' privacy and confidentiality and seeking informed consent from all research participants. The following steps were taken to address these concerns:

- Information sheets (Appendix 2) as well as informed consent forms were personally distributed to all participants in schools and the researchers outlined what would be involved in this research. This was viewed by the research team as an essential and ethical approach to recruiting research participants.
- A Child consent form was designed specifically for the age group of the children (6-7 years). (Appendix 2).
- Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants is maintained throughout the written report. The pilot schools are not identified in the report. While external stakeholder agencies have been identified, individual representatives are not.

Section 3 - Findings

The findings emerging from the Doodle Families Literacy Programme evaluation have been categorised into four overarching themes as follows:

- **Theme A** - Programme set up and design from the perspectives of schools and external agencies;
- **Theme B** - Experience of programme delivery from the perspectives of children, parents and schools;
- **Theme C** - Outcomes of the programme from the perspectives of children, parents, schools, and external agencies;
- **Theme D** - Future development of the programme from the perspectives of children, parents, schools, and external agencies.

Each theme and respective subthemes will be discussed in greater detail in this section of the report.

Theme A: Programme set up and design from the perspectives of schools and external agencies

Findings under this theme were subdivided into three subthemes:

- Subtheme 1 – Programme set up
- Subtheme 2 – Feedback on the training for facilitators
- Subtheme 3 – Manual development and adaptation in schools

Subtheme 1- Programme set up

Programme set up explored school staff and external stakeholder's perceptions of the consultation process; the application process; recruitment of facilitators; recruitment of parents and children and the timing of programme delivery.

Consultation and application process

In September 2014, consultation meetings were held in both Limerick and Dublin, with eight and six people attending respectively. All those supporting the delivery of Doodle Den were invited to attend, and participants included school principals, HSCL Coordinators, Speech and Language Therapy Co-ordinators, School Completion Programme Coordinators, National Adult Literacy Association (NALA) and Clare Family Learning Programme. In Limerick, three of the six DEIS Urban Band 1 primary schools and two of the three School Completion Programmes involved in delivering Doodle Den were represented at the meeting. Representatives of Limerick City Library, Clare Family Learning Project (CFLP) and the Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project were also in attendance. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the development of Doodle Families as a pilot booster programme to the Doodle Den Programme.

At each of these consultation meetings, CDI presented a summary of the literature review commissioned to inform the development of the booster programme, and a draft of the programme content. Participants provided feedback on activities, suggestions in relation to timing and duration, and advice on the core literacy objectives.

A key decision following this consultation was that the programme would be delivered to parents and children

together, as there was a very definite feeling that parents are reluctant to attend events without their children. The duration was reduced from a planned twelve weeks to eight sessions, and the content was changed considerably to reflect the discussion¹².

The six schools delivering Doodle Den in Limerick (and those in Tallaght) were subsequently invited to submit an expression of interest to CDI to participate in the pilot of Doodle Families. Of the three schools that participated in the pilot programme, only one school was represented at the consultation meeting. The other two schools received correspondence from CDI by email and the DDQS, Limerick, also met with all three school principals to discuss applications.

On receipt of applications and agreement on timing of training and delivery, a contract and payment was issued by CDI to the three selected schools.

The principal of the school that had attended the consultation meeting indicated satisfaction with the information received in the consultation process and noted that the school decided to participate in the programme on the basis that it was a pilot.

'Well I suppose to be fair to them we were told that it was piloting that it was experimental that it was experiential and that we'd be kind of finding our way as we went. So we agreed to go with it knowing that yeah.'

None of the programme facilitators who delivered Doodle Families had attended the consultation meeting. In all three of the pilot schools the principal submitted the application form to CDI.

As part of the consultation process a meeting about the programme was also held in Limerick between CDI and the Department of Education and Skills (DES), Limerick Education Centre (LEC) and Education Welfare Services (EWS). The evaluation included individual interviews with representatives of the DES, EWS, NALA, Clare Family Learning Project and CDI staff involved in the development of the programme. Feedback from this group indicated that the majority were satisfied with the information they received.

Recruitment of facilitators

The six programme facilitators comprised of: two principals, two Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Coordinators, a DEIS Literacy teacher¹³ and an English as an Additional Language (EAL) teacher. Arising from the consultation meeting and individual meetings between CDI and school principals, it was suggested that HSCLs would be the 'obvious' choice to facilitate the programme. Following the meeting about the programme in Limerick between CDI, DES, LEC and EWS, permission was sought by CDI from TUSLA for HSCLs to facilitate the programme as part of their brief. This was approved, with decisions about the planning of the programme in the HSCLs timetable to be the responsibility of the principal and the HSCL. Where possible the HSCL in the schools concerned facilitated the programme.

¹² Information provided by CDI, November 2015.

¹³ Under Limerick DEIS Primary Schools Literacy Initiative there are 8 ex-quota teachers who coordinate literacy in the schools involved. It is centered on the enhancement of literacy teaching and learning within the framework of the Department of Education and Skills' National Literacy Strategy "Literacy & Numeracy for Learning and Life" published in 2011. The initiative is focussed on the enhancement of teacher and whole school capacity to implement a comprehensive and coordinated literacy and language instruction approach throughout each school.

The selection of the second programme facilitator was linked to the timing of the programme. Despite being originally designed as an afterschool programme, two schools delivered the programme during the school day and the third bridged the school day and after school time, (the rationale for this is outlined below). Two principals decided to co-facilitate with a colleague because of the difficulty of releasing a class teacher during the school day. In one school, the DEIS Literacy teacher was asked to facilitate because of previous experience in facilitating a programme with the HSCL for parents and in another school, the EAL teacher was invited to facilitate because the HSCL was not available.

Recruitment of parents and children

Two of the three pilot schools only recruited parents of First Class children who had participated in Doodle Den the previous year. The third school reported difficulty recruiting parents from this cohort due to a number of issues including perceived lack of interest, along with childcare issues. This school decided to offer the programme to parents and children who had not previously been involved in Doodle Den.

Timing of programme delivery

Two issues emerged from school staff interviews in relation to the timing of programme delivery: 1) time of day and 2) time of year. In relation to time of day, as mentioned above, two of the three pilot schools delivered Doodle Families during the school day, starting at 1.30pm and 2pm respectively. The third school started at 2pm with the intention of bridging the school day and afterschool by running until 3.30pm. Both of the schools that started the programme at 2pm noted that more often than not, the programme ran beyond the school day, with parents and children staying to complete activities. The rationale for delivering the programme during the school day as reported by schools centred on previous experience of delivering programmes for parents. One school reported that they made this decision based on previous experience of delivering programmes for parents and from talking to the parents involved in Doodle Families, they felt that after school delivery would not be feasible.

'I knew from talking to the parents here, asking them to come to a Doodle Families after schools is going to be a washout because, as a parent myself, I knew it's the busiest time of the day when you pick up the children and we knew we weren't going to get the take up so we went with in school time.... I asked first and they said "oh god we couldn't come at the time, we're picking up and they do homework at that time."

In a second school, both facilitators (one of whom is the principal) attributed the rationale for in-school delivery to the length of the programme as an after school activity and difficulty in recruiting parents to attend after school time. The third school highlighted a clash with another established after- school activity in the locality on the particular day that Doodle Families was delivered, and so decided to deliver it within school time.

The timing of programme delivery was also impacted by the availability of personnel to deliver it. Due to running the programme in school time, two schools highlighted the difficulty of releasing a class teacher during school time, as is evident above in the discussion on recruitment of facilitators.

In the parent focus groups, parents in two of the schools indicated their satisfaction with the time of delivery and in the third school there was consensus amongst the parents that their preference would be for the programme to be delivered earlier in the school day. This was due to an off campus activity that children attended right before attending Doodle Families. The parents felt the children did not have time to 'wind down' before starting Doodle Families.

In relation to time of year, facilitators in two of the schools indicated that they would prefer the programme to be delivered earlier in the school year. In one of these schools, the facilitators' decision not to present the programme to the parents as an eight week programme at the outset was based on the time of year that it was delivered (April - June). In the other school, one member of school staff felt that the Easter break was detrimental to attendance and had to actively work to re-engage the parents subsequent to the holiday. The second member of staff felt that January would be a better time to commence the programme. In the third school, one parent suggested that should the programme run again, a couple of weeks before Christmas with a break and continuing after would be ideal.

Subtheme 2 – Feedback from facilitators on the Doodle Families training

The following section highlights some of the key issues discussed in the facilitator's interviews in relation to the training that they received. Training for programme facilitators took place in February 2015 and was delivered by an external agency with expertise in family learning. Programme delivery commenced in the schools in March 2015.

The programme facilitators provided feedback on a number of aspects of the training including suitability of the trainer, the pitch, length and relevance of the training, what they perceived to be the most and least valuable aspects of the training and finally any perceived gaps in the training.

Feedback on the trainer

The programme facilitators felt that the trainer was suitably qualified and experienced, very knowledgeable and provided some excellent strategies for family learning. However, they believed that the trainer lacked awareness of the background and expertise of the participants and as such their feedback outlined below indicates a perceived mismatch between the level at which the training was pitched and the needs and experience of the facilitators.

In the interview with the trainer, she confirmed a misunderstanding about the background and experience of the group, indicating that the training had been designed for participants who were not familiar with education methodology.

On the first day of training different expectations emerged. Facilitators expected to get the programme manual. However, the trainer only had access to a draft outline of the programme content, on the basis of which the training had been agreed with CDI. The trainer relayed that he/she requested copies of the manual, which were provided by CDI, and the training was adjusted accordingly.

Pitch of the training

One member of school staff felt that the programme of training did not match the specific needs of the group. A second felt that the trainer was excellent and would be amazing for HSCLs but that the trainer did not have an understanding of the background and experience of the facilitators.

'We all would have extensive experience of working within DEIS schools over ten years all of us and em I kind of felt that it was targeted at people who had no sense of parental involvement or working with parents at all or you know.'

In addition, two other school staff members felt that the trainer thought they were a group of parents. One member of school staff questioned whether, given the expertise of the group, they needed a trainer as such or whether a facilitator might be more appropriate. Another member of school staff felt that time would have been more usefully spent in the training session if it was targeted at implementation of the programme manual.

Relevance and length of the training

Due to the amount of time spent on general family literacy strategies and the existing knowledge base of the group, the school staff raised concerns about the focus and relevance of the training and indicated a strong preference for time dedicated to familiarising themselves with the content of the programme manual. The school staff also found two days' training to be too long.

Most and least valuable aspect of training

The school staff members highlighted a number of valuable aspects about the training. Staff from two of the schools spoke of the excellent tips and strategies that they picked up from the trainer. One member of school staff spoke of picture cards of everyday learning activities that had been provided with images of children and parents engaged in activities such as visiting the post office or the credit union. S/he felt these helped to show how literacy and numeracy form part of everyday life.

'There were little picture cards that we used in the first session and they were the highlight of the whole Doodle Families Programme for me.... basically just completely was a fantastic em opportunity to show parents the, the great role that they can play in doing you know, basically when they're doing their everyday tasks how that can relate to literacy and numeracy development you know so em that was good for the training.'

School staff in another school reported that the trainer provided some lovely games and activities that could be used with any group of parents and even be brought into the classroom.

The opportunity to talk about the programme with school personnel that were facilitating the pilot programme across three schools was viewed as a positive experience. One staff member noted that teachers would not often get the opportunity to meet, talk with and share ideas with other teachers and schools about programme delivery. Another member of school staff commented that

'Really there was a lot of expertise around the table and so like what we could get from one another was great so we felt that was where we needed the time.'

The trainer also spoke about how valuable this aspect of the training was for the facilitators commenting that the original aim had been to provide the training in family literacy first and then introduce the manual afterwards. However, s/he felt that it was 'right in a way' to provide them with the manual at the training so that facilitators had a chance to review the material. He/she reported that when the facilitators were given this opportunity they identified specific activities that they felt might not be suitable for their parent cohort and decided to insert some of the activities which were introduced as part of the training.

'You know there was a letter that had to be written to somebody that you hadn't seen in a long time and that might be the person in prison. You know the issues would be coming up that people may not want, or like to be brought up in front of others in a classroom. You know what were innocent and lovely ideas may not just transfer right across to different settings, all settings. Especially in the very disadvantaged settings. So the schools were doing, they were coming up with other and adapting the programme to suit.'

Staff members in two of the schools felt the amount of time spent on the general overview of family literacy to be the least useful aspect of the training. In the third school, staff felt the least useful aspect was a mismatch between the training delivered and the needs of the group.

Gaps in training

The main gaps in the training as perceived by the school staff were:

- Not having the programme manual until the second day of training;
- Too much time spent on the general overview of family literacy given the background of the group;
- Not enough time dedicated to the content of the programme manual.

Other gaps identified included: not enough time to discuss flexibility of methodology and approach along with more time required for planning and linking the ideas and activities that the trainer provided to the programme content.

Arising from the review of the programme content in the training, school staff made adaptations to the content which will be detailed later in the report. A further gap in training expressed by staff from one of the schools was that they would have welcomed the opportunity to engage directly with someone involved in developing the manual. Their rationale was that they were uncertain about the veracity of the adaptations made by the group of facilitators and were concerned that they had moved away from the original aims of the programme to promote literacy activity in the home.

'And that was nice talking about ideas and stuff but then it would have been nice if someone who had written the programme had been there going, no we have to do these kind of things, cause then I feel we went maybe away from the literacy part of it a little bit.'

The second member of staff in that school commented that s/he found *'this in-between designing activities yourself and prescriptive programme'* quite difficult and struggled constantly with editing the manual and he/she commented that the training had not prepared them for this.

'..... Am I supposed to follow the manual or am I supposed to put my own input into it and I suppose the initial training just completely fell short of that. I was very unclear afterwards and when it's a pilot anyway it's, it's it is middle of the road you know.'

Subtheme 3 – Manual development and adaptation in schools

The development and adaptation of the Doodle Families manual is described below in three phases, namely the development of the programme manual by CDI, adaptation of the programme manual by the group of facilitators and further adaptations by individual schools:

1. Phase 1 – Development of the programme manual by CDI.

A staff member from CDI along with representatives from NALA and CFLP commented on the Doodle Families manual development process. The CDI staff member outlined the process commencing with the identification by principals in Tallaght of the need for a booster programme for children who had completed the Doodle Den Programme. A consultation process with a range of stakeholders took place and research was commissioned

identifying existing, independently evaluated literacy supports for 6 – 8 year olds in DEIS schools (NíCheirín 2014). This report identified family literacy programmes amongst other strategies. Subsequently, CDI consulted with other stakeholders involved in the delivery of family literacy programmes, including NALA, to identify best practice and learn about what types of programmes were already being delivered in the wider community. The Doodle Families Programme was then drafted and circulated to relevant stakeholders for initial review and feedback. The updated draft of the programme manual was provided to the facilitators on the second training day in February 2015. The facilitators made some adjustments to the draft programme manual. The adjustments were related to both aspects of the material and methodology. The learning objectives were not changed. The CDI staff member was of the view that the adaptations were within the scope of flexibility built into the programme.

2. Phase 2 – Adaptation of the programme manual by facilitators at the training delivered in February 2015 and at the Community of Practice meeting in April 2015.

These adaptations were agreed between programme facilitators and CDI, after considering the target group and the key learning objectives, and gaining agreement that the proposed amendments did not undermine the key programme focus.

3. Phase 3 – Further adaptations were made by the individual schools in the roll out of the programme in each of the pilot schools.

A table of the manual implementation is available on pages 26 and 27. This details the manual implementation as reported by the three participating schools in the school staff interviews and based on programme outlines provided by two of the schools to the Doodle Den Quality Specialist, Limerick. School staff reported that they maintained the objectives of each session while making adaptations to programme content.

School staff rationale for manual adaptations

School staff outlined the adaptations they had made to the programme manual and their rationale for doing so. The main reasons for adapting the programme content were:

- Responding to the literacy levels of parents (all three schools) and English language needs of parents (one school);
- Responding to cultural and familial diversity and placing less emphasis on personal circumstances and family background in the activities (two schools);
- Staff in two schools also felt that some activities i.e., still images and drama activities, would be too uncomfortable for their parents to participate in.

More detailed feedback from school staff, parents and children on the programme content is included under *Theme B: Experience of programme delivery*.

Theme B - Experience of programme delivery from the perspective of children, parents and schools

Findings under this theme were subdivided into the following subthemes:

- Subtheme 1 – Expectations and understanding of the programme
- Subtheme 2 – Organisation of programme delivery
- Subtheme 3 – Attendance and participation
- Subtheme 4 – Programme content
- Subtheme 5 – Delivery and facilitation of the programme
- Subtheme 6 -Community of Practice
- Subtheme 7 – Challenges to delivery

Subtheme 1 – Expectations and understanding of the programme

Findings under this subtheme explore the following elements:

- Child, parent and school staff's understanding and expectations of the programme;
- Parent and school understanding of roles;
- Comparison with the Doodle Den After School Programme.

Child, parent and school staff's understanding and expectations of the Doodle Family Programme

In the child focus groups, only one child made explicit reference to their understanding of Doodle Families and this was in response to a question about the difference between Doodle Families and Doodle Den. This child's understanding of the programmes was that Doodle Den was for children '*learning more things in school*' whereas Doodle Families was for parents '*to tell [principal] that, what you used to do in Doodle Den.*'

In the parent focus groups, parents displayed a variety of responses in sharing their understanding and expectations of the programme. In one school, parents understood the programme to be about getting children involved in reading and understanding what they are reading. In addition, this group of parents spoke about Doodle Families as an opportunity for parent and child to spend time together as well as an opportunity to '*learn how your child learns.*'

In the second group of parents, one parent viewed the programme as an opportunity for parents to get to know each other better. Another saw it as a chance for children to also get to know each other better.

In the third group, one parent's understanding and expectation of the programme was based on experience of the Doodle Den Programme. This parent expected '*more of a literacy focus*' and that the programme would be '*story oriented*' like Doodle Den, which s/he felt focused on teaching children to read and write. The other parents in this group reported that they expected it to be about '*colouring and doing papers*'. Others noted that they did not know what to expect.

School staff also gave a variety of responses in discussing their understanding and expectations of the programme. School staff spoke about the programme as a follow on from Doodle Den, as an opportunity for parents and children to work together and as an opportunity for schools to provide support and advice for parents to support their child's literacy development. They also spoke about making literacy activities fun and developing relationships between parent and child, particularly where a parent and child would not always have the opportunity to spend one to one time together at home.

Parent and school staff understanding of roles

In describing their role in the Doodle Families Programme, one parent compared it to shared reading and spoke about being a role model for their child:

'It's like shared reading then as well you know, if they see you're getting in on it, they get more in on it.'

Other parents viewed their role in terms of supporting their child's reading and making sure they understand what they are reading. Communicating with children about learning and other activities in a more relaxed environment was highlighted by another parent as part of their role. The parent of a child with a younger sibling at home spoke about his/her role in terms of spending time with the older child:

'I thought it would be a good thing to actually sit down with (child) because I have a 17 month old as well so it's just nice to sit down the two of us and do something together.'

School staff perceptions of their role varied from bringing parents and children together *'in an atmosphere conducive to learning'*, to modelling of activities for parents, to emphasising the importance of the parent's role in their child's learning and coming up with ideas for the delivery of the programme. Three of the six facilitators spoke about promoting the role of the school in supporting family learning. One of these, a HSCL coordinator, spoke about wearing two hats: 1) that of HSCL and 2) having a specific literacy focus. This raised a tension related to the aims of the programme, in terms of trying to balance parental involvement with a literacy focus. Other facilitators also spoke about this tension under subtheme four of theme B i.e., programme content feedback – what facilitators enjoyed least.

'But sometimes if you veer too much towards the academic and make it too academic then you might lose the parents. So it's finding the balance really between just having them here working with their children and enjoying it and also putting in the structure.'

Another member of school staff also spoke about the difficulty as a facilitator trying to find activities that meet the needs of parents, children and the Doodle Families Programme.

Comparison with Doodle Den

When asked about the difference between Doodle Den and Doodle Families, one child spoke about difference in programme content – in Doodle Families they did *'news and stuff'*. Children also spoke about Doodle Den being after school, that Doodle Den was for Senior Infants, that there were no parents in Doodle Den and for one school in particular, only children that did Doodle Den were in Doodle Families.

Similarly, parents highlighted that they had not attended Doodle Den, that it was after school three times per week and described the programme content. One parent highlighted the certificate ceremony held at the end of Doodle Den for all children:

'We went to Mary Immaculate then at the end of it and they all got a certificate each. That was good like d'you know they loved that cause they got the cert and whatever like.'

Not all of the children participating had been involved in Doodle Den, so some parents were not aware of the programme.

While the Doodle Families programme facilitators were aware of Doodle Den in their school, none of them had been directly involved in the delivery of the programme. They spoke about Doodle Den being more prescriptive and that there was more flexibility in Doodle Families. They also perceived Doodle Families to be more about involving parents in children's learning and about maintaining the child's interest in reading. One member of school staff felt that Doodle Den had had a huge impact in their school and that the effects were evident through literacy skills testing. For this staff member, Doodle Families was an extension of the experience *'and kind of in a nice way gives the responsibility to the parents after Doodle Den finishes.'*

Subtheme 2 – Organisation of programme delivery

Findings under this subtheme explore feedback from parents and school staff on the following elements: duration, structure of sessions, and physical environment.

Programme duration

Feedback from parent focus groups indicates mixed views on the suitability of the length of the programme. All parents in one school agreed that the programme was too short. Three parents in a second school felt that it had dipped in the middle when *'the novelty wore off'* and one parent in particular felt it was too long. A parent in the remaining school felt that the programme length of six to eight weeks encouraged attendance in comparison to other longer programmes:

'There's some that you do as a parent and you say ok hands up I'll do it being asked and like oh God why, how many more weeks have we got to do with this. And this wasn't like that because it was a shorter time as well. There wasn't a whole lot of weeks, cause I joined some that have been ten, twelve weeks and you're thinking this will never be over whereas this was quite short.'

Overall, school staff feedback indicated that they believe the programme was too long in duration. As mentioned previously, one school presented the programme as a four session programme, and then offered a second block of four weeks when parents had settled in order to encourage attendance. The other two schools found it hard to keep the momentum going for eight weeks. One suggested six weeks would be better and the other suggested four to six weeks on the basis that one and a half hour sessions of eight weeks duration was a very long commitment for parents on a voluntary basis.

Structure of the sessions

One group of parents spoke about the structure of the sessions delivered. The parents felt that the sessions were too long and would benefit from more physical activity and a dedicated break-time as it was difficult for children to concentrate. A smaller group size to allow for more interaction between children was also suggested by some of the parents.

Physical Environment

The physical layout of the room in which the programme was delivered was also highlighted by parents and school staff in one of the participating schools. It was also evident in the observation that, despite being in a good location in the school with appropriate visual displays and being quite bright and airy, the room was too small for the full group of participants. Parents felt cramped and the principal acknowledged that the space was an issue with the room being *'small and cramped'* for the delivery of the programme.

In contrast, the observations undertaken in the other two schools recorded that the rooms were sufficiently spacious for the number of participants and that they were bright and airy with appropriate and useful visual displays. On the day of the observation in the first school, the group were in the computer room to type up their newsletters. A photocopier is located in this room and other school staff members came in and out to use the machine but this did not seem to distract the group as there was a small number present on the particular day.

Subtheme 3 – Attendance and participation

This subtheme explores feedback from school staff on levels of attendance and parents and school staff feedback about the factors they believed created barriers to and supported attendance.

Levels of attendance

A table on the number of parent and child participants is included in the methodology section, (Table 1). Delivery in two schools was interrupted by the Easter break in April 2015, and the third school commenced directly after the Easter break.

Staff in one school reported full attendance of parents and children for the first and last sessions, with a dip in the middle sessions and very low attendance in the seventh session.

Staff in a second school reported that attendance was good initially but there was a significant drop in attendance half way through the programme due to the Easter break. There was full attendance of parents and children in the final two sessions.

Staff in the third school reported full attendance of parents and children except for sessions five and six when one parent and child were on holidays.

Factors which supported or created barriers to attendance

As previously mentioned, staff in one school introduced the programme to parents as a four week programme and then offered a further four weeks. They believe this supported attendance which they maintained for the duration of the programme as parents were enjoying it and happy that it was to continue.

In another school, one of the facilitators highlighted the amount of ‘chasing’ involved in encouraging parents to attend the programme but advised that parents did give advance notice if they were unable to attend.

‘There was a lot of, let me tell you there was a lot of chasing going on. But nice chasing you know what I mean, I’d ring them every Tuesday and just say ‘you haven’t forgotten.’

This school also decided not to take a child out of class for the Doodle Families Programme if the parent was unable to attend, despite disappointment for the child. Their rationale was that it would have impacted negatively on parental attendance.

Two of the three schools felt that the timing of programme delivery i.e., during the school day, contributed positively to parental attendance. The third school believed that keeping the atmosphere as relaxed and comfortable as possible helped participation.

'And I think that's what they enjoyed about it, they didn't feel like there was any kind of expectation of like you know that this has to be done and it has to be done right and you know that they felt relaxed and comfortable here.'

A parent being motivated by their child's interest in the programme was reported by two staff cohorts to support attendance. Similarly, some of the parents reported that this helped their participation. One parent spoke about wanting to be involved for their child and another in the same school talked about becoming more involved in their child's learning because of his/her aspirations to be a doctor or a teacher when they became an adult. In a second school, two parents spoke of their child's interest in the programme and maintaining the child's attention as helping their own participation. One parent also felt that the length of the programme i.e., not too long, helped them to continue to engage.

Two of the schools felt that the time of year at which the programme was delivered i.e., later in the school year, had a negative impact on attendance.

Subtheme 4 – Programme content feedback

Findings under this sub-theme explore the following:

- Description of activities;
- What children and parents enjoyed most and least about participating in Doodle Families;
- What school staff thought worked well and what could be improved about the programme content;
- Appropriateness of resources and materials;
- Manual variation across the three sites.

Description of activities

The children listed and described the following activities when they were asked to discuss the type of things that they did in Doodle Families: reading, party, pictures, food/snacks, library, stories, drawing/colouring, map of community, scrapbooks, newspaper, memory box and visit to a community centre.

They also highlighted what they liked about a particular activity, e.g. doing an activity with their parent/carer.

The parents listed and described the following activities when they were asked to discuss the type of things that they did in Doodle Families: Library visit, family object, newspaper article, writing the story, memory box, photos, NCCA DVD, communication, scrapbooks, and visit to a community centre.

School staff described programme activity in terms of adaptations to the manual and outlined what they implemented. Please see Table 2 for an overview of programme content delivered in each school.

What children, parents and school staff enjoyed most and least about participating in Doodle Families

Children identified a wide variety of aspects of the programme which they enjoyed. The following were cited most frequently across the three schools: drawing, the library visit, treats and food. Similarly, parents reported a variety of aspects that they enjoyed most including: scrapbooks, the library visit, the memory box,

communication with children, story time and one to one time with their child, their child's interest in a particular activity, and the tour of the school.

In terms of what the children enjoyed least, children in two schools reported very little other than *'they tried to make us read instead of our mams'* and having to leave the programme early on a particular day. Two parents in one school highlighted writing and correcting a child in front of the teacher as the least enjoyable aspects. During the Parent Feedback Sessions for the member checking process, one of these parents added that s/he felt the child was almost being 'micro-managed' by the parent and facilitators, one of whom was the principal and that this put the child under a lot of pressure. Lack of space was also specifically highlighted by one school.

All parents in another school reported the timing of the delivery of the programme at the end of the school day as the least enjoyable aspect and noted their preference for the programme to be delivered earlier in the day.

In terms of what school staff thought worked well, schools provided quite a variety of response with two schools highlighting the library visit. The opportunities provided through Doodle Families to nurture communication between the family members and between the school and families were also highlighted by staff members in two schools. One school also noted the opportunity the programme provided for communication between parents and the other school highlighted the opportunity provided for communication between parent and child.

Facilitators made a number of suggestions for programme improvement including:

- Keep writing to a minimum to engage all parents (all three schools);
- Be sensitive in selecting writing activities (two schools noted that writing a letter was not appropriate);
- Structure sessions in the format of oral language, reading and writing activity (two schools);
- One school suggested having one realistic literacy objective per session;
- Less emphasis on personal circumstances and family background in the activities (two schools);
- Staff members in two schools reported that they felt still images and drama activities would be too uncomfortable for their parents to participate in;
- Staff members in two schools noted that they struggled with the tension between the literacy objectives and the level at which the programme was pitched and also with trying to develop positive parental involvement strategies through the programme.

Appropriateness of resources and materials

The resources and materials used during the delivery as evident during the observations were found to be appropriate to the manual content specifications. All schools were observed delivering session five or session six, both of which in the final version of the programme manual are about the family newsletter. Resources included the use of an interactive whiteboard and in one school parents and children were supported by facilitators to use PCs in the computer room to type up their newsletter. In the other two schools, the session focus was on the development and writing of the stories, with either the whiteboard or interactive whiteboard in use. In one school, a wide variety of books were on display for children and parents to choose from and each parent and child also had their own folder and scrapbooks. Markers were available for all to use. In the other school, work stations had also been set up in advance with materials laid out for the session. Photographs taken at the previous session were available for children and parents to review and they could select those

they would like to include in their scrapbooks. In one school, copies of the local newspaper were available for parents and children to review and explore how a newspaper article is constructed. This had a very clear literacy focus that supported the engagement of children and parents in reading everyday literacy material together. However, the topics of some of the articles may not have been suitable for the age group of the children i.e., driving over the speed limit etc.

Manual variation across the three sites

Table 2 below illustrates the programme content implemented in each of the three pilot schools as reported by facilitators. Staff in one school reported that they adhered to the manual as much as possible but that they made quite a few changes to the activities. They did not provide the researcher with a written breakdown of weekly activities, but spoke in detail about the programme they delivered during the interviews. This school highlighted the addition of the learning styles activity, as one of the activities that worked well. Parents also spoke about this activity in terms of what they benefited from the programme.

The other two schools provided researchers with a written account of the modified Doodle Families Programme which they delivered. They also spoke of these modifications during the interviews and provided a rationale for the same. In one school, staff used the photographs of everyday learning activities, which had been provided by the trainer, in the first session with parents and children. Another school used Rory's Story Cubes in the opening session. All three schools included variations of the Family Object and Treasure Box in the second session and variations of the map of the local community in the third session. One school included Story Time in the second session and two schools indicated that shared reading was allocated for 'homework'. All three schools implemented a variation of the school tour in the fourth session and the family newsletter in sessions five and six. At the Community of Practice meeting in April, the facilitators decided to allocate session seven to the library visit, which they did, with one school including a visit to a community centre. The final session was allocated to learning games and a certificate ceremony and all the schools opted to have parent focus groups for the evaluation at this session.

All three schools indicated that they made significant changes to activities suggested in the manual, as indeed the manual specified they could. School staff indicated that they adapted individual activities to suit the group of parents and children and the rationale for these modifications to the programme content adaption has been discussed above. For example, in the two schools that were observed delivering session six, it was clear that they had adopted a slightly different approach to the delivery of this session as outlined in the manual, with one school using the computers to type up the family newsletter which had been developed the week previously and the other group focusing on developing the writing of the article, exploring examples of articles from local papers and also writing their own story into the scrapbooks.

Table 2 – Manual variation across pilot schools

Week & Manual Content ¹⁴ (Weeks 6-8 adapted after COP in April 2015)	School 1 Implementation ¹⁵	School 2 Implementation	School 3 Implementation
Week 1 Introduction; Cooperative Game; Story Time; Ground Rules; Closing.	As per manual ¹⁶ .	Introduction; Opening activity – Name Game; Literacy and numeracy – photograph cards of learning activity from trainer; Story Time – shared reading ‘Owl Babies;’ Ground Rules; Close.	Introduction; All about me; Scrapbook – Family and memories they share; Rory’s Story Cubes – make connections or memories of things they did; Create own stories using cubes; Homework – scrapbook.
Week 2 Family Story 1; Opening round; Family Object; Still image; Closing round.	As per manual but with the addition of Family Story Treasure Box.	Name Game; Family Object; Family Treasure Box; Story Time ‘Happy Town’; Library discussion; Homework – decorate scrapbook and put object in box.	Scrapbooks; Name – where came from, meaning etc.; Special Objects and worksheet; Memory/treasure box; Homework – special object, scrapbook and shared reader.
Week 3 Family Story 2; Opening Round; Family Story; Write a letter; Closing round.	As per manual but with the addition of Our Community Map of Local Area.	Name Game; Our Community; Map of local area; Story Time – Owl Babies hidden messages; Homework – read picture book for hidden meaning & take book home to read.	Home and community; Draw house and names of family; Places around home; Community Map; Homework – shared readers & scrapbooks.
Week 4 School Experience; Introduction; Opening round; Group Work: Parents – School experience and NCCA; DVD; Children – Map/tour of school.	As per manual but with the addition of Learning Styles.	Learning at school; Parents: NCCA leaflet; ‘Helping your child learn’ and NCCA DVD; Children: Prepare Treasure Hunt of school; Parents & children – complete Treasure Hunt and discuss what learned about school etc.	School – discussion with parents and children; School trail with iPads; Doodle Den website; Homework – shared readers etc.
Week 5 Writing a newsletter; Opening round; Family Times; Closing round.	As per manual.	As per manual – Newsletter.	Review weeks 1-4; Newspaper article; Homework – shared readers, memory box and scrapbooks.
Week 6 Originally Time Capsule; COP changed to continuation of newsletters/publish on computer.	Revised content after COP April 2015.	Revised content by COP April 2015.	Finish newspaper article on computer; Online story websites, activities and games.

¹⁴ Please note that each activity in the manual gave facilitators the option to devise another activity suitable to the needs of the group with whom the facilitators were working and which addressed the objectives of the session.

¹⁵ Implementation as reported by facilitators in the interview process.

¹⁶ This school indicated during the interview process that they delivered the programme as outlined in the manual version agreed upon at the training in February 2015.

Week & Manual Content (Weeks 6-8 adapted after COP in April 2015)	School 1 Implementation	School 2 Implementation	School 3 Implementation
Week 7 Originally Family Portrait; COP changed to visit to Library & community centre.	Revised content after COP April 2015.	Revised content by COP April 2015.	Visit to library and community centre.
Week 8 Originally Support and Games for Learning; COP changed to graduation, cooperative games and celebration of achievement.	Revised content after COP April 2015 and also Parent Focus Group.	Revised content by COP April 2015 and also Parent Focus Group.	Parent Focus group; Time to add to shoebox, scrapbooks and family portraits.

Subtheme 5 – Delivery and facilitation of the programme

Findings under this subtheme have been subdivided into the following elements:

- Facilitators' overall experience of delivery;
- Facilitating parents and children together;
- Facilitator modelling of skills;
- Parent's views on facilitators approach;
- Behaviour management;
- Pace of delivery and number of activities;
- Relationships between facilitators.

Facilitators' overall experience of delivery

Overall, the facilitators reported that they enjoyed delivering the programme, particularly the opportunity to get to know parents and children better. One HSCL Coordinator commented on the experience of working with the parents saying;

'I often meet them on the corridor and they'll stop and talk to me, even more than they did before.'

The school staff discussed a number of challenges including identifying the most appropriate personnel to deliver the programme and modification of the programme content whilst being cognisant of programme objectives.

The HSCL Coordinators and principals who delivered the programme also spoke about the duality of their role of facilitator. One HSCL found that s/he *'couldn't take off my home school hat'*, and was focused on ensuring that parents would enjoy the experience and be open to engaging in other activities with the school as a result and *'that it might open doors for them'*.

While the two principals who facilitated the programme stated that they enjoyed getting to know the children and parents, they felt it would not be feasible for them to continue as facilitators in the future due to the time commitment and their other responsibilities. Additionally, one principal felt that it could potentially be counterproductive if parents felt pressurised to participate because it was being facilitated by the principal. One principal also commented that principal involvement in delivery of a programme like this brought a 'political'

dimension to the context and that HSCL delivery might be more feasible in the future.

During observations in two of the schools, the facilitators that were either a principal or a HSCL had to leave the room at some point in order to fulfil a responsibility related to their role.

Two facilitators in one school spoke about the difficulty they experienced in designing activities themselves and in trying to adhere to the manual and the original objectives of the programme. Discussing the manual adaptations, one in particular was concerned that they *'lost a little of what it was meant to be'* and as a result started to question the overall objectives of the programme.

Facilitating parents and children together

Feedback on facilitating parents and children jointly highlighted many of the strengths and challenges of the programme.

One of the principals who facilitated the programme described it as *'parental training at its best because the child is there'* and believed this to be the highlight of the programme stating *'it worked that way 100%'*. Facilitators highlighted the opportunity the programme provided for greater interaction between children and parents and how much they enjoyed this aspect of the programme. One HSCL coordinator felt that, in this sense, Doodle Families worked better than some other parent and child programmes s/he had experienced because of the quality of interaction facilitated between parent and child in contrast to the child doing the activity with their parent present in the room. Staff in another school also spoke about this interaction as being the most beneficial part of the programme:

'And that they were able to work together to work on little projects and kind of stepping back and just letting them kind of problem solve amongst themselves and figure it out amongst themselves and just have that interaction and that time together.'

In all three schools, this level and quality of interaction between parent and child was evident in the observations, with the majority of parents and children highly engaged in the activities and facilitators communicating appropriately with both parents and children and encouraging them to engage with each other.

Staff members in all three schools spoke about the challenge in having parents and children with mixed skills levels in the group and the need for particular sensitivity to parent's literacy and/or English language levels. During the observations, this difficulty was observed in one school where a parent appeared to the observer to have very little English. The parent did not seem as engaged as the other parents and the child was easily distracted. The facilitators made consistent efforts to work with the pair and to help keep them on track with the activity.

In all three schools, staff expressed the need to work with parents in a respectful manner, most specifically the need to be cognisant of not being condescending in communicating with parents, or having negative perceptions of parental capacity or ability. One member of school staff expressed concern about making assumptions regarding parents' literacy skills commenting that *'Some of them would have it but you wouldn't want to assume'*. In a second school, a staff member felt the parents were *'quite able'* and was very conscious that parents would not find the pitch of delivery condescending or inappropriate. A member of staff in the third

school was also conscious of not having deficit beliefs about parental skill levels and prejudging the types of home learning activities and levels and engagement in learning activity pre-existing in the home.

'Maybe they do go to the library, maybe they are already signed up... and actually some of them were.'

The importance of adopting a suitable approach to working with parents was highlighted across the school staff interviews. They specifically referred to the pitch of literacy activity and making sure parents were comfortable and not intimidated. One school's approach was to keep writing to a minimum and make the programme more child led for writing activities or concentrating on drawing where necessary for some of the activities. Another member of school staff felt that it was important not to be seen to be 'teaching parents':

'So it's a very fine balance between keeping parents on side and not reverting into teacher mode.'

A school staff member who described themselves as experienced in training adults in a formal context where *'they're looking for knowledge and I'm giving it to them'*, described Doodle Families as more of a reciprocal experience where facilitators were looking for information from parents *'to help to fuel our next session, you know, because I wanted it to be something that would work for them at home'*.

An additional challenge in facilitating parents and children, highlighted by one member of school staff, was in trying to deliver activities that meets the needs of both children and parents at the same time. A second school highlighted this challenge stating that they were very conscious of mixed skill levels. In an effort to address this challenge, the members of school staff advised, as detailed above, that they kept writing to a minimum and writing activity more child led throughout the sessions.

A further challenge highlighted by one member of school staff was that some parents struggled with some of the writing activities and with understanding how much they should support their child with writing versus *'doing it for them'*.

For one of the six facilitators, the Doodle Families Programme was their first opportunity to work with parents, as well as with parents and children together. S/he felt that having children present and parental attention focused on children, created an environment in which the parents were more comfortable interacting with each other because parents themselves were not the direct focus of attention.

Facilitator modelling of skills for parents

In discussion about programme delivery, school staff across all three schools referred to the modelling of skills for parents. They talked about modelling the reading of stories, how to choose appropriate level of readers, and how to access literacy materials and support from different sources e.g., YouTube, websites, the library and community centres. During the observations, facilitators were observed modelling skills such as how to write a newspaper article and how to do paired reading.

One member of school staff expressed the hope that parents would model what the teachers were modelling in school for children. Another commented that one of the biggest challenges they encounter in school is the lack of *'behavioural skills and parenting'*, and felt that the more parents engage with the school, *'the more they're seeing the modelling of good strategies and positive strategies.'*

Views of parent about facilitators' approach

On the whole, parents spoke positively about the facilitators and their approach to programme delivery and to engaging with participants. In one school, parents spoke of facilitators as displaying great interest in their children. One parent commented that:

'They actually felt like they wanted to be doing it as opposed to a chore for them really which is great to see especially as it's kind of an extra job for them.'

Parents in another school spoke about the different styles of facilitators, with one more focused on the subjects and project for the weekend and the other being more 'structured' about the content of each session. This group of parents also spoke about tension they experienced when facilitators asked a child to be quiet, or asked them to move onto another activity when the child had not finished what they were engaged in, for example colouring or writing their names. Regarding behaviour management, the parent felt this caused confusion for the child.

'You know asking them to be quiet cause they might be talking to us or still explaining something and then for [facilitator], and they're kind of looking at us then to say is [facilitator] allowed do that? I'm talking to you, I'm talking to my mom or my dad. Something like that.'

This tension also raises the issue for school staff, parents, and children about who is responsible for managing the behaviour of the child when parents and teachers are present in programmes such as this.

Other parents spoke about how patient they found the facilitators who 'steered' the children rather than forcing them to do an activity that the children did not want to do.

Facilitators across all three schools were observed being welcoming of, friendly to and communicating well with parents and children. Facilitators were also observed responding to the individual needs of children and parents during the observations and moving around to assist different pairs as required.

Behaviour management

Some parents and children along with one school staff member spoke about behaviour management during the Doodle Families Programme highlighting the tensions referred to above.

Parents spoke about the difficulty they experienced in correcting their child in a group situation. One parent felt that if a child had done something inappropriate everyone in the room was aware of it. Another parent spoke about feeling guilty for making their child do a specific activity when the facilitator encouraged him/her to, rather than the parent doing it for the child. One parent praised the facilitators for their patience and approach when his/her child's behaviour became an issue during a session. S/he felt that they didn't 'make an issue' of it, they let the parent handle it and the child was able to join in again after a few minutes 'without it becoming a big deal.'

In one school, a child became quite disengaged during the observation and expressed the opinion that s/he did not want to participate in the activity. The observer noted that the parent worked gently with the child for a while and s/he gradually re-engaged. In another school, facilitators moved around the room and gently encouraged parents and children to engage if they seemed to be losing focus. When one child sat backwards

on a chair to look out the window, one of the facilitators moved over beside the child without saying a word and s/he turned around to reengage with the activity.

One member of school staff felt that the Doodle Families experience had highlighted a child's behaviour issues for a particular parent.

Pace of delivery and number of activities in each session

The pace of delivery of the programme and the number of activities in each session was referred to by parents in one school during the focus groups and by some staff members across the three schools. The majority of parents in the school concerned felt that some of the activities were a bit rushed and indicated their preference for a slower pace of delivery as well as fewer activities in each session. Similarly, during the member checking process, parents in a second school indicated their agreement with this perspective commenting that children did not have time to complete some of the activities started during the programme. They also said that one or two children were not happy about having to complete their work at home with the result that some of the activities were not completed.

School staff members in two schools spoke about '*stepping back*' when parents and children were quite engaged in and enjoying a particular activity. Staff in one of the two schools felt it was important to be as relaxed as possible in such instances and let the parents and children continue with the task as opposed to being bound by a timetable.

'If there're getting a lot from it, you're not working to a timetable or a schedule. Like if they were really enjoying an activity and they were really engaged in it and they were getting a lot from it, we just let them continue it like you know.'

The pace of activity during the observations was relaxed and comfortable with facilitators stepping back when pairs were engaged in an activity and stepping in if they seemed to need encouragement or some direction.

Relationship between facilitators

School staff members in all three schools spoke about the positive experience of working with a co-facilitator. In one school, the staff members had worked together previously on a parent and child programme so they felt comfortable working together and there was '*no stress*'. In another school, one member of staff spoke of how they complimented each other with '*one coming up with the ideas*' and the other looking after the '*organisational side*' of things. In the third school, one member of school staff felt that having two different styles of facilitators was positive, as well as having facilitators with two different roles who were '*coming at it from different angles*'. In the observations, it was evident that the facilitators were comfortable working with each other and had developed a good working relationship during the programme. As previously mentioned, during two of the observations facilitators had to leave the room to fulfil responsibilities associated with their substantive role. The benefit of having two facilitators meant that the sessions were not interrupted to a great extent. Facilitators also consulted with each other during the delivery of the observed sessions and having two facilitators present meant that they were each able to support the parent and child pairs that most required attention.

Subtheme 6 – Communities of Practice

In addition to the training received, the facilitators had the opportunity to participate in a Community of Practice (COP) facilitated by the Doodle Den Quality Specialist. Two COP meetings took place, one after the initial four week block of programme delivery (16th April) and the second after programme delivery (16th June). The purpose of the first COP was to reflect on sessions 1-4 and plan for sessions 5-8. The second COP meeting reflected on session 5-8 and the programme as a whole. Half (or three) of the facilitators attended the first COP meeting and five attended the second.

In feedback about attendance at the Community of Practice meeting (only one was held prior to the interviews) facilitators referred to discussions which took place in relation to the manual content adaptations and the sharing of learning and experiences across sites. One facilitator felt under some pressure at the meetings, wondering if programme delivery in their school was as good as in other schools. The facilitator attributed feeling this way to struggling with the amount of adaptations they made to the programme in order to meet the needs of parents and children in their own school context.

School staff members in another school felt that there was great value in sharing experiences and learning from others involved in programme delivery. Some made reference to their awareness of how activities had been implemented in other schools.

Subtheme 7 – Challenges to programme delivery

School staff members spoke about a variety of challenges experienced during the delivery of the Doodle Families Programme. Feedback from parents and children was more focused on what they enjoyed most or least about the programme. External agencies commented more generally about the challenges of parental engagement in programmes and highlighted the difficulty in reaching the most vulnerable or hard to reach parents, and about measuring the outcomes of family literacy programmes across different settings and contexts.

Challenges identified related to programme content and appropriateness to diversity in family and cultural background; encouraging communication between parents; language and cultural barriers; facilitators' core responsibilities and time requirements for manual adaptation; timing of delivery; supporting parents to support their child's learning rather than 'doing it for them' and balancing the needs of parents and children in programme delivery.

Programme content and appropriateness to diversity in family and cultural background

School staff members felt that some of the activities included in the pilot manual were inappropriate for the families that were engaging in the programme. One highlighted the difficulty he/she experienced in delivering activities relating specifically to personal family experiences, expressing the view that it is *'inappropriate'*, with parents' lack of response confirming the facilitators' belief:

'I think it they basically, very loudly said it was inappropriate because they didn't, in our situation some of them were coming from other countries, so emotionally they don't want to talk about their past em and in some situations they would have come from very difficult situations.'

This school staff member added that they felt that some activities might even be too personal for parents to share with their young children, particularly the activity about writing to someone in your past.

Two of the schools recounted that the programme activity that required parents to talk in detail about family was of particular concern. One felt that even asking parents for information about where they used to live can be a sensitive topic as some families in Limerick City, for example, have been rehoused through regeneration and may have lived in *'a lot of different places'*. Another commented that they would completely avoid activities like a family tree because they would not be aware of the relationships between different families in the room, or even within the family unit itself.

Another school staff member noted that they did not want to put families under pressure to share what items went into their memory box commenting that:

'We didn't want to put them under pressure to have to bring the items in because again, that's revealing personal stuff about your family and I know certainly that one person might have come in and said that the remote control was important in their house, and another person might have said the encyclopaedia Britannica was important. So from that point of view it would have been very difficult for them to share. So we never asked them to share what went into the boxes.'

Encouraging communication between parents and language and cultural barriers

One school staff member spoke about the challenge of encouraging a diverse group of parents from different countries, cultural and religious backgrounds to communicate with each other. He/she partly attributed this to his/her belief that parents initially feel uncomfortable in the school environment and their lack of confidence. He/she also identified language and cultural barriers as a challenge with such a diverse group.

Facilitators' core responsibilities and time requirements for manual adaptation

Facilitators highlighted the challenge they experienced due to their dual roles. Both principals felt it would not be feasible for them to continue to facilitate the programme in the future due to their wider responsibilities. One of the HSCL Coordinators spoke about trying to play 'catch up' with other responsibilities as a result of facilitating the programme.

'So I don't know how that would work out in the future because it meant there were times when I was signalling out to parents 'can't talk to you now'. So you were playing catch up all the time like you were doing your own work outside of school [time] and trying to make phone calls when you came out [of the Doodle Families Programme] or whatever you needed to do.'

Facilitators also highlighted the time commitment involved in adapting the manual and preparing for weekly sessions as a challenge.

Timing of delivery

In one school, a staff member felt the timing of the programme was a potential challenge. As discussed earlier in the findings, schools ran the programme during the school day or as a bridge between school and after school time. This staff member felt that delivering the programme after school would impact negatively on attendance levels of parents as it would be difficult for them to attend. In addition, this person was of the view that it would also make the day very long for children who would be participating in an after school programme which is not specifically connected to their homework.

Supporting parents to support their child's learning rather than 'doing it for them'

One facilitator highlighted the challenge of trying to encourage parents to support the child's learning rather than *'doing it for them'*. This was a particular reference to writing activity where the facilitator noted that:

'We were trying to scaffold that but you could see that they would take over and just do it because the child would just give up with them and then I think they felt they had to do it.'

Balancing the needs of parents and children in programme delivery

Facilitating the parents and children together highlighted the challenge for facilitators of trying to respond to the needs of both. This issue has been discussed in greater detail under their experience of facilitating the programme. Facilitators highlighted the need for sensitivity to parents' literacy and/or English language proficiency and relayed the challenges of trying to pitch the material at a level that was comfortable for parents without appearing condescending.

Theme C - Outcomes of the programme from the perspectives of parents, schools, and external agencies

Whilst this evaluation did not measure outcomes, the perspectives of a number of key stakeholders in relation to the benefits of the programme, were considered.

Findings regarding the outcomes of the programme from the perspectives of parents, schools and external agencies were divided into two subthemes:

1. Outcomes for children, parents and schools;
2. Development of relationships.

In the Child Focus Groups, children were not specifically asked about programme outcomes, although some of them did comment on what they enjoyed about Doodle Families or how they felt about learning with their mum or dad as discussed previously, with the majority of them indicating that they were fine or happy about it. They were also asked about what activities from Doodle Families they continued or would like to continue at home with their parents. Children indicated that they would like to continue going to the library, going to the museum, going on outings with parents, drawing, writing, making stories on the computer and eating. When asked in two of the focus groups if they had continued the Doodle Families activities at home, the children indicated that they hadn't. This was despite some evidence to the contrary from parents and facilitators e.g., scrapbook 'homework'. It must also be noted that the external agency representative spoke more broadly about the outcomes of Doodle Families in terms of parental engagement and what they hoped or anticipated the outcomes would be. These included increased parental engagement in children's learning, the development of parents' skills and the capacity to engage with and help their children with literacy activities. They also believed that engagement in the programme provided encouragement to parents to 'go forward' and link with literacy support services should they need support in that area themselves. Some mentioned that they could not comment on specific outcomes until they had the opportunity to review the evaluation report.

Subtheme 1 - Outcomes for children, parents and schools

The outcomes from the point of view of parents, school staff and external agency staff have been analysed thematically with several outcomes identified for children, parents and schools.

Outcomes for children

The outcomes for children as identified by their parents and school staff, and external agencies interviewed for this evaluation included perceived development of literacy and social skills, the opportunity to spend more time with their parents, the opportunity to engage in learning and fun activities with parents and other family members, greater involvement of their parent in their school life and library visits and library membership.

Perceived development of literacy and social skills

It would be very difficult to attribute literacy gains, as measured by standardised testing, to this programme given the children are all attending DEIS Band 1 schools which have literacy intervention programmes, the absence of pre and post literacy testing, and the short duration of this intervention. However, both parents and school staff spoke about perceived improvement in children's literacy skills when asked to identify outcomes for the children.

Parents across the three schools talked about how children's literacy skills, specifically reading, writing and spelling, along with cognitive skills in the form of improved concentration levels had developed as a result of participation in the Doodle Den Programme and how their interest in literacy activities, such as reading, was reignited by participating in the Doodle Families Programme. One parent felt that since Doodle Families his/her child had:

'Got so much more interest, got back into reading, back into colouring and back into everything got you know more excitement about it all over again so I suppose he/she has started, kind of came on a bit since Doodle Families.'

This was echoed by a second parent who felt his/her child had rediscovered a love of books.

'I think it kind of came back to (name) again with getting the books from here again.'

Many of the parents also spoke about how their children's social skills developed and how they were now more confident having participated in the programme. In some cases this was attributed to the development in their literacy skills but also, as noted by some parents, because they were interacting with other children outside of a classroom setting. One parent commented that children *'had more of a voice in Doodle Families'*, than they would have in a classroom of twenty two children and felt they enjoyed that. Another parent commented that his/her child had become more comfortable asking questions in school.

One of the external agency representatives also highlighted the opportunity that Doodle Families provided for children who had attended Doodle Den to participate in a follow-up literacy programme. He/she also voiced the opinion that the delivery of the Doodle Families Programme offered children who had not participated in Doodle Den the opportunity to participate in a literacy programme. Another external representative felt that children would benefit in terms of improved literacy skills and greater engagement in literacy skills in the classroom.

When asked if the Doodle Families Programme had supported learning in the home, staff in all three schools believed that it had, citing specific examples of children and parents' engagement in literacy activity in the home. Staff in two schools shared how many of the children and parents came back with work done in their scrapbook.

'And they all came back in with the scrap books, stuff added in. And the memory boxes, there, more stuff added in. So they were doing work at home d'you know.'

In all three schools, staff reported that children and parents took books home to read during the programme, with one member of school staff commenting that they often brought them back the next day looking for more books. Two facilitators felt that children and parents had a renewed interest in reading and were reading at home for pleasure. One commented that:

'I noticed as well with the reading, while there's a big emphasis with the reading, an awful lot of them would do a lot of reading at home. They even admitted themselves, God we haven't read, we haven't been to the library in a while, we haven't been reading like in a while so like when they started bringing home the books each night, they actually started spending time each night reading you know and talking about like even outside of the books that they were getting here, the other interests that they had.'

Facilitators in one school spoke about how they felt that the *'five finger rule'*¹⁷ introduced during the programme to help parents gauge the appropriate level or book for children was successful and that parents could apply this at home or in the Library.

Opportunity to spend more time with their parent

In discussing what parents felt their child gained from the programme, what they themselves gained as well as the advantages of parents and children learning together, parents across the three schools spoke directly and indirectly about the experience of spending time interacting with their child during the delivery of the programme. One parent talked about how the child reminded him/her every week not to forget Doodle Families. On one occasion, when the parent was unsure whether he/she could make it,

'(Child) said 'Don't miss Doodle Families, Doodle Families is for both of us, it's you and me'. I said ok no problem.'

Another parent talked about how his/her child enjoys one to one reading time at home. The parent spoke of a time when the child's friend called to play and the child said *'go way, it's me and (parent) time'*. Other parents spoke about Doodle Families as *'one to one'* time for parent and child especially when there are other children at home.

Staff in all three schools spoke about the opportunity that the Doodle Families Programme provided for children to spend more time with their parents. In two schools staff felt that this was the greatest benefit of the programme. School staff felt that children really enjoyed this aspect of the programme, especially where there are other siblings at home.

'They were very happy to be working with their parents, quite absorbed actually in the twosome you know.'

'Yeah, just a bit of 'me time' with them and there was nobody else there. A lot of the kids were sitting on top of their parent's knees you know and doing their bit and they were taking photographs of them together as well.'

¹⁷ Five-Finger Rule - If there are five or more words you did not know, you should choose an easier book.

'Like the children used to just come and sit on their mommy and daddy's laps while they were doing it you know. It was such a lovely picture you know.'

Opportunity to engage in learning and fun activities with parents and other family members

In tandem with the opportunity to spend more time with parents, a related outcome identified by parents and school staff for the children was the opportunity Doodle Families offered them to engage in learning and fun activities with parents.

School staff described the positive warm interactions they observed between children and parents during learning and fun activities, highlighting working on the scrapbooks, the memory box, the community map, the tour of the school and learning about where their names had come from. One talked about a parent and child decorating their memory box together, writing their names on the box and the items they chose to put into it including pictures from when the child was younger and a memento of a family day out. Another spoke about the interaction facilitated between a parent and child when they were working on the map together and making their memory box. School staff also spoke about how extended family members had become involved in the scrapbooks and memory boxes with siblings and grandparents getting involved as well. As mentioned in relation to development of children's skills, children and parents reading for pleasure was highlighted by one of the school staff member.

External agencies spoke about the perceived 'knock on benefit' or indirect benefits for children as a result of participating in the programme with their parents and highlighted that Doodle Families gave parents and children 'the space' to engage in fun activities. One representative spoke about how parents had different interests and talents such as singing, music, drama or gardening and highlighted that there was also an opportunity to tap into those skills and interests and for them to be 'passed down' to their children.

Parents also spoke about engaging in learning and fun activities with children, and this will be discussed in more detail under outcomes for parents. One parent felt that his/her child learned that the parent could be fun.

Greater involvement of their parent in their school life

Parents and facilitators spoke about how Doodle Families had created an opportunity for parents to become more involved in their children's school life and this will also be discussed later as an outcome for parents. One parent felt that children were proud that their parents had come into the school. Two school staff members felt that the children really enjoyed having their parents more involved in their school life. One school staff member commented that the children really enjoyed the interest that their parents showed in the programme and also valued parental involvement, demonstrated through parents coming into their school and into their class or 'their little space'. He/she also felt that the children enjoyed showing their parents what they could do.

Library visits and library membership

Two children reported in the focus groups that they had become library members as a result of the visit. In talking about what they enjoyed about the programme, the library visit was highlighted by children and facilitators also felt it was successful aspect of the programme. It must be noted that staff members in two schools highlighted that many children and parents were already members of the library, with one noting that

those who had participated in Doodle Den had the opportunity to do so in Senior Infants. Some parents also talked about taking their child to the library prior to the Doodle Families visit.

Outcome for parents

Outcomes for parents as identified by parents themselves, school staff and external agencies will be explored in this section. Outcomes included the development of their knowledge of the curriculum and their skills to support children's learning at home, greater familiarity with and comfort in the school environment, opportunities to spend dedicated time with their children engaging in learning and fun activities and greater knowledge of their child's interests as well as social and academic development.

Developing parents' knowledge of the curriculum and their skills to support children's learning at home

School staff and parents both identified the development of parents' knowledge of the curriculum and skills to support learning at home as an outcome of Doodle Families. Parents spoke about developing specific skills and knowledge to support their child's learning as one of the advantages of participation in the programme. The specific skills they recounted included: the 'five finger rule' for selecting books with an appropriate reading level for their child; how to read books to their child and how to support their child to read a book. Outlining the 'five finger rule' one parent explained:

'If they don't understand five or more words in the book, it's too hard for them and if they're down to one word, it's too easy.'

Another parent spoke about giving the child time to absorb what's going on in the story when reading picture books and added that he/she had also learned to listen to the child:

'Well I learned now when (child) was doing reading, and you know the way the pictures in the books and (child) would be taking ages taking in all the pictures and I'd be rushing and rushing and rushing but didn't realise that (child) is obviously getting some of the answers or you know trying to understand the story rather than reading it.'

Knowledge of their child's learning style, knowledge of how children learn in school, aspects of the curriculum and how to write a story were also identified by parents as skills they developed through participation in the programme. Four parents spoke specifically about how greater knowledge of their child's learning style had been beneficial to them, particularly in doing homework.

'Like as I said I learnt that (child) is visual and that I was as well so I found that if (child) was having difficulty at home with homework, usually (child's) in tears with homework and I'm roaring and screaming. But I think since I learned the way (child) learns here, I just explain it in a different way and I just find it easier.'

'And for me, I learned that (name) is a visual learner, so for me it makes it easier for me to do homework with (name) so you know I'm kind of, I learned that we're both actually the same cause we got questionnaires the first day to find out what kind of learners we are and we're the very same so I think that was brilliant yeah.'

'His style of learning, yeah so at least when you're at home, he won't be trying to pull a fast one!'

Other parents spoke about the value of learning about how their child learns in school and how this might be different from the parent's approach.

Parents also spoke about learning from the subjects they were doing with the children and benefitting from the tips and strategies that the facilitators shared with them.

'It's, like I do think that we did learn from it as well like, d'you know like, in subjects that we were doing with the kids and how to do different things like if we were going to go about a story book, well this is how the teacher showed us how to do it, write about what not and d'you know, I did find that we kind of benefitted as much as the kids did.'

'Like ideas from the teachers to do things at home and how to go about doing things at home with them.'

When asked about the advantages of parents and children learning together, parents from non-English speaking backgrounds spoke about how their children help them learn to speak English. One parent talked about how his/her child translates for both parents and how this has helped them to learn to speak English. Another parent felt that the child learning to read from an early age had a positive impact on the development of the parents' English vocabulary. Being immersed in an English speaking programme with their child along with other parents has potential to contribute to the development of their proficiency.

'Well for myself, I speak (language), some words I still like I speak (language). (Child) told me no mammy/daddy it's not like that, it's like this. I say ok thank you. (Child) help me eh because (Child) start to learn eh very, start to reading very early.'

'I speak (language), I don't speak English very well. At home my (child) teach me all the time and my (spouse). Now it's ok, I'm going to school.'

School staff members spoke about what they hoped the parents gained from the programme, with one commenting that it was difficult to quantify. They felt that the Doodle Families Programme provided guidance on literacy activity for parents as well as knowledge of how their child learns, their learning style and how to read to and with children and how to speak to their child about learning activities. One shared his/her hope that parents *'went home feeling proud of their children'* and affirmed in their role as parents and *'that at no stage did they go home feeling inadequate'*.

Another school staff member felt that, irrespective of their own literacy levels, parents gained confidence in their function around supporting learning in the home. They believed that this was achieved through coming into the school and gaining an understanding of the huge part they have to play in the literacy development for their child. In one school, staff talked about how they felt one parent in particular *'got so much'* from the programme despite having weaker literacy skills than some of the other parents. They felt this parent was very involved and took on everything and also did homework in the scrapbook with the child. They also felt this parent's confidence increased during the programme, highlighting another outcome for parents in terms of their own personal development.

'And one parent that came in was very shy at the start and then (he/she) was coming in so enthusiastic talking about the child so (his/her) confidence was going up so we could see that which was great.'

Greater familiarity with and comfort in the school environment

School staff members highlighted familiarity and comfort with the school environment as an outcome for parents who participated in the programme. They spoke of how they felt parents seemed more comfortable in the school, about how they enjoyed coming in and commented on how relaxed they appeared to be. They also spoke of parents' greater familiarity with the school building as an outcome, particularly where parents would normally only interact with a limited number of staff and not progress beyond a particular corridor or even upstairs into the 'unknown'. As one member of school staff commented:

'They all said like you know they had never been up the stairs and they felt like it was this unknown.'

One of the parents spoke about getting to know the teachers better as a positive outcome of the programme. Two other parents highlighted learning about services and facilities that are available to them in the local community, such as the library and a community centre, as a very positive outcome of engaging with this programme.

One of the external agency representatives identified greater communication with and increased parental interest in the school as an outcome of the programme.

Opportunity to spend dedicated time with their children engaging in learning and fun activities including reading for pleasure

Parents and school staff spoke about how participation in Doodle Families created opportunities for parents and children to spend dedicated time together engaging in learning and fun activities, especially when they have other children. One member of school staff was of the view that the most interesting aspect of the programme for parents was that they had an hour and half exclusively with a particular child and reported that one of the parents said that:

'It was wonderful to be here for an hour and a half and know that none of your other children were going to call you or you weren't cooking a dinner at the same time, and (parent) said it was just lovely to have that time together.'

Another felt that parents loved the concept and experience of working one to one with their child in a school setting.

Parents were asked who they felt gained most from parents and children learning together and responses varied from the child, to parent, to both. One parent, who felt that both had gained, noted that the child enjoyed the parent coming into school to spend time reading and doing other activities. Parents who felt they gained most talked about learning more about their children and enjoying the time they spent together. One parent described how his/her child had requested that a different relative attend the programme because the parent and child spend so much together. This parent enjoyed the programme and felt he/she learned more about the child than vice versa.

External agency representatives also spoke about the programme as providing an opportunity for children and parents to engage in fun literacy activities together, with one commenting that such activity might encourage them to develop a habit of engaging in fun literacy activities together that they might continue afterwards.

Greater knowledge of their child's interests as well as social and academic development

Parents and facilitators identified greater knowledge of their child's interests as well as greater knowledge of their social and academic development as an outcome for parents. As mentioned above in relation to outcomes for children, parents talked about the perceived social and academic developments in their children arising from participating in Doodle Den and Doodle Families. They also reported that they had seen their child's self-confidence and confidence in their abilities improve. They also spoke of learning about their child's needs, likes or dislikes, as in the case of one parent who learned that his/her child, while quite good at reading, did not like to read out loud. Another parent said that through engaging in the programme they had learned about how their child communicates his/her needs, such as when the child needs a rest or that reading helps him/her to go to sleep.

Learning more about the child's interests through Doodle Families activities was highlighted by some parents. For example, one parent found that in completing the scrapbook he/she learned more about what the child is interested in and commented that he/she *'made more of an effort to chat about it'*. Another parent felt he/she learned more about the child through the programme than vice-versa.

'I kind of picked up things that I didn't know about (child) like d'you know like drawing pictures and all that. Now I didn't think (child) would like d'you know be into that. The same with reading like d'you know, I didn't think (child) would like it so much d'you know so I kind of picked up more of (child) than s/he did d'you know.'

Parents in one school had a discussion about how, through Doodle Families, they learned how independent their children had become, how capable they are and the importance of not viewing them as 'babies'.

Outcomes for schools

School staff identified a number of outcomes for schools arising from the delivery of the Doodle Families Programme. They listed the following: the opportunity to engage parents of young children and develop the home school relationship; developing school staff capacity to deliver family literacy programmes and the opportunity to support the school's overall aims for inclusion.

Structured opportunities to engage parents of young children in the school and to develop the home school relationship

As discussed throughout the findings, facilitators spoke about how much they enjoyed observing the interaction between children and parents during the programme as well as recognising the benefit of greater communication between the school, parents and children and also the value of getting to know them better. They had the opportunity to engage in a meaningful way with parents and children and hear *'genuine concerns'* as one member of school staff noted. It also provided affirmation and a sense of appreciation for one school about the work that they are doing to engage parents and children.

'I would have got a very positive feeling from the parents about the school and how welcome they feel in the school and how appreciated they feel and you know that was nice reassurance to know that the school is doing a good job in that front.'

Another member of school staff spoke about the overall *'positivity'* of the programme and although already having a keen appreciation of parental engagement, the experience re-emphasised this appreciation:

'It just brings home like the value of having the parents coming into these kinds of programmes in school.'

In terms of outcomes for parents, school staff spoke about parents being 'more relaxed' and 'more comfortable' within the school environment and this was also recognised by facilitators as a positive outcome for the schools as well.

One external agency representative felt that the programme was beneficial for the Home School Community Liaison Coordinator's work as the programme resonated with their work and also because it was manualised.

Developing school staff capacity to deliver family literacy programmes and engage with parents

School staff reported that their own skills and capacity to deliver family literacy programmes had been developed through the experience of delivering Doodle Families. For one, it was a first opportunity to engage with a programme for parents, as well as a parent and child programme. This facilitator felt that the development of his/her skill base was a real benefit of the programme.

When asked what they learned from the experience, school staff listed the following: the need to have realistic expectations about literacy objectives; that activities need *'to be structured, but not seem structured'* to avoid putting parents off; and the need to reflect on their own approach and attitudes towards parents and families during the process.

They also recounted the challenge of facilitating joint parent and children sessions. One facilitator commented that although they had *'struggled with the technicality of it'* overall it was a very positive experience for the school. In another school, staff spoke about the programme as providing an opportunity to *'see what works'*, noting that they had *'lots of ideas about going forward with such a programme'* and that it had been a *'very creative exercise'*. One of the school staff commented that it will influence how other programmes are delivered in the school into the future stating that it gave them *'an idea of the scope and possibility of running the programme again next year and ...what works and how we can kind of work with it.'*

External agencies mainly saw the programme as developing facilitators' skills and their capacity to deliver family learning and parental engagement programmes by providing a model of different ways of working and different way of engaging parents. One external agency representative felt that it was an opportunity for teachers, who are quite comfortable working with children due to their training, to learn more about working with parents. Another felt that s/he could not comment on this because they had not had any feedback from pilot schools on the programme delivery.

Supporting the school's aim to be inclusive

One of the final outcomes for schools identified by schools was that the programme supported their efforts to be inclusive of families by *'creating a joy around learning'* and that it was hoped it would have a knock-on effect in motivating parents to be more inclined to engage with other activities to support their child's learning.

Subtheme 2 – Enhanced relationships

Across all three schools, children, parents and schools staff spoke about the opportunity that the Doodle Families Programme provided for the enhancement of relationships between children and parents and also between the home and school.

Children’s thoughts on learning with their parents in school

Children provided a variety of positive responses when asked what they liked about their parents being in school with them. They listed a variety of activities which they shared with their parents during the Doodle Families Programme including sharing writing activities, going to the library together, reading together and showing them their classroom. In response to how they felt about mum/dad/relative being in class with them, many of them replied that it was ‘good’, ‘fine’ or they were happy about it. Some reported they were happy because they like or love their parent and one child was happy because *‘I get to be with my mam in school.’* Another child also felt that it was fun for his/her parent.

Children and parents bonding during Doodle Families

The Doodle Families Programme provided opportunities to nurture relationships. Learning about their parents and the opportunity to develop relationships with and bond with parents during one to one time were highlighted by parents and school staff as positive outcomes for children from participating in the Doodle Families Programme. Children were asked if they learned anything about their mum or dad during the programme, in response to which some of the children replied that they already knew about their mum or dad. One child mentioned learning about the parent’s favourite book and another that his/her mother is very special and takes care of him/her.

Staff members in all three schools spoke about enhanced parent-child relationships as an outcome for both children and parents. One felt that it was lovely to hear children ask parents *‘what do you like’*, and believed that children learned a lot about their parents during the programme. Another described the interaction between children and parents as *‘a time of togetherness for them’* and felt that programme activities were designed to promote parents and children working together on tasks. He/she also believed that children working comfortably with their parents was an important outcome. A child being praised by their parents during the programme was identified by another school staff member as helping to develop relationships between parent and child. In addition, this person felt that it was nice for parents and children to engage in positive activities together where there was *‘no one giving out’*. Another school staff member described the *‘sharing and the bonding that they got to do’* as an outcome of the programme.

Parents also spoke about aspects of the programme that could be described as developing relationships. One parent felt that Doodle Families encouraged the child to talk about what they are interested in as well as speaking about his/her needs. Another parent felt that his/her child learned that parents are *‘actually real people’*, and that the parent enjoyed engaging in activities outside of home with the child like coming into the school for programmes. This was echoed by another parent who felt that his/her child knows now that he/she will engage in activities of interest to the child. Another parent felt that the child was interacting more at home about what he/she is doing in school as a result of the programme.

The enhancement and development of the parent-child relationship also underpins much of the outcomes for

children and parents that have already been discussed. The programme provided an opportunity for children and parents to spend dedicated time together both in school and in the home through reading and working on their scrapbooks. Some parents reported that they had learned more about their child's academic skills, social and emotional development, needs and interests as a result of participating in the programme.

Developing the home school relationship

Similarly, the development of the home school relationship underpins much of the outcomes already explored for children, parents and the schools. The Doodle Families Programme provided an opportunity for parents and children to engage directly with key staff members with a remit around the development of positive home schools relationships as well as those with responsibility for literacy development in the school. School staff spoke about the opportunity to get to know parents and children better. Parents and school staff spoke about greater familiarity with the school environment as a result of the programme.

Theme D - Future development of the programme from the perspectives of children, parents, schools, and external agencies

Child, parent, school staff and external agency feedback on the future development of the programme will be explored in this section under the following subthemes: children's view on other activities, parent's recommendations about future delivery, school staff recommendations for future delivery and external agency recommendations about future delivery.

Subtheme 1 – Children's views on other activities

Children and parents made quite a few suggestions on what they would like to see continue in the Doodle Families Programme. Children mainly spoke about other trips that could be included such as: Tons of Fun, the Zoo and LEGOLAND. Some children spoke about bringing in their pets or going to the pet shop to get their own pets. They also highlighted more art, reading and writing.

Subtheme 2 - Parents' recommendations about future delivery

In relation to improvements parents highlighted that the lack of space was a particular issue in one school. A related improvement suggested by these parents, was greater opportunity for children to be physically active. During the member checking process, parents from this school suggested that the programme be delivered in the Halla, if available, as there would be more room for parents and children to move around. Parents in a second school also added during the member checking process that larger groups could be split into work stations in order to give parents and children the opportunity to move around more and allow for greater interaction.

Other suggestions from parents included a slower pace of programme delivery along with less activity in each session, more outings and keeping drinks and snacks until break-time.

As previously discussed under Theme B Subtheme 2, regarding the organisation and delivery of the programme, parental feedback on the programme duration was varied and inconsistent. In relation to timing, two schools were satisfied with the timing of the programme. In the third school, the parents were in agreement that their preference would be for the programme to be delivered earlier in the school day preferably, as identified during

the parent member check process by this group, first thing in the morning when children are more alert or on a day that there are no off campus activities taking place for this class.

Finally, in one of the Parent Feedback Sessions, a parent recommended that parents and children be given badges as the end of the programme stating 'I completed Doodle Families.'

Subtheme 3 –School staff recommendations for future delivery

Recommendations emerging from the school staff regarding future development of the programme included the need for significant revision of the pilot programme manual. Detailed feedback has been provided on the programme content in order to inform the revision of the manual. One school staff member highlighted the importance of consulting with the facilitators as a group in redesigning the manual. Speaking specifically about future development of the pilot manual, another recommended that one practical literacy activity per session that parents could do at home with their child would be sufficient. For example, session one might cover informal, everyday activities that could be seen as learning opportunities, these might include an activity such as shopping; session two might focus on how to read a picture book with your child at home and session three could focus on how to involve your child in writing a shopping list.

A revision of the training programme was also suggested in the detailed facilitator feedback interviews which reviewed the training.

School staff identified greater sensitivity in relation to the diverse cultural demographics and family background as areas for improvement in the manual. Feedback on the programme content, for example, indicates that schools found it necessary to adapt some of the activities to suit the diverse cultural and family background of parents and children. The need for sensitivity to intra and inter family dynamics was also highlighted.

School staff also identified the importance of sensitivity to the diverse skill levels of parents and children with feedback on the programme content indicating that schools found it necessary to adapt the activities to suit the skill levels of parents and children e.g., less emphasis on writing activity.

All three schools felt that the programme should be delivered during the school day to facilitate parental engagement, although parents were not asked to comment on this. The difficulty of releasing staff during the school day to deliver the programme during the school day was highlighted previously but the HSCL coordinator was seen as an 'obvious' choice for the role of facilitator. Two school staff members suggested that the HSCL coordinator facilitate the programme in future, with one suggesting that if the programme was run over a shorter period, a second facilitator may not be required. Another suggestion was to have an external facilitator co-deliver with the HSCL coordinator. Principal feedback on the challenges of their continued involvement as facilitators has already been highlighted. All schools found the programme to be too long in duration.

Subtheme 4 - External agency recommendations about future delivery

External agency representatives made some suggestions about the future development of the programme. Only one of the external agencies had direct feedback from the schools about the participation in the pilot programme and the others emphasised the difficulty of commenting on the same in the absence of school feedback. Suggestions that were made included:

- One external stakeholder felt that, while a lot of thought went into the pilot programme, sometimes it can be more fruitful to engage directly with hard to reach parents about what they are interested in and build up a rapport with them in advance of running a more structured programme. This person felt that responding to a need or interest that parents have expressed can help to develop this rapport and also highlighted that sometimes parents would like something for themselves that has nothing to do with their children;
- Programmes such as Doodle Families should be learner centred as much as possible and should respond to the needs and interests of the group;
- Disseminate the findings and learning from the evaluation with feedback from the pilot schools, as well as the evaluation approach to other stakeholders such as HSCL coordinator clusters, SCP coordinator networks and the OSCAILT network of DEIS principals in Limerick. This was viewed as a means to promote future uptake of the programme;
- If other schools are interested in participating in the programme it would be helpful for them to talk to the schools that were involved in the pilot;
- Ensure that any future programme delivery compliments rather than duplicates existing programmes in the city and make formal linkages with existing programmes e.g., Little Voices;
- Ensure that any future programme delivery formally links with existing support services e.g., the Library and Adult Literacy Service of the Education and Training Boards and Family Literacy practitioners;
- Ensure that the programme is as easy to use as possible for people delivering the programme and easy to mainstream so that it is a good option for people to run with;
- If the programme is found to be effective, encourage as many schools as possible to engage in future delivery of the programme.

Section 4 - Discussion

In this section of the report, we discuss the findings of the evaluation. The findings were presented thematically in the previous section and in this section we now present an analysis of the findings with reference to the aims and objectives of the Doodle Families Programme, as well as to the short-term outcomes identified in the Doodle Families Programme Logic Model developed by CDI (Appendix 6).

Aims and objectives of the pilot Doodle Families Programme

The programme objectives are:

1. To pilot the Doodle Families Programme as a follow up to Doodle Den;
2. To train a panel of facilitators from the three pilot schools and local services to deliver the programme;
3. To verify programme content, implementation issues and training needs to support the replication of the Doodle Families Literacy Programme.

The programme aims are:

- To support the home learning environment by offering projects, tools and confidence for families to engage in literacy enhancing outcomes;
- To equip parents with the skills to carry out literacy activities in the home;
- To support and extend the benefits of the Doodle Den Programme. For example to build on children's comprehension skills, enjoyment of school, and levels of reading in the home;
- To encourage family literacy activities and library use;
- To provide a context for families to participate in fun literacy based games and activities.

The short term outcomes (by 2016) identified in the Logic Model are:

1. Increased effectiveness of school and community agencies working with families to develop children's literacy;
2. Increased parental knowledge and skills of how best to support their children's school learning at home;
3. Improved Home-School relations between parents and teachers, including positive parenting skills and home learning environment;
4. Sustained and improved outcomes for children including:
 - Oral, written and digital literacy skills;
 - Regular school attendance;
 - Positive relationship with family and peers;
 - Positive engagement in learning;
 - Ability to positively engage in learning opportunities.

Were the stated programme aims met?

Aim 1 – To pilot the Doodle Families Programme as a follow up to Doodle Den

The pilot Doodle Families Programme was implemented between March and June 2015 in three DEIS primary

schools in Limerick city that had delivered the Doodle Den Programme in the previous school year of 2013-2014. The majority of the children completed Doodle Den in Senior Infants as part of the 2013-2014 cohort in Limerick. Only two children had not been involved in Doodle Den previously and the rationale for including them in Doodle Families was that the school experienced difficulty in recruiting enough parents and children who had completed Doodle Den.

The first aim of the programme to deliver the pilot programme as a follow up to the Doodle Den programme was achieved in part. CDI originally intended to run the programme as an afterschool programme and as evident in the findings, the timing of delivery was adjusted by schools to maximise parental engagement. The aim of delivering Doodle Families as an afterschool programme has therefore not been met. Overall, the children, parents and school staff indicated that they enjoyed the experience of participating in the Doodle Families Pilot Programme.

Aim 2 - Train a panel of facilitators from the three pilot schools and local services to deliver the programme.

The findings in relation to aim two are less clear cut. Initially, CDI set out to train a panel of facilitators from the three pilot schools as well as local services to deliver the programme. However, only school staff from the participating schools were trained.

The facilitator training was provided by a staff member from an external agency. An issue that emerged in the data collection was that there was a misunderstanding about the background and experience of the trainees.

One of the original aims of facilitator training for the pilot was to focus on the Doodle Families Programme content. Feedback from all the interviews with facilitators who participated in the training indicates that, while the trainer was very skilled and knowledgeable and demonstrated expertise in delivering family learning initiatives, there was insufficient focus during the training on the programme manual content. As a result of this, one of the tensions that emerged in the findings is that some facilitators felt that they were not fully prepared for the extent of the adaptation that they would need to make to the programme manual to suit the needs of their group, despite this level of flexibility having been requested by them. Another issue arising is that of how best to provide training for the programme and whether there should be more than one trainer involved e.g., one who is an expert in family literacy accompanied by a trainer who was involved in the development of the specific programme content.

Detailed recommendations from facilitators in relation to training requirements were made in the interviews and these will be considered under the recommendations section.

Aim 3 - To verify programme content, implementation issues and training needs to support the replication of the Doodle Families Programme

Detailed feedback on the programme content was provided in the Findings Section. Initial adaptations were made to the programme manual during the second afternoon of the training, and subsequently at the Community of Practice meeting in April 2015. There was also variation in how the facilitators delivered the programme in each context. In addition, in recognition of the pilot nature of the programme and the challenge of creating a comprehensive manual, the programme manual specifically notes that facilitators can devise alternative activities suitable to meet the needs of the group that they were working with provided that the

learning objectives are retained. The manual included some examples of alternative activities to support them. While this level of flexibility is essential to successfully engage parents and children, it creates a challenge for the evaluation in asserting that there is specific, verifiable programme content. This is further complicated by variation in how the programme was delivered across the three pilot sites. We can only explore school staff and participant perceptions of the modified version of the programme content that was implemented in each site. Additionally, parents and children would not have been aware that facilitators modified the programme content.

A number of programme implementation issues arose in the interviews and facilitators were of the view that the programme content should be redesigned for future delivery. It is evident from the findings that they delivered modified versions of the activities in the original manual in sessions 1-4, adding some of the activities suggested by the trainer such as the learning styles activity and photos of everyday learning activity. Modification to sessions 5-8 were agreed by the Community of Practice meeting in April, and it would appear from the description of the activities provided by facilitators, as well as the outlines of the sessions provided, that they by and large implemented similar activities across the three schools for the second four week block and this is in line with the manual i.e., the focus on the learning objectives was retained. Facilitators essentially implemented an individualised version of the programme in each school and this highlights the first key implementation issue arising from the pilot. The programme content was modified in order to respond to the diverse familial and cultural background of participants, as well as the diverse literacy and/or English language skills of parents and children. According to CDI this would be considered best practice in terms of family literacy programmes.

While facilitators reported that amending the manual took quite a lot of work, more than they anticipated at the outset, the programme was a pilot and two of the three schools identified the capacity to adapt the content and contribute to the future development as a positive aspect of the programme. However, it was evident in the interviews that facilitators struggled with the level of adaptation necessary to suit the needs of the group. There was also a lack of clarity expressed by some facilitators about whether they were supposed to adapt the manual to any great extent and a sense of confusion regarding the overall objectives of the programme in relation to facilitating the development of relationships between children and parents or implementing family literacy activity.

Other implementation issues identified by facilitators included:

- **Timing of programme delivery.** School staff favoured the delivery of the programme within the school day despite the development of the programme being for after-school delivery. Parents in two schools indicated satisfaction with the timing and in one school they stated a preference for the programme to be delivered earlier in the school day.
- **Releasing staff to deliver the programme.** Delivering the programme during the school day created a difficulty in releasing staff and principals in two of the three schools decided to facilitate the programme for this reason. This was despite funding from CDI to facilitate staff delivery. The original aim of the pilot was to have a member of school staff and a staff member of a local support service facilitate the programme. This was not the case, all facilitators were school staff members. These issues will be given consideration in the recommendations section.
- **Time of year.** The time of year at which the programme was implemented was identified as an area that needs consideration. The programme was delivered before and after the Easter break and some facilitators felt the break was detrimental to attendance levels. All three schools were of the view that

the programme should be delivered earlier in the school year to encourage attendance.

- **Programme duration.** Feedback on the duration of the programme was mixed. Facilitators felt that the programme was too long whereas parental feedback was inconsistent across the three schools. They either felt it was too short, dipped in the middle and too long or of sufficient length to not lose interest.
- **Balancing the aims of parental engagement and the literacy focus of the activities.** School staff spoke of the tension they encountered in trying to balance the literacy focus of the activities, particularly writing activity, and the objective of engaging parents in the programme and the school.
- **Balancing the needs of parents and children participating in the same group.** This was identified as an implementation issue in two of the schools, with one facilitator specifically commenting on how much of the content as adapted by the school, was focused on the needs of parents.
- **Physical environment.** In one school the physical environment was raised by facilitators and parents as an implementation issue as the room was quite small but unfortunately the school had no other general purpose space available during the school day.
- **Behaviour management.** Behaviour management and how facilitators dealt with children's behaviour when parents were present was raised by parents in two schools. This raises the implementation issue of who is responsible for managing the child's behaviour in such situations and the need for clear understanding between parents and facilitators about the same.

Recommendations on the future development of the programme manual in light of the implementation issues that emerged will be considered in the next chapter.

In relation to the aim of the pilot to verify training needs, it is clear from the facilitator feedback that they believe that the training should also be redesigned with a greater emphasis on the programme manual content. The input received during training on more general family literacy strategies and approaches was found to be very worthwhile but the need to engage with and discuss the programme manual content in greater detail, as well as engage with those involved in the development of the programme were highlighted by facilitators. Detailed recommendations relating to training requirements were made by facilitators in the interviews and these and other recommendations emerging from the findings will be considered under the recommendations section.

Were the stated programme objectives met?

This section discusses the specific programme objectives of the Doodle Family Literacy programme in relation to the findings.

Objective 1 - To support the home learning environment by offering projects, tools and confidence for families to engage in literacy enhancing outcomes

The findings from parent and facilitator interviews indicate that the programme was successful to some extent in terms of the objective of supporting the home learning environment through the delivery of the Doodle Families Programme. One of the main outcomes identified by facilitators and parents was the bonding that took place between parents and children as a result of engaging in the programme activities and subsequent enhancement of the child-parent relationship in terms of greater communication between them about children's learning as well as about their interests and needs. This could be viewed as having a positive influence on

parents' capacity to support learning in the home. School staff and parents also highlighted specific skills that had been developed by parents through the programme, and spoke about ways in which parents' confidence about their role in their children's learning had also been enhanced. The Doodle Families Programme was also viewed as contributing positively to the home-school relationship with parents becoming more comfortable in the school environment and more knowledgeable about the school curriculum. Additionally, school staff felt they became more knowledgeable about children and parents and how parents are supporting their children's learning as well as any areas where the school could potentially provide further support. School staff members reported that their capacity and skills to deliver family literacy programmes and engage with parents were also enhanced as a result of delivering the programme. Children and parents also took books home to read and some completed projects such as the scrapbook or memory box at home between weekly sessions. In addition, the findings discussed here lend support to the realisation of the first three short-term outcomes identified by CDI: 1) Increased effectiveness of school and community agencies working with families to develop children's literacy; 2) Increased parental knowledge of how best to support their children's school learning at home and 3) Improved home-school relations between parents and teachers, including positive parenting skills and home learning environment. Regarding the first outcome, the pilot was only delivered by school staff.

Objective 2 - To equip parents with the skills to carry out literacy activities in the home

Parents and facilitators identified the development of parents' skills and capacity to support children's learning in the home as a positive outcome of the Doodle Families Programme, indicating that this objective has been achieved to some extent. Feedback from the parents across all three schools indicates that some of them believe they developed specific skills to support their child's learning in the home. These included increased parental understanding of how to support children with their homework, helping them to choose appropriate levels of books and supporting children to read a book. Some parents also spoke about developing their own listening skills and communicating more effectively with children about their interests and needs. A greater knowledge of children's learning styles and how to support children in literacy activity were also highlighted by some of the parents. School staff feedback certainly echoed the development of these skills although some were unsure if particular activities presented in the programme manual e.g., writing a family newsletter, would be an activity that would be continued in the home. These findings contribute to the realisation of the second short-term outcome, 2) Increased parental knowledge and skills of how best to support their children's school learning at home.

Objective 3 - To support and extend the benefits of the Doodle Den Programme. For example to build on children's comprehension skills, enjoyment of school, and levels of reading in the home

Parents spoke about how they believed that children's literacy skills in the form of reading, writing and spelling, cognitive skills, such as concentration, and also social skills in terms of confidence had developed positively as a result of participating in Doodle Den. Both parents and school staff specifically identified children's interest in reading being renewed as a positive outcome of the Doodle Families Programme and some parents felt that their children had 'got back' into other learning activities. Parents and school staff also highlighted how much the children enjoyed the programme and how much they loved having their parents in school with them. Additionally, children indicated that they had enjoyed the programme and the activities involved. These findings support the success of the third objective of the programme, particularly for the children that had previously participated in Doodle Den. These findings would also contribute in some way to short-term objective number 4) Sustained and improved outcomes for children, such as oral, written and digital literacy skills and positive engagement in learning.

Objective 4 - Encourage family literacy activities and library use

Family literacy activity was encouraged as part of the Doodle Families Programme, with each activity designed or adapted to facilitate engagement between parents and children. In relation to the outcomes of the programme, parents spoke about how they had enjoyed spending one to one time with their children during the programme, with some commenting on the time they spent at home engaging in family literacy activities, particularly reading. A few of the parents indicated that they had made this more of a priority since participating in the Doodle Families Programme. School staff also highlighted that some of the children and parents came back with work completed in their scrapbook, citing this and reading of books they had borrowed from the school, as examples of how they believed the programme supported learning in the home. However, when children were asked if they had done any of the Doodle Families activities at home with parents, they either did not respond or indicated that they had not.

The library visit was highlighted by school staff members and children as one of the most positive aspects of the programme. Two children indicated that they joined the library since the visit as part of the Doodle Families Programme and school staff and parent interviews supported this finding.

The findings indicate some support for the realisation of this objective, as well as contributing to the achievement of short-term objective number 4) Sustained and improved outcomes for children, in the form of positive relationships with family, positive engagement in learning and ability to positively engage in learning opportunities.

Objective 5 - To provide a context for families to participate in fun literacy based games and activities

Feedback from children, parents and teacher interviews and focus groups indicates that the families that participated enjoyed the programme greatly. A key outcome identified for parents and children was the opportunity to spend one to one time together engaging in fun literacy based activities. This was particularly pertinent for children with other siblings at home. Feedback on the programme content highlights the particular activities that were enjoyed most such as drawing and the library visit by children and the scrap books, memory box and library visit by parents. The schools indicated that the final session of the programme would cover literacy based games and in two of the three schools, the parent interviews were conducted at the start of the final session so parental feedback on this aspect was not included in the focus groups. The findings support that this objective has been met to some extent in terms of delivery of the programme. Finally, these findings would also support in some way short-term outcome number 4) Sustained and improved outcomes for children in the form of positive relationships with family, positive engagement in learning and ability to positively engage in learning opportunities.

The following table highlights how the findings in relation to the objectives of the programme correspond with the short term outcomes as identified by CDI in the Logic Model for the programme.

Table 3 – Short-term outcomes and correspondence to programme objectives

Short-term Outcomes	Objectives
1. Increased effectiveness of school and community agencies working with families to develop children’s literacy.	Objective 1
2. Increased parental knowledge and skills of how best to support their children’s school learning at home.	Objectives 1 & 2
3. Improved Home-School relations between parents and teachers, including positive parenting skills and home learning environment.	Objectives 1 & 3
4. Sustained and improved outcomes for children including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oral, written and digital literacy skills; • Regular school attendance; • Positive relationship with family and peers; • Positive engagement in learning • Ability to positively engage in learning opportunities. 	Objective 4 No findings from pilot to support this outcome Objectives 4 & 5 Objectives 4 & 5 Objectives 4 & 5

Section 5 - Evaluation Recommendations

The recommendations emerging from the evaluation process have been categorised into four sections. The first section focuses on the consultation and programme set up in schools, the second discusses the training for facilitators and Community of Practice meetings and the third looks at recommendations regarding the programme content and implementation. The final section focuses on recommendations relating to the dissemination of the learning from the evaluation to relevant stakeholders to promote the future development of the programme. The recommendations are primarily grounded in the feedback from parent and school staff interviews about their experience of engaging with the programme and additionally for facilitators, their experience of the training. For example, participants offered their perceptions of what they believed worked well, what they thought could be improved, any perceived gaps in the programme and their recommendations for future delivery. Consideration has also been given to recommendations made by external agencies about the future development of the programme and any perceived gaps that they identified in the pilot phase. Finally, in reviewing the pilot manual, observing the implementation of the pilot and consolidating and synthesising feedback from participants, the researchers also drew on their own knowledge and experience of designing and implementing educational interventions and training programmes to identify any gaps from the researcher's perspective as well as possible ways that CDI could potentially address same.

Consultation and programme set up in schools

Consultation with schools interested in participating in future delivery of the programme

The consultation processes with schools offer an important opportunity for ensuring clarity in relation to programme aims and objectives along with programme content. We recommend that consultation would additionally address and create a shared understanding of how Doodle Families builds on Doodle Den, as well as issues relating to implementation, timing, and identification of the most suitable personnel to deliver the programme. Only one of the principals of the three pilot schools was able to attend the consultation meeting in Limerick. Individual consultation meetings with schools would be an important step in any future consultation process for schools interested in delivering the programme. School staff, other than principals, indicated an awareness of Doodle Den but did not seem to be particularly familiar with the programme content. Internal communication between relevant staff in schools interested in participating in Doodle Families and Doodle Den facilitators in the school would also help to create greater awareness of both programmes, most specifically how Doodle Families aims to build on the Doodle Den programme.

Consulting with and engaging parents

One of the external agency representatives highlighted consultation with parents and outreach work with 'hard to reach' parents as a gap to be addressed in terms of future programme development. While schools indicated that they had made efforts to meet the needs of parents in relation to the timing of the programme and in regard to adaptations to the manual, it is not clear to what extent parents were consulted as part of the development of the original programme manual. Neither was it apparent what input facilitators had from the trainer in relation to outreach strategies to engage hard to reach parents. This evaluation did not explore in detail the efforts that schools made to recruit parents to participate in the programme, particularly those parents whose children had not participated in Doodle Den previously. The findings indicate that there was a broad diversity of parents participating across the schools in this programme, including parents from non-English speaking backgrounds, as well as parents who may have had literacy difficulties. There was some evidence that

facilitators struggled to respond to this diversity at times. The researchers have identified the need for training and the development of resources to enable facilitators to respond proactively and creatively to this diversity as a particular issue in the pilot phase. Best practice guidance for facilitators and schools on how to engage with such a diverse group of parents would be a crucial aspect of the future development of the programme in terms of both the training programme content and the manual content and guidelines. Such best practice guidelines should include: engaging with parents of non-English speaking backgrounds, engaging with parents with low literacy levels, cultural sensitivity and sensitivity to family background in delivering programmes for diverse groups of parents and children, and guidelines for facilitating joint parents and children learning programmes. These guidelines should also focus on the positive opportunities provided by the diverse cohort of families e.g., opportunities to share stories from other countries or cook/taste food from different countries or even opportunities for language development such as saying hello in a number of languages.

Experienced school staff, such as HSCL coordinators, may well have developed such expertise over their career but not all facilitators would necessarily be knowledgeable about same.

It is evident from the findings that facilitators experienced tension in trying to balance the literacy objectives of the Doodle Families Programme and the overall parental engagement objective. This tension is most salient with parents who have not engaged in a structured programme or activity with the school system previously and further raises the need to attend to the development of opportunities for parents to build capacity and skills. It was clearly evident that parents were very keen to learn skills to support their children's learning. The pilot model relies on developing those skills as an integral part of the Doodle Families Programme which may not always be the most appropriate model given the challenges faced by parents in relation to literacy, language and familiarity with the curriculum. Based on these findings, the researchers recommend that if the programme is to continue, other models of delivery should be considered. For example, facilitators could meet parents 30 minutes before a session and discuss key topics such as behaviour management, concentration or motivating children. This model could grow organically as parents are offered opportunities to debrief in relation to previous sessions and plan for upcoming sessions. Another model to be considered might include a two phased approach to programme delivery in schools. This could be similar in content to the pilot model of Doodle Families but focuses on the development of the home-school relationship in advance of skills development sessions:

- Phase 1 - Firstly, to encourage parents to develop a relationship with the school, offer a block of 3-4 weeks with a more general introduction to children's learning in First Class e.g., everyday activities that parents already do to support children's learning, introduction to the school environment, overview of the curriculum, overview of learning styles and tips for behaviour management. This first phase could be more focused on the needs and interests of parents, as well as the development of relationships with the school and also between parents themselves. This phase might include some parent only sessions while children are in class or alternatively, have a parent only session mid-way through the eight week programme in order to offer the facilitators a dedicated opportunity to check in with parents and for parents to engage with each other and hear each other's experiences and opinions. In the parent feedback sessions during the member checking process, parents in two schools indicated that they would welcome the opportunity to have a parent only session at the outset to that parents could get to know the facilitator and each other. One parent also commented that it would be important to have an overview of what the programme would cover each week to make an informed decision about whether their child should participate. Such an approach could also give facilitators an opportunity to become more aware of literacy levels, English language needs and

cultural and family background particularly if it is the parents first time engaging in a programme with the school.

- **Phase 2** - A second phase of 3-4 weeks could focus more specifically on parents and children engaging in literacy and fun activities together and modelling and enhancing the skills children developed in Doodle Den that could be followed up in the home learning environment e.g., how to read a book together, how to support and scaffold a writing activity, how to encourage oral language development. It would also be important for parents to have a user-friendly resource that they could take away with them at the end of the programme outlining the skills covered in the programme and providing tips and strategies for follow up at home. Modelling of how to use technology to access literacy focussed websites and programmes would also be a key element of this phase as well as the opportunity to practice these skills.

Through working with parents in the first phase facilitators should have a deeper understanding of their parents and be in a good position to differentiate the second phase of the programme content accordingly. If facilitators have concerns about the skill set of particular parents, schools could look at tailoring the Doodle Families Programme to meet their needs as well as referral to other relevant support services.

Identifying facilitators to deliver the programme

It was clear from the findings that principals did not feel that it would be feasible for them to continue to deliver the programme in future due to their responsibilities and workloads. The HSCL coordinator was identified by school staff as the most appropriate staff member to be involved in programme delivery. Consideration needs to be given to whether there should be a second facilitator and if so, who should fill that role. One of the advantages of having a second facilitator, as identified in the evaluation, was that facilitators were able to give each parent and child pair individualised attention during the sessions as they required it and also it served to encourage their engagement. Secondly, programme delivery could continue without much disruption if one facilitator had to leave the session for any reason. The original aim of Doodle Families was to have up to ten parent and child pairs participating in each school. While the largest number of parent and child pairs in a school was eight in the pilot, the number of facilitators required to deliver the programme effectively would need to be taken into consideration for future delivery, especially with higher numbers.

Principals noted that they experienced difficulty in releasing a teacher, other than the HSCL coordinator, to deliver the programme during the school day. The original after school delivery mechanism would have addressed this issue. Should the programme be offered during the school day in future, the researchers recommend that other possibilities be explored such as recruiting School Completion Programme staff or Youth and Community workers to deliver the programme with the HSCL. If this option was to be explored and piloted, it would entail tailored training programmes in recognition of the diverse skills each would bring. It is also possible that parents might be upskilled in the long term to act as facilitators.

One of the recommendations by an external agency for future development was to ensure that links were established and maintained with the relevant support services for family literacy programmes including the local Adult Education Service in the Education and Training Boards, many of whom have a brief around Family Learning. While some links were evident with Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board, it is not clear if formal links were made with the local Adult Education Service in the pilot programme. There may be possibilities of recruiting co-facilitators from Adult Education Service staff who are experienced in delivering family learning

programmes, and this option should be explored. Another possibility would be to have the HSCL coordinator coordinate the programme in the school and work with a pool of facilitators to co-deliver depending on the theme of the session being delivered. Practical examples of working with a pool of co-facilitators include: working with a staff member from the library to co-deliver a session on reading story books with a child, or collaborating with a Speech and Language Therapist to provide an input on oral language development and activities that parents and children can do at home together to promote language acquisition. This would also help to build greater links between schools and support services in the locality. Additionally it would build greater awareness of services amongst parents along with the opportunity to nurture a personal connection with support services. While HSCL coordinators already link with Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board services as part of their role, for future delivery of this specific programme, it would be beneficial to create formal links with the local Adult Education Service and other support services in the city. This would be particularly important given the demographics and skills levels of parents that would be targeted to participate in the programme.

Training of facilitators and Community of Practice meetings

While facilitators recognised the skill levels of the trainer, and indeed used some of the strategies learned in the training to modify the programme, they were clearly of the view that there were gaps in the training and that consideration should be given to the redesign of the training programme.

Recommendations arising from the evaluation regarding the revision of training include:

- Conduct a short training needs analysis of facilitators prior to delivery of training so that it can be tailored to suit the identified needs of facilitators. A detailed input on family literacy and educational methodology would be more relevant for facilitators who have little or no prior experience of teaching or working with parents and children on family learning programmes. Conversely, school staff members or Family Learning tutors may need less of an input on these aspects;
- Tailor the length of the training to suit the training needs of the facilitators;
- Allow greater time during the training for facilitators to engage with the programme manual content and discuss each session, review the planning required for delivery, along with a review of the most effective methodology and approach. In addition, allow sufficient time to tease out any adaptations that facilitators feel might be necessary to suit individual contexts. One possible approach would be to provide facilitators with the manual or part of the manual in advance of the training and ask them to complete some preparatory work so that they come to the training focused and having had an opportunity to engage with the programme content and reflect upon any queries or possible implementation issues;
- Involve the programme developer/s in the delivery of training so that facilitators can engage directly with them about the rationale, aims and objectives of the programme;
- The training could be delivered in two parts at the outset. For example, deliver one full day of training before the programme commences that would provide a general overview of the rationale, aims and objectives of the programme, as well as an overview of the programme content. Then give facilitators an opportunity to fully review the manual and reflect on any adaptations they may feel necessary to suit the group in advance of a second day of training which might look in more detail at how the programme content could be implemented in each setting. A third instalment of training could follow through to the first Community of Practice meeting at an early stage in delivery to review

implementation and discuss tips, strategies, activities, resources, challenges and successes or games that could be delivered as the programme rolls out;

- Emerging from the findings of the evaluation, particularly the facilitators interviews, it is essential that the training include guidance for facilitators on sensitivity to cultural and social contexts and diverse family background as well as how to respond to diverse literacy skill levels and English language proficiency. It is very important that engagement with parents is not approached from a deficit perspective, but rather embraces a perspective which values parents skills, 'funds of knowledge', linguistic capital, cultures and talents. Facilitators should be encouraged to consider their own biases and preconceived ideas of parental capacity which might impact negatively on the programme;
- The researchers also recommend that it is essential that best practice guidelines are provided if co-facilitation with other support services is to be pursued in the future development of the programme, to ensure healthy productive working relationships between facilitators. While there is an inherent value in interagency partnerships it does bring with it the need to generate a shared understanding of work practices and ethos, so there would be a need to develop consensus relating to many aspects of the programme including responsibilities and approaches.

The evaluation recommends that it is essential that the programme trainer/s is/are fully aware of the background and training needs of the facilitators as well as proficient in the programme manual content, rationale, aims and objectives. Facilitators identified the opportunity to engage with the programme developer/s as a gap in the training therefore the evaluation recommends that consideration should be given to having a staff member from CDI who was involved in developing the programme delivering part of the training.

Development of the programme manual content and implementation

Findings from the evaluation, particularly facilitator feedback, indicate the need for significant revision of the programme manual, including:

- Sensitivity in selecting writing activity and, where necessary, provide differentiated writing activity for parent and child pairs;
- Structure the sessions in the format of oral language, reading and writing activity. This would reflect and support the English language curriculum;
- Have one key literacy objective per session;
- Sensitivity to personal circumstances and family background in the programme activities;
- Drama activity and still images may not be appropriate for the target group of parents;
- A need to have clarity around the primary objective of the programme i.e., for parents to develop a skill set to enable them to engage in literacy activities in the home or to encourage more parental engagement in children's learning in general. The latter might include how to read a book with your child or how to develop oral language skills whereas the former might focus on parents being more comfortable in the school environment or an overview of the curriculum. In some contexts, trying to achieve both in a short programme may not be realistic, depending on the needs and skill sets of the parents and children. Feedback from parents in one school during the member check, supported the view that parental involvement in their children's learning should be the main focus of the programme. These parents felt that the programme should be about the child and parent spending one to one time together, that children should be consulted about their interests and that there should be less pressure on children to engage in writing.

The findings of the evaluation detailed the aspects of the programme that children, parents and facilitators enjoyed most and least. The evaluation recommends, as identified by one of the facilitators, that for future development of the manual, it would be worthwhile consulting with the pilot programme facilitators as a group about any revised programme content.

Emerging from the findings the researchers have identified the following recommendations regarding the development of the programme manual:

- The manual should include contextual material such as an introduction, programme rationale, aims and objectives and an overview of the structure of the programme and individual sessions;
- The manual should highlight the relevance to the Primary School Curriculum, particularly the English curriculum, and detail how the Doodle Families Programme compliments the curriculum as delivered in First Class with examples of how they can be integrated. In the pilot manual there is an apparent lack of connection to what children are already doing as part of the school day or for their homework;
- The manual should also highlight how the programme builds on the Doodle Den Programme as well as how the programme compliments the Home School Community Liaison Scheme, school planning for DEIS schools and literacy plans;
- The manual should allow for a differentiated approach to meet the needs of diverse literacy skills and English language proficiency of parents with sample sessions and guidelines for facilitators on how to approach same. It must also be noted that parents may not write in the English Latin-based alphabet and the practicalities of supporting their children to write in this way may need to be considered. An appendix with a list of sources for materials to support this recommendation would be helpful;
- The manual should include best practice guidelines to support facilitators to engage with families from different cultural and social backgrounds, and guidelines on how to encourage participants to engage with each other. It is also recommended that the programme contain a menu of fun activities which the parents and children could engage with, for example appropriate co-operative games or creative games or direct facilitators to resources where they could find the same;
- It is recommended that the manual would provide clarity about the nature of the relationship between the facilitators and parents i.e., that the facilitator's role is to mentor and work collaboratively with parents;
- The manual should also include recommendations about other implementation issues including guidelines on the scope for flexibility within the programme.

Implementation issues

Emerging from the findings, it is clear that the pilot schools had a preference for the programme to be delivered during the school day to maximise engagement of parents. Similarly, parents indicated their satisfaction with the programme timing as part of the school day, with one focus group stating a preference for earlier in the school day. This should be taken into consideration in planning future delivery in schools. School staff believed that sessions of one and a half hours were too long in duration and this should also be taken into consideration, particularly given the recommendation from schools that the programme run during the school day.

Feedback on the length of the programme was inconsistent. However, in line with the two phased approach recommended above, the evaluation would recommend two blocks of 3-4 weeks each depending on the needs of parents and children. Consideration should also be given to delivering the programme earlier in the school

year as all three pilot schools indicated that it was a disadvantage to deliver it late in the school year. This would also allow more scope for the programme to be delivered to a second cohort of parents and children. Children, parents and school staff indicated that the trip to the library was a very positive experience and the evaluation would recommend that this continue in future delivery and that consideration be given to a second trip or outing at the end of the programme in consultation with parents and children.

Lack of space was identified as an issue for one school and in such instance, the evaluation would recommend that schools have adequate space to accommodate the number of children and parents participating. It would also be useful to consider building in a break in the session to offer children and parents an opportunity to circulate and perhaps have a snack and a chat informally. Behaviour management was raised by parents in two schools, with one parent in one school identifying it as an area of tension. There needs to be a clear understanding between parents and facilitators from the outset as to who has responsibility for behaviour management. Additionally, facilitators may need training and guidelines around behaviour management in a multi-stakeholder context.

Dissemination of the findings from the evaluation

The findings from the evaluation should inform any future roll out of the programme. In conducting the interviews with representatives from external agencies, it was clear that they were very interested in the findings of, and the key learning from, the evaluation. An important follow up with these stakeholders including the pilot schools would be to disseminate the evaluation report of the pilot. This would allow them to contribute their specific expertise to a discussion and/or for relevant agencies (e.g., NALA, ETBs, Library Service) to input directly to future development of the facilitator training and programme manual. This would also create a platform from which to engage in dialogue about future delivery of the programme to other schools and/or community groups as well as helping to secure commitment for any future roll out of the programme.

Recommendations that emerged from external stakeholders specifically related to the Limerick context and included presenting the findings to the following groups and inviting representatives of pilot schools to share their experiences: HSCL cluster meeting; SCP Coordinator network meeting; OSCAILT network of DEIS primary and post-primary principals. Similar presentations could be made to relevant groups in Dublin and other areas. In doing so, it would be crucial to present a clear vision and overview of how the programme training and content has been developed taking the evaluation findings into consideration.

Section 6 - Conclusion

A key issue identified in the evaluation was that the Doodle Families Programme was not delivered in the pilot schools as originally intended by CDI i.e., as an afterschool programme. The schools presented a clear rationale for same. Consequently, the researchers were only in a position to evaluate the programme as it was implemented by schools and report and analyse the findings as such. However, the findings from the evaluation indicate that the objectives of the Doodle Families Literacy Programme pilot have been met to some extent. Children, parents and facilitators enjoyed the experience of participating in Doodle Families and spoke positively about their experiences. The findings from the interviews and focus groups indicate that parents of children who participated in Doodle Den in Senior Infants believe that children's literacy, cognitive and social and emotional skills improved as a result of the programme. Doodle Families was perceived as contributing to further enhancement of these skills in First Class. School staff in particular felt that Doodle Families contributed to the home learning environment in that parents and children appeared to be reading together at home and completing activities in their scrapbooks. One of the key benefits of the programme that parents and school staff highlighted was the opportunity for children and parents to spend dedicated time together engaging in fun literacy activities and the enhancement of the parent child relationship as a result of this. School staff also believed that the programme contributed to parents feeling more familiar and comfortable in the school environment. They also said that home school relationships had been enhanced through participation in the programme. Parents spoke of how their skills to help their children with their learning, particularly reading books, had developed. Finally, school staff spoke about how their capacity and skills to deliver parental engagement and family literacy programmes had advanced through this experience.

Key learnings from the Doodle Families Literacy Programme Pilot

The key learnings from the delivery of the pilot Doodle Families Programme are outlined below.

- One of the key benefits of the programme is that it provides a unique opportunity for parents to learn about supporting their children's learning and practice skills with children present;
- The aims and objectives of the programme need to be clear and explicit for all stakeholders;
- The pilot schools cater for very diverse family demographics with children and parents from different social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Responding to and celebrating this diversity in delivering a family learning/literacy programme is essential to promote parental engagement and enhancement of the home learning environment for children;
- Facilitators delivering the programme may need guidance and support to respond appropriately to the diverse family demographics in their schools in delivering programmes such as Doodle Families, particularly around how to engage parents with low literacy levels and from non-English speaking backgrounds;
- Training for programme facilitators should be cognisant of the previous two key learning points outlined above and be tailored to the training needs, background and experience of the group;
- In developing the programme manual, the format of programme sessions should focus on how parents can support children's learning with greater emphasis on the elements of the English language curriculum i.e., reading, writing and oral language, and less emphasis on writing activity for parents and family and personal circumstances;
- A differentiated approach in the programme manual content to allow for flexibility to meet the diverse skill set of parents and children is essential;

- While flexibility and capacity to adapt activities in the programme manual is key, facilitators need a wider range of support materials to draw from in implementing the programme.

The Doodle Families Programme pilot offered a valuable opportunity to schools to enhance family literacy skills. Many elements of the programme were successful and these elements need to be built upon. However, as one would expect in a pilot programme, a number of areas which need addressing have been identified.

References

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Research questions and embedded questions

Research Questions

- Have the objectives of the programme as outlined in the Terms of Reference been achieved?
- Has the programme been implemented and delivered successfully?
- What are the stakeholder's perceptions about the delivery of the programme?

There are a number of sub-questions arising from these:

Consultation process on programme design and delivery

- How effective was the consultation process with stakeholders?
- Were local and national partners satisfied with the consultation process? Why/Why not?

Application process

- How effective was the application process for schools? What worked well? What could be improved?
- How would schools and programme coordinators describe the support and information received from TWCDI in the application process?

Identification and training of programme facilitators

- How were facilitators identified and recruited?
- What factors were taken into consideration when recruiting facilitators?
- Was the training and support provided appropriate, effective and relevant? What went well? What could be improved/done differently? Were there any gaps in the training?
- From the perspective of facilitators and schools, was/were the trainer/s suitably qualified and experienced?

Programme content and delivery

- Was the content relevant and appropriate to the stated aims and objectives of the programme?
- To what extent (if any) did the programme content and materials reflect the consultation process with stakeholders?
- To what extent did the programme content and materials meet the expectations of schools, facilitators and parents and children?
- How did schools, facilitators, parents and children find the programme content and materials? Were they useful, relevant and/or engaging?
- What worked well for schools, facilitators, parents and children in terms of programme delivery? What could be improved? Are there any gaps in the programme content and materials?

Experience of the Doodle Families Programme

- What was the experience of the programme for children? Parents? Facilitators? The school? And other agencies?
- What do trainers, schools, facilitators, parents and children perceive as the outcomes of the programme? For example:
 - What did they learn/gain from the programme?
 - Did the programme promote /support learning in the home environment? Please describe?
 - Did the programme build on the Doodle Den programme? In what way?
 - Are there aspects of the programme that parents and children would like to use at home?
- What were the benefits of the programme as experienced by stakeholders? What were the challenges of the programme as experienced by stakeholders?
- How did children and parents find the experience of participating in the programme together?
- What were the attendance and participation levels for parents and children? What helped participation? What could be improved?

Future development of the programme

- Overall, what worked well about the programme? What could be improved? Are there any gaps?
- What advice would stakeholders give to other schools, parents and children who are interested the programme?

Appendix 2 - Information and consent forms

Doodle Families Evaluation Child - Invitation to Participate



Hello,

You and your mum or dad will take part in the Doodle Families programme with your teachers over the next few weeks. The TED project in Mary Immaculate College are doing a study to learn more about what you are doing and what you like or dislike about it. We would like you to take part in the study.

What is the study about?

This study will look at what was good about the Doodle Families programme and what could be better.

What happens if I take part?

- Photos will be taken of the classes you have with your mum or dad.
- You will be asked to take part in a focus group with other children who are doing Doodle Families.
- Someone from the TED Project will ask you and the other children about Doodle Families.
- We will ask you to tell us about the photos we took and draw some pictures.
- The focus group will be recorded, if you agree to it.
- We will also ask your mum and dad if it is ok for you to take part.

Other things you should know.

You do not have to take part in the study if you do not want to. If you decide to take part and then change your mind that is ok with us.

We will share what we learn with other people who are interested in Doodle Families but won't use your name or photo in the research report so people won't know who you are.

The audio files from the interviews and focus groups will be destroyed after the research project but the other information will be stored for use in possible future studies about the Doodle Families Literacy Programme.

If you have any worries about taking part you can talk to your teacher or parents. We will also ask your mum, dad or guardian if it is ok for you to take part in the study.

What do I do now?

I will give you some information for your mum, dad or adult at home about taking part so you can decide together. I will give you a form and I will also give your mum or dad a form.

If you want to take part, I need you to complete your form and your mum or dad or adult at home to fill in the other. You can return both forms to your teacher.

CHILD CONSENT FORM
DOODLE FAMILIES EVALUATION



My name is: _____

My school is: _____

CHILD CONSENT FORM

	YES	NO
An adult read the Information sheet with me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know I am going to take part in the Doodle Families Evaluation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know that whenever I feel like stopping that's okay, I won't get in trouble and I don't have to say why I feel like stopping.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know this isn't an exam and by doing the activity I am just helping out the people from Mary Immaculate College.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to my photo being taken as part of the study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to being observed in the study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to the focus group being voice recorded.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

SIGNED: _____ **DATE:** _____

Please return this page to school

Doodle Families Evaluation

Parent - Invitation to participate



Wednesday 29th April

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Over the next few weeks, you and your child will take part in the Doodle Families programme in the school. The TED Project in Mary Immaculate College has been asked by the programme funder, Tallaght West Childhood Development Initiative (TWCDI) to evaluate the delivery of the programme. We would be delighted if you would agree to take part in the study.

What is involved in the Doodle Families Evaluation?

Children, parents, facilitators and schools will be asked about their experiences of the programme.

- Photos will be taken of you and your child taking part in the Doodle Families programme with your permission.
- The TED team will observe some of the Doodle Families sessions.
- You will be asked to take part in a focus group with some other parents who also did the programme and talk about some of the photos taken. Focus groups will take about an hour with a member of the TED Project and will be voice recorded with permission from you.
- Your child will also be asked to take part in a focus group with other children, to talk about the photos taken and to draw some pictures about it. The focus group with your child will be recorded with permission from both you and your child.

What are the risks?

There are no risks in this research greater than those involved in everyday practices.

What are the benefits?

The evaluation of the Doodle Families programme will help TWCDI to learn about people's experiences of the programme. It will look at what works well and what could be better.

What happens to the information?

The information will be used to write an evaluation report on the Doodle Families programme. It may also be used for presentations about the programme. The audio files from the interviews and focus groups will be destroyed after the research project but the other electronic data will be stored for use in possible future research about the Doodle Families Literacy Programme.

In reporting about Doodle Families, all information about you and your child will be confidential and anonymous.

What if I do not want my child to take part?

Participation in the research is voluntary. You do not have to take part if you do not want to. Your child will also be asked for permission to take part in the study and can decide not to if they wish. There are no consequences of any kind if you or your child decide not to participate.

Contact details:

If you have any questions about this study my contact details are:

**Ruth Bourke,
TED Project Co-coordinator,
Mary Immaculate College,
South Circular Road,
Limerick
061-774715
Ruth.bourke@mic.ul.ie**

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, please contact:

**MIREC Administrator
Mary Immaculate College
South Circular Road
Limerick
061-204515
mirec@mic.ul.ie**

**PARENT CONSENT FOR CHILD PARTICIPATION
DOODLE FAMILIES EVALUATION**



PARENT CONSENT FORM

	YES	NO
I have read and understood the information about this research.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand what the study is about, and what the information will be used for.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am fully aware of what is involved, and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know that my child’s participation is voluntary and that he/she can withdraw from the research at any stage without giving any reason.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am aware that the identity of the research participants will be kept confidential.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to my child taking part in this research study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to my child being observed during the Doodle Families Programme.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent my child’s photo being taken for this research study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to the focus group being voice recorded.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Child’s Name (PRINTED)	
Parent/Guardian’s Name (PRINTED)	
Parent/ Guardian’s Signature	
Date	

PLEASE RETURN THIS PAGE TO THE TEACHER

**PARENT INFORMED CONSENT
DOODLE FAMILIES EVALUATION**



PARENT CONSENT FORM

	YES	NO
I have read and understood the information about the research.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand what the study is about, and what the information will be used for.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am fully aware of what is involved, and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the research at any stage without giving any reason.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am aware the identity of the research participants will be kept confidential.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to being observed during the Doodle Families programme.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to photos of me being taken for this research study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to the focus group being voice recorded.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Parent/Guardian's Name (PRINTED)	
Parent/ Guardian's Signature	
Date	

PLEASE RETURN THIS PAGE TO THE RESEARCHER

Doodle Families Literacy Programme Evaluation

Letter to Principal



Wednesday 29th April 2015

Dear X,

The Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project, Mary Immaculate College, has been asked by Tallaght West Childhood Development Initiative (TWCDI) to evaluate the delivery of the pilot Doodle Families Literacy Programme with three schools in Limerick City including your school. We would be delighted if you would consent to your school participating in this research.

Why is the research being done?

The research will explore children's, parents', facilitators' and schools' perceptions and experience of the Doodle Families programme. It will specifically ask about:

- 1) The training received, programme content, materials and delivery;
- 2) How the Doodle Families programme worked for the schools and families taking part;
- 3) How the Doodle Families programme could be improved.

The findings from this research will be shared with participants and other relevant stakeholders and will inform the future development of the Doodle Families programme.

What will be involved?

The research team at TED will observe programme delivery in each school. We will interview parents, children, facilitators, Home School Community Liaisons, Principals and trainer/s involved. Parents and children will be invited to participate in focus groups and facilitators, HSCLs, Principals and programme trainer/s will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview. Each focus group and interview will be recorded with permission and will last about 45 minutes approximately. We will also take photographs of children, parents and facilitators, with permission, during the Doodle Families programme to use in the Child Focus Groups to help children to talk about the activities they engaged in. The research will be carried out between April and June 2015. The research has been given ethical clearance by the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC).

Recording and Storing of Information Gathered:

The interviews will be digitally recorded so that the researcher can listen to the recordings at a later date. At the end of the interview the researcher will go through the main points made in the discussion and check that the participants are satisfied with the discussions. When information from all of the participants has been gathered it will be analysed and a report will be written. The final report will be shared with participants and other key stakeholders. All information that the researchers collect will be maintained securely by the research team. The electronic data will be archived for possible use in any future research about the Doodle Families Literacy Programme and audio recordings will be destroyed at the end of the project research.

Use of the information gathered:

The information gathered in the observations and interviews will be used to write up a report for TWCDI about how families and schools worked with the Doodle Families Literacy Programme. Every effort will be made to

ensure that the individuals that participate in the research remain anonymous and cannot be identified in the final report. Anonymity of the school will be retained in the evaluation report should you decide not to make the school's identity known. However, we cannot guarantee that knowledge of your school's participation in the pilot of the Doodle Families Literacy Programme is not in the public domain.

The report will be made available to participants and other key stakeholders and will inform the development of the Doodle Families Literacy Programme.

Informed Consent and right to withdraw:

If you agree to your school participating in the collection of information for research, please sign the attached form and return it to the researcher. You have the right to refuse to participate and to withdraw at any stage of the research process.

Additional Information:

Please do not hesitate to contact the research team for further information relating to this research.

Ruth Bourke

TED Co coordinator,

Mary Immaculate College,

South Circular Road,

Limerick.

E: ruth.bourke@mic.ul.ie

P: 061 204715

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

MIREC Administrator

Mary Immaculate College

South Circular Road

Limerick

061-204511

mirec@mic.ul.ie

PRINCIPAL – PERMISSION FOR SCHOOL TO PARTICIPATE IN DOODLE FAMILIES EVALUATION



CONSENT FORM

	YES	NO
I have read and understood the information about the research.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand what the study is about, and what the information will be used for.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am fully aware of what is involved, and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know that participation of my school is voluntary and that we can withdraw from the research at any stage without giving any reason.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am aware that the identity of the individual research participants will be kept confidential.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to the research taking place in the school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to my school being identified in the evaluation report.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name (PRINTED)	
Name of school (PRINTED)	
Signature	
Date	

PLEASE RETURN THIS PAGE TO THE RESEARCHER

Doodle Families Evaluation

Facilitator/HSCL invitation to participate



Wednesday 29th April 2015

Dear X,

The Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project, Mary Immaculate College, has been asked by Tallaght West Childhood Development Initiative (TWCDI) to evaluate the delivery of the pilot Doodle Families Literacy Programme with three schools in Limerick City. We would be delighted if you would agree to participate in this research.

Why is the research being done?

The research will explore children's, parents', facilitators' and schools' perceptions and experience of the Doodle Families programme. It will specifically ask about:

- 1) The training received, programme content, materials and delivery;
- 2) How well the Doodle Families programme worked for the schools and families taking part;
- 3) How the Doodle Families programme could be improved.

The findings from this research will be shared with participants and other relevant stakeholders and will inform the future development of the Doodle Families programme.

What will be involved?

The research team at TED will observe programme delivery in each school. We will interview parents, children, facilitators, Home School Community Liaisons, Principals and trainer/s involved. Parents and children will be invited to participate in focus groups and facilitators, HSCLs, Principals and programme trainer/s will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview. Each focus group and interview will be recorded with permission and will last about 45 minutes approximately. We will also take photographs of children, parents and facilitators, with permission, during the Doodle Families programme to use in the Child Focus Groups to help children to talk about the activities they engaged in. The research will be carried out between April and June 2015. The research has been given ethical clearance by the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC).

Recording and Storing of Information Gathered:

The interviews will be digitally recorded so that the researcher can listen to the recordings at a later date. At the end of the interview the researcher will go through the main points made in the discussion and check that the participants are satisfied with the discussions. When information from all of the participants has been gathered it will be analysed and a report will be written. The final report will be shared with participants and other key stakeholders. All information that the researchers collect will be maintained securely by the research team. The electronic data will be archived for possible use in any future research about the Doodle Families Literacy Programme and audio recordings will be destroyed at the end of the project research.

Use of the information gathered:

This information gathered in the observations and interviews will be used to write up a report for TWCDI about how families and schools worked with the Doodle Families programme. Every effort will be made to ensure

that you remain anonymous and cannot be identified in the final report. The report will be made available to participants and other key stakeholders and will inform the development of the Doodle Families Literacy programme.

Informed Consent and right to withdraw:

If you agree to participate in the collection of information for the research, please sign the attached consent form and return it to the researcher. You have the right to refuse to participate and to withdraw at any stage of the research process.

Additional Information:

Please do not hesitate to contact the research team for further information relating to this research.

Ruth Bourke

TED Co coordinator,

Mary Immaculate College,

South Circular Road,

Limerick.

E: ruth.bourke@mic.ul.ie

P: 061 204715

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

MIREC Administrator

Mary Immaculate College

South Circular Road

Limerick

061-204511

mirec@mic.ul.ie

FACILITATOR DOODLE FAMILIES EVALUATION



INFORMED CONSENT FORM

	YES	NO
I have read and understood the information about the research.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand what the study is about, and what the information will be used for.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am fully aware of what is involved, and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know that my is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the research at any stage without giving any reason.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am aware that the identity of the research participants will be kept confidential.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to being observed during the Doodle Families programme.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to photos of me being taken for this research study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to the interview being voice recorded.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name (PRINTED)	
Signature	
Date	

PLEASE RETURN THIS PAGE TO THE RESEARCHER

Home School Community Liaison DOODLE FAMILIES EVALUATION



INFORMED CONSENT FORM

	YES	NO
I have read and understood the information about the research.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand what the study is about, and what the information will be used for.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am fully aware of what is involved, and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know that my is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the research at any stage without giving any reason.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am aware that the identity of the research participants will be kept confidential.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to the interview being voice recorded.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name (PRINTED)	
Signature	
Date	

PLEASE RETURN THIS PAGE TO THE RESEARCHER

Appendix 3 – Observation Schedule

Doodle Families Evaluation

Site Observation Recording Template

Date:	Facilitators:
School:	Session no:
No. children present:	No. parents present:

Observation Notes	
<p>Learning Environment</p> <p>Physical –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suitable room • Heat and light • Access to toilets for child and parent • Accessibility of room • Furniture • Visual displays <p>Atmosphere –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal/informal • Welcoming • Friendly • Appropriate open and close 	Notes:
<p>Quality of Facilitation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcoming • Communication skills – did facilitator communicate appropriately with children and parents? • Relationships • Organization and planning • Delivery of programme • Effectiveness of shared facilitation • Was child and parent participation facilitated? • Was child – parent interaction enabled? 	Notes:
<p>Quality of interactions</p> <p>Examples of the following interactions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Parents ---- Children 2. Parents ----Facilitator/s 3. Children --- Facilitator/s 4. Parents --- Children ----Facilitator/s 5. Children --- Children 6. Parents --- Parents 7. Member of school staff--- Member of school staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balance of interaction and engagement across all stakeholders • Level of contribution • Is the interaction empowering for parents and children? 	Notes:

Observation Notes**Participation of Children and Parents**

- Level of engagement with each other
- Level of engagement with facilitator
- Level of engagement with program/activity
- Did the activity foster active engagement of child and parent
- Communication between parent and child

Notes:**Resources and materials provided**

- Appropriate for the group
- Sufficient materials and resources
- Appropriate to content of the programme

Notes:**Adherence to curriculum**

Session no.

Did programme delivery match the expressed outcomes in the curriculum?

Notes:**Additional Comments**

Need to observe in relation to:

1. English language proficiency
2. Classroom management – how is behavior managed?

Other?

Notes:**Recommendations**

Note any possible recommendations arising from the observation

Notes:

Appendix 4 – Report Feedback Template

Evaluation of the Doodle Families Literacy Programme Pilot Report Feedback Template

Thank you for taking the time to participate in the member checking process for this research. Please note that all feedback is welcome and that any identifying information about respondents who submit feedback will be kept confidential by the TED Project. Whether you wish to contribute anonymously or to identify yourself, please complete the form and return by post by Friday 15th January to: Ruth Bourke, TED Project, Mary Immaculate College, S.C.R., Limerick.

Alternatively, you can email the template directly to ruth.bourke@mic.ul.ie by Friday 15th January or contact Ruth directly on 061-774715 to give your feedback verbally or to arrange to meet in person.

1. Truth and accuracy: Does the report reflect your contribution?

Yes No Somewhat

Comment: _____

2. Feedback on content: Suggested improvements/changes. Indicate in the table areas where the report could be improved/changed.

Section / Page Number	Change suggested	Reason for change

3. Required changes: Please identify sections that are not currently satisfactory and that you would like changed before publication of the report. Please indicate your reason for the change, e.g., identifies place/person; factually incorrect; incorrect inference; etc. Please use additional sheets as required

Section Number	Change proposed	Reason for change

Appendix 5 - Thematic Map Doodle Families Evaluation

Theme A: Programme set up and design from the perspectives of schools and external agencies

Subtheme 1 – Programme set up

- Consultation and application process
- Recruitment of facilitators
- Recruitment of parents and children
- Timing of programme delivery

Subtheme 2 – Feedback from facilitators on Doodle Families Training

- Feedback on the trainer
- Pitch of the training
- Relevance and length of the training
- Most and least valuable aspects
- Gaps in training

Subtheme 3 – Manual development and adaptation in schools

- Phase 1 - Development of the programme manual by CDI
- Phase 2 – Adaptation of the programme manual by facilitators at training and Community of Practice
- Phase 3 – Further adaptation by individual schools
- School staff rationale for manual adaptations

Theme B: Experience of programme delivery from the perspective of children, parents and schools

Subtheme 1 – Expectations and understanding of the programme

- Child, parent and school staff understanding and expectations of the programme
- Parent and school understanding of roles
- Comparison with Doodle Den programme

Subtheme 2 – Organisation of programme delivery

- Programme duration
- Structure of sessions
- Physical environment

Subtheme 3 – Attendance and participation

- Levels of attendance
- Factors which supported or created barriers to attendance

Subtheme 4 – Programme content feedback

- Description of activity
- What children, parents and school staff enjoyed the most and least
- What school staff thought worked well and what could be improved
- Appropriateness of resources and materials
- Manual variation across the three sites

Subtheme 5 – Delivery and facilitation of the programme

- Facilitators' overall experience of delivery
- Facilitating parents and children together
- Facilitator modelling of skills
- Parent's views on facilitator's approach
- Behaviour management
- Pace of delivery and number of activities
- Relationship between facilitators

Subtheme 6 – Community of Practice

Subtheme 7 – Challenges to delivery

- Programme content and appropriateness to diversity in family and cultural background
- Encouraging communication between parents and language and cultural barriers
- Facilitators’ core responsibilities and time requirements for manual adaptation
- Timing of delivery
- Supporting parents to support their child’s learning rather than ‘doing it for them’

Theme C: Outcomes of the programme from the perspectives of children, parents, schools, and external agencies

Subtheme 1 – Outcomes of the programme

Outcomes for children

- Perceived development of literacy and social skills
- Opportunity to spend more time with their parent
- Opportunity to engage in learning and fun activities with parents and other family members
- Greater involvement of their parent in their school life
- Library visits and membership

Outcome for parents

- Developing parents’ knowledge of the curriculum and their skills to support children’s’ learning at home
- Greater familiarity with and comfort in the school environment
- Opportunity to spend dedicated time with their children engaging in learning and fun activities including reading for pleasure
- Greater knowledge of their child’s interests as well as social and academic development

Outcomes for schools

- Structured opportunity to engage parents of young children in the school and to develop the home school relationship
- Developing school staff capacity to deliver family literacy programmes and engage with parents
- Supporting the school’s aim to be inclusive

Subtheme 2 – Enhanced relationships

- Children’s thoughts on learning with their parents in school
- Children and parents bonding during Doodle Families
- Developing the home school relationship

Theme D: Future development of the programme from the perspectives of children, parents, schools, and external agencies

Subtheme 1 – Children’s views on other activities

Subtheme 2 – Parents’ recommendations about future delivery

Subtheme 3 –School staff recommendations about future delivery

Subtheme 4 – External agency recommendations about future delivery

Appendix 6 – Doodle Families Logic Model

Vision/Overall Aim of the Tallaght West Childhood Development Initiative Consortium of the Doodle Den Literacy Booster:

A community where families are empowered by schools to further develop their children's literacy and learning in family settings

Monitoring and evaluation: School data on children's literacy, school attendance, engagement in learning; Pre and post testing of literacy skills; Qualitative interviews with parents, children and teachers.

Objectives

- **To develop an evidence informed Family Literacy programme** for families of children aged 6 to 8 years old
- **To train school and community organisations** to deliver the Family Literacy programme in Tallaght West
- **To support the trained facilitators in the effective delivery** of the Family Literacy programme to families
- **To evaluate** programme impact on child & adult literacy

Inputs

Financial resources:
Programme Budget

Planning Processes:
Stakeholder Consultation; Literature Review of the Evidence on Literacy Programmes in Ireland; Programme Planning; Curriculum Development

People:
CDI Programme Staff; Researchers; Local Partnerships - Schools (Principals, HSCL's, Class teachers), NALA, VEC,

Materials:
IT, Communications & Print.

Key Activities & Outputs

Activity 1: Programme Planning

Output: Stakeholder agreement of plan, participants, roles and responsibilities

Activity 2: Curriculum Design

Output: Production of Family Literacy programme materials

Activity 3: Coordination

Output: Agreed schedule of partnerships, training and work

Activity 4: Training

Output: Delivery of Family Literacy programme training to professionals

Activity 5: Programme Delivery

Output: Engagement of target families & delivery of training in Family Literacy activities

Activity 6: Programme Support

Output: Delivery of Community of Practice support groups

Activity 7: Programme Evaluation

Output: Production of research report on pre & post child literacy and family literacy outcomes.

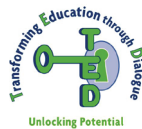
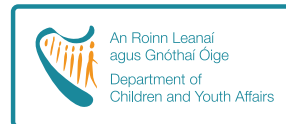
Short Term Outcomes (by 2016)

- **Increased effectiveness** of school & community agencies working with families to develop children's literacy
- **Increased parental awareness and skills** to practice effective family literacy activities with their children
- **Increased parental knowledge** of how best to support their children's school learning at home
- **Improved Home-School relations** between parents and teachers
- **Sustained and improved outcomes for children** in 1st and 2nd class including:
 - Oral, written and digital literacy skills;
 - Regular school attendance
 - Positive relationships with family and peers
 - Positive engagement in learning.

Longer Term Outcomes

- **Strong community awareness** of the value of family literacy
- **Proactive school support** of and engagement in family literacy activities
- **Skilled parents engaged** in their children's literacy & learning
- **Children motivated and supported** to develop excellent oral, written and digital literacy competencies
- **High levels of child and adult literacy** levels and educational attainment in Tallaght West

Evidence: Doodle Den RCT, Local stakeholder Consultation, Literature Review of Irish Literacy programme research, Evaluation of DEIS (ERC, 2012)



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