Sparkle Evaluation

Report

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Sparkle ⭐

Supporting Pre-school groups in Mid Kent

A multi-agency pre-school initiative

CONTENTS

Transformative learning in early years' settings– an evaluation of Shepway SPARKLE.

<u>**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**</u>

The SPARKLE early years inclusion initiative was established in 2001. Based in Kent SPARKLE is currently available to early years' settings in three localities, Shepway, Ashford and Maidstone. This report provides a summary of the SPARKLE evaluation. Commissioned by the SPARKLE steering committee, the evaluation had two phases. Phase one involved the development of an evaluation framework and tools. The second phase focused on generating data about the processes and outcomes of the SPARKLE teams' work in the Shepway locality over four new terms. The evaluation process began in September 2006 and was completed in June 2008. Three early years settings (EYS) participated in the evaluation. Recommendations and implications for the future of the initiative have been developed following consultation with members of the team and steering committee. It is anticipated that this evaluation will contribute to decisions about how to further develop, enhance and extend the initiative.

<u>**Key recommendations:**</u>

- Set explicit goals of learning and reflection in early year settings and develop opportunities for EYPs to identify future learning needs at the conclusion of the SPARKLE intervention.
- Vary the amount of in-put from SPARKLE based on a more detailed assessment of need in the early years setting.
- Assess the motivation of EYPs and the readiness of the EYS to engage with the SPARKLE initiative.
- Apply the Inclusion Framework devised for the evaluation - this will enable teams to measure progress and outcomes, to reach their targets, observe change and know when these goals have been achieved.
- Establish clear beginning and end points to each of the separate stages of SPARKLE to bring focus and purpose to the work of the team.
- Teams to maintain an integrated approach to delivering SPARKLE by organising shared visits, developing joint goals and delivering joint training wherever possible.
- Develop quality printed and web based resources that promote SPARKLE and disseminate good practice across the County.
- Inform families about SPARKLE and develop strategies to involve hard to reach families.

Background

Current government policy highlights the importance of good quality childcare, education and early intervention for all children but especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds[1]. Multi-agency and partnership working with young children and their families is a theme of all recent policy affecting children & families[2]. That quality of provision is important to achieving positive outcomes for young children is acknowledged, challenges exist in how to develop the skilled workforce that will successfully deliver these aims[3]. Health professionals play an important role in sharing their knowledge and skills with EYPs and can contribute to a greater appreciation within early year's settings of typical child development and early intervention strategies that promote development. There are several examples of successful partnership working between health and education services particularly in relation to promoting communication and the development of language skills in early years[4]. Initiative such as Sure Start established speech & language therapists as key partners with education. Recent evaluations of these services have generated greater understanding about the benefits of these partnerships and the models of service delivery that work most effectively[5]. SPARKLE although based on similar principles can be distinguished from these initiatives in that the team share their knowledge & skills with EYPs adopting an educational rather than a direct or consultative (indirect) model of service delivery.

SPARKLE model

The multi-agency team includes: a speech & language therapist, physiotherapist, occupational therapist and specialist teacher advisor. Individual therapists are contracted by the local authority to provide 10 hours a week to the team and they work closely in each locality with a learning support assistant who is allocated 20-25 hours a week. SPARKLE provides a multidisciplinary and multiagency service to allow Pre-school settings to enable all children to access activities regardless of any difficulty the child may have.

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[1] Sylva K, et al (2004) Effective Provision of Pre-school Education EPPE Project report. http://www.surestart.gov.uk/_doc/P0001378.pdf

[2] DfES Every Child Matters http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/earlyyears/

[3] Potter C (2007) Developments in UK early years policy and practice: can they improve outcomes for disadvantaged children? *International Journal of Early Years Education* 15 (2) 171-180.

[4] DfES www.surestart.gov.uk

[5] Barber M et al (2002) Evaluation of speech and language therapy projects supported by the standards fund 200-2001. London: DfES.

Aims of SPARKLE

- To increase the confidence of EYPs in meeting the needs of a range of children including those with special needs.
- To increase EYPs knowledge and understanding of child development
- To assist in the early identification of children with special needs and to assist early year's settings to meet those needs in an inclusive environment.
- In response to individual needs identified by the early years setting to offer advice, resources and support that enhance play & learning opportunities provided by the setting.
- To work closely with parents.

The team adopt a staged model in delivering their intervention over a period of four terms, approximately 8 months. (1) Initial Observation, (2) Identification of SPARKLE goals negotiated with early years setting (3) Intervention, (4) Review of goals and evaluation.

Rationale for the Evaluation

SPARKLE is recognised by those involved as providing an excellent level of support into early years. Since its inception in 2001 the team have gathered positive feedback from a range of EYS. These data includes personal testimonies, observations, questionnaires from practitioners and parents and statistical data which indicate that numbers of children requiring statements in the localities in which SPARKLE operates have declined. Letters received from EYS identify the benefits of the initiative and emphasise the importance of the educational aspects SPARKLE to the developing the skills of the EYPs.

- The positive impact on practitioners' knowledge and understanding of child development.
- The uniqueness of the team approach in working alongside practitioners within the setting and offering a balance of role modelling and targeted training.
- The importance of specialist input into the early years settings.

Design

An external illuminative evaluation [6] was commissioned by the Steering Committee in order to determine in more detail how the SPARKLE team bring about the positive change identified in the EYS and the extent to which SPARKLE meets its stated aims as an inclusion initiative. There were two distinct phases of the evaluation. Phase 1 focused on developing an Inclusion Framework for the evaluation and SMART observation and goal

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[6] Parlett M & Hamilton (1972) Evaluation as Illumination.

setting tools which would enable the Shepway team to measure change. In Phase 2 the Shepway SPARKLE team generated case study data from three participating early years' settings over a period of 4 terms. Interviews (n = 11) were also carried out in each of the settings at the conclusion of the intervention. Thematic analysis of the interviews and principles of qualitative case study analysis were applied to the case study data[7].

Key Findings & Recommendations

(1) Throughout the evaluation EYPs and the SPARKLE team were observed to be actively engaged in experiential learning[8]. The SPARKLE team worked alongside EYPS increasing their understanding of young children's development through demonstrating specific activities, providing written explanations for the choice and purpose of activity and modelling good practice in terms of how to further adapt and extend these activities to meet the needs of the children in the EYS. Targeted training was provided which focused on typical child development and explored how to promote young children's communication and interaction, motor development and play. The targeted training was used to reinforce the experiential learning in the setting. This engagement in learning was not explicitly stated as a goal, or openly acknowledged by either the team or the EYP, the perception by the EYP that the team were there to provide new 'ideas' for activities lead to opportunities for EYPs to build on and reflect on their learning not being fully exploited.

Set explicit goals of learning and reflection in EYS and develop opportunities for EYPs to reflect on their learning and identify future learning needs at the conclusion of the intervention.

(2) The individual case studies identify how the team worked flexibly to meet individual targets in a range of settings. Each of the settings differed in terms of the populations they served, levels of motivation to engage with SPARKLE and existing understanding and skill of the EYPs. The impact of the intervention, measured by the depth and quality of learning that occurred varied in each setting but appeared greatest in the setting where motivation amongst the EYPs was high and level of social deprivation greatest. One setting where standards were already high demonstrated how 'good provision could be made even better' but the team may have achieved this goal in a shorter time frame.

The team should consider varying the amount of in-put dependent on a more detailed assessment of need. Taster sessions could be used to establish levels of motivation and readiness to participate and shorter

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[7] Loftland J & Loftland L (1995) Analysing social settings.

[8] Kolb D (1984) Experiential learning. Experiential learning is when knowledge develops meaning when applied in a setting relevant to the learner.

or longer interventions delivered dependent on the needs of the setting.

(3) Analysis of the case study data highlighted the importance of the preliminary phases of identifying the EYS and the early negotiations with the settings about what the purpose of the intervention was and the approach of the team. The motivation of individual EYPs and the readiness of the setting to engage in the intervention influence how effective the team are in a particular setting.

The initial questionnaire could be developed as a means of establishing the motivation of EYPs and the readiness of the nursery to engage with the SPARKLE team. It is important that all EYPs are told about the decision to invite the team in to the setting and that everyone understands the educational nature of the initiative.

(4) During Phase 1 of the evaluation the Shepway team developed and piloted a framework which operationalised the concept of Inclusion. The framework enabled the team to develop an observation tool and to devise from these observations a set of SMART[9] inclusion goals for each of the settings they worked with over the period of the evaluation.

Establishing criteria for measuring progress and outcomes is essential for the team to reach their targets, observe change and most importantly know when these goals have been achieved. Teams should utilise the Framework of Inclusion and the observation and goal setting tools in each new setting.

(5) At the conclusion of phase 1 the team had clarified the exact purpose of each of the separate stages of the intervention. During piloting it was apparent that clear beginning and end points to each of the stages, with the addition of a formal meeting and negotiated goal setting stage assisted in bringing focus and purpose to the work of the team.

Clear beginning and end points to each of the separate stages of the initiative with the addition of a formal and negotiated [with the nursery] goal setting stage brings focus and purpose to the work of the team.

(6 & 7). The data from the case studies and interviews highlighted that the SPARKLE team work in parallel, this is possibly because they do not share a physical base and meet once a term. Some members of the team worked with all the children others identified small groups of children. Team members provided differing amounts of in-put. Parallel working was

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[9] Originally a management tool SMART goals are widely used as outcome measure in education and health services. Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timed.

reinforced by the development of separate therapy goals, activity plans and individual training sessions.

There is scope for team to work in a more integrated fashion by organising shared visits and joint goals, delivering joint training and developing jointly advice and activity sheets. This will assist in presenting to the nurseries an integrated and inclusive intervention.

Advice sheets and leaflets shared with the early years settings are handwritten, photocopied and generally do not reflect the high quality of content. Funding should be sought to develop quality printed and web based resources that support the initiative and promote it to a wider audience.

SUMMARY

Caution needs to be exercised in generalising the outcomes of this small-scale qualitative evaluation of SPARKLE in the Shepway locality. It is difficult to generalise the findings to other localities, where SPARKLE teams have started to diversify since the start of the evaluation, and now differ with regard to the balance between targeted training and experiential learning opportunities offered. It is also difficult to apply the outcomes of this evaluation to other early years' initiatives. Bearing these limits in mind, it is intended that key findings will provide greater insight into how SPARKLE works and effective ways of facilitating learning & development in early years' settings.

The evaluation has provided greater understanding of how the SPARKLE team work flexibly with a wide range of early years settings adapting and modifying their interventions depending on need. It has provided evidence of how the team in some settings achieved transformational learning and generated depth, quality and variety in the learning experiences of the EYPs they came into contact with. The evaluation has highlighted aspects of service delivery that could be developed; these include the need to make explicit the educational aims of the intervention. The evaluation has highlighted how maintaining an integrated team approach in the delivery of the intervention is important. Finally it has highlighted where additional resources could help promote SPARKLE reflecting the high quality of its provision and ensuring that good practice in early year's settings is disseminated widely across the County. [10]

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[10] Children's Executive Board Kent County Council (2006) Positive about our future Kent's Children and Young People's Plan 2006-2009.
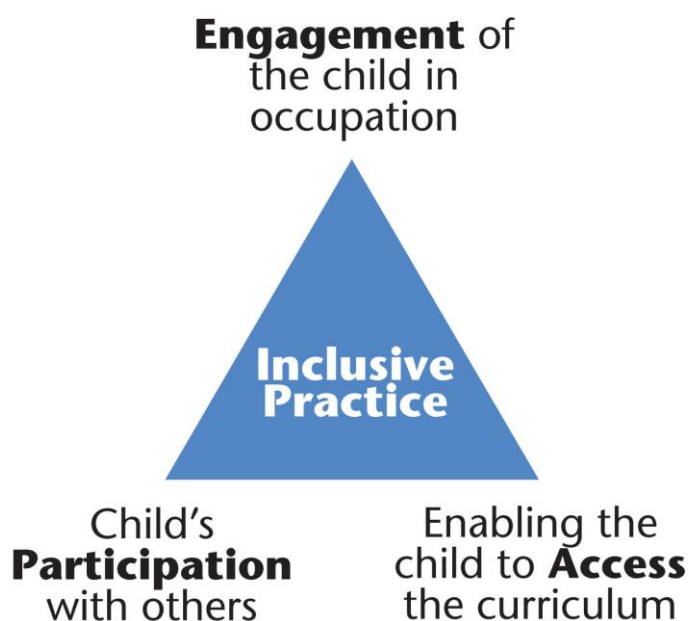http://www.kent.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/89358E99-18B8-4591-AAE1-D0857107FCBA/0/childrenyoungpeoplesplan.pdf

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Framework of inclusion

SUMMARY REPORT

1 INTRODUCTION

The SPARKLE early years inclusion initiative was established in 2001. Based in Kent SPARKLE is currently available to early years' settings in three localities, Shepway, Ashford and Maidstone. This report provides a summary of the SPARKLE evaluation. Commissioned by the SPARKLE steering committee, the evaluation had two phases. Phase one involved the development of an evaluation framework and tools. The second phase focused on generating data about the processes and outcomes of the SPARKLE teams' work in the Shepway locality over four new terms. The evaluation process began in September 2006 and was completed in June 2008. Three early years settings (EYS) participated in the evaluation. Recommendation and implications for the future of the initiative have been developed following consultation with members of the team and steering committee. It is anticipated that this evaluation will contribute to decisions about how to further develop, enhance and extend the initiative.

2 BACKGROUND

Current government policy highlights the importance of good quality childcare, education and early intervention for all children but especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Multi-agency and partnership working with young children and their families is a theme of all recent policy affecting children & families[11]. That the quality of this provision is important to achieving positive outcomes for young children is uncontested, challenges remain however in how to develop the skilled workforce that will successfully deliver these aims[12]. Health professionals play an important role in sharing their knowledge and skills with EYPs and can contribute to a greater appreciation within early year's settings of typical child development and early intervention strategies that promote development. There are several examples of successful partnership working between health and education services particularly in relation to promoting communication and the development of language skills in early years[13]. Initiative such as Sure Start established speech & language therapists as key partners with education. Recent evaluations of these services have generated greater understanding about the benefits of these partnerships and the models of service delivery that work most effectively[14]. SPARKLE although based on

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[11] DfES Every Child Matters http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/earlyyears/

[12] Potter C (2007) Developments in UK early years policy and practice: can they improve outcomes for disadvantaged children? *International Journal of Early Years Education* 15 (2) 171-180.

[13] DfES www.surestart.gov.uk

[14] Barber M et al (2002) Evaluation of speech and language therapy projects supported by the standards fund 200-2001. London: DfES.

similar principles can be distinguished from these initiatives in that the team share their knowledge & skills with EYPs adopting an educational rather than a direct or consultative (indirect) model of service delivery.

3 SPARKLE MODEL

The multi-agency team includes: a speech & language therapist, physiotherapist, occupational therapist and specialist teacher advisor. Individual therapists are contracted by the local authority to provide 10 hours a week to the team and they work closely in the Shepway locality with a learning support assistant who is allocated 20-25 hours a week. SPARKLE provides a multidisciplinary and multiagency service to allow Pre-school settings to enable all children to access activities regardless of any difficulty the child may have.

4 SPARKLE AIMS

The combined educational and therapeutic aims of SPARKLE are:

- To increase the confidence of EYPs in meeting the needs of a wide range of children in EYS including those with special needs.
- To increase EYPs knowledge and understanding of child development
- To assist in the early identification of children with special needs and to assist pre-school setting to meet those needs in an inclusive environment.
- In response to individual needs identified by the EYS to offer advice, resources and support that enhance play & learning opportunities provided by the setting.
- To work closely with parents.

The Shepway team adopt a staged model in delivering an intervention over a period of four new terms, approximately 8 months. Following the identification of an early years setting and an expression of interest from them, there follows an initial meeting where a checklist is administered which captures information about the numbers of children, those with identified special needs, the demographics of the area, the skills and qualifications of staff and the resources of the setting.

Stage 1 Initial Observation
Stage 2 Identification of SPARKLE goals negotiated with Pre-school setting
Stage 3 Intervention
Stage 4 Review of Goals and evaluation

5 RATIONALE FOR THE EVALUATION

SPARKLE is recognised by key stakeholders in the initiative as providing an excellent level of support into early years. Since its inception in 2001 the team have gathered positive feedback from nurseries that have participated in the initiative that suggests that it is achieving its aims. These data sources includes personal testimonies, observations, questionnaires from practitioners and parents and statistical data which indicates that numbers of children requiring statements of special educational need have dropped in the localities where SPARLKLE operates.

Letters received from early years settings that have participated identify in their testimonies some of the key benefits of the initiative. Typical are these from settings in one locality. One mentions the impact on practitioners' knowledge and understanding of child development.

'The whole experience has been important for us; it has given us many ideas for ways of working with children to develop their skills which we may not have thought of. It has also given us the confidence in what we do and the ability to explain to parents e.g. with pre-writing activities rather than writing. This is a unique project and must continue for the benefit of other groups and children' Manager Early Years Setting.

Another identifies the uniqueness of the team approach in working alongside practitioners within the setting and offering a balance of role modelling and targeted training.

'All staff have a very strong understanding of where a child is developmentally…this is down to the training that the SPARKLE team shared with all the team members who valued their input tremendously. The team empower you to realize your mistakes and most of all role model activities to teach you how to teach. They lead by example. I truly hope the project continues to grow to cover the whole of England because it is the best investment that the government have made in a long time' Head teacher.

A further letter acknowledges the importance of specialist input into the early year's settings.

'Before SPARKLE we had very little input from specialist needs teams and were unsure how to get in touch with the necessary bodies. SPARKLE provided an excellent service and helped us enormously identifying and referring children with specialist needs, it was useful to have a second opinion before we referred children.' Deputy Head teacher

These testimonies together with other supporting evidence have prompted those responsible for the initiative to consider rolling out the model across the County. There are acknowledged gaps in provision in Dover and Deal.

Before funding could be sought to extend the initiative it was felt necessary to carry out an external evaluation to determine in more detail how the SPARKLE team bring about change in the early years settings and the extent to which it meets its stated aims. It is anticipated that the outcomes and recommendations generated by this evaluation will contribute to decisions about how to further develop, enhance and extend SPARKLE.

6 DESIGN

An external illuminative evaluation [15] was commissioned by the Steering Committee in order to determine how the SPARKLE team bring about the changes identified in the EYS and the extent to which SPARKLE meets its stated aims as an inclusion initiative. Shepway SPARKLE was chosen as a pilot evaluation site. At the outset of the evaluation all three localities adopted a shared approach to service delivery. Illuminative methods are particularly useful in the evaluation of innovative initiatives and assist in exploring both process and outcome within a given context. There were two distinct phases of the evaluation

Phase 1 focused on developing an Inclusion Framework (appendix 3) for the evaluation and SMART[16] observation and goal setting tools, this would enable the team to measure changes in the settings during the second phase of the evaluation (appendix 4,5). This exploratory phase involved the teams from all three localities participating in a shared workshop which explored their perceptions of SPARKLE.

In Phase 2 the Shepway SPARKLE team generated a range of case study data from each of the three participating early year's settings over a period of 4 terms[17] Interviews with EYPs (n = 11) were conducted by the facilitator and a co-facilitator[18] in each setting at the conclusion of the intervention, in order to incorporate their views and experiences of SPARKLE. Thematic analysis of the interviews was carried out by the facilitator and interpretation of the data checked with the co-facilitator and the SPARKLE team. The case study data was used to generate typologies which would be helpful in understanding how the team bring about change in different types of setting[19].

Data collection across phase 1 & 2 (appendix 2)

The range of data gathered across the two phases on the project included:

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[15] Parlett M & Hamilton (1972) Evaluation as Illumination.

[16] Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timed.

[17] Data included: observation checklists, goal setting data, activity plans, visual data, evaluations of training & parent sessions.

[18] A Steering Committee member assisted in data collection and interpretation of the data gathered during the interviews.

[19] Loftland J & Loftland L (1995) Analysing social settings.

- Notes taken at the locality team meetings attended by the evaluator
- Notes from the SPARKLE workshop of the 19.07.07
- Copies of letters and testimonials from early years settings
- Copies of team administered end of training/workshop questionnaires from parents and EYPs
- Goal setting data and SMART objectives from all of the three EYS case study sites.
- Interview data gathered from semi-structured interview with EYPs (n = 11).
- Feedback from the SPARKLE team & Steering Committee to emerging analysis of the interview data.

7 PHASE 1

(7i) Aims

- Explore with the team the ethos of SPARKLE in order to determine a framework for inclusive practice in early year's settings.
- Clarify the timing and purpose of the separate stages
- Establish and pilot SMART goals as a means of measuring change in the early years setting.

The facilitator attended ten team meetings during the first phase and explored the objectives above with the team. A workshop was arranged in July 2007 where teams from all three localities attended and where teams discussed and debated the shared ethos of SPARKLE.

(7ii) Outcomes Phase 1

Framework of Inclusion

In order to establish the extent to which SPARKLE achieved its aim as an inclusive initiative a clearly defined framework was needed. At the conclusion of phase 1 *A Framework for Inclusive Practice* adapted from Behaviour 4 Learning www.behaviour4learning.ac.uk was adopted by the team. The framework operationalised the concept of inclusion into three categories which were relevant to the work of the team in an EYS.

(1) Access – the extent to which activities provided by the EYS and the EYS environment were accessible to all children.
(2) Participation – the type of interactions between children and between children and staff in the EYS
(3) Engagement – the extent to which ALL children were engaged in the activities and routines of the nursery.

Observation tool and SMART goal setting

The framework enabled the team to devise an observation tool and to develop from these observations a set of SMART[20] inclusion goals for each of the nurseries they worked with over the period of the evaluation. Establishing criteria for measuring progress and outcomes is essential for the team to reach their targets, observe change and most importantly know when these goals have been accomplished.

These tools provided baseline data about current practice in the setting and enabled the team to measure changes in specific areas. Using these tools the team can gather useful data around the activities provided by the nursery settings and the impact of the environment on the children's experiences. From the observational data SMART inclusive goals were developed in partnership with the EYS for each EYS.

Review of the 4 stages of the intervention

Alongside the development of the framework and tools the team reviewed the stages of the intervention. The preliminary stages of the intervention involve a series of informal contacts with the nursery by the specialist teacher advisor. During one of these visits a questionnaire is completed. It was felt that the content of the interview scheduled used during the initial interview with the nurseries could be revised in order to generate more relevant data. Subsequent analysis of the case study data has highlighted the importance of choosing carefully settings that will benefit from the intervention. The initial questionnaire could be further developed in order to establish the motivation of staff and readiness of the nursery to engage with the SPARKLE team.

Summary Phase 1

At the conclusion of phase 1 the team had clarified the exact purpose of each of the separate stages of the intervention. During piloting it was apparent that clear beginning and end points to each of the stages, with the addition of a formal and negotiated goal setting stage assisted in bringing focus and purpose to the work of the team. The team had achieved:

- A clearer understanding of how the SPARKLE team worked as an Inclusion initiative.
- The development of Inclusive individualised SMART goals.
- Greater clarity by the team of the purpose of the different stages
- Established that negotiation with the setting around the goals identified is an important element in successful intervention.
- The agreement to record a baseline for measuring change.

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[20] Originally a management tool SMART goals are widely used as outcome measure

- Piloting of recording sheets which were subsequently adapted and changed in response to feedback from the team

8 PHASE 2

(8i) Aims

The aim of Phase two was to generate rich case study data by the team using and applying the data collection tools developed in phase 1. This data was supplemented by visual and other qualitative and published data[21] to build case studies of each setting. Analysis of this data would provide insight into how the team worked and the extent to which they met their goals in different contexts. The interviews would provide greater understanding about how the EYP's viewed SPARKLE, what their expectations were and what they valued most from the initiative. The case studies are presented as EYS 'types' representative of generic features that are shared by other EYS. Such categorisation is intended to aid in determining in which settings SPARKLE is most effective and will provide insight into how limited resources can be targeted most effectively.

(8ii) Outcomes - Case studies

The SPARKLE team collected data over four 'new' terms (3rd September 2007 – April 4th 2008) in order to build a series of individual case studies of the three EYS that had agreed to take part in the evaluation. [22] All three EYS were located in the Shepway area. The case studies enable comparisons to be drawn between the EYS, thereby assisting in identifying how the team meet their specific targets in a range of settings. The case studies also enabled analysis of the relative influence of different factors on the success of the intervention; these factors included the physical and human resources of the EYS, the receptiveness of staff to engage in learning and their willingness to adopt changes in practice.

Case study 1 'A quiet transformation'

In this setting a high level of motivation in the nursery and openness to change was evident. Comments from the manager and EYPs that their practice had become 'stagnant' and they needed to refresh their approach strengthened this impression. The interview data pointed to close collaboration and partnership between the SPARKLE team and the nursery staff once the EYPs had built up a relationship with the team and they understood the aims of the initiative. Initially however not all EYPs were aware that the team would be working with them and were therefore

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[21] Ofsted reports are in the public domain and provide useful background information about the EYS .

[22] Data included the following: Initial information sheet, Ofsted report, observation sheets, goal setting form, staff training evaluations, activity sheets, visual data, review of goals, parents course evaluation, therapy checklists, information sheets.

unsure of what to expect. Good working relationships took some time to develop in this setting.

Evidence from the interview data demonstrated deep learning[23] with many examples of staff experimenting with new knowledge, and building on existing knowledge and personal experience. The EYPs gave examples of how they had adapted and developed ideas that the team had suggested. The EYPs felt that the team suggestions linked well with their planning and that the focus of activities was 'right' for their children, the links the team made to the early years foundation goals were appreciated.

The SMART goals were evidenced as EYPs gave many examples of changes in practice during the interviews. They made comments about the introduction of activities to promote fine motor development, increasing the range of gross motor activities and the greater inclusion in activities of children with receptive and expressive language delay. Parental involvement was very limited but this was a reflection on the location of the EYS in an area of social and economic deprivation rather than a lack of desire from the team to involve them. This pointed to the fact that different approaches to involving hard to reach families needs to be considered.

The SPARKLE team's work in this setting was transformational in terms of how they had influenced EYPs understanding attitudes to inclusion and practice. Out of the three settings this was potentially the most effective intervention, in terms of the needs of the population of children they reached, the readiness of the nursery to engage in learning and the quality of that learning. It was a 'quiet transformation' in the sense that during the interviews it was apparent that although the nursery staff, recognised the benefits of the initiative they did not fully acknowledge the extent of the changes that had occurred.

Case study 2 'Making good provision even better'

This setting already has high standards of care and education with experienced and highly motivated staff and was located in a middle class area where parents were actively involved. The EYS manager was aiming to benefit from the opportunity to 'learn more'. All staff were made aware of the team's arrival and had been consulted. Parents were involved in the initiative from the beginning, attending the parents SPARKLE sessions and feedback from the nursery staff were that ideas about, for example messy play, would be backed up at home. Parents' expectations around children's acquisition of writing skills had been re-evaluated as a result of greater understanding of child development.

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[23] Deep and surface approaches to learning (Ramsden 1994)

There was a good level of consensus around the goals set and the understanding by the nursery staff of what the team were trying to achieve. The impression gained from comments from both team and nursery staff was that a strong collaborative relationship had been established relatively quickly and strengthened over the period of the intervention and good lines of communication existed.

The case study data recorded that SMART goals were achieved over a short period of time and then renegotiated suggesting that this was a setting that had maximised opportunities to learn. EYPs evidenced improved skills in their observation of the quality of children's movements, greater ability to identify children with language delays and ways of increasing their participation. They had focused on adapting and changing the layout of the nursery to make activities more accessible. This was a case of making good provision even better and the deep learning and development that occurred in the setting as evidenced by the data provided in the SPARKLE folder and gathered during the interviews supported this.

Case study 3 'A qualified success'

For practical reasons the SPARKLE team had a shorter period of time (3 terms) with this nursery prior to the evaluation, hence it is difficult to determine what the outcomes would have been if they had been involved for 4 terms and the conclusions drawn from the data can only be partial. As an interesting juxtaposition with the other two settings what the data suggest is that positive working relationships do take longer to develop in some settings. Compared with the setting above where good working relationships appeared to have developed very quickly. There wasn't the same sense of collaboration or partnership between the team and the nursery staff in this setting although these improved over time.

The EYPs felt that the SPARKLE team were there to offer 'advice and ideas', they 'entertained' the children but that many of their suggestions did not fit in well with the children or the setting. The fact that the nursery shared a community space seemed to be a constraint, restricting what they were able to do in terms of activities and the need for them to be 'tidy' and having restrictions on space played a part in limiting their enthusiasm for some activities. Some of the nursery staff were more critical than others suggesting that ideas were too 'expensive' 'not suitable' for the setting, the team 'didn't know our children well enough'. But others suggested that the initiative had been very helpful and fun and emphasised the opportunities presented to them of being able to observe their children. There were therefore different views and different responses rather than consensus within the EYS. Despite these limitations evidence from the interviews supported that the SMART Goals were met. The depth and quality of learning differed from the other case studies and there appears to be an

association between levels of motivation within the setting and subsequent learning.

A summary of the findings from the case studies and interview data in table form is found in appendix 6.

(8ii) <u>Outcomes - Interview data</u>

The interview data was analysed across all three nursery settings and reflect three area of questioning.

(1) How did the nurseries hear about SPARKLE and what were there expectations?
(2) What did the nurseries value from the initiative?
(3) How would they sustain the initiative once the team had finished its work?

<u>How did the nurseries hear about SPARKLE and what were their expectations?</u>

All of the nurseries had heard about the initiative through the early years' network. The majority of the EYPs mentioned expectations around gaining 'new ideas' and 'refreshing' their ideas and practice. In two of the settings some of the staff were not aware that the team were going to join them and therefore had few expectations. In one setting where there were good lines of communication, all the staff were aware that the team were going to join them and expectations were consequently higher and focused. Some staff had experience of working with therapists before some had no prior experience.

In terms of inclusion some mentioned that they thought the team worked with all the children but for others their experience of SPARKLE had been of team members working with children who had difficulties.

<u>What did the nurseries value about SPARKLE?</u>

The nurseries found it hard to identify or articulate what the valued with the exception of gaining 'new ideas'. Their accounts however gave many examples of deep learning that suggests that the intention of bringing about change in practice through learning needs to made more explicit. Although the SPARKLE leaflets include this information either EYPs had not focused in on this aspect or it was not highlighted during the initial discussions with the team. Staff in all the settings mentioned that the team had given them 'lots of new ideas'. Links between the activities provided by the team and the early year's foundation goals were valued. The SPARKLE team worked in differing ways, some of the team worked with all the children others in small groups with children with 'problems', sometimes but not always the therapists were perceived to be working inclusively. The

team provided differing amounts of in-put, some went in regularly others provided more focused advice and support. Occasionally two of the team worked together. All the EYS valued the training sessions and where parents had attended the parents' sessions there was a positive response.

<u>How will they sustain the initiative, how will it be developed and suggestions for improvements.</u>

The nurseries felt that they would be able to build on the activities and suggestions that the team had introduced. They valued the SPARKLE folders that contained the activity suggestions and said that they would refer back to these. All suggested that now they had made contact with the team that they would be more likely to contact them for advice, facilitating long arm support. Some suggested that 'top up' sessions would be useful. In terms of improvements some of the nurseries said the team need to consider the practicality and affordability of the activities they suggest. Some suggested that there could have been closer liaison between the individual team members to agree the amount and type of in-put.

<u>The response of the SPARKLE team to the interviews with EYPs</u>

The team were disappointed that the nurseries didn't have a clearer understanding of SPARKLE as an inclusive initiative. They wondered if it there was too great an emphasis on the initiative providing 'new ideas'. It is important that all nursery staff are involved and informed of the decision to invite the team in to work with them.

Equally essential is the need that everyone is involved from the beginning and that all understand the nature and purpose of the teams' involvement right from the start. The team were pleased that the children enjoyed the activities they organised and that they were fun. There was some concern that there wasn't greater recognition by the nursery staff of the learning that had occurred - specifically the intention to help them 'make links' between the activities the team had suggested and the purpose of those activities in terms of promoting development for all children.

The interviews carried out as part of the evaluation, provided an opportunity for the nursery staff to reflect on the SPARKLE teams work and consider how they would build on the intervention. In so doing it highlighted the importance of this as a stage in closing a cycle of learning[24]. During the interviews individual staff had the opportunity to reflect on the team's involvement and this assisted in their recognising the variety of learning opportunities that had been available to them during the SPARKLE intervention.

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[24] Kolb 1982

9 SUMMARY OF PHASE 2

- Evidence of 'deep' learning[25] and changes in the knowledge understanding and skills of EYPs
- Evidence of physical and environmental changes in the early years settings
- Recommendations to improve & further develop the initiative

10 DISCUSSION

Caution needs to be exercised in generalising the outcomes of this small scale qualitative evaluation of SPARKLE in the Shepway locality, It is difficult to generalise the findings to other localities, where SPARKLE teams have begun to diversify in their approach with regard to the balance between targeted training and intensive situated learning offered to the pre-school settings. It is also difficult to apply the outcomes of this evaluation to other pre-school initiatives. However despite these limitations, it is intended that key themes emerging from the data will provide insight into how SPARKLE works and effective ways of facilitating learning & development in the EYS.

The evaluation has produced and piloted outcome measures in the form of an Early Years Inclusion Framework, observation and goal setting data and it is hoped that these will be rolled out amongst the existing team and used as a baseline for the development of the initiative in new SPARKLE teams. Although the locality teams have worked together over several years there has been no consensus about the ethos of SPARKLE or agreement amongst the team of what type of service model SPARKLE adopts. This has led to difficulties in identifying clear outcomes or measures of success. An outcome of the evaluation has been to clarify what model of intervention the team adopt through observation of their work and evidence from the case study data.

Throughout the evaluation EYPs and the SPARKLE team were observed to be engaged in facilitating experiential learning[26]. The SPARKLE team worked alongside EYPs over a sustained period increasing their understanding of young children's development. They achieved this through demonstrating specific activities, providing written explanations for the choice and purpose of chosen activity and modelling good practice in terms of how to further adapt and extend these activities to meet the needs of the children in the EYS.

Targeted training was provided which focused on typical child development and explored how to promote young children's communication and interaction, motor development and play. The targeted training was used to

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[25] 'Deep' in terms of contextualising knowledge and understanding and changing attitudes.

[26] Kolb D (1984) Experiential learning. Experiential learning is when knowledge develops meaning when applied in a setting relevant to the learner.

reinforce the experiential learning in the setting. This engagement in learning was not explicitly stated as a goal, or openly acknowledged by either the team or the EYP, the perception by the EYP that the team were there to provide new 'ideas' for activities meant that opportunities for EYPs to build on and reflect on their learning were not fully exploited.

The individual case studies identify how the team worked flexibly to meet individual targets in a range of settings. Each of the settings differed in terms of the populations they served, levels of motivation to engage with SPARKLE and existing knowledge and skills of the EYPs. As case studies they highlighted characteristics which could contribute to a more detailed assessment of the settings readiness to engage with SPARKLE. The impact of the intervention, measured by the depth and quality of learning that occurred varied in each setting but appeared greatest in the setting where motivation amongst the EYPs was high and level of social deprivation greatest.

One setting where standards were already high demonstrated how 'good provision could be made even better' but the team may have achieved this goal in a shorter time frame. This highlights the need to review the model of service delivery and considering the possibility of varying the amount and in-put of the team's intervention dependent on the baseline knowledge and skills of the setting. Some settings may require a longer term intervention; others may achieve goals in a shorter time frame. Taster sessions could be delivered to assess the readiness of the settings and enable realistic expectations of the initiative to be established within the setting.

Analysis of the case study data (Appendix 6) highlighted the importance of the preliminary phases of identifying the EYS and the early negotiations with the settings about what the purpose of the intervention was and the approach of the team. The motivation of individual EYPs and the readiness of the setting to engage in the intervention influence how effective the team are in a particular setting.

During Phase 1 of the evaluation the team developed and piloted a framework which operationalised Inclusion. Prior to this the concept of inclusion had been difficult for the team to define and agree on. The framework enabled the team to develop an observation tool and to establish from these observations a set of SMART[27] inclusion goals for each of the settings they worked with over the period of the evaluation. Establishing a criterion for measuring progress and outcomes is essential for the team to reach their targets, observe change and most importantly know when these goals have been achieved. A clear way forward which would help to bring direction and focus to the team would be for all teams to

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[27] Originally a management tool SMART goals are widely used as outcome measure in education and health services.

utilise the *Framework of Inclusion* (appendix 3) and the observation and goal setting tools in each new setting.

At the conclusion of phase 1 the Shepway team had clarified the exact purpose of each of the separate stages of the intervention. During piloting it was apparent that clear beginning and end points to each of the stages, with the addition of a formal meeting and negotiated goal setting stage assisted in bringing focus and purpose to the work of the team.

The data from the case studies and interviews highlighted that the SPARKLE team currently work in parallel rather than as an integrated team, this is possibly because they do not share a physical base and meet once a term. Some members of the team worked with all the children others identified small groups of children. Team members provided differing amounts of input. Parallel working was reinforced by the development of separate therapy goals, activity plans and individual training sessions. There is scope for team to work in a more integrated fashion by organising shared visits and joint goals, delivering joint training and developing jointly advice and activity sheets. This will assist in presenting to the nurseries an integrated and inclusive intervention.

Advice sheets and leaflets shared with the early years settings are handwritten, photocopied and generally do not reflect the high quality of content. Funding should be used to develop quality printed and web based resources that support the initiative and promote it to a wider audience. Many of the EYS mentioned that they regularly accessed the internet and used this as a source of 'ideas'. Including SPARKLE information and activity advice on the Kent Trustweb or equivalent is advised. EYS can then find out more about the initiative, share ideas and activities and the benefits of the initiative can be disseminated widely.

The Children Act (2004) required the development of partnership working across the key agencies of health, education and social services in delivering integrated services to children and families. In Kent under the umbrella of the Children's Trust, responsibilities have been devolved to twenty three Local Children's Services Partnerships (LCSP) these will identify priorities relating to their own locality, develop plans and measure outcomes using a local plan based on the Kent wide Children's and Young Peoples Plan (KCC 2006). In relation to early years settings Kent County Council work with providers from the private, voluntary, independent and maintained sectors with the aim of 'creating a strong, sustainable and diverse childcare market that meets the needs of parents' (KCC 2008 p 4).

Within this context the evaluation supports SPARKLE as offering a unique service, tailored to the individual needs of the setting which complements the range of other support available to EYS. The evaluation has provided greater understanding of how the Shepway SPARKLE team work flexibly with a wide range of early years settings adapting and modifying their

interventions depending on need. It has provided evidence of how the team achieved in some settings transformational learning and generated depth, quality and variety in the learning experiences of the EYPs they came into contact with. The evaluation has highlighted aspects of service delivery that could be further developed, these include the need to make explicit the learning and professional development aims of the intervention and to skill the team in their understanding how to engage adult 'learners' in their workplace. The evaluation has highlighted how important is the establishment of a closer more integrated team approach to its delivery. Finally it has highlighted where additional resources could help promote SPARKLE more effectively reflecting the quality of its provision and ensuring that good practice in early year's settings is disseminated more widely across the County. [28]

11 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Set explicit goals of learning and reflection in EYS and develop opportunities for early year's practitioners (EYPs) to reflect on their learning and identify future learning needs at the conclusion of the intervention.
- Vary the amount of in-put from SPARKLE based on a more detailed initial assessment of need in the early years setting.
- Assess the motivation of EYPs and the readiness of the EYS to engage with the SPARKLE initiative.
- Apply the Inclusion Framework devised for the evaluation - this will enable teams to measure progress and outcomes, to reach their targets, observe change and most importantly know when these goals have been achieved.
- Establish clear beginning and end points to each of the separate stages of SPARKLE to bring focus and purpose to the work of the team.
- Teams to maintain an integrated approach to delivering SPARKLE by organising shared visits, developing joint goals and delivering joint training wherever possible.
- Develop high quality printed and web based resources that promote SPARKLE and disseminate good practice across the County.
- Inform families about SPARKLE and develop strategies to involve hard to reach families.

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[28] Children's Executive Board Kent County Council (2006) Positive about our future Kent's Children and Young People's Plan 2006-2009.
http://www.kent.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/89358E99-18B8-4591-AAE1-D0857107FCBA/0/childrenyoungpeoplesplan.pdf

12 **<u>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</u>**

13 **<u>ETHICS</u>**

Ethical approval for the evaluation was received from Kent County Council Research Ethics Committee and Canterbury Christ Church Health Ethics Committee (appendix 12,13)