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Follow-up Evaluation Study of the ParentChild+ Programme





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Executive Summary

This report presents the key findings from the follow-up study of children and families who were beneficiaries of the ELI delivered service of the ParentChild+ programme. The follow-up evaluation was commissioned by the ELI and completed by an independent researcher from Saol Research Consultancy between February and December 2022. The report contains details of the programme background and a literature review exploring the outcomes and impacts of the ParentChild+ programme and other home visiting programmes. The report then details the methodology utilised in the research and in-depth results. Finally, the report discusses the results and provides a number of recommendations.

ParentChild+ Programme

The ParentChild+ Programme is an evidence-based, innovative early childhood home-based literacy and parenting programme that strengthens families and prepares children to succeed academically. Originally developed in the United States, the ParentChild+ programme forms a key part of the Early Learning Initiative's family support programmes and has been operating in the Dublin Docklands since 2007.

Study Rationale

This follow-up evaluation study builds on evaluations of the ParentChild+ programme (2014-2017). The initial evaluation found that the programme goals were being achieved and children's attitudes towards school were positive. An action, as part of the ELI's 2020-2025 Strategic Plan, was to conduct an evaluation of the long-term impact of the ParentChild+ programme. Therefore, the rationale of the current study is to provide a deeper insight into the experiences and progression of graduates of the programme and to identify any recommendations to further support children and families. Specifically, the research aimed to explore their current home learning environment experiences, academic engagement and development across cognitive, behavioural, and socioemotional domains, and to map the children's educational journey and find out what, if any, other supports children may need as they progress through the education system and to identify if the service was beneficial to the participants.

Methodology

The report is based on an in-depth, qualitative, case study of 13 parent and child graduates of the ParentChild+ programme and 2 teachers. Parents and children completed questionnaires on the home learning environment, academic performance, behaviour, hobbies and activities, and the perceived impact of the ParentChild+. Additionally, parents were also invited to take part in group

discussions. Three groups were conducted, with a total of n = 5 parents. The discussions further explored the topics in the questionnaires. The 2 teacher participants completed semi-structured interviews exploring academic achievement, engagement, and perceived socio-emotional development of the ParentChild+ children. Additionally, standardised test scores were collected for child participants in the study. Comparisons were made between the current study and data collected from previous evaluations of the ParentChild+ programme where results could be directly compared.

Findings

The findings indicated the continued positive impact of the ParentChild+ programme for both children and mothers. Significantly, development of strong communication skills, socio-emotional and academic skills, and a love of learning were noted as being related to the experience of being a part of the ParentChild+. Parents stated that the ParentChild+ programme helped them to have “a little more patience and open mind about parenting” and that it was “great to have someone else coming and seeing... [the child’s]... progress”. The parents mentioned the “warm and affectionate” relationships fostered by the Home Visitors and that they were “just so brilliant” and they “really enriched our lives”. Additionally, parents also mentioned that they continued to employ the skills they learned with their “other children”. These findings support the previous evaluations (2014-2017) of the ParentChild+ programme and the baseline study completed in 2011 (Share et al., 2011).

Recommendations and Lessons Learned

The report concludes with lessons learned and makes a number of recommendations in relation to ongoing evaluation of the ParentChild+ programme, developments to the programme structure, and developments of further activities within the ELI.

Challenges arose in the recruitment process, particularly in contacting vulnerable families in an area with high rates of homelessness and temporary accommodation. Many families who were renting moved out to the suburbs during COVID-19 due to cheaper rental accommodation. Additionally, a large number of the stored contact phone numbers for graduates of the ParentChild+ programme were no longer in service. The timing of the research also posed challenges when contacting schools, as it was towards the end of the academic year. It is important to note, also, that schools have been facing ongoing challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic and reduced staffing levels.

Whilst it was a small, qualitative study, this research endorses the previous findings of the positive impact of the programme on both parents and children. Further, longitudinal, research is needed to further elucidate the long-term impacts of the programme. It is recommended that evaluation tools

be developed for long-term, sustained, data collection. Additionally, the development of an Alumni Network is recommended along with the creation of access to education workshops and events. The development of informal group meet-ups or events for participants of the programme is also recommended.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This independent research study, to conduct a follow-up evaluation of the ParentChild+ programme, was commissioned by the Early Learning Initiative (ELI) in January 2022. This report examines the influence of the ParentChild+ programme on the educational (academic), socioemotional, cognitive, and behavioural outcomes of children, parents and families in disadvantaged communities in Dublin's Inner City. Furthermore, this report also recommends resources and supports required in the future, for children to achieve academic success as they progress through their educational journey up to 3rd level education, along with recommendations for continued research and evaluation.

In this chapter, the rationale for the study is detailed, followed by a brief introduction to the ParentChild+ programme. The aims and objectives of the research are then outlined, followed by details of the structure of this report.

1.2 Rationale

The rationale for this follow-up evaluation study builds on, and extends, on previous studies. The initial study (2014-2017) collected questionnaire data from parents via interviews and found that the ParentChild+ goals were being achieved in the areas of programme development and service-user satisfaction. The findings also indicated that children's attitudes towards school were incredibly positive. These findings have added significant value to the programme.

Context: This project is part of the ELI's 2020-2025 Strategic Plan under Action 2.1.1 Evaluate the long-term impact of the ParentChild+ Programme (previously called the Parent Child Home Programme). It is linked to the National College of Ireland's (NCI) Academic Strategic Goal: Excellence in Research (pp. 16-17) and the Theme: Lifelong Learning (pp. 34-35). Since 2007, 876 children have taken part in the ParentChild+ programme in Dublin's Inner City, with approximately 180 involved each year. Beginning in 2013-2014 the ELI followed up with the first 45 Docklands ParentChild+ children, exploring how they were doing both at home and in school. A critical review of this study was conducted in 2018-2019, which outlined the next steps needed to scale up the research to ensure that the ELI are systematically tracking and supporting the remaining 831 and subsequent ParentChild+ children.

1.3 ParentChild+ Programme

The ParentChild+ programme is an early childhood home visiting programme that is introduced to parents experiencing disadvantage when their children are generally aged between 16 and 18 months. The programme focuses on the centrality of parents as agents of change for successful learning and development outcomes of their children during their early childhood and throughout their school years. There is an abundance of literature suggesting that conditions in early childhood are foundational to the development of the skills needed for academic achievement and to be successful in life (Aboud & Yousafza, 2015; Britto et al, 2017; OECD, 2020). The first five years of life are critical for all areas of development, particularly cognitive and language development during which the influence of parental behaviour is significant (Valcan, Davis & Pino-Pasternak, 2018). Previous research highlights the importance of such early childhood intervention programmes in bridging the gap between children at risk and school readiness (Han & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2019). Moreover, children engaging in high quality early education and care programmes, supporting parents and families, have been found to improve child development outcomes and alter trajectories (Peterson, Loeb & Chamberlain, 2018).

Specific to the ParentChild+ Programme, research in the U.S. continues to support the long-term benefits of the programme for the children and families who engage with it. Evidence has indicated that participation in the ParentChild+ programme results in a reduced need for special educational supports (Lazar & Darlington, 1982), improved reading and numeracy skills, and higher rates of school completion (Levenstein, Levenstein & Oliver, 2002). Research has highlighted how these early experiences have long-term impact on children's outcomes and has found evidence of a relationship between children's early home learning environment experiences and later life success as measured by school completion rates, employment levels, and income levels (Centre on the Developing Child, 2023; European Commission, 2011; Sama-Miller et al., 2019).

1.3 Research Aims

The ParentChild+ Follow-Up Evaluation aimed to contact previous graduates of the programme and:

1. Explore their current Home Learning Environment experiences, academic engagement in school and development across cognitive, behavioural, and socioemotional domains.
2. To map the children's educational journey and find out what, if any, other supports children may need as they progress through the education system.

1.4 Research Objectives

The objectives of the current study were to explore:

1. Parents' and childrens' perceptions of their current Home Learning Environment.
2. Parents' and primary/post-primary school teacher's perceptions of children's engagement with school, school attendance, involvement, and children's academic development/achievement as reflected in STen scores in standardised tests such as Drumcondra Primary Reading (DPRT-R), Sigma T, and Micra T tests in Maths and English.
3. Perceived self-confidence levels of ParentChild+ parents towards supporting their child's learning and development in general.
4. Primary school teachers' perceptions of ParentChild+ children's socioemotional, cognitive, and behavioural development.
5. ParentChild+ children's perceptions and opinions towards their academic journey and career goals.

1.5 Report Structure

Chapter 2 of this report provides a literature review, firstly detailing the geographical context within which the research was conducted, namely the Dublin Docklands. An overview of the ParentChild+ programme is then provided, including programme development and structure. An exploration of the evaluation literature for the ParentChild+ programme, and other home visiting programmes, is discussed.

Chapter 3 details the research methodology utilised in this study, including study design, procedure, materials used, and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 provides a comprehensive analysis of the results of the in-depth, qualitative study of 13 families.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings and provides a number of recommendations based on the results of the evaluation. It also provides an insight into the lessons learned from conducting the study in the context within which it was set.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 The Dublin Docklands

The Dublin Dockland region comprises 526 hectares of land which spans over the north and south banks of the river Liffey. Over the decades, the Dublin Docklands has experienced a considerable amount of regeneration, both in physical and social redevelopment. Previously, the area was heavily industrialised with manufacturing industries and shipping. The reduction of manufacturing industries and their relocation to suburbs and areas away from inner city Dublin, combined with the economic decline and widespread unemployment of the 1970s-1980s, saw a deterioration in the area. The inner city communities were affected by this redevelopment, communities with extensive social problems such as drug use, anti-social behaviour, and feuds between rival criminal gangs (Share et al., 2011). Owing to the neighbourhood decline, and serious social disorder issues, the Docklands were considered to be an undesirable place to live. However, in 1997 despite the social and economic deprivation, high unemployment rates, and only 35% of children attending school to Leaving Certificate, there was still a strong sense of community spirit from the 17,500 people living in the area (Dublin City Council, 2020).

Today, the area has witnessed rapid growth in a diverse socio-demographic population and has seen the development of vast technical infrastructure after much investment, government tax incentives, rezoning of the area, and regeneration frameworks. Development plans such as The Master Plan (2008), The North Lotts and Grand Canal Dock Planning Scheme (2014), The Smart Docklands (2018), and The National Development Plan (2019-2027), has seen the Docklands transition from an undesirable area to a 'quality public realm' (Dublin City Council, 2016, p.6) that interconnects with the broader city of Dublin.

Ongoing investment and development aims to further sustain and enhance the quality of family life and the communities of inner city Dublin. As part of the social regeneration to improve and maintain the quality of family life and for communities to move out of poverty (Dublin City Council, 2016; Department of Education and Skills, 2019), there has been huge investment in the area of education, including a wide range of educational programmes offered to local educationally disadvantaged families (Hyland & Deane, 2008).

2.2 National College of Ireland's Early Learning Initiative

The National College of Ireland's Early Learning Initiative (NCI's ELI), which lies at the heart of the Dublin Docklands, has set up a community-based education initiative through learning networks comprising many partnerships at local, national, and international levels (Bleach, 2016). Since 2006, the ELI and the learning networks aim to support local families of socio-economic disadvantage and to assist parents, who did not acquire the benefits of the regeneration process, and also to improve educational outcomes for children (Fagan, 2012; Share et al., 2011). Axford and Whear (2006) conducted a report on behalf of the NCI whereby parents (n = 101) were surveyed to evaluate the level of need in the inner city communities. Consequently, this evaluation enabled the ELI to prioritise supporting children's learning journeys from birth to 3rd level higher education.

Findings from the Axford and Whear (2006) report note that although many parents had high ambitions for their children's education and wanted them to succeed, they were inadequately equipped to do so and did not recognize their valuable role as parents to enrich and develop their own children's learning. In addition, 77% (n = 76) expressed an interest in attending early learning courses, provided they were facilitated locally (Axford & Whear, 2006; ELI, 2008). Coupled with the findings from the report and commitment from local community networks of parents, schools, and early childhood education and care environments, the ELI introduced three educational programmes, one of which was the ParentChild+ programme (Bleach, 2016; Kent, Bleach & Fagan, 2016).

2.3 ParentChild+ Programme Background and Supporting Evidence

In 1965, the Parent Child Home Programme (PCHP) and Mother Child Home Programme was developed and facilitated by Phyllis Levenstein, an Educational Psychologist and Social Worker. The programme was renamed in 2019 and is now known as the ParentChild+ programme (Benjamin, 2019). The core focus of this programme was to reduce the rising number of school dropouts in the State of New York. Levenstein decided to work with children of two and three years, and their families, to promote critical language development and early literacy skills while advocating and supporting the importance of parent and child interactions in developing these vital skills for educational success.

Underpinned by a robust theoretical foundation, Levenstein's ParentChild+ programme was strongly influenced by interdisciplinary studies (Levenstein, Levenstein & Oliver, 2002; Share et al, 2011). In particular Bruner (1961) and Vygotsky's (1962) social and cognitive theories, whereby young children's learning and development is bi-directional and highly influenced by parent/family

interactions and relationships to acquire and co-construct knowledge through language, influenced the development of the programme (Turuk, 2008; Hunt, 1961). Additional influences include Bronfenbrenner's (1974) Bio-ecological Theory and its systems of influence on child development in the context of family/environment and the social landscape (Ryan, 2001) and Sigel's (2002) original distancing programme now known as the Psychological Distancing Model (PDM) as an enquiry-based educational approach to young children's learning and the role it plays in executive function and emotion regulation (Giesbrecht, Müller & Miller, 2010; Levenstein, Levenstein & Oliver, 2002).

A considerable number of research studies have found significant relationships between the quality of the ParentChild+ programme provided in the first few years of a child's life and a wide range of developmental outcomes. These include communication, language and literacy skills (Hindman & Morrison, 2012; Son & Morrison, 2010), numeracy skills (Anders et al, 2012), school readiness skills (Chazan-Cohen et al, 20019), and reduced behavioural difficulties (Hindman & Morrison, 2012). Specific to the ParentChild+ programme, research in the U.S. continues to support the long-term benefits of the programme for children and families who engage with it. Evidence has indicated how participation in the ParentChild+ programme results in a reduced need for special educational supports (Lazar & Darlington, 1982), improved reading and numeracy skills (ORS Impact, 2015), and higher rates of school completion (Levenstein et al, 1998). Research has highlighted how these early experiences have long-term impact on children's outcomes.

Longitudinal research has found evidence of a relationship between children's early home learning environment experiences and later life success as measured by school completion rates, employment levels, and income levels (Crawford, 2014; Dubow, Boxer & Huesmann, 2009; Sammons et al, 2015; Trentacosta et al, 2008). Research supporting the ParentChild+ programme has found that children learn from continuous positive responses from their mothers (Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000), and from parents who engage in home literacy activities. This supports the notion that the ParentChild+ programme has a positive effect on children's learning and social outcomes (Baker, 2013; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002).

A number of more recent evaluation studies (Cabrera LeMay, 2021; Cullen, Cullen & Bailey, 2020) have also examined the efficacy of the ParentChild+ programme in achieving the programme aims. Cullen, Cullen and Bailey (2020) conducted an evaluation of the ParentChild+ programme over 2 years of pilot delivery in 2 areas of England. This evaluation utilised a longitudinal approach, collecting baseline, mid-point and end-point data along with qualitative data from parents and the delivery team (Cullen, Cullen & Bailey, 2020). The results found significant increases in parents' communication, consistency, affection and responsiveness, along with significant increases in

children's independence, social cooperation, task orientation, cognitive ability and emotional stability (Cullen, Cullen & Bailey, 2020). Additionally, qualitative data found that parents experienced an increase in positive parent-child interactions and in understanding how to support child development, and identified positive progress in their child's development (Cullen, Cullen & Bailey, 2020). Masters research conducted by Cabrera LeMay (2021) examined 2 programmes, 1 based on the ParentChild+ Programme and another based on the HIPPY programme through interviews with the primary caregivers. The research supports previous research which indicates that the ParentChild+ programme enhances parent-child relationships (Cabrera LeMay, 2021).

2.4 Target Families of the ParentChild+ Programme

The ParentChild+ programme targets families who are considered at risk based on parents' income, employment, and level of educational attainment. Levenstein and Levenstein (2008) classified parents in 2 categories, "Strivers" and "Hesitators". Strivers are described as socio-economically disadvantaged and as a result of their own college education and life experiences, they recognise the importance of taking time to encourage and support their young children in conversation through the use of educational books and toys provided that they are available to them (Levenstein & Levenstein, 2008). Conversely, Hesitators are socio-economically disadvantaged and are often too overwhelmed with life challenges and disabled by poverty to obtain the enthusiasm and motivation to enhance their children's cognitive, emotional, and physical development (Levenstein & Levenstein, 2008). Hesitator's children are theorised (inclined) to have major difficulties in school and with school performance, and therefore, may be less responsive to the ParentChild+ programme interventions (Levenstein & Levenstein, 2008). In addition to the target families mentioned above, single parent families, culturally diverse families, teen parents, homeless families, and /or families who experience language difficulties causing a barrier to education are also eligible to participate in the programme.

2.5 ParentChild+ Programme Structure and Background in Ireland

ParentChild+ has been in operation in the Dublin Docklands community since 2008. Consistent with Levenstein's philosophy, the programme is delivered by Home Visitors who are all women living in the community among the family participants (Kent, Bleach & Fagan, 2016). Many home visitors have been participants of the programme themselves and have limited or no formal 2nd or 3rd level education (Levenstein & Levenstein, 2008). However, Levenstein advised that to become a Home Visitor, they need to be familiar with the families living in the community, and they must display warm, flexible, and non-judgemental attitudes (Levenstein & Levenstein, 2008).

All Home Visitors are trained by the ELI to become highly skilled and experienced Home Visitors. Specific training is delivered by the ParentChild+ Co-ordinators and this is complemented by a series of lectures from professional early childhood specialists. The Home Visitors engage in further training, for example the Hanen Programme and Parent Plus, to enhance their knowledge in guiding children to express themselves in an age appropriate way, to become effective communicators, and to encourage positive interactions between the parents and children utilising a non-directive modelling approach (Kent, Bleach & Fagan, 2016). Home Visitors complete the Level 5 degree award in Early Childhood Care and Education to broaden their knowledge and understanding of child development, family participation, the Irish Early Childhood curriculum and quality frameworks – Aistear, and Síolta, as well as regulatory bodies such as TUSLA. Also, with other international education and care approaches for young children’s learning and development. More recently, the ELI/NCI have developed microcredentials in Home Visiting that many of the Home Visitors and Co-ordinators have participated in. Additionally, Home Visitors have the opportunity to complete a Bachelors degree in Early Childhood Care and Education in the NCI following this earlier training and development.

Families volunteer to participate and begin the programme when their child is 18 months old (Kent, Bleach & Fagan, 2016). However, children can be as young as 16 months at the commencement of the programme (Share et al., 2011). Only one child per family is eligible to participate in the programme. Ideally families will continue to participate in the programme for 2 years (Kent, Bleach & Fagan, 2016). The families are visited in their home, twice weekly for 30 minutes by the Home Visitor. Each week the Home Visitors brings either an educational book or toy, which they model for parents on how to use between visits. These educational materials are a gift to the family to enable them to continue the learning activities in their own time and use them with younger siblings. Using the educational materials provided over 2 years, the Home Visitors encourage the parents to continue to talk to, read, and play with their children in their own time on a daily basis, thereby enabling the ParentChild+ child and their siblings to develop their language and literacy and numeracy skills. Therefore, introducing to the parents the importance of educating their children from a young age.

2.6 Supporting Evidence from Similar Programmes

A number of early childhood Home Visiting programmes exist which support child development across educational, emotional, and cognitive domains. A recent study carried out by the UCD Geary Institute for Public Policy on the early intervention Preparing for Life Programme (PFL) found that after approximately five years from the completion of the programme, it still had a considerable

impact on children's cognitive abilities, standardised test scores, and self-regulation (Doyle, & UCD Geary Institute PFL Evaluation Team, 2016). They concluded that the PFL programme has a long term positive impact on children's learning and development far beyond the duration of the programme (Doyle & UCD Geary Institute PFL Evaluation Team, 2016)

A recent systematic review of 11 studies conducted by Henwood, Channon, Penny, Robling and Waters (2020) examined the impact of Home Visiting programmes on the language development of young children. The aims of the programmes fell under 3 main categories: Supporting the mother (including parenting skills); Supporting the child (including development and relationships); and Health promotion (Henwood et al, 2020). The results found that Home Visiting programmes have the potential to positively impact language development but not all programmes achieve these positive outcomes (Henwood et al, 2020). Henwood et al. (2020) tentatively concluded that the earlier a Home Visiting programme supports and engages a parent, the more likely the programme will have a positive impact on the child's language development, specifically starting during the prenatal period.

A qualitative study conducted by Heaman, Chalmers, Woodgate and Brown (2006) examined the factors for success of the BabyFirst home visiting programme according to the parents and facilitators. Interviews were conducted with 58 participants, and results identified the following components as contributing to success: strength-based philosophy; voluntary enrolment; regularly scheduled visits; a curriculum to structure the Home Visitor's interventions; and careful selection, training and supervision of Home Visitors (Heaman et al, 2006). Similarly, a meta-analysis of 29 studies exploring the effects of Home Visiting programmes on maternal behaviour (Nievar, Van Egeren & Pollard, 2020) found that programmes with at least 3 Visits per month were more than twice as effective than less intensive programmes.

2.7 Conducting Research during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Self (2021) discussed conducting phone based interviews during the COVID-19 pandemic and the potential impact for moving to remote data collection. Although Self (2021) identified the benefit of conducting phone interviews, including reduction in researcher time and resourcing, they state the necessity to consider both the researcher's and the participants' contexts, including the digital divide and lack of privacy during the data collection period. This is further supported by Roberts, Pavlakis and Richards (2021) who conducted research on the challenges of undertaking qualitative research virtually during the COVID-19 era. Specifically, they state that virtual qualitative methodologies should be considered distinct from traditional, face-to-face methods as they found that moving to online research affected nearly all aspects of the research process, including recruitment and data

collection (Roberts et al., 2021). Practical considerations for the recruitment process included multiple modalities, e.g. email, phone, fliers, and information sessions in addition to rapport building through online events e.g. virtual coffee morning (Roberts et al. 2021). Although, research has indicated there are constraints to conducting online research, in particular during the COVID-19 context, the online modality provides researchers with the opportunity to conduct reliable, high-quality, research outputs when constrained by public health protocols, or simply resourcing issues (Torrentira, 2020).

Chapter 3

Methods

3.1 Research Design

The Follow-up Evaluation study employed a qualitative approach to explore the long-term developmental and educational trends of children who engaged with the ParentChild+ programme. Primary data were generated for the study through the use of questionnaires, group discussions, and semi-structured interviews. Secondary data were sourced through the academic achievement/performance scores of children as reflected in the standardised test scores.

Timeline of the study: The Evaluation was due to commence in 2020 but was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020 the initial literature review was completed, and potential participants were identified and contacted. The study recommenced in February 2022, once normal research activities were encouraged to resume. However, the results of the study should be viewed in light of the challenges experienced due to the pandemic, including fatigue and trauma, the war in Ukraine, and the cost of living and housing crises.

3.2 Selection of Participants

Purposive sampling was used for the current study. Originally 2 cohorts of ParentChild+ programme participants were identified for inclusion:

Cohort 1: Children aged 8-10, who participated in the ParentChild+ programme and who completed their 2nd Class standardised test scores in May/June 2019, along with their parents and teachers.

Cohort 2: Young people aged 13-15, who were the original ParentChild+ cohort in 2008, along with their parents and teachers. These young people and their parents were part of a baseline evaluation in 2011 and a pilot study by the ELI in 2013-2014.

Sixty-four potential participants for Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 were identified and contacted in early 2020. A number of these potential participants were uncontactable (phone numbers out of service and/or moved accommodation), and another set were outside of the exclusion criteria (e.g. had not yet completed standardised testing). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic research activity had to cease during the periods of national lockdown. As a result the sample was extended to include the original potential participants identified in 2020 who were successfully contacted and additional potential participants who fell into the 2 Cohorts in 2022. This means that Cohort 1 now includes children aged between 8-12/13 (n = 67*) and Cohort 2 now includes young people from 13-17 (n = 18).

Cohort 2 now includes young people who are not graduates from the original ParentChild+ cohort of 2008.

In total, 13 families and 2 teachers participated in this research study. Further details on the recruitment process are detailed in 3.3 below (Data Collection) and in 4.1 of the Results Chapter (Recruitment).

*n = 67 includes 2 families with sets of twins, therefore n = 67 children and n = 65 parents/guardians.

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection commenced in April 2022 and was completed in December 2022. Potential participants were contacted by the researcher in April 2022 by phone, detailing the study and gauging potential interest in participating. Those who indicated an interest, or those for whom the Researcher was unable to contact, were then contacted by their Home Visitors and provided with the study Information Sheets and consent forms. Some potential participants were uncontactable even by the Home Visitors. Once consent forms (n = 22) were received the following process was followed:

Data collection for Cohort 1, comprising children aged 8-12/13, involved the children and parents completing a questionnaire over the phone with the researcher. Data collection for Cohort 2, comprising young people aged 13-17, involved completing a questionnaire with the parents over the phone with the researcher and the completion of an in-depth semi-structured interview with the young people.

A sample of parents were also invited to participate in a focus group online and the standardised test results of all participants (children and young people) were to be collected. Additionally, once permission was received from the parents, teachers of both cohorts were contacted by the Researcher to participate in an online semi-structured interview and to provide the participants' standardised test scores.

3.4 Data Analysis

The quantitative data, in the form of questionnaires, were collected first. All data from the questionnaires were inputted into SPSS. Descriptive statistics and bivariate analysis was to be employed to analyse this data, due to participant numbers a qualitative case study approach was employed instead. Comparative analysis was conducted with the results of this study and the previous evaluation studies (2014-2017).

The 2014-2017 evaluation studies employed a mixed-methods design to explore the long-term impact of the ParentChild+ programme on parents and children who have previously engaged with the programme. Qualitative and quantitative data was collected through the use of a questionnaire, which were similar to the questionnaire employed in this research.

The semi-structured interviews and group discussions generated qualitative data with topic guides developed from the questionnaire and the previous evaluation studies. The interviews and focus groups were conducted online and were audio recorded for the purpose of transcription. After the interviews and focus groups were transcribed verbatim, the researcher read through the transcripts multiple times to become familiar with the data. Data was analysed, focusing on data that is relevant or connected to describing the participants' lived experiences of participating in the ParentChild+ programme, of education and learning (young people), and when living with (parents) or teaching (teachers) the graduates of the ParentChild+ programme.

3.5 Ethics

Ethical approval was initially granted by the NCI Ethics Committee in April 2020, however a decision to defer the study until the COVID-19 pandemic was over was made. A Document of Change was submitted in February 2022 highlighting the change in commencement date and change of Researcher, and this was further approved by the Committee. Garda Vetting was obtained by the Researcher through the NCI in April 2022.

Information Sheets and Consent/Assent Forms were provided to parents and children and young people, detailing the nature of the study, the data collection and storage methods, and the contact details of the Researcher. Those who wished to participate were asked to sign a number of Consent/Assent Forms as appropriate, these included:

Parents

- Consent form for participation in the study and providing permission for their children to be asked to participate
- Consent form for participation in group discussion element of the study
- Consent form for permission to obtain standardised test results from schools and to contact their child's school/teacher

Children and Young People

- Assent form to participate in the study
- Assent form to obtain standardised test results

Schools

- Consent form for Principals/School to obtain standardised test results

Teachers

- Consent form to take part in semi-structured interviews.

All data was securely stored on the ELI SharePoint for the Follow-up study. This Folder is only accessible by the Researcher and the ELI team. Study data will be stored using participant codes and all identifying information will be removed prior to analysis. No identifying information will be provided in any reports or publications associated with this study. Audio recordings were used for the interviews and group discussions, but once they were transcribed the audio recordings were deleted.

Chapter 4

Results

4.1 Recruitment

In March 2022 potential participants were identified by the ELI team and once the Researcher obtained Garda Vetting in April 2022, potential participants were contacted by phone. Table 1. below details the outcome of this initial phone contact by the researcher. Initial contact was used to inform potential participants of the study and to gauge their willingness to participate. Overall, 17 participants from Cohort 1 indicated that they would, or maybe would participate and 10 participants from Cohort 2 indicated that they would, or maybe would participate.

Table 1. Outcome of Initial Contact with Potential Participants and Further Contact by Home Visitors

	Cohort 1	Cohort 2
Total N	67*	18
Following Initial Contact By Researcher		
Number out of Service N (% Total)	11 (16.5%)	3 (16.5%)
No Answer/ No Reply N (% Total)	37 (55%)	5 (27.5%)
Successful Contact N (% Total)	19 (28.5%)	10 (56%)
Willingness to Participate N (% Total)	12 (18%) Yes 5 (7.5%) Maybe 2 (3%) No	9 (50%) Yes 1 (6%) No
Following Contact by Home Visitors		
Successful Contact N (% Total)	9 (13%)	3 (16.5%)
Willingness to Participate N (% Total)	6 (9%)	1 (6%)

* 65 includes 2 families with sets of twin graduates each

Following on from the initial contact by the Researcher a number of Home Visitors were engaged in making contact with potential participants, providing them with the information sheets and consent forms. This resulted in successful contact with 12 additional potential participants. Contact with participants, by both the Researcher and Home Visitors resulted in n = 20 completed consent forms

from Cohort 1 (including one family with a set of twins bringing total potential participant numbers to $n = 21$), and $n = 2$ consent forms from Cohort 2.

The Researcher contacted all participants who had returned consent forms requesting arrangement of a mutually suitable date and time to complete the questionnaires with both child and parent. Data collection was successfully completed with $n = 7$ participants from Cohort 1 and $n = 1$ participant from Cohort 2. Communication challenges arose in arranging a data collection time with the remaining participants and therefore the Home Visitors were engaged with making contact to check availability. This was important as some participants may have been anxious about answering calls or text messages from phone numbers unknown to them. Following this process data collection with an additional 6 participants was completed bringing the total number of participants in Cohort 1 to 13 and Cohort 2 remaining at 1. In total, initial contact informing parents and graduates of the ParentChild+ programme of the study was attempted 3 times, further contact was made up to 3 times with those who returned completed consent forms. It was decided that no further contact should take place due to potential ethical concerns regarding coercion. Additionally, parent participants were further contacted regarding participation in the group discussion. 3 groups were organized and a total of 9 participants signed up to take part. Ultimately 4 participants were unable to attend the discussions (one from each scheduled session) this resulted in discussions with $n = 5$ participants in 3 sessions.

During the data collection process, participants were asked to provide their consent and assent to contact the children's schools and teachers for standardised test results and recruitment for teacher interviews. Initial contact with schools was made by the Researcher and the ELI's Programme Coordinators via email, phone, or in person. The Researcher then followed up via phone call, leaving a voice message when necessary. This contact took place in May and June 2022, a busy time for schools and it was decided that further communication attempts would take place once the schools returned for the academic year. Additional contact made by the Researcher in September and October 2022 resulted in 6 returned consent forms, of which 2 did not give consent to participate in the teacher interview. Standardised test results were received from 4 of the schools, with a further set received from a parent. It is important to note that one set of the returned standardised test scores were received for a child who did not complete the questionnaire. Contact was made with the 4 teachers who agreed to take part in the interviews to arrange a suitable time. Ultimately, interviews were conducted with 2 teachers. Further communication was attempted by the ELI to obtain standardised test results and additional participation from teachers, which was unsuccessful. It is important to note the timing of data collection fell during a busy time for schools, additionally

schools were facing a number of challenges in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, including resourcing and staffing issues.

4.2 Data Analysis

Due to the low participant numbers it was determined that bivariate analysis was no longer viable, therefore descriptive statistics, including a comparison with the 2014-2017 studies and the Growing Up in Ireland data, along with case study analysis were conducted. As only one set of participants (parent and young person) from Cohort 2 completed the study, they will be included as a case study with any potentially identifiable information removed. The following results comprises data from Cohort 1 (children n = 13 and parents n = 13), teachers (n = 2) and comparison data from the 2014-2017 studies and Growing-up in Ireland. It is also important to note that all 13 parents in Cohort 1 and the parent from Cohort 2 were mothers, when participants are referred to as parents below they were all mothers.

Table 2. Participant details

	Total N	Male N	Female N	2 nd Class	4 th Class	5 th Class	6 th Class
Cohort 1	13	8	5	2	3	5	3
Parents	13	0	13	-	-	-	-
Teachers*	2	1	1	-	-	-	1

* One class teacher and one principal

The 2014-2017 studies collected data on the contemporary home learning environment, the child's attitude towards school, the child's engagement with school, the child's academic development, and the primary caregivers' confidence towards supporting their child's learning and development.

The comparison data (2014-2017) comprises a total of n = 4, with variations on response rates for individual items. The results of which will be compared with the n = 13 respondents of the current study.

- 2014-2014 total participants n = 15
- 2015-2016 total participants n = 14
- 2016-2017 total participants n = 15
- 2022 total participants n = 13

Additional comparisons were drawn between the current study and the Growing-up in Ireland study with comparable questions from the parents' questionnaire. The comparisons have been made using

the percentage responses for items and must be viewed with the small sample size of the study in mind. Total participants for the ParentChild+ comparison is n = 13 (current study), and total participants for the GUI is n = 8565.

4.3 Parent Questionnaire

The Parent Questionnaire comprises 5 Sections: Home Environment; Schooling; Child/Parent Relationship; Response to Child’s Misbehaviour; Children’s Pastimes; and Standardised Test Scores (this section was a confirmation of consent). The group discussions also generated a number of themes discussed in the following section.

4.3.1 Home Environment

The results found that there were variations in the number of children’s books in the participant’s homes. Four stated they had between 1-10 books and 11-50 books, 2 stated they had between 51-100 books, while 3 stated they had between 101-250 books. No parents indicated that there were no children’s books in their home. Comparatively, with the 2014-2017 data, the reported number of children’s books in the home was relatively consistent across time points with the majority of participants reporting between 11-50 books in their home (see Figure 1.)

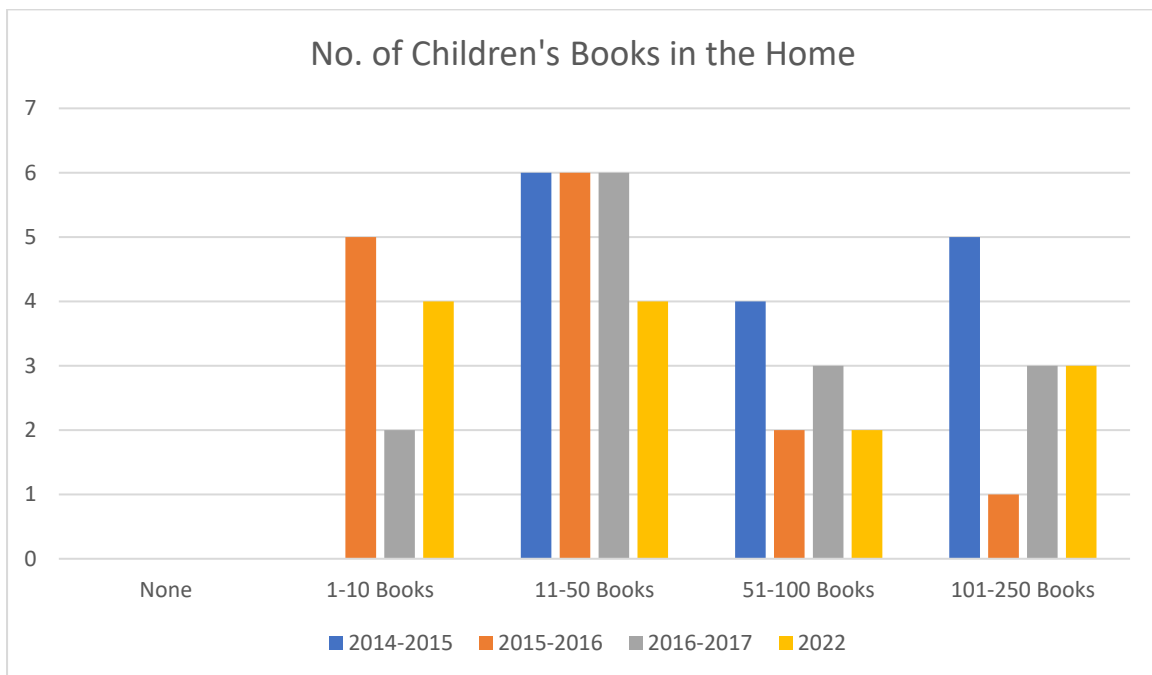


Figure 1. Comparative Number of Children’s Books in the Home

The results found variation in the degree to which the ParentChild+ programme influenced their child’s attitude towards schooling/learning as seen in Figure 2. below. However, the majority of respondents stated that the programme influenced their children’s attitudes moderately or above.

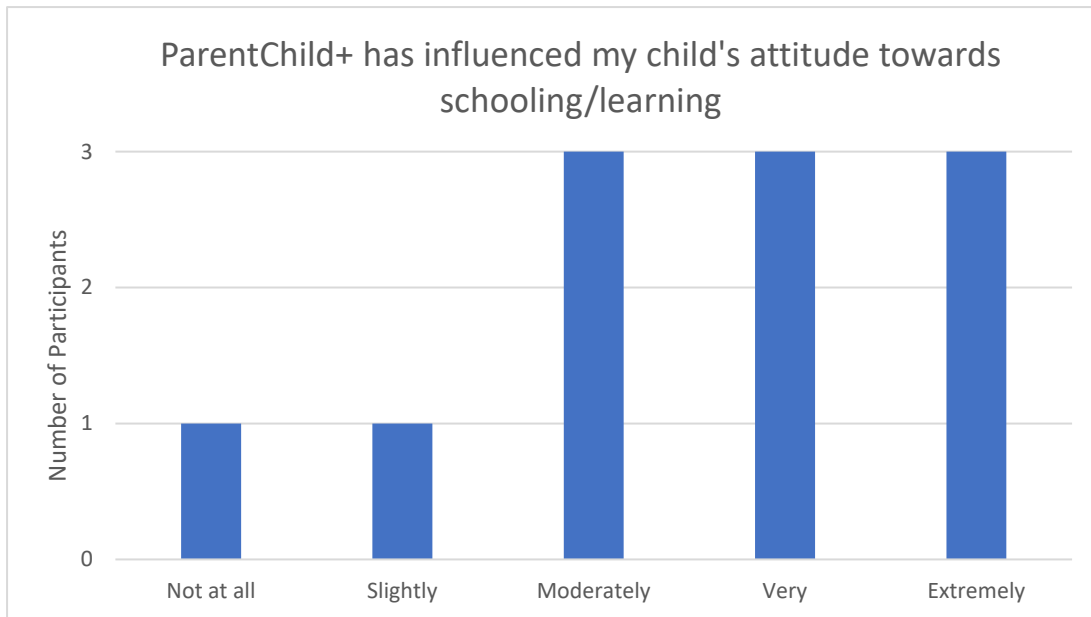


Figure 2. ParentChild+ Influence on Child’s Attitudes towards Schooling/Learning

Very few children have access to devices in their bedrooms in general, as detailed in Figure 3.

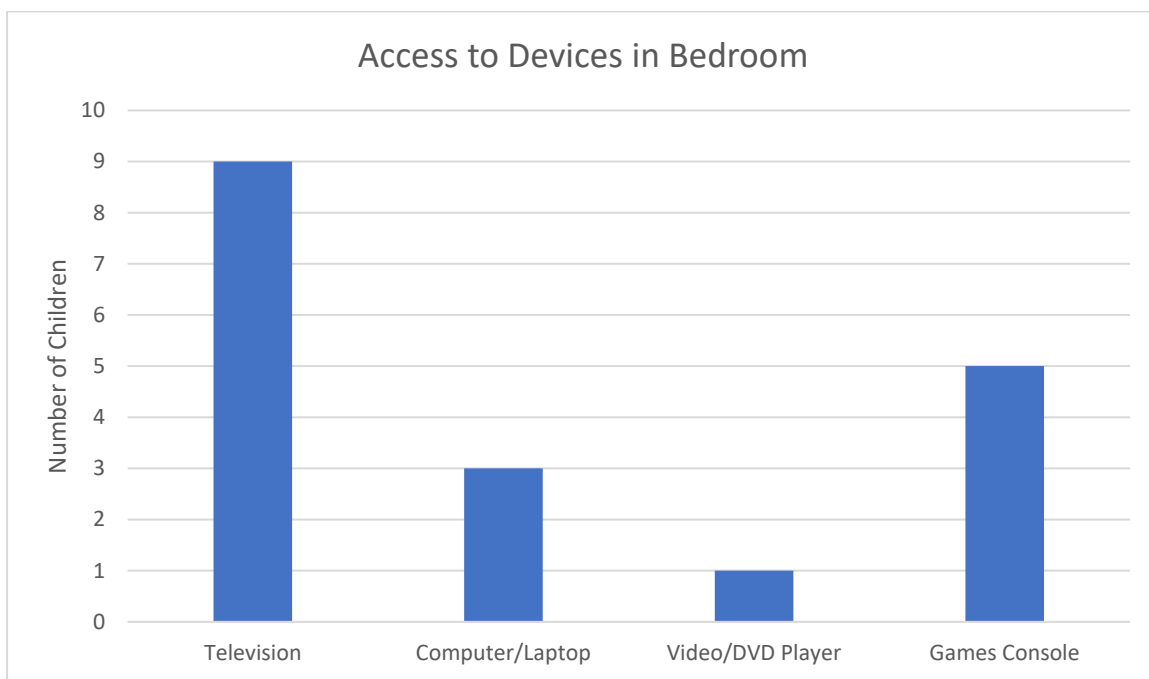


Figure 3. Access to Devices in Bedroom

Although 9 mothers stated that their child has a television in their room it is important to note here that 4 of the respondents said this was temporary due to school holidays/COVID-19. Additionally, of the 3 respondents that stated their child has access to a computer or laptop in their room, they stated this was mainly used as an assistive technology device.

4.3.2 Schooling

The majority of mothers indicated that their child has a positive attitude towards school. Ten parents indicated that their child says something good about school more than once a week, with 2 stating that their child says good things about school once a week or less and 1 stating their child does not say good things about school. Similarly, 11 parents highlighted that their child looks forward to going to school more than once a week, with 2 looking forward to going to school once a week or less. In relation to more negative attitudes to schooling, 7 parents stated that their child has complained about school once a week or less with 5 and 1 stating that their child never complains about school or complains more than once a week respectively. The majority of parents (7) have stated that their children have not been upset or did not want to go to school, with 5 parents stating that their child has become upset or not wanted to go to school once a week or less.

Eight mothers stated that they always or sometimes know what their child is learning or doing in school and 5 parents stated that they don't know what their child is learning in school.

Figure 4 below provides a breakdown of the parent ratings for their child's performance in Maths and English.

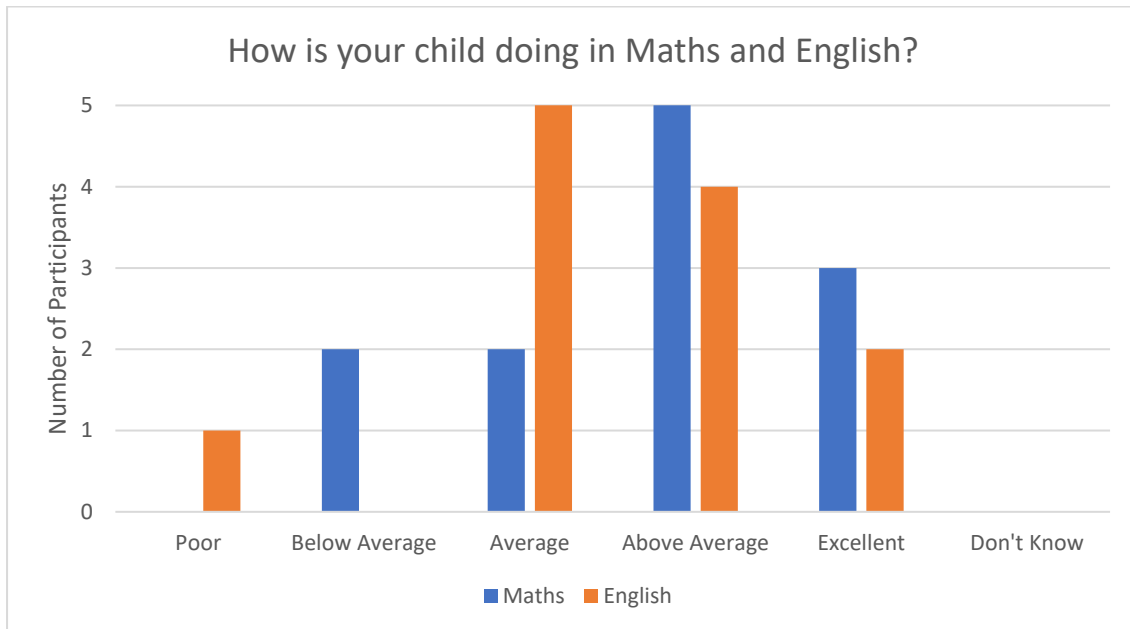


Figure 4. Child's Performance in Maths and English

Overall, mothers perceive their children to be doing better in Maths than in English and most parents have stated their children are above average or excellent in Maths (9) and average or above average in English (10). In comparison to the 2014-2017 data, no parent indicated that their child

was doing poorly in Maths across each of the time periods of data collection (see Figure 5.). Additionally, the majority of children were rated as either above average or excellent apart from the 2016-2017 cohort, where the majority of parents rated their child as performing averagely or excellently.

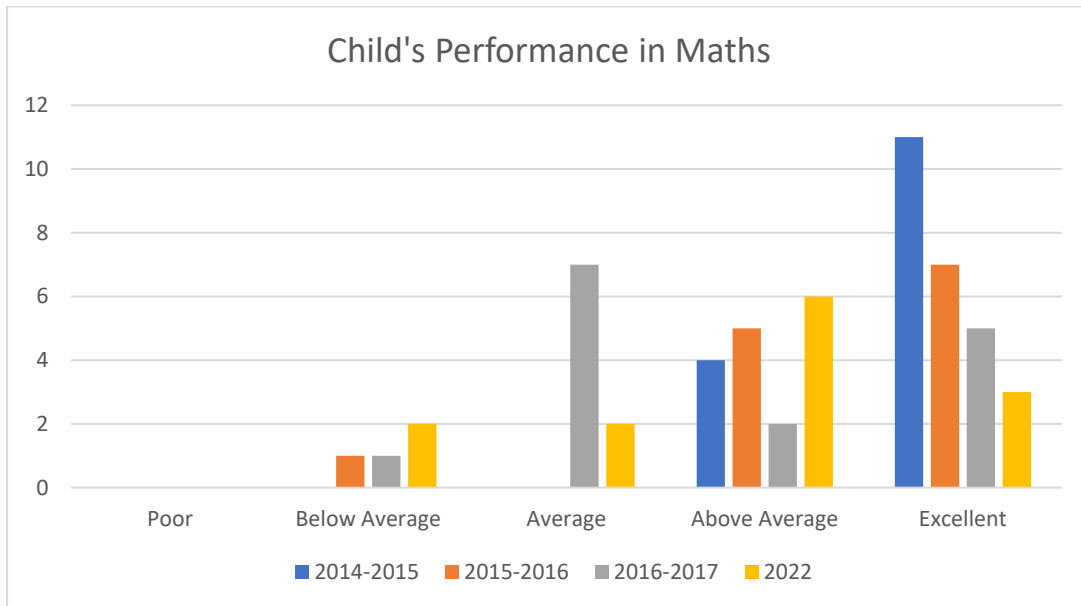


Figure 5. Comparative Child's Performance in Maths

Comparatively, in relation to reporting on their child's performance in English, 1 parent indicated a poor performance in 2022, with the majority across time points reporting performance ratings of average or above. In particular, the majority of time periods reported a rating of excellent, apart from the current study in which the majority of participants rated their child as average in English.

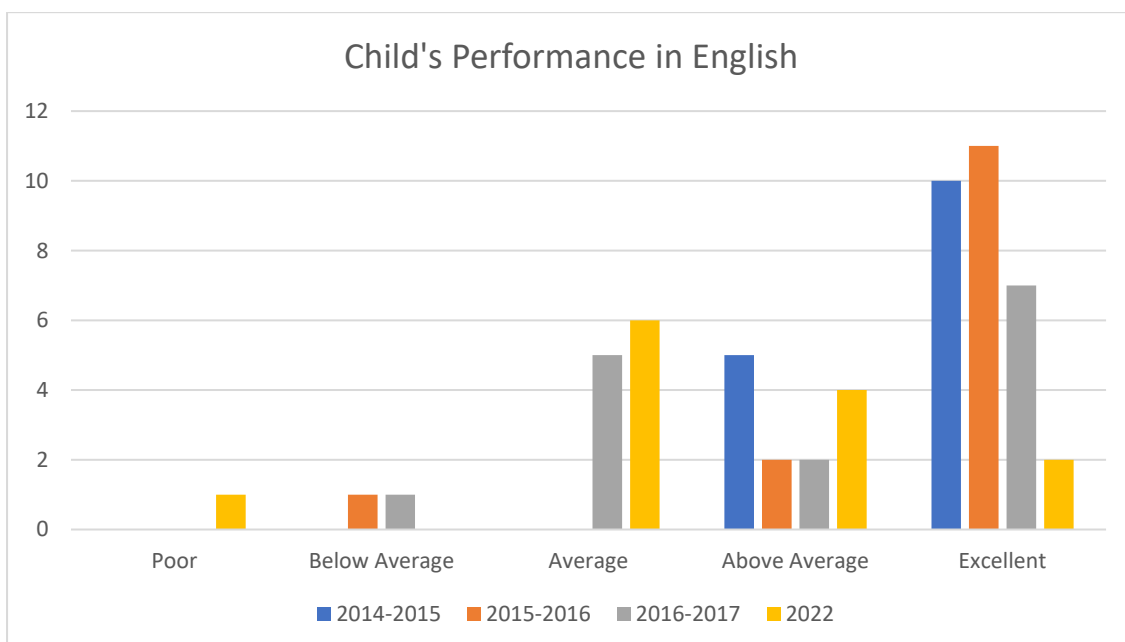


Figure 6. Comparative Child’s Performance in English

Five parents have indicated that their child was, or is, in receipt of additional supports. Specifically, 2 children were in receipt of one-to-one reading support when in Junior Infants, 2 children have a diagnosis of dyslexia and are receiving educational supports, assistive technology, and SNA support. One child received one-to-one help with maths. This help was found to be related to confidence rather than ability and has subsequently ceased.

Standardised test scores were received for n = 4 children (n = 5 in total as one set of scores were returned for participants who did not complete the questionnaire). STen scores between 1-3 indicate well below average, 4 low average, 5-6 average, 7 high average, and 8-10 well above average. The results received for the children from the 2022 academic year are presented in Figure 7 below along with the comparable parent ratings for those children using the ratings from the Parent Questionnaire. Descriptively, it can be seen that parents are perhaps overestimating their child’s performance when compared to the STen scores.

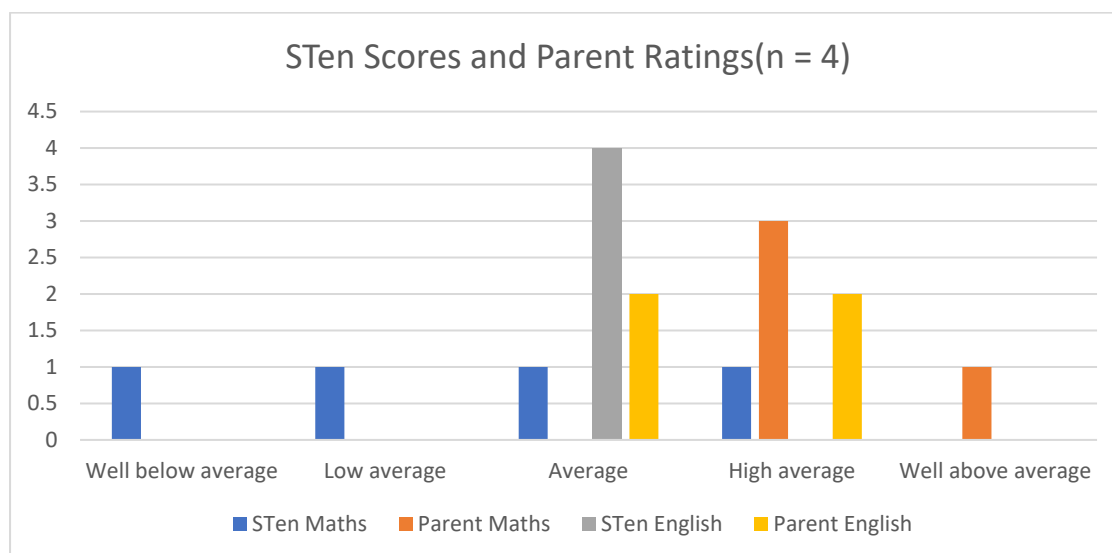


Figure 7. STen Scores for N = 4 Children and Parent Ratings

The 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 academic years should still be viewed in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, due to ongoing cases across the country. This is reflected in the results exploring absences from school with 11 parents stating health as being the main reason for absences. One parent reported that absences were due to problems with the teacher, and one respondent did not answer. The largest number of days missed in any one grouping of days was 11-20 days (5 participants), with the majority of children missing between 0 and 10 days. Two children had missed more than 20 days.

Comparative data is only available for the 2016-2017 cohort in relation to the number of school absences. Figure 8. provides a comparison between the current study and data collected then.

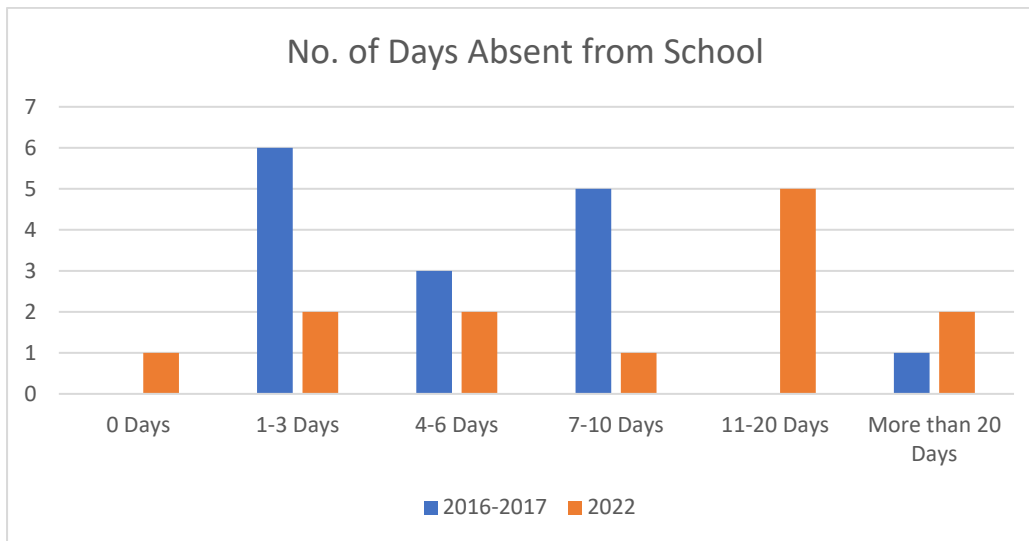


Figure 8. Comparative Number of Days Absent from School

The majority of parents (mothers) reported absences of 1 to 3 days in 2016-2017 compared with 11 to 20 days in 2022. This increase in absences should be viewed with the COVID-19 pandemic in mind, with increased instances of illness due to infection and related absences due to self-isolation, and isolations of close contacts.

Most parents (8) stated that their child receives homework on 3-4 days of the week with the majority of children (9) spending 30 minutes to less than one hour completing their homework. Three parents stated that their school sets the homework for the week on a Monday, to be completed a little each day. Nine parents indicated that they sometimes help their child with their homework with 2 stating they never help. Parents of children in older classes indicated that they used to help their children with homework more frequently but as their child has gotten older, they required less help. None of the children currently attend a homework club.

All but one parent have attended a parent-teacher meeting in the current academic year (2021-2022), with parents stating that most teachers indicated that the children are doing well in school. The qualitative data was examined and two themes were present: Getting on Well and Minor Challenges. This is reflected in the parent discussions and teacher interviews discussed later in the report.

Getting on Well

Mothers self-reported that teachers were pleased with their child's progress both academically and socially and that improvements had been made:

P1018: He's getting on amazingly well, he said he's fantastic...good with his peers, he listens... he gets involved. Personality wise he's really smiley...

P1002: He's had his best year, recently changes schools and he's now the top of the class in all subjects and maths is his best subject

P1003: Quite happy with her confidence with maths. Very pleasant.

Minor Challenges

A number of parents self-reported some minor challenges either academically or socially that were raised by the teachers in the meetings. These include concerns around performance in particular subjects and classroom behaviour:

P1011: ...we brought up an issue with her spelling and her teacher signed her up to a spelling programme. She has a tendency to rush things and not think about them but she's brilliant, so positive... she'll try anything.

P1004: ...could apply himself better, stop being giddy, no major problems.

P1014: She struggled this year, I don't know if it's due to COVID or not, but she's only been diagnosed in the last year [dyslexia]...

Ten of the mothers felt that their child would go on to complete further or higher education with 2 stating they would complete the Leaving Certificate and 1 stating their child would complete an apprenticeship.

4.3.3 Child/Parent Relationship

Parents described their relationship with their child via a number of statements. Figure 9. below provides a breakdown of the findings.

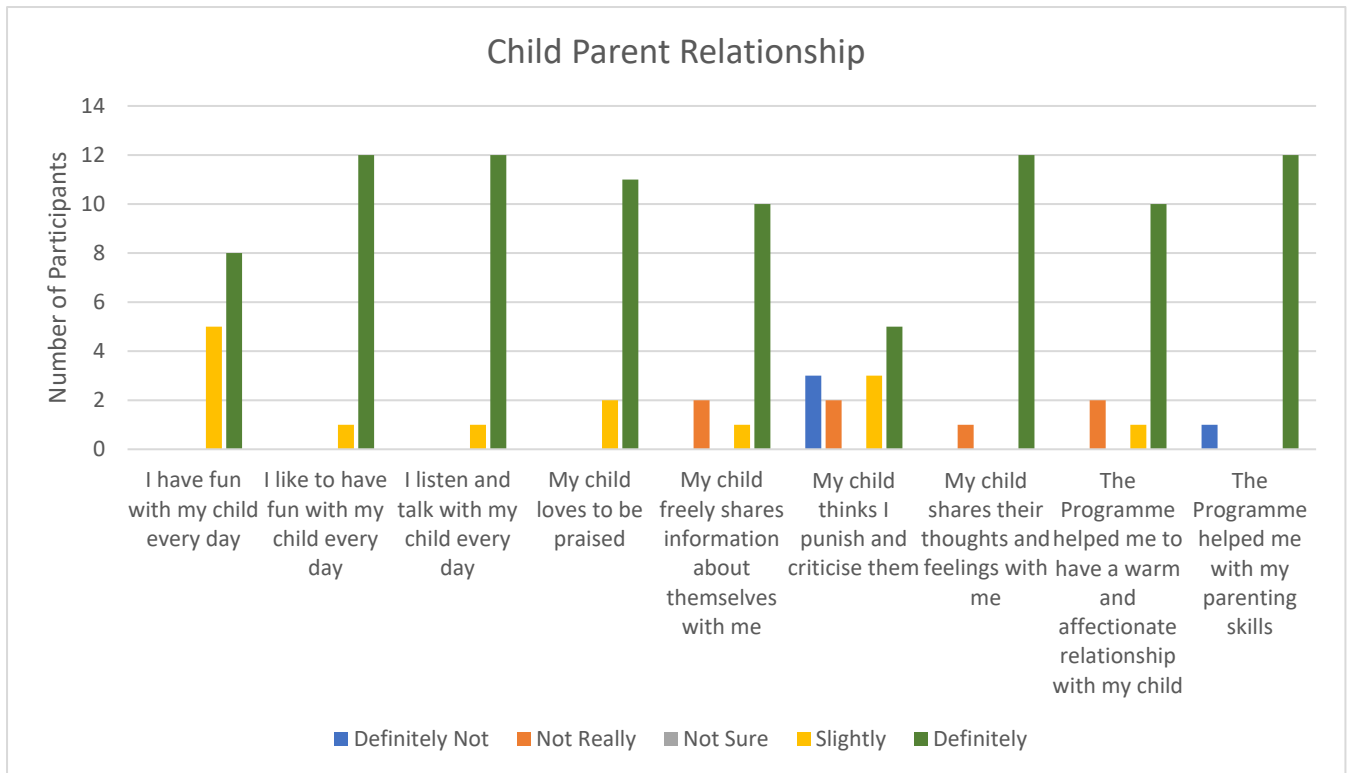


Figure 9. Child-Parent Relationship

Overall, the majority of parents stated that they have fun with their children and feel that their children share their thoughts and feelings with them. Additionally the majority of parents stated that the ParentChild+ programme definitely helped them to have a warm and affectionate relationship with their child and helped them with their parenting skills, n = 10 and n = 12 respectively.

Parents were asked to describe other ways in which the ParentChild+ programme helped them as a parent. Parents stated that the ParentChild+ programme helped them to have “a little more patience and open mind about parenting” and that it was “great to have someone else coming and seeing... [the child’s]... progress”. The parents mentioned the “warm and affectionate” relationships fostered by the Home Visitors and that they were “just so brilliant” and they “really enriched our lives”. Additionally, parents also mentioned that they continued to employ the skills they learned

with their “other children”. A number of themes were also identified in the data: Confidence, Learning, and Support.

Confidence

Parents described how the programme provided them with confidence to effectively interact with their child and to understand that learning can happen through play, which have had a long term impact:

P1014: As a first time mammy I didn't know what was right or wrong but with the 2nd child it's really helped me read with him...

P1001: Myself and my child sit down together to talk and she's comfortable telling me things. The programme gave me the confidence to know that listening is good and ok.

P1002: Confidence that play is learning...

Learning

The parents mentioned how they learned new skills and developed an understanding that scaffolding their child's activities can be important for development. Additionally, how effective small changes can be in their child's development:

P1007: I learned to observe more before helping with tasks, to let my child lead the way... to only assist and not do the puzzle or put the lid on the toothpaste.

P1012: Learning that toys were also educational made me think more about toys when I would be buying them...

P1003: Showing me how to interact through play and teaching

P1018: I learned the little things and you realise as you start doing them how effective they are. Stuff like that really stuck out for me.

Support

Having the support of the Home Visitors was another theme present in the data, particularly having the support of another person during a time that can be isolating for new mothers:

P1018: All the women are really lovely too so it's nice to have a little chat with them when they come in because you're on your own at home all the time. Just having a chat with another woman

P1008: Having extra support, especially as I'm not from the area. Having someone visit, as I wasn't working, it was nice having the support

P1005: ...good support.

The majority of mothers (11) stated that they explain to their child why their behaviour was wrong and the majority of parents (8) also indicated that they never ignore their child when they misbehave. Figure 10. provides further details on parents' responses to misbehaviour.

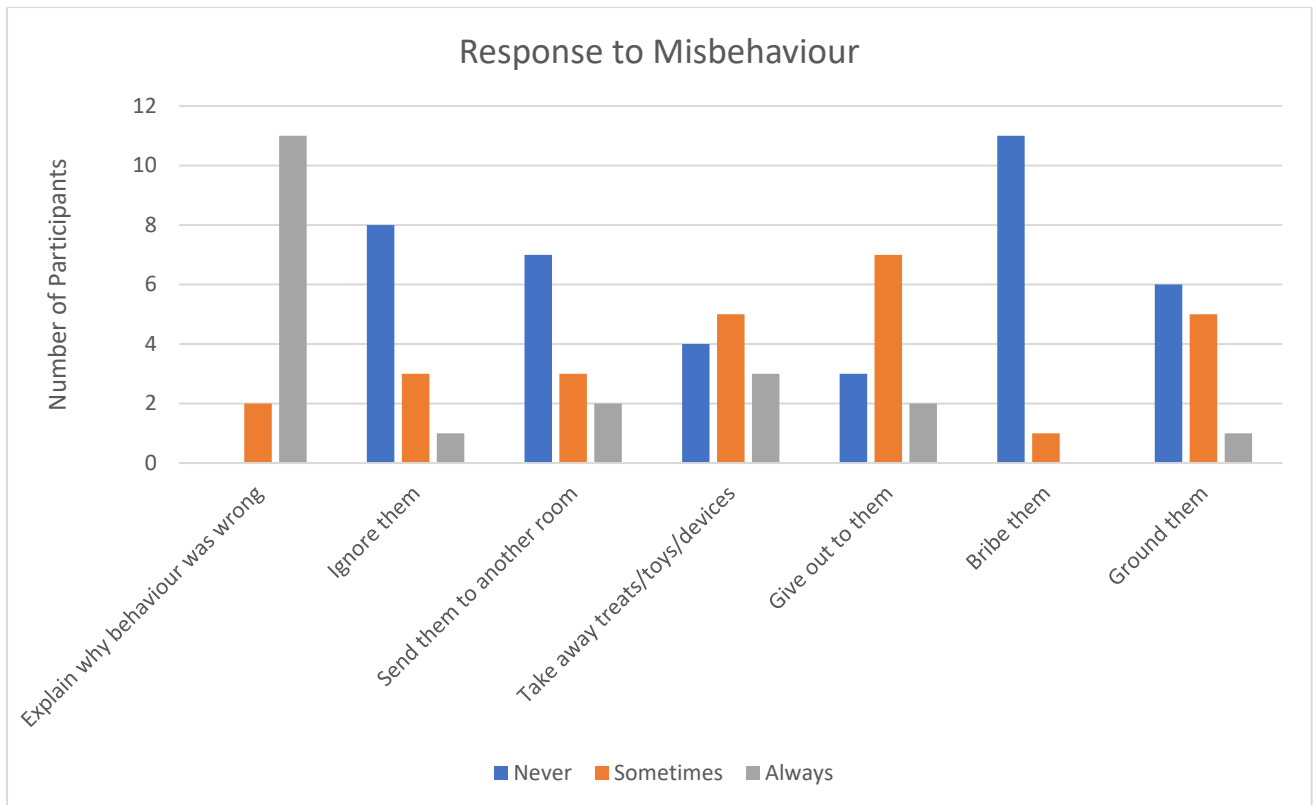


Figure 10. Parental Response to Misbehaviour

4.3.4 Children's Pastimes

Section 4 of the questionnaire was concerned with how the children spend their time. Seven of the parents stated that their child spends between 1-3 hours a day watching television, videos or DVDs with 5 stating that their child watches television or videos for less than one hour and 1 stating their child watches television or videos for 3-5 hours a day. Nine of the parents stated that their child does not use a computer with 3 using a computer for less than an hour, and 1 using a computer for 1-3 hours. Five of the participants indicated that their child spends between 1-3 hours every day playing video games, with 6 stating their children played for less than an hour and 2 stating their child spends no time playing video games.

In terms of reading for fun, there are mixed results from the parents. One parent stated their child never reads and 2 parents stated that their child reads once a week or less. Four parents indicated that their child reads a few times a week and 3 parents highlighted that their child reads every day for fun. In comparison with the previous data collection periods, the 2022 results indicate a decline in reading, with more respondents stating their child reads for fun, never, rarely, and once a week, than in the previous time points.

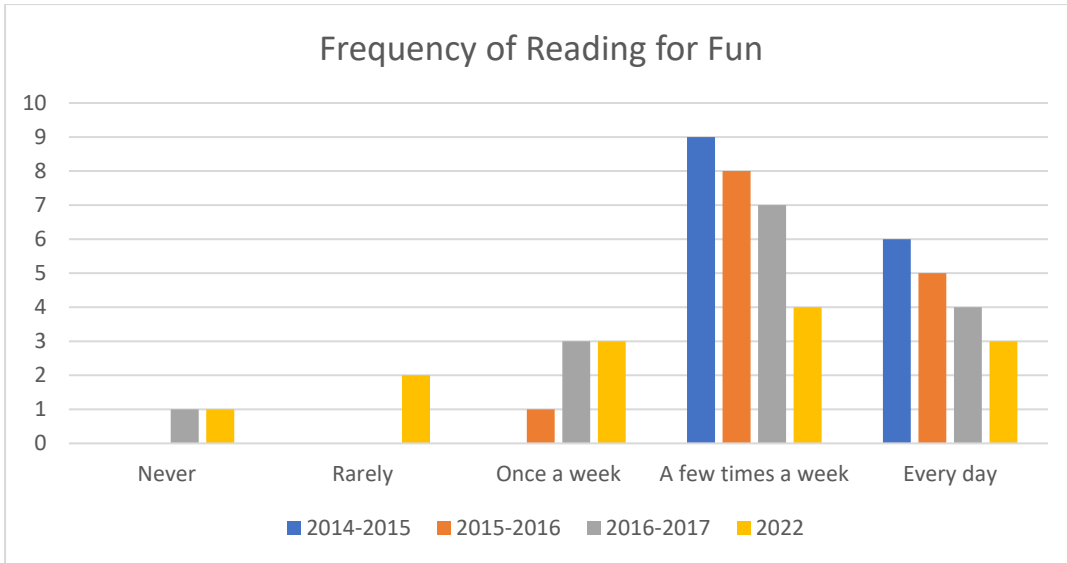


Figure 11. Comparative Frequency of Reading for Fun

Five mothers stated that their child never visits the library and an additional 4 stated that they visit a library once a week or less and a further 4 stated their child rarely visits a library. This result is mirrored with the parents with 5 never visiting, 5 rarely visiting, and 3 visiting a library once a week or less. It is important to note here that a number of parents indicated that they were frequent visitors to the library before COVID-19 and this activity has yet to be reintroduced at the time of data collection. This is also mirrored in the comparative analysis between the previous studies as seen in Figures 12. and 13. below.

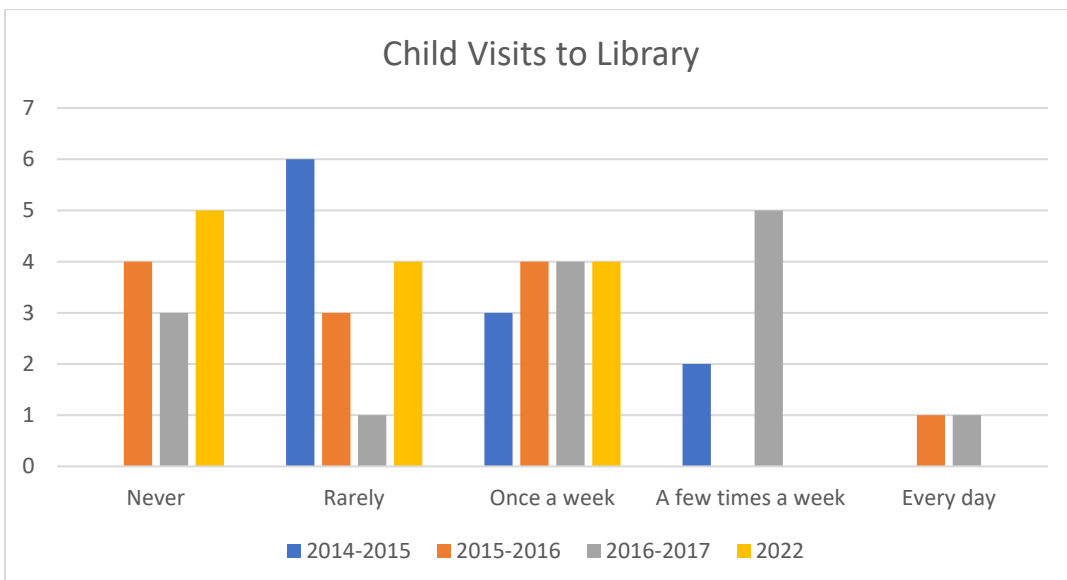


Figure 12. Comparative Frequency of Child Visits to Library

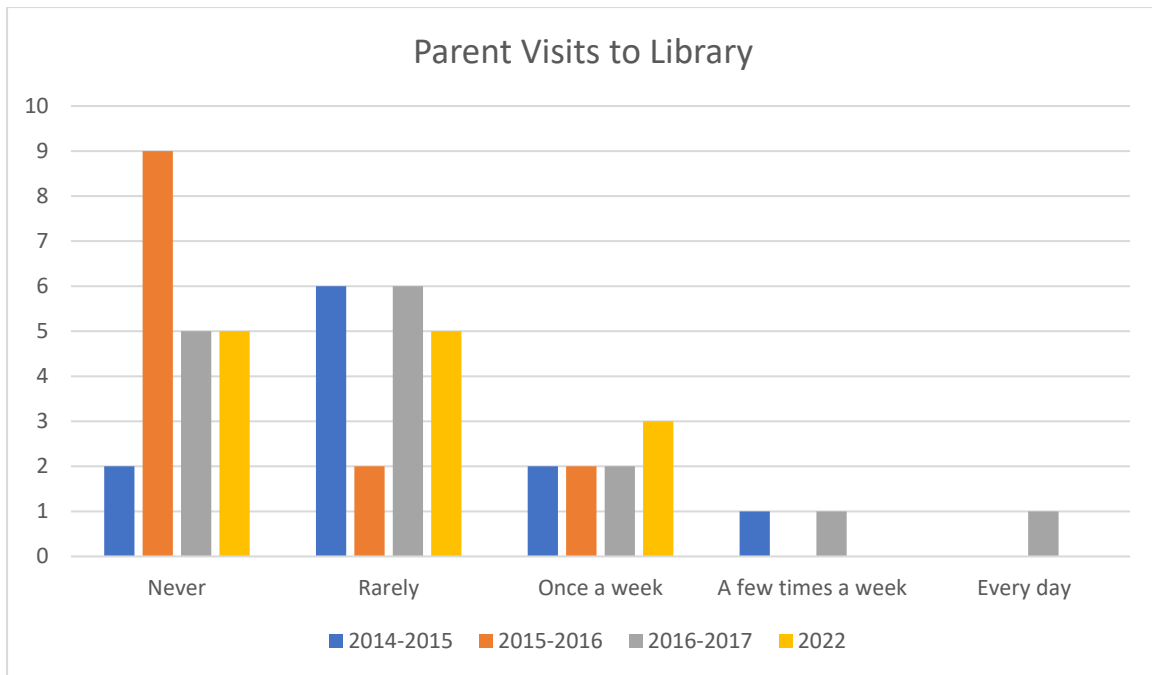


Figure 13. Comparative Frequency of Child Visits to Library

The majority of children (12) attend a club or organisation outside of school. These include GAA and swimming, Youth Club, Soccer, Dancing, and Drama.

4.4 Parent Discussion Groups

Three parent discussion groups were scheduled with parents consenting to take part in the follow-up evaluation study. Nine participants agreed to take part in one of three scheduled discussion groups (Group 1 n = 2, Group 2 n = 4, and Group 3 n = 3). A number of participants were unable to make their scheduled group on the day and therefore the final number of participants taking part were 5. This resulted in the conduction of 1 parent interview and 2 mini groups with n = 2 participants each. One of the participants in the first discussion group (P1019) did not complete the parent questionnaire, and their child did not complete the child questionnaire. For ease of understanding these 3 sets of data will be referred to as “parent discussions”.

A thematic approach to data analysis was employed to examine the academic and social outcomes of the children, the impact of the ParentChild+ programme on the parents, any improvements or changes that can be made to the programme, and any additional supports or resources needed for the children and parents in the locality. A number of themes were present in the data, Figure 19 details the thematic map.

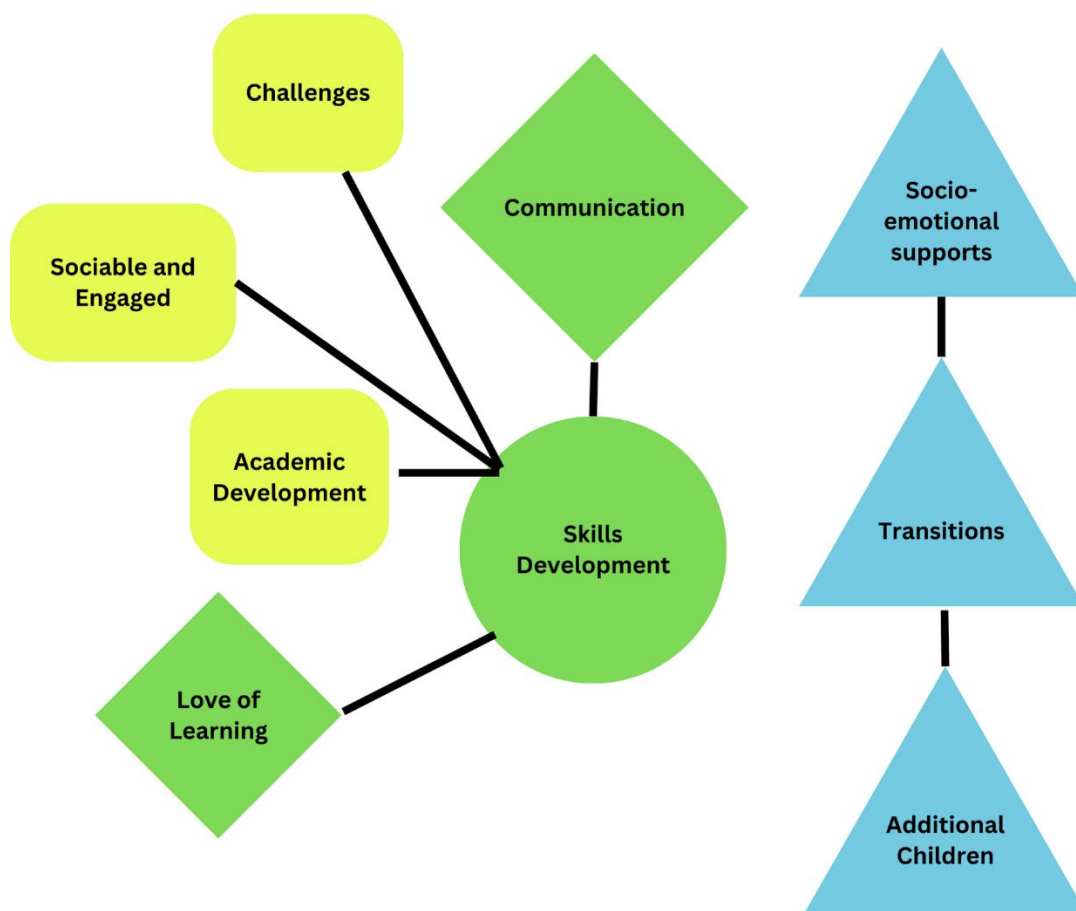


Figure 14. Parent Focus Groups and Interview Thematic Map

The participants indicated that the ParentChild+ programme helped them with **Skills Development** and instilled a **Love of Learning** in their children. Positive **Communication** was evident in the data and children were described as being **Sociable and Engaged**. **Academic Development** and **Challenges** were also present. Additional supports and resources were focused on **Socio-emotional Supports, Transitions**, and supports for **Additional Children**.

4.4.1 Skills Development

The parents felt that the ParentChild+ programme enabled them to develop new skills and further develop skills they already had.

Additionally, parents felt that although they would have been inclined to read and learn with their child anyway, the programme still provided additional benefits by creating an open approach to book and toy selection and the insight of another person into their child's development.

P1005: I suppose I think I always would've been involved with his reading and learning even without the programme. It certainly opened up at the time, it exposed him to a lot more books and toys...And for us it was great to have somebody else who was coming and seeing him... seeing the development.

P1011: Really the same as P1005, you answered it really well...and it made us aware of a lot more books... Goodnight Moon, I wouldn't have dreamt of getting that because it looked so old fashioned and stuff, but it was one favourite.

4.4.2 Love of Learning

When asked how the ParentChild+ programme has supported their child's learning, parents highlighted that the programme instilled a love of learning which has continued to have a positive impact as the children have progressed through primary education and, for some already, into secondary education. There was an understanding that this could be attributed to the element of the programme which makes learning fun.

P1002: I feel that it has supported my child's learning because I believe that he gained a love of learning and it was fun... I was like 'that's what learning is, its through play'... So I think having that kind of message instilled in him, it really helped him to progress in his learning...

Mothers also describe how the programme made learning more normal for their child and framed it as a normal, fun activity you would do regularly.

P1012: It was kind of the whole routine of it...it just made a kind of a bit, it's the norm... so he would've even sat in his own bed when he was six or seven maybe, and it's be the norm for him just to pick up a book and start reading.

4.4.3 Communication

Although not directly attributed to the ParentChild+ programme, this theme was strongly present across the parent interviews. Particularly, the willingness of both child and parent to engage in open conversation about important or sensitive topics. There is also the presence of good self-awareness from the children.

Interviewer: And if he was beginning to start to feel anxious would he come to you?... P1012: Oh definitely, oh yeah.... he's been more confident... he'll tell me now when he's anxious and he's able to tell me what's making him anxious.

Interviewer: And would she be open to talking to you about things... P1011: Yeah, but we all think our kids would... she would be very honest and she'd be very open and she'd want to talk about everything and every kind of feeling. But her little sister, she wouldn't.

P1005: we're all about talking about everything... and he can come to me and talk to me about things

Additionally, the ParentChild+ programme was deemed particularly important for a parent whose first language was not English, for both them and their child:

P1019: ...because you know what, we have two languages at home. So it was actually a good start for me how they, let's say how [Home Visitor] shows me all the things. I'm not saying that we don't know English but in any way for him... he feels maybe more comfortable in the class as he knows some, let's say games... and he's not, how to say naked before everybody in what he knows.

4.4.4 Sociable and Engaged

Parents highlighted that their children were sociable both inside the classroom and outside, and the children were also engaged in classroom activities and in extra-curricular activities in school and the local community.

P1019: He's easy, let's say to talk with neighbours to say hello. He's always smiling and really nice, nice boy.

P1002: ... a wide circle of friends. He has friends from football, he has friends from the school and he also has friends from where we live...he loves being social... thrives in social settings.

P1005: He's an only child, so he enjoys being around other kids when he's in school.

4.4.5 Academic Development

This theme focused on the academic ability of the children, particularly their strengths and areas that could be improved. Parents highlighted that when their children have a particular interest in a subject they'll engage more willingly.

P1019: ... he loves history, he loves cooking

P1002: [CC1002's] last parent teacher meeting they reassured me that he's getting on absolutely brilliant. He's flying with maths... once he enjoys the subject, he'll try even more

P1011: She's okay across the board. Nothing is awesome, nothing is terrible. She's just totting along... languages wouldn't be her strong point. Irish would be her weakest point, but then we don't speak Irish at home either.

P1005: He seems to be managing fine and he says he likes maths, he likes doing maths, but he was just recently saying that he doesn't like it, but it's more to do with... when it's on during the day because it's close to break time or they get moved to different tables

4.4.6 Challenges

A number of challenges were discussed during the parent interviews, both academic challenges and socio-emotional challenges. Parents presented a willingness to engage in further supports to alleviate these challenges, or were already engaged in such activities.

P1019: ...about school, some subjects... like maths... maybe sometimes he's struggling...

P1002: I would say ... the subject that he would find the most challenging is Irish... so I already know through the ELI that they offer Irish tuition and so it's already something I'm thinking ahead of.

Additionally, challenges were identified in relation to emotional development and transitioning into adolescence.

P1011: CC1011 is our oldest. So it's just kind of, the biggest challenges would be keeping her safe but making her aware of things that are going to be happening in the future...because she's very sheltered.

4.4.7 Socio-emotional Supports

A number of themes focused on supports and resources that parents felt were needed for their children. Parents felt strongly that development of socio-emotional competence, and skills for self-regulation were of particular importance for their children, particularly when progressing through later years of primary education.

P1005: And definitely I think that's something that there should be more programmes for in schools with managing emotions and social development and that side of things. Maybe something like that could be more beneficial than reading and writing type courses.

P1011: I'd agree that's very important. Again, the whole emotional development of people can be quite difficult to manage.

Additionally, it was suggested that self-esteem and confidence building could be conducted by the ELI to support exploration of activities the child may be anxious about trying.

P1011: I don't know if there's something that could be done... it'd be for the kids who aren't that confident with something...about having the confidence, emotional strength and confident and actually join another social activity.

4.4.8 Transitions

Transitions was another theme present across all of the 3 parent interviews. Specifically, a need for supports and resources for children experiencing periods of transition, not just in terms of school transitions, but other life transitions such as moving home. This theme may have been more prominent due to the ages of the children being discussed, with the majority transitioning into secondary within the next year or so, or having just transitioned. It is worth noting also that parents have taken active steps to prepare their children for this transition.

P1012: So it's a lot of talk about it at the moment [secondary school]. We got the local secondary school... principal was in the school and they get a booklet about it and we'll go to the next open say...so we get an idea because I think there is a little bit of anxiety about it.

P1002: We did visit up to the school, he likes to see where he is going...he likes to become familiar with it before he even gets here.

P1012: I'm going to see if maybe he might start walking up to school on his own... because I know when it comes to secondary whatever about getting dropped off in the morning, he certainly isn't going to want to have his nanny of granddad or his mammy outside the gate waiting. So I think we're going to try and get him in to work on that as well this year

P1012: So it's a lot of talk about it at the moment [secondary school]

Interviewer: These periods of transition, perhaps if there's programmes that are around building confidence and resilience...especially for children... in those periods of transition... P1011: yeah, yeah

4.4.9 Additional Children

The final theme present in the data was related to supports for parents who have subsequent children once they have participated in the ParentChild+ programme. Practical suggestions were made in relation to providing refresher sessions, enabling those with large time periods between children to participate again, or the provision of other programmes.

P1012: The only thing I'd say is if maybe, see they were already doing it for two days so I can't even say for the kids to have more time, the only thing I'd say is if it may be more kids in one family... I definitely think my youngest...would have definitely benefited from it...she got really tired of reading

P1002: I would like every person to be able to get it and even though you're given the tools and the knowledge for your children... I feel that if that.. you're out having a 3rd or 4th child and your confidence is gone a little bit, that maybe the programme can be... I definitely think that every child should receive it.

P1019: If we can help... more children... just do it wider.

4.5 Children

The Child Questionnaire, for Cohort 1, comprised 4 Sections: School; Family and Home Environment; Activities; and Future Planning.

4.5.1 School

The majority of children (9) stated that they sometimes like school, while 3 stated that they always like school, and the remaining 1 stated they never like it. Additionally, the children were asked if they like their teacher and 9 stated that they always like their teacher, with 3 stating they sometimes like their teacher and 1 child indicating that they never like their teacher. Figure 15. details how the children rated themselves in English, Maths and school in general. The majority of children stated that they were doing good in Maths, English and School in general (n = 9, n = 9, and n = 6 respectively).

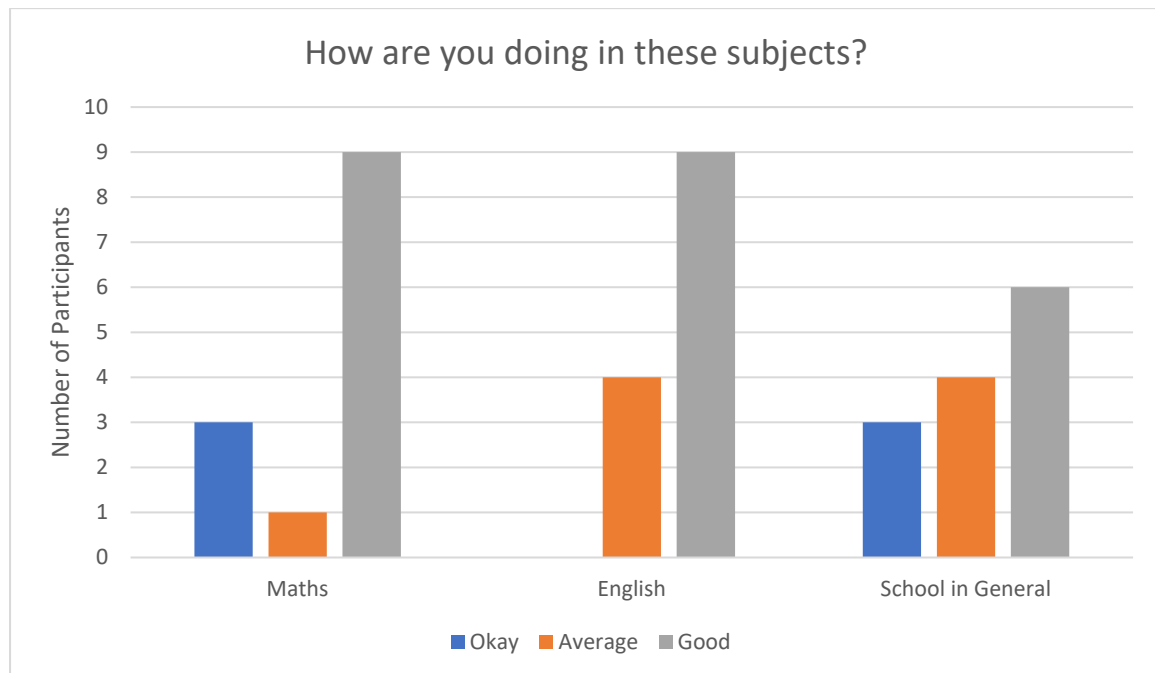


Figure 15. Child Self-report Performance in School

Five children stated maths was their favourite while 3 children stated P.E. was their favourite and another child stated English was their favourite. Two children mentioned history as being their favourite subject with 1 stating that they did it outside of school as it wasn't really taught. Additionally 1 child mentioned both Science and Art as being their favourite subject and another student mentioned Drama or Art as being their favourite. In relation to homework, 10 of the children said they receive homework 3-4 days a week, with 1 stating they receive homework 1-2 days a week and 2 children stating they get homework everyday.

4.5.2 Family and Home Environment

All children (13) stated that they had siblings, with 5 saying they get along with their siblings and 7 saying they sometimes get along with their siblings. One participant stated that they don't get along with their sibling(s). The majority of children (8) indicated that they would talk to their mum if they had a problem, with 1 child saying they would talk to their friends and another 3 saying they would talk to both parents. One participant stated they would talk to either their sister or their mum if they had a problem. Five of the children said that their family asks for their input about what they could do as a family, and 8 stated that they are sometimes asked for their input.

The majority of children have access to playgrounds, youth clubs and activities, and the majority of children stated that it was safe for them to play where they live. Figure 16. provides further insight into the childrens' environment.

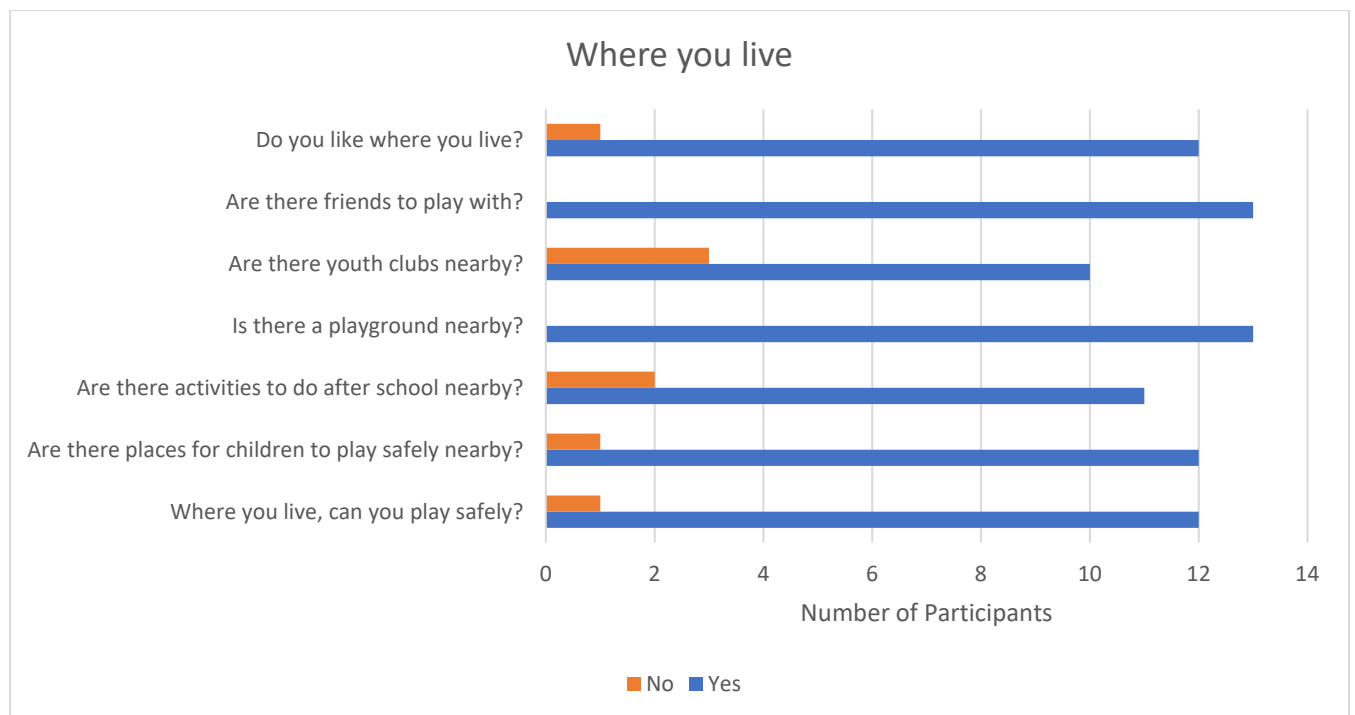


Figure 16. Child Self-report on Local Environment

4.5.3 Activities

The majority of children (9) stated that there is a computer in their house, with 5 indicating they sometimes use it and 4 saying they never use it. Two children said they use it to play games, while a further 2 children stated they sometimes use it to play games. One child uses the computer to chat with friends online and 3 use it to watch films or listen to music. One child stated using the computer sometimes for each of the following: to email, instant message, explore the internet, and do homework. Three children stated they use the computer to do school projects. The majority (10) of

the children stated they were allowed to use the internet without supervision with the remaining 3 stating they were not allowed. One parent clarified that although the child said they can use the computer without adult supervision, the access is restricted and the parents can see what the child is doing at all times.

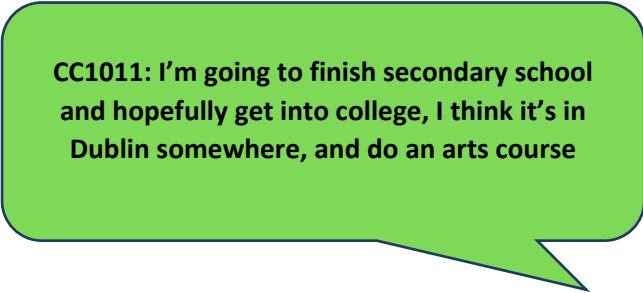
Children indicated enjoying a number of activities, including playing with friends, playing sport, playing outside, playing computer games, and watching tv. The majority (10) stated that a physical activity was their favourite hobby or activity (football, swimming, soccer, dancing). Eleven of the children said they play sport while only 2 of children stated that they read for fun every day. Seven stated that they read a few times a week for fun while 1 child stated that they never read for fun. The remaining 5 stated they read for fun once a week or a few times a month. Eight of the children have a mobile phone.

4.5.4 Future Planning

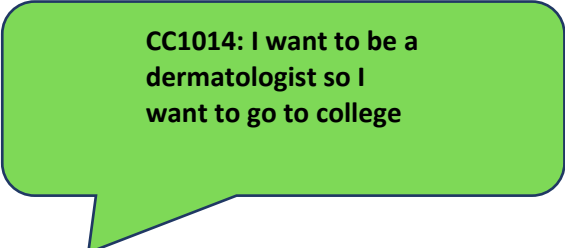
The children provided qualitative insights into their plans for the future. The most prominent theme was that the children wanted **to Continue with Education**. This theme can be broken down further into sub-themes of **Concrete Ideas** and **General Continuation**.

Concrete Ideas

A number of children expressed concrete plans for their future education, including the desire to follow a particular career path or study a particular topic.



CC1011: I'm going to finish secondary school and hopefully get into college, I think it's in Dublin somewhere, and do an arts course



CC1014: I want to be a dermatologist so I want to go to college

General Continuation

Children also described wanting to continue on with education but without having a particular goal in mind. This continuation included completing secondary school, going to college, or continuing with education generally due to its importance:

CC1001: I want to finish secondary school but otherwise I don't know.

CC1018: Maybe go on to college. I'm not sure what I'd like to do in college.

CC1009: Finish secondary school and college.

CC1008: I don't really know but I'll follow on with education because it's most needed for life.

Additionally, 1 child mentioned that they would go to secondary school but not continue on to college. Another child stated that they had “nothing in particular in mind” in terms of education because “school is fun but the only thing I want to do is football”. One of the children stating they want to go to college didn't understand that part of 2nd level education was mandatory and thought they could skip straight to college from primary school.

The children provided an array of preferences for their future career plans. Again, the themes present in the data encompass concrete plans or more open ideas for future career paths. The themes can be categorised as **Concrete Plans** and **Broader Aspirations**.

Concrete Plans

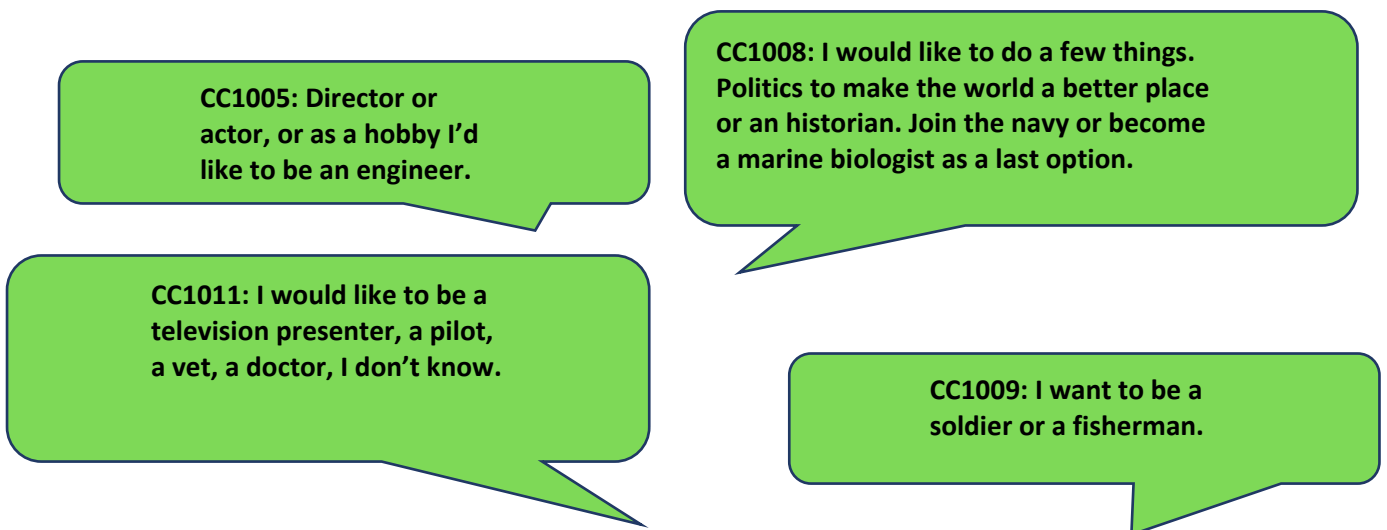
A number of children stated that they want one specific career when they get older, the most common response being “Footballer” (3). Additionally, the participants with a single career in mind highlighted a broad range of preferences:

CC1001: Vet.



Broader Aspirations

A number of children identified an interest in a variety of careers. One participant mentioned wanted to be a footballer or a mechanic, bringing the total number of children indicating a career in sport as n = 4. The participants present in this category indicated wanting to pursue jobs that were quite different from each other:



4.5.4 Memories and Recommendations: ParentChild+ Programme

The children found it difficult to recall specific memories of the ParentChild+ programme but subsequently provided a memory. One child stated "I don't know, I don't really remember much" and another said "nothing". The children mainly enjoyed the **Activities** and the **Home Visitors**:

Activities

CC1002: The reading.

CC1011: My favourite memory would be one day [Home Visitor] brought around this little orange basket and we played shops.

CC1009: Making the shakey bottle toy.

CC1004: I can't remember all of it but I still have a few books and I liked when mam read to me.

Home Visitors

CC1003: I like when she came to the house and we played games

CC1008: I don't really remember but she was really nice and still says hi to me if she sees me.

The children stated that there was nothing they didn't like about the programme, saying a variation of 'nothing': 'nothing'; 'nothing really'; and 'nothing, I loved it' or "I can't really remember". Two participants didn't provide a response.

A number of suggestions were made to make improvements on the programme, these included linking the activities to the specific interests of the child and scaffolding skills. Additionally, types of activities were mentioned: "maybe you could make some things in the books related to the things we like, like soccer", "by giving them video games instead of books and toys"; "teach to paint before you ask us to do it"; "don't really remember but the boardgames and books were really fun so keep including fun activities"; and "arts and crafts and outings and meeting up with others".

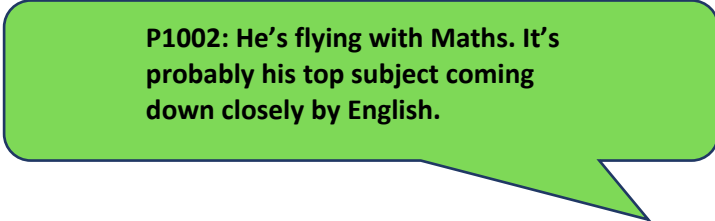
4.6 Case Studies

As two teachers completed the Teacher Interviews for this research, it was felt that those children could be included in case studies to provide a comprehensive overview of the child's development, academically and socio-emotionally, home learning environment, and insights into the potential impact of the ParentChild+ programme. Additionally, as only one set of participants from Cohort 2 completed the measures, the results were included as a further case study.

4.6.1 Participant CC1002

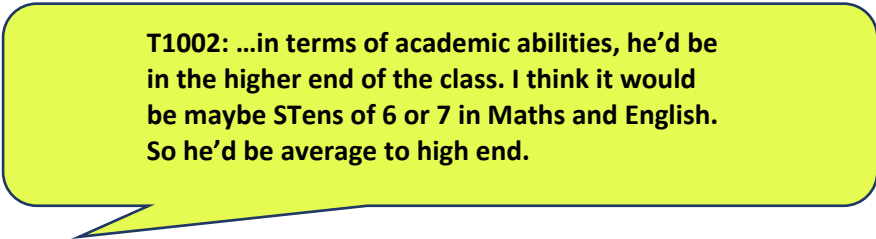
Participant CC1002's parent and child questionnaires were completed in the 2021-2022 academic year when CC1002 was in 5th class. Additionally, CC1002's teacher completed an interview in the 2022-2023 academic year, when CC1002 was in 6th class. P1002 also took part in a mini parent group discussion (detailed above) in the 2022-2023 academic year.

Academic Achievement. A number of sources of data are available to explore the academic achievement of CC1002, including parent and child self-report, STen scores from 5th class and information from the teacher interview. CC1002 self-rated his academic performance as "Good" (the highest rating) across Maths, English and School in General. This rating was supported by his parent's self-report. P1002 self-reported their child as being excellent in Maths and above average in English. This was further detailed in the parent focus group:



P1002: He's flying with Maths. It's probably his top subject coming down closely by English.

In relation to his STen scores for 5th class, he received a STen of 7 in Maths and 6 in English, placing CC1002 in the high average bracket for Maths and the average bracket for English. The participant's academic achievement is further supported by the teacher interview:



T1002: ...in terms of academic abilities, he'd be in the higher end of the class. I think it would be maybe STens of 6 or 7 in Maths and English. So he'd be average to high end.

The teacher also provided the most recent school report for CC1002 indicating a highly motivated student with high academic achievements but with challenges in Irish, not inconsistent in comparison to the rest of the class:

T1002: ...his English for listening, oral reading and writing he got 4 out of 5... he's worked hard, applies himself... For Gaeilge it would be 2 out of 5. So that might be an area of weakness but that wouldn't be uncommon in the class. Maths he's got 4 out of 5.

This was also mirrored by P1002's discussion of his academic development in the focus group.

P1002: ...the subject that he would find the most challenging is Irish.

Socioemotional and Behavioural Development. From both the parent focus group and the teacher interview, we can see that C1002 has a highly developed socioemotional domain. He readily engages with peers in school and has a large friend group. Additionally, some behavioural challenges are present, but considered minor, focusing around temper.

T1002: Socially, he's very social, very sociable. He's very vocal, sometimes too vocal. He doesn't seem to have any problems with friendships... he'll be a leader in the classroom... he's popular with the staff, students. He has good manners. He's dependable.

T1002: He has kind of a bit of a temper, he gets a bit sulky if things don't go his way...but he's easy enough to turn around and get him smiling again, he's a good sense of humour. So he's just a bit tetchy at times.

4.6.2 Participant CC1004

Participant CC1004’s parent and child questionnaires were also completed in the 2021-2022 academic year and the interview with CC1004’s teacher took place in the 2022-2023 academic year.

Academic Achievement. The sources of data available to explore CC1004’s academic achievement mirror that of CC1002, however additional STen scores are available between 1st Class and 5th Class and his parent did not participate in the parent group discussions. According to CC1004’s parent, he is performing above average in both Maths and English. CC1004 themselves, rated their performance in Maths, English, and School in General as “Good”, indicating agreement between parent and child. Figure 20 below provides details of CC1004’s STen scores.

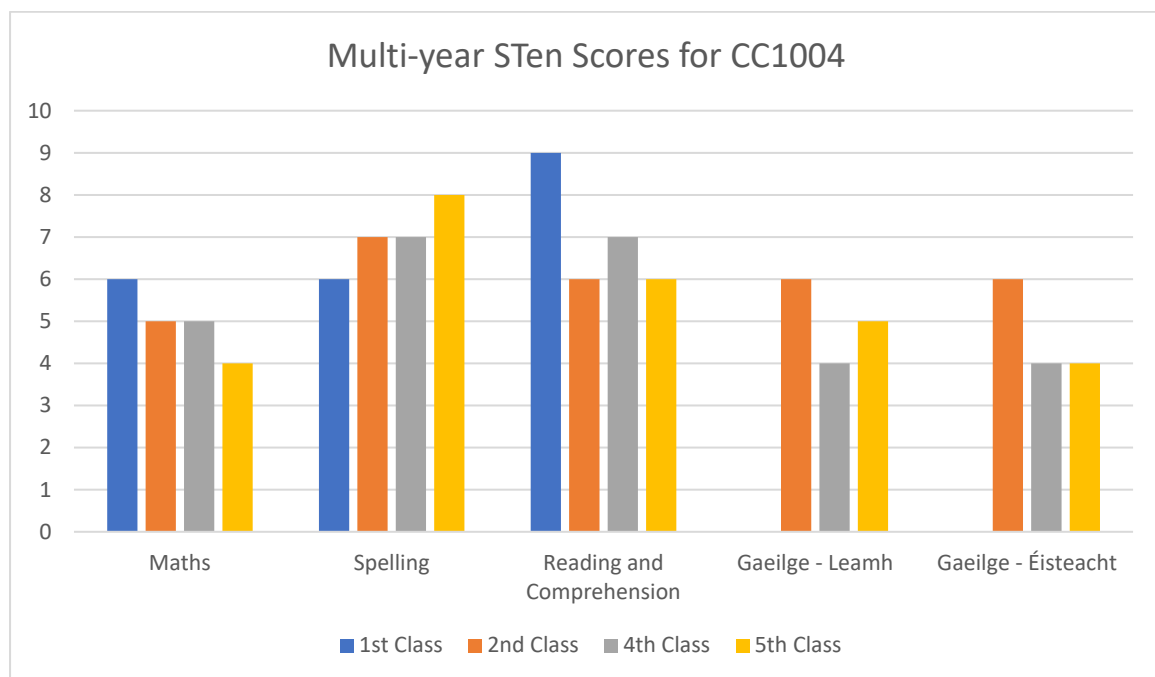


Figure 17. CC1004 STen Scores

Standardised tests in 3rd class were not conducted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, no standardised tests in Irish – Reading and Irish - Listening are conducted in 1st class. In Maths we see a slight decline in STen scores between 1st class and 5th class, and in Spelling we see a slight increase. Reading and Comprehension has fluctuated more but has still declined over the years. The 5th class STen scores were low average in Maths and Irish – Listening, and average in Reading and Comprehension and Irish – Reading. A 5th class STen score of well above average was recorded for Spelling.

CC1004 exhibits a high level of engagement in the classroom with a willingness to participate in activities and class discussion, which has seen improvements in more recent years. Additionally, he has made consistent improvements academically in terms of handwriting and taking on board teacher feedback.

Interviewer: And in terms of engaging in class and engaging in the lessons would he be active in answering questions and engaging that way? **T1004:** Yeah, absolutely, and one of the real telling points was, we have a school assembly... children would engage and they would come up and then they would speak...CC1004 invariably was the first one with his hand up to do that. And he would speak really sincerely... and I'm so proud of him because now he engages in every single art class and does it willingly and shows me his work.

Socioemotional and Behavioural Development. The teacher interview has suggested that CC1004 has grown consistently over the past 3 years she has been his teacher and has gained confidence. He's well liked by his peers and exhibits a high level of empathy. Behavioural challenges arise every now and again around inappropriate giddiness in the classroom, but this behaviour is becoming less prevalent.

T1004: One thing I would say is that he has a lot of empathy, he has a huge amount going for him socially, he can be very charming, very entertaining and the children really love him... CC1004 would let me know if there's something up with somebody else. So he will have the awareness, the observation, and he would do it discreetly.

T1004: I've had CC1004 since 4th class, so I've had him for a number of years now... and so last year we would have had an odd little set-back, nothing like in 4th class. In 4th class the hood would go up and the body language would go down... I haven't seen [that] now in 6th class.

T1004 : And on the other hand, he can also at times, you know, he gets into a fit of giggles over silly nonsense, really you could say... typical school... so he is kind of in a little bit of a phase of that now at the moment... I think we're going to move out of that phase now as well.

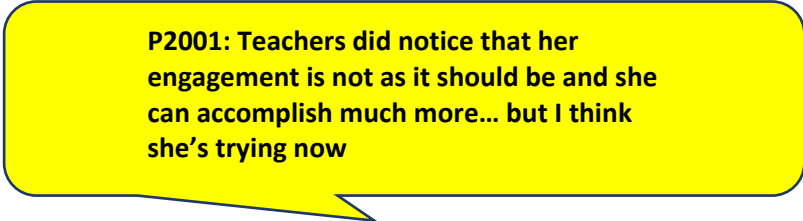
4.6.3 Additional Teacher Insights

Teacher interviews also highlighted the willingness of parents to engage with the school in relation to their child's learning and behaviour, and also to participate in school activities such as the Parents Association and fundraising events. Teachers described parents' relationships with their children as being open and supportive. In relation to school attendance, although there are higher than the norm absences reported for school during the 2021-2022 academic year, teacher interviews indicated that attendance was extremely high for the two children in which the interviews concerned.

4.6.4 Participant YP2001

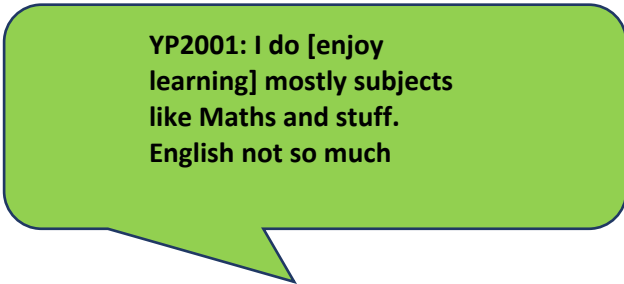
Participant YP2001's parent questionnaire and young person semi-structured interview were completed in the 2021-2022 academic year when the participant was in 3rd year of second level. The semi-structured interview focused on academic achievement and opinions about school, with a number of questions related to future plans and memories of the ParentChild+ programme (see Appendix V for the full interview schedule).

Academic Achievement and School. Participant P2001 stated that they strongly agreed that the ParentChild+ programme influenced their child's learning and has a positive attitude towards school. YP2001's mother rated her as excellent in Maths and poor in English. From parent-teacher meetings, P2001 stated that teachers felt YP2001 is not fully meeting her academic potential:



P2001: Teachers did notice that her engagement is not as it should be and she can accomplish much more... but I think she's trying now

YP2001 stated that she enjoys learning but some subjects more than others. YP2001 says she likes learning because she likes "knowing" and being the one to "know during class".



YP2001: I do [enjoy learning] mostly subjects like Maths and stuff. English not so much

The participants most enjoyable part of school is interacting with their friends and peers as they are “a very social person”. Their least enjoyable part of school is tests as they become anxious.

YP2001: The nerves... I can do very well in class but when it comes to tests, no... I think if I was less nervous about tests I would be able to study better.

Future Plans. P2001 stated that they believed their child would definitely attend college. YP2001 said that don't really know what they want to do for a career but it would be “something outgoing” and with “hands on projects”. In terms of education YP2001 said she would definitely go to college.

YP2001: Definitely, yeah... I always wanted to do a criminology course. I find that really interesting, but I don't know I'm still thinking about that.

YP2001 stated that being able to attend workshops or courses providing taster sessions for college courses would be useful for her to make decisions about the future and to achieve her goals.

YP2001: Maybe there's some courses you could do now to see what it's like... like a job work experience too... I did a psychology course for a few weeks, it gave me an idea about what it would be like

ParentChild+ Programme. P2001 stated that the ParentChild+ programme was transformative for them, as a person who was new to the area, and stated that the programme definitely helped them with their parenting skills.

P2001: it's a wider programme... it helped me to become a confident parent and helped me with my kids.

P2001 also stated that the programme gave them support and developed a habit of reading with YP2001 and with her younger sibling.

P2001: it gave me support when I needed it... I was young and unsure of what I was doing... even that half an hour...can mean a lot. It helped me to enjoy and have fun. And I continued to read books with her and her younger sister.

YP2001 stated that she didn't remember much about the programme but that she remembers her Home Visitor.

YP2001: I remember that I enjoyed it and I remember the girl that came to visit me and I'd recognise her if I saw her.

Chapter 5

Discussion

As a qualitative case study approach, the breadth of data available in this study does indicate the promising positive impact of the ParentChild+ programme on children and parents. Mothers, children, and teachers highlighted that children were doing well in school academically, with a minority requiring additional supports, this is further supported by the STen scores received for some participants indicating a position in the average range for English this is in line with previous research exploring early, home visiting programmes (Doyle & UCD Geary Institute PFL Evaluation Team, 2016). However, the data indicates a potential upward bias in relation to parents' self-report of their child's academic performance. The majority of children also exhibited positive socio-emotional development, with the majority of children participating in extra-curricular activities. The two teacher interviews also highlighted the children's willingness to engage in the classroom and their positive engagement with their peers. Teacher interviews suggest a high level of socioemotional development with the children concerned.

Mothers felt well equipped to support their children with their learning and developmental outcomes, and partly attributed this to the skills developed in the ParentChild+ programme supporting previous research examining the programme's efficacy (Anders et al, 2012; Chazan-Cohen et al, 2019; Hindman & Morrison, 2012). Some areas were considered beyond their capabilities, for example Irish or Maths, but it was stated that the children had access to other supports for this, whether that be another parent or outside tuition. Those parents who identified struggles in certain subjects and whose children were not currently receiving supports have stated they are exploring support options.

Parents discussed the positive impact the ParentChild+ Programme had on them, both at the time of participation in the programme, and the long-term benefits. Parents highlighted the importance of the social element to the programme, how it reduced feelings of isolation and provided a sense of belonging to the community, this was highlighted by parents originally from Ireland and those who moved here from abroad. Additionally, parents with English as a second language mentioned the added benefit of improving confidence and ability in communication for both themselves and their child. Following on from this, some parents stated that although they would have liked to have participated in the programme again with subsequent children, they were able to apply their learning with the children and felt at times their subsequent children benefited even more.

5.1 Lessons Learned

Throughout the process of this research a number of lessons have been learned in terms of conducting action based research with the ParentChild+ population during a time of global public health restrictions and emergence from a series of restrictive lockdowns. Additional lessons have been learned in terms of the ParentChild+ programme itself, and the impact on, and perception of, the parents and graduates of the programme.

5.1.1 Research Process

A number of challenges were experienced early on in the recruitment process for this research. Particularly, challenges around the initial contact with participants resulted in significantly lower participation rates in the research than originally anticipated, and planned for. The stored contact details were out of service for a large number of potential participants, and it was difficult to make successful contact with another set. It was determined that the Home Visitors would try to make contact with potential participants the Researcher had been unable to contact, and this resulted in only slight success. Recommendations detailed below may be useful in alleviating some of the challenges in the recruitment process, including the development of an Alumni Network.

Difficulties also arose when contacting schools for participants' standardised test scores and teacher recruitment. As previously mentioned, this was compounded by the timing of the recruitment contact, towards the end of the academic school year, and by challenges facing schools nationally due to the extended impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and resourcing and staffing issues exacerbated by the current housing crisis.

Additionally, due to the continued presence of COVID-19 the research was conducted via phone and online. This may have added another layer of complexity to the research process for families as arranging a specific time and date for data collection may have proved challenging, especially at a time when extra-curricular activities and office-based working were returning to normal. As highlighted in the results, once successful contact had been made 22 completed consent forms were returned, however only 13 participants from Cohort 1 and one from Cohort 2 completed the study measures.

5.1.2 ParentChild+ Programme

Due to the number of participants, it is difficult to make recommendations on improvements on the content or delivery of the programme itself. It is important that continued, longitudinal research is conducted with participants and graduates of the ParentChild+ programme to more fully elucidate

the long-term impacts on the programme outcomes. Additionally, as the children are quite young when participating in the programme, very few were able to provide insights into what works well and what doesn't work well for the programme, though a number of suggestions have focused on aligning the books and games used by the Home Visitors to the specific likes of the child.

It should be noted that there was a strong wish from participants in this study to be provided with the opportunity to complete the programme with subsequent children, due to the nature of the programme itself (i.e. developed for completion with one child per family) it may be important to consider development of further opportunities to engage with Home Visitors outside of the ParentChild+ programme. It is important to note that the Stretch Graduate programme has been developed and implemented in ELI which may incorporate this. The programme focuses on supporting families with children aged between 4 and 6 years of age that have graduated from the ParentChild+ programme, from other ELI programmes, of who have been referred from schools and services from the Dublin Inner City. More details on this lesson are provided below.

5.2 Recommendations

In the course of conducting the Follow-up Evaluation study a number of recommendations have been identified through the act of recruitment and data collection, and through the data itself. During the course of the data collection a number of challenges have arisen, and the following recommendations aim to alleviate these in future, and are supported by the data from both parents and children. It is important to note that it has been a considerable amount of time since the participants in this study graduated from the ParentChild+ programme and a number of the below recommendations may, in some capacity, already be implemented within the ELI. The recommendations, based on the data, can be used to strengthen the activities that are already in place, or can be used to develop new additional supports and activities. It is beyond the scope of this research to explore all implemented programme that may already be addressing these recommendations.

Recommendations:

- Further development of evaluation tools for baseline, mid-point, end-point, and follow-up for participants of the ParentChild+ programme to continue with ongoing data collection and evaluation (based on lessons learned from conducting the research). This includes the use of standardised psychological test batteries examining cognitive and socio-emotional development.

- Development of formal and informal group meet-ups/events for participants of the ParentChild+ programme both during the programme and after completion.
- Development of an Alumni Network for graduate families, to ensure up-to-date contact information and delivery of additional supports to enable children to attain their goals.
- Creation of/extension of an Access type event for primary school children to introduce them to pathways to education and training. Transition events and socio-emotional development events, this could include development and/or strengthening of referral pathways to external services.
- Fostering of close relationships with local primary schools including development of evaluation tools for continued data collection on outcomes for the ParentChild+ programme children and controls.

5.2.1 Evaluation Tools and Follow-up Data Collection

It is strongly recommended that the ongoing evaluation of the ParentChild+ programme continues, including submission of ethical approval for annual data collection. The further development of pre-existing and new evaluation tools should include measures to obtain baseline data, data on programme completion, and for follow-up data on an annual basis. The inclusion of standardised measures of child cognitive and socio-emotional development should also be considered to track changes over time and to provide data to compare to norms for age groups. The engagement of ParentChild+ graduates in an annual data collection process could help to alleviate recruitment challenges experienced in the current research. A full overview of the programme goals should be conducted, including an exploration on the potential long-term impacts, in conjunction with the Growing-Up in Ireland datasets, to develop a comprehensive set of tools enabling direct comparative analysis across time points and with the GUI. Consent forms for long-term participation in research activities and for the ongoing collection and storage of contact information should also be developed. In order to comply with GDPR, and to support ongoing communication with parents who have completed the programme, periodic consent should be obtained from participants to allow secure storage of their contact details for research and/or communication purposes.

5.2.2 Development of Group Events

Both parents and children identified the desire to take part in group events during the course of the ParentChild+ programme and on its completion. It is understood that these events are currently taking place and perhaps were not in place during the course of the participants initial engagement

with the programme. Informal group events, such as a parent-child library meet up, is encouraged due to the references to isolation some parents made during their participation in the research and the wishes expressed by them. Connecting with other participants on an informal basis will strengthen the parent and child's connection to the local community, but can also help to improve ELI communication and dissemination of events, activities, and programmes.

Additionally, it is recommended that parent graduates of the programme be offered the opportunity to engage additional ParentChild+ training for subsequent children. This could take the form of a refresher workshop or event of a limited number of home visits. The majority of the parents participating in this research identified this as an improvement that can be made to the current ParentChild+ structure.

5.2.3 Alumni Network

The development of an Alumni Network is highly recommended, if it is not already in place. Dissemination of a periodic newsletter highlighting upcoming events and activities, as well as research studies, can potentially increase a sense of community in the graduates of the ParentChild+ programme and can provide them with important information about supports available to them and their child(ren). This is particularly important as a range of knowledge was exhibited from participants in this study about ongoing programmes and supports available from the ELI and the NCI. This knowledge ranged from none to highly knowledgeable.

5.2.4 Events

It is recommended that the ELI continue to develop their suite of programmes and events for eligible parents and children within their catchment area. Particularly Access events for further and higher education, including pathways and career development workshops. Parents and children showed they have ambitious plans for their futures but that the exact pathways remain unclear. Additionally, parents have highlighted the importance of showcasing the range of opportunities available to their children based on their areas of interest.

Transition events were also highlighted as important for the parents who participated in this study, particularly in relation to transition to second level, but also regarding transitions more broadly. This leads into the desire for supports and resources around socio-emotional development. Whilst the parents have highlighted the positive impact of the ParentChild+ programme on their child's learning, they have identified a gap in relation to socio-emotional development and consider this to be an important area of development that should be addressed.

5.2.5 Fostering Relationships with Schools

The ELI has strong links to a number of local schools and the ongoing development of these relationships should be continued, and where possible should be extended to include schools typically not identified as part of the catchment area. The current national context with the cost of living and housing crises have exacerbated challenges with communication with schools in this research, including changes in staffing. In order to alleviate this, it is recommended, where possible, to have a number of staff in each school identified as liaisons to the ELI.

It is important for the continued evaluation of the ELI programmes to develop strong research links with the schools, both for children who are taking part in ELI programmes, and the ParentChild+ programme specifically, and for the development of control groups. Consent and assent forms should be developed for parents and children (engaged in ParentChild+) to provide permission for the ELI to contact schools for research purposes (as outlined in recommendation 5.2.1 above). The development of a research strategy should include all related ethical and GDPR concerns.

5.3 Limitations

It is important to note the context within which this research was conducted. The recruitment and data collection took place between April and December 2022, when society was beginning to emerge from over 3 years of public health restrictions and changes to daily life due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This context may have had an impact on recruitment and a willingness to participate in research as many have felt the impacts of the last number of years. Additionally, it should be noted that Ireland is currently experiencing a housing crisis which has resulted in increased incidents of homelessness and a reduction in teaching staff in main cities, and in Dublin in particular. In relation to this there has been a considerable amount of movement of families from Dublin's Inner City to suburbs in search of cheaper accommodation options and nicer living environments. This shortage has resulted in increased workloads on teaching staff and additional strain on school resources, which may also have impacted on the recruitment for this study.

Due to the reduced number of participants than originally anticipated, the data analysis plan needed to be adapted to better suit the data collected. It was decided that conducting bivariate statistical analysis was no longer viable and therefore a more descriptive approach was designed. To more fully explore the long-term outcomes of the ParentChild+ programme, it would be important to conduct longitudinal, quantitative research, comparing the graduates of the programme to national norms and quantitative research utilising standardised test in cognitive and socio-emotional development. This was the initial aim of the current research but was not fully employed due to participant numbers. Therefore a continuation of this study is recommended with another cohort of participants, including collection of psychological cognitive and socio-emotional standardised test

data. Limitations arise for the ELI in the development of extended research due to resourcing challenges (financing) and methodological considerations, for example can the research be conducted with internal ELI researchers or is it necessary, and more robust, to employ independent, external researchers.

Additionally, demographic information was not collected as part of this research, therefore exploring the data in relation to socio-economic background or location was not possible. It is interesting to note that a small number of participants are attending schools not typically associated with the catchment area of the ELI or of participants in the ParentChild+ programme. This was also a finding in the previous evaluation studies conducted on behalf of the ELI for the ParentChild+ programme. An exploration of the access and entry routes to these schools could add an important dimension to the ongoing evaluation of the programme.

A further limitation of this study was that no fathers participated in the data collection process, either the completion of the Parent Questionnaire or participation in the parent discussion groups. Therefore the voice of the father is not present in the current study and experiences may be different from those of the mothers who participated. Future research should make a concerted effort to include the voice of fathers in the evaluation of the programme.

5.4 Conclusion

To conclude, the data of the current study in combination with the comparative data from the 2014-2017 studies provides a promising exploration of the long-term outcomes of the ParentChild+ programme across cognitive and socio-emotional domains. The results suggest that the programme can instill an extended love of learning in the child and an understanding of the importance and scope of learning in the parents. Both parents and teachers are positive about the academic performance of the child graduates of the programme and children exhibit a willingness to engage in the classroom both academically and socially. The children performed averagely or above averagely in their standardised tests, and parent and child self-report, and teacher reports support this assessment. The parent-child relationship was found to be open, with clear avenues of communication for the child and the schools, as found in the parent questionnaires, focus groups, and teacher interviews. Further, follow-up evaluation is required to fully examine the long-term impacts and to enable a generalization of the results.

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Appendix I: Parent Questionnaire

The following questions were taken from the GUI 9-year-old cohort questionnaires.

Section 1: Home Environment

How many children's books are there in your home?

None	1-10	11-50	51-100	101-250

PARENTCHILD+ has influenced my child's attitude towards schooling/learning

Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Very	Extremely

Does your child have the following in his/her bedroom

Television	Computer/laptop	Video/DVD Player	Games console (Play Station etc.)

Section 2: Schooling

On average, since your child has started school:

	More than once a week	Once a week or less	Not at all
How often has your child complained about school?			
How often has your child said good things about school?			
How often has your child looked forward to going to school?			
How often has your child been upset or did not want to go to school?			

Do you know what your child is learning or doing in school?

Yes	No	Sometimes

In your opinion, how is your child doing at Maths and English?

	Poor	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Excellent	Don't know
Maths						
English						

Has your child required any special educational support? Does your child do a one-to-one with a teacher?

Yes	No

If yes, what in particular?

How many days this year was your child absent from school for any reason?

0 Days	1-3 days	4-6 days	7-10 days	11-20 days	More than 20 days

What was the main reason for your child being absent from school?

Health reasons (illness or injuries)	
A problem with the teacher	
Problems getting to school	
A problem with children at school	
Problems with the weather	
Difficulties in childminding	
Family holiday(s)	
Other (state the reason why)	

On average, how many days a week does your child get homework?

None	1-2 days	3-4 days	Every day

When your child is given homework, how much time does he or she usually spend doing homework?

Less than 30 minutes	30 minutes to less than 1 hour	1 hour to less than 1.5 hours	More than 1.5 hours

How often do you give help with your child's homework?

Never	Sometimes	All the time

Does your child attend a homework club?

Yes	No

In the last 12 months, did you attend a formal meeting with your child's teacher?

Yes	No

If yes, how did they get on?

How far do you expect your child will go in their education or training?

Junior Cert	Leaving Cert	Further/Higher education	Apprenticeship/training	Don't know

Section 3: Child-Parent Relationship

Describe your relationship with your child from the following statements:

	Definitely not	Not really	Not sure	Slightly	Definitely
I have fun with my child every day					
I like to have fun with my child every day					
I listen and talk every day with my child					
My child loves to be praised					
My child freely shares information about themselves with me					
My child thinks I (nag) punish and criticize (put them down) them					
My child shares their thoughts and feelings with me					
The PARENTCHILD+ helped me to have a warm and affectionate relationship with my child					
The PARENTCHILD+ helped me with my parenting skills					

Can you describe other ways that the PARENTCHILD+ has helped you as a parent?

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Section 4: Response to Child's Misbehaviour

Do you do the following when your child misbehaves?

	Never	Sometimes	Always	Don't know
Explain why the behaviour was wrong				
Ignore him/her				
Send them to another room				
Take away their treats/toys/devices				
Give out to them				
Bribe them				
Ground them				

Section 5: Children's Pastimes

On average, how long does your child spend a day watching television, videos or DVDs (before and after school)?

None	Less than an hour	1-3 hours	3-5 hours	5-7 hours	7 or more hours

How often do you and your child read for fun (not for school/work)?

Never	Rarely	Once a week	A few times a week	Every day

How often does your child visit the library?

Never	Rarely	Once a week	A few times a week	Every day

How often do you visit the library?

Never	Rarely	Once a week	A few times a week	Every day

On average, how long does your child spend a day using a computer (not for school)?

None	Less than an hour	1-3 hours	3-5 hours	5-7 hours	7 or more hours

On average, how long does your child spend a day playing video games such as, Play Station, X-box, Nintendo etc. (before or after school only)?

None	Less than an hour	1-3 hours	3-5 hours	5-7 hours	7 or more hours

Does your child participate in any clubs or organisations outside of school hours?

Yes	No

If yes, which ones?

Section 6: Standardised Test Scores

What school is your child attending?

What class is your child in?

Do you have your child's standardised test scores we could access?

Yes	No

In no, would you be happy with us contacting the school to get these results as part of the research? This will mean informing them that your child completed the PARENTCHILD+ Programme.

Yes	No

Would you be happy with us talking to your child's teacher to see how they are getting on in school as part of the research?

Yes	No

If yes, what is the name of your child's teacher?

Appendix II: Child Questionnaire

Section 1: School

What do you think of school?

Always like it	Sometimes like it	Never like it

Do you like your teacher?

Always	Sometimes	Never

In your opinion, how are you doing in the following subjects?

	Good	Average	Okay
Maths			
English			
School work in general			

What is your favourite subject?

How many days a week do you get homework?

None	1-2 days	3-4 days	Every day

Section 2: Family & Home Environment

Have you any brothers and sisters?

Yes	No

If yes, do you get on with them?

Yes	No	Sometimes

If you had a problem, who would you talk to?

Does your family ask you what you all could do as a family? For example, what to do at the weekends, what to watch on TV, where to go on days out or holidays?

Yes	No	Sometimes

Think about where you live and answer the following:

	Yes	No
Do you like where you live?		
Are there friends to play with where you live?		
Are there youth clubs nearby?		
Is there a playground nearby?		
Are there activities to do after school nearby?		
Are there places for children to play safely nearby?		
Where you live, can you play safely?		

Section 3: Activities

What is your favourite thing to do together as a family?

Have you a computer in your house?

Yes	No

If yes, do you use it?

Yes	No	Sometimes

What do you use it for?

	Yes	No	Sometimes
Playing games			
Live chat with friends			
Watching films or listening to music			
Emailing			
Instant messaging			
Exploring the internet			
Doing homework			
Doing school projects			

Are you allowed to use the internet without adult supervision?

Yes	No

What do you like to do best, second best and third best in your spare time?

	Best	2 nd Best	3 rd Best
Play with friends			
Chat with friends online or on the phone			
Play sport			
Watch TV			
Play computer games			
Reading			
Play outside			
Listen to music			
Talk to your family			
Something else (write down)			

What is your favourite hobby or activity?

Do you play sports?

Yes	No

Do you read for fun? (not in school)

Every day	A few times a week	Once a week	A few times a month	Less than a month	Never

Do you have a mobile phone?

Yes	No

Section 4: Future Planning

What are your education plans? For example, finish secondary school, go to college, do an apprenticeship. Describe.

What job would you like to do when you get older? Describe.

What is your favourite memory of PARENTCHILD+?

What did you not like about the PARENTCHILD+?

How can we make the PARENTCHILD+ better?

Appendix III: Focus Group Interview Schedule

Q1. How have your children been getting on in school?

Q2. Are they experiencing any challenges. If so, what might they be?

Q3. Are you confident in supporting your child's education in primary school? If so, how?

Q4. How has the PARENTCHILD+ supported you in your child's learning?

Q4. Do you feel the school/ teacher is approachable if you need to discuss your child's progress or any difficulties they might have?

Q5. In your opinion, has the PARENTCHILD+ benefited your child's learning and development. How?

Q6. In your opinion, how can the PARENTCHILD+ improve?

Q7. Are there educational supports you think you or your child needs to help learning in school?

Q8. Do you get involved in school activities such as parent associations, fundraising, etc. If so, why. If not, why?

Q9. What are your future ambitions for your child?

Q10. What educational support or resource do you or your child need to support your ambitions?

Appendix IV: Teacher Interview Schedule

- Q1. How is (named child) getting along (socially, academically, friendships, school engagement) compared to other children in the class?
- Q2. Are you aware of other children in the class that participated in the PARENTCHILD+ programme?
- Q3. If yes, are many of the PARENTCHILD+ children absent from school? / If no, how is named child's attendance been?
- Q4. What is the primary reason for the PARENTCHILD+ child/ren being absent from school?
- Q6. Do the PARENTCHILD+ child/ren come to school with appropriate lunches, pencils, school bags, etc
- Q6. Are there any challenges for the PARENTCHILD+ child/ren in school? Why?
- Q7. Does the PARENTCHILD+ child/ren come to school with their homework completed? If not, why?
- Q8. In general, how does the PARENTCHILD+ child/ren perform in the following areas in relation to other children in the class? (Reading, Writing, Comprehension, Mathematics, Imagination / Creativity, Oral communications, Problem solving)
- Q9. Does the PARENTCHILD+ child's parent attend parent/teacher meeting?
- Q10. Does the PARENTCHILD+ child's parent participate in school activities (parents association, DOM, fundraising)
- Q11. Do many of the PARENTCHILD+ children have a physical or learning difficulty? If so, what might they be?
- Q12. Do many of the PARENTCHILD+ children experience difficulties at home that you are aware of?
- Q13. Do many of the PHCP children experience behavioural difficulties?
- Q13 Do many of the PHCP receive special help or resources in school because of their difficulties?
- Q14. Are there other educational resources or supports that the PARENTCHILD+ children might benefit from outside of school?

Appendix V: Young Person Interview Schedule

- Q1. What do you think of the ParentChild+
- Q2. Is there anything that could have been better about the programme?
- Q3. Do you enjoy learning? Why/why not?
- Q4. What is the most enjoyable part of school? Why?
- Q5. What is the least enjoyable part of school? Why?
- Q6. Do you find school difficult? Why/why not?
- Q7. Do you get your homework finished?
- Q8. Do you like to read? Why/why not?
- Q9. Do you like where you live? Why/why not
- Q10. What would you like to be when you get older? Why?
- Q11. How far will you go in your education?
- Q12. What activities do you like to do in your spare time?
- Q13. Do you go to any youth clubs or after school clubs?
- Q14. What supports would you like in the future to help you achieve your goals/ambitions?
- Q15. How could the ELI help children who have taken part in the ParentChild+ programme?